

Trade union conference: as the STUC meets, we argue that workers would be better off with independence
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Radical indy: new book is brimming with good ideas
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Scottish Socialist Voice



REALITY OF THE BETTER TOGETHER PARTIES

UNIONISTS BACK BENEFITS CAP AS EXPENSES SCANDAL RESURFACES

'Why the benefits cap doesn't fit'
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Colin Fox gives his personal and political tribute

MARGO MACDONALD

MSP was a friend and ally of the Scottish Socialist Party from the very beginning. Passionate about independence she shared our desire for a Scotland that was socially just, democratic and left wing. And like the SSP she had abundant faith in the Scottish working class's ability to achieve extraordinary things and respond positively to progressive causes well presented.

Born in Hamilton seventy years ago her first act of rebellion was as a young political activist in rejecting the corrupt and stifling Lanarkshire Labour establishment to join the fledgling SNP. This was the 1970s. The SNP was not then the slick party of government it is today. Margo was on its working class left from the outset.

She stood for the SNP in a Parliamentary by-election in Govan in 1973 and won a famous victory that changed the shape of Scottish politics forever. It was an advance for the nationalists every bit as iconic as Winnie Ewing's groundbreaking success at Hamilton in 1967.

Broken the mould

Yet it was more significant because although Margo lost her own seat in the first General Election of 1974 the SNP went on to win 13 others. Her success in Govan had broken the mould.

She was soon rebelling again this time against her own party leadership who were taking the SNP to the right and moving its political base away from the populous central belt. Expelled by the SNP as a member of the banned left wing '79 Group' along with Alex Salmond and others, she would remain a feature of the Scottish political landscape for the next 40 years.

She brought up her two daughters Petra and Zoe and launched a successful career as a broadcaster and journalist.

MARGO



MARGO MacDonald: the only MSP brave enough to confront the Scottish Executive when four SSP MSPs were fined and banned from Holyrood without a hearing for defending the democratic right to protest against the G8 leaders at Gleneagles in 2005 PHOTO: Craig Maclean

Later living in Edinburgh she rejoined the SNP and was elected as a Lothians list MSP in the first elections to the new Scottish Parliament in 1999.

But she fell victim to bitter internal politicking in the SNP at that time and was in effect deselected. Undeterred she left and stood as an Independent.

It was not an easy decision for her nor without risks but she won a resounding success in 2003 and again in 2007 and 2011.

It was during my time as a fellow Lothians MSP that I got to know her personally. And I'll always be grateful for the friendship and kindness she showed towards me. On the 2003 election night the result in the Lothians was delayed by

administrative hiccups and was on a knife-edge. She took me aside before the result was dramatically declared and patiently advised me how to handle the figures when they were finally announced. Not for the last time did I fail to heed her wise counsel. I was soon "hurdling around Meadowbank stadium like a kangaroo on speed" as one wag famously described my spontaneous reaction to the result. She forgave me of course, not least because she and Jim were just as delighted at our success.

She was intelligent, incredibly witty, unbelievably gregarious, kind, loyal, fiercely determined and above all brave. Brave not just in battling the Parkinson's

disease that killed her but politically brave too. She fought the Labour Party for 50 years and the SNP too. But she fought the Scottish establishment above all.

And I treasure the way she alone confronted the Parliamentary authorities that expelled me and my SSP colleagues in 2005. We were handed the most severe penalty any 'Parliamentarians' have received since the English Civil War over our silent protest at the Scottish Executive's attempts to subvert the democratic right to protest against the G8 leaders at Gleneagles.

They banned us from Parliament for 30 days and fined us £30,000. And Margo MacDonald was the only MSP to speak out against their decision to deny us a hearing of any kind. Faced with a Parliamentary 'lynch mob' she was the only one brave enough to confront them.

I really admired her for that.

Advice

I was also indebted to her for the advice she gave me in helping me steer my Bill to abolish NHS prescription charges through Holyrood. It was a long process and Margo sat on the Scottish Campaign to Remove all Prescription charges [SCRAP] Committee alongside John Swinburne and the other MSPs sponsoring the Bill.

I am comforted that I got to say my goodbyes to her last week. I was at the house to take Jim Sillars to speak at an SSP public meeting in Govan.

Clearly in great discomfort and on strong painkillers, she was eager for news about the SSP and the Yes campaign.

She gave me good advice on what to say at the meeting and told me how confident she was of a Yes vote. She felt all the classic signs of victory were visible in the way people were now responding to our message.

That was Margo: engaged, positive and clear to the end.

by Ken Ferguson

TOP NATO warmonger and bitter opponent of independence Lord Robertson, in a startlingly frank outburst, has confirmed the case of the independence left on the international significance of a Yes vote.

Of course, in his speech to the powerful US Brookings think tank, the long term supporter of NATO bombing and intervention, painted a rather more right wing picture than that of the left.

For him, a democratic decision taken in a free vote to back independence after years of debate would not be welcomed but rather would represent a gain for the “forces of darkness” and a victory for the enemies of the west.

As a bolt of lightning can harshly illuminate the scene amidst the darkest storm, so the noble Lord’s words lift the lid on the central fears of the powerful men at the heart of the ruthless, warmongering British state.

The brutal truth

Never mind all the honeyed words about our shared heritage, democracy and being “Better Together”, Robertson’s speech tells the brutal truth – for the British state, their status as a nuclear armed militarised power is absolutely central to their determination to defeat the Yes campaign.

A look at Robertson’s political history quickly explains how it was he, among the clutch of right wing, ermined Labour Lords gracing Better Together, that was chosen to play the war card in the indy debate.

From his earliest days in parliament, the then plain George Robertson was a fan of nuclear weapons aimed at civilian populations and whose use would have incinerated millions during the Cold War.

His politics marched in lock step with the US in the days when the shadow of nuclear destruction hung over the world and thou-

Top warmonger rallies neoliberal elite against Scots independence



LORD ROBERTSON: never interrupt your enemy when he is making a mistake

sands marched for peace. He then went on to become secretary general of NATO which, after the Soviet collapse was not dissolved like its Warsaw Pact opponents but expanded.

Robertson was central in launching NATO’s bombing campaign in Yugoslavia – labelled an “unpardonable folly” by Alex Salmond in the first time the alliance had used its military muscle. It would not be the last.

He came into his own after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, backing NATO’s Afghan campaign and going on to support air raids on Iraq.

During his time at the NATO helm, the alliance moved from deterrence to real warfare and indeed is now largely viewed as the armed wing of neoliberalism.

This view often under the cloak of “humanitarian intervention” has seen high tech death rained by cruise missiles, bombs and drones from Kosovo to Kabul in a ceaseless drive to make the world safe for globalised capital.

And it the potential threat to this world order, not concern about giving terrorists an “early Christ-

mas”, that underpins the scary words by this long term cheer leader for British imperialism.

A Yes vote will, despite black-mailing by Robertson and his ilk, force Trident out of the Clyde and almost certainly Britain (or what is left of it) out of the distastefully named “nuclear club” of terror weapon states.

Make no mistake, the arrogant foreign policy are determined to stop this and thus endangering the permanent British seat on the UN security council.

This was granted to the UK as one of the partners in the victori-

ous anti-nazi coalition at the end of the war. Given the massively diminished state of Britannia, it now largely remains held in place by the nuclear weapons prop.

No Trident, probably no seat at the UN top table, diminishing influence with our senior US military partners and recognition that, other than as a minor actor the British part in ‘policing’ the world is over.

Alternative

For the left, the speech should be seized upon as clear evidence of the progressive potential that a Yes vote can unlock, not just in peace but in boosting those across Europe and the world fighting for a people’s alternative to the mandarins, bureaucrats and profiteers.

The left might like to heed the words of Napoleon who wisely counselled “never interrupt your enemy when he is making a mistake”.

Lord Robertson, scion of the rich and powerful, director of the Weir Group, darling of the generals and copper-bottomed imperialist has certainly done that.

The Yes forces should go all-out to expose his pompous warmongering scares and tell the truth that another peaceful and prosperous Scotland and planet are possible.



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by John McAllion

DURING HIS recent televised debate with Jim Sillars, George Galloway warned that an independent Scotland would be “no cold water Cuba”. It was the only point during the debate that George’s arguments connected to reality. A Yes vote will herald the break-up of the British state and the birth of a new Scotland.

However, it is no guarantee that politics in the new Scotland will shift decisively to the left. In the most recent Scottish Parliament elections, Scotland’s four big parties took 98 per cent of the seats and 99 per cent of the constituency vote.

By no stretch of the imagination could any of these parties be described as socialist. Arguably, in that election, the SNP fought on the most progressive of the manifestos on offer.

It promised to defend universal benefits, to keep privatisation out of the NHS, to retain Scottish water in public ownership, to preserve free higher education and to oppose Trident renewal.

Pay limits

Yet, at the economic core of the same manifesto, it also promised low and competitive taxes for Scotland’s private sector, not to use the parliament’s tax varying power, a freeze on local government taxes, a cut to the costs of Scotland’s public and civil services and the imposition of pay limits on Scotland’s public sector workers.

It also argued for Scottish control of corporation tax as a means of achieving “...the lower rate needed to maximise the economic benefit for our nation”.

All of Scotland’s mainstream parties are committed to NATO membership, the retention of the monarchy, privatised utilities and deregulated markets in which capital is free to roam the globe in search of private profit.

None of them are committed to repeal of the harshest anti-trade union laws in Europe. All of them claim to be pro-business and all of them denounce the politics of class warfare.

In the event of a Yes vote, most of the sitting 59 MPs and 129 MSPs will share a sense of entitlement to a seat in the newly independent Parliament. The party hierarchies and machines that sustain these politicians will still be in place.

The same safety-first civil service will continue to patrol Scotland’s corridors of power. The print and broadcast media will

WE CAN'T JUST PUT A KILT ON NEOLIBERALISM



WARNING: the Bradford West MP said an independent Scotland would be “no cold water Cuba”

go on reporting what the big four parties do. The legal, educational, financial and business establishments will carry on trying to set the limits to political action.

There is a real danger that having campaigned hard for two years and having won a Yes majority against the political odds, that some will believe it is job done on the morning of 19 September. If so, they would be making a huge mistake.

The real struggle for a socialist independent Scotland begins after we have secured a Yes vote. If the ruling elites referred to above are allowed to inherit the reins of power in an independent Scotland without serious political challenge, then the Yes campaign will have achieved little more than to put a kilt on the neoliberal status quo.

That cannot be allowed to happen.

One of the most encouraging aspects of the Yes campaign has been the re-energising of politics across the country. Old style political meetings are back. The SSP case for a socialist Scotland has played to packed meetings across the country.

The Radical Independence Conference in Glasgow attracted 1000 accredited participants. Yes Scotland are themselves drawing in crowds that are unprecedented for a non-party campaign. Old style canvassing is also back with 90 activists

knocking on the doors of one Glasgow housing scheme on one recent night.

A generation that had turned away from party politics in disgust has now re-engaged with a political struggle that has everything to do with building the good society and nothing to do with feathering the nests of politicians on the make.

The vision driving Yes activists across Scotland has nothing to do with ethnic nationalism. It is entirely free of any form of racism. It has no trace of anti-English sentiment. It is all about building that other possible Scotland in which people come before profit.

Organise

It is all about building a more equal, a greener and a socially just society.

That vision can only become a reality in an independent Scotland if Yes activists organise to make it happen.

That will mean re-building a mass party of the left. It will mean re-constituting our trade unions as instruments of radical change.

It will mean devising new models of common, public and democratic ownership and much more besides. It will mean turning the world as we know it upside down.

18 September is not the end. It is just the beginning.

by Colin Fox

YES SCOTLAND and the Scottish Socialist Party have come a long way together since that famous launch event in Edinburgh in May 2012. Many 'wise' people had written the Scottish Socialist Party's political obituary back then referring to Scotland's 'post-SSP' political landscape. But then people have been writing off the SSP since we were founded 15 years ago.

They said we would not last the year back in 1998. They predicted would never get MSPs elected to Holyrood. They predicted our six MSPs would not achieve anything. Ignoring our Bills to abolish poundings and warrant sales and NHS prescription charges for example they insisted they had nothing to do with us. They claimed we were finished after Tommy Sheridan tried to destroy us.

They told the country we were the ones who had committed perjury. Predictably, none of them had the character to apologise when the truth finally emerged. But that's how it goes with these 'Nostradamii'. Mark Twain put it best when he quipped 'Rumours of my death have been greatly exaggerated'.

Kept the faith

Despite these forecasts a brave band of SSP activists kept the faith because we knew of no other party worthy of working class support in Scotland. We refuse to accept that Labour or the SNP are socialist parties nor can they adequately explain the nature of the world today far less provide relief from the never ending exploitation facing Scotland's working class majority.

We helped launch Yes Scotland in May 2012 because we felt it could champion the independence cause most effectively and we felt we could win greater political support for the SSP from it.

That decision has paid dividends. We have won widespread respect for the constructive and collaborative role we play in building Yes Scotland. It has be-

SSP good for Yes campaign Yes campaign good for SSP



GOVAN MEETING: around 120 locals packed into the SSP's Socialist Independence public meeting in Govan on April 1st. Speakers included Jim Sillars, Colin Fox and Carolina Perez

PHOTO: Alan Ferguson

come the biggest grassroots political movement Scotland has seen since the anti-Poll Tax struggle of the late 1980s, a movement many of today's SSP leaders led.

Yes Scotland Chief Executive Blair Jenkins has voiced his appreciation of the role the SSP plays, saying "From day one of Yes Scotland, the SSP has been hugely supportive and the party is a highly-valued partner in the broad national movement for an independent Scotland.

"One of the real strengths of the Yes campaign is that people from different political perspectives are working side by side and street by street to get the result we all want so much in September.

"The SSP has brought all of its energy and enthusiasm to contribute to that Yes momentum."

And Independent MSPs John Finnie and Jean Urquhart, who have addressed several SSP public meetings throughout the past year, are also keen to point out the important role the party plays:

"There's growing public awareness' said John 'that the independence debate is more than Alex Salmond, more than the SNP. Much of the credit for that change goes to the SSP who, by

way of street campaigns and an ever growing list of well-attended public meetings, have taken the constitutional debate to the people. The Yes campaign is both a sophisticated political machine and a 'grassroots' campaign and the SSP has been an active and informed contributor to both."

Jean concurs, adding: "The Yes campaign has been a terrific melting pot for everyone in Scotland. The lost voice of the SSP in the Scottish Parliament is Scotland's loss. After independence, we need to truly reflect all the people of Scotland; that cannot be done without its Socialist voice."

Sense of purpose

Yes Scotland has at the same time been a godsend for the SSP.

The independence campaign has given our work a clear sense of purpose, forced us to engage with complex issues and compelled us to come up with new solutions and strategies to address those issues. The SSP is growing again into the mass socialist party Scotland so desperately needs.

More than 700 people have applied to join via our website scottishsocialistparty.org alone in the past year.

We have established new branches throughout the country and we recently inaugurated two new societies at Edinburgh and Stirling Universities that have enjoyed sparkling success promoting our unique socialist message among a new generation of students.

We have expanded the Scottish Socialist Voice – Scotland's only socialist newspaper – to 16 pages and held two very successful Voice Forums to discuss issues emerging from the independence movement.

We have hosted more than 30 SSP public meetings on 'the socialist case for independence' the length and breadth of the country with thousands having attended cumulatively. Our pamphlet *The Case For An Independent Socialist Scotland* has become our most successful publication ever.

And of course all these rewards would not have been possible without the painstaking work carried out by a dedicated band of SSP members across Scotland who build the party every day. And I again pay tribute to them for their efforts.

The lesson? The SSP has been good for the Yes Scotland coalition and vice versa.

In the first of a series on neoliberalism, **Bill Bonnar** looks at the Thatcher years and where they led

'There has been a right wing plague right across the world'

PICTURE THE scene. It is 21 May 1988 and the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, is addressing the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

Her speech was labelled, 'The Sermon on the Mount' an attempt to outline a theoretical justification for her government's neoliberal policies.

The speech came a short time after her controversial remark that 'there was no such thing as society only individuals and their families'. It should have been a receptive audience.

A hall full of austere-looking Church of Scotland Ministers; that most conservative assembly and representing a church which had been the bedrock of the Conservative Party in Scotland.

In fact some reacted with anger, heckling the Prime Minister. Others stormed out in protest. Most received the speech with an angry and stony silence. The applause at the end of her speech could not have been more muted and was rounded off by the Moderator; the Right Reverend James Whyte, handing her a copy of the Church's report on Homelessness and Welfare; a devastating critique of government policy.

Chasm

It was a vivid example of the chasm that had opened up between conservative opinion in Scotland and the same in England.

They had become very different things. Under Thatcher the Conservative Party had embraced neoliberal policies with enthusiasm alienating traditional conservative opinion in Scotland whose values came from a very different place. For them we definitely belonged to a collective society where the strong had a moral responsibility to look after the weak.

They were comfortable with ideas of public service and state re-



THATCHER: heckled by angry Church of Scotland Ministers in 1988

sponsibility. It was a value system that came from and fitted comfortably with Presbyterianism. This alienation of conservative opinion was reflected in the decline in the support for the Conservative Party in Scotland. In the 1979 General Election the party won 22 seats with 31 per cent of the vote. In 1997 it was down to 18 per cent and lost all its seats. The Conservatives had become, to quote one of its own leading members, a 'toxic brand in Scotland' and remains so today.

At the 2010 General Election the party pulled 17 per cent of the vote gaining just one seat.

Neoliberal ideas usually embrace the following.

Regressive taxation lessening the tax responsibilities of the rich and leading the increased inequality; something seen as desirable. An attack of the public sector both in terms of expenditure and also ideologically with the belief that private is

good and public is bad. Widespread privatisation and not just in terms of taking public companies into private ownership.

It also meant shifting responsibilities from the state to the individual.

The best example of this was in education where the abolition of grants and the introduction of tuition fees shifted the cost of higher education from the state to the individual. The scrapping of regulation aimed at ensuring that capitalism adhered to basic standards and, above all, the promotion of market values into all areas of life.

These ideas have had little purchase in Scotland and when imposed created a considerable backlash. The establishment of the Scottish Parliament reflected, in part, the need for Scotland to be shielded from these alien values.

neoliberalism has become the dominant ideology in England embraced equally by both the

Conservative and Labour Parties. In fact the Labour Government of Tony Blair/George Brown became the natural heirs to the Thatcher Government after several years of 'backsliding' by the government of John Major.

The next general election will be fought on an agenda in which neoliberal ideas are regarded as the norm.

This makes the referendum on independence all the more crucial. It is a chance to take Scotland in a radically different direction.

Onslaught

Imagine, for a minute, if Scotland had become independent in 1979. More than a generation later what would the country be like? We would not have been subjected to the neoliberal onslaught which scars our society to this day.

We would still have a mixed economy with the railways, energy industry and other sectors remaining in public ownership. The process of rapid de-industrialisation, while still occurring, would have been managed in a way that avoided some of the industrial devastation which blighted the country.

The regressive tax laws, which are a hall mark of all neoliberal governments, would not have been implemented. The list could continue. It was best summed up by writer, William McIlvannie who said that "there has been a right wing plague right across the world".

While socialists will always argue that the real alternative to capitalism is socialism, a new Scotland whose starting point is a fundamental rejection of the ideas and policies of neoliberalism is a good place to begin. It would also act as an aspiring alternative for what remains of the UK.

by David Mackenzie,
Trident Ploughshares

AS THE sun came out, the Spring Walkers turned the last bend into the North Gate entrance to Faslane, their bright banner and standards adding the final touch to a scene already made colourful by 60 yards or so of pink knitting by the Wool for Weapons enthusiasts.

Then the sound. The honking horns of passing cars, the hoots and clapping of the welcoming crowd, the singing from Protest in Harmony.

The hopeful, upbeat atmosphere is not accidental. With a Yes vote in September's referendum now looking more and more possible, Trident's jacket is on a shaky nail.

Nuclear disarmament has to date been high on the independence agenda as one of the key issues that pushes our vision for Scotland beyond laudable Nordic-style social improvement to something more radical.

Nowhere to go

There is also growing awareness that the anti-Trident aim is not NIMBY.

If we kick it out of the Clyde it has nowhere to go.

Recent weeks have seen the inept attempt by Westminster, through a deliberate senior leak, to link Trident to the currency question. Although there was a little delay while the Scottish Government dealt first with the question of the pound, they did in time make a strong statement to the effect that Trident removal is not negotiable.

This was underlined by Nicola Sturgeon at the Spring Walk rally in Glasgow on Saturday. The SNP position on NATO is both worrying and bizarre but it was again cheering to hear a senior member of our government fix herself so firmly to the

TRIDENT'S JACKET IS ON A SHOOGLY NAIL



WALKING THE WALK: in early April, SCND held a week-long Spring Walk

disarmament cause. None of this is accidental, either. Trident is not on the agenda by default.

The fact that it features so prominently is down to hard and persistent work by lots and lots of people.

Those who will potentially be elected representatives in an independent Scotland have to be reminded time and again that they have a constituency that is watching their every move to ensure that their anti-Trident stance remains unwavering.

The issue must also remain visible to the public at large. Although only 30 miles from Glasgow Faslane and Coulport are still relatively out of sight. The most likely palpable contact people will have is with the warhead convoys.

The convoy monitoring network Nukewatch UK 1 has been putting a renewed effort into tracking the movements of these huge trucks and to alerting the public to their existence. This has begun to pay off with increased call-ins

from "random" spotters and concerns being raised among communities along the routes. It is time to cease allowing this appalling traffic to skulk relatively unnoticed along our roads and instead to hoot and hound it as it goes.

One important part of the work has not yet even been tackled. There is considerable global interest in the potential impact of UK disarmament via Scottish independence but it needs to be more vocal. We have to persuade these global supporters that their intervention and support is vital. Ideally there will be delegations to Holyrood and widely publicised statements of support. This will also have a huge spin-off benefit of connecting us to that wider world beyond the narrow parochial bond of the Western *cosa nostra*.

The currency-for-Trident ploy raises the question of how far, in the event of a Yes vote, Westminster will go to retain the nuclear weapon

status quo. Among prevalent speculations is the idea that when they realise they are without effective surrogates in the new Scotland the dark interior of the state will roll out its arsenal of dirty tricks and heavy intimidation.

There is also the notion that the task is just too big, too revolutionary – let's be realistic, folks. At the other extreme there is the belief that there is a significant element of the establishment, including many in the military, retired or otherwise, who might be very happy with an outcome that rids the UK of an outdated, useless and expensive totem without they themselves having to take the blame from the Daily Mail.

After all, so many of their tigers have already turned out to be rather papery.

Pushing at the door

These are only guesses. We don't know. And if we don't know what do we do? Decide not to give that door a real push because we believe it is stuck fast for ever or because we worry something monstrous lies behind it?

For myself the push is the only option. It's a win/win.

The monster behind the door scenario means the critical exposure of the cruel and pitiless reality of a state prepared to threaten mass murder in its own interests.

The effective shove gives us what we want.

• See nukewatch.org.uk and call 08454588365 if you spot a convoy

by *Richie Venton, SSP
national workplace
organiser*

THE ANNUAL conference of the Scottish Trades Union Congress meets against a background of ferocious attacks on workers, their rights and living standards by employers emboldened by the most vicious government of millionaires in memory.

And it meets amidst raging debate on whether trade unionists should support Scottish Independence.

With 37 affiliated unions and 630,000 members, the STUC represents a huge force, so the battery of progressive policies and demands being debated are potentially vital to the future working people face, provided the STUC takes decisive action in pursuit of its own decisions.

How to win reforms

As the Westminster old-Etonians kick seven colours out of workers' rights, and preside over the most prolonged decline in wages since the 1870s – yes, the worst drop in real wages for 140 years! – the STUC Motions up for debate rightly demand an end to austerity; investment in public services; fair pay; a living wage; redistributive taxation; reduced inequality; social justice; support for carers; investment in public sector

WORKERS NEED INDEPENDENCE TO IMPROVE THEIR LIVES

housing; a ban on zero hours contracts; an integrated public transport system; renationalisation of Royal Mail; public ownership of the Big Six energy companies; collective bargaining rights for workers; industrial democracy; election of accountable trade union representatives on company boards; take union facility time for unions in all workplaces with over 21 workers; state retirement at 60...and a host of other specific reforms that would enhance the lives of millions in Scotland.

Two related questions arise. How can the trade unions best put up a serious fight to achieve these gains? And how

does that relate to the referendum?

Nothing has ever been gained by merely passing Motions at conferences.

It's always taken determined action, with maximum unity, to win every reform, however mild or far-reaching.

Duty of unions

The STUC and its affiliated unions have a duty to give leadership amongst working people, their families and communities, through public forums, rallies, demonstrations and in some circumstances united industrial action – such as in opposition to the crucifying cuts emanating from the Twin Tory Coalition.

Pleas for mercy fall on deaf ears; action by the working class speaks far louder than words. So the STUC conference needs to support those Motions that include a strategy for action. But that inevitably also raises the issue of the Referendum.

Those unions backing the scrapping of Trident and Defence industry diversification must surely face up to the fact a Yes vote would guarantee this path, whereas it is beyond the powers of a devolved Edinburgh parliament in a continued UK.

Calls for collective bargaining, trade union facilities at work, employment rights will fall on utterly stony

'A LIVING WAGE SHOULD RAISE LIVING STANDARDS'

John Miller, Cumbernauld & Kilsyth TUC delegate, told the Richie Venton about three Motions he will be moving at the STUC conference.

“In my own workplace a wage freeze for the last few years has now been followed with a non-consolidated rise of 0.7 per cent. That amounts to £9.50 a month before deductions. If the unions are campaigning for a living wage then it

should be a credible level that raises workers' living standards.

That's why our Motion calls for a legal minimum set at two-thirds male median wages – £9 an hour in 2013 figures.

On the Bedroom Tax, we have an opportunity to be rid of this benefits cut for good. The trade union movement should be at the forefront of the campaign to bin it, building on the hard work and successes of local activists so far.

On the referendum, the UK Westminster

parliament offers nothing but cuts and attacks on jobs and services for the next decade. By calling for a Yes vote we can challenge the establishment parties' consensus that there is no alternative.

The trade union movement needs to grasp the issue of the right to self-determination by fighting for an independent socialist Scotland as a catalyst to the rest of the progressive left and working people in the rest of the UK that change is possible.



FIGHT: trade unionists need to fight for a just, egalitarian Scotland, based on the movement's best traditions

PHOTO: Craig Maclean

ground if we remain under Westminster rule – even in the less than probable event of Miliband's Labour winning office in 2015; look at Labour's record in office. And again this is all beyond the remit of a devolved Holyrood.

Likewise with the level of minimum wage; state pension; welfare spending; retirement age; fully redistributive taxation – not to even mention the fact Holyrood is powerless to take Royal Mail, transport or energy into public ownership, or to pursue the general aim (in UNITE's Motion) of "public and common ownership, with election of trade union reps onto company/industrial forums and boards".

Only a fully-fledged government elected by the Scottish people would have the powers to transform workers' lives, through these and other measures.

And here again there needs to be a bit more consistency on the parts of many trade union leaderships. The STUC and its affiliates have a proud record of fighting South African Apartheid (as, in fact, referred to in a Motion to this STUC on the death of

Mandela), fighting for majority rule. So where are many of the same trade union leaders when it comes to majority rule for the Scottish people – with an overwhelmingly working class majority?

Are they going to advocate a No vote on 18 September so we continue to suffer 'rich minority rule' by Westminster Tories – who have been openly, nakedly dictating over Scotland for at least 34 years since 1955, despite never once getting a majority vote in Scotland since that year?

A conference Motion from ASLEF rightly offers solidarity to the Greek people, supporting "democracy, sovereignty, independence and the right of the Greek people to determine their own future free from oppressive external intervention". Does this not sound uncannily familiar? And why therefore do union leaderships like those of ASLEF, USDAW, GMB, CWU not apply the same principles to Scotland? Why are they so

rightly eager to support self determination for the Greeks or Palestinians, but so eager to ignore the right of their own Scottish memberships to determine the views of their own trade union on the referendum – through branch debates, votes and a Scottish conference, rather than having no consultation or sham consultation after the UK-wide union leadership declared and imposed support for Better Together?

And the dusty old argument that independence would wreck the unity and solidarity of the working class melts in the face of reality.

Since when did any British government – including Labour ones – ever encourage or facilitate the unity and solidarity of workers across the UK?

On the contrary, measures banning so-called secondary action, combined with the break-up of public sector industries and services through rampant privatisation, have

been used to block workers' unity, to divide and conquer.

On the other hand, when Liverpool dockers, Manchester care workers, or Bristol civil servants were brought on tours of Scottish workplaces and unions by those of us who founded the SSP, not one Scottish worker ever spurned them on the grounds they were English. Nor did they turn away appeals for support to Irish car workers or Danish bus drivers that I toured Scotland with. The solidarity of Scottish workers – which also dates back to the 1930s Spanish Civil War or the 1973 fascist coup in Chile – has never been dependent on workers being part of the UK, and certainly never awaited the support or permission of any Westminster government.

Emboldened class

So why should that change after Scotland gained self-rule? The opposite: an emboldened Scottish working class, which helps not only to win a Yes vote but goes on to organise to shape the type of Scotland we build, would act as an example, a shining beacon, to workers across England, Wales, Ireland, Europe and beyond.

Trade unionists should not only stand up for Scottish self-determination, but fight to achieve a just and egalitarian Scotland, based on the best traditions of the trade union movement – an independent socialist Scotland – which would advance the cause of workers and socialism well beyond the boundaries of Scotland.

In contrast, continued rule and ruin by the Westminster puppets of bankers and capitalists spells misery for millions of working class people. The choice is stark, the opportunity for sweeping change in favour of working people far too precious to miss.



Why the benefits cap doesn't fit

by Sandra Webster

JUST WHEN you thought that the Tories could not stoop any lower their latest blitzkrieg on the poor became law last week. As well as personal benefit caps which affect individual families a cap has been set on the total amount of welfare spending all future governments make.

Iain Duncan Smith, the architect of misery, says it is all about accountability and ensuring the taxpayer knows just where their contributions are being spent. The Tories, bolstered by opinion polls, feel that the public is behind them as they get tough on some of the most vulnerable in society.

Behind the rhetoric

What most people don't realise is that behind the rhetoric the welfare budget has increased under this government. The cost of a new computer system to roll out universal benefit has wasted millions of pounds of taxpayers money. Housing benefit payments have soared too as more people seek smaller properties to avoid the Bedroom Tax. Perhaps Housing Benefit should be called rich landlord subsidy as some rake in money which could be spent on building more social housing but instead goes into the back pocket of the rich. The Duke of Westminster, one of the biggest landowners

in London has a personal wealth of £7.9 billion – greater than that of the bottom 20 per cent of the rest of us. The poor are nothing more to these people than yet another way of increasing their wealth. In times of austerity while most of us suffer the rich see it as an opportunity to increase their wealth.

Iain Duncan Smith when celebrating the passing of the bill in the Commons talked a lot about accountability. If future governments want to increase spending on welfare they will have to show the (of course) hardworking taxpayer where the money has been spent. Unfortunately though nothing has been said about accountability in other areas of gov-

ernment spending. We would surely like to see accountability in MPs expenses and the monstrous spending of Trident. However for this government, transparency of spending is only for what suits them. This suits their scapegoating of the poor who have become easy targets.

Traditionally the Labour Party may have been seen as the champions of the poor but Ed Miliband put an end to this belief when he said Labour would support the cap. The majority of Labour MPs voted with the government in a shameful act of collaboration. Their actions must be seen as nothing less than shameful. At the very least a party in opposi-

tion in Westminster are expected to rally against the worst excesses of the party in power. With barely a whimper though they supported the government.

The Labour Party now say they are the party of hard working families, some of them such as Tom Harris who said "We are no longer the party of the scroungers". Ironically the majority of benefits are paid to those in work due to their low wages.

This action must be seen as the death knell of Labour's claim to be the party of the working class.

Their levels in the polls continue to decrease. At this point in such a draconian parliament you might expect them to be soaring well ahead of an unpopular party in power. Instead a UKIP/Conservative coalition looks a harsh possibility in the next Westminster parliament. Thank heavens for the independence referendum which may set us free. Many ordinary voters are waking up now to the realisation that there is no difference between the blue and red Tories.

Free from hunger

With independence will come the opportunity to design our own welfare state. I hope enshrined in a written constitution will be the basic right that as citizens we will be free from hunger.

With the absence of socialists in the Labour Party, it is our role on the left to speak for those who are the victims of misfortune and ensure that there will be a safety net for those who need it in an independent Scotland.

Some hope the Labour Party in Scotland will be revived but given the present state of affairs in Scottish Labour they will need a rocket of socialism. We are the left, and it is our duty to offer an alternative.

I hope we are being seen more as part of mainstream politics – we will be the radical voice of an independent Scotland, always on the side of those who need our support.



ARCHITECT: Iain Duncan Smith and the Tories butcher the welfare state

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by John Finnie MSP

IT'S A honour to be convener of the Scottish Parliament's cross-party group on human rights and a privilege to meet individuals and human rights groups from around the world visiting Scotland.

In recent weeks I've met a former government minister from Bangladesh concerned about non-participation in the recent election, a priest from Colombia whose flock had their land confiscated by their government and global corporations, and the Human Rights and legal affairs ministers from Yemen concerned about the challenges faced, and inertia caused by a long-term transitional government some of whose citizens are detained without trial in Guantanamo or have been killed by illegal US drone attacks.

Like every other nation, Bangladeshi, Columbian and Yemeni's elites, the military, the bankers, and the corporations flourish whilst ordinary folk suffer. The monarchical state that is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is no different.

Societal change

So, in an independent Scotland will there be changes? Well we all hope so. What will be the barriers to developing a progressive, democratic and equal society?

What do the Scottish Government's aims of an independent Scotland keeping the monarchy, the pound in and being members of NATO tell us about the prospects of a Yes vote delivering significant societal change?

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland policies are made by, and in the interests of, a select group of elites; the bankers, the corporations, the generals, the public school boys and the arms dealers.

An independent Scotland will still have to be part of the capitalist world. The challenge for any independent nation is the extent to which it regulates its banking and financial sectors. The 'light touch

ELITES RULE OK?



DON'T MENTION THE NATO: arms traders are pressing for assurances over their post-independence status

regulation' commended by Gordon Brown should have no place. Public interest must always triumph over private profit. Investment banks being glorified bookmakers for wide-boys cannot be allowed. We must encourage an alternative 'ethical' financial sector with workplace and community credit-unions nurtured.

Corporations may be impressed by the Scottish Government's planned bidding war with Gideon Osbourne on corporation tax, but many Scots aren't. The idea of the Amazons or Starbucks, institutional tax avoiders, being given any encouragement for their greed is crazy. I would like to see the approach, which largely went un-noticed on the recent Scottish budget, when the small-business bonus, a system of rates relief for small local businesses, was no longer applied to the premises of 'pay-day lenders' extended.

A modest but clear example of how regulation can be used to curtail rather than reward the many unacceptable faces of capitalism.

The generals will need controlled too and that's something

that will be challenging in any NATO nation committed to 'Article 5' defence imperative i.e. an attack on one is an attack on all.

Recently, after some difficulty, I eventually secured a copy of a report, commissioned by Scottish Enterprise about the arms industry in Scotland. Large tracts of the report were redacted in bright yellow. The public could pay for the report but not read it!

Group of elites

What is clear is the truly depressing statement in the White Paper "If in government in an independent Scotland the Scottish Government will work with the defence industries to support their continued growth and to meet Scotland's own defence needs".

I've not seen that passage commented on but those few words highlight that one particular group of elites, the arms traders, are already ahead of the game winning assurances for their continuing status post-independence.

As Jim Sillars highlighted in his recent book *In Place Of Fear II*, public schools in Scotland do

very well out of their 'charitable status'. Fettes gets an 80 per cent discount on its Council Tax bill and pays £41,828 whilst Wester Hailes, where 45 per cent of the pupils are eligible for free school meals, pays £261,873. Early action needed there too.

That leaves the monarchy and a commitment to continue the flawed constitutional model. There can be no place for privilege and undemocratic structures and an early referendum is not only desirable it's essential. Progressive forces in Scotland must be ready to act to ensure that our goals of greater democracy, greater accountability, greater equality and simple humanity, rather than more of the same, win the day in our new independent nation.

Last week, Scotland lost Margo MacDonald.

Margo was one of the nation's finest daughters, a colleague, a friend and an inspiration.

Margo would not have allowed an independent Scotland to be a 'wee UK' where the elites carry on as before and we owe it to her to ensure that doesn't happen.

Book review: Yes – The Radical Case For Scottish Independence
by James Foley and Pete Ramand

by Jack Ferguson

IN JUST 130 pages, the authors identify the social, economic, democratic and imperial crises creating a dystopian future for Britain, the dangers inherent in US/UK imperial alliance, and sketch an outline of the structure of capitalism in Scotland.

In doing so they put the referendum in its international context: the ongoing battles raging across the world over neoliberalism and austerity that mark the long decline of capitalism through which we're living.

'Yes...' is in many ways a manifesto for the Radical Independence Campaign, of which the authors, James Foley and Pete Ramand, are leading figures. Reading it, I was in many ways reminded of the role that Alan McCombes' book *Imagine* played for a slightly earlier generation of Scottish Socialists.

The tone is slightly more academic, and 'Yes' may not be as immediately accessible to every reader as *Imagine*, but the vision of how Scots can create a better society here is just as inspirational.

'The end of history'

The differences between the two books are also illustrative of their different tasks. *Imagine* is a wide ranging manifesto, which when it was published 2000 aimed to simply re-present the idea of socialism to a generation still reeling from the collapse of the USSR and the so-called "end of history".

It was written in a time of hope for the future, in which long years of unexciting stability under Lib/Lab coalitions had still to elapse before we had the more dramatic years of the capitalist crisis.

Fast forward to 2014, and the stakes are all together much higher. As a result 'Yes' strikes a more urgent, focused note. There is a creative tension within the book: on the one hand, pointing out that Britain has progressed particularly far down the neoliberal road, with an imperial history that gives it a unique place in the history of global capitalism.

In demonstrating this exceptionalism, they aim to show how abnormal and socially backward the UK is compared to most northern European countries, and the immense progress that the

A succinct but powerful contribution from the left to the referendum debate

Scandinavian countries have made under social democratic governments. So far, so familiar. But as they state in the introduction:

"But although we find the progressive case appealing, our aim here is not to defend this vision. We wish to go further, and define what we call a radical vision for independence... Besides written rights and pleas for 'fairness' we need to know who benefits, and how they organise through political alliances.

"Even when we subtract Westminster and its wars and nuclear bombs, Scotland will remain a capitalist, class divided society... The Nordic examples are useful... But like all capitalist societies, they are not equipped for the challenges of the 21st century, and a just, sustainable Scotland would have to go further, setting new precedents.

"To address climate change and the rise of the 1 per cent, most economic decisions must be transferred out of private hands and placed under public control."

'Yes' certainly weaves more discussion of sexism and racism into the heart of the text than 'Imagine' ever did. And of absolute relevance is the discussion of climate change, and how continued adherence to the UK's "carbon-based political order" is suicidal...

They borrow the term 'Anglobalisation' from right wing historian Niall Ferguson to signify the continuity between the British and American empires, both aiming to subjugate the world under a certain form of English speaking capitalism.

They enunciate how British policy has led us to economic collapse, and destruction of any kind of respect for political authority through the corruption of the Westminster democratic process. (A startling statistic cited is that Brits have less trust in their politicians than Greeks or Italians!)

The authors tackle head on the issues of nationalism and racism, acknowledging up front the racism that blights Scottish society, but also challenging the defenders of British nationalism to unpick their own dangerous, banal fantasies of the inherent betterness of being part of the UK, and how imperial ideology feeds Scottish racism more than any link to the independence movement.

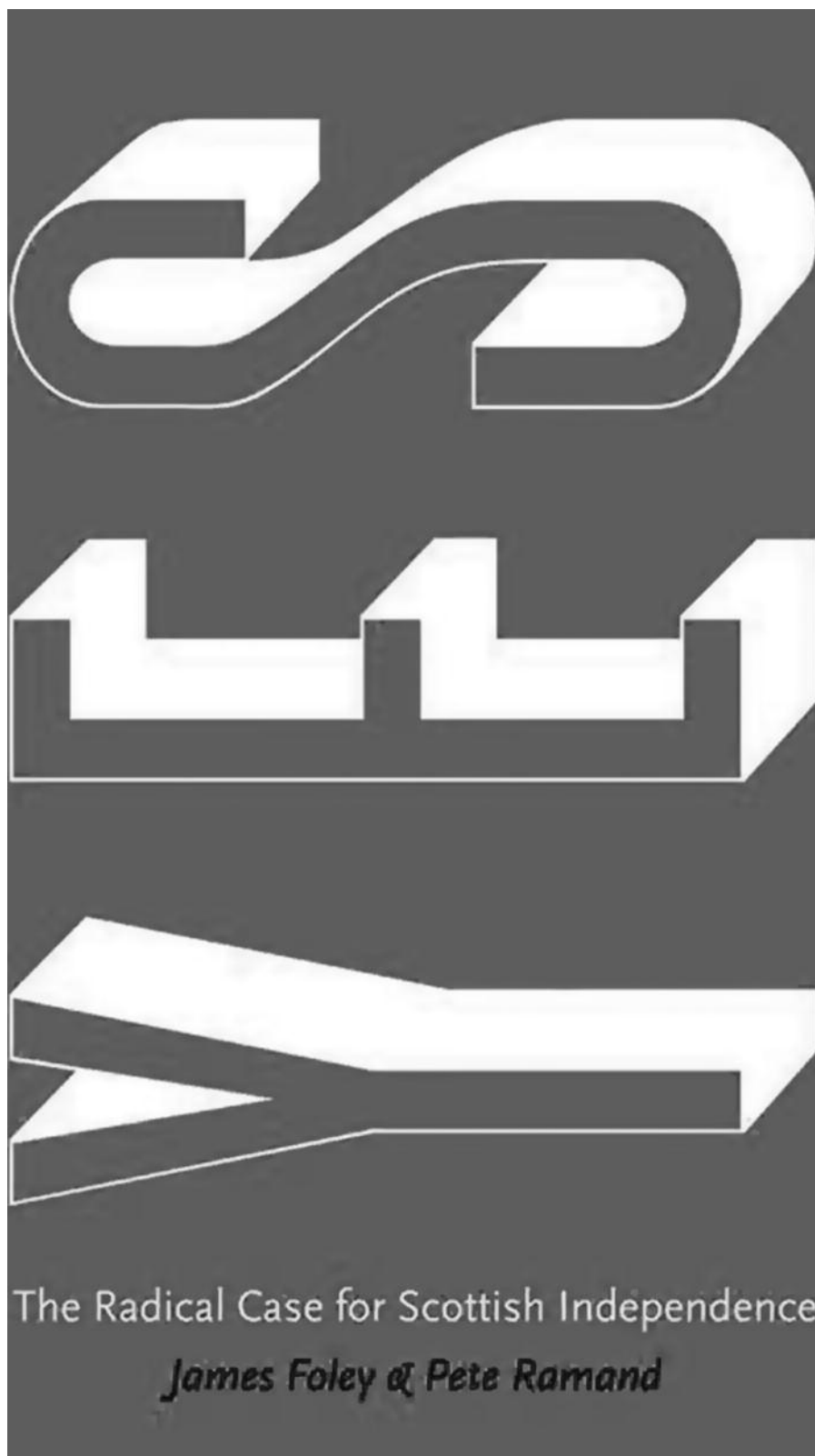
It also has the most comprehensive attempt I have seen in a Scottish socialist text to address head on the issues of anti-Irish racism.

Glaring omission

The book is strong in its analysis of the local neoliberal strategy for Scottish cities, with a section on the retail and property led consumerist failures of Glasgow's "regeneration".

Also strong is the account of the process by which the right captured the Scottish Labour party, pushing out left-wingers like John McAllion and Denis Canavan.

But a glaring omission from the account of recent Scottish politics is any mention of the SSP. This may prove



difficult for the authors, who were themselves active protagonists in the unprincipled and wrong-headed split off from the party.

But this ignores the fact that the pro-independence organised left is not a new phenomenon. There was a substantial, successful body of organised activists who adhered to the basic vision of radical changes coming

through Scottish independence, something which at the time much of the “revolutionary left” found fanciful and below contempt, but which time has borne out as the best chance of progress for Scotland.

The SSP is the missing element in a historical account of how we got here. Activists spent years in the street campaigning for policies like free school

meals and scrapping prescription charges that were later implemented by the SNP. We helped shift the debate, creating the space which has allowed the SNP to mobilise the working class against traditional Labour domination.

The history of what the SSP achieved is an indispensable part of creating any new left regroupment, and what the Scottish left does next should be bigger and better from building on that experience.

The final chapter sketches a series of immediate demands to mobilise around that begin to address the crises affecting our society. Of particular interest is the focus on what sociologist Erik Olin Wright calls ‘Empowered Participatory Governance’: direct democracy, participatory budgets and non-corporate political funding, which the previous discussion of Glasgow’s dysfunctional leadership proves is essential.

Gender discrimination

Also worth noting is the call for active measures to combat gender discrimination, such as a 50 per cent quota for parties standing for Holyrood.

This in itself proves how far the left has been forced to come on issues of gender, sexual and ethnic oppression, when compared to the battle that was fought in the SSP to enshrine 50/50 candidate lists.

The book certainly weaves more discussion of sexism and racism into the heart of the text than Imagine ever did.

And of absolute relevance is the discussion of climate change, and how continued adherence to the UK’s “carbon-based political order” is suicidal. They counterpoint instead a strategy of nationalising North Sea oil in order to finance a green new deal.

‘Yes’ is a book brimming with good ideas that is a product of a time of unprecedented opportunity. For SSP members, Radical Independence campaigners and all of the Yes left, the challenge is how we can get back to a position of unified action to grasp these opportunities, organise and build the power that the Scottish working class will need to wield in order to make the vision a reality.

• *Jack was organiser for Scottish Socialist Youth, the youth wing of the SSP, between 2006 and 2008, and worked with the authors on a number of campaigns*

Gig review: **Manic Street Preachers**, Glasgow
Barrowlands, 4 April 2014

Manics look to the future

by *Simon Whittle*

'I AM nothing and should be everything,' beams the video backdrop on the Barras stage on a spring Friday night in Glasgow.

A Karl Marx quote oft-used by glam Welsh lefties Manic Street Preachers, it was used on the back of their first EP, 1990's *New Art Riot*.

Circles complete – and here we are again, nearly a quarter of a century later, the older Manics just as angry and intelligent. Only with sorer knees and slightly less star-jumps.

And the music has calmed down a bit. With that, though, comes another form of beauty. Take their last album, *Rewind The Film*. Think 'Dylan goes electric' in reverse and without the outcry. But the Manics didn't so much shun their signature sound as wrote so much that their self-imposed two-year hiatus spawned two very different sounding albums.

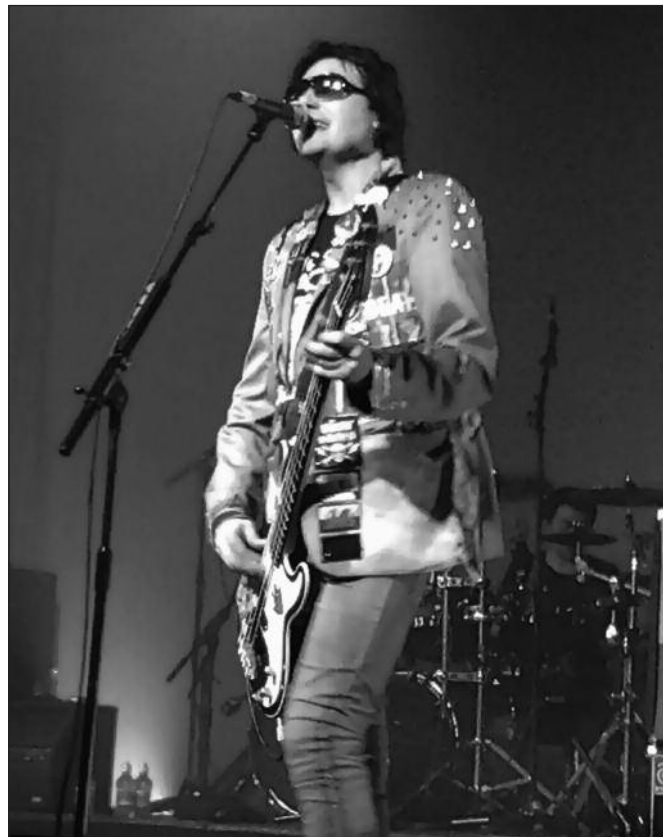
The first of these, the acoustic-tinged *Rewind The Film*, was released last September to critical acclaim.

Situationist stance

Heralded by a promo film of its title-track, *Rewind The Film* swapped the Manics' earlier punk, situationist stance for something much more subtle but just as direct.

While the track itself is as introspective as their main lyricist Nicky Wire often is, the film (shown in all its glory as a backdrop to the band as they played it live) features an old miner wandering through his old, closed-down pit village, through a dusty old mine workers' club while the haunting duet (featuring ex-Pulp guitarist Richard Hawley sharing vocal duties with the Manics' James Dean Bradfield) plays out.

A second video from the album, *Show Me The Wonder*,



NICKY WIRE: holding out for one last star-jump before his back packs in
PHOTO: Simon Whittle

sees a similar old club come back to life at the turn of the 1980s, before Thatcher has taken on the miners and their communities, the Manics on the small stage – all sideburns and moustaches – as a young couple fall in love.

But the true heartbreaker is the third film (for the song *Anthem For A Lost Cause*), the band's timely reminder of the power of support women gave the mining communities during the great strike of 1984-85.

The video's director Kieran Evans said of these women:

"They represented the very essence of true socialist principles; collectivising and organising themselves not only to protest against the huge injustice they suffered at the hands of Thatcher but also to feed, clothe and support fellow workers and their families.

"In some small way, we wanted to bring a sense of this history to the promo and shine

a light on the heroic women who took on Thatcher and her thugs. We should never forget their struggle."

Ok, they never played *Anthem For A Lost Cause* at the Barras but I urge you to see these three videos (especially *Anthem...*). Nor did they play the anti-Thatcherite *30-Year War*, the final track on *Rewind The Film*, with its references to "old Etonian scum" lining Westminster's front benches, "the lies of Hillsborough, the blood of Orgreave" and its Lenin-quoting coda, "I ask you again, what is to be done?"

So with such potent songs missing from their live set, what's left to review of the gig? Plenty – this is a band that has, amongst their rich history, another new album up its sleeve and a cult classic hurtling towards its 20th anniversary.

A couple of tracks from 1994's *The Holy Bible* got a long-overdue airing – *Die In The*

Summertime and *Archives Of Pain* – so all's well and good. And the two tasters from new album *Futurology* (due for release this June) not only didn't fail to please, they amazed.

The chorus of *Futurology* is almost a direct musical lift from Aztec Camera's *Good Morning Britain*, but good rock'n'roll never let plagiarism get in the way of a decent, uplifting riff.

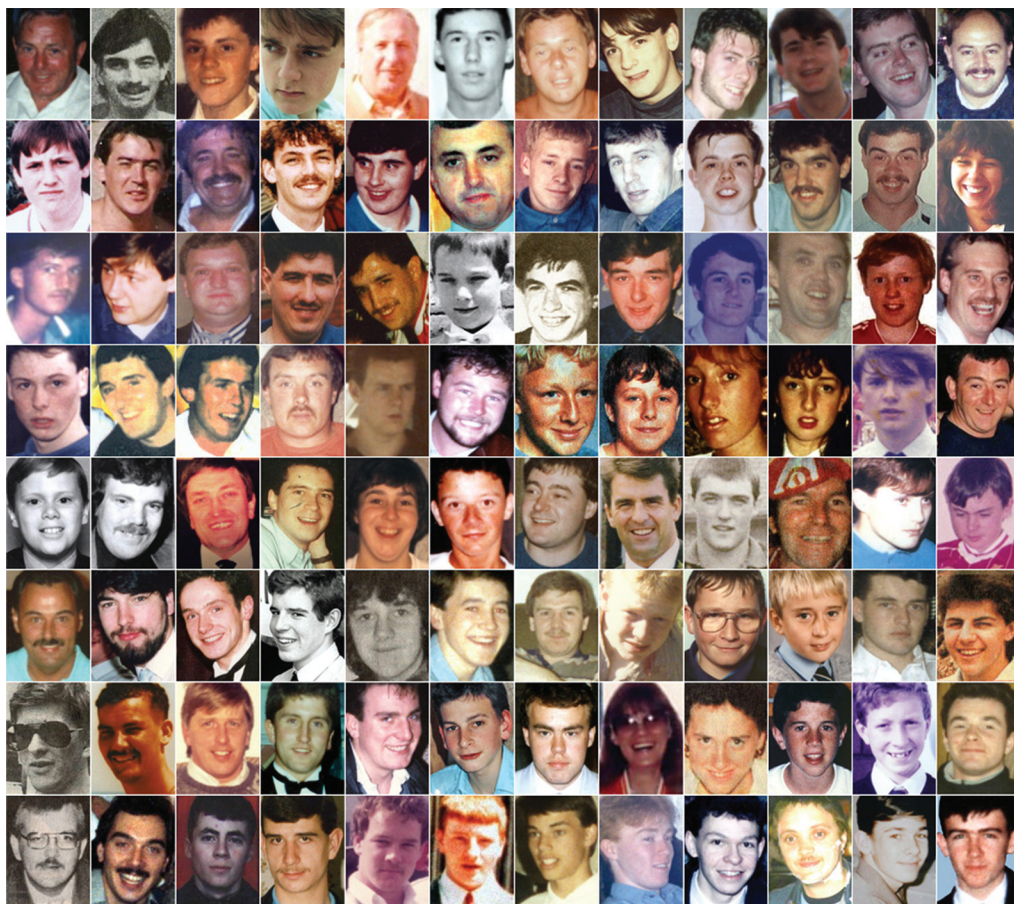
Another newbie, *Europa Geht Durch Mich*, is a stomping slice of motorik-driven krautrock with additional vocals by German actress Nina Hoss (she wasn't at the gig but her voice was). If there's any sanity left in the music biz, this should be a massive hit (European elections and the World Cup will be its backdrop on release) but, as ever, I won't hold my breath.

Chomsky quote

And the rest of the night? Choose your hits – they were played. Their two socialist-themed number one singles *If You Tolerate This Your Children Will Be Next* (about the Spanish Civil War – a feat only the Manics and Abba have achieved) and *The Masses Against The Classes* (with its Cuban flag artwork and Noam Chomsky quote intro, used live tonight at the Barras), as well as *Motown Junk*, *A Design For Life*, *You Love Us*, *Enola/Alone*, *La Tristesse Durera...*

Surprise of the night was singer James's insistence that, during his now traditional acoustic break (bassist Nicky must rest his knees), the crowd sing the lead guitar riff in *From Despair To Where*. It was both bizarre and inspired.

So I'm left looking back at another great gig by the Welsh three-piece (forever indebted to their 19-years missing former fourth member, Richey Edwards) and I'm looking forward to *Futurology*.



• *continued from back page* turnstiles. Instead of delaying the kick-off, they shoved thousands of fans through Gate C and turnstiles like cattle. Disastrously, Gate C led them straight down a steep tunnel into the already-overcrowded middle sections.

In their vilification of the dead and injured, the same police chiefs who ordered the opening of Gate C then told the media that afternoon that the gate had been smashed down by fans – a malicious strand to their lies about “drunken, ticketless Liverpool fans” being the cause of the disaster.

As the crush began, rows of police, three deep, lined up outside the cages at the goalmouth where people were dying. Eyewitnesses told me how police ignored pleas for help: shoved the fence back into position when fans desperately tried to smash it down as a means of escape; refused to help a child gasping for breath who was passed over the heads

of fans; truncheoned a group of fans who managed to get onto the pitch to try and rip down railings.

This callous failure to act as a rescue service largely lay in the previous training of police as unthinking, obedient servants of the police chiefs, who in turn deployed their forces on behalf of the Tories against mining communities and disaffected young people, and whose attitude to Liverpool working class people in particular was steeped in class hatred.

Tory hatred

It is no coincidence the police mercilessly doctored the evidence, to smear Liverpool fans and hide their own scandalous role. Thatcher’s Tory government’s fingerprints were all over this monstrous frame up. Only four years earlier, hundreds of thousands of the city’s working class, led by socialists in general strikes and demos of 50-60,000 for

jobs and services, won £60million in government funds in a massive defeat of Thatcher’s Tories. Liverpool was an inspiration to workers across the UK and beyond; the target of ruthless revenge by the Tories and their media lickspittles.

Thatcher made the trip north the day after the Disaster to meet South Yorkshire Police chiefs. In part to defend her loyal protectors during the momentous class confrontation with the miners in 1984-5 – but also fuelled by the Tories’ desire to avenge their government’s 1984 defeat by the rebellious Scouse working class, led by socialists.

In their demonisation of Liverpool, the press didn’t even wait for the dead to be buried before spewing out their vitriol.

A Sheffield Tory MP, Irvine Patnick, passed The Sun a packet of vicious lies, peddled by police chiefs, which the Murdoch rag gleefully

published. This accused Liverpool fans of being “drunken animals”, of “urinating on the dead and police”, of “mugging dead bodies”, of “assaulting firefighters”. Sales of The Sun have never recovered since on Merseyside. Boris Johnson, now Tory London Mayor, wrote in the Spectator magazine after Hillsborough that Liverpool “is wallowing in victim status”.

Several Inquiries and successive Tory and Labour governments buried the truth, terrified of the backlash against institutions that the rich rely on to maintain their power. But they reckoned without the Hillsborough Justice campaigners, who were adamant in their demand ‘Never again – justice for the 96’.

Monument to 96

I stand by the words I wrote in April 1989: “They are desperate to cover up the real culprits – the police, the Tory ministers, the football clubs who just want our ticket money. They do nothing about the clapped out, unsafe grounds, which are part of the whole rotten free enterprise system which the Tories and their press uphold...”

The unity of working class people in this hour of sorrow cuts across the rivalries which big business fosters in order to reap profits...

“One day the silent, choked up rage of these two million people [the number who poured into Anfield to pay tribute to the 96 the first week after the tragedy – RV] will be turned on the authorities responsible for this needless suffering and death.

“They will erect the best possible monument to the fallen 96 – a society where men, women and children can work, rest and play without fear of poverty or death for profit’s sake.”

*by Richie Venton,
Liverpool supporter and
regional organiser of the
Merseyside socialists
1980-1992*

THE FAMILIES of the 96 Liverpool football fans crushed to death at Hillsborough 25 years ago are reliving their indescribable pain and loss, at the opening days of the Coroner's Inquests, ordered by the High Court after it quashed the original, rigged verdicts of 'accidental death'.

15 April 1989 witnessed the worst ever British sports disaster; the same day saw the launch of a monstrous campaign of pernicious lies from police chiefs, press and politicians, who tried to frame and blame the 96 who died.

When the Hillsborough Independent Panel's Report was published in 2012, their names were cleared, in a victory for the superhuman tenacity, courage and heroism of the victims' families and other fans who fought for justice for 25 long, cruel years.

Police lies

"JFT96" was inscribed on thousands of banners and tens of thousands of people's hearts, as they fought to expose the truth of what happened. A new wave of bitter rage followed the 2012 Report's revelation that 41 of the 96 (some medical experts reckon 58) could still be alive today if they'd received prompt medical attention – denied them by the incompetence of police chiefs, which meant only two out of the 48 ambulances that arrived on the scene actually reached the pitch, deterred by police lies that the fans were rioting.

Justice for the 96

Hillsborough disaster - 15 April 1989



Millions were shaken to the core in their assumptions about the police, press and ruling powers by the horrific evidence in the 450,000-page Report. It proved police chiefs organised a blatant, corrupt coverup, crudely doctoring documents and witness statements – with successive Tory and Labour governments aiding their smearing of the dead in order to camouflage their own responsibilities for this man-made slaughter.

The Report's naked exposé of corruption in 'high' places forced the Crown Prosecution Office and Independent Police Complaints Commission to initiate an unprecedented scale of inquiry into police officers and the football authorities, potentially leading to charges of gross misconduct and even manslaughter.

Whilst pressing for prosecutions of those responsible, we should not lose sight of the wider,

deeper implications of this appalling episode. It reveals a system that is steeped in class hatred for working class people, with the establishment, all the various arms of the state, implicated – a brutal reminder of just how low these people are prepared to stoop to retain their power and privileges.

Some of us had lived through the savage class brutality of the Tories during the miners' strike four years before Hillsborough – with Thatcher's use of South Yorkshire and other police forces as well-fed, well-paid, beefed-up government militias that treated working class people as scum, rampaging like uniformed thugs in the pit villages.

But even veteran socialists were gob-smacked at the crude corruption of senior police – including the subsequently knighted Sir Norman Bettison and the South Yorkshire Police solicitor – who altered 116

junior police officers' statements to erase all criticism of police actions.

This was literally a tragedy waiting to happen, through blatant failure of football club owners to invest their profits in crowd safety measures, and police chiefs' refusal to learn from their own incompetent past performance.

They had plenty of warning: the very same FA Cup semi-final, between the same Liverpool and Notts Forest, was held at the very same Hillsborough the previous season, 1988.

Overcrowding, lack of ground safety measures and incompetent policing had led to a near-disaster, with fans crushed, but no fatalities. But absolutely nothing was done to improve matters by 1989, either by Sheffield Wednesday's profit-conscious owners or South Yorkshire Police.

Framing the dead

People at the match told me 25 years ago how they arrived to utter chaos. There was no proper stewarding of fans, with only two policemen outside Leppings Lane! Fans thronged into the middle terraces, even though the side terraces were half empty. Whilst doing nothing to address this, senior police officers vastly compounded the crush by ordering the opening of Gate C (one of the Leppings Lane exits) – to reduce the logjam at the

• continued on page 15