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Scottish Socialist Voice

UNITY CAN DEFEAT THE BEDROOM TAX and open the way for a **Yes** vote

by Ken Ferguson

DEFEATED in Afghanistan and facing the pressure at home, the Westminster coalition is feeling the heat. Behind the spin about the Afghan army taking over the war, the bitter truth is that the NATO war there has been a failure.

It was said of the Bourbon monarchs that they forgot nothing and remembered nothing - the Syrian sabre-rattling by Cameron is a example of this. Behind the war-talk is the reality that Cameron would struggle to win a Commons vote for arming the rebels, as opposition ranges from Boris Johnson to the Labour left.

Revulsion at cuts

At home, the picture is equally gloomy with revulsion at cuts such as the Bedroom Tax and attacks on disabled benefits growing by the day.

Against this background, the STUC Bedroom Tax conference on 29 June can play an important role both in defeating this vicious measure and extending practical solidarity to its victims. The full power of the broad Labour Movement must resource challenges to the Tax, ensuring its victims get solidarity, practical advice and help.

Meanwhile - as Labour copies the Tories by suggesting regional benefits levels, maintaining the cuts planned by Osborne and capping the benefit budget - the longer term question of how an alternative can be won cannot be ducked. Both the SSP and the *Voice* take the view that only a radical break with Britain's warmongering neo-liberal state through independence can open the way to a different approach.



PHOTO: Simon Whittle

**REGISTER FOR
THE STUC'S
SAT 29 JUNE
BEDROOM TAX
CONFERENCE**

The STUC's Scotland United Against The Bedroom Tax Conference takes place on Sat 29 June, 10am-2.30pm at Meadowbank Stadium in Edinburgh. To register for the event, see: stucantibedroomtax.eventbrite.co.uk or phone 0141 337 8100



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'For further intrusion into your private life - vote No'

Alan Bissett takes a look at anti-Scottish independence dirty tricks campaigns

WHEN I was growing up, during the latter stages of the Cold War, we were told very simple stories about communists. They 'hated the West'. They were 'not allowed to have their own thoughts'. The Russians were characterised in popular culture as brainwashed automatons. Dissent was forbidden.

Governments spied on their citizens. It was never explained to us that 'communism' was also the political system of public ownership of all utilities and resources. This alone exposes the hypocrisy of Western posturing about Soviet propaganda. Far be it for me to defend the monstrosity which Soviet communism became, but it's becoming increasingly clear that when we were told that the West had to defeat it in order to defend 'freedom' we were being sold a lie.

Nothing to fear?

Now we have discovered that the UK government is able to circumvent the law by using the US security services to read our private emails and Facebook messages.

Foreign Secretary William Hague defended this practice with the usual rhetoric: "You have nothing to fear if you have nothing to hide."

While the majority of people are not breaking the law in their private lives, nonetheless it might be highly embarrassing for them to have their personal emails read, or perhaps even used against them by an even less scrupulous future regime.

Rather, it seems to be the government which has 'something to hide', such as the very existence of this programme, which only came to light through a whistle-blower.



Further abuses of power by the British state are simply too numerous to fit into this article, but I'd refer you to two excellent books: *Web of Deceit* by Mark Curtis, about the methods used by Britain to undermine democracy abroad, and *Cruel Britannia* by Ian Cobain, about the state's use of torture.

Margaret Thatcher's government in the 1980s conducted various 'dirty tricks' against the National Union of Miners (or the "enemy within" as Maggie liked to call them), including the bugging of phones, media manipulation and the infiltration of the miners by spies. Make no mistake, this was part of an onslaught by the ruling class, whom Thatcher was defending, against the entire British working class, of which the NUM was the most organised form.

This is all done in the name of 'security', a catch-all, Orwellian euphemism which means British capitalism doing whatever the hell it likes in order to protect itself against us. The idea that ordinary Brits are 'free' is one of the more elementary cons we are asked to believe.

Given how the UK state conducts 'security', we should not be surprised at the extent of the dirty tricks cam-

paign against the greatest threat to it since World War II: Scottish independence. Knowing that, if Scotland votes in favour of autonomy, the international prestige of the UK will be weakened, the Trident nuclear submarine will have to be dismantled and lucrative oil revenues will be diminished, the British establishment is pulling out all the stops to prevent it. You must have noticed the steady stream of scare stories being fed to the media on a daily basis, about how the sky will fall in if Scotland becomes independent.

The truth is that it is the UK state which is dangerous to Scotland, not independence. Incredibly, few Scots know of the existence of the McCrone Report, commissioned by the Tories in 1974, which said that if an independent Scotland were to nationalise its oil industry it would be one of the richest countries in the world. The Tories and Labour colluded to bury the report, until it was unearthed by one determined SNP activist 30 years later. Denis Healey, Chancellor of the Exchequer for this period, admitted only last month that the Labour government freely lied to the Scottish people about the extent of the oil reserves. By 1979, Labour would be trying to derail

Scottish devolution by insisting that 40 per cent of the total electorate had to vote for it, although this is not how Westminster referendums work. This meant that, even although 51 per cent of Scots who voted in 1979 wanted devolution, it was not allowed to pass. We were even promised more power should we vote against devolution, but what did we get? Margaret Thatcher using Scotland's vast oil wealth against us, to bankroll her programme of de-industrialisation.

Fast forward to 1999 and you'll find Tony Blair and Donald Dewar, Scotland's inaugural First Minister and so-called 'Father of the Nation', using the powers of the new parliament to rezone 6000 square miles of Scottish sea-water into English territory. They didn't even inform the Scottish people about this, let alone consult us. Two guesses what's in those waters? That's right. Oil.

Better together? Aye right.

War criminals

Theirs is a campaign which was given half a million pounds by a man with links to both Saddam Hussein and Serbian war criminals. They're not even embarrassed about that. Tells you all you need to know about their moral compass.

As momentum gathers towards the referendum in 2014, expect more outright lies and behind-the-scenes manipulation, to prevent Scots from realising the potential of this historic opportunity. Dirty tricks are what the UK establishment specialises in. Only this week, the highly-respected Margo McDonald said that she suspects British intelligence has already infiltrated the Yes campaign, a peaceful and democratic movement. The message is clear: for further intrusion into your private life, vote No.

HOW SHOULD SCOTLAND'S UNIONS RESPOND TO LABOUR'S RIGHT SHIFT?

asks John McAllion

"THINGS fall apart; the centre cannot hold..."

We might not yet have reached the stage where the words quoted above can be applied to "the great alliance" that once existed between the Labour Party and the Trade Unions in Britain.

Yet it is difficult to remember a time during the past century when that relationship has been under greater strain than now. There are a number of reasons for this.

The Labour Party was brought into existence to be the political voice of the organised labour movement across Britain. They were in parliament to defend the interests of that movement and the working class the movement represented.

Somewhere between 1979 and 1997 the Labour Party gave up any pretence of being that kind of party. In the words of the recently deceased author Iain Banks: "Labour gave up being Labour."

Anti-union laws

The embrace of the harshest anti-trade union laws in Europe by the Blair and Brown governments was the most obvious signal of New Labour's change of direction. There were many others.

Illegal wars, privatisation, deregulation, welfare cuts and attacks on civil liberties are some examples of Labour's drift to the centre right ground of politics; and of its drift away from the socialist and collectivist principles that had traditionally defined the labour and trade union movement.

Labour's affiliated trade unions were powerless in the face of this betrayal. Within the parameters of the British state they had nowhere else to go. Bad as Labour had become, the Lib Dems and the Tories were even worse. The unions



WE'RE ALRIGHT, JACK: the two Eds - Miliband and Balls - said they'd continue Tory-inspired cuts

may have hated what Labour Governments were doing. They were more frightened of what Lib Dem or Tory Governments might do if given the chance.

Events were to prove them right. The onset of the financial crisis in 2008 first ended 13 years of New Labour Government and then ushered in a ConDem Coalition committed to a programme of austerity that threatens to destroy everything "the great alliance" had ever stood for. In particular, it threatens the one part of the economy where the unions remain relatively strong - the public sector.

One senior union official recently told a pensioners' conference that more than 50,000 public sector jobs in Scotland had disappeared in the last four years and another 250,000 were set to go over the next four years.

The trade unions' key role in electing "Red Ed" Miliband as Labour leader was meant to signal the beginning of fight-back against austerity, a break with New Labour

and the hope of a steady return to the collectivist and egalitarian ideals of "the great alliance".

This flight of fancy was soon brought crashing to earth as Miliband and Balls, in true New Labour style, announced that they would honour the Tory inspired spending cuts, cap social security spending and erode universal benefits through further means testing. Anyone looking for an end to austerity under a Labour Government would look in vain.

Political funds

So where do trade unions turn now? The argument for trade unions to have political funds rests on them being able to use the money to campaign politically on issues of social justice that affect their members - full employment, rights at work, decent public services, the eradication of poverty and inequality and so on.

How then can any union continue to fund and support a Labour party that is committed to austerity

policies that threaten all of these socially just ends? The only credible answer to that question is that within the British state there is no electable alternative to Labour.

Scotland, of course, is different. We now have an historic opportunity to break with a British state that has remoulded what was supposed to be a party of labour into just another prop for a deeply conservative political culture. The challenge facing the leadership of the Scottish trade union movement now is to face up to that uncomfortable reality.

The STUC and its Labour affiliated unions claim that social change and not constitutional change should be at the heart of the referendum debate.

If they mean what they say they must recognise that the social change their members need cannot be achieved through a Labour party thirled to the British state but only through the break-up of that British state.

It really is time to think again.



'SCOTLAND FREE OR A DESERT'

Campbell Martin tells the story of the 1820 radicals

IN the early part of the 19th century, foreign revolutions helped feed the growth of Scottish working class radicalism and a belief that the power of the ruling class could be challenged.

In 1776 America had thrown-off the yolk of British colonialism and dispelled the idea that countries had to be ruled by a monarch. Likewise, in 1789, the French revolution had shown that an entire system of aristocratic privilege could be overthrown and replaced by a viable republic that put power in the hands of ordinary people.

Buoyed by these events, and the inspirational literature of people like Robert Burns, Scottish radicals began to organise in pursuit of social and political change. However, the parliament in London and the pseudo-English, ruling aristocracy of Scotland were not prepared to have their power challenged.

Sedition or treason

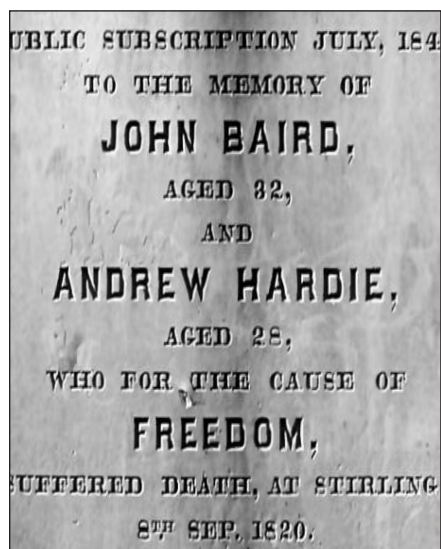
As the demands of radicals grew stronger and more vociferous, the British Government introduced new laws that meant individuals or groups advocating reform could be tried for sedition or treason. As a result, workers' groups agitating for change tended to meet in secret, but significant support amongst the working class meant that details of meetings were hard to keep quiet and government spies were able to infiltrate organisations.

By 1820, radicals had assembled a Committee for Organising a Provisional Government, which consisted of people elected from within trade unions, and which was tasked with organising and putting in place the social structures for a People's Republic of Scotland following a planned uprising against the British state.

Unfortunately, during a meeting in March 1820, held at Marshall's Tavern in the Gallowgate, Glasgow, the committee was betrayed by a government spy and all members - except one man who left the meeting early, a Glasgow Weaver known as John King - were arrested and imprisoned. Despite such a significant body-blow, the radical move-

ment in Scotland continued to organise and plan for an armed struggle to overthrow the unrepresentative and oppressive government of aristocrats in London.

It seems though that British spies had infiltrated the organisation to such an extent that when an uprising took place, the government knew every detail in advance and were well prepared. In fact, some historians speculate that forces of the British state were so well informed, as to events and names of radicals taking part, that the 'uprising' may actually have been organised by agents provocateurs working to a timescale most suitable to the government. Certainly, with the leadership committee locked up in jail, it seems the rebellion was initiated by a small group including John King, the man who escaped arrest on the night the police raided Marshall's Tavern.



MONUMENT: at Sighthill in Glasgow

In April 1820, told that he would be met by a 7,000-strong radical 'army' on the outskirts of Glasgow, James Wilson, a Weaver, led a group of 23 men from Strathaven to join the uprising to establish a workers' government in a Scotland once-again independent of England.

Remembered to this day, the banner under which Wilson and the Strathaven radicals marched bore the slogan - 'Scotland free or a desert'.

But there was no radical army waiting at Glasgow. Word of the true position reached Wilson and the others, allowing them to escape the British trap and return to Strathaven. However, government forces had been provided with the names of leading radicals, and Wilson was arrested at his home.

James Wilson was tried for treason, found guilty and executed in Glasgow on 30 August 1820. Knowing he would receive no justice from the British state, Wilson asked simply that he should be remembered as having acted "in the glorious cause of liberty".

British-inspired traps

On the same day Wilson had set-off from Strathaven, two other groups of radicals were caught in British-inspired traps. Both groups had been told to meet at Condorrat in Glasgow, from where they were to march to the Carron Iron Works in Falkirk, which at the time was a major manufacturer of weapons.

One group was led by a man called Andrew Hardie, the other by John Baird. Under the instructions of John King, the man who had left the Marshall's Tavern meeting before it was raided, the united group began its march towards Falkirk. King, however, indicated he had to go ahead to bring another group to meet them. It was the last anyone saw of the Glasgow Weaver, and the only group that subsequently met the radicals was a force of 32 British soldiers who ambushed them at Bonnymuir. In total, 19 radicals were arrested and imprisoned at Stirling Castle.

Andrew Hardie and John Baird were tried and convicted of treason: both were executed on 8 September 1820 at Stirling Castle.

As a lesson to others of like-mind, James Wilson, Andrew Hardie and John Baird were hanged and then beheaded.

Another 19 radicals were sentenced to death, but the sentence was subsequently commuted and they were 'transported' to New South Wales in Australia.

Despite the unsuccessful nature of the Scottish radical uprising of 1820, the actions of Wilson, Hardie, Baird and others played a significant part in laying the foundations of Scotland's socialist and independence movements.

An invaluable tool to resist the neo-liberal onslaught on higher education

Higher Education is a devolved matter, so decisions about funding are made by the Scottish Government rather than Westminster. Following the Browne Review in 2010, the maximum level for tuition fees for an undergraduate degree at English universities was set at £9000. Currently, Scottish students living and studying in Scotland pay no tuition fees at all. In the wake of Johann Lamont's attack on the no tuition-fee policy for Scottish students, **Andrew McGettigan's** recent book on the future of higher education in England is worth studying by those contemplating the future of higher education in Scotland. Safer under Westminster Labour or under independence? **Alex Miller** takes a look at a new book on the subject

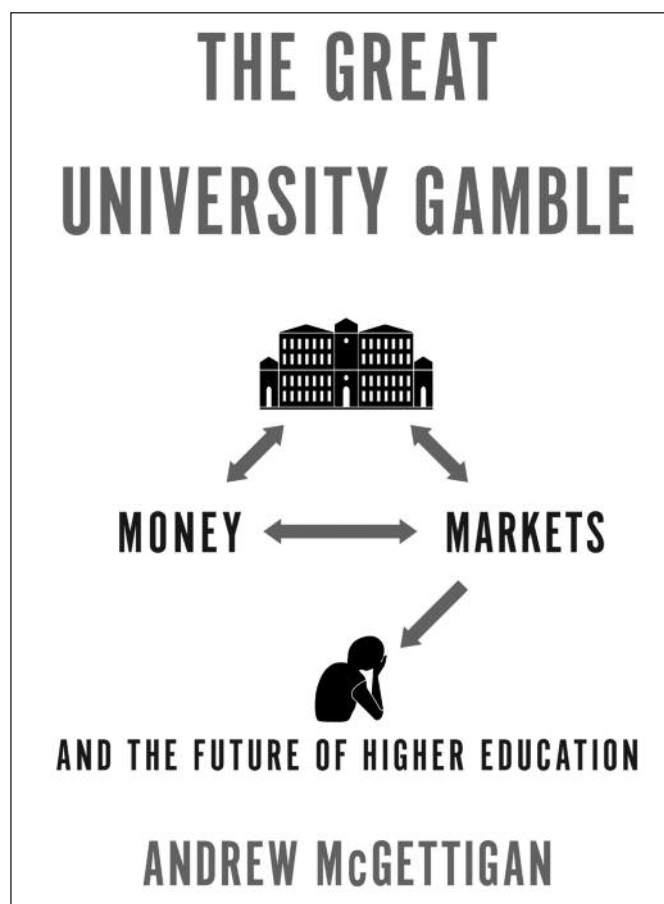
The Great University Gamble: Money, Markets and the Future of Higher Education by Andrew McGettigan (Pluto Press 2013, £16.99)

IN this excellent primer on the current neo-liberal assault on higher education, Andrew McGettigan gives an admirably clear and accessible account of the gradual commercialisation and privatisation of universities in England introduced by Mandelson and New Labour, and now accelerated (without primary legislation and with only limited parliamentary scrutiny) by Willetts and the ConDem Coalition.

On the surface, many of the policies introduced by the current UK government appear to be measures designed to deal with a funding crisis brought about by the great financial crash of 2008 and its aftermath. In particular, the raising of the tuition fee limit to £9000 in late 2010 made headline news, especially in the wake of the brutal treatment of students by police at the now infamous demonstration in Westminster in December of that year.

Sinister attack

As McGettigan demonstrates, however, beneath the headline grabbing rise in tuition fees lies a sinister attack on the whole concept of university education as a fundamentally public good, with the entire higher education



sector opened up to competition from "alternative providers".

The main aim of this is to provide lucrative risk-free money to for-profit companies often linked to the shady world of private equity: The Parthenon Group, "eager market consultants", have described the higher education sector as "treasure island", and the government has no plan to restore the old "block grant" to universities if the economic situation ever improves.

As McGettigan argues, while the narrative of "deficit reduction" may make political sense

for the Coalition, it is "economically illiterate" and a massive gamble with the future of higher education. The student loans system that will (in theory) allow students to pay the inflated tuition fees are "income contingent repayment loans".

These are loans where the monthly repayments are determined by the current income of the borrower rather than by the total amount borrowed. This means that the loans are potentially open-ended, and also that the government cannot guarantee that the loans will ever be re-

paid: the loans are unsecured, and students may not find regular employment that will take them above the point at which repayments are triggered.

According to the government's own projections, only 68 per cent of what is lent to students entering in 2012 will have been repaid by 2046, the point at which the first cohort of undergraduates to fall under the new funding regime reach the 30-year limit after graduation at which the loans are written off (and this figure is based on the optimistic assumption that the Coalition's austerity measures lead to sustained economic growth!).

Lining pockets

Crucially, according to the accounting conventions used by the UK government, the loans to students - since they are loans - don't count as expenditure: only the portion of the total debt that the government expects not to be repaid is counted as expenditure. So the government can portray the new funding regime as reducing public expenditure, when in fact the government will have to increase the amount of public money it actually puts into the system: not with the aim of providing a service to the public, but with the aim of lining the pockets of private equity firms and "for profit" education multinationals.

Like Gove's attack on schools and Lansley's attack on the NHS, Willetts's plans for higher education are (at best) an ideologically driven attempt at "creative destruction". By providing a clear and detailed account of the basic facts, figures and policies, McGettigan has provided an invaluable tool for those resisting the neo-liberal onslaught on higher education.

by *Richie Venton*

THE Tory Bedroom Tax is taking its toll. Above all, its human toll. This vicious wealth transfusion from the poorest to the millionaires' tax cuts has claimed its first victim.

Stephanie Bottrill, a grandmother who went without proper heating all winter to save up for the Bedroom Tax, couldn't cope with the £20 a week cut to her housing benefit, and took her own life. In a heart-rending final note to her son, she wrote, "Don't blame yourself for me ending my life. The only people to blame are the government."

On the streets of Ayrshire, SSP campaigners have been told of another suicide by a woman's neighbour for the same reasons, which she told me the victim's family want to keep private. People are at their wit's end. Even when this doesn't lead to the ultimate tragedy, it has racked up stress levels, poverty levels, the numbers of adults and children going without food.

Grinding poverty

Real levels of inflation on life's daily necessities like food, shelter, energy and transport is a nightmare for the entire working class, whose incomes are crushed downwards through pay and benefit cuts.

But for the very poorest sections, which includes the 105,000 Scottish families hit by the Bedroom Tax, price rises are even more punishing: a recent Report confirmed those on the lowest incomes pay on average 10 per cent more for the same essential daily items. And that's even before the Bedroom Tax impacted!

The proof of this grinding poverty, if proof was needed, lies with two simple facts: the exponential rise in applications for Discretionary Housing Payments in the two months since the Bedroom Tax came in, and reports across the country from social landlords of around 60-70 per cent of those tenants hit by the Bedroom Tax falling into rent arrears.

People simply can't afford to pay. Some have abandoned family homes after decades to escape this tax on the poorest, uprooting them-

selves. Some have fallen into the jaws of the private sector, where rents are drastically higher - which of course blows apart the government's nonsense about the Bedroom Tax being designed to cut the housing benefit bill. A majority have stayed put, often because the local council or housing associations have no smaller houses available anyway, but are wracked by anxiety at the fear of facing eviction.

And it's not just those on housing benefits living in social sector housing who are being hammered by one of the most punitive measures in a package of brutal attacks by the upper-class Westminster boot-boys. Already some social landlords, particularly local housing associations, are slashing the wages of long-serving staff, including the very Welfare Rights officers who are at breaking point with the workload of helping tenants get every benefit they can to offset the worst effects of the Bedroom Tax and other benefit cuts. In one such case in Glasgow, the £100,000 a year bosses of a housing association have used this as an excuse to cut the wages of people with over 20 years loyal service to their tenants by an obscene £5,000 a year, on top of making large num-

bers redundant. Services to tenants collapse, as staff stretched beyond breaking point have six-week waiting times for appointments.

Unity in action is critical against Lord 'eleven spare bedrooms' Freud and the rest of the Tories who devised this daylight robbery. Unity between those in the community directly hit by it and those not. Unity between housing staff and tenants. Unity across the broader working class movement, as the Bedroom Tax is only one blade in the hands of David 'Scissorhands' Cameron.

Opportunity

That makes the Scotland United Against the Bedroom Tax conference, called by the STUC on 29 June, a critically important opportunity to build real, decisive unity in action - in defence of those at the sharp end of the tax, but also to spearhead a movement to bring about its downfall, and that of its Tory architects.

The STUC conference recently took the very significant decision to officially support the No2Bedroom-Tax campaign, which is tenant-led, and which initiated and organised the huge anti-Bedroom Tax demos on 30 March in Glasgow and Edin-

burgh. The STUC has now called this conference of tenants, trade unionists, anti-poverty campaigns, political organisations and local anti-Bedroom Tax campaigns, to look at how best to coordinate a national campaign of opposition and resistance.

The conference needs to arrive at concrete decisions that give maximum solidarity to those affected - tenants and workers - and which targets those in various levels of political power who have the ability to resist, frustrate or even abolish the Bedroom Tax. The enormous resources of the STUC, with its 630,000 affiliated trade union members, should be unleashed to give people practical support as well as to coordinate action to defeat the Tax.

For instance, they should build on the work already done by UNITE Community branches who have printed leaflets with advice to tenants. If the STUC produced hundreds of thousands of such leaflets and planned teams to cover shopping centres, community halls, and areas of concentrated social housing, they could help cut across the fears people have and maximize the measures available to mitigate the impact of the Bedroom Tax. Alongside that they should deploy social

UNITE: evict Tories and their tax



NO EVICTIONS! the SSP has been at the heart of the battle to axe the Bedroom Tax PHOTO: Ian Wallace

media to spread information. And a well advertised STUC advice hotline would be a reassuring point of contact for those unsure about their rights, with welfare and benefits experts on hand to help people through the legal quagmire.

For example, they should broadcast the advice to appeal, automatically, in writing, within one month of getting the letter of decision from Housing Benefit departments announcing cuts - with guidelines on grounds for appeal.

They could popularize knowledge of the test cases being pursued through the courts, ranging from the impact on separated parents with shared custody of kids, as a violation of European Convention of Human Rights Articles on the right to private and family life; to the requirement for larger accommodation for disabled people; or challenges to the size of the room as a definition of whether it's a bedroom; and the right of a survivor of rape, harassment, assault or stalking to have an extra room as an adapted 'panic space'.

Likewise the trade union movement should assist people applying for Discretionary Housing Payments, to lessen the losses in income they face. . . something that

welfare rights workers are already doing automatically in most cases. DHP, though pitifully small as a pot of money in most council areas, is supposed to have the objective of preventing homelessness, good grounds for applying when people simply can't afford the Bedroom Tax. And STUC-funded advice and legal representation if or when tenants face Pre-Eviction and Eviction Procedures for rent arrears could help prevent many human tragedies.

Pound politicians

But the power of the trade union movement, tied to grassroots community action around the No2BedroomTax campaign, needs to go far beyond a support network for the victims of the Tory tax.

Action needs to be planned to pound the politicians to side with the people they claim to represent, or in the case of the Tory/Lib Dem Coalition, to drive them out of office, to halt their rule and ruin.

The conference on 29 June is an opportunity to plan action to pressurise Councils of all political colour, and the bosses of local housing associations, to not only pledge there will be no Bedroom Tax evictions, but also end the THREAT of

such evictions, by forcing them to take two further steps: reclassify rooms to avoid Bedroom Tax liability, and mount a ferocious campaign to demand the Scottish government cough up the £53million estimated shortfall in social landlords' rental income caused by the Bedroom Tax.

A minority of councils have taken the welcome, though limited, step of promising no evictions for a year "provided they are satisfied tenants have made all reasonable attempts to avoid rent arrears." To their shame, Labour councils have point blank refused even this faltering step in the right direction - content to play politics with people's lives, sometimes making such a demand on SNP-run councils but not doing it where Labour themselves are in control!

But even the SNP councils saying this are leaving the door ajar for backdoor evictions - whether of people already struggling to keep up previous repayment arrangements and now hit by the Bedroom Tax, or tenants on £71 a week whom it is utterly unreasonable to expect to pay £10 a week or more.

The STUC should aid mobilization of working people alongside No2BedroomTax tenants to pound the Scottish government with de-

mands to outlaw ALL evictions across councils AND local Housing associations - which is well within their powers - and to use under 30 per cent of last years Scottish government underspend of £179million to fund the rental shortfall! That one measure, similar to their cushioning of cuts to Council Tax benefits for a year, would eliminate the threat of evictions for twelve months, during which the STUC, individual unions and anti-Bedroom Tax campaigners could escalate the battle to evict the Tories and their Bedroom Tax.

Alongside their support for No2BedroomTax, the STUC conference took another vitally important decision, which they need to pursue with urgency: to support the building of a one-day general strike of workers against the ConDem cuts.

The Bedroom Tax is one strand to the most savage assault since at least the Dark Ages of Maggie Thatcher's crusade against the working class. So a concerted preparation of united industrial action, alongside community resistance to any threats of eviction, would embolden and unite every section of working class people - whether in or out of work, on benefits or not.

Confront the rich

The SSP has been at the heart of this battle to bury the Bedroom Tax and it's Tory architects. For example, the one and so far only council in Scotland to both pledge no evictions and to reclassify at least some of their houses to dodge the Bedroom Tax is North Ayrshire - which decided that after months of public meetings, street stalls and protest demos organised and led by the SSP.

We aim to make a difference here and now, as well as highlighting the fact there is absolutely no excuse for cuts to benefits, pay, services or jobs in this fabulously wealthy nation.

The rich are getting richer at the expense of the rest of us. But as the poet said, "We are many, they are few". Join the battle to confront the rich and their government, force them to scrap their Bedroom Tax, evict the Tories, and help forge a socialist future free of poverty and exploitation.

FOOD BANKS CASH IN ON POVERTY

by Sandra Webster

DESPITE the so called crisis in the banking sector, the use of one type of bank continues to strip demand. In a time of austerity the use of food banks are on the rise.

Over 500,000 people have now been fed by them including 14,000 Scots last year alone.

In a time when benefit cuts are impacting on the lives of so many, the only source of help available is a voucher to provide them with a three-day supply of food.

Most of the food banks have been set up by the Trussell Trust, linking in to local churches. They claim to be a non-political but have strong links with the Conservative Party.

Tory links

Its director Chris Mould has links with the Shaftesbury Partnership, who describe themselves as a "social business". One of the board of directors, Neil Atkins, is a Tory party councillor and the Mayor of Worthing.

The Shaftesbury Partnership recently congratulated one of their staff, Will Gallacher, on his recent appointment as special advisor to Chris Grayling.

Vouchers provided by the trust are now used instead of crisis loans to give people an emergency three day supply of food rather than the crisis

loan which as part of the ConDems welfare cuts were quietly "devolved" to local authority control in April of this year.

The harsh reality is that cash-strapped local authorities now distribute vouchers for the Trussell Trust instead of a small amount of money which an individual could use to choose the type of food they would like to eat.

"Annie" who has recently been removed from ESA and placed onto Jobseekers Allowance, despite being unfit for work for many years, is typical of many people who are forced to use food banks. In Scotland, there has been a 150 per cent increase in the number of people having to use one.

Half of these are casualties of benefit cuts and a direct result of their benefits being reduced, withdrawn or stopped.

A month ago, after being found fit for work by ATOS, her benefit payments were stopped for three weeks and her community psychiatric nurse gave her a token for a food bank in Renfrewshire.

She is a proud woman but had no choice but to go along to a local church where the food was distributed.

She told me that the volunteers were kind but that they had offered to pray for her to help her situation. She was given a three-day supply



HARVEST FESTIVAL TIME? supplies at a Glasgow food bank. **Ok if you like tinned food all the time and Rolos for breakfast**

of food. The food is collected from members of the charity and are all tins and packets.

I saw the food she had been given and it reminded me of the collection of tins you might get from a harvest festival at school, where items are found from the back of cupboards and collected to be distributed to the needy.

Pitied

There is also no fresh food available, though some food banks provide fruit or a vegetable. This food did help keep Annie going for a few days but she said she felt like the recipient of charity and pitied by the volunteers.

Her story reflects the experiences of many. In 2010-11, the government paid out £228million in crisis loans. These were small amounts of money to tide people over, and would be reclaimed from benefits.

It gave people the means to buy very basic food but they controlled where and

what they bought. Food banks are nothing more than another step further down the road to the bad old days when no pay meant hunger and starvation.

It is not acceptable that as Cameron took his place in the G8 this week, thousands are forced to rely on charity to eat.

Unfortunately for many, food banks are the only option they have in a very harsh financial climate.

The Westminster government seems to be moving further away from the thoughts of many, that we should support our neighbours and families. DLA was a true lifeline.

Looking forward to the referendum next year I, like many others, wonder how we can dare to be different. It is important that we share our vision of how different Scotland can be.

People will vote Yes because their lives will be transformed, not because their lives will stay the same.

A Scottish socialist pound?

by Bill Newman

IT SEEMS very odd that the SNP, whose main purpose in life is to achieve an independent Scotland, should have adopted policies which limit the reality of independence.

Retaining the Queen as head of state and voting for an independent Scotland to join NATO seem perverse decisions. But strangest of all has been the proposal to keep the English Pound. These policies don't demonstrate pragmatism, but rather show weakness and a lack of trust in the electorate to embrace true independence.

The Scottish Pound, of course, though our pounds may look different, is exactly the same as the English Pound and each Scottish Pound is backed by its equivalent in English currency. To retain the current arrangement, as the SNP insists, is to sacrifice all monetary policy to the Bank of England (and, ultimately, to the Westminster Government).

This doesn't just mean that Scottish interest rates would be determined by the Bank of England, but that money supply, a key determinant of economic policy, would be controlled by the Bank of England. And monetary policy doesn't exist in a vacuum, but has deep effects on fiscal decision making, not least on national budgets.

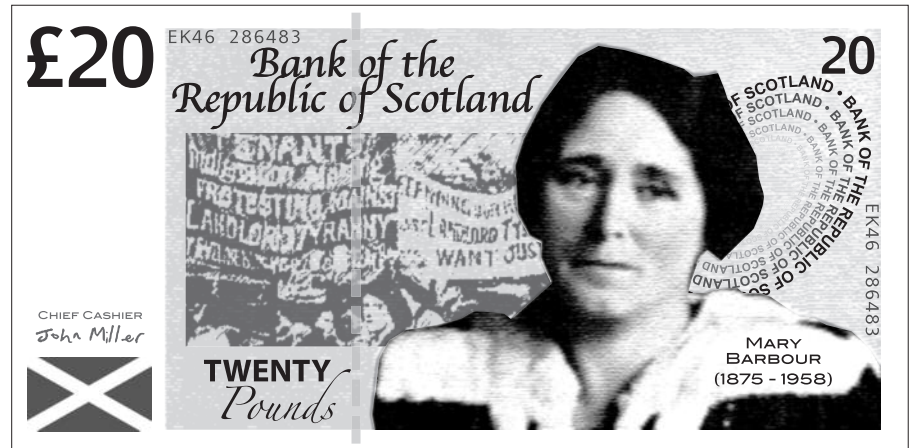
Alternatives to SNP

Even with a token Scottish member of the Bank of England's policy making institutions, it is surely self-evident that the Bank of England would pay little, if any, attention to considerations of economic priorities outside England.

There are, of course, alternatives to the SNP position. One possibility would be to adopt the Euro, as Latvia has recently unwisely chosen to do. Despite scare-mongering assertions by some No campaigners, who should, and probably do, know better, there is no requirement for new EU states to adopt the Euro.

Moreover, given the chaos inside the Euro Zone, surely no-one could seriously suggest that such an adoption would be desirable. Indeed, it is lunatic to tie Greece, Cyprus, Spain and Portugal to a Euro exchange rate which leaves the Euro wildly over-valued for their economies while leaving Germany with an under-valued currency. The current Euro system is a capitalist absurdity which causes totally unnecessary misery to workers in southern Europe and which must eventually collapse under its own contradictions.

Another possibility, and one that at first glance looks like a sound socialist solution, is



to establish a non-convertible currency; that is, a currency prohibited from exchange into another currency. This prevents currency speculation, thus allowing internal economic change without external market-driven pressures.

But if a Scottish currency were non-convertible, then trade with other countries, including the remainder of the UK (RUK) could only be conducted through a system of barter (known as counter-trade), by using national convertible currency and gold reserves or by borrowing convertible currency (in other words, accumulating national debt). The economic distortion which this would cause would be intolerable and cannot be considered a viable proposition.

A perfectly feasible solution would be to establish a new freely floating currency created by a new Central Bank of Scotland. On the face of it, this looks like the obvious solution: a new currency dependent on market conditions and independent of external national controls. But there would be significant problems. The Scottish economy would be much stronger than the remainder of the UK with a probable trade surplus and a positive balance of payments. Indeed, the prospect of a prosperous Scotland and a weaker RUK terrifies all the major Westminster parties and largely explains the furious attempts to secure a No vote.

The problem is that a free-floating Scottish Pound, following an initial speculative period, would float upwards, damaging Scottish exports (particularly to the RUK) and tourism. This would distort the Scottish economy and make economic adjustments very difficult in the early years of independence. At the very least, it would be important that economic relations (particularly trade) with Scotland's overwhelmingly largest trading partner, the RUK, should be kept as smooth as possible and a free-floating Scottish Pound would not achieve this. So, if none of the above proposals are either desirable or achiev-

able, what alternatives are left? A solution whereby a Scottish currency is not beholden to the Bank of England, but allows external economic relations to continue without distortion seems the best option. And this can be achieved! A new Central Bank of Scotland should be established and a new currency should be created, but this currency should initially be linked to the Bank of England's Pound at parity on a basis controlled by the Central Bank of Scotland.

Fairer society

There is nothing unusual in the attachment of one currency to another, or to a basket of other currencies. This would ensure that trade and other economic flows continue without speculative distortion and give currency stability while progress is made to establish a fairer and more socialist society. It should not be envisaged that such an arrangement would continue indefinitely and progressive steps could be taken over time towards a more freely convertible currency, should a Scottish Government and the Central Bank of Scotland consider this desirable.

Such a solution is not ideal and a good deal of preparation and negotiation would be necessary before adoption, but it would be preferable to other proposals. Why the SNP should consider a currency subservient to the Bank of England seems very curious and is not even a policy shared by all nationalists nor by other partners in the Yes campaign. The recommended solution above may not be perfect, but it does at least provide a platform for debate and is certainly preferable to the SNP position.

• Before retirement, Bill Newman worked as an economist and member of the general management team of a City of London bank. He emigrated to Scotland some 20 years ago and is a long standing-member of the SSP.

INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT AND CHANGE GATHER PACE IN SYRIA AND IRAN

Bill Bonnar reports

EVENTS in the Middle East have taken a dramatic turn with the decision by Britain and other western nations to step up their military support for the rebel groups in Syria and the election of Hassan Rouhani as President of Iran.

It is now clear that a stalemate situation has arisen in Syria. The Assad Regime and its allies, while strong enough to stay in power, are not strong enough to defeat the rebellion. On the other side, the rebels, while strong enough to continue fighting are not strong enough or united enough to defeat the regime. Only a negotiated solution can now end this conflict which makes the decision to increase military support for the rebels an act of great recklessness.

Already Russia has responded by stepping up its military support for Assad. Syria is experiencing the nightmare scenario that many commentators feared. A generalised civil war fuelled increasingly by religious and ethnic divisions, spilling over into neighbouring countries and drawing in outside forces. To pour extra arms into this conflict is like pouring petrol onto a house which is already on fire.

The role of the international community should be to facilitate a negotiated solution which to be fair to countries like Russia and Iran; has been attempted. To say that western intervention on this issue



ROUHANI: his election could thwart Israel/US ambitions in the region

has been less than helpful would be an understatement. Britain, America and certainly Israel, while acknowledging the need for a negotiated settlement, want to make sure that western interests are protected in the process.

What would a negotiated settlement look like? Central to this must be the removal of President Assad and his immediate entourage. This is not the same as the removal of the Baathist party from power. Its removal or collapse would signal the final collapse of the country with appalling consequences.

The Baathist Party must be one of the key architects of any peace process. The second is a commitment to preserve the integrity of the Syrian state and third to maintain

the principle of secularism as central to any settlement. In a country riven by religious conflict this is crucial. This may be enough to tempt enough forces on both sides to try an end the conflict.

In Iran the landslide election of Hassan Rouhani has come as a shock to many outside commentators. This is in part because his election victory did not quite fit the script of an Islamic dictatorship, driven by fanatical clerics and ruthlessly repressing all dissent while arming themselves to the teeth with nuclear weapons.

The BBC, in particular, seemed utterly confused by this turn of events. Iranian politics have always been much more complex and contradictory. Although an Is-

lamic state, in which major areas of power are held by the religious hierarchy, there are also important democratic spaces in terms of an elected parliament and president. Like all Islamic countries, the central struggle is between religion and secularism and this struggle impacts widely. Rouhani's victory appears to be as a result of a backlash against many of the policies of the outgoing President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

His term of office has been characterised by severed economic problems fuelled, in part, by sanctions, a belligerent stand on foreign policy issues and what many saw as attacks on democracy and civil rights. He also appears to have divided the religious establishment many of whom switched their support to Rouhani. Underlying all this may well be events in Syria and a generalised fear of Iran becoming engulfed in another war after the trauma of the Iran/Iraq war in the '80s. Rouhani won the election on a platform of normalising Iran's relations with its neighbours and the wider community and in extending democratic reform within the existing constitution.

For the United States and Israel, who quite liked having Ahmadinejad in power, Rouhani presents a problem. It may prove a lot harder to paint him and by extension, his country, as warmongers and go some way to thwarting their ambitions in the region.

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RESISTANCE: people shout anti-government slogans during a rally by the labor unions in Istanbul, Turkey on 17 June

Turkey: street battles continue

by Bill Bonnar

THE anti-government protests in Turkey have taken many people by surprise and demonstrate, once again, that under capitalism conflict and instability are rarely far away. On paper it shouldn't be happening. The government of Prime Minister Erdogan and his Justice & Development Party hold a comfortable majority in parliament. The country has a democratic constitution and strong secular tradition.

Economically, Turkey has weathered the financial storms of recent years better than most and until quite recently has shown impressive economic growth. Of course, all of this is on the surface.

Underneath, major fault lines are opening up in Turkish society.

At the last election around half the electorate voted for the Freedom & Justice Party. For the half of the population that didn't there have been a growing disquiet around the direction the government is taking the country. The country is increasingly becoming polarised around a number of issues.

The first is between secularism and what is perceived as a process of Islamification. Modern Turkey is a fiercely secular state yet there have been concerns for some time that Prime Minister Erdogan is gradually moving the country away from this. Often it is small things like restrictions on the sale of alcohol or introducing more of an Islamic dress code but enough to send warning lights flashing among those who want Turkey to remain a secular state.

The second has been a growing disparity between rich and poor. In recent years Turkey has achieved significantly large growth rates but the feeling amongst many that this increased wealth has fallen mostly into the hands of the rich. Corruption has increased and the government is now seen by many as a government for the rich.

The third is a belief that Turkey is once again moving in the direction of dictatorship in a country with a long history of such regimes. While in the recent past this has taken the form of military rule there is growing evidence of the emergence of the kind of 'elective dic-

tatorship' which exists in places like Russia.

In Turkey the government, through its increasing control of the media, its dominance over the political institutions of the country, its use of state funded patronage and its open use of the forces of repression, is creating an electoral majority around itself while actively marginalising the opposition.

This has created the kind of backlash witnessed in recent times. When people feel that their concerns are not been met by the formal political process they tend to take to the streets. An interesting feature of this is the emergence of Left parties in a leadership role in the protests and the active intervention of the trade union movement. They, along with student and environmental groups, have successfully filled the vacuum caused by the inaction of the main opposition Peoples Republican Party.

This has given voice to that large section of the electorate which oppose the government yet have felt powerless in recent years. That voice includes demands for the defence of secularism and for demo-

cratic reform; for workers' and trade union rights, for a redistribution of wealth, an end to endemic tax evasion by the rich and for stricter control and accountability for the police and security forces.

At the time of writing it would appear that government repression has succeeded in quelling many of the protests but this comes at a price. Already the Peoples Republican Party has sharpened its opposition and begun to articulate some of the demands of the demonstrators no doubt worried that it will lose support.

Divisions appear to be emerging within the ruling party around the handling of the crisis while the position of the Left and trade union movement have been enhanced. On the Left there are a number of legal small socialist, social democratic and green parties and a couple of banned Communist Parties.

The protest has shown the need to create a Left vehicle which can work within the Turkish political system and become a significant Left opposition. The recent protests have shown that the space for such a vehicle clearly exists.

DLA - obituary of a benefit

by Sandra Webster

ON 10 June, another landmark in the welfare cuts juggernaut rolled into the news again. This was the end of the road for all new claims of Disability Living Allowance for all new adult claimants. The government claim the new Personal Independence Payment will target those who need it the most. Disability groups and charities challenge their rhetoric and say the government's actions are nothing more than about making cuts. They also report the widespread misery the cuts will have on many people with disabilities.

Lifeline

DLA was introduced by a Conservative government in 1992 and was designed as a support for the extra cost of living with a disability. For many people, it is a true lifeline and helps them not only work or study but access to all areas of life most of us take for granted. It is also a passport to other help such as concessionary travel pass and carer's allowance for family member who offers support. It is an effective benefit with a very low fraud rate only 0.5 per cent from the government's own figures - so why change it? Despite their protestations of



MAKING A KILLING:
the new assessment
tests will be carried
out by ATOS and
Capita, who will
make profits of
millions of pounds
from DWP contracts
PHOTO: Simon Whittle

spending more money, the reality is that the charity for people with a disability, SCOPE, estimate that over the next five years, 60,000 people with disabilities will lose their entitlement to extra support. DLA is being replaced by a new benefit called Personal Independence Payment or 'PIP'. Even from the very early feedback following its introduction, many disabled people fear that they will not meet

the new stricter criteria needed to be able to receive it.

At the centre of the concerns is how fit for purpose the new assessment test will be. Under the present system for DLA, claimants have to complete a 45-page claim form as well as back up their claims with medical evidence. The new assessment which everyone will have to attend seems mostly to be based on

the physical tasks an individual can do. Mental health and autism charities have added their voices to growing concerns that the tests do not take into account the difficulties experienced by those living with neurological mental health and cognitive difficulties.

They will also be carried out by ATOS and Capita - well known organisations - who will make profits in the millions due to contracts from the DWP. Their names and involvement, due to their handling of the ESA assessments, mean people with disabilities are living in fear.

'Catherine' looks after her son who has Post Traumatic Stress Disorder after being pensioned out of the army. He is in receipt of DLA, which helps him get around, as he is unable to use public transport.

Concerns

Although he will not have to claim PIP until 2015, she spoke movingly of concerns that she has, and the deep depression he has, which impacts on all areas of his life.

They are both fearful he will not meet the criteria for PIP and will lose many of his benefits. Though the change to their circumstances are two years down the line, they are already living under the long shadow of the introduction of PIP.

As DLA is laid to rest, we should mourn its passing. It was a good benefit which helped many to live. Perhaps that was its downfall - it was too effective. It supported people with disabilities, not to be seen as recipients of charity, but to live full and independent lives. This is alien to the image the ConDems would have us believe. RIP to a good benefit - we will not forget you.

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