



INDEPENDENCE threatens the livelihoods of some 1,400 employees at HMRC's Accounts Office in Cumbernauld, the Labour Party has warned.

This was the headline on 24 August 2014 just ahead of the vote on Scottish Independence. Labour and Better Together claiming that a Yes vote would see the loss of 1400 Jobs at Cumbernauld's HMRC office.



Yet another scare story blown out the water, unfortunately for Scotland it comes too late.

Just 445 day after Labour said Independence would cost Scottish jobs we see a headline that we are becoming very familiar with. Better Together also promised us that a No vote in the referendum would secure jobs in the Scottish Steel industry, we saw that not to be the case with the planned cut of 270 jobs at TATA Steels Dalzell plant in Motherwell.

The Tax Collection offices are to be closed in a move that sees the consolidation of HMRC throughout the UK. HMRC's chief executive Lin Homer said: "HMRC has too many expensive, isolated and outdated offices. This makes it difficult for us to collaborate, modernise our ways of working, and make the changes we need to transform our service to customers and clamp down further on the minority who try to cheat the system."

SNP MP George Kerevan says "the service can't cope with workload at current staffing levels and reducing numbers will fly in the face of common sense". Kerevan showed figures that the number of calls answered by HMRC fell from 79% to 72.5% in a year and only 70% of letters were answered within the target 15 days last year. The East Lothian MP said: "The Tories need a serious and urgent rethink of these plans".

Since the 19th of September last year we have seen no end of Better Together threats and Scaremongering coming to fruition, however, as we all know, it's not because Scotland voted Yes to Independence it's because Scotland decided to stick with a unequal uncaring UK

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Does the Scotland Bill 2015 deliver the promises of the "Vow", and does it meet the agreements and recommendations of the Smith Commission? The Unionist Parties seem to think so, "Lord" Smith says it does and of course MSM and the BBC say it does too.



The UK Government say "that in its current form the Bill will make the Scottish Parliament the most powerful devolved assembly in the world", Tory Scotland Secretary David Mundell (left) states that it is now "beyond doubt that the recommendations of the Smith Commission – set up in the wake of last year's referendum – have been delivered".



SNP Westminster leader, Angus Robertson (right), said "the sole purpose of the Scotland Bill had been to implement the Smith Commission in full". He argued that the bill still fell "far short". He added: "We have seen with this debate a Westminster failure to support the devolution of powers over tax credits, industrial relations and workers' rights powers and on the sovereignty of the people of Scotland. People should look and learn because, if this is the way to bring forward legislation, we don't need it."

We don't have enough space in our wee bulletin to go through the Vow, The Commission and the proposed Bill bit by bit, But, if you are in any doubt (there should be doubts) about whether they have or have not been delivered the best thing to do is check for yourself. Below are 3 links to each stage, the Vow, the Commission and the Bill, there are many, many more links and articles/publications available so please don't just take our word for it, research the facts for yourself.

- www.itv.com/news/update/2014-09-16/leaders-sign-the-vow-to-promise-scots-new-powers/
- www.smith-commission.scot/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/The_Smith_Commission_Report-1.pdf
- www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/2015-2016/0003/16003.pdf

The final stage of the Scotland bill before it goes to the Lords was a farce and an insult to the people of Scotland. A landmark bill that is supposed to make Scotland's Parliament the most powerful devolved Parliament in the world was given a whopping 5½ hours of debate. A debate that was covering 100 amendments over 76 pages of text and only 5½ hours.



Five and a half hours that was whittled down to just over 3½ after all the divisions (voting) and talk of English devolution took up a further ½. Then we have the added insult of 20-25 Unionist MPs in on the debate but, when it comes to voting the chamber fills with them just to make sure that SNP amendments favourable to Scotland don't pass. A Vow delivered? Smith Commission fulfilled? Better Together? **Not a chance!**



At the Scotland Branch conference a few weeks back Kezia Dugdale, the unknown (according to recent poll) Scottish Branch Manager of the UK Labour Party, promised that if they win power in 2016 they will make sure not one person loses out because of the Tories swinging cuts to Tax Credits.

Promising to restore Tax Credits to a reported 350,000 working families in Scotland with a projected cost of £440m per year. This announcement came just days after John Swinney the SNP

finance minister stated that "*the Scottish Government could not afford to reverse the abolition of tax credits by the UK government or restore all the UK government's welfare cuts*". The proposal rightly put pressure on the SNP Government to counter. and eventually they did with a promise to mitigate the cuts about to hit Scotland's working poor, whether this proves wise or not is still to be seen.

Dugdale told delegates that retaining tax credits would be affordable without increasing taxes in Scotland. It would be funded by rejecting the SNP's plans to first cut and then phase out air passenger duty (APD) and resisting Tory plans to raise the threshold for the 40p tax rate from the current £42,385 to £50,000 by 2020, sounds good doesn't it?

It's not. Dugdale has a lot of plans for the APD monies, before the tax credits announcement it was to be used for education, but now it's for tax credits, or is it for both.

They don't need to find extra money in the sense that it's over and above what's existing, but they do need to find money to effect the tax cut itself, and in finding that money, so it releases a pot that we can use differently. We've had the accountants check over

But does that matter as it appears Labour feel they don't need to raise any money to counter tax credit cuts.

Dugdale says, the cost of compensating the victims in full for the loss of tax credits will be approximately £440m per year. That means that **extra money** must be found over and above the current Scottish budget. She claims that £250m will come from not implementing the SNP plan to phase out APD. But, and this is a big but, that won't generate an extra £250m, it will just avoid **losing** £250m from the budget.

There is two other sides to Scotland branch's plan. First, avoid the planned Tory increase in the thresholds for higher tax rates. This hits exactly the same stumbling block as APD, it does NOT generate any more income, it just avoids spending/losing it from the starting budget.

Secondly there is, a 5p increase in the top rate of income tax to 50p. Kezia Dugdale admitted in Holyrood Magazine on 30 October, that this step could in fact raise nothing at all she said, "Up to £100 million. But bluntly, **it could also raise zero** because of the mechanisms by which people can avoid paying tax so it is up to £100 million."

So both the SNP and Labour Scotland Branch want to mitigate the singing tax credit cuts about to hit the Scottish working poor next year. Yes, they do but the similarities stop there. The SNP first want to oppose the planned cuts every step of the way in the hope that Osborne might just change his mind, Labour don't.

In a further move to negate the effects of the cuts in Scotland, the SNP put forward an amendment to the Scotland bill asking for Tax Credits to be devolved in full to the Scottish Parliament. This would have given Scotland control of tax credits and in effect allowed the Scottish Government to retain them, not mitigate them. Were Labour in agreement with this amendment to help Scotland's working poor by transferring the power of tax Credits to Scotland? Simply put, **NO**.

As you seen from the first image on page one the chamber is all but empty on the Tory and Labour sides of the house, the large grouping of MPs in the bottom right of the first picture are the SNP MPs. Now, if there was a logical rule that said to vote on a motion/amendment you had to be present for the debate on it, clearly the amendment put forward by the SNP to devolve tax credits would have won the day, unfortunately for Scotland it never.

Even with the support of the Labour benches it is unlikely that the amendment would have made it through. Unfortunately (again) the UK has a majority Conservative Government meaning that had Labour sided with the SNP for the good of Scotland the Tory numerical advantage would have seen it defeated anyway. But that's not what Labour chose to do, even our sole Scottish MP from the Labour benches voted against devolving tax credits to the Scottish Parliament.

Vote to devolve working tax credits and child tax credits to the Scottish Parliament

Scottish MPs : **Yes 53** No 2 - English, Welsh and Northern Irish MPs : **Yes 3** No 475

The only non-Scottish MPs to vote in favour were the Greens' Caroline Lucas, and the SDLP's Margaret Ritchie and Mark Durkan. Plaid Cymru's Hynel Williams and Jonathan Edwards acted as the two non-voting tellers for the 'Aye' side to allow all SNP members present to vote.

So after 10 days of raging and haranguing the Scottish government into some form of submission over tax credits, by having them pledge to expensively mitigate the cuts by some yet unknown means, Labour denied the Scottish Government the power to stop them happening at all.

It doesn't stop there, it get worse. SNP MP Mhairi Black asked David Mundell "*if he would pledge that the Tories wouldn't treat any compensatory payments to victims of the cuts as income and claw it back to Westminster – leaving Holyrood hundreds of millions out of pocket but the victims no better off*" Mundell point blank refused to do so and with a smile on his face too, Iain Duncan Smith had also refused to answer previously.

If it makes through the Lords (it may not) The Scotland Bill, will bring about a scenario where the Scottish Government may have to make cut to our services or increase taxes to fund top-up payments, implement the costly and complicated bureaucracy to carry it out, and then see all the money spent disappear, not into the people of Scotland's purses and wallets, but into the ever increasing Scottish money sitting in the London Treasury.

