ASLEF CALLS FOR AN INTEGRATED, PUBLICLY OWNED, ACCOUNTABLE RAILWAY FOR SCOTLAND

(which used to be the SNP’s position – before they became the government!)

FIGHT ANTI-UNION LAWS

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www.rmt.org.uk

General Secretary: Mick Cash
President Sean Hoyle
HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL OUR SUBSCRIBERS, READERS AND SUPPORTERS. AND, WITH THE PLEASANTRIES NOW DONE, LET’S GET BACK TO THE MATTERS AT HAND – OF HARD POLITICS. OVER THE LAST FEW MONTHS, DAY-IN-AND-DAY-OUT IN THE PAGES OF THE GUARDIAN, ITS PARLIAMENTARY SKETCH WRITER, JOHN CRACE, HAS LAMBSTAD THERESA MAY AS AN AUTOMATON, A ROBOT CALLED MAYBOT. MAYBOT HAS, ACCORDING TO CRACE, ENTERED SUCH A STATE OF MALFUNCTION THAT SHE IS ONLY ABLE TO REPEAT THAT SHE IS ‘VERY CLEAR’ ABOUT ‘BEING CLEAR’. HER BEHAVIOUR WOULD SEEM, ACCORDING TO SOME, TO AMOUNT TO THE TIP OF ONE ALMIGHTY MESS IN BRITISH POLITICS OVER BREXIT. AFTER THE PULLING OF THE MEANINGFUL VOTE IN PARLIAMENT AND THE INABILITY TO GAIN ANY FURTHER CONCESSIONS, THE PROSPECT OF FALLING OFF THE CLIFF OF A ‘NO DEAL’ DEPARTURE IS SEEN AS A LITERAL CRASHING OUT OF THE EU. TO THIS, OTHERS MOAN THAT THE POLITICAL SYSTEM HAS BEEN SO SKEWED ON THE KNIFE OF BREXIT THAT THERE’S A POLICY VACUUM ON OTHER MATTERS (ALTHOUGH IT SHOULD BE NOTED – AS CHRIS STEPHENS POINTS OUT IN HIS ARTICLE - UNIVERSAL CREDIT CONTINUES AS DOES AUSTERITY). OTHERS GO FURTHER AND CALLED THIS MESS DOWNRIGHT CATASTROPHE. AND, MANY MORE BEMOAN THAT THE WHOLE SYSTEM OF POLITICS ITSELF IN BRITAIN IS IN A MESS. NO POLITICIAN OR PARTY STANDS OUT WITH ANY DIGNITY OR STATURE IN THIS SITUATION ACCORDING TO THIS VIEW.

THE PROBLEM WITH SUCH AN ANALYSIS IS THAT IT TENDS TO DEPOLITICISE WHAT REMAINS AN INTENSELY POLITICAL PROCESS. THE VIEW IS ALMOST AS IF THERE WERE AT HAND COMPETENT AND SKILLED POLITICIANS PREPARED TO WORK TOGETHER IN THE ‘NATIONAL INTEREST’ THAT THE SITUATION WOULD BE DIFFERENT AND SO MUCH BETTER. BUT THIS IS A DEEPLY APOLITICAL AND NAÏVE APPRAISAL. THE REASON WHY MAY’S DEAL IS UNLIKELY TO GET PASSED IN PARLIAMENT IS BECAUSE THE TORY PARTY IS NOT ONLY WEAK (RELIANT UPON THE DEMOCRATIC UNIONIST PARTY (DUP)) AND BADLY SPLIT (WITH THE LIKES OF JACOB REES-MOGG OF THE EUROPEAN RESEARCH GROUP AND BORIS JOHNSON BEING THE OBVIOUS ‘HARD’ BREXITEERS). BUT BEHIND THIS ARE A FEW Seldom recognised realities.


THE POLITICAL CRISIS AROUND BREXIT IS NOW SO PROFOUND THAT THE CASE FOR A REFERENDUM ON EITHER MAY’S DEAL OR A ‘NO DEAL’ IS VERY MUCH REQUIRED. THIS IS NOT A BETRAYAL OF THE ‘NO’ VOTE IN 2016 PRECISELY BECAUSE THAT REFERENDUM DID NOT TAKE A VIEW ON WHAT FORM BREXIT SHOULD TAKE. IT IS CLEAR THAT MAY’S DEAL IS NOT A GOOD ONE AND A ‘NO DEAL’ IS EVEN WORSE. RATHER, ANOTHER REFERENDUM WOULD ALLOW ‘NO’ VOTERS THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPRESS THEIR VIEW ON WHAT KIND OF BREXIT THEY WISH FOR. WHETHER THIS TURNS INTO A REFERENDUM TO REVERSE THE DECISION OF THE 2016 ONE WOULD DEPEND ON WHAT THE QUESTION (BINARY CHOICE BETWEEN MAY’S DEAL AND ‘NO DEAL’) WAS OR QUESTIONS (THE BINARY CHOICE PLUS THE OPTIONS TO DELAY LEAVING, RESCIND ARTICLE 50, STAY IN THE EU/REJOIN...
the EU etc etc) were. Of course, what makes the political crisis as profound as it is are the intractable divisions in Labour, between ‘leavers’ like Corbyn and ‘remainers’ like Keir Starmer and how this influences many tactical questions including the relationship between calling for a general election and any kind of further referendum. Corbyn and a section of the left in Labour have been against the EU for decades in the vein of Tony Benn. Starmer and others see membership of the EU as a condition for a cosmopolitan type of capitalism.

Unfortunately, the echoes of Theresa May seeking to defend Britain’s so-called aforementioned ‘national interest’ can be found elsewhere. The ‘national interest’ is a compound of nationalism and power, a subterfuge of and for ideology and material interests. In a class-based society such as Britain, there can be no ‘national interest’ in the sense that it means that all citizens have the same interests and can benefit together and in equal measure from this or that government action. Instead, the ‘national interest’ is defined by the rich and powerful as the means to defend their interests — material (economic), political and ideological. And yet, Jeremy Corbyn still uses his version of this concept. Despite leading on political and economic priorities ‘for the many, not the few’, he has proclaimed his criticism of May and her Brexit deal because it does not work for ‘for the whole country’. On occasion, he has even used the term ‘national interest’ too. Succumbing to the notion of the ‘national interest’ in terms of British nationalism has its parallel in Nicola Sturgeon and the Scottish National Party (SNP). Sturgeon, whether in regard of independence for Scotland or opposing Brexit, has couched her arguments in terms of what is good for ‘Scotland’ and ‘the Scottish people’, as if class was but a ghost in the machine. Her followers including Derek MacKay, finance cabinet secretary, talk of the SNP Scottish Government’s budget being ‘a Budget for all of Scotland’ as if there were no rich and poor, no ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’ — or that the Scottish Government could simultaneously serve the interests of all such groups in equal measure.

This language of populism is more pernicious now than for a long time because the current erosion of the centre ground in British politics means that the hard right is using it as a way to deflect attention from the actual causes of the crises as well as whose interests are being defended in doing this. Populism is defined as juxtaposing the masses against elites. Is there a case for the left trying to use the same terms and language for its own purposes? Put more starkly, can the left refashion what is usually the preserve of the right, turning it against the right? Recall, David Cameron’s ‘we are all in it together’ mantra of the Coalition government era. In Gramscian terms, this would mean establishing a counter-hegemony with it. Certainly, Corbyn’s ‘for the many, not the few’ slogan is compatible with this perspective but that does not make it synonymous with it. It is altogether different ground when the more singular terms of ‘country’, ‘nation’ and ‘people’ are used — for reasons given above - as ‘for the many, not the few’ could at least be taken to suggest there is some kind of class system in existence. Contrast that with the launch by the People’s Assembly in December just gone of its ‘Britain is broken — we can’t afford the Tories’ campaign against austerity. In unfortunate echoes of Unite’s similarly named campaign just after Len McCluskey was elected to the position of its general secretary, it cannot be said that Britain is broken for there is at least one sizable section of society in Britain which is ‘doing very well, thank you very much’. Comprised of landlords, senior managers, investment banker and the like, this is an elite which keeps getting richer as wealth inequality across society widens.

But that cannot be the end of the linguistic matter because — as these editorials have repeatedly pointed out before — when the likes of Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell, Richard Leonard and now new Welsh Labour leader, Mark Drakeford, say that they are socialists and advocate socialism, what they actually mean is they are social democrats advocating social democracy (sometimes also called democratic socialism - as per Labour’s constitution and membership cards - in order to contrast itself to Soviet communism and Stalinism). This misnaming of socialism is repeated by the likes of the Morning Star and former Trotskyist Militant Tendency member and de facto leader of Liverpool City Council in the mid-1980s, Derek Hatton (who has rejoined Labour). There are also some examples of it in this issue of Scottish Left Review. Of course, while it is good that the term ‘socialism’ has re-entered the lexicon of the political mainstream as a term of commendation as result of Corbyn et al., this does not mean it comes without its own problems when used in this manner. Indeed, the imprecision of use here has in parallel in the imprecision of using the other terms discussed above. This is not to suggest that properly using terms like socialism would miraculously strengthen Labour’s electoral standing or its radicalism. But it is to suggest for the longer term that socialism rather than social democracy is what is required to address and end the ills of capitalism.

Speaking of Labour’s electoral standing, with three left leaders now in place, it is strange that Welsh Labour is more popular than Scottish or British Labour. Incredibly, British Labour has still not pulled away in the polls from the Tories despite May’s Brexit ‘shambles’ and their patent divisions. They remain neck and neck with each other. Something similar can be said about Scottish Labour — the SNP still has some Teflon-like qualities even though it has presided over the shambles of Scotrail and the running down of public services despite its protestations of shielding ‘Scotland’ against Tory austerity. Even when Sturgeon challenged the opposition parties to say where they would make cuts in spending to allow increases in spending elsewhere, this did not become an open goal for left opponents like Scottish Labour. So, Scottish Labour has made limited polling progress in reclaiming its former position despite a shift to the left in its policy positions and its willingness to deploy for progressive ends as yet unused legislative powers in the Scottish Parliament. We have two articles looking at the state of Scottish Labour since Leonard became leader in November 2017.

All that said, the theme of this issue is the Just Transition. When powerful and articulate, if nonetheless maverick, voices like Gary Smith, GMB Scotland regional secretary, attack the arguments from the left about a just green transition to a low-carbon economy as ‘pie in the sky’ and wanting to turn his boiler fitting members into ballet dancers, the left has to be able to respond in a credible way. We hope the theme of this issue helps in this cause. In this connection, and remarked upon by Stephen Smellie in his lead article, it is interesting to note that the GMB, Prospect, UNISON and UNITE unions, with 200,000 members in the energy sector, have produced a blueprint so workers and communities can be helped to adapt to the advent of the low carbon economy called ‘Demanding a Just Transition for Energy Workers’.
Just Transitioning – marrying environment protection and social justice

Stephen Smellie lays out what is meant by Just Transition and what role unions have to play here

The concept of the ‘Just Transition’ to a low carbon economy has become policy over the past few years with the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC), Trades Union Congress (TUC) and International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) all having it on their agenda. It was the international union movement, through the ITUC, that ensured global climate talks had the Just Transition concept adopted, including in the 2015 Paris Agreements.

The concept has become used quite broadly in terms of justice for a number of current or potential victims of the effects of climate change. This would include island communities threatened by rising sea levels; developing nations whose carbon footprint has been low and, therefore, their contribution to the problem negligible yet who are told they should not increase their use of carbon by developed nations whose carbon use for 200 years has brought them wealth and power which they now want to deny to others; and poorer nations who look for the rich world who don’t want to pay for the damage their economic policies have caused.

However, the concept was first developed in the union movement to address the need to consider the workers whose jobs, families and communities are dependent upon carbon industries and who stand to lose out when the current high carbon economy transitions to a low carbon economy. Those workers should not pay the price for society reaching a socially-agreed objective.

Canadian union activist, Brian Kohler, was one of the first to use and popularise the term in union circles in 1998 when he attempted to reconcile the union’s fight for decent jobs and the need to protect the environment. He said: ‘The real choice is not jobs or environment. It is both or neither’.

In Scotland, we know when industries change or close workers are the last consideration for employers and governments. The coal and steel industries simply cast workers and communities aside when they were no longer needed. As did manufacturers in the 1980s as Thatcher’s lack of industrial policy saw jobs exported. There was no justice for workers when these transitions occurred.

It is, therefore, correct that workers in today’s carbon industries, gas, oil, chemicals, and their unions have raised the demand that their interests need to be looked after as we move towards a low carbon economy. The GMB, Prospect, UNISON and Unite unions recently published Demanding a Just Transition for Energy Workers, which details their demands for a just transition. These include training, access to jobs that are as well paid as current jobs and a voice for energy workers in the planning for the future.

This is a growing international union movement working towards a just transition. Canadian unions in the coal industry have welcomed the setting up of The Just Transition Task Force for Canadian Coal-Power Workers and Communities which will draft a plan to support affected workers and communities as Canada moves to phase-out coal-fired power. Australian power plant unions have signed up to a number of Just Transition agreements that have included transferring workers from power plants into renewable sectors as coal plants close.

The starting point for Just Transition to a low carbon economy has, however, to be the commitment that the transition is necessary and that society, government, industry and unions have agreed that there is an urgency to not only make the transition but to work together to make this transition within the shortest time possible. The recent warnings from the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report which said we have 12 years to put in place the measures needed to reduce carbon use to avoid catastrophic global warming provide the evidence needed to create this sense of urgency.

However, some stakeholders don’t buy into this urgency and sometimes not even into a commitment to a transition. Trump is the obvious example but very few governments around the world have implemented the measures that would put them on course for achieving the targets agreed in Paris. The outcome of the Katowice COP (Conference of the Parties) talks was equally disappointing.

Some sections of the union movement can often appear reluctant participants in discussions regarding transitioning to a low carbon economy and use the language of Just Transition to refuse to contemplate any change unless the current members’ jobs are protected, or that alternative highly paid and unionised jobs are readily available. This approach is sometimes justified by the evidence that the shift to renewables did not create a bonanza of new jobs in the construction of renewables or in the new renewables sector.

In Scotland, we have some unions and politicians continuing to see the extension of oil and gas production as a priority for the economy and jobs. Some have argued in support of fracking and still harbour ambitions to overturn the effective ban that the Scottish Government has implemented. Their
reasons for this relate solely to the question of jobs, which for unions, is always going to be their starting point.

On the other hand, a growing number of unions and politicians, as well as environmentalists, scientists, and world climate change agreements, understand the argument that extending oil and gas production is the last thing we should be doing at the moment in terms of the urgent need to cut carbon emissions to stop global warming. All the evidence points out that most of the known carbon and fossil fuels in the ground should stay there if there is any chance of preventing the record breaking year-on-year temperature rises we have been seeing and which cause the increase in severe weather events, the melting of ice-caps and subsequent rise in sea levels and the extinction of many species of insects and animals.

It is in this context the need to protect workers’ interests and at the same time the environment, that the Just Transition was originally conceived. As the growing environmental movement of the 1970s and 1980s became more influential, as the evidence mounted about the impact of capitalist industrial processes on the environment and its likely impacts, and they stopped being dismissed as tree-hugging cranks, an engagement with the labour movement and the environmentalists became essential.

This was not the first time that unions engaged with the environmental movement. Throughout years of campaigning on health and safety, the link to the danger to the environment and workers has been made in relation to asbestos or the nuclear industry. American union leader, Tony Mazzochi, of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers’ International Union, pioneered these links in the 1960s.

Whilst some energy unions in the carbon industries were less receptive to messages about how their industries were a problem and needed to change, other unions became acutely aware of the consequences of continuing a high dependence on carbon use. Health union members reported increases in respiratory illness. Education union members were discussing with children the science of global warming and its consequences. Unions in the science sector had members producing the evidence of what was happening.

Therefore, the coming together within the union and labour movement of these forces created the necessary impetus to, on the one hand, accept that action is needed to reduce the use of carbon but, on the other, develop strategies that ensure that the workers in the carbon sector are not forgotten about and are looked after.

A transition to a low carbon economy must happen and that transition needs to be just to the workers. However, the Just Transition agenda is not simply related to these workers in the energy sector whose current jobs are part of an industry that is contributing to the problem. Other workers are in jobs that are at risk. Agricultural and food processing workers face changes related to climate change. The water industry, seafarers and other transport workers face significant challenges. High energy using industries such as manufacturing and construction face rising costs. The public sector workers whose budgets for services are cut to divert money to efforts to ameliorate the effects of climate change on infra-structure.

Other workers have a significant part to play in the transition and making sure that it is just: the science workers creating alternatives; the education workers training the current energy and future workers with the skills necessary for the future low carbon industries; and the public sector workers in environmental protection, infrastructure and planning, designing better communities that use less carbon.

Therefore, the assertion by some in the union movement that the Just Transition to a low carbon economy should be left to the energy workers needs to be challenged. This is an issue that affects all communities and all workers. Our consumption of energy, at work and at home, is part of the problem and our skills, knowledge and commitment to the transition to a low carbon economy is part of the solution.

For Scottish workers, we have immediate challenges and so the Scottish Government’s Just Transition Commission, set up after lobbying by the STUC and some unions working with Friends of the Earth Scotland in the Just Transition Partnership, is crucial to ensure that the necessary government actions in relation to industrial policy, education and training and harnessing public sector procurement and spending are directed towards a Just Transition for workers.

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Scottish Left Review, 14 West Campbell Street, Glasgow G2 6RX

Printed by
Hampden Advertising Ltd, 403 Hillington Road, G52 4BL, Tel: 0141 429 1010
Greening economics and politics with social justice

Francis Stuart argues unions are central to creating the Just Transition

At the STUC’s most recent annual congress, a number of resolutions were discussed which showed that energy and climate change policy are of enormous industrial and political significance to unions. A General Council statement committed the STUC to a body of work around energy and climate change – continuing our influencing work around the Scottish Government’s Just Transition Commission, looking further at energy policy, and considering how workers’ pensions might help address societal challenges such as climate change. This work is recognition that there are costs in failing to address climate change and costs in approaching a transition without justice at its heart.

Primary among this is a deepening environmental catastrophe and the subsequent impact on people around the world. The World Health Organisation estimates that by 2030, climate change will cause 250,000 additional deaths per year, due to malnutrition, malaria, diarrhoea and heat stress. The majority of those deaths will be in the global south rather than on these shores.

Climate change is already impacting disproportionately on people of colour, women, and those with the least capacity to respond to natural hazards, such as droughts, landslides, floods and hurricanes. Climate change is, therefore, an issue of race, gender and class. The cost could also be the rise of the far right. The irony that climate change caused by the rich in the Global North is now causing thousands of environmental migrants and refugees in the Global South will not prevent the far right stirring up racist sentiment against migrants for their own ends.

There are also huge risks in the current market-dominated approach to climate transition. Trump was quick to try to connect with the Gilets Jaunes, tweeting that the French had come around to his scepticism about the Paris climate change agreement and the cost of deindustrialisation and globalisation. The Scottish and British Governments’ complete lack of a coherent strategy for job creation in the low carbon economy has also meant we have failed to create good quality jobs in low carbon manufacturing. Scotland has one of the largest wind sectors but next to no manufacturing jobs in renewables. We have three BiFab yards in Scotland lying idle, developers who make their turbines abroad, and no political framework to ensure we capture value domestically. And we haven’t been able to capitalise on world-leading academic expertise in offshore wind, wave, tidal, and carbon capture and storage.

Over the last twenty years a number of Scottish Government documents, from parties of all stripes, have over-promised and under-delivered. For example, the 2010 Low Carbon Economic Strategy promised 60,000 new jobs by 2015. While data for low carbon jobs is poor and subject to a high degree of uncertainty, there is currently an estimated total of 49,000 direct and indirect low carbon jobs in Scotland, including a number in nuclear energy. Together, this represents less than 2% of jobs in Scotland.

Many of these jobs are less secure or unionised than traditional fossil-based jobs. A 2016 Strathclyde University study suggests that between 2004 and 2012 ‘employment in low carbon jobs in Scotland grew, but that this was more volatile than aggregate employment, and in particular that employment in this sector was particularly badly hit during the great recession’. A recent Guardian article highlighted a number of migrant workers building the £2.6bn Beatrice offshore windfarm were being paid less than the minimum wage.

There are clearly challenges for unions both in policy (ensuring that new jobs created aren’t simply left to private company profiteering or based on market incentives) and in organising (ensuring that unions adapt to a changing labour market and organise...
workers which aren’t simply centrally based as they were in the past). A key question in addressing both these challenges is the question of ownership.

The situation whereby one man, Jim Ratcliffe, owns a hugely important strategic energy asset accounting for 4% of Scottish GDP, and can threaten to up sticks and leave, is clearly not an acceptable state of affairs. Hopefully, Unite’s recent success in restoring collective bargaining arrangements might reign in the worst of Ratcliffe’s excesses.

The North Sea is also illustrative of a hyper-competitive model based on private company value extraction. Between 2014 and 2017, 160,000 jobs have been lost. At the same time, companies have sought to cut terms and conditions, lengthening shift rotas for offshore workers. Within the decommissioning sector, rigs are towed to beaches in South East Asia where they can be decommissioned without serious environmental regulations or workers’ rights.

Companies involved in renewables aren’t the flag-bearers for a more ethical form of capitalism either. Scottish Power is a wholly owned subsidiary of Spanish multi-national, Iberdrola. It recently announced plans to sell off its remaining coal and gas assets and go 100% renewable. While the move earned plaudits, it is entirely unclear how much capital spend of the move earned plaudits, it is entirely unclear how much capital spend of the move earned plaudits, it is entirely unclear how much capital spend of the move earned plaudits, it is entirely unclear how much capital spend of the move earned plaudits, it is entirely unclear how much capital spend of the move earned plaudits, it is entirely unclear how much capital spend of the move earned plaudits, it is entirely unclear how much capital spend of the move earned plaudits, it is entirely unclear how much capital spend of the move earned plaudits, it is entirely unclear how much capital spend of the move earned plaudits, it is entirely unclear how much capital spend of the move earned plaudits, it is entirely unclear how much capital spend of the move earned plaudits, it is entirely unclear how much capital spend of the move earned plaudits, it is entirely unclear how much capital spend of the move earned plaudits, it is entirely unclear how much capital spend of the move earned plaudits, it is entirely unclear how much capital spend of the move earned plaudits, it is entirely unclear how much capital spend of the move earned plaudits, it is entirely unclear how much capital spend of the move earned plaudits, it is entirely unclear how much capital spend of the move earned plaudits, it is entirely unclear how much capital spend of the move earned plaudits, it is entirely unclear how much capital spend of the move earned plaudits, it is entirely unclear how much capital spend of the move earned plaudits, it is entirely unclear how much capital spend of the move earned plaudits, it is entirely unclear how much capital spend

Decarbonisation of heating of homes and businesses can be driven more effectively if gas supply was to be publicly-owned. Municipal energy companies which both reduce energy prices and promote clean, decarbonised generation can win significant share of the supply market. A publicly-owned offshore wind company could stimulate investment and capture some of the returns that will be made from our natural resource. Linked to the availability of finance on the right terms from the Scottish National Investment Bank, publicly owned energy companies can transform energy in Scotland.

Scotland’s unions are clear that tackling climate change is a moral, social and economic imperative and Scotland must play its part in reducing emissions. However, meeting targets must ensure that workers and communities benefit and manufacturing is not simply offshored. A genuinely just transition, addressing fundamental questions of ownership, is the only way in which we will move to a low carbon economy while building a more equal economy and society.

Francis Stuart is a Policy Officer at the Scottish Trades Union Congress.

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Setting up a Just Transition Commission which will advise ministers on the development of a carbon-neutral economy that is fair for all appears to be a bold move by the Scottish Government. Initiatives or commissions in other countries have so far been restricted to just transition of specific sectors or locations like the coal industry in Spain or Tar Sands in Canada. The Scottish Government is also setting up a Scottish National Investment Bank which may well include Just Transition or at least investment in low carbon infrastructure in its remit. In addition, the option of a publicly-owned energy company is being considered. These three initiatives are the core things which the Just Transition Partnership has been pushing for. So are we on the verge of a successful transformation to a carbon-neutral economy that is fair to all in Scotland? So far, welcome though they are, these are all words, not deeds.

Meanwhile in its Climate Change Bill, the Scottish Government has resisted calls to set a target date to achieve net-zero emissions. And its actions in supporting the continuing development of oil and gas extraction point in the opposite direction. SNP MPs appear to be supporting the introduction of Transferable Tax Histories, the latest Treasury wheeze to deliver public subsidy to underpin the continuing profitability extraction and further exploration. ‘Maximising Economic Recovery’, the policy framework established after the report of the Wood Commission in response to job losses in the North Sea, appears to be about financial support to private enterprise rather than workers’ jobs and conditions, which continue to be under attack.

How will the Just Transition Commission negotiate these contradictions? The announcement of its remit and some of its members without the participation of unions or any of the leading environmental groups raised some eyebrows though that may have been just an initial hiccup in the process and there have been assurances given that union representatives will be included. The Just Transition Partnership, set up by Friends of the Earth Scotland and STUC in 2016, has made it clear that radical changes in objectives and methods of economic development and industrial policy are necessary. While built on longstanding dialogue about climate change and policy engagement of some unions, the impulse for the partnership was losing 60,000 North Sea jobs as the oil price plummeted in 2015-2016.

In face of further such jobs losses, and further deindustrialisation, the partnership focused initially on creating new jobs which can provide continued employment for those affected by decline in fossil fuel industries and provide similarly good or better wages and conditions in order to avoid the unjust transition when coal mining was shutdown. Some of these new jobs will be offshore (wind, wave, tidal, decommissioning) and others in the economic transformation needed to go low-carbon onshore (such as transport and energy efficiency).

The partnership has facilitated unions having a voice in the debate about climate change, seen originally as an environmental issue; and environmental organisations having increased purchase on economic and industrial issues. Working through the practical issues in joint papers combining these two perspectives, often for government consultations, identified:

- The need for action for reasons of climate change and economic justice are urgent.
- Market-based solutions have failed, publicly-driven solution are necessary, rooted in the extension of public control over economic outcomes.
- This will require public, municipal and community ownership of key parts of the energy systems so that it is reliable and effective and anchors development benefits in Scotland and to localities within it.
- Plans at national, sectoral and regional levels will not only generate well-paid jobs, with better employment conditions, but also deliver social benefits, which will be core to popular support and political positioning of this transformation as an opportunity not just a cost.
- The participation of the workers most affected, through unions as well as relevant communities, should be central aim.

This approach to economic development will give certainty and confidence for the large-scale investment programmes which are urgently required. Transformation of finance is needed for transformation of energy and industrial infrastructure, for which a powerful National Investment Bank will be at the core. Just Transition has to be central to its remit and to a revised Economic Strategy which ensures the commitment of the development agencies and moves government support away from fossil fuels. Any support to the energy sectors should be to deliver the just transition and employers should be required to negotiate just transition agreements with government and unions.

The biggest failure in terms of justice will be if the transition does not happen or is too slow. There has to be as much emphasis on ‘transition’ as there is on ‘just’; the transition won’t happen unless it is just because it will require a popular movement supporting it. If the Just Transition Commission follows through on its remit logically and without fear or favour to the powers that be, it will understand this and will be able to build on the policy framework developed by STUC, Friends of the Earth Scotland and other members in the Just Transition Partnership. We hope it does; and whether within or without the Commission, the Partnership will continue to develop support from across the political spectrum for these vital ideas.

Matthew Crighton works at Friends of the Earth Scotland

Friends of the Earth Scotland

1978 – 2018
Forty years of action to protect our environment

Matthew Crighton outlines the Just Transition Partnership between the STUC and Friends of the Earth Scotland

Scottish Left Review Issue 109 January/February 2019
The science is clear: either we make radical changes to our relationship with the environment, or hundreds of millions – potentially far more than this – will die. Whether by rising seas, expanding deserts or eroding soil, billions will be displaced. Combined with the unknown influence of positive feedback loops, the result could threaten civilisation as we know it.

The science has been clear for decades but in that time the response has been utterly inadequate: global emissions have risen by 60% since 1990. As we now stand, for any hope of avoiding 2°C of warming we’ll need rich countries to cut emissions by 90% by 2030. Under the Paris agreement, the EU target for that year is 40%. The British government has demonstrated its lack of concern with a budget ruling out any subsidies for renewables until 2025, meaning a 95% fall in investments over the next three years. For decades now, there have been marches held, petitions signed – and still our planet remains on course for catastrophe.

Something needs to change – and Extinction Rebellion (XR) plans to be that change. Our movement believes that, when faced with a political establishment unwilling to take the necessary steps to avert catastrophe, our only remaining choice is to take direct action to preserve our planet’s future.

Our methods take inspiration from the movements of Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi. These movements were mass-scale, assertive enough to practice civil disobedience, but above all peaceful: XR puts a high priority on non-violence in both our actions and our language. We take this approach not just because it’s nicer but because it’s better: the work of Erica Chenoweth, for example, finds non-violent movements twice as likely to succeed as violent ones.

As we’ve been demonstrating, though, non-violence doesn’t mean meekness. Governments can ignore and have ignored petitions and routine marches, just as they’ve ignored the increasingly severe effects of climate change – but they can’t ignore gridlocked roads, blockaded buildings and overflowing police stations. So on the 17 November, when 6,000 rebels shut down five London bridges before marching on Parliament Square, the police vans and helicopters were closely followed by invitations from MPs to talk about climate policy.

Our demands are simple. First, the government openly acknowledge and publicise the truth about our situation: from parliament to the BBC, the present discussion of climate change is a long way from the urgency obliged by the facts. Second, that the government enact legally binding policies to reduce carbon emissions to zero by 2025, and act accordingly in the international arena. And third, that a Citizens’ Assembly create a plan for this change: this will be a body chosen by sortition to represent the people’s perspective in a political system which has grown out of touch with those it claims to represent – as is strikingly apparent in the case of climate change, with 71% of respondents to a YouGov poll favouring more investment in renewable energy, and 83% demanding that fossil fuel companies bear the costs of climate change.

Since taking the bridges on the 17 November, we’ve kept up the pressure, with multi-day roadblocks in London, a march on Buckingham Palace, the blockading of government buildings, and a national day of action spanning from Totnes to Inverness, involving everything from die-ins to guerrilla gardening. Some of our actions are more disruptive, others less: we take no pleasure in causing inconvenience, but see such disruption as a regrettable necessity in the fight to avert the much darker disruptions to come from climate change.

We’ve been growing fast, and as we grow we’re making efforts to decentralise as much as possible, both organisationally and geographically – with 80 branches across Britain at the time of writing since we were established in late October 2018. This broad reach has allowed us to work towards our demands on the local level as well as the national, with local authorities in Bristol, Stroud, Totnes, Trafford and London all now having declared states of climate emergency. In keeping with this decentralised approach, XR Scotland is currently working on its own Scotland-specific version of XR’s declaration of rebellion.

And it’s not just in Britain that we’re growing: at the time of writing there are nearly 200 XR branches spread across 25 countries, from Norway to India. This international scale is, of course, essential to achieving our goal of limiting the effects of climate change and the related environmental crises. With this in mind, our forthcoming actions will be building towards a week of international rebellion, beginning on the 15 April, where we will tell the leaders of the world with one voice that the time to act is now.

There’s plenty to do before April. XR Scotland held its inaugural meeting in Edinburgh in November, attracting over 200 people, and has since established branches all over Scotland. Hundreds of people are attending talks and trainings, in preparation for large-scale actions in 2019. If you’d like to help, or would like to learn about our movement, contact xrscotland@protonmail.com.

Douglas Rogers is a member of Extinction Rebellion’s press team. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extinction_Rebellion for more on XR

Douglas Rogers is a member of Extinction Rebellion’s press team. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extinction_Rebellion for more on XR
The global dimension of the Just Transition

*Bill Bonnar argues Africa, as the poorest continent, needs special attention and resources*

There is no doubt that the issue of radical climate change has rocketed up the political agenda both in Britain and on a global scale. It seems the dramatic warnings contained in the now endless reports are hitting home and the world is waking up to the scale of the crisis. In the past, climate change was seen as a future crisis worthy of attention but not a priority. Now it is clear that this future has now arrived and is having an ever increasing impact.

A report from Oxfam some years ago described a two stage process. In the short to medium term, the world would see a dramatic increase in severe weather events including everything from hurricanes to droughts as the planet gradually warmed. In the longer term, rising sea levels would have an even greater impact. It is now clear we are living through the first of these scenarios. According to the follow-on reports from Oxfam (which had been monitoring ‘climate-based disasters’ from 1995 to 2015), there had been a fourfold increase in such events in that period. The reports described a climate-based disaster as ‘an extreme weather event which caused significant human casualties’. In a similar vein, the former Australian Prime Minister at a Climate Change Conference in Melbourne, when discussing the severe drought affecting that country, said that we should stop referring to this as a ‘drought’. Calling it a drought implies something temporary whereby at some stage the drought will end and normality will resume. In fact, the drought is the new normality and Australia had witnessed a climactic shift.

The continent most affected by climate change is Africa. It is also the continent least able to deal with its significant challenges. Drought is now a major factor in many parts of Africa. In the southern and eastern parts of the continent, the drought is as severe as that in Australia but with one major difference. Australia has the resources to deal with it. In countries such as Zimbabwe, Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, Namibia, Mozambique, Angola and Botswana, drought is having a dramatic effect. Expanding deserts, less arable land and less fresh water supplies are having an increasing impact on the economies of these countries and in turn are exacerbating social and tribal conflicts. Across the continent, competition for declining resources has become a major factor in some conflicts. An example is the on-going war in Darfur in Sudan which originated as a conflict between two tribal groups over access to scarce arable land before being exacerbated by the government in Khartoum.

Africa faces many climate change problems. The growth of urbanisation has led to a dramatic increase in the need for fresh drinking water while the demands of globalisation have had a major distorting effect on African economies. Africa is a major exporter of raw materials yet has effectively no control over the prices it can charge for these exports. This is because these industries are largely owned and controlled by multi-national companies or through trade deals with countries like China.

African economies has also been forced down the road of replacing production for domestic consumption with cash crops for export which again has had a distorting effect on many economies. So, according to the United Nations in 1970, Africa was almost completely self-sufficient in food production and a major global exporter of food. Today, every African country without exception is a major food importer. All of this makes it difficult for African countries to finance the kinds of measures needed to tackle the effects of climate change. Africa needs massive financial aid from richer parts of the world, not as an act of charity but because tackling the problems of climate change in one part of the world affects all others. Besides, given the wholesale looting of the continent in the colonial and post-colonial period, Africa is due some of that money back in reparations.

The recent international climate change conference in Poland highlights some of the issues. Like at other such conferences, scientists identify the problems and the absolute minimum set of measures needed to tackle them. In order to reach agreement, these hitherto absolute minimum measures are then watered down massively, reducing their effectiveness. That’s if they are actually carried out at all. The track record so far on this is not encouraging. The value of such conferences, therefore, tends to be symbolic as well as raising awareness. Actual change comes through the climate change programmes of individual countries and, here, Scotland has become something of a world leader as it makes the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy. The tens of billions of pounds of resources and the infrastructure needed to implement change are beyond the reach of most African countries. Future international conferences are needed to focus on how the richer countries can assist the continent for the benefit of everyone.

*Bill Bonnar is a member of the editorial committee of the Scottish Left Review*
Why and how the SNP must stop being ‘the party of oil’

Simon Barrow argues the SNP must more fully commit to the Just Transition

Climate change is the all-embracing challenge of our civilisation. At stake is the survival of the planet itself. Intertwined with the central causes global warming are the multiple failures of free-market capitalism, inequality, poverty, forced human migrations on an unprecedented scale, and the potential for further catastrophic conflicts across the globe.

This is why all political parties and movements have a fundamental duty to re-examine their core political and economic outlook and policies in order to face the sweeping changes which the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and grassroots Extinction Rebellion movement are pointing towards with stark urgency.

In the case of the SNP, that means confronting the necessity for a historic shift away from being the ‘party of oil’ to being a party of just transition heading towards a cutting edge green technology future for Scotland. This is the Rubicon that the governing party in Scotland now has to cross, if its frequent claims and aspirations to being a world-leader in tacking climate change are not to ring hollow. But what does it mean in practical terms?

In the United States, the left inside and outside the Democratic Party has made a ‘Green New Deal’ the centrepiece of an effort to shift establishment politics and opposition to Trump into a new paradigm: one that seeks to unite a pioneering political and economic programme to the growing but inchoate public mood for change. This involves subverting and redirecting political energies which are currently submerged in dangerous right-wing populism.

Something similar now needs to happen in Scotland. The debate within the SNP and on the left over our national future should not just be about Brexit and constitutional change (a reformed Europe, self-governance, and the possibility of a confederation of nations and regions replacing the UK), important though those are. It has to be about Scotland having a clear alternative prospectus in the midst of a neo-liberal quagmire. A Scotland that – alongside others on these islands and beyond – aims to be a socially just, equitable, internationalist, nuclear-free country whose shared economic prosperity is founded upon hosting some 40% of Europe’s on- and off-shore renewable energy potential.

In other words, the inescapable challenge of transitioning rapidly and justly away from a fossil-fuel based economy to a non-carbon future one dovetails with the kind of democratic, progressive, sustainable political platform which stops the SNP sinking into the dull, centrist, technocratic social democracy to which it will otherwise fall prey. It is as essential for political renewal and post-austerity economics as it is for the survival of a small nation on an imperilled planet.

Practically, the need is for much more joined-up thinking about shifting rapidly from dependence on oil and gas to a renewable energy economy grounded on investment, high wages, mobile and automated technology, and skilled jobs.

Some of the required levers for this are in place or are on the threshold of being introduced. They include a national investment bank, a publicly owned energy company, and a national infrastructure company. Such instruments can be transformational. As the Scottish Greens have pointed, many of the powers required for a just transition already exist – but far more are needed. If the pro-Brexit disaster capitalists get their way (or anything like it) in Britain, there is simply no alternative than for Scotland to regain maximum possible control of its political and economic future.

This requires a major shift in political imagination. ‘It’s Scotland’s oil’ was the widely publicised political slogan used by the SNP during the 1970s in making its economic case for independence. During the 2014 referendum falling oil prices encouraged the idea of seeing oil as ‘bonus’. But ever since then, in spite of adopting a swathe of other environmentally oriented policies, the party has cheered every new oil or gas deposit discovery. The deep dependence on fossil fuel thinking has not changed. We need to understand that carbon fuels aren’t a bonus; they’re a planetary liability. Equally, they are also a source of thousands of jobs and social infrastructures that need replacing. Investment, political will, policy creativity, scientific know-how and community engagement are all needed to make green transition just is enormous. But it is also possible and necessary, and it has to start right away with an acknowledgement by the SNP that we are in the midst of a climate emergency.

Simon Barrow is director of the beliefs, politics and ethics think tank, Ekklesia. He is a co-opted member of the SNP Trade Union Group executive committee, and also an executive committee member of SNP Socialists. He has co-edited ‘A Nation Changed: Ten Years of the SNP and Scotland’ (Luath Press, 2017) with Gerry Hassan, and ‘Scotland 2021’ (Bella Caledonia and Ekklesia, 2016) with Mike Small.
Opportunities for Scotland’s climate related legislation

Gordon Morgan says the Scottish Government has several opportunities to help make the transition

The Scottish Government boasts that it is a world leader in reducing climate emissions and to a certain extent that is true. However, most of the actual emission reductions have come from the fortuitous circumstance that we have the best climate for wind power and potentially for wave and tidal power as well and, therefore, can produce energy from these cheaper than elsewhere in Britain. This has enabled the entire removal of coal based electricity generation, thereby helping to reduce emissions by around 50% but this is as part of the grid to which Scotland exports electricity. The Scottish Government also has amongst the most transparent and most accountable reporting mechanisms with annual reports to parliament, unlike England which has a five-yearly reporting scrutiny process.

The coming year will test the Scottish Government’s resolve to maintain this progress with significant legislation being considered. To some extent the Scottish Government is getting its excuses in first with justified claims that energy policy is a reserved matter and the Tory Westminster Government seems distracted by Brexit and has not brought forward meaningful responses to the latest UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report or Westminster’s Climate Change Committee (CCC) criticisms of its lack of action on transport and housing. However, the CCC makes the same criticisms of the Scottish Government. So what legislative issues are being considered and what difference will they make?

Climate Change Bill

Whilst this may seem the most important piece of legislation, it largely updates target emissions and does not include precise mechanisms or policies to mitigate climate change. These targets may be changed once the CCC report is received in March or April 2019. The other policies require other legislation. The Government is also relying on the latest model for the lowest cost path to climate reduction (the TIMES model which is used across Britain but with a Scottish set of parameters). A low cost model will not accelerate actions that can be taken now and these could reduce emissions in early years faster through changes in the transport infrastructure.

Fuel Poverty Bill

This is essential for the Just Transition as we cannot expect all households, or indeed, the majority of households, to embrace voluntarily adapting to the higher costs of electric heating compared to gas without at least compensating energy savings. Two critical issues are the targets for eliminating fuel poverty and how fuel poverty is defined. This Bill may be amended to take account of changes to the definition of fuel poverty and how Energy Performance Certificates are awarded or reviewed. A Warm Homes Bill will be introduced later in the year which will also impact on the refurbishment programme and should set out policies on moving away from gas heating. To meet these targets, enormous amounts of government support will be necessary which would need to be funded by general taxation or price controls on energy, which the Scottish Government has no powers for as yet.

Transport Bill

This will allow for low emissions zones to be introduced and may pass authority to local councils to regulate buses and better control road repairs. It does not, however, mention walking or cycling or ferries. A separate bill would ease the establishment of 20 MPH zones. Separately, the Government needs to be pressed on how much of the rail network can be electrified, what steps are being taken to ensure low carbon trains on the remaining 70% of the network that cannot be electrified and whether rail will be brought into public ownership.

Proposed Prohibition of Fracking Bill

This could outlaw rather than suspend indefinitely fracking.

Proposed European Charter of Local Self Government (Incorporation) Bill

This would to a degree limit the control of central government over local authorities.

Publicly Owned Energy Company (POEC)

Although this will proceed to legislation, the recommendations from the parliamentary committee are that Scotland moves to establish an independent body, perhaps along the lines of a Danish-style Energy Agency, and that the POEC should be positioned at the heart of energy policy and market transition, strategic in its long-term thinking and planning. Critical will be whether the Government accepts that it has to be more than another energy company in a crowded marketplace making no profits. Although this is a critical issue it can only be resolved fully, given Scotland’s current position, if somehow either Westminster or the EU allows state investment or rationalisation/nationalisation of the energy market.

The Scottish Government’s response to the above programme along with their targets for electric recharging, encouraging electric and hydrogen vehicles, improving energy standards in all new buildings, deciding how to replace gas from existing houses and their consideration of a date for banning new gas boilers will determine whether Scotland can meet its own existing climate targets and maintain its status as a leader on climate change.

Gordon Morgan is an energy researcher and member of the Scottish Left Review editorial committee

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Capitalism is the climate crisis

Dave Sherry says the systemic roots of the crisis lie in the economic system we live under

To a great media fanfare, the UN climate change conference drew to a close in December with nothing agreed that could even pretend to avert climate catastrophe. Representatives from 200 countries gathered in Katowice, Poland, for two weeks of discussions about implementing agreements from previous conferences. The last summit in Paris produced an empty promise that countries would limit carbon emissions to keep the global temperature rise within 2 degrees above pre-industrial levels. In Poland, the talks worked out a guideline for putting this in place, but couldn’t agree much beyond this. The more contentious issues were postponed to next year.

Capitalism has set humanity on a collision course with nature. In its latest, neo-liberal phase it has unleashed what conservation ecologist, Ian Rappel, calls: ‘a scale of ecological destruction that has few precedents across the earth’s geological history. We are teetering on the brink of a sixth mass extinction event. … this wanton destruction of non-human life in its myriad and amazing forms is surely one of the most obvious markers of our descent towards barbarism’ (International Socialism, 160).

The frustrations and the enormity of this challenge have led some to adopt dubious strategies and compromises. Their drive to assign monetary value to bio-diversity and nature is being touted as the only way to get the message across to governments, corporations and the markets. This strategy of ‘nature financialisation’—the process whereby bankers turn to environmental conservation as a new field for speculative investment, has won acceptance among scientists and politicians while global recession wreaks havoc.

For today’s pragmatic environmentalist, the concept of ‘natural capital’ (NC) is the answer. Its more extreme advocates argue environmental regulations are ineffective and distort the market; its more moderate supporters qualify their enthusiasm by asserting ‘nature conservation’ through ‘natural capital accounting’—a financial audit of the impact of society on nature. Given the rich history of fraud associated with neo-liberalism, it’s no wonder Ian Rappel has argued this approach - the spirit of Katowice - will prove naive: ‘Appealing to market capitalism, its corporations and politicians, to value biodiversity through money is akin to asking the fox to look after the henhouse’.

Warnings are coming thick and fast about how the earth is hurting towards catastrophe. 2018 has been an unusually hot year, with record-breaking droughts, floods and hurricanes across the globe. The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warns the earth’s temperature must be kept below a rise of 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels and estimates that in 12 years it will be too late to limit the temperature rise to that figure. It says carbon pollution will need to be eradicated by 2050—not 2075 as suggested by the previous agreements. But as the IPCC bemoans ‘the political will at the top of society is lacking’.

In the short run, the rich will shield themselves from the worst aspects of climate change. So millionaires were able to hire private fire fighters to protect their homes during November’s California wildfires while entire working class communities burned to the ground. Climate change, like every other horror of capitalism, will hit working people and the poor first and hardest.

As this becomes clearer, new radical forces are emerging to pressure the politicians to act. Throughout November school students across Australia held protests and strikes to demand action on climate change now. There have also been weeks of school and university strikes throughout Germany. And in Britain, Extinction Rebellion has drawn thousands onto the streets to declare a ‘climate emergency’ (see Douglas Roger’s article, this issue). The first Saturday in December saw thousands march through London to demand ‘drastic and rapid action’. Called by the Campaign against Climate Change, this march brought together environmental activists, workers and students with Extinction Rebellion present too.

Canadian Marxist ecologist, Ian Angus, argues in his Facing the Anthropocene that while the dependence on fossil fuels began with the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century, the new epoch actually began in the second half of the twentieth century. Like most scientists involved in the research, he calls the period since 1950 ‘the Great Acceleration’ as a result of the growth of fossil production and use, auto-mobilisation of Western society, corporate concentration and the rise of monopolies, mass introduction of synthetic petro-chemical based products and industrialisation of agriculture with the Second World War accelerating their rise.

It is significant that many scientists most closely associated with Anthropocene research have endorsed Angus’s book and Marx’s contention that capitalism would generate a ‘metabolic rift between human society and the larger natural world of which it was an emergent part’. This suggests that climate scientists as well as rebellious youth are being pushed towards more radical conclusions and are willing to engage with a specifically socialist argument—capitalism is not an option.

Dove Sherry is a member of the Scottish Left Review editorial committee
Universal Credit – universal cruelty for the poor and vulnerable

Chris Stephens says the real scandal of this Tory government is its welfare policy not Brexit

It’s all too easy for MPs to be consumed by all matters Brexit at Westminster given the bulk of debate is devoted to scrutinising the Tories’ mishandling of negotiations and the increasingly frantic attempts by May to box everyone into accepting the false dichotomy of her deal versus a ‘no deal’. In ordinary times, this would easily result in a ‘no confidence’ motion. However, these are no ordinary times as Brexit has blown apart many accepted political norms as neither government nor the lead opposition party has a clear united position on the issue. When much of the discussion centres around when to trigger such a motion, we know we are in the twilight zone. But there is a non-Brexit issue commanding cross-party support that should trigger a vote of ‘no confidence’ in the government - a pressing issue that is literally a matter of life or death for some people. It’s called Universal Credit (UC).

The Tories are not just presiding over a broken social security system but knowingly pushing ahead with a policy and process that is actively harming people. A growing and impartial body of evidence proves that UC is not just driving people into poverty but is pushing them to the brink and beyond in physical and mental health terms. In the face of the evidence presented to the Work and Pensions committee that I sit on from respected and diverse sources, it is hard not to conclude that both an austerity/cuts agenda and a judgemental ideological agenda is being pursued by May and the Tories.

Since UC was rolled out to both job centres servicing Glasgow South West, my office has seen not just an increase in caseload, but local food banks and charities experiencing a steep increase in people needing urgent assistance and an immediate rise in applications to the Scottish Welfare Fund. Were it not for the huge generosity of local people and their donations to food banks and other charities, the crisis would be even worse. Make no mistake, the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and government ministers know this and are relying on the kindness of strangers to their fellow citizens to plug the gaps in their budget.

The concept that this system will help people adjust to a working environment is nonsense. Consistent research shows claimants moving out of work to social security are more likely to have been paid on a weekly or fortnightly basis rather than monthly.

One of the biggest dangers to claimants is the five week wait for the initial payment. Despite encouragement to reduce this further from the Work and Pensions Select Committee, all immediate evidence is that this wait is causing significant hardship in our communities. Every charity and food bank is reporting claimants can just about manage to get to 3 weeks, but need immediate help in week four.

The real scandal involves the two child limit, and the repulsive rape clause. We now have a government implementing a policy which punishes a child for their birth order. Asked about the impact this policy will have on child poverty, the Child Poverty Action Group told the DWP Select Committee: ‘You could not design a policy better to increase child poverty than this one [and] families with three or more children have a much higher risk of poverty already. The rate of child poverty in these families after housing costs is up to 42% in the last dataset. This is projected to go up to 52%. We have carried out analysis - working with the Institute for Public Policy Research using their modelling that suggests that at least 200,000 additional children will go into poverty as a result of this policy, and 100,000 into severe poverty’.

The one single household payment is not protecting claimants who are victims of domestic abuse. During the committee’s inquiry, it became clear that women’s aid charities saw split payments as the way forward as a minimum payment should be paid to main carer.

A recent development is how sanctions increase with UC (as opposed to the legacy benefit system). Take the example of someone who refuses a zero hour contract. They were not able to be sanctioned under legacy system, but under UC will be. In an incredible exchange between myself and Amber Rudd before Christmas, the Secretary of State suggested that this was the correct approach, and did not seem to appreciate that this would push people into insecure work and delay benefits payments pushing people into debt.

The Scrooge like qualities of this government are evident. The DWP Christmas bonus was kept at the same rate since 1972 at £10 but will now be abolished. For some people, £10 can make the difference between heating or eating, never mind Xmas cheer.

Of all the reasons to get rid of the Tories, UC and punishing people for being vulnerable and in need is as important as what may or may not happen with Brexit. There are few certainties about what happens in 2019, but as long as Universal Credit stays in place as it is then many people, families and children will suffer hunger and stress. Brexit will only increase this vulnerability and unnecessary suffering.

Chris Stephens is the (SNP) MP for Glasgow South West and a member of the Scottish Left Review editorial committee.
Death in Police Custody: the case of Sheku Bayoh

Aamer Anwar explains why his death must be the subject of a public inquiry

Sheku Ahmed Tejan Bayoh was a well-liked, hard-working young man, with no previous history of violence, when he died aged 31. He was a loving partner and proud father of 4 month old, Isaac, and 3 year old, Tyler. Sheku moved to Britain from Sierra Leone when he was 11 and joined his sister in Kirkcaldy when he was 17.

On 3 May 2015, he left his home between 7.00am and 7.15am and walked about a mile. Police officers responded to several calls from members of the public of a black male acting erratically with a knife. Two police vans and 5 police cars were dispatched and 9 uniformed police officers attended the scene. Several officers confronted Sheku and a minimum of 5 were involved in his restraint.

Sheku’s family believe his behaviour was totally out of character. He was under the influence of drugs and his family believe whilst police have the right to defend themselves, any use of force has to be at all times lawful, reasonable and proportionate. The family subsequently learned Sheku was not carrying a weapon at the time the police arrived, he did not use a knife on the police nor was one ever found upon him.

Despite an attempt to smear Sheku after his death through ‘police source leaks’ to the media, he did not attack police officers with a knife or a ‘machete’. The family also now know Sheku did not attack the police first but that he was attacked by them not once, but several times even though he had not acted violently. It was following this that a police officer was injured.

It has been confirmed that CS spray, Pava (pepper) spray and batons were used by uniformed police officers on Sheku as he was restrained and brought to the ground by several officers within 42 seconds of their arrival. Some officers stated they believed they were under ‘terrorist attack’. Sheku was also handcuffed and restraints applied to his knees and ankles. Shortly thereafter, he lost consciousness and died. His body was covered with lacerations, bruising and a broken rib.

At 7.34am CPR was attempted at the scene, an ambulance was called and he arrived at the nearby Victoria Hospital at 7.45am but despite attempts to resuscitate him he was officially pronounced dead at 9.04am. Reports were also issued shortly after his death that a police woman was stabbed but these turned out to be completely false.

Following his death, over the course of the next 6 hours, 5 different versions of events were given to the family by police officers. Initially, both Sheku’s partner, Collette and his family were told by police it was a member of the public who found his body and the police were looking for 2 individuals.

The family does not understand why the officers involved in engaging with Sheku were allowed to sit in one room together for several hours, whilst they refused to provide statements to the Police Investigations and Review Commissioner investigators and failed to do so for 32 days. The officers were not immediately suspended ‘without prejudice’ after Sheku’s death. To do so is not to pre-judge the investigation’s outcome but ensure neutrality, integrity of the investigation, transparency as well as protecting officers involved in such incidents.

Positional asphyxiation was suspected which is a form of asphyxia which occurs when someone’s position prevents the person from breathing adequately. Drugs were also found in Sheku’s blood stream which led to behaviour which was totally out of character.

From the very beginning Sheku’s family placed their faith in the Lord Advocate, Police Scotland and PIRC to act decisively to restore confidence and satisfy the need for a demonstrably independent investigation. Sheku’s family and the Scottish public deserved to have a robust, impartial and transparent investigation into his death which scrutinised the individual conduct and tactics of police officers present at his detention and restraint and those in command of them when Sheku died.

The use of CS spray and dangerous restraint techniques poses questions about the power of the police and must be subject to public scrutiny and approval so that future deaths and injuries to the public can be prevented. The question of race has always been the elephant in the room. Sheku’s family do not feel he would have been treated in such a manner had he been white. A BBC investigation revealed the family of one the officers who restrained Sheku had a violent history and it was alleged that he ‘hated black people’.

Sheku’s family believed there should be no impunity for those found to be involved in any criminality, misconduct or impropriety.

On 3 October 2018, the family met with the Lord Advocate, Scotland’s top prosecutor to be told there would be no criminal proceedings against the officers. At this point in time, we are preparing to seek a review of that decision but expect that the police officers will simply walk away.

The family have requested Cabinet Secretary for Justice, Humza Yousaf, orders a full judicial public inquiry to ensure that the full facts of the circumstances of Sheku’s death are brought into the public domain, including a focus on Police Scotland’s use of CS spray, restraint techniques, the question of race and the circumstances in which they operated on 3 May 2015.

Whilst it is often fashionable to talk of ‘black lives matter’ in the USA or London, this happened on our streets in Scotland. Nobody should be allowed to evade accountability or frustrate the investigation process and Sheku’s family will not rest until they have the truth.

Aamer Anwar is the leading human rights lawyer in Scotland and the solicitor for the family of Sheku Bayoh.
On the frontline: fighting the fascists
Talat Ahmed calls upon the left to mobilise on 2 February in a show of strength

It is five years since Greek anti-fascists called for international solidarity for their struggle against the fascist party, Golden Dawn, and for a response to the growth of racism and the far right. Stand Up To Racism (SUTR) Scotland is calling on trade unionists to help build the anti-racist movement. On Saturday 2 February, SUTR will hold a conference to bring activists together to discuss key issues and build for the coordinated international protests on 16 March 2019, around UN Anti-Racism Day.

History tells us if we unite and mobilise a mass movement, we can push back racism and crush the growth of fascist organisations. This lesson is a crucial one for us today. In June 2018, we witnessed one of the largest far right organised demonstrations ever in Britain. Some 15,000 assorted racists, xenophobes and Hitler-admirers protested in Whitehall to ‘defend free speech’. Oswald Moseley’s British Union of Fascists or the Nazi boot boys of the National Front in the 1970s never achieved such a mobilisation. This ‘Free Tommy Robinson’ rally was backed and funded by an international network of the far right that has been emboldened by Trump’s presidency. Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, the real name of Tommy Robinson, has become a pivotal figure in the resurgence of the far right in Britain.

Using racist scapegoating, he is successfully uniting people around his Islamophobic agenda, but he’s not the only one. Eighteen months ago, we saw the emergence of the Football Lads Alliance (FLA) in the aftermath of a series of terrorist attacks in Britain. It capitalised on the outrage felt by many at the loss of innocent lives and professed to be “united against extremism” but its Islamophobic underbelly was soon exposed by determined campaigning by SUTR.

We have not seen the frightening sight of fascists enter parliament here. Yet in Germany and Hungary this is the case. The Austrian government is now run by a Tory-Fascist coalition. In too many countries in Europe and beyond over recent years, the growth of the far right has shocked people. Anti-semitism has reared its ugly head in Poland and Hungary, driven in the main by authoritarian governments, but Islamophobia is the glue cementing the far right globally.

It will, no doubt, be no surprise to readers of this magazine that we have seen the far right’s popularity grow after years of global economic crisis. The stakes are high. At SUTR’s International Conference in London last October attendees were shocked at the scale of the task at hand and inspired by the determined action in many countries to counter the far right.

Semantism is increasingly dominated by open fascists, is gaining in elections. It was involved in the violent rampage against migrants in Chemnitz last September. There was an immediate response from anti-racists in Chemnitz and over 250,000 joined the ‘Unteilbar’ (indivisible) march in Berlin after a broad-based mobilisation of the left, the unions and the wider anti-racist movement.

In too many places racism is becoming socially acceptable and Scotland is not immune. In the last six months alone Stand Up To Racism Scotland has organised and joined with many others to counter a series of racist attacks in Edinburgh, and opposed fascists trying to grow in Glasgow and Dundee. We saw the effects of Theresa May’s ‘hostile environment’ in Glasgow with Serco’s threat to evict vulnerable people from their homes, those they deemed to be ‘failed asylum seekers’. The response from campaigners, politicians and trade unionists to defend them was magnificent.

We must challenge the racist scapegoating from the political mainstream that helps fuel the growth of the far right. The emerging new far right street movement is attempting to take advantage of the political crisis by scapegoating migrants, refugees and the Muslim community. And we cannot allow our unity to be broken. In early December fascist ‘Tommy Robinson’ called his ‘Great Brexit Betrayal’ march in London, hoping to take advantage of May’s crisis over her Brexit deal. Sadly, some argued that your position over membership of the European Union should be a dividing line in the mobilisation against Robinson. Thankfully, a united demonstration was forged on the day that called for people (whether ‘leave’ or ‘remain’) to say no to racism and fascism. We outnumbered Robinson’s march by three to one. Unity is our strength.

Dr Talat Ahmed is Lecturer in South Asian History at the University of Edinburgh and Convenor of Stand up to Racism Scotland (see https://www.facebook.com/SUTRScot/)

Ismahane Chouder, co-founder of the International Forum against Islamophobia and for civil rights, underlined the dangers of the left not challenging discrimination and targeting of Muslims or Roma or other minorities. Civil rights and Roma campaigner, Sandor Szoke, reported the chilling news in Hungary that a new crime of homelessness had just been included in the country’s constitution. Gender studies, discussing Marx or women’s liberation has also been forbidden by Viktor Orban’s regime.

But the march of the far right is not going unopposed. We also heard from anti-fascists in Poland now mobilising thousands on the streets. This is all the more important since Polish state officials refused to distance themselves from fascists organising around Poland’s independence day parade.

In Germany, the racist AfD party, which
‘Value Education, Value Teachers’ campaign marches on
Larry Flanagan explains the magnificent mobilisation of teachers so far

The Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) launched its Value Education, Value Teachers (VEVT) campaign last January. The aim of the campaign was simple: to seek to reverse the decade-long decline in the value of teachers’ salaries by achieving a significant pay rise for Scotland’s teaching professionals. Since the financial crash and the imposition of austerity, Scotland’s teachers have seen the value of their take-home pay decline by over 24% in real terms through a decade of pay freezes, sub-inflation pay settlements, and increases in pension and national insurance contributions.

While pay has declined, workload has soared. Scotland has 3,000 fewer teachers than it did a decade ago, with pupil numbers on the rise. This toxic combination created a growing crisis in teacher recruitment and retention across Scotland. Student teacher places remain unfilled, local authorities struggle to fill vacant posts, and experienced teachers are increasingly walking away from the profession early in search of less stressful, better paid jobs.

Against this backdrop, the VET campaign has become a lightning rod for the discontent amongst teachers. Whilst pay is a key issue, EIS members have been clear that excessive workload, the developing crisis around inadequate support for pupils with additional support needs, and the relentless changes in curriculum and assessment are all equally critical.

All public sector workers have suffered under austerity, of course, and the EIS has been clear from the outset that the campaigns of all unions in the various sectors would benefit from synergies and solidarity actions.

In terms of the teachers’ campaign, the 10% claim immediately signalled to members that this year was different. It emerged from our previous AGM which had demanded a major fight back on pay – inspired in particular by the successful strike action of EIS FELA in the college sector and by our members in West Dunbartonshire.

In the first phase of the campaign, the tactic was to build the narrative around the claim – aiming at members as much as the public and politicians. Our Ten for 10% tagline allowed us to evidence the case, and slowly but surely build support for the campaign from the ground up.

Active engagement by the membership was always the target. Branch meetings started getting a little bigger and then bigger still. Regional campaign events were organised and well attended. And, the lobbying of local councillors and a ‘Message the Minister’ campaign saw thousands of members who had never been active in the union before getting involved.

Whilst the pay talks dragged - almost a full year now - the EIS continued to work to build the campaign, leading to a massive turnout in our National Demonstration in Glasgow in late October, when more than 30,000 people hit the streets to demand a fair pay rise for Scotland’s teachers. Such was the scale of the protest that as the front of the march reached George Square, those at the back of the line in Kelvingrove Park (2.5 miles away) had not even moved off. The demonstration sent a very clear message that Scotland’s teachers were united in their anger.

Shortly after the demo, the EIS opened a consultative ballot on a ‘final’ pay offer that had been proposed by the employers and the Scottish Government. The EIS urged members to reject the offer, while the Scottish Government and COSLA attempted to ‘sell’ the pay offer to teachers by writing to them directly, in defiance of established protocols processes and, indeed, the Fair Work Convention. Members voted overwhelmingly (98%) to reject the offer on a 74% turnout.

These figures are significant because we have been aware throughout the campaign that the Tory Trade Union Act 2016 would come into play if we moved to a statutory ballot – for education unions, it means not only do we require a 50% turnout, we also need to secure 40% of our entire membership voting ‘yes’ to striking. In effect, someone not voting is counted as a ‘no’. The ballot result has left us confident, but absolutely not complacent, that we can beat the Tory thresholds, if required. And as things stand, we may need to do so. Learning from the CWU and PCS unions, we mapped the returns in our consultative ballot and so stand well placed to maximise our campaigning in any statutory ballot process.

At the time of writing, we are still in negotiations but to prevent the constant procrastination which is the hallmark of COSLA, we also set out our own timetable for decision making which means that January is the key month. A special Council meeting has been set for 12 January and that will consider the move towards a strike ballot, if no acceptable offer has been made. Ultimately, it will for our members to decide what we do next, but in my view the campaign has already succeeded in building enough confidence, engagement and justified anger that if strike action is required, members will vote for it.

Larry Flanagan has been the general secretary of the EIS union since 2012. He is a former teacher.
Tories in tatters results in rise of right?

Sean Duffy argues that the beneficiaries of May’s meltdown are likely to be Rees Mogg and his cohorts

The Conservative Party’s 40 year war over Europe was once a political curiosity fit only for the most nerdish of democratic spectators. Yet as the winter grows cold, this conflict has come to define not only the future of the country, but threaten the very existence of the most influential political party in British history – a party hurtling towards its end on a rightwards trajectory. This spells grave danger for working people, as the public services and freedoms we enjoy will certainly be torn apart in the party’s wake. This danger may have arisen out of the peculiarities of Europhobia, but it is inherent to the crisis of capitalism itself.

It now seems more than a millennia ago that former Tory PM, Ted Heath, proclaimed to a room full of Brussels bureaucrats: ‘we have all come to recognise our common European heritage, our mutual interests and our European destiny’. In 2016, 52% of the country firmly did not agree. Heath’s prophesy never transpired, due in part to the inability of the European Union to be seen as anything other than an autocratic common market. Yet also due to the rise of the European Research Group (ERG), which is guaranteed to make sure the Tory party has no shortage of vital importance, and the establishment may well be shocked to find they choose the latter. As with all schisms, the figure head is not only the future of the socialist Labour Party, and the wider left, that have not been present for some time. Here we have a reckless and incompetent government pledged to economic suicide, being protected only by an enslaved press. A party determined to exploit social and cultural difference, leaving space for socialists to expose the crushing doctrine of liberal capitalism and replace it with a unifying message of radical change and workers’ ownership.

If the public is left with the choice between a resurgent ethno-nationalism on the Tory right and investment-led socialist project under Labour, the establishment may well be shocked to find they choose the latter. As with all schisms, the figure head is of vital importance, and the Tory party has no shortage of petty pretenders to the throne. Aside from the perennial media darling Boris Johnson, the favourites to be the next leader are Dominic Raab, Sajid Javid, and Michael Gove. Raab defined his short stint as Brexit Secretary with an unflinching aversion to facts and advice, finishing off in resignation having refused to agree to the deal he himself allegedly negotiated. Javid, ostensively on the ‘remain’ yet Thatcherite wing of the party, has quickly moved to crackdown on immigration as Home Secretary, continuing the hostile environment of his predecessor by declaring that skilled migrants will need to earn over £30,000 per annum to stay in Britain - a policy as economically short sighted as it is archaic. Gove is a more heavyweight alternative yet he has perhaps sullied his record with the blue benches by switching one way then the other on far too many occasions. Not that a lack of principle has ever been any great barrier to success in the Conservative Party, as the continued prevalence of the man Gove stabbed in the back, Boris Johnson, attests to.

Where the Tory hard right have made mistakes in the past, it will now learn from them. Under the incompetent leadership of Iain Duncan Smith, the right wing whip crackers chose an individual replete with private scandal and zero personality. It will not make that mistake again. It is only the Tory’s insular leadership selection process that has in any way protected the moderates from upheaval. If the membership is given the opportunity, it wants an arch-conservative as much as Labour members want a true socialist. All of this and more spells trouble ahead for Tory reformers and even greater distress for anyone even vaguely committed to fairness and workers’ rights in Britain. Between a right-wing led ‘hard’ Brexit and the increasing influence of Trumpian inspired neo-fascism, the time is more pressing than ever for socialists to unite in direct and disciplined opposition. Hesitation is no longer an option.

Sean Duffy is the Secretary of Campaign for Socialism, the sister organisation of Momentum within the Labour Party – see http://www.campaignforsocialism.org.uk/
Scottish Labour – the return of its radical roots

Mike Cowley says under Richard Leonard Scottish Labour is back on its way to influence.

In November 2017, Scottish Labour elected their first leader from the explicitly socialist wing of the party since the advent of devolution. On the left, it was a moment of jubilation and vindication of a long march spent largely in the often marginalised peripheries of protests, solidarity campaigns, and the unions. Yet one year on, the future of the Leonard project is uncertain, and the path it has taken has not been without bumps in the road.

Quietly Leonard has pushed a radical agenda centred around municipalisation, defending local democracy and the argument that Scotland must use its new powers to redistribute wealth and power. Notably, this incorporates pushing for workers to have a statutory right to own the company they are employed in, £40 billion of new investment in Scottish industry through tax rises on the highest earners, and a Mary Barbour law to tackle extortionate rents by tying them to average incomes.

Leonard has patiently chipped away at the SNP’s timid policies on economic redistribution and repeatedly skewered the government over their treatment of schools, in particular the on-going pay dispute with teachers, a skill he has honed over years as a trade unionist.

His conference speech was widely regarded as the best by a Scottish Labour leader for over a decade, enthusing an upbeat and growing membership that increasingly identifies with the socialist roots of Labour rather than the ‘Third Way’ tenets dominant since devolution. But his interventions have not always been met with affirmation from the rank and file.

In September, Leonard seemed to take a hard line on the question of independence, committing the party to blocking another referendum in its next British manifesto, a position that received criticism from many who feel that Scottish Labour must triangulate towards ‘yes’ voters who have grown disillusioned with the SNP’s centrist approach.

Revitalise Scottish Labour

Because a radical democratic Scotland needs a radical democratic Scottish Labour Party

The organised left of Scottish Labour, under the influence of the Campaign for Socialism, has remained implacably loyal to Leonard, yet concerns were raised in May when Leonard voted against the Corbyn and Momentum backed candidate for the position of vice chair on Labour’s National Executive Committee.

It has been far from smooth sailing within the party also. Leonard has suffered repeated briefings against him from within his cabinet from day one. Stalwarts of the party’s right, Anas Sarwar and Jackie Baillie, were sacked in October when the insubordination became too transparent, causing a rift that has yet to be healed. Though it was a popular move with the membership, the decision served also to expose how out of touch the Holyrood group are with the new direction of the party.

Those MSPs who remain in the Scottish Parliament after the disaster of the 2016 election under Kezia Dugdale are largely aligned with the centrist tendencies that saw the party pushed into third place in Scotland. This has meant a cabinet containing left-wing stalwarts such as Neil Findlay and Elaine Smith alongside more pragmatic advocates of change who did not turn their nose up at the Corbyn phenomenon, including Monica Lennon and Alex Rowley.

The path to a socialist Scotland does not lie solely at Holyrood, or indeed at Westminster, but Leonard will struggle to achieve the radical agenda he is wedded to without new blood arriving in Edinburgh. Earlier this year, positive signs emerged that he will move to alter the way Labour selects candidates for its list and constituency campaigns, including increasing the role of unions to bring forward new talent.

These radical changes have been mirrored in the campaigning focus also. Leonard, like Corbyn before him, has been quick to push the party and its activists towards more direct community based campaigning in an effort to mend some of the reputational damage done by the Better Together campaign.

In recent months, notable by-election victories have been achieved with an energetic activist base mobilising behind Leonard’s message of ‘Real Change’. In order to maintain and build upon these victories, however, the organs of the party in Scotland will need to endorse and amplify this new spirit. Concerns have been raised by members about the continuing dominance of the party’s right in Scottish Labour’s main office in Glasgow, a problem that has long been considered detrimental to any hopes of fundamental change over the long term.

If that change is to be more than just a flash in the pan, Scottish Labour will need a much bigger team championing the cause of socialism, and Leonard will have to maintain the difficult balance between being more autonomous whilst adopting many of the exciting reforms that have come out of the British party since Corbyn was elected.

I am confident this can be achieved and after a long year of adversarial yet community focused politics, I remain convinced that Richard Leonard embodies the radical alternative to a stultifying politics of bland centrism and nationalist apologism which have held sway in Scotland for too long.

With the right impetus, Richard Leonard’s Labour could well gain considerable popularity in the post-industrial towns and villages of a Scotland left behind by the neo liberal settlement, but there is a long way to go yet.

Mike Cowley is the Political Education Officer for Edinburgh North and Leith Constituency Labour Party and a member of the Campaign for Socialism executive committee.
Labour’s Scottish problem

Róisín McLaren argues Scottish Labour’s star cannot rise until it changes course on independence

A YouGov opinion poll published on 16 December showed the Tories with 40% support at the UK level, up 2% from a fortnight earlier, Labour was on 36%, down 1%, and the Lib-Dems on 10%. If accurate, these figures are both astonishing and surely deeply worrying for Jeremy Corbyn’s chances of forming the next government. It seems incredible that, in the week Theresa May was forced into a humiliating climb down over her ‘meaningful vote’ on the EU Withdrawal Bill and a vote of No Confidence in her was backed by 117 of her own MPs, Labour actually lost ground.

Yet it is against this discouraging background that Scottish Labour leader, Richard Leonard, marked his first year in office - a year when he too has also regularly found himself trailing behind the Conservatives in the polls. The SNP continues to dominate the social democratic arena in Scotland. In England, Corbyn can draw crowds of thousands while in Scotland 100,000 marched through Edinburgh for independence – marchers who if not SNP members are certainly nationalist voters and crowds to which the ‘Corbyn bounce’ just bounced off.

When presented with Labour policies, 2 out of 5 Scots say they support them yet go on to vote SNP – they believe such policies are unachievable via Westminster and because voting Labour in Scotland often means sending Corbyn an enemy, not an ally.

Scottish Labour is widely seen as being to the right of Labour in England and Wales. And unlike in England and Wales, Scottish Labour has not seen such a dramatic influx of new members. Most Scottish Labour members (54%) have been members since before 2015, whereas in England and Wales it’s only 40%. Neither is Scottish Labour seen as a force for change but rather as part of the old-style politics with a new coat of red paint. At the heart of this dilemma, of course, is the party’s infamous alliance with the Tories in ‘Better Together’ in defence of a British union which, as the Brexit drama amply highlights, is often dominated by a free market fundamentalism - with a neo-racist fringe.

While it remains on the wrong side of the national question, Scottish Labour cannot attract the ‘yes generation’ of activists because this milieu has already drawn the conclusion that progressive politics is not possible to achieve via Westminster. It’s that ingrained belief that has become the foundation of the political consciousness for a generation of young Scots, the equivalent of whom in England makeup Corbyn’s base. That’s the reason why 2 out of 5 Scots say they support Labour policies but vote SNP.

Scottish Labour, fully aware of these problems, is trying to build links with movements of the sort which proved successful in England. But Richard Leonard can’t get past the sticking point that many politically conscious Scots are likely to have become first engaged with politics through the ‘yes’ movement – and the foundation of their political identity is, therefore, support for independence and the conviction that Westminster is not a vehicle for radical change.

Richard Leonard cannot convince them that he, or his party, is to the left of the SNP. His political opportunism on issues like the Glasgow Equal Pay settlement, the SNP’s ‘PFI-lite’ Scottish Futures Trust, its refusal to return Scotrail to public hands, its failure to replace the unfair Council tax or its cuts agenda are all undermined by Labour’s own vapid record at local and Scottish Government level. Consequently, Scottish Labour is seen as no more socialist under Richard Leonard than it was under Donald Dewar.

This leaves socialist opinion in Scotland facing a choice in an increasingly right-wing Britain, either to gamble on the remote chance of a Corbyn government being elected or campaign for independence as the opening to a renewed class politics. For the last 20 years, the Scottish Socialist Party has argued independence is the key that unlocks the prospect of a Scotland that puts working people and the planet before profit.

Rather than ignoring the repeated failures of British and Scottish Labour, we campaign for socialist change and a modern democratic Scottish republic.

Meanwhile what does 2019 hold for working class Scots? More insecurity and greater exploitation: as more companies like Michelin relocate to cheap labour climes; another year for retail staff to worry about their job prospects; greater indebtedness and deeper social divisions.

More than ever Scotland’s working class majority need their political leaders to provide a coherent explanation of why things are as they are and to outline a way out of this misery; employing tactics based on democratic socialist values; mobilising mass support; and emphasising conscious solidarity and collective action for the good of all.

Róisín McLaren is the joint national spokesperson for the Scottish Socialist Party (https://scottishsocialistparty.org/)
Scotland needs a community organising movement

Drawing on her Leith experience, Linda Somerville argues there are new and effective ways of organising

The good citizens of Leith are currently in uproar at plans to demolish a two-storey art deco sandstone building at the bottom of Leith Walk. Until recently, the proposed development site contained much loved local businesses and social enterprises in the row of art deco shops. The £50m development includes a 471-bed student accommodation complex with hotel, restaurant, retail units and 53 ‘affordable’ homes. The developer believes it has gone above and beyond with both community consultation and by providing ‘affordable’ housing in the development. Under current legislation, developers are not required to provide any ‘affordable’ housing in purpose built student accommodation – exposing why student flats appear to be filling any gap sites available in our cities.

Leithers became aware of this in spring last year and in the eight months since the campaign has gathered 12,000 signatures against the demolition, supported residents to formally object to the proposals with over 3,500 objections lodged on the council planning portal and hosted large and lively public meetings with hundreds of Leithers. The campaign has received wide spread support from leading artists including Irvine Welsh, Young Fathers, the Proclaimers and cross party support from local councillors, MSPs, MPs with Jeremy Corbyn calling the campaign ‘iconic’ during his recent meeting with community groups in Edinburgh.

While there is wide and solid support for saving the building and influencing the development, a number of underlying issues have contributed to the uproar around this proposal. Housing in Edinburgh has always topped the rest of Scotland for expensiveness and Leith filled the affordability gap with lower rents and flats for sale is an area that was often overlooked by many. The growing number of tourists and short-term lets have pushed Edinburgh’s housing into a crisis with basic rents set at over £1,000 per month. The local authority’s economic reliance on tourism and higher education has tipped the balance with hotels and student accommodation peppering an ever widening area.

While the developers may have ticked the community consultation box, locals don’t feel they have had a say in what happens in the area nor had their concerns listened to when raised. Scotland’s flawed planning process limits community involvement and has no right of appeal for communities, only for the developer. The lack of agency is widely felt and represents the disconnect with elected representatives that many working class communities face.

None of this is unique to Leith or Edinburgh with communities across Scotland and Britain facing similar challenges as big business dictates what happens on our doorstep. The campaign has received enquiries from Canada to Berlin as journalists and academics examine how working class populations are faring in our changing cities.

The lack of trust in the political and planning process highlights failures in our local democracy. The model is transactional where each citizen is asked to give a vote in return for a commitment. There is no ownership of decisions for voters, no power transferred to communities, just a hope that the winner will follow through on its promise. Local democracy needs to be overhauled to bring decision making closer to people, with smaller constituencies, more power held locally and support for communities to, as the Electoral Reform Society Scotland calls it, ‘Act like you own the Place’.

While we don’t know the outcome of the planning process yet and the focus is still on stopping the demolition to Save Leith Walk, the energy, spirit and creativity of the campaign has emboldened locals to think more strategically about their area and what they want from Our Leith Walk.

All too often campaigns are focused on opposition and use mobilising tactics with a strategy based on increased numbers and a centralised structure. This campaign has utilised community organising tools to consider how to agree objectives, examine where power lies and offer a way to build our power in the community. With consensus decision making and distributed responsibility for activity, there is no committee or rigid structures that are often associated with campaigning and the left. It feels like an experiment, and in many ways it is.

As the impacts of neo-liberalism sweep through our towns and cities and the economy shakes before Brexit and the next financial crash, we need to defend and develop our communities and ensure the toxicity of the far right does not gain ground. Scotland needs a community organising strategy. Community organising can provide the key to a diverse and lively local democracy bringing people together to make the changes they want to see. We need trained community organisers, a network for campaigners for peer to peer learning, opportunities to problem solve together, consider how technology helps or hinders us as well as share tools and tactics that win.

A movement of community organising provides a different way of campaigning, recognising that this will also challenge some of the power structures and practices within the left that are too reliant upon models that centralise power and ensure that certain skills and experience stay at the top table. Creating a community organising movement would be transformative across Scotland as individuals and groups are brought together, heard and supported to build collective power and make the change they want to see.

Linda Somerville is Director of NUS Scotland, and lives and works in Leith. She has been a key figure in the Save Leith Walk campaign (https://saveleithwalk.org/). She is on twitter @lindasomervill
Another Edinburgh revolt: staff and students elect a radical rector

Angi Lamb recounts her experience of managing Ann Henderson’s successful rectorial campaign

My participation began with an email to Ann Henderson a week before rectorial nominations closed on 26 January 2018. I’d just retired the previous year, after 27 years working at the university and serving as an active trade unionist. A former colleague had asked me if I could think of anyone to stand for rector, as no one had yet been nominated. The hope was preferably for a woman, to be only the second out of 52 previous rectors since the Universities Scotland Act 1858. The only one, Muriel Gray, served between 1988 and 1991. In addition, 60% of the previous 52 were titled in some way — such as Gladstone or Kitchener.

The Rector is elected for a period of three years with a primary duty to preside at the university’s governing body, the University Court. Edinburgh is the only one of the ‘ancient’ universities where staff can vote for the Rector, and has the largest electorate with over 55,000 staff and students.

Ann accepted the invitation to stand. I was delighted to have a leading role as her campaign manager, allowing Ann to focus on meeting and listening to as many people as possible — in person, on our blog, Twitter, Facebook and other media.

Although much smaller than the other candidate, Marco Bauder’s team, ours was more experienced. Ann is a seasoned campaigner which shone through during the campaign. The ‘dream’ team had two talented young campaigners, Emily and Vijay, designing our eye-catching leaflets and posters. The campaign was physically challenging. Around 30 volunteers — the backbone and unsung heroes of any campaign — distributed leaflets and hung posters around some of the University’s 700+ buildings across the city. We were aware of the restrictions on political posters, where the other candidate’s team wasn’t and subsequently had to remove them and this probably helped us. Posters were only allowed in Bristo Square and on noticeboards or doors within university property.

We gained crossover support from staff who, at any other time would have campaigned for Ann anyway, were rightly taking industrial action over proposed pension changes. Leaflets were handed out on the picket lines. On strike days, we visited as many as we could with Ann speaking at a lunchtime rally just before voting opened.

We had a strict budget for election expenses, funded by donations from individuals and other bodies such as the Edinburgh TUC. We had to be smart about where we spent, 50% on leaflets and posters, 20% on Facebook ads which was a novelty to both of us.

A consistent campaign trail concern from all sides was about housing affordability and availability for both students and staff. Student accommodation can range from the £320 per month from Edinburgh Student Housing Co-op to over £1,000 pm privately. There are considerable tensions around the University and city with the perception of student housing taking priority over affordable housing with no clear advantages to anyone other than investors.

Other significant issues include staff workload issues, where we asked for a university wide staff survey which took place for the first time this past autumn. The impact is not only on staff, but as students eloquently suggested: ‘Your working conditions are our learning conditions’.

For many students, particularly for the 45% non-UK students, fees with an annual average of £21,000 are of high concern around affordability and a correct perception of subsidising other activities within the University.

Most people in the University are not aware of governance arrangements so we were commonly met with blank stares around mention of the University Court and Rector: “What does the Rector do?” In addition to the formalities, the Rector can ask difficult questions, and with other members of Court hold University management to account while deciding upon institutional strategy in the three major areas of people, finances and infrastructure. Education strategy is the provenance of the University Senate.

The last week of campaigning was Flexible Learning Week where many students were away from Edinburgh. Ann focused on meeting medical and vet students who remained, and staff. Sunday night we met with many returning students at Pollock Halls.

Scottish politicians from Green, Labour and SNP publicly endorsed Ann’s campaign as did other public figures reflecting her broad based appeal and in particular her lifelong commitment to equality and diversity.

Ann won 77% of the vote and greeted this with: ‘Thank you for all your support. I am proud to be your new Rector!’ The snow closed Edinburgh that night for a couple of days - a welcome rest period after three weeks campaigning.

I know Ann primarily from the regular Women’s Dinner at the Scottish Parliament where after being elected she was the guest speaker and received a well-deserved standing ovation. It was a privilege to campaign for Ann and subsequently watch her chairing Court with aplomb – she has a fabulous capacity for detail and timing.

Angi Lamb worked at the University of Edinburgh from 1990 to 2017, was the elected staff member on its Court between 2013 and 2017, served on the UCU union’s NEC between 2009 and 2014, and is Rector’s Assessor for 2018 to 2021.
Betrayal of the Sandinista revolution

Joseph McAleer recounts that power pacts have killed the dream of freedom in Nicaragua

Eight months after students first took to the streets in Managua in April 2018 to protest against unjust social security reforms, Nicaraguans are living a de facto state of exception whereby newly introduced draconian laws brand any individual or organisation involved in or supportive of protests against the Ortega-Murillo government as terrorists and all protests have been declared illegal. Some 500 civilians have been killed, the majority by police and government-loyal paramilitary groups. Thousands have been injured and are missing and an estimated 50,000 have fled, mostly to Costa Rica. Arbitrary detentions of protesters have led to over 600 political prisoners, held in subhuman conditions, subject to cruel treatment and torture and with little or no access to legal defence, at the mercy of a corrupt criminal justice system that is at the beck and call of the political agenda of the Ortega-Murillo regime.

For the international left in the 1970s and 1980s, Daniel Ortega personified resistance to US imperialism in Latin America and the Sandinista Revolution was a beacon of hope for socialism. Since 1990, however, his pragmatic approach to politics has seen him abandon his Marxist-socialist roots and consolidate a series of pacts with right-wing, conservative elites within Nicaragua and internationally. The first of these, as leader of the opposition in the 1990s, was Ortega’s infamous pact with right-wing president Arnoldo Alemán (1997-2001), securing changes in the electoral law to reduce the share of votes required to win the presidency outright in the first round from 45% to 35%. This paved the way for Ortega’s eventual electoral victory and return to the presidency in 2006 with 38% of the vote.

The Ortega-Alemán pact also included mutually assured immunity from prosecution: for Alemán when faced with corruption and money-laundering charges and for Ortega when accused of sexual abuse and rape by his stepdaughter Zoilamérica Narváez in 1998. Alemán was subsequently tried and imprisoned for corruption, then released under the pardon of Ortega when accused of sexual abuse and rape by his stepdaughter. Zoilamérica’s efforts to bring Ortega to justice, with the support of the feminist movement, were thwarted by Ortega’s control of the criminal justice system and she and her family were eventually forced into exile in 2013.

In 2005, Ortega and Rosario Murillo (now vice president) were officially married by Cardenal Obando y Bravo, sealing a second pact with the conservative hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Ortega’s support for legislation to criminalise abortion for any reason secured the vote of many Catholics and was a key factor that enabled him to win elections in 2006.

In 2014 Ortega, now as president, consolidated a third pact, this time with the private sector, through constitutional reforms that established a ‘corporative economic model’ of government. This effectively handed over control of the economy to big business and continued neo-liberal economics on the understanding that they, in return, would not interfere in other aspects of government policy. The previous year, Ortega signed an agreement with the (now defunct) Hong Kong Nicaragua Canal Development Group granting it exclusive rights to construct and manage an interoceanic canal and other related projects, as well as the right to expropriate land within 5 km on each side of the canal thereby displacing up to 100,000 rural and indigenous people. For more than 10 years, Ortega’s government has also received massive financial support from the Venezuelan government, all of which has been administered independently from the national budget, by members of his family and loyal political allies, making them more powerful and richer in the process.

To further consolidate his power, Ortega procured additional constitutional reforms to allow unlimited re-election and exercise political control over the Electoral Council, Supreme Court, police and army, eroding their autonomy as independent entities. Furthermore, fraudulent elections guaranteed an absolute majority in the National Assembly and control of almost all municipal governments.

In eleven years of government, Ortega’s power has grown and become increasingly authoritarian. As far back as 1998, the Nicaraguan feminist movement warned of the imminence of an ‘institutional dictatorship’. International condemnation of the Ortega-Murillo government is widespread and growing. The Inter-American Commission for Human Rights and Amnesty International documented grave violations of human rights and crimes against humanity committed by the Nicaraguan state and the Organisation of American States, the United Nations, the European Parliament and national governments, including the Scottish Government, have emphatically denounced the Ortega-Murillo regime. The US government issued sanctions against corrupt Nicaraguan officials responsible for human rights abuses and the recent ‘Nica Act’ authorises further action to block access to international loans and against individual governmental agents involved in the repression.

Prominent figures on the international left like Noam Chomsky, Pablo Iglesias of Podemos, and former Uruguayan President, José Mujica, have spoken out against Ortega, as have the Socialist International and the ‘Workers’ Commissions’, the largest union in Spain. In Britain, the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign continues to shamelessly support Ortega, and the groundless allegations of a US backed coup, as do some Labour Party members including MPs Chris Williamson and Dan Carden. Corbyn, despite his solidarity with Nicaragua and Latin America, has remained conspicuously silent.

Ortega has betrayed the values of the Sandinista Revolution and its socialist principles. Any support given to him and his regime, even when framed as a rejection of imperialist interventionism, reveals, in the words of the Socialist International, ‘an outdated view of the relations between sovereignty and human rights’. Hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguans have become the protagonists of a self-convened, non-violent insurrection to reclaim basic human rights. Hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguans have become the protagonists of a self-convened, non-violent insurrection to reclaim basic human rights. Hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguans have become the protagonists of a self-convened, non-violent insurrection to reclaim basic human rights."
Catalonia and the continuing Spanish crisis

George Kerevan argues what the international left does will influence the cause of Catalanian independence

In 2018, the political crisis triggered by the Catalan independence referendum of October 2017 became a generalised crisis of the whole, corrupt neo-Francoist Spanish state that has existed since the death of the Caudillo. 2018 has seen mass public protests continue unabated in Catalonia, prompted by the arrest and imprisonment of most of the independence campaign leadership. Over a million people surged through the streets of Barcelona on 11 September. This represents the most sustained popular political campaign in Europe since World War II, outlasting in length and intensity the Polish Solidarnosc movement in the 1980s or the marches in East Germany in 1989 that brought down the Berlin Wall.

In June of 2018, the minority Popular Party (PP) government of neo-Francoist apparatchik, Mariano Rajoy, fell as a result of corruption charges and was replaced by an equally minority Socialist PSOE administration led by Blairite clone, Pedro Sanchez. He sought to bolster his parliamentary position by making concessions to the Catalans, restoring the Catalan Parliament, returning nationalist political prisoners to jails in their home nations, and dangling the prospect of eventual constitution reform.

These moves outraged the Spanish far right, triggering a new phase of political instability. Open street violence by the far right is now common. Then in December 2018, the right won the election in Andalucía, Spain’s most populous region and a traditional stronghold of the PSOE. The new PP leader, boyish demagogue, Pablo Casado, based his campaign on blaming the PSOE for being ‘soft’ on Catalan nationalism. The biggest shock in the Andalusian vote was the electoral breakthrough of the openly neo-fascist Vox party, which won 12 seats on a programme of attacking North African immigrants and making the Catalan separatist parties illegal.

By far the most important internal development inside Catalonia in 2018 has been the growing split over tactics between the two main independence parties – the centre-right European Democrats (PDeCAT), led by exiled, Carles Puigdemont; and the social democratic Left Republicans (ERC), led by the imprisoned, Oriol Junqueras. Ex-journalist Puigdemont has shed much of the corrupt image of Convergence, the PDeCAT’s immediate predecessor. He has done so by moving the party convincingly into the pro-independence (as opposed to devolutionist) camp. But PDeCAT remains at heart a pro-EU, social-liberal party representing the petty bourgeoisie. Last July, Puigdemont unilaterally launched Crida Nacional per la República (National Call for the Republic) as a new, umbrella body for the independence movement, into which he hopes to subordinate the ERC.

But the social democratic and traditionally pro-independence ERC is frightened that joining such a permanent common front with PDeCAT will destroy its left-wing credentials and freedom for manoeuvre. It would also make it more difficult for progressive independence forces to make common cause with those working class elements in Catalonia – Moroccan and South American immigrants, and non-Catalan speakers – still hesitant about independence. However, many of those taking part in the street demonstrations are confused by the split between PDeCAT and the ERC, creating the basis for an ‘anti-politics’ mood.

So what happens in 2019? 2019 sees a number of likely trigger points. Probably the most significant is the response in Catalonia to any guilty verdicts against the imprisoned independence leaders. We can expect mass demonstrations and possibly a general strike. The movement is committed to a peaceful transition, so the danger lies in a jubilant ultra-right responding with violence and using the situation deliberately to destabilise the Sanchez government.

The next waypoint is the May 26 Barcelona local election. The current mayor is Ada Colau, who rose to prominence leading the city’s anti-austerity and homeless movement. Despite her distance from the independence campaign, Colau supported the right to hold a referendum and even opened Barcelona’s schools for the ballot in 2017. The danger in this election is that deep divisions on both the left and between the various factions of the independence movement will allow the victory of the Manuel Valls, who has the de facto support of Ciudadanos, the main representative of the anti-independence Barcelona middle class. Bizarrely, Valls is a former French Socialist prime minister. He is of Catalan origin and speaks the language. Valls is virulently anti-independence and would use control of Barcelona town hall to thwart any new referendum.

Unfortunately, the independence movement is fielding two rival candidates. The ERC is standing Ernest Maragall, brother of the former PSOE mayor at the time of the 1992 Olympics, Pasqual Maragall. The US-based philosopher, Jordi Grauera, has the backing of the ANC, the Catalan civic movement, which organised a mayoral primary in the vain hope of encouraging a unity candidate.

How events turn out in Catalonia and Spain will depend, ultimately, on the degree of international solidarity from the rest of Europe. In the nineteenth century, the early workers’ movement made heroic endeavours in support of the national independence movements in Ireland and Poland. Sadly, the mainstream European left and unions have made only token moves in solidarity with the right of Catalonia to exercise their right of self-determination. By default, this political neutrality has been a factor in the re-emergence of a significant far-right in Spain.

Age, ageing and ageism: how ageist is Scotland?

Bill Johnston argues the left needs to start taking ageism seriously and act accordingly

Part one (Scottish Left Review issue 108, November/December 2018) of this series of three articles discussed demographic ageing in terms of neo-liberalism and current developments in Scottish Government policy. That article also urged the left to incorporate an analysis of ageing as part of the challenge to neo-liberalism and support for human rights and equalities. This second article discusses the threat from ageism as a powerful focus for the left in Scotland.

Age is a protected characteristic in British equality legislation but is not as well-known as the more high profile provisions for gender, race, disability and sexual orientation are. At present, older people are often framed in public discourse as ‘a burden’ with little response from politicians and state organisations. However, Lord Bracadale’s 2018 report on ‘hate crimes’ has raised the issue of ‘age hostility’ in relation to possible new statutory powers.

The concept of ageism could be a useful unifying focus for the various social, legislative and civic issues entailed by Scotland’s ageing population and the associated risk of a rise in ageist behaviour over the coming years. A starting point is this account of ageism from a recent EU report:

Ageism is the stereotyping of, prejudice or discrimination against individuals or groups based on their age. Although ageism can target young people, most studies in this area focus on the unfair treatment of older people. Ageism is deeply structural ‘[f]inding[1] expression in institutional systems, individual attitudes and inter-generational relationships’. All manifestations of ageism – at the individual, group or societal level – gravely undermine older people’s right to human dignity and reduce their potential to contribute actively to society.

This report described ageism as the most frequently mentioned discrimination in the EU and underlines the intersectional nature of ageism. It also argues that the emphasis for civic and political action should be on rights leading to empowerment rather than only seeing deficits leading to needs. The report offers powerful arguments for a more positive approach to ageing populations, and advocates a move away from dependency and deficit models of ageing.

Two interlinked approaches to raising awareness and combating ageism are available to us. First, a challenge to stereotypes and media representations characterising older people as a burden on the taxpayer, or ‘stealing the future’ from younger people. Language and imagery, which suggests that older people are all alike - dependent, a burden, lonely and incapable - should be challenged and replaced. Such a conceptual rethink could adopt a ‘pro-ageing’ stance and generate positive attitudes and behaviour to combat ageism. Community groups, third sector projects, and larger organisations like Age Scotland could play a part in hosting such civic debate.

Second, structural, institutionalised ageism requires investigation and exposure. This would require in-depth study of organisations across society and their impacts on ageing and older people. For example, what demographic data sets are used and to what extent are strategic plans, resource allocations and staff conduct aligned to eliminate institutional ageism? It would not be enough to rely on bland statements of values or intent, which can be used to mask dysfunctional behaviour and attitudes. Close scrutiny and, if necessary, action to eliminate ageist attitudes and behaviour would be required. An anti-ageism alliance of unions, political parties and other civic organisations working with the Equality and Human Rights Commission, Scotland would offer a powerful force for institutional change.

In both cases, a key aim is for the Scottish Government to give ageism a higher profile in its statements on equalities and in developing its new Older People’s Framework proposed for March 2019. The left has a long track record of challenging racism, sexism and other inequalities, so perhaps now is a good time to extend that commitment to ageism given the Scottish Government’s projected growth in the ageing population: ‘Over the next 20 years we will see a large increase in people over 75 with more than 70% of all population growth in the over 75 age group’. That future age group is currently in its fifties so awareness raising, rethinking and serious forward planning is required by the present administration and the other parties represented at Holyrood.

A target in 2019 could be to press for a debate on ageism in the Scottish Parliament to explore the current situation and future prospects. This could be supported by a wider conversation in union branches, community groups, political party branches and other forums. As demand for independence continues with local YES groups, and Pensioners for Independence, apparently growing in activity, that too would be an important point in the debate on Scotland’s future.

Bill Johnston is Chair of the Scottish Seniors Alliance (http://www.spanglefish.com/scottishseniorsalliance/) and writes in a personal capacity.


Scottish theatrical revolution

Mark Brown argues Modernism is the motor of Scotland’s belated and celebrated theatrical renaissance

If 1968 was a year of political revolution, from Prague to Paris, the aesthetic revolution in Scottish theatre started the following year. In 1969, the board of the Citizens Theatre in Glasgow appointed a young Scot by the name of Giles Havergal, then director of the Palace Theatre, Watford, as its new artistic director. Within a few short years, he - and his celebrated directorial collaborators Philip Prowse and Robert David MacDonald - had transformed the Gorbals theatre into an international powerhouse, and profoundly altered the direction of travel of Scottish theatre culture into the bargain.

The Havergal Citz was, for those of avant-garde, Modernist tastes, quickly to become a palace of delights. Combining radical reinterpretations of the classics with a largely modern, continental European repertoire, the theatre’s output was a shock to the Scottish system, both artistically and socially. A notable case in point was Havergal’s production of Shakespeare’s Hamlet in September 1970. Featuring an all-male cast (with a young David Hayman in the title role) and a liberally adapted script, the production announced its intentions early on, with an opening scene in which the regicidal Claudius was seen copulating with his new wife, the murdered King’s spouse, Gertrude.

There was, predictably, outrage. The Scotsman decided the production was so outré that it deserved top billing. In a review that appeared on the newspaper’s front page, Allen Wright wrote: ‘[t] is shameful that this should be the play’s first production in Glasgow for ten years, giving many young people a warped impression of it’. Glasgow Herald theatre critic, Christopher Small, declared the show a ‘silly Hamlet’ in which Shakespeare’s play had been ‘reduced to a dead uniformity of ‘decadence’’. Mamie Crichton of the Scottish Daily Express reflected a widely held view - namely, that Havergal’s coat was, barely a year into his tenure, already on a shoogly peg - when she wrote that, in staging the production, the Glasgow theatre had a ‘death-wish’. School bookings for the production were cancelled and a considerable amount of pressure was exerted on the Citizens board to get rid of the enfant terrible, Havergal. It was to the lasting benefit of Scottish theatre that members of the board held their nerve and stood by their director. Not only did Havergal go on to complete an extraordinary 34-year directorship at the Citz (most of it with Prowse and MacDonald by his least on Communicado, arguably the most significant of Scotland’s touring theatre companies. For Gerry Mulgrew, a founding member of Communicado in 1983, the Citizens was ‘a European theatre ... There were very few Scottish actors who worked there. They were seen as vagabonds or gypsies, exotic people doing exotic things. They all had English accents, but they were doing German and French plays ... I wanted to do something that had Europeanness in it, but also to try and do it as a Scot’.

That Communicado succeeded in its Scots-European project is not in doubt. With a repertoire that has encompassed Robert Burns and Liz Lochhead, Nikolai Erdman and Václav Havel, it was the first in a long line of acclaimed Scots-European companies which includes Suspect Culture, Vanishing Point, Grid Iron and children’s theatremakers Catherine Wheels.

By the 1990s, this revolution in aesthetics manifested itself in a golden generation of Scottish playwrights who were writing for a European and global audience. With plays like Knives in Hens (1995), The Censor (1997), The Cosmonaut’s Last Message to the Woman He Once Loved in the Former Soviet Union (1999) and Further Than The Furthest Thing (2000), David Harrower, Anthony Neilson, David Greig and Zinnie Harris achieved a hitherto unimagined international status for Scottish playwriting. It is through this late flourishing of European Modernist aesthetics, from Havergal’s path-breaking Hamlet in 1970 to Martin McCormick’s Ma, Pa and the Little Mouts (a gloriously absurd, Ionesco-meets-Billy Connolly play) in 2018 that Scotland has finally taken its place among the family of theatrical nations.

Mark Brown is theatre critic of The Herald on Sunday. He is a regular teacher at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. His book Modernism and Scottish Theatre since 1969: A Revolution on Stage is published by Palgrave Macmillan early in 2019.
Outlaw King (2018),
director: David Mackenzie
Reviewed by Jackie Bergson

Hailing from Scotland, David Mackenzie contextualises his film about Robert the Bruce’s rise to becoming the chief successful figure in Scotland’s fiercest battles for independence with backdrops of medieval turmoil and political savagery. Outlaw King – possibly unavoidably comparable with multiple award-winning Braveheart (1995) – certainly draws unequivocal reminders to William Wallace’s spirit and influence, as well as his execution and beheading by the English. Mackenzie and Scottish producer, Gillian Berrie, strive to portray Robert the Bruce through diverging from heroic martyr Wallace’s story: post-screening, her comment that she ‘would like Scotland to be brave and take things forward out of this [mess] that Theresa May has landed us with’ conveys political ideals which are internal and external to their film.

In the opening scene of Outlaw King, a Shakespearian abbreviation of historical events symbolises political manoeuvres amongst opposing forces of power, together with propositions to rejoice the upcoming marriage of God-daughter to King Edward I, Elizabeth de Burgh (Florence Pugh) and Robert the Bruce (Chris Pine). The taking of Stirling Castle by King Edward I (Stephen Dillane) is forebodingly represented by one vast, destructive slingshot. Clearly not intended to provide a simple history lesson, Outlaw King delivers much more, abridging time arcs between 1304, when John III Comyn (Callan Mulvey), contender for the Scottish crown, submitted power to King Edward I and 1314, when the Battle of Bannockburn was won by the Scots.

Blood-free, with excessive mud underfoot, the opening tableau ascertains young Edward, Prince of Wales (Billy Howle) and young Robert as obvious rivals, creating a brooding atmosphere of kinship, rivalry, betrayal, love and revenge yet to play out. It also establishes King Edward as a man who is unable to inspire trust in his assumed lieges.

Outlaw King magnetises our emotional investment around the players closest and most loyal to Robert the Bruce. Cast with a fabulous blend of actors, including Pine, James Cosmo (Robert the Bruce senior), Tony Curran (Lord of Islay) and Aaron Taylor Johnson (Lord of Douglas), the storyline weaves a profound tapestry of solidarity. Feisty, sensual and intelligent as Robert the Bruce’s lover and then wife, Elizabeth, Pugh also turns in a notable performance, ultimately dicing against the English King under his brutal command, steadfast in her true loyalty to her husband.

Rendering similar characteristics of ruthless, taciturn resolve and judicious charisma borne through his former work with Mackenzie in Hell or High Water (2016) and with an authentic-sounding Scots accent to boot, Pine radiates masculine integrity. Nonetheless, outstanding performance plaudits in Outlaw King could easily be handed to Johnson. The actor cuts a luminous swathe of fierce intention and crazed revenge across the screen like barely contained wildfire, somehow also imbuing the character of Black Douglas with enthralling charm.

‘The actors just went for it’ says Mackenzie, responding to the post-screening question of how he managed to get such a performance from Johnson, humbly belying his own extraordinary ability in directing talented performers - Jack O’Connell in award-winning film Starred Up (2013) representing just one other case in point. Outlaw King sees Mackenzie, whose talent in bringing stellar performances to the silver screen is consistently lauded by film reviewers, working to brilliant effect again with Chris Pine. The total chemistry of acting talent is tremendous.

Ferocious, bloody battle scenes culminate in the Scots seizing back Kildrummy Castle and, ultimately, winning victory at Loudon; there is no question that Robert the Bruce’s precedent murder of disloyal challenger, Comyn, resounds with sagacious reason; when Edward II is finally forced by Robert the Bruce to surrender and...
retreat, we applaud both the inimitable quality of the Scots warrior’s considered victory and the dishonourable humiliation of Edward II in defeat. Such is the potent authority of acting and storytelling in this film. Flashes of gutty, true-to-life humour add a bit extra. Accompanying spectacular music score (composed by Scottish company, Grey Dogs) contributes a unifying effect to both magnificent panoramic and microcosmic features, through a hybrid of modern and traditional soundscapes.

Not quite perfect as a sum of all its parts, the momentum of Outlaw King briefly drops during scenes where Clan MacDougall forces Robert the Bruce into hiding. Evidently edited for commercial deadlines, this action piece falls short of the rest of the film’s powerfully driven war-craft stratagem and its muscular deadlines, this action piece falls short of the rest of the film’s powerfully driven war-craft stratagem and its muscular plot. However, two hours and seventeen minutes of watching time seems much shorter thanks to the unreservedly engaging and beguiling thrust and sheer sustained interest. Evidently edited for commercial considerations, the rest of the film’s powerfully driven war-craft stratagem and its muscular plot.

Jackie Bergson has worked in the voluntary sector and commercial business development in technology and creative sectors. Educated in and living in Glasgow, her political and social views chime left-of-centre.

Tom Devine,

The Scottish Clearances: A History of the Dispossessed, 1600-1900,
Allen Lane, 2018, 9780241304105
Reviewed by Sean Sheehan

The dispossession of people from the Highlands and rural Lowlands of Scotland cannot be dissociated from the emergence of the country as a modern nation. This is the baseline for the importance invested by Devine in his subject matter, an event that continues to haunt the Scottish consciousness and one which belies the tourist image of the Highlands as a great empty wilderness where few people ever lived (à la Zionist descriptions of pre-colonial Palestine as empty and desolate).

In reality, of course, the Highlands was populated by numerous townships and farming families who had toiled on the land for generations. But Devine questions the commonplace assumption – given undue credence by books like John Prebble’s The Highland Clearances – that the dispersal of people and the consequent sense of betrayal and loss can be laid solely at the door of hard-hearted lackeys and the greedy landlords, former chieftains of the clans, whom they served. The book’s argument is that the Clearances have a multi-layered genealogy, one not reducible to loose talk of ethnic cleansing. Nor is it one, contra the view obtainable from most recent scholarly literature on the topic, confined to the Highlands. Celebrations of Highland culture in literary traditions, not to mention the Outlander fantasy series and Scotland’s ‘Roots Tourism’, contribute to a marginalization of the rural Lowlands. What Devine calls ‘the boring reality’ is that most Scottish emigrants who crossed the Atlantic came from the Lowlands, not driven there by post-Culloden repression and perfidious landlords but lured by the prospects of a better life in North America.

The Scottish Clearances sets out to compare and contrast how the two regions, Highlands and Lowlands, underwent a violent and historical transformation. The experience for those living through it was to bear witness to dispossession on a scale never previously imagined. An old world passed away and in little over a hundred years Scotland had become a different country.

The callousness and violence of forced dispossession has been well chronicled but not the differing chronologies and all-important regional differences that were interwoven with social and economic dynamics underlying the historical phenomena. These included: rent increases and a growing intolerance by landlords to accumulating arrears; harvest failures and potato blight which did not receive remedial response; leases to sitting tenants being relocated to crofting townships; illicit whisky making being targeted by the authorities; and new opportunities beckoning overseas or in towns. In the Highlands, schemes of ‘compulsory emigration’ were introduced and – anticipating current Tory welfare policies – racist and class attitudes came into play with newspaper talk of feckless Celts who needed shock treatment.

Lowland dispossession began as early as the last decades of the seventeenth century and was largely unopposed. The physical landscape changed as stonework from traditional townships was recycled for use in building drystone dykes and walls which became a hallmark of a refashioned countryside. Highland dispossession began later, lasted longer and left for evidence the ruins of abandoned settlements. The Church of Scotland was firmly on the side of the landlords but there was resistance elsewhere, especially in the late nineteenth century when ‘the land question’ came to the fore in British politics. Evictions became public and shocking events, newspapers dispatched reporters to cover dramatic scenes of dispossession, and women played an important part in organized resistance. Surviving Gaelic poetry of the time points to an oral tradition of resistance and two impressive examples, in the original and with translated versions, are provided by Devine. Satire is one of such poems’ weapons, caricaturing the nose of one oppressor as being ‘like an iron plough-share’ and his abdomen resembling ‘a male ass’. There is also rage and a desire for revenge:

If I could get at you on an open field
With people tying you down,
I would pull with my fists
Three inches [of flesh] out of your lungs.

Devine is far from denying the cruelty and poignancy of forced evictions but he draws attention to factors that complicate a reductive approach that opts for ‘a single explanation of human wickedness’. These include
the effects of a rising population – ‘a dominating factor in the social history of the Highlands’ – on poor land where people’s subsistence farming rendered them more vulnerable than ever before; bankruptcy of the old landed class; ‘the absence of any viable alternative to pastoral husbandry’; and the encroaching power of market capitalism. In chapter 27 of Capital, Marx, cognisant of what may have been the most significant factor, lambasts the tyranny of the market that fuelled the expropriation of Scottish peasants’ land. Marshalling original sources for its wealth of information and nuancing the material with empirical exactness, this book, complete with evocative photographs, could be called revisionist in the material with empirical exactness, this book, complete with evocative photographs, could be called revisionist

Greg Albo, Leo Panitch and Alan Zuege (eds.)

**Class, Party, Revolution: A Socialist Register Reader,**

Haymarket Books, 1608469190, £20.99

Reviewed by Robin Jones

C
current events invariably colour one’s interpretation of political texts but, for this reader, recent months of both British and world politics have not only coloured my reading, but invaded, confused and frustrated it. Such was the case with *Class, Party, Revolution,* an anthology of classic essays from the *Socialist Register* (which has been published annually since 1964 and was begun by Ralph Miliband and John Saville as a response to their criticisms of the *New Left Review*).

In his 1968 essay, ‘Reform and Revolution’, André Gorz writes that the institutions of bourgeois democracy are so conceived as to deny voters ‘all collective power over the organisation of society’ in favour of ‘a permanent delegation of power every four of five years to representatives with no direct relations with the masses’. Reading this, I pause for a moment and think of Brexit. I ask myself whether the referendum on Europe restored some of that collective power, or further undermined it. But I have allowed myself to be distracted; I return to my book.

An hour later, I encounter Lucio Magri. He is writing in the wake of the civil unrest of May 1968 in France. He states that ‘[i]n differing ways, many people who are not Marxists have begun to be conscious that the present system is wrong’. Again, I pause. This time I find myself thinking about the disparate political motivations of the *gilets jaunes* and their supporters. Two thirds of the French population, polls have suggested, support the basic aims of the protestors, while the protestors themselves hail from the full breadth of the political spectrum. The militancy of the protests troubles me, as does the involvement of the extreme right. I dismiss the thought, and get back to my reading.

When I reach Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, writing in 2017, I am almost irretrievably derailed: ‘[t]he delegitimation of neoliberalism has restored some credibility to the radical socialist case for transcending capitalism as necessary to realise the collective, democratic, egalitarian, and ecological aspirations of humanity’. My first thought is of Jeremy Corbyn - to what extent does his popularity represent a broad dissatisfaction with neoliberalism? I ask the same question of Bernie Sanders. Next, Pablo Iglesias. Soon, however, I find my mind drifting to the White House.

Oftentimes, it is suggested that Trump represents a similar rejection of the elites. This rationalisation, it strikes me and many others, is demonstrably false. Despite his rhetoric of right-wing populism, Trump’s interests coincide entirely with those of corporate power. He has done nothing to help the day-to-day lives of his broader voting constituency, or to alleviate their difficulties at times of crisis. He has, however, determinedly used his power to maintain the wealthy, not least with his $1.5 trillion tax cut in December 2017. But back, once more, to the *Register.*

*Class, Party and Revolution* is a book of significant consequence. It is also one of contemporary relevance - so it proves at each turn of the page. Spanning the journal’s more than fifty-year history, these essays all discuss the question of organization: what is the role of the political party for those on the left? The strategic goal, it is stated in the introduction, should not be the installation of ‘islands of socialism in a capitalist ocean’ but rather ‘discovering and implementing the structural reforms necessary to sustain further shifts in the balance of class power and ruptures with the logic of capitalism’.

Which returns us to Trump, for the inverse might be formulated as his strategic goal: ‘the willful obstruction of the structural reforms necessary to shift the balance of power, and the rejection of all ruptures with capitalism’. The 45th President is anti-elitist in no meaningful sense. It is the responsibility of the left to challenge any attempt to portray him as such.

Robin Jones lives in New York where he works as an editor. His writing has appeared in the *Edinburgh Review, Jacobin, Gutter,* and the *Huffington Post.*
Happy New Year. The start of January is always a relief to me, as it signals that the sheer living Hell of Christmas is out of the way for at least eleven months. The December party season is without doubt the worst time of year to earn one’s living as a stand-up comedian. Playing to audiences of drunk office parties made up of people who don’t even like each other is an annual chore we all approach with the same degree of enthusiasm as Theresa May must approach PMQs each week.

Having said that, this year I actually found myself entering into the spirit of Christmas more than I normally do. I made an advent calendar. To be totally accurate it wasn’t an advent calendar, it was a Brexit calendar. Every day I opened a window to find a picture of a different member of the government who had resigned in 2018.

January is normally the month when we make predictions for the year ahead. If the last few months of 2018 can be seen a bellwether, only a fool would have bet on Jose Mourinho getting the sack before Theresa May? Stubborn, arrogant, unbending, underachieving and unpopular. Aloof and monosyllabic when dealing with the media. Parking the bus, trying to convince their critics that their unattractive route one game plan is the only tactical approach on offer, totally unwilling to accept that there might be a plan B. Hated and ridiculed by many on their own team. It really is difficult to tell the difference between May and Mourinho?

It reportedly cost Manchester United around twenty-million pounds to give Mourinho his jotters, but they obviously thought it was a price worth paying. God knows what the cost will be to Britain of allowing May to stay in her job.

Eventually, the guy gave up and left the shop without any fags, probably hoping to find a vending machine in a bar he could shout at. It strikes me that Theresa May negotiated her deal with the European Union along very similar lines, and with a very similar outcome. Even when she returned to Brussels to try to re-negotiate the deal, she found that she couldn’t even negotiate her way out of the back seat of a limousine.

Having said only a fool would make any predictions for 2019, here are mine:

* Jose Mourinho will be offered a number of highly-paid jobs in Europe.
* Everyone is going to be bored shitless by endless documentaries celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the moon landing.
* The pound will become so valueless, Hearts fans will be able to throw even more coins at Neil Lennon.
* Theresa May will not be offered any sort of job in Europe.

Aside from that, anything could happen in the next twelve months.

Vladimir McTavish will be appearing at The Stand, Glasgow with his solo show ‘25 Years Of Stand-Up’ on Sunday 24 March as part of Glasgow Comedy Festival www.thestand.co.uk
The union for Scotland’s teachers and lecturers

Campaigning for fair pay settlements for all of Scotland’s teaching professionals.

The Educational Institute of Scotland – Speaking up for teaching professionals and for Scottish education.

www.eis.org.uk/ValueTeachers