After 12 December....

What’s Plan B?
Well, the polls were stunningly accurate so we well and truly had our ‘Friday the thirteenth’. Welcome, readers, subscribers and supporters then to an unhappy New Year. We’ll all need 2020 vision to get through this year and the next ones because it’s all too glib to say all we need to do is just resist and rebel. For a start, that doesn’t take account of the difficulties in doing so before 12 December 2019 – like the sabotage of the Labour right, the timidity of the SNP leadership, the division over Brexit, falling union membership and the like. And after 12 December 2019, the hold of many of these forces will be all the stronger. Plus, there’s the demoralisation of those who campaigned for a Labour government – given that many saw the manifesto as seeking to deliver socialism and the divisions amongst the working class with many having voted Tory for the first time.

Let’s start with one unpalatable truth which only hindsight can now really verify. The election was won by the Tories long before the election was called. According to the polls, it was in August just after Johnson was elected Tory leader. What this signifies is that issues like how Brexit, anti-Semitism, media scrutiny and so on had taken their toll on Labour long before the 29 October when the election was called. There was only the smallest amount of regaining ground by Labour in the face of a twin juggernaut of the Tories and the SNP.

Unfortunately, Labour was in so many ways the author of its own fate. It didn’t recognise that its 2017 campaign couldn’t simply be replicated for 2019. Sure, Labour led by Corbyn could be expected to have come under fierce attack. That should have been taken as read, prepared for and batted off. Even during the election campaign, the attacks for (wrongly) being anti-Semitic could have been prepared for. Only the charge of being anti-Semitic was new in any sense - albeit from 2016. On Brexit, the editorial for the September/October 2019 issue of Scottish Left Review said:

Meantime, Labour continues to get a ‘sore arse’ by sitting as many different ways as possible on the Brexit fence. It’s understandable given the split over Brexit amongst its core supporters. But it would have been far better to have declared a crystal-clear position – whatever that may have been – take the inevitable, short-term hit and then move on to campaigning on that position instead of ever grudgingly changing on shifting sands.

Labour’s final position on Brexit took that to the nth degree. Polling analyst firm, Datapraxis, calculated that a maximum of 0.8m Labour voters switched to the Tories, while the Lib Dems gained at least 1.1 million votes from Labour, the Greens 339,000 and the SNP a quarter of a million.

Then there’s the issue of Corbyn himself. Whilst we must not forget that it is wholly unhealthy in any type of democracy to so heavily have the fate of a political party tied to the fate of their leader – and which forces in our political culture are responsible for this, Corbyn did not measure up. Before the election – like over the dispatch box at PMQs – he so often failed to hit the target or land a killer blow. In the election itself, he looked tired and lacklustre. His rage seemed somewhat unconvincing. Of course, it didn’t help that the media mostly gave Johnson a free ride. But it’s also the case that Johnson was fairly Teflon-like because of the frustration over Brexit and his promise to ‘Get Brexit Done’.

All this is such a pity because Labour’s manifesto was genuinely radical and progressive. It wasn’t socialist and couldn’t deliver socialism per se as many supporters insisted. Recall the unfortunate use of the ‘A Britain that works for all’ phrase. But it could have made a massive and positive difference to the material conditions of the working class. The fly in the ointment was that Labour left activists thought it would be the vote winner and forgot at the same time that the credibility of the overall message – ‘real change ... for the many not the few’ - contained in the manifesto was dependent upon things other than the manifesto itself (like Corbyn).

This brings us to the situation in Scotland. But before getting there, some perspective is needed. The Tories won 365 seats (+47) with just under 14m votes (43.6%, +1.2%) while Labour won 203 (-59) with just 10m votes (32.1%, -7.9%). This may suggest the result was rather more a Labour defeat than a Tory victory. And, though Labour won 2.5m less votes than in 2017, it wasn’t the worst result since 1935 as the mainstream media like to say because that only looks at the parliamentary arithmetic. In their time, Blair, Brown, Miliband and Kinnock fought elections where Labour won fewer votes. This again highlights the thoroughly reprehensible nature of our first-past-the-post voting system and the virtues of proportional representation.

So, Scotland was an unmitigated disaster for Labour with only one of the most right-wing of Labour MPs being the (sole) one to be returned. Although far from the only factor contributing to this near wipe-out, it’s hard to understand the stupid tribalism inherent in politics in Scotland that stopped Labour from saying, even opportunistically: ‘We’ll support the democratic right to have a second referendum on independence. But when it comes, we’ll campaign against independence.’ Ironically, that is the position of the Scottish Labour left allies, the Communist Party. Instead, what we had was Richard Leonard’s more hard-line opposition to a second referendum than that of Corbyn and McDonnell. This does not sit well with Scottish Labour’s support for the Claim of Rights. Only now are some senior voices in Scottish Labour – like Neil Findlay and Monica Lennon – as well as hundreds
of left activists via Scottish Labour for Radical Democracy breaking cover to say that. Instead, Scottish Labour policy in the election was not support for a second referendum unless the SNP won a mandate for it in the 2021 Holyrood elections. If it holds to that line in any discernible way, then it will easily gift the SNP that policy commitment (and to the exclusion of growing discontent over the SNP Scottish Government’s handling of health, education and transport). Scottish Labour will likely face another wipe-out in those 2021 elections.

That the SNP won (effectively) 48 seats given the situation in Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath is all the more significant when one considers its manifesto was thin and based upon fairly explicit support for independence and stopping Brexit. But, again, some perspective is needed as this was not quite the re-run of 2015 when the SNP won 56 of the 59 seats. The Tories still have six seats albeit it down from 13 in 2017 and are now confined to the Borders and the north-east. The lack of a surge from the LibDems was epitomised by Jo Swinson losing her seat. The extent of the SNP victory is better measured by recognising that from 2017 to 2019, the party’s share of the vote went up from 37% to 45%, with the Tories falling from 29% to 25% and Labour sliding from 27% to 19%. The results of the 2015 election for vote share were 50%, 15% and 24% respectively.

The seeds of Labour’s defeat on Brexit, it seems, were also sown many years earlier. The legacy of Blairism and ‘new’ Labour still reverberates for many in the north and north east of England. Feelings of being the victims of globalisation led many working-class people to vote for a lying Tory toff despite a radical Labour manifesto. It seemed as if class hatred had evaporated. So, the ‘blue tide’ breached the ‘red wall’. But with Brexit being done – in as much as Britain will leave the EU on 31 January 2020 – and Corbyn no longer leader by March, will the Tories retain this support? Will they become the workers’ party and people’s government as they say they are?

Let’s now look at the future. Did too many of the left put too many of their eggs in Labour’s basket and not sensibly anticipate the result (given that polling methodology had been improved since 2017)? Will Labour swing to the right, and does the election result mark the end of the Corbyn project?

We’ll get some sense of this from the elections for leader and deputy-leader positions fairly soon. How will Johnson’s professed ‘one nation’ Toryism fair under the tensions between free traders and protectionists, liberals and social conservatives and ‘true blue’ southern shires and ‘blue collar’ northern Britain within the Tories?

In Scotland, most immediately we need to think about the Alex Salmond trial which begins on 9 March. Whatever the outcome, the SNP will be damaged as Salmond is pitted against Sturgeon. But who will be the beneficiary and what will it do for support for independence? Further ahead, is the third in a row (2015, 2017, 2019) win for the SNP at Westminster the beginning of a permanent trend for it? Will the results of the Holyrood elections in 2021 cement this in the run-up to the 2024 Westminster election? Most would expect a Tory Westminster government to be a great recruiting sergeant for the SNP and the cause of independence (especially as a left unionist project is in decline or on the defensive now). But, probably, the most strategic dilemma for the SNP is that having won so handsomely again, how will it not look impotent and adrift when a Section 30 Order is again rejected? How long can it dial up the rhetoric without seeming like wearing the emperor’s new clothes? Will it manage well this tension in the run up to the Holyrood elections in May 2021? This is where it is likely to be because it will not countenance an unofficial referendum or extra-parliamentary action. What difference will Scottish Labour’s new – yet to be defined - constitutional offer have on its level of support?

We asked these and many other questions based around a ‘what happened?’ and ‘what do we do now?’ perspective to a range of left activists and commentators. We hope that out of this some consensus may begin to emerge and then out of that consensus some action may be taken because in the battles ahead, words will only be worth anything if they result in effective action. In this regard, some have mentioned ‘getting the [non-Tory cross-party] band back together’ of in the form of a Constitutional Convention from 1989 or a Scotland United from 1992. Recalling both these phenomena, it seems apparent that the mass mobilisations of Scotland United will be necessary but they will only become sufficient when part and parcel of a wider programme of political change.

- Although this ‘thanks’ should have gone in the last issue of 2019, the editorial committee of the magazine wish to publicly record their gratitude to all those involved in the production and publication of Scottish Left Review – the proofers, the readers, the cover designer, the typesetter, the web uploader, the printers, the subscriptions manager and the like. So much of this labour is voluntary that without it Scottish Left Review simply would not be able to keep going.
Battered, bloodied and bruised: down but not out

Richard Leonard says when the people speak, political parties must listen

The election result was grave for Labour. Though we tried to break through the din of Brexit and the issue of a second independence referendum, we failed. And while we tried to be positive and set out what we were for and what a Labour Government would do, the general tone of the debate was negative. ‘No’ and ‘stop’ were the key words dominating the election campaign in Scotland.

After the campaign, I looked back. I joined Labour in 1982 which meant that the first general election I campaigned in, and indeed, voted in, was in the newly created Stirling constituency in 1983. It was a harsh experience, not so much for me as a young student, but for the people who had lost their jobs in the local factories which had been closed because of government economic policy, who were looking for work and looking for new hope. Harsh too, although we did not yet know just how harsh, for the people of the eastern villages: those mining communities to the east of Stirling, in the neighbouring Clackmannan constituency, who a year later were to be engaged in a brutal struggle with the government to defend their jobs, their pits and their community.

I fear that we are in for a repeat, as the failed experiment of austerity and an economic policy which is designed to serve the interests of the City of London is revived. Labour’s manifesto, if implemented, would have improved the lives of millions, from guaranteeing a decent wage, extending employment rights and union freedoms, to ending Universal Credit. With its Green industrial revolution, Labour was the first party in British political history to produce a serious and workable plan to tackle climate change. And, there was a clear promise of renewed investment in our economy, people and public services. By way of contrast, we now face a ‘hard’ Brexit and no chance whatsoever of the people being given a final say on Johnson’s tawdry deal.

Nevertheless, voters have sent a strong message to Labour and it would be a grave mistake not to listen. With defeat must come humility. This is why it is my view that instead of expecting the people of Scotland to come home to Labour, Scottish Labour must come home to them. On the doorstep, it was clear that many voters liked and supported our manifesto but doubted whether we could be trusted to implement it.

Despite repeated insistence by Corbyn, McDonnell and myself that there would be no pacts, deals or coalitions with other parties, there was a false message promoted by our opponents. Thus, many swing voters, particularly in parts of Glasgow and Lanarkshire where we won seats, and came closest to winning seats in 2017, decided they could have a Corbyn government and its policies at Westminster by voting for the SNP.

We will conduct a swift review and one that is evidence based backed up both by the best available data, from the British Election Survey and candidate and activist feedback. But more importantly we will undertake an outward looking engagement with the people and those communities who share many of Labour’s values and who want to see real change, but who no longer look to Labour to deliver that. No one should doubt my determination to learn and, more importantly, implement lessons from this serious defeat, however uncomfortable this may be for some in Labour.

It’s clear twenty years on from devolution that the British state is too centralised. There are huge imbalances of power in the economy too. In our manifesto, we promised to set up a Constitutional Convention to decentralise power. Learning the lessons from the Scottish Constitutional Convention, we now should establish a Constitutional Convention in opposition. This could develop a blue-print which will be ready to legislate for and implement in government. And, we should be prepared to work on this with other parties and civic organisations if and where possible.

With Britain’s now imminent departure from the EU, it means we need an urgent plan for the devolution and decentralisation of repatriated powers. Exiting the EU should not bolster the centralised British state. It must mean new powers at a Scottish and local level and be backed with new demands for active regional policy and investment.

I do not believe that the answer lies in the creation of a separate Scottish state, with its separate Scottish currency, a neo-liberal economic model with worker flexicurity, and significant economic power and control resting outside Scotland. To bring about change we need democratic representation and intervention at the level where economic power lies.

We could decide to create a new political state but withdrawal from Britain would open up a significant democratic deficit in the economy. I think it would be a profound mistake. In this century, we should not be putting new borders and national boundaries up. We should be bringing them down.

By the Scottish Parliament election in 2021, the SNP will have been in power for 14 years. Its record on the NHS, public health, education, the economy, the funding of local services is coming under increased scrutiny. People can see growing evidence of under-resourced and poorly managed services, letting down pupils, patients, staff and working people.

That is why Labour needs to listen and learn. And it is also we why need to start to win again: not for our own sake but for the sake of those people and communities that need a Labour Scottish Government committed to equality, economic democracy and real change. That is the challenge that lies ahead.

Richard Leonard MSP is leader of the Scottish Labour Party
Where and what now for the Scottish left?

Kenny MacAskill offers suggestions on how to build a united anti-Tory, democratic alliance

The elections over and the debacle has come to pass. The country now faces a Tory Government that the Scottish people loathe and fear. Parties need time to grieve and to have their celebrations and it’s inevitable that there’ll be reflections and even recriminations. But they must be concluded quickly, carried out with dignity and magnanimity and most of all there must also be unity on the Left.

The SNP must avoid triumphalism. It should remember ‘what goes around comes around’ as politics is cyclical. And, in any event it’s both an electoral turn off as well as being entirely counter-productive as a strategy. For Labour, it needs to try and avoid bitterness, no matter how hard that can be for many individuals who gave their all but have paid a heavy price. Despite the deep divide between the two large monoliths in Scottish politics, there’s much more that unites them than divides them. That’s always been the case and most certainly is now.

Most importantly of all it must be remembered that the election is behind us and it’s the future that’s before us. What was said or done in the campaign is past and even more importantly the positions taken in the 2014 independence referendum are history, if not also irrelevances. It’s not about scoring debating points against each other that matters but how we now unite to protect our people.

Global warming threatens humanity and debates on Brexit and the constitution will be irrelevant to future generations unless this crisis is resolved. Moreover, Thatcher’s election in 1979 saw an unprecedented attack upon Scotland’s industry. Nationalised services were privatised and older industries were devastated. Now, 40 years on, we face an attack upon the social infrastructure of our country. The welfare state and even the NHS are in Johnson’s sights blighted Scottish politics must end. But, in addition, there needs to be discussions at all levels across the left and within the labour and union movement. Both the SNP and the Scottish Government must be an integral part of that but equally both of them need to display respect for the role and rights of others. Defending the social and civic infrastructure that our foremothers and fathers established for us is our duty, and the attacks are coming and will be relentless. Just what the nature of that opposition will be can be discussed but it’s likely to be wide ranging and across multiple fields.

So, it’s time for unity. Structures need established and tactics discussed but the political sectarianism that has blighted Scottish politics must end. To paraphrase, now’s the time for all good people to come to the aid of the country.

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Independence, yes, but for whom and from what?

Grahame Smith says resolving constitutional matters can unlock progress on social and economic issues

After such a momentous election result, almost everybody will have an opinion on why it turned out as it did. Was it simply a Brexit election? Was there a Corbyn factor? Was Labour too radical and its spending promises too unconvicing? Was the demand for indyref2 a determining factor in Scotland? In time, psephology will seek to answer these questions. So soon after an election, and before such analysis is available, those first out the traps with opinions tend to be either defeated candidates, leadership contenders or their supporters, or opportunists keen to exploit the situation for their own political ends. So, treat what I am about to say with that in mind.

I hoped we could have more than a ‘leave’/‘remain’ or ‘yes’/‘no’ election. Alas, there was too much at stake. As unions, our job was to try to ensure parties focused on the everyday issues that affect our members and present progressive programmes that appealed to working people backed by evidence and not populist soundbites. If we were successful, I was convinced that voters would reward those who offered progressive visions for our society.

It appears, in Labour’s English heartlands at least, I was spectacularly wrong. Any hope that voters would be open to considering the wider issues at stake simply failed to materialise. After years of Brexit-dominated politics, positive messages on tackling poverty and inequality and the radical polices required to deal with the climate emergency, automation of work and decline in our economic and social infrastructure were, it seems, ignored.

We know, from opinion poll evidence commissioned by the TUC, that many longstanding union polices included in Labour’s manifesto were popular with the public. Not only that, they are considered the norm elsewhere. The French would think it odd not to have high levels of union membership or to pay higher taxes for better public services and the Norwegians not to have a state-owned energy company.

Blair might have been right when he said the British public wouldn’t vote for such policies. That’s hardly a surprise when, for forty years, they have been deemed extreme and continually denigrated by a vocal faction within the party advocating them.

Alongside progressive polices, a further victim of the election would appear to be the value placed by voters on properly researched evidence or on politicians that tell the truth. Either people were so focussed on the demand for Brexit that they simply weren’t listening or, and considerably more worrying, they heard but simply didn’t care. It also seems significant numbers prefer a ‘strong man’ Prime Minister than the more collegiate, collaborative and less confrontational one Corbyn offered. If that view prevails, it will inevitably influence the election of the next Labour leader and the nature of Westminster politics for the next decade.

Of course, drawing sweeping conclusions from the result is a dangerous game given Britain’s electoral system. While the Tories won by a huge majority in terms of seats, they didn’t win the majority of votes. And, they didn’t win in every age group and in every nation or region.

As in 1987, when the Tories last won such a majority, Scottish voters chose a different path. Then Labour won overwhelmingly. Then as now, voters in Scotland, held differing constitutional perspectives. Then, but not now, Labour had a compelling offer on the constitution - a devolved Scottish Parliament. It was an offer that was well-established and understood to such an extent that Scotland’s constitutional future was not the deciding factor in that or the two subsequent elections. Voters were open to consider how the parties would address their everyday issues like health, education and jobs, and they backed Labour.

In the decades since, the constitutional debate has moved on. For the 2014 referendum, the STUC presented a detailed case for enhanced devolution. The ‘Vow’, cooked up by Gordon Brown and taken forward through the Smith Commission, may have contributed to the ‘no’ outcome but it hasn’t quelled demand for further constitutional change or support for the SNP (largely at Labour’s expense).

The First Minister has made it clear that she will now push for indyref2. This has left Labour in a quandary: it cannot hold, as it has, the overall election result gives the Tories a Brexit mandate, and simultaneously maintain the result in Scotland cannot be viewed as a mandate for indyref2.

The democratic wishes of the people of Scotland need to be acknowledged. The Scottish Labour movement should support indyref2. But it should also confront the question of what independence actually means in a modern geo-political and economic context.

No country exists independently. Whether Scotland’s currency is the £, € or its own, the ability of its government to act independently will be constrained by the nature of its trading relationships and the structural of a Central Bank in either London or Frankfurt. Membership of the international community comes with obligations to abide by on a wide range of minimum rights.

While the question on the ballot paper may remain: ‘Should Scotland be an independent country?’, the real question is what powers, or what elements of Scotland’s sovereignty, are Scottish voters willing to share and with whom? The Labour movement has nothing to fear and much to gain from constructive engagement on this. As in 1987, it needs a compelling offer on the constitutional question, without which it will struggle to get the public to respond to the many positive policies it advocates and constitutional rather than class politics will continue to dominate.

Grahame Smith is the general secretary of the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC)
Once again, Scotland and England have diverged sharply in their electoral choices. Campaigns in both countries focused on Brexit but in Scotland equal prominence was given to the prospect of a second referendum on independence.

In 2014, Scots voted by 55% to remain in the UK after a campaign in which both sides shared the wish to stay in the EU. Two years later, Scotland voted by 62% to remain in the EU. The ‘leave’ vote in England and Wales, however, meant that Scotland was constitutionally obliged to follow. The initial response of the SNP was to suggest a new independence referendum in order to remain in Europe. That gambit backfired as some 30% of pro-independence voters had backed Leave. In fact, in spite of the logic of the SNP argument - that Europe makes independence easier - most electors had never made the connection. Analysis by the British Election Study showed that, cross-tabulating the ‘yes’/’no’ vote in 2014 and the ‘leave’/’remain’ vote in 2016, there was no majority for any combination. Nor were most Scots ready for yet a third constitutional referendum after the turbulence of 2014 and 2016.

On the back of this, the Scottish Conservative made a remarkable, if modest, revival in the 2017 general election, winning 13 seats out of 59. Taken with the Scottish elections of 2016, this made the Conservatives Scotland’s second party, overtaking Labour. The basis of their campaign was simple – no to a second referendum. Accusing the SNP of being obsessed with independence, the Scottish Conservatives talked of almost nothing else. Since 2017, matters have begun to change. The SNP, unlike the British Labour Party, made little effort to straddle the ‘leave’/’remain’ divide and seems to have lost many of its ‘leave’ voters to the Conservatives or (initially) UKIP/the Brexit party. Instead, it doubled down on a strategy of ‘remain’ (and a second Brexit referendum) and independence (through another referendum). The Scottish Conservatives doubled down on a strategy of ‘no’ to an independence referendum and ‘yes’ to Brexit. Scottish Labour lined up behind a second Brexit referendum but the electorate do not seem to have noticed, given Jeremy Corbyn’s vacillation on the matter. Labour were equally unclear on a second independence vote.

The outcome was a big win for the SNP, which gained 45% of votes and 48 seats, while the Conservatives fell to 25%, losing seven of their thirteen seats. The SNP immediately demanded an independence referendum for 2020. This is unlikely. First, a new referendum would require longer to prepare. Second, there is no guarantee of victory. Polls in recent months have shown support for independence at around 50%. In contrast to 2016, polls have shown a small majority of ‘remain’ voters supporting independence. It may be that Scots are sorting themselves into ‘independence’/’remain’ and ‘union’/’leave’ camps but the alignment is far from perfect.

Third, there is the need for Westminster’s consent for a referendum. The Scottish Government has made it clear that it has no desire to follow the Catalan route of a unilateral referendum. The Westminster Government would not, unlike the Spanish one, send the police in to stop people voting but the unionist side could simply boycott and ignore the whole thing. The Scottish Parliament could pass a referendum bill and wait for the Westminster government to take it to the Supreme Court. There, the Scottish Government could present historical arguments about the Union, say that the referendum was only consultative or hope that the Court would look to the more permissive precedent of the Supreme Court of Canada some years ago. Given the attitude of the British Supreme Court to the constitution, however, it is difficult to see this succeeding.

This means that the issue will be settled politically. Nobody wants to be the Prime Minister who lost Scotland or presided over the dissolution of the United Kingdom. Public opinion in England, however, may be less rigid. Surveys have shown that almost half of English voters are content to leave the matter to the Scots, with many of the rest having no opinion. There appears to be little appetite for coercing Scotland, should Scotland really want to leave. Polls have even shown a majority of ‘leave’ voters in England prepared to lose both Scotland and Northern Ireland if that is the price of Brexit. Around a fifth of English voters would actually like Scotland to leave Britain.

The Johnson Government is now set on a hard Brexit, having abandoned the aim of harmonising regulations with Europe. It was quick to take worker protection provisions out of the new withdrawal bill. Instead, its new working-class voters are offered mega-investment projects of the sort that usually end up absorbing huge amounts of cash. City and region deals, along with the proposed Shared Prosperity Fund, will steer headline-grabbing sums to Scotland and Wales but which, in the bigger order of things, are small beer. The biggest imbalance in the spatial economy, the uncontrolled growth of London, is unlikely to be restrained.

All of this could increase support for independence but three issues stand in the way. With Scotland in and England and Wales out of the European market, there would be a hard border between them. The issue of the currency is still unresolved. After the Sustainable Growth Commission, the SNP seem to have abandoned the ‘Nordic’ model of small state prosperity in favour of economic orthodoxy. Getting support for independence convincingly over the 50% mark is still a hard task.

Michael Keating is Professor of Politics at the University of Aberdeen and Director of the Centre on Constitutional Change.
I n conducting their research with such forensic rigour, Greg Philo, Mike Berry, Justin Schlosberg, Antony Lerman and David Miller have done Labour, the movement and the anti-fascist struggle a considerable service. Their research asks our media, a minority of the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) and a number of Jewish organisations claiming to speak for an undifferentiated community some very hard questions. Their evidence is marshalled throughout with a convincing academic sobriety. All those whose allegations made less likely the possibility of an authentically anti-racist government being elected to office should read this book. It is too late to recant, though clearly the political motives underpinning many of the interventions of the last few years made such epiphanies wholly implausible. Confronting anti-Semitism was not in fact their real concern. Discrediting Corbyn and Labour’s left turn, while shoring up the legitimacy of an apartheid Israeli state, is.

We are presented throughout with the kind of evidence that any journalist with a modicum of integrity should have found straightforward to gather. The opening focus group discussions demonstrate just how effective the campaign of misinformation has been. Despite referrals totalling a small fraction of 1% of Labour’s membership, participants express the belief that labour is ‘riddled’ with anti-Semitic behaviours. An initial pilot study finds that respondents believe between 25%-40% of Labour members have been the subject of complaints. A subsequent national poll reveals an average figure of 34%. The lie machine has done its job.

Philo addresses actual instances of anti-Semitism his researchers uncover in their investigations. He rightly makes clear a single incident is one too many. But it is clear these cases are not only numerically small, but often confirm the need for political education amongst members whose poor understanding of anti-Semitic tropes demand critical appraisal rather than public condemnation. Indeed, Philo draws our attention to cases where allegations have been dropped or found baseless, and members left with no support despite public vilification.

Philo is critical of Labour’s handling of initial attacks on Ken Livingstone and Naz Shah. A clear strategy designed to clarify and defuse was conspicuous by its absence. Labour was at once hesitant and overly-defensive. However, once Shakibarti’s report emerged and Labour moved to accept elements of the definition of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), before adopting it in full, onlookers of goodwill could have taken stock and accepted Labour was acting in good faith. But that was never the intention.

Despite other initiatives such as an on-line education campaign, the Board of Deputies and others refused to acknowledge the Party’s efforts. In fact, they were open to misrepresenting them. Labour Friends of Israel sustained the manufactured outrage, and a compliant media – from the tabloid right to the liberal press, the Guardian in particular – continued the allegations, confecting an environment in which, as the focus groups confirm, a public belief that ‘something must be going on’ was possible. MPs such as Margaret Hodge is exposed as ruthless in their desire to defame and smear Labour, irrespective of the consequences for an anti-fascist movement which more than ever requires maximum unity and clear thinking about the genuine threat of a far right only too happy to benefit from discord within the ranks of their political enemies.

Some startling moments emerge from Bad News for Labour:

• In advancing its national interests, the Israeli state is no different to any other state actor. However, a ‘racist state’ has more cause than most to aggressively lobby in defence of its fraying reputation. A web of influence and political leverage is exposed as working on behalf of Israeli state interests. This is not a ‘Jewish conspiracy,’ and Philo is quick to caution against such lapses. The intrigues of a state defending its political formation and unafraid to smear anyone or anything which threatens its hegemony are brilliantly revealed. Philo clarifies its character; a state of Israel is not intrinsically racist. As conceived under Likud and its far-right partners, however, the Israeli state has been captured by racists in both theory and practice. Throughout, the authors are keen to provide a nuanced discourse on the crimes of the Israeli state which does not stray into lazy anti-Semitism. For this service alone, the book is to be commended.

• The IHRA is exposed as being unfit for purpose, and Labour’s adoption of its full terms a consequence of political pressure which could and should have been managed better.

• Labour politicians and members are encouraged to be adroit in choosing when and where they intervene on the issue. The attack dogs are never satisfied, and there is a time, a place and an approach which limits the risk of walking into avoidable traps.

• Jennie Formby emerges as an unsung heroine of events. She inherits a dysfunctional disciplinary machine where staff are overwhelmed with both workload and public scrutiny, while others sought to actively sabotage Labour’s efforts. Formby is far more effective in addressing complaints and instituting new processes than her predecessor.
Despite this, the prevailing hysteria frames her as complicit in racism and ineffective in office.

Glasgow University Media Group have a long and honourable record of interrogating moral panics and media narratives rooted in the legitimisation of class power. Their analysis of events which threatened to overwhelm Labour led by politicians with histories of standing on the frontlines of the anti-racist struggle provides the first exhaustive overview of a campaign aided and abetted by a foreign power determined to silence its critics at home and abroad. It provides activists with an understanding of how to engage with the Palestinian struggle while acknowledging the fears of a Jewish diaspora as the far right mobilise again.

This is an invaluable guide to framing our arguments in fraught conditions and confronting a lie machine determined to poison the well of public discourse.

And, as John McDonnell rightly predicted, allegations of anti-Semitism did indeed ‘hurt’ Labour at the polls. Beyond the anecdotal evidence of activists, it is difficult to quantify by precisely how much. However, the choreographed intervention of the Chief Rabbi was bound to revive concerns. In directing Jewish voters to vote for anyone but Labour, we were confronted with voices clearly privileging their own ethnic group (and their very partial conception of its interests) over those targeted by Johnson and the right. Here was a PM-in-waiting whose racism, misogyny, homophobia and explicit anti-Semitism was a matter of sometimes recent public record. No matter. The issue was now a political football, to be used to discredit and defame, not to enlighten. This was recently confirmed again when Stephen Pollard, editor of the Jewish Chronicle, declined to withdraw support for an article published in his newspaper by arch mainstream racist, Melanie Phillips, which cast doubt on the ‘bogus’ concept of Islamophobia. Yes, Labour should have reached out with a more emotionally nuanced approach. But ultimately, as Philo et al. demonstrate, Labour’s detractors were, and remain, in no mood for reasoned discussion.

Mike Cowley is chair of Edinburgh Momentum/Campaign for Socialism and a member of the EIS FELA National Committee

Responses to #GE2019

We asked a further range of left activists and commentators to provide their assessments of what happened and what we should do now.

Chris Stephens,
SNP MP, Glasgow South West

The full-scale horror of Labour losses only becomes evident when visiting the House of Commons. So many familiar faces gone to be replaced with Tories who appear to be everywhere. Turn a corner and they are with their new Commons lanyards thinking they own the place.

The warnings were evident during the campaign, with all SNP candidates noting that the Tory vote was strong and motivated, and with a sense of concern that if it was like this in the urban belt of Scotland, it would be similar elsewhere. Yet we hoped a hung Parliament could still be achievable if Labour could hold its own in other parts of Britain. Alas this did not happen, and the Westminster Parliament hosted several Labour colleagues in shock and putting together their own thoughts on what went horribly wrong.

I am sure I am not the only one watching television aghast at the interviews with former miners admitting they voted Tory in seats which Labour had held for generations. It is with no sense of satisfaction that I find myself returned facing a stronger Tory Government with a large majority. The challenges are obvious. Brexit that is neo-liberalism ‘on stilts’. With workers protections, consumer and environmental protections ready to put to the sword, it will take an almighty effort both within and out with Parliament to stop them in their tracks. Early indications already suggest that further restrictions on social security support for the most vulnerable in society will be under attack.

Scotland chose a different path and, with a clear offer to Scots that they should have the right to choose its own future, SNP voters, some voting SNP for the first time, were motivated just as much as Tory voters were. It was clear from very early on polling day the SNP vote was coming out, with indications across Scotland that it was going to be a satisfactory day.

The political divergence between voters in Scotland and other parts of Britain is so great that an independence referendum is now the only way to solve this dichotomy. Encouragement should now be given to those seeking to resolve this issue, and to assist those who find themselves seeking a political space to support firstly a referendum and/or independence. For some this will be the SNP, the Green Party and for others a re-establishment of RISE or other left groups. For others, it will be using internal devices to encourage Labour or various unions to support a referendum. All these developments should be encouraged. Indeed, unions have a pivotal role in ensuring that the debate encourages progressive change.

I will certainly be playing my part to encourage these developments, whilst at the same time building support to resist Tory attacks on unions, on those who have chosen Scotland as their home from other nations, the most vulnerable and the poorest in our society, and our precious public services. For those who support independence, setting out a vision of a different society and different economic and political society is more important than ever.

Neil Findlay,
Labour MSP, Lothians

In a West Lothian community centre, voters going to the polls walked past a basket containing food donations. It was placed there so that hungry, needy people could help themselves to donations. A few hours after the polls closed, my local food bank tweeted: ‘Looks like we’ll be busier than normal for the foreseeable future, please consider donating food ahead of Christmas’. Against the backdrop of a Tory landslide, this tragic comment reflects the devastating reality of what
lies ahead for many of our citizens. But it also reflects the fundamental need to change the economy in a transformative way so that food bank Scotland and Britain is no more.

As the SNP continues to dominate Scottish politics, the constitutional future of Scotland and Britain will hog the agenda more than ever. We cannot deny the people of Scotland a second referendum where the majority is calling for it. However, there would need to be a clear proposition, something that is impossible until we know the outcome of Brexit and that will not happen in 2020.

Surveying the ashes of the political earthquake, Scottish Labour must now face up to that reality, not grudgingly, not reluctantly but honestly and with as much positivity as it can muster in these difficult times. Tens of thousands of former Labour voters voted SNP. You only need to assess the swings from Labour to the SNP for evidence of that. These voters cannot be ignored. Nor should we pretend they will come back to us any time soon if we don’t address their concerns.

George Kerevan, former SNP MP

Elections are a test of the relative strengths of the main class forces. At a British level, the election showed an almost 50:50 split among working class (C2 and DE) voters between the ‘remain’ parties (including Labour and SNP) and right-wing ‘leave’ parties. We’ve been here before: a significant element of the Protestant working class voted Tory down to the 1950s. Yes, the election shows the bourgeois right has recaptured considerable working-class support. The damage, however, is not as bad as it looks and is repairable.

Crucially, the major working-class cities voted preponderantly for Labour (London, Liverpool, Manchester) or the SNP (Glasgow, Dundee). Working-class Tory and Farage votes were concentrated among frightened pensioners and the precariat living in marginalised seaside communities or smaller, de-industrialised northern English towns. These latter are places where class solidarity has already been weakened, unlike the urban conurbations. Conversely, across Britain, the majority of the new proletariat of young workers, immigrants, skilled professionals in small companies, and cultural workers voted solidly in a progressive direction.

In England, Corbynista Labour was the force in mobilising this emerging new proletariat. Factcheck: Labour’s ostensible loss of vote share in London is explained by middle class ‘remainers’ switching to the LibDems. Actually, Labour’s only British seat gain was in Putney. On Merseyside, where Tory austerity has been epically catastrophic, Labour easily held all 14 seats - defectors like Frank Field were booted out. In Scotland, the combined vote share of the progressive parties (SNP, Labour, Greens) remains the highest in Europe – around two thirds of the electorate. This is the best reason for independence I can think of. Suggestion: Scottish Labour might allow a self-determination referendum in return for a French-style Common Programme of the Left at Holyrood for 2021.

In Northern Ireland, the election was truly historic, with parties supporting reunification (Sinn Fein and SDLP) winning more seats than the unionists for the first time. In punishment for allying with the Tories, the DUP lost its Westminster leader, Nigel Dodds. Conclusion: the real, immediate threat to Britain lies across the Irish Sea. Once internal border checks (implicit in the Tory Brexit deal) become visible, the horse manure will hit the fan.

As ever, the biased voting system favoured parties of the ruling class. Yet Boris barely managed a fragile one-point increase in the total Tory vote share, compared to Theresa May in 2017. He can only re-boot a post-Brexit economy through massive, Asian-style deregulation which could wreck his new voting coalition. True, Boris’ victory has defused the immediate parliamentary crisis of the ruling bloc. But political unrest in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and the looming post-Brexit economic disaster, mean the ruling order is in existential crisis. Let’s keep our heads and organise.
Bryan Quinn,
Scottish Green Party

Standing in a marginal contest between the Conservatives and the SNP was an interesting experience, as the Scottish Greens cut through the noise to demand climate action. Both parties are paying lip service to the biggest crisis facing us, the climate emergency. This is a crisis which will impact upon the world’s poorest the most.

But while SNP candidate, Alyn Smith, put out a leaflet inflating his green credentials, the Tories avoided talking about the climate at all in this election. Now we are facing another five years of them in charge. Climate change was barely mentioned in their manifesto, yet they now have a key responsibility in solving the crisis, as they sit at the table with other world leaders. Their 2050 net zero target only gives us a 50-50 chance of staying below the 1.5C temperature increase needed to avoid some of the worst effects of climate change. Like the Scottish Government, they are also particularly bad at meeting targets, which makes me doubt very much that they will even meet the 2050 target they have set.

It is not the only crisis which this government threatens to deepen. We have already seen the suffering and deaths caused by welfare reform, and the continued roll out of the failed Universal Credit will lead to a further rise in rent arrears and foodbank usage. Meanwhile, Trump seems keen to do a trade deal with Boris. Everyone should be concerned for the rights, standards and environmental protections we currently have that will be up for negotiation during any trade deals. Boris claims the NHS is not on the table - I don’t believe him.

Scotland clearly rejected Brexit and has clearly rejected Boris Johnson’s offer to ‘Get Brexit Done’ and reject another independence referendum at the general election. Now we are faced with a choice in Scotland: Boris and 5 years of the Tories driving us out of the EU and into a de-regulation race to the bottom or an opportunity to build something new. Even if you disagree with independence, it is hard to justify that circumstances, especially with the contrasting result, do not merit the people of Scotland having a say over their future.

The Scottish Greens believe in a greener, fairer, more equal society. We want to be world leaders in tackling the climate emergency with investment through a Scottish Green New Deal that would rebuild the public sector and create 200,000 green jobs in Scotland. We want a society where everyone has the security of a universal basic income instead of the threat of sanctions and insecurity offered by Universal Credit. The people of Scotland now need to be given a choice. It is up to all of us to make the case for a new, sustainable and more equal Scotland that people will want to vote for.

Siobhan McCready, activist, Labour left

In the run up to 12 December, there was so much positivity. Young activists were engaged. Labour was, once again, getting a hearing on the doors. That hope turned to disbelief and despair the minute the exit poll was announced. So where does Scottish Labour go next?

Two weeks before, I was out campaigning with young activists. Their excitement and energy were infectious. One conversation sticks in my mind though. I was asked, ‘So are you excited about a Corbyn-led Labour Government?’ My response must have seemed a bit flat: ‘This is reminiscent of 1987. We were so sure then too!’ While I was managing expectations, I never in my wildest dreams thought the result would be so devastating for those of us on the Labour left who’ve worked so hard to deliver change.

How can working class communities vote for a Conservative Party and policies that leave people, our people, dependant on foodbanks and handouts? Why have we allowed the Establishment to control the narrative victimising the poor, degrading disabled people, and blaming immigrants for the mistakes of others? How could people reject positive change and be influenced by soundbites, lies and spin from a ruthless right-wing Tory Government? It’s heart-breaking, yet here we are again, back with a Tory Government that few in Scotland voted for.

A hard Brexit is increasingly likely - working class communities didn’t vote for that to ‘Get Brexit Done’.

They did, however, want out of a system of government that doesn’t work for them, much like the arguments presented by those promoting a vote for independence in 2014. Voters continually tell us they want change, to be listened to, that they feel let down and taken for granted by a political class who simple don’t get it. We could argue all day around Brexit and independence, the emotional and economic case being made or otherwise. However, like it or not, as democratic socialists we need to accept that the people have spoken. The left in Scotland needs to listen. Whilst polls for independence sit around the 45% mark, much of the left vote sits there too. Our people, our communities, are giving us a message.

Politics is in stalemate and Labour is becoming an irrelevance stuck in the middle between nationalism and unionism. It’s time to develop and put forward an alternative socialist constitutional offer to people and we need to discuss this and develop it in terms that people can engage with. The left is too often guilty of overly academic, complex pitches when we need to win over hearts and minds with an offer that resonates. It’s time to listen, talk and agree a way out of this mess, for all our sakes.

Gavin Lundy,
National Convener, Young Scots for Independence

It is fair to say that activists around my age have already experienced enough political drama for a lifetime; an independence referendum, an EU referendum, an ordinary general election, and two snap elections. Of all these memorable campaigns, the 2019 General Election will be the most depressing to look back on. But at least...
that affords us the opportunity to be frank with ourselves.

Across England and Wales, Labour was utterly crushed by a vacuous populist and traditionalist conservative movement with an ‘anti-politics’ ethos. In England, where it worked, this manifested itself as ‘Get Brexit Done’. In Scotland, where it didn’t, this was ‘Say no to indyref2’. Enough politics: everything is fine.

The result - which by the time you are reading this you will have come to terms with more than I have now – was devastating. Many will have their own takes but it was ultimately down to the failure of Labour to build a coalition of voters. I question the idea that being more Brexity or less would have made a substantial difference. Indeed, a pro-Brexit stance would have moved Labour’s electoral difficulties to different battlegrounds than the ones that they ultimately lost on. By the time the election was called, it was too late to ‘bring people together’. This result means continued austerity, economic damage, struggling public services, and the end of the NHS as we know it. So where then, now?

Jim Sillars,
former Labour and SNP MP

Nicola Sturgeon never went for an unambiguous vote for independence, using the softest language on indyref2 with a formula that it was right for Scots to make a decision about our future. Something difficult for any reasonable person to disagree. Then, she changed tack, and made the last lap all about stopping Boris and Brexit, to get ‘remain’ voters. She succeeded with that late shift, and has been honest enough to acknowledge that not everyone who voted SNP supports independence.

This was reversion to normal in SNP election campaigning. Most never noticed that between 1992 and 2014, the SNP never fought an election on independence. It was always something else such as ‘A Stronger Voice for Scotland’. Failing to build an independence vote is the reason we were at 29% in February 2014 when that campaign started. So, another election goes by and the SNP sought ‘remainder’ Unionist votes, thus undermining the claim to have a mandate for indyref2. Another chance missed to build the independence vote.

Anyway, everyone with any political nous knows that Nicola’s demand for indyref2 in 2020 is play acting to up the consequences of the Alex Salmond trial, and the suspended Holyrood inquiry into her conduct, starting again after the trial. How the activist gallery to which she is playing don’t see they are being led up the garden path beats me.

The result of the election is that Scotland is stuck. A group of 48 MPs go to London to demonstrate their impotence. They will shout at Johnston but will have no leverage over him. That call for Unionist ‘remainer’ support, and the admission they got it, will enable him to mock their demands for indyref2. The Scottish Government and its Westminster MPs are happily in the EU’s pocket and will be seen as an EU Trojan horse in this Parliament. The party can hardly threaten Johnston with an electoral defeat if he keeps ignoring them, because there is little political difference between 48 seats they now have and a few more.

There is a near future problem of which the SNP leadership and membership seems blissfully unaware – what if Johnston gets a good free trade deal, and Brexit does not turn out to be the economic disaster with the 100,000 job losses that they have forecast? What if it is a success, as I, who voted ‘leave’, believe it will be? Johnston is in a far stronger position vis-à-vis the EU than May ever was with her small majority or he was before the election. Not only has the political balance shifted, but so has the economic one. The German economy, whose car industry sells 870,000 vehicles to Britain each year, is wobbly. Some others are not doing well either. So, his chances of getting a good deal improved dramatically on 12 December. You can bet the Tories have filed away every claim by Nicola and her MSPs and MPs of the ‘catastrophe’ she claimed was inevitable.

Has Johnston no problems? The big one is delivering to those Labour areas he knows gave him the vote this time but put him on probation. I am one of the few on the left who never under estimated him. Behind the gaffe prone and outlandish buffoonery, there is a ruthless politician who knows the first rule is to get elected, and the second rule is to get re-elected. In pursuit of the first rule he, a Tory leader wanting to give a signal to working class voters that he was not the bosses’ frontman, told the CBI to its face that they were not getting the £6bn tax break promised.
The left better wake up and smell the coffee. He is going to be hard to beat.

**Stella Rooney, Chair, Unite Scotland Young Members**

There are no bones about it: this election was a defeat for the left. Our next steps merit reflection. But there several issues we must consider now in the aftermath of the result. Sadly, things may well get worse, and we’re going to have to show practical solidarity with one another in opposition to an uncaring state.

We can take a little time to lick our wounds but we must remain alert. The Tories will immediately clamp down on our right to protest and to take democratic collective action in our workplaces. We must oppose any infringement on the right to strike fiercely, whether this means taking part in civil disobedience or breaking laws which are anti-worker.

It’s time to change our political strategies: simply mobilising our existing base is not good enough. We are obligated to build real workers power. Not only is this more worthwhile, it is our only hope as we cannot legislate against austerity and precarious work. Sadly, there is no bill of employment rights, and no end to zero hours’ contracts coming to save us. Self-organisation is our primary means of defence, and our most important work is not going to take place in parliament.

We must adapt to this vulgar economy or else face being unable to change it. Unions must expand their organising models to include precarious workplaces as a matter of urgency. Listening to the voices of young, migrant and insecure workers is crucial to our recovery.

We must also attach these principles of workplace and collective democracy to the institutions that govern us. We cannot endure another five years of the Tories, and workers in Scotland did not vote for it. Devolution was a lifeline for the Scottish working class, and in the face of a further electoral endorsement of an independence referendum, the left must engage.

Abstention from constitutional politics is no longer an option. It’s time for us to truly engage with both the limitations and opportunities of independence. We must these examine these dilemmas, and understand the direct link to our material conditions. It is a matter of urgency to carve out a space to the left of a hard-right Tory party, and the SNP’s vision of independence based around the neo-liberal consensus.

Scottish Labour cannot continue to block a referendum simply because it would rather have a socialist Britain. Tragically, the ‘British road to socialism’ is off the table for the foreseeable future. Labour’s programme for government proved popular: we must have honest discussions about how this policy programme can best be implemented in Scotland. Our principles of worker’s self-determination must guide these interrogations of the British state in its current form. I hope we can have these important discussions in comradeship for we are going to need each other in the fight yet to come.

**Róisín McLaren, National Co-spokesperson, Scottish Socialist Party**

This election was to be won or lost on the clarity and popularity of the party’s Brexit position. Labour’s was neither clear nor popular. However, this defeat represents something more profound. It is symptomatic of the unravelling of Labour’s electoral bloc.

Social democratic parties do not build an apparatus for government within the working class, i.e. thriving branch structures, popular education, support networks, because they are not trying to prepare the working class for overthrowing the system and governing. Instead of this grassroots structure, as Jon Cruddas puts it, Labour relied on a historic compromise: the working class allowed itself to be represented in parliament by the middle class, on the proviso that these middle-class representatives would operate in the working class’ interests. The breadth between this deal and the reality of its execution has been growing. It has now ruptured. Labour is now so out-of-touch with the class it is meant to represent that this election saw Welsh ex-miners voting Tory.

The Labour right will argue that Labour lost due to a manifesto that was too left wing. Policies like an immediate minimum wage rise to £10 an hour will be derided as economic fantasy. In this regard Labour’s loss is damaging to the entire left, as it associates such policies with defeat. In a pattern, that is exasperatingly familiar, Labour will swing to the right under Keir Starmer while the unions and Labour left will fall back in line with the logic of ’electability’.

Just as exasperating is the situation in Scotland. The SNP’s 48 seats are not indicative of a rise in support for independence. Unionists voted SNP because they were the most effective proponents of ‘remain’. Sturgeon is now forced to ask for a Section 30 order, which will not be granted. The reaction to this refusal will be to lead the charge through the courts. This brings us not an inch closer to independence. There is no legal right to a referendum. Independence is a political argument which must be won on political grounds.

George Kerevan has postured civil disobedience as a route to independence. Peter Bell argues that Scotland should unilaterally declare itself independent. These are tactics, not strategy. Both a mass civil disobedience campaign and UDI require the moral authority of overwhelming support for independence to gain legitimacy. Therefore, the independence movement’s task is to build support to such a majority that its democratic legitimacy is unquestionable. SNP will never entertain extra-parliamentary action. Compromised by their cross-class base, its vision of independence is fundamentally conservative. Noting this, is it not the Scottish left’s job to peel support off from the SNP to a socialist project that can effectively fightback against a decade of Tory rule?

**Maggie Chetty, former chair, Communist Party of Scotland**

Boris Johnson’s electoral victory revealed two conflicting strands of the
thinking of working people in England - rejection of the Corbyn project and profound alienation. The exception to this is in Liverpool where the people’s continuing boycott of the Sun has insulated them from its racism and anti-Corbyn rhetoric. In Wales, Labour and Plaid Cymru increased their vote after an excellent performance by Plaid’s Leader Adam Price.

Scotland presented a different outcome with its SNP electoral gains from the Conservatives, Labour and Jo Swinson’s seat. The Lib Dems took a seat in Fife from SNP’s Stephen Gethins. Interesting to the ‘yes’ campaign in Scotland is how the English electorate is beginning to echo the ‘yes’ campaign’s 2014 calls for Britain’s finances to be less concentrated in London and the South East. It is extraordinary to consider that the person to touch on the alienation of the North East was George Osborne with his talk of the need for a Northern Powerhouse - not that he did anything about it as indeed we expect of Boris Johnson!

Scotland has firmly rejected the Corbyn manifesto - good as it was. We are left with a single Labour MP, the centrist, Ian Murray in Edinburgh South. Scotland’s politics in the post -election period have been enlivened by the word that the Labour for Independence is to become engaged with the debate on constitutional change in Britain. No doubt the subject of federalism will emerge which always seemed a doomed project – whoever expects Westminster to agree to share its powers must have more than a dash of naivety!

The stars of the election have been the SNP with substantial gains and the people of Northern Ireland where they punished the DUP for their intransigence, moving support to the left/middle ground (Sinn Fein, SDLP and Alliance party) and opening the door to more progressive outcomes in the years ahead.

What for the future? The SNP has to sharpen up its act and ditch policies like the Growth Commission roundly which was rejected by many left ‘independistas’. It will also have to examine the legal options including the Treaty of Union which I suspect Westminster would like to forget about. It should be upping the ante in every conceivable way including on the streets but also maintaining patience so as stop the opposition wearing itself out.

Scottish Labour should fall in with the pro-independence campaign for its survival as a party. If it was wise, it could re-build Labour from a Scottish base and cities like Liverpool. An SNP/Labour/ Green alliance in Holyrood would become unstoppable and be a beacon for the rest of Britain - a challenge to the poisonous Tory Government, a safe haven for decent, pro-peace politics and a green industrial revolution that would attract our friends and neighbours in the rUK and Europe.

Vince Mills, Secretary, Scottish Labour Left

As you might expect from someone who believes the EU is a major impediment to socialist advance and, therefore, voted to ‘leave’, I was not surprised by the overall vote for the Tories’ ‘Get Brexit Done’ against Labour (however bitterly disappointed I was). I think gut working class hostility to the EU is well placed and I expected the Labour collapse in ‘leave’ voting areas.

I also believed, therefore, that, even in Scotland, had Labour sustained its 2017 stance of respecting the EU referendum result, it may have been able to appeal that section of the 1,018,322 citizens who had voted to leave in 2016, most of them working class and many of them SNP supporters - a third of SNP supporters voted ‘leave’ - who felt abandoned by the SNP leadership on this issue.

Indeed, from a class perspective, the depth of support for the current SNP leadership is difficult to explain. It is not just questions about the underfunding of some services or mis-management of others - it is the explicit espousal of a neo-liberal offer on independence embedded in the Growth Commission. This raises the obvious question: in that case, why did Labour do so badly?

It is because the SNP has supplanted Labour as the ‘the party of moderate progress within the bounds of the law’ as the Czech writer, Jaroslav Hasek, would have it. The SNP’s politics very much reflect its membership, 71% of which are ABC1 – upper to lower middle class.

While we on the left may sneer at this, like Blair, Sturgeon has found a way to keep her influential, middle class, core vote happy while poverty and inequality remain endemic in large sections of the working-class Scotland, many of whom (32%) did not vote on 12 December and remain well out of the reach of the union movement.

Of course, I am not writing off the role Scottish nationalism plays in this electoral dominance. As a potent mixture of grievance and entitlement often feeding off the very poverty it masks, the dominant form of nationalism explains and inflames a legitimate working-class sense of injustice, as national oppression and then directs it to a managed expression of anger at the ballot box.

Labour needs to adopt a much bolder strategy, embracing parliamentary and extra-parliamentary struggle that goes beyond winning elections to transforming society. We must engage with all of those suffering under capitalism. Labour, therefore, should support the union movement and other dissident groups when they resist exploitation and cuts and this includes local government. This should be underpinned by an approach to the constitution which maximises the capacity for solidarity across the regions and nations of Britain with the ultimate aim of confronting capital at its very heart, in the City of London.

Morgan Horn, Industrial Organiser, Young Communist League

A Tory majority this big spells even more disaster for working people and our institutions. The pundits would have you believe that this result is a rejection of socialism – it is not for 10.5m voted for a radical manifesto. Labour’s policies were popular but constitutional questions reigned supreme. It is now up to us who believe in the cause of socialism to defend it and to continue to bring people together under a vision and a hope for a better future that is possible. For despite the devastating defeat, our ideas and our principles remain.

Whilst the battle in Labour for its leadership now rages, working people still need to be empowered, and for that we look to the unions. For too long, the union movement has failed in its primary purpose of representing...
our class. Over the past 20 years, union leaders have become the gatekeepers and managers of decline, and the collapse of membership and overall industrial clout reflects this. Unions need to organise or we will soon be rendered unfit for purpose.

Make no mistake, the Tories are coming to wipe us out. If we thought the Trade Union Act 2016 was bad, we are going to get hit with even worse. We have already seen their plans to legislate strikes and pickets in certain sectors out of existence. We cannot sit back and watch this happen - when the Tories come for the transport workers, we need to be strong enough to act in defiance with them, and we need to be willing to break the law.

We need united collective action. It’s the only hope to build power for our class, to reconnect the link between the individuals and the collective, the workplace and the community, the people and the political weapon that will liberate them.

We have a hell of a fight on our hands over the next five years and workers need to be centre of that fight. We are the wage slaves; we are the mortgage and rent payers; we are the ones who suffer from social security attacks; we are the ones in huge amounts of debt to our landlords’ extortionate rents; and we are the ones who need to be centre of that fight. We are the primary agents of change. Over the next five years and workers will liberate them.

Building trust and showing workers that they can take control of their own lives by building collective strength is the only way to undercut a growing divisive, racist and fascist rhetoric. We can do this by encouraging and facilitating workers to look at workplace issues as our class issues; and to transform these issues in to transformative actions. It is up to us to ensure that these links are made.

We need to organise to fight like we never have before. We need to take the struggle beyond just resisting the onslaught of the Tory government and in the direction of transforming society in the interests of the working class.

**Myshele Haywood,**
**activist, Scottish Green Party**


As we enter the third decade of the twenty first century, things are about to get much worse. The Tories have consolidated their power. They’ve established lying and corruption as acceptable in public life. They’ve facilitated eye-watering levels of inequality. They’ve spread instability, division, suspicion. They’ve empowered the far right. It’s slash-and-burn politics, and it’s terrifyingly efficient.

How do we take down such a monolith? On the left, there’s a tendency to look for the ‘one right answer’, and become evangelical about it. But what if the concept of ‘one right answer’ is itself part of the problem? We know that ecosystems need diversity to thrive.

How can we restore our political ecosystem with a single movement or party or ideological position? We can’t take down a monolith by building a bigger monolith – or a small one in the same image.

Whatever answer we think we’ve got it hasn’t worked. We need to stop expecting someone with a red flag to come over the hill and save us. Equally, we need to stop deluding ourselves that we’re the ones with the red flag.

Too often, we worry about winning people over. We chap doors when we want votes. What are we actually offering, aside from promises? What are we contributing to people’s lives? Instead of thinking about how to take people with us, let’s think about how to stand with them. Instead of asking for their support, let’s consider how to provide support and mutual aid.

It doesn’t need to be complicated. We don’t need instructions or permission from on high. But as the Tories continue to break their promises, we need to be the ones who show up, follow through, and get shit done. We need to rebuild trust and solidarity.

Look around your neighbourhood, see what needs doing, and do it. Get to know people who don’t attend political meetings. Build relationships. Strengthen what the Tories are trying to destroy. Volunteer at a library, foodbank, or community centre. Perhaps take inspiration from groups like Living Rent, Better Than Zero, the Unemployed Workers’ Network, or hundreds of small organisations working on local issues. Where can you put your skills or money or time to good use?

Destruction is easy. Rebuilding is hard. Now is the time to set aside ideological certainty. We need to stand together, protect what can be saved, heal what’s been damaged, and prepare the ground for new growth.
COP25 ignores demands for climate justice

Mary Church argues COP26 in Glasgow in 2020 must be a rallying point for people and planet

The outcomes of the longest ever meeting in the history of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change - the COP25 negotiations in Madrid - have failed to reflect the urgency of the crisis or any grasp of the real solutions to the climate emergency. Rather, governments around the world continued to ignore both the undeniable science and the rising tide of peoples’ movements demanding radical action on climate. That unwillingness to listen to the people could not have been better illustrated than by the response to a mass action of civil society observers including indigenous peoples, NGOs, unions and climate justice groups in which over 300 people were aggressively ejected from the UN talks, in a chilling echo of the violent repression in Chile that led to the last minute relocation of the talks to Spain.

Instead, what we witnessed in Madrid was corporate-captured governments fighting for the interests of the fossil fuel industry and elites, unable to see past short-termism, unable to get out of the neo-liberal mindset that has brought us to this point. All part and parcel of a concerted effort over the past decade and more by rich historical polluters to shift the burden of dealing with the climate crisis onto those who have done least to cause it and will suffer the worst impacts.

Two major issues came to a head at COP25 that demonstrate this clearly: the question of finance for loss and damage, and rules on carbon markets under the Paris Agreement.

On the first, rich countries shamelessly resisted calls from developing countries for financial support to help them recover from the impacts of climate change that it is no longer possible to adapt to, offering instead to simply cut up the cake of existing international development aid and climate finance into smaller pieces. They also attempted to re-write the Paris Agreement by inserting a non-liability clause into the treaty to protect themselves from any compensation claims by climate impacted people. One of the few silver linings of these failed talks is that developing countries stood firm and resisted this. But expect to see the same fight play out next year in Glasgow.

On the second, sometimes no deal really is better than a bad deal. And that’s definitely the case with carbon markets. With no effective cap in place under the Paris Agreement, and no time left to buy and sell the atmosphere (even if it was an acceptable thing to do) carbon markets risk fatally undermining efforts to limit warming to 1.5°C. Not only do they divert time and resources away from real solutions to the climate crisis, they also risk increasing emissions, by carrying over a flood of carbon credits from previous trading schemes and through double counting of reductions. If that wasn’t bad enough, carbon trading also violates human rights, especially impacting indigenous peoples and global South communities whose lands and livelihoods are being grabbed to be sold as carbon ‘offsets’.

With parties unable to come to a consensus on carbon markets in Madrid, the issue will be firmly back on the table in Glasgow at COP26. Only fossil fuel companies and other reckless profiteers stand to benefit from carbon markets - this is the part of the Paris Agreement that Shell boasted it wrote - and they won’t give up easily.

Next years’ climate talks in Glasgow, COP26 will ultimately be the litmus test of the Paris Agreement. 2020 is the deadline for countries to resubmit their emissions reductions pledges, known as ‘Nationally Determined Contributions’ under the treaty. With current pledges putting us on the highway to a hellish 3-4 degrees warming, and no sign of the rich historical polluters who have ultimately caused the climate crisis stepping up to do their fair share, the chances of keeping the planet at a liveable temperature are on a knife edge.

In attempting to navigate our way out of the crisis it is crucial that the voices of those most impacted by the climate crisis are heard: participation of global South civil society and indigenous peoples is essential for climate just outcomes. The knowledge and small scale, sustainable livelihoods of indigenous peoples, rural and forest dwelling folks around the world are part of the key to turning the Titanic around.

Yet Glasgow will be the fourth COP in as many years, and five out of the last six annual UN climate talks to take place in the global North. This is highly problematic in terms of ensuring global South participation. The grim reality is that in light of December’s election results we anticipate the continuation of the racist hostile environment border control in Britain, which will put additional barriers in the way of climate impacted peoples’ participation. In this context the Scottish Government’s more internationalist outlook is important: Ministers can work with the UN to put pressure on the new Westminster Government to guarantee strong global south participation at COP26.

In terms of what to expect from Britain’s presidency of COP26, the Conservatives promised to scrap the Department for International Development and instead use the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to promote British business objectives abroad, giving a clear indication of the perverse priorities of the new Government. The manifesto on which the party was elected ranked by far the worst of the main political parties in terms of their pledges on climate and environmental action. While the Scottish Government is doing significantly better than that, including with its stronger national climate targets, the reality is that the bar for climate leadership is set dangerously low, and we are far from committing to a truly fair share of climate action.

When COP26 comes to Glasgow, therefore, both Britain and Scotland will be exposed as simply other developed countries which have grown rich by polluting the atmosphere and causing the climate crisis. The talks will shine a spotlight on the Britain’s unacceptable oil and gas expansion plans - and the
Chileans want to ‘smoke opium’ and so much more

Oscar Mendoza explains the roots of the revolt and the emergence of new progressive forces

A social explosion started on Friday 18 October 2019 in Chile, triggered by mass fares avoidance by mainly students in the Santiago subway, rejecting an increase of 30 Pesos (a few pence) in the peak time one-way ticket. It baffled most international observers and rocked the Chilean political establishment to the very core. With this explosion, Chile - the Latin American neo-liberal poster-child and heavily promoted by the World Bank and IMF as the model for growth and stability in the region - has experienced a wave of social and political protests not seen since the return of formal democracy to the country in 1990, following 17 years of dictatorship under Pinochet.

The protest against the fares hike quickly became a national, non-party political, wave of mass resistance to the status quo. By 25 October, over 1.2m people attended a rally in Chile’s capital demanding change. Although in 2006 up to 100,000 secondary students went on strike for weeks and in 2016 three demonstrations against the pension system were joined by over half a million people, these protests are of a different magnitude, have reached every corner of the country and involve all sectors of society. Here, I want to focus on its political implications and examine possible ways forward.

First, though, let’s recap briefly on why Chileans have lost patience with ’business as usual’. Growing inequality, exemplified by the fact that the richest 10% earned 7.8 times more than the remaining 90% of the population between mid-2017 and mid-2019, according to the University of Chile’s Microdata Centre report of 22 October 2019. Low wages are a major factor with 50% receiving the minimum salary.

Health provision, the mixed Chilean model where a state funded FONASA covers 80% of the population, is chronically underfunded and the services provided are not up to the best standards and accessed only after long delays, queuing and frustration. The private health insurance system provided by suppliers called ISAPRES, which cover the remaining 20%, is much better funded and private clinics and hospitals are well equipped. Insurance premiums rise continuously, do not cover many pre-existing conditions and the balance in costs must be fully covered by the individual insured.

Pensions, private financial institutions known as AFPs (Pension Funds Administrators) manage the individual pension savings accounts of people in work. The system, established by the dictatorship, promised much but 80% of pensioners receive less than the minimum salary. The richest Chileans do much better than many are also dissatisfied.

Basic services, simply fail to deliver for consumers. The subway, Metro, in public hands and very effective, carries 2.6m passengers daily and is fundamental for Santiago residents. It’s also one of the most expensive services anywhere, in relation to incomes, and is estimated to take up almost 14% of a minimum salary. The Buenos Aires equivalent costs 6%. In terms of electricity supply, a market dominated in Chile by the Italian multinational group, ENEL, prices have increased around 4% in the last 12 months adding greater pressures on household incomes.

Chile is the only country in the world where water supply is wholly in private hands. Given vast levels of demand by the mining and agricultural exports industries, plus severe droughts and wild forest fires over recent years, prices are very high and supply intermittent, contaminated and difficult in places. Hydric resources are being exhausted at an alarming rate in the face of government inaction.

Although Chile compares well with advanced OECD countries and ranks above most of Latin America, education is highly segregated and quality varies greatly. A subsidised private sector, which started in the dictatorship as a way of reducing the state, converted Chile’s education provision into a business, with over 60% of pupils outside the state sector. Most entrants into higher education come from the private sector, blocking social mobility.

Lower income families, if they can, avoid the state sector which is chronically underfunded, with infrastructure often not fit for purpose, poorly paid teachers and generally poor outcomes. Only the poorest are left with no choice. Collusion by large businesses has led to major scandals, which on top of corruption, have fuelled the discontent. In 2008, the three largest chains of dispensing chemists fixed the price of 222 medicines, many for the treatment of chronic conditions, leading to excess profiteering. The two largest suppliers of toilet paper fixed the price for this product for over a decade in supermarkets, chemists and wholesalers, again to the detriment of consumers.

Corruption in politics between 2014 and...
2017 further alienated public opinion. Large economic interests were found to illegally financing some politicians by issuing invoices for services rendered – usually research, advice and promotion – which were demonstrably false. Both the right wing and centre-left coalitions were implicated. Major corruption was also found in the army and police during 2018 and many high-ranking officers, including former commanders in chief, are facing legal proceedings for the malefeasance of millions of dollars. To cap it all, Chile’s political class enjoys salaries, expenses, pensions and other perks that exceed those of much richer countries like Britain. This combination of abuses and widespread corruption has led to a serious undermining of public confidence in the establishment and existing institutions. Dissatisfaction with politics peaked during the 2017 presidential election, when turnout was less than 50%.

After the first weeks of mass protest, consensus built around the need to change the constitution and associated legal framework, imposed by Pinochet in October 1980. The popular cry became centred on a Constituent Assembly and urgent improvements in minimum salary, pensions and reversing increases in the prices of public services.

The response of the right-wing Piñera government to the social explosion was predictable, given his Chile Vamos coalition’s strong ties and complicity with the Pinochet dictatorship. On 19 October, the billionaire president decreed a state of emergency, brought the armed forces onto the streets of major cities and towns and upped his rhetoric referring to ‘being at war with a powerful enemy’. Widespread condemnation followed, even from his side, since the protests have been largely peaceful, though some incidents of violence, looting and destruction have occurred. The resulting wave of repression, which continues, has led to over 25 deaths, 200 plus people losing the sight of at least one eye from injuries caused by pellets and tear gas canisters, hundreds of other injuries and thousands of arrests.

Human Rights Watch first on 22 October, the UN Human Rights Commission on 8 November and the Inter-American Human Rights Commission on 6 December roundly condemned the Chilean state for excessive use of force against demonstrators and for abuses, including rape and torture, of detainees. They called for restraint, thorough investigation and punishment of those responsible.

For its part, the traditional centre-left coalition, which has governed for over 20 years since the end of the dictatorship, has been largely absent from the streets and restricted to statements by party leaders and parliamentarians. Protesters blame it almost as much as Piñera’s government for ignoring people’s demands over decades and perpetuating the neo-liberal model they rebel against today.

The alternative Frente Amplio left, which erupted onto the scene in 2017, gained a fifth of the vote in the presidential elections the same year and sent a significant block to parliament (20 deputies and one senator), has probably experienced the greatest upheaval with serious internal strife caused by conflicting views on how to pursue change. More identified with progressive social movements, such as secondary and university students, Frente Amplio is paying a high price for siding with the parliamentary establishment in efforts to dampen down protest. Firstly, by lending support to the ‘acord for peace and a new constitution’ signed on 15 November, seen by protesters as another betrayal as it was done behind their backs (‘cocina’ or cooked up). Then, more worryingly perhaps, by lending votes to punitive anti-demonstration legislation in Congress.

The small but influential Communist Party (eight deputies, general secretary of unions confederation) has sided with the street since the start and attacked ferociously those who have done deals ignoring the popular will. Similarly, the Humanist Party and members of other parties have abandoned the Frente Amplio in protest.

Though the protest movement is non-party political, civil society groups have come together to form Unidad Social (social unity), including unions, public sector staff, university and school students, feminist groups, campaigns against the pension system, indigenous peoples, relatives of the victims of the dictatorship and many others. In spite of their strong support base, government and opposition have tried their best to exclude them and maintain parliamentary power. This has simply led to mass demonstrations continuing unabated. Politicians’ hope is that the summer recess, starting with Christmas, will dissipate the protests and kill off the spontaneous mass movement.

This is unlikely to succeed in the long run, especially since the key demand of a new constitution is only grudgingly being conceded. The extreme right of Piñera’s government (UDI) is fighting change tooth and nail but has had to give some ground. Symbolically, the government insisted in the name Constituent Convention, not Assembly, and proposed two methods for selecting its membership: a fully elected and a mixed of elected members and current parliamentarians.

The bigger concessions, however, have been made by the opposition who have agreed to a two thirds majority for constitutional changes, which gives a veto to the right, and given up on securing gender parity plus reserved places for indigenous peoples and independents. The opposition also failed to support the president’s impeachment for human rights abuses and instead impeached the resigned Interior Minister, Chadwick, a cousin of Piñera’s. This has led to calls of betrayal and being sold out by demonstrators and civil society, hence the continuing wave of protests.

The legislation needed to hold a referendum for the new constitution was passed by Congress on 18/19 December, amidst more recriminations and name calling. The referendum should be held in April. A citizens’ consultation carried out by the Chilean Association of Municipalities (like COSLA) involved over 220 out of 330 local authorities and 2.1m people voted online (93% for a new constitution and 71% for a fully elected convention).

Chile will undoubtedly have a new constitution sometime in late 2021. Piñera will see out his period in spite of huge levels of rejection and scorn. Some improvements in the economic situation will take place. However, politicians will pay a high price for once more ignoring the people’s demands. The right will possibly be vitalised as their support favours repression over dialogue. The centre-left will continue its march towards political oblivion but hang on to power quotas. The alternative left has already failed its first real test and will need a lot of effort to recover its credibility. The communists will remain marginalised and excluded, but could gain some electoral terrain. Civil society has spoken and will never be silent again. That much is clear.

In 2013, José Antonio Gómez Urrutia, a moderate leader from the social democratic, Radical Party, proposed a new constitution, fair high-quality health, education and pensions, labour and tax reform. Famously, or should it be infamously, the then president of the Socialist Party accused him of ‘smoking opium’. It seems as if the immense majority of Chileans have decided that they want to ‘smoke opium’ too.

Oscar Mendoza, a political prisoner in Chile between 1973 and 1975, is a retired social scientist and a specialist in international development and funding.
I dish nibbles and pour wine at events in University College London (UCL). I serve water at the start. I put chairs and tables in place and move them across venues. I pick up coffee cups from the floor. I test the AV system and adjust the volume of the microphones. Speakers arrive, for the most part women, and we speak about their trip and the timely nature of their work. When they are late, there is still time to exchange some nice words. They ask for my name and thank me for my work.

Some other speakers arrive, for the most part men, a little bit anxious. I ask them about their trip. They answer briefly avoiding interaction and looking for familiar faces around the room. I ask them to speak into the microphone because it is difficult for them to be heard at the back of the room. Some of them don’t do this because they believe, I think, the microphone should adapt to them and not them to the microphone. They get nervous; their eyes demand at me, as if yelling, that I repair the microphone. I believe it is them who are broken.

I wouldn’t, however, ask the same to others, for the most part women. Technology is surprisingly sexist; our microphones and loudspeakers pick up and project lower-pitched voices better. In fact, we can refer to microphones with a masculine name: ‘mike’. The space is also sexist because it does not project equally masculine and feminine voices. When ‘others’ speak, I try to push the system to its limits, but mikes have character. Some days they work, some days they don’t. They freeze in front of stressful situations. In certain circumstances, they project a high-pitched noise that increases exponentially second after second. Once they get to the climax, they switch off.

During Q&A sessions, I pick up the roving mike and bring it to the audience. If the microphone does not work, my colleagues shout louder.

For two years, I have been passing the mike to visible people that speak about invisible people. It is an absolute delight but I would love that the invisible could have more chances to speak with the visible. Pouring wine, picking up cups, passing the roving mike and calibrating the volume can cure arrogance. If only I could prescribe these cures to managers to heal themselves and their environment.

On 19 November 2019, IWGB workers undertook a 24-hour strike following a ballot which achieved 98% support. Another strike took place on 4 December. UCL’s feeble response only included a firm commitment to increase annual leave and a vague promise to look at some of the other demands - no plan to bring my colleagues in-house, and no intention to dialogue with IWGB and their workers.

My colleagues and my union are effectively left without a mike. They do not vote in elections but they are exploited; they are invisible but the result of their labour is crystal clear. December 12 was a setback so we need your help to make the invisible visible. You can support their cause through their hardship fund (https://www.gofundme.com/f/ucl-outsourced-workers-strike-fund) and visit https://iwgb-universityoflondon.org/.

Albert Brenchat Aguilar is the Events Curator and Communications Officer at the Institute of Advanced Studies in London. He is also working on PhD at Birkbeck College called ‘Planning Ecologies of Knowledge’.
Why our peace movement must be intersectional

The word, pacifism, was coined in Scotland in the early twentieth century. Tim Gee asks if it is time to broaden its scope.

In 2011, after a racial slur was used on a women’s rights march, writer Flavia Dzodan wrote a blog called, ‘My feminism will be intersectional or it will be bullshit’. The framing was picked up by others, adapting the title to environmentalism and to activism more broadly but it was far less talked about in the peace movement.

Peace campaigners have long pointed out the connections between struggles for peace and for equality in its various forms. Yet the very reason that so much has needed to be written on these themes is that the transition to becoming a fully equal, anti-sexist, anti-racist peace movement has very often been resisted. So, I want to argue that the stated aim of non-violent action should be the liberation from all kinds of oppression, which in the process will help end war, and for that matter climate change too.

The word, pacifism, was born in Scotland, at an early twentieth century peace conference in Glasgow, to describe the practice of actively creating the conditions for peace, as an alternative to ‘anti-war-ism’. Very quickly though - and in particular through the course of WWI - it became a word principally used to describe what a person was against.

The term, intersectional, was coined by the academic and civil rights advocate Kimberlé Crenshaw, in 1989 as a means for understanding how different forms of injustice and oppression compound one another. The ‘intersection’ is the crossroads where traffic representing racism, sexism, classism, ageism, disability, homophobia or transphobia converges, leading to the risk of harm being done to any person at the intersection.

For proponents of peace, the frame applies to the outbreak of armed conflict, where the effects of such injustices come together. I make no claim to know whether the capacity for violence is part of human nature or not. I do say with confidence, though, that structural violence is the product of systems made by humans, which can be remade by humans into something better.

The pathway to ideas that link masculinity to violence starts early. If you grew up male, the chances are that someone at some stage gave you a toy soldier or a gun to play. This often forms part of a sub-conscious strategy of preparing boys to fight. To some extent the strategy works: Most of the world’s soldiers are non-trans, straight, men. It’s also likely that it has side effects: The vast majority of terrorist attacks are by men. Most knife crime is by men. Most domestic abuse is perpetrated by men. Most of the politicians who send people to wars are men.

Masculinity to violence starts early. If you grew up male, the chances are that someone at some stage gave you a toy soldier or a gun to play. This often forms part of a sub-conscious strategy of preparing boys to fight. To some extent the strategy works: Most of the world’s soldiers are non-trans, straight, men. It’s also likely that it has side effects: The vast majority of terrorist attacks are by men. Most knife crime is by men. Most domestic abuse is perpetrated by men. Most of the politicians who send people to wars are men.

Racism is another violent mindset, often closely intertwined with xenophobia and religious intolerance. Again, it is not inherent or natural to anyone, but instead is learnt and, to some extent, taught. Among those doing the teaching are governments, seeking to persuade their populations that it’s okay to kill people born elsewhere. This has domestic effects too, including street violence and abuse against people perceived to share the nationality, ethnicity or religion of the places with which the government is at war. Thus, Islamophobia has grown in North America and Europe, fuelled by the so-called ‘War on Terror’ and far-right political forces.

We also need to talk about class, because the people who profit from resources won in war are usually the rich. Meanwhile, it is mainly workers recruited to fight and die in wars for those resources. If they survive, a great number later become homeless or experience PTSD. Ultimately, war harms everybody; soldiers, casualties, families, civilians, even those not yet born. If we look to those most affected by war, it is often women of colour, especially if they are already experiencing poverty. If people are disabled, LGBTQI+, old or very young, the ability to access support networks that would help them move out of warzones, become even more limited.

IN the face of such entrenched injustice, it can be hard to imagine what peace would look like. But if we picture a more equal world, free of racism, toxic masculinity and other discriminatory worldviews, then perhaps we could hold an image – maybe a feeling – of a peaceful world within reach.

Non-violent revolutionaries often say the means shape the ends. The hierarchy inherent in winning change through war tends to be reflected in post-transitional societies. Social approval for violence as a tool of political change very often then gives legitimacy to those who do not like the actions of the post-liberation governments to pursue their agendas through violence. This then leads to greater state repression in response.

Indeed, a 2011 study by Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan compared over 300 anti-regime, anti-occupation or independence campaigns over 100 years, concluding unarmed-people power campaigns are more than twice as likely to win in whole or in part compared to those using armed resistance.

But there’s a problem. While non-violent campaigns have helped transitions from dictatorships to democracy as well as speeding the end of extreme injustices in constitutional democracies, the method has rarely been followed by the election of governments willing to renounce violence abroad. Likewise, it’s often said that unarmed struggles like Indian independence and US civil rights movements did not have an appreciation of gender equality, and as a result the progress achieved was not accompanied by improvements in women’s rights.

If ostensibly non-violent movements fail to ‘join the dots’ between different...
forms of structural violence during their campaigns, then the chances are that the governments and policies that follow their revolutions will fail to do so too. There are lessons here for Scotland’s independence movement.

Most people would agree that peace is a laudable goal, and many would agree justice must be part of it. But many people and institutions who desire peace and justice do not call themselves pacifists. This partly results from terminology and believing peace is a condition. But peace is a process, of working for justice through nonviolent means. By definition, this involves working with people who are working against inequality, whether or not they see themselves as peace campaigners.

The pacifist holds that killing is wrong, as are the systems of systemic injustice. What then if a group to whom extreme injustice has been done, decides to take up arms in the cause of liberation or to defend themselves against an immediate threat? To criticise those caught up in such a situation is rarely a route to understanding. To do so without first recognising the violence of the structures they are fighting could rightly be called hypocritical. From a position of working against the same injustice faced by the oppressed group though, we may well say that we don’t think that violence is right or effective and that it always runs the risk of entrenching the same dynamics from which the group is seeking to liberate itself.

This is an old discussion and, in practice, pacifists over the years have worked in the same spaces as those who have chosen other routes. In the Spanish Civil War (among many other conflicts), pacifists assisted those displaced by the conflict by setting up refugee camps and support. In WWII, many pacifists worked with the Friends Ambulance Unit, despatched amongst other missions to travel with the Free French. In the USA in the 1960s, when parts of the civil rights movement carried guns, Quakers in Baltimore and Philadelphia found ways to work with Black Panthers to run services for the community. In South Africa’s anti-apartheid struggle, non-violent activists continued the non-violent campaign, even after the ANC and South African Communist Party began training for armed struggle.

Today, pacifists create safe spaces for conversation between different sides in conflicts and act as mediators during wars. Their pacifism means each side knows no violence will be done by those they were speaking with. Pacifists have called for halting weapons sales to regimes that would use them in human rights abuses.

Is this just a cop-out? Aside from the duty to follow conscience, there are few hard and fast rules that apply to all situations. There are, however, some. War crimes, torture and capital punishment need to always and universally, publicly and confidently be named as unacceptable anywhere.

Pacifists are often asked if we believe in defence. The answer is yes but not necessarily in the way the questioner thinks. In any major war in the world, you’ll find that combinations of toxic masculinity, racism, classism and other forms of inequality helped pave the way for conflict. Tackling such injustices is the best route to global security.

Instead, money is poured into weapons like Trident. These weapons don’t protect us from major threats like climate crisis. Warnings have gone unheeded so violence is now being perpetrated through extreme weather. Nevertheless, governments spend 12 times as much on war as they do on climate change.

The goal of the pacifist is to take away the occasion of all wars. But would this approach have stopped Hitler? With an intersectional approach, the answer is yes. We now know Nazism grew in Germany thanks to racism, nationalism and fear among the elite of wealth being redistributed so they sided with the far-right. Rather than take these as lessons of history though, elites have used the memory of WWII to justify continued imperialist violence.

Spurious comparisons to Hitler were used to inform the decisions to assassinate the Congo’s first democratic Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba, to imprison Ghana’s independence leader, Kwame Nkrumah, and to put hundreds of thousands of people in detention camps in Kenya, in which tens of thousands died, in response to anti-colonial unrest. Similar rhetoric was used to justify the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, Iraq in 2003, Libya in 2011 and Syria in 2015. Each of these led to countless people being killed and led to further conflict.

Supporters of war will often search for the ‘exception to the rule’ against violence, before working from there to defend the use of armed force more broadly. But the focus of this argument is different. It’s about identifying the causes of war and violence and finding ways to transform them.

Sometimes that mean clogging up the roads leading to weapons bases by sitting in the road. But it also means trying to disrupt the traffic of toxic masculinity, racism, classism, disability, homophobia, transphobia, ageism and other inequalities. If we fail to adopt an intersectional approach, and our movement ends up entrenching inequality, we would be well deserving of a great deal of the criticism we get. If we truly do tackle inequality as well as war though, then we will be forging the pathways that lead to peace.

Tim Gee is the author of ‘Why I am a Pacifist’ (John Hunt, 2019). This article is based on his talk at the Edinburgh Radical Book Fair on the book.
Surveying the unspoken concepts underpinning higher education

Reflecting on his experience of applying to university, Patrick Phillips gives a critical appraisal

Last summer I applied to ‘attend’ university. ‘What are you attending to, or, for?’ was a question that made me wonder. When we say we are ‘going to university,’ how have we imagined, or rather perceived, what our final destination will look like when it’s all over? Have we as a society become too obsessed in the possessions of degrees, rather than seeing the reality of the modern illusion of having one? Is it not time to reconsider university education as only offering one way of learning and merely as part of a longer, linear experience in the context of a lived life?

This was not my first time in applying, actually it was my fourth. Each time from a different location, Sheffield, Scarborough, Edinburgh and now my latest, Inverness. I was made a ‘Conditional Offer.’ But prior to this offer, having spoken on the phone with the academic leader about the admission process as a mature student, he said ‘if the evidence you submit is not strong enough, I’ll get you to write an essay’. At this point of the call, I was happy, pleased with myself, knowing I had plentiful ‘essays’, which I could submit as part of my UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) application.

I had my recent polemic book, which I had completed over a year ago, articles published online, a manifesto and future projects which I plan to go deeper into the experience of human life. I felt in many ways that nothing could stop me now, seeing my chosen degree as part of my overall life’s destiny.

And, then it all came crumbling down - in my own sense of disillusionment - when once again I began to think through the terms of the ‘conditional offer’. Let’s think about the words used here: a condition has now been set, which in reality is holding back the progress of my own life, a man-made condition (pre-set) to the significance of my being in the world.

It was an out of date offer - it should have been for 2020. Information contained therein was incorrect; for example, could I complete an access course during the summer to start my chosen degree for September 2019 (not possible), and mentioning nothing about the telephone conversation I had with the academic leader, who at the time was on holiday (why are programme leaders receiving student applications if they are still on holiday?). I was deeply disappointed and naturally angry.

What had gone wrong and why had this happened? For myself, it seems to me, upon reflection, that the whole farce and lack of effective communication has to do with a form of modern indulgence. Let’s face it, to be a lecturer today has really become a way of escaping from the reality of capitalism, a kind of academic holiday. Life is a breeze. There is nothing really to worry about. There are no real challenges (apart from the challenge itself of being in an institutionalised environment), and I say this because the academic, or lecturer will neither challenge nor disobey their institution. Why? It would be a threat to their already secure existence, which is the status-quo in reality. What we are effectively witnessing here is an unspoken form of neo-ontology.

It seems to me lecturers are full of resentment, often with themselves for wanting to break free from the constraints of the academic bubble they inhabit, namely, an educational system that promises everything to the student but, in reality, delivers very little. Lecturer or academic - they know they are part of the illusion. They envy everyone from outside, and yet they are envied, because they have financial security, a high salary, a decent pension and a life-long future of learning and intellectual promise with a moderate likelihood of interruption.

For the proletariat, a life of but only moderate interruption is still only a dream. Distance between lecturer and proletariat nowadays is a bitter divide, with the wall only getting higher. A good example is how universities today publish thousands of books each year, on every subject and aspect of life, and yet the proletariat rarely read them (usually because they can’t afford them). Society instead still continues to struggle on, with no real improvement along the way. There is a deep disconnection here, between knowledge and experience, where no definitive link has been made.

Therefore, we must decide, which knowledge or experience in the modern world today have we placed the most value upon. And yet both, lecturer and proletariat, still don’t
realise how more than ever they need each other if we are to truly transcend the mess of today’s economic tyranny and inequality.

Lecturers live today like the social worker in a kind of surreal reality. They have to live everyday with the contradictions of our present system, not here or there, but face-to-face in ‘disquiet’ with them. I have separated the lecturer from the proletariat class because their struggles are different, even though both desire freedom from today’s ruling-elite. Lectures and academics are aware of the struggle outside but it is a situation which they still choose to do nothing about, and often ignore.

‘You don’t meet the usual entry requirements’ - what an unjust sentence that has become, being unethical and pushing away the uneducated and the minimum wage class which many have been forced to become. This sentence came to me when I considered asking for a second opinion from a different academic leader and of a different degree choice, with an email then stating that their ‘decision was final’ when I requested, under the Freedom of Information Act, information about how they had actually made the decision.

Why have we allowed education to become a commodity? How absurd it has become to live in a society where the natural desire to better yourself (not just from an economic perspective) has been reduced to a UCAS application. And, let us not forget the personal statement, life experience and personal touch. More excuses - at least that’s how I still see it.

From the response I received to my complaint, in the end, all I was offered was a demoralising and patronising re-worded (and now updated) ‘conditional offer’. I wondered what an ‘unconditional offer’ would feel like? Where I could complete, for over £200, a ‘Thinking and Writing for Study Work and Life’ course? I could not believe it. It was a slap in the face. I mean what I have been doing for the last 34 years on this planet. Does my experience mean nothing? Has all my thinking and writing up until now been invalid? Also, once I’d completed this course, I’d then have to wait until September 2020 (having applied again through UCAS) and then borrow £6,500pa for four years. All this work and effort just so we can spend a bit of time outside of today’s economy. In so many ways, universities are proof that education is a commodity.

I’m not against the idea of a university but I still think that the way they are run is to an unethical standard. Universities today, instead of expanding the imagination of students, are shrinking them through neo-liberal corporatisation. For me, the future university will be a place where people can come and go freely – with no more barriers, no more admissions, and no more ‘entry requirements. They will be a place where everyone can have access to learning for free in order to help improve lives, and crucially, society too.

This is why, in Scotland, I’m still in shock as to why this hasn’t really already happened, Education is already a devolved power and, therefore, there are no excuses as to why not to implement such a reality. As the Scottish Government has for a long time now prevented tuition fees from being paid for home students with the effect that universities in Scotland are substantially funded publicly, universities should run akin to the needs of the people. If we want an economy no longer based on the measurement of GDP but on the well-being of a human life, then ending the barriers to learning, needs to happen now.

Patrick Phillips is an artist, thinker, writer and dreamer (https://patickphillips.blog/). His photo memoir, The Lawyer’s Dream, about a lawyer who started his own circus, was published in 2019.

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General election 2019 analysis

We would welcome any responses to the analysis contained in this issue – what’s right, what’s wrong, what’s missing etcetera – as we intend to continue our coverage of the implications. Please send any comments, articles or suggestions to the editor, Gregor Gall (gregorgall@outlook.com), for the March/April issue by Friday 21 February at the latest.
‘The Only Game in Town’ part 2 – the response as cover-up

Campbell Martin gives an update on his expose on the PPP scandal in North Ayrshire

When ‘new’ Labour swept to power in 1997, the party embraced the Tories’ Private Finance Initiative (PFI) method of funding public sector capital projects. However, having ridiculed the funding method while in opposition, ‘new’ Labour, once in government, rebranded PFI as Public Private Partnerships (PPP) and massively expanded their use.

Under the Blair/Brown governments, any local authority or health board that wanted to build new schools or hospitals was told there was only one way to fund their projects. Public Private Partnerships became the ‘only game in town’.

In 2018, MacAulay Gibson Productions released the documentary ‘The Only Game in Town’, which revealed what actually happened when North Ayrshire Council embarked on a project to build and maintain four new schools, funded by a PPP. The film showed North Ayrshire Council only ever had one credible and viable bid for its £380m contract, but maintained – and still maintains – that another bid had provided genuine competition. In ‘The Only Game in Town’, viewers see that the second bid received by the council had come from a then newly-formed company with no office, no accounts, no experience in building or maintaining schools, and which had lied in its bid submission.

The company behind the second bid, Comprehensive Estate Services Limited (CES), claimed to be a subsidiary of a major Singapore-based construction firm, but this was proved to be an outright lie. CES also listed four referees, whom the company claimed would vouch for its credibility. ‘The Only Game in Town’ showed none of the referees had given permission for their names to be used.

Given these irregularities – amongst others in the North Ayrshire PPP procurement process – Strathclyde Police was asked to carry out an investigation. However, ‘The Only Game in Town’ revealed this ‘investigation’ had lasted just two weeks, before being handed to the Crown Office Procurator Fiscal Service with a report stating the police could find no evidence of criminality. The case was dropped.

Now, in a follow-up film called ‘The Only Game in Town 2 – The Cover-Up’, MacAulay Gibson Productions set out the ongoing establishment cover-up around the North Ayrshire Council schools PPP scandal. The new documentary shows, I believe, the lengths to which those in positions of power in Scotland are prepared to go to prevent a thorough investigation into what happened when North Ayrshire Council decided to build four new schools, and why the establishment does not want such an investigation.

Shockingly, ‘The Only Game in Town 2 – The Cover-Up’ reveals North Ayrshire Council actually knew very little about its own multi-million-pound PPP contract. It was not the local authority that ran the project; the Council simply did as it was instructed. Councillors were told they could not see the final business case of the deal they agreed until after the contract was signed.

License to profit and plunder

The new film also provides evidence of senior civil servants in the then Labour-Lib Dem Scottish Executive colluding to ensure North Ayrshire Council was told as little as possible about issues affecting the local authority’s PPP project.

In addition, ‘The Only Game in Town 2 – The Cover-Up’ shows Police Scotland attempting to keep secret a number of documents the force holds in relation to the extent of the Strathclyde Police ‘investigation’ into the North Ayrshire PPP procurement process. Possibly because no such ‘investigation’ ever took place.

The Private Finance Initiative, as respected investigative journalist, John Pilger, recently revealed in his film, ‘Dirty War on the NHS’, has been a major element of plans by successive Westminster governments to privatise public assets. Started under the Tory government of John Major, PFI allowed private companies to build and maintain public buildings, such as hospitals and schools, while accruing massive profits in the process.

However, it was under the ‘new’ Labour governments of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown that PFI, rebranded as PPP, became ‘the only game in town’. Partnerships UK was an organisation tasked with promoting PPP to public sector bodies. Initially, Partnerships UK was staffed by civil servants seconded from the Treasury, then under the stewardship of Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown. Eventually, Partnerships UK itself became a Public Private Partnership, bringing into its staff representatives of private companies who were also involved in delivering PPP contracts across the Britain.

In Scotland, the then Scottish Executive established a body of civil servants called the Financial Partnerships Unit, the official remit of which was to ensure the public purse received value for money from Scottish PPP contracts. However, in fact, the Financial Partnerships Unit was the body that promoted PPP to local authority’s and health boards. It was also the Financial Partnerships Unit that instructed public bodies in how to run procurement processes and how to do deals.

Although ‘The Only Game in Town 2 – The Cover-Up’ focuses on the North Ayrshire Council Schools PPP Project, the film reveals that the establishment’s reluctance to investigate what happened is not actually about four schools in North Ayrshire. The North Ayrshire project is the tip of a multi-billion-pound iceberg that those in power want to keep hidden from view.

Campbell Martin is a journalist and former SNP MSP. The original Scottish Left Review article on ‘The Only Game in Town’ documentary was published in the January/February 2018 (103) issue – see http://www.scottishleftreview.scot/license-to-profit-and-plunder/ . ‘The Only Game in Town 2 – The Cover-Up’ can be viewed on YouTube at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=19kng8RjBkg
The Big Meeting (2019),
Director: Daniel Draper, editor: Christie Allanson
Reviewed by Jackie Bergson

The Big Meeting is a documentary by film company, Shut Out The Light, which follows from the success of its Nature Of The Beast (2017) about now former Labour MP, Dennis Skinner. Its latest feature-length chronicle of the 134th Durham Miners’ Gala focuses as much upon the ingrained character of this annual event as upon the people involved in both organising and attending it.

The film opens with panoramic views over local fields, soulfully sound-tracked by a full-length record of Paul Robeson singing Deep River. The resonant singing voice of this now-deceased left-wing political activist, actor, singer and high-profile friend of British mining communities signifies film director, Dan Draper’s, deliberate inclusion of internationally, culturally relevant aspects of Labour and socialism which scope back across history.

A cornucopia of ground-level sound follows, to join us with people taking part in the current gathering of country-wide galas in Durham. Here, Draper grants first spoken voice to 19-year-old Charlotte Austin, who tells of her family’s mining legacy and of her involvement in Jeremy Corbyn’s Labour Party. Undoubtedly contributing to the film’s political tone as much as its vitality, a multitude of articulate voices, both ordinary and extraordinary, thus abounds: from people taking part in the 2018 gala event; to voice-overs from such as broadcaster and activist, Paul Mason; to a nerve-tingling recording of actor Richard Burton’s description of miners being ‘aristocrats of the working class ... kings of the underworld’.

Bitterness about Margaret Thatcher’s heartless decimation of the mining industry in the 1980s is given due airtime without taking over the film’s more positive outlooks. Henceforth, banners, books, bands, businesses and artworks populate the film’s attention to the richness and diversity of Durham’s cultural and industrial talent. Mediating throughout its diverse strata of spoken words and political imagery: features include an overview of locally curated mining industry paintings by such as Tom McGuiness, Norman Cornish and Ted Holloway and an interview with filmmaker, John Irvin. Women’s roles in business, in the labour movement and in the gala’s traditions are given voice. Mention of such as climate change and feminism bestow almost effortless ripples, contrasting with gravitas marking pioneers like Hardie, Bevan and Benn.

Split-screen techniques occasionally energise prosaic footage of the gala, in a way which Draper felt echoed the filming of 1960s music festival, Woodstock. The result may be to add a touch more rock-and-roll flavour which parallels the appearance of political glitterati, Jeremy Corbyn and Dennis Skinner, enjoying brass band parades from a municipal balcony. Such glimpses behind the scenes are reasonably low-key, even in sight of VIP attendees such as film director, Ken Loach.

Unquestionably, The Big Meeting has an extraordinary amount to show-and-tell. From touching upon the origins of political reform through the Victorian capitalist Methodists, which allowed the formation of trade unions; to reminding us that this movement helped create a workforce which became globally regarded as the best and most powerful in the world. Through the lens of this modern, knowledgeable film, we thus observe the sun shining upon the ‘political theatre’ of the galas’ musical heritage. Brass band members and followers of all ages happily talk un-self-consciously, on and off camera; a live, Scottish bagpipe elegy ultimately resounds within Durham Cathedral, profoundly moving all who hear it.

Post-screening, Draper is clearly
passionate about the significance of his own politics: ‘galvanising... [and] tapping into 60% of [people in Britain who represent the] working classes’ being his stated ideal. His inclusion of film participants’ vocalisations about working miners’ families having ‘hate-love’ relationships with the mining industry proffers shade over bright idealism. Vintage film footage of mining conditions involved reaffirms reasons for such dichotomous feelings and the polarisation of thoughts about the industry being a lifeline, while it also took lives.

The Big Meeting could never be viewed as a politically impartial film. Its sentiments clearly stand with Labour. Nevertheless, those who stand closely enough will value the film’s clued-up take on the Labour movement, within the focused context of Durham Miners’ Gala.

In creating a documentary which meaningfully augments imagery around and beyond the 2018 event itself, Draper clearly aims to enlighten his audiences about the wealth of political and social understanding which he and his crew broadcasts. The oxygen which his film deigns to breathe into their observations of the annual event habitat weaves and illuminates between and beyond its spontaneous viewpoints. The result is a small masterpiece - definitely worth seeing.

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.

Scotland the Brave? Twenty Years of Change and the Future of the Nation, 2019,
Gerry Hassan and Simon Barrow (eds.) Luath Press £14.99
Reviewed by Gordon Morgan

This is a hugely ambitious book to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Scottish Parliament. It consists of forty chapters each written by a diverse set of people whose biographies alone take up ten pages. The chapters are grouped into six separate sections plus an introduction and each chapter is restricted to between five and ten pages including references and the book overall is 340 pages long. This means the book is more a dip into rather than a continuous read.

However, the editors with assistance from 22 advisors have marshalled the contributions to some cohesion.

The introductory chapter by Neil Ascherson states ‘I have a nightmare’ after Brexit Britain ‘will become a place the young want to leave.’ He compares the SNP to the pre-1918 Irish Home Rule Party in whom ‘the fires had died down on the national question’ and notes ‘impatience always breaks through’ and states we must act ‘As if’ Scotland is already independent.

Many of the following chapters suffer from a lack of space. The three ‘economy’ chapters all highlight the need to break from the ‘casino capitalism’ but lack the space to explain solutions. The social justice section’s eight chapters covers public health, the NHS, education, housing, and the criminal justice system. Gerry McCartney notes the positive effects of the smoking and alcohol price restrictions whilst noting that that poverty which is the main cause of health mortality relies in reserved powers. Douglas Robertson notes that whilst slum housing has been removed, disrepair in private housing persists and ‘rentier capitalism’ has returned. Fergus McNeil notes that the first report of the parliament was on reform of the justice system and, however, despite progress there much is to be done.

The public realm section consists of nine chapters covering participation, gender, race, democracy and environment amongst other topics. Two of these involving dialogues between experts in ‘participation’ and separately humanity and public service are distinctive. Mike Small imagines a post-oil Scotland and points out the major environmental and economic issues the Scottish Government needs to address.

Cultures of imagination deals with the press, broadcasting, arts, literature, music, architecture and design, football and separately religion! The authors include Douglas Fraser, Ruth Wishart, Richard Holloway and many others each of whom is well worth reading. Meanwhile, place and geographics starts with Andy Wightman on land reform and follows with Malcolm Maclean on Gaelic followed by five chapters on individual cities or communities. George Kerevan suggests Edinburgh could ‘become a global laboratory for post capitalist living’. John Bone says ‘viewed with a wider lens, Aberdeen’s oil boom comes to appear as a period of hiatus in a story of long-term historical decline’.

In the wider world, William Walker looks at how events have progressed since ‘Scotland’s Future’ was produced in 2014. Trident would ‘again be vexing’ and the entirety of Scotland’s defence issues remain ‘to be negotiated’ post-independence. In the final chapter, Fintan O’Toole looks at England, Brexit and Scottish independence within a historical literary context quoting John Stewart Mill, George Orwell, W.B. Yeats amongst others. He states that as an outsider, what interests him about Scottish independence ‘is not that Scotland might become a new state, but that it might become a new kind of state.’ This is very much the theme of the book so it is well worth dipping into and buying.

Gordon Morgan sits on the editorial committee of Scottish Left Review

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Scottish Left Review Issue 115 January/February 2020
Maggie Chapman reviewed James McEnaney's A Scottish Journey in Scottish Left Review (Sept/Oct 2019. My eye was drawn to her review as it brought to mind a book of the same name, one briefly referenced but rightly praised by Chapman herself. This other book is Edwin Muir's Scottish Journey from 1935. Muir's book, not 'the' Scottish journey but 'a' Scottish journey, is deserving of all those who visit and revisit its pages. It remains an important work, reminding us that national unity is never a given, not least in Scotland's quest for home rule.

Muir understood better than most that no single Scottish experience exists. Different pockets of the country can seem as removed from one another as entirely different worlds might. Muir, torn as a young boy from his pastoral, Edenic Orkney and unainted into the Glasgow slums, likened this shift to travelling forward in time by a hundred years, or witnessing the fall of mankind before one's very eyes. Such was the enormous difference between these two places. Industrial life brought to Muir and his family the gravest misfortunes one might predict to befall those living amongst such miserable decay and deprivation. These same circumstances led Muir to socialism, an awakening he readily compared to his religious conversion aged fourteen.

It is Muir the socialist and poet whose observations we read as he navigates Scotland in a borrowed motorcar, one that dances 'like a high-spirited colt' when pushed anywhere beyond thirty-five miles-per-hour. Muir convinces us from the outset that he is not looking, as a tourist might, for a Scotland historical or romantic, but rather the Scotland which presents itself 'to one who is not looking for anything in particular, and is willing to believe what his eyes and ears tell him'.

What then, does Muir see? He sees much about Scotland that he admires, dislikes, and much that can only be of hindrance to anything like progress. He understands and effectively articulates the various contradictions and hypocrisies often found strung together in the identity of a place.

In Edinburgh, this is poignantly characterised by the ugly divide between rich and poor, and the obsessive keeping-up of appearances, despite glaring sanctimony, by the middle-classes. In the Borders, he visits Abbotsford House in Galashiels, once the home of Sir Walter Scott. Scott, along with Burns, whose house is also visited, was a literary figure seen as the embodiment of the kitsch, sentimental 'Scottishness' to which Muir and his generation of Scottish writer were so vehemently opposed. For those baptised as the Scottish Renaissance, Scott and Burns represented the idealised Scotland of the tourist; unblemished, quaint, bonnie, and not the Scotland experienced by the majority of its inhabitants. This rather fictitious Scotland contains little remedy for the large-scale unemployment that Muir sees in Glasgow, a city that once housed such misery for him. Nor does the fine imagery of mist-wrapped hills and mirror-like lochs have anything to say about that stage of industrialism, also seen in Glasgow, that stays jammed at human exploitation on its path towards affordable luxury. In the Highlands, a region that really does accommodate the majestic, natural beauty that many mistake for the whole picture, Muir is no less sympathetic towards the ordinary people living there. They are as much thwarted by a crass romanticism belying genuine struggle as the rest of Scotland is.

At his time of visiting, Muir believed the Scottish Highlands to be in a third stage of its decline, something that had begun with the punishment afflicted upon the Highlanders following Culloden. The second phase of decline would, of course, be the Clearances; the forced eviction of thousands and the installation of landlordism where the clan system had previously existed. The third stage, Muir argues, is symbolised by 'the pictures of slaughtered animals that disfigure the walls of Highland hotels.' This is the Highlands as a sporting playground, for its wealthy estate owners, many with little connection to Scotland other than the land they have inherited, and for those who come from elsewhere to enjoy this version of wild Scotland. The majority of locals, growing smaller in number, serve one of two purposes; to cook and clean for these visitors, or to slaughter animals for them; their own form of non-Industrial subjugation.

Was the independence effort of the time, the National Party of Scotland, the answer to any of the problems discussed? From Muir, a resounding no. This movement was to the poet an absurd coalition of political beliefs gathered optimistically beneath the banner of self-government. In Muir's own words, 'The National Party has nothing behind it but a desire and nothing before it but an ideal.' Scottish independence, for Muir, would have to mean socialism - one could not be achieved without the other.

Some things have changed, no doubt, since 1935. Nevertheless, Muir teaches us the importance of going and finding out for ourselves, of taking the responsibility as Scots to understand Scotland and all her people. Also, the poet's remarks about benign, optimistic nationalism not being enough remain entirely pertinent. Belief in Scottish independence must always extend to something other than simple agreement with the basic argument of the party line. For Muir, this means socialism, for others perhaps not.

Regardless, those in favour of independence must understand what home-rule would, and should, mean for all of Scotland. It would be naïve to assume that we are inextricably united, rather than culturally diverse. Instead, we must take the issues affecting each of Scotland's communities to heart. This requires a concerted effort to fight the kind of ignorance often attributed towards those from whom we are trying to break.

Rory Green is a 22-year old youth worker from the Highlands who has recently graduated in Scottish Culture and Heritage from the University of the Highlands and Islands.
Slavoj Žižek Sex and the Failed Absolute,
Bloomsbury, 2019, £20.00
Reviewed by Sean Sheehan

Žižek’s first English-language book, The Sublime Object of Ideology, appeared in 1989 and was an immediate sensation, comparable to watching Pulp Fiction when it came to cinemas in 1994, or seeing one of Alexander McQueen’s runway shows a decade later. There was a realisation that the book – nay, the very first chapter ‘How Did Marx Invent the Symptom’ – was intellectually electrifying. It distinguished its author and proved to be the launch pad for his rocketing journey to international fame.

Fast forward to 2019 and Žižek’s latest book, Sex and the Failed Absolute, induces an instant shot of déjà vu. Hostile critics might say this is because a lot of what he says here can be found scattered across his previous publications. But this would be unfair because he has accomplished a remarkable and pure distillation of ideas that, yes, he has been repeating but also refining and honing over three decades. The result is a penetrating new study that redefines a term that most would fail to recognise the antagonisms that undercut notions of an individual possessing an inner identity prior to social mediation.

The transcendental, on the other hand, is the frame that defines the coordinates of our everyday reality. Kant inaugurated the realisation that what we take as reality is shaped by categories in the mind of the subject (cause and effect, for example, and substance). He deemed the core reality of objects that lies behind their appearance – the ‘thing-in-itself’ – to be impenetrable and ultimately unknowable.

Žižek looks to Hegel and Lacan for the radical steps that locate the split between subject and object within the subject itself. And his second theorem pinpoints sex as the space where the human animal confronts the ontological incompleteness that renders everything as torn. Human sexuality is characterized by a meta-physical force that spiritualises sexual enjoyment as a goal-in-itself. It is observed how the Catholic church, fearing this claim to a higher dimension in our lives, ironically seeks to keep us at the level of raw animality by insisting on tying sex with procreation.

Sexuality bears the subject’s indelible failure to fill the incompleteness at the heart of being. Difference between two sexes, far from marking male and female as positive entities, is the pure difference, the inconsistency, that cuts into any sexual identity. A part of Žižek’s reservations about #MeToo is its inability to recognise the antagonisms that undercut notions of an individual possessing an inner identity prior to social mediation.

The third theorem transposes the earlier two into unorientable surfaces – the Möbius strip and the Klein bottle – as ways of understanding and visualising the puzzles and paradoxes of quantum physics. The explication of the kind of materialism at work in the universe is fiendishly intricate at times and requires close reading. It bears testimony to the power of the Lacanian death drive, the self-reproducing loop of desire that endlessly embodies its lack by aiming for something that it knows cannot be reached. Žižek’s death drive is the pursuit of what he calls ‘less than nothing’ and the intelligence and energy that fuels his drive gives life to his dauntless endeavour.

in the late nineteenth century as a movement. Given the hostility in many European countries which some Christians displayed towards the minority Jewish communities, it is not surprising that the idea of a Jewish homeland would appeal to many of those discriminated against. Two points must be made, however. The potential homeland was not always seen as Palestine. Theodor Herzl, who organized the first Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897, saw Palestine as the ideal setting but considered Uganda and Argentina as possibilities. Many Jews were strongly opposed to Zionism.

Thompson treats the Balfour Declaration as the key event leading to the setting up the state of Israel. On behalf of Lloyd George's (British) government, the Foreign Secretary, Arthur Balfour issued a statement saying it would facilitate the establishment of a 'national home for the Jewish people' in Palestine. The British Empire was at war. The Declaration assumed a future victory and the consequent breaking up of the Ottoman Empire. This transpired. Palestine came under the control of the British, rather than the Ottoman, Empire. This was later approved by a League of Nations mandate.

The wishes of the existing population of Palestine were not given high priority. The Balfour Declaration had referred to the need not to prejudice their civil and religious rights, but how could this be achieved if another population was to be introduced to their territory against their will? Essentially this was power politics at work. British government promotion of a Jewish homeland was based on perceptions of its own imperial interests, coloured by prejudices. It did not view favourably the large-scale migration of European Jews to Britain. To Lloyd George, Jews were the people of the Holy Bible he had studied from childhood. Zionism's main proponent was Chaim Weizmann, a cultured British academic. By contrast, Palestinians seemed to Britons at the time to be relatively backward people, who might benefit from the entrepreneurial skills of Jewish incomers.

Eventually, after the Second World War, Britain had to admit defeat in its attempts to satisfy both Jews and Arabs and withdrew. The Jewish colonists, for that is what they were, were better organized than the native Palestinians and, thus, established the state of Israel we have today.

Thompson’s book is essentially a work of history but, of course, he argues that looking at that history has implications for current politics. He says that this is a ‘uniquely difficult’ colonial problem left over from an ‘earlier age’. Only the ‘central players’, Jews and Arabs, can bring about a resolution. However, Thompson suggests that if any external agency can play a part, it is Britain. It should shed ‘stale partisanship’ and seek justice and peace.

Thompson does not explore what might be involved in Britain following such a course. One current problem is that supporters of Israel loudly proclaim any criticism of its policies as anti-Semitic. This is despite the fact that there are Jewish critics of these policies. At present, ‘anti-Semitism’ is employed so widely that socialists in the Labour Party are severely constrained because the National Executive seems unwilling to distinguish between criticism of ‘Israel’ and hostility to ‘Jews’.

The pressure that many British Jews are putting on socialists derives from their quasi-religious conception of the State of Israel. However, Israel is not God-given. It has arisen from a number of actual historical contingencies. These contingencies are clearly outlined in Thompson’s book. Therein lies the book’s political significance. Socialists generally can find in it justification for arguing that Israel is essentially a colonial power and, as such, exploits the colonised. As someone who studies the social psychology of beliefs, I am aware that irrational beliefs are difficult to break down. Conceptions of Israel which seem to be common amongst Jewish communities are essentially mythical. People often stick to emotionally satisfying but irrational ideas. As a socialist, I hope that this book may contribute to the global struggle against all forms of racism by giving strength to those who are seeking realistic and fair solutions to the political problems in Israeli and Palestinian relations.

Sandy Hobbs is a founder memory of the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research. His archives are available at Glasgow Caledonian University.
Reviewed by Colin Fox

Whilst reading this international bestseller by Harvard academic, Shoshana Zuboff, I also happened to watch the Netflix documentary, The Great Hack, about the 2018 Cambridge Analytica scandal. Both the paperback and the film exposed a practice that claims human experience to be a free raw material for commerce. Google invented this ‘surveillance capitalism’ on a scale that is both astonishing and disturbing, conducting more than 1.2tn internet searches annually and manipulating freely all the information it finds. The market value of Google now exceeds $600bn with 2bn customers using its services every month. Advertising accounts for virtually every dollar Google and Facebook earn.

Both corporations, declares Zuboff, are ‘like an invasive species of predators who drive its business at speeds neither public institutions nor individuals could possibly follow’. These ‘predators’ know everything about our lives yet ‘their operations are designed to be unknowable to us’ she adds. ‘They revel in a world in which technology users are no longer customers but raw material in an entirely new industrial system’.

In The Great Hack, New York University professor, David Carroll, tries to find out what information Facebook holds about him and his students. Although ultimately unsuccessful, his quest nevertheless shows how Facebook and Cambridge Analytica pilfered data from millions of people during the 2016 US election and Brexit referendum.

Networking was supposed to offer solutions to millions of problems in the form of social connection, access to information, time saving convenience and support. But, said Carroll, ‘so how did the dream of the connected world tear us apart?’

The misuse of information, data sets and patterns of behavior has been part of the answer and on an unprecedented scale. ‘Project Alamo’, the code name Cambridge Analytica gave to their goal of winning the 2016 election campaign for Donald Trump, targeted 5.9m people unknown to them via individual Facebook ads in bell-weather states among those they deemed ‘the persuadables’. Such was the slender margin of victory for Trump in the end that this pivotal act could well have made the difference between his winning the White House and losing.

This data was taken from millions of people without their knowledge. And like David Carroll’s all requests to know what was taken were refused. After a prolonged enquiry, The House of Commons Culture Select Committee Report on Cambridge Analytica in 2018 concluded that British election laws are no longer fit for purpose because social media privacy has been so compromised. Guardian investigative journalist, Carole Cadwalladr, went even further concluding that since Facebook refuses to let people have access to their own data ‘It is impossible to have free and fair elections’.

‘Those companies who once claimed to embody the promise of information capitalism as a liberating and democratic social force’ concluded Zuboff, now believe regulations to be burdensome and safeguards restrictive. Surveillance capitalism clearly intends, therefore, to keep democracy at bay.

Zuboff asks three questions about the functioning of the world’s digital media platforms: ‘Who knows what data they have?’ ‘Who decides what they keep?’ and ‘Who decides who decides?’ To the first: The machine, the elite executives at the top of Google, Facebook, Microsoft, Amazon and Apple. To the second: The ‘narrow business model’ determines the parameters. To the third: ‘Financial capital bound by the disciplines of shareholder value maximization.’

Social conditioning is now the ultimate prize for these technological ‘Masters of the Universe’. Their position papers were written by the infamous Harvard behaviourist and author of Walden Two, B.F. Skinner. ‘The real problem is not whether machines think but whether men do’ Skinner insisted in his 1960s heyday. The founders of Google, Facebook and Microsoft today see surveillance capitalism through his same logic of accumulation. They see machines becoming more and more invincible. Whereas the tyranny of Mussolini, Hitler and Stalin operated through the means of violence, according to Zuboff, 21st century ‘instrumentation’, surveillance capitalism and totalitarian power prioritises behavioral conditioning.

On reflection, it’s perhaps little surprise surveillance capitalism developed in the twenty first century amid such ruthless neo-liberalism. ‘It arrived on the scene with democracy already on the ropes’ concludes Zuboff. With its enormous wealth and political influence in mind she is reminded of Thomas Paine’s wisdom when he advocated increasing the capabilities of common people as against aristocratic privilege ‘because a body of men holding themselves accountable to nobody ought not to be trusted by anybody’.

Surveillance capitalism is, argues Zuboff, a tyranny that thinks itself invincible and she is reminded of an earlier era of danger. Writing in 1940 the US former Trotskyist and author of The Managerial Revolution, James Burnham, forecast the victory of German political leaders via ‘A new managerial class composed of executives, technicians, bureaucrats and soldiers who would concentrate all power and privilege in their own hands: an aristocracy of talent and privilege built on a semi-slave society’. George Orwell was scathing of Burnham’s ‘cowardly’ pronouncements and accused the right-winger of ‘bowing down before fascism’. Hannah Arendt, equally dismissive, declared his forecasts as a perversion of egalitarianism that sought to treat all others as insignificant. ‘Surveillance capitalism is a profoundly anti-democratic social force ... an anti-egalitarian juggernaut’ concludes Zuboff who is determined to insist humankind does not succumb to the claimed inevitability of surveillance capitalism’s ‘illegitimate power’.

Colin Fox is National Co-spokesperson of the Scottish Socialist Party
As the bells rang in the New Year and 2019 drew to a close, many on the left were still in a state of shock that a philandering sociopath who had lied to the country, lied to MPs, lied to the Queen, attempted to shut down Parliament and dodged multiple medias interviews had still managed to win an 80-seat majority at the General Election, on a manifesto which essentially amounted to three words ‘Get Brexit Done’.

Britain has now voted twice in the space of three-and-a-half years to commit increasingly masochistic acts of self-harm. I’m still unclear which was the worse, voting for Brexit or voting to put Boris Johnson in charge of Brexit. Either way, if you’re vaguely left-leaning and don’t live in Scotland, the future is pretty bleak. At least, we in Scotland have a potential way out of this mess.

In fact, the only way in which Britain could be more fucked up would be if enough members of the Royal Family were to be wiped out in a plane crash to put Prince Andrew on the throne.

We’ve had two Queen’s Speeches in Parliament plus one Queen’s Speech on TV within the space of the last two months. Added to the fact, she’s already been given a whole pile of bullshit from her Prime Minister as to why she had to suspend Parliament, I reckon she probably hasn’t got a clue what the Hell is going on around her. Either that, or at the age of ninety-four, she just assumes she’s suffering from dementia.

But then, so do quite a lot of the rest of us. We live in such grim times, the only solace many of us have is to pretend we are imagining current events, rather than witnessing the country plunge off a cliff.

Imagine if you had been in a coma for ten years and you woke up at the back end of 2019. Your first re-action would be: ‘What the fuck’s going on? Have I entered some kind of parallel universe where everyone lives in world ruled by Dom Jolly?’

Indeed, if you had been in a coma due to an accident where you’d lost the use of your legs, and you were informed about this on regaining consciousness, you would probably assume you would qualify for incapacity benefit, only to be told ‘No, you don’t, you’re fit to work. You were assessed three years ago when you were still in the coma. You’ve got a job in a call centre, but you’re actually up on a disciplinary right now for taking a three-year toilet break’.

Anyone who had been in a coma for ten years would struggle with conversational English. You’d be wondering what the Hell this thing Brexit was that everyone was talking about. And it’s not the only word or phrase to have entered the lexicon in the past decade. ‘Food bank’ wasn’t a term in common use at the start of 2010, and ‘zero hours’ was a concept yet to find its name.

Ten years ago, ‘No Deal’ wasn’t a threat to the country’s economy, it was one half of the title of a TV show that somehow resurrected the moribund media career of Noel Edmunds. ‘Vape’ wasn’t a word ten years ago. Not only would you not understand what the word meant, you’d also be utterly flummoxed by the number of people on the streets sucking fruit-scented water vapour out of contraptions that looked like Soviet-era sex toys. ‘Uber’ wasn’t a word ten years ago, unless you speak German. Nor was ‘deliveroo’.

Deliveroo sums up the age we live in. It’s futuristic and Victorian at the same time. If you’re too lazy to get off your arse and walk to the kitchen to cook your own meals, you can get the futuristic technology of an app on your phone which allows you to order any food you want from a whole range of local restaurants. And that food appears at your front door very quickly due to the futuristic miracle of some poor bastard cycling up a steep hill with a massive fridge on their back.

If you work for Deliveroo. You don’t have a boss or a line manager. Instead, you’re employed by an algorithm. Which is futuristic and sinister. But your working conditions come straight out of the pages of Charles Dickens, cycling hundreds of miles a week in the pouring rain on a zero hours contract. Young people today fall into two distinct categories. They are either clinically obese, or they are anorexically thin because they spend their entire working week cycling hundreds of miles delivering food to lazy fat bastards. It’s Boris’s Britain in a nutshell.

I imagine our vocabulary will have more new words by the end of 2020, most of them synonyms for ‘shitstorm’ Happy New Year!
ScotRail is failing to deliver for the people of Scotland. The performance of Abellio has been truly terrible. The company has failed to recruit enough drivers, is continually skipping stations, does not have enough rolling stock, has used HSTs that have not been refurbished, and has a history of poor industrial relations. But we don’t want to replace one failing private train operator with another because the model is broken. It is clear to everyone – to businesses as well as passengers, and to everyone who works in the rail industry – that privatisation has failed. The Tories privatised our railways and the SNP refuses to bring our services back into public ownership. But it’s time to stand up for Scotland and run our railway as a public service, not as a vehicle to make a private profit.

Mick Whelan, general secretary
Dave Calfe, president
Kevin Lindsay, ASLEF’s organiser in Scotland

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