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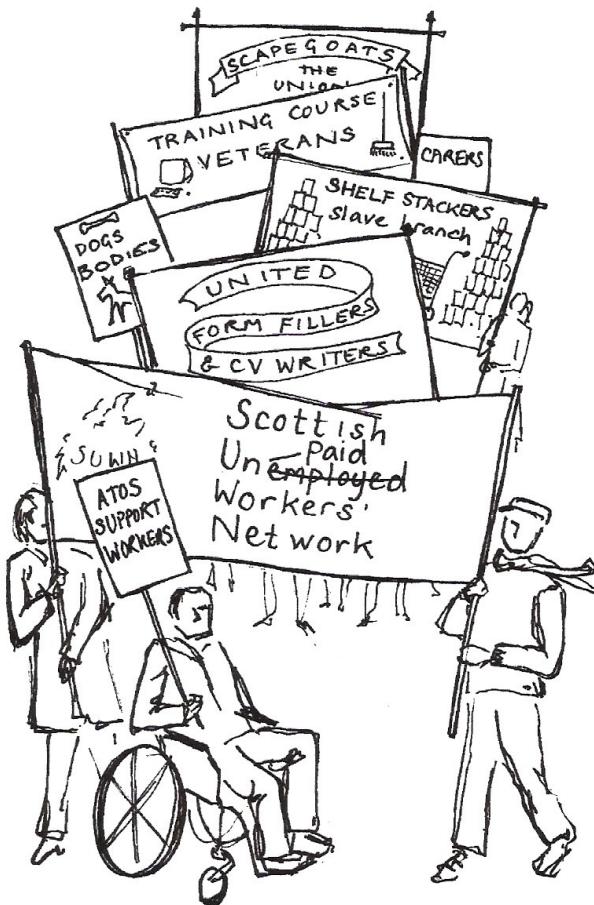
An open letter to the Scottish Minister for Youth Employment

The 'no' Work Programme

NEWSLETTER 4
May 2012

Scottish Unemployed Workers' Network

On 15th March, politicians and media gathered at Dundee College for a National Convention on Youth Employment – or, as even the BBC interviewer mistakenly put it, youth *unemployment* - hosted by the UK Government. The SUWN called a Demo for Real Jobs outside, and managed to get some of the issues that were never discussed in the hall raised on the radio; but the evening news showed Iain Duncan Smith, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, telling the convention that there were plenty of jobs for people who wanted them! Angela Constance, the Scottish Minister for Youth Employment, met us for a brief discussion in the lobby, and the letter printed here was sent to her as a follow up to this. While it naturally concentrates its criticism on the SNP government, this is not intended to suggest that the other mainstream parties would be any better. The Conservative/Liberal austerity coalition is destroying jobs and lives, Labour also supports cuts (just less fast) and originally brought in workfare, and all the main parties supported the casino economics that made the rich richer and produced the financial crash.



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AN OPEN LETTER TO THE SCOTTISH MINISTER FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Dear Ms Constance

Thank you for meeting with us in Dundee on Thursday. Of course it was not really a situation in which it was possible to discuss issues properly, let alone resolve anything, so we hope that you will see that meeting as just the beginning of a longer dialogue.

The SNP has gained significant support because it is seen to be the most progressive of the mainstream parties – though, frankly, there is little competition. Many of us would love to be able to believe in a vision of Scotland as a ‘progressive beacon’, but we need more concrete evidence that the SNP would cause that beacon to shine brightly enough to make a real difference.

We understand that the Scottish Government’s powers are limited by Westminster budget cuts, but there is still scope under devolution for a more progressive distribution of resources and also a more progressive taxation. More progressive taxation cannot, of course, be achieved through varying the basic rate of income tax, but Scotland has the power to change local taxes. If you are serious about creating a more equal society, why did you abandon your plans for a local income tax and opt to freeze the existing council tax, to the greatest benefit of those in most expensive homes?

<http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/home-news/council-tax-freeze-rewards-richest-scots.16923679> Quoting savings for the ‘average’ household is not helpful. And what about the Greens’ proposals for a Land Value Tax? <http://www.scottishgreens.org.uk/news/show/6530/greens-launch-land-tax-plans-fairer-more-sustainable>

John Swinney has rightly stressed the importance of investing in infrastructure – and yet you could be doing so much more of this, and doing it so much more

effectively. We mentioned the example of housing. It is encouraging to see some new council houses being built again, but a large proportion of government money spent on housing goes on subsidising private ownership (and so feeding the next housing price bubble) rather than on boosting construction of much-needed social rented housing. And when the government does fund large infrastructure projects, it is vital that Scottish firms get the work. We understand about EU tendering restrictions, but, as Jim and Margaret Cuthbert have shown, <http://www.scotsman.com/news/transport/forth-crossing-smaller-contracts-could-have-benefited-scots-firms-1-2157846> the contracts for the Forth Bridge could have been divided up so that smaller Scottish firms were not excluded from the process.



Demo for Real Jobs, Dundee College, 15th March 2012

You met with one of the girls whose care course was about to be axed, and this is just part of the crippling cuts that Scottish FE colleges have been forced to impose as a result of the SNP’s budget. And yet we have been promised education and training for all 16-19 year olds. Can you tell us why we should not be suspicious that this promise may prove to be no more than empty rhetoric, or (perhaps worse) that young

people will be offered only nominal training of no real educational or practical value?

You criticised our comment that you believed it was only necessary to change the details of the workfare system – and indeed our use of the term ‘workfare’. But, as we understand it (and we hope we are wrong), you do support the basic concept of Britain’s Welfare to Work policies, which are openly based on the US Workfare system. We are talking not simply about the compulsory schemes so rightly condemned in the media, but about the basic principle of expecting people to work for nothing. Alex Salmond even announced at the SNP conference that there would be more opportunities for people to work for nothing at the Commonwealth Games, and while this will probably be more interesting work than stacking supermarket shelves, there is no reason not to pay people. Unpaid work is demeaning to those expected to do it, and if work is being done by volunteers then there will be fewer paid jobs. There is no evidence that these ‘work experience’ schemes increase a person’s prospects of future work (with many

young people just expected to do one ‘work experience’ scheme after another). http://www.boycottworkfare.org/?page_id=6630 And, as the STUC Assistant Secretary made clear when speaking out, after Thursday’s convention, against all unpaid employment, there is already a system for trial work periods through probationary clauses in employment contracts. You can’t have a ‘living wage nation’ with some people working for subsistence-level benefits. Workfare schemes, under whatever name, have no place in a progressive society.

Finally – for the moment – while we are as concerned as anybody about the impacts of youth unemployment, we are also concerned that this be addressed as part of wider employment issues, else there is a risk that schemes to get young people into work will merely displace other older people. There is no alternative to the creation of more jobs.

We look forward to your response to the issues raised in this letter, and hope that, whatever happens in the independence referendum, we can help ignite our progressive Scottish beacon.



On 24th March, a thousand trade unionists and other activists took part in the STUC march against Youth Unemployment past the Scottish Tory Party conference in Troon. It received no coverage in the mainstream media. When legal protest is so readily ignored, anger and frustration will find another outlet. (Photo by Rob Stewart)

Sean Cudden of *Right to Work* looks at

THE (NO)WORK PROGRAMME

The stated aim of the UK Government's 'flagship' policy on unemployment, the Work Programme, is to get 36% of its clients into jobs. The clients are long-term unemployed, and the jobs are supposed to be of a fairly substantial length. This programme is overseen by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) but is run by so called 'providers' - private companies who are paid by results. The DWP expects 3.3 million people to pass through the programme over a 5 year period and that it might cost anything from £3 billion to £5 billion.

Despite this cost and despite the programme being designed (that might be too strong a word) to deliver the most help to those who need it most, the National Audit Office (NAO) has already said it reckons the programme will fall well short of its already worryingly low target. The NAO expects that only about 26% of the easiest clients to work with will find jobs that will last long enough for providers to make a profit. David Miliband, of all people, recently criticised the scheme (which builds on ideas developed under Labour) saying that of the young unemployed people sent to the Work Programme, only 20% get a job.

The Work Programme helps with CV

writing, advice on filling in application forms, practice interviews and so on. That all seems like useful stuff, but nothing that couldn't be provided by Jobcentres if they were funded to do it. Why private providers? Because the private sector does everything better than the public sector of course. Just look at the railways, private water companies or the American health care system if you need proof.

Even if the Work Programme ultimately improves the prospects of some of the individuals on it of finding work, what will that achieve? It might mean that one person on the Work Programme gets a particular job that another jobless person doesn't. Even if it works for some individuals, the programme doesn't actually create any jobs, except for those working for the companies running it - such as Ingeous and the infamous A4e - so it won't bring down unemployment. Surely the money could be better invested in creating real jobs. It could be used for building social housing, for developing renewable energy, for saving public services (and jobs) that are being axed, or it could be invested in F.E. Colleges. Or here's an idea - give it to unemployed people who have seen the value of benefits plummet in recent years (and who would spend it in the local economy)!

*National
Unemployed
Workers'
Movement
Scottish May
Day paper, 1932*

