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BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW...?

'No' camp want Scots to vote for more cuts

by Ken Ferguson

IT was the Roman satirist Juvenal who coined the phrase "bread and circuses" to describe the way rulers supplied basic food and big events to keep the population quiet.

Over the past few months, his acolytes in the No campaign have been busily taking his advice as the breathless pap of the royal jubilee was followed by the shameless Union Jack waving of the Olympics.

And now, as previously predicted in the *Voice*, the millionaires cabinet are laying their plans to use the centenary of the outbreak of the imperialist blood-bath of World War One in 2014 to boost their No message.

No doubt unpalatable facts like the much higher proportion of Scots who died defending their regime of plunder and pillage, and whose names adorn countless memorials from Wigtown to Wick, will be sidestepped.

So far, they have scored some success as shown in polls giving the No campaign a lead in the independence battle.

However the last few weeks have seen a series of events through which the carefully



CAMERON'S MESSAGE TO SCOTS: PM says there's no alternative to the misery of cuts and sackings

crafted Better Together campaign's case has started to unravel.

Looming over the No campaign's three-in-a-bed London party alliance is the growing

shadow of an economic crisis which all of them - Labour, Tory and Lib Dem - say can only be solved at the cost of jobs, services and living standards.

Like old fashioned blood letting surgeons, they all want to bleed the patient - only arguing about how much blood to take as

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INDEPENDENCE BREAK WITH BRITISH FAILURE

PHOTO: Craig Maclean

by Campbell Martin

IN *The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists*, published in 1914, Robert Tressell (real name Robert Noonan) described life for the working class in the late 19th century.

Today, it is hard to contemplate the deep-seated levels of poverty and deprivation endured by men, women and children who worked themselves into early graves. The workers saw no improvement to their lives, but their employers, who did not work, grew ever richer.

At the time the book was set, a fledgling socialist movement was beginning to spread across Britain, making the case for working-class' rights and socialist representation in parliament.

Indoctrinated

The response of the ruling elite – the aristocrats and the bosses – was to issue pamphlets warning the workers that if they voted socialist, their lives would be hell.

That message was addressed to people whose lives already were a living hell under the capitalist system, but many were so indoctrinated by the power of the wealthy that they actually broke-up socialist



A BETTER SCOTLAND IS POSSIBLE! the SSP's Colin Fox addresses last month's Yes Scotland demo

meetings and chased them out of town, believing the line that workers needed the bosses to be in control or there would be no work and 'their lives would be hell'.

Fast-forward just over 100 years and the ruling elite are still in place, still exploiting the working class, and still using the same line of argument.

In 21st century Scotland, we stand on the brink of re-taking our political independence, of securing the right to govern our own country in the interests of the people and of representing ourselves on the world stage.

In other words, we are about to vote on whether or not we want Scotland to be a normal, independent country. But still the ruling elite, the capitalists, the bosses, the bankers, the British Unionist political parties tell us that if we vote for independence it will be 'a disaster' for Scotland (our lives will be hell).

The British capitalist parties

– Tory, Labour, Liberal Democrat – have united in a partnership to tell Scotland and the Scots that we are too wee, too poor and too stupid to govern ourselves.

Our best bet, they tell us, is to remain within the British Union and continue to be governed by and from Westminster (with a devolved parliament in Edinburgh that is entirely answerable to the British parliament in London).

Certainty

Despite independence being the normal status for most nations in the world, the Unionists tell us that, for Scotland, it would result in us "sending our children to a deeply uncertain future".

The message is clear: vote for independence and our lives will be hell. Instead, the Unionists tell us we should stay with the certainty of the capitalist-run British State.

That is the certainty of a

collapsed economic system; the certainty of soaring unemployment; the certainty of large areas of multiple deprivation in towns and cities across Scotland; the certainty of cuts to public spending and services we desperately need; the certainty of continuing child poverty; the certainty that many of our elderly citizens will die over the next few months because they are poor and can't afford to pay the gas and electricity bills from profit-driven, private utility companies; the certainty that young Scots will continue to be sent to kill or be killed in illegal, immoral, imperialist wars.

Independence is simply being a normal country.

We have nothing to fear from governing ourselves and building a better, fairer Scotland. It is remaining in the British Union – 300 years of making life hell for the working class – that is the scary prospect.

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Reject the No campaign's cuts agenda

by Colin Fox

BEHIND all the Better Together campaign's anti-independence scares, one truth they don't want to discuss is that staying with Britain signs you sign up to the worst recession in 80 years, sackings, cuts and slashed benefits and pay.

That's why, elsewhere in this *Voice*, we put the case for workers to both fight the cuts and back independence.

As we go to press, the annual ritual of inflation-busting gas and electricity prices hikes has opened as one energy firm after another expose the fable that they are in competition as they play leap frog to increase power bills and their obscene profits. A system backed by the London No parties.

The chaos on our privatised railways grinds on as the public suffer a double mugging of taxpayer subsidies to rail firms and prices among the highest in Europe. Again a system backed by the London No parties.

As taxpayer bankrolled bus profits flow into the coffers of privatised owners they chorus

goes up claiming that we cannot afford travel concessions for older people. Yet again a system backed by the London No parties.

There are many other examples of this truth but the basic message is plain: all that the much hyped No campaign offers is a set of policies which pamper the rich and drive down benefits and pay, slash vital

services and offer hard times as far as the eye can see.

It is no surprise then that Labour, Tories and spineless Lib Dems all not only sing from the same hard times song sheet but are slashing services locally and nationally.

The SSP is unwavering in our resolve to defend jobs, services and communities while at the same time backing the Yes cam-

paign's drive for independence. We want independence to open the way to a new Scotland which uses our wealth skills and talent to end poverty, tax the fat cats, break with foreign wars and nuclear weapons, putting peoples interests before the greed of a few. This vision of a new Scotland is gaining more and more support - and its a vision worth fighting for.



USUAL SUSPECTS: unholy alliance of Labour, Tory and Lib Dems want Scots to back their recession

BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW...?

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the patient grows ever weaker.

To justify this dictatorship of the rich, they are running a relentless propaganda war to mug the victims of the bankers' greed with slashed benefits, frozen pay, sackings and slashed services.

It is this reality that has seen a parade of unionist politicians peddle their "no alternative to misery" message, seemingly unaware that by offering this dismal prospect for Britain, they endanger its attractions to voters.

Leading the charge were Tory toffs Cameron and Osborne who went out of their way to reassure the so called 'wealth creators' in the

city and the banks that their cash is safe as they plan a further £10billion assault on welfare. Bidding eagerly for best supporting act to the Tory duo, step forward next leader of the Scottish/North British toxic-Tories, Ruth Davidson.

Having won a leadership election against a candidate who wanted to abolish her party, she branded Scots as spongers idling on benefits, with only 12 per cent contributing to national wealth.

Leaving aside that the 88 per cent contain such idlers as firefighters, nurses, surgeons and even MSPs (like her) paid from the public purse and themselves taxpayers, it seem unlikely that attacking 88

per cent of voters will prove a winning plan. Even arch Thatcherite and Tory hatchet man in her cabinet Michael Forsyth criticised it in an interview with Andrew Neil.

Not to be outdone Johann 'put-the-gas-bill-in-the-drawer' Lamont, supposed-Labour leader in Scotland, continued her assault on the gains won by her party and the wider Labour movement in benefits and services.

As she continued to out-Tory the Tories on supposed freebies, Lamont heaped fuel on the fire burning Labour's credibility as the Peoples' Party in Scotland. Behind the bread and circuses of London 2012 and the god bless you ma'amism of the jubilee then, the cold reality.

The British state supported by

the Westminster gang of three is determined to manage the burgeoning economic crisis in the interests of the rich and will make the rest of us pay. As this hits home - 80 per cent of cuts are still to bite - the ability of the No men to portray Britain as the best option for an economic and social future will steadily decline.

It is the key task of the Yes campaigners both to grasp this reality and put forwards a vision not just of independence but of what it can offer as an alternative to Britannia's austerity.

That's why the SSP will be backing Yes and campaigning for a socialist Scotland in which policies putting people before profit are the order of the day. The stakes are high but the battle can be won.

NOW STRIKE TOGETHER and demand socialist independence

by *Richie Venton*,
SSP national workplace
organiser

THE tens of thousands marching in Glasgow on 20 October, alongside the hundreds of thousands demonstrating in Belfast and London, are a powerful force with the potential to stop all cuts - and even topple the Twin Tories who are out to ruin the future for working class people.

But it will take more than a rally to halt the worst assault on people's livelihoods since the 1930s. Workers, communities, claimants, pensioners, young people and students are marching together for a better future. As a next step we need to strike together. The recent TUC congress hotly debated and then agreed a coordinated one-day general strike against the Westminster assault on pay, jobs, benefits, services and workers' rights. Fine words need to be rapidly converted into decisive deeds.

Showdown

The STUC leadership should play their part in implementing this united action, by naming the day for a showdown with the government of millionaires, where the irreplaceable role of working people in providing goods and services through their hard work would be highlighted by a combined refusal to work for that day.

Combined with rallies, such a strike day would massively boost the fighting morale of workers and communities who are at their wits end, and all too often feel isolated and fearful. And as well as confronting the Westminster Cuts Coalition with a clear message that they have no mandate to rule and ruin Scotland, with a demand for their removal, a one-day general strike would simultaneously



PHOTO: Craig Maclean

PRESSURE: a one-day general strike would send a message to the SNP government to stop passing on Westminster's cuts

mount pressure on the SNP government to stop passing on the Westminster cuts.

Instead of passing eye-watering Westminster cuts onto FE colleges, councils, the NHS and in yet another year of below-inflation pay settlements for Scottish public sector workers, they should be defying Westminster, leading a people's rebellion that demands the funding to save every job, service and pay packet - alongside fighting for an independent Scotland free of cuts, unemployment and poverty.

The alternatives to fighting back in such a coordinated fashion are unthinkable. The brutality of the cuts are beginning to sink home, even though 88 per cent of them have yet to come!

The naked class war from the Tory and Lib Dem friends of the bankers and billionaires, and from the profit-driven employers themselves, has recently escalated. Ninety nine per cent of pay settlements this year were below infla-

tion - whilst profits boom.

In his nauseating empty rhetoric about an "aspiration nation", Cameron denounced "nonsense about health and safety" in workplaces where staff shortages, overwork, stress, illness and even deaths are rising, as employers squeeze more profits out of fewer workers - who face the fear of mass unemployment.

The Tories are slashing workplace rights, delaying legal protection until two years into the job, and then plan charges of up to £2000 for pursuing Employment Tribunal cases. They are targeting and demonising civil servants - in part because these workers have had the audacity to fight back, and even win some concessions - threatening rights ranging from eye tests to longer hours to the right to be properly represented by a union.

Osborne offered to buy off what little remains of workplace rights - including redundancy pay, time off for training and protection from un-

fair dismissal - by company shares; a crude, absurd attempt to make workers even more vulnerable and pliable as unprotected producers of profit for the privileged few.

People made increasingly sick by assaults on workplace rights and conditions are demonised in the drive to steal billions of pounds off benefits for the sick and disabled, with profiteers like ATOS abusing them. Millionaires in mansions are declaring that people in modest houses have too many rooms, punishing them with the Bedroom Tax, whilst utterly failing to build affordable houses for need.

Working class students are being denied courses by Old Etonians slashing education. Families face a cold cruel winter as privatised energy companies making hundreds of millions in profit jack up household bills by another 9 per cent.

Green energy

Privatised train companies hammer travellers with fare increases whilst raking in £2.7billion subsidies off taxpayers last year.

Over a million young people, including 100,000 in Scotland, face the indignity, despair and abject poverty of being unemployed, whilst there is a crying need for employment in building decent affordable homes, expanding green energy, educating children, minding the sick and elderly.

These are some of the sure and certain prospects not only under the Tory-Lib Dem coalition, but also if Labour was returned to office.

The trade unions, with 650,000 members in Scotland alone, have the potential to carve out an entirely different future - but only if some of their leaders wake up to the realities. Marching and striking against the Twin Tories is essential, critical to the survival of a semi-civilised existence for the majority

Great line up for radical book fair

THE 16th Edinburgh Independent & Radical Book Fair opens on 24 October and welcomes a vast range of authors from beyond the bestseller lists. Seeking to engage locals as well as visitors to Edinburgh, every event at the Book Fair is free and it takes place in Leith rather than the city centre.

"Why do we do it?" asks one of the fair's organisers, and owner of Word Power Books, Elaine Henry. "We want to offer an alternative to the mainstream book events. We have real debates and there is plenty time to talk to the writers. We also display a huge range of books from small and independent presses."

This year's highlights include *ex-Guardian* features editor Richard Gott opening the book fair and launching his new book *Britain's Empire: Resistance, Repression and Revolt*; Alasdair Gray, reads from his forthcoming complete short stories anthology; panel events like David Graeber on his Bread & Roses award-winning *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*, Fi Martynoga on Scotland's Wild Harvest, and Richard Holloway on Belief, the Individual and the Power of Institutions.

Voice columnist Alan Bissett will perform *The Red Hourglass*. There's also poetry from Stirling roofer William Letford, Tessa Ransford and Iyad Hayatleh. And there will be a live link-up with the 'poster girl of Palestinian militancy', now Palestinian National Council member, Leila Khaled - whose life story is told in Sarah Irving's 2012 book, *Fighting For Palestine*.

• See www.word-power.co.uk for full details and events list

population. The unions should openly build a crusade to topple the Tories, to drive them out.

But if the only alternative the union leaders advocate is to wait for a Labour government, they may as well call marches, rallies and strikes in favour of Cameron, Osborne and Clegg's continued rule.

Labour leaders like Ed Balls and Ed Miliband have declared they will be "ruthless" in carrying on the public sector cuts. They support the devastating pay cuts - more an Ice Age than a pay freeze.

They denounce workers driven into strike action in self defence. They kept the Tory anti-union laws for 13 years of Labour government, and privatised more public assets than even the previous Tory governments dared touch.

And Johann Lament's outburst about Scotland being "a something for nothing society" not only shows how impervious she is to the real hardship of real people in Scotland, but is also a harsh warning of the assault on benefits, services, the social wage, and the entire notion of social provision to expect from a future Labour government - whether at Westminster or Holyrood.

A far cry from the aims of labour movement pioneers, or even today's trade unions.

Workers need look no further than Glasgow Labour council to glimpse what Labour rule means.

Instead of standing up for funds off Edinburgh and London to boost the city's services and workers' jobs, the Labour council is hacking away at hundreds more jobs on top of the thousands they already slashed - and had to be fiercely fought to even permit the STUC march the right to assemble in the historic George Square!

Continued trade union funding of Labour whilst waiting for a Labour government is like voluntarily paying a standing order to an incurable arsonist whilst handing over the keys to your house.

Tax the rich

Workers and young people need an entirely different Scotland to that on offer from the Tories, Lib Dems, Labour - or even the SNP.

A Scotland liberated from the Westminster dictatorship of the rich - whatever party sticker the Prime Minister might wear. A Scotland that taxes the obscenely rich minority and big business to fund well-paid jobs for all the unemployed and all school leavers.

A Scotland with a £9 national minimum wage; equal pay for women; an immediate £50 rise for pensions and benefits; a living grant for all students at 16; investment in housing, health, education, public transport and local services.

A Scotland where the government has the powers and the political will to take the banks, big

industry, energy, landed estates, construction, transport and all services into democratic public ownership. In a phrase - an independent socialist Scotland.

Those marching on 20 October - and the mass organisations that are members of - should join the SSP in fighting for the construction of a mass socialist alternative to all the parties and governments of cuts, poverty, unemployment and exploitation. Driving out the hated Tories is imperative. But seeking to swap them with a capitalist Labour government is a different route to the same destination. Continued Westminster dictatorship for and by the rich, regardless of which major party holds office, is a guarantee of decades of assaults on the working class.

The quickest, by far most realistic route out of this misery for millions is self-rule, independence, the powers to radically change the system and therefore our futures.

But swapping flags and emblems on its own will do nothing to create 'a future that works' for the working class. Those marching on the 20th need to carve out a socialist future for a independent Scotland, free not just of the Union Jack and Westminster's dictatorship of the rich, but also free of profiteering rule by Scottish and multinational capitalism. In a phrase - an independent socialist Scotland. Join the SSP as a modest step in that direction.



STRIKE NOW FOR A WORKERS' FUTURE! we need to carve out a socialist future for an independent Scotland free of profiteering rule by Scottish and multinational capitalism

by Richie Venton

IN our previous feature in the *Voice* on the 1989 Hillsborough Disaster, where 96 Liverpool fans died, we exposed the role of the police, the football authorities, the media and Thatcher's Tory government - not only in creating this man-made disaster, but in the subsequent monstrous frame-up of the dead and cover-up of the truth (see issue 403).

But despite the attempt by the current Tory government, media chiefs and police bosses to draw the sting from the horrendous revelations in the mid-September Hillsborough Independent Panel's Report - through a combination of public apologies and a switch to frivolous 'business as usual' in the media - the clamour for justice has put the authorities under siege.

Corruption

And further leaked documents have shown up the corruption of a system that needs to be dismantled for the safety of people at work, rest or play.

Senior police officers, including the subsequently knighted Sir Norman Bettison, and the solicitor representing South Yorkshire police, supervised the recording of junior police officers' recollections of events that day.

In contrast to the normal procedure of writing up their notes in official police notebooks - which can then be legally requisitioned as evidence in any court case - the police were instructed to write them on loose sheets of paper. Then they were doctored under the vigilant eye of police chiefs.

Later, these top-rank forgers offered the excuse that amendments were made to remove 'opinion' about the fans. That was a cynical, dirty lie: the documents published by the Independent Panel reveal that not a single case of this happened. Plenty of vicious



HYPOCRISY: for all his unavoidable public apology, David Cameron has not admitted the guilt of his mentor Maggie Thatcher and his Tory party in framing the 96 and burying the truth for 23 years

Hillsborough:

'opinions' about fans remained in the amended statements - but in 116 junior officers' statements, all their original comments critical of the policing that tragic day were removed.

In the wake of the damning, irrefutable public exposé of the role of senior police in the Independent Panel's Report, unprecedented investigations of serving and retired police officers have been launched by both the Crown Prosecution Service and the Independent Police Complaints Commission.

Those facing potential charges of gross misconduct or even manslaughter include Chief Constable Sir Norman Bettison, who had tried to dodge the full consequences of his role in the unforgivable cover-up by first of all apologising whilst provoking fury with the remark that "Liverpool fans had made policing more difficult than it should have been", and then by announcing his retirement on a full, generous pension next March.

The scale of the CPS and

IPCC investigations have the potential, at least, of starting to bring about some measure of justice - although the public outcry at the revelations of the truth which have been instrumental in forcing this action from the authorities will need to remain as eternal vigilance to ensure justice is done.

And the mid-September Panel Report's damning revelations to millions has been joined by the current flood of revelations about the despicable sexual abuse by Jimmy Savile, and in particular

the cover-up by that pivotal wing of the media, the BBC.

Taken together, these monumental scandals mean the powers-that-be will be terrified of a complete meltdown in the public's faith in the media, police, prosecution services, allegedly independent complaints bodies, judiciary and governments; hence their obligation to be seen to do something about it, even if it has taken them 23 long, cruel years to even start.

Tory guilt

For all his unavoidable public apology, David Cameron has not admitted the guilt of his mentor Maggie Thatcher and his Tory party in framing the 96 and burying the truth for 23 years.

Thatcher made the trip north the next day, 16th April 1989, to meet with South Yorkshire Police chiefs, no doubt to endorse their launch of a propaganda offensive against the victims, in part to protect her loyal protectors during the momentous class confrontation of the 1984-5 miners strike - the civil war without bullets - but further fuelled by Thatcher's and the Tories' desire to avenge their government's defeat by the

rebellious Scouse working class, led by socialists, in 1984.

But one of the most appalling recent revelations, hot on the heels of the Independent Panel's Report, is the leaked documentary confirmation that the Labour government which replaced the Tories in 1997 sustained the cover up of the real facts, prolonging the pain and indignity of the victims' families and the vilification of the reputations of the 96 by a clear extra 15 years.

Within five weeks of taking office, Labour Home Secretary Jack Straw had made up his mind there was no need for a further Inquiry into the causes of the tragedy.

Whilst assuring Hillsborough Family campaigners he would leave no stone unturned in seeking the truth, he cynically organised Labour's own cover-up, in connivance with PM Blair.

On 5 June 1997 Straw wrote to Attorney General John Morris: "I am certain that continuing public concern will not be allayed with a reassurance from the Home Office that there is no new evidence. I therefore propose that there should be an independent examination of the

alleged new evidence by a senior legal figure."

On 9 June he rammed home the same cynical calculation in a secret Memo to Tony Blair, fearing the public would refuse to accept their verdict from the government, and that it had to come from an independent source instead.

Labour betrayal

Late in June Straw met the hand-picked 'senior legal figure/independent source', Lord Justice Stuart-Smith, appointed to lead the review.

Straw told him his officials had already looked at the case and concluded "there was not sufficient evidence to justify a new inquiry". So he conveyed his scepticism to the judge before he even started his Review. On 26 June, a Note of a discussion between Home Office Minister Alun Michael (Straw's junior) with Des Parkinson, secretary of the Police Association of England and Wales, reveals that:

"Jack Straw was very concerned to avoid starting a hare running.

"As a result there had been some 'creative thinking' in the Home Office to find a way of

testing the evidence without reopening the whole affair."

This is in stark contrast to the weasel words of Straw in a statement to the House of Commons four days later, on 30 June:

"I am determined to go as far as I can to ensure that no matter of significance is overlooked and that we do not reach a final conclusion without a full and independent examination of the evidence."

The Stuart-Smith Inquiry dragged out for seven months and predictably concluded there was no case for a new Inquiry - and utterly failed to investigate evidence that police statements from the fateful day had been substantially rewritten.

No wonder Margaret Aspinall, whose 18-year-old son James died, responded to these recent revelations by stating: "What he [Straw] did was deceitful. All governments let us down, not just the Conservatives."

This was an appalling example of Labour's betrayal of working class people in their devoted defence of all arms of the capitalist establishment and of the capitalist system that puts power and profit before the safety and lives of people.

demand justice



STRAW: was very concerned to "avoid starting a hare running" - in plain English, he never wanted justice



BETTISON: after last month's inquiry, he still said fans' behaviour made the police's job harder than it needed to be on the day

TORIES' DOWNTON ABBEY ECONOMICS

by Sandra Webster

IN a week where I tried to avoid watching the news as much as possible as it's the annual event I dread every year the Tory Party Conference. It is a time for the party faithful to come together, relax, kick off their paternalistic caring Tories image and clap and applaud their leaders spouting venom on the poor and dispossessed.

They always have a special group to target and as usual those on benefits are top of the list.

According to some polls, most of the population agree with the Tory policies on benefit cuts. Not really difficult to believe when one considers the divide-and-conquer tactics they use.

Few opportunities

Gideon Osborne kicked it off this week with his soliloquy on how hard working people going off to work are dismayed by their neighbours across the road in their homes with their blinds closed living off the state.

When people have their blinds shut it is an attempt to shut out the world and the reality is due to this recession there are few opportunities for work. An event in the St Enoch Centre in Glasgow to take on 200 Christmas casuals saw 2000 people turn up. Let's also understand what they mean by 'people living on benefits' and their view of the welfare state.

A report in *The Independent* re-

ported 90 per cent of Scots were on benefits. This does not just include those on JSA or tax credits but all the public sector workers from tax collectors to teachers, nurses and doctors. The people who are at the centre of our communities. In the Tories' dystopian vision of society, they would like there to be no welfare state and no public services.

The news that was announced at the Tory Conference this week was not news at all. It is part of the welfare cuts they brought in at the beginning of their government and a continuation of the previous Labour government's plans.

For the young just starting out, things are going to be much tougher. Those under-25s will no longer be eligible for housing benefit. Young people they say should stay at home with their parents.

For some young people this is not possible. We have a young woman staying with us as a result of a difficult home life. She will not be able to stay home so she is sleeping on our couch. She has no money from benefits, so like most of you would do, I am helping her as much as I can.

It is when the impact of the cuts get personal - and they are going to - that we realise their affect. In the next few years we are going to see people we know and love being impacted the most.

This doesn't impact on the Tory Overlords, most of whom won't have a neighbour with blinds shut across the road - more like rolling

countryside or a pied-à-terre in a nice area of town they can choose to live in. In attacking the most vulnerable, they said no to a "mansion tax" where the richer members of our society would be expected to make a contribution.

The crux of the matter is that those with money cling on to it and pass it on to the next generation. It is *Downton Abbey* economics.

Those in receipt of benefits put

back all they are given into their local economy to buy food, clothing and all their family needs. In a recession, does it not make sense to distribute our nation's wealth this way? The Tories will always look after their own, and they are not our own. I am glad to have faith that the poor and dispossessed are the kindest people in the world and will always look after each other if they can.

Voice Mail

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We need to tackle fuel poverty

With the Independence Referendum looming in 2014, ordinary folk in Scotland will have many questions to ask. But millions of us want to know what an independent Scotland will do to stop fuel poverty? With winter fast approaching, many of us will have to choose between heating or eating. The reality is that some 20,000 people died of fuel poverty in the long, cold winter of 2009, and a further 25,000 died in 2010/2011. According to the latest official government statistics, it is expected that a further 27,000 will die in 2012-13. Over 72,000 citizens in the UK will have died of cold-related illnesses in just three years. Truly shocking. And what is the government's response to this?

They cut the National Winter Fuel Allowance last November, from £250 down to £200 for over-60s, and they cut £100 off for the over-80s - down to £300. So much for their commitment to abolishing fuel poverty, eh? The 'Big Six' private energy companies are reeling in profits, while the rest of us shiver. They made £15 billion in profits last year, yet intend to put the fuel up another 9 per cent this November. It went up 19 per cent last winter. That's an increase of 28 per cent in 12 months. Who are they kidding? We also need answers on these obscene pre-payment meters that millions are forced on to, due to not being able to pay the obscene fuel bills. If you don't have enough money to top the meter up, then you are completely disconnected, and left with no heating, lights, cooking facilities, hot water and everything else electrical. It's absolutely scandalous that this barbaric treatment of people is allowed in the 21st century. We must challenge the profits of the Big Six and bring electricity and gas back to where they belong, into public ownership.

Ann Lynch, Clydebank.
Campaign Against Fuel
Poverty - tel: 07747311676

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Food production, sackings, soaring prices - it doesn't need to be like this

says Roz Paterson

AS we go to press, the axe is still suspended over Hall's of Broxburn. If it falls, 1,700 people will be thrown out of work. And in the deep midwinter of this recession, the possibility of new jobs to replace those lost are remote, to say the least.

If Hall's goes down, then so too do the fortunes of Scottish pig farmers, already struggling due to a recent rise in the cost of pig feed. Many farmers may go to the wall in that case. All this follows a summer of discontent amongst dairy farmers, following the supermarkets' forcing them to accept a second 2p drop in the price paid per litre to the producer.

Given that it costs 30p to produce one litre of milk, being paid 26p per litre meant farmers were working for less than nothing, while providing already vastly profitable supermarkets with a loss-leader to further boost sales.

Blockades

Hence the tractor blockades of milk processing plants, the anger, and the despair. And more small farms going to the wall. What on Earth is happening here?

How come, in a country with the potential to pretty much feed itself – cereals, meat, veg and fruit, not to mention milk, all capable of being produced in abundance – we are only 60 per cent food secure, and instead of being self-reliant, we find ourselves at the mercy of the global trade winds that barrel through our communities and leave them desolate?

Global capitalism works like that, is the easy answer. But it's not really an answer at all, is it? Global capitalism is in crisis – check out Spain and Greece for the latest updates on how the free market experiment is currently performing – and at some point,



AGRICULTURAL REVOLUTION: post-USSR, Cuba now grows its own

something's gotta give. It would be nice to think it won't be society, community, stability that gives.

That we won't be rioting in the streets in our sheer bloody despair. It would be nice to think we could re-think some of this before it all goes belly up.

In Greece, where the economy is collapsing faster than the Greenland ice shelf (and, mark my words, that's actually quite fast!) many of those young hopefuls who travelled to Athens for the bigger, better life, have returned to their native villages. To grow food.

Not so much because there isn't food – though, in fact, the dreadful summer of 2012 will impact on food availability, and prices – as because fewer and fewer people have enough money to buy it.

In Cuba, following the collapse of the USSR, growing food became a sudden, urgent concern too. Without the Soviet Union supplying it, Cuba suddenly had no oil, no petroleum-based fertilisers, no-one to trade its cash crops with. In consequence, the

agricultural sector contracted by 50 per cent, the economy as a whole by 35 per cent, and the available average calorie intake, per person, fell from 2,900 to 1,800, while protein intake plummeted by 40 per cent.

And so began the 'Special Period', when Cuba had to grow its own, from scratch, without chemical fertilisers and pesticides, abandoning pretty much all previous agricultural methods.

Private and urban farms mushroomed everywhere, in vacant lots, disused land, even in the spaces between roads.

As in Britain during WWII, every scrap of land was dug up and composted for the general good. Cuba saw a massive decentralisation of production, spelling the end of monolith agribusiness and monocultures that could be felled by a single disease or bad growing season.

Unused, state-owned land was parcelled out for cultivation, and farmers were supported, through credit schemes, co-operatives and muscular, grassroots collectives.

Food production decisions were made, not by a parent company in Eindhoven, but at a municipal level, matching local demand with local supply. And it was something of a miracle; the sort of thing that can happen when action is collective and on a grand scale, but sensitive to local needs.

The available average calorie intake is now 3,200, the highest in any Latin American country. Not only that, but this green revolution embraced – as of necessity – organic farming methods, it encouraged biodiversity, slashed food miles and food waste, and provided employment for 383,000 farmers, and the rest.

Imagine, go on, such a thing happening in Glasgow. Instead of bleak brownfield sites, acres of green shoots. Potatoes sprouting in central reservations. Kale flourishing in dug-over lanes and back greens. Even, as in New York, roof-top gardens worked by the people who live downstairs.

Guerrilla gardening

Imagine this in Broxburn, Linwood, Ravenscraig, wherever the sick joke of international commerce left whole communities of people without a lifeline.

Guerrilla gardening – the practice, increasingly common, of taking possession of little bits and bobs of disused land and growing stuff in it – isn't enough to change the world, of course. Not even enough to give the Hall's employees something to smile about.

But the example of Cuba, isolated from the world trade cycle, should give us pause for thought.

We could run our food industry ourselves, for ourselves, and in so doing, respect nature, increase food security, and live better, more connected lives. And never have to worry about a decision, made miles away, by people we don't know, closing us down.

ABORTION IS A VERY PERSONAL ISSUE

by Sandra Webster

THIS week saw Tory Health Minister Jeremy Hunt and his Scottish equivalent Alex Neil both come forward to say they both believed the legal limit for abortion should be lowered.

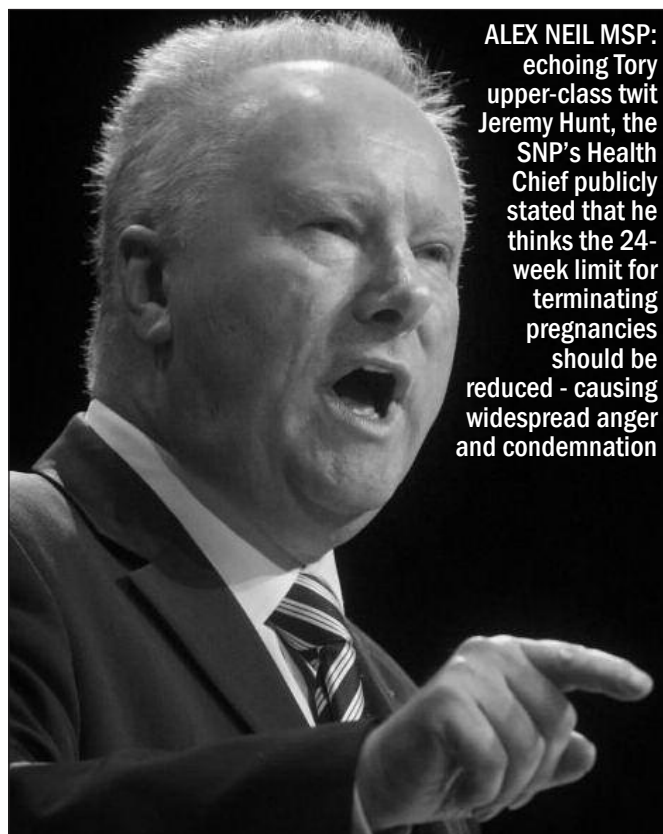
They were both mindful that this was a personal belief and all parties were quick to issue statements that they will not support a new debate and any vote would be a personal matter of conscience for individual MPs and MSPs.

I was brought up in a loving, faith home where there was the duality that abortion was wrong and the only contraceptive advice I received from my father was "never bring an illegitimate child to my door".

Choice

This was in the '80s and I hope things have moved on from then. But I still believe it is a woman's right to choose. The decision to have a child and all the issues surrounding it will have so much impact on a woman's life.

So is having a pregnancy terminated too. No-one but the person themselves could imagine all the emotions involved in it. I have been hearing some of the radio



ALEX NEIL MSP: echoing Tory upper-class twit Jeremy Hunt, the SNP's Health Chief publicly stated that he thinks the 24-week limit for terminating pregnancies should be reduced - causing widespread anger and condemnation

debates this week and listened to some of the stories of women who had an abortion up to 50 years ago and still live with the child they have lost. It is a personal decision and the women's right to choose.

No contraception is 100 per cent effective. I know this personally. After my second child was born with a very rare genetic disorder which had not shown up on ultrasounds, we were given

genetic counselling and told there was a one in two chance any future child could be affected. My husband and I then decided not to have any more children. I decided to have a mirena coil fitted which I was reassured was 99.9 per cent effective. I was one of the one in a 1000.

I know you read of stories about women giving birth not knowing they are pregnant and I had read them with disbelief. I was a mother of

two - of course I would know if I was pregnant. But I didn't discover it till I was 26 weeks pregnant. We were shocked and mourned as we knew our lives would never be the same again.

We had our youngest son but it had such a huge impact on our lives and relationship. We love him dearly though and are glad he is in our lives.

A call for an earlier limit to termination would limit the opportunity for women to discover if there child was going to be born with a life limiting illness and even the basics of knowing they were pregnant and the impact this would have on them.

Worrying

For these reasons, I don't believe any man should tell a woman what they should do or force her into a life-changing situation. The right to choose is ours alone.

This was a very emotional article to write as I am mindful of all my sisters who are reading this and their situations and past experiences.

However, it is worrying that two men in positions with responsibilities for health have made their personal positions known. I will always campaign for an individual woman's right to choose.

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Hugo Chavez wins: 'the revolution has triumphed'

by Bill Bonnar

"THE revolution has triumphed." It was Hugo Chavez's reaction to the news of another impressive election victory.

Despite a united opposition, serious health problems, a hate-driven international campaign aimed at isolating the revolution and genuine issues of concern even for many of his supporters; this election victory will be celebrated by progressive opinion all over the world. In the election Chavez polled 54 per cent of the vote in a turnout of 80 per cent. His right wing rival, Henrique Capriles polled 46 per cent.

Despite the slanders directed against the revolution by the western media there has been no suggestion of election irregularities. In fact, the previous election was described by former American President Jimmy Carter from the International Election Monitoring Group as "one of most democratic elections he had ever covered".

Challenges

Hugo Chavez faced a number of challenges. His well publicised ill-health became an election issue with not unreasonable claim that he would not be able to fulfil a full term in office.

The right wing opposition was united behind an impressive candidate in Capriles while the failure to tackle law and order problems became a major electoral issue.

Caracas is often labelled the most dangerous capital in the world and the failure to tackle this issue led to the opposition winning Caracas in regional elections last year. More than anything else, Chavez's victory was a massive endorsement of the social, political, economic and international direction Venezuela has



VICTORIOUS: but the Venezuelan revolution is at a crossroads and faces a number of challenges

travelled over the past decade. This includes political reforms aimed at strengthening the country's democracy - making a mockery of some of the slanders which have appeared in the western media branding Chavez as a dictator. In a country with a long history of dictatorship, all of the reforms have been aimed at strengthening democratic institutions.

Such as economic reforms which have extended public ownership and control with the aim of sustainable growth and an economy which aims to serve the interests of all the people and not just rich elite and foreign companies.

Such as environmental policies which have tried to tackle an appalling environmental legacy inflicted on the country by previous governments. Such as social reforms which have directed tens of billions of pounds into programmes to reduce inequality and poverty with colossal investment in housing, health, education, the minimum wage and pensions and

an approach to international issues which have put Venezuela at the forefront of the struggle against imperialism.

This compares with what went on before Chavez, when a combination of disastrous free market economic policies, environmental devastation, rising poverty and inequality and the steady erosion of democratic rights brought the country to the brink of disaster.

Despite this victory, the revolution is at something of a crossroads and faces a number of challenges.

The country is now dangerously polarised and the government must ask why 46 per cent voted against the revolution. What can be done to win over some of these people?

Too much of the political process is centred on the personality of Hugo Chavez. What efforts are being made to build the emerging United Socialist Party and with it a strong collective leadership?

It also has to be recognised that when the opposition criticise the

government for failing to tackle organised crime and violence - or that not enough is been done to invest in the infrastructure of the country or that corruption is rife - there is more than an element of truth in these allegations.

In his victory speech, President Chavez seemed to accept the validity of many of these issues and would seek to address them. The balancing act that Chavez must achieve is to tackle these issues while driving forward to the ultimate goal of socialism.

Perhaps the revolution's strongest card is that it is not isolated and is at the centre of an alliance of progressive governments in the region, all of whom gave strong support to Chavez during the election. The strengthening of these alliances are the ultimate guarantee that the political earthquake that has shaken Latin America in the last decade and moved the continent in a radically different direction will continue to its ultimate triumph.

Nukes ban makes Salmond's pro-NATO stance 'even more bizarre'

by David McKenzie,
Trident Ploughshares

THERE can be no doubt that the strong and reasoned response to the move to drop the party's long-standing rejection of NATO membership has given the SNP leadership cause for thought.

A recent indication of this is Alex Salmond's proposal to include a ban on nuclear weapons in the constitution of an independent Scotland. This is a significant step for the SNP and the Scottish Government. Previously, in spite of much pressure from disarmers, they have refused to move the issue into the legal and constitutional arena.

Now the clear implication is that their principle objection to Trident is as a weapon of mass destruction which is illegal under international humanitarian law. As such, the proposal is most welcome. At the same time, it makes Salmond's stance on NATO ever more bizarre. The louder they trumpet their opposition to Trident, the more blatant is the logical and moral contradiction of sheltering under NATO's nuclear weapons umbrella.

The SNP/CND group have summed the position perfectly:

"In the end, the lack of credi-



SNP/NATO: what came first, the NATO policy or the justification?

The louder they trumpet their opposition to Trident, the more blatant is the logical and moral contradiction of sheltering under NATO's nuclear weapons umbrella...

ble work that has been done to formulate and argue for this policy change is so substantial that it must be assumed that the policy came first and the justification second.

"This seems to be an intentional attempt to disguise a policy that favours the interests of the US commercial sector, arms man-

ufacturers and the secret services as something that matters to ordinary Scots."

As I write, there is still no certainty about how the SNP vote will go on 19 October. If the party sticks with its anti-NATO policy (and the leadership genuinely and wholeheartedly accept the decision) that is the ideal outcome.

If the leadership proposal is carried or the decision is somehow delayed then there could still be another positive development. The recent Yes Scotland rally showed that the independence issue is owned by a much broader constituency than the SNP.

A bad NATO decision by the SNP will expose a new set of political fault-lines within which the vision of a Scotland responding to the dispossessed and disadvantaged at home and abroad, co-operating with others on the basis of respect and equality and working for the peaceful resolution of conflict can still be hammered out.

Meanwhile, we can be encouraged by the impact of our resistance to NATO membership. Keep sharing the information and the arguments and, if you can, come to the demonstration at the Perth Concert Hall outside the SNP conference on the afternoon of Friday 19 October.

• *More detail on the conference demonstration at www.notonatoscotland.org.uk There is an excellent rebuttal of the recent Angus Robertson briefing on NATO here: www.snpcnd.org/news/data/upimages/Correcting_the_NATO_brief.pdf*

**No To NATO Scotland
demo - outside SNP
conference at Perth
Concert Hall, Fri 19
Oct, 12noon-5pm
See: NoToNATOScotland.org.uk**

**SSP Fringe Meeting
at SNP Conference
Fri 19 Oct, 5.30pm**

Mission Hall, St Matthew's Church, Tay Street, Perth
Speakers: former SNP MSP Campbell Martin,
former Labour MSP/MP John McAllion,
Leonna O'Neil from Faslane Peace Camp,
SSP co-spokespersons Sandra Webster and Colin Fox