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Scottish Unemployed Workers' Network

'Work as if you live in the early days of a better nation'

We've not - yet - gained a free country, but we have gained an amazing grass-roots movement that is pushing for change. This newsletter looks at how the Independence campaign has catalysed action in the Yes City of Dundee - and there is a new level of activity all over Scotland.

We campaigned for the freedom to build a better society. Our struggle for liberty was inseparable from the struggle for equality. Now many of the people who fought for Independence are on the streets trying to help those who have been failed by our current political system. This help is urgent and necessary. It is also not enough. At the same time as helping people with emergency food, we will have to do our best to ensure that they are aware of those few rights that they do still have. And at the same time as spreading information about welfare rights, we will have to campaign against the system that is taking those rights away. We can waste no opportunity to highlight and attack policies that are creating inequality and hardship, and we must continue to campaign for the freedom to replace those policies. We are trying to build a better society from the bottom up, and we can't be limited to patching up the crises created by an uncaring system. We need to come together to change that system. Our struggle for equality remains inseparable from the struggle for liberty.

If we can co-ordinate our activities and link the bread and butter politics to the bigger struggle our movement will only get stronger. And if we win independence this way, alongside and as part of the struggle for social justice, then the nation that we win will have a much greater chance of being that better nation that we all hope for.



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Tony Cox of Stobbie4AYE (www.facebook.com/stobbie4aye) and the SUWN asks

WHERE STANDS SCOTLAND?

Where stands Scotland now, in the wake of the historic referendum vote of September 18th? One thing is obvious: our country has been transformed in the last few months to an extent that no-one, not even the most ardent nationalist, could ever have predicted - and this despite, or even because of, the result. What has happened is nothing less than a 'Great Awakening', a new Enlightenment, a revolution in consciousness.

If we go back even a few short months to June or July this year, there was little indication that we stood on the threshold of such a transformational change in Scotland's political culture. The official YES campaign, despite their best efforts, struggled to get a pro-YES message over on the mainstream media, which poured scorn and vitriol on every pro-Indy utterance. The SNP high command stuck to the script that had been written for them by media advisors and image consultants – an unremittingly up-beat message that nevertheless emphasised how little would actually change with independence: the 'don't scare the horses strategy'. However, the debate on the streets - and in kitchens and bus-stops and workplaces and Facebook – was not so easily contained; and, as the summer progressed, more radical campaign groups, outwith the official YES campaign though often working alongside them, used grass-roots campaigning to help raise hopes and expectations. Their pro-Indy message was much more grounded in what might be called 'the social question', or even 'the class question', and rested on the pressing need for real and meaningful change. The debate became, 'what kind of country do we want to live in?'; and the slogan, 'another Scotland is possible', popularised by the Radical Independence Campaign (RIC), summed up the growing mood and appetite to take the fight to the 'Bitter Together' camp on the basis of a radical message of change along broad socialist lines.



The First Minister visits our stall outside the Bureau

Although the SUWN had agreed to back Independence in April, for activists campaigning outside Dundee Job Centre, it was not till around June or July that the issue started to come into sharper focus. We had been campaigning outside the Job Centre from early spring, and we had established, beyond a shadow of doubt, the real connection between the growing use of food-banks in the city and the escalating problem of benefit sanctions. The cases of absolute want that we were encountering had made us not only angry, but also determined to drive down the sanctions rate. We aimed to make benefit claimants more aware of their rights, and to train ourselves up to become advocates for the unemployed in meetings and interviews with Job Centre advisors, or 'coaches' as they now demand to be called. We were aware, however, that meaningful change in the sanctions regime could not be achieved without far-reaching political change, and so we embraced the principle of Scottish Independence, despite the fact that few, if any, of the activists within the SUWN or Dundee Against Welfare Sanctions (DAWS) could be described as nationalists. From July onwards, our campaign on welfare rights and against sanctions became more and more tied in with our growing support for Independence: a link that was underlined in late August, when Alex Salmond came to Dundee and visited

the voter registration stall established by Stobbie4AYE, SUWN and DAWS outside the Wellgate Jobcentre. During the course of his brief visit, the First Minister gave, for the first time, a guarantee that Scottish Independence would lead to the ending of the sanctions regime. He later spoke of how humbled he was by the long queues of Dundonians snaking along the length of the City Square, patiently waiting to be registered to vote at the council offices - making the pointed observation that these ordinary working-class people were not registering to vote NO. We had the same experience every day of the last week of the voter registration drive, when we were inundated by people wanting to register, with queues forming even before the stalls were up in schemes right across Dundee.



Registering voters outside the Bureau

From that point on, we could sense a qualitative shift in the nature and character of the Indyref campaign. The class question had become utterly meshed with the issue of 'what kind of Scotland' we wanted to build, and there was a new focus on what Independence could deliver in terms of improvements for those on the sharp end of the ConDem war on the poor and the vulnerable. Whilst the vote was lost, it is as clear as day that nothing can remain

the same. People are not returning to normal, because what we now accept as 'normal' has also undergone a transformation. Indeed, 'the Scottish disease' is catching: the northern English cities, in particular, are stirring, and Labour can no longer take its working-class 'vote bank' for granted. In Scotland, this process has gone much further – Labour here are on the verge of a historic collapse, albeit they will hang on for a while yet in some places.



SUWN campaigners gathering statements from claimants for our forthcoming report on the impact of benefit sanctions

For our part, the fight continues for a welfare state that treats its recipients as citizens rather than 'scroungers' or objects of charity. We know that the ConDem coalition is engaged in a once in a generation attempt to reduce the welfare state, as a final preparation for its complete removal through the privatisation of provision and services. The political mobilisation brought about by the Indyref campaign has enabled us to take this fight onto a new level of activity.



Bob Costello explains how his

'YES BUS' HAS BECOME 'YES WE CARE'

Through the YES Bus, we campaigned hard and we fought well. Much of our campaigning was done on the streets of Dundee and in particular the City Square, where it became apparent that there were many unfortunate people who were basically living on the streets. When we found that our dreams had not been realised, we looked at the next step, because we all knew that this was not the end of the story. We had the idea of linking the ongoing campaign for independence to the need to take care of the less fortunate of our society, so we decided to link our efforts to collecting for food banks and at the same time attempting to bring this scandal to the notice of the appropriate authorities.

The YES We Care team have now carried out four food bank collections, teaming up with the Taught by Mohammed Food Bank, St Salvador's Church Food Bank, Stobie4Aye the SUWN and DAWS. We have compiled a list of where food is available every day of the week, and at our collections we also have packed lunches available for more pressing needs.

Morag Lennie describes plans for a

DUNDEE FOOD CO-OP



We had hoped that the referendum result would have allowed us to begin to tackle the circumstances which had forced ordinary people into a situation where they struggled to feed their families or had to rely on food banks.

Having raised expectations within the areas of multiple deprivation - and awareness among those who were, perhaps, not struggling, of the obscenity of the big supermarkets making huge profits out of food - we felt we could not just 'shurrup and get back in our boxes', as advised by Alasdair Carmichael. Instead, at the Red YES meeting in Dundee, held shortly after the Referendum, the idea was floated of starting a not-for-profit food outlet in Dundee. This would make it possible for people on low incomes to feed their families more effectively, and for those with higher incomes, who were fed up with contributing to the profits of supermarkets, to shop ethically.

We have several more spots in the centre of Dundee between now and Christmas, and hope to encourage donations of warm clothes and sleeping bags to distribute among our less fortunate neighbours as the weather becomes ever colder.

It is a poor reflection on society when you can look out to sea and there is oil rigs, but when you look inland you see food banks. We are still on the road to independence and this journey belongs to every one of us.



Since then, a group has been meeting to draw up a constitution, apply for charitable status, find premises, source food suppliers, and make contact with local farmers, from whom we will happily buy their gnarly carrots etc. that the supermarkets won't take. It is still early days, but we are determined to bring this project to fruition. We will be applying for start up grants, and also having a donations box for those who could afford to shop at the supermarkets but prefer to buy from us to leave a contribution to cover basic running costs.

It is intended to run the shop with volunteer staff and to invite students to get hands-on experience in community action. We are also committed to providing space for a benefits advice clinic within the premises. This is only one of the initiatives taking place in Dundee, proving that we of YES City are not going away.

YES WE CARE and Dundee Food Co-Op both have Facebook groups