

# Scottish Left Review

Issue 111 May/June 2019 - £2.00

a celebration & a critique

'best re(a)d'

20  
years

since the re-founding of  
**THE  
SCOTTISH  
PARLIAMENT**

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our lives, and  
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# TO BUILD A POLITICS FOR THE MANY

## THE HOUSE OF LORDS HAS GOT TO GO



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**NEAL ASCHERSON**

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The theme of this issue of *Scottish Left Review* is an examination of the intentions, processes and outcomes of the Scottish Parliament upon the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of its re-founding. The referendum of 11 September 1997 voted to re-establish a Scottish Parliament with its own (minimal) tax raising powers. The first elections to the Parliament took place on 6 May 1999 and the Parliament began sitting again on 12 May 1999. The hope to see a ‘people’s parliament’ – or certainly one in Holyrood reflecting more progressive politics than those traditionally found in Westminster – was also the spur to the founding of the *Scottish Left Review* by Jimmy Reid and others like Aamer Anwar, Roseanna Cunningham, Cathie Jamieson, John McAllion and Bob Thomson (see <http://www.scottishleftreview.scot/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/SLR-1.pdf> for its first issue in October 2000). More than anything, *Scottish Left Review* sought to establish a cross-party (and none) forum for creating a progressive left agenda for

the Parliament. We have reflected on the progress made on this in our recent issues (100 and 107).

So, in this issue, we have asked a number of left writers to reflect upon the issues at hand, whether from a combined personal and political perspective (like current and former MSPs, Elaine Smith, Alex Neil and Colin Fox - we also asked Patrick Harvie as the longest serving Green MSP (2003) but he did not respond) or from a single-issue perspective (on housing, poverty, rail etc). If the content of these ‘on theme’ articles seems rather more slanted towards ‘critical’ critique than ‘congratulatory’ celebration that is merely because the general consensus on the left is that the Parliament has not delivered sufficiently upon the (left) aspirations of it. Recall that one of the most cited reasons for having a Scottish Parliament again was not just to reflect and represent ‘the will of the Scottish people’ – remember the ‘Scotland votes Labour but gets a Tory government every time’ - as it was termed but also to provide a shield against any future

Thatcherism. Here, there were to be ‘Scottish solutions to Scottish problems’ as Donald Dewar told the Scottish Labour conference in September 1999.

Sure, we have had some protection from the ill Westminster winds of neo-liberalism – via limitations on privatisation, marketisation, austerity and the like - in the areas of the public provision of health, education and social welfare as a number of the articles point out. This shows what could not have been achieved without a Scottish Parliament. And yet, there is still palpable dissatisfaction. The sense of more critique than celebration may result for a number of primary reasons – the aspirations were unrealistic given the devolution settlement (with the continuation of important reserved powers), party machinery exerted itself in a parallel way to that found in Westminster, and the hand of neo-liberalism over political imperatives has strengthened since 1997-1999. These certainly dwarf initial concerns that the cost of building the parliament escalated from £40m to £400m, that second home allowances for MSPs created a gravy train, and that the location was Edinburgh and not Glasgow. Indeed, some argued for the parliament to be built around Stirling as a central location and with a parliamentary village comprising dedicated, stated-owned residences.

Despite the strengthening of the devolution settlement with consequent Scotland Acts of 2012 and 2016 and with continued demands for independence from a sizeable proportion of the electorate, it seems hard to find any lasting truth in the words of then leader of the (British) Labour Party, John Smith, when he told the Scottish Labour Party conference in 1994 that a Scottish Parliament would represent ‘the settled will of the Scottish people’, much less that its creation would form the ‘cornerstone’ of his party’s plan for democratic renewal within the United

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Kingdom. (Normally, this editorial would change 'UK' to Britain on account of the nations and classes of these isles not being particularly united and because of longstanding republican tendencies. But in this instance keeping the 'UK' serves to remind us that Labour, in particular, has a long way to go to create a 'united' Britain and a republic).

Those campaigning for a Scottish Parliament – from many different shades of left opinion – believed that the Parliament would offer an opportunity for 'new politics' to be conducted in a 'new way' (for example, the committee system, list MSPs elected by a new voting system etc etc). Others were somewhat disdainful. To devolution, revolution was baldly counter-posed - and it was said the only benefit of a Scottish Parliament was that it would be lessen the distance to be travelled to mount protests outside parliament. Like many things in life and society, experience suggests that if the truth does not quite lie in between the two, then certainly neither were particularly accurate assessments. The wipe out of the Scottish Socialist Party in the 2007 election after its implosion in 2006 was one particularly unforeseen event (even though the SSP's policies - put into the form of parliamentary bills - on free school meals, free prescriptions and free public transport continue to reverberate in our polity). So too was that the SNP would ever form the government – which it has from 2007 onwards and showing that the prediction from Labour MP, George Robertson, and then shadow Scottish secretary, in 1995 that 'devolution will kill nationalism stone dead' has been turned on its head.

Although what does emerge from the 'on theme' articles is common agreement that the Parliament has barely gained a '6/10', that consensus breakdowns on how it could and should do better. Some favour using existing powers or more fully using them, some favour further devolution, some favour devolution within Scotland and, of course, some favour independence.

As we now know, the Brexit bandwagon could continue to roll on until October this year – or it could just as easily stop shortly. Either way, it is concerning that Labour is still not clearly and consistently ahead in the polls for a possible general election. Indeed, Labour was not a beneficiary of the hammering the Tories took in the

local elections of 2 May. But should Theresa May go, this does not mean the current Conservative government will do similarly. Shouts of 'General election now!' from the left forget the rudimentary mechanics of how our parliamentary system works (for better or worse – usually worse) and that what does unite the Tories and DUP, above all else, is their hatred of Corbyn and his ilk. That may well be enough to prevent a general election happening before the next scheduled one in 2022.

Of course, the situation is not helped by the sore arse Labour has gotten from sitting on the fence so long in order to try balance out its messages out in favour of not alienating or offending both its actual and potential 'leave' and 'remain' supporters. In fact, it seems to have ended up with the worst of both worlds. In the meantime, Nigel Farage and his new Brexit party make hay while the sun shines out of the tensions between different forms of concurrent representative democracy (referenda and parliament both based on first-past-the-post) in the run up to possible European elections on 23 May. So too does the SNP – albeit not to the same extent. For the SNP, the Brexit benefit bounce seems to have finally come in terms of support for independence. Time will tell whether the eve of SNP conference poll was a blip or the begin of a new trajectory. And, the independence supporting left should not get too excited about the defeat of the SNP leadership on the currency issue at its spring conference. Not because Scotland not having its own currency is not important but because the wording of the successful amendment to make preparations as soon as practically possible for a new currency does not exactly tie Sturgeon's hands. The SNP leadership will easily be able to mould this to fit into its cautious overall approach to independence, whether that be dependent upon Brexit per se, a hard Brexit or any future qualifying tests it may wish to dream up - Gordon Brown used the latter on the Euro endlessly while Labour and the SNP currently use them on the type of Brexit and a new Scottish currency. Given the SNP leadership's endorsement of the neo-liberal Growth Commission report (see issue 106), it won't just be caution that is moulded to.

For the Scottish Parliament elections in 2021, polling shows support for

Scottish Labour initially rose after Richard Leonard was elected in late 2017 but then fell back in 2018 to the low twenties with 2019 showing some polls indicating support now of less than 20%. Under interim leader, Jackson Carlaw, a surprisingly strong parliamentary performer, the Tories have stayed above 20% (and the SNP has seldom been below 40%). With a move to the left in policy terms, the question must be: 'What is it that now stops Scottish Labour from connecting with more people than it does?' It cannot simply be the continued legacy of Labour being in 'Better Together' (especially as that does not help explain relative shifts in support). But it might have something to do with Scottish Labour's ability to convincingly prosecute these new policies. While Leonard cleared out the right from his top team in parliament, those now in his top team are not exactly inundated with the necessary talent to undertake this prosecution. (The SNP is not inundated with talent either but that lack of talent matters more when a party wants to be a successful insurgent). Or it might be to do with Scottish Labour's continued refusal to countenance a further referendum on independence. Meanwhile, Corbyn has said he would not necessarily say 'no' and would be guided whether the Scottish Parliament has a mandate to pursue another referendum. That may be because a future Labour Westminster government might need SNP support. But at least, it still allows British Labour to say there should be a democrat right to have another referendum even though it would maintain its right to campaign against voting 'yes' in that referendum. Or it might be talking mostly in terms of 'class' when (working) class consciousness remains so low and the SNP – through being the Scottish Government - still seems to have something of a monopoly on making anti-Tory rhetoric in Scotland. Or it might be that the right in Scottish Labour is still strong – see its recent Scottish Executive election performance – and that the longstanding Campaign for Socialism, a sister to Momentum, has membership among not much more than 5% of the party's 21,000 odd membership north of the border. Some serious debate and discussion are needed to understand what exactly the problem is given that the left has often assumed having the right policies is the critical and deciding factor.

# Has devolution lived up to its promise?

Michael Keating makes a balance sheet of the good, the bad and the not so beautiful

Devolution in 1999 was the culmination of over a hundred years of debate and some twenty years of campaigning after the false start of the 1970s. Initially conceived as a way of bringing power back from London, home rule had expanded to an ambition to do things differently. The 'new politics' that was promised would be liberating, participative and representative. Repudiating the hidebound traditions of Westminster, Scotland would have a Parliament for the twenty-first century. There was always something a bit naïve about 'new politics' though. It was to be inclusive and consensual but also to promote progressive policies and equality. It put great faith in procedures and ignored deeper questions of power and social inequality.

There have, nevertheless, been advances. Holyrood has family-friendly working hours, shedding the gentlemen's club ethos of Westminster. The gender balance among SNPs was initially much better than in Westminster, although the proportion of women has subsequently



stagnated at around a third. On the other hand, the social class balance has moved towards the Westminster model of university-educated, middle-class people, often coming from jobs associated with politics.

Much faith was invested in the committee system, which was intended to hold government better to account and to play a strong role in scrutiny and policy development. The record here is decidedly mixed. Committees, like the Parliament as a whole, are dominated by the political parties and discipline is tight. At a time when Westminster committees have started to exert manifest influence, especially where they have strong leadership, Holyrood committees have not progressed. Incredibly, they have not even taken the step of electing convenors, a reform on which Westminster MPs insisted some years ago; appointment here remains in the hands of the party leaderships.

Proportional representation has

opened up politics, with minor parties gaining representation and, occasionally, independents using the list system to get in. There has only been one single-party majority government in five parliaments. Yet this has not encouraged much inter-party cooperation, as opposed to the annual haggling over budget details. The experience of coalition government in the early years, indeed, was to close down much effective debate, as the policy programme was hammered out in advance by the party leaderships. Party whipping is strict and majority governments have hardly ever lost votes. Westminster, meanwhile, was becoming more rebellious even before the collapse of party discipline over Brexit.

Outside Parliament, political parties have apparently had a revival: the SNP and Greens following the independence referendum and Labour since the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader. Yet the SNP, Labour and the revived Conservatives are centralised and

## The Scottish Parliament Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

tightly controlled. Party conferences are not allowed to debate freely or take meaningful decisions on the great issues of the day. Party members elect the leaders but, thereafter, are meant to support the party line.

Preparations for devolution gave a lot of attention to the Parliament as the focus of new politics. Much less attention was given to the executive although, in a parliamentary system, this is where actual power lies. Initially, the Scottish Executive was based on the old Scottish Office, which itself had been eviscerated of much of its policy capacity since 1979. Policy in the early years was cautious and rather timid, as though ministers were conscious of the fragility of the new institutions which did, indeed, face a fierce backlash from sections of the press that never accepted the change.

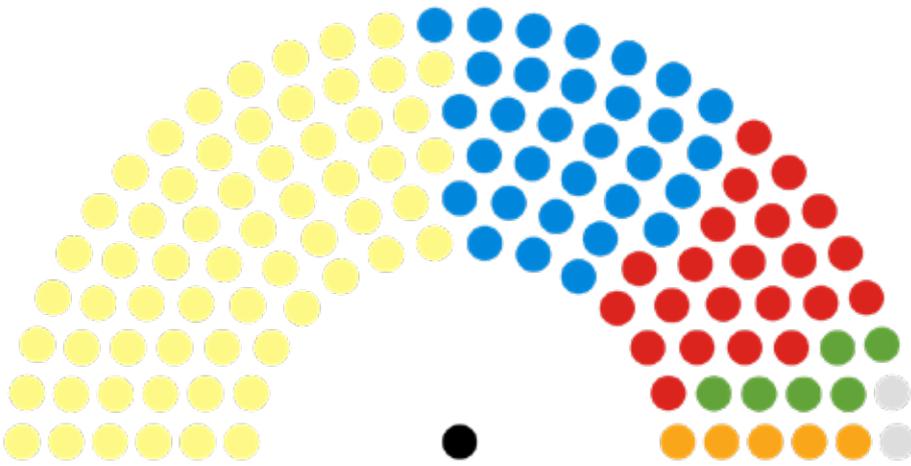
The arrival of the SNP in the renamed Scottish Government in 2007 brought a new sense of self-confidence, without

the need to look over their shoulder to London. There was also a change in structures, with the abolition of the old departments and a flatter hierarchy, enabling more fluid communication between ministers and officials. There was to be a focus on strategic objectives and performance. Related reforms were intended to focus on the long-term and on preventive spending to stop social problems emerging rather than fixing them afterwards. Much of this impetus, however, was later lost in the eagerness (reminiscent of 'new' Labour) to embrace the latest public management fads and jargon. There is much naïve talk of 'joined up' government and 'holistic' approaches, of partnership and co-production, which avoid important issues of power and genuine political differences.

Government in Scotland is certainly more accessible than in the past. There is a great deal of consultation and discussion with 'stakeholders'. This has not, however, developed into the broader social partnership or dialogue found in other small nations and regions, devolved or independent. Concertation and partnership in Scotland tend to take place within

sectoral policy communities around, for example, economic development, or inequality, or the environment. Too rarely do these come together to strike the necessary social compromises and trade-offs. Instead, there is an assumption of a natural consensus, just waiting to be organised.

Devolution has occurred at a time when the scope and scale of government are undergoing massive change. Social welfare is being transformed away from the old male-breadwinner model. Old, invidious distinctions between the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving' poor have re-emerged as politicians and commentators on the right talk of 'strivers and skivers'. The focus of economic development has moved from attracting mobile multinational investment towards local capacities. The relationship between labour market policy and welfare has become crucial in getting people into work at a time of precarious employment. Westminster



The 2016-2021 Scottish Parliament by party MSPs

policy has been more focused on punishment than empowerment. Government rhetoric in Scotland has been more enlightened, as in the recuperation of the old term 'social security' around the newly-devolved benefits. An opportunity was lost, however, at the time of the Smith Commission, for a serious review about the right balance of powers in taxation, welfare and employment that could have allowed Scotland to design a system that is both economically more effective and socially more inclusive.

The initial devolution settlement gave Scotland almost no taxation powers. This has been changed in the *Scotland Acts* of 2012 and 2016. The new powers are still limited. Unearned income is taxed at Westminster, the tax base is reserved, as is the tax-free allowance. Nonetheless, there are the beginnings of a serious debate about taxation. Having gained new tax powers, the Scottish Government could not allow them to atrophy as had the 3p power in the original *Scotland Act*. Recent changes in income tax are small but politically significant as they show that change in a progressive direction is possible. Claims that thousands of middle-class people would decamp to the south (to face higher housing costs and university fees for their children) if they had to pay a little more have been confronted. Council tax, on the other hand, was frozen for years and is still based on valuations set in the 1990s as successive governments, seared by the experience of the Poll Tax, have failed in the courage to do anything about it. Millions of people who are paying too much are ignorant of the fact that they could win. There is a similar timidity on issues like the tourist tax when lobbies implausibly claim that a couple of pounds a day

would drive the tourists away from Edinburgh.

Some of the most important effects of devolution concern things that did not happen. Scotland did not get the wasteful, ideologically-driven experiments in marketization of the National Health Service, from which England is trying to recover. There is not the frenetic competition among schools (taking a toll on parents and pupils) found in England, in spite of the efforts of some newspapers to create league tables. Universities still play the game of meaningless rankings but we have been spared the bureaucratic nightmare of a Teaching Excellence Framework; instead performance is rated in a more sensitive and qualitative way. There is still a certain ethos of public service, as educators, health professionals and people in the social services are treated as responsible professionals rather than target-driven drones working by numbers – although there is a certain amount of all that in Scotland. The scandalous Private Finance Initiative (renamed Public Private Partnership by 'new' Labour) was rolled out in Scotland, leaving the next generation with massive liabilities. Partly this was because the original devolution scheme did not allow the Scottish Government borrowing powers, even to invest; the incoming SNP Government did not have much scope to do anything about it.

Scotland in the last twenty years has become a more open and tolerant society and devolution and the debates it provoked has a role here. The early debate about the repeal of Section 28 put the new institutions to a severe test but they held their nerve. The debate about sectarianism might have appeared to be turning the clock back to the old agenda, but it probably had

to be held and most people agreed that the problem, while much less pervasive than in the past, had to be faced. The cross-party consensus in favour of immigration shows how economic needs and social liberalism can be combined and that leadership does matter – there is no evidence that Scots are naturally more enlightened on these matters.

Those of us old enough to remember the old days might look back in wonder at the fact that our domestic politics was conducted in a Parliament four hundred miles away by commuting MPs – even in matters concerning only Scotland. We could vote for one government and get another. Scrutiny of government was scanty and politicians, while hard-working, were scarcely accessible. Devolution has made Scotland into a vibrant political community but there is the feeling that, whatever its constitutional future, it could make more of itself.

*Michael Keating is Professor of Politics at the University of Aberdeen and University of Edinburgh and Director of the Centre on Constitutional Change*

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# Red Scotland unrealised?

Elaine Smith argues the Scottish Parliament has made little progress in realising its essential tasks

Gordon Brown, in *The Red Paper* (1975), argued: 'The irresistible march of recent events places Scotland today at a turning - not of our own choosing but where a choice must sooner or later be made'. He went on to suggest that the manifest issues at that time facing Scotland were 'our unstable economy and unacceptable level of unemployment, chronic inequalities of wealth and power and inadequate social services'.

One turning point was the referendum for a Scottish Parliament in 1997; enabled by the election of a Labour Government following eighteen years of the Tories. The vote was overwhelmingly in favour of a devolved parliament with tax varying powers; widely believed to be a reaction to the way Scotland had been treated during Thatcher's era. The belief that a Scottish Parliament would be a bulwark against further right-wing Tory policy was a motivating factor in the support for devolution.

I was elected in 1999 as the first MSP for Coatbridge and Chryston and the Parliament opened with great fanfare. Some major changes were already visible such as the number of women elected. This was the third highest of any parliament in the world. However, women's representation has plummeted from third in the world in 1999 to thirty second now. In comparison, Cuba, thirteenth in 1999, has now taken second place. A critical mass of women is important and results in progressive legislation in areas such as domestic abuse, breastfeeding and period poverty.

Initially, the expectation that this parliament would be different to Westminster and would be more left-leaning did seem to be realised. Labour won the most seats of any party but, without an overall majority, entered coalition with the Liberal Democrats. Former Labour MSP, John McAllion, and I argued at the time for a minority Labour administration which we felt would be better placed to drive a more socialist agenda.

The system of member's bills meant Tommy Sheridan (the then sole SSP MSP) was successful in outlawing the cruel practice of poindings and warrant sales. This was achieved as he gained the support of left-wing labour MSPs. However, the prospect of more such legislation gaining cross-party support

did not last as party political pressures began to emerge; with positions evolving to become more entrenched. In addition, constitutional issues have taken precedence over policies to deliver a fairer Scotland. Some member's bills have had success, such as my own Breastfeeding bill, but they need to be supported by the government to succeed.

Likewise, the committee system was supposed to operate as a second chamber to hold government to account but doesn't work as expected. For example, if amendments to bills are passed at committee, they can be overturned by the Government at Stage 3. The committees do work hard scrutinising legislation but are susceptible to pressure from whips.

Two decades on and has our parliament lived up to the expectations many on the left had at its inception of accessible democracy and a more socialist Scotland? In terms of access, voting systems, sitting times and committees there have been some improvement over the Westminster system. However, the issues identified by Gordon Brown in 1975 have not been resolved and it could be argued they are worse. The idea that people, including those in work, would be dependent on foodbanks (unheard of in 1999) would have been met with disbelief. And yet, the Scottish government is resisting legislating for a right to food.

Homelessness on the rise, educational standards declining and child poverty set to dramatically increase are not scenarios anticipated twenty years ago. In 2003, the Labour-led administration implemented the most progressive homelessness legislation in Europe yet now our streets are sadly occupied by many rough sleepers. We started out

with a world class Scottish education system. It is now in decline with a growing attainment gap, college places lost and learning support reduced. The SNP promised to scrap student debt in 2007 but, instead, it is rising.

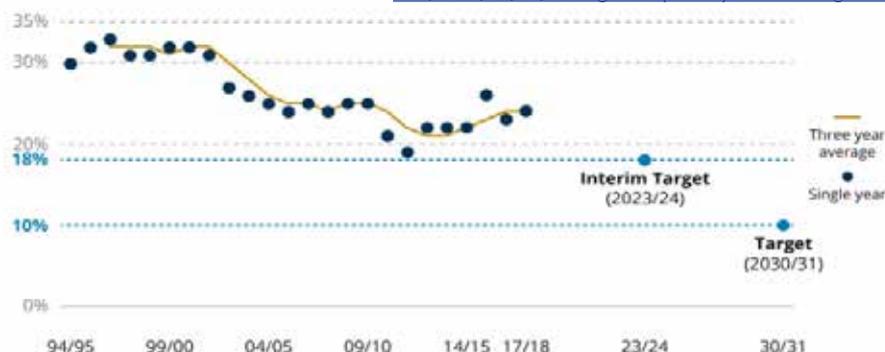
Perhaps worst of all, child poverty is predicted to hit the shocking figure of 29% in 2023. The graph below shows that it began to decline in the late 1990s but has been on the rise again since 2010. Cruel Tory welfare policies can be blamed but so too can the SNP government. With much increased powers over income tax rates, they could mitigate the two-child cap; implement the £5 top-up to child benefit and bring forward the introduction of a minimum income standard. Free school meals could be rolled out, with holiday hunger addressed nationally as it has been by some Labour councils. Instead, Tory austerity has been passed on tenfold by the SNP to local government. This was not envisaged by those on the left on Scotland in 1999. Indeed, initial editor of the *Scottish Left Review* and my good friend, the late Jimmy Reid said: 'The mega-rich want less public spending so that they may pay even less tax. The only alternative is that we pay more taxes to fund the expenditure required to make our society more civilised. It really is as simple as that. Which side are you on?' (*Power without Principles*, 1999). Twenty years later and the Tories are on the rise in Scotland pushing Labour into third place. Until we have a Labour-run Scottish government implementing socialist policies 'for the many, not the few', then we will not see the promise of our Scottish Parliament fully realised.

*Elaine Smith is the Labour MSP for Central Region and Shadow Cabinet Secretary for the Eradication of Poverty and Inequality.*

## How does relative child poverty in Scotland compare to targets?

Poverty and income inequality in Scotland: 2015-2018

Source: SPICe, 9 April 2019 <https://spice-spotlight.scot/2019/04/09/ending-child-poverty-the-challenge-ahead/>



# Twenty years of the Scottish Parliament

Alex Neil is both proud and disappointed on the amount of left progress made

When I was elected as a Member of the Scottish Parliament on 6 May 1999, I was elated. This was the first ever democratically elected Scottish Parliament. As a believer in social justice and independence, I was full of hope that our new Parliament would deliver for the people of Scotland. I wanted to prove that Jimmy Maxton, the ILP MP for Bridgeton in Glasgow from the 1920s till he died in 1946, was correct when he said: 'A Scottish Parliament would deliver more in five years than Westminster would in twenty five years'.

Twenty years, later I am both proud of what the Scottish Parliament has delivered but also left with a deep sense of disappointment at our failure to deliver the kind of transformational change in the economic and social circumstances of the Scottish people to which I and my colleagues aspired. Part of the reason for our failures has been the restrictive nature of the devolution settlement, coupled with the imposition of austerity from Westminster. However, part of it is also down to our own lack of audacity as a Parliament. We have been far too timid and not nearly as ambitious or radical enough.

Here we are twenty years after the Parliament was established and still the pattern of land ownership in Scotland is almost identical to what it was in 1999. The land reform measures passed by the Parliament are welcome. They have made a difference, especially in those communities where community buyouts have taken place. However, there has not been the radical transformation in the pattern of land ownership and control that we should, by now, have delivered.

The levels of poverty and deprivation in Scotland are still at an unacceptable level and rising again. A quarter of our children are living in poverty. A fifth of our pensioners and most of our disabled community are struggling to make ends meet. The blame for this lies very much at Westminster's door but as a Parliament, we have not been nearly pro-active enough in forcing change.

Although unemployment levels are at record lows, the quality of too many jobs in Scotland is inadequate, with low wages, zero-hour contracts, and poor

prospects for promotion and career development. About 40% of jobs are either part-time or temporary or in (often forced) self-employment. We need to do much more to address these shortcomings.

We have a dire shortage of skilled labour in many industries. Every year we are about 7,000 people short of the skilled IT workers we need to develop this high-paying, modern industry. We have a shortage of about 12,000 skilled construction industry workers. We are short of social care workers, mainly because of low pay and poor career progression. There is a shortage of skilled people in the oil and gas sector as well as in the medical profession. We have a shortage of specialist teachers in many areas. We even have a shortage of about 5,000 long-distance lorry drivers.

These are all well paid jobs. These shortages represent a huge opportunity to redeploy people who are in low income, poor quality jobs to obtain enhanced levels of employment and income and at the same time ensure these industries can recruit the people they need. We need a Cabinet Secretary for Full Employment to tackle this issue as a matter of urgency.

We still are not doing nearly enough to diversify the Scottish economy, to make it fit for the twenty first century. For example, although recent progress has been made, our investment in research and development is nowhere near where it needs to be, compared to the likes of Finland and Norway. Our infrastructure investment levels are far better than they used to be but still way below the needs of a modern economy. I hope that the new National Investment Bank will deliver a step change in the scale of such investment as well as boost finance and credit facilities for small and medium-sized businesses. It cannot happen quickly enough.

We still have not abolished the council tax, one of the most unfair taxes ever invented. We need to instil new urgency into abolishing the council tax and replacing with a much fairer income-based local services tax. We need to introduce a land tax to incentivise

new investment in our most abundant, under-used natural resource and thereby help grow the Scottish economy.

Therefore, there is much more to do. However, without the added bonus of being independent we will continue to under-achieve as a Parliament and as a nation. That is why we need a clear strategy for achieving full self-government. We also need to re-think the relationship an independent Scotland should have with Europe. My own view is that 'Independence in Europe' should be re-defined. Instead of an independent Scotland seeking to re-join the European Union, we should instead join the European Free Trade Area (EFTA) and the European Economic Area (EEA). That way we get the benefits of free movement and the single market without the downside of being in an increasingly centralised EU.

There is a huge and exciting agenda for the Scottish Parliament to pursue in its third decade, only a small part of which I have outlined here. Let us deliver on Jimmy Maxton's mantra and show the Scottish people that the Scottish Parliament is delivering for them.

Alex Neil is the (SNP) MSP for Airdrie and Shotts

## Scottish Left Review

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# How managerialism hijacked Holyrood

*Colin Fox says promises have been unfulfilled, challenges ducked and the poorest Scots failed*

**O**n this, the twentieth anniversary of the Scottish Parliament, I find myself reflecting on the lofty promises it made in 1999; politics would be done differently we were told, the world's newest legislature would be a 'People's Parliament' with a progressive policy agenda, powerful parliamentary committees would hold special interests to account and serve the interests of all Scots. Those promises, perhaps, predictably went awry.

Politics have not been 'done differently'. The same 'special interests' dominate today as they always have. I recall the academic, Gerry Hassan, concluding after the first 10 years that the same privileged, elite who would have gained most had Holyrood not existed were the ones who had benefitted most from the Scottish Parliament's establishment. That remains true today, only more so.

Holyrood may be more accessible than Westminster – its 400 miles closer after all - but Tony Blair ensured the powers devolved were little more than those held by the regional and district authorities of yesteryear. My most vivid memory as an MSP was being constantly told what I couldn't discuss; the illegal war in Iraq, unjust employment practices, regressive taxation policies, punitive social security decisions – the very issues most of my constituents wanted me to raise on their behalf.

'Power devolved is power retained' Enoch Powell insisted and it is ironic then that this 'power retained' became the SNP's 'get out of jail card'. They use it to justify their own insipid record in Government claiming 'if only Holyrood had more powers we would do so much more.' Such sophistry cannot hide the fact that the 'Lib-Lab' managerialism of the first decade gave way to the SNP's in the second.

Of course, the global 'hegemony', as Gramsci famously termed it, of finance capital and its apparently unchallengeable strength has dictated all the political rules throughout

the world over this entire period. Its instructions were certainly never challenged by Holyrood. And yet until they are no real, meaningful progress can be made.

Fundamental changes have been few and far between in the last twenty years at the postal address of Edinburgh EH99. Free personal care for the elderly, free tuition for students, free prescriptions for the sick, free bus travel for senior citizens - leave aside the fact they are not, of course, 'free' at all but paid for out of our taxes, no more poindings and warrant sales humiliating the poor, the closure of coal fired power stations, the new railway line to the Borders and the Aberdeen bypass were all welcome. But the harsh truth is these improvements are not much to show for 20 years work by highly paid MSPs and their long and expensive deliberations!

Not when one in three children still lives in poverty and in the same working-class areas as twenty years ago. Not when inequalities have widened markedly. Not when slave wages and mass underemployment now stalk the land. Not when fuel poverty continues to scar one of the world's energy rich nations. Not when hundreds of thousands of bright youngsters went to university and are materially no better off for it.

Five First Ministers took office without the slightest intention of challenging the forces that hold back progress in this country. Holyrood remains gripped by a deeply conservative middle-class 'managerialism', a philosophy never advocated in any democratic election.

Since 2007, the economically right of centre nationalists have kept loyally to the script, retaining, for example, the deeply unfair council tax they promised to scrap. They promised to eradicate fuel poverty in 2011 and abandoned that pledge too. They attacked Labour's PFI privatisation programme in opposition only to introduce their own 'Scottish Futures Trust'. They cosy up to rapacious

capital just as 'new' Labour did before them because they too reckon anything else is futile.

Who can forget the 'red carpet' treatment Donald Trump and his billions received from Alex Salmond when a Site of Special Scientific Interest [SSSI] in Menie, Aberdeenshire was targeted for despoliation? The SNP refuse to take Scotrail back into public hands or ensure our energy industries again belong to the people because big business doesn't approve of such notions. And their sycophantic attitude toward the EU today displays, above all, a party beholden to corporate capital.

'The rainbow parliament of 2003-2007' was unquestionably the progressive, democratic high point of the last twenty years. There was then a genuine political pluralism at Holyrood with free thinking SSP, Greens and independent MSPs challenging the stultifying *status quo*. Unfortunately, Holyrood today has no socialist voices within it. Its political 'centre of gravity' is more conservative than at any time in the last two decades. The challenge facing left-wing opinion remains considerable. And yet only we are likely to fulfil all those promises made in 1999.

*Colin Fox is the national spokesman of the Scottish Socialist Party. He represented the SSP at Holyrood as MSP for the Lothians from 2003-2007.*

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# Scottish Parliament still to reach its full potential

*Dennis Canavan says only independence will allow Holyrood to become a heart in a heartless world*

Throughout my entire political life, I campaigned for the setting up of a Scottish Parliament, even at a time when it was not a popular cause amongst many comrades on the left. The case for a Scottish Parliament was reinforced during the quarter of a century I spent at Westminster, most of that time in opposition. The years of Tory Government from 1979 to 1997 exposed more than ever the democratic deficit of the unwritten UK constitution. During those long years of Tory rule, Scotland was repeatedly returning a majority of Labour MPs. At one stage we won as many as 50 out of 71 Scottish constituencies but we were able to deliver little, if anything, for the people of Scotland because we were outnumbered and outvoted by Tory MPs from south of the border. Even on legislation applying to Scotland alone, the Government frequently used its majority to foist upon Scotland policies which had been clearly rejected by the people of Scotland and the majority of their elected representatives. This was repeatedly done on important matters such as education, housing and the NHS but probably the most glaring example was using the people of Scotland as guinea pigs for the imposition of the iniquitous poll tax.

When the result of the referendum on a Scottish Parliament was declared in 1997, people were literally dancing in the streets. There were great hopes and expectations that this would herald a new dawn of Scottish democracy. Some people may have been naive enough to imagine that the new Parliament would be a panacea for all of Scotland's ills but they were quickly brought down to earth by some early decisions such as the escalating cost of the Parliament building and the obstinate refusal to abolish tuition fees for students.

People soon came to realise that any Parliament is made up of human beings and human beings sometimes make mistakes. Nevertheless, over the last twenty years, the Parliament has had many positive achievements, such as the introduction of free NHS prescriptions and eye tests, the abolition of tuition fees, a more generous system of caring for the elderly and a start to radical land reform, including an end to the feudal system, ensuring a right of access to land and more opportunities for community ownership. None of those policies would have been implemented by Westminster which continues to treat the people of Scotland with disdain. The Scottish Parliament, on the other hand, responds more positively to the needs, the wishes and the aspirations of the people of Scotland.

Proportional representation has ensured that the Parliament is more representative of the people compared with Westminster's first-past-the-post system. The committee structure has also ensured more opportunities for people and organisations to influence the Parliament's decision-making process, including at the pre-legislative stage. However, parliamentary democracy is diminished by too much control freakery. MSPs seem obliged to toe the party line on virtually every vote, even in committees, and the party bosses have too much control over the agenda. For example, at First Minister's Questions, far too much time is given to party leaders. When I was at Westminster, a hard working back-bench Member could get Question Number One to the Head of Government. That is impossible in the Scottish Parliament and even the allocation of members' debates is fixed on a party basis.

However, the main reason why the Scottish Parliament has not yet

reached its full potential is because of the limitation of its powers. Some of the most important matters such as macro-economics, foreign affairs and defence are still reserved to Westminster. As a result, the Scottish Parliament is powerless to stop Brexit or abolish Trident yet the Scottish Parliament is more in tune with the wishes of the people of Scotland on those matters than Westminster.

So, the democratic deficit remains and it will continue until the Scottish Parliament has all the powers of an independent Parliament, which will facilitate the introduction of a radical, left-of-centre agenda. Critics may argue that it will not guarantee such an agenda but we should have more confidence in our ability to win the hearts and minds of the people of Scotland. There are some on the left who try to defend their unionist stance by waxing eloquent about working-class solidarity and internationalism. The truth is that the unity of the working-class is not dependent on the unity of any kingdom and true internationalism embraces all the nations of the world, most of which are independent. Independence is not an end in itself but a means towards building a better Scotland which will play a full part in the international community to help build a better world.

*Dennis Canavan was a Labour MP (1974-2000) then an independent MSP (1999-2007)*

# Building democracy for the next 20 years

*Grahame Smith argues the Scottish Parliament has made a good start but has unfinished business*

In his iconic speech at the formal opening of the Scottish Parliament on 1 July 1999, Donald Dewar described the Scottish Parliament as: 'Not an end [but] a means to greater ends'. The devolution of power to Scotland and the reopening of a Scottish Parliament was an historic moment. It offered the opportunity to revitalise democracy and to give the people of Scotland a greater say over how they are governed.

It is easy to forget the antipathy towards devolution during the new Parliament's early years encouraged by some calamitous own goals by some naïve but hapless politicians. No longer. Even the Scottish Tories are devolutionists! The significance and the value of the Scottish Parliament are broadly accepted. In devolved areas, Scottish public services are increasingly different from those in England. Successive Scottish Governments have placed a greater emphasis on social justice objectives and public sector delivery. While not immune to privatisation and the neo-liberal driven policy, these features little in our public policy discourse.

The Scottish Parliament has offered the opportunity for a unique approach to the challenges that Scotland faces. An economic policy characterised by inclusive growth; a focus on reducing inequality and increasing fair work; curriculum for excellence and free tuition; free prescriptions and social care; the smoking ban and minimum unit pricing, are approaches shaped to reflect the demands of Scottish society.

To varying degrees, the STUC and Scotland's unions have exerted significant influence over these and other defining Scottish policies. We have helped shape a broad consensus around the type of Scotland we want. The nature of our policy debate around the workplace - the drive for fair work, the valued role of unions, the positive impact of migration - is far removed from the current debate at Westminster. Contrast our approach to fair work and collective bargaining to that of the Taylor Report commissioned by the Westminster Government. Scotland has not been inflicted by the rise in ultra-right populism,

experienced elsewhere. The role of our Parliament is not insignificant in this regard.

That said, we need to avoid lapsing into comfortable complacency. If there is such a consensus, it is fragile and doesn't go far enough. Too great a focus on the Scottish Parliament as the sole vehicle for progressive change runs the risk of de-legitimising other critical elements of our democracy.

The biggest causality of this is, of course, is Scottish local government, which has been increasingly starved of funding and stripped of power. The prolonged council tax freeze, the centralisation of police and fire services, and the proposals to limit local control over education, damage democracy.



With some notable exceptions, including the unions, a once vibrant Scottish civic society has struggled to maintain prominence. In part, this is a consequence of the reduced capacity of our councils and other public bodies to engage effectively. Genuine social partnerships have been replaced in some spheres by commissioning and contracting.

The Scottish media is now so focused upon the Scottish Parliament, and the political class within, that significant parts of our economic and social life are ignored. In its early years, the Parliament consumed all of the knowledgeable industrial correspondents. Every industrial issue is now viewed only through a political lens. Media coverage of the STUC Congress, for example, is now largely restricted to the interventions by the First Minister and other prominent politicians.

Last month, the First Minister announced a renewed constitutional debate, with a focus on further powers for the Parliament. In her statement to Parliament, the First Minister said:

'the devolution settlement in its current form is now seen to be utterly inadequate to the task of protecting those [Scotland's] interests. In other words, the status quo is broken'.

The British Government's catastrophic handling of Brexit, including its proposals to centralise rather than devolve repatriated powers in non-reserved areas, has undoubtedly placed significant strain on the devolution settlement. However, to characterise 20 years of devolution in such a manner seems designed to advance her political objective of Scottish independence rather than to promote a fuller debate on democracy in Scotland and on how power, economic as well as political, can be fairly distributed.

We do need a fuller discussion on the powers that our Parliament should have. The STUC, for example, would like to see legislative responsibility for employment and union rights reside in Scotland. We do not demand this as an end in itself. We demand it because its absence limits the impact that current economic and labour market powers have on reducing poverty and inequality and achieving fair work and inclusive growth.

However, the value of the Scottish Parliament must not be judged by the powers it accumulates but by its effectiveness in finding solutions to the challenges we face, solutions that advance the interests of the people of Scotland. This must include not only using the powers it has to their fullest effect, but sharing power with other democratic and representative institutions. Our constitutional debate also needs to focus on the role of local government, on the role of civic society and how Scottish communities, and the people who live and work in them, can be empowered to participate fully in our democracy.

*Grahame Smith is general secretary of the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC)*

# The campaign for a Scottish Parliament

Pat Kelly recalls the struggle for a Scottish Assembly and how it shaped the Parliament we have today

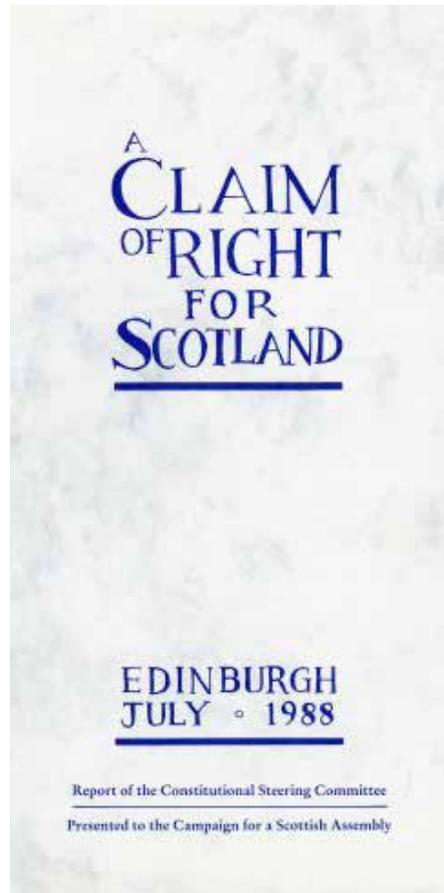
In his speech at the official opening of the Scottish Parliament on 1 July 1999, Donald Dewar encapsulated the feelings of the country when he declared: 'For me, for any Scot, today is a proud moment; a new stage on a journey begun a long time ago and which has no end'. It was often a tortuous journey, especially after the bitter disappointment of the 1979 referendum, when a majority voted in favour of a Scottish Assembly but not enough to satisfy the infamous 40% threshold stipulation. The requirement, inserted by George Cunningham, the anti-devolution Scottish Labour MP for Islington South, was supported by a substantial number of Labour MPs. In the referendum campaign that followed, some Labour MPs joined the 'no' side. Shortly afterwards, the SNP, which had been propping up a minority Labour government, voted along with the Tories in a no-confidence motion against the Labour Government. The hostility between the Labour Party and the SNP increased to an unprecedented level.

Some stalwarts carried on the fight and only a few months after the Conservatives won the 1979 election and so the Campaign for a Scottish Assembly was founded. Although shunned by the leaderships of the main parties, its supporters included individual members of all parties, trade unionists, and academics. Its objective during the first period of the Thatcher Government was simply to keep the debate about devolution alive.

But the Tory victories in general elections of the 1980s gave impetus to the campaign, especially in the Labour Party. Although they won nationally, the 1987 election saw the Tories reduced to 10 seats out of 71 and only 24% of the vote in Scotland. This electoral decline, together with unpopular policies such as the Poll Tax contributed to the argument that Scotland was suffering from a 'democratic deficit'. Scottish Labour Action, a left-wing pressure group, was formed to agitate against the Poll Tax and to campaign for Home Rule as the overwhelming feeling within the Labour Party drifted towards home rule. Culturally, the period was highly creative with musicians, writers, and artists contributing to the vigorous debate

about Scotland's identity.

The Campaign for a Scottish Assembly had discussed the idea of a Constitutional Convention, a cross-party gathering of politicians and civic Scotland charged with drawing up a blueprint for a Scottish Assembly. However, it did not have the political clout to shift the main parties towards cooperation and felt the idea would be better received if it came from a 'representative group of people who were seen to be above the party battle'. This group duly produced the impressively written document, *A Claim of Right for Scotland*, a persuasive mix of historical analysis and proposals for a Constitutional Convention.



Civic Scotland rushed to embrace the proposals as did the Liberal Democrats. The Labour Party, initially lukewarm to the idea, was won over. However, the SNP felt the Convention would lead them into a 'devolution trap' and refused to join. Nevertheless, the Convention went ahead without the SNP with an impressive array of MPs, MEPs, leading members of local councils, churches, trade unions and minor political parties.

Many innovative proposals were discussed and implemented. Crucially, the Labour Party agreed to support proportional representation. The idea of 50:50 representation of men and women, initially coming from the STUC Woman's Committee, was adopted in the scheme. The term 'Assembly' disappeared to be replaced by 'Parliament', and the Campaign for a Scottish Assembly followed suit. The blueprint was ready for the expected Labour victory at the 1992 General Election. The agony of a further set back on the long journey to a parliament broke many hearts but three days after the election, 5,000 people responded to a call from the hastily formed Scotland United to a rally in Glasgow. Other groups such as Common Cause and Democracy for Scotland added their ideas to the campaign.

Not long after Tony Blair became Labour leader, he caused fury and accusations of betrayal when he insisted that no legislation on a Scottish Parliament would take place without a referendum. More difficult to accept was a separate second question about giving the parliament tax varying powers. However, after the victory in 1997 election and the wipe-out of the Tories in Scotland, it brought about an unusual phenomenon in Scottish politics - Labour, Liberals and the SNP agreed on a joint campaign to for a 'yes' vote on both questions.

The extent of the victory - 74.3% for the parliament and 63.5% for tax varying powers - surprised most observers. But it was a lesson on what a united approach could deliver. Other lessons the long campaign taught us was the power of groups like Scottish Labour Action to shift thinking within a major party. And the grassroots, cross-party Campaign for a Scottish Assembly (later Parliament) showed what a few doggedly determined people can achieve if persistent.

*Pat Kelly was a member of the group which drafted 'A Claim of Right for Scotland'. He is the convenor of the editorial committee of Scottish Left Review.*

# Creating a constitutional moment

Pauline Bryan argues that Brexit could represent an opportunity to remake Britain in a federal mould

Sometimes when you ask for directions, you're told: 'I wouldn't start from here'. That may be the best response when considering the British constitution. Not having a codified constitution may have some advantages - it has allowed changes to be introduced quickly when governments have to respond to significant political pressure. But quick fix solutions are not necessarily the best. In the Britain, it has resulted in a piecemeal approach to devolving powers leaving a patchwork of different arrangements in different parts of Britain.

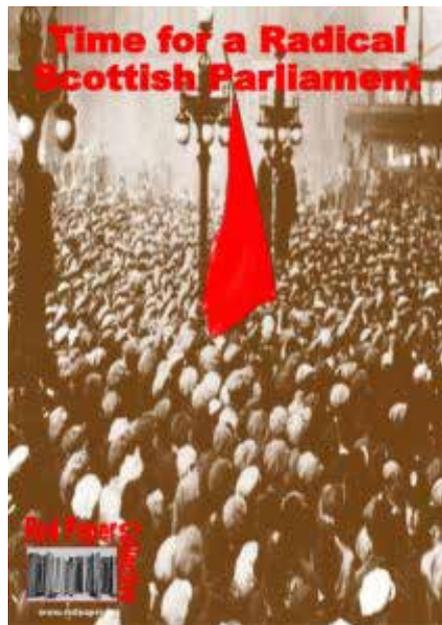
As a result, we have ended up with the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh, Northern Ireland and London Assemblies, each with different powers. Across the remainder of England, there are Metro Mayors, Police and Crime Commissioners, City Deals, Unity Authorities, Metropolitan Districts, County Councils, District Councils, London Boroughs and the City of London. And finally, as a response to the Scottish independence referendum, up popped English Votes for English Laws (EVEL). Regardless of the Brexit outcome, it is important that Britain looks at its constitution from top to bottom, or better still from bottom to top.

Local authorities across Britain are being starved of funding but also have a list of statutory duties. The traditional powers excised by local government over decades have not been safeguarded as is shown by the Scottish Government bypassing local authorities, and in the name of giving more powers to head teachers, taking more direct control of schools which has effectively taken education out of local democratic control. This follows the centralisation of the Fire and Rescue Service and Police Scotland.

The SNP government has followed in the footsteps of Margaret Thatcher's rate capping by placing restrictions on how much council tax could be raised without incurring prohibitive sanctions. The business rate is set by the Scottish Government and collected centrally. In all, the powers of local government have been diminished and councillors have been encouraged or required by law to behave more like company directors than political representatives. It can mean that the unelected officials have disproportionate influence on the work

of councils. Rather than devolving power, the Scottish Parliament has led to more central control at Holyrood and less at local council level.

When the Scottish Parliament was established, it had a range of devolved powers including the power to vary taxation. In 1999, it was probably assumed there would be a period of stability while the Parliament bedded in and tested the limits and possibilities of its powers. Following the death of Donald Dewar and the quick resignation of Henry McLeish, there were three First Ministers in less than three years. The coalition governments were uninspiring and failed to justify the expectations of those who had campaigned for the Parliament. This, together with the Blair government's involvement in the Iraq war and other policies, helped spread a disillusionment with the coalition of Labour and the Lib-Dems and encouraged support for the SNP and, to some extent, independence.



The Scottish Parliament's history seemed to confirm Michael Keating's claim in 'Second Round Reform' (2009) that once you start down the road of devolving powers there will be demands for more. The British constitution is particularly vulnerable to these demands because making a fundamental change only requires an Act of Parliament.

The powers of the Scottish Parliament could theoretically be withdrawn by the Westminster Parliament. While the Sewel convention established Westminster would not legislate on devolved issues

without the express consent of the Scottish Parliament, we have seen from the repatriation of powers through Brexit that this may not always be adhered to.

A referendum on independence was 'granted' by the Cameron government, and to succeed it only required a simple majority. As with the EU referendum the outcome appeared to be assured, but as the campaign went on polls showed that support for independence was growing. As the gap narrowed the British government made promises of additional powers for the Scottish Parliament. This led to the Smith Commission and, even though no Scottish government had maximised the use of existing powers and the tax varying power had never been used, more powers were devolved.

The range of powers that the Scottish Government received under the *Scotland Act 2016* included raising its own income tax, rail franchising, Crown Estate in Scotland, Air Passenger Duty, enhanced control over 8 social security benefits and legislating on abortion. The Red Paper Collective has always asked: 'What is the purpose of a new power? And, what will it be used for?' It believes in powers for a purpose, not for their own sake.

Constitutional experts have explained our lack of a codified constitution as being due to not having gone through a 'constitutional moment' when circumstances obliged the state to codify and put in writing the rules under which it would operate. Britain had its 'moments' mainly during the 17th century before the concept of a constitution had been established. Unlike similar states, the British Constitution is based on conventions, but these are not on a statutory footing and even what we may think they are set in stone they can be overturned simply by an Act of Parliament. For example, the Human Rights Act could be removed or amended as easily as a change to laws on shop opening hours.

Could Brexit be that 'constitutional moment' for the British? Adjusting our constitution for the return of powers from the EU is not straight forward. It is not simply a case of returning to what applied in 1972 before entry. Most crucially there was no Scottish Parliament or Welsh Assembly at that time. What we

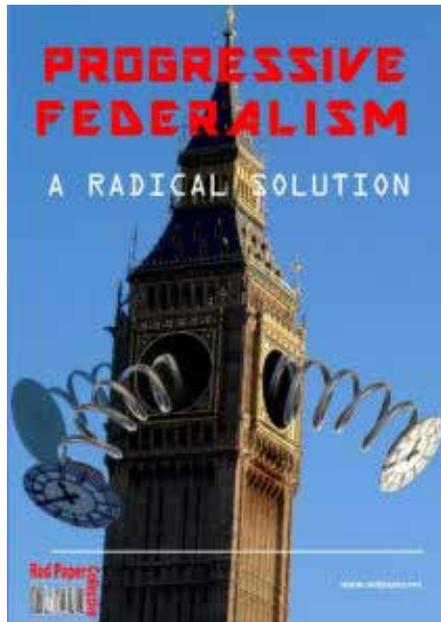
are seeing in the process of adjustment is that the British Government is immediately claiming the repatriated powers centrally and it is the British Government that will decide what will be passed on to the devolved governments. Theresa May retained control of 24 areas that are covered by devolution including public procurement, fishing, agriculture and some

environmental issues. This challenge to the devolved settlements and concern for how devolution can be safeguarded gives further impetus to those supporting a more federal arrangement for the British.

A poll conducted last year for the Electoral Reform Society showed a clear majority support reform of the House of Lords. Many would argue that is long overdue and that a second chamber cannot continue to be unelected, unaccountable and have among its members hereditary peers. There is growing interest in replacing it with a Senate of the Nations and Regions. Jeremy Corbyn has stated: 'We have a House of Lords which is dominated by a small number of people from London and the south east. I would want to see an elected second chamber that it is representative of all regions and nations of the United Kingdom. I think that's very, very important. I think it should have an electoral mandate to go with it'.

One of the issues raised when considering a fully elected House of Lords is that it would challenge the sovereignty of the House of Commons. Both Houses would have the same legitimacy of being elected, so what is there to stop stalemate between the two resulting in the British equivalent of the US government shutdown?

One way to avoid this is to make the two Houses responsible for different aspects of government. Without the EU providing common standards and regulations between the devolved Parliament and Assemblies that role could be undertaken by a second chamber. Considering this arrangement immediately raises the question of how would England be represented? A single English Parliament would raise concerns about its size in proportion to the other parts of the British. I suspect that it would also reinforce demands for powers to be devolved to the regions of England.



Some argue that the second chamber could be a mixture of elected and appointed members so that people with significant expertise in particular areas can be given a role. The 'expertise' of the current Lords reflects the British establishment and while these people are eminently qualified in their areas of interest, it doesn't make them better able to make decisions on behalf of the vast majority of people in the country. You can see some of the members of the current chamber who have wonderfully impressive experience and knowledge and who sit on the Tory benches supporting the Government's attacks on working people.

The Red Paper Collective has for the past 10 years argued the case for progressive federalism. It will campaign at Scottish Labour Party conferences and the Scottish Trades Union

Congresses for support for a radical, democratic constitutional settlement, based on the commitment to redistribute power and wealth, and that takes account of the consequences of Brexit.

The new settlement should move from the existing model, where power is devolved from the central state to Scotland. It should instead be a relationship of shared power based on partnership, not hierarchy. Under this arrangement there must be common minimum standards across the Britain on human rights, employment rights, consumer protection and environmental protection and

that the Scottish Parliament should have the power to enhance but never detract from these minimum standards.

*Baroness Pauline Bryan was appointed by Jeremy Corbyn in 2018 to develop the Labour's constitutional policy. The publications of the Red Paper Collective can be found at <http://redpaper.net/> and this article is an abridged version of a chapter in its latest publication, 'Time for a Radical Scottish Parliament'.*

**nus** scotland  
national union of students

"The Scottish Parliament has been transformational for Scottish civic society. Across a range of issues, NUS Scotland has campaigned successfully for Scotland's students – free tuition, widening access, developing college students' associations, to name just a few. We're not close to finished though. We'll continue to campaign for a better deal for students: better cost-of-living support, better mental health services, and much more."

Liam McCabe  
NUS Scotland President

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# Calling out for a democratic, decentralised revolution

*Maggie Chapman believes new opportunities are now presenting themselves*

In the 1980s, communist stalwart, Joe Slovo, set out a two-stage transition for politics in South Africa. First, a national democratic revolution. Then a socialist revolution. This theory is of relevance to our politics in Scotland. We have witnessed over five years something that comes close to a national democratic revolution: who would have thought that people would queue to vote at polling stations as they did in September 2014? And that followed many months of political engagement and discussion the likes of which we had not witnessed for generations.

We have an opportunity to transform our politics again: the climate emergency has facilitated a recognition that our economy and politics must change if we are to have a liveable future. Whilst perhaps not being the kind of socialist revolution Slovo envisaged, the winds of change are definitely blowing in Scotland. In one week in April alone, we saw the launch of three different initiatives for independence: the SNP's Yes.scot fundraising campaign, *The National's* '10,000 steps' campaign, and the Scottish Independence Convention's 'Voices for Scotland' civic campaign organisation. It seems clear to me that our politics will be framed by constitutional debates for some time to come.

Two understandings of the constitutional discussion in Scotland have solidified since the Edinburgh Agreement in 2012. One believes the desire for Scottish independence is nationalist whilst the desire to remain part of the British state is internationalist. The other sees Scottish nationalism pitted against British nationalism.

On the Smith Commission, this latter understanding was thrown into sharp relief by Labour's opposition the STUC's stance that union laws should be devolved. There are important tactical considerations in this. In its years in government, Labour failed to repeal Thatcher's anti-union laws. Since the Smith Commission, the Westminster Government has imposed further restrictions on unions. It was clear that workers' rights would be better protected in Scotland than by a British

government. The only impact of the Labour approach to workers' rights has been to land Scottish workers with a worse deal than they otherwise would have had.

But, the principle of this is much more important. It is clear that Labour's approach here stems not from any rigorous analysis of Scottish nationalism but of a mistaken belief that a hegemonic nationalism (Britishness), especially one that maintains imperial delusions, is somehow internationalist. It is not. We should be building a genuine internationalism, not clinging on to these imperial misapprehensions masquerading as internationalism.

I also believe that we need to give power to workers in workplaces and empower citizens in their communities. That is where we should be focusing our prefigurative attention. It is quite clear that in 2014, we reconfigured the Scottish polity. There is a level of engagement with politics that simply does not exist elsewhere on this island, and is rare in the world. This reconceptualisation was reflected in the Brexit vote in 2016 (Scotland voting 'remain', England voting 'leave') but is also reflected in quite different political aspirations in Scotland.

Before 2014 political differences between Scotland and England largely stemmed from the different configurations of parties: Labour tacking to the right in England chasing 'centre-ground' votes from the Tories, while Labour in Scotland maintained its course from the 1980s in response to an SNP challenge that was relatively social democratic. What happened in 2014 through a popular movement was that this difference in the structure of party politics materialised in popular politics. It became about people's lived experiences of politics rather than about parties.

In this context, Scotland voted, in 2016, quite clearly, to remain (and reform) in the EU referendum. In an incredibly tight vote overall, this, along with the remain vote in the north of Ireland, should have prompted a collegiate response

from the Westminster government. In a devolved arrangement, such a collegiate relationship should mean that the First Minister should be able to get the Prime Minister's attention relatively easily. If this failed, we might expect that a Conservative Prime Minister could at least be swayed by a group of Conservative MPs elected to represent Scotland's voices.

Instead, we have seen the voices of Scotland - and those from the north of Ireland, and Wales (to a lesser extent) - largely ignored. For all the talk of the Britain being a union of nations, it is clear that this is not the reality. It should now be clear to everyone that Brexit was, of course, always about the Conservative Party, and its desperate attempts to not only hold itself together, but also cling on to a dying imperial past.

However, the aspirations for Scotland from 2014 have not yet materialised in ways many of us hoped either. As much as we would love to be able to say that we are leading the world on devolution of power to workplaces, we are not. We have made some progress with community empowerment, but not nearly enough beyond Crofting buyouts. And local authorities still struggle to gain control over the finances they need to provide vital services: local councils have also failed to use the move towards more participatory process to engage citizens in democratic processes.

We see a malaise in our politics because our politics involve the Tories. But it is clear that our problems would not all be solved if May listened to Sturgeon. We need to purge from our politics the centralising tendency we see in many parties, and which has characterised our politics since the early twentieth century. We need our politics to become much more participatory and deliberative. We do need Scotland's voices to be heard. But we also need the voices of our communities and workers to be heard.

*Maggie Chapman is a Co-convenor of the Scottish Green Party and a Board member of Voices for Scotland*

# The parliamentary road to tackling poverty?

Peter Kelly suggests policies without powers behind them are coming up short in the progress against poverty

There are currently more than one million people locked in poverty in Scotland, a number that has been slowly rising over the last few years. If the predictions are correct, then we can expect this to increase further still. As we rightfully celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the Scottish Parliament, these figures should make us pause. Why have we not made the progress that many of us would have hoped for? Is it a lack of ambition, or a failure of policy making, or the limitations of our powers? If we are to make greater progress in the future, then we must begin to answer these questions.

When the Parliament was re-established, it was seen as providing an opportunity to address long standing issues of social injustice in Scotland. This participatory body would enable 'Scottish solutions to Scottish problems'. For Donald Dewar, and for many others, devolution was a means to an end and no end was 'more important than the creation of a socially cohesive Scotland'.

The ambitions for social policy were still high in 1999, and not just in the Scottish Parliament. Tony Blair made his famous commitment to eradicate child poverty in Britain by 2020 and the introduction of the National Minimum Wage gave an immediate pay rise to millions of low paid workers. After years of policies that saw steep increases in poverty and inequality, it was beginning to feel that progressive social change was on the political agenda. The creation of the Scottish Parliament was part of that change, and for many of us a central challenge for the Parliament was to use its powers to drive down poverty.

The new Scottish Executive got to work quickly on preparing its social justice strategy, *A Scotland where everyone matters*. Published in November 1999, this strategy's key target was the elimination of child poverty within a generation, which at the time was at

around 30 per cent. Other long-term targets covered full employment, literacy, lifelong learning, and a plethora of policies were introduced to help achieve the targets.

Since this first social justice strategy, we have had various revisions to the approach, usually after each Scottish Parliament election. It would be hard to fault the ambition of any of the administrations over the last 20 years. At the rhetorical level they have all made serious commitments to address poverty. But bold statements on the need to tackle poverty have rarely been accompanied by the policies required to make them a reality. There was no appetite, for example, to make use of the Parliament's limited tax raising powers to help fund the fight against

than the treatment of social ills. This is a recommendation that is far from realised. We need only look at the number of people in Scotland turning to charitable food aid to see how far we still need to go to prevent poverty.

In the late 1990s, the Scottish Parliament inherited child poverty of around 30%. Over the next few years, rates may once again return to these levels. Whilst some of the driving forces behind this remain outside the control of the Scottish Parliament, there are new opportunities that exist to make a manifest difference.

New powers over social security now exist in Scotland, including the power to top up reserved benefits. A new agency, Social Security Scotland, has been set up to deliver these new powers, and

is committed to doing so in ways that respect the dignity of those it will work with. We have child poverty legislation with stretching targets to reduce child poverty. There have been greater efforts to address in-

work poverty through the promotion of the voluntary (real) Living Wage. Strengthened tax raising powers give us more options to generate resources to invest in the fight against poverty.

There has never been a better moment in the short history of the Scottish Parliament for our politicians to match the strategic commitments to address poverty with the practical policy actions we need. If we are to make good the promise of the Parliament, we must ensure that these new opportunities are taken and are taken now.

*Peter Kelly is the director of the Poverty Alliance. Formed in 1992, it is a network of organisations working together to combat poverty and inequality in Scotland (<https://www.povertyalliance.org/index.php>)*



the  
**POVERTY  
ALLIANCE**

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poverty and options on reform of the regressive council tax system have been repeatedly shelved.

However, there is no question that the 2008-2009 economic crisis, and the decision to implement a savage programme of austerity and welfare cuts from 2010 by the Westminster government, have been the primary cause of the recent increase in poverty. We have seen important attempts to mitigate the excesses of some of these changes, for example around the bedroom tax, or in the creation of the Scottish Welfare Fund. These measures have helped thousands of families, but mitigation has come to dominate our responses to poverty.

Where we should have been focusing more of our efforts over the last 20 years is on the prevention of poverty. The 2011 Christie Commission set out the clear need for public spending to be more focused on prevention rather

# Not yet even a half-way house: parliamentary progress on housing poverty

Graeme Brown reviews progress on housing and homelessness since 1999

1999 seems both close and very distant now. It's hard to recall the days when housing debate for Scotland, at a parliamentary level, used to be squeezed into an annual 90-minute slot and the very, very occasional piece of legislation. By the time the Scottish Parliament came along there were two major themes: at a practical level, a large queue of legal reform which had been side-lined at Westminster; and, at a policy level, a determination to ensure that Holyrood was very different from what had come before.

So, for many of the new MSPs elected in 1999, nothing better symbolised the failures of Westminster government than the rising tide of homelessness, especially among young people, from the late 1980s onwards. That is why the first major policy announcement of any kind, only weeks after the Scottish election of May 1999, was a homelessness task force. That task force was set up and did some ground-breaking work in updating homelessness law and improving services for street homeless people by the time it reported in 2002. But, of course, homelessness still blights Scotland today, to the extent that the current Scottish Government set up its own Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group in 2017. Changing law is one thing; changing lives is a lot more difficult. At best, tragically, action against homelessness remains work in progress.

At a practical level, the bills came thick

and fast after 1999. Within two years a sprawling housing bill dealing with public sector housing management and critical issues like fuel poverty. Another few years and a companion piece on private sector housing: repairs, housing conditions and housing sales. And so it continued: new laws on private renting over three different acts. Protection for people facing mortgage repossession. Abolition of the totemic Thatcherite policy of 'right to buy'. Tenement

law reform. Planning reform. And a succession of changes to law on anti-social behaviour.

Some of these reforms have been more impactful than others. Would we have Right to Buy ended and new tenancy arrangements in private renting without a Scottish Parliament? No way! But if I had a criticism of the last twenty years, it would be the sheer rush of legislation without proper pause to take stock, assess impact and consolidate. Sometimes I think that MSPs need to be reminded that just because they *can* legislate does not mean they *have* to legislate. Indeed, one of the most significant commitments of the last twenty years – the current programme of 50,000 affordable homes – has not needed to go near the statute book.

And, of course, the Scottish Parliament is only one player. Progress on tackling fuel poverty, for example, has been uneven because housing standards might be devolved but levers over incomes and fuel prices largely aren't. Homelessness is frustrating because, until recently, most aspects of welfare provision are not within the scope of the Scottish Parliament. Universal credit, benefit caps and benefit reductions can saw the legs from under the most progressive programme of reform. The worsening state of public finances since 2010 has hit hard on vital services like advice and housing support.

And there is so much still to do. Affordability has worsened over the last twenty years, both with soaring rents in a private rented sector three times larger than in 1999; and for would-be home-buyers. The number of socially-rented homes has started to edge up for the first time since the 1970s but this is only the start of what needs to be a long-term commitment to a bigger, better public housing sector.

Looking back, Scotland is a better place since 1999 and the Scottish Parliament is part of that. But it is nowhere near what it could be, especially for those at the sharpest end. That is why Shelter Scotland will keep fighting until there is a home for everyone.

*Graeme Brown is the Director of Shelter Scotland*



## A call for new writers to contribute

The tectonic plates of politics in Scotland are about to undergo a further seismic shift. Not only is the dynamic of Britain leaving the European Union colliding with the continued demand for independence but the Tories – at Westminster at any rate – are in meltdown as Labour struggles to regain lost ground. Over the course of the next two years, these pressures will then find their expression in the Scottish Parliament elections of May 2021. New opportunities may be opening up as a consequence.

Therefore, *Scottish Left Review* renews its call for those wishing to not only analyse these changes but also help shape them in progressive ways to get in touch with suggestions for articles – either for themselves or others to write. Drop a line to the editor with a brief outline of your suggestion. We look forward to hearing from you.

Professor Gregor Gall, editor, SLR ([gregorgall@outlook.com](mailto:gregorgall@outlook.com))

**Scottish Left Review**  
radical Scottish political writing

# Stalled and stymied? The right to informed democracy in Scotland

Carole Ewart says it didn't take an FoI request to work out all is not well in the new, open Scotland

Rarely do politicians tell you what they really think of freedom of information (FoI) as it's poor form to criticise a key way for the public to hold politicians to account. However, Tony Blair boldly vented about FoI after he left office in his memoirs *Tony Blair: A Journey* (Hutchinson, 2010):

*Freedom of Information. Three harmless words. I look at those words as I write them and feel like shaking my head till it drops off my shoulders. You idiot. You naive, foolish, irresponsible nincompoop. There is really no description of stupidity, no matter how vivid, that is adequate. I quake at the imbecility of it. ... Once I appreciated the full enormity of the blunder, I used to say – more than a little unfairly – to any civil servant who would listen: 'Where was Sir Humphrey when I needed him? We had legislated in the first throes of power. How could you, knowing what you know, have allowed us to do such a thing so utterly undermining of sensible government?'*

Conversely, the Campaign for Freedom of Information in Scotland (CFoIS) wants to see bold and robust FoI laws. Established in 1984, we provided solutions to temper Britain's keenness for secrecy laws that were too often used to silence politically embarrassing stories.

The Scottish Parliament was to be 'open, accessible and accountable' in 1999, so CFoIS seized upon the opportunity to demand a robust FoI law to embed a transparent and accountable culture in the new civil service of the Parliament and the Scottish Executive. We quickly became frustrated at the slow pace.

There was a proliferation of FoI laws globally, including in the USA and New Zealand, with the first recorded in Sweden in 1766 (see <http://www.peterforsskal.com/>) so it was not a new concept. However, it was alien to our system of government. It was three years before the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act (FoISA) was passed, steered through the Parliament by its champion, Jim Wallace, and it took until 1 January 2005 for the right to be enforceable. FoISA has been a game changer in enabling each one

of us to enforce the right to access information held by over 10,000 public authorities. Hundreds of thousands of information requests have been made primarily by members of the public but also by voluntary organisations, housing associations, lawyers, academics, councillors, MSPs, MPs and private sector bodies.

**Right to Know. Right Now!**

Yet FoISA's strength has shrunk, failing to keep up with the fast-paced changes in how we transmit and publish information. There have been broken promises on adding bodies for coverage and poor practice by the Scottish Government which prompted enforcement action by the Scottish Information Commissioner. There are legislative omissions and loopholes which require a remedy informed by how government and parliament actually operate. The good news that the Scottish Parliament has eventually decided to progress the unanimous decision of MSPs on 21 June 2017 and embark on post-legislative scrutiny of FoISA.

FoISA operates alongside the Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations (EIRs), and both are enforced by the Scottish Information Commissioner through a free complaints process for requestors. Free access to justice makes the public's right to know strong and offers a model to be replicated elsewhere in Scotland, for example, for breaches of human rights

by public authorities.

Reflecting on 20 years of the Scottish Parliament and 14 years of FoISA, CFoIS believes:

- FoISA must apply to all authorities funded by the public purse, including all ALEOs and all services publicly funded including those delivered by voluntary and private organisations.
- FoISA must focus more on the duty to publish information of the type people want and require publication schemes to be progressively, not regressively, delivered in detail.
- The process of making an information request, and the information on how to do that must follow the principles of inclusive communication. These principles must also be followed when pro-actively publishing information. More information is available at the Inclusive Communication Hub <http://inclusivecommunication.scot/>
- Learn from good practice elsewhere such as the European Ombudsman's Code of Good Administrative Behaviour.

Given the popularity of FoI, it is clearly here to stay. According to an IpsosMORI poll in March 2017, 94% agreed that it is important for the public to be able to access information and 77% would be more likely to trust an authority that publishes a lot of information about its work. However, FoISA needs to be radically strengthened to ensure the public's expectations are met on transparency and accountability and to fulfil the original ambition of how the new Scottish Parliament would operate.

*Carole Ewart is convener of CFoIS and a member of the Scottish Left Review editorial committee. For more information on CFoIS's work, see <https://www.foi.org.uk/scotland/>*



# The Scottish Parliament and transport – transporting us into a new era?

*Mick Cash argues opportunities have been missed but the struggle is not yet over*

Debates around the history of the Scottish Parliament often raise the question of powers, whether it has enough, and how it has used the powers it does have. With regard to the transport and offshore sector there has been a lot of fog and confusion and inaccuracies about the powers of the Scottish Parliament which have not helped that debate. Take rail passengers services, for instance, where there has been debate, for example, around why the current SNP Scottish Government won't nationalise Scotrail services or why the Westminster Government won't devolve more powers over rail.

The reality is when the Parliament was first established, power was devolved to allow the parliament to be responsible for Scotrail services. A large neo-liberal snag to this was these powers were conditional on the continued requirement for a tendering process and Scotrail services being operated by the private sector. So, in many ways the transfer of power was illusory and, with the prevailing neo-liberal consensus at that time, there was little objection from any of the main Scottish political parties.

Fast forward to the Smith Commission, and Scotland and Britain had now stomached years of rail privatisation and there was an appetite to at least support a public alternative to privatisation. Yet again, however, there was monumental missed opportunity when it came to rail. All the parties on the Commission at the time supported new powers for

the Scottish Parliament which would allow for a 'public sector bid' for Scotrail services. This merely meant that at the end of any franchise services would still be put out for tender but there could be a public sector bid for that service.

Whilst Humza Yousaf in his role as Transport Minister seemed more positive that such a process could lead to a publicly-owned Scotrail, his successor Michael Matheson seems less keen, talking ominously of a level playing field between public and private sector. The RMT will, of course, work constructively with the Minister, but we might not be in this position if the main political parties at the time of the Smith Commission had argued that the *Tory Railways Act 1993* (which requires the tendering and private operation of rail passenger services) should no longer apply to Scotland.

Thankfully, Labour and the Greens are now doing just that and with the Westminster Government's current review of rail there is an opportunity for the Scottish Government to be clear in its submission that it wants the compulsory franchising or bidding process for the Scotrail services to end. We await to see the Scottish Governments submission with interest - but at the moment the signs are that Scottish Ministers are more interested in using the review to take complete control of the nationally publicly-owned rail infrastructure manager, Network Rail. This a move that would cause more damaging fragmentation and possibly

further privatisation of the rail system.

When looking back on 20 years of the Scottish Parliament, it's not only the balance of power between the Holyrood and Westminster parliaments that we need to consider - we also have to consider the relationship with the European Union. When it comes to transport, this is an important issue because the EU's fourth rail package will soon make it compulsory for member states to tender rail services and will also prohibit states fully integrating rail operations and infrastructure. Similarly, EU laws have been the source of much aggravation surrounding Scottish Ferry services with successive Scottish Governments using EU directives as a cover to tender Calmac Ferry services.

What is definitely the case is that the Scottish Parliament has allowed for far closer and intensive campaigning and lobbying of politicians. RMT successes around supporting industrial action with political campaigning against Driver Only Operation or the privatisation of Calmac are the best examples here. The ferry services are also a case in point where RMT campaigning with others saw the Lab/Lib coalition at that time defeated in a parliamentary vote on the tendering of Calmac ferry services, representing the first time in the Scottish Parliament's history that MSPs actually overturned the Scottish Government!

*Mick Cash is General Secretary of the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union*

## Update from the Foundation

There was a very successful launch at the Scottish Trade Unions Congress (STUC) in Dundee in mid-April of the paper commissioned by UNISON Scotland - and written by Professor Mike Danson and Dr Geoff Whittam for the Foundation - on alternative sources of funding for local government. It was covered widely in the press and media - being the front page story on the Herald on Sunday on 14 April and then in some forty other news outlets - and around 40 people attended the launch of the paper at a lunchtime fringe meeting at the STUC congress with Mike Danson speaking alongside David Ross (co-leader, Fife Council), Maggie Chapman (co-convenor, Scottish Greens) and Lilian Macer, convenor, UNISON Scotland. The paper is available at <http://reidfoundation.org/2019/04/unison-scotland-commissioned-report-on-alternative-sources-of-funding-for-local-government/> The Foundation and UNISON Scotland will meet shortly to decide how to progress the proposals contained within the paper.

In addition to publishing and launching a paper on the neo-liberalisation of universities (see other JRF advert, this issue), we shall also do similarly with one on sport in society. Later in the year, Scotland's leading human rights lawyer and rector of the University of Glasgow, Aamer Anwar, will give the Jimmy Reid annual lecture (on Thursday 10 October). The venue is the Bute Hall at the university where Jimmy Reid gave his famous rectorial address on 28 April 1972. Ticketing and other details will be released shortly.

Towards the end of 2019, the Foundation will also hold a public meeting in Glasgow to launch the forthcoming biography of Jimmy Reid written by Professor Alan McKinlay and Dr Bill Knox (to be published by Liverpool University Press). Again, ticketing details etc will be forthcoming.



The Jimmy Reid  
Foundation

# FWC inquiry into social care

*Lilian Macer lays out what must happen to improve social care and the lot of social care workers*

Today in Scotland, we see a rising tide of demand for social care services, driven by demographic changes and advances in medical technologies as people are living longer, and linked to their needs becoming more complex. This increase in demand is set against the context of a decrease in funding for Scottish local authorities who provide and commission these vital services.

Social care in Scotland currently operates in a mixed market economy with over 1,000 providers offering a myriad of terms and conditions within the sector. However, this was not always the case. Nationally-agreed terms and conditions were once the norm, until legislation in the 1990s opened up market-led provision in social care. This agenda of marketisation and competitive tendering was pivotal to the then Conservative Government's commitment to increasing efficiency through the development of the market. So, over two thirds of adult social care jobs moved to the independent (private) sector, with a significant percentage of council provision being delivered by arm's length bodies.

This market-driven environment is clearly focused upon balancing financial objectives and, thus, places workers and service users secondary to matters of money. Consequently, staff delivering these services have little power, choice or control in their work environment. Ultimately, this commissioning process results in poor employment practices that are not consistent with fair work. Some 20 years into the re-founding of the Scottish Parliament, we have seen both Labour and SNP governments subject our most vulnerable in our society to the vagaries of the market whilst overseeing workers' wages, terms and conditions being driven down.

As a consequence of concerns raised during the consultation for the Fair Work Convention's Fair Work Framework (FWF), a decision was taken to undertake a detailed inquiry into the social care sector in Scotland. The aim was to determine what was needed to implement the FWF across the social care workforce. The inquiry was established in January 2017 and over the past 18 months, alongside the chief

executive of Alzheimer Scotland, Henry Simmons, I had the privilege of being one of the co-chairs of the inquiry.

The inquiry commissioned a piece of research from the University of Strathclyde on how frontline workers and their managers feel about their day-to-day work in relation to the FWF of effective voice, opportunity, fulfilment, security and respect. The primary finding is that fair work is not being consistently delivered in the social care sector. Who knew? Well, UNISON know that we have a dedicated workforce who are on precarious work contracts where they have little power or influence. Women told the inquiry they enjoy being involved in people's lives and like that they make a positive difference. More than 200,000 people work in social care in Scotland - 7.7% of the overall workforce – with about 82% of them women. However, the inquiry found that these workers were often on zero hours contracts and expected to work excessive hours.

Without a voice mechanism, workers are less able to convey their concerns effectively, challenge employers on poor practice or make the reality of their situation visible to policy makers. That is why the inquiry's first recommendation is that a new sector-level body be established in Scotland with representation from across key sector stakeholders to establish standard minimum fair work terms and conditions for the social care workforce and provide the opportunity for ongoing dialogue and agreement on workforce matters. The first task of this body should be to develop Fair Work First criteria for inclusion in commissioning.

The report found employers complained that it was hard to offer better employment conditions because of problems with funding or commissioning. However, the report did recognise some positive policy initiatives in recent years that have aimed to improve the situation, notably the Living Wage initiative. Yet, the report concluded that low pay is a symptom of wider structural problems arising from the commissioning system for social care itself.

Therefore, the inquiry recommended treating the problem at source.

Recommending that the current commissioning practice of hourly rate based non-committal competitive tenders and framework agreements should end. Social care providers should be commissioned based on their levels of skill, expertise, understanding and application of the Fair Work Framework, and on costs based on the right numbers of staffing required and a satisfactory and fair income level for each member of staff. Commissioners should be responsible for assessing and predicting the level of demand and commissioning the right levels of staff from the provider organisation, with no expectation that the provider or worker carry the risk for working time not being required. Delivering fair work for social care workers is crucial to ensure a workforce for the future and to ensure high quality social care services to some of our most vulnerable citizens.

UNISON Scotland believes the social care sector faces a perfect storm in which the impact of years of chronic underfunding has been worsened by increasing demand and the knock-on impact of cuts to other key public services. This has produced a situation in which the needs of many of society's most vulnerable people are not being met and in which care workers are almost universally underpaid and largely undervalued. The lack of status and chronic undervaluing of social care is not unconnected to perceptions of care as 'women's work'. Failure to address the gendered dynamics of the care sector and to challenge its significant voice deficit, low pay and one sided-flexibility all contribute significantly to women's poorer quality of work and to Scotland's gender pay gap.

*Lilian Macer is the Convenor of UNISON Scotland and a member of the Fair Work Convention. The FWF can be found at <https://www.fairworkconvention.scot/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Fair-Work-Convention-Framework-PDF-Summary-Version.pdf> and the social care report at <https://www.fairworkconvention.scot/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Fair-Work-in-Scotland%E2%80%99s-Social-Care-Sector-2019.pdf>*

# On the frontline: crushed by corporate capitalist culture

*'Late Night Girl' tells of the bullying behaviour at work she suffered and how she is fighting back*

**M**y story with Pret-A-Manger is very complex and long. Only in hindsight, do I think I understand the extent of what I've been through and how systemic the problem of workplace bullying in profit driven companies can be.

I have always worked in the food industry in three different countries. I have worked in a hotel, wine bar, canteen and various restaurants and cafe chains but I have never experienced the stress and discrimination I went through in Pret. Only now, when I have contact with unions (like the BFAWU) and activists, do I realise that this is a growing problem as a result of capitalist globalisation and the accompanying intensification of competition.

Before I worked in Pret, I was an assistant manager (AM) in Caffe Nero. Nero was a lot of stress, but nothing like Pret, and the atmosphere with colleagues and managers was relaxed. I left Nero as Pret paid better. Even as a new team member, I got paid more than as an AM in Nero. I would not have left Nero if the wage was not so poor. Little did I realise that the reason Pret pays a little more than its competitors is because the work is so intense, incredibly stressful and with a bullying environment under poorly trained management.

But I'm used to hard work and don't shy away from it. I started in Pret in 2008 just when Bridgepoint, the private equity investor, purchased Pret and put forward the target to open on every street corner (in London specifically). That meant a lot of managers were needed, but there was not the effort to really train them, and most have neither people nor leadership skills.

But again, I gave Pret the benefit of the doubt, thinking in time when I moved on or rose upwards in position that it would become easier. I never expected this bullying environment - which at first I denied was happening as it happened in every shop I worked but it continued and even intensified when I was bereaved.

I was a team leader of the shop floor - there is a separate leadership in the kitchen - from around 2011 onwards. Team leaders do the real work, whereas managers tend to sit in the office, come in late, leave early, look important, go to meetings etc. Team leaders are blamed a lot while not being supported.

My story really starts to become horrendous when my brother died. This in itself was the most traumatic event in my life and I never expected to be treated so badly with the seeming intention to have me leave my employment as bereaved employees seem quickly to become something of an inconvenience in Pret, and often in many other companies.



My brother died in December 2014 in his flat and was not found for approximately six days when neighbours smelt the strong odour of his corpse. My brother was self-employed - after having gone back to studies, he started his own business as an environmental advisor on green energy to companies. He travelled throughout Germany where I'm from, so it was not unusual that neighbours didn't see him much.

We didn't know for five weeks that my brother died, and to make it even worse, the police did not investigate properly, not finding us and after a few weeks just cremated him. I have written extensively about this on my blog (<https://expret.org/>). Here, I summarise what I went through in Pret.

I travelled back and forth between London and Germany for the funeral, running errands, investigating what happened, brought my mum with me to London as I had to continue to work. I spent all my savings with all the costs and was forced to return to work.

I had basic support from Pret as staff receive a few days 'compassionate leave'. But that was all. I was never sat down and told what support I may need, and was also put on late shifts which kept me from vital support from friends as I worked when they were off and they worked when I was off. Initially, I didn't mind and didn't even notice, as I couldn't sleep until the morning anyway as I was tormented with shock and grief. I kept going to work to keep me occupied and distracted as best as possible.

I approached human resources (HR) informally to make a suggestion on how to support bereaved employees. But unbeknown to me at the time, I believe this inadvertently put a 'target on my back' and my superiors, I think with the guidance of HR, started pursuing me with little issues where I made mistakes (but my mistakes were even less than those of my colleagues).

One of several Mystery Shopper (MS) requirements is that staff have to smile, be friendly and show happiness all the time. Only recently have I learnt that this is called 'emotional labour' that is forced upon low-wage workers and I have since written about it. Also, in Pret, staff have one minute to serve customers, one minute to serve the hot drink from the time of payment, are tested to see if they give eye-contact, make some polite remarks etc. The MS even times the service to the second. I give a few examples with excerpts of MS comments on my website.

If teams fail in any or several points, the whole team loses its bonus. The bonus system is the biggest chunk towards managers' remuneration. So, managers are extra strict when staff fail. I was traumatically bereaved: I even begged sometimes to be sent into the kitchen, away from the shop floor as I was

Take this flyer to your nearest Pret and ask for your FREE explanation from the manager!



## Stop Victimizing Rodrigo

Rodrigo established the Pret A Manger Staff Union (PAMSU) on 1st September 2012. Shortly after the managers at his workplace started bullying him. He was physically attacked by one of them and when he complained he was transferred to another shop. He also received a final written warning for an alleged unauthorized absence, although, he reported his absence by a phone call. Pret has double standards as it does not accept Rodrigo's request to be able to report his absence by an email, although, the managers are allowed to do it. Rodrigo is being victimized for establishing the union.

★ **STOP UNION BUSTING!**

★ **SOLIDARITY WITH PRET A MANGER STAFF UNION!**

and then fired while my dad was in intensive care, just out of a coma. CEO Clive Schlee labelled me his 'late night girl' due to my late night emails to everyone which then led to my firing. I adopted that label to be a sore in his and Pret's eyes. I confront Pret openly on Twitter and Facebook about this.

Because I have never experienced anything like this in any workplace, I was so traumatized with my brother's death and the circumstances surrounding it, I became so out-of-sync giving Pret the benefit of the doubt again and again and putting blame on myself and what psychologists call 'Sibling Survivor Guilt'. I even apologised for a nervous breakdown after a line manager rebuked me repeatedly in front of my team. For an overview of my trauma with Pret, I have created a 'Mind Map' linking each title to a blog entry as my blog has grown: <https://www.mindmeister.com/1194255218/my-pret-a-manger-ordeal>

'Late Night Girl' also tweets at <https://twitter.com/LateNightGirlMe> and she was recently interviewed on a podcast based in California where she tells her story in more detail (see front page of her website: [expret.org](http://expret.org)).

- The editor adds:

There is a facebook group, started in 2011, called 'I Hate Pret A Manger'. And, a now former employee, Andrej Stopa, helped start the Pret A Manger Staff Union (PAMSU). He was reportedly fired in 2012 under the pretence of him allegedly having made homophobic remarks. See also the case of Rodrigo (in boxed graphic), another fired union activist. Unfortunately, both groups are not very active now. Unions like the BFAWU and UNITE are continuing to try to unionise Pret. For more on the employment practices of Pret, see <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/may/30/pret-people-power-sandwich-payout-employees> and <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/pret-workers-want-more-for-their-smile-enough-pay-and-hours-to-live-on-8439133.html>

tearing up at times and didn't want to be seen by customers. I couldn't afford to go home as I had had to spend all my savings. But I was denied this with the reason that I'm not used to the kitchen and would be slow. Everything in Pret has to be done fast. 'Time is money', customer circulation in and out of shops has to flow fast, meaning the money flows fast.

After I approached HR informally, I also requested a transfer to a shop where I would have rotating shift patterns, as my then general manager refused to give me rotating shifts as the evenings weren't as busy and the MS visited very rarely in the evenings. I was warned when I didn't smile by an area manager, and was summoned into the office on my day off because I made some minor mistakes. I was sent to another area and shop that had lots of problems, and in hindsight, I believe, I was sent there to set me up for failure.

I quickly became paranoid and felt I was targeted. And, I think I was right because months later I applied for my employee file which included emails between HR and managers who were brainstorming all the time what to do with me. I was constantly put under pressure in the hope I would resign. But I didn't. I even declined four settlement offers if I'd resign and never speak about my ordeal or go to court. Three offers were made internally and the fourth was via the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) when I withdrew my Tribunal claim as my dad just died in the middle of preparing for the case. I could not afford a lawyer and

was unable to fight this on my own.

I have collected other staff reviews from employment review websites, YouTube, Twitter etc and I have learnt the hard way that, without a union, there is no hope of raising issues of systemic workplace bullying. Many people were shocked and disbelieving when I mentioned how Pret really is behind its well-polished PR facade. Only the unions, activists and some from the press have believed me.

The targeting I went through was everything apart from sexual and physical violence - the typical bullying, both open and subtle. I was shouted at and, when this didn't work, I was excluded from leaders' meetings, was not given important information I needed to do my job, and was sent to difficult shops to receive a disciplinary for failing even in little things. Pret, it seems to me, works mainly with fear management.

The more perverse thing Pret did was with emails after I became ill. I believe I was targeted in group emails from my boss, in the emails I read between HR and managers etc. I spiralled into 'ill emailing'. I received a disciplinary for the emailing but Pret used a Development Manager who told me she had also lost her brother in similar circumstances to my brother. She went into personal text messages and emailing with me because of our common grief. But this confused me further and, only in hindsight, does it now seem that I was being set up to get fired. I believe I was 'gaslighted'

# Free bus travel – fanciful idea or radical ambition?

*Pat Rafferty shows how free bus travel can have immense economic and social advantages*

**R**ichard Leonard's keynote speech at the Scottish Labour party conference in March 2019 included a commitment to a Labour government introducing free bus travel across Scotland. Is this a fanciful idea or a radical ambition?

In 2017-2018, Scottish bus companies received £298m in subsidy from local and central Government, yet neither the Scottish Government nor travelling public have any real say on how, where or when buses are run. These decisions, ultimately, lie with the bus companies and as profit maximisers they will pick the profitable routes and timetables irrespective of the needs of the community, with the Scottish Government stepping in to subsidise the routes the bus companies don't want.

Given the climate change challenge, there have been calls for parking levies and Low Emission Zones in our large cities to tackle this. Both have proved controversial, with some local authorities saying they will not implement a levy. It is proposed that the levy would be wholly met by employers, but as was the case in Nottingham, it can (and inevitably would) be passed on to employees. Our economy functions 24/7, yet currently bus timetables favour those living in an urban environment, working between 8.00 a.m. and 6 p.m. and off on weekends. Travel outwith these times is often sporadic or non-existent as is the case in many rural communities.

Yet more and more employment contracts require workers to be available at night and at weekends and precarious and shift work often means working out with so-called 'normal' hours. Unite set up the 'Haud the Bus' campaign to raise awareness around, and campaign against, the continued withdrawal of so-called unprofitable bus routes operated by private sector bus companies, which have left communities across the country, from West Lothian and Aberdeenshire to the Borders, abandoned. These

communities are being cut off from services and opportunities at the whim of bus companies without sufficient or meaningful engagement with the people affected.

Unite sees municipal ownership of the bus network as providing social value as well as economic value and an essential component in response to these cuts by increasing bus provision where it is needed, including the opportunity to extend services to areas of the country that have been left in so-called 'transport poverty' and, ultimately in the longer term, doing so at no cost to passengers.

Fare-free buses operate in the French channel port of Dunkirk, a city of 200,000 people. There, free bus travel has proved an overwhelming success, with a 50% increase in passenger numbers on some routes, and almost 85% on others. Bus routes and bus

transport offers people the ability to fully participate in the economy. It also offers access to opportunities in employment, education, health and leisure. All recognised as important in good mental and physical health. There are also precedents for public ownership of transport in Scotland. Scotland's ferry network is run by Caledonian MacBrayne a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Scottish Government. In 2013 Prestwick Airport was bought by the Scottish Government for £1 as it was a 'strategic infrastructure asset' airport and to save jobs, and Scotland's rail network - previously fully publicly owned - has also been heavily subsidised by the Scottish Government.

The First Minister also announced she was prepared to take the railways back into public ownership following complaints about the service. As in Dunkirk, free travel could be funded

using the money the Government currently spends on subsidising concessionary travel as well as the subsidy provided to bus companies to run less profitable bus routes and services. Other income could be raised through improved

job opportunities leading to increasing levels of employment which would result in increased tax revenue. Or, as is the case in Dunkirk, a tax on employers to assist employees travelling to work which is not passed on to employees. Less car journeys would result in less wear and tear on our roads, presently costing Scottish taxpayers around £68m pa. Less pollution would help attain climate change targets, ultimately improving the country's overall physical health and, with access to social and recreational activities, an overall healthier nation, reducing costs to the NHS. It is clear there are many ways to fund free municipally owned buses. The hurdle may not be funding it but the desire and political will to implement it.

*Pat Rafferty is the Scottish secretary of the UNITE unions. The full version of this article first appeared online at Red Robin in April 2019.*



fleets have been extended and include green buses run on natural gas. Prior to free buses, fares raised only around 10% of the network's €47m (\$41.6m) annual running costs - 30% came from local government and 60% from a public transport levy on organisations and public bodies with more than 11 employees. (By increasing the transport tax slightly to account for the 10% needed there was no requirement to increase taxes for households.) Free buses run by the public sector have allowed people on low incomes to travel further afield for work rather than being constrained by their inability to afford the cost of travel. The information presently in the public domain shows the Dunkirk model is working. However, while the devil may be in the detail, it is certainly a model worth further consideration.

Accessible, affordable and sustainable

# Cuba's post-revolution medical advances

On the 60th anniversary of its revolution, Imti Choonara, Ollie Hopkins and Kath Campbell chart the progress of healthcare in Cuba

If the accomplishments of Cuba could be reproduced across a broad range of poor and middle-income countries the health of the world's population would be transformed' said the Lancet Medical Journal in 2014. In spite of the overwhelming challenge of the US blockade, Cubans receive world leading healthcare. Health is enshrined in the constitution as a fundamental human right and delivered free of charge. Although initially modelled on the NHS, its subsequent development has focused more on a preventative model focussing on health promotion, with community based primary care, partly because of limited access to many of the medicines on the world market due to the US blockade.

Before the revolution, Cuba had only three medical schools which were exclusively for wealthy Cubans. Today, there are 23 medical schools training Cubans and overseas medics. Their Latin America School of Medicine, which educates foreign students free of charge has seen well over 30,000 doctors graduate, many of whom go back to work in their own communities. This has achieved one of the highest doctor-to-patient ratios in the world: over eight for every 1,000 citizens – more than double the rate in the US and Britain.

The country has a similar life expectancy to the US and a lower infant mortality rate: 4 for every 1,000 live births compared to 5.7. Women receive a minimum of 13 antenatal check-ups during pregnancy with maternity homes caring for those with high-risk pregnancies or social problems. Family doctors are the foundation of Cuba's primary health care preventative model. They work in conjunction with a nurse from a small neighbourhood office – a 'consultorio'. They also live in the community they serve. Emphasis is on the family doctor knowing each family, both medically and socially which is extremely important in relation to child health where parents have a major influence on child health outcomes. Child mortality rates (neonatal, infant and under-five) are all lower in Cuba than in the US.

All Cuban families receive a minimum of an annual visit from the family doctor.

As well as carrying out routine health checks such as blood pressure and heart checks, they also monitor lifestyle and other factors affecting health. Higher risk families, for example, those with existing health conditions, or smokers, are seen more regularly.

For more specialist services, including adult medicine, paediatrics, obstetrics, gynaecology, dentistry and psychology, patients are referred to a polyclinic – which serves between 14 to 30 consultorios. Patients see specialists quickly – usually waiting for one week – without needing to go to hospital. The primary care system ensures communication between the family doctor, the specialist and the patient.



Regional and specialist hospitals exist throughout the country for complex and tertiary care, but it is Cuba's community-based primary healthcare provision which has produced impressive results. In contrast to other developing countries, Cuba has an ageing population and health problems are similar to that of rich countries. The response to these new health challenges is huge investment in public health education around smoking, alcohol, diet and exercise – and the family doctor and nurse are key in delivering this message.

Cuba's preventative model has made world leading achievements. If the Global South could replicate Cuba's achievements, hundreds of millions of lives could be saved each year. In 2015, the World Health Organisation reported that Cuba had become the first country to eliminate mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis. There have also been outstanding medical and scientific advances. Cuba has developed a lung cancer vaccine, CimaVax, which is

currently undergoing further research. Successful vaccines have been produced for cholera, malaria, meningitis B, hepatitis B, and many more.

Cuba's international solidarity is beyond compare with their medical brigades being sent not just across South and Latin America, but throughout the world. Operation Miracle, a joint initiative from Cuba and Venezuela has seen more than 4m people have had their sight saved or restored with free eye surgery.

After the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the largest contingent, caring for 40% of the victims was from Cuba. Following the two earthquakes in Nepal in May 2015, Cuba sent a brigade with their own medical equipment and a team of surgeons, anaesthetists, obstetricians, nurses and GPs. Since the Chernobyl disaster in 1986, 20,000 children have been treated for radiation-related illnesses free of charge in Cuba. More than 250 voluntary and specialised health cooperation workers of the 'Henry Reeve' medical brigade took part in the struggle against Ebola in West Africa. Cuba sent 2,400 volunteers to Pakistan following the 2005 Pakistan earthquake, who were responsible for treating more than 70% of those affected.

This has all been achieved in spite of the blockade. It prevents Cuba obtaining crucial medical equipment, particularly in tertiary care, and US-produced medications. The blockade can also impose limitations on collaboration, exchange of knowledge and advances both within Cuba and beyond. If the blockade was lifted, how much more impressive could Cuba's health achievements be?

*Dr Imti Choonara, Ollie Hopkins and Kath Campbell are activists in the Scottish Cuba Solidarity Campaign (SCSC, <https://www.facebook.com/scottishcuba/>, <https://twitter.com/scottishcuba>). SCSC campaigns in Scotland for the defence of Cuba, and support its people's rights to self-determination. It holds bi-monthly Film and Discussion Nights at John Smith House, 145 to 165 West Regent St, Glasgow G2 4RZ on 16 May, 15 August and 17 October 2019.*

# The ship that sailed for Spain ... to fight the fascists

Graham Wallace explains what Glasgow's new memorial is all about



Members of the RMT Glasgow Shipping Branch at the unveiling of the memorial (photo courtesy of the RMT Glasgow Shipping Branch).

The Glasgow Shipping branch of the RMT union recently hosted a gathering of local, national and international supporters at the unveiling of a plaque and statue on the banks of the Clyde at Broomielaw, in memory of the seafarers who ran vessels to break the blockades during the 1936-1939 Spanish Civil War. People came from all over Scotland, Britain and Europe to attend.

It is an international memorial to seafarers who left their home ports from all over the world to support and bring supplies to the Spanish people, who were fighting the fascist Franco. In Britain, they especially came from the ports of Cardiff, Liverpool and Glasgow. And the people of Glasgow played their part too. When the working class of the city didn't have much, what little they could spare they used to help the Spanish people in the plight they faced.

We hope the memorial will be the catalyst for other memorials in these proud seafaring cities. It took us 15 years to complete, but the proudest thing about it is that it's there for all us of forever, especially now at a time when the far right and fascism are on the rise again. So, it's both a memorial and a warning for future generations.

Frank Casey, the sculptor who designed

the plaque and memorial, is an old communist from Glasgow. About 15 years ago, he saw Harry Secombe on *Songs of Praise* interview an old captain in Greenock. When asked what his greatest achievement was, he declared it was running the blockades in the civil war. Frank took this on board, ran with it, and approached our Glasgow Shipping branch.

Of the 61 merchant vessels sunk between 1936-1939, 29 of them were flying the Red Ensign. Normally, such an action by a foreign power would be seen as an act of war, and be met with force, but such was the appeasement mood in the British government that they let it pass.

The plinth features a stanza from Herbert Peacock's 1938 poem, *A Ship for Spain*:

'I had a ship,' the captain said,  
'A ship that sailed for Spain,  
And if I had that ship right now  
I'd sail there once again.'

'I'd take a story with me then  
And let the people know  
In Barcelona why their bread  
Is fathoms deep below.'

'With my own lips I'd do to them say:  
The English people true  
Want you to hold against a foe  
But it's more than the Government do.'

'Any fool with eyes could see  
When the planes swept over low  
They didn't give a damn for the Union  
Jack  
Spread-out across the bow.'

'And why don't they care for the English  
flag  
And the rules of the bloody game?  
Because they know that Chamberlain  
Has traded the English name.'

'Has traded the name to the Japanese,  
Licked Mussolini's boots,  
Let Hitler get hold of the Austrian lands  
For you doesn't care two hoots.'

'We sent a wire when we got to land,  
And in Parliament next day,  
Franco's lackey got up and said  
We just went there for our pay.'

'These are the taunts we have to bear  
From the traitors we've got at home.  
From the traitors who sullied the English  
name  
And played second fiddle to Rome.'

'I had a ship,' the captain said,  
'A ship that sailed for Spain,  
And when I get another ship  
I'll sail there once again.'

Then, as now, and forever, no pasaran!

*Graham Wallace is the branch secretary of the RMT Glasgow Shipping Branch.*

# Profit-ism: the nightmare of daydreamers

Patrick Phillips examine the motivation of those that play and pray for profit

Each year, thousands of books are published that demonstrate how profiteers make profits but never why. My forthcoming book, *Ways of Expressing*, aims to answer the questions: why are profiteers so insistent on the making of a profit, and what alternative economic-exchange is available to us now? Below are some extracts from it:

Today's ruling-expression is that of the making of a profit. This expression is not our own, but that of Profiteers. Enclosure of our common land made such an expression reality. It was an act of re-capitalizing existing landownership. Before the enclosure movement, many landowners were already making a profit. But why the need to make even more of a profit? The need to feel eternal in sensation is essential to our existence. Enclosure reorganised Time and Travel; all headed in the direction of the making of a profit. Hence today's global tyranny in their quest for eternal profit to feel eternal in pleasure. This is why Profitism creates eternal waste, because of a Profiteer's calculated economic exchange. If the making of a profit was eternal in sensation, then Profiteer's would only need to make a profit once. Because it is not how many times we exchange that is important but the way in which we exchange. What they make in a second takes you a month. What they make in an hour takes you a decade. What they make in a day will

take you beyond your own life time.

Profiteers edify their own illusionary unity with nature, thus, exploiting all natural resources between us and nature. Technological progress has now enabled Profiteers to make a profit invisible, and in consequence, their exploitation of us too. Automation and AI are enabling Profiteers to make a profit even faster: in less than a second. Hence an uninterrupted economic-exchange; again, so that Profiteers can feel eternal in sensation.

The relationship between nature and society is no longer considered to be in continuity. Unity between the two is being rendered obsolete. Profitism today is portrayed as our final end - in that there is no more progress to be had - and no more expressions to be lived out. Profitism is now not the only way, but the way. Each day, we are forced to live out and believe in this exploitative quest for eternal profit. The only time available to us now is the making of a profit.

In our so-called 'modern' society our relationship with nature has been completely segregated. We no longer freely live out our dreams awake, nor intrinsically consider our essential daily relationship with nature. How close are we in our daily experiences to being in unity with nature? Never before have we been so removed and disconnected from nature. Our situation today is like no other situation in human history.

We have arrived at the modern world without the modern world.

The way we are forced to live today is an ontological crisis (which is getting worse) - because to live a transient existence is to live with the constant threat of our existence. Our fight today is for the ontological right for everyone to exist. This is the urgency of this book: to understand why Profiteers are so insistent on the making of a profit, without ethical consideration. We must begin not only a new way of expressing, but, a new way of becoming.

Profiteers are not hoarders. Today we see hoarding as a mental illness but rarely do we question enough a Profiteer's quest for eternal profit. We could compare a hoarder with a Profiteer, but a hoarder tries to preserve the eternal waste that surrounds them daily.

In a new expression - without a ruling expression - class would no longer exist. A way of expressing is a way of being, and therefore, living. We need to establish a universal way of expressing - which includes the expression of every human being - in all our dreams awake.

*Patrick Phillips is an artist, thinker, writer and dreamer (<https://patrickphillips.blog/>). He lives and works in a mountain village in Scotland. His photo memoir, *The Lawyer's Dream*, about a lawyer who started his own circus will be published in 2019.*

## Public launch of new paper:

**'Neo-liberalism and the new institutional politics of universities'**  
by Jeremy Valentine (formerly Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh)

6pm-8pm, Thursday 30 May 2019

UCU Scotland offices,

4th floor, 227 Ingram St, Glasgow G1 1DA



The Jimmy Reid  
Foundation

Jeremy Valentine will lay out the how, where and why of neo-liberalism now dominating the way universities are run and the purposes they are run for. Alongside Jeremy will be speaking Ann Gow, president of UCU Scotland, and Carlo Morelli, president-elect of UCU Scotland. There will be plenty of time for Q&A. All are welcome

Established in 2011 by the *Scottish Left Review*, the Jimmy Reid Foundation (JRF) is an independent 'think tank' and advocacy group focussed on producing practical, policy proposals for transforming Scotland based upon analysis and investigation of the current Scottish and global political, cultural and social situation. Visit our website @ <http://reidfoundation.org/> to see our policy papers and news.

# Age, ageing and older people's issues

*Bill Johnston concludes his appeal for the left to take older people's issues seriously*

This third article concerning age, ageing and older people's issues relates these interrelated factors to Scottish politics and suggests priorities for the left during 2019. The essential argument is that policy and action should oppose the present neo-liberalisation of ageing, and be driven forward by a rights-based approach rather than the current dependency model and methodology for defining older people and their issues. Identifying and combating ageism in all its forms should be a particular target for government, political parties, unions, charities, community groups and socialists in anticipation of the next Holyrood election in 2021 and campaigning around a possible second independence referendum.

The Scottish Government's *A Fairer Scotland for Older People: A Framework for Action* appeared in March 2019 and is a major statement of intent. The focal point is a very welcome commitment to tackle ageism and implement a rights-based approach to our ageing population. The list of actions described seems more symbolic than material and more reliant on collaboration with existing programmes and partners than in breaking new ground and establishing new change mechanisms. Equally, there is a requirement for funding and budgets to be clarified to allow a balanced evaluation of the document and the possible impact of its proposals.

Analysing, critiquing and if necessary proposing alternatives to the Framework will be a major task for the left during 2019/20. A foundation for analysis is the challenge of linking demographic ageing to other major dynamics such as climate change, technological change, and the economic environment and which are currently treated as separate issues in public policy. Accepting this challenge is a key political and electoral task for reforming and managing the present devolved settlement and envisaging a future independent Scotland.

The 2017 general election manifestos did not come anywhere near this objective, lacking even distinct sections on older people. The Framework does not really make up for those deficiencies but it is a step in the right direction and offers all parties a common reference point for their thinking about older

people and the ageing population.

Looking ahead to the next Holyrood election in 2021, the SNP should be well placed on particular aspects of older people's issues, having introduced a new cabinet post of Minister for Older People and Equalities in 2018 (Christine McKelvie MSP). However, it will need to defend its previous decade in power regarding older people's issues. The new Minister and the current Framework exercise offer the SNP an opportunity to explain their efforts on older people and equalities, thereby, creating a baseline to deflect criticism. That said their political prospectus must offer a strategy for ageing within an independent Scotland as well as a checklist for improvements under devolution.



The other parties can simply react to an SNP stance but that would be a weak and disaffecting position if the SNP produced an attractive offer to older voters. The initial challenge for all parties is to devote serious attention to population demographics as an issue in its own right and align policies for age and ageing and older people accordingly. Can we look forward to a 'Grey Deal' for Scotland's older people to match the various 'Green Deals' likely to be on offer for the next election?

In any case, Brexit is currently reshaping the landscape on a basis of unstable governance. Whatever the outcome, it is unlikely to benefit many older people. So, when the impacts become clearer, the grey voters may punish politicians for not protecting their interests. In the short term, no party seems willing to offer any form of mitigation if there

is a detrimental impact on pensioners standards of living. In fact, direct attention to older people's needs has been scarce in the Brexit debate by comparison to the attention dedicated to trade, tariffs, internal party disputes and other headline grabbers.

What of independence and the present focus on another referendum on it? An independent Scotland would be born overnight complete with its own population, so the approach to demography post-independence needs to be defined in advance - ideally by showing a clear break from neoliberalism towards socialism. This is as important an issue as the popular debates about currency, EU membership etc., and should be solidly based in existing population data. In a paper for the Commonweal called *The Demographics of Independence: 2018 edition*, Craig Dalzell summarised the demographics of Scottish democracy so there is a common basis for analysis and policy discussion about ageing. In electoral terms, he showed age is a powerful and subtle correlate of voting preference on independence. In effect 'older' voters are a key segment of the electorate for both pro- and anti-independence campaigners but they cannot be taken for granted by either side.

To conclude, many older citizens today are those 'Baby Boomers' who campaigned for progressive policies on racism, equal opportunities, abortion rights and workers' rights over the last forty years. They are not the anti-young people demons of right-wing propaganda. The demographic challenge for the left today is to unite the generations to combat the divisions caused by negative stereotypes and propaganda designed to set older and younger citizens at odds with each other.

*Writing in a personal capacity, Bill Johnston is Chair of the Scottish Seniors Alliance*

*(<http://www.spanglefish.com/scottishseniorsalliance/>)*



## **Rosa Luxemburg (1986),**

director: Margarethe von Trotte

Reviewed by Jackie Bergson

This timely re-release of Margarethe von Trotte's biographical feature film about Polish Marxist pacifist, philosopher and revolutionary socialist, Rosa Luxemburg, movingly represents the crushed opposition to autocracy and fascism. Largely an existential piece about Rosa, this important film emphasises that her political and social relevance today continues to be prescient, on the centenary of her tragic death by murder.

The unambiguous power of von Trotte's female protagonist saw Barbara Sukowa winning Best Actress prize at Cannes in 1986 for her excellent performance, which unashamedly highlights Rosa's provocative, stoical activism, her depth of commitment to her purpose and her graceful, compassionate soul. The film gives voice to the meaning of social democracy through Rosa's fiery intellect; rejecting the notion of martyrdom, by reason of humanity, her qualities of passionate loyalty and quiet self-deprecation, her personal sacrifices and flaws and her essence as a formidable educator are equally brought to light.

Socialism and democracy conveyed through recreations of Rosa's dialogues with her comrades and remarkable political speeches reveal the central belief that the proletariat holds a respected place in European society. Shunning challenges and pity from her socialist-communist colleagues and her beloved, long suffering family, Rosa's presence amongst them in the film divulges their dedication to her, along with their admiration of her unshakeable endurance. It undoubtedly helps that Sukowa's fellow actors included her true-life husband, Daniel Olbrychski, as Rosa's soul-mate and husband, Leo Jogiches. Seemingly

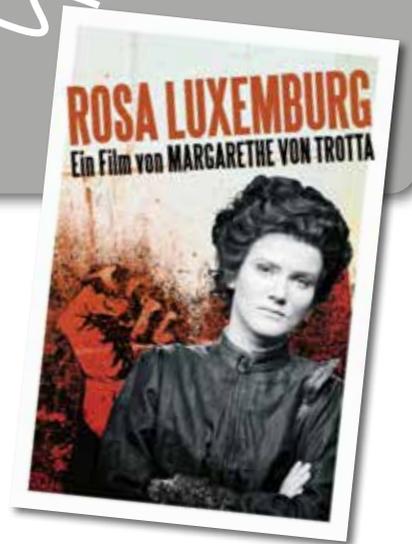
effortless, although impeccable, chemistry is created on-screen through their performances – each partnership therefore exquisitely manifest.

Rosa experienced paradoxical worlds of middle-class existence and political imprisonment throughout the last fourteen of her 47 short years of life. Her foresight as founder of The Red Flag, The Spartacus League and The Communist Party of Germany showed her far-left intellectualism, her ability to sustain humour and loyalty during her darkest of times and the symbolic gift of a deep red rose from her comrades are all conveyed with clear meaning in the film.

Spoken by Sukowa, more private words from Rosa's letters evoke the gentlest aspect of her soul. Images of fluffy skies accompany her innermost thoughts and hopes; the image of an overloaded ox being beaten reflects her empathic memories of deep sadness, inescapable burden and absolute exhaustion. Ultimately, ripples in the dark waters of Landwehr Canal in Berlin devastatingly echo von Trotte's insightful reflections upon the callous murder of her female protagonist.

Maybe forever to be seen by some as a controversial figure, evidently unbroken until her ninth imprisonment, Rosa is latterly portrayed in deep consideration of her comrades. Her final release from prison signalled a critical stage in the history of workers' fight for socialism and peace. Quieter and recovering from illness, Rosa's growing scepticism towards using socialism and nationalism within political discourse and practice beckoned opposition paramilitaries' final determination to crush her existence.

*Rosa Luxemburg* was first released during an era when world leaders publicly denounced the Berlin Wall and called for its destruction – which came to be in 1991. Post-McCarthyism and



post-Holocaust, von Trotte's erudite 1986 representation of early twentieth century fascism and paramilitary Freikorps must have powerfully resonated – and must continue to resonate – with knowing horror.

Conveying no doubt about the unaccountable cowardice, misogyny and evil of those who presumed to end her life and her ideas without trace, this film's telling of Rosa Luxemburg's life remains true to events in Poland, Russia and Germany during her time. Set within a decade prior to the Brown Shirts becoming the Gestapo under Hitler and Himmler, the terrifying spectres of Nazism and supremacist racism could not be clearer to present day and future audiences of this outstanding film. Modern-day socialists will undoubtedly relate parallels to current, significant rises in white supremacy within global political rhetoric and to facts such as that Germany's far-right National Democratic Party recently gained solid political ground.

Re-mastered into 4k digital format, the film's original music retains its authenticity while dating it – arguably, one sole contention. *Rosa Luxemburg* more emphatically, synergises political importance and poignant artistry within its form and content: very highly recommended.

*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.*

Henry Bell, John Maclean -

## ***Hero of Red Clydeside,***

*Pluto, pp256, 9780745338385, £14.99*

*Reviewed by Dave Sherry*

The explosion of working-class revolt during WWI produced one of Britain's finest revolutionaries. John Maclean was one and he broke from the leaders of his own party to become the most consistent opponent of British imperialism, becoming the most prominent figure in the anti-war movement. Working independently, in virtual isolation, he made a series of impressive breakthroughs echoing those of Lenin and the Bolsheviks. Like Lenin but unlike most of the socialist left, he defended the 1916 Dublin Easter Rising.

Drawing on earlier sources and more recent material, Henry Bell's engaging biography explains all this clearly to a new audience, showing the lengths which the British state went to counter Maclean. The account is compelling and timely. It captures the essence of Maclean, portraying him as a towering, creative figure from a momentous period in our history – an enduring figure that can speak to us today.

Maclean was a fierce opponent of British imperialism who led the opposition to the First World War. He was involved with the Clyde Workers' Committee (CWC), which spearheaded the rank and file revolt against the dismantling of union defences during wartime.

It is doubtful that its leaders would have taken such a lead had it not been for Maclean's efforts to show how the war served only imperialist interests and should be opposed by the workers. He held regular anti-war meetings at the factory gates and outside army recruitment offices.

He campaigned against spiralling wartime food prices. Alongside women like Mary Barbour, Helen Crawford and Agnes Dollan, he connected the great Glasgow rent strike of 1915 to the power of the Clyde munitions workers and in so doing helped lead it to a stunning victory.

His importance was recognised by both the British and Russian governments, if for opposite reasons. Lloyd George's war cabinet saw him as a dangerous revolutionary and imprisoned him repeatedly. Twice he was condemned to lengthy terms of penal servitude for sedition and on both occasions he was

released early, thanks to mass agitation in Scotland and around the world. In Russia, the new revolutionary workers' government elected him their honorary president and appointed him Soviet consul in Glasgow.

In May 1918, Maclean had been sentenced to five years in Peterhead. But six months later in November the German Revolution toppled the Kaiser and ended the war. Maclean was immediately released and Bell explains why:

'A snap General Election was called for December and the Scotland Office feared that if Maclean defeated Labour Minister George Barnes in the Gorbals and was then unable to serve due to imprisonment, they might face increased unrest on the Clyde. ... The Home Secretary noted Maclean had the support of revolutionaries in Wales and London who would see his release as a triumph over the government. And the Scotland Office noted that 'if Bolshevik propaganda is put out in this country Maclean will be the leader'. Nevertheless, the government decided that releasing Maclean was still the wisest course of action to defuse the growing protests.'

Maclean returned to Glasgow a hero and the newspapers estimated 100,000 lined the streets to greet him, including many who had struck work. This was the event that later inspired Hamish Henderson to write his *John Maclean March*.

When, encouraged by Lenin and the new Third International, the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) was belatedly formed in 1920-21, Maclean refused to join because he had major political differences with those who would lead it and this brings me to my only criticism of an otherwise excellent book.

Henry Bell agrees with Maclean's refusal to join the CPGB. In doing so he confuses the new party of 1920 and the Third International to which it belonged, with the deformed caricatures they'd both later become after Lenin's death and Stalin's ascendancy. Stalinism was not the heir of Bolshevism; it was its nemesis, the gravedigger of the Russian Revolution.

It was a mistake on Maclean's part. He was head and shoulders above those he criticised - those who later,

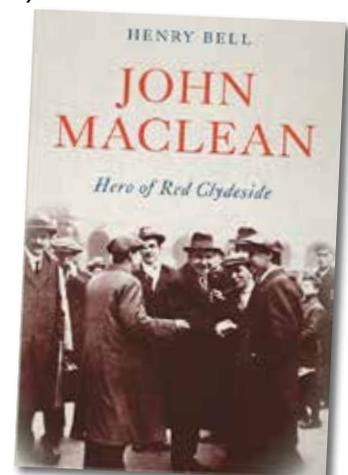
in his absence, became the leaders of the CPGB. But tragically his refusal to join cut him off from the most class-conscious workers. It was the one organisation, which despite its undoubted weaknesses, tried to face up to the task of rebuilding the working-class movement in the teeth of a vicious employers' offensive.

Maclean's absence isolated him from the movement and deprived the new revolutionary party of the most talented and courageous socialist in Britain. He was still highly regarded among the Scottish working class, as was shown by the thousands who lined the streets for his funeral in 1923. But sadly, his Scottish Workers' Republican Party, founded towards the end of his life, numbered its membership in the dozens and its electoral support in mere hundreds.

But this weakness cannot diminish Maclean's immense significance for socialists today; nor does it deter me from recommending this book. In his final chapter, the author argues convincingly:

*It is hard to imagine Maclean would see the idea of a Scotland, independent but still under capitalism, as any kind of ideal. He would, however, still see the break-up of Britain as a blow against capitalism and imperialism. Were Maclean to take part in the campaign for independence today it seems likely he would do so by fighting the housing crisis, unemployment and rising fascism – just as he did in the 1920s.*

*Dave Sherry is a member of the Scottish Left Review editorial committee and author of 'Empire and Revolution: A Socialist History of the First World War' (2014), 'Russia 1917' (2017) and 'John Maclean' (2014).*



# VLADIMIR McTAVISH'S Kick up the Tabloids

In 1999, many people were sceptical about the effect the new Parliament would have on the everyday life of ordinary people in Scotland. Few would have predicted at the time that within fifteen years, we would vote in an independence referendum, with the distinct possibility of a second before 2021. I for one did not imagine at the time the wealth of comedy material that it would inspire over the next twenty years.

The Scottish Parliament has not only been a great source for humour, it has also performed the invaluable service of getting under the skin of right-wing letter-writers from the leafy suburbs. Even its very creation was making angry people from Trinity (in Edinburgh) so hot under the collar that they had to fire off an outraged missive to the editor of *The Scotsman* to vent their spleen, and they've been doing it on a near-daily basis ever since.

Twenty years ago, the average person in Scotland would not recognise any politicians from our country unless they were in the Westminster government. It was impossible to make jokes about Scottish politics, because even in Scotland audiences did not know who they were meant to be laughing at.

It may have taken a while to get going, but once it did, the Scottish Parliament changed all that. Over the past two decades, it has brought us a colourful cast of characters who have entertained us with their exploits in the Parliament and with their extra-curricular activities. We've had people taking holidays with BBC presenters, ministers having to resign for eating pies in the canteen when they should have been at their work, we've had alleged visits to swingers' clubs in Manchester and we've had a guy trying to set fire to a hotel. It has been more dramatic and twice as amusing as *River City*!

The 2007 Scottish parliamentary election was a watershed in the new parliament's history. It not only delivered the first Nationalist administration, but it also represented the most incompetently-run election in our history, with a stunning 100,000-plus spoiled ballots were recorded. In other words, enough people to make up the population of an entire city failed to understand the question on the ballot paper.

While researching this piece (i.e. looking through my old joke books), I discovered this poem I wrote about it at the time, in the style of William McGonagall:

Passions rose so high the night of the 2007 election that a voter in Edinburgh attacked a polling station wielding a golf club. What a particularly Edinburgh way of making your feelings felt! In Paisley or Dundee, the sporting equipment of choice would have been a baseball bat.

In 1997, the Scots constitution  
Was rewritten by the Act of Devolution  
'There shall be a Scottish Parliament'  
The First Minister Donald Dewar said  
But alas before it opened he was sadly dead.  
Although his statue now stands in Buchanan Street in Glasgow  
Often with a traffic cone on his head  
When the building opened people came from all around  
To see what they were getting for their four hundred million pound  
They flocked to Edinburgh to visit Holyrood  
But when they saw it many said 'I don't think it's that good'  
The nation's leaders gathered there to talk  
Unless they had gone on holiday with Kirsty Wark  
Each member carrying out their parliamentary role  
Apart from Tommy Sheridan who –  
According to some salacious stories in the tabloid papers was –  
Allegedly down in Manchester getting his hole  
In 2007 election day  
Was set for Thursday the 3rd of May  
But it caused many people much distress and dismay  
The spoiled ballot papers numbered 120, 673  
The same as the population of Bonnie Dundee  
Which the English treated with very much glee  
South of the border they did laugh and did gloat  
Saying bloody Jocks don't even know how to vote  
But it's wrong to blame the entire population  
For a highly confusing system of proportional representation

2014 was, of course, the year when the whole of Scotland engaged in the political process and we were introduced to a whole new cast of buffoons and pantomime baddies. I'm sure I am not alone in being able to watch endless re-runs of Jim Murphy being pelted with eggs in Kirkcaldy.

Where Scotland as a nation will be twenty years hence is anyone's guess. We may be independent; we may be part of a third-world UK, or we may be under twenty feet of water if sea levels continue to rise. Let's hope we're still laughing in 2039!

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



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General Secretary

Tosh McDonald  
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