

Protests at Darling's visit to Edinburgh International book festival

Alistair Darling's talk at the Edinburgh International Book Festival was the scene of controversy last night as his appearance sparked two separate protests by Citizens United Against the Cuts and a pro-nationalist group, during his discussion with James Naughtie in Charlotte Square.

The former chancellor was at the festival to promote his new book, in which he describes his time at Number 11 during the financial meltdown in 2008. Citizens United Against the Cuts were there to protest what they saw as a 'whitewashing' of the story, and wanted their points noted, they argued that the situation for working people is worse than ever. Mr Darling is also the face of the pro-union 'Better Together' campaign.

The talk was attended by several high-profile ministers of the Scottish Parliament, as well as many members of the public, and the protest outside the RBS Main Theatre by Citizens United Against the Cuts could be heard clearly from within the tent. Sean Clerkin led the anti-cuts protest, loudly vocalising the group's key ideals and views for over 30 minutes during Alistair Darling's talk. Other members of the group held banners such as "Close tax avoidance loopholes" and "Banksters must be prosecuted".

The other protest, by pro-independence nationalists, was held on the pavement outside the venue, featuring a large Yes for Scotland banner and an appearance by the Abominable 'No' man who added some colour to proceedings. Neither Alistair Darling nor James Naughtie could be reached for comment regarding either protest.

Sean Clerkin of Citizens United Against the Cuts, was keen to

point out that Alistair Darling was sitting in the RBS Main Theatre, paid for by a bank bailed out by the taxpayer during the meltdown. At one point a member of the public criticised him for politicising the event, to which he responded that the event was sponsored by bailed-out banks and gave a platform to Alistair Darling's version of history.

Citizens United Against the Cuts are a prolific protest group who have staged sit-ins and protests at events and in banks, and who fight to have their points acknowledged when they see what they regard as a white-washing of the issues. They campaign for arrest of bankers who they believe have committed fraud and call for an end to austerity which punishes the poorest and most vulnerable in society while allowing the richest to continue to prosper. Sean Clerkin said he wanted to end the culture of "socialism for the rich, capitalism for the poor".

Alistair Darling was at the book festival to promote his book, *Back from the Brink: 1,000 Days at Number 11* in which he discusses his time as chancellor during the financial meltdown in 2008, and claims that his and the government's actions averted economic disaster.