

PHOTO: Craig Maclean

Bedroom Tax hypocrisy: Scottish Labour deputy leader Anas Sarwar under pressure after he fails to vote against hated tax at Westminster

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Scottish Socialist Voice

A TALE OF TWO POLITICS

AS THE independence White Paper fuelled debate on the real prospect of a more just Scotland with independence, UK PM David Cameron's coalition dredged new depths of UKIP-style racism, attracting the United Kingdom the label "the nasty country"

It offers a snapshot of the choice in next year's referendum:

Hope and change with the new politics offered by independence...

Or fear, cuts, militarism and despair with Cameron and his 'Better Together' chums in Labour and the Lib Dems.

2014 will be a year of decision – make it a decisive Yes.

PHOTO: Craig Maclean



HOPE & CHANGE



NO HOPE & NO CHANGE



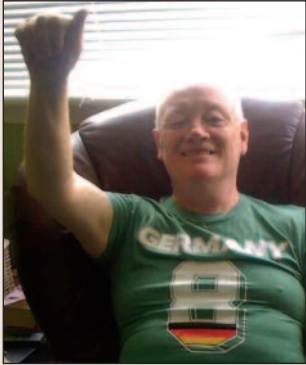
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GLASGOW

CLUTHA PUB TRAGEDY ROCKS SCOTLAND



WORKING CLASS poet John McGarrigle was one of the victims of the Clutha bar tragedy in Glasgow on Friday 29 November. Nine people were killed when a police helicopter crashed through the roof of the busy pub at 10.25pm. The Clutha Vaults has always held a special place in the hearts of local socialists. As we remember the nine who lost their lives on that Friday night, it is with the utmost respect that we pay tribute to John by reprinting one of his poems.

RENT ARREARS

Dear Sir

In answer
to your letter
dated
March fifteenth
concerning
my non payment
of rent
arrears
Gerritupy
Yes!
Gerritrightupy
Yir hoose
izny
wurth
a fuck
anyway

John McGarrigle

SSP protest highlights Labour MP's Bedroom Tax hypocrisy

PHOTO: Craig Maclean



ON FRIDAY 15 November, the Scottish Socialist Party initiated a peaceful protest at Scottish Labour deputy leader Anas Sarwar's shameful failure to vote for the abolition of the Bedroom Tax. The SSP appealed to anti-Bedroom Tax activists to join the protest outside Sarwar's

office, to express their disgust at his failure earlier that week to attend a Westminster debate and vote for the abolition of the hated tax. The flash protest was initiated by SSP Glasgow Shettleston council by-election candidate Tommy Ball – a constituent of Mr Sarwar's.

Two visions for Scotland collide

by Ken Ferguson

IN THE gloom of a storm a flash of lightning can illuminate the scene and so it was as the White Paper on independence was published by the Scottish Government.

The ink was barely dry on the White Paper, and the metropolitan press corps back on the London flight, when the Cameron government launched its offensive on foreigners, immigrants and anti-vision of European co-operation. In both tone and content it was straight out of the UKIP play book.

Given that its aim is to counter the UKIP threat in England, this was no great surprise. However, it stood in stark contrast to the vision offered in Edinburgh of a non-nuclear, inclusive social democratic Scotland by the Holyrood government, and the two events have done much to draw the battle lines and choices for next year's referendum.

Political botox

Cameron and his backers spent a fortune on political botox to rid the Tories of the long shadow of the year of vicious class war waged by them in the Thatcher years and which earned them the label of the 'the nasty party'.

Indeed, despite that hard work and skilful spinning Cameron – with his man of the people myth – still failed to win the general election and had to fall back on the copper-bottomed opportunists in the Lib Dems as a prop for power.

Now, in a single speech, all that hard work to present the Tory/Lib Dem gang as cosy, nice and on your side has



RADICAL IDEAS: 1000+ packed into the RIC's second annual conference

PHOTO: Craig Maclean

been blown away, and the real reactionary nature of the ConDems revealed.

The nasty brand of privatising, sub-racist and greed worshipping was underlined by the far right pseudo buffoon Boris Johnson who proclaimed the gospel of Gordon Gekko "greed is good".

No wonder European ministers warned Cameron that the United Kingdom was in danger of being seen as "the nasty country".

Meanwhile in Scotland, as we enter the decisive

referendum year, progressive option is overwhelmingly swinging behind independence with only an insignificant rump still pushing for a British Road to Socialism.

Routing of Farage

From the 1,000-plus Radical independence events through a mass Yes campaign, the routing of Farage in Edinburgh and the work of parties such as the SSP the belief that another, more just Scotland is possible is gathering pace.

The Voice is the only socialist paper wholly edited and produced in Scotland and we have consistently backed independence as a means to that other Scotland.

Our first forum on this in Edinburgh is, we hope, the first of many, and we will also continue to bring the facts and arguments in support of our vision on our pages.

This is our last paper before the opening of 2014 – 800 years after Bannockburn and nine months to a Yes vote.

We look forward to playing our part in that fight.

Scottish Socialist Voice
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by John McAllion

Why a written constitution matters

A CRITIC once described the British constitution as “not worth the paper it is not written on”. As constitutions go, it certainly has many democratic flaws.

It is unwritten and infinitely flexible allowing our ruling elites to define the limits or absence of limits on how they govern. It embeds hereditary monarchy and elitism at the core of the state. It wrests sovereignty from the people and places ultimate political authority in the “Crown-in-Parliament”. Effectively, it facilitates government by an elected dictatorship.

However, despite its many flaws, it also demonstrates that constitutions do matter. They effectively determine the systems of authority, law and practice under which political power is exercised in our daily lives. Without the British constitution, Scotland could not have been governed for 21 of the last 34 years by political parties it did not elect. Without the British constitution, there would be no weapons of mass destruction on the Clyde; no Scottish participation in the illegal invasion of Iraq... the list could go on and on.

Sovereign authority

The left therefore cannot ignore the section of the White Paper “Scotland’s Future” headed “Constitutions, government and citizens”. Within it lies the SNP Government’s proposed framework for how politics will be conducted in an independent Scotland. Within it we will discover how serious that Government is about recognising the people rather than politicians as the sovereign authority in the new Scotland.

We will also discover the extent to which democratic principle rather than party interest is the driving force behind their constitutional proposals.

“Scotland’s Future” promises an independent Constitutional Convention “designed by the

people of Scotland for the people of Scotland.” A duty will therefore be placed upon the first independent Scottish Parliament to convene such a convention to debate and draft a written constitution. We are promised a fully “participative and inclusive process” involving just about everyone and their granny.

Unfortunately, there is little detail about how this is to be achieved. Reference is made to citizen-led assemblies and other convention examples from around the world but there is no clarity whatsoever about what Scotland would do. Would the Convention be directly elected? Would it involve citizen-engagement through some kind of focus group arrangement? Will it be a self-selecting, elitist and ultimately unrepresentative gathering of politicians and other civil society actors? Will it be purely

advisory leaving final decisions on the constitution to parliament? Will its proposals be binding and subject to a popular referendum?

The White Paper provides no answers to any of these fundamental questions. It is also less than transparent on the role of the monarchy in an independent Scotland. On the one hand we are told that Scotland will continue to be a “constitutional monarchy” and that the Queen, as head of state, will form “an intrinsic part” of Scotland’s constitutional future. On the other hand we are told that the people rather than politicians or state institutions (the monarchy?) are sovereign. Scotland’s sovereignty is distinct from that of Westminster to the extent that it is based on the people and only the people.

These assertions leave hanging in the air the monarchy’s re-

lationship to an independent Scotland. Will the Scottish Crown in the Scottish Parliament no longer be sovereign? Will the Queen continue as commander-in-chief of Scotland’s armed forces? Will her assent still be required to Scottish legislation? Will she continue to appoint Ministers? Will there be a Scottish Privy Council? Will she and her successors have any kind of political role? There are simply no answers to any of these legitimate questions.

The SNP’s ideas on the contents of Scotland’s written constitution are also limited. A ban on nuclear weapons being based in Scotland is fine as far as it goes.

However, it does not go far enough since it leaves the way open for an independent Scotland to shelter under the protection of NATO’s nuclear weapons deployed elsewhere within the other nations of that alliance.

More worryingly is the failure to properly address workers’ rights. If we can embed the European Convention on Human Rights in our written constitution, why can we not do the same for the ILO’s “Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work”? if we can constitutionally guarantee the right to education, why can’t we do the same for the right to strike?

Impact

I have touched on only a few examples of how written constitutions can impact on our everyday lives. There are many more examples. The British constitution has facilitated elite rule on these islands for more than three centuries. The American version, penned in 1776, continues to impact for better or worse in the 21st century United States.

Rarely does any generation have the opportunity to make a completely new constitutional start. That privilege may yet fall to this generation of Scots.

We better make sure that we are ready to seize that opportunity if and when it comes.

PHOTO: Craig Maclean



YES...TO NATO? the SNP wants to ban Trident after independence but also wants to join NATO

by Colin Fox, SSP
national co-spokesperson

NOW THAT the dust has settled on the Scottish Government's White Paper on Independence, it is time to assess its likely impact on the 2014 referendum campaign.

Whilst Joan McAlpine, MSP, compared it to 'the Gettysburg address' and George Kerevan described it as 'a game changer' other pro-independence commentators were more measured in welcoming the White Paper. If less effusive than card-carrying members of the SNP, Ian Bell writing in *The Herald* believed it marked the point "where the independence argument properly began".

And Ian McWhirter felt it was "simultaneously a bid for independence and a platform for re-electing Alex Salmond". He aptly described the SNP's vision of Independence as "a rather Unionist one" pointing out that the White Paper seemed above all to "celebrate the BBC, the monarchy, NATO, the pound, the Bank of England and the British passport". He left us wondering whether the First Minister had overplayed his 'canny' hand in seeking to woo conservative opinion in Scotland to the Yes case. If, as they say, 'imitation is the sincerest form of flattery' the Unionists were predictably not so welcoming of his 'flattery'.

Muted response

The response on the left has been more muted. Yes Scotland Chairman Dennis Canavan urged the entire Yes Scotland coalition to welcome the White Paper and its progressive proposals but referred to it a little more obliquely saying:

"I am confident, as more and more people become engaged in the debate and learn about the unique opportunities a Yes vote promises, the more they will see that independence makes sense for them, their families and our



PHOTO: Craig Maclean

OTHER VISIONS OF INDEPENDENCE ARE AVAILABLE

country." There is much in the White Paper to welcome such as introducing a written constitution, removing Trident nuclear weapons, growing Scotland's economy and population by welcoming those who wish to come and live here, returning the Royal Mail to public ownership, scrapping the hated Bedroom Tax, providing universal free childcare for preschool children, providing seats for workers on company boards, supporting far greater environmental protection, promoting greater energy efficiency and extending much needed social protection to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.

But we were also entitled to ask for more. I publicly welcomed the commitment to reduce gas and electricity bills by 10 per cent per annum with independence but said I would

like to have seen the Scottish Government go further and reiterate the pledge it made in its 2007 manifesto to eradicate fuel poverty in Scotland completely.

I would also liked to have seen a commitment to take the renewable energy industry into public ownership – just as the Scottish Government did recently with Prestwick Airport – and return our gas and electricity supply industry to public hands.

Both measures are concomitant with pledges to achieve greater economic prosperity, social democracy and fairness. And I believe there should have been a promise to return our railways to public hands, another progressive policy popular with voters.

And, as I have said many times, the SSP prefers the very successful Norwegian approach to its oil and gas resources

where it took them both into public ownership rather than privatising them as Britain did. As a result of this decision Norway has now accrued £840 billion in a state 'Oil Fund' with which to benefit its citizens and future generations.

So for me the White Paper should also have had a commitment to repeal the worst anti-union laws in Europe a move which would undoubtedly be welcomed by the country's 630,000 trade unionists and their families. And where is the progressive tax system which sees the rich pay more and the poor pay less? Or the guarantee of much needed affordable social housing?

And what about policies rewarding local communities where our renewable energy schemes are situated with the cheap electricity it produces? Each of these would have complemented the strong social democratic tradition the independence case promotes.

SSP's crucial role

I accept that much of this will form the basis of the 2016 Scottish Parliament elections but I am bound to say it is commitments such as these that will help persuade working class people across Scotland to vote Yes next year.

And in this regard last week's Panelbase opinion poll showing a 9 per cent lead for the No side revealed that support for them was highest among the better off social classes whereas support for Yes was higher among the poorest. And this latter category also registered the highest proportion of 'don't knows'.

So, if we are to win the working class majority to independence, we need to provide them with better reasons to vote Yes than we have done so far.

And that is why the SSP has a crucial role to play in this debate in pointing out that 'other visions of independence are also available'.

SHAPE SCOTLAND'S FUTURE FOR WORKERS' RIGHTS

by *Richie Venton*

THE SNP government's White Paper on 'Scotland's Future' contains many welcome reforms, and certainly represents a massive step forward from the jail-house conditions working class people currently endure. But a Freedom Charter for workers it is not.

Many of the measures pledged by an aspiring SNP government in an independent Scotland would substantially boost the living standards of Scottish workers and their families. Abolition of the bedroom tax, calling a halt to the dreaded Universal Credit scheme, scrapping of Trident - such plans would halt attacks on the poorest, and potentially release a fortune for spending on jobs, public services and people's incomes that is currently squandered on devilish weapons of mass destruction.

The headline-grabbing promise of free childcare of 30 hours a week during term time for all 3-4 year olds and vulnerable 2-year-olds is a powerfully welcome key to many, many women (and some men) being able to realistically choose to work – provided of course the jobs were created.

Promises of a Youth Guarantee of either education, training or employment as a constitutional right for all aged under 24 is in stark, glittering contrast to the wasted generation under Westminster rule, and is indeed something socialists have demanded for years – again, provided we fight to ensure it is based on provision of a living income or student grant and is not a device exploited by employers to displace unionised, older workers with cheap youth labour.

Renationalisation of Royal Mail has been welcomed not just by CWU members but workers in

general as a means to reverse profiteering and service cuts at the hands of the privateers.

With 630,000 workers organised in trade unions – and probably at least as many again willing to join but terrified of victimization, job losses and blacklisting if they openly joined a union – the White Paper was a golden opportunity to enlist the support of the working class majority population of Scotland. But for those hesitating, or even being dragooned into the No camp by the scurrilous Fear Factory that is Better Together and their offshoot United with Labour, a bold, striking vision of a markedly different future under independence is the necessary method of persuasion.

Win over workers

Again, measured against what we suffer now under Westminster's rule by and for the millionaires, the SNP's prospectus is progress. But nothing like the advances the likes of the SSP or the broad based Trade Unionists for Independence are striving for. What do we face as a future if a No vote is cast next September? The UK already boasts the infamy of some of the lowest pay, longest working hours, shortest holiday entitlement and most savage anti-trade union laws in the western capitalist world. And things can only get worse!

The Tory Lib Dem boot-boys have slapped prohibitive fees on Employment Tribunal cases, pricing workers out of any measure of justice. They are hammering the right of union reps to function and represent members in the civil service.

Boris Johnston, an obnoxious reactionary disguised as a boisterous buffoon, has pioneered a drive towards banning the right to strike in

the public sector and for a 'review' of union balloting laws on industrial action whereby those members who abstain would be counted as voting against any proposed collective action. And as well as ushering in further cuts to the block grant to Scotland from Westminster, a No vote would embolden the Old Etonians to lay waste to what little workplace rights remain.

So trade unionists don't even face a choice between the status quo and independence, but between a further clawing back of gains won by past generations of trade unionists and socialists in struggle – or a chance to improve our lot as workers by voting for the right to get whatever government the Scottish people elect!

The White Paper rightly states that under Devolution, "the Scottish government is responsible for training the present and future workforce, equipping them with the skills and knowledge they need, but has no say in how they are treated once they are in a job."

It makes the welcome pledge that an SNP government with the full powers that independence provides would "reverse recent changes introduced at Westminster which reduce key aspects of workers rights. "For example, on independence we will restore a 90-day consultation period on redundancies affecting 100 or more employees".

Likewise they will abolish the 'shares for rights' scheme recently initiated by the Coalition, bribing workers into surrendering fundamental redundancy and unfair dismissal rights, etc, for a few non-voting company shares.

Welcome promises, but very timid. Not a word about scrapping the bulging package of anti-union laws ushered in by Thatcher's Tories in the 1980s, retained by Blair

and Browns Labour regimes, brutally added to by the current Thatcherites – both Tory and Lib Dem! No mention of the guaranteed right to be in a union, the right to strike without fear of victimisation, the right to take solidarity action with fellow workers.

In sharp contrast to the vilification of trade unions offered by the Better Together parties, 'Scotland's Future' sets as its priority "working directly with the trade unions, employers' associations, employers and voluntary sector to build a partnership approach to addressing labour market challenges".

Positive role

The Paper goes on to promise "particular focus on encouraging wider trade union participation and recognition of the positive role that can be played by collective bargaining in improving labour market conditions". The central proposals on offer from the SNP are the formation of a National Convention on Employment and Labour Relations, involving employers and trade unions, and a subsidiary Fair Work Commission.

The latter "will deliver the mechanisms for uprating the national minimum wage" with the "guarantee that it will rise, at the very least, in line with inflation, to ensure work is a route out of poverty".

Considering the UK minimum wage has lagged inflation for years, leaving workers at least £675 worse off than if it had tracked price rises for the past five years, this is better than the No campaign can offer hundreds of thousands of workers. But it is miserably timid, with no pledge nor proposal for a guaranteed living level of minimum wage, legally enforced. Matching inflation but starting with the current £6.19



RADICAL: socialists want to carve a future that goes beyond the vision painted in the White Paper

an hour for those over 21 – and the White Paper is silent on the lower youth rate – would certainly not be ‘a route out of poverty’.

The SNP swear their allegiance to the Living Wage campaign, and are right now funding a Poverty Alliance Accreditation Scheme – seeking to persuade employers to pay at least £7.45 an hour. 400,000 Scottish workers earn less than this. But again this is not a legally enforced government figure, merely an aim that they seek to cajole employers into paying, based on the core faith the SNP has in businesses big, medium and small.

These proposed structures are founded on a central philosophy of ‘social partnership’ between employers, trade unions and government. The SNP even raise the idea of worker directors – imitating the actions of 14 out of the 28 EU states where workers have some form or other of representation on company boards. They advocate “employee representation to bolster longterm decision-making and improve industrial relations”.

Given the way workers’ trade unions have been cast out into an industrial Siberia the last 30 years, frozen out of important discussions, with dictatorial management all too common, this is a very seductive prospectus. But it is strewn with pitfalls and lethal traps.

Secret accounts

Of course, elected union representatives having direct access to discussions on their employers’ plans would be a massive advantage compared to, for instance, the capitalist dictatorship on display by INEOS boss Jim Ratcliffe at Grangemouth. Access to secret company accounts would help unions restrict the shenanigans of employers. But the problems arise because the interests of workers and those of their capitalist private employers clash; in essence there’s a conflict over who gets the bigger share of the wealth produced, whether in wages and conditions for the workforce, or profits and dividends for the big shareholders. Social partnership amounts to the

partnership of the rider and the horse – not two people with common interests, equals. In many cases worker directors are gagged from speaking out on company secrets, or at the very least bound by the decisions the majority on the board. That seems to be the situation already in the NHS.

The SNP White Paper lauds First Group as a local example of their model for the future, mentioning the transport giant has had a worker director since it was set up in 1989. That begs the question, where was this ‘workers’ voice’ when First ScotRail launched its savage assault on rail workers a few years ago – when in fact it was uncovered that the SNP government had secretly agreed to subsidise the company for any losses they incurred through strike action by the RMT union? Is that what social partnership entails?

In some retail companies, committees exist with handpicked workers on them, partly in an attempt to bypass the collective union and it’s elected stewards,

partly to pass down the message of top management to the shop floor, disguised as the ‘decisions’ of these workers on the carefully moulded committee. Despite all the window dressing, this is an attempt to undermine, not enhance, the collective bargaining of organised workers. The proposed Convention is of course a welcome arena for the unions to independently advocate measures that meet the needs of their members – ranging from advocating a formula for a living level of legally enforced national minimum wage for all over 16, to a charter of workplace rights.

Scotland’s trade unions should welcome the Convention, and use it to put forward the views of independent trade unions. But they need to thoroughly discuss the lessons of experience here and abroad when it comes to so-called social partnership and ‘worker directors’.

Social Con trick

Back in the 1974-79 Labour government, something very similar was implemented, named the Social Contract, initially popular with some of the lower paid who won wage rises in the first phase, but bitterly nicknamed the Social Con trick in the following years – until it was smashed on the rocks of workers’ strike action in 1978-9. The core problem was that the government could control (i.e. hold down!) wages, but they couldn’t control prices in a capitalist economy, leading to rip-roaring inflation and a collapse in workers’ real wages. Union leaders who were the architects of this earlier edition of ‘social partnership’ were discredited, workers confused, Labour defeated, and Thatcher elected by default!

More recently, workers in the South of Ireland have been hamstrung and made to pay the price of horrendous capitalist crisis because their national union leaders sold them a pup - successive National Agreements that allegedly ensured bosses and workers were ‘all in it together’, which drastically hampered their ability to fight back collectively and defend living standards.

• *continued on page 8*

• continued from page 7

Of course, in all probability an independent SOCIALIST Scotland would include properly elected workers' representatives on workplace committees, to control day-to-day operations, and a working class majority elected onto boards of publicly owned industries, services and cooperatives. But that is a far cry from what is on offer from this White Paper, which is rooted in the open continuation of privately owned capitalist enterprises, which in fact are promised cuts of up to 3 per cent in Corporation Tax.

Trade unions and their members cannot afford to be neutral on the referendum. We have far too much to lose if we don't help win a majority for independence. More wage cuts. Even worse assaults on services. Catastrophic removal of the remaining rights we have at work. And all of these regardless of what colour of rosette the capitalist Prime Minister in Westminster wears.

Duty

The SNP government's White Paper is one version of independence, but only one. It says itself, "Each of Scotland's political parties will bring forward policy proposals at the future election to an Independent Scottish parliament."

Absolutely. And the duty of trade unions, as the biggest single collective body in Scotland, is to seize the unique opportunity offered by national self-government, and combine with socialists to carve out a future that goes far beyond the vision painted in this White Paper. Fight for public ownership of key sectors like energy, North Sea oil and gas, the banks and industrial giants - with new forms of democratic control and management by working class people that go way beyond a few token 'worker directors'.

With socialist change we could build a genuine social partnership. This White Paper is a very substantial improvement on what we have in the capitalist UK; it is pale and timid compared to what socialists and the trade union movement need to campaign for on the road to a Scottish workers' republic.

INVESTING IN THEIR FUTURE



by Sandra Webster, SSP national co-spokesperson

POLITICIANS measure their words carefully. Any document they publish will be full of buzz word bingo terms but when they use words such as "transform" about a statement of intent we should all sit up and read between the lines.

The word is used several times by the SNP government in the White Paper about pre-five provision of pre-school childcare.

It lays out their intentions to offer by the end of a second term hours equivalent to hours spent in school for all three and four year olds. There has been some good thinking behind this. Rather than leave this all in the hands of the private sector they have called for capital investment in new build for local authority provision.

They call for quality in pre-school provision and a nurturing environment for children. To this end they will increase the training of nursery nurses creating new jobs too. They emphasise that the quality of childcare is essential.

Such emphasis is crucial. Some recent academic studies have raised concerns about the impact of spending long amounts of times in a nursery setting will have on young children.

For many working parents quality of service is essential to them returning to work and another key measure of the White

Paper is preventing barriers to mothers returning to work.

One thing it doesn't lay out is the choice that mothers of young children should have the choice to choose to care for their children rather than send them to nursery provision. Does one size fit all?

The White Paper states it intends to lessen inequalities among disadvantaged groups in society and create a kinder fairer society but for women caring for children perhaps at the crux of this should be choice.

For pre-five provision this might mean knowing that high care quality exists but also the choice to be able to care for your children and stay at home without being economically punished.

Provision should be not a one size fits all provision but individual to each need then it can be described as truly unique.

All our children are unique and all come with varying level of support needs. Childcare commitment and the stresses of looking after children does not end when they reach school.

Many parents still require pre and after school care. Some parents of pre-five schoolchildren also have to work in the evenings and weekends.

The White Paper addresses the need of "flexibility" but does not lay out how this will be provided or what "flexibility" means.

The needs of parents caring for children with disabilities who will

often require support into adulthood is not addressed. Many carers felt let down by the Scottish Government as their caring role is not to be mentioned in the White Paper.

The White Paper is described as a conversation which should be a two way process. They have listened to the needs of families and the need for pre school childcare provision.

However with recognising these needs they cannot claim to transform society perhaps just make things easier and provide excellent child care support.

This support will be welcomed and allow our future citizens to reach their full potential. Children are our future they will be citizens in an independent Scotland so much should be invested in them.

To transform society through the provision of additional pre school provision is worthy and a vision that may encourage some voters to vote Yes but a transformation of society?

How does the extension of childcare become a game-player within the vision of a low corporation tax nation where employees rights are secondary to those of the demands of corporate greed.

How will an independent Scotland dare to be different? Transformation of society and the tarmacking of inequalities means any more measures to be taken and we as the socialists can share our vision with others.

A dead impressive addition to Scotland's crime fiction scene

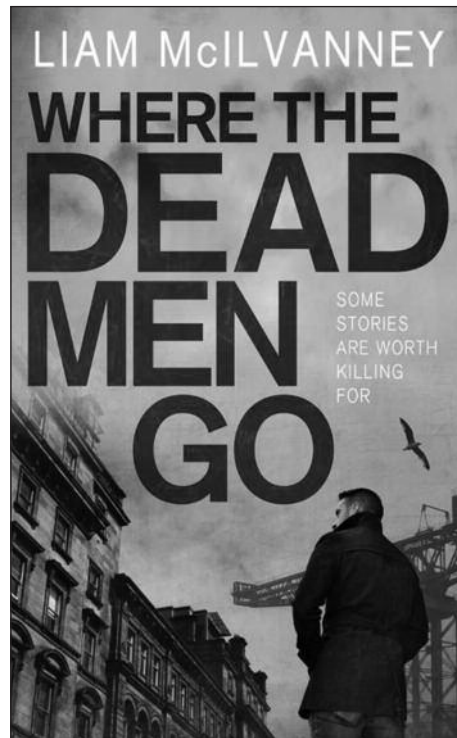
Where The Dead Men Go
by **Liam McIlvanney**
(Faber 2013, £12.99)

by *Alex Miller*

ALTHOUGH THE huge success of Ian Rankin's Inspector Rebus novels have put Edinburgh centre-stage in the contemporary crime fiction scene, many would say that the "Tartan Noir" genre was born in Glasgow, with William McIlvanney's 1977 Laidlaw, and Jack Laidlaw's subsequent appearances in The Papers of Tony Veitch (1983) and Strange Loyalties (1991).

With the emergence of writers such as Denise Mina, there has been a resurgence of Glasgow-based crime fiction in recent years. Liam McIlvanney's debut novel All The Colours of the Town (2009) – set mainly in Glasgow and Belfast – introduced Gerry Conway, crime reporter for the Glasgow-based Sunday Tribune, and constituted a powerful and acclaimed addition to the West of Scotland genre.

McIlvanney's second novel sees Conway returning to the Tribune after an absence of



three years working in PR. Conway is now on the politics desk of the Tribune, and much of the action in the book is set against the backdrop of the upcoming Independence referendum.

When the body of Martin Moir, the current crime reporter at the Tribune, turns up in suspicious circumstances, Conway finds himself plunged into the twilight zone in which the worlds of politics and crime

overlap with his personal life in a sometimes frightening way.

McIlvanney is a compelling storyteller, and has an eye for the Glasgow street theatre and an ear for the banter. The book contains many striking images: for example, the Finnieston Crane is described as looking like "a vast handgun trained on the city". It also captures well the political atmosphere in

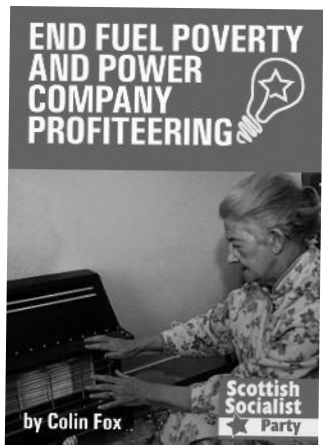
which the Labour Party's erstwhile stranglehold on Scottish politics is quickly unravelling. As one character says of the Scottish Labour leadership: "You've seen them, Gerry, the Party's Scottish emissaries. It's not the brains trust. They're not in government, they know fuck all about opposition".

Where The Dead Men Go is an impressive addition to the already flourishing crime fiction scene in Scotland.



To order your copy of 'The Case For An Independent Socialist Scotland' by Colin Fox, send £5 to: SSP, Suite 370, 4th Floor, Central Chambers, 93 Hope St, Glasgow G2 6LD. Cheques: 'Scottish Socialist Party'.

To order your copy of 'End Fuel Poverty And Power Company Profiteering' by Colin Fox, send £4. Or get both pamphlets for only £8 (inc. p+p)



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Critical time for Venezuela

by Bill Bonnar

FORTY YEARS ago, a violent military coup overthrew the democratically elected left wing government of Salvador Allende. The coup didn't just happen but followed months of political and economic chaos. This included widespread political violence, mostly originating from the right, and widespread economic disruption which pushed the economy into a major crisis. In fact, apologists for the coup point to this period as the reason why the coup was necessary; to sort out this chaos. It's a neat theory except for one problem. We knew at the time and certainly know now that much of this crisis was manufactured by the right and overseen by their paymasters in Washington DC.

The political violence was highly organised while much of the economic crisis was deliberately created. To give one example; in the months prior to the coup the country's economy was crippled by a strike of lorry owners. We now know that this was organised and paid for by the United States. It's called de-stabilisation and aims to bring the country to its knees preparing the way for a military coup.

Coup hallmarks

There is now growing evidence that this strategy is at work in Venezuela. While the outcome is unlikely to be a coup all the other hallmarks are there. The right wing opposition and their American sponsors have refused to recognise the result of the last presidential election alleging vote rigging. This despite the fact that the election was given a clean bill of health by international monitors and the failure to provide evidence. Their initial response was to launch a campaign of violence which included the murdering of seven government supporters



SALVADOR ALLENDE: overthrown in 1973 right wing Chilean coup

mostly in drive by shootings. That campaign of violence has continued ever since. There is also growing evidence of economic sabotage. Last month the country suffered widespread power cuts due to faults at generating stations. An investigation showed that they had been sabotaged. This is the most serious in what appears to be a growing campaign.

The opposition have called for the overthrow of the government and the revolution. They are orchestrating violence hoping to provoke a violent government response while actively engaging in a campaign of disruption and civil disobedience. On 8 December, local elections will take place throughout the country. The Right have called on their supporters to make this a 'day of rage'; a clear sanction for widespread violence and the destroying of the democratic process.

Who are the right? Most western media describe them as the 'democratic opposition'. Nothing could be further from the truth. While no doubt there are legitimate democratic elements, at its core is a movement which is reac-

tionary, racist, anti-democratic and increasingly violent. Led by what remains of Venezuela's wealthy elite and supported by most of the privately owned media they have waged a campaign against the Venezuelan revolution characterised by violence, sabotage, an absolute contempt for democracy and at least one attempted coup. Emboldened by the closeness of the last election result and cheered on by their supporters in Washington they are involved in a campaign of de-stabilisation aimed at destroying the revolution and turning the clock back to that point before Chavez came to power. That they have a close ally in the Obama Administration is clear.

Nothing strips away Obama's 'progressive' credentials than his actions in Latin America. One of his first acts as President was to vastly increase the scope for American intervention in the region including a huge increase in America's Latin American based 7th Fleet and support for every reactionary movement on the continent. His main criticism of the Bush Government has been its failure to defend 'American inter-

ests' in the region. The Venezuelan revolution is now facing its greatest challenge. While a military coup is unlikely the possibility of a drift into civil war cannot be ruled out. For many in the opposition this seems to be their preferred option. While the government in Caracas needs to stand firm against this threat it also needs to find ways of reaching out to those genuinely democratic elements in the opposition.

The country is dangerously polarised something which can only benefit the right. Meanwhile the need for solidarity is vital.

The Venezuelan Solidarity Campaign is stepping up its activities. This includes trying to break through a hostile media happy to peddle the lies coming from the opposition and Washington. Exposing the true nature of the opposition while showing that the revolution has been the true defender of democracy in the country. Publicising the enormous gains of the revolution in terms of health, education, social care and lifting millions out of poverty.

US support

The coming months will be critical. The opposition probably feel that this is their time to strike. They already appear to have written off the democratic process and know that in any upcoming conflict they will have extensive support from the United States and their allies in the region.

In Chile in 1973 the Allende government was overthrown primarily because it was so isolated; its only allies an equally isolated Cuba and the Soviet Union a world away. Forty years later the region has changed. The Venezuelan revolution has powerful regional allies and the support of a worldwide solidarity campaign. Its survival is central to the entire movement for progressive change in the continent.

WELCOME TO THE PARTY

More than 300 people have applied to join the Scottish Socialist Party since April. **Jamie Kindhaugh** met one of the newest ones, **Fiona Donaldson** from Edinburgh, to find out what led her to join

SURROUNDED BY

canapés and clinking wine glasses, Fiona Donaldson was eager to pursue her passion for the politics of food when she attended a taster session for a gastronomy course at Queen Margaret University.

Her potential classmates, however, were more interested in chatting about luxurious delicacies and pretentious beverages than grappling with the everyday realities of food banks and cooperatives.

Leaving with a bad taste in her mouth, Fiona used her last £3 on bus fare home. Rather than meeting like-minded people as she had hoped, she felt alienated by the posturing she had encountered.

When I interviewed her, in the very unpretentious surroundings of a branch of McDonald's in Central Edinburgh, she told me that since she joined the Scottish Socialist Party recently, she has finally met people who share her values and respect her opinion.

Class struggle

At 25, Fiona is a relatively young political activist; but coming from a staunch left-wing Edinburgh family gave her an early insight into the class struggle.

Her grandfather, a socialist, had been a miner in Gilmerton along with his brother – Fiona's great uncle – who earned the nickname 'commie Tommy' among his fellow workers. And her militant lineage can be traced even further back to her great grandmother Euphemia



'FOR REAL': Fiona Donaldson with Colin Fox at last month's Radical Independence Conference in Glasgow PHOTO: Craig Maclean

who was sent to Calton Jail for conscientious objection and took part in a three-day anti-war protest in The Meadows in the 1940s because she did not wish her sons' lives to be put at risk on the front line during the Second World War.

As she was growing up, this working class family history gave Fiona an immense sense of pride and an early interest in politics, but rather than following her parents in their support for the Labour party, Fiona joined the SNP when she was 15.

"I felt distant from the UK state," she explains, "and definitely in favour of independence."

But the SNP failed to engage

her and she felt they made little effort to get her involved beyond requesting her vote at election time. It is perhaps little wonder then that she left the SNP about five years ago, but the debate around the forthcoming independence referendum kept her immersed in political ideas:

"I think independence has gotten more people interested in politics.

"There is an inquisitive atmosphere in this country."

The hard work done by Scottish Socialist Party members in the Yes campaign caught Fiona's interest and admiration. One such comrade was Paolo Caserta, the secretary of the Lothians

branch of the SSP and an active Yes campaigner.

Only a few weeks ago – while travelling on the bus after work – Fiona noticed Paolo wearing his 'Independent Socialist Scotland' badge whilst campaigning and struck up a conversation with him to learn more about the SSP.

Hearing about the party's policies and reading the articles on the party website prompted her to fill in the online application form.

Colin Fox, the SSP's national co-spokesperson contacted her the following day to welcome her into the party. "After a really bad day at work, that made my day," she tells us.

Values

Since then, her experience of being an SSP member has been very positive:

"Joining the SSP has been therapeutic for me" she says.

"People actually want to know what I have to say and they respect me.

"I have heard people speak passionately and have been inspired by them to do work for the party."

Fiona feels she has found an organisation of like-minded people who share her values and want to hear her opinions.

Upbeat about the SSP's future, she sees the party going forward, but she warns we must be committed to our principles above all else:

"I think potentially, the majority of people would share the SSP's beliefs, but I wouldn't want the party to become a glossy pile of nonsense. I'm glad to feel part of something and be proud of it; this isn't like joining the Labour Party or the SNP: this is for real."

for Socialism, Independence
and Internationalism

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PHOTO: Simon Whittle



PHOTO: Craig Maclean



Yes to independence in 2014

PHOTO: Simon Whittle

