



BEDROOM TAX SPECIAL:

As the ConDems try to make April Fools of us all, the people take to the streets to fight back

• see pages 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10 & 11

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Scottish Socialist Voice

AXE THE BEDROOM TAX

As 105,000 Scots face the Bedroom Tax attacks, the ConDems award millionaires an extra £107,000 a year in tax cuts...

- NO EVICTIONS**
- VOTE YES TO MAKE THE TORIES HISTORY**



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Playing party games with people's lives

by *Richie Venton*

THE Tory onslaught on the poorest to pay for the millionaires' tax cuts and bankers' bailouts has put both Labour and the SNP to the test.

And behind their headline-grabbing statements lurks a lot of fudge, party political manoeuvring and outright cynicism and hypocrisy - especially on the part of Labour.

The Tories and Lib Dems exist to exploit the working class, so it's no surprise they launched the Bedroom Tax, like an Exocet missile aimed at those

desperately juggling the bills to survive, as they have to choose between heating, or eating, or keeping a roof over their head.

From the outset, the Scottish Socialist Party has been up-front in calling for abolition of the Bedroom Tax.

But whilst helping to build a movement to bring about it's downfall, we have also campaigned for immediate steps that at least shield those hit by it from its worst effects, including demands on councils, local housing associations and the Scottish Government to outlaw all evictions arising from the rent arrests

that inevitably follow when people on rock-bottom incomes are expected to cough up from £10 to £22 a week.

SSP Motion

The first such motion raised anywhere by a councillor was put by the Scottish Socialist Party councillor in West Dunbartonshire, Jim Bollan. He won the backing of the opposition SNP councillors, but the ruling Labour councillors refused to hold an emergency council meeting to debate it - an outrage, considering since they took power in 2012, Labour has

slashed back council meetings to just four a year!

In contrast to this stance, the opposition Labour councillors in North Ayrshire proposed a Motion very similar to Jim Bollan's, including the call for no evictions by the council. The SNP delayed a decision, seeking legal advice - and their leader told me how Labour had defeated an SNP motion along the same lines in East Lothian!

For the first time in modern history, some local Labour parties have conducted street stalls against the Bedroom Tax - which we of course welcome,

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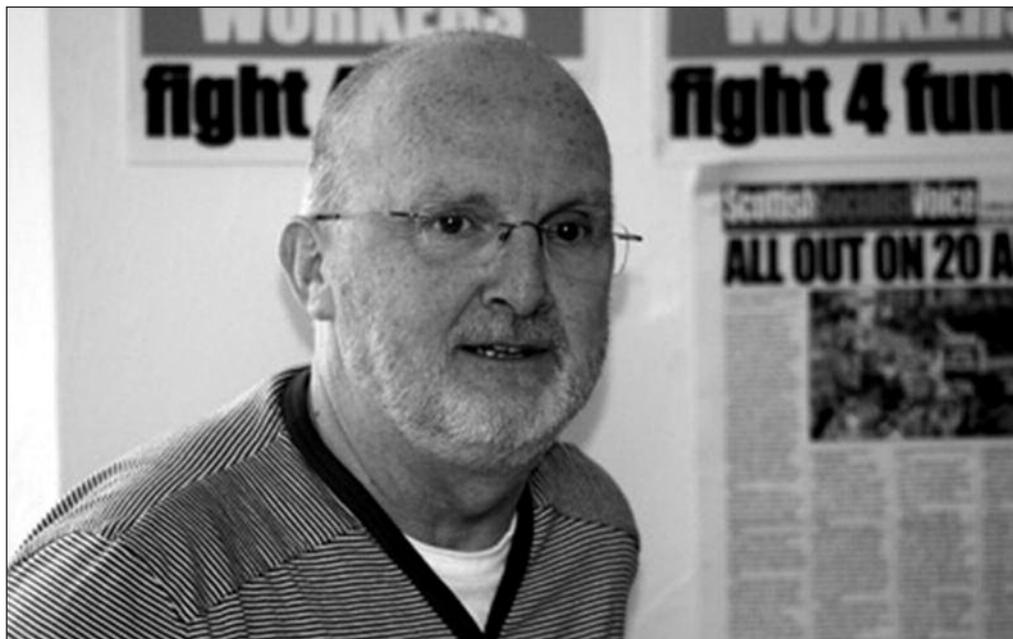


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JIM BOLLAN: SSP councillor was the first to call for a 'No Evictions' policy anywhere in Scotland

even if they're less effective at doing it than the SSP!

Labour has rightly demanded - in common with the anti-Bedroom Tax movement generally - that the Scottish Government should amend the Housing (Scotland) Act to remove the threat of evictions based on Bedroom Tax arrears.

To their shame, the SNP government has refused to do this, even though it is well within their devolved powers, and would have demonstrated in practice the advantages of full-blown self government, to provide the powers to scrap the Bedroom Tax.

Labour hypocrisy

But Labour doth protest too much, methinks! In contrast to their attempts to embarrass the SNP in Holyrood on this issue of amending housing law, and Labour's Margaret Curran branding it "a cruel tax", their Shadow Cabinet member Helen Goodman has spilt the beans. She trotted out the Labour line "in the short to medium term we need to reduce the housing benefits bill".

But instead of going on to pledge, for instance, to regulate the private rented sector to cap outrageously high rents and

thereby cut the £21billion annual handout to these profiteers, she made it plain that a future Labour government will keep the hated Bedroom Tax... "but it should only apply if people have been offered a place to live and turned it down".

To make matters worse, Labour's Welfare spokesperson Liam Byrne reiterated their devotion to attacks on some of the poorest sections of the working class:

"The best way to bring down the benefits bill is...a tough but fair Compulsory Jobs Guarantee...one they'd be required to take, no ifs, no buts."

And of course the vast majority of Labour MPs abstained to let the Tories off with forcing unemployed people into unpaid

Workfare without compensation.

After initially saying "nothing much can be done until independence" (Linda Fabiani MSP), the SNP has at least taken the welcome steps of declaring they would scrap the Bedroom Tax under a future independent government, and the ruling SNP council in Dundee has pledged no evictions for the next year, "provided the director of housing is satisfied the tenant has done all that can be reasonably expected to avoid arrears".

In turn this has led to Alex Salmond's declaration that all SNP-led councils will do likewise. Those are welcome, if hesitant steps forward for people worried sick at the prospect of being turfed out of their home.

But at most, the SNP lead nine out of Scotland's 32 councils. So Labour should match its talk with action by at least following suit. And the SNP government needs to be bombarded with demands to outlaw ALL Bedroom Tax evictions, to cover tenants in local housing associations as well as council tenants.

Alongside that, they should fund the £50million shortfall in rental income that social sector landlords face this year because of the Tory Tax - and follow the example of Knowsley council's Housing Trust which is re-designating it's entire housing stack to evade the Bedroom Tax. SNP Housing Minister Margaret Burgess has hinted at the latter in a letter to social landlords.

Evict the Tories

The time for fudge and veiled hints are over - people desperately need those elected to represent them to get off the fence and stand up straight in solidarity with tenants in defiance and resistance to the Tories. Labour and SNP politicians can't be allowed to play party games with people's lives.

The Scottish Socialist Party will continue to unite with others in putting demands on them to outlaw evictions, fund the losses caused by the Bedroom Tax, and join with working class communities in defence of all who are hammered by this cut, building a rebellion to evict the Tories, not tenants.

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by John McAllion

ACCORDING to the most recent opinion poll on voting intentions, the SNP enjoy a comfortable eight point lead over Scottish Labour.

Meanwhile, the Scottish Tories and Scottish Lib Dems trail the Nationalist party by 30 and 36 points respectively.

It is no surprise therefore that Labour's assumption of the leadership of the 'Better Together' campaign went unchallenged. The prospect of either of the Coalition parties heading up the No operation north of the border, while their own UK leaderships pursued scorched earth policies across the Scottish public sector, was always a non-starter.

Labour, on the other hand, has only recently seen half a century of Scottish political ascendancy brought to a crushing halt by Nationalist electoral success. More importantly, Labour is now in opposition at Westminster and therefore able to distance itself from the deeply unpopular UK austerity programme.

Currently, only Labour can make any kind of case for sticking with austerity Britain.

Labour inaction

Scottish Labour politicians, for example, are able to denounce the hated Bedroom Tax as a "crazy" policy that "won't work" but is likely to leave thousands of Scots homeless. Labour's Margaret Curran even denounced the Scottish Government for its inaction in failing to protect Scotland from this Coalition assault.

Obviously, had Labour still been the Scottish Government, the Shadow Secretary of State would never have dared to utter such a call to arms against Westminster rule.

However, she also omitted to mention that UK Labour is itself intent on introducing a version

The reality behind Better Together's rose tinted unionism



HYPOCRITE: Better Together high heid yin Alistair Darling

of the Bedroom Tax when or if it ever again gets its hands on Britain's reins of power.

Like the Tories and the Lib Dems, Labour too favours what Westminster terms "sensible welfare reform". Labour's Shadow Chancellor has also made clear that he will not reverse the Tory Chancellor's public spending cuts.

Westminster-style austerity will be with us whatever the result of the next UK election.

Nor can we look for any relief to Scottish Labour. Their leader, in her now infamous "something for nothing" speech, has given notice that her party has renounced the redistributive principle of universal benefits funded from progressive

taxation and free at the point of use. The one-time party of the welfare state now threatens to ditch many of the policies it helped to introduce, including free nursing and personal care, free concessionary travel for older people, free prescriptions, free university tuition and much more.

There is, of course, no mention of any of this on the Better Together website or in the speeches of its chairperson Alistair Darling. For North Britons, Scottish jobs, pensions, benefits and futures are threatened only by the spectre of independence.

Scotland, they argue, is too small, too poor and too inconsequential to either afford

or to deliver the lifestyles and security that we all derive from being "British".

Conscious that the "British" Coalition government is already destroying jobs, slashing benefits and pension entitlements, as well as dismantling what is left of the welfare state, Darling likes to lace his speeches with references to the "profound disagreements" his party continues to have with their Tory and Lib Dem partners in Better Together.

Darling tries to paint a picture of a Labour Britain far removed from the real Britain of Labour's "Better Together" allies. The facts do not fit his argument.

On the economy, Labour is as committed as the Coalition to free markets, public spending cuts and deficit reduction. The interests of the City of London and international finance remain paramount whichever British party is in office.

Savage

Britain's three big parties take turns at reforming and shrinking the public sector. All three support the most savage anti-trade union laws in Europe. The list could go on.

The Britain that Better Together dreams of reviving remains rooted in its imperial past – a permanent seat on the UN Security Council; membership of the exclusive nuclear weapons club; punching above its military and diplomatic weight; a big power nation feared and respected throughout the world and so on.

These are the real priorities of Britain's three big political parties. There is no space in such a Britain to prioritise working class interests.

Scottish independence alone will not guarantee those interests. However, it will rid us of a British state that has strangled workers' aspirations for far too long. That has to be progress.

WILL 'GREAT' WAR COMMEMORATION GET BEYOND THE TALES OF GLORY?

asks **Campbell Martin**

ON 4 August 1914, Britain declared war on Germany, which had, in the preceding few days, declared war on Russia and France, and invaded Belgium. These events unleashed the First World War and previously unimaginable human carnage on an industrial scale.

A recently-announced 12-strong panel of 'experts' has been formed to recommend a preferred approach for Scotland's commemorations marking the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the so-called Great War and the blood-soaked battles that followed.

The panel has also been tasked with delivering a programme of events remembering what took place from the fields of Flanders to the shores of the Gallipoli peninsula.

Panel

Sitting on the panel that will decide how the First World War is remembered are retired former senior members of the British armed services - including a Brigadier, a Lieutenant-General, a Commodore and a Group Captain. The military men are joined by historians and Scotland's largest land-owner, the Duke of Buccleuch, who is there by virtue of his title as Captain General, the Queen's Bodyguard for Scotland, Royal Company of Archers.

I could be wrong, but the membership of the advisory panel suggests the focus of commemoration might be on the military history that pitched armies against each other in tactical battles that ultimately



SLAUGHTER: the Battle of the Somme

determined the outcome of a global conflict.

If that turns out to be the case, what are the chances we will also see a jingoistic British press bombarding us with Union Jacks and stories of how 'we' in Britain fought together against a common enemy and were all the stronger for it - just as Scots go to the polls in the independence referendum?

There is no doubt that people from across the British Isles fought together in the First World War, most of whom marched off willingly to fight for 'King and Country'.

But how many of those men fully understood the nature of the conflict they were about to take part in - not just the new mechanised killing they would encounter, but the actual reasons for the war?

Whipped-up into a jingoistic fervour by capitalist-owned newspapers, the working class

of Britain were told they had to 'do their duty' by defending their country when, in fact, the war was all about the imperial aspirations of the ruling class and the wealth they could accumulate through colonial expansion and exploitation.

In a situation unchanged since medieval times, ordinary men were to fight and kill each other at the behest of their lords and masters.

One unattributed comment perfectly summed-up the reality of the First World War when it described the close-quarter use of the bayonet fixed to a rifle in the following terms: "A bayonet is a weapon with a worker at each end."

Any commemoration of the First World War must tell the story of so many lives destroyed - on both sides - working class men sent to kill other working class men, while capitalist arms-producers on

both sides amassed personal fortunes running into millions of pounds.

Will the military men on the First World War advisory panel commemorate the 1915 Rent Strike in Glasgow, led by women who rebelled when capitalist landlords hiked-up rents for overcrowded, unsanitary and damp homes while the men were away at the front?

Will the story be told of how, faced with rocketing inflation, which severely diminished the value of already poverty-level wages, and ever-increasing demands for greater productivity as part of the war effort, engineering workers in Glasgow took unofficial strike action?

Will we hear how the British Government's reaction to the Glasgow strike involved the introduction of 'treasury agreements' that saw workers' rights removed for the duration of the war, including the right to strike?

Suffering

The story of the First World War is one of suffering on a previously unimaginable scale. Next year we will see newspaper and television reports showing men in trenches, but from the distance of 100 years, we can not even begin to imagine the horror.

What we must not have is the war portrayed as a British success story, accompanied by waving Union Jacks and the strains of catchy music hall tunes.

The First World War was fought for imperialist and capitalist gain, with the working class of many nations paying the price in blood.

by Ken Ferguson

Nightmare reality of No Camp's Scotland

AS the *Voice* goes to press, a chill is running through the smug unionists gathered under the union jack umbrella of the Better Together anti-independence campaign.

After months of an apparently unassailable poll lead, the latest survey shows the gap narrowing to around 10 per cent with some 18 campaigning months to go before the referendum. More worrying for the No camp, those 18 months are unlikely to bring much to boost popular support for the union.

The component parts of the cross-class No campaign have existed, rather like a camel in the desert, on the hump of tales and half truths built up over decades to brainwash Scottish voters to believe an independent Scotland would be an impoverished basket case compared to the shiny, secure Great Britain.

Myths

We all know the myths from Scottish oil being worthless to being cut off from *Coronation Street* on the telly and all the boneheaded stuff in between.

From the time of the 1707 union, which was passed after those in power were "bought and sold for English gold", through New Labour "Divorce is expensive", to today's crop of half-baked myths about passports at Gretna, etc, it has been a well worn strategy - but it is wearing thin.

That's why we can expect a crop of "exclusives" in the shamelessly unionist press and BBC telling us what our benevolent friends in the No camp will "give" Scotland if we vote No.

Even the ingrained union jack wavers of the tiny Tory rump in Scotland are floating vague ideas about more powers as their Westminster partners in crime, the Lib Dems, gush away about federalism. However, neither have much of



JOHANN LAMONT: highlighting Labour's attitude to the poor

an electoral base in Scotland.

Labour - the supposed "peoples party" - promise more powers to Holyrood but abstain on compensating those illegally sent on work schemes to earn benefits, and duck and dive on the detested Bedroom Tax, huffing and puffing but equally supporting housing benefit cuts.

And this is the core of the problem - all the No parties, in their own way support the British policy of cuts, sacking and austerity which favour the bankers at the expense of the

people, and there is no conceivable future UK government which will break with that sour medicine.

After all, Better Together's front man is none other than ex-Chancellor Alistair Darling, who spent billions baling out bonus-guzzling bankers, and whose only real difference with the Tories is the speed at which the cuts axe should be wielded.

Indeed, this is the stark reality of taking the British Road and voting No next year. A No vote is a vote for cuts, cuts, sackings and cuts, no matter

who sprawls on the green benches at Westminster.

Nor is this a secret weapon but it is hammered at all of us, day-in day-out, that only austerity which pleases "the markets" offers some kind of market-driven paradise somewhere beyond the far horizon.

What this means can be judged with the latest information telling us that the Scottish share of the welfare cuts coming down the track will be an eye-watering £4.5 billion, and anybody who thinks voting No will reduce those cuts needs to get out more.

If a No vote happens, expect, shortly after Scots deliver themselves handcuffed to British control, to be told that so grave is the situation that further cuts in the cash given to Holyrood are unavoidable.

Down this path follows cuts on a scale likely to force the abandonment of progressive policies such as free travel for over 60s, free prescriptions, the scrapping of tuition fees and so on.

'Freebie Scotland'

There will be no need to worry about the powers of Holyrood as the anti-Scottish lobby, powerfully entrenched among the Tories who regards the Scots as "subsidy junkies", will choke off the cash needed for distinctive Scottish policies.

Given that the leader of Scottish Labour, Johann Lamont, has already underlined her break with universal benefits - crudely labelled "freebie Scotland" - it would be unwise to expect to much resistance from that quarter.

Increasingly, the fog is clearing and the historic choice between continued support for British made austerity and war, and a people-based alternative, becomes clearer.

The outcome of that battle will be critical in shaping the future for decades ahead, and that's why winning a Yes vote is such a vital task.

SCRAP THE TORY BEDROOM TAX



by *Richie Venton*

APRIL Fool's Day takes on new significance this year. That is the day the Tories and Lib Dems must think millions of people are too foolish to notice their vicious wealth transfusion from the neediest to the greediest, whilst the Westminster hypocrites prattle on about us being "all in it together", in "the Big Society".

From April, big business enjoys yet another state handout through cuts to Corporation Tax, and the pampered minority on incomes over £150,000 a year enjoy a tax cut from 50p to 45p in the pound. For millionaires, that means an annual 'wage' rise of £107,000!

Brutal

On the same day the brutal Bedroom Tax clobbers people on the lowest incomes, many of them on £71 a week, others low-paid workers who currently qualify for partial housing benefit. They stand to

lose from £12 to £22 a week on average. How the hell are people supposed to live?

Of the 105,000 Scots hammered by this vicious Tory Tax, around 70 per cent have a disabled person in the household. And the Twin Tories' goal? To steal £1 billion in Housing Benefit off the poorest in society over the next two years.

Even the government's own Department for Work and Pensions estimates that across the UK, 95,000 of the total 666,000 facing this slaughter of their meagre incomes will be simply unable to afford to pay it - which ultimately means the threat of evictions and homelessness, a searing condemnation of 21st Century capitalism.

At the numerous street stalls and

public meetings organised by the SSP across the country we hear absolutely heartbreaking stories of the effects on people's lives.

Controversial

The coyly named Housing Benefit (Amendment) Regulations 2012 declares that a person living on their own, or as a couple, in a social sector house, are only entitled to one bedroom - or face a 14 per cent cut to Housing Benefit for the first spare bedroom, 25 per cent if they have a third bedroom.

On the surface, the idea of a single person or couple having just one bedroom might not seem controversial. But at virtually every street stall we talk to people whose partner suffers ill health, such as

COPD, making sleeping together impossible. The Tories make no allowance for that.

We have spoken to several people newly bereaved, as they traipse down to the council offices in search of a smaller house, to avoid the Bedroom Tax, immediately after losing the loved one they cared for with the essential extra bedroom during prolonged illness. The heartless gangsters in Westminster make no allowance for that.

Likewise, hundreds of separated parents have described the horrible prospect of not being allowed a second bedroom for their children to stay over by arrangement with the other parent. The

• *Continued on next page*

NO EVICTIONS!

BEDROOM TAX



LET THEM KNOW: protesters put pressure on North Ayrshire Council over the Bedroom Tax recently

PHOTO: Ian Wallace

• Continued from previous page
Tories, ‘party of the family’, make no allowance for that.

These millionaires living in mansions have the bare-faced cheek to dictate that kids under ten have to share a bedroom, regardless of gender. And if they are of the same gender, they are expected to share a bedroom up to the age of 16! So much for children’s rights. So much for aiding the development of independence and maturity. The Coalition of Westminster cut-throats are past masters at the tactics of divide and rule; going right back to the days of Empire and colonial conquests. They demonise the sick, disabled and unemployed, so as to try and split them away from the solidarity of those in jobs.

Deprivation

They hope to succeed this way in hammering the disabled, who face the Bedroom Tax on a second bedroom even if they have occasional sleep-over carers - only being exempt if they literally rely on 24/7 live-in care - and it has to be registered carers, not family members, or else they’ll still face the tax. The areas of multiple deprivation are precisely those which

NO EVICTIONS!



the army target to recruit young teenagers to do their dirty work in the killing fields of Afghanistan, or god knows where next. Only the heat of public uproar has forced the Tories to beat a partial retreat in their plans to tax the bedrooms of squaddies.

Educate yourself to secure a future, they tell us. But students will have to stay in their parents’ home at least two weeks a year to dodge the Bedroom Tax; fairly manageable, you might think, but when the separate benefits attack that is Universal Credit eventually comes in,

that will increase to students having to live at home a minimum of six months in the year!

The Bedroom Tax is a classic case of class war by the rich, hoping to divide and conquer the rest of us. They must not succeed.

Hundreds of people are pouring into public meetings on the Bedroom Tax, seeking answers, pledging to stand together, looking for how best to resist and defeat it.

The meetings are red raw with anger and anxiety, with passionate speeches and applause, searching questions, and absolute determination to show solidarity to all those affected, including against the threat of evictions.

And that is a very real and present threat. Since new regulations were passed last August in Scotland, social housing landlords – councils and local Housing Associations - are legally bound to prevent rent arrears mounting up before taking what’s called ‘Pre-

action requirements in rent arrears cases’. This involves repayments being negotiated before moving to notice of eviction (Proceedings for Recovery of Possession).

Eviction notices for arrears of a few hundred pounds are common already. So when people on very low incomes lose £12 to £22 a week, it won’t take long before they face the threat of eviction.

Human cost

In addition, the Bedroom Tax will immediately impact on thousands of repayment arrangements made for eviction cases already dealt with at the Sheriff Courts. For example, there were 14,601 new eviction cases brought by social sector landlords in Scotland in 2010/11, plus older evictions that have been ‘sisted’ (stayed, or delayed).

The human cost of eviction is beyond words. But they don’t even make financial sense; housing charity Shelter reckon they each cost the taxpayer £24,000.

FAT CAT FREUDS CHUFFED WITH THE BEDROOM TAX

by Voice Reporter



ANGER: campaigner Ann Lynch at a Bedroom Tax lobby at Holyrood

The SSP is clear: we will unite with communities to form walls of human solidarity to prevent every single eviction in Scotland!

The Tory/Lib Dem architects of this brutal tax on the poorest are telling people to downsize to a smaller house, or get more hours of work, or take in a lodger!

They want to drive the working class back to the days of the single-end, of horrendous overcrowding...whilst Lord and Lady Freud rattle round in their eleven spare bedrooms (see article to right).

Build homes

This Tax will not create a single new house, nor a single new job. Quite the opposite. There are no homes being built for rent. The legacy of the 'right to buy' ushered in by Thatcher in the 1980s is a terrible lack of decent social sector housing, including one-bedroom houses. So we face the cruel absurdity of tenants potentially facing evictions, with the council then legally obliged to rehouse them... in a house of the same size, or even bigger, for lack of smaller ones!

In any case, why should people have to leave the family home they've been in for years, even decades, just because their kids have grown up or their circum-

stances changed? These are more than bricks and mortar: they are memories, the solidarity of good neighbours, a lifetime's investment - homes, not just houses.

And where do these millionaire dictators propose people get extra hours of work, when their own policies of public sector cuts and mass unemployment, plus their anti-union laws, mean that employers are cutting back on hours available rather than expanding jobs?

On top of all that, the Bedroom Tax is already being used by some councils and Housing Associations as an excuse for further cuts, as Scottish social landlords stand to lose over £50million in Housing Benefit payments this year alone, with people simply unable to pay the Bedroom Tax.

This is not just a reason for cuts to staff and housing services, but an opportunity: some housing association bosses (themselves on £100,000) are already demanding redundancies and slashing staff wages by £5,000 a year, at the very time frontline staff are at breaking point with the workload caused by tenants' despair in dealing with benefit cuts.

Unity between communities and workers is essential.

ONE family is more than chuffed at the Bedroom Tax. David and Priscilla have three kids who have grown up and flown the nest.

But this couple do not share the worry, distress and pain of not having a spare bedroom for their adult kids, or their grandchildren, to visit and stay in.

David and Priscilla live in a £1.9million townhouse in Highgate, London. With four bedrooms. At least they do during the week. At weekends and holidays they stay in their second home, one of the oldest country mansions in Kent - with eight bedrooms! So they have a total of eleven spare bedrooms!

But they don't face the Bedroom Tax; in fact David is Lord David Freud, grandson of the famous psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, and the Tory Welfare Minister who designed the details of the Bedroom Tax - after he ceased to be a Labour government adviser in 2009!

What the SSP say

The SSP is absolutely clear: we don't want this tax amended, we want it scrapped. We also see this as an added reason for an independent Scotland, so we can elect a government with the powers and political commitment to abolish it.

But people can't wait until 2014, or the subsequent 2016 elections. We need action here and now.

At SSP street stalls and public meetings we have appealed for volunteers to mount legal challenges to the multitude of outrageous anomalies and injustices in the Bedroom Tax.

We have helped to build networks of people prepared to defend anyone facing future evictions, in the ways many of us did in the anti-Poll Tax struggle, to block the use of Sheriff Officers to throw people out on the streets. And we have organised protests

at council meetings, to demand that they do two things that are well within their powers: declare there will be no evictions arising from Bedroom Tax arrears, and that they imitate the actions of Knowsley Council on Merseyside, which is 're-designating' all its houses, redefining what is a bedroom, so as to dodge the tax.

The same protests need to target community housing associations - combined with demands on the Scottish government to fund the £50million shortfall in social landlords' rental income this year.

Pressure

Likewise we need to mount pressure on the Scottish Government and individual MSPs to demand a 'No Evictions' pledge, which would lift a huge fear from thousands of people, and support the demand to amend Section 16 of the Scotland Housing Act so that Bedroom Tax arrears will not lead to evictions.

The government should also fund councils to ameliorate the impact through Discretionary Housing Payments, and guide councils and housing associations on a definition of 'bedroom' that avoids this iniquitous tax.

A hundred thousand people need immediate action from councils, housing association bosses and the Scottish Government.

Solidarity and unity in the community is critical to resisting this appalling attack.

The SSP is at the heart of this resistance, whilst also fighting for longer-term, permanent solutions, including the building of decent, affordable housing for all needs, which in itself would generate jobs, and for taxation of the rich to fund jobs and increased benefits for those unable to work.

Unite against evictions. Unite to axe the Bedroom Tax. Unite to use the nation's wealth for the millions, not the millionaires.

As living standards fall, the reasons to vote Yes rise and rise



by Colin Fox

THE independence movement in Scotland is understandably focused, with 18 months to go until the referendum, on how best to turn around opinion polls and win a Yes vote.

There are those, like the Scotsman columnist and SNP insider George Kerevan, who insist the referendum is more likely to be won on the back of a growing UK economy which makes people feel confident about their future.

But with economic and social conditions across Britain facing a prolonged deterioration for the working class majority, the key challenge must surely rather be to show that independence offers us the chance to avoid the worst recession in 80 years, to avoid another generation being lost to under-employment, to avoid the further vicious attacks on our living standards planned by the Tory/Lib Dem Coalition.

The 'under occupation penalty', as the government prefer to call the Bedroom Tax, is the latest policy of a Coalition making working class people pay for a crisis caused by the bankers and the rich. It is a harbinger of what is to come for more and more of us. It means a cut in housing benefit of up to £35 per week for those least able to weather the economic collapse.

Poll Tax comparisons

Due to be implemented on April 1st, the Bedroom Tax is being compared to the Poll Tax because it is again being implemented here despite the opposition of the overwhelming majority of Scots. We remain powerless to stop it because we are at the mercy of a government that has no mandate to govern here.

Scotland has rejected the Bedroom Tax as we overwhelmingly as we rejected NHS prescription charges, elderly care charges and university tuition fees. But unlike the latter changes made at Holyrood the Bedroom Tax is foisted upon us by Westminster.

We have, as is plain to see, different political values North of the Border. The independence movement must therefore explain to our fellow Scots there would be no Bedroom Tax and no



POSITIVELY YES: Scottish Socialist Party co-spokesperson Colin Fox sits on the Yes Campaign Advisory Board, giving the working classes a voice there PHOTO: Craig Maclean

more Tory governments hacking away our standard of living if we were able to make our own decisions.

But for the Scottish Socialist Party, independence means much more than that. It involves a commitment to full employment, with everyone earning a living wage and enjoying far better working conditions than is currently the case. It means ending fuel poverty, with our gas and electricity industries returned to public ownership and control. It means ridding our nation of chronic poverty and inequality that brings shame on our international reputation. For the SSP, being part of the UK holds Scotland's working class majority back.

The referendum is increasingly being fought against a background of deteriorating economic and social conditions for millions. Recently for example The Independent [14/3/13] warned in a page one banner headline "Half UK children will be living below the breadline by 2015". And similarly The Scotsman [13/3/13] reported government figures showing the standard of living of Scotland's working class majority had plunged over the last five years with household bills up 25 per cent whilst wages increased on average by only 6 per cent.

This then is the context of the debate on in-

dependence and we must not underestimate the profound sense of change that is sweeping the country. Independence could offer us the chance to avoid a profound fall in our living standards.

All supporters of independence will have realised, I'm sure, that our opponents pay us the great complement in ditching the central message they used when they argued that Scotland was 'too small, too poor and too weak to be an independent nation'.

But that argument has been soundly defeated so they now insist 'Of course we could run our own affairs. Of course Scotland could be one of the wealthiest nations on earth they say, it's just we will be even better off if we remain in the UK.'

Unfortunately for them, the Bedroom Tax, rising fuel poverty, falling living standards, rising under-employment, rising child poverty and the worst recession in 80 years make this claim increasingly difficult to sustain.

The choice then is increasingly clear. We can vote Yes and become a nation free to determine our own future, or watch our living standards plummet with further attacks on public services and social support as our reward for remaining part of the United Kingdom.

AXE THE BEDROOM TAX

Scottish
Socialist
Party 

SOLWAY'S DEADLY DEPLETED URANIUM MILITARY LEGACY MAY BE ILLEGAL

by Ken Ferguson

THE main claim to fame of the ancient burgh of Kirkcudbright on the Solway coast is its links to a thriving artists colony in the last century which included notables such as Jessie M King and Charles Oppenheimer. However, under the tranquil waves of the Solway, the British Army has left a more sinister legacy of some 30 tonnes of depleted uranium (DU), fired at the nearby Dundrennan tank testing ranges.

DU has been linked with a range of cancers and illnesses of the brain, kidneys and lungs, and the scale of the Solway pollution can be judged by comparing the 30 tonnes in the Solway to the 1.9 tonnes fired by British forces during the entire Iraq war.

Cleaning up the DU pollution caused by coalition forces in Iraq is set to cost \$30million and may result in the current Iraqi government suing UK and US forces.

Panic

For more than 30 years, the radioactive waste product depleted uranium has been fired into the Solway Firth as a part of the Ministry of Defence's (MoD) test firing programme at the Dundrennan range, near Kirkcudbright. Some 6,759 DU tank rounds have been fired from the range, amounting to approximately 30 tonnes of DU.

Now panic is spreading in the corridors of the MoD as a Freedom of Information (FoI) request from the Campaign Against Depleted Uranium (CADU) has revealed internal MoD concerns over whether the controversial DU test firing programme is legal after it emerged that the dumping of radioactive and toxic DU into the Solway Firth would be in breach of EU legislation protecting the marine environment.



NO: UK's DU rounds expire soon but MoD wants to keep using them

Minutes from an internal MoD committee released to CADU in a FoI request highlight concerns that "...there could be a future problem with regard to firing into the seas... the OSPAR agreements stated now that it was illegal to dump waste into the sea."

OSPAR agreements exist between fifteen European governments, including the UK, and the European Community, with the aim of protecting the marine environment of the north-east Atlantic.

Concern over whether the MoD has been acting illegally by firing DU into the sea was echoed exactly 30 years earlier in an assessment of the then proposed MoD firing programme. In 1974, the assessor Safety Official Bowman pointed out that it was unlikely that all the fired projectiles would be recovered from the seabed, and therefore that the firing programme would be contrary to the Oslo convention (the predecessor to the OSPAR agreements).

Bowman was clear in his disapproval, stating that: "It is unlikely the 'losing' of the projectiles in this way would be considered an approved method [of disposal]".

In 2001 when a potential project for recovering a small number of DU rounds for research purposes

was considered, it was shown to be technically complex and expensive and concerns were raised over setting a precedent for recovering DU rounds. Later that year, Dr Lewis Moonie, the then Labour Secretary of State for Defence stated at a public meeting that: "...the MoD did not consider it possible to recover fired rounds from the seabed".

Facing the prospect of managing a potentially illegal test firing programme, the shadowy mandarins in Whitehall came up with a defence which is straight from the pages of *Yes Minister*.

The current agreements prohibit the "dumping" of such waste, but not its "placing" in the sea - so the likely defence from best brains advising ministers look likely to be to suggest that loading a shell in a tank or field gun pointing it out into the Solway and firing it amounts to "placing" it into the sea. This will, of course, not alter by a gramme the amount of DU sloshing about the seabed in the Solway's notoriously fast moving tides with a radioactive life of some 700 million years, just provide a legal fig leaf for crown forces who put it there.

This is confirmed by the FoI response which says: "According to

Annex II of the OSPAR convention, states are prohibited from dumping waste in the sea. The agreements state that dumping does not include '...placement of matter for a purpose other than the mere disposal thereof...'

"Thus as the purpose of firing of DU rounds into the Solway Firth is to test fire weapons as opposed to disposing of nuclear waste, officially DU can be described as being 'placed' into the sea."

Not only are the military polluters in Britain's war machine dodging the problems of the existing 30 tonnes of pollution but, campaigners fear, despite evasion from MoD officials, further testing to add to it is planned.

The charge for the misnamed CHARM3 tank ammunition, the UK's last type DU munitions will expire this year and the military want to extend the life of the round even as international pressure grows over the acceptability of the use of DU in weapons.

Pollution hazard

This has to, at the end of the process, involve live firing, and the Dundrennan Range is the only range suited to the purpose of test firing in the UK.

Those fighting to defeat a Yes vote next year never tire of hyping the "benefits" to Scotland of British war spending north of the border but have said little about this pollution hazard which, should independence happen, be left for the locals to sort out.

• *The Voice was greatly helped in producing this report by Aneaka Kellay at the Campaign Against Depleted Uranium which has and continues to oppose the use of DU and campaigns to have it banned. See: www.cadu.org.uk*

WAITING FOR THE GREAT LEAP FORWARD

Ken Loach's call to arms for a united left

The Spirit Of '45, directed by Ken Loach

by Simon Whittle

KEN Loach's *The Spirit Of '45* blends archive footage with interviews of those who remember the socialist policies implemented by the post-WW2 Labour government, and those who seek such changes now. Loach's aim is clear - to remind his audience of the Britain we had, and to highlight what we've lost, what we could lose, what we're fighting for and who we should be fighting.

The film opens with black and white footage of VE day celebrations, and it builds up a picture of what life was like for the working classes before and immediately after the war, through archive film and modern interviews - all presented in black and white.

Soldiers returned home having defeated fascism, determined to build a better country, a better life than the one they'd left behind a few years before.

"The achievements of the '45 Labour government have largely been written out of our history," says Ken Loach.

Welfare State

"From near economic collapse, we took leading industries into public ownership and established the Welfare State. Generosity, mutual support and co-operation were the watch words of the age."

And remember this film does. Describing the childhood squalor of sleeping five to a bed infested with bugs and vermin, former dock shop steward Sam Watts recounts the joy of seeing his new council house for the first time as being one of the best moments of his life.

Labour's 1945 landslide took everyone by surprise. As they embarked on carrying through re-



HAPPY DAYS AREN'T HERE AGAIN: not while the working classes are attacked by Tory policies

forms such as nationalisation of transport, coal, electricity, and gas - and the establishment of the NHS - a defeated Churchill begged the US for the money to pay for these changes (we borrowed the equivalent of £200billion now - still a quarter of the UK's debt), warning that a real workers' revolution could engulf Britain if these reforms weren't delivered.

Loach skilfully moves us through the victories of these nationalisations, but not without criticisms - dock workers were still casual hired hands right up until 1967; many brutal industry bosses retained their positions of power after the reforms; private health-care consultants still operated, their mouths "stuffed with gold".

The film's great leap forward is society's great leap backwards - jumping from a confident country at the dawn of the 1951 Festival Of Britain, to May 1979 and Margaret Thatcher entering Downing Street, quoting St Francis of Assisi (the cinema erupted with boos and hisses at this point). Where there is harmony, the Tories bring discord; where there is hope, they bring despair; where there is to-

getherness, they bring selfishness.

Then, as we know, all the points the film has built up are undone by the Tories - through anti-working class policies and with the strong arm of the law at their side.

The programme of privatisation Thatcher started is still being carried through - the coal industry was decimated, it's workers crushed and defeated by the state; privatised energy spells misery for millions of families, as they struggle to pay bills that will line the pockets of a few shareholders.

Under attack

The pursuit of profit and cost-cutting under a privatised rail network has led to tragedies at the hands of corporate greed and incompetence. And the NHS, one of the last bastions of the spirit of '45, is still under attack by Cameron, Osborne and Clegg.

Living standards are declining now, council houses aren't being built now, ordinary people are not being looked after now. The sheer horror of the Bedroom Tax is like an axe hovering over all our heads.

"It is time to remember the determination of those who were

intent on building a better world," says Loach.

But how we fight capitalism's assaults is a salient point in this film - a strong, united left challenge to the Thatcherite parties of New Labour, the Lib Dems and of course the Tories is what the working classes need to protect its interests. *The Spirit Of '45* ends with its opening footage, this time in colour, signifying the hope of this brave, almost forgotten generation, a reminder of the strength that we have as a class if we are unified against the terror of multinational capitalism and selfishness of individualism.

Labour is finished as a representative party of the working classes, and has been for generations. Socialist and green policies are desperately needed to protect us from the brutality of capitalism and its corrupt cheerleaders.

The depth of socialist and environmentalist unity will determine how effectively we take on capitalism, and transform not just our lives but also the lives of our children and the generations to come.

• See www.thespiritof45.com

After Chavez: what future for Latin America's left?

Bill Bonnar takes a look

IT STARTED as a funeral and commemoration - millions of people gathering to remember the life and legacy of Hugo Chavez. Yet very quickly the sadness was replaced by a celebration of the achievements of the revolution so identified by the departed president and a determination to carry on the struggle to its inevitable victory.

Overlooking the proceedings where Presidents Rouseff (Brazil), Humala (Peru), Morales (Bolivia), Fernandez (Argentina), Mujica (Uruguay), Correa (Ecuador), Ortega (Nicaragua) and Cuba's elder statesman, Raul Castro. As they watched events unfolding, all would have cast their minds back to a darker time. This year marks the 40th anniversary of the military coup on Chile which overthrew the socialist government of President Allende.

The American representative at the funeral would no doubt have harkened back to a time when things were so much simpler; when an 'anti-American' government emerged in your backyard, you simply had it removed.

When the Allende government was elected in 1970, it was on a programme which included bringing key national resources into public ownership so they served the interests of the Chilean people and not the multi-national companies, an ambitious programme of economic and social reform aimed at lifting significant numbers of its people from poverty, the quaint notion that the rich should actually pay some taxes and the equally quaint notion that Chile's foreign policy should be set in Santiago, not Washington DC.

Violent coup

For the American government and the wealthy elite that ruled Chile, it was as if the Martians had landed. The country was battered by economic sanctions, political and economic sabotage, orchestrated violence, and when all that failed, the Allende government was overthrown in a violent military coup in which the president died. The destruction of the socialist experiment in Chile plunged the continent into a kind of dark ages. For the next three decades, South America was ruled by vicious military



DODGING WASHINGTON BULLETS: democratically-elected Marxist Chilean President Salvador Allende (left) meets his fate on 11 September 1973, as the CIA-backed coup began

dictatorships waging all-out war against their own people on behalf of the a rich elite and in defence of US hegemony.

In the eighties and nineties, the continent was devastated by the impact of free market, neo-liberal economic policies which systematically wrecked economies, plunged millions into even more poverty, widened the gulf between rich and poor to almost unimaginable proportions and wreaked havoc with the environment.

The election of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and the other left governments which followed was the political reaction to this capitalist nightmare. The system had proved itself to be economically, politically, socially and morally bankrupt. An alternative was necessary.

The left governments which have come to power in large parts of the continent, often winning successive elections, range from the social democratic to the more overtly socialist, yet all share a basic agenda.

First, a complete rejection of the kind of free market economic policies which proved so damaging and their replacement with an alternative economic strategy which places state ownership, public spending, regulation

and sustainability at the heart of their economic strategy. Second, an understanding that the poverty and inequality so endemic in the region is not there by accident. It is structural in nature and requires active government intervention to deal with the problem.

Rich elites

Third, democratic reform which takes power away from the rich elites and strengthens democratic institutions in a continent blighted by military dictatorships; fourth, a repudiation of the so-called Munro Doctrine which declared that Latin America belonged to the United States sphere of influence giving it the right to intervene and shape the destiny of the continent to suit American interests. Lastly, the need to increase the co-operation and integration of Latin American states.

The record has been impressive. Sustained economic growth and radical economic reform at a time when much of the world has been plunged into recession. Tens of millions of the poorest people lifted from poverty by huge investments in health, education, housing and employment. Political reforms which have con-

solidated and extended democracy despite the protests of the right and even some ill-informed liberals abroad. Practical measures across the continent which have accelerated integration reawakening the Bolivarian dream of a United Latin America and a willingness to face down US threats on issues like Cuba.

Forty years ago, the Allende Government was overthrown because it was so isolated from its allies. It is almost inconceivable that something similar would happen again although the United States has orchestrated less violent constitutional coups in Honduras and Paraguay and actively supported the flagrant rigging of elections in Mexico in a desperate attempt to turn the tide of history.

Global struggle

For those of us old enough to remember the Allende government, the events of the past decade have been exhilarating with the frontline in the global struggle against capitalism now firmly set in Latin America. It also opens up a debate about the nature of that struggle, particularly after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

When left governments come to power they face a number of dilemmas. How to maintain economic stability and growth while pushing through radical economic and social reforms. How to maintain broad coalitions for change

while keeping the country on the road to socialism. How to deal with right wing anti-democratic forces, often supported by outside powers, while maintaining democracy and civil rights.

So far, the various governments above have managed to navigate these complicated waters although this has involved trying to square a number of circles, for example in Brazil, the combination of state intervention and colossal public expenditure has created a phenomenal growth in the private sector strengthening the political influence of this sector. The success of the ruling Workers Party has undermined the case for even more radical reform and has opened up the debate on the left as to whether the WP can be the vehicle for further change.

What of the future? The likelihood is that the left of centre governments which have already emerged will consolidate their hold on government and are likely to be joined by others.

As has been stated already, but for coups in Paraguay and Honduras, and rigged elections in Mexico, these countries would have joined the camp. The move towards political and economic integration across the continent and beyond is accelerating with talk of the establishment of a Latin American equivalent of the EU. Many of these governments claim socialism to be the final destination, although the details of when and what this socialism will actually look like is unclear. Perhaps this is not a bad thing. Socialism cannot come in a pre-packaged form. It has to grow organically from the conditions and struggles that it finds itself in.

However, if the next decade is anything like the last, we will be a lot closer to answering some of these questions.



HUGO VICTORY: under Chavez, Venezuelan oil was made available at favourable rates to neighbours struggling to build more just societies



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Pivotal times for Scotland's media

NUJ Scottish organiser
Paul Holleran reports

THIS is a pivotal week in the future of the Scottish media.

Unions at BBC Scotland will be taking strike action in the fight against compulsory redundancies and bullying. Journalists at *The Scotsman* will be in shock at the scale of restructuring proposed this week as management seek a radical approach to the downward spiral of circulations and ad revenues.

The third major issue facing the press is the next stage of debate around the Leveson and McCluskey reports on the setting up of a regulator in place of the Press Complaints Commission.

These events are important in respect to the direction of the industry. The future of BBC management is on the cusp, as the old guard cling to the flawed approach of ruling by cuts, through bullying and targeting of individuals including union reps from NUJ and BECTU.

Bullying

A full scale investigation into systemic bullying has been completed and is due to be reported on soon, although there is no surprise that members of management are already trying to minimise details of the scale and depth of the evidence.

Union members however know what is happening and have voted overwhelmingly to strike this week. They are still determined to save the nine jobs at risk in BBC Scotland and stop the ensuing cuts under the



JOBS RISK: journalists at *The Scotsman* are worried about editorial department restructuring

misnomer of Delivering Quality First.

The new Director General - Lord Hall of Birkenhead, or Tony to his pals, starts in his new post next week and has the opportunity to get off on the right foot and bring a new broom to sweep away the bullying fat cats currently mismanaging the BBC.

The announcement on Tuesday by Johnston Press to restructure editorial departments came as a major shock to staff, although anyone reading the company results earlier this week shouldn't be that surprised.

The proposals to cut specific jobs and change the dynamic of *The Scotsman* is a brave move, although those journalists whose jobs are at risk won't appreciate it too much.

The editor hopes to turn the paper into a high level forum and drive the agenda on the Scottish political and cultural fronts by focussing on content by good writers.

Grand plan

It is a grand plan which encompasses a view on what a future Scottish media should look like but can only work with continued and correctly targeted investment.

The McCluskey report put together by an expert independent panel took many people by surprise with its radical proposals to regulate the press. In effect it set the stall out for a robust Scottish Press Ombudsman or Regulator working with a Press Council independent of the media and politicians. The NUJ has backed such

proposals, particularly as they are working in practice across the water in the Republic of Ireland under an Irish model not a million miles away from the Scottish proposals.

I came in for a bit of flak for standing up for the main elements of the McCluskey report from some senior editorial people, but the union's national executive council last weekend drafted a constructive response to the move towards a regulator broadly welcoming the Royal Charter, with the fall back of a Scottish model if employers and politicians try and renege on engagement with the Leveson principles.

A crucial week ahead which could be a compass for which direction the industry is heading.