



Freedom of Information

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Reason to Vote SNP in General Election 2015. Over the past week or so we have seen the 3 main Westminster Parties in a panic, running around like headless chickens, except when it comes to Anti-SNP sentiment that is. The rise in the SNP has taken everyone by surprise, none more so than the Better Together friends of Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrats. All 3 believed the Indy-ref would be the end of Scotland making a noise and demanding recognition either as a separate country or as a democratic player in Westminster, they couldn't have been more wrong. Since September SNP membership has risen from around 25,000 to over 110,000 and is rising every day, and it is not just the media portrayed Yes voters who have flocked to join either. Thousands of people who voted No in the Independence Referendum have also joined, why?, it's easy really, The Smith Commission never recommended the Powers that were promised and Westminster has diluted those recommendations even further, but more so, they have joined because they know that the SNP are the only Party that will fight tooth and nail for Scotland.

Now, the Westminster 3 will have you believe that the SNP are not interested in making it work at Westminster, in their opinion the SNP are going to London with the sole purpose of breaking up the Union. All three are claiming that a vote for the SNP in GE15 is a vote for indyref2, Labour Scotland branch have even went to the effort of making a campaign video claiming just that. They even use sections of the Mhairi Black interview that was debunked in last week's (issue 14) bulletin. This could not be further from the truth, the SNP are not using GE15 as a stepping stone, they are fighting for a Stronger Voice for Scotland and an end to the savage austerity measures of the LibCon coalition, measures that will be continued throughout the next term by all 3 Westminster Parties.

As we all know Labour are the worst of culprits, but we didn't realise how bad they would get until this week. Over the weekend it has came to light that Anas Sawar has been sending out duplicate letters (see <http://tinyurl.com/mbdu5ja>) claiming to be a neighbour. The opening paragraph goes like this *"I am one of your neighbours in 'street name'. I don't normally get involved in politics, but who we have fighting for us as our Member of Parliament will make a big difference to people living in Glasgow"* It is also been reported that Sawars father has been knocking the doors of Asian families, warning them not to vote out his son. Jim Murphy has been at too, he has been sending out letters to pensioner households (see issue 14) (<http://tinyurl.com/ndfhsjr>). Jims letter ends *"I don't want to see the pensions put at risk and, unlike the SNP, will never vote to scrap the UK pension in the House of Commons. I don't want the SNP to retire the UK pension in Scotland. Now that the SNP have committed to scrapping the UK pension and Tories are determined to continue with their unfair austerity, the only way to protect pensioners in Scotland is to vote Labour"*. This is to be backed up by the new Leaflet going to all homes (supposedly) stating that *"we have 23hrs 59min to stop a 2nd referendum"*. **Lie after Lie after Lie with a bit of scare thrown in.** But that's not all we have a Labour Activist group posting letters through doors, letters (<http://tinyurl.com/ozla5xw>) with the SNP letterhead claiming to be for new members, one paragraph reads *"It is clear that the SNP will be sending its greatest number of MPs to Westminster ever. But, to make a real difference we need to work with others. David Cameron, despite the rhetoric in the press, supported the referendum, and in many ways is the party closest to our views of prosperity for all. You will know that beyond the rhetoric the SNP and the Tories have collaborated in the past.* Outrageous and foolish propaganda by a desperate party who will stop at nothing to maintain its hold over Scotland.

Now that I have detailed the underhanded lying scaremongers the Westminster 3, especially Labour Scotland branch, I will try and detail why the SNP is the right choice for Scotland. I will not mention referendums because we all know this election is not about that, I will not mention pensions because we all know they are safe, I will look at policy. I don't think for one second that anyone can look rationally at the record of the SNP as a minority then a majority Scottish Government and realistically claim they have not done a good job. We have better public services, better education and better national healthcare in Scotland all because of the Scottish Government. Yes, they have had to make some tough decisions that not all of us have agreed with, but we must remember we can't borrow and must stay within a budget handed out to us from London. And, when London cuts our budget in Scotland, sometimes cuts must be made in Scotland of that there is no escape.

The SNP have already given Scotland, Free prescriptions, free education, free personal care, best NHS in UK, 9600 more NHS staff, increased childcare, council tax freeze (5yr), no bridge tolls, free hospital parking, saved local A&Es from closure, 1000 more police officers, reduction in crime, free school meals for P1-3 kids, a commitment to provide 25000 modern apprenticeships per year, negated the bedroom tax, building 35% more homes (per 1000 people) than England and 49% higher than Wales, a Fracking planning moratorium and more. Lord Foulkes claimed *"the SNP are on a dangerous tack at the moment, what they are trying to do is build up a situation where services are manifestly better than south of the border in a number of areas"* asked if that was a bad thing, he replied *"No, but they are doing it deliberately"*.

Voting SNP on Thursday will give Scotland a stronger voice, fight the life threatening austerity programme of the Westminster 3, fight child benefit, tax credit and disability cuts, push for increase in carers allowance to match min wage, protect NHS from cuts and privatisation, push for greater NHS spending, higher pensions, to stop the pension age rising, protect the pensioners fuel allowance and more (see issue 13)

Don't believe the lies of the Westminster parties, a vote for the SNP is not a vote for the Tories or Labour, **a vote for the SNP is a vote for Scotland.** Currently Scotland provides a net **35** anti-Tory MPs (47 Labour and SNP minus 12 Tory and Lib Dem). Even were the SNP to pull off a clean sweep, wiping Labour out totally, that number would rise to **59** anti-Tory MPs. That's **24 extra anti-Tory votes** in the Commons compared to the Labour landslide of 2010. **A vote for the SNP is a vote for anti-austerity** for a change in the same old UK politics that just don't work, **a vote for the SNP is a vote for Progress not just in Scotland but for the entire UK.**

Remember, if you read it or hear it research it, you will be surprised at the truth.

10 Reasons NOT to Vote Labour.

- 1. 1000 more Nurses in Scotland funded by UK tax on properties worth over £2m.** This is Jim Murphy's flagship policy, the Mansion Tax would NOT directly prop up Health spending North of the Border as the newspapers claim. New Nurses in Scotland would not be funded by any specific tax. What is happening here is politics, pure and simple, a headline fabricated by Murphy for 3 reasons. **First**, to suggest that Scotland benefits directly from the Union. **Second**, it highlights Labours pledges on the NHS as well as a Mansion Tax. **Third**, it engineers a confected split with Ed Miliband, which makes it look like Labour in Scotland is no longer taking orders from London. Press outlets like the Daily Record eat this up as the record would follow Labour into hell and right wing outlets such as the Times, the Telegraph oblige because it suits their agendas to bash Ed Miliband and Scottish Nationalism.
- 2. Freeze Energy Bills so Prices can Fall but not Rise. Reform of our broken Energy Market.** Actually consumers are being denied energy price cuts as of much as £130 per year because of Ed Miliband's price freeze proposal. Industry analysts are now telling us that the energy companies are failing to pass on the price drop in the wholesale prices because they're afraid they'll not be able to cover their costs if the prices rise again under a Labour Government. Now the Labour Party say they didn't mean to talk about a freeze at all, the idea was to have a cap. So, they have somewhat abandoned this policy as they are trying to reform it.
- 3. Double Paternity Leave. We will extend leave to 4 weeks and raise pay by more than £100pw so that working Dad's can afford to take time off.** A policy that may actually be a good one, but the Libdems are proposing 6 weeks and the SNP were proposing up to a shared 9 months in the White Paper on Independence.
- 4. Fair pay with an £8 (not £8.50 Murphy claimed on leaders debate) Minimum Wage and the Living Wage. To give a Pay Rise to ½ million Scots, make work pay for ordinary families and deal with the cost of a Living Crisis.** The £8 minimum wage is the most fabricated piece of nonsense by Ed Miliband. This will not occur until 2020 and that will barely keep in line with inflation. Alan Millburn's Commission on Social Mobility recently published a report that found that **this pledge makes people worse off**. The proposed £8ph rate is not at all ambitious, it implies a slower rate of increase between 2014 and 2020, than there was between 1999 and 2014. If that trend (1999-2014) continued, the same rate of growth continued, then the national minimum wage in 2020 would be £8.23ph and not £8, so reform needed on this policy. **The SNP propose a minimum wage of £8.70ph by 2020.**
- 5. A Jobs Guarantee for our Young People. We will guarantee a job, training or an apprenticeship for Young People.** Three points/questions here. **First**, what kind of jobs are they exactly? **Second**, will subsidising employers to take on the long term unemployed give those applicants an unfair advantage over others? **Third**, will the subsidisation breach EU state and aid laws? There is also some misgivings about how this policy is actually going to be funded, we'd love to see it.
- 6. Tackle Tax Avoidance. We will close loopholes that cost taxpayers billions of pounds a year, increase transparency and toughen up penalties.** So is everyone, **even the Tories** are saying they are going to tackle Tax Avoidance, although can we believe that, we are not really sure. We think every Political Party wants to tackle Tax Avoidance.
- 7. A Triple Lock against Fracking Plans. To freeze fracking in Scotland and make sure residents always have the final say with a local referendum.** The Scottish Government (SNP) has announced a moratorium on all planning consents for all unconventional oil and gas extraction, including fracking. This has been welcomed by campaigners as a very big nail in the coffin for the fracking industry in Scotland. But, when it came to a UK wide moratorium on fracking in Parliament **Labour abstained**. Labour just cannot be trusted on the Fracking Debate.
- 8. 100,000 New Homes. To deal with SNP's housing shortfall which has seen house building at its lowest level since 1930's.** Again, this is devolved to the Scottish Parliament. However, whilst we are on this subject, *to tackle the SNPs housing shortfall*. There is a problem with housing and building in Scotland, it's not going at the rate that perhaps it should be. But, the **Scottish Government has made a £200m increase in the housing budget for 2015/16** compared to the previous year. We have seen over 1300 council houses started in the past 3 years, which is more than **twice the number in the previous 11 years combined**. There are 15500 homes completed in the year to end September 2014, 901 homes more than the year ending September 2013. To put this in a UK wide perspective this equates to a rate of 289 per 1000 people in Scotland compared to 214 per 1000 in England and 194 per 1000 in Wales. So, house building in Scotland is above and beyond (**35% higher** than England and **49% higher** than Wales) what has gone on at a UK wide level. The SNP is on track to meet its commitment of 30,000 new affordable homes in the five years to 2016.
- 9. A Ban on Exploitative Zero Hours contracts (see issue 14 U-Turn). Ensuring that, those working regular hours have a right to a regular contract.** This came just 2 weeks after the revelations that the Labour Party are employing people on Zero Hours. At least 68 Labour MPs across the UK employ staff on zero hours, nearly a ¼ of Labours Parliamentary Party and Glasgow's Labour Administration employs nearly 2000 people on zero hours contracts Hypocritical is an understatement..
- 10.** This is not a pledge, policy or misdirection from the Labour Party, this is just sheer **HYPOCRICY**. The **SDLP** stands for the reunification of Ireland, yet it's affiliated with Labour. Labour stands down in Northern Ireland to give the SDLP a free run in elections. So, the **SNP** believe in independence for Scotland, and Labour point blank refuse to work with them in the UK for that reason. **Plaid Cymru** believe in independence for Wales, Labour categorically refuses to work with them in Parliament, same as they do the SNP. However, **The SDLP want independence for Ireland**, breaking up the Union, but Labour not only work with them in the Parliament but **actively help them to win seats by not standing against them**.

The Labour Scotland Branch are in disarray, candidates are not being supported by councillors, activists are lying on the doorsteps, and members are already calling for Murphy's resignation, even Labour HQ are losing it. Miliband stating "*even if I lose this election because of it I do deal with the SNP*" only for him to announce the following day "*Labour will talk to the SNP*". Don't vote Labour.

Broken Promises, failed policies and a Helping Hand to the Tories. Why you should not vote Liberal Democrats.

- 1.(Effects Scotland) **A tax cut for millionaires** – cutting the 50p top rate of tax gave 13,000 millionaires a handout worth on average £100,000 each.
- 2.(Effects Scotland) **Halving the fuel poverty budget.** Whilst energy bills spiral and energy companies' profits soar. Around 900,000 households in Scotland, more than 1 in 3 are estimated by Energy Action Scotland to be in fuel poverty now. This means they are unable to afford adequate warmth in the home. It is estimated that there are 7 million fuel poor households in the UK. On average Scots pay 10% more on energy bills than our friends and family down south. A definition of fuel poverty is; *the need to spend more than 10% of income to pay for household fuel bills. If over 20% is required, then this is termed as being in extreme fuel poverty*
- 3.(Effects Scotland) **Increasing VAT to 20%.** Lib Dems warned before the election of a "Tory VAT Bombshell". Then he helped them introduce it. Lower income households spend a larger proportion of their incomes on taxed goods, meaning they are proportionately harder hit, on average a 2% loss of net income compared to <1% for the richest.
- 4.(Effects Scotland) **An economic policy that choked off the recovery, the slowest for 100 years.** Vince Cable **warned** before the 2010 election that "*the danger of drastic cuts in public spending right now is that it would make the recession worse and it would make the deficit worse*" But, he signed up to them and his original statement was proven correct.
5. (Effects Scotland) **The Bedroom Tax** – an unfair policy that is hitting over 400,000 disabled people. To be fair it's a Labour Policy supported by Tories and Lib Dems. The **SNP** removed the need for Scottish Households to pay the Bedroom Tax by covering it from the Scottish Block Grant/Budget meaning poorer and disabled residents don't have to worry about being evicted.
- 6.(Effects Scotland) **The 'granny tax'.** An unfair policy leaving pensioners paying more while the highest earners pay less. A age related that means millions of people are not as protected from tax as they expected to be that effects their financial planning as they approach retirement. Taking inflation into account, this will leave 4.41 million people worse off than they would have expected, by an average of £83 per year in 2013-14. Figures from HMRC
- 7.(Effects Scotland) **The introduction of the Strivers' Tax** – a raid on working age benefits and tax credits. Estimated to leave working families £1,152 worse off over the next five years. This huge cuts to tax credits will hit 7.9 million families with at least one adult earning (2013 figure). At the same time the Lib Dems and Tories handed out a £3billion tax cut to the highest earners – worth an average of £107,000 to 8,000 millionaires.
- 8.(Effects Scotland) **The Lobbying Bill that let's Cameron's chief adviser and the cigarette lobbyist Lynton Crosby off the hook.** At the same time seeking to gag cancer charities. The bill aims to tighten regulation on campaign spending during election periods. People or organisations who are not standing as candidates or political parties will have to register with the Electoral Commission if they spend a sufficiently large sum on campaigning. A Friends of the Earth spokeswoman said the charity was "bitterly disappointed" by the development. "*This is bad day for anyone wanting to protect the environment, save a hospital or oppose tuition fees*" she said.
- 9.(Effects Scotland) **Scrapping the Future Jobs Fund** – even though the Lib Dems **promised** before the election that they would keep it. Now almost one million young people are unemployed, the number of young people unemployed for more than a year is **up 142%**. The scheme to get unemployed people into work, scrapped by Lib Dems (*Danny Alexander played large role*) and Tories for being too expensive, produced a net gain for Britain, according to a government report. The fund, introduced in 2009 to get 35,000 long-term unemployed back to work was dismissed (2011) as a badly targeted failure. An impact analysis for the DWP found that society gained £7,750 per participant through wages, increased tax receipts and reduced benefit payments. Participants gained £4,000 and employers gained £6,850, costs to the exchequer were calculated to be £3,100 per job. Two years after the start of their time, former jobseekers were 16% less likely to be on benefits than non-participants, an average of 8 days, they were 27% more likely to be in unsubsidised employment. The fund reduced the amount of time young people spent on benefits and increased the amount of time they were in unsubsidised employment, the report said.
- 10.(Devolved) **Increasing rail fares up to 9% from next January.** The Lib Dem manifesto **promised** to cut them every year.
- 11.(Devolved) **Cutting 15,000 police officers** – even though the Lib Dem manifesto **promised** an extra 3,000 police officers.
- 12.(Devolved) **Scrapping the Education Maintenance Allowance.** The EMA was a lifeline for young people from deprived backgrounds who wanted to stay in education and training after the age of 16.
13. (Devolved) **Cuts to Sure Start**, with 558 fewer centres, even though Nick Clegg said "**I want all of these centres to stay open**".
- 14.(Devolved) **Trebling tuition fees.** Nick Clegg **promised** to vote against any rise in tuition fees. He didn't.
- 15.(Devolved) **£3 billion top-down NHS reorganisation**, while queues at A&E grow and over 5,000 nurses are cut.

Added to all above we have the increase in the national debt under the Tory/Lib Dem Coalition, figures from 2008-14 don't make good reading for two Parties who's austerity agendas have made 100s of 1000s children need foodbanks and seen people killing themselves or dying because of hardship by benefit sanctions and welfare reform. Debt by year is as follows; Labour, 2008-£0.53T, 2009-£0.62T, 2010 - £0.76T, now for Tories and Lib Dems, 2011-£0.91T, 2012-£1.1T, 2013-£1.19T, 2014-£1.26T and 2015-£1.36T. Austerity doesn't work but along with Labour and the Conservatives the Liberal Democrats will keep trying in the hope that one day it just might, but, ask yourself this. How many people will die and suffer as a result of failed austerity agendas? Don't vote Lib Dem

Lets help End the Evil Empire of David Cameron - Reasons not to Vote Conservative

As many of us have come to expect and accept Political Parties make promises around election time, promises that make many thousands vote for that party, but, promises that never materialise. The Conservatives are no different to most in all but one respect, most broken Tory promises cause undue hardship and even death as this last LibCon coalition has proven.

In the run up to the 2010 GE David Cameron made few big promises that swung a few votes his and his Parties way, not enough to win a majority, but did that really matter? After all the Liberal Democrats have shown that they are no better than the Tories in many respect.

'We have absolutely no plans to raise VAT.' Cameron pledge, talking to BBC's Jeremy Paxman, he added: "*Our first budget is all about recognising we need to get spending under control rather than putting up tax.*" Nick Clegg and the Lib Dems also swore they would not raise VAT, while warning voters that the Conservatives would. When the U-turn came the "Tory VAT bombshell". George Osborne announced in his very first budget that he would raise VAT from 17.5 to 20 per cent..

(Devolved) 'We are going to make our midwives' lives a lot easier... we will increase the number of midwives by 3,000.' Cameron in an article for the Sun in January 2010. - There are just over 2,000 more qualified midwives now than there were in May 2010.

(Devolved) 'The government should say not just there is a presumption you will be prosecuted if you carry a knife, but that there will be a presumption you will go to jail.' Cameron first said this in a Sun interview in 2008. No law has been passed that automatically jails anyone who carries a knife. The coalition did introduce a new crime of "threatening with article with blade or point or offensive weapon in public or on school premises". Adults could expect to get a custodial sentence, but not just for carrying a knife, a judge could still decide against jail depending on the circumstances.

(Devolved) 'I'm not going to flannel you, I'm going to give it to you straight... I like the child benefit, I wouldn't change child benefit, I wouldn't means-test it, I don't think that is a good idea.' from a question-and-answer session the Cameron did in March 2010.

In 2013 means-testing of child benefit kicked in, with a reduced benefit for households with one parent earning more than £50,000 a year. The change was predicted to affect about a million families. Nick Clegg had also appeared to rule out such a move before the election, saying in a BBC interview: "*There are some benefits and I think child benefit is one of them, where actually I think it's quite important that everybody, rich or poor, wherever they live, feels they have got a stake in it.*"

(Devolved) 'We've looked at educational maintenance allowances and we haven't announced any plan to get rid of them. We don't have any plans to get rid of them. It's one of the plans the Labour party keep putting out, but we're not.'

David Cameron was answering a question on the future of the educational maintenance allowance (EMA) at a question-and-answer event in January 2010. Save EMA campaign director James asked "*Do you support it?*" and: "*Is that a yes?*" The Conservative leader eventually replied: "*That is a yes*". A month before the election the future Education Secretary, Michael Gove, said: "*Ed Balls keeps saying that we are committed to scrapping the EMA. I have never said this. We won't.*" The EMA, a grant paid to the poorest 16 to 19-year-olds in further education, was of course scrapped after the election.

Now that's just broken promises, promises we accepted and voted on but accept when they are not carried through. Anyway, broken promises do not make a Government Policy and Action makes a Government. Under the Tories we have seen extreme rises in Foodbanks, the Trussell Trust estimating that 1,000,000 children are using foodbanks today. Benefits Sanctions have not seen many of the UKs poorest suffer extreme hardship, but the sanction regime has been responsible for the deaths. One example is David Clapson, he died with no food in his stomach. His benefits had been stopped as a result of missing one meeting at the jobcentre. David was diabetic, without the £71.70 a week from his jobseeker's allowance he couldn't afford to eat or put credit on his electricity card to keep the fridge where he kept his insulin working. Three weeks later David died from diabetic ketoacidosis, caused by a severe lack of insulin. A pile of CVs was found next to his body. The minister in charge of welfare is the sadistic Ian Duncan Smith, a man who claimed over £35 for a single breakfast and claimed anyone should be able to live on £7 per day.

The introduction of the Strivers' Tax, a raid on working age benefits and tax credits. Estimated to leave working families £1,152 worse off over the next five years. This huge cuts to tax credits will hit 7.9 million families with at least one adult earning (2013 figure). At the same time the Coalition handed out a £3billion tax cut to the highest earners – worth an average of £107,000 to 8,000 millionaires.

NHS England's biggest-ever privatisation deal worth up to £780m. 11 private firms paid by the NHS to carry out heart, joint and other types of operations and perform scans, X-rays and other diagnostic tests on patients. This could have knock on implications to the NHS in Scotland as nearly £78m of cuts look like they are heading our way.

Let us not forget the promises to clear the deficit and bring down the debt over the term of parliament, not achieved, not even close but they fully intend to go against Economists advice and continue with austerity, hurting societies worst off and making the rich richer, stopping the economy from ever truly growing. By growing I mean really growing, not moving the unemployed from one register to another. Debt by year is as follows; Labour, 2008-£0.53T, 2009-£0.62T, 2010 - £0.76T, now for Tories and Lib Dems, 2011-£0.91T, 2012-£1.1T, 2013-£1.19T, 2014-£1.26T and 2015-£1.36T.

And finally from the Party of broken promises, the mighty VOW, the promise of near Federalism for Scotland, all powers except Foreign Policy and Defence. Not even close. On 19th September Cameron tied the vow to changes in England and the un-democratic English Votes for English Laws (EVEL), instantly changing the deal he promised the Scottish electorate. Added to that is the further delusion of the derisory Smith Commission recommendations and we have a Party that would know honesty and social justice if it slapped them in the face. Don't vote Tory.

The Question isn't Why should People Vote SNP, the Question is Why wouldn't You?

This should be the question facing many Scots as they head into a UK general election like no other in living memory.

The traditional two Party system which has dominated UK politics appears to have gone, maybe even for good, as politics seem to be heading to a more European style of coalitions and deals for support. The normally accepted block of Labour MP's duly delivered by the Scottish people to Labour head office in London is under considerable threat with the emergence of the SNP, who are riding high on the waves of pro independence support following the referendum. Despite the hugely supportive right wing media, which was recently described by the UN's human rights chief Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein as "**Nazi**" *propagandists* (IBTimes, 2015), the two main parties have not been able to dent the grassroots movement which seems to be pushing Scotland evermore into the open arms of the SNP. But despite this, there are still at least as many people who are not supporting the SNP.

So what do they need to know that they possibly don't at the moment? What issues are perhaps not penetrating the filter of the UK media, so routinely relied on by many for the truth? There are actually too many to go through within this piece, with the squandering of the oil wealth; Scotland's economic status being at least 24th in the world (without oil); or the need for land reform to name but a few. But let me have a stab at it and in doing so take into consideration two issues that have been important to non-SNP supporters and finishing with one which should seriously concern us all.

Nuclear Weapons: There are considerable differences in the estimated cost of renewing Trident, with the estimates ranging between £20 & £100 billion. What this debate boils down to is two things, affordability, and the need for a deterrent or not. In UK political terms, the SNP are the biggest party to advocate that these weapons are both immoral and cannot be affordable in an economic climate that has resulted in rising child poverty and severe pressures on public services etc. Equally, the SNP would argue, who are Scotland or the UK in danger of attack from that nuclear weapons would serve as a deterrent to? If we were under threat from North Korea; Russia or Iran by not having these weapons, then surely we would be no more under threat than many other non-nuclear nations who have been opponents of these nations, like Germany, Spain, and Australia etc. Interestingly, this vision or view adopted by the SNP is not theirs alone.

Apart from some smaller UK parties, there has recently been a call from 160 countries in the world for the UN to ban nuclear weapons (Reuters, 2015). Unfortunately this was vetoed by, you guessed it, the security council who are all nuclear. Interestingly, as highlight by Helen Pidd in The Guardian (2009), the former head of armed forces Field Marshall Lord Brammell, backed by two senior generals, claimed that "*nuclear weapons have shown themselves to be completely useless as a deterrent to the threats and scale of violence we currently face or are likely to face.*" They highlight that the biggest threat to the UK is terrorism, for which these weapons have no use.

Finally, in a Channel 4 news blog in 2013, the former Chief Weapons Inspector Dr Han Blix, who was made famous by his declarations that Iraq had no weapons of mass destruction before the second Iraq war, has also commented on the UK's approach to nuclear weapons. His most explosive statements centred on Britain's plan, in an age of austerity, to spend vast billions on replacing Trident with a new "*nuclear deterrent*". From a peace and security perspective he described it as "*a completely pointless exercise*". In the aftermath of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki nuclear massacres, the 1950s saw the rise of the "ban the bomb" movement. Today, all these years on, the "**threat**" is altogether different, as Dr Blix explained. Asymmetric warfare has no nuclear component. Even if it did, it would be very hard to combat with a nuclear bomb. So interestingly not only do we have generals agreeing with UN arms inspectors, but the only large party in the UK who agrees with them is the SNP.

Economy: The main economical arguments at the moment are essentially between austerity or anti-austerity. On the one side we have the Tories, Labour and Liberals who are all advocating for a further £30 billion of cuts and we have already seen who these cuts affect most. The poor. Despite the claims that we are all in it together, the rich have continued to get richer, with Lucy Clarke-Billings pointing out in The Independent in April this year that the number of **billionaires in the UK has doubled in the last five years**. Whilst we also have **40% of families in the UK "too poor to play any part in society"** (Wintour, 2015). In the same timeframe across the UK we have also seen a **34% increase in homelessness** (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2013). So is this the reality of flawed economics? Well what do the economists have to say on the matter? This year on the BBC (no less), Professor Hi-Join Chang (University of Cambridge) highlighted that "*the trickle down economy, is (in fact) a trickle up economy. In the late 1970's the top 1% of earners in the UK owned 10% of the wealth. In 2008, it was 24%.*" We also have Professor Thomas Piketty (Paris School of Economics) who suggests that rather than relying on trickle-down economics that don't work, "*it would be better to have an annual tax on wealth. It is a matter of common sense. When you have booming property values and booming financial portfolios, it would be crazy not to ask for a little bit more.*"

So whilst the New Labour are currently saying that they will tax the rich, they are still committed to further austerity cuts of £30 billion. So the poor will still be punished even if they carry out their promise to tax the rich. The only large party who is suggesting taxing the rich and moving away from austerity are the SNP. But have they got this right about austerity? Once again, let's turn to economists. The first is a Nobel prize winner. Paul Krugman is an academic from the U.S. who won the above award for his work in economics. On the current austerity policies of the UK he claims, "*Conservatives like to use the alleged dangers of debt and deficits as clubs with which to beat the welfare state and justify cuts in benefits ... scare talk about debt and deficits is often used as a cover for a very different agenda, namely an attempt to reduce the overall size of government and especially spending on social insurance. The 'primary purpose' of austerity, the Telegraph admitted in 2013, 'is to shrink the size of government spending' – or, as Cameron put it in a speech later that year, to make the state 'leaner ... not just now, but permanently.'*"

So once again, let's not forget, Labour and the Liberals are backing the Tories financial plans for a further £30 billion of cuts. But who across the globe actually believes that austerity policies work? Well according to Krugman, "*Hardly anyone ... except the coalition that still rules Britain – and most of the British media.*" The second economist is the Director at the National Institute of Economic and Social

Research, Jonathan Portes, who stated on the BBC News channel (12.02.15) that, *"What Nicola Sturgeon is proposing is borrowing a great deal more, but this is fiscally sustainable ... this idea that further austerity is inevitable, desirable and necessary simply doesn't stack up from an economic perspective and in that sense I think Nicola Sturgeon is quite right to put this on the agenda."* So these seem to suggest that this austerity argument is actually ideologically driven and one which the three main UK parties have all signed up to. Is this what you want?

Democracy: What price would people place on democracy? Or how does it influence their voting patterns? Tony Benn once said, *"If you cannot get rid of the people who govern you, then you do not live in a democratic system."* So can Scotland get what it votes for or does the will of the Scottish people dictate policy? Of course much has been made by the SNP that Scotland voted for Labour in its droves in 1979, 1984, 1989, 1994, and 2010 but got the Tories anyway. However, more worryingly, if you consider that Tony Blair took the Labour Party to the right of the political spectrum and that Scotland has always, in the main, desired a left wing Government, then you could add another 13 years of New Labour Government to the timeframe above. Which effectively means that despite voting Labour religiously, Scotland hasn't had a left wing government that it voted for since the last Callaghan government in 1974 - 41 years ago. So whilst the rhetoric of Labour in Scotland appeals to the left of the political spectrum, as we all know and was acknowledged by Johann Lamont in her *"branch office"* comment, it will be New Labour Head Office in London who decides the direction of the party. A fact not lost on the Scottish electorate. Add to this the current election, with Scotland on the verge of voting for an anti-austerity party, but the three main parties are pro-austerity. So to go back to Benn's statement above, how can this be democratic for Scotland?

The lead up to and aftermath of the referendum campaign also taught us a great deal about democracy in the UK. Firstly, despite strong indications in polls that many Scots favoured a question in the referendum about 'Devo Max', David Cameron refused to agree to it. Was that democratic? Of course not, but he took this decision because he thought at the time that he could kill off nationalism for several generations without conceding any new powers, as the polls at the time only suggested about 30% support for independence. Then in the frenetic panic that consumed the three main parties when the polls seemed to suggest a yes vote, Scotland were promised the earth: On Channel 4 news on 10.09.14, David Cameron said: *"If Scotland says it does want to stay in the United Kingdom then all the options of devolution are there and are possible."*

We also had Gordon Brown on behalf of New Labour promising in *The Scotsman* 15.08.14: *"We're going to be within a year or two, as close to a federal state as you can be in a country where one nation is 85% of the population."* And finally, Danny Alexander on behalf of the Liberals stated in *The Telegraph* (13.09.14) that: *"Scotland will have more powers over its finances, more responsibility for raising taxation, and more control over parts of the Welfare system - effective home rule but within the stability and security of our successful United Kingdom."* And, we had a Panelbase survey between 29.09.14 and 01.10.14 which showed the following support within Scotland for additional powers: **71%** wanted control over ALL taxation. **66%** supported control over everything except Foreign Policy & Defence (Devo Max). **75%** wanted control over ALL welfare and benefits.

Given that full control is not to be delivered, in fact nothing like it, whilst you could argue that it was just another broken political promise, ask yourself, was the will of the Scottish people respected? In actual fact, it's worse than that, as there is evidence to suggest that the powers granted are actually detrimental to Scotland's future. Iain McWhirter highlighted in *The Herald* (30.11.14) that the lack of devolution of taxes other than Income Tax *"would lock Scotland into economical decline."* A decline sanctioned by the three main UK parties. The Institute of Fiscal Studies described how the powers granted could in fact be *"unworkable and fraught with practical difficulties"* (*The Scotsman*, 18.12.14). Even the former Labour First Minister Alex McLeish stated on 25.01.15 that: *"Let's be clear. The command paper published by the UK Government this week is not home rule ... nor anything resembling either home rule or a settled position around which the majority of Scots can see a sustainable, credible, attractive and popular alternative to nationalism and independence."*

So on the evidence above, it doesn't seem beyond the realms of possibility that Westminster are determined to minimise the Scots ability to manage their own affairs. So once again - is this democratic? However, how far would Westminster go to realise their objective of minimising self autonomy? The answer is, a lot further than many would think.

Craig Murray the former Foreign Office Ambassador and human rights activist wrote in his blog (04.04.15): *"When I gave that talk to the SNP club, I warned that, as the main threat to the British state, we would suffer the full panoply of dirty tricks from MI5 and CIA. This would include increased penetration, communication interception, agent provocateur activities, forgeries and eventually might include false flag violence blamed on nationalists."* He goes on to describe, *"We are at a crisis in our constitutional history. I believe the momentum towards a Scottish exit from the UK is unstoppable. The British state is seeking to appear on the surface to agree to give Scots a free and democratic choice, while using every dirty trick to subvert that choice. Those tricks range from complete control of state and corporate media to the darker arts of the security services."* Let's not also forget the memos that were sent out by UK Embassies to foreign embassies in other countries to encourage them to make statements against Scottish Independence, which only came to light when it was leaked to a local newspaper in Spain. Or the approach made to Vladimir Putin to ask Russia to comment when they were due to chair the G12 summit. Which they refused.

In Summary; So there are several things people who aren't planning to vote for the SNP need to consider. Do you want to vote for a party that backs spending billions of pounds on nuclear weapons when we have retired generals saying they can't be used against the threats facing us; do you want to vote for a party who follow discredited economic policies; and do you believe that there is justification for the UK to subvert the will of the Scottish people? These are huge issues with huge consequences for all, especially the country we want our children and our children's children to grow up in. Please think carefully!