

Bedroom Tax: As the Voice went to press, the High Court in London ruled the Bedroom Tax did not unlawfully discriminate against disabled people. Here we look at the brutal reality of living in the shadow of eviction caused by the tax. • see page 5

£1 • issue 421 • 2nd - 15th August 2013
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Scottish Socialist Voice



RETREAT: Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby said he was "embarrassed" by revelations that his Church's own pension fund has links to Wonga - the payday lender he had said he wanted to put out of business

NEITHER WONGA NOR THE BISHOPS BUT FAIR WAGES, BENEFITS AND UNION RIGHTS

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Royal baby media blitz can't conceal ConDem class war

by Ken Ferguson

DAY after day of royal baby overkill with colour supplements, mindless TV coverage and sick-making "experts" gushing may fill the media but back on planet Scotland the reality of the ConDem class war continues.

Elsewhere in this *Voice* we look at the continuing impact of the war on welfare and wages which is slashing living standards and driving increasing numbers into the arms of loan sharks.

Alongside the direct economic assault further attacks on already weak workers' rights with charges to take lousy bosses to employment tribunals - designed at the behest of the over hyped Lib Dem Vince Cable - came into force.

Meanwhile few *Voice* readers will have been surprised at the "revelation" by Westminster MPs that the public have little trust in the big energy firms!

Fuel poverty

With about a million Scots in fuel poverty and an almost constant stream of announcements that the poverty-stricken power firms will need to further hike prices, their lack of credibility may be news to handsomely-paid MPs but not to anybody else.

Yet faced with this rip off of the public the reaction is crocodile tears, hand-wringing and pointless calls for switching accounts or increasing competition. Choosing between different



sets of rip off merchants is a failure and it is high time that energy was taken into public ownership and run not as a cash cow for profiteers but a vital - and affordable - public service.

The same is true of the Wonga vs The Bishop loans row.

Rather than scrapping over how much a loan should cost the real debate should centre on why thousands of people have to survive each month on pay cheques that only last two weeks, filling the gap with loans.

The truth is that the 30-

year-long assault on workers' rights, started by Thatcher and carried on by union funded New Labour has driven down wages and, since the crash, can no longer be filled by cheap credit.

Bloated profits

What is needed is a drive for decent wages and fair benefits backed by restored union rights and paid for from the bloated profits and dividends of the rich.

Thirty years of pandering to the speculators and tax dodgers has now created a

world of misery for the many alongside opulence for the few.

This however is a world endorsed enthusiastically by all the No parties and most shamefully by the misnamed Labour Party.

Without the participation if Labour in Better Together, the No camp would be exposed as the pro-bosses, anti-worker bunch they are.

That's why the Yes campaign needs to ruthlessly expose the fact that Labour no different than their partners in crime and that voting No will not change that.

Only a Yes vote which opens the way for a government which can repeal anti-union laws, break with Labour-supported ConDem cuts and break with the increasingly racist politics led by the Tory/UKIP bloc and tail ended by Labour.

A Yes vote will not only open the prospect of a more progressive Scotland it will light a beacon of hope for those struggling for change in the rest of the former UK.

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WHY DO MAJORITY OF SCOTLAND'S ARTISTS SUPPORT INDEPENDENCE?

Alan Bissett takes a look

RECENTLY, I found myself on *Newsnight Scotland*, taking part in a discussion about artists and the independence movement.

The item was prompted by three events: Alex Salmond inviting some of Scotland's top writers to help word the SNP's flagship White Paper on independence; and an article by the journalist Joyce Macmillan in *The Scotsman*, who has noticed a dearth of artists supporting the Union.

In response, the Better Together campaign has announced its own cultural response, headed up by the composer, Eddie McGuire. With no disrespect to Mr McGuire, I can barely think of any of my fellow artists who will rush to join their campaign.

Imagination

The first question we should ask, then, is: why do the majority of Scotland's artists support independence, when most creative types run a mile from 'narrow' nationalism? It's because the possibilities of independence excite the imagination. The Union is a failing state and a stunted democracy, which exists primarily to wage war, buttress capitalism and maintain upper-class rule.

The very existence of an unelected chamber of hereditary peers is proof of this. The rhetoric from the Better Together campaign, who want to protect this elitism, is backward-looking and negative, predicting an apocalyptic future for Scotland if we vote Yes.

It is no surprise that they even call themselves, privately, 'Project Fear'. Furthermore, British 'national' culture seems to consist these days of manufactured excitement about Royal weddings, babies and Jubilees. True artists are



CULTURAL MOMENTUM: artists like poet Liz Lochhead kept the Scottish working-class imagination alive in the face of Thatcherism

not easily fooled by the false narratives of the powerful.

Here in Scotland they are imagining a better social and economic future, an increased cultural confidence, awaiting us at the other side of independence. They also don't detect a xenophobic or ethnic strain to Scottish nationalism, unlike British nationalism - as expressed by the Conservatives, UKIP and the BNP - whereby imperialist might and suspicion of foreigners is symbolised with every flutter of the Union Jack.

For these reasons, most in the Scottish creative community believe that independence will release a renaissance in our literature, theatre, film, television and music, as we throw off the suffocating cultural effects of London dominance.

The other question to ask, however, is: does it matter what artists think anyway? If you are unemployed or a fast-food worker on minimum wage or a lorry-driver or a cleaner, why should you care what a bunch of painters, actors and poets have to say?

I'd argue that it's the job of

artists, primarily, to think. Artists are in the business of exercising their minds, daily, and can often see round the corner of society to what's heading our way.

Scottish artists see only further domination and inequality within the Union, and greater social democracy and fairness with independence.

Another reason to pay heed is that Scottish artists have been proven right before. Robert Burns himself decried the Act of Union, in his famous poem *A Parcel O' Rogues*, realising, correctly, that Scotland had been betrayed by its ruling class for their personal gain (or, as he put it, "bought and sold for English gold").

Two of our greatest 20th century poets Hugh MacDiarmid and Edwin Morgan believed in Scottish independence early on, MacDiarmid being among the first to equate it with the socialist struggle.

After the rigged 1979 referendum on devolution, with Scotland left politically impotent, the artists picked up the slack. Novelists such as James Kelman, Alasdair Gray,

Irvine Welsh and Janice Galloway; poets such as Liz Lochhead and Tom Leonard; and painters like Alexander Moffat and Ken Currie were able to keep the Scottish working-class imagination alive, in the face of Thatcherite oppression, and create cultural momentum which carried towards the creation of the Scottish Parliament in 1999.

A third reason to trust the artists is that they are not toe-ing a party line. While all want independence, none fully support the SNP. Scottish culture is left-wing in inclination and a great many artists have socialist tendencies.

After independence, we will switch our attention from attacking Westminster to attacking the Scottish government, and Scottish capitalism, whichever forms those take, using our cultural weight to campaign for a stronger working-class voice in Holyrood.

None of us are risking our reputations, our hopes and our energies simply to help establish a new Scottish ruling-class.

Scotland's 1966

The comparison I made on *Newsnight* is that 2014 could be Scotland's 1966, our greatest, historical moment of cultural triumph. Imagine what it was like to be in London at that time: the youth rising up against a decrepit social order that still doffed the cap; music and attitudes changing; civil rights on the march; the future seeming bright.

On the same *Newsnight*, Eddie McGuire could only offer doom-filled warnings about Greek-style collapse. So much for inspiration!

If we do not have the hope of a better Scotland - a socialist Scotland - then we do not have anything. Over the coming year, the nation's artists will be dreaming that potential into being.

SCOTLAND'S ROLE IN THE BRITISH EMPIRE IS A PERMANENT STAIN



by Campbell Martin

AROUND the mid-1800s, Scots were beginning to find their voice in radical and socialist organisations. Living conditions for much of the population were appalling, with large families often crammed into one room of festering, unsanitary accommodation in Scotland's expanding cities.

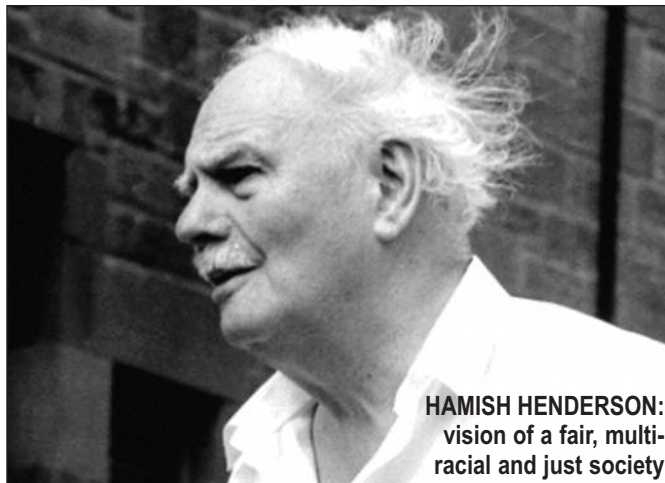
Fledgling bodies representing workers and local communities began to demand improvements, both in the workplace and from housing landlords.

Often, a cornerstone of such organisations was the recognition that 'home rule' for Scotland was a necessary requirement in the struggle to throw-off the yolk of remote governments in London, which were seen as being in the pockets of the rich, the very people whose interests were served by the conditions that trapped the working class in grinding poverty.

Suppressing

However, while the seeds of class consciousness and the importance of Scottish national self-determination were taking root at home, many Scots were actively conquering and suppressing the peoples of other nations in the name of the ever-expanding British Empire.

Throughout the 19th Century, Britain extended its military and economic power around the globe, with Scots playing significant roles in the building of an Empire 'on which the sun never set' - a reference to the fact that British colonial



HAMISH HENDERSON:
vision of a fair, multi-racial and just society

conquests spanned so much of the world that there was never a time during a 24-hour period when the sun was not shining on at least one part of it.

Nations and peoples were defeated by British military might, including massed ranks of Scottish regiments. Once colonised, every ounce of wealth was extracted from the conquered nations, with Scots to the fore in providing clerks and administrators within ruling regimes, in addition to managers in plantations and other British commercial interests. For example, in India, the jewel in the crown of the British Empire, the first three Governors-General were Scots.

Throughout this period - the mid-to-late 1800s - Scots at home were also seen to 'benefit' from Scotland's membership of the British Union and as a 'partner' in Empire. Colonial railways needed steam engines, which were built in the Glasgow district of Springburn: mills in Dundee prospered from the jute industry linked to trade with India.

Fabulous wealth was built by Glasgow merchants through their trade in tobacco and sugar harvested in the West Indies. But, amidst these 'success stories', thousands-upon-thousands of ordinary men, women and children

in Scotland continued to live in absolute poverty.

The British Empire was built on the pursuit of wealth through exploitation, the founding principle of modern capitalism. Scots aristocrats and merchants who signed-up to the project were well rewarded, while those at the bottom rung of the colonial ladder saw little benefit, other than a misguided feeling of superiority gained from policing the so-called 'lesser beings' of conquered nations.

While it can be argued that ordinary soldiers and lowly clerks were products of their time and knew no better than to carry out the orders of their social and military 'superiors', the same argument cannot be made for Scots of supposedly 'higher orders' and positions.

To this day, many Glaswegians remain unaware that the 19th century wealth of the city was built on slavery. Much of Glasgow's stunning architecture and many of its mansions and town-houses were built by merchants who made their money from tobacco and sugarcane cultivated in the West Indies and picked by slaves forcibly removed from their homelands in western Africa.

Not only did Glasgow merchants grow fabulously wealthy on the labour of slaves, but when slav-

ery was abolished within the British Empire, the former slave-owners received financial compensation from the British Government.

Official papers show the British exchequer paid-out £400,000 to 100 Scottish claimants. Most of the Scots who received compensation for the loss of their slaves were recorded as living in Glasgow: the amount they received would have a value today in the region of £2 billion. The time of British Empire is a period of shame, and the significant role played by Scots in the violent repression, subjugation and exploitation of the peoples of other nations is a permanent stain on our history. There are very good reasons why, today, the British flag fluttering in the warm breeze of foreign lands still generates feelings of foreboding in local people.

Wind of change

The late Hamish Henderson, in his seminal work *Freedom Come All Ye*, written in 1960, described how the role of Scots as both cannon-fodder and colonial oppressors in the British army led to a situation where the sound of bagpipes instilled fear in lands across the globe.

However, Henderson went on to reflect that a wind of change blowing across Scotland - the strengthening of socialist beliefs and of Scottish national identity, as opposed to British - has the potential to sweep-away the British state-control under which Scots helped to exploit others in the name of imperialism.

In a vision of a fair, multi-racial and just society, Hamish Henderson referred to a Scotland and a world where we are "aw Jock Tamson's bairns", and where Scots, shorn of the negative baggage of British unionism and colonialism, are welcomed as friends in countries around the world.



EVICT THE TORIES! a Westminster government will not be the solution and a Labour government will offer no guarantees

Under the shadow of the Bedroom Tax

by Sandra Webster

IT has been just over a hundred days since the benefit cuts which include the Bedroom Tax were first implemented but already the impact is being felt by so many people.

Never before in recent history at least has such a tax been designed to hit some of the most neediest households in Scotland affecting on those who rent their homes from social landlords.

In a recent COSLA poll 80 per cent of councils reported receiving half or less of their usual rent revenue with 60 per cent reporting loss of revenue of 40 per cent.

For cash-strapped local authorities this means that more vital frontline services have been cut.

The cold mathematics of this means that for many vulnerable tenants more and more pressure is being placed on individual tenants to pay the Bedroom Tax

arrears they have built up through no fault of their own.

'Sonia' lives in Renfrewshire, where the council have pledged that there will be no compulsory evictions due to Bedroom Tax arrears, as long as "tenants work with housing staff".

She was relieved, as she is in receipt of Employment Support Allowance due to ill health however she soon found out what the extra caveat to work with staff meant.

She had never been in debt in her life and was ashamed after only a couple of weeks to have a letter informing her she might be in arrears and legal action could be taken against her.

She phoned her housing officer and had a home interview where her income and expenditure were gathered. Renfrewshire Council count Disability Living Allowance as income even though this is a benefit which is meant to help with the extra cost of living with a

disability, and not ordinary income.

Some disabled people are fighting these decisions by local authorities but for many like Sonia they feel too overwhelmed and isolated.

The staff told her she would probably be too well off to qualify but she would hear in two weeks time.

The next two weeks were difficult for Sonia as she was put under pressure by a housing officer by telephone and visits to her home asking if she could pay some of the arrears.

Her story has a temporary happy ending as she is now in receipt of a discretionary housing payment until the end of September but then she will have to apply again.

Unfortunately, Sonia's story is not an unusual one as more and more people are being put under pressure to pay Bedroom Tax arrears.

There have been reports of local authorities offering to pay the Bedroom Tax for some of their tenants while

they attend a budgeting course. The people on benefits should be the teachers!

As local authorities panic about their decreasing income they will put pressure on their front line housing staff to collect as much arrears as possible.

There will be no such pressure on MPs who will condemning the benefit cuts refuse to say if they will repeal the Bedroom Tax and say the benefit cuts are necessary.

A Westminster government will not be the solution and a Labour government will offer no guarantees.

We must fight to oppose this malicious attack on the most vulnerable and most importantly be there for those most affected.

I believe our hope is in the 2014 independence referendum, when a Yes vote will mean we can look to build a kinder, fairer society.

That is the prize I will be struggling for in the next year.

by *Richie Venton*

ACCORDING to *The Bible*, 2,000 years ago Jesus Christ entered the temples to find them overrun by money-changers, fashioned himself a whip, overturned their tables, scattered their coins and drove them out.

Two millennia on, Justin Welby, the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury - and therefore one of the men claiming to represent Christ on Earth - entered the debate about today's moneylenders, denounced Pay Day Loan giant Wonga - only to hastily retreat days later when it emerged his own Church of England has huge investments in Wonga!

Rather than lash out JC-style with verbal whips, JW admitted to being "irritated" and "embarrassed" at the revelations of having such dodgy investments, and then heaped praise on Wonga chief executive Errol Damelin as "a very intelligent man, with a very professionally managed company", feebly mumbling "there are plenty of others much worse".

Flock of fury

The Christian churches - whichever wing - are amongst the most enduring institutions in human history. One critical factor is their ability to tack and weave in response to the winds of change in social opinion, adapting just enough to hold onto their followers.

The Archbishop's mother was Winston Churchill's personal assistant. He is related to the 1950s Tory leader Rab Butler. He was Eton and Cambridge educated; went on to become

NEITHER WONGA NOR THE BISHOPS - FOR A LIVING WAGE

an oil industry executive, and in 2008 defended disgraced bankers from being 'named and shamed'.

But as he surveys the public outrage at the scourge of Pay Day Loan sharks, he tries to reflect some of that fury amongst his flock, pledging to "compete Wonga out of business" by promoting and assisting the growth of Credit Unions.

Even the Tory-led Westminster Coalition are trying to perform the same, deceitful balancing act. They have pledged £35million in funds to Credit Unions, but rejected calls for a cap on the interest rates charged by the booming Pay Day Lenders like Wonga - whose 'representative' annual interest rate (APR) is a mind-boggling 5,853 per cent!!

This £35million is welcomed by the 400 local Credit Unions, who are currently going bust at a record rate and unable to match the escalating demand for modest loans off working class people. But it is entirely dwarfed by the £2,000million Pay Day Loan industry; sixty times over.

Loan sharks are a cancer at the heart of Britain's low wage economy.

Pay Day loans are the product of a poisonous cocktail of poverty pay, mounting inflation on daily essentials like food and rent, and the failure of the high street banks to offer credit, let alone affordable credit, to the working class majority.

Last January, *Which?* magazine found that over half the population had used credit cards, store cards and Pay Day loans to pay for Christmas - borrowing on average over £300. 1.75 million adults in the UK are denied bank accounts. Another 9 million have accounts that deny them any credit. And those granted overdraft facilities are charged exorbitant daily rates for using them.

Poverty pay

When the rent is due, and shopping for food unavoidable, but it's still a week to go to pay day, it's dangerously tempting to reply to the deluge of seductive emails and adverts from Wonga, Payday Pig, and the whole array of offers of magic 'solutions'.

Recent surveys show that young workers aged 18-34 are far more prone to take out Pay Day Loans - because they generally suffer the lowest pay, often in the most insecure jobs. A horrifying one in six surveyed in that age bracket plan to incur such crucifying interest charges over the next six months.

When you borrow £100 off Wonga to buy food, you typically pay back £137 a

month later - or roll over the debt, then take out more loans to pay it off, sliding into the abyss of mounting indebtedness.

The underlying cause is the pathetic £6.19 legal National Minimum Wage - and that's the 'adult' rate!

The higher level Living Wage - recently updated to £7.50 - is entirely voluntary, the product of campaigning pressure on employers. It is hardly a princely sum. But even that modest figure has been denounced this week by the Scottish arm of the Confederation of British Industry as a threat to jobs and the economy!

Low pay is the curse of the modern working class. Over one in five earn below the Living Wage. Oxfam Scotland calculate that costs Scottish society £6billion every year.

Growing numbers of bosses dodge even the measly legal Minimum Wage.

This sea of poverty pay slashes spending power - endangering jobs.

Westminster Coalition cuts to in-work benefits have further driven workers towards the murderous clutches of the Loan Sharks - whether the backstreet versions that enforce repayments with a claw hammer, or the £2billion-strong 'legal' Pay Day Loan outfits.

Workers' wages are at their lowest share of national wealth in 60 years. Recent government figures admit 280,000 of us in Scotland who work are in

“It shouldn't have happened, it's very embarrassing but these things happen and we have to find out why...”

**- ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY JUSTIN WELBY
ON WONGA'S LINKS TO THE ANGLICAN CHURCH**



RETREAT: Welby said he was “embarrassed” by revelations that his Church’s own pension fund has links to Wonga - the payday lender he had said he wanted to put out of business

officially recognised poverty. That is the pool trawled by these ruthless examples of financial capitalism.

People desperate to survive clutch at the Wongas of this system to tide them over, only to be drowned in a sea of rip-off charges. No wonder Wonga was named as Europe’s fastest growing business in 2010; and these predatory capitalists stole £62.4million in profit off workers’ wage packets last year.

Credit Unions are a lifeline to many working class people. Their interest rates are capped at 2 per cent a month - about 27 per cent APR. Compared to the Loan Sharks like Wonga that is like heaven on Earth. But their resources are limited. On their own, they can’t possibly provide the cheap or interest-free loans that would be possible if the enormous resources of the banking system were taken over into democratic public ownership.

Pouring a few drops into Credit Unions from the ocean of wealth in their hands by the wage-cutting, benefit-cutting

Westminster bootboys is a dishonest bit of political posturing. It’s in the same school of hypocrisy as Westminster driving half a million families into food poverty and then praising Food Banks.

And Cameron is accompanying this token investment with raising the cap on interest from 2 to 3 per cent a month, a huge leap in repayment costs for those seeking refuge in Credit Unions.

Root causes

Plans by the Anglican Church and the Kirk to set up their own Credit Unions as well as provide premises and volunteers for existing ones seems laudable. But it is fundamentally flawed because it does not confront the root causes of people’s increasingly desperate reliance on loans.

And Justin Welby has quoted annual interest rates of 80-90 per cent as necessary to make a profit in such Credit Unions – hardly an example of “blessed are the poor”.

Unless the Archbishop of

Canterbury, the Anglican Church and the Kirk in Scotland are prepared to challenge the rule of the bankers, wage-slashing employers and their hired capitalist politicians, they cannot hope to drive the latter-day moneylenders out of the temple! They cannot hope to overcome poverty and the ocean of debt that decent working people are drowning in.

And the Church as an institution is hardly clean when it comes to capitalist exploitation. The Church of England has investments worth over £5.6billion. They used to be the biggest landowners in the country, but now also invest heavily in property and international stock markets.

They seek to appease the moral feelings of their churchgoers by setting limits on the type of investments they profit from. The Church Commission’s guidelines accept that they can make money from investing in companies where up to 25 per cent of profits come from gambling, alcohol or high-

interest loans, and up to 10 per cent from the arms trade; anything above these thresholds would presumably be sinful!

Workers in low paid, insecure jobs can’t rely on the Tories or the Church hierarchy to rescue them from the Hell of Loan Shark Britain - with its brutal anti-union laws, designed to shackle workers and hamstringing our efforts to increase pay to a Living Wage as a guaranteed legal minimum for all over 16.

Workers in unionised workplaces have on average 12 per cent higher wages than their exact equivalents in places where the government’s laws and the fear and terror used by employers have blocked the unions getting organised.

So rather than wait for Eton-educated Westminster Ministers or Eton-educated archbishops to challenge Wonga capitalism, (which they are tangled up in anyway), we need to organise and fight back ourselves, as workers, young and old, religious and non-religious.

Decent living wage

We need to demand a decent Living Wage as a legal minimum; full trade union rights at work from day one in the job; taxation of the bloated rich and big business; and democratic public ownership of the entire banking and financial sector, to then offer cheap loans to individuals, small businesses and the public sector.

When the plundering Wongas of this capitalist world slap us in the face, we should reject the philosophy of ‘turning the other cheek’ so they can smite that too.

We need to overthrow the capitalist Coalition that dictates on behalf of the moneylenders and wage-thieves of big business. We need to fight back together, ‘clearing the temples’ of these obnoxious capitalist exploiters and their system.

Anti-cuts victory in Midlothian

by Robbie Paterson

ANTI-CUTS campaigners achieved a notable victory when Midlothian Council rejected proposals to close community buildings in Mayfield, Newtongrange, Gorebridge and Newbattle and centralise facilities in a new 'community hub' to be built as part of a replacement building for Newbattle High School.

When council officials announced plans to close swimming pools, libraries and community centres, local communities set up action groups to oppose the closures. Midlothian Campaign Against the Cuts (MCATC), a group of local trade unionists, service users and concerned Midlothian residents who have been campaigning since the announcement of the ConDem government's Comprehensive Spending Review were also to

the forefront in the struggle to reverse the proposals.

At a well attended meeting in Newbattle Community Centre, MCATC warned of the dangers of local councillors voting for closures in their own wards but voting for them in other wards. Midlothian residents were urged to show a united front to any community closures anywhere in Midlothian.

A petition was circulated stating: "We believe our elected representatives have a duty to maintain the provision of community facilities in our communities. At the next election we will remember and remind others of the councillors who voted for and against the closure of community facilities in Midlothian."

Midlothian council officials carried out a 'sham' consultation process where the only options offered contained proposals for

closures. At the packed consultation meetings, it was made clear to these officials that the people of Midlothian wanted local services provided in local communities and not in centralised 'hubs'.

When the officials reported back to the full council meeting, they admitted that there was overwhelming support for keeping all community facilities open and they put forward two new proposals; building a new school only and keeping existing facilities open or building a new school with community hub and closing the community centre and library in Mayfield.

The SNP administration amended the second proposal by removing the clauses closing the Mayfield facilities. The Labour group put forward the first proposal. In an interesting debate, the Green and the Independent councillors held the balance of

power. The Green supported the Labour Group, the Independent indicated he would abstain. When the vote was taken everyone was surprised when the Labour Councillor for Mayfield broke ranks and voted with the SNP giving them an unexpected victory for their proposal to build the new school with a community hub while keeping all existing community facilities open.

Despite this successful outcome of the 'no closures campaign' activists will remain vigilant to ensure community facilities continue to be properly maintained and kept open.

Midlothian have a track record of running down community facilities, declaring them unfit for purpose and closing them. Campaigners will also ensure that the costs of the new school and 'hub' are not met from cuts elsewhere in the Midlothian Budget.

Selective memory of Spanish Civil War casts shadow

by Mike Arnott, Executive Member, International Brigade Memorial Trust

THE series of commemorations, organised over the past couple of years to mark significant 75th anniversaries of events during the Spanish Civil War, moves towards its close. July saw us recall the beginning of the Battle of the Ebro, then 21 September sees the anniversary of the final withdrawal of the International Brigades and 7 December the arrival of the main body of British Battalion volunteers back in the UK.

Highlights have included the creation of the new travelling exhibition 'Antifascistas', telling the story of the British and Irish contribution in Spain, the unveiling of a memorial in Tarancon to the Scots volunteers who fell at

Jarama, and this September a new memorial will be unveiled overlooking the positions from where they were finally withdrawn from the front line.

Recently, on 20 July this year, a new memorial was inaugurated in Duchess of Hamilton Park, Motherwell, to the volunteers from North Lanarkshire and, as we go to press, we still cling on to a living link through Stan Hilton, the last survivor of the British Battalion, now residing in a nursing home in Australia. But, as the International Brigade Memorial Trust looks forward to its October AGM in Edinburgh, with its membership never higher and interest in the brigaders never more avid, a shadow has been cast by the attitudes of Spanish civic society to the historical memory of the civil war. These have been ex-

pressed through a legal attempt to have a memorial to the International Brigades, unveiled in the grounds of Madrid University in October 2011, demolished.

The memorial was unveiled by four veterans, including British Battalion member Dave Lomon, who has since died. It marks the role the Brigades played in the defence of Madrid and the University City in late 1936 and is the only such memorial in the whole of the Spanish capital. The pretext for the legal ruling is a lack of planning permission, although the University did apply (and is still waiting) and in similar cases the awarding of retrospective permission has not been an issue.

Condemnatory Early Day Motions have been tabled at both Westminster and Holyrood by Jeremy Corbyn MP and Drew

Smith MSP respectively, and hundreds of personal messages have been sent to the Madrid City Council, to ambassadors and consuls across Europe and in the US and Canada. Information on the campaign can be found on the IBMT Facebook page and website.

A short walk away from the memorial, which appropriately stands outside the international students union building, can be found Franco's triumphal Victory Arch and the towering memorial to the Condor Legion, destroyers of Guernica. I doubt if planning permission was an issue for the victors. Hopefully the campaign to save the memorial to the brigaders will be successful and it can be celebrated by ourselves and by future generations as a corner of a foreign field that is forever International.

RED ED CLOSES BRITISH ROAD TO SOCIALISM

John McAllion explains

THE British left has itself long ceased to have any faith in the leadership of the Labour Party. The Communist Party in its "Open Letter to Workers Socialists and the Labour Movement" (2011) frankly admitted that the movement goes largely unrepresented in the House of Commons because the Labour Party leadership refuses to fight for policies that would defend public services, jobs, wages and pensions.

They recognise that the leaders of the one-time peoples' party now tamely operate within the free market consensus that sets the policy limits for Westminster's three big parties.

Of course, since that letter was published, "Red Ed" Miliband has moved the Labour leadership even further to the right and ever closer into the embrace of neo-liberalism. He has accepted a Tory cut of more than £11 billion in public spending for 2015/16.

He has agreed a total cap on welfare benefits regardless of people's needs. He acknowledges that some kind of bedroom tax for the poor in social housing is unavoidable. He has added his weight and that of his party to further attacks on the rights of unemployed workers.

'One nation'

Most recently, he has also begun to dismantle Labour's longstanding and close relationship with some trade unions. At its height, Keir Hardie described this relationship as "the great alliance" between the industrial and political wings of a single and united British labour movement. Miliband now dismisses his party's relationship with the unions as "old politics...rightly hated" by all who support his own "One Nation" brand of politics.

With the applause of the Blairites ringing in his ears, he promises to reform the way in which trade unionists pay to affiliate to his party - opting in rather than out of Labour membership. The inevitable conse-



quence of this change will be a massive reduction in the number of trade unionists who choose to do so.

As their numbers reduce, so too will the influence that trade unions can bring to bear on Labour's internal policy development and on its internal leadership elections and candidate selections. Tony Blair himself describes the reform as "a defining moment" of "real leadership" quality that shows Labour will govern for the country and not just for one section of it - the trade unions.

Trade union influence on Labour is effectively over. Hardie's "great alliance" is ended. This presents the British left with serious strategic problems. While they were ever willing to attack the Labour leadership for their many failures, they drew the line at attacking the Labour Party itself. In its "Open Letter" referred to above, the Communist Party argued that the ConDem Coalition had to be dealt a crushing blow at the 2015 General Election and that only the Labour Party is capable of winning enough seats to deal such a blow.

From their perspective, no other socialist or left wing grouping has any chance of winning anything like a Commons majority.

They did, of course, recognise the futility of winning such a Labour majority if that majority then put the present Labour leadership into Government office. Replacing the Con

Dem Coalition with a Labour Cabinet that refuses to defend public services, jobs, wages and pensions and supports austerity represents little or no progress for the wider labour movement. Their way out of this contradiction was to argue for a take-over and transformation of the Labour Party itself.

The trade unions were central to this strategy. Acting as a kind of left wing Trojan Horse inside the Labour Party, they would act at every level to change the very nature of the party itself. Unions would make their financial contributions conditional on the Labour leadership showing "solidarity" with workers in struggle. At the grassroots level unions like UNITE would affiliate their members to local constituencies and guarantee the selection and election of committed working class MPs.

Labour in this way would become a mass party of the wider labour movement capable of winning elections and, more importantly, capable of delivering in office the policies of the Peoples' Charter, the left wing programme and other Communist supported platforms.

It is doubtful that such a strategy could ever have worked. In the most recent Scottish and British leadership elections, the majority of Labour constituency activists voted for the more right wing candidates. At the parliamentary and constituency

level, the vast majority of Labour's politicians and supporters care more about winning elections than they do about the reasons why they want to win them. For them winning is itself enough.

There is no evidence to suggest that they see the policies of the Peoples' Charter as in any way relevant to them or to their party's project.

However, with the unions influence over Labour now effectively ended, the British left strategy of using them to turn the Labour Party upside down is reduced to rubble. It is no longer credible to argue that the strength of Labour's affiliated unions will overwhelm its increasingly right wing parliamentarians and its moderate membership.

In electing brother Ed ahead of brother David, the unions believed that they had won a famous victory against what was left of New Labour. How wrong they were. Ed has now delivered what Tony Blair feared to attempt. The union link is broken. The British parliamentary road to socialism has come to an inglorious end.

Condemnation

Under the banner of "One Nation" politics, Labour claims to be the party of the employers and the employed alike. Its embrace of anti-union laws, its routine condemnation of striking workers, its support for welfare to work policies that drive the unemployed into low-paid and insecure employment, its failure to address blacklisting and victimisation when in office, its collusion in savage attacks on public sector workers, its surrender to a low tax, deregulated, privatised and free market economic model - all of these and more tell a very different story.

If Labour ever was potentially a mass party of the organised labour movement, it no longer is or can be. It has become just another political prop for an elite state that entrenches massive inequalities in wealth and power, while keeping the workers across the nations of these islands under the iron heel of capitalism.

INTERNATIONAL Celebrations in Nicaragua

by Sam Gordon in
Nicaragua

NEWS of US whistle blower Edward Snowden was humming round the world's news channels. The governments of France, Portugal and Spain, backed up by steady, reliable old Austria were making prats of themselves over Snowden's non presence on a South American jet.

The problem, of course, was that Snowden was not strapped into a seat of the jet, chatting to Bolivian president Evo Morales.

So, it looks like US intelligence sources had got it wrong. And that "special relationship", usually reserved for twisting Britannia's arm was groping about some of her European partners. US Secretary of State, John Kerry - what were you up to?

Gun boat diplomacy

This piece of extradiplomatic behaviour - in a bye gone age known as gun boat diplomacy - got some Latin American countries into a huddle.

But hardly a tizzy, after all there was nothing new.

As the world now knows

young Edward has been offered diplomatic asylum in Bolivia, Venezuela and Nicaragua. Quoted in La Voz del Sandinismo Nicaragua's President Daniel said, "The United States and the European Union have things in common, they want to judge everybody and dictate strategies, so it's not strange that with the same goals they endeavour to push for a coordinated approach."

Staying in Nicaragua, the annual commemoration of the Sandinista Popular Revolution followed a well established pattern of public celebration. It helps that the Sandinistas are also the party of government.

Better still, it's a national holiday at the start of a long week end. And no one can bring in the crowds like the Sandinistas. The organisers say there were 300,000 gathered in the centre of the capital, Managua; some say more than 100,000.

Besides some fraternal foreign dignitaries the usual suspects addressed the crowd. Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo said a few words about how young people had made sacrifices so that following generations in Nicaragua

would have a better life.

First Lady Rosario Murillo never misses a chance to get her oar in. Predictably, she spoke of Nicaragua as, socialist, Christian and in solidarity which also represents a country of unity, peace and reconciliation.

On the street the thousands wait for hours, under a burning tropical sun, for President Daniel Ortega to address them. Daniel has been doing this for 34 years.

What would turn the crowds on this year? A couple of weeks before he had announced that a Chinese company was going to explore the possibility of constructing a inter-ocean canal. This would allow ships to pass through Nicaragua, linking the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean.

Forces of nature

That is looking like it will go ahead; it is hard to see what will stop it. That is, besides the accumulated forces of nature and the small question of \$40 billion, or about £26billion.

Yes, that did get a mention. And as always with Daniel, it was linked to the dreams of his party's iconic namesake

General Augusto Sandino who led an insurgence war against the US marines who occupied Nicaragua 80 years ago.

Popular revolutions for national liberation all too often write up a debit of sacrifice but don't always deliver the dividend of a better life for those who most need it. So has Nicaragua faired any differently?

A partial response, if not a definitive reply, to that query came from Daniel Ortega on the day celebrating the Sandinista Popular Revolution.

Nicaragua has a social security system, but with no unemployment benefit. So many of the elderly poor, and disabled, have been unable to contribute to the national fund. This has left them unable to draw a reduced pension even when they reached pensionable age.

On the day of the celebrations Daniel made a decree ensuring the elderly and the disabled a minimum pension, despite not having the required contributions.

That has done more to catch the attention and good will of the population than all the talk of yesterday and principled declarations.



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WHERE NEXT FOR EGYPT?

As the *Voice* went to press, clashes were continuing between the Egyptian army and supporters of deposed President Morsi, with a rising death toll and growing fears of a civil war. US Secretary of State John Kerry urged restraint on the military while EU opposite number Catherine Ashton made a secret trip by military helicopter to meet Morsi at an undisclosed military location. Here, **Bill Bonnar** looks at the background to the gathering crisis and the forces involved in it.



POOR RECORD: the Muslim Brotherhood have failed to deal with the spiralling social and economic crisis engulfing Egypt

EVENTS in Egypt took a dramatic turn last month when the army staged a military coup and overthrew the Muslim Brotherhood government of President Morsi. It did so against a background of mass demonstrations which were the largest the country had ever seen.

An estimated 27 million people took to the streets in towns and cities demanding the removal of the government. This followed a petition calling for the same which gathered 22 million signatures.

Three things have emerged from these events. The first has been the growing isolation and unpopularity of the government.

Catastrophic

The second the role of the army and third the re-igniting of the popular revolution which overthrew President Mubarak. All against the background of a catastrophic economic crisis with unemployment sitting at 32 per cent, foreign debt rising from \$34 billion to \$45 billion, domestic debt rising to 365 billion Egyptian Pounds and poverty now engulfing 50 per cent of the population.

This based on official figures with many believing the situation

to be much worse. Whole sectors of the economy have collapsed and without a massive increase in American aid the government would literally have run out of money.

Much has been made of the fact that President Morsi was legitimately elected and that the coup is an attack on democracy. In fact his election had more to do with a divided and organisationally weak opposition rather than widespread popular support for the Muslim Brotherhood. Since taking office the Muslim Brotherhood's record has been poor by any standard.

They have failed to deal with the spiralling social and economic crisis engulfing the country, have alienated the majority secular population and carried out what amounted to a constitutional coup last November by given the Muslim Brotherhood effective control of many of the institutions of the state. If an elections had been called it is almost certain that they would have been heavily defeated.

The role of the army and its motivation for staging the coup is one of the complexities of the situation. The army is a central institution in its own right both

politically and economically. While initially sympathetic to President Morsi, its High Command found itself increasingly marginalised by the appointment of Muslim Brotherhood members to key positions of influence.

It also felt that its own vested economic interests were being threatened by the economic collapse. Perhaps most tellingly they witnessed the mass character of the protests and realised that they had to choose sides.

Siding with the government might mean being swept away along with that government. The High Command was also worried about the loyalty of soldiers and junior officers who seemed to be enthusiastically supporting the mass movement.

By staging a coup on the side of the popular movement they felt that they would be able to shape that movement and prevent it producing a more radical government. The demands of that mass movement could not be clearer. They want Egypt to be a modern secular country led by a government that is genuinely representative. They want a constitution that guarantees civil rights including

the rights of women and religious minorities.

They want the carrying out of a programme that, while tackling the desperate economic crisis engulfing the country, also tackles corruption, inequality and poverty.

Those involved in the mass movement for change recognise that it was their division and organisational weakness which allowed the Muslim Brotherhood to win the last election. There is now active discussions across many groups on how to avoid this scenario happening again. How to translate the mass struggle into some kind of coherent programme and forge a political alliance that can win the next election.

It is clear that Egypt is currently at a crossroads with almost everyone collectively holding their breath to see what happens next.

Priority

The Muslim Brotherhood has been dealt serious blow but remain popular among significant sections. Many will now reject the ballot box and may seek a military solution with the very real danger of plunging the country into civil war. The military High Command, may have been responding to a radical mass movement, but are deeply conservative and form an integral part of the country's ruling capitalist class. Safe guarding the economic, political and strategic position of that class will always be their main priority.

This means that guns which today are pointed at the Muslim Brotherhood could, tomorrow be pointed at the more radical elements of the popular movement.

The longer the army is in power the more they will try to create a government acceptable to them and the class they represent. The need for the popular movement to find organised political expression and become the next government is of the highest priority.

Old and new faces celebrate Faslane Peace Camp birthday

by Sandra Webster

ON 28 June, members from Acting Strange Theatre company visited Faslane Peace Camp along with members of the SSP. Organised by Campsie SSP, this was the second annual cabaret to celebrate the Peace Camp's birthday.

It was a noticeable new chapter as the old peace campers have now moved on leaving behind new people who will continue to carry the vision and ethos of the Camp to the Independence Referendum and beyond. The new campers have moved from all over the UK and some people have offered to stay part time to offer more support to the full time campers.

We were privileged to have two long time peace protesters with us Ron Mackay and Maggi Sale. Ron, who in his ninetieth year is the second oldest member of the SSP, spoke movingly about his life which is one which is a testament to socialism.

He reminded us of times before some of us were born when the anti-nuclear movement was born with the arrival of polaris in Scotland. Thousands of people came together to demonstrate.

His talk moved onto the present and filled all of us present with humbleness for his tenacity and passion. Maggi Sale (who was 70 on the day) spoke of her campaigning from Greenham Common to the original peace camp and her continuing peace work.

Last week she hosted a visit of the grandmothers of which she is one. They are an international group of women who travel the world campaigning for peace.



OAPs vs WMDs: long-time peace protesters Ron Mackay and Maggi Sale at the gates of Faslane

She finished with a sentiment we all shared how she will be happy when there are no more weapons of mass destruction in Scotland.

Acting Strange members performed some sketches while Pauline Bradley and Citizen Smart performed some songs. This year Rosie Kane and her brother Andy McGarvey performed an extract from Rosie's one woman show about her one woman protest in Glasgow City Chambers.

This raconteur had everyone in stitches. Rosie also spoke movingly of how much she had learned from the peace movement and environmental protesters. The day as always finished with a demonstration at the gates of Faslane naval base which was again accompanied by music.

This was the second Faslane Cabaret by Acting Strange and it is hoped this will be an annual

event. It was a good opportunity to meet the new campers and begin to forge new friendships.

We all feel relieved that the future of the Peace Camp is guaranteed in the short term foreseeable future. In the independence campaign it will be there as a reminder of all that is decent and a presence that insists that Scotland is no place for weapons of mass destruction.

However for the Campers to continue with their work they need practical support both financial and practical. They also welcome visitors and people to come to their Wednesday Vigil at the gates.

Members of the SSP have begun to form a Scottish Socialist Party CND network for all party members who would like to concentrate some of their efforts into anti nuclear protest. There is a Facebook page or contact Neil Scott for further details.

Let's hope that next year's Acting Strange Cabaret will be the last one that is necessary at the Peace Camp as after the referendum the Peace Camp's work will be done and it can be dismantled. Plans are already afoot for next year's cabaret and we hope to welcome you along.

There is a Facebook page for any SSP members who may be interested in forming an SSP CND network and any anti nuclear action. We all hope that next year's Acting Strange Cabaret will be the last one that is necessary at the Peace Camp as after the referendum the Peace Camp's work will be done and it can be dismantled.

Plans are already afoot for next year's cabaret and we hope to welcome you along. Please look out on Acting Strange's Facebook page for further information. Let's work to make nuclear weapons a thing of the past.