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Top firms' 100 greediest fat cat chief execs earn £1,200 an hour!

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**FIGHT FOR A
£10 AN HOUR
MINIMUM
WAGE
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Show zero-hours contracts the red card

by Calum Martin, Edinburgh South and Midlothian SSP

THE START of the New Year: a time of consideration of resolutions for the year ahead. Amidst the crisp weather of the New Year, Scottish Socialist Party activists in Edinburgh got the campaigning season off to a bright start—3 January saw not only the first street campaign stall of New Year on Princes Street, but also Scotland's first political stunt of 2015.

On the afternoon of the 3rd, SSP activists staged a stunt outside the Sports Direct store at Straiton, saying it was time to "Show Zero-Hours Contracts the Red Card". Armed with the aforementioned red card placards, leaflets, a good stock of whistles and a pair of referee costumes, the event kicked off at noon. From the very beginning, it was clear the response at Straiton was overwhelmingly positive.

Even in the cold, people were keen to voice their support – a first-hand display that even in the midst of New Year festivities; even in the midst of the clearance sales; even from the very beginning of this year, the depth of the desire across Scotland to see the end of Zero-hours contracts and workplace exploitation is only growing deeper.

Sports Direct is of course not unique amongst in Scotland in its use of exploitative contracts and conditions. Figures released by the House of Commons report on Zero-hours contracts in April 2014 revealed at least around 90'000 workers in Scotland were on zero-hours contracts. Some estimates have placed that figure even higher. The impacts of these contracts are widespread.

The SSP though is unique amongst Scotland's political parties in our unflinching determination to stand up for

the rights of working people. Who else will fight to see zero-hours contracts ended? Who else will fight to see a £10 Living Wage for all? Who else will fight for a society that puts people before profit? We should be proud to remember that we are working together, as Scotland's socialist party to achieve real and lasting change in our society. Boldness, hard work and determination are essential for us in going forwards – so too are energy and innovation. We have all of these attributes: let's make sure we use them well.

So if you are still looking for resolutions this year, why not try this: resolve to help to build a fairer society. Help to build Scotland's socialist party; help to build the campaign; help today to start building that society now.

The New Year is begun and so is the campaign. Let's show zero-hours contracts the Red card and win that Living Wage.

by *Richie Venton, SSP national workplace organiser*

FAT CAT TUESDAY: who says £10 an hour is unrealistic?

NEXT TIME somebody says that the SSP's campaign for a £10 an hour national minimum wage is unrealistic, or would damage the economy, spare a thought for the bosses who dictate the poverty pay that workers struggle to survive on.

Last year we had 'Fat Cat Wednesday'. This year it came a day earlier; Fat Cat Tuesday, 6th January 2015, was the day by which the average chief executive of the FTSE 100 companies raked in as much as the average worker will earn over the entire year!

By late afternoon on their second day back at work, the average chief executive of each of the FTSE 100 firms had already piled up £27,200 in earnings, which was the average annual wage of a worker in the UK in 2014.

£1,200 an hour!

Even if we make the naively generous assumptions that these bloated bosses work a 12-hour day, only take 10 days' annual leave, and work 3 out of 4 weekends (none of which assumptions we have any evidence for!), that still means they are on £1,200 an hour! Their annual average income for 2014 was £4.72million—each!

Whereas the average worker's wage 'rose' from £27,000 in 2013 to £27,200 last year, the FTSE 100 chiefs awarded themselves an increase of £500,000 each!

Let's break down this obscenity of inequality a bit, to master the mind-boggling figures involved. If you did some of your shopping in Primark before Xmas, you helped boost the profits of its parent company, Associated British Foods. That outfit's top dog, George Weston, was awarded a £5m Xmas bonus for meeting targets, on top of his £1m salary and £900,000 annual



bonus. Yet Primark refuses to pay its workers the Living Wage.

Those cold figures mean that if you are earning the average national wage of £27,200, it will take you 195 years to earn the same as Primark's George Weston. And more to the point, given the wages this outfit grudgingly pays its workers, if you are a full-time worker on the £6.50 national minimum wage, it would take you 354 years to match his income!

To use just one other example, if you were lucky enough to use Easyjet at Xmas, you will have helped boost the income of its chief executive, Carolyn McCall. If you are fortunate enough to get the average worker's wage it will take you a modest 283 years to match her annual income. But if you are on the 'economy class' legal minimum wage, you'd need to stretch it out to 592 years of work!

These gaping chasms of income are perverse. And don't be fooled into thinking they are the exception, restricted to just the top 100 Fat Cats.

Whilst workers' wages have plummeted by £50 a week on average since 2010, the pay of ALL

company directors rocketed by 21 per cent in 2014 alone.

Just 2,600 senior bankers in London grabbed an average of £1.3m each last year. That means just 2,600 wreckers of the economy had a combined income substantially greater than the entire block grant from Westminster to the Scottish government—which of course was cut, because "we have to balance the books", and "we are all in it together"!

TUC: £10-an-hour now

It's time to challenge this rotten system, stinking with corruption, rooted in the ripping off of the working class who produce the wealth in order to fill the boots of the obnoxiously rich.

It's time the trade union movement rose up on its hind legs, mobilised workers, organised in communities, and fought to implement the policy agreed unanimously at the recent Trades Union Congress, "for a £10 per hour minimum wage for all workers".

It isn't asking the earth, in this fabulously rich country. It wouldn't mean workers on £10 an hour could wallpaper their

living rooms with £50 notes! But it would transform the lives of millions, including the million people who relied on foodbanks for handouts last year—many of them in jobs.

The SSP is dedicated to fighting poverty pay. We are out to abolish the accompanying obscenity of Zero Hours Contracts. We are constantly told that the economy is recovering from the aftermath of the 2008 financial crash. Workers haven't seen a share of any such recovery. But since profits are booming, and the Fat Cats are bursting with gluttony, we are in all the stronger a position to demand a bit back from the wealth created by workers in the first place.

Right now, workers on the pathetic 'adult' minimum wage of £6.50 would have to toil for 363 years to earn as much as the average FTSE 100 Fat Cat gobbles up in a year. Not a very realistic option!

Join the SSP and fight for £10 an hour now—for all over 16, scrapping age wage discrimination, and with equal pay for women. £10 an hour is not just modest, but entirely realistic, provided we organise and fight for it.

by Ken Ferguson

THE VOICE goes to press in the wake of the gigantic Paris demonstration defending press freedom and free speech—both key gains of the revolution of 1789—upheld by journalists, democrats and socialists everywhere.

The millions marching in France—whatever their differences of opinion or belief and supporters across the world—marched to underline their support for these rights and in rejection of both the actions and ideology of those who perpetrated the murders at the Charlie Hebdo offices and the kosher supermarket.

However if the sincerity of the millions filling the Paris boulevards was not in question the same could not be said of the uncomfortably arms linked “world leaders” who, suitably suited in politicians uniform, headed the people’s march.

Dubious line-up

This dubious line-up included Israeli Premier Netanyahu whose forces last year killed seven journalists as they reported the reality of the IDF’s war in Gaza, Egypt’s foreign minister whose government has held

TOUGH ON TERRORISM, TOUGH ON THE CAUSES OF TERRORISM

Al Jazeera journalists captive for over a year now and NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg whose warplanes deliberately targeted journalists in Belgrade in 1999 killing 16.

They were joined by greater or lesser opponents of domestic press freedom including UK prime minister David Cameron, whose government seized files uncovered by Edward Snowden and handed to the Guardian and had them destroyed.

It is this sharp contrast between the millions of citizens and the hypocritical elite who claim to speak for them that goes not just to the

heart of the democratic issues raised by the Paris attacks but the wider question of the so called “war on terror” and its consequences.

In the same week as the French atrocities 23 Iraqi soldiers died in a car bombing, 33 Yemeni police officer wee murdered in the same way and a leading Saudi border guard commander was shot dead. In Nigeria a 10-year-old girl was used to detonate a suicide bomb killing scores.

The brutal truth is that the war on terror far from offering a solution is in fact a key part of the problem not the answer to it.

The millions who marched against the Iraq war across the globe knew that this is the case. Predictably the “statesmen” ignored them and led to mayhem first in Iraq, then Afghanistan and now across the planet.

In France in the aftermath of the massive marches for democracy President Hollande put his country on a war footing with 10,000 regular troops on the streets alongside 5,000 para military gendarmerie while David Cameron, Boris Johnston and

the head of MI5 all called for extra spying powers for police and secret service forces.

As the reality of the Afghan defeat has shown there is not a military solution to a complex of injustice which includes drone warfare, torture and widespread repression and economic misery.

Much of the current problem centres on the ghastly war in Syria. Initially the west dreamt of toppling Assad with a coalition of pro NATO forces.

It didn’t work out that way and the west’s chosen forces are now eclipsed by fundamentalists such as ISIS in what is now a brutal quagmire beyond their control.

Issues at the heart

The immediate task must be to find a way to a ceasefire and then a peaceful end to the Syria conflict as an opening to new international approach that addresses not just the symptoms of so-called terrorism but the lengthy list of flashpoints and issues at its heart.

Democracy, free speech and press freedom are among our most precious possessions and that is why the surest way to protect them is to work for peace abroad and resist the siren voices seeking to curb our civil rights at home.

Bleak as the outlook is, another way is possible.



HOLLANDE: war footing

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by Colin Fox,
SSP co-spokesperson

SSP puts living wage at centre of general election campaign

NEXT WEEK the Scottish Socialist Party will announce the seats we will contest in May's General Election. Each of our candidates will be standing on an unashamedly socialist and pro-working class platform.

We will be campaigning for a £10/hour living wage and an end to zero hour contracts, an end to the austerity that see working class people penalised for debts run up by reckless, greedy bankers and support for an independent socialist Scotland which goes hand in hand with our belief in a modern democratic republic.

And uniquely all SSP candidates promise to become 'workers MP's on workers wages' to confront Westminster's financial corruption.

The election result is presently too close to call with Labour and the Tories running neck and neck in the polls. Neither David Cameron nor Ed Miliband inspires much confidence in working class people. In circumstances where no party wins a majority the stage will be set for another Coalition Government.

'The end of ideology'

Accordingly the Tories are making overtures to their right wing colleagues in UKIP, the Ulster Unionists and even the Lib Dems. Labour meanwhile has opened informal talks with the SNP, Plaid Cymru, The Greens and the ever promiscuous Lib Dems.

In Scotland the polls suggest Labour will lose most of its seats. Their decline, which the SSP has highlighted for more than a decade now, is fundamentally down to Tony Blair's 1990s legacy where Labour represented 'the end of ideology'.

Consequently there was no principle Labour would not sell.

Blair's abandonment of Clause Four, his u-turn on pri-

vatation and his lies over the war in Iraq illustrate the point well as does Johann Lamont's infamous attack on universal benefits. Each betrayal of working people and progressive ideas ate away at Labour's soul. Now the party is rotten to the core and has been reduced to its backward backwaters and old corrupt redoubts.

Seeing this decomposition of the Labour Party many have rushed into the arms of the SNP in the belief that 'anything is better than Labour'. Working in the cross party 'Yes Scotland' coalition these past 2 years however gave me the chance to see the SNP party machine up close.

I was certainly impressed by its professionalism, discipline and efficiency, but socialist it is not. For all their enmity towards the party of Jim Murphy the SNP are in fact very similar to Labour politically. Every bit as neoliberal in economic terms the Nats are admittedly more left on social policy. Mind you

as any novice of Scottish politics could point out being to the left of the Labour Party in Scotland is not difficult.

In this time of profound realignment in Scottish politics however it is vitally important people 'keep the heid' and not lose sight of fundamental principles. The SNP is no more socialist than Labour. And to be fair they have never claimed to be.

Nicola Sturgeon has never said she was a socialist as far as I'm aware. She is a corporate social democrat.

The SNP are a capitalist party and happy to be so. When they refused to take ScotRail back into public ownership in November they did so, not as they claimed, because they did not have the powers, but because their corporate principles refused to countenance it as a sustainable course of action.

They also overturned their historic opposition to NATO after their defence spokesman Angus Robertson MP claimed in October 2012 'we cannot win



PHOTO: Craig Maclean

the referendum with this policy'. Since the independence vote was lost with the policy many will logically ask when will the former policy be reinstated?

Equally the SNP want to reduce corporation tax. And they wish to maintain the monarchy and thus tie Scotland to an anti-democratic, un-elected, unaccountable and unrepresentative feudal Head of State.

The SNP are ideological nationalists who claim 'we [Scots] are all 'Jock Tamson's bairns' to obscure crucial socio-economic and class differences. But Scotland's working class are exploited on a daily basis by 'Jock Tamson's' other bairns, Scottish employers and the state they control.

Responsibility

The Scottish Socialist Party is different. We are committed to building an independent socialist Scotland where the nation's wealth is evenly distributed and where the landowning classes, the corporations, the Edinburgh financiers, the Glasgow lawyers, the Perth businessmen, the Dundee technocrats and the Aberdeen oilmen fully understand their responsibility to serve society as a whole.

Unlike the SNP we are committed to emancipating working class people from the brutal exploitation of 21st century capitalism.

The SSP therefore has a crucial responsibility today to promote socialist ideas and further the interests of working class people. In that spirit all our General Election candidates are committed to advancing the socialist cause and building the mass party of socialism Scotland so desperately requires.

by *Richie Venton, SSP national workplace organiser*

ANYONE WHO doubts we are in the midst of a class war hasn't been awake recently!

The Tory party election manifesto for May's Westminster general election includes an open declaration of continued class war by the rich on the rest of us. That applies to most of their aims, but specifically new anti-trade union measures, a de facto ban on the right to strike for millions of workers, especially in the public sector.

It comes as no surprise to trade unionists or socialists, but it highlights the need to struggle or face starvation.

The Tories want to legislate a 40 per cent threshold of all potential voters—NOT just those

Then the present Westminster Coalition was foisted upon us in the rigged 2010 election outcome—rigged, because nobody was ever asked to vote for a Tory-Lib Dem coalition, and many were stupid enough to imagine voting Lib Dem was an anti-Tory vote!

Cameron and Clegg's Westminster boot-boys have trampled on the rights of workers in a systematic crusade to rob our wages, pensions, public services and jobs, so the rich can get obscenely richer.

Fees for taking cases of workplace mistreatment to Employment Tribunals have priced workers out of any pretence of justice. The Citizens Advice Bureaux report a fall in the number of new cases submitted since fees were introduced (in 2013) from an average 48,000 a

for union membership fees to be collected from civil service workers' wages—in an attempt to smash the socialist-led PCS union—accompanied by removal of facilities for elected PCS reps to represent their members at work.

Now the Tories want to add the clause that unless over 40 per cent of all potential voters in such a ballot actually vote for it, any industrial action is illegal, and union funds could be seized.

They want this to apply to workers in the NHS, transport and fire services. Their excuse is that these services are 'essential'—something the same axe-wielding capitalist politicians deny in action as they slash jobs and public service provision in all these sectors.

Their aims are nakedly obvious. As the Tories gear up to

use of agency workers as scabs during industrial action—so they can dragoon desperate people into undermining the conditions of fellow-workers, knowing full well that agency workers feel helpless and without rights in many cases.

And they want to 'review' minimum service levels during strikes, so as to prevent total shutdowns. Over the years I've often encountered situations in the likes of local government and the NHS where strikers' unions have had to agree levels of cover for emergencies during the strike that actually meant MORE staff on duty than on the average day before the strike, such as the appalling levels of under-staffing! Now the Tories want to turn the screw even tighter, as part of a package to effectively outlaw the right to

TORY CLASS WAR ON

who ACTUALLY vote—in any union ballot for industrial action, before workers can take lawful action in self-defence from the government's escalating assault on their jobs, wages and conditions.

Ripping up our rights

The Tories have already ripped apart the few remaining rights we have at work.

Prior to the 2010 elections, the UK already boasted the most vicious, reactionary, anti-worker employment laws in the whole of Europe—after not just the 1980s Thatcher Dark Ages, but also the subsequent 13 years of Labour governments.

Tony Blair shamelessly boasted of "the most restrictive employment laws in Europe", as his government unleashed a profit-crazed, totally deregulated banking and business regime on the population.

quarter to 13,612 in the third quarter of 2014.

Cash is the chief barrier—and those workers not in a trade union are totally defenceless, as they'd have to fork out up to £1,200 just to get a Tribunal case heard.

In the CAB survey, four out of 10 workers with an issue they'd like taken to a Tribunal only had £46 a week left after paying their essential bills, meaning they'd have to save up for six months just to pay the fees for an Employment Tribunal—with no guarantee of success either, of course.

Recently the Tories and Lib Dems introduced a rule that industrial action ballots require a turnout of over 50 per cent. That in the context of clamping down on the ability of unions to meet or function in workplaces. Most notoriously, the same government has abolished the facility

force through the remaining £55 billion in public sector cuts of the £90 billion total that they've previously declared, they want to crush the resistance of workers in the frontline.

For instance, the Coalition has already shut down 39 fire stations since 2010, and shed 5,000 firefighters' jobs—so they want to neuter the ability of the Fire Brigades Union to fight back, as they are currently doing through strike action in several regions.

Legalised scabbing

As they impose even more pay cuts on public sector workers who've had pay cuts for 6 or 7 years, the political arm of capitalism want to make collective action to win better pay legally impossible.

Alongside the 40 per cent threshold, the Tories plan to end the current restrictions on the

strike for millions of workers. The MPs who want to further shackle workers have absolutely no moral basis for their 50 per cent and 40 per cent thresholds on union votes. These chancers enjoy full rights and resources to put their case in the media and at meetings in a fashion workers' union representatives can't even dream of being allowed to do in their workplaces.

They spend £millions on election propaganda—on top of their free access to compliant, sycophantic media, owned by the same billionaires who use the mainstream media to smear and demonise trade unionists.

But despite all these advantages, those MPs who have hamstringed workers' unions with their anti-union laws can't even get the kind of share of the vote they want to impose on the unions.

Since 1945, not a single one of



DEFEND WORKERS: working class people need to shape their own future, demanding full democratic rights at work

WORKERS' RIGHTS

the successive Westminster governments got over 50 per cent of the votes cast, let alone a majority of the entire electorate.

In fact, not one UK government since 1945 has gained the votes of over 40 per cent of the electorate—the threshold the Tories plan to impose on union ballots.

In the 2010 Westminster general election, 433 out of 650 MPs gained their bloated salaries despite getting less than 50 per cent of the votes cast.

Rejected by Scotland

Cameron's Tories only gained 36 per cent of the votes cast in 2010, in a 65 per cent turnout of voters—meaning these capitalist dictators only got 23.5 per cent of the electorate to vote for them! And that's across the UK, not Scotland, where they were overwhelmingly rejected. Even if you distort reality by adding on

the Lib Dems' share (a distortion, because not a single MP was elected as a Tory-Lib Dem candidate), the Coalition still only managed 38 per cent of the electorate.

The 40 per cent con-trick is especially bitter-tasting in Scotland. In 1979, a clear majority of voters favoured a Scottish parliament, but were denied their wishes by the '40 per cent of the electorate' threshold that had been imposed on that year's referendum. Scots were denied a parliament for another 20 years.

Trade unionists and socialists must resist these escalated attacks on workplace rights by every available means. But relying on a Labour government is not one of those means.

It was Labour in government from 1997 to 2010 which retained Thatcher's brutal package of anti-union laws. It is today's Labour party that re-

fuses to pledge repeal of these laws. It is today's Labour party that pledges to cut public spending every single year they are in office until they have cleared the public deficit—making workers and communities pay for the debts created by Labour's £1.3trillion bailout of the bankers that the same Labour government had given free rein to 'get rich quick'.

Defend workers

In fighting these draconian additions to the worst anti-union laws in Europe, trade union leaders should give workers some confidence by declaring that where the issues demand it, the unions will simply defy the anti-union laws and take decisive action to defend workers. These are laws imposed by governments elected by minorities, ruling in the class interests of the 1 per cent who

own the bulk of the wealth created by the working class in the first place.

Working class people need to shape their own future, demanding full democratic rights at work, through their trade unions, community organisations, and by building a mass socialist party.

The SSP has consistently fought for workplace democracy, including the rights of free trade unions to function, and the right to take action by a majority vote after full debate.

As long as we are dominated by an economic system that seeks maximum profit for the few, workers will face attempts to castrate their unions and ban their rights to resistance. We need to combine the struggle for workplace rights with the broader battle for democratic ownership and control of the economy—for socialism.

Report: meat industry endangers the planet

by Roz Paterson

TWELVE MONTHS to save the planet! At the end of this year, world leaders will gather in Paris for a series of photo opps, some free bottled water...oh yeah, and to hammer down a global deal to prevent global warming from exceeding the danger mark of two degrees celsius.

A global temperature rise beyond that limit, and you're looking at major swathes of the earth becoming uninhabitable, sterile oceans that can no longer support life, world hunger on a scale last seen in the King James Bible, and weather events that make that tornado at the start of the Wizard of Oz look like a summer's breeze. In short, the end of life as we would like to know it.

Notions of progress

There will be much talk of cutting carbon emissions in industry, perhaps of moving to a post-fossil fuel society, reducing consumption, maybe even redefining our notions of progress, away from the more-is-more model pioneered by the United States in the booming 1950s.

All good, all worthy topics for this most crucial of global conversations.

But will anyone dare to say so much as a word about...pies?

Meat pies, that is. The kind you buy dirt-cheap at the shop and which are primarily crafted from lard and sundry



LACK OF AWARENESS: people just don't have the beef on meat when it comes to greenhouse gases

other parts of deceased ruminant? Or chickens? Cheapo cheapy chicken, now going for 99p a chunk at KFC? In fact, meat in general, and its close cousin, dairy?

Meat and dairy consumption, despite the rise of the vegetarian celebrity, is soaring. By 2050, we can expect a 76 per cent rise on 2005's meat consumption levels. Put it this way. In the Western world, we eat 176 pounds of meat per person per year. If everyone in the world ate like that, then we would need to use two thirds more of the earth's surface for intensive farming than we do now, according to Vaclav Smil, Professor of Environment and Geography at the University of Manitoba.

Or put it this way. There are 22 billion farmed chickens in the world; that's three per person!

Meat-eating has gone

exponential partly because it has become so cheap. Intensive farming methods mean a shit life for the animals, horrendous pollution of water sources and coastal regions from agricultural runoff, increased resistance to antibiotics thanks to heavy usage at farm-level, but...cheap deals on Sunday roasts at the supermarket, hurray!

But it's not much to celebrate if you consider the environmental impact of this global meat-fest.

Global emissions

The livestock industry—that's everything from pork chops to pints of milk—accounts for 15 per cent of all global emissions, which is equal to the emissions caused by all vehicles, everywhere. The link between carbon dioxide and global warming is well known, and understood, but far less

is made of those other greenhouse gases, specifically methane, issuing from the digestive tracts of cows, sheep and goats, and nitrous oxide, a by-product of the manure and fertilisers used to grow animal-feed crops.

Add to this the CO2 emissions from clearing huge areas of forestry, most famously in the Amazon region, to make way for pasture and feed-crops, and meat-eating becomes much less of a side-salad. Perhaps, indeed, it should be served up as a main course in current climate discussions?

There are many reasons why politicians keep quiet on the issue, but none of them are compelling.

First, there is a widespread lack of awareness on the subject. A survey, the first, of multiple countries, conducted by IPSOS-Mori on behalf of think-tank Chatham House,



THE LIVESTOCK INDUSTRY: it accounts for 15 per cent of all global emissions, which is equal to the emissions caused by all vehicles, everywhere

found this to be the case. People know about cars and planes, but just don't have the beef on meat.

Other stumbling blocks appear to be that 'don't tell ME what to do!' attitude so prevalent in our non-collective communities.

But this attitude has been overcome before. Consider how drink-driving, once almost socially acceptable as a kind of intoxicating blend of manliness and devil-may-care, is now pretty much universally condemned, as witnessed by the fulsome support, across all sections of society, to the zero tolerance approach rolled out in Scotland this winter.

New-age travellers

Ditto, smoking in public places. Almost ditto, driving your car round the corner to the shop and back again. Maybe not almost, but getting there, by slow degrees.

Perhaps the fact that the issue of vegetarianism has always been linked with animal rights issues, in what red meat enthusiasts work hard to popularise as an us versus them, humans versus animals, showdown, has ensured that career-minded politicians fight shy of allying themselves with the cause of plant-based diets. They don't want to be seen siding with vegan, new-age travellers against already beleaguered, family-run dairy farms, struggling to keep heritage cattle in business.

Hmm, not that family-run farms are the issue here. Most farms are falling into the hands of big business, such as Tyson, the chicken farming conglomerate in the USA, who seek to control the whole process, from egg to chicken sandwich, implementing intensive farming methods at every step. In America now, 40 per cent of the chicken

industry is owned by just two companies.

Here, we are familiar with the supermarket squeeze on small farmers, who are given worthless contracts and, scandalously, paid scarcely enough to cover production costs. Exit picturesque family farms, enter the big brutes and their industrial animal-rearing.

Plasma cholesterol

And big business, as we know, always has friends in high places, fighting their corner against any notions of progress, world health, and even the future of the planet.

Yet much could be made of reducing our meat consumption.

For one, it's much healthier. Vegetarian diets are linked to lower incidence of certain cancers, heart disease and obesity. In China, a traditional, predominantly vegetarian society where meat-eating is associated

with better times, a step away from subsistence, meat consumption is escalating.

And hand-in-hand with this adoption of Western-style diet, is a rise and rise in Western-style disease.

According to the China-Oxford-Cornell study China II, which surveyed diet, lifestyle and disease in 65 rural Chinese counties, the rise in Western-type diseases amongst the population 'correlated highly significantly with increased concentrations of plasma cholesterol, which are associated with increasing intakes of animal protein.'

So not only are we killing the planet, we are also killing ourselves. It is high time we got meat off our plates, and on the table at every climate change discussion.

• *Much of this info came from <http://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/16379>*

by Connor Beaton

DEMOCRACY UNDER THREAT IN SOUTH KOREA

THE INTERVIEW'S odyssey from production to release dominated the international news circuit in the run-up to Christmas 2014. This would-be blockbuster's 25 December launch was almost completely scuppered by the major, unexpected compromise of Sony's computer systems, a bizarre attack that quickly escalated into threats of cyber-warfare between the United States and North Korea.

How did this all begin? At time of writing, it's not clear. The politics at play obfuscate the situation; accusations and counter-accusations are thrown between states through newspapers and TV stations.

Mainstream discussion about North Korea is rarely rational, well-considered analysis—more often, coverage is distorted by a latent chauvinism and an overt fear or distrust.

One example of the sensationalist approach of the British media is the BBC's 2013 report that North Korean men are forced to adopt Kim Jong-un's haircut, citing a bulletin by Radio Free Asia—a non-profit established and funded by the US government. Less than a day later, the Washington Post's Adam Taylor struggled to find a single expert on North Korea that considered the reports credible.

Reporting on North Korea is a challenging endeavour when

Western journalists have little access to the country, but there exists a clear and consistent trend: stories which fit a convenient narrative of the country as an amusing basket-case are taken up without hesitation.

It is taken for granted that the North is in a state of near-collapse—indeed, a US government-funded think tank published a lengthy report in September 2013 that claimed an insurrection was imminent. It remains to be seen whether the report winds up as credible as that of the CIA panel that claimed, in 1997, that North Korea would collapse by 2002.

It is easy to imagine the British press in hysteria in the hypothetical scenario that Kim Jong-un endorsed a film about the assassination of a high-profile Western leader. The Interview was a highly political project from the outset: an unprecedented targeted insult to a living head of state—admittedly intended to amuse Americans through its chutzpah, rather than serve as a genuine diplomatic slight. Yet, when Sony declared that the film's theatrical release would go ahead, a White House spokesperson was quick to tell newspapers:

"the president applauds Sony's decision".

The developing dispute is now a major diplomatic incident between two nations that have been at loggerheads for decades. While moving towards rapprochement with socialist Cuba, the US is considering returning North Korea to its list of state sponsors of terrorism—and, notably, accusing its opponent of technological warfare while remaining remarkably coy over whether it engineered the complete Internet blackout in North Korea as retaliation.

In comparison to the frenzy over The Interview, British media outlets barely reported on the court-ordered dissolution of the Unified Progressive Party (UPP) in South Korea. This coalition of leftist forces collected over two million votes in the 2012 elections, winning thirteen seats and becoming the third-largest political bloc in the South's parliament.

Progress

Built with the support of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), a radical trade union congress legalised after four years of struggle against stifling labour laws, the initial success of the UPP represented progress for Korea's populist left. Its largest founding group, the Democratic Labor Party (DLP), was originally established to provide political representation for the KCTU.

The UPP's dissolution in an 8-1 ruling by the South's Constitutional Court on the basis that its politics were too pro-North should alarm all promoting peace and democracy on the Korean peninsula. It is even

more shocking that those concerns were originally brought to the court by the cabinet of South Korea's ruling right-wing Saenuri party, which argued that parties opposed to capitalism and partition in Korea should be excluded from notions of political freedom.

This suppression of a significant political force, only quietly protested by liberal parties in South Korea, contradicts popular belief that the country is a bastion of democracy—rather than, like Israel, a colonial outpost of US foreign and military policy. UPP parliamentarians are being deprived of their seats while the party tries desperately to co-ordinate legal action against the court decision.

Different exposure

Which incident is of greater concern to the worldwide working class? The endangered release of a Hollywood comedy, or the end of parliamentary representation for the South Korean left?

That these two events took place in rapid succession, yet achieved considerably different exposure in countries like Scotland, speaks to the manipulative nature of our private media and the distorted version of international events fed to workers through tabloid headlines.

Rather than obsess over movie releases, all left-wing and peace activists across the Western world who support a united socialist Korea should be co-ordinating immediate solidarity action with Korean socialists against these increasingly audacious efforts at political suppression and fighting the counterproductive, media-driven demonisation of the North.

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by Bill Bonnar

IN 2009 I had the great privilege of being part of an SSP delegation to Havana to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution.

While there two things were striking. The negative impact of a half century of economic sanctions and the outrage at the jailing of the Miami Five; the Five Heroes as they were described in Cuba.

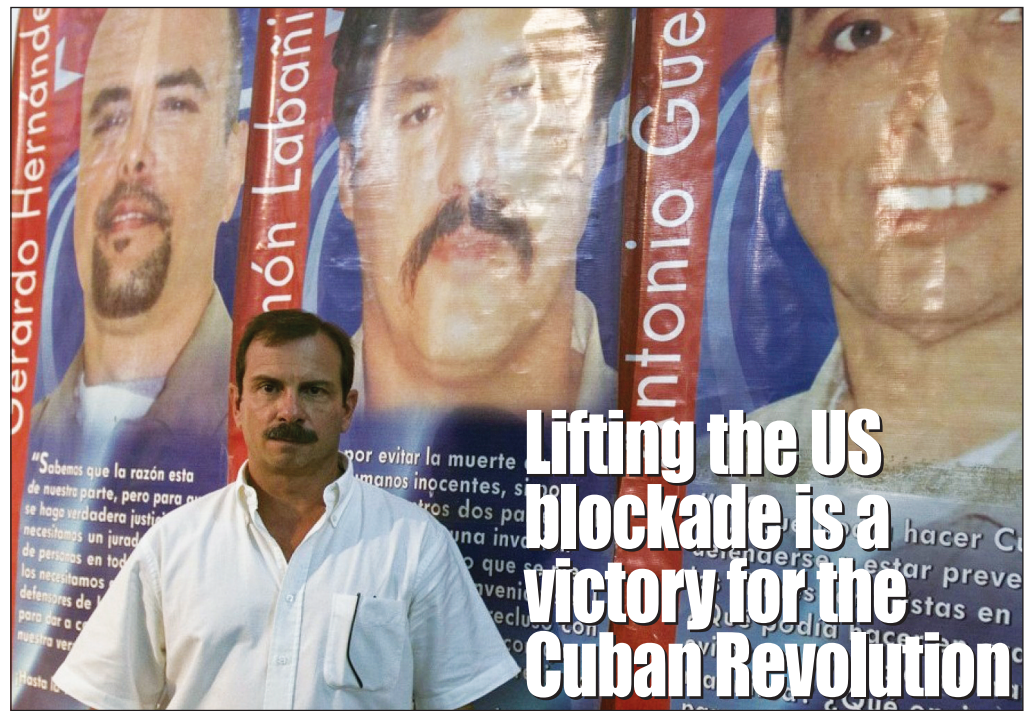
The announcement that the easing of economic and political sanctions and the release of the Miami Five has been greeted with joy and celebration and a great degree of national pride. Make no mistake this represents a victory for the revolution and the Cuban people and a humiliating defeat for Washington.

The blockade, both economic and political, was about isolating the Cuban revolution from the rest of Latin America. Yet in recent years, with the rise a number of left wing governments in the region, it has been the United States which has found itself isolated. At the same time the economic sanctions were about bringing about the collapse of the Cuban economy and represented a kind of collective punishment against its people.

Soviet Union

While the economy did suffer severe problems in the nineties following the collapse of the Soviet Union it has survived through restructuring and is growing again. Obama's recent announcement of a policy shift and the move towards 'normalising' relations is a recognition of the bankruptcy of this strategy and the belief that they can better influence developments in Cuba by taking a different approach.

The Miami Five were Cuban intelligence agents sent to Florida to infiltrate and report on the activities of anti-revolu-



FERNANDO GONZÁLEZ: one of the 'Cuban Five' in front of a poster of imprisoned Cuban intelligence agents

Lifting the US blockade is a victory for the Cuban Revolution

tionary exiled groups operating in the area.

These groups have a long history of political and economic terrorism directed against the Cuban people.

This has included acts such as the blowing up of a Cuban airliner, poisoning water supplies, kidnap and murder.

When the government routinely complained to Washington about these activities on American soil the claims were dismissed as lacking evidence.

Hence the decision to send agents to gather evidence which could be presented to both the US Government and the United Nations.

However, the agents were detained by the FBI before they could complete their mission and in a trial condemned as a 'kangaroo court' sentenced to life imprisonment with the harshest conditions possible.

Sixteen years and a massive international campaign later, they have been returned to Cuba as the heroes they undoubtedly are.

Cuba is a society very much in transition. While remaining true to the idea of a planned economy based on social ownership they are steadily moving

away from the concept that social ownership means universal state ownership. This is being replaced by the idea that while the state should continue to play the central role in the economy there is room for the development of co-operatives and small businesses and for foreign investment through the model of joint stock companies.

These are enterprises part owned by the state and part owned by foreign companies. This is already transforming the Cuban economy from one based on complete state ownership to a kind of socialist orientated mixed economy.

Threat

One criticism often levelled at the Cuban political system, including from those who should know better, is that Cuba is ruled by an oppressive dictatorship. This is a million miles from truth although Cuba certainly does have an authoritarian system of government. This has been largely shaped by the experience of the past 56 years and the threat from the United States.

The threat has included the declared aim of the overthrow of the revolution, the return of

the wealth and property to the assortment of gangsters and wealthy elite who used to run the country, support for terrorist groups, economic sabotage and outright invasion.

This ever-present threat has made normal government impossible with the need for continuous vigilance.

A case in point is the treatment of so called dissidents.

Many dissidents may be well meaning and with legitimate grievances against the government yet all organised opposition is directly or indirectly controlled by a foreign, enemy state which makes these dissidents traitors in the eyes of most Cubans.

Cuba cannot have a normalised political system until the threat from the United States is lifted; something which may lead to a greater democratic transformation.

The continued survival and development of the Cuban Revolution against overwhelming odds is one of the great stories of the last 50 years. Allied to progressive and socialist developments elsewhere in Latin America it continues to be one of the great stories of our time.

Personal independence payments: the attacks continue relentlessly

by Sandra Webster,
SSP co-spokesperson

IT IS time for the ConDems to put aside peace and goodwill to all men and continue with their dismantling of the Welfare State. The DWP have announced the new areas where Disability Living Allowance or DLA will be replaced by the new Personal Independence Payments or PIP.

Although Esther McVey minister for people with disabilities and Iain Duncan Smith say it is not about the money, disability charities have estimated thousands will see a reduction or even the loss of a payment that helps people with disabilities not only survive but live more independent lives.

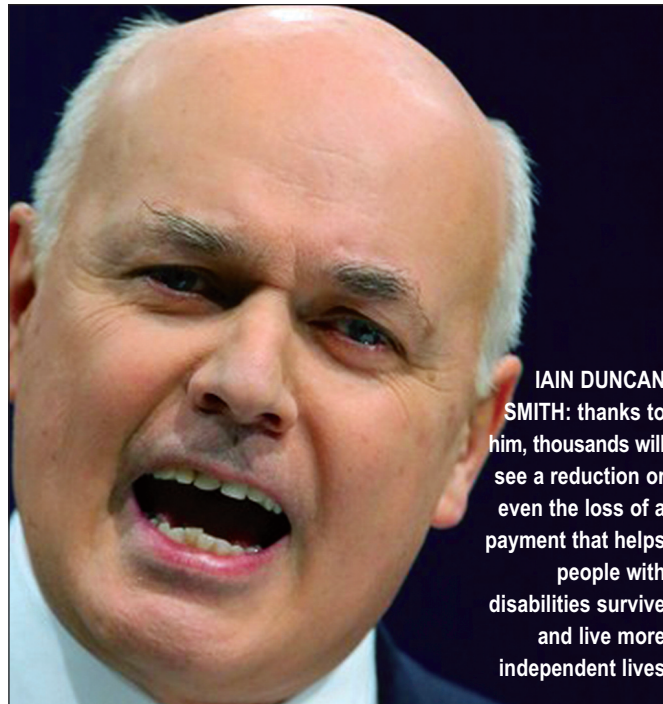
The areas targeted include Dumfries and Galloway, Edinburgh and the City of Glasgow.

Freedom

Ironically DLA was introduced by Thatcher's government when awards were being given to children affected by the drug Thalidomide and was in recognition of the additional expense people with disability face in living "ordinary" lives.

Despite press reports of people with chronic conditions being funded to drive expensive cars and being able to afford luxury holidays, the truth is it allows people the freedom that most of us take for granted.

It is also not easy to apply for, there is a lengthy application form and doctors and specialists are contacted as well as children's schools. The fraud rate is estimated to be very low under 2 per cent but in their wis-



IAIN DUNCAN SMITH: thanks to him, thousands will see a reduction or even the loss of a payment that helps people with disabilities survive and live more independent lives

dom the ConDems have decided to replace this with a work capability Assessment Test and a questionnaire.

From last year all new applicants had to apply for PIP but from today in Glasgow, Dumfries and Galloway, Galashiels and Edinburgh those in receipt of DLA will be invited to endure the dreaded work capability assessment.

As is the case with the dismantling of the welfare state, private companies such as Maximus and Capita stand to make millions out of peoples misery. Many people with disabilities especially those with chronic conditions and hidden disabilities fear they will lose their entitlement to essential benefits.

"Jane" lives with MS. She can walk around with crutches and can prepare a hot meal. "I get easily tired but I can walk 100

metres so I will lose the high rate of mobility. I use this for a mobility car which I rely on. If I lose the car I won't be able to leave the house."

"Jane's" fears are echoed by many other people with disabilities especially those with less obvious signs of their conditions or those whose conditions fluctuate and have good and bad days.

If the ConDems are elected again which frightening though it may be is a possibility and worse still in an alliance with UKIP this process will continue.

The DWP time-scale estimates the whole country will be forced to apply for PIP by 2017. A blitzkrieg on some of the most vulnerable in society.

People with disabilities in Glasgow and Edinburgh are also facing the cuts at local government level which sees the closure of day centres and the

slashing of personal budgets. Sense in Glasgow have just announced the closure of their much valued respite unit. Closing only because Glasgow City Council no longer makes referrals as it is too expensive.

What we are seeing is the McDonaldisation of care and respite having to be rationed out putting more families under pressure.

The Smith Commission promises to devolve welfare to Scotland. The SNP promise to be the party that will tackle inequality in Scotland yet it has been reported this week that they are sitting on a £440million underspend.

Labour and austerity

How much good could that amount of money do in the lives of people who need it most? Nicola Sturgeon proudly announced she was going to double the amount of motor neuron disease nurses. In Scotland that means from two to four.

We know the Labour Party are no different than the Tories and will roll out PIP and other austerity measures.

It is time for us to stake our claim that we truly are the only party that will defy austerity and have a track record of policies that tackle inequalities such as free school meals and prescriptions for all.

Let's be proud of all we achieved so far and look forward to the years ahead and the opportunity to show we can be the architects in the creation of a kinder fairer society. I look forward to working with you.