

SOLIDARITY

SCOTLAND'S SOCIALIST MOVEMENT



www.solidarityscotland.org

Solidarity, Scotland's Socialist Movement, believes that we share a historic responsibility to provide people in Scotland with a socialist alternative to the pro-market agendas of New Labour, Tories, Liberal Democrats and the SNP. Many working class voters are so disillusioned with politicians that they do not vote at all.



The scale of anger and disillusionment with New Labour is growing and the need for that socialist alternative is more urgent than ever. Solidarity is the broad party of socialism in Scotland – bigger, better and bolder than that which has gone before, a fresh movement with an attractive, pioneering, and inclusive spirit, welcoming to all who join, irrespective of ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation or disability.

We will demonstrate:

SOLIDARITY WITH those fighting against low pay and oppression.

SOLIDARITY AGAINST poverty and discrimination in all its forms.

SOLIDARITY FOR an independent socialist nuclear free Scotland.

This manifesto details the policies and ideas that we believe can help shape a better Scotland. We call on everyone who shares our vision to join us.

Tommy Sheridan & Rosemary Byrne

Solidarity Is More Than Just A Word. It Is Who And What We Are

Solidarity is a new and principled socialist movement in Scotland. Hundreds of socialists, anti-war activists and trade unionists rushed to join Solidarity when it was launched at a 600 strong rally in Glasgow in September 2006. Currently we have two MSPs in the Scottish parliament, Tommy Sheridan and Rosemary Byrne.

In a few short months we have built branches across Scotland and seen hundreds join our ranks. We stood in solidarity with workers in struggle - from the PCS civil service workers who recently took national strike action against privatisation and job cuts, to the Simclar workers in Ayrshire who fought back against the sudden closure and asset stripping of their factory by a brutal employer; to the Glasgow and Falkirk council workers who took action against public sector wage cuts and RMT signal workers struggling to secure the implementation of the 35 hour week won by the workers last year. In all of these struggles, Solidarity members have played a prominent role, and as a result have rapidly emerged as the only party in Scotland for all workers and trade unionists looking for a fighting socialist alternative.



The billions of pounds that will be spent on Trident replacement is money that can and should be invested in public services, in creating jobs, in raising the standard of living of the poorest in our society, thus bridging an income gap that has increased since 1997 and which is a national disgrace. Morally and economically nuclear weapons are unacceptable under any circumstances, which is why Solidarity will continue to demand the removal of all nuclear weapons from Scotland and why we are proud to have participated in blockades and other actions at Faslane.

We have actively defended asylum seekers and opposed the unacceptable and barbaric use of dawn raids against vulnerable people and their families. We have stood up and said no to increased racist attacks and to Islamophobia, cynically used by the government to justify their attacks on our civil liberties under the guise of the so-called "war on terror".

Understanding that social and economic injustice at home is the foundation upon which a foreign policy of economic and military imperialism rests, we have played a leading role in the anti-war movement, helping to build mass opposition to the imperialist occupations in Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine.



During the last term of the Scottish Parliament Tommy Sheridan and Rosemary Byrne moved bills to scrap the council tax, introduce drugs rehabilitation legislation, ban airguns, and renationalise Scotland's railways.

We have also ensured that the voice of workers in struggle has been heard at the parliament, specifically by calling a debate on worker's rights and inviting Simclar workers to the parliament in order to highlight their plight at the hands of an

unscrupulous employer. Both MSPs attended picket lines during the recent PCS strike and RMT signal workers dispute, and Rosemary Byrne took part in the 24hr occupation of the Simclar factory in Kilwinning, joining the workers in a sit-in and gaining enormous respect nationwide as a result.

Solidarity is the only party standing in the Scottish Parliament Elections which has given full support to the Trade Union Freedom Bill raised in Westminster by John McDonnell MP.

Tommy Sheridan and Rosemary Byrne have, since they were elected, rejected the inflated salaries paid to MSPs and, instead, taken a solidarity wage commensurate with that of an average skilled worker. Solidarity MSPs, if elected, have pledged to continue this principle, thus separating us from the other parties as a party of principle and conviction.

Why Solidarity?

Solidarity was set up last year following Tommy Sheridan's titanic victory over the News of the World, part of Rupert Murdoch's global media empire. It was an acclaimed victory over an anti-working class and anti-socialist



organisation that has in the past described striking miners as “scum” and striking firefighters as “Saddam’s Stooges”; an organisation that, in the aftermath of the Hillsborough disaster, accused Liverpool fans of urinating on the dead; a despicable lie that has ensured that The Sun and the News of the World are boycotted by the people of Liverpool to this day.

Tommy Sheridan's triumph over this despicable and reactionary organisation was welcomed and celebrated by trade unionists, socialists and working class people across Scotland and beyond.

Sadly, key figures in the current leadership of the Scottish Socialist Party lined up on the side of News International against Tommy Sheridan, exposing a lack of honesty, principle and courage that made it impossible for them and for the SSP to continue to carry the banner of socialism in Scotland. The decision to launch Solidarity was taken because hundreds of SSP members, including an overwhelming majority of the party's trade unionists, were not prepared to tolerate a leadership that was widely seen to have sided with the Murdoch press against a fellow socialist.

Since then, and in only a few short months, Solidarity has gone on to emerge as the largest and only viable socialist party in Scotland. As a result, in the Scottish elections Solidarity will be standing across the country so that everyone in Scotland is given the opportunity to vote for a principled socialist party prepared to stand up to the establishment.

If Capitalism Is The Answer We Are Asking The Wrong Question

Last Christmas witnessed the brutal realities of the free-market in the 21st century. 3,200 speculators in the City of London pocketed a colossal £8.8 billion in bonuses between them, while at the same time we saw the collapse of the Farepak savings scheme, a disaster which effectively cancelled Christmas for 150,000 low income families. As one Farepak pensioner who lost £2,000 put it in a letter to a newspaper: “The kids in my family are experiencing the ugly face of capitalism earlier than I would wish. I hope the guilty millionaires finish up behind bars but I expect instead they will find a home in the House of Lords.”

The world’s millionaires and billionaires recently met in the exclusive Swiss mountain resort of Davos for their annual jamboree. The World Economic Forum, attended every year by the CEOs of the richest global corporations, along with leaders of the world’s richest nations, is committed to plotting the continued growth and spread of capitalism across the globe. With record profits and an ever growing share of wealth going to this pampered elite, they have every reason to be happy with their lot. However, this year a stark warning was given by one of their leading economists, who commented: “Look at the shares of national income in the major economies of the developed world. The share going to labour is at historic lows; the share going to capital is at historic highs. The [political] pendulum is moving left.” Another economist warned the Davos summit that: “We have to do something or the backlash is going to be very, very severe.”

They are right to be worried. Never in the history of humanity has there been such an accumulation of wealth and power in so few hands. The richest 691 people in the world have a combined wealth of \$2.2 trillion, an amount which is greater than the income of the worlds poorest 1.6 billion added together. The gulf between the rich and the rest of society has grown to unprecedented levels. In 1960 the global wealth gap between the top 20% and the poorest 20% was 30:1. Today it stands at 150:1. Look at the profits for big business here at home. In the UK big business has never had it so good, with company after company reporting record breaking profits. The top five banks in Britain will make £40 billion in profit this year alone; and up to £5 billion of that from illegal bank charges. Tesco made £1.1 billion in profits last year, which is the equivalent of £170,000 for every full time employee. Chancellor Brown’s further 2% cut in the corporation tax that these profit-obese beasts pay, is yet further evidence of New Labour’s governance on behalf of big business and the rich.

This transfer of wealth, the largest ever, has been achieved through the ruthless application of brutal anti-working class policies. Privatisation of state assets, the slashing of public spending, attacks on pensions, wages and working conditions have all been used to increase the profits of big business. The priorities of capitalism – to make ever increasing profits for a small minority, at the expense of the vast majority of people on the planet – are being exposed like never before. This exposure is reflected in overwhelming opposition and, in some countries, mass mobilisations against privatisation, attacks on workers rights, global poverty, the environmental crisis, and the imperialist occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan.



Internationally The Pendulum Swings To The Left

The new millennium began with the uprising in Bolivia against water privatisation. These “water wars” resulted in a stunning victory for the people of Cochabamba and a defeat for global corporations hoping to profit by selling the rain. A mass movement erupted demanding the nationalisation of Bolivia’s gas and oil reserves, which resulted in the first “nationalisations” of the 21st century in 2006, and which led directly to the election of Evo Morales as Bolivia’s president.

The opening days of 2007 were then marked by Hugo Chavez’s declaration that Venezuela was on the road to becoming a socialist republic. It is no accident that parts of Latin America have been in the vanguard of opposition to free-market capitalist policies. After all, Latin America was the guinea pig for a cruel experiment in mass privatisation under the flag of neo-liberal globalization, and its proximity to the United States has traditionally ensured its economic, political and, where necessary, military domination by the superpower to the north.

The Davos gathering may have been referring to Latin America when it pointed to the pendulum swinging to the left, but the mass opposition to neo-liberalism and the re-emergence of socialism as an alternative to capitalism in Latin America is merely the beginning of a worldwide rejection of the right-wing agenda of an international capitalist elite. What began in Cochabamba, La Paz and Caracas has and will continue to spread to Europe, North America and Asia, leaving us in no doubt that at last the tide is turning.

In July 2005 – 250,000 people marched in Edinburgh to Make Poverty History. Yet a few days later, in the plush surroundings of the Gleneagles Hotel, George Bush, Tony Blair, and the other leaders of the eight most powerful nations in the world declared that it was business as usual.

Thousands of activists from across the world gathered at Gleneagles to voice their concerns, and Solidarity members were at the forefront of G8 Alternatives. Since then, and despite the hollow promises of Blair and Brown with regard to alleviating global poverty, nothing has changed.

Today 1 billion people continue to live on less than 50p a day. In addition, 1.2 billion people on the planet cannot get access to clean drinking water; this despite the obscene \$1 trillion that is spent each year in the arms industry. Like a vampire on blood, capitalism thrives on exploitation and poverty, and therefore it is self-evident that before it is possible to make poverty history we need to make the economic system responsible for poverty history.

That economic system is capitalism.

Stop The War

There may be no money to tackle the 21st century scandal of poverty and hunger but there is a blank cheque for war. George Bush has spent \$745 billion so far on the invasions and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. The military budget of the US alone for 2008 will be \$20,000 a second. And for what? At least 655,000 Iraqi people have died since 2003. More than 3,000 US troops have been killed and there have been hundreds of British casualties. The justification for the war in Iraq - WMDs - was a lie. Regime change - the removal of Saddam Hussein - was achieved but the cost has been horrendous. Today, the Iraqi people are worse off than they ever were under Saddam's brutal dictatorship, caught as they are in a vice of military occupation and growing sectarian carnage on the one hand, alongside mass unemployment and poverty on the other. Bush's planned "troop surge" will be the equivalent of pouring petrol onto a raging fire, and the reality is that the US imperialism is witnessing a military defeat in Iraq that will have profound consequences.



In truth, the Bush administration - representing the interests of a right-wing cabal of neo-conservatives planned to use the dominant military power of US imperialism to impose their policies on the people of the world, starting with the Middle East. The long planned invasion of Iraq had nothing to do with bringing "democracy" to Iraq and the wider region. It was a politically and economically driven strategy to create a new world order, the self-styled New American Century, part of a pre-9/11 agenda.

Control of Iraq's vast oil reserves is designed to break OPEC's stranglehold over oil prices, whilst at the same time meeting the threat posed by the emerging economies of China, India and the EU. It was for this reason that the Iraq invasion was launched and that Iraq's economy rapidly came under the control of corporations such as Halliburton and Bechtel.

Now this strategy lies in tatters and Iraq and the Middle East is in flames. Anti-American feeling has exploded in the Middle East and beyond. Meanwhile Israel, America's main ally in the Middle East, suffered a huge setback following their military defeat at the hands of Hezbollah during their offensive in southern Lebanon in 2006, and also in the election of Hamas by the Palestinian people previously.

The grotesquely misnamed "war on terror" has undoubtedly led to an increase in anti-American feeling, alienated Muslim communities at home and abroad, and has succeeded in polarising the world to an extent never before seen in our lifetime.

Solidarity is totally opposed to such atrocities as were carried out on 9/11 in New York and on 7/7 in London. The victims of both attacks were ordinary people, indiscriminately slaughtered regardless of race, religion or ethnicity. But we are also totally opposed to the whipping up of anti-Islamic bigotry - Islamophobia - and all forms of racism in general. We condemn the indiscriminate targeting of the Muslim communities by the British government, the media and the state apparatus.

Solidarity is proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with all those facing racist attacks and discrimination and will continue to do so.

Further, and again as a direct result of the war in Iraq, the government has also declared war on refugees and asylum seekers. Solidarity believes we should be holding out the hand of welcome and friendship not the keys to a prison cell for men, women and children, whose only crime is to have fled economic privation, political and/or religious persecution, and the scourge of war. In the majority of instances these refugees are fleeing dictatorships backed in the past by our own and other Western governments.

Solidarity will campaign for the Scottish Executive to control its own immigration policy and use these powers to end dawn raids, close Dungavel. We support a general amnesty and the right to work and equal citizenship rights for all refugees and asylum seekers.

Tony Blair's recent announcement of a phased withdrawal of British forces from Iraq is a recognition that Britain has been forced to retreat as a result of the scale of the resistance that they have faced. But New Labour will have spent £10 billion on the Iraq disaster, and many of the troops withdrawn from Iraq will end up in Afghanistan, fighting another war that is doomed to end in defeat. To add insult to injury, Blair and Brown have announced they are to squander up to £100 billion on Trident.

The sad aspect to all this is that, at time of writing, Blair will be allowed to leave Downing Street of his own volition, no doubt to take up a seat on the board of some US corporation as a thank you for services rendered, or perhaps to write his memoirs for a hefty advance, followed by a speaking tour.

Along with millions the length and breadth of Britain and throughout the world, Solidarity considers Tony Blair a war criminal and, as such, we call for his prosecution for war crimes.



Environmental Catastrophe

The recent report on climate change by Sir Nicholas Stern, former chief economist of the World Bank, threw a further spotlight on the environmental catastrophe facing the planet on the basis of capitalism. The Stern Review is the most recent compilation of scientific evidence that the growing concentration of pollutants in the atmosphere, particularly carbon dioxide will, unless checked, have devastating consequences for all humankind.

The report lists increasing flood risk from melting glaciers, up to 200 million refugees from rising sea levels, declining yields from agriculture, increases in the intensity and frequency of extreme weather, and up to 40% of species facing extinction - all as direct and short-term consequences of rising global temperature. Many of its conclusions have been mainstream scientific thinking for a decade or more. If business carries on 'as usual' the report predicts temperature rises could lead to

global economic output falling by 20%. Stern even wrote that, "climate change... is the greatest and widest ranging market failure ever seen". All the main parties and the Greens as well talk of so-called "green taxes". The bulk of green taxes are aimed at ordinary working people and their families - the rich can always escape the consequences of a tax. Just take, for one example, the massive expansion of air travel, which for some is the first target for green taxes.

Raising taxes on travel would not stop the rich travelling the world but would hit working people disproportionately. Capitalism is the problem not the solution. We support a massive investment in clean and green energy alternatives, specifically including clean coal technology allowing safer and more environmental sustainable extraction of coal via opencast mining instead of deep mining. As well as public ownership of transport to develop a genuine



integrated transport system that would rapidly reduce carbon emissions. But we also campaign to put an end to the wasteful and degrading market system. We believe that a democratic socialist economy would put the protection of the environment as a top priority.

Stop The Race To The Bottom

That the free-market is in truth a rigged market in favour of the industrialised West at the expense of nations of the developing world is now commonly acknowledged. That said the prerogatives of the free market have also impacted negatively on workers in the developed world.

In Scotland recent announcements by NCR, Young's, Weir's, Solectron and Simclar, among many others, of thousands of job cuts has revealed the brutal reality of capitalism. The drive to reduce wages and cheapen costs – pitting workers against one another in a race to the bottom - is increasingly being used by the bosses to increase profitability. Production is being moved to Eastern Europe, China and India, where workers can be exploited at a far cheaper cost to big business.

Unprecedented wealth for a tiny minority built on debt, misery, insecurity and colossal inequality is the truth behind an economic system predicated on profit regardless of the human, social or environmental cost.

The cruel irony is that Scotland and Britain are awash with unprecedented wealth. However, the share of this wealth that is owned by the richest 1% in Britain is now higher than at any time since before the Second World War. Britain's richest 1,000

people in 2006, after 9 years of this New Labour government, had amassed collective fortunes of £300 billion between them. That's a 204% increase in obscene wealth for the multimillionaires under New Labour. How many pensioners and ordinary workers have experienced a 204% increase in their wealth under New Labour?

Working class families, by contrast, are living under a debt burden reflective of an economy built on consumer credit and spending. Rocketing house prices have led to record levels of available credit, but it has also resulted in a whole generation who cannot afford to buy a home. The average age of first time buyers in Scotland is now 34.

Tommy Sheridan has exposed the depth of the low pay scandal. A mind boggling 478,000 workers in Scotland live on less than £12,000 a year, and the existence of this vast army of the working poor is a shameful indictment of 10 years of New Labour in power.

New Labour has declared that they are in favour of increasing the retirement age to 68. Work till you drop is New Labour and the bosses' answer to the so-called pensions crisis. Occupational pensions are under attack, though not for the top bosses or MPs, many of whom have supported the Government's attacks on workers' pension rights.

One in every four of our children, around 240,000, have been condemned to poverty in Scotland, and 250,000 of our citizens are officially classified as suffering fuel poverty, spending 10% or more of their income on heating and lighting. The massive hike in fuel costs on ordinary families and pensioners has coincided with record profits for the privatised power companies.

After 8 years of the Scottish parliament almost 1 million people in Scotland live in poverty and recent reports have found that we are poorer now than we were in the 1960s. But rather than get to grips with this crisis of inequality and widening income gap, the Scottish Executive has used their control of the Scottish Parliament to champion the wholesale transfer of council housing, in addition to introducing record levels of privatisation into public services and the NHS through the implementation of PFI and PPP, both by-words for inefficiency, waste, and mismanagement.

Only radical and decisive action can end this scandalous situation. Now more than ever Scotland is crying out for a party and a movement prepared to speak out against the 21st century crimes of poverty, inequality and illegal wars - a party that will defend workers rights and stand on the side of communities fighting back against the attacks of big business; that will oppose privatisation in words and action and champion public ownership and wealth redistribution from the rich to ordinary people; a movement that will campaign for a new Scotland and a new world based on socialist principles.

Solidarity is that party, is that movement, which is why we are asking for your vote on May 3rd.

A New Vision For Scotland

Solidarity stands for an independent socialist Scotland - a modern republic which sets as its first order of business the eradication of poverty, inequality and injustice. We want to see a parliament with real power, able to refuse to send troops to illegal and imperialist wars in Iraq and Afghanistan - a parliament with the power to bring our oil, gas and electricity companies into public ownership; that could remove Trident from the Clyde and implement a living minimum wage of £8.50 an hour.



Unlike the other pro-big business parties, who all defend the same rigged free-market economic system, we fight for real democracy, recognising that political sovereignty without economic sovereignty is no sovereignty at all. The vision for Scotland is fundamentally different from that of the SNP, a party that supports the same failed capitalist policies of the other mainstream parties.

Solidarity, unlike the SNP, stands for an end to privatisation and its replacement with public ownership of all major industry.

Solidarity, unlike the SNP, opposes tax cuts for big business and calls for increased taxes on the profit hungry bosses and the rich.

Solidarity, unlike the SNP, calls for the immediate withdrawal of all British and US military personnel from the Middle East, doing so on the understanding that our presence there is illegal under international law and is rejected by the vast majority of people in the region.

Solidarity In The Scottish Parliament

The powers of the parliament at Holyrood are limited. Nevertheless, we have examined how we can use even these limited powers to make real and serious changes that will benefit ordinary working class people and their families. Throughout this manifesto we have laid out proposals which, taken collectively, could represent a real turning of the tide away from the failed pro-capitalist policies of New Labour, proposals that embrace a socialist vision of society in which the millions and not the millionaires will see their lives transformed.

These policy pledges for the next Scottish Parliament are detailed in the next section. We have proposed a total of sixteen practical bills that could be delivered if a Solidarity MSP were to be elected in each of Scotland's eight regions.

16 Bills For A Better Scotland

1) SCRAPPING THE COUNCIL TAX

Paying for local services and putting money back into families and the community

The Council Tax represents an intolerable financial burden on hundreds of thousands of people in Scotland.

It represents only approximately 1/5th of local authority budgets, yet because it is the only money that local councils can raise independently it means that every time New Labour cuts a council budget by 1% in real terms, our council tax has to go up 5% just to meet existing expenditure.

The result is that families, low paid workers and pensioners students are struggling to meet council tax bills that are often in excess of £100 per month (*average band D bill in Scotland for 2006/2007 was £1129 per year*).

Meanwhile, at the same time as the burden of financing local services has increasingly shifted from big business and the well-off to people on average incomes, local councils have consistently made cutbacks in often vital local services. The result is that we are now paying more for less in return.

The Council Tax is universally hated in our society, with only the Tories and New Labour continuing to support it. **But, despite the Lib-Dems, Greens and SNP all saying that they favour its abolition, in February 2006, when Tommy Sheridan raised a bill in the Scottish Parliament to abolish the Council Tax, each of these parties voted against or abstained.**

Solidarity has a solid, worked out proposal to replace the Council Tax with a Scottish Service Tax. Enlisting the expertise of some of Scotland's most respected economists and academics, our Service Tax would:

- **exempt all individuals with an income below £10,000**
- **leave 77% of Scottish households better off**
- **raise at least £300 million more annually for the provision of local services**

How would it work?

A Scottish Service Tax works by getting rid of the hated Council Tax and replacing it with a simple and straightforward system based on the ability to pay. It would be an individual tax deducted from income at source through the existing tax system and

distributed to Scotland's councils on the basis of an agreed formula, whether you lived in Kirkwall or Kelvinside, it would be based on your income not the notional value or size of your house.

No-one would pay any Scottish Service Tax on the first £10,000 of their annual income, and thereafter people would pay a percentage of their taxable income in rising bands.

From £10-30,000 per annum 4.5% of income would be paid, from £30 – 50,000 15%, £50—90,000 18%, with the very richest in our society paying an extra 20% in tax on every pound they earn after the first £90,000.

A household with two earning the average wage of £19,000 would pay £40 each. Nothing on their first £10,000 and 4.5% on the other £9,000. That is £810 between them compared to an average council tax bill of £1,129. A saving of £319.

Detailed statistical analysis on the Scottish Service Tax proposal has been done by Professor Mike Danson and Geoff Whittam of Paisley University. 77% of Scottish Households would be better off than they are under the current system, many substantially so. Around 7% would face roughly the same level of liability while only the wealthiest 16% in Scotland would pay more.

Tommy Sheridan has been the only MSP to introduce a parliamentary Bill to abolish the Council Tax and replace it with a progressive income-based alternative.

Solidarity pledges to reintroduce the bill in the new Parliament. As a socialist party we want to use what powers the Scottish parliament has to increase the disposable income of the majority of Scots.

A vote for Solidarity is a vote to scrap the Council Tax.

2) REDUCING CLASS SIZES

Giving Our Young People The Best Start In Life

A report on education across the European Union showed that Scottish Primary School sizes were among the highest in Europe, with an average of 24 pupils to every class compared to a European average of 19.

No comparable figures exist for secondary schools but teachers, pupils and parents are often well aware of the difficulties of giving each of our young people the individual attention they need and deserve to flourish at school in over-crowded classes.

It is no co-incidence that the well heeled private education sector boasts of smaller class sizes in their glossy brochures to upper middle class parents who can afford to buy a better education for their children. There are few better established educational facts than the no-brainer that children – particularly younger children – tend to do better in smaller classes.

The EIS, Scotland's biggest teaching union, says in a briefing paper to MSP's:

“attainment correlates with student teacher ratios, a rough surrogate for class size; the worse the ratio the lower level of attainment...Large class sizes are not merely associated with lower attainment, they impact negatively on pupil behaviour, on pupil motivation, on pupil self image...”

The same report quotes a London University study

“...the message is clear: an association was found between class sizes and pupils' attainment on standardised tests. Test scores for literacy decreased as class size increased...low achievers show the largest effects from being taught in small classes.”

The lesson, the educational experts tell us, is simple and straightforward: employ more teachers and reduce class sizes and every single school pupil will potentially benefit.

Does anyone remember “Education, Education, Education”? 10 years after Blair was elected on this mantra we have tuition fees and student loans discouraging young people from going to university, the scandal of faith based schools in England promoting creationism as science, and class sizes that are a disgrace.

As part of the “Partnership” agreement of 2003 New Labour and the Lib-Dems agreed to bring down class sizes in Scotland – yet as with much of the rhetoric of these cynical parties, words have not been translated into action.

Solidarity pledges to introduce to the Scottish Parliament a class size reduction Bill, setting clear targets for local authorities to reduce primary class sizes to the European average within the lifetime of a Parliament, with pro-rata reductions in teacher-pupil ratios in our Secondary schools. This Bill will finance the employment and training of the additional teachers necessary through cuts in bureaucratic management, over-testing and meaningless league tables, and through the abolition of charitable tax relief for private schools.

As socialists we believe that every child, regardless of background, parent's income, special need or academic inclination deserves a first rate and fully comprehensive primary and secondary education.

Across all the range and levels of ability and inclination we are currently failing many tens of thousands who pass through the education system. We believe in world-class education for all – free at the point of need and paid for through general taxation.

A vote for Solidarity is a vote to reduce class sizes and increase educational attainment in Scotland.

3) FREE SCHOOL MEALS

Tackling Poverty, Diet, Ill-health And Stigma

Although there have recently been some signs of slow and marginal improvement, Scotland is still the sick man of Europe with high rates of alcohol abuse, lung cancer and coronary and other dietary related diseases.

More children are being clinically diagnosed as obese than ever before, yet the Executive's response to this crisis remains politically anaemic – it is about “education” and “choice”.

It was revealed recently that the Executive's high profile healthy eating hotline had hardly any calls. This is scarcely surprising since most folk don't require to be patronised by government and know full well that oily fish and fresh fruit & veg are better for them than a pie supper.

Diet, however, is not merely informed by knowledge in the abstract but by issues such as culture, poverty, affordability, accessibility and acquired taste.

That is why dozens of prominent medical and nutritional experts, health and anti-poverty groups and churches previously backed the first attempt by Tommy Sheridan in 2001/02 to introduce universal and nutritious school meals for all state school pupils.

Unfortunately, the New Labour/Lib-Dem Executive have been happy to swing on Jamie Oliver's coat-tails while once again demonstrating the prime characteristic of their unimaginative managerialist regime – consisting of a thousand and one action “plans” but no real action. Despite support from groups such as One Plus, Child Poverty Action, Poverty Alliance, the Scottish Churches Social Inclusion Network and the association of Headmasters and Deputies in Scotland, the Executive has pooh-poohed the idea of such radical action to improve the health and eating habits of youngsters at such a critical stage in their development

That is why Solidarity pledges to re-introduce a Free School Meals (health and nutrition) Scotland Bill in the next Parliament.

Currently, only about half of children in Scotland take a school meal, with only about a third of those entitled to a free school meal actually taking them. Experts estimate around 100, 000 children living in poverty in Scotland do not get a school meal either because the rigid benefit entitlement excludes them or because, although they are entitled they do not take the meals because of attached stigma.

Universal free school meals with built in high nutritional and health standards would be:

- **an anti-stigma initiative – everyone is entitled so no one is perceived as being “poorer” than anyone else.**
- **an anti-poverty measure – the most recent Joseph Rowntree report concluded that, after 10 years of new Labour at Westminster and 8 in**

Holyrood, 1 in 4 children in Scotland still lives in poverty. A free healthy meal delivered universally through the education system would help alleviate some of the symptoms and stresses of that poverty.

- **a pro-health measure – by ensuring children are exposed to a wide variety of well-prepared and interesting healthy eating choices from an early age we can actively improve health and reduce rates of obesity.**
- **a pro-education measure – studies have shown properly fed children with a well-balanced are more likely to be alert, have better concentration and retention and are therefore capable of getting more from school.**

While no one, least of all Solidarity, pretends that such a bill would answer all of Scotland's health problems, we do believe it would be a solid start. Nations, such as Finland, who adopted such programmes in the Seventies have seen huge public health benefits and educational benefits over a generation.

Providing free school meals for all would cost an estimated £180 million per year, equivalent to around one third of the Scottish Executive's average annual under-spend. In other words, the money exists to implement this measure now. It would surely replace itself many times over in the years to come in the form of reduced costs to the NHS through lower levels of dietary related disease. All of the international evidence indicates this to be the case.

**A vote for Solidarity is a vote for pragmatic and realisable measures to improve all of our children's health, diet and education.
A vote for Solidarity is a vote for free, healthy school meals for all primary and secondary school pupils.**

X On May 3rd—Look Left Vote Left Vote Solidarity

4) A CARERS ALLOWANCE

All of us need care at some point in our lives and frequently that care is provided for by our families. Carers provide their services free out of familial love and compassion. Carers can be male or female, young or old. They can be care givers for a short period of time or it can be a lifetimes' task. Regardless, we should recognise and support the vital and necessary role they play in society.

There is a need:

- **to change political attitudes from the language of patronising rhetoric to positive measures and general action on behalf of carers.**
- **for carers to be fully incorporated in decision making processes that directly affect them or their charges.**
- **to assert that this participation be legally binding.**
- **for younger carers to be offered the opportunity of 'distance learning' and Open University courses free of charge, including all necessary equipment and course materials. This practice would not just be of educational benefit, but would help reduce the 'isolation' of the carer from society at large and help prevent episodes of mental breakdown.**
- **For existing legal benefits to be properly distributed throughout Scotland and all local authorities to be adequately funded to ensure this. In addition, central government must desist from introducing counter productive legislation that takes away previously gained benefits to carers.**
- **Solidarity wants to make sure carers receive a proper allowance to help them in the difficult and unpaid work they do and to show that society as a whole appreciates their work.**

At the present time there are estimated to be some 480,000 unpaid carers. 115,000 of those give care for over 50 hours per week. These carers save the NHS a massive £5.3 billion, more than half the entire budget of NHS Scotland.

There are at least 17,000 young people in Scotland with caring responsibilities. As a result of the care that they give, around 50% miss some of their schooling during their teenage years, while 25% leave school with no qualifications. 33% self harm due to the stress they are under and over 50% experience sleep problems.

Solidarity will invest at least £10 million to strengthen support services to allow young people to be young people first and carers second.

Many carers are financially disadvantaged as a result of their caring responsibilities. Carers' income is markedly less than those of equivalent non carers in society. Research has shown that 20% of carers have cut back on their food at some point while caring. While 33% face problems paying basic utility bills, 58% of those with

caring responsibilities have left work to care. Carers also face difficulties in re-entering the job market. 80% worry about trying to get a job stating lack of skills, lack of knowledge of new technology and lack of confidence as barriers to gaining a job.

When challenged about a carers allowance the Scottish Executive have stated that they have drawn the issue to the attention of UK Minister and that they have maintained contact at official level.

Once again the Scottish Executive uses the limits of the Scottish parliament to shrug its shoulders of responsibility. We cannot continue to abuse the love and compassion shown by carers in our society. While benefits legislation is reserved to Westminster, the Scottish Parliament can, under section 12 of the Scotland Act, Social Work legislation section, implement such an allowance. The Scottish Parliament can legislate for a carers allowance. Solidarity is determined to make this a reality in the next Parliament.

Solidarity will introduce a bill to give a non means tested carers allowance to all carers. This bill will also exempt carers from being charged for services to support them in their caring responsibilities including respite breaks from caring, while concessionary travel fares will be extended to all carers.

A vote for Solidarity is a vote to recognise and support the work of the thousands of carers up and down the country caring for their loved ones.

5) HANDS OFF OUR WATER

Abolishing Domestic Water Charges And Keeping Scottish Water Out Of Private Hands

During the battle to keep Scottish water public in the early nineties, Tommy Sheridan said on the television news “why should someone make a profit from something that falls from the skies for free?”

Of course, he was not disputing that pipes, treatment plants and so on have to be paid for. What he and the Scottish people were then rejecting was the Tory nonsense that some City fat cat should make a killing every time you have a shower or take a glass of water.

Now the Lib-Dems have raised the prospect of the ‘mutualisation’ of Scottish Water, which is nothing less than a fancy back door way of trying to privatise one of Scotland’s most prized natural resources

Solidarity pledges to introduce a bill in the next Parliament that puts Scottish Water firmly under the control of the people, entrenches public ownership, and that abolishes domestic water charges.

On a world scale, the planet's water resource is finite and is in crisis. Modern free market society is depleting, diverting and polluting the planet's fresh water resource. There is an increased demand for water for a variety of reasons including continuing population growth, urbanisation, industrialisation and intensification of agriculture.

The predominant attitude amongst capitalist countries and institutions such as the US, the EU, the International Monetary Fund and the WTO is to address the problems with water-by-market mechanisms, or in other words to see water as a marketable resource.

The right to water is a fundamental human right and must not be up for sale.

Due to the effects of New Labour's economic policies, there is at present a general erosion of the public sector ethos of common ownership across key sections of Scottish public life. In the water industry this can be seen in the gradual acceptance of the commodification of water and in the private ownership of Scottish Water Solutions.

Over the past eight years there has been a relentless downsizing and outsourcing of the skills base within the water industry. This subsequent loss of expertise results in Scottish Water becoming increasingly reliant on private companies. Solidarity wants to invest in Scottish Water to retrain, recruit and retain staff in the industry reducing the reliance on and subsequent charges to the private sector.

Scottish Water also needs a large and continuous investment to upgrade and maintain the water system and to invest in good water management from source to supply and disposal including river basin management, new pipes and sewage disposal plants.

The business sector in Scotland uses large amounts of water and yet pays comparatively low charges. By contrast, domestic users pay large charges for small water usage. This imbalance cannot continue. Solidarity wants to increase water charges for business and industry users while abolishing charges for domestic customers.

Solidarity's bill in the next Parliament will:

- **place Scottish Water under the control of the people of Scotland. Scottish Water will remain a national and publicly owned strategic company.**
- **write off historic debts to give it a level playing field with the English private utilities whose debts were written off by Thatcher.**
- **give increased powers of competence to borrow and invest at competitive market rates.**
- **ensure local water assets will be controlled through local committees consisting of users, community and employee representatives.**
- **ensure Scottish Water will operate as a public service prioritising social**

and environmental efficiency.

- **take Scottish Water Solutions, which is currently 49% privately owned and who build and operate much of the new investment in the Scottish Water Industry back into public control.**
- **abolish domestic water charges – the cost of this is just over £600 million per year and it would be paid for by the abolition of Scottish Enterprise (see elsewhere in this manifesto) and increased water charges and conditions of carriage on businesses with turnover in excess of £500,000.**

A vote for Solidarity is a vote for the abolition of domestic water charges. It is a vote to keep Scottish Water firmly in the hands of the Scottish people.

6) HOMES FOR SCOTLAND

Providing Quality Affordable Homes For All

Had you just arrived in Scotland and switched on the television to that inane diet of banality which is daytime TV, you could be forgiven for thinking that the Tory and New Labour vision of the property owning democracy had arrived, and that ordinary folk had nothing better to do but buy properties in France, or country cottages to do up and rent out.

It took a written question from Tommy Sheridan, Solidarity MSP, to Scotland's Housing Minister to burst that bubble, and show the true nature of Scotland's housing crisis.

In his answer, the minister confirmed that official homelessness across Scotland had risen by 38% under New Labour. In East Ayrshire, East Renfrewshire and Fife homelessness had nearly doubled, while North Lanarkshire and the Highlands had seen a doubling and trebling. Nearly 40, 000 households in Scotland are households registered as homeless.

There are several key areas of national social need in relation to housing that are now becoming particularly acute. The general nature of the housing problem is exacerbated in areas where spiraling house prices, an increasing lack of public sector rented accommodation and high rents in the private sector combine. Such areas in Scotland are becoming more and more common. This is broadly the picture that now faces a large minority, if not an outright majority, of the population.

Official homelessness tells only half the story. Many low to medium income workers, people on benefits and young people, are trapped in unsuitable and insecure private rented accommodation. They have little or no prospect of achieving housing stability either through buying or renting.

Those “lucky” enough to have their feet on the so-called property ladder are mired in high levels of mortgage debt with disposable incomes extremely vulnerable to upward fluctuations in interest rates.

It is now common for banks and building societies to offer mortgages at 4-6 times an individual’s annual salary, because house prices are so artificially high due to a restricted market. This is compounded by the paucity of affordable public or social housing, changing work life patterns and a buy-to-rent epidemic (itself a consequence of pension uncertainty, where property is seen as the best ‘investment’ for retirement).

Incredibly, against this background of rising housing debt and inequality, the priority of the last Labour/Lib-Dem Scottish Executive has been to try to bring affordable council housing to an end in Scotland. Compliant councils, told that “there is no alternative”, have sought to sell-off their council stock to private housing associations and abrogate their historic responsibility to provide housing to rent for those who need it. The carrot held out to these councils has been that if they persuade tenants to vote for stock transfer then the council’s historic housing debt would be cancelled and written off.

Increasing numbers of tenants (and some councils) have seen through such undemocratic chicanery. Within the space of about a year tenants in four councils, one after the other – Edinburgh, Stirling, Renfrewshire and Highlands - voted to reject stock transfer and remain council tenants. In Edinburgh this resulted in the council coming down hard on their tenants with announcements that there would be no money made available to improve or carry out maintenance on existing council housing stock.

Solidarity will introduce a bill to the next Scottish Parliament to cancel all outstanding historic housing debt owed by councils in Scotland. We would place a statutory requirement on councils to use the hundreds of millions of pounds released to build quality affordable homes for rent according to defined social need in their area.

At the same time we will campaign for legislation which would see a democratic mechanism created allowing Housing Association tenants to return to local authority control with a majority vote.

Further, we will end the right to buy on all new build public sector housing and replace it with a right to live rent free after 25 years tenancy. This will ensure that not only this generation, but future generations, have affordable renting as a realistic housing option.

Solidarity support Shelter’s demand for new homes for rent to be built immediately. We will call for a minimum of 30,000 new local authority homes in Scotland within the next three years.

**A vote for Solidarity is vote for homes for Scotland.
It is a vote to end the ideological assault on council
housing from New Labour and to build tens of thousands
of new quality affordable homes for rent.**

7) DRUG TREATMENT AND REHABILITATION

Helping Drug Misusers And Their Families Make A New Start

Solidarity recognises that there is a big difference between recreational non-problematic drug use – both legal and illegal - by many hundreds of thousands of people in Scotland, and problematic drug misuse and addiction – again both legal and illegal – which blights so many lives. In both cases, we see the dire effects of a failed prohibition ‘Just Say No’ approach to drug misuse in society. Solidarity believes that drug misuse is a social, not criminal, problem and therefore requires to be treated as such.

No one doubts that drug misuse affects all of society, from users and their families to the wider community and society as a whole. The misuse of drugs can adversely affect the ability of parents to attend to the needs of their children, while the children of drug misusing parents make up a substantial proportion of the children coming to the attention of the child protection authorities for abuse or neglect. Children of drug misusing parents may also experience behavioural or psychiatric problems and may themselves engage in drug misuse. The effects of drug addiction are a massive strain on the health and social services sector.

Crime in the community is also a major effect of drug misuse. The majority of housebreakings in Scotland are carried out by those suffering addiction to hard drugs such as heroin, while a recent House of Lords report stated that the cost of heroin to the UK economy was approximately £30 billion. Research undertaken by the National Treatment Outcome Research Study showed that, for every £1 spent on proper treatment and rehabilitation services for drug misusers, £9.50 is saved on criminal justice and other public expenditure.

Tackling drug abuse is currently seen primarily as a justice issue while the social costs to all continue to mount. There are gaps in service provision and this is compounded by differing levels of service provision across the country. Drug misusers and their families deserve help to address their problem and break the cycle of addiction. Our communities deserve the right to be free of the criminal heroin and crack dealing gangs who thrive on prohibition.

Solidarity will introduce a drug treatment and rehabilitation bill to begin to seriously address these problems.

What it will do and the difference it will make

Our Drug Treatment bill will provide an individual holistic care plan for all users within seven days of them requesting such assistance. The care plan would include support and treatment for them and their relatives, while the Bill would also allow for a percentage of the monies seized under the Proceeds of Crime Act (2002) to be used to pay towards the care plan.

The Bill would help the drug user by offering an appropriate drug treatment programme, including physical and mental health care, employability, family support, welfare, benefits and housing support. This would ensure that a full range of treatment and rehabilitation services would be available throughout the country, ensuring that users could get help no matter where they lived. Rehabilitation would be tailored to the clients needs and could encompass residential rehabilitation or could be community based rehabilitation. This would take the client from their present state of drug use to being able to lead an independent life. These measures would ultimately reduce the stress on the health and social care services.

As treatment would be based on clinical need, this may include prescribing clinical heroin under medical supervision. This would allow those for whom other substitute prescribing treatments have failed to at least be stabilised on a clean safe supply of heroin while also receiving other support. While this helps the users to stabilise, it also helps communities by cutting off a customer from a dealer and breaking that link with the criminal fraternity. Funding will also be available to support abstinence based approaches such as those promoted by Calton Athletic Drug Recovery Group.

Once users stop using drugs their need to steal to feed their habit is reduced. The effects of this on communities would be massive in terms of the reduction of drugs based crime.

We understand that these problems would not disappear over night and that drug dependency is a complex issue. But we believe that by offering a range of treatment for drug misusers and their families and by helping individuals to take back control of their lives, we can take our communities back. The task is large but not impossible and our drug treatment bill is the start.

A vote for Solidarity is a vote to give drug users and their families the help they need to take back control of their lives.

A vote for Solidarity is a vote to get rid of the scourge of drug related crime in our communities.

8) BAN AIR GUNS

Keeping Our Communities Safe

All of us have a vested interest in safer communities. We seek maximum peace of mind for our children and the wider community. Improving society as a whole requires major and radical surgery to tackle inequality and the poverty it spawns. However small step changes can be made quickly to make our streets safer. One such step change is the banning of all air rifles, pistols and pellet guns. They are a constant source of vandalism, injury and even death in the wrong hands.

The whole of Scotland was appalled by the tragic death of two year old Andrew Morton from Easterhouse in March 2005. He was killed by a pellet fired from an air rifle. Currently possession of such air rifles or air pistols is not illegal. We think that is unacceptable. The message that Solidarity is sending out is that air guns are lethal weapons and should be banned except for exceptional purposes in registered gun clubs or by pest control officers. The circulation and use of such lethal weapons in our communities must be radically reduced and eventually eradicated. If we can do this it would represent a small step towards safer communities.

Solidarity will ban the sale and use of all air rifles, pistols and pellet guns except for use in a registered gun club or by a registered Local Authority pest control officer. This would mean that anyone owning a gun except for use in a gun club or for legitimate local authority pest control purposes would be committing a criminal offence and that all such weapons would be kept in registered gun clubs under secure storage and in designated secure storage areas in Local Authorities.

There is no need for these guns in our housing estates and 82% of Scots agree with us.

While it is an offence to indiscriminately and recklessly fire an airgun from private premises, it is not an offence to own one. This cannot make sense. If we do not want the young men in our housing estates running around with knives why would we allow them do so with airguns?

In 2005-06, air guns were used in 79% of offences of vandalism, 63% of offences of reckless conduct with firearms, 57% of offences of minor assault, 75% of offences of serious assault and 8% of offences of robbery. It is our housing estates and our communities where these incidents are taking place. Solidarity wants to see our housing estates and communities safe places for people to bring up their families in peace. Places where they feel safe and where our young men do not need to go armed.

The police estimate that there are around 500,000 air guns in Scotland and while the vast majority of those will be owned and used by responsible adults we have to ask what for? What need can there be for an air gun in a housing estate?

While we accept that many of those guns are used by responsible owners, the use of airguns remains a serious issue in Scotland. Figures show that in 1999/00 there were 555 offences involving air guns, in 2005/06 this figure was 594. Injuries from 1999 to the present day area are a massive 1,154 including 3 fatalities. Offences

involving airguns is increasing. Air guns accounted for 58% of all offences involving firearms in 2005-06, compared to 43% in 2004-05.

It is time to say enough is enough and to ban airguns except in certain circumstances. In practice this would mean that air guns would only be kept in Registered Gun Club premises or designated Local Authority offices and could only be legally used by Gun club members in the confines of the Club or by designated Local Authority pest control officers.

This would also mean that air guns could only be legally bought and sold via Registered Firearms Dealers to Gun Clubs or Local Authorities.

Solidarity pledges to introduce a bill in the next Parliament that bans the use of airguns and pellet guns except for use in gun clubs or for legitimate pest control purposes. A vote for Solidarity is a vote to get unnecessary weapons off our streets and to make our communities safe places to live.

9) BRINGING SCOTLAND'S RAILWAYS BACK INTO PUBLIC OWNERSHIP

Those slightly older amongst us will remember the sick-making propaganda of the Thatcher Tory government as it embarked on an unprecedented wave of privatisation back in the Eighties; selling off valuable public assets at knock down prices to their friends in the City of London.

Publicly owned industries were “flabby and unfit”. They told us that they needed the “whip-hand” of the market to make them more efficient. Twenty years on and a faceless minority of big business corporate shareholders rake in multi-million pound profits annually, with little or no evidence of any real improvement in public service. If anything, there have been increased worries over safety and service provision.

One of the most striking examples of the folly of privatisation has been the railways. Railways everywhere have always required a subsidy from national government in order to run. France has one of the world's most efficient rail networks and it is publicly owned and subsidized. Big thinking governments understand that an efficient rail network is a national asset for all sorts of economic, social and environmental reasons.

Our privatised railways never seem to have benefited from the market's “whip hand” however. The private railway companies receive more from the taxpayer now than they ever received when the rail networks were publicly owned, yet where has been the dramatic improvement in service? The answer lies in the fact that we as the taxpayer are directly feathering the nests of the bosses of the rail networks with

millions of pounds in unearned “profits”.

In Scotland, on 31st March 1997, just over a month before the General Election that saw Tony Blair elected to power, Scotrail became the last of the rail franchises to be privatised. Public subsidy was then paid to the private train operators who had made the successful bid. New Labour had pledged in the manifesto to bring the railways back into public ownership, but that was to be only one of their many broken promises.

Since then **£3.8 billion** of public money has been paid to private sector companies to run rail passenger services in Scotland. This year you, the taxpayer, will hand over £262 million alone, according to Tavish Scott, the Lib-Dem Transport Minister in a written answer to Tommy Sheridan MSP.

Solidarity does not pretend that we would spend less than that if First Scotrail were publicly owned. But the tragedy and scandal is that approximately £13 million of this money per year goes straight into the pockets of First Scotrail shareholders as their profit dividend.

If the Scottish railways were run as a public (not-for-profit) company then that extra £13-15 million would be available, year on year, to spend on expanding and modernising the rail network, lowering fares, bettering the pay and conditions of the workforce.

Over a 5 to 10 year period such year on year additional investment could see dramatic improvements in our railway services – something privatisation has signally failed to deliver.

Solidarity pledges to introduce a bill in the next Scottish Parliament that would mean Scottish rail passenger services were run by a public not-for-profit company at the first available opportunity, as the first stage to bringing all of our public transport under democratic public ownership in an independent socialist Scotland.

Such a move is backed by the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) and many other trade unionists. It is backed by some of Scotland’s leading transport experts. We believe it would have the overwhelming backing of the people of Scotland and, in particular, the many hundreds of thousands who use the service on a weekly basis.

A vote for Solidarity is a vote for a publicly owned and controlled transport system in Scotland.

It is a vote to drive the profit motive from our public services.

It is a vote for our railway services to be owned and run for the benefit of the millions, not the millionaires.

10) SCRAPPING PRESCRIPTION CHARGES

returning to the founding principles of the NHS

Aneurin Bevan, founder of the NHS, believed in the principle of health care for all, free at the point of need and paid for through general taxation. This initially held true for prescriptions for medicines; though prescription charges were introduced at a fairly modest level in the 1950's.

During the Thatcher years, the Tory war on the concept of 'free and equal healthcare for all' saw prescription charges raised time and time again, until today in Scotland many people still face a charge of £6.85 per item for the crime of being ill and needing medicine. Prescription charges clearly undermine that founding NHS principle of care when you need it, free at the point of need.

The Scottish Executive says that around 90% of prescriptions are already free and that those "who can afford to pay" should – yet many on low incomes have to pay for their medicines and people on disability living allowance and incapacity benefit have to pay

Some chronically ill people are exempt from prescription charges but others are not. We currently have a crazy system which says people with diabetes and chronic thyroid conditions are rightfully exempt from these charges while sufferers of cancer, chronic skin conditions, hepatitis, multiple sclerosis, cystic fibrosis, mental health problems and many other conditions are forced to pay.

Meanwhile, each year an estimated 75, 000 Scots go without the medicines their doctors prescribe because they cannot afford to pay nearly seven quid per item.

Yet it would only cost £46 million per annum – about a quarter of one percent of the Scottish Executive's total annual budget - to solve the problem by abolishing prescription charges altogether. Many health experts argue that sum would be easily recouped from fewer emergency and acute hospital admissions resulting from a failure to take medicine which they felt they could not afford.

The Welsh Assembly has already abolished prescription charges for Wales, to very popular acclaim. If no-one in Wales has to pay for their medicine, why do we in Scotland continue to have to pay for ours? Could it be the Blairite Executive is politically frightened that taking the relatively simple measure of scrapping prescription charges, in case the public start asking why they are having to pay for other things that should be part of a free NHS – like dental and eye care for instance?

Aneurin Bevan never proposed that the NHS should be means tested, that it should provide free treatment for some illnesses but not others, or that those on slightly better incomes should have to pay. The socialist founder of the pride of the welfare state believed in universal provision – and would no doubt turn in his grave at the antics and sophistry of his New Labour descendants.

Solidarity will introduce a bill to the next Scottish Parliament, abolishing all prescription charges in Scotland.

A vote for Solidarity is a vote for free prescriptions for all; it is a vote to return to the founding principles of the NHS.

11) RENEWABLE ENERGY

Public Ownership And Socialist Strategic Planning Is The Way Forward

Global warming is by far the most serious problem facing humanity today. The amount of solar heat, trapped in the atmosphere of our planet is highly sensitive to small but significant changes in greenhouse gas concentrations, principally carbon dioxide. Burning fossil fuel releases CO₂ and there is clear evidence that even when all other variable factors are accounted for, CO₂ levels have been rising towards dangerous levels, since about 1850 (the western world industrial revolution).

A steady rise in mean surface temperature has been accurately recorded but though this figure to some may seem insignificant, the changes are not evenly distributed. The disturbance caused by burning such huge amounts of fossil fuel and increasing the atmospheric CO₂ levels has disrupted the climate regime of our planet, inducing more frequent storms, floods and the extent of desert regions. Polar ice is melting at an unprecedented rate, which will accelerate the process because ice reflects solar energy back out into space but water does not.

In the wake of the Stern Review (published 30 Oct 2006) the threat posed by climate change has risen rapidly up the agenda of all the establishment political parties. Or so it appears from the rhetoric!

However, when these apparent converts to the cause of environmental responsibility speak of the dire consequences of uncontrolled and devastating climate change, they do so rooted in the absurd ideology that the so-called free market is the vehicle through which such an issue of huge social and environmental importance should be addressed.

The current approach is to reel-in large private power and construction companies with prospect of lucrative returns on investment. But instead of any coherent overall strategy about the right mixture and most appropriate sites for particular technologies, the conventional wisdom is tantamount to fishing. Drop the lines overboard and see which private corporations bite the worms.

Additionally, because the responsibility for transition to renewable energy has been handed to the private sector, almost all the talk is about who gets what. The focus is

almost exclusively on money, when it ought to be about protecting the environment. Research and development budgets are also profit-centred, which means, inevitably, that necessary research and development is under-funded.

The process is slow because private investment needs time to weigh the risks and benefits in financial terms. The process meets further delay as local lobbyists, with a natural scepticism about the motives of profiteers, defend their own patch and rapidly network to oppose any transition towards renewable energy in their particular backyard.

There is a better, more coherent, democratic and socially just way; a way which would meet much more widespread approval and deliver a renewable energy policy second to none.

We believe only socialist public ownership and strategic planning CAN deliver the significant switch to renewable energy in the time scale needed. We believe such a strategy could make Scotland a global leader in renewable energy generation.

- **Solidarity will introduce a bill to the Scottish Parliament setting up a publicly owned, not-for-profit, renewable energy corporation for Scotland, with general powers of competence to borrow and invest in the national and global interest. This bill would also:**
- **place a statutory duty on the Executive, councils and the new corporation for rolling ten-year strategic plans for the most efficient and universally acceptable transition to a renewable energy economy within a generation.**
- **enable and ensure that funds that are currently poured into the private pockets of the generating company fat cats would be poured instead into research and development or used to eliminate fuel poverty.**
- **ensure proper R&D and investment into a variety of renewable energy solutions, not an over concentration on land based wind farms.**
- **ensure all areas of Scotland benefit from the skilled job potential of such a huge program.**

Such radical moves would begin the welcome process of a less narrow public debate on renewable energy and potentially make Scotland a world leader in renewable energy.

Of all the issues facing humanity, climate change is not one that should be abandoned to the vagaries of the 'free-market' roulette wheel or the willingness of the wealthy minority to act in their own selfish interests.

A vote for Solidarity is a vote for a publicly owned, not for profit, renewable energy corporation. It is a vote for a

serious and urgent approach to the devastating threat of global warming.

12) A NEW DEAL FOR THE FISHING INDUSTRY Bringing Together The Environment And The Community

Most fishermen live in a situation of constant job and income insecurity, due to their complete reliance on market forces and uncertainties beyond their control. Individual fishermen are generally paid in a share system, based on the market value of the catch that the boat they work on lands. If prices fall, or demand for what they have caught is low, they will be paid less than expected. If the weather is too poor to fish, the boat's engine breaks down or fishing gear is damaged, they will receive no income at all. The companies that buy fish and shellfish from the boats and resell them in other markets try to do so at the lowest price possible to increase their own profit margins, and more unscrupulous operators may try to hold prices artificially low, or not pay fishermen for everything that has been landed.

In addition to the stress caused by their complete reliance on market forces, fishermen also worry about the impact of changing government policy and regulations. They tend to feel chronically embattled and misunderstood by the government and by the majority of the Scottish public. Many are particularly hostile to Scottish Natural Heritage, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and other conservation groups which tend to see nature as something separate from humans and which must be preserved from their influence. Finally, although there must be close cooperation within a fishing boat crew, boats are in constant competition with each other, a situation exacerbated by the current method of fisheries regulation by quota, which means boats race against each other to catch their quota.

The fact that fishermen do not have a stable income means that it is far more difficult to get any kind of bank loan or mortgage. The increase in the popularity of coastal areas for tourism and second homes has pushed up property prices, and the chronic shortage of council housing in rural areas means that many fishermen must rent private accommodation at high prices. The constant stress and worry means there is a high incidence of mental health and alcohol-related illnesses, and increasing centralisation may mean that services to deal with these problems are not available locally.

The Scottish Executive have recently released a flurry of fishing and marine-related policy papers. None actually deal with the problems facing fishermen on a day to day basis.

Within the UK, the government has allowed a system of free-market quota-trading to emerge in the past few years. Fishing quota is now very expensive, and studies in other countries show that it is likely that larger and larger proportions of this quota will likely become concentrated in the hands of a few fishermen or fishing companies.

The increasing public concern about eating fish that is sustainably caught is justified and well-meaning, but it is placing increasing strain upon fishermen already

operating under difficult and stressful circumstances.

Solidarity understands the material conditions that fishermen work under. We will lead the way in considering real changes to benefit the precarious working lives of fishermen, their families and those who work in related industries which allow fishermen to respond to public concerns about sustainability positively and with dignity, instead of being made to feel like pariahs.

Solidarity proposes a bill that would mean real long term and positive changes for our fishing communities and those who buy and eat the fish from Scotland's waters. Our bill would set up a Scottish Fisheries Board comprised equally of representatives of government, fishing communities, scientists and consumers. This board would have the power to

- **set minimum landing prices, and help set up buying cooperatives run by fishermen in a fair and transparent manner.**
- **offer fishermen direct financial incentives to adopt environmentally friendly working practices, including: subsidies for improved fishing gear, more fuel-efficient engines, and payment for income lost due to seasonal closures.**
- **liaise with councils to promote substantial investment in council housing in fishing areas, especially in areas under pressure from tourism.**
- **help set up adequately resourced and democratically run local organisations where fishermen could advise on government policy and collaborate with scientists operating at a small enough scale to permit genuine participation and consultation.**
- **explore setting up a system of effort-based fisheries management rather than one based on quota.**
- **if a quota-based system of management is used, to develop a non-market based system where quotas and licenses cannot be traded**

A vote for Solidarity is a vote to support our fishing communities. It is a vote for genuine democratic participation and long term sustainable fisheries.

X On May 3rd—Look Left Vote Left Vote Solidarity

13) FARMING FOR THE FUTURE

Protection For The Countryside

The way our food is currently produced is economically, socially and environmentally unsustainable. We need a method of agriculture that gives us nutritious food for our children while caring for the environment and at the heart of that is our farms.

For too long we have stood back as the multinationals, big agribusiness and the World Trade Organisation have decimated our rural communities and countryside, buying up family and tenant farms to create bigger and bigger industrial units that produce food in the interests of the big business supermarkets.

We can argue long and hard about many things in modern society, but we still need food to eat and always will. Why then do we not return the production of that food to those that know best - the small to medium sized farmers? Farms and farming are part of the lifeblood of our rural communities and stewardship of our countryside and should be treated as such.

We have all heard of the large subsidy payments that farms receive and undoubtedly big agribusiness bleeds the taxpayer dry in the name of profit. But what is the reality for small tenant and family farms? How many of us would do the long hours summer and winter? How many of us would put up with the endless paper work? How many of us would put up with the mediocre pay? Solidarity believes we should support our farmers and put farming back to what it should be – the production of quality food and the protection of the rural countryside.

Solidarity will introduce a bill that protects our tenant farmers, family farms and crofting.

We would cap the rents charged for tenant farms, introduce full grants to our young farmers at agricultural college (as with all other students – see Free University Education section elsewhere in this manifesto), as well as grants to help new entrants into farming and grants to support organic farming. We will investigate ways of releasing more land for tenant farms.

We have the situation in Scotland where vast tracts of land are owned by a tiny minority of very rich individuals, while young graduates from agricultural colleges struggle to find farms to work. While we pay ever more for our weekly groceries, there are young farmers without farms – a ludicrous situation.

A vote for Solidarity is a vote to curb the power of big agribusiness and the supermarkets. It is a vote to secure the future of small to medium scale family and tenant farming.

14) ENABLING DEMOCRACY

A Referendum On Independence For Scotland

Solidarity is a socialist party. It is a party that has no truck with failed Labour top down paternalist experiments of the past, nor the horrific totalitarian regimes which blighted the face of the Twentieth Century and called themselves 'socialist'. Solidarity is a party that believes both in individual freedom and in the power of collective action for the social benefit of all.

We are an internationalist party that stands for an independent Scotland – but not just to fly a different flag on Edinburgh castle or to promote a “tartan” version of the failed big business policies of New Labour and the SNP. We see the right of the Scottish people to manage their own affairs as a fundamental democratic and progressive demand.

In an independent socialist Scotland we could do away with the twin evils of low pay and low pensions; we could provide quality affordable housing for all those who need it; we could develop health and education services second to none; we could rid ourselves of nuclear weapons and refuse to become involved in illegal and immoral wars abroad.

Solidarity has a vision for the future. We want to see a massive extension of democracy into every sphere of Scottish life. We would like to see an independent socialist Scotland in which every citizen is empowered to be part of the social and democratic decision making process in their daily lives, in their workplaces, and in their communities – a Scotland in which our vast wealth and abundant natural resources are harnessed and democratically owned for the benefit of all, not the obscene enrichment of the few.

However, we also believe we can make a start in extending democratic participation and decision making in a meaningful sense right here; right now.

This means, in the first instance, supporting the right of the Scottish people to have a direct say in the lifetime of the next Parliament on whether Scotland should become a modern, democratic and independent nation.

The SNP, having previously committed themselves to a referendum on independence within the first hundred days of being elected as the biggest party in the Scottish Parliament, now seem to be fudging that issue. The Lib-Dems arrogantly state they will not support a referendum regardless of the election result.

Such a referendum would provide a direct mechanism to allow the people of Scotland a say on whether we want to run our own country as a full, sovereign and independent nation – a nation free of the back room bargaining, shady deals and stitch ups between parties that have become so commonplace and the scourge of our democracy.

A vote for Solidarity is a vote to guarantee an independence referendum in the lifetime of the next Parliament.

It is a vote to give the Scottish people their democratic say on whether or not Scotland should become an independent nation.

15) FREE UNIVERSITY EDUCATION FOR ALL abolition of back ended tuition fees and restoration of the student grant.

New Labour politicians are the masters of Orwellian doublespeak. “Education, Education, Education” was Tony Blair’s mantra before he came to power. “We want every child to have a world class education” ministers told us at every opportunity.

What they didn’t tell us was that by the time they’d finished this generation would be the first since the World War II to find it more difficult to go to University than their parents. Jack McConnell, Gordon Brown and Tony Blair all benefited from a University education that was free at the point of need; with proper grants – not loans – available to students. Yet these hypocrites, together with the Tories that preceded them, have seen fit to saddle those attending our universities today with loans instead of grants and back-ended fees for their tuition.

Once again, it’s back to the future. Access to university education is rapidly becoming the province only of those who can afford it. These multiple financial burdens weigh most onerously on students from low to average income backgrounds.

Before young graduates even start work or think about a mortgage they are emerging from University education (if they manage to last their course under such financial pressures!) saddled with huge debts.

The Scottish Executive’s own official statistics show that nearly 31,000 Scottish graduates have a debt of over £10,000, while 11,416 have debts of over £15,000, and nearly 2,500 have debts of over £20,000.

Undoubtedly these shocking figures would be even higher were it not for the high and increasing drop out figures of working class students unable to take the strain under New Labour’s new pay-as-you learn market orientated ideology.

New Labour and the Lib-Dems continue to perpetuate the myth that they “abolished”

tuition fees (which they introduced in the first place!). All they actually did was make the payment of the fees back-ended rather than up front, in the form of the discredited graduate endowment tax.

All of this has combined to see a significant drop in student admissions of Scottish students to Scottish Universities over the last few years.

Solidarity believes that access to quality higher education, free at the point of need, should be the right of all citizens in a civilised society. We believe that investing in the graduate education of our young and mature students provides not only a significant benefit to those individuals but huge benefits to society as a whole.

Indeed, it is a sickening lie put about by cynical New Labour spin doctors that under the old system universities were starved of cash and that students made no contribution in return for the “advantages” conferred upon them by a graduate education.

Graduates in the UK pay on average – because of their higher salaries – more than £200, 000 in additional tax compared to non-graduates.

If free university education, with grants, was affordable for Jack McConnell’s generation, at a time when a Tory government was in power, when there was massive economic recession and more than 3 million unemployed, then why is it not affordable now?

Solidarity will introduce a bill to abolish the graduate endowment tax (tuition fees) and restore a non-means tested living grant to all students undertaking University or tertiary education. The bill will also establish a commission to establish the best methods of funding free education and financing quality research at our academic institutions, from one, or a combination, of the following options:

- **Increasing corporation tax - tycoons like Sir Tom Hunter are often in the papers bemoaning the lack of quality graduate. Perhaps their companies ought to be prepared to pay for them.**
- **A Scottish Universities Research and Patent fund which can redistribute profits from research and patents at Scottish Universities back into the education system.**
- **A general power of competence for Universities to borrow and invest for research, development and teaching.**
- **Redirecting tax breaks for business back into university education**
- **General taxation**
- **Use of the Scottish parliamentary under spend**

Solidarity has a vision of Scotland as a hi-tech world leader; of a new renaissance in literature and the arts; of a new progressive Scottish Enlightenment. To achieve any or all of these things we must realise market mechanisms and the profit motive have no place in our education system and restore to this and future generations the right to a quality university education unburdened by financial struggles and debt.

The profile of those studying at Scotland's universities and colleges, and the way they are choosing to study, has changed dramatically in recent years. Currently funding for higher education assumes that full-time study is the norm and part-time is an exception. In fact part-time students represent 39% of students in higher education and have to pay up front fees for their study. We would ensure parity of treatment for part-time students.

A vote for Solidarity is a vote for university education free at the point of need; for an end to tuition fees and student debt; for a decent living grant for all students; for the educational future of Scotland.

16) JOBS FOR SCOTLAND

Abolishing Scottish Enterprise. Funding Real And Lasting Jobs For Local Communities

Scottish Enterprise and its 12 Local Enterprise Companies are a collective of barely accountable quangos that exist to disburse public money to private companies in the name of job creation. Together they cost the taxpayer approximately £500 million pounds a year.

In 2003 an Audit Scotland report cast doubt on the operations of this quango when it revealed that over a fifth of its annual budget (£108 million) had been spent on "consultants and contractors" rather than on job creation. Since then, even pro-business media commentators have speculated on whether Scottish Enterprise even comes close to doing what it says on the tin.

It is astonishingly difficult to cut through the waffle and babble of Scottish Enterprise's own performance targets, but the Scottish Parliament Information Centre briefing 03/21 provides remarkably concise figures for the year 2001-2002 in terms of jobs created (or retained) by the Scottish Enterprise network and the additional estimated contribution to annual GDP (gross domestic product) represented by those jobs.

16,900 jobs were created or retained in that period, according to Scottish Enterprise's own statistical methods, adding £237 million to Scotland's GDP.

It sounds like a positive development, one to be welcomed – until, that is, you do the sums. 16,900 new jobs into that year's annual budget of £502 million for SE networks means that each single job created cost approximately £29,000 in public

subsidy. Further, it means the taxpayer invested £502 million that year to achieve an increase in GDP of less than half the sum invested.

Isn't capitalism and entrepreneurship meant to make things lean, profitable and efficient? That would seem to be far from the case in relation to Scottish Enterprise.

The Local Enterprise Companies are largely discredited in the communities they are supposed to serve. Local business leaders can sit on the boards of these companies and – provided they declare an interest – it is perfectly legal, though certainly immoral, for those boards to then award grants to their businesses.

Solidarity will introduce a bill in the Scottish Parliament to abolish the kickback for capitalism that is Scottish Enterprise; to save over £500 million a year and to direct funding into the creation of proper apprenticeships and long term jobs in local communities. Our bill will

- **abolish Scottish Enterprise and its related LEC's to free up £500 million annually which will be spent on abolishing domestic water charges in Scotland (see HANDS OFF OUR WATER - Abolishing Domestic Water Charges And Keeping Scottish Water Out Of Private Hands proposal elsewhere in this manifesto).**
- **ring fence the £330 million pounds a year extra revenue for councils generated by the abolition of the council tax and the introduction of the Scottish Service Tax for local authorities to create local jobs in local services.**
- **place a statutory requirement on local authorities to use part of that funding to set up, in conjunction with local colleges and businesses, properly paid and accredited apprenticeship schemes in a wide variety of trades and occupations – including plumbing, joinery, construction, electrics, electronics, IT and others.**
- **allow local authorities to disburse grants to local not-for-profit businesses and Social Enterprises, but with no-one receiving a grant entitled to sit on the body disbursing it.**

We believe that by directly investing in local authority jobs that provide much needed public services; by increasing the numbers of young people undertaking a proper trade in our local communities; by supporting not-for-profit businesses and the Social Economy, by pump-priming the economy through a substantial increase in monthly disposable income for those most likely to spend it through scrapping the council tax and domestic water charges, we can create many more genuine and lasting jobs than Scottish Enterprise - an undemocratic quango committed to the interests of big business - ever could.

A vote for Solidarity is a vote to put Scottish Enterprise and the Local Enterprise Companies on a real bonfire of the quangos; it is a vote for direct investment in local jobs, services, apprenticeships for our young people and genuine innovation at a local level.

Your Solidarity Candidates

Glasgow

West of Scotland

South of Scotland

Central Scotland

Lothians

Mid Scotland and Fife

North East Scotland

Highlands & Islands

Tommy Sheridan

Jim Halfpenny

Rosemary Byrne

Lynn Sheridan

Pat Smith

Kate Stewart

Jim Malone

Anne MacLeod

X On May 3rd—Look Left Vote Left Vote Solidarity

Solidarity Can Deliver

Tommy Sheridan and Rosemary Byrne have proved that they can deliver policy change in Scotland. Tommy successfully raised a bill that abolished warrant sales and poindings; Rosemary managed to secure a change in the law opening up allowances for grandparents and others who adopt the children of family members. Tommy's bills on Free School Meals and Scrapping Council Tax have led to concessions and to other parties adopting the policies.

Our candidates across Scotland are experienced campaigners with track records of delivering on their actions. We are the only credible force for change in Scottish politics.

The policies in this document represent only part of what Solidarity will campaign for, in and outside of the Scottish Parliament. A Solidarity MSP in every region would allow us to introduce all sixteen of these bills, but we hope that the Scottish people will return more Solidarity MSPs and councillors across the country, allowing us to take the fight for a fairer, better Scotland even further.

Some issues and campaigns are reserved to Westminster but we will use the parliament to highlight these issues as well as campaign with the wider movement for change in Scotland, the UK and abroad.

Over and above the 16 bills listed here we will campaign for a nuclear free Scotland; for trade union rights; for an increase in NHS dentistry provision; for transport reform; a fair deal for rural and island communities; an end to privatisation and PFIs and a wide range of reforms and ideas.

The full details of our policies and aspirations can be found at www.solidarityscotland.org

A vote for Solidarity is a vote for a fairer, better Scotland.





“We want to build a better Scotland, free from poverty and low pay, where our resources are publicly owned and controlled, and where fat cat privatisation is a thing of the past. A Scotland free from nuclear weapons in a world without war, a Scotland where immigrants and asylum seekers are welcomed, a Scotland of Peace, a Scotland of solidarity, an independent socialist Scotland.”

TOMMY SHERIDAN
www.solidarityscotland.org