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## Dundee in 2015

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Last month I took part in what was one of the most memorable events in the story of the Labour Movement in Dundee –the 8,000 demonstration against Tory Government attacks on decent retirement pensions for public sector workers.

It was a feat of organisation, a procession of people power with hundreds and hundreds of brightly coloured flags and vivid banners, and expressions of unity as a light to guide us down the long grim tunnel that this decade will be.

By contrast, the Tory Government's attempts to portray their deficit reduction policy as a crusade of national solidarity – “We're all in this together” - were rudely dispelled last week when David Cameron pleaded with the rest of the EU for special treatment for just one group in Britain – the banks, the same institutions that have got the country into the mess we're in.

The other 26 countries in the EU, some with governments that are on the Centre-Right of politics want to impose a Robin Hood-style tax on banks' transactions.

However, David Cameron stood firm for Bankers' Rights, for the same institutions still revelling in bonuses, that will not lend today to businesses that want to borrow money to create jobs.

In the 2010's Dundee faces a “lost decade” in which its “lost generation” will see its living standards slump to levels not experienced in many years.

Employment in Scotland is forecast not to return to previous higher levels until the early 2020s.

A couple living on average wages in 2015 will be no better off than they were in 2002. So a couple in Dundee with a joint weekly income of £714 this year will be worse off in 2015 than the same couple in Dundee were in 2002 with a joint income then of £599 .

Male pay in Dundee has slumped by 7 per cent on average in the past year.

A pay freeze will endure in the public sector till 2013, and Chancellor George Osborne plans to limit pay rises to 1 per cent till 2015 thereafter.

As prices rise, real wages fall, reducing living standards.

The new economic model is the old belief that government should be acting in the same manner as the household does.

This says that when a household hits hard times, it cuts back, and therefore a government in the same straits should cut its spending and as quickly as possible.

Decades ago, this argument was disproved by Keynes with his "paradox of thrift".

For Keynes, national economies cannot be run like individual household budgets.

The more money a person saves or cuts back on, the less money is available for buying the goods and services that are being produced, leading to job losses and less taxation coming into Treasury.

The next few years are almost certain to be less healthier times.

Not surprisingly, personal health worsens as insecurity heightens.

One of the best ways of keeping people healthy is to keep them in a job.

Job loss and job insecurity can make people more vulnerable to illness through loss of self-worth, lower income, exclusion from previous social activities because of lower incomes, and living with no control over daily life.

The Child Growth Foundation has already expressed concerns that huge job cuts mean less income, resulting in people turning to cheaper calorie-rich food higher in fat, risking higher levels of diabetes and obesity.

Cuts in voluntary sector funding puts greater stress on an already overstretched NHS, at a time when the number of nursing and midwifery staff in NHS Tayside has fallen to its lowest in 4 years.

Local government faces a cut of some £700 million in real terms till 2015.

Councils have received a "flat cash freeze" in their revenue allocation from the Scottish Government as a result.

These dire assessments describe how everyday life will be in the first few years of this decade.

The 30<sup>th</sup> November rallies across Britain against pensions "reform" are unlikely to be the last.

Pensions are very much a personal rather than a political issue.

Bear this comparison in mind .... last weekend, world-wide publicity was given to Moscow, ( population 11 million, the most populous city in Europe), saw 60,000 demonstrators take to the streets last week in protests against election-rigging by Vladimir Putin.

In Dundee, (population 140,000,) the strength of opposition to Tory plans to cut public sector pensions saw over 8,000 take to the streets.

### Dundee 2015 figures

#### Pay

The Institute for Fiscal Studies predicts that a couple living on average wages in 2015 will be no better off than they were in 2002

In 2002, the median weekly pay for men in Dundee was £358.

In 2011 it now stands at £ 405 .

In 2002 the median weekly pay for women in Dundee was £241 .

In 2011 it stands at £309 .

(Source : Office of National Statistics )

So a couple in Dundee with a joint weekly income of £714 this year will be worse off in 2015 than the same couple in Dundee were in 2002 with a joint income then of £599 .

### Dundee City Council spending – the Flat Cash Freeze

Dundee City Council's revenue allocations from the SNP Government to provide services in the city remain frozen, meaning a cut in real terms spending and services.

2011-12 £317million

2012-13 £316million

2013-14 £318million

2014-15 £318 million

The number of teachers in Dundee is now the lowest in 6 years.

### NHS Tayside spending

NHS Tayside's current budget of £596million is forecast to increase in real terms by just £6million by 2015, a 1 per cent increase, at a time when health service costs are rising annually by 4 per cent.

Overall in Scotland total health sending is set to decrease by £319million in real terms.

The number of nursing and midwifery staff in NHS Tayside is now the lowest in 4 years.

### Fuel Poverty

1 in 4 households in Scotland lives in fuel poverty.

A household is defined as being in fuel poverty if, in order to maintain a satisfactory heating regime, it would be required to spend more than 10% of its income on fuel.

This year, as energy companies pushed up prices even higher, the SNP Government all but abandoned its promise to “eradicate” fuel poverty in Scotland by 2016.

The SNP Government has also slashed funding for fuel poverty support by one third – from £71 million last year to £48 million this year.

### Obesity

Over 1 in 4 of all adults in Scotland is obese, with the highest level, almost 40 per cent in the age group 55-64 .

The percentage of children aged 2-15 with a body mass index “outwith the healthy range” rose to its highest level last year to over 30 per cent.

### Diabetes

NHS Tayside over 19,000 diagnosed with diabetes at the beginning of 2011 almost 1 in 20 of the population.

Almost ten years previously the figure had been 11,200.