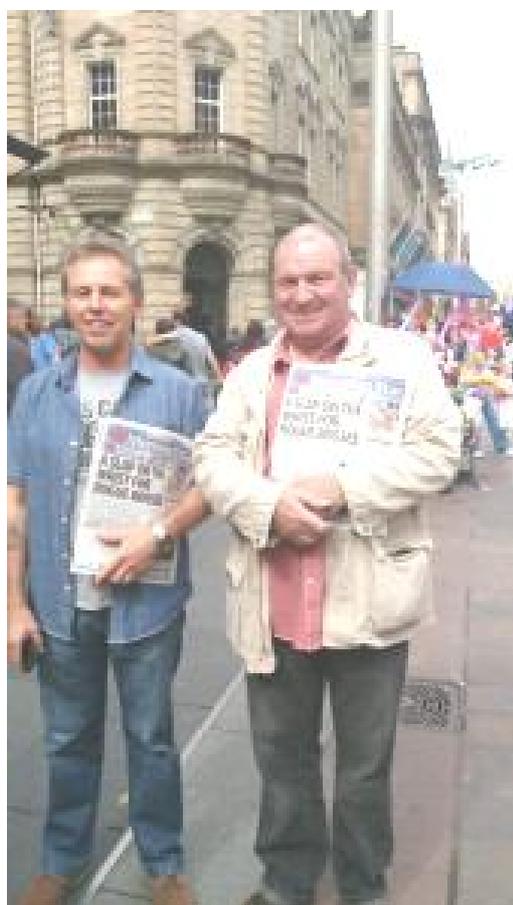


# 2014

Report of the Scottish  
**Morning Star**  
Readers and Supporters  
Conference

## WIN THE FUTURE WIN **NEW** READERS



Held at the STUC 1 November 2014

# Participants

Agnes Tolmie	Unite NEC
Ben Chacko	Acting Editor
Drew Smith	MSP Glasgow
Jane Carolan	Unison Chair National Policy Committee
Jackson Cullinane	Unite Scotland Political Officer
Colin Finlay	Stirling Falkirk RSG and EIS National Council
Arthur West	Ayrshire RSG
Jim Whiston	Ayrshire RSG and Bazaar Convener
Ian Trotter	Dumfries RSG
Stuart Hyslop	Dumfries RSG
Tom Morrison	Clydebank TUC and RSG
Rab Paterson	Midlothian TUC
Richard Shilcock	Edinburgh RSG
Ronnie Moran	Lanarkshire RSG
Ian Davidson MP	Labour SW Glasgow
Graham Barrie	Dumfries RSG
Kenneth Phillips	Stewarton
Simon Steel	Glasgow West
Chris Bartter	Glasgow West
Rob O'Donnell	Glasgow West
Susan Galloway	Glasgow West
Gordon McFadden	Glasgow West
Marc Livingstone	Glasgow West; Glasgow TUC
Shona Menzies	Paisley
Margaret Thomson	Stirling
Rory Pryde	YCL
Zoe Streatfield	YCL
David Smith	Steps
David Brockett	Unite Glasgow Building
Tom Simpson	Lanarks
John Foster	Govan RSG and Scottish Morning Star Campaign Committee

*Apologies: Phil McGarry, Keith Stoddart, Tom Kirby, Ray Mennie, Malcolm Burns, Andy Ritchie, Hugh Samson, Graham Sampson, Gordon Scobie*

## CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS

# AGNES TOLMIE



Agnes Tomie opened by welcoming all those present to the second Scottish conference of Morning Star readers and stressing the political importance of keeping the paper in existence as the movement struggled against the most reactionary government for a generation. 'I was brought up on the Morning Star. It gave me my political education. I remember how the victory of the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders lifted the whole movement. I also remember the solidarity won for the Grunwick strikers and the boost that struggle gave to the movement for women's equality. And there was also my elation the first time my name appeared in the paper after speaking at a trade union conference: my family knew I had finally made it.'

Agnes stressed the importance of the paper in breaking the boycott on trade union news, particularly on her own union Unite, and ensuring that the Lobbying Act did not hamstring the attempt by the Labour Movement to bring pressure to bear on parties ahead of the 2015 election. 'There are key issues that we cannot allow to be buried. Unless we stop TTIP, it will not just be the NHS that will be endangered but the wages and conditions of all workers. We need a movement that can defeat neo-liberalism and, to be effective, that movement has to have a voice, the Morning Star. This conference is about ensuring that voice survives and for that to happen we have to identify the practical steps needed to build circulation.

## SESSION 1 A LEFT WING DAILY FOR SCOTLAND

# BEN CHACKO

## ACTING EDITOR



Ben began by congratulating readers and supporters on breaking the Summer of Heroes target and raising £154,000. This money had been used to pay for the technology required for the e-edition and meet outstanding bills. It demonstrated the depth of support that existed.

But the financial problems remained. Simply in terms of production costs and sales the paper was losing £3,000 a week – with the deficit having to be made up by other forms of sales and fundraising. The only long-term solution was to increase circulation of the both the print and e-editions. Just one thousand more daily readers would make the paper viable. The Cooperative's Management Committee had just adopted a development plan that, as a result of this and other measures, would see the paper in balance by later in 2015. Carrying the plan into practice would mean detailed targets for improving circulation in each nation and region in Britain.

In Scotland, as a result of the new printing arrangements adopted in 2012 and the return to day of printing delivery, circulation had risen by almost 200 copies in a year. Although circulation had somewhat fallen back since then, it showed what could be done. If Scotland could secure just 100 extra daily readers over the next year, it would have played a more than proportionate part in the required sales drive.

More sales would guarantee survival and the ability to employ more staff. However, the real arguments for increasing circulation were political. If we were to meet the current challenges, the

paper had to become the paper of the working class movement in real terms, on a mass scale. The Conservatives had shown how frightened they were of truth when they passed the gagging act earlier this year. They wanted to prevent Charities and other bodies exposing the truth about poverty, the housing crisis, crisis of local government services and the NHS from reaching the public in the run up to the general election – although by exempting the press barons they had revealed also how dependent they were on the manufacture of prejudice and disinformation. The Morning Star represented more or less the only available antidote.

In the coming year it would be crucial in two senses. First, it would alone allow the trade union movement to speak to the people. As a journalist he had seen the guides to industrial reporting issued to staff in the mainstream media. These specifically forbade information on **why** workers were striking. The focus had to be on the disruption to the public and the damage to the economy. In the coming year the trade union movement, along with campaigning organisations such as the People's Assembly, had to speak directly on the social and economic catastrophe that would result from a Tory victory backed by UKIP. The second reason was linked. A Tory victory was virtually certain unless Labour moved to the Left and restored its links to working class communities. This was essential in England. It was doubly so in Scotland. Policies based on 'austerity lite' could never win the election. The Labour Movement had to bring pressure to bear on The Labour Party. The Morning Star, in the new legal circumstance, was more or less the only public channel for doing so.

Ben ended by noting that Scotland had held a Readers and Supporters conference the previous year. Many good proposals had been made. But circulation had not risen – despite the paper having some of the best and most balanced coverage of the independence debate and being used by both sides to project their perspectives. Those attending the conference now had to ensure that on this occasion its proposals were taken forward concretely in particular unions, in workplaces and local communities.

## DREW SMITH MSP



Drew began by outlining steps taken by a relatively small group of Labour MSPs in the Scottish Parliament to ensure the presence of the Morning Star in the Parliament's library – despite attempts to get it removed. He also noted that it was now read by Conservatives and others who had no other source of information on the trade movement and the Left.

Drew stressed the challenges which the Labour Party had to face in Scotland. It was essential, first, to win an understanding that it was possible to secure a progressive Labour government with Left policies. Secondly, and no less essential, it was necessary to overcome the divisions caused by the Independence referendum – and to focus on the issues that united the Left in terms of class politics and international issues: on Palestine, armaments, Latin America and war preparations in the Middle East.

“The independence debate did see a considerable degree of politicisation. But it is important not to be complacent or to overestimate the depth of this politicisation in terms of an understanding of political and economic realities of where power lies. The mainstream press trivialises. Serious political reportage is being killed off. That is why we need a counterweight.”

Drew instanced the recent research showing that one quarter of MSPs were graduates of just one Scottish university: Glasgow. Pat Kane had commented that this was of little concern as the values of Glasgow University, like the rest of Scotland, were “collective and egalitarian”. “A shocking

complacency. Scotland is in fact one of the most unequal societies in Western Europe. We need a paper that can show how power relations operate – as was demonstrated by the punishment meted out to innocent workers at Grangemouth last year.”

This ability to and expose how economic power operates was equally important in terms of the current debate on the devolution of powers and submissions to the Smith Commission. The mainstream press was happy to create the illusion that the more powers devolved the better it was: “Dev Max” would solve everything. “We should ask ourselves isn’t this what both the SNP and the Tories support? What would it do? It would destroy the principle of redistribution in light of social need at British level – and the principle of redistribution more generally from rich to poor. Take the example of the devolution of powers over Air Duty Tax. The companies owning airports wanted it devolved precisely so they could lobby for its reduction. We need to think what powers are to be used for – for or against working people, for or against wealth and privilege”.

These were the reasons why the Morning Star was needed on a daily basis and why all on the Left had a duty to boost its circulation.

## JANE CAROLAN



“I have relied on the Star throughout my life as a trade unionist – right from starting out as a shop steward in my workplace in the 1980s. A shop steward needs three things. The first is common sense. The second is an ability to argue. The third is an ability to explain *why*: to tell fellow workers why managements are acting as they do and the wider picture that explains attacks on wages and conditions. To get collective action there has to be political debate and discussion in the workplace and this cannot be provided by one off political education sessions. It requires the daily supply of information that can break through the diet of trivialised, dumbed-down news from the press barons or the BBC’s bland claims for neutrality. Any reading of the research by the Glasgow University Media Group exposes these claims. The BBC automatically assumes that neo-liberal economics is the only model possible.”

“Yet the real facts are simple things to get hold of if you have a daily paper like the Star. Apparently most people actually believe that immigrants account for up a third of the population. If you have the true figure, UKIP’s propaganda can be immediately punctured. How many do?

“People will be told that the NHS strikes later this month are the work of greedy workers. They won’t be told that the poorest workers have seen a 30 per cent drop in real wages over the past five years. Nor will they be told that the ‘research’ showing “the NHS is becoming too expensive” is simply designed to justify its privatisation – so even more money is spent to boost profits.

“Here in Scotland most people don’t realise that the services that they rely from local government just won’t be here in five years time unless the cuts are halted. 50,000 jobs have gone already – most under an SNP government. This coming year we will see the knife reach into essential services. Highland Region has just announced it is increasing the entry age to primary schools to 6. And these cuts don’t come because there’s a ‘deficit’. They come from the class nature of our society.

“In terms of strengthening the Star’s readership Unison has had some success. It has encouraged all branches to order it – and also to support the Fund appeal. It orders copies for the 150 delegates attending Regional Council meetings and has also promoted the e-edition among officers. The Star is the best form of political education there is. And today we have to use it – or lose it.

## **IN DISCUSSION the following points were raised:**

### **Regional and Scottish reporting: why not more ?**

Ben replied that there was more than these was. The Management Committee had taken decisions to appoint a Scottish reporter and also a Northern reporter (Peter Lazenby) and this had started to change the balance – even though we had temporarily lost a full-time Scottish reporter and there was still no Welsh reporter. However, there needed to be more and it would depend on finance. Drew Smith stressed that regional reporting was important. It showed people in Scotland that their plight was no different to that in Newcastle or Swansea.

### **Lack of acknowledgement of emails with news stories**

Ben agreed that it was important to respond and thank those sending in materials because this was a key part of the paper's function. However, the news desk only had one or two reporters trying to field hundreds of emails each day – at the same time as writing the paper for a deadline.

### **Young people and the Star**

A couple of delegates raised the issue of getting the paper to young people who relied largely on the web – or got no news at all. The editor replied that the e-edition was intended to meet part of this need but it required local organisation to reach many more young people.

## **SESSION TWO**

# **TRADE UNIONS AND THE CIRCULATION BATTLE**

## **JACKSON CULLINANE**

**POLITICAL OFFICER, UNITE SCOTLAND**



Jackson praised the Morning Star for its balanced and fact-based coverage of the referendum debate.

He outlined two immediate priorities for the trade union movement in Scotland. One was to maintain unity despite the differing opinions on independence. The other was to win a Left agenda within the Labour Party. "And these two priorities are linked. There are a whole range of policies on which the 'Left' Yes and the Left 'Nos' can agree: no cuts in benefits, rights to collective bargaining, an end to zero hours contracts, restoration of student grants. We can campaign on these as a movement – and these are also the policies that will make Labour electable. The trade union movement needs an understanding that there were valid 'Left' arguments for voting Yes and also for voting No and these should unite us still."

"At the same time we have to face up to the crisis in working class representation to which Drew has already referred. Currently only 10 per cent of elected representatives have a working class background and the number committed to left-wing or socialist values is not much more. It will be a double disaster for Labour in Scotland if it goes into the next election identified with the right-wing policies that have been responsible for defeat in the past. Only by setting out a Left agenda based on class unity and solidarity can the ground be shifted. I don't think it is sectarian to say that a nationalist victory in the 2015 general election can only have one outcome: to ensure the continuation of a Tory government in Westminster."

“The Star therefore has a key role in raising these priorities in the trade union movement – in current circumstances particularly around the issue of workplace rights and workplace democracy. The Working Together report published in August registered some progress on the front but only because the trade union side managed to budge the Scottish government away from simply endorsing the EU model of worker directors, bound by ‘collective responsibility’ to the firm, to the idea of TU directors responsible to the workforce. However, any reflection in legislation will require a real movement on the concept of workplace democracy.

“The same goes for public or social ownership – the ultimate form of workplace democracy. This can take many forms: cooperative ownership, local government ownership or ownership at Scottish or British level of basic utilities. But all must be bound by a degree of social responsibility that is impossible if a company is legally bound to maximise profits for shareholders.

“It is this is the job of explanation that only a daily newspaper can do and why we have to transform the Star’s readership base. And here the key word is “people”. It will not be done simply as a result of circulars or leaflets. It needs individuals, people talking to others they know, and convincing them of the need to take the paper.

Unite’s work on this front could be described as a partial success. The paper is available in all offices and used directly in all training courses for shop stewards. The union has also headed the drive for branches to take out shares. But we are aware we need to do more.”

Jackson remembered back to the days when he took over as convener of the ICI plant in Ayrshire. The management supplied a whole range of papers to convener’s office. He told them he wanted just two: the Financial Times for what he needed to know – and the Morning Star for what he wanted to know. But in hindsight he was wrong. The Star also gave what he needed to know. The Star was the only paper that reported advances for working people internationally, that recorded the successes in Latin America and gave hope of a new and better society. The old slogan Agitate, Educate and Organise still rang true. The Star did all three – but only if combined with people.

## **COLIN FINLAY**

### **MEMBER EIS NATIONAL COUNCIL**

Colin began by noting the centrality of EIS to immediate struggles in Scotland. “Education budgets have been salami sliced so far. There have been cuts but they have been ‘managed’. Over the coming period it will be lumps that will be hacked out of all local government budgets. Local mobilisation will be critical.”

“EIS has fifty thousand members. Traditionally, or at least in a previous generation, EIS had been a relatively radical union – but after the McCrone Review a degree of complacency set in. This is now beginning to change. Attendance at branch meetings is increasing. In my role as a Learning Rep. I’ve been getting up to a hundred teachers turning up at events on a Saturday morning. So change is happening. But there remains a serious lack of wider knowledge. Many teachers appear to think that they are employees of the school rather than the local authority and not understand the importance of working with other unions. Attending the Tripartite meetings at Falkirk Council I can see the importance of building joint understanding and action at workplace level.”

“In terms of the Morning Star it has not always been easy to get it accepted but there was a growing recognition in the union of its role. To some extent it has been a matter of pushing at an open door. The paper supplies the narrative needed to make sense of all the apparently disconnected

things happening about us – and, unless the Star’s narrative was provided, other narratives would prevail, all ultimately right-wing, some very right-wing.

Colin suggested that thought needed to be given to balance and readability of the content. “The Sun requires a reading age of 7; the Financial Times 15. Where is the Star in relation to this? We must remember those to whom we seek to inform. And we need if possible also to entertain, to provide laughter - and give hope.

## **REPORTS FROM READERS AND SUPPORTERS GROUPS**

### **AYRSHIRE**

Arthur West and Jim Whiston reported monthly meetings over the past year, an organising meeting in the coming week and some activity in terms of monthly sales. Arthur felt that there was potential for film nights across a variety of Ayrshire venues and he hoped that they could make the sales more regular. This was the best way of establishing continuing contacts and winning daily readers.

### **DUMFRIES**

Ian Trotter and Stuart Hyslop reported on a new group that had been established only six months before. They now had a regular Saturday public sale and had held a Music Evening in conjunction with Hope Not Hate. They still had to secure backing from the Trades Union Council and would welcome support from local unionised workplaces. They also called for the Star to produce Guidelines on how local RSGs should best operate.

### **CLYDEBANK**

Tom Morrison reported that the Star was supported by the Trades Union Council and by the local Unison branch and that there was a regular Wednesday sale of the paper. Meetings were held relatively frequently and Stars taken to meetings.

### **GLASGOW**

Tom Morrison reported that the stall was now in its eighth year in Buchanan Street every Saturday, come wind or rain. There was also a weekday stall in Partick. They also kept up two Saturday Star delivery runs to 40 readers – one of whom had today sent £250 for shares in the paper. Comrade Alan Mackinnon was maintaining one of these runs despite his illness. Chris Bartter noted that the commemoration event and film for Tony Benn on 30 November would provide an opportunity for promoting the paper.

### **MIDLOTHIAN AND EDINBURGH**

Rab Paterson and Richard Shilcock gave the report. Rab reported that the first Morning Star Our Class Our Culture meeting had been held in Dalkeith in October under the auspices of Midlothian Trades Union Council. It had reminded everyone of the importance of political education, something previously carried on in the area by the NUM. He hoped that a properly constituted RSG for the Lothians, including Edinburgh, could be established in the very near future. Richard reported that there was a regular Saturday Star sale in Princes Street and occasional Star meetings – although despite ensuring the display of Stars in newsagents near the university there seemed to be very little response from students. They had also tried to use social media – and he hoped that the thumbnail pdf Star front page could be restored on the free web version so that it could be disseminated more widely.

## **LANARKSHIRE**

Ronnie Moran gave the report. The group had now been running for three years and over the last year they had restored a regular weekly public sale in Coatbridge. There was a regular committee – although attendance at public meetings had fallen back to dozen after attendances in excess of 40 a year back. The group regularly collected money for the paper. A recent public meeting on the way forward for the left post-referendum had attracted 30-40 people and it was hoped they might become part of the group. The Group had agreed to focus on trident and TTIP as campaign issues.

## **BAZAARS AND FUND-RAISING**

Jim Whiston reported on the role of local groups in raising cash for the paper. Traditionally a key fund-raising activity had been Bazaars at Christmas. Currently there was only one Bazaar remaining – that in Glasgow – but there were all kinds of ways in which social events could be organised to raise funds.

This year's Glasgow Bazaar would be in the Annexe at Stewartville Street, Partick, on Saturday 13 December. Helpers are required from 10 a.m. and donations were needed. And there really should be a Glasgow Committee formed to organise it: currently comrades from Ayrshire had to do a disproportionate amount.

# **ACTION POINTS ARISING FROM THE CONFERENCE**

Agnes Tolmie as Chair ended the meeting by thanking all those who had attended. It had been a practical conference, as was necessary, but also brought politics and organisation together. She outlined the following action points which had come out of the discussion

1. **WIN MORE UNIONS TO USE THE STAR IN EDUCATION AND SHOP STEWARD TRAINING**  
To be effective EVERY shop steward needed to read the Star
2. **DISCUSS IN UNIONS AND IN READERS AND SUPPORTS GROUPS THE ORGANISED WINNING OF NEW READERS**  
Scotland had a target of 100 new daily readers to win within twelve months. We needed realistic aims. 10 each for the three big unions and 10 for each of the seven functioning RSGs would quite possible. But we needed organisation and reporting to ensure progress. The Scottish Morning Star Campaign Committee should set this up from its next meeting on Wed, 3 December.
3. **DEVELOP RSGs AS HUBS FOR LOCAL WORK IN BOTH UNIONS AND THE COMMUNITY**  
Unions at Scottish level needed to ask local branches to get involved with local RSGs so that there can be links between local workplaces, Trades Union Councils and the Star. At the same time RSGs provided a vehicle for reaching those outside the organised movement, especially the young, by bringing together local organisations and charities dealing with homelessness, hunger and discrimination.
4. **PUSH SUBSCRIPTIONS TO THE E-EDITION**  
But don't forget the importance of print edition. The e-edition was individualised. The print edition should and could be passed on.
5. **DON'T FORGET THE VITAL IMPORTANCE OF FUND-RAISING AND THE MONTHLY TARGET**