



“Freedom of Information”

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WELCOME: Scotland remains a divided country post referendum with some people desperate to move on and forget all about the campaign, while others are bristling with resentment that a more autonomous Scotland was denied our people by those preferring to be ruled from London. The YES campaign was very energetic full of hope for a better future while the No campaign concentrated on telling Scots what they couldn't do rather than what they could do. Better Together actively campaigned for a soporific attitude in Scotland especially amongst women. The campaign video by the woman in red stating that there was only so much time in the day and thinking about politics was too much bother was testament to that.

The Unionists would like nothing better than the soporific attitude to remain and for Scots to accept their fate regarding London's decisions on Scotland's future. But that kind of apathy is not going to happen. The Scottish people have a new political awareness that has galvanised young and old throughout our country. That is why the purpose of this newsletter is to keep our people informed of the political and social realities that affect them and their family. It is up to all Scots to take an active interest in politics now, because at the end of the day what affects Scotland, affects every one of us. Our newsletter concentrates on two important issues this month.

There is nothing more emotive in the minds of caring people with a social conscience than the need for food banks. They are testament to why the London government is failing thousands of Scots. For those who care, they will want to do something about it, but others are not interested in the plight of those less fortunate than themselves. Read this article, and decide what side of the fence you stand on.

The media have something new to concentrate on now and that is the impending new leadership of the Labour Party in Scotland. Labour is scrambling to regain some credibility in the eyes of Scots after their referendum alliance with the Tories. Who will succeed Lamont? That is the question everyone is interested in.

LABOUR: Hardly a day goes by without a headline on the leadership of the Labour party. Although not completely connected to the independence referendum, it would seem that the cracks surfacing can be traced back to the referendum fallout and the resignation of the Labour Scotland leader, Johann Lamont. After playing a pivotal role in convincing the people of Scotland they were 'Better Together' with the rest of the UK under Westminster rule, Johann resigned just over one month later, complaining resentment towards Ed Milliband running the party from London and treating the Labour 'Scotland' party as no more than a 'Branch Office'.

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One issue of concern to Johann was the devolution of further powers "**The Vow**" promised by all 3 union party leaders and Gordon Brown in the campaign's closing days. The Herald reported Johann travelled to London after the referendum win to present her thoughts on devolving all income tax to Holyrood, only to find proposals replaced by a weaker initiative. Indeed in the separate proposals put forward to the Smith Commission by all parties, even the Tory party suggests devolving marginally more than Labour, which seems surprising, considering Labour has been the party Scotland has trusted most often in Westminster. However, the picture becomes clearer in light of Gordon Brown's warning reported by the Scotsman that full income tax devolution is a '*Tory trap designed to strip Scottish MPs of their voting rights*'. Considering this, it is clear to see why Johann would have concerns; when the decision on what is right for Scotland's income tax is made after thought is given to ensuring Labour can use all their MPs (including their 41 Scottish MPs) to vote on all matters – including those relating exclusively to English laws.

Selection for Johann's replacement is underway, with three candidates running leadership campaigns; Sarah Boyack, Neil Findlay and Jim Murphy. By and large the campaign being given most newspaper inches is that fronted by Jim '100 towns in 100 days' Murphy.

In particular the most recent headlines emanating from Murphy indicate one of his first intentions is to repeal the Football Act, which was passed in 2012 giving police and prosecutors extra powers in tackling sectarian abuse and songs at football matches. As an alternative Murphy suggests tackling this in '*classrooms and communities*'. These are changed days indeed for Jim, who previously called for **appropriate action** to be taken against Donald Findlay QC in 1999 for singing sectarian songs, The Sash and Follow Follow, at a function held in a Rangers social club. Jim said at the time – '*the matter shouldn't rest here*'. Quite a turnaround from considering singing amongst fans of your own team unacceptable, to his current view which could allow such singing in close proximity to opposition fans.

Tackling this issue by more than one means would of course be welcomed (communities and classrooms could be places to make a start). However, it is debatable whether or not these initiatives alone could yield the kind of immediate results which would allow both Blue and Green Glasgow football fans to attend games at this time with their kids in-tow (effectively the next generation of fans). Whilst this problem is capable of being tackled at the point of source, families of fans will feel suitably safe to continue supporting their respective teams. However, there is a real fear that a backward step which allows such behaviour at football games go largely unchallenged, we could see some support turn away from football in a bid to protect their children from the shame of sectarianism; which would be a shame for all Football Clubs and fans in Scotland.



FOODBANKS: Even if you live in some of the most far-flung corners of Scotland, chances are you will no doubt be aware of the rise in food banks. Tory austerity cuts have hit the most vulnerable hardest, and with all three major parties (Tory, Labour and Liberal Democrats) intending to continue austerity cuts beyond May 2015, the situation looks set to continue for some considerable time. Accordingly the Guardian reported on 19 September 2014 that:

‘In an assessment of the budget plans of the three biggest Westminster parties, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) found that austerity would continue under a Conservative, Labour or Liberal Democrat chancellor’

A more recent Guardian article notes how ‘welfare’ has become synonymous with the notion of waste and worthlessness; therefore it is understandable that those relying on food banks often feel embarrassed and ashamed. However despite the lazy or layabout image projected by programmes such as Benefits Street and The Scheme; unemployment benefit payments amount to only 3% of the total welfare budget. We are essentially being gently encouraged to think the problem is a lot more widespread in order to fuel outrage towards the ‘something for nothing’ element of society, and in turn support the ‘necessary’ austerity cuts. Many people currently assume that the reliance on food banks is due to benefit payments being wasted or mismanaged. However the truth is that in many cases those forced to rely on such hand-outs are actually in work. Unemployment may be falling, however many people are being forced into zero hours contracts, or part-time positions, which force stark choices to be made in respect of paying their bills to keep a roof over their heads whilst managing to feed themselves and their families.

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The Mirror recently reported the struggle of low earners, with the example of Angela (a West Lothian grandmother) forced to rely on food banks whilst being desperate for more working hours and a wage in line with current living costs. So whilst Tories and Labour fight it out over the ‘West Lothian question’ (also known as English Votes for English Laws) we have a West Lothian grandmother struggling to feed herself and keep a roof over her head; this situation hardly seems fair.

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There are many food banks dotted around the country, we are focussing on one today – the Trussell Trust, who cover the whole of the UK. They quote a number of reasons why people are faced with going hungry:

‘Redundancy, illness, benefit delay, domestic violence, debt, family breakdown and paying for the additional costs of heating in winter’

I personally can relate to at least a few of these, and I hope that those of us in more fortunate positions might be able to manage to donate food, or perhaps offer some volunteer help to a local food bank. You can find the nearest Trussell Trust food bank by following the link on their website: <http://www.trusselltrust.org/map> and they recommend the following donations:

Milk (UHT or powdered), sugar, carton fruit juice, soup, pasta sauces, tinned goods (sponge pudding, tomatoes, rice pudding, meat, fish, vegetables, fruit), cereals, tea bags, instant coffee, instant mash potato, rice, pasta, jam, biscuits / snack bars. All food donations must be within the sell by or use by dates, no fresh fruit, vegetables or meat or partially used items can be taken by foodbanks.

In addition to food as outlined above, baby products (nappies, wipes and toiletries) and other toiletries (toilet rolls, shower gels, deodorants) are also needed by many.

We hope with a bit of support in their time of need, those forced to rely at present can find their way out of the situation currently facing them.

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the TSN website is still under construction, we apologise for any inconvenience this causes, it should be running smoothly by the next edition

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