

Yes

March For Independence: with just one year to go until the referendum, the pro-independence camp prepares to rally on Edinburgh's Calton Hill

• see page 12

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Scottish Socialist Voice

LIB DEMS TOLD: 'DISAGREE WITH NICK ON BEDROOM TAX'

Grassroots motion forces conference to debate hated tax

**BIN THE
BEDROOM
TAX DEMO
SAT 14 SEPT**

**Mass march
and rally on
Lib Dem UK
Conference**

- Assemble at noon at Glasgow Green
- March to SECC



CLOSE TO THE EXIT? Nick with Tory chum Dave

THE LIB DEM UK conference could see the party face defeat over grassroots activist Julie Pörksen's motion opposing the hated Bedroom Tax.

Lib Dem MP John Leech said: "I will certainly vote for that motion, there is no question about it. It stands a good chance of success. Most party members would support it."

The motion slams the Bedroom Tax for discriminating against the most vulnerable in society. If the motion is passed, it will become party policy under Lib Dem rules.

• See pages 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8



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by Neil Rothnie,
offshore oil worker

HERE we are after another four deaths in a helicopter disaster in the North Sea oilfields – the latest of five choppers to come down and a total of 20 lives lost in the last four years. And now it would seem from press reports that the focus, by the powers that be in the industry, is on rebuilding the shattered confidence of the offshore workers (and their families) who regularly fly to work in the Super Puma. And I thought they would be concentrating on replacing the fleet of aircraft that take us there. But just maybe, behind the scenes, the real focus of the authorities is to come up with some explanation for the latest disaster and the death of four workers, and a plan to halt the carnage in the UK sector and who knows how many other disasters and near disasters in oilfields worldwide.

My guess would be that there'll have been hundreds, maybe thousands, of minor incidents at the base of the pyramid supporting these five recent catastrophic and near catastrophic events in the UK.

Disinformation

And right on cue, the employers safety organisation, Step Change in Safety, send a man onto BBC's Radio 4 *Today* programme to tell James Naughtie that, "Safety is the first priority", and Naughtie, like so many others in the media, swallows the employers' disinformation whole as though it was incontestable. Indigestible, more likely!

No doubt if you'd asked the PR man for the company who built the world's highest building, the Burj Khalifa in Dubai, he'd have told you the same thing - safety was their first priority. Just possibly he'd have gone on to explain that the real purpose of the building was to make a

NORTH SEA: BIG BUSINESS AS USUAL - SUPER PUMA MAKES SUDDEN RETURN



suitable spot to place a red light to ensure that aircraft would be alerted and not crash into it. Sorted! It is of course nonsense. Money (ie, oil and gas) is the oil companies' and the government's first priority when it comes to the North Sea. If safety is now a major issue it's because the workforce, after the Piper Alpha, made it so.

Some employers will concede that safety can also be good business. It must be galling to lose your installation, your helicopter or the skilled worker that you've invested so much time and money on.

The oil industry's first priority was always going to be how to get these choppers back in operation as soon as possible, causing minimum disruption to their operations (read 'profits'). You'd expect this. You'd expect a bear to shit in the woods. It's not shameful – certainly not for the bears. What's shameful is the disinformation and posturing and hand-wringing. And when it comes to rebuilding confidence in the workforce – just why would the workforce be amenable to industry

assurances about safety?

It's over a year and a half since Total allowed the G4 well on their Elgin well to blow out. That "event" was by all reports a very near miss – a spark away from disaster – according to the RMT union. Over 8,000 cubic meters an hour of explosive gas escaped during and after the four hours it took to evacuate the installations by helicopter, and during this time and for a further five days that spark was actually very, very close in the form of a naked flame left burning in the flare stack. Only the wind direction (luck) stopped Elgin going up – and with what consequences for oil workers' lives if it had?

Near-catastrophe

A year and a half after the Elgin near-catastrophe, and six months after gas production from Elgin resumed, the HSE have not reported yet. So workers in the industry still don't know why the well was allowed to blow out and why 238 lives were put in jeopardy. Total's talk of a "gas leak" was classic oilfield disinformation.

But Total's claims that no human errors were involved, and that it was all down to a mysterious substance Bromine Carbonate in combination with pipe thread lubricant, would be laughable if it wasn't so serious.

There's no disgrace in being frightened of packing yourself into the sardine can that is the Super Puma while running through in your head just what you would do as the chopper flipped over and filled with water - assuming you survive the impact. And your family at home will be as helpless as ever. That's maybe worse than actually going in a chopper you've lost confidence in.

Forty-plus years of failure by the trade union movement to effectively organise the UK sector may again come to the rescue of the employers as they attempt to get back to business as usual. But one day, those workers, without whom the industry just could not function, might still come to the conclusion that enough is enough. On that day, overdrive in the disinformation industry might not be quite enough either.

Brutal reality of the Bedroom Tax revealed by Ayrshire online paper

by Campbell Martin

THE3TOWNS.COM, an online local newspaper in North Ayrshire, recently revealed the shocking consequences of the Bedroom Tax. In the same week that the local council had eight one-bedroom properties available for allocation, there were 1,765 tenants facing higher rent charges because the UK Government deems them to have at least one room more than they need in their home.

In other words, 1,765 tenants are now looking for a one-bedroom property to avoid having to pay increased rent that they can't afford, but the council has just eight such homes available.

These are the victims in just one local authority area of an iniquitous tax imposed from London by two political parties – Tories and Lib Dems – who were soundly rejected by the people of Scotland at the last UK general election.

In addition, there are 3,654 people already on the North Ayrshire Housing List looking for a one-bedroom property, giving a total of 5,419 applicants for just eight homes – 675 for every one-bedroom house.

Rent shortfall

The 1,765 existing council tenants who now find their Housing Benefit cut because they have more bedrooms than the UK Government says they need, have virtually no chance of 'down-sizing' into a one-bedroom property.

Their benefit is automatically cut, so they have to find the difference to make up the shortfall in rent, but that is impossible on the very low fixed-income they receive from the state. This has led to rent arrears soaring across the country.

North Ayrshire Council's SNP administration has said there will be



PHOTO: Simon Whittle

NEW TORIES: Labour won't axe the tax if it wins Westminster power

no evictions resulting from someone getting into arrears because of the Bedroom Tax, so long as tenants work with the local authority to address the arrears.

A 'no evictions' policy is to be welcomed, but how are impoverished tenants supposed to address their arrears caused by the Bedroom Tax when they just can't afford it?

On the other hand, local authorities, themselves, are also victims of the Bedroom Tax. Any notional saving for the UK Treasury arising

from cutting the Housing Benefit of tenants results in a shortfall in income for councils who also face increased expenditure in dealing with people plunged into arrears and in supplying social care and support services to stressed tenants forced to look for smaller homes that don't exist.

In addition to the core unfairness of the Bedroom Tax, the legislation exposes the democratic deficit still faced by Scotland.

The majority of Scottish MPs at Westminster voted against the Bed-

room Tax, but Scots have it imposed on us because we remain part of the British union. We rejected the Tories and the Liberal Democrats at the last UK Election in 2010, but we have them imposed on us as a government because we remain part of the British union.

Imposed

The Labour Party has refused to scrap the Bedroom Tax if it were to be elected by the people of England at the next UK Election in 2015.

Fortunately, Scots can end both the Bedroom Tax and the democratic deficit simply by retaking our political independence through voting Yes in next year's referendum.

With independence, Scots will always get the government for which we vote – never again will we have Tories imposed on us by the voters of England.

A Yes vote at next year's independence referendum will lead to the people of Scotland electing our first independent parliament and government in May 2016.

With independence, it will be for us to decide which party governs Scotland, and I would suggest that no party proposing anything like the Bedroom Tax would ever get elected in an independent Scotland.

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by Richie Venton

THE Bedroom Tax is a bitter tale of human tragedy. And it is just one hellish front in a class war at home launched by the Tories and their Lib Dem props, against the sick, disabled, poor and the entire working class.

The Bedroom Tax traps people in homes unsuitable for their disabilities. It confronts 100,000 Scottish households with the impossible choice of eating, heating or paying £10-£25 a week in Bedroom Tax, because Tory millionaires living in multi-bed-roomed mansions decree that they have 'spare rooms' – an obscene illustration of the class-divided society we suffer.

It taxes people for a room literally too small to swing a cat in, or a bedroom for the children of a separated parent, or the room required for dialysis machines, wheelchairs or other disabled equipment.

It makes no allowance for changes to family structures, such as children growing up and fleeing the nest, or the death of a partner, or the fact children need private space to mature.

This vicious transfer of wealth from the poorest to the richest has already taken its human toll in the form of several suicides and attempted suicides. The Tory-Lib Dem Coalition has blood on their hands here at home, just as Cameron and Clegg tried to lead us into a bloody war on Syria.

Workers hammered

Even when people are not driven to such extremes, they are stressed out by the overhanging fear of evictions, uncertainty whether they will have to move – despite a survey of social landlords proving 96 per cent of tenants affected have nowhere available in local social housing to downsize to – and the desperate juggling of low incomes to combine paying for food, heating and something towards this Bedroom Tax, as they

POUND CLEGG'S YELLOW TORIES INTO RETREAT

Mass action can beat the Bedroom Tax

are hounded by social landlords to stop falling into arrears.

And as tenants, mostly on about £71 a week, simply can't afford to pay, overpaid chief executives of many local housing associations are also tackling the shortfall in rental income through redundancies and pay cuts to over-worked, stressed-out staff.

One such local housing association chief, on over £100,000 a year, whilst making great play of her opposition to the Bedroom Tax in the media, has discarded staff with 20-30 years loyal service, piling up impossible workloads on those who remain to deal with the nightmare consequences of all the benefit cuts to tenants – and 'downgraded' workers' wages by over £5,000 a year each.

So unity between tenants and workers in the front line is critical in the battle to bin the Bedroom Tax.

That makes the Bin the Bedroom Tax Demo on 14 September a vitally important part of the resistance to this brutal measure. The alliance of the tenant-led No2BedroomTax campaign, the 630,000-member

STUC, the Scottish Tenants Organisation, and Disability Alliance working under the motto 'tenant led, worker supported', is precisely what is needed to unite the strands of struggle.

The role and involvement of the West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations in this alliance has caused some controversy.

From the point of view of the Scottish Socialist Party, which has been at the heart of the fight to scrap the Bedroom Tax from last year onwards, it is to be welcomed that housing association bosses have publicly called for the Tory tax to be scrapped, adding breadth to the gathering movement for its outright abolition.

Mass demo

Likewise, their offer of laying on transport for tenants to attend the demo on 14 September must be welcomed by all who wish to build the biggest possible event as the Tories' little Lib Dem props in government hold their UK conference in Glasgow.

But as the SSP has said throughout, housing association bosses – and of course council-

lors and council bosses – should accompany their vocal opposition to the tax with an equally loud, clear and unequivocal declaration that their tenants will not face the threat of evictions arising from the Bedroom Tax.

Likewise, instead of slashing the pay, jobs and services provided by their staff, they should join tenants and trade unions in demanding the funding off the Scottish government to compensate for the impact of the Bedroom Tax, whilst fighting for its abolition.

The SSP, both in our own name and also in collaboration with the tenant-led No2BedroomTax campaign, has lobbied and demonstrated at several councils and housing association headquarters, demanding a No Evictions policy, plus reclassification of rooms to dodge the Tory tax...and won concessions on this in a few cases already.

People power, mobilised in a mass protest demo at the Lib Dem UK conference at Glasgow's SECC, could play a vital part in the resistance to this daylight robbery of the poorest to pay for tax cuts for the millionaires.



PHOTO: Simon Whittle

ACT NOW TO AXE THE TAX: we can't wait for independence to remove the curse of the Bedroom Tax

The Westminster Coalition was never elected – not even by the people of England, let alone Scotland, where an overwhelming mass voted anti-Tory in the 2010 elections.

Cameron's blue Tories rely on Clegg's yellow Tories to prop them up and carry out vicious attacks on the working class – both those in jobs and out of work.

So a mass demo should pound the Lib Dems with the clear message that they face oblivion unless they go back to Westminster and remove their support of the Bedroom Tax, by putting forward a motion for its abolition. That could initiate a climbdown by Cameron's much-weakened regime, seriously damaged by his inability to get the war he wanted against Syria.

A call for outright abolition would also put the feeble Labour 'critics' of the Bedroom Tax on the spot. Labour leaders have feebly tried to reflect some of the fury of those they rely on for votes, by a few verbal skirmishes against the Tory tax.

But they have disgracefully failed to pledge outright aboli-

tion of it if they gain office in 2015, hiding behind excuses about needing to know 'the cost of abolition' and 'the economic situation'.

Meantime, Labour councils have refused to even adopt the qualified, equivocal position of SNP councils and some local housing associations, who have pledged "no evictions for a year, provided we are satisfied tenants have taken all reasonable steps to avoid arrears".

Eviction notices

More outrageous still, the likes of North Lanarkshire Labour council issued real eviction notices, only retreating in the face of furious protests by local people against such brutal treatment of a severely disabled mother.

To their credit, the SNP has pledged that they would abolish the Bedroom Tax in an independent Scotland.

That is a reminder of one of the many reasons the Scottish Socialist Party has consistently fought for independence – so that we have the powers to build a new, decent welfare system, including a living income and

fully-funded support services for those either too young, too old, too sick or disabled to work – paid for by taxation of the filthy rich and big business.

But we can't wait for independence to remove the curse of the Bedroom Tax. That would condemn people to its hellish assault on their ability to survive for the next four or five years.

The SNP government could vastly assist a movement of tenants and housing staff, workers and those on benefits, by very openly declaring there will be no evictions in Scotland, whether by councils or housing associations – and by simultaneously using just £53million (of last years Scottish Government budget underspend of £179million) to fund the shortfall in rent to social landlords caused by this Tory theft.

And when SNP leaders object that to do that could mean cuts to other services, the Scottish Socialist Party has a very straight answer: stand up to Westminster, mobilise a Scottish people's rebellion and demand back some of the stolen £billions off Westminster, so there's not a penny

cut in pay or benefits or jobs or public services.

The Scottish working class has a golden opportunity to boot away the yellow Lib Dem props to the Cameron Tory dictatorship of the rich on this issue.

And our anger, determination and confidence in fighting to defeat the Coalition on the Bedroom Tax should be fuelled by a simple fact: there is absolutely no excuse for such a cut in income, nor indeed any of the cuts to welfare and the public sector.

Obscene cabal

We live in the fifth richest country in the world. Just 100 Scots – the richest 100 – have a combined wealth of £39billion.

And contrary to all the guff about being 'all in it together', needing to 'tighten our belts' during recession – that cabal of 100 obscenely rich saw their incomes leap last year by £21billion, over 100 per cent of a rise!

One hundred of them have substantially more than the entire budget of the Scottish Government for use in jobs and services amongst the rest of Scotland's 5.3 million people.

Capitalism means food banks for desperate families, bank bailouts at public expense for those who caused the crisis.

It means tax cuts for the rich, Bedroom Tax for the poorest. It means a doubling of energy prices for households in energy-rich Scotland in the last five years, and billions in profit for the giant privatised energy monopolies.

If tenants and workers, trade unions and socialists combine in mass action to bin the Bedroom Tax, it would be another hammer-blow to the millionaires' Westminster Coalition.

And it would boost the self confidence of Scotland's working class majority to seize the chance of self-government in 2014, as a prelude to building a society for the millions, not the millionaires – a socialist Scotland.

'This is more than politics - this is about real people who are very, very scared'

In the run up to the Bedroom Tax Demo at the Lib Dem UK conference in Glasgow, *Voice* editor **Ken Ferguson** spoke to No2BedroomTax spokesman **Alan Wyllie**

Alan, can you tell us a bit about yourself and why and how you became active in opposing the Bedroom Tax?

I do not come from a political background. In fact, it is the opposite. Politics was never spoken about in my family and was seen as irrelevant 'guff' that had little or no impact in our life. Even growing up with Mrs Thatcher's shadow over Scotland did not spark political interest in my family.

As I grew up I realised that my family was wrong. Politics is important. But up until 2010 I was not political aware. Watching Question Time once a week was the limit of my political activities!

It was the ramifications of the 2010 General Election which drew me to politics. I just couldn't understand the logic of the Lib Dem (who were more left than Labour) going into coalition with the Tories. This angered me as I expected better from the Liberal Democrats.

Inhumane

Since 2010, the working class of this county have been hammered by the Tories ideological driven path of destruction; The inhumane and evil persecution of disabled people, The infringement of human rights and workers' rights, tax breaks for millionaires while the poor and working poor are deemed as 'scroungers'.

The lists goes on and on. But for me, the Bedroom Tax was the line in the sand. The straw that broke the proverbial camel's back.

I first heard of the Bedroom Tax in 2012 when it was going through the Houses of Parliament as part of the Welfare Reform Bill 2012. From first glance, it seemed like a ridiculous policy which should never become law as it would be unworkable and would result in those who are most vulnerable being the hardest hit. The Bedroom Tax played on my mind until the end of January this year.

I spoke to a friend who stays in Bootle (an area of Liverpool) and he told me of his efforts to stop the Bedroom Tax. This was a community that was not 'political' but had he has the courage to stand up for what they believed in. The Bootle Campaign inspired me to take action.

At the beginning of February, I announced on Facebook that I was organising a protest in Glasgow against the Bedroom Tax for 31 March.

I teamed up with some other friends on Facebook and in the middle of

February we created the No2Bedroom Tax Campaign. The intention was for the No2BedroomTax Campaign to be a 'tenant's campaign', in that it put the fears and concerns of the tenants first and foremost. We believe that if tenants are informed of their rights and what support they have available then those tenants will be empowered to both fight the Bedroom Tax and promote community spirit in the hometown. The demo in March was a success.

Cyberspace has played a significant part in building the campaign against the tax what role to you see for it in keeping up the pressure for its defeat?

The internet is a fantastic democratic tool. Websites such as Facebook and twitter have spawned a new generation of political activist who are well informed, motivated and directly affected by the cuts. Social media sites now provides the fact-based counter-argument to the neo-liberal austerity project. I don't think we can underestimate the power of political activism online. We should embrace it so it enhance politics in general.

There have been a number of demonstrations against the tax over the past few months and, of course, there is another on the 14th. How effective are such actions in the campaign and how does the 14th differ from those that have previously taken place and what impact can it have?

The nationwide demos against the Bedroom Tax in March was beneficial as it highlighted the strength of feeling felt by 'ordinary' folk against the Bedroom Tax. The demonstration in March was primarily promoted via social media and shows tangible evidence of the power of the internet. I believe that it was significant that the demo in March had a high turnout of folk who had never been on a march/protest before.

This may be done to the use of social media or the blatant unfairness of the Bedroom Tax.

The Lib Dem Lobby is being organised by BinTheBedroomTax (www.binthebedroomtax.net), a new initiative which involves tenants and landlords, workers and non-workers, disabled and the able bodied in a tenant-led coalition which has one objective: To end the Bedroom Tax.

The protest at the Lib Dem conference differs from other protest as it is a 'mass lobby' of the Lib Dems. We look at the Lib Dems as the weak link of a weak government and believe that we can send Mr Clegg back to Westminster with his tail between his legs.

The march will start at Glasgow Green at midday and go through two of the hardest hit areas of Glasgow, The Gorbals and Govan. We want to bring



ALAN WYLIE: "By having a tenant-led campaign we can ensure that tenants are at the heart of every move the campaign makes..."

the campaign to the people it affects most, as they are the most important voices in this campaign.

There is a 'Bedroom Tax' motion which was submitted by grassroots Lib Dems that will be debated on the Monday of the Conference. We believe that we can win this motion and we will be doing everything within our power to encourage and support Lib Dems delegates who will vote against the Lib Dem leadership.

Beyond the 14th how do you see the campaign developing and what demands should it make on the various players involved such as councils, social landlords, the STUC and Scottish and UK governments?

We will be looking to expand binthebedroomtax to ensure that all stakeholders can have input to this campaign. I envisage that BinTheBedroomTax will be a platform to fight the Bedroom Tax and other austerity measures.

The No2BedroomTax Campaign has been lobbying various councils in Scotland for 'no eviction' policies with some success. We are in talks with a local authority in Scotland with a view of them reclassifying bedrooms. We would advise everyone to do the same for their own council and will support anyone who is doing so.

Duty to protect

We believe that the Scottish Government has a duty to protect vulnerable Scots from the excesses of the Tory government. The No2BedroomTax Campaign supports Shelter's demand for the Scottish Government to cover the Bedroom Tax shortfall. We had a petition submitted to the Scottish Parliament calling on the Scottish Government to provide £53million in extra finance which would cover the full shortfall for the Bedroom Tax in Scotland for this year.

If the Scottish Government agreed to this demand, it would in essence, end the Bedroom Tax in Scotland.

We support all demands on the Scottish Government to mitigate the effects of the Bedroom Tax. We support the STUC's demand of increased DHP and Mr Daily's demand of an amendment of Section 16 of the housing (Scotland) Act.

Can the Bedroom Tax be defeated?

I firmly believe that we can end the Bedroom Tax but we need to be united against the Tories. This campaign must be led by tenants.

By having a tenant-led campaign we can ensure that tenants are at the heart of every move the campaign makes.

Our first concern is, and always will be, tenants. I implore any tenant who is affected by the Bedroom Tax to speak to an expert. There are agencies that can and will help tenants; Shelter, your local law centre or a Welfare Rights Officer will give you the help and support to protect your home and fight the Bedroom Tax. Because this is more than politics, this is about real people who are very, very scared.

REAL PEOPLE SUFFER BEHIND THE BEDROOM TAX HEADLINES

PHOTO: Simon Whittle

by Sandra Webster

SINCE its introduction in April, the Bedroom Tax has never been out of the headlines. Behind these headlines which quickly become yesterday's news, are the real stories of the lives that are affected.

Although the coalition promised to protect the most vulnerable, it becomes clearer each day that these are among the greatest affected. As we prepare to march on the Lib Dem UK conference, it is good to be reminded of why we are taking action.

Two years ago, the 'Smith' family moved into a housing association property. They care for their 18-year-old daughter who lives with cerebral palsy. Her condition means she needs care around the clock.

They were so relieved to be able to move into a home which had been especially adapted for her needs. They also had a spare room to store all her medical equipment and a room each for the other children.

Arrears

In April though they received notice that they would have to pay £16 a week for their "spare" room. The situation was exacerbated by one of the children moving out due to the stresses of living with a disabled sibling.

With rent arrears of only £120, they felt pressurised to look for another property. They have now moved to a



REAL SOLIDARITY: we need to support each other as the Bedroom Tax and other Coalition cuts continue to affect the most vulnerable

ground floor flat with a lack of storage space. The irony is that their previous home still remains empty after two months, meaning the housing association has lost more revenue than the rent arrears.

'James' and 'Sara' are divorced but share care for their sons who are both on the autistic spectrum. This means both boys' needs are well met.

The boys' sleeping patterns can be erratic with them both being awake at night. Due to this, both parents have a three bedroom house so each of the boys can have their own room.

This was assessed as a medical need by an occupational therapist employed by the local authority.

With the introduction of the Bedroom Tax, siblings under the age of eight of the same sex are now automatically

expected to share a room, even with a medical condition. As the main carer, 'Sara' has been successful in applying for a discretionary housing payment but 'James' is expected to pay the extra cost of having two "spare" rooms. He is contesting this at the moment but his arrears keep increasing.

These are just two of the stories that have been shared with SSP members manning stalls on the Bedroom Tax.

What they do highlight is that, although people with disabilities are among the priority groups for Bedroom Tax discretionary housing payments, the funds are sometimes not reaching those who need them most.

It is evident that many vulnerable people are being put under more stress as the

Bedroom Tax legislation impacts on their lives.

We have heard stories of parents whose children have been taken into care, immediately having to pay. Some people have still not heard of discretionary housing payments, despite the advertisement campaign.

Others are not aware of the right to appeal. Part of our role is not just to campaign to bring an end to this odious attack but also support those affected.

Isolated

There are good news stories. 'Jean', a woman with severe epilepsy, attended one of our public meetings last month. She had been told by her housing officer that due to her receiving disability living allowance she would not be entitled to any help with paying the Bedroom Tax.

She has cut off her phone and broadband, leaving her more isolated to ensure she could pay. Local members supported her in making another claim and she told us this week she had got a letter saying she will not have to make any further payments.

This small victory reminds us that the Bedroom Tax campaign can be won in many ways, and is only one example of the many people we are supporting.

A person free from the worry of eviction or increasing rent arrears has more energy for further campaigning, and will spread the message to the communities they live in. That's why the battle of the Bedroom Tax will be won on the micro and macro levels.



Carnage of war saw upsurge of working class activity

by Campbell Martin

RADICAL socialist views grew amongst Scotland's working class and found public expression during the human carnage that was the 'Great War', the First World War of 1914-18.

Trade unions and individual socialists across Britain had hoped to avoid war by uniting with their German counterparts in a show of international solidarity. As the likelihood of war grew stronger, the call was for workers to refuse to kill other workers in an imperialist war fought in the interests of capitalism.

However, once the conflict began, most of the leaders of labour in each country quickly dropped their opposition and backed the war effort. In September 1914, the Labour Party assured the Liberal Government that "the head office of the party [and] its entire machinery, are to be placed at the disposal of the government in their recruiting campaign."

Jingoistic

Whipped-up into a jingoistic fervour by capitalist-owned newspapers, the working class of Britain were told they had to 'do their duty' by fighting for King and country when, in fact, the war was all about the imperial aspirations of the ruling class and the wealth they could accumulate through colonial expansion and exploitation.

In a situation unchanged since medieval times, ordinary men were to fight and kill each other at the behest of their lords and masters. One unattributed comment perfectly summed-up the reality of the First World War when it described the close-quarter use of the bayonet fixed to a rifle in the following terms: "A bayonet is a weapon with a worker at each end."

In Scotland, the period leading up to the outbreak of the First



World War had seen the birth of the movement that was to become known as Red Clydeside.

From around 1910, the social and political conditions affecting the working class in Glasgow and surrounding industrialised areas produced a popular consciousness and militancy that demanded change. Labour unrest involving both men and women increased dramatically leading to strike action and a surge in membership of organised trade unions.

What made the activism on Clydeside different to anything seen before was the leadership and determination of shop-stewards, like Willie Gallagher and Davie Kirkwood. Alongside activists in the broader political movement, such as John Maclean, members of what became known as the Clyde Workers Committee were seen to be 'of and for the working class', as opposed to many trade union leaders whom it was believed were remote from the people and 'in the pockets of the bosses'.

In the first ten-years of the 20th

century, more than half of all the world's ships were built on the Clyde. Glasgow was the 'engine room' of the British Empire, creating vast wealth for shipyard owners and employers while those who created the wealth – the workers – were paid poverty wages and lived in damp, overcrowded and unsanitary housing.

In 1915, while many men were fighting amongst the carnage of the Western Front in Flanders, Glasgow's capitalist landlords sensed the vulnerability of the women and children left at home. Despite the appalling condition of much of the housing, a massive hike in rents was announced. Tenants who could not afford the increased rent were thrown onto the street.

With the men away, it was women who were most affected by the landlords' action, and it was women who led the fightback.

Prominent amongst those who took direct action and led a rent strike in 1915 was Mary Barbour, a member of the Kinning Park Co-operative Guild. Sections of the

press referred to the female protesters as 'Mrs Barbour's Army'.

Supported by male activists, such as the socialist John Wheatley, the women physically blocked close mouths to prevent Sheriff Officers from gaining entry to carry out evictions (a tactic repeated almost 80 years later in the fight against the Poll Tax). Contemporary reports also suggest the women frequently humiliated Sheriff Officers by a process of engaging them in dialogue while others approached from behind and pulled down their trousers.

Demonstrations

On 17 November 1915, Glasgow saw one of its largest demonstrations when women protesting against the rent hikes were joined by thousands of shipyard and engineering workers in a parade that marched through the city's streets to the Sheriff Court. Newspaper reports at the time described the demonstration as being of 'near riot proportions'. Twelve-days later, as the rent strike spread to other cities across Britain, the Liberal Government in London hurriedly introduced legislation, the Rent Restriction Act, which pegged rents to pre-war levels.

In June 1916, Mary Barbour together with Helen Crawford and Agnes Dollan, two other activists from the successful Glasgow rent strike, founded the Women's Peace Crusade, which worked to bring an end to the horrors taking place on the battlefields of Flanders.

Four years later, in 1920, following the widening of suffrage contained in the 1918 Representation of the People Act – all men over 21 and women over 30 were given the vote – Mary Barbour became the first female councillor elected to Glasgow Town Council where she represented the Fairfield Ward, a shipbuilding area of Govan.

Opposing the war drive best solidarity with Syrian people

by Bill Bonnar

PERHAPS the Assad regime was responsible for the chemical weapons attack in a Damascus suburb or perhaps it was irregular forces associated with but not controlled by the regime or perhaps it was carried out by rebel forces.

For the MPs who voted against British military intervention there were too many perhaps. For them and the country at large the legacy of the Iraq looms large when the country was bounced into a disastrous war on the basis of lies.

The question needs to be answered. Why would the regime carry out such an attack; a propaganda own goal of monumental proportions especially when the UN Inspectors were already in the city only a short distance away?

If it was carried out by pro-Assad forces it would suggest the regime has no control over these forces. Either that or the attack was carried out by rebels attempting to discredit the regime and provoke outside intervention.

The United States does not appear to be bothered by these details and now appears to be searching for a legitimate reason

to intervene. If it does so it will have little to do with alleviating the suffering of the Syrian people and everything to do with its proxy war with Iran.

All the forces in the region are now positioning themselves for the post conflict settlement.

Like in Iraq the aim of the United States is the establishment of a dependent, pro-American regime in Damascus and their intervention will be to support those forces most likely to bring this about.

That many of these forces are Islamic fundamentalist groups will not cause much sleep to be lost in Washington; they already co-exist in close alliance with the principal ally of some of these groups; Saudi Arabia.

Any proposed intervention will also be driven by a recognition that the Assad regime appears to be gaining the upper hand in the conflict and with the support of Iran and Russia will be able to dictate what happens after the end of the Assad Regime.

This now appears to be when rather than if. The removal of Assad is central to any settlement and a pre-condition for peace talks. The likelihood is, if he is not

overthrown, he will be spirited away into exile.

That some kind of settlement is crucial is shown by a current picture of the war. The struggle is now between fragmented coalitions. On the government side are the core of the Syrian army, various militias and irregular forces and some outside forces. The rebels are a patchwork of forces including regional groups, Islamic fundamentalist organisations, and disaffected elements of the army and also outside forces.

The government controls most of Damascus and other large cities while the various rebel groups are in effective control of the rest of the country. Hundreds of thousands of people have died; two million have fled to neighbouring countries while seven million have become internal refugees. The country has ceased to exist as any kind of unitary state while the conflict is now spreading into neighbouring states.

Any western military intervention will only exacerbate the situation, prolong the war and make any settlement more difficult. It will lead to an increase in support for the Assad regime

from Russia and Iran with the possibility of direct Iranian intervention and the escalation into a much wider conflict.

In Britain opinion polls shows that the great majority of people are opposed to intervention. They remain unconvinced by the claim that the Assad Regime carried out the attack, are suspicious of some of the rebel groups and can see no military rationale for an attack.

Following Iraq they are deeply sceptical of the government's real reasons for intervention and the belief that this is really about placating the United States.

It was this opposition which forced the hand of MPs in the vote in parliament. However this does not mean that we become complacent.

If the United States does attack then intense pressure will be put on the British Government to support any action. No doubt various 'dodgy dossiers' are being prepared.

The anti-war movement must remain vigilant and keep the pressure on. Preventing a British military intervention and undermining the American war effort is our best way of showing solidarity with the Syrian people.



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Remembering life in Allende's Chile - 40 years after the coup

PHOTO: Carolina Perez

Dictatorship's young victims

The testimonies of children tortured under the dictatorship have now emerged as part of a project called *Mentiras Verdaderas*. Around 2,200 minors have been identified as victims of political oppression and torture. Here is the testimony of **Anje Espinoza**

I GOT into a lift in a public building in Santiago on my way to an appointment. I was 23 at the time. In the lift was an elderly man whose face I recognised immediately.

"You were a policeman. You were assigned to [location unknown] police station."

"Yes, I have been in the police force all my life" he said proudly.

"Do you remember me?"

"My dear, I have met many people in my career."

"Yes, but how many eleven-year-old girls do you remember repeatedly kicking in the back, chest and head so that her father would 'talk'?"

'Obeyed orders'

The colour drained from the old man's face. "I only obeyed orders", he said.

"It's ok, calm down. I have struggled to come to terms with what happened in my past but I have now learned to be happy.

"The one thing you could not kick out of me was hope. I learned to forgive you a long time ago."

He became a little unsteady on his feet; I took his arm and smiled at him. For almost a decade, whenever I saw a police uniform, I would wet myself, literally. When I got out the lift, I finally felt free.

Now, at the age of 35, my story doesn't appear in any official documents or history books; I may be invisible but I have confronted my attacker which has allowed me to move on. A psychiatrist put it down to 'resilience' but I simply attribute it to my desire not to be a prisoner anymore and to continue living again.



SMALL WORLD: Ramon Perez (left) with former air force workmate and fellow political prisoner Luis Rodriguez. They bumped into each other years later in Clydebank. Luis lives in Cumbernauld

The election of Allende and Popular Unity meant hope for the less privileged people in society.

The government introduced a better health service and a pint of milk for every child in primary education. They raised the standard of living.

There was full employment. The people were full of enthusiasm for a new beginning because their destiny was in their hands. Chilean arts, folklore, music and books flourished.

Before Allende, class division was very notorious in Chile, as was the lack of opportunities for the poor. When Allende was elected, it was easier to improve education. Schools with expensive fees, universities and further education colleges became available for poorer people.

There was more money in people's pockets, so they could buy things produced by the newly nationalised industries,

Ramon Perez used to work for the Chilean Air Force. When the fascist coup of **General Pinochet** overthrew the world's first democratically-elected Marxist president **Salvador Allende** 40 years ago on 11 September 1973, many brave Chileans stood up to the brutal regime. Exiled to Britain in 1975, Ramon now lives in Renfrew. He spoke to **Simon Whittle** about life in Allende's Chile

where the workers had a say in the running of their factories.

But right-wingers set out to destabilise Popular Unity. As the country was slowly progressing, the right started to boycott the government with strikes by lorry owners, which paralysed the country. It is well documented that they were paid by US agencies. My father had a couple of lorries but he never stopped working. He was offered cash – in US dollars – to join the strike. Some drivers were paid hundreds of dollars a day to strike. Because of not joining the strike, my father's vehicles were shot at with air guns – the windscreen broken and the tyres blown out. Essential

products began disappearing from the shops. The opposition blamed the government but after the coup, warehouses full of decomposing food were discovered.

I was an electrical engineer in the Chilean Air Force – we had instructors from the USA, and among the technical lectures, there was always an anti-left wing message. When the coup came, and many of us refused to be part of the bombing of Allende's presidential Moneda Palace on 11 September, we were arrested and imprisoned.

• See: chile40yearson.org for more info on the anniversary and details of events around the country marking the coup

by Ken Ferguson

THE Rally For Independence on Edinburgh's Calton Hill on Saturday 21 September can be the curtain raiser for a decisive year in the battle to win an independent Scotland capable of breaking with Britain's endless austerity and war.

However, as the opinion polls move, one thing is clear – the vast majority of Scots reject the extremist policies of warfare over welfare at the heart of the Westminster coalition and largely backed by their “loyal” Labour shadows.

The fact is, all the evidence shows that if a further Tory government was certain in the 2015 Westminster polls, a decisive majority would pile in behind a Yes vote.

Faced with this situation, it is clear that the left of the independence movement have a decisive role to play in convincing our fellow Scots who still look to London Labour to deliver policies reflecting Scotland's left of centre consensus that such an approach is a dead end.

Trident

This is the same Labour Party which backs the continuation of Trident nuclear weapons on the Clyde, supports some 80 per cent of Tory spending cuts, refuses to axe the Bedroom Tax and whose Scottish leader rails against hard won benefits as “freebie Scotland”.

Taken with their dismal record of protecting the bankers while privatising services, slavishly backing the insane Bush war on Iraq and saying British troops would go to Afghanistan and “not fire a shot”, their repudiation of labour values is undeniable.

MAKE INDEPENDENCE MARCH CURTAIN RAISER FOR A DECISIVE YEAR

PHOTO: Craig Maclean



**RALLY FOR
SCOTTISH
INDEPENDENCE
SAT 21 SEPT
EDINBURGH**

**11am-12 noon:
Assemble, High Street**

**12 noon:
March to Calton Hill**

**1pm-4pm:
Rally**

DATE WITH DESTINY: in these potentially historic times it's essential to press for a Yes vote

The task facing the pro-independence left is to convince the thousands of Labour voters betrayed by the neo-liberals now running Labour that a Yes vote is the best, most realistic path to regaining the possibility of Scotland's shared collective approach delivering those lost values.

To that end the Scottish Socialist Party is stepping up its public work to convince voters that independence is the best way to win a government which will have

public services, peace and democracy at its heart, and reject the warmongering greed of neo-liberalism backed by the London big three.

Progressive

We work both in the Yes campaign and in support of the Radical Independence Campaign, and on our own platforms at public meetings, street activity and through our fortnightly *Scottish Socialist Voice* to take that message to voters. Our pamphlet setting out our case

for an independent socialist Scotland, a democratic republic, will be on sale at the Calton Hill event and will be taken out to the public in meetings across Scotland in the weeks ahead.

These are indeed potentially historic times and it is essential that the case for a Yes vote next year is pressed home across Scotland.

And given Scotland's progressive consensus, the more clearly the case for the pro-independence left is put the more likely is a positive result.