'best re(a)d'

Ready to Rebuild?

As Scotland counts the cost of the COVID-19 crisis for our economy and society, and looks towards repairing the damage, we ask:

Do we just go for a patch-up job - or is this our chance to rebuild properly?
The left is in one of its classic dilemmas. On the one hand, while the Tories are in office with a substantial majority, the sheen is certainly coming off them - even if Labour has done little to bring this about. And yet, on the other hand, the next election is some time away – 2024 under the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011. Added to that, and notwithstanding the recent Black Lives Matter demonstrations, there is little evidence of extra-parliamentary opposition the Tory government. So things are getting better from the standpoint of Thursday 12 December 2019 but it’s still not clear whether the Tories are experiencing anything more than a temporary setback, whether Labour will be able to get its oppositional act together and whether the prospect of truly mass unemployment after 31 October this year will either subdue or incite any latent discontent outside Parliament.

Let’s unpack this a little. Recent polling has indicated more disapproval of the Tories’ handling of the COVID-19 crisis than approved of it, Boris Johnson’s personal ratings went into the negative, and the Tories’ lead has fallen from low fifties in late April to low forties in mid-June. The Cummings catastrophe added to the crisis over PPE and was since been added to other so-called ‘mis-steps’ over testing, tracking and tracing. Some senior Tories are even speculating that Johnson may not be the one to lead them into the 2024 election. Meanwhile, Labour under Keir Starmer is still not perceived as being clear on what its policies are (even with Starmer being a better parliamentary performer than Corbyn) even though its poll ratings have from high twenties in late April to low high thirties in mid-June. It remains to be seen whether the Labour Together group’s review of the party’s 2019 election performance leads to a further period introspection and whether any useful clarity emerges from that introspection. It’s interesting to note that Starmer has still not released Labour’s own internal review to members of how it dealt with anti-semitism – this was the report that uncovered internal attempts to undermine Corbyn’s leadership. On top of this, having sacked Rebecca Long-Bailey from the Shadow Cabinet for anti-semitism is likely to be seen as a declaration of war on the Labour left, especially because there was no evidence of anti-semitism in what she did. So much for uniting Labour as Starmer said his key task was. And, of course, it was not a politician but a footballer, Marcus Rashford, who scored the biggest goal against the Tories (even if this was just for free school meals over the summer).

But there are also further imponderables at the moment – are we still heading for a no-deal Brexit and how long will the Tories say that having the ‘national’ debt at greater (110%) than the ‘national’ GDP is acceptable? A no-deal Brexit could deliver another shock to an already enfeebled economy while it’s unlikely that, as the 2024 election approaches, the Tories would go into that contest with the albatross of financial profligacy around their necks. So, public expenditure cuts and not tax rises would be on the cards from them. Will Labour have the temerity to say that it must be a case of ‘by any means necessary’ to protect livelihoods and living standards (including a four day week to combat unemployment) and recount that in 1945 the national debt was 200% of GDP when the great reforming Labour government led by Clement Attlee took office?

Meantime, support for independence in Scotland seems to be stabilising at around just over 50%. This is intriguing as the biggest supporter of independence, the SNP-led Scottish Government, is not having the best of times over its handling of the COVID-19 crisis (especially with regard to schools, the NHS and care homes which are devolved matters). That maybe due to continuing concerns over Brexit and
revulsion against Boris Johnson and his Westminster Government. But even though the SNP Scottish Government is making heavy weather at the moment, it is still riding high in the polls for next year’s Holyrood elections. Maybe, this arises from the situation where the Scottish Government finally seems to be departing from mirroring the actions of the Westminster Government. But it also might be more to do with the lack of effective opposition to the SNP in the context of two things. The first is the media does not seem to have the will or capability to scrutinise the Holyrood Government – so much for being the ‘fourth estate’. The second is that Scottish Labour still does not seem credible in terms of personnel or policies. At First Ministers’ Questions (FMQs), the questions are pedestrian and do not cut through an equally pedestrian defence. Added to this is that Scottish Labour is now committed to go into those 2021 Holyrood elections opposed to a further referendum on independence. Scottish Labour says now is not the time for more constitutional navel gazing and that attention should be paid to class issues and economic and social injustice. What it just cannot seem to get its head around is that for many, it is those very same things that mean the avenue of an independent Scotland remains a credible one (without that being the SNP’s offering from its Sustainable Growth Commission). By contrast, Scottish Labour could say it shall support the right to a further referendum in order to help get one, merely in order to have the public argument against independence per se or any particular version.

It is a testament to the common and frequent experience of racism members of by the BAME communities in Britain that the Black Lives Matter campaign here has been re-ignited by the protests condemning the murder of George Floyd, whether by taking down statutes or street names of racists or taking the knee. For dedicated anti-racists, the issue must now become one of how can this campaign embed itself as a broader movement so that it becomes about more than protesting. Antonio Gramsci developed the idea of the need to establish a counter-hegemony through a ‘war of position’ – in other words, develop alternative values and an alternative ideology to those that dominate capitalism. German communist student leader, Rudi Dutschke, in the late 1960s translated this into his strategy of ‘the long march through the institutions’ to describe his method for establishing the conditions for revolution such as subverting society by infiltrating institutions such as the professions. Unbeknown to many, the long defunct Revolutionary Communist Party has achieved this. Alongside many of its former members now being Brexit Party MEPs, newspaper columnists and the like, one – as head of Number 10 Policy Unit - is now leading the newly announced Westminster government commission into racism. This is Munira Mirza. She has previously denied institutional racism exists and has attacked anti-racist campaigners.

**How to stay safe at work**

Section 44 of the Employment Relations Act 1996 provides employees with the means to contest the adequacy and/or suitability of safety arrangements at work without fear of recriminations (like getting sacked) or suffering detriment (like loss of wages). It provides employees with the right to withdraw from and to refuse to return to a workplace that is unsafe and to do so on full pay. Employees are entitled to remain away from the workplace if they believe the prevailing circumstances represent a manifest risk of serious and imminent danger which they could not be expected to avert. Section 44 entitles employees to claim for constructive dismissal and (unlimited) compensation in the event that an employer fails to maintain safe working conditions. For more details see [https://section44.co.uk/](https://section44.co.uk/)

**Statement from Scottish Left Review**

This statement was printed as a letter in *Scotland on Sunday* (10 May 2020) and circulated on social media. It was released as the integrity and reputation of *Scottish Left Review* was wrongly traduced.

‘Unfortunately, Dani Garavelli (Scotland on Sunday 3 May 2020) engages in her own conspiracy theory when she writes: ‘Ironically, MacAskill’s piece in the Scottish Left Review – which claims the charges were “utter bunkum” – was almost certainly part of an orchestrated campaign to rehabilitate Salmond because, lo and behold, it was accompanied by Jim Sillars’ revelation that the former first minister is writing a book that will be like “a volcano”’. She could have tried to substantiate this theory merely by contacting myself, the editor of Scottish Left Review. If she had, she would have been told that this is wholly untrue because of the following:

i) We asked for a range of writers to analyse the fallout from the Salmond trial in terms of a) the impact on the SNP, Scottish Government and independence movement and b) the way the media reported the case. Those approached other than Kenny MacAskill and Jim Sillars declined or did not respond;

ii) We have had Kenny MacAskill and Jim Sillars writing for us before so this was not a new relationship brought into being and for the purpose Garavelli alleges; and

iii) Our pages are open to different views, opinions and perspectives on the left. That is the raison d’etre of *Scottish Left Review* – to be a forum for the constructive discussion between and across the left and those in parties and not in parties. We hold true to that today as did Jimmy Reid, our founding editor, did in 2000 when he set up the magazine. Indeed, in the same issue as those articles by Kenny MacAskill and Jim Sillars is one supportive of the SNP Scottish Government by Joe Middleton.’

The text of this statement was also sent to Dani Garavelli but we received no response. Subsequent to this, and in line with our editorial policy, we have further articles in this current issue which touch upon the subject matter that underlay those articles in the May/June issue. We look forward to this being recognised by Dani Garavelli in the pages of *Scotland on Sunday*. 

---

**Consultation on Proposed Right to Food (Scotland) Bill**

Eilidh Smith MSP, Member for Central Scotland, Scottish Labour

Please give your views on this proposal: [www.righttofoodscotland.co.uk/righttofood](http://www.righttofoodscotland.co.uk/righttofood)
Mary MacCallum Sullivan starts with an apology to SLR: I wish I’d met you earlier

...Scottish

Mary MacCallum Sullivan is a psychotherapist and educator with an interest in a more meaningful local and ethical politics.

Whatever we call the way forward, we must take action; there must be alliances, there must be a plurality and a diversity in our action, to attempt new ways, reformulate tried and tested ways, invest resources in people, meaningful work and ‘well-being’, locally-driven, nationally-directed, internationally co-ordinated. A radical courage is now called for, an openness to local and community initiatives and the major decentralisation of power.

It is a moral challenge such as we have never faced before. Can we, as a people, raise ourselves to our full height, losing the ‘Scottish cringe’ in the process? Can we, as a species, take up and acknowledge our responsibility for the destruction we have wrought on the planet and its living systems, and pledge the local, national and international will and resources to work towards global repair and the realisation of a just transition to a safer and more equitable future? Make no mistake: this will not be easy. Revolution must be joined; nothing less will do.

Mary MacCallum Sullivan
Money begets money: how the Tories helped the rich get richer during the COVID-19 crisis

Prem Sikka dissects the Westminster government's series of economic and financial initiatives

On 30 January 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared Covid-19 to be 'a public health emergency of international concern'. This provided ample warning and time for the Westminster government to manage the economic consequences of the pandemic. Its response has been chaotic and inadequate. It did little to help the poorest and this exacerbated existing inequalities. Companies receiving government aid were not required to give any binding commitment to maintain jobs, pay taxes or refrain from paying dividends. This article provides a brief overview of the details and shortcomings of the major economic interventions that Westminster government has taken.

The Chancellor’s budget statement of 11 March 2020 contained very few measures in relation to the Covid pandemic. It said that the government would reimburse the cost of statutory sick pay for up to 14 days for businesses with less than 250 employees, which could provide up to £2bn for up to 2m businesses. Other initiatives included allowing businesses and the self-employed to defer tax payments. Rather than any direct help, the government said that banks will offer loans of up to £1.2m to support small and medium sized businesses, and the government would provide guarantee to cover 80% of the losses. Other steps included 50% business rates relief for selected businesses with a rateable value of less than £51,000. The cost of this was estimated to be around £1bn. The Chancellor boldly forecasted that despite Covid-19, the economy would grow by 1.1% in 2020.

By mid-March, governments in Denmark and elsewhere were announcing lockdowns and agreeing to pay a significant proportion of furloughed employee wages, with conditions that the employers commit to no redundancies for the next twelve months. There was no equivalent move in the UK. On 17 March 2020, the Chancellor announced that the government would provide £330bn of loans to businesses, with government guarantees. Small businesses soon complained that banks were subjecting them to more expensive loans and fees.

On 20 March 2020, the government announced the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS). Under this, the government paid 80% of the salary of retained workers up to a total of £2,500 a month for employees on the payroll at 1 March 2020. The staff had to be furloughed and that was a decision only to be made by employers. There was no guaranteed minimum level of support from the government.

The tight date meant that those recently made redundant or put on unpaid leave were not covered by the scheme. Typically, more than half a million people start a new job every month and many of these were not eligible for the wage support. The wage subsidy was not accompanied by any stipulations about redundancies. The subsidy was operated through Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and linked to the Pay As You Earn (PAYE) system of paying tax, i.e. only employees already paying tax at source were covered. Many employers refused to top-up the wage and their workers received only 80% of their normal wage. Those on the national minimum wage, set at £8.72 from 1 April, were particularly hit hard. Despite the enforced wage cut, workers were still liable to pay 100% of the cost of rent, rates, food, gas, water, electricity and other bills. Mortgage payments were deferred but eventually would need to be paid. People could hardly dip into their savings. At the end of January 2020, the UK household debt stood at £1,680bn and 12.8m households had either no, or less than £1,500, in savings. Some 7.5m workers had virtually no savings. The government’s wage support did nothing for 320,000 homeless people in Britain, many of whom are outside the tax net altogether.

After public criticism, on 26 March 2020 the government announced the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS). It consisted of a taxable cash grant, equivalent to 80% of their average monthly profits over the last three years, with an upper limit of £2,500 a month. The scheme applied to sole traders and partnerships with annual income of up to £50,000. The scheme was open to claimants receiving more than half of their income from self-employment. The scheme again operated through HMRC and the size of the grant was determined by the claimants’ tax returns for 2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19. The claimants had to show that they traded in 2019-20; had been currently trading and intend to continue to trade in the tax year 2020-2021.

The House of Commons Treasury
Committee reported that over a million people did not receive any support, and added that ‘hundreds of thousands of people who have set themselves up in business since April 2019 who do not meet the eligibility criteria’. About 225,000 self-employed people with annual trading profits in excess of £50,000 were also ineligible for support. Some 710,000 directors of companies pay themselves with a combination of dividends and a salary. The dividend part did not qualify for the SEISS. Freelancers and agency workers also seemed to be excluded.

Somewhat perversely, the government penalised the people investing in their businesses’ future. Imagine the case of two businesses with identical trading profits: one makes investment in productive assets which qualify for capital allowances (a sort of legal depreciation) and, therefore, reports lower taxable profits. The second business does not make an investment and reports higher taxable profits. The owner of business investing in the future received lower cash grant.

The government has given all businesses financial support. They enjoyed wage subsidies and business rates holidays, all without any stipulations. Social security benefits are means-tested, but the same did not apply to Covid support. So far, and in return for loans, the government has not acquired an equity stake or a charge on the assets of the business.

The UK government made £330bn available for loans though the Covid Corporate Financing Facility (CCFF). By 19 May 2020, £18.8bn had been loaned to 55 major corporations and a further £38.8bn of potential lending to another 68 businesses had been authorised. In return, the Bank of England said that borrowers ‘will be expected to provide a letter addressed to HM Treasury that commits to showing restraint on the payment of dividends and other capital distributions and on senior pay during the period in which their commercial paper is outstanding’. So far 53 companies, recipients of £16.2bn of loans, have provided this type of letter. No monitoring or enforcement mechanism was specified for any element of the government support and some novel practices came to light.

Many wealthy individuals own more than one home. A second home is often owned through corporate structures. Some of these companies are considered to be small and became eligible for business rates holiday and £10,000 coronavirus grant intended for small businesses. The owners of more than 7,000 second homes in Cornwall and Scilly alone qualified for millions of pounds of government support. A survey by solicitors in June suggested that around a third of employees were asked to commit furlough fraud during the lockdown and persuaded to work, with threats of pay cuts and deportations. HMRC is examining some 3,000 cases.

During the Covid crisis, supermarkets did a roaring trade and it is hard to make any economic case for them to receive subsidies. For the year to February 2019, Tesco had pre-tax profits of £1.3bn and is expected to show even higher amounts for 2020 and 2021. Its co-owners were boosted by £585m from the government’s business rates relief. During the lockdown and persuaded to work, threats of pay cuts and deportations. HMRC is examining some 3,000 cases.

Amidst the crisis, on 6 February 2020, EasyJet directors put down a resolution to pay final dividend of £174m whilst putting staff on unpaid leave. Some £60m would go to its co-founder, Sir Stelios Haji-Ioannou. Shareholders duly voted for it and the dividend was paid on 20 March. On 6 April, EasyJet secured a £600m loan from the government even though 34% of its shares are held in a Cayman Islands based trust.

An investigation by TaxWatch in June showed that 13 of the aforementioned 53 company borrowers had links with tax havens and possible tax avoidance. For example, Baker Hughes, which is a subsidiary of General Electric (via a Bermuda holding company) received £660m. General Electric (GE) is embroiled in a £1bn tax dispute with HMRC over unpaid taxes going back to 2004. Chanel Limited is owned by a company based in the Cayman Islands. It received £600m of government money. Tottenham Hotspur football club received £175m despite being owned by a billionaire tax exile, Joe Lewis, who lives in the Bahamas.

So, in summary, there is little evidence of any well-planned government strategy. The economic policy was reactive and made on the hoof, with numerous holes. Millions of people did not receive any financial support. The poorest were hit the hardest as the government failed to provide a minimum level of support. Due to low wages, income/wealth inequalities would have increased. Large amounts of money have been given to corporations, but without any stipulations about jobs or changes to corporate governance.

In the absence of such stipulations, the ending of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme would result in a spike in job losses. Businesses were not required to repatriate profits or control from tax havens. A golden opportunity for ending offshore opacity and tax avoidance games has been missed.

Prem Sikka is Professor of Accounting and Finance at the University of Sheffield and Emeritus Professor of Accounting at the University of Essex. He writes regularly for Left Foot Forward (https://leftfootforward.org/author/prem-sikka/) on accounting, economic and financial matters and can be found at @premsikka on Twitter.

---

**LET'S BRING IN BILLIONS TO FIGHT COVID-19**

**THEROBINHOODTAX**

---

6 - ScottishLeftReview Issue 118 July/August 2020
Roz Foyer reports on what’s been happening in Scotland’s workplaces

Fighting for fairness in COVID-19 crisis: workers and unions provide the sensible solution

The STUC supports the Fair Work Convention’s vision that by 2025 people in Scotland should have a world-leading working life where fair work drives success, wellbeing and prosperity for individuals, businesses, organisations and society. The Convention’s Fair Work Framework (FWF) goes on to define Fair Work through work that offers all individuals an effective voice, opportunity, security, fulfilment and respect. For workers, ‘voice’ is one of the most crucial elements of the FWF and the STUC has lobbied hard to ensure the extension of collective bargaining has been recognised by Scottish Government as the most legitimate way to give workers that voice so they can effect positive change in their workplaces.

Building on the FWF, the STUC and the Scottish Government produced a joint statement on fair work expectations during the COVID-19 crisis. The statement sets out strong expectations of employers, including: strict adherence to health protection advice; paying workers while they are sick or self-isolating; supporting those with caring responsibilities; facilitating home working; providing adequate personal protective equipment (PPE); undertaking continual risk assessments; and protecting contracted workers as well as core staff.

Despite this, the defining experience for too many workers during the pandemic has been a complete disregard of fair working practices. Since the beginning of March, the STUC and the Better than Zero campaign have been deluged with calls, emails and Facebook messages from workers concerned about their lives and livelihoods.

First and foremost, workers are concerned about the health and safety of themselves, their colleagues, their families, and their communities. An STUC survey of more than 2,000 workers undertaken at the beginning of the crisis revealed unparalleled levels of fear. Over half of respondents required to work didn’t feel safe and 42% said they did not have access to adequate PPE.

Health and care unions have reported outrageous health and safety breaches, including a lack of PPE, particularly in residential care homes. Frontline health and care workers have died. Among them are: Kirsty Jones, 41-year old mother of two and healthcare support worker for NHS Lanarkshire; Angie Cunningham, 60-year old great grandmother and NHS Borders nurse; Catherine Sweeney, 64-year old Dumbarton care worker; and Robert Black, 51-year old father of two and Kintyre paramedic.

Health and care workers have had to deal with the trauma that they may have infected the very people that they were caring for, through no fault of their own. This is a scandal of the highest order, for which employers and Government are responsible.

We must remember all the workers that have put themselves in harm’s way to keep earning for their families and to care for their communities. And, we rue the day that there are some who value their profits more highly than life itself. Nearly 70% of private care homes have had suspected Covid-19 cases, significantly higher than not-for-profit homes. This is a result of allowing profits to be put before people.

In other sectors, non-essential employers have continued to operate and failed to implement adequate social distancing measures. From whisky to construction, manufacturing and non-essential retail, employers have put workers lives at risk in the pursuit of profit.

Call centre workers have been forced into offices with scant regard for social distancing, crammed into lifts and made to use filthy toilets and workstations. A detailed study by Professor Phil Taylor from the University of Strathclyde, involving more than 500 call centre workers across Scotland, found three-quarters were convinced they would catch the virus and 9 in 10 feared bringing it home to infect their families. If workplaces cause this much fear, they should not be open. It is as simple as that. But guidance and rights are of scant use to low paid workers in precarious employment – it’s worker power and not words on paper that can make all the difference.

Where workers are organised collectively in a union, they have been able to fight back. Postal workers have walked off the job in protest at delivering junk mail; education and transport unions have refused to return to work until they have guarantees it is safe to do so; and health and care unions have won financial support for social care workers, ending the absurd situation where care workers are left terrified of getting coronavirus symptoms and having to self-isolate on £94 a week statutory sick pay. Each of these have been crucial victories – not simply for their own terms and conditions – but for the health of our society as a whole.

Life for Scotland’s workers has been made a little easier for those who know they can rely on their union for support and safety. STUC’s survey highlights that unionised workers feel safer, have more access to PPE, and are working in places with clear policies on dealing with the virus. The joint STUC Scottish Government statement has also played its part with many affiliates reporting that it has been a useful tool in their negotiations with employers during the crisis. During these exceptional times and periods of crisis, we need solidarity and collective power more than ever.

As well as fighting for lives, the STUC has been fighting for livelihoods. We launched the ‘Time 2 Pay Key Workers’ campaign calling for an immediate £2 an hour pay increase for all keyworkers. It is a travesty the keyworkers keeping our society running are also some of the most systematically low-paid and undervalued workers in our society.

We are also fighting for financial security for those working in large swathes of the economy that have been shut down. More than 110,000 Universal Credit claims were made in Scotland in the five weeks to 7 April 7. An estimated 750,000 in Scotland have been furloughed, representing more than a quarter of the workforce. Were it not for the union movement making the case for the furlough scheme we would have undoubtedly have seen countless more redundancies.

Yet it has not just been Government intervention that has saved jobs, workers have had to take action too. Because the furlough scheme pays the business not the workers, employees are at the mercy of employers and we know that thousands more have been laid off. Workers whose employers refused to furlough them have looked out for each...
other. Others who were told to sign new contracts followed the advice that Better Than Zero distributed at the start of the crisis: Don’t Sign, Delay, Organise.

Workers at the Lighthouse, a Glasgow City Council-owned venue who are employed through an agency, were told on 18 March that the building was to shut and they would only be paid scheduled shifts until 22 March. While the agency and employer played a game of ping pong with both refusing to take responsibility, workers came together through a WhatsApp group, made collective demands, went public, and won. And beauty salon staff at the PURE Spa in Silverburn, which has chains across the country, refused to accept the zero hours contracts they were told to sign, instead banding together and winning guarantees they wanted as well as full furlough. They looked out for each other like a family, with support from Better Than Zero, and they well deserve the name they earned of ‘Silverburn Suffragettes’. Now they are in the GMB union.

This experience is commonplace up and down the country. Almost half of furloughed workers work in hospitality and non-essential retail. These are two of the most low-paid, precarious, and from the point of view of employers, easily disposable sectors in our economy. Yet they have shown how to navigate a treacherous environment through a clear course – collective demands with collective demands.

Workers in oil and gas, manufacturing, construction and education have also fought and won being furloughed rather than laid off. Workers at BA are currently fighting a campaign against its plans to shut and they would only be paid if the building was to shut and they would only be paid scheduled shifts until 22 March. While the agency and employer played a game of ping pong with both refusing to take responsibility, workers came together through a WhatsApp group, made collective demands, went public, and won. And beauty salon staff at the PURE Spa in Silverburn, which has chains across the country, refused to accept the zero hours contracts they were told to sign, instead banding together and winning guarantees they wanted as well as full furlough. They looked out for each other like a family, with support from Better Than Zero, and they well deserve the name they earned of ‘Silverburn Suffragettes’. Now they are in the GMB union.

This experience is commonplace up and down the country. Almost half of furloughed workers work in hospitality and non-essential retail. These are two of the most low-paid, precarious, and from the point of view of employers, easily disposable sectors in our economy. Yet they have shown how to navigate a treacherous environment through a clear course – collective demands with collective demands.

Workers in oil and gas, manufacturing, construction and education have also fought and won being furloughed rather than laid off. Workers at BA are currently fighting a campaign against its plans to lay off workers before re-employing them on worse terms and conditions.

There are risks of a rise in temporary and casual work, and pressure to work faster and cheaper, in traditional gig work like food distribution, but also increasingly in sectors like care and catering. The STUC and all unions have an enormous challenge to keep up with these changes, and to make sure workers in these irregular kinds of work are supported with the best tools and tactics, and can share their own insights and organise together.

Times are more uncertain than they have ever been. One in three workers in Scotland are now out of work. Half of the respondents in the STUC survey were unsure if they would have a job to return to. Nearly two thirds were worried about their own and their family’s employment in the future.

We must also recognise that while Covid-19 affects everyone, it does not do so equally. Black and ethnic minority people are at greater risk of dying. Those living in the most deprived areas are more than twice as likely to die from Covid-19 than those in the least deprived communities. While the majority of deaths are those aged over 75, it is younger people who are most affected by the closure of large swathes of the economy. Women are more likely to suffer economically, face additional childcare responsibilities and be at greater risk of domestic abuse.

Workers on precarious contracts are at far greater risk of financial insecurity. Large numbers of workers fall through the cracks in the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme. Half of people working in the creative industries have been forced to borrow money to survive.

We must address the specifics of these issues in order to organise a collective, working class response. Unionised workers are twice as likely to feel their job is safe than non-unionised workers. That is why it is so important that workers join a union and get active. But until we represent all of these groups, we will not fully represent the working class.

One of the most inspiring stories I heard during the crisis was of twenty workers at a restaurant in Glasgow City Centre. Pre-lockdown they had their hours suddenly cut to zero with no clarity on their job status or whether they would get paid for work they had already done. Their questions and emails were initially ignored, limiting their ability to access financial support. The first workers to seek clarity were then offered their jobs back, but they declined. Why? Because the offer was not extended to all.

Call it mutual protection or solidarity, this is what it means to be in a union. Once you are combined together, it is easier to join up with the others who are facing the same. Approach it together with a plan, and we will get more than we would ever get alone.

There are organising lessons in this crisis for all workers. Keeping in contact with fellow workers through WhatsApp or other messaging platforms; demanding to see risk assessments; examining company’s profits; making collective demands; exerting pressure through public criticism; and taking collective action. As the furlough scheme is wound down and the economy opens up, these simple steps will be crucial in delivering fairer work in workplaces the length and breadth of Scotland.

The crisis has shown employers will not deliver Fair Work unless they are forced to and currently the Scottish Government lacks the powers to enforce changes in employment practice. So if the Convention’s vision of Scotland being a world-leading Fair Work country by 2025 is to be met, it will depend on us to make it happen and turn these aspirations into actual change on the ground by unions educating, agitating and organising across all Scotland’s workplaces and throwing the resources of our whole movement behind that effort.

Roz Foyer is general secretary of the Scottish Trade Unions Congress (STUC)
Crisis within a crisis: the failure of private sector care

Stephen Smellie charts a way out of the crisis in both short- and medium-terms

Thousands have died in care homes in a fragmented service delivery model designed to generate a market, where operators’ desire to make profit rather than provide quality care is the driving force and where public accountability is weak and regulation light. This model was failing in normal times to provide quality care. It was clear the model was not going to be able to cope under pressure of a pandemic where the most at risk were the older people that care homes cater for.

Predominantly a private sector - 59% of care homes and 77% of care beds in Scotland are for profit, provision is in the hands of a range of providers, from economically inefficient single care home operators to large international companies. The latter has developed a model where profit from providing care is sometimes less important than their profits from property transfers and leases – and profit that, in some cases such as HC-One, is off-shored to shareholders in tax havens.

The pre-pandemic signs were not good. A quarter were rated only as adequate or poor by the Care Inspectorate and 52% had vacancies for nursing staff. For years, recruitment to the sector was a major problem. Given its low-wage business model, long hours and stressful working conditions, this was not surprising.

The crisis has exposed the weaknesses of the system in stark human terms measured by the deaths of service users and staff, the level of staff absences compared to health staff and the poverty that staff have experienced whilst being forced onto Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) as the employers refuse to pay normal wages while staff isolate.

Support for a National Care Service (NCS) is growing but we are some way from being clear about what that would, should or could be. A NCS where care is publicly funded, nationally coordinated and delivered on a not-for-profit basis is an aspiration to work towards and government, councils, unions and others should start planning for this. However, the Scottish Government, NHS and local authorities have had to take steps to alleviate the failings of the private providers in this crisis. These steps are the basis on which an alternative system can be built.

The crisis in supplying PPE for staff in care homes and providing care at home mirrored that across the NHS and council services. However, it was exacerbated by fragmentation. Eventually, the government set up a system where the NHS supply system and council run distribution networks were able to ensure sufficient supplies reached staff in the private care sector. This could be extended to include the provision of all essential supplies to ensure continuity of supply and the benefits of large-scale procurement.

The number of deaths suggests private care homes failed to implement full infection control measures. Early on UNISON demanded staff who were being told that they should isolate for 14 days if a household member had symptoms must be paid their normal wages and not the much lower SSP. It was inevitable some staff, faced with huge cuts in earnings, would go to work, hoping their partner’s cough was not Covid-19 and, therefore, breaching infection control measures. Despite assurances to the sector that additional costs would be met, companies refused to take this simple step to protect staff and service users. The government had to intervene, under pressure from unions, to effectively regulate the payment of normal wages to staff in private care companies. This mirrored the recent experience of getting the Scottish Living Wage (SLW) paid to care staff where negotiations are needed each year for the payment to be made. Even then unions had to fight to get sleepovers included and for domestic and catering staff to be included. The Fair Work in Care Group should now build on this by developing sectoral bargaining to cover terms and conditions across the sector. This would start with consolidating the SLW across the sector and set out a timescale for raising levels of pay to equivalents in health and local government over an agreed period (like five years).

The staffing level crisis has been compounded by NHS and council staff having to be deployed to plug critical gaps in private sector provision, with health boards taking control of private companies' staffing levels and provision. This illustrates the urgent need to develop a national workforce plan for social care led by the Scottish Government working with CoSLA, health boards, unions and providers, and should be based on the Fair Work principles.

Concern about death levels led the Cabinet Secretary for Health to give additional responsibility to Directors of Nursing in each health board to ensure the clinical standards expected of care homes. This is designed to address the suspected failures of clinical standards in many care homes. Simultaneously, the Care Inspectorate has been required to report to Parliament on its findings in monitoring and inspecting care services. These responsibilities should be enhanced with powers to require councils to takeover care provision where standards are not being met including where staffing levels have not been maintained at safe levels.

The testing regime that has been introduced in care homes, co-ordinated through the NHS, will need to be maintained with providers required to ensure that this is delivered across all care homes. On the basis of these measures, the funding formula for care homes should be revised to ensure all the expected measures of standards of care, staffing, Fair Work and supplies are met before any profits can be taken and these capped at a modest level. Where providers decide they wish to withdraw from the sector, as the prospect of making great profits reduces, the government should have a strategy for care homes to be brought into the public sector at no cost.

Imagine that you have a partner who constantly belittles you and your children. Or, who controls where you go, who you speak to and what you wear. Imagine that they humiliate you, and that sometimes they are violent. Now imagine having been trapped in a house with them for the past three months. Stress about Coronavirus is not causing domestic abuse – domestic abuse is an abuser’s choice, always. However, measures taken to address the pandemic have been providing additional tools for abusers to exercise their control.

At Scottish Women’s Aid (SWA), we work with a network of 36 local Women’s Aid groups. We have heard from them, and from the team on Scotland’s Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline, that perpetrators are using these new tools to control women’s movements, keep them isolated, threaten to expose them to the virus or tell them that services are not operating or that the police will not respond if called. We also know that many women who do not live with their abusers are living with more fear because their abuser knows that they will be spending time at home, making stalking easier for him.

As well as increased risk, lockdown and associated measures have limited the opportunities that women, children and young people have to reach out to Women’s Aid or call services for help. Constrained mobility also means fewer opportunities to access emergency accommodation, including refuge.

Domestic abuse is the number one cause of women’s homelessness in Scotland. Access to refuge has been seriously affected by a reduction in refuge spaces due to social distancing measures. To make a bad situation worse, many social landlords have frozen allocations of vacant homes so women and their children have been unable to move on from refuge into those homes. As lockdown measures begin to be relaxed, an urgent scaling up of efforts to help women and children stay safe at home or, if that is not safe, move to welcome place of safety is needed.

Other measures during the pandemic are problematic for those living with domestic abuse. Restrictions on the conduct of court business, combined with changes to police and court procedures, mean that the waiting times between police response and trial are mounting rapidly, as is the backlog of trials. Access to affordable, domestic-abuse-competent legal services is poor at the best of times for women, children and young people experiencing domestic abuse. This access is now further constrained as many solicitors have been furloughed. All of this means that decades of progress in reforming courts and building confidence in the justice system is swiftly eroding.

Women are not the only ones at higher risk during lockdown - children and young people are victims alongside their mothers. With the closure of schools, nurseries and after-school clubs, children and young people have lost their safe spaces and had few opportunities to reach out to trusted adults outside of their home. As children return to school, we anticipate a period of increased disclosures of abuse. It is vital that resources are in place to support them, that their needs are readily identified by schools and social workers, and that there is adequate funding for Women’s Aid and other children’s services to provide the right support at the right time.

The impact of the pandemic will mirror the inequalities already embedded in the everyday lives of women: we are more likely to have part-time and precarious employment, to head single-parent households, to depend upon social security benefit, to do unpaid caring work and to be absent from the tables where power is wielded and resources are distributed. As we look towards another recession, the needs of women and children who have experienced domestic abuse must not be overlooked. Recently, our sisters at Engender and Close the Gap published a set of nine principles for inclusive economic recovery that would benefit all women. It is vital that these principles are implemented so that women and children who have experienced domestic abuse are not left behind in the aftermath of the Coronavirus.

Domestic abuse has not taken a break for this pandemic, and neither have we. Women’s Aid groups have radically redesigned their services to continue providing support, and Scotland’s Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline has remained fully operational. However, Women’s Aid groups were already facing intense difficulty before the increased pressure of the pandemic: 84% of our groups were already operating waiting lists and 79% had seen reduced or standstill funding from their local authorities. This picture has to change – we need significant increases in local funding and a long-term plan to ensure that adequate funding is stable and sustainable. Responses to Coronavirus make this a greater priority, especially as we see a tsunami of economic problems approaching, and we will continue to call for the needs of women, children and young people who have experienced domestic abuse to be visible and prioritised as lockdown measures ease and as plans for economic and social recovery are made.

If you or somebody you know is experiencing the coercive and controlling behaviours we’ve described here, Scotland’s Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline is available 24/7 to listen to you and offer support. You can call on 0800 027 1234. Or, if it’s not safe to speak, you can email and web chat from www.sdfmh.org.uk. We are here for you, and it’s safe to speak.

The Engender and Close the Gap report can be found at: https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Gender--Economic-Recovery---Engender-and-Close-the-Gap.pdf

Megan Gordon is the External Affairs Officer for Scottish Women’s Aid
Scottish education in the Covid pandemic: to be forewarned is to be forearmed

With so much still unknown, Bill Ramsay says the rush to return to school is ill-advised and dangerous

When considering Scottish education at this time, it must be borne in mind that the tension between health and economic factors, what I will call the 'Covid calculus', is constantly changing. As the 'Covid calculus' changes so do the expectations and demands on all in Scottish education. The current positive downward trajectory of Covid-19 may continue and much of the discourse and political aspiration is focusing on that. Yet, this downward trajectory may stall. And in amongst all this, we have science as 'truth', science as 'conjecture' and now, dangerously, 'inconvenient' science. Some climatologists must be thinking, 'welcome to my world!'.

The politeness and patience of some child poverty champions when confronted by the crocodile tears of some on the right is commendable. We can only hope that these new political champions and their 'born again' support for programmes of educational equity is sustained into the longer term. Certainly, teacher trade unionists in Scotland will do their bit to hold them to their pledges of support.

What we can all agree on, though, is that Covid-19 has forced a new discourse around education. Within this, Covid-19 has highlighted the centrality of the teacher, the classroom and the school. These are three components that, because they have been around 'forever', so-to-speak, tend to be taken for granted. In, and of themselves, they are the most critical components that any education system can bring to bear on educational inequity after, of course, the socio-economic settings in which young people find themselves.

At this time, some in the political community and in the media seem to have an expectation for teachers to plan for a wide range of contingencies, but then switch from any one of them to any other almost immediately on the 11 August this year.

We should remember that last year in Scotland there were 697,989 pupils and 52,247 teachers working for over thirty different employers. Even an organisation in uniform of that size would not be expected to flip from plan A to plan B to plan C and, if circumstances change, back to plan A with the flip of a switch.

As school buildings closed, teachers continued to work - though in different ways. Also, the response to the call for teachers to staff hubs was met swiftly. From the start, many teachers, often using their own or borrowed equipment, started to provide work and reassurance to their pupils. It should be remembered that many teachers have their own families to look after during lockdown. Most teachers are in the 25 to 40 age range and across the whole teacher workforce 77% are women, many of them carers. Then the Covid-19 Education Recovery Group was convened to work up a plan in response to our public health crisis.

At the time of writing, we have had some statements from the Scottish Government concerning the 2021 exam diet. Some, with a more progressive perspective, hoped that the educational storm clouds of Covid-19 might lead to a silver lining where one of the original visions of the Curriculum for Excellence, a single exit exam, might somehow emerge.

At least there appears to be a consensus, in the educational community, around the need for more teachers to deliver a blended learning approach. However, in the political community there seems to be no equivalent consensus around funding. Some local authorities were preparing, due to historical budgetary legacies, to pare down their teacher workforces while at the same time the General Teaching Council was issuing a plea to retired teachers to step up to the plate.

Delivering teaching and learning for 700,000 pupils in a school estate, straight jacketed by the 'efficiencies' of the Public Finance Initiative (PFI), was challenging enough. In my view, the death-avoiding strategy of physical distancing cannot be ignored.

We still do not know when we will have a vaccine; we still cannot with certainty know that we will have a vaccine. We still not know how many in the wider population have the virus. We still do not know how many children have the virus without any symptoms. We still do not know with any certainty whether children transmit the virus. We still do not know when we will have a testing and tracing regime that is as comprehensive as those in some other countries.

Given these many unknowns, the loud demands from some politicians, and somewhat simplistic assertions made in sections of the media, for a swift return to normality in Scotland's schools is, at this time, premature. In order for schools to open safely for everyone, more teachers are required and, if the best of the digital learning experiences are to be sustained in the future, that will require central and local government to provide significant additional resources.

Bill Ramsay was the 2019-2020 President of the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) union

Cover: Nadia Lucchesi
(nadia.shemail@gmail.com)

Proofing services: John Wood and John Daly

Editor Email: Gregor Gall
gregorgall@outlook.com

Web: www.scottishleftreview.scot
Tel: 0141 424 0042

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

Printed by Hampden Advertising Ltd, 403 Hillington Road, G52 4BL, Tel: 0141 429 1010
Universal Basic Income: simple solution to a complex conundrum?

William Craig surveys the arguments and evidence on a topical subject

The enormous upheaval caused by the pandemic has forced us to look at our society as never before and to ask questions about how we interact with each other. Of all the questions, the most overarching one is this: how do we deliver fundamental support to all our citizens when and where they need it? The Westminster government has introduced a series of schemes for personal and business support (see Prem Sikka’s article, this issue), some more practical and, thus, successful than others. It is arguable that, more than any other issue, the supply of spendable cash to individuals and turnover liquidity to small businesses have been amongst the most important aids delivered, especially in smaller communities, where economies of scale and readily available infrastructure are less apparent.

In this context, many commentators from a wide variety of political backgrounds have renewed their interest in the case for introducing some form of universal basic income (UBI) for all citizens in Scotland and further afield. Many see that the case has been strengthened significantly by the coronavirus pandemic, and the strains placed on our overly bureaucratic tax and welfare system. The implications apply to everyone, rich and poor alike and so should the solutions.

The proposition is both a socialist one and a green one, and one which would be acceptable to Gramsci, my arbiter for nearly all social policy dilemmas. It is that, like education, clean water and air, a basic income, which is enough to supply minimum needs should be freely provided by the state to every adult citizen, adjusting existing social security and other means-tested benefits but preserving disability payments and child allowances. This basic income would be a right for every citizen. Income derived from work or entrepreneurial endeavour would then be the just reward of each person for industry and effort, and taxed by the state accordingly.

A more radical view of basic income is that it is the manifestation of the right of every citizen to a share in the prosperity and productivity of the nation, though this idea could not be enshrined in law as our country is without a written constitution. In Scotland, with a productive economy producing around £70bn annually, the idea of paying out around £5,000pa by way of a dividend to citizens each year could be argued as being a modest return, and an efficient way of delivering it.

UBI, citizen’s income and basic income guarantee are some of the best known and widely used terms for the concept of having a governmental public program for a regular payment delivered to all on an individual basis without means test or work requirement, a form of social credit payment. I will use the generic term ‘basic income’ as a cover all. The payment made in such schemes are:

- Unconditional, and could vary with age from 16, but with no other conditions. Under 16s would be covered by child allowances, and pensioners would be taxed on income above UBI. All people would receive the same basic income, whatever their gender, employment status, family structure, contribution to society, fixed overhead costs, or anything else.
- Non-removable, and would not be means-tested. It is deemed irrelevant if earnings increase, decrease, or stay the same. The basic income will not change and cannot be removed.
- Individual, and would be paid on that basis, not on the basis of a couple, household or family group.
- Non-assignable, payments would be a cash payment to the named recipient and not able to be assigned to any third party; landlord, spouse, debt-collector. It would be paid into a bank account or paid in cash at a post-office.
- As a legal right, every legal resident would receive a basic income, subject to a minimum period of legal residency and continuing residency for most of the year on the same basis as tax residency.

What are the advantages? An unconditional basic income would enable workers to wait for a better job or negotiate better wages. They could improve their marketability by going back to formal education. It would also allow individuals to leave employment, or full-time employment, to care for a relative. It would remove the perceived problem that welfare systems keep people ‘trapped in poverty’. A simple cash payment would also cut down on bureaucracy as it would have 100% uptake at minimal cost. The money paid out would tend to be spent locally, and to generate economic activity in communities. Basic income has a direct effect on child poverty and helps bridge the pension-earnings gap which is at its greatest in Britain when compared to other EU members. And, some countries are concerned about falling birth rates. A guaranteed income would give young couples the confidence they need to start a family. Finally, from a macro-economic viewpoint, it would give society much-needed fiscal ballast during a recession.

What are the disadvantages? If everyone suddenly received a basic income, some fear it would create inflation. Most would immediately spend the extra cash, driving up demand. Retailers would order more, and manufacturers would try to produce more. Where they couldn’t increase supply, they would raise prices. Higher prices would soon make the basics unaffordable to those at the bottom of the income pyramid. In the long run, a guaranteed income would not raise their standard of living. Some say a guaranteed income that’s enough to eliminate poverty would be too expensive and if everyone received a free income, it might remove some of the incentive to work hard.

So, what do the experimental trials tell us? The world’s most robust study of UBI has concluded that it boosts recipients’ mental and financial well-being, as well as modestly improving employment. Finland ran a two-year universal basic income study in 2017 and 2018, during which the government gave 2000 unemployed people aged between 25 and 58 monthly payments with no conditions.

The payments of €560 per month were not means-tested and were unconditional, so they were not reduced if an individual got a job or secured a pay rise. The study was nationwide and selected recipients could not opt out of the measure of the employment and well-being of basic income recipients against a control group of 173,000 people who were on standard state benefits.

Between November 2017 and October 2018, people on basic income worked an average of 78 days, which was six days more than those on unemployment benefits and there was a greater increase in employment for people in
families with children. These findings suggest that basic income does not seem to provide a disincentive for people to work.

UBI can be implemented nationally, regionally or locally. An unconditional income that is sufficient to meet a person's basic needs is sometimes called a full basic income while if it is less than that amount, it is sometimes called partial. Where the level is set will depend upon economic strength and in that sense must be ‘affordable’. However, this would be a judgement for economists in relation to overall economic policy. A welfare system with some characteristics similar to those of a UBI is a negative income tax, often favoured by right-wing economists - like Milton Friedman - in which the government stipend is gradually reduced with higher labour income. Some welfare systems are regarded as steps on the way to a basic income but, because they have conditions attached, they are not basic incomes. If they raise household incomes to specified minima, they are called guaranteed minimum income systems.

For example, Bolsa Família in Brazil is restricted to poor families, and thus means-tested, and the children are obligated to attend school as a condition of receipt.

Closer to home, there has been growing enthusiasm for at least trialling a UBI in some parts of Britain with Brighton and Hove council recently being put forward as a trial subject and a petition calling for the council to request a trial in co-operation with the Westminster government has attracted widespread local support. Moves are afoot in Liverpool, Sheffield and Hull for similar local initiatives, and this form of local action shows enthusiasm for such new ideas in much the same way as Bristol has championed the idea of a local currency, the Bristol Pound which has been successfully trading for nearly eight years.

Indeed, our own First Minister has become an enthusiast for such a system but sees it would require the cooperation of the Westminster government to be able to be run effectively, perhaps as a pilot, in Scotland. A recent report from Reform Scotland, a non-party thinktank, suggested adults could be given £5,200pa – £100 per week but would lose the personal tax allowance as a consequence. Thus, as a standard basic rate taxpayer in employment or self-employment, you lose £2,500 and gain £5,200 per year. A net improvement with no administrative complexity. Reform Scotland said the scheme would cost the Scottish government £20.4bn pa but suggested raising over £18bn through scrapping personal tax allowances alongside some traditional, means-tested benefit payments such as the fatally flawed Universal Credit. This as currently envisaged would leave a funding and affordability gap of £2.4bn per year in Scotland. This can be filled by

either raising tax on earned income, by cutting expenditure in other parts of the budget, or by reducing the basic income by around 12% to £4600 or £88 per week. Obviously, a combination of these solutions could achieve an equitable result but at the cost of administrative complexity.

It is useful that the evaluation of the Finnish study is now available and is being examined by the EU Commission, and a variety of governments across the world including policy-makers at Westminster and Holyrood. The Finnish trial was the world’s first UBI experiment that was spread across a nation, statutory and based on a field experiment. As participation was not voluntary, it is possible to draw more reliable conclusions about effects of the experiment than is the case when based on voluntary participation.

Generally, recipients were more satisfied with their lives and experienced less mental strain than the control group who were excluded from the trial. They also had a more positive perception of their economic welfare. Participants were more satisfied with their lives and experienced less depression and sadness. They also had a more positive perception of their abilities; memory, ability to concentrate and to learn new skills. For some, the experiment offered new opportunities of participating in society for instance through voluntary work or informal care and seems to have increased activity of different kinds among those who were already active. However, for those who were in a challenging life situation before the experiment, the basic income does not, in and of itself, seem to have solved their problems.

Gramsci’s concern that in developed economies, without fundamental revolutionary change, the bourgeoisie simply expand to absorb those workers who are able to marginally improve their condition, is addressed in both the idea and practice of UBI. As a dividend share in the state’s wealth as of right, it is a revolutionary concept, but also as it is universal, automatic, and equal for all citizens it gives relative economic power to the poorest unconditionally.

For more on Finnish trial: https://www.newscientist.com/article/2242937-universal-basic-income-seems-to-improve-employment-and-well-being/#ixzz6M8Da4Ael

William Craig is a retired law academic having worked at the University of Aberdeen (1991-2008) and Robert Gordon’s University (RGU, 2009-2017). He was the Universities and Colleges Union (UCU) branch president at RGU and served on the union’s Scotland Executive.
A cross the world, CO2 emissions are falling due to the pandemic with lockdowns, restrictions on aircraft, car use and limitations on world trade. The International Energy Agency (IEA) estimates emissions will fall by 8% in 2020 and energy use fall by 6%. Renewables will make up 40% of global power generation, as compared to 34% for coal. Many countries are seeing improved air quality, reduced respiratory infections and fewer consequential deaths over time than the deaths caused by the pandemic. Government spending to mitigate the economic effects of the pandemic has smashed the idea that money is limited and that ‘austerity’ is required to balance the books. If Britain can ‘find’ £125bn overnight, similar sums can be found to create green jobs and meet climate targets. Reduced fuel prices will reduce global fossil fuel subsidies to $180bn in 2020. The opportunity to eliminate them and invest in green energy is there.

Global CO2 emissions in 2019 were roughly flat as opposed to the 6% reduction each year required to limit the rise in temperature to 1.5% by 2050. Moreover, huge fires across Australia showed how unprepared we are for chaotic climate change. In this regard, the IEA Clean Energy Transitions Summit in July this year will help governments identify the best approaches for creating jobs, putting emissions into structural decline and increasing energy sector resilience. The pandemic has also postponed COP26 by one year and it will now be held in November 2021 in Glasgow.

In Scotland, a number of organisations have set out plans for how the epidemic can be used to create a ‘new normal’ creating jobs and shaping a green transition. Amongst these are: i) the Committee for Climate Change (CCC) has urged the Scottish and British Governments to prioritise actions to recover from the pandemic based on six resilience principles; ii) 82 organisations have written to the first minister seeking a Just and Green Recovery; iii) the Common Weal has produced plans for a Resilient Economy leading to a new green deal for Scotland; and iv) the Jimmy Reid Foundation has shown how supporting people and the planet is incompatible with the principles of our current economic models.

The commonalities of these approaches outweigh their differences so the following is a summary of their main points relating to climate change:

1. Use climate investments to support economic recovery and jobs. Sets of investments have been identified, by the CCC, which reduce emissions and manage the social, environmental and economic impacts of climate change. Many are labour-intensive, spread across Britain and ready to roll out as part of a targeted and timely stimulus package.

2. The borrowing cap for the Scottish Parliament should be removed or lifted substantially so public expenditure can be used where needed and the Scottish National Investment Bank should be given full powers to act as a bank, capitalised from sources such as pension funds and lending to the public as well as the private sector.

3. Public procurement should be directed to supporting Scottish business and achieving the maximum number of manufacturing jobs. This unlocks many billions of pounds of investment for the Scottish economy with little or no additional burden on taxpayers.

4. The Government can lead the way to creating new social norms and behaviours that benefit wellbeing, improve productivity and reduce emissions such as supporting home-working, remote medical consultations and improved safety for cyclists.

5. Coronavirus is a rare chance to markedly accelerate the repurposing of government away from the prioritisation of economic growth and towards goals of wellbeing and sustainability, ending inequality and environmental destruction.

6. A resilient economy requires strong policies to reduce Britain’s vulnerability to the destructive risks of climate change and to avoid a disorderly transition to Net Zero. They must be implemented alongside the response to COVID-19 and will bring benefits to health, well-being and national security.

7. As it kick-starts the economy, the Government should avoid locking-in higher emissions or increased vulnerability to climate change in the longer-term. Support for carbon-intensive sectors should be contingent on them taking real and lasting action on climate change, and all new investments need to be resilient to future climate risks.

8. The benefits of acting on climate change must be shared widely, and the costs must not burden those who are least able to pay, or whose livelihoods are most at risk as the economy changes. Lost or threatened jobs of today should be replaced by those created by the new, resilient economy and a retraining guarantee given to anyone who has lost their job. Working with universities and, particularly, colleges, training needs for this new economy would be identified and training packages would be developed.

9. Create and protect jobs in sustainable travel, renewable heat, affordable local food and energy efficiency, with ambitious green employment opportunities for young people and support for retraining where whole industries are affected. Put measures in place to ensure all government programmes tackle inequality, public health and the just transition away from fossil fuels, excluding rogue employers, tax avoiders, major polluters and arms manufacturers from bailouts.

10. Strengthen incentives to reduce emissions when considering tax changes. Revenue could be raised by setting or raising carbon prices for sectors of the economy which do not bear the full costs of emitting greenhouse gases. Low global oil prices provide an opportunity to
increase carbon taxes without hurting consumers.

11. Protect marginalised people and those on low incomes by redistributing wealth. Provide adequate incomes for all instead of bailouts for shareholders, significantly raise taxes on the wealthy, ensure all public workers receive at least the real Living Wage and strengthen health, safety and workers’ rights. The ‘new normal’ must effectively tackle health inequalities with radical action on income support, household debt, social security, housing, public services and the environment and eliminating child poverty. With interest rates at record low levels, there is no urgent requirement to pay back debt, and we should fund increased spending by tackling tax avoidance and taxing wealth.

12. Expand public ownership of public services and boost investment, including in social care, strengthen the NHS and cradle-to-grave education, and create zero-carbon social and cooperative housing instead of buy-to-let.

13. Build a broad alliance of unions, environmentalists, passengers and beyond to make clear that there can be no more of the status quo when it comes to public transport, that continued investment and public ownership is needed, to create a sustainable public transport system which values passengers and workers, not private profit.

14. Jobs dependent on the oil industry will be under threat and the corporations will be looking to governments for further cash in excess of the £2.4bn tax allowances documented over a five-year period for keeping the oil flowing. The costs to the public purse on tax relief for decommissioning oil installations (£30bn) could be redirected to maintaining the income of oil workers whilst the economy is restructured to a low waste, low consumption, renewably sourced, socially beneficial (and publicly owned) energy regime.

15. Instead of a quarter of all workers being furloughed for a few months, the 150,000 or so workers directly employed in oil and gas in Scotland should be furloughed in a planned, staged way as a state-led construction of a renewable infrastructure is put in place, creating 200,000 jobs in the process.

16. A national industrial strategy is required to create high-pay design, primary production, manufacturing and processing jobs to replace the low-pay service sector jobs that are being lost. This not only creates major economic stimulus and reduces low pay and poverty it also speeds up the greening of Scotland’s economy and creates much more resilience in an economy less reliant on importing. The sectors it should focus on are based on Scotland’s abundant natural resources.

17. If public procurement is repurposed so ‘public kitchens’ (the food bought by all public sector agencies) buy in a way that provides ongoing security for domestic businesses it will enable them to scale up production with confidence. This can provide a foundation for substantial expansion in food growing and processing in Scotland.

18. Scotland has the lowest level of forestry in Europe but the highest potential for this industry. Materials crops (particularly wood but also crops like bamboo and hemp) form the basis of modern green advanced materials like cross laminated timber, insulation products, bioplastics and hempcrete. These can provide high quality, ethical, domestically-produced source materials for the replacement of unsustainable imported construction materials and to stimulate a light manufacturing sector. Scotland currently imports large volumes of low-quality light manufacturing which ends up in landfills, and billions of pounds of this is bought by the public sector (for example, furniture and equipment for schools, medical supplies for the NHS and stationery for local authorities).

19. High-quality public rental houses with low rents can be built without subsidy. The public sector can build as many of these as there is demand and, if targeted at medium-sized domestic businesses, guaranteed order books can be used to support these businesses to transition to green off-site building technologies and to develop and support domestic supply chains of ethical construction materials (only 20% of construction materials are sourced here).

20. Scotland has failed to capture almost any of the manufacturing jobs linked to our renewable energy resources. We need a National Energy Company which develops large-scale renewable energy opportunities in collective ownership, commissioning the manufacturing from Scotland and capturing as much of the supply chain in Scotland as possible.

21. To develop this industry requires a lot of spare electricity capacity. That nation will take a global lead in the emerging hydrogen industry and nowhere is better placed than Scotland to be that nation.

22. The Scottish economy is underdeveloped and in particular makes poor use of our land and other natural resources. Fuelling the transition will be land-based industries which themselves represent tens of thousands of potential jobs, with many of those in rural Scotland. However, this requires substantial land reform so that land-based businesses can gain access to the enormous proportions of Scotland’s land which is currently used unproductively. A quarter of greenhouse gas emissions globally comes from agriculture and other land-based activities. Removing subsidies to intensive agro-industry, introducing a pesticide tax and breaking up land ownership will enable more people to work in small scale food production, cut emissions and toxicity and increase food sovereignty as part of the system change to sustainability. Scotland’s seas, if responsibly managed, are also a great source of natural resources.

23. To achieve the above requires Government action and continued pressure on them to act.

Gordon Morgan is a member of the editorial committee of the Scottish Left Review
Is Coronavirus causing a shift in attitudes towards immigration?

Lubnaa Joomun reveals some seemingly positive changes but wonders whether they will be permanent

Only four years ago, immigration was one of the most topical crises in the British press – one that had Britain at breaking point. Since then the world has met a crisis in the COVID-19 pandemic. With the world turned upside down, are we beginning to see a shift in attitudes towards immigration? We can a sense of this by asking a series of questions.

First, how many immigrants are there in Britain? You may be aware that most people tend to dramatically overestimate the proportion of immigrants in the country – guessing on average double the actual figure (which stands at 14%). Perhaps, an unsurprising statistic given the negative headlines surrounding immigration that consumed our news feeds in the years leading up to the Brexit referendum. But now, research shows that we are beginning to see a shift in attitudes towards immigration. So, what has changed since then?

Immigration has been labelled a hotly contested issue and was often named Britain’s ‘most important issue’ between 2001 and 2016. Since the EU referendum, however, the nation’s primary concerns have switched to issues such as the EU and NHS. Following a report by the Demos thinktank, the Daily Mail reported on 30 May 2018 that ‘Most Brits believe that migration has harmed communities’, the Daily Mail reported in 2018. Meanwhile a report by Ipsos-MORI suggests that we are becoming more positive towards immigration: only 45% of the nation agree that there are too many immigrants in 2017 compared to 64% 4 years earlier. Like Brexit, the topic of immigration is no longer a trending issue – with the world in the grips of a deadly pandemic, Coronavirus has consumed our attention.

But we have also gone from hearing the ways in which immigrants are draining the NHS, to seeing how important they are to it – even Piers Morgan, not always the most credible of public figures, has been paying tribute to the immigrants ‘saving lives’ in the NHS. A majority (62%) of the public now support offering British citizenship to frontline migrant workers – evidence of an appreciation of the invaluable contribution they are making. And, this represents a marked contrast from headlines pre-COVID-19, which has forced us to focus the untruths that were sown into British politics and grown into Brexit.

What about the media? Does its coverage cause or simply reflect the views of its audiences? At the very least, we can say the media has a key role in focusing public interest. The ‘Leave’ campaign placed huge emphasis on immigration, and most newspapers at the time were occupied with negative portrayals of immigration levels. Consequently, concern over the numbers of people coming to Britain played a major role in the Brexit vote, according to the authoritative British Social Attitudes survey in 2017.

Since then, immigrants have been given a break – and even incorporated as a key part of the social fabric. More recently, Home Secretary, Priti Patel, lauded the ‘extraordinary contributions’ of immigrants to the NHS during COVID-19, though at the same time refusing to waive the huge health surcharge foreign NHS workers face. And, the world has changed, Tory MPs recently proclaimed, advising that harsh new immigration rules must be rethought due to the vital role lower-paid migrant staff have played during the pandemic.

But immigrants have always played a key role in the NHS. It appears that it is only in times of crises that the nation is able to address this ‘collective amnesia’ and rewrite immigration in a positive light – in the same vein that the Windrush generation invited to help ‘rebuild the country’ after WWII have since been chased into deportation.

That the conversation surrounding Brexit could have led to years of bitterness and a country ‘split down the middle’, and for that same conversation to now be given a makeover is not an act of contrition. It is an exposure of the extent to which mainstream media can steer a strategic narrative. Language is powerful, so what does that say about those with power to manipulate it?

Across the country, frontline workers are being hailed as heroes. We have clapped for our key workers every Thursday. But the NHS has been consistently underfunded for the last decade: a political decision. Key workers continue to work without basic protection. Boris Johnson has often been lauded as the Churchillian hero leading Britain through its biggest fight since WWII, but the UK’s death toll is third only to the US and Brazil - countries led by presidents who have tried at different points to deny the virus is even real. There is much to say for the way narratives are framed.

So, where is the migrant crisis in 2020? It does not exist because it never did exist. Immigration is no longer a salient political issue, now that the pro-Brexit vote has been achieved. The hostile sentiment against immigration may have softened, but Britain has also seen a rise in racism following the COVID-19 outbreak, including a horrific incident where a woman was knocked unconscious as she defended her Chinese friend from abuse. Just like the country witnessed post-Brexit. The government and media have done little to prevent prejudices from spreading.

To what extent should we celebrate the shift in attitude towards immigration? While aforementioned shifts are to be welcomed in some ways, we must also understand why they have happened and what forces led to these shifts. If we do so, we will realise that many of the shifts are simply short-term, instrumental ones. That does not bode well for the aspiration to have a society free of racist prejudice.

Lubnaa Joomun is a political correspondent for the Immigration Advice Service, an organisation of immigration solicitors – see https://iasservices.org.uk/
Crisis in the councils ... mental health challenges ... key workers still key? ... freedom of information

Councils in Scotland have been at the forefront in dealing with COVID-19 humanitarian community response, reinforcing public health messaging and ensuring continued safety and well-being of our most vulnerable. Prior to the pandemic, they were already struggling financially with overall revenue funding having fallen by 7% in real terms between 2013-14 and 2019-20 (when Scottish Government revenue had fallen by only 2% in the same period) and the proportion of their revenue ring-fenced for Scottish Government priorities having increased to 61%. The Westminster Government announced an additional £1.6bn of support south of the border, with £155m consequentials for Scotland support south of the border, with £155m consequentials for Scotland calculated through the Barnett Formula. This money has only recently started to be drip-fed to councils, with the Scottish Government asking for evidence of need before it has been released.

The Scottish Government has made further announcements which require councils to respond to - such as the roll out of full pay for sickness absence and death in service payments for third and private sector social care staff - at significant cost without any detail on how this will be funded or any clarity on when this will happen.

The Covid-19 crisis has increased the pressure on local authority budgets via increased charges for PPE and procurement of services at the same time as their other revenue streams like business rates and charges have dried up. They are now in desperate need for additional financial support from the Scottish Government - so desperate that we now have Scottish councils applying to the Westminster Government for funding from the furlough scheme to keep directly employed council staff in a job. The return of schooling has highlighted that councils will require significant investment if they are to implement the new delivery model, maintaining social/physical distancing, upgrade of IT systems to cope with blended learning and address the issues of school transport.

SOLACE, the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers, has issued the following statement to the Scottish Government’s Economic Recovery Group: ‘The delivery of strong and sustainable public services is a key requisite for economic recovery – the education of the country’s future workforce, caring for elderly parents and the vulnerable to allow the working age population to contribute economically’. The route to economic recovery cannot be at the expense of public services and public servants, who have responded heroically during the pandemic. Recovery plans need to invest in these services, protect jobs and give due consideration of an ambitious Green New Deal for Scotland.

Mark Ferguson is the chair of the UNISON Scottish Local Government Committee

The COVID-19 crisis has combined mental health stressors that have been studied before in other disasters, but which have never been seen consolidated in one global crisis ... There is research on how humans cope with quarantine, mass disasters and ongoing stressors but not on all three’.

This comment by an expert in the treatment of trauma sums up the potentially overwhelming impact of the current coronavirus crisis on the mental health of all of us. Some people have referred to that impact as being like a ‘tsunami’. In one sense, that’s a good description. Like a real tsunami, the multiple stressors produced by the crisis – loss of job and income, social isolation, loss of loved ones, fear of becoming unwel or even dying, uncertainty about the future – can overwhelm our psychological defences, our normal ways of coping. In another sense, however, it’s misleading. For while Covid-19 is clearly a particularly nasty pathogen, as writers like Mike Davis and Rob Wallace have shown there is very little that is ‘natural’ either about its origins, which lie in neo-liberal capitalist agricultural methods or the way it has spread via globalised trade and transport networks.

Nor is there much that is natural about the impact of the coronavirus crisis on mental health. It’s true, of course, that anyone can experience mental distress, including the Royals. And it’s positive to see Princes William and Harry talking openly about their mental health problems – anything that reduces the shame and stigma around mental distress is to be welcomed. But we shouldn’t be fooled into thinking that the pressures on them, self-isolating in the splendour of their different palaces, is in the same league as the mental health pressures on the lone parent with young kids trying to self-isolate in a council flat, or of health and social care workers looking after the old, the vulnerable and the sick without proper PPE.

Like every other aspect of this crisis, its impact on mental health is shaped by the divisions and inequalities of capitalism. That includes the effects of a decade of austerity policies on mental health services. So, for example, recent research shows that young people are one group who are finding the experience of lockdown particularly hard on their mental health. Yet as the Scottish Children’s Services Coalition has argued, despite recent increases in funding by the SNP Scottish Government, mental health services for young people in Scotland remain woefully inadequate. NHS figures released in March 2020 show that thousands of children and young people are failing to be treated within the Scottish Government mental health waiting time target of 18 weeks, with more than 200 waiting for over a year.

So, fighting now for more and better user-informed mental health services is an urgent task, both to address the new pressures arising from the Coronavirus crisis and also to redress the cuts to both NHS and community-based mental health services over the past ten years. And, as the recent experience of the Black Lives Matters movement has shown, by challenging our sense of powerlessness and isolation collectively...
fighting back can itself be very positive for our mental health.

Iain Ferguson is Honorary Professor of Social Work and Social Policy at UWS and author of ‘Politics of the Mind: Marxism and Mental Distress’ (Bookmarks, 2017).

Usdaw is calling for a New Deal for Workers, after the Coronavirus emergency has shown that millions of low-paid workers have stepped up in the most difficult of circumstances to keep our country going. Too many key workers are low-paid, with insecure hours and few employment rights. They have been undervalued for too long and deserve a new deal. So, Usdaw is calling for a new deal for workers based around:

- Minimum wage of £10 per hour for all workers: To provide some recognition of the value of our key workers and help relieve the financial burden faced by too many low-paid working people.
- Minimum contract of 16 hours per week: An end to the use of short-hours contracts that do not benefit the worker. A minimum 16 hours, for those who want it, ensures that work is offered on a meaningful basis that can only be reduced through express agreement from the worker.
- Contract based on normal hours of work: Those regularly working over their contracted hours should have them guaranteed in their contract. Regular hours enable workers to plan their lives and finances.
- Protection of workers legislation: Abuse, threats and assaults should not be part of the job. The current law fails to protect retail staff and the Government must ensure stiffer penalties for those who abuse workers.
- Improved sick pay provisions: Workers should not face significant debt because of sickness. Usdaw is calling for Statutory Sick Pay to be paid from day one and reflect average earnings for all workers.
- A proper Social Security system: Universal Credit has been besieged by problems ever since it was launched. Usdaw is calling for the five week wait to be scrapped and for the system as a whole to be overhauled.
- A voice at work: The Government needs to promote union recognition, remove the current hurdles around statutory recognition and include trade union representatives on all business review bodies.
- Job Security: We need stronger protections against redundancy and dismissal, from day one of employment. We also need proper consultation about new technology and investment in skills so that workers are able to keep up in a changing workplace.
- Fair treatment and equality for all workers: Most underpaid frontline key workers are women. These essential roles have been undervalued and underpaid for too long. Women workers need equal pay and they need decent pay, along with new family friendly rights that support parents and carers to juggle work and family life.

Further information on Usdaw’s campaign can be found at: https://www.usdaw.org.uk/Campaigns/A-New-Deal-for-Workers

Stewart Forrest is Usdaw’s Scottish Divisional Officer

History alerts us to the practice of governments trying to limit human rights during a national crisis. Scotland was no different and Freedom of Information (FoI) rights were weakened by emergency legislation so that public authorities could ‘better utilise resources to deal with the effect of coronavirus’. The measures were controversial as the extent of interference with FoI rights was unreasonable and disproportionate. By mid-May the vociferous Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat MSPs were joined by Green MSPs and FoI rights were restored plus two measures introduced to mitigate the harm caused: requiring regular performance reports from Scottish Government and providing a public interest test when people complain to the Scottish Information Commissioner about delays in providing information from 7 April to 26 May 2020. How the public interest test is applied in these cases requires monitoring.

What cannot be undone are the changes to culture and practice on gathering, storing and pro-actively releasing information in the 10,000 public bodies affected such as health boards, individual GP practices, local government and regulators such as the Care Inspectorate. The ‘all hands-on deck approach’ reflected the national mood to do everything to prevent and treat those infected. Failing to realise that good record management was essential to achieving those aims was a mistake, and not an understandable one. Transparency and accountability help public servants, politicians, unions, civil society, and the private sector to understand what went wrong and identify a better way forward. Preparing for a second or third wave makes access to official information critical to enable evidence led solutions. Although we are all in this together, it is a matter of fact that some groups are far more at risk than others including the very elderly, obese and disabled people. So targeted, preventative action is essential.

Anecdotally we hear about what is happening to the management of information locally such as GP practices requiring care homes to return the apparently unilaterally issued ‘verification of expected/predicted death forms’ that had accompanied the ‘do not resuscitate forms’ for individual people. Clearly what might be missing from a file is just as important as what remains.

Ultimately, we should not be distracted from the urgency of reforming the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 which has been confirmed as operationally inadequate, failing to keep up to date with how information is stored and communicated and still being resisted within some public bodies. The thorough report produced by the Public Audit and Post Legislative Scrutiny Committee of the Scottish Parliament, prompted by an unanimous motion passed exactly three years ago, requires prompt attention by politicians to convey the clear message that FoI rights are permanent and need to be strong to be effective. Developments are keenly awaited.

Carole Ewart is Convener of the Campaign for Freedom of Information in Scotland

FIGHT COVID19
Attitudes towards women’s oppression and sexism have become better understood and have advanced positively in the socialist and union movements since the 1980s when I first became involved in politics. This shift has grown in tandem with changes in attitudes in society. Part of that societal change was driven by women in the Labour Party and unions fighting a long hard battle inside their organisations and influencing wider society in their wake.

Despite this progress we are still having to go over the same issues concerning sexual abuse, harassment and inappropriate behaviour towards women perpetrated by male leaders of our movement.

In recent years, these issues have damaged political parties (SNP, SSP, SWP) and unions (GMB, UCU). For organisations which on paper are some of the most progressive on women’s rights, why does this keep happening? And, if we want to build united working-class organisations, we need to understand what is going on.

Three questions which need to be addressed: why do powerful men behave as they do; how do we hold men in our movement accountable for their behaviour; and, why once their behaviour is in the public domain do they still manage to marshal support despite this?

Holding abusive men in leading positions to account for their behaviour is generally left to individual women. Either those suffering the sexual abuse and harassment or other women who have been informally approached about it. I have been one of those women challenging it - not just in the SSP for I was a Labour member for ten years in the 1980s.

I have been informally approached many times by women who want to tell me in confidence about a certain leader’s behaviour - they don’t want to take public action but they want it noted and they want the perpetrator challenged informally. In my experience, there is a metaphorical underground railroad of knowledge that travels unseen, amongst women activists, sharing information about men who are ‘a problem’. Predatory sexual behaviour can be hard to prove as women have found and the sharing of information is a form of protection.

Why is it underground? In left parties and unions, women activists are committed politically. They know what their organisations are up against in terms of the media, employers and the establishment. They have given their time and energy to build their party or union and there is a countervailing pressure that to go public will damage the movement and be a gift to the right or their employers to inflict as much damage as possible. This is always a dilemma for women on the left. There is always a personal and political price to pay.

Another consideration is the ‘great leader’ syndrome, that even if women do courageously break the silence they won’t get support from within the ranks as many members will support the leader who has a huge platform to refute and attack. Here, it becomes not just a matter of truth but a matter of loyalty. These contexts all act to protect men in leading positions who exercise predatory sexual behaviour. It is easy to read books on feminism, to understand in the abstract women’s oppression historically and globally, but when confronted with everyday misogyny, it is sometimes as if invisible blinkers have been fitted to men on the left en masse.

In the middle of the first Tommy Sheridan defamation trial in 2006, I attended an SSP local meeting. There were about 15 people there of whom three were women. We were discussing whether executive members of the party including the MSPs should take to the witness box and tell the truth. Those supporting Sheridan thought we should lie. That day Sheridan had put a woman SSP member in the witness box and asked her the most intimate details he had sacked his QC - about their relationship. I was speaking after a male supporter of Sheridan. I had rehearsed all of the arguments ad nauseam but, on the spur of the moment, I asked him directly: ‘When did you last have sex?’ to stunned silence. I waited in the uncomfortable silence, so I continued: ‘Who was it with?’ When the chair started spluttering and trying to silence me, I then asked ‘Have you ever had an affair?’ He refused to answer any questions. I didn’t want or expect an answer. Several men were up in arms by now: I was a ‘disgrace’; this wasn’t ‘political’; what was I trying to do and how dare I?

They were outraged that I had asked questions in public about their intimate lives in a meeting of 15 people. Yet, they had just voted that it was okay for the leader of the SSP to drag a woman into the witness box to ask her intimate questions in the full glare of judge, jury and media, and then call her a liar when they knew she was telling the truth. And there is the disconnect.

This was not just about the individual man for it was systemic. Sheridan was exploiting the power given to him by society and the criminal justice system, using it against the women. When left parties and unions don’t get this, they become part of the problem. When women tell the truth, we are taking on all of this and the backlash.

The verdict in the recent Salmond trial and the subsequent attacks on the women will unfortunately act as a deterrent for women in politics to break the silence, but in the era of #metoo these issues are not going away. Unless there is a shift in understanding and left political culture, we will continue to be damaged by the predatory sexual behaviour of powerful male leaders.

Frances Curran is former MSP and is currently a member of the executive the further education lecturers’ union, the EIS-FELA.
What should an ideal Scottish male leader look like?

Heather Farley and Saffron Roberts say there should be a non-gendered type of ideal leadership

A buse of power by leading men has dominated the headlines in Scotland over recent years. Yet, compared to England’s leading men, with Johnson’s ‘letterbox’ comments and Cummings’s Durham trips, you’d be forgiven for thinking Scotland was, relatively speaking, progressive. Yet this is far from true; from harassment accusations by female colleagues to unsolicited messages to teenagers, men in powerful positions in Scotland are in disgrace.

In this climate, what should a man in a powerful, public leadership role look like? Charisma is often listed amongst crucial leadership qualities, but this is often problematic and male-centric. Charisma is something that has long been used to justify men’s actions when they behave poorly in the name of ‘charm’. The Guardian (11 February 2020) talked of Derek Mackay: ‘while not now in any way condoning his despicable private behaviour, recall[ed] his wit and charm on public occasions in the past’. Here, we have an example of that ‘essential’ leadership charm that men are allowed to keep, often alongside their positions of power, even after accusations rife with predatory behaviour.

Scottish parties appear united in their scandal. In 2018, Tory MP, Ross Thomson, was drawn into the public eye when another MP accused him of ‘unwanted physical touching’. Thomson stepped down from his position, after another instance of ‘inappropriate sexual touching’, though continued to deny all accusations against him.

Leadership that utilises threatening behaviour to assert dominance goes far beyond the spheres of politics. STV in early October 2019 reported that Forbes Police station in Moray is claimed to be home to a ‘boys club’ of officers who, in addition to a number of other such acts, made the headlines for driving a woman officer into the woods in the middle of the night and abandoning her ‘to ‘teach her a lesson’ after she made a report of domestic abuse and sexual assault against her police officer ex-partner’. Abuse of leadership not only impacts the individuals harmed, but influences community attitudes regarding what authority figures and men can get away with. These attitudes present ‘get-out-of-jail-free’ cards and prevent survivors from seeking help and reporting the crime. Abuse of power by individuals is damaging to the systems that they represent, and to the youth for whom these people should resemble role models.

So, the question we should, instead, be asking is not what makes a good male leader, but what makes a good leader. Men and women should not have to conform to different standards, especially when it comes to positions of power. In 2020, when we are teaching our children that their identity does not and should not limit their aspirations, we must also acknowledge that both stereotypically ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ characteristics belong in our leaders. In doing so, we must be careful not to maintain the hegemonic binary that suggests that ‘feminine’ traits exist only to support and cushion more leader-like ‘masculine’ traits. This rhetoric is condescending and encourages the idea that leadership is for men, and that ‘feminine’ qualities in leadership can only be implemented by men.

Further to this, when we dismantle the gender binary, enabling all genders to express themselves and lead in a way that reflect their politics, circumstances and personality, we must do so in a way that acknowledges the structural inequality that women and other marginalised people experience. This means cis-gendered, white men and women in power acknowledging their privilege while actively facilitating and developing organisations that are representative of the diverse society we live in.

Concrete steps must be developed and taken to address gender inequality in all areas of our lives, and to achieve full social, economic and political equality we need more women in positions of power. It is imperative that these processes facilitate more leaders that identify as LGBTQI+, are disabled, or are black or from an ethnic minority. Dismantling the gender-binary does not mean that we aim to be gender-blind. We must see gender, as only in having constant awareness of traditional gender norms and the oppression that they present can the gender binary be dismantled. Taking responsibility for gender inequality, while enabling a leadership which is fully representative, is the only way forward for Scotland.

There is a long way to go in addressing the power imbalance created by men’s oppression of women and girls and to change this we need good leadership at all levels. We need to replace domination and repression with power based on empowerment, mutual support, and collaboration. A good male leader looks the same as a good person who is also held accountable for their actions. Otherwise, we end up with a community both ruled and influenced by predatory criminals.

In these troubled times, we should be aspiring to a male leader who can deal decisively but empathetically with a major terrorist attack, a volcanic eruption, and a pandemic all in the first term of office, at the same time as caring for a newborn. The female version is known to us all.

Find out more about our campaigning work to end men’s violence against women at www.zerotolerance.org.uk

Heather Farley and Saffron Roberts are Project Support Interns at Zero Tolerance. Heather is a recent graduate in International Relations from the University of St Andrews. During that time, she ran a student-led Got Consent initiative which educated students in bystander intervention. Saffron is a recent Edinburgh English Literature graduate and activist. In early 2018, she founded the campaign Period Poverty Edinburgh.
Taking arms dealing seriously – what needs to happen

Jonathan Deans explains the how and why of an unregulated business that gets away with murder

What do the movement of heavy commercial vehicles in Kent, court fees for proving the validity of a will, and the definition of ‘commercial pornography’ have in common? They are the subject of draft statutory instruments sitting before Parliament which are contingent upon affirmative procedure. This means that both Houses of Parliament must approve the proposed regulations before they become law. And so, these matters will be subject to more parliamentary scrutiny than the Ministry of Defence’s (MoD) ‘gift’ of almost £3m in military equipment to the Libyan government in 2017.

The equipment comprised Counter-Improvised Explosive Device (C-IED) equipment for using to defuse unexploded ordinance and IEDs left in Sirte after it had been liberated from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. As this was a gift with a value of over £300,000 which had not previously been budgeted for, Parliament was notified via a written ministerial statement, in line with Treasury policy. There was no legal requirement to notify parliament, but this was expected in order to get Treasury approval.

The procedure then allowed any MP 14 sitting days to raise an objection. If an objection was raised, then the gift would not be sent until the objection had been answered. There was no requirement for the Ministry to formally reconsider their decision. There is no further procedure that would have been triggered by an objection. No MP objected which is unsurprising, as bomb-clearing equipment is much less controversial than tanks and missiles. However, the total information available to Parliament consisted of just four short paragraphs.

There was no further description of the equipment being provided. C-IED equipment can range from bomb-defusing robots and electronic jamming systems to body armour and mine-resistant vehicles. Much of it has other military usage beyond the disposal of ordinance.

There was also no explanation about how this equipment was sourced by the Government. Providing military surplus to a nation in need may be justifiable. Buying millions of pounds of equipment from a private company and then transferring it to another country is a different matter for this could be a ‘windfall’ to the manufacturing company. This scepticism may be warranted, considering ministers had been wined and dined by arms trade lobbyists the same day MPs called for a halt of sales to Saudi Arabia, and then later admitted to selling that country cluster bombs banned under international law.

Three years later and the Libyan civil war continues. Amnesty International has reported both sides have committed war crimes, particularly the indiscriminate use of explosive weapons in civilian areas.

Following the Arms-to-Iraq affair and the Scott inquiry in 1996, new legislation reformed the approach to exports. Until the Export Control Act 2002, the law had been the Import, Export and Customs Powers (Defence) Act 1939, which essentially allowed the Government to act however it pleased. Since the 2002 Act, the Government now must issue ‘control orders’ in respect of certain kinds of export. The Export Control Order 2005 governs arms exports. It does not appear to have ever been discussed by Parliament at the time it was implemented.

Export licenses for military equipment are issued to companies by the Department for International Trade (DfIT), with MoD and Foreign Office guidance. The Department for International Development (DFID) and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills used to also have roles but these were removed in 2016. If there is internal disagreement as to whether to grant an export license, the matter is escalated to the Cabinet Office, and then to the Ministers. There is no requirement to notify Parliament that a contentious export license is currently being considered. There is no procedure for Parliament to debate the granting of licenses.

The Government does publish quarterly and annual reports on granted export licenses. However, there is little effort made to make them easily understandable, they only provide detailed information on one of the six kinds of license, and they only provide information on broad categories of equipment rather than specific details. Example categories are ‘biotechnology equipment’ and ‘equipment for the production of explosives’. There is little reason to think that these reports are perused by elected officials, except perhaps the members of the relevant oversight committees.

The select committees overseeing the Foreign Office, MoD, DfIT and DFID all meet together and work as a group called the Committees on Arms Export Controls. Its last report was published in July 2018, covering arms exports from 2014 to 2016. It begins by bemoaning that the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for International Trade did not appear in front of the Committees to give evidence; the Government encourages companies to apply for open licenses to reduce the licensing workload; the Government does not carry out any compliance auditing in respect of UK companies’ overseas operations; and the information provided by the Government is ‘in formats that are very difficult to navigate, interrogate and interpret’.

The report only discusses trends in the provision of export licenses and does not touch on any individual cases. It may have been pointless for the committee to comment on individual cases, given that they were only able to investigate export licenses granted at least two years previously. It may have been impossible for the Committees to comment on individual cases, given the unworkable format of the evidence provided by the Government.

The Government’s response to this report gave little indication that they would implement any of the recommendations made by the Committees. Indeed, it explicitly pushed back on suggestions that Britain honour its Arms Trade Treaty obligations to report on arms imports, providing the excuse that Britain does not have a mechanism in place to do so. Clearly, the Committees meant for the Government to create such a mechanism.

Since records began in 2008, Britain has approved international arms exports worth almost £6.9bn, not counting goods exported under open licenses, for which there are no records. Counting to June 2020, this is an average of around £3.7bn pa. The peak came in 2015 with £6.9bn, the result of the beginning of the Yemeni civil war in March 2015.

Since that war began, Britain has approved over £6.4bn in exports to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates alone. Widespread bombing...
of civilian areas by all parties had killed an estimated 17,729 civilians by March 2019. In June 2019, the Court of Appeal in England ruled that British arms sales to Saudi Arabia were unlawful, on the basis that the Government had failed to consider the relevancy of Saudi Arabia’s historic pattern of breaches of international humanitarian law. The Government suspended these arms sales following the ruling, while appealing to the Supreme Court. The appeal is expected to be heard this year, although the Supreme Court has not yet decided on whether to hear it. In September 2019, the Secretary of State for International Development admitted the Government had unlawfully granted three more export licenses and there may have been more cases which the Government had not yet taken notice of. This Secretary of State is still in post. Despite the suspension of sales to Saudi Arabia, Britain has still exported £5.1bn of arms worldwide in 2019.

The point here has been to showcase the structural flaws and institutional deficiencies in the UK arms control regime.

Despite the efforts of the Committees on Arms Export Controls, oversight is virtually non-existent. Secretaries of State do not fulfil their obligations to account to the Committees. No contemporary oversight exists. Instead, the Committees resort to reporting on broad trends of arms sales some two to four years previously. They lack the means to discern these trends from convoluted and jargon-heavy spreadsheets. In very rare circumstances, Parliament may be notified, but MPs are unlikely to object or even request more details.

The Government admits to continuing to grant export licenses in defiance of a court judgment and defecits from reports which highlight Britain is in breach of its international obligations. The Government encourages companies to apply for open licenses, as this cuts down on their workload, despite the fact that this greatly reduces control and oversight.

The Campaign Against Arms Trade has the stated goal of abolishing the international arms trade. The Control Arms Campaign has the more modest goal of setting up the international Arms Trade Treaty and now campaigns for states to abide by its terms. Unfortunately, no major reforms are remotely in-sight in Britain and a change in culture is required.

Most victories for the anti-arms trade movement in recent times have been superficial. The Blair Government banned the trading of land mines and torture equipment, which may have been significant if not for the fact that no companies in Britain produced them in the first place. The Brown Government expanded the list from countries banned from holding export credits from 41 to 63, by adding 22 countries that imported barely any weapons. The Coalition Government signed and ratified the international Arms Trade Treaty, but Britain has still not fully implemented its obligations under the treaty.

The Government is aware that arms dealing is unpopular and often morally unjustifiable. It is arguable that this is why the system has been set up to restrict scrutiny, to avoid public discussions and tense votes over an act that many MPs may disagree with but view as a necessary evil. A comparison is Dominic Raab’s comments following the murder of Jamal Khashoggi; that it was ‘terrible’ but that the Government would not be terminating the relationship with Saudi Arabia because of the huge number of British jobs that depended on the relationship, i.e. that depend on the arms trade. A more realistic take is that it is the profits of the arms trade and not the workers which are the key consideration here. It is also likely a government which has frequently pandered to nationalist rhetoric and dreams of a resurgent Britain is not willing to relinquish its global military pretensions.

Raab’s comments imply that we should stomach any misbehaviour or atrocities committed by our trading partners, as taking action would affect British workers and our country’s bottom line. If the Government wishes to make this argument, then it should be made before Parliament in debates over the granting of licenses. The Government has always jealously guarded the elements of its ‘prerogative’ to manage foreign affairs. When the civil war in Yemen broke out, there was no discussion in Parliament, but the Government clearly pursued a policy of permitting and increasing arms sales to Saudi Arabia. It is time for unitary control over arms exports to be reined in.

At the bare minimum, the Government should set up an oversight body, similar to the Inspector Generals of the United States. This would allow dedicated staff, with expertise, to monitor arms trading on a real-time basis and report back to Parliament. The opposition and backbench MPs should then seriously challenge the Government on the decisions it has made. The Government should also set up a system where licenses of exports to a small list of allied countries can be approved by the Government departments internally, but licenses to other countries must be debated in Parliament, perhaps as a statutory instrument subject to affirmative procedure. If the movement of heavy commercial vehicles in Kent is important enough for Parliament to consider then so are arms exports.

Jonathan Deans is a trainee solicitor, community councillor, and a member of the Scottish Labour Party. He lives in Glasgow. He has studied public law and the laws of international commerce at undergraduate and postgraduate levels and has previously had articles published on abortion rights, hospital smoking bans, and the use of children as covert intelligence sources.
How will the pandemic change the Scottish political landscape?

Ahead of the Holyrood 2021 elections, Colin Fox argues all that is solid just might melt into air.

With less than a year to go until the Holyrood elections, the opinion polls appear to suggest the result is a foregone conclusion. The SNP is at 52% support, according to a May 2020 YouGov poll and looks set for its fourth win in a row. And yet? Well, given what lies ahead, who can say what Scotland will look like in May 2021. The full, long-term impact of the coronavirus, unknowable at this stage, will surely be seismic. The collapse in economic output over the past four months will leave many Scots at the mercy of forces way beyond our shores. The decline in living standards threatens to be unlike any seen in the Holyrood era.

Nicola Sturgeon’s handling of the pandemic has earned her respect but she has made mistakes. She may be adept at ‘spin’ but her fundamental strategy was the same as Boris Johnson’s and included the same initial inaction, the same shortages of equipment and even more shocking numbers of care home fatalities.

‘Of all the UK’s mis-steps in tackling coronavirus, the epidemic in the care homes is the worst’ thundered the Financial Times (15 June 2020). It continued: ‘In Scotland, half of the 4,000 deaths have occurred in facilities that were under resourced and ill-prepared for the crisis’.

Tough questions, therefore, lie ahead for Sturgeon when this pandemic is over. Many of us believe the case for a National Care Service free at the point of need, publicly owned and run alongside the NHS is now overwhelming (see also Stephen Smellie, this issue). This is unfortunately not the view taken by the SNP which wishes to retain the private sector model.

This is, therefore, another issue where the SNP has bullied many on the ‘soft Left’ in Scotland into swallowing things they shouldn’t. The same charge can be levelled at their public spending cuts, their privatisation of NHS facilities like Edinburgh’s Sick Children’s hospital, their neo-liberal economics as outlined in the Sustainable Growth Commission and their evasion on the abolition of the council tax.

There’s also ‘indyref2’, where the SNP wasted four years tying the case for independence to membership of an anti-democratic, neo-liberal EU. It didn’t lead to the majority support for ‘yes’ it predicted it would.

The SNP strategy for securing that second vote was even more inept. It rightly ruled out a Catalan-style ‘fringe vote’ which hardly worked out well there. But the ‘dogs in the street’ know Britain will not grant permission for a second independence referendum so the Section 30 route is clearly a dead end. And with the SNP opposed to extra-parliamentary tactics, the cause is stuck in an impasse and losing momentum. The nationalists appear more interested in keeping their parliamentary seats and large salaries than in advancing the cause of independence.

The impending ‘civil war’ between Alex Salmond and Nicola Sturgeon reflects all these underlying conflicts. Salmond is adamant his successor as First Minister and SNP leader conspired to level serious sexual assault charges against him. Had those charges been upheld he would have gone to jail for a long time. His court victory in February, however, was diminished by evidence offered in his defence which conceded his behaviour as First Minister often demeaned the office and did him no credit. But having won his case, he is out for revenge. He intends to publish a ‘warts and all’ expose in November alleging Sturgeon plotted against him and, more damagingly, that she lied to Parliament about her own role in the failed civil action of 2018. It is inconceivable the SNP will emerge unscathed from the book, the forthcoming parliamentary inquiry or this exceedingly acrimonious public feud. Sturgeon faces the most damaging battle of her political life. It remains to be seen whether she emerges intact to lead the nationalists into the next election.

So, regardless of who leads it, the SNP must defend a record of orthodox managerialism that undermines its claim to be ‘social democratic’. It pursued a conservative policy agenda on all the ‘big ticket’ items: economic management, taxes, industrial strategy and combating inequality. It has tackled to the right politically since 1990 because it believed the electorate had already done so. It embraced privatisation despite having fought it in opposition. It backed the warmongering NATO alliance after having fought against it for 50 years. Its failures on the issues that matter most to Scotland’s working class majority provide the basis for the deep seated contradiction between the SNP’s electoral success and their conservative politics. So how do they pull it off?

Money plays a part. The SNP runs an expensive and powerful party machine. It buys into all the latest political science techniques, digital communications, intensive private polling, complex social media analytics, employing hardened career politicians and ‘special advisers’ all seeking to give the electorate what it thinks it wants.

Yet for all its ‘spin’, there has been little meaningful change in the Scotland it took over in 2007. The same virulent inequalities remain and the same working-class communities are left behind. The same management of the established order for the rich and powerful prevails. With the 2020 pandemic having ripped up the political playbook and with unchartered economic waters ahead, new challenges will inevitably emerge. It is not difficult to feel the change that is coming. But you can also sense the old world, the one the SNP once dominated, has been left behind. In these circumstances, it wouldn’t be wise to predict the future based on opinion polls conducted this far out from May next year.

Colin Fox is the Scottish Socialist Party national co-spokesperson and was a Lothians MSP (2003-2007).
Forget your roots at your political peril
Kenny MacAskill considers the case of Kansas to give a handle on those feeling left behind but not left

It’s never wise to forget your electoral base, or worse to treat it with contempt. But it’s all too easily done, and it comes at a high cost. That came to mind reading Thomas Frank’s 2004 book, What’s the matter with Kansas? How Conservatives won the heart of America. The author, on the American left, narrates radicalism’s sad decline in his home state.

Of course, America’s not just far away but a vastly different society and economy. But there’s still lessons for us here that we’d be wise to heed. For Kansas may now be red-neck Republican but it wasn’t always and that’s happened not just because of targeting by the ‘alt-right’ but tragically through policies and attitudes of the Democrat leadership. We forget our roots and ignore our base at our peril.

The book had been recommended to me by my friend, Henry McLeish. We share both an interest in and an affection for America. Not its government and its policies but its natural beauty and the diversity and dynamism of its people. It’s far from a universal view on the left but reading the book reminded me of my longstanding admiration for Eugene Debs, Woody Guthrie’s songs that I still enjoy, along with the great American labour authors, such as John Dos Passos, first introduced to me by an old Communist Party stalwart a lifetime ago.

For Kansas was a radical state from its inception. Established by northern abolitionists as a bulwark to the westward spread of slavery, it inspired the likes of John Brown and its struggles pre-dated the Civil War. Thereafter, it became a bedrock for the Farmer Labor cause not just in books and song but in politics. A county in Kansas was one of only four in America that voted for Debs in 1912’s Presidential election, and the other three were all Mid-West States.

But no more. Now it’s a lost cause for the Democrats and has lurch to the ‘alt-right’ with many of their new rabid redounds, being former blue-collar democrat strongholds. As the book narrates there was no single reason for Kansas radicals. As radicals were dispirited, evangelicals were inspired. As one cause failed, another offered salvation and the people moved further away from a party that they had once been the pillars for.

Of course, behind the demands of the moral crusade and social policies of the alt-right came their economic ones, of lower taxes and de-regulation. As Franks wrote it was ‘like a French Revolution in reverse - one in which the sans-culottes pour down the streets demanding more power for the aristocracy’. Bitingly commenting that those who proclaimed ‘Jesus Christ’ were mocked and derided for their views. This dislocation from the roots manifested itself in Brexit. It was in many ways a cri de coeur from areas that were hurting - striking out, in Sunderland as in Kansas, and delivering up their own destruction, driven not by racism but rage, against leaders who had failed them. Tragically, it hasn’t ended there as the Red Wall’s collapse showed in 2019.

Suggestions that there’s a Hadrian’s Wall to protect north of the border are as fanciful as the Atlantic being an unbridgeable barrier. It can afflict any country or party. In 2014, the bedrock of the ‘Yes’ vote was the housing schemes. Triangulate your policies, ignore their pleas for Indy Ref2 or denigrate them as the Great Unwoke and you begin to alienate. Prejudice needs abhorred and gender and identity politics have a place. But class and the economy remain fundamental. Forgetting your roots is political folly.

Kenny MacAskill is the SNP MP for East Lothian. Previously, he was a SNP MSP from 1999 to 2016.
‘Jack Jones: The Unsung Hero’ - making a film about a union leader

Nigel Flanagan tells the tale of the subject of the film and the means by which is was made

S

at in a room in Hurricane Films in Liverpool, we had come together to talk about making a film about a union leader and who it could be. Our discussion moved onto the film about Thatcher starring Meryl Streep. It made us decide to make a film about one of our side, born in Liverpool and a person associated with union power but probably unknown to most generations before us. The idea was simple and good. Brian Reade of the Daily Mirror wrote a script and was asked to narrate and we listed people from the movement who would talk about Jack and his life. Jack’s family themselves gave the project our blessing.

Hurricane Films went about the film making with their strong sense of purpose. They interviewed Jack’s family (who also allowed family film footage to be used), Roger McKenzie of UNISON, Owen Jones, Dennis Skinner, Len McCluskey, Francis O’Grady, author and activist Tansy Hoskins and the late Rodney Bickerstaffe.

Brian Reade’s beautiful script captured the essence of Jack. Brian had written that his three great heroes were Bill Shankly, Mohammed Ali and Jack Jones - and that he had been lucky enough to meet them all. His narration captures the young man who went to fight in the Spanish Civil War, who was badly wounded and lost so many good friends and comrades and who came back to Britain, married his love, Evelyn, and set about organising workers in amongst many other places, the growing car factories in the Midlands.

The film is a work of love for Jack. Director, Sol Papadopoulos, and producer, Roy Boulton, show Jack out and about as General Secretary of the mighty Transport and General Workers’ Union, arguing and losing his case at the TUC in 1977 for the Social Contract, retiring and immediately donating his retirement gift to the National Pensioners Association and leading Pensioners in many protests about the abject level of the state pension.

There is humour too as his life was not an ordinary one, but mostly there is a sense of a man who cared deeply and passionately about workers and the rare temper he had to go with it.

His wife, Evelyn, features strongly too. A committed activist who more than matched the passion of Jack, she was also reputed as the only comrade who could properly contradict him on his politics. Interviews with her show that their personal partnership was also deeply rooted in the politics they shared. But then again Jack’s son tells us in the film that often his mother would be frustrated and lonely, unable to fully involve herself in political activity. Her sacrifices are not overlooked.

There is the controversy of the allegations of him being a Soviet spy, robustly and completely refuted by his family. The debates around the TUC and the anti-apartheid movement are featured as is his final act in his union leadership career, the Social Contract. In the film, Jack accepts with good grace that he could not be an advocate for workers’ democracy and then complain when it defeated him.

There were many challenges in making the film and Hurricane Films overcame all the artistic, practical and technical ones. Even the political problems were swiftly overcome in the general goodwill that exists around Jack. Unite and Len McCluskey were vital to the film, providing material and money to make sure it got made. Every region donated and many Unite branches sent money, often with kind words about Jack from activists who still remembered him. Everyone had a story to tell. Glen Williams of UNISON North West also successfully raised money from UNISON sources to keep the film project going. Individual workers sent money with more stories about Jack. Nearly every union in Britain donated money to the film. But it was not enough.

Everybody agreed that a film about successful unions needed to be made and when it was premiered in Liverpool Philharmonic Hall in June 2018 over 850 people turned out to see it. Since then it has been shown at union organised screenings across Britain.

But we could not cover the costs to fund the footage rights to either broadcast or distribute the film. The film relies on the use of footage of the Spanish Civil War, old news items and interviews with Jack. The amount we need to do this - £60,000 – compared to the millions and millions spent on TV productions and film productions in Britain is heart breaking for us. We cannot go back to trade unionists who have already collectively raised nearly £200,000 for the film. We have DVD copies that we are not allowed to sell, and we can only screen it at private showings. Whenever or wherever we screen it there is a tremendous response to the film. It shows unions with power, a leader with principles who was impersonated and referenced in popular TV culture of the 1970s, reflecting the confidence the movement had at the time.

At a time when people are rightly throwing statues into rivers, what a shame that we cannot get a broadcast or distribution deal. We prefer a film everyone can see about the great life of Jack Jones to the statues of racists and imperialists that litter our cities.

If you want to arrange a showing of the film for your CLP, union branch or organisation then email nigel.flanagan@icloud.com

Nigel Flanagan is global organiser currently working from Liverpool as well as Director of the Jack Jones Trust and Associate Producer

Nigel Flanagan is global organiser currently working from Liverpool as well as Director of the Jack Jones Trust and Associate Producer
Socialists in Scotland lost one of their finest thinkers with the untimely death of Neil Davidson (9 October 1957 – 3 May 2020). Neil was a very rare thing in this modern age of intellectuals being housed in universities. He was not just an autodidact but an organic intellectual. His contribution to understanding the evolution of society in Scotland and Scottish nationalism – and from a Marxist perspective – are second to none. His output of writing eight books, editing one, co-editing another five, and producing countless academic and non-academic articles was prodigious to say the least. Though a committed member of the Socialist Workers’ Party (SWP) for most of his adult life, this contribution is widely respected throughout the radical and revolutionary left in Scotland and further afield.

As a civil servant from 1984, Neil held down a full-time job, was a union activist, a political activist and managed to begin his own independent Marxist study of Scotland, starting with a joint contribution to the International Socialism journal in 1990. This saw the beginning of not only Neil making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the study of Scotland but also him marking out his place within the SWP. Although there were at that time other talented individuals in the SWP in Scotland, he soon and rightly became the leading ‘expert’ on matters of Scottish history.

A decade later, he published his first book, The Origins of Scottish Nationhood (Pluto, 2000). Not much later came his next book, Discovering The Scottish Revolution (Pluto, 2003), which won two book awards, from the Deutscher Prize and the Saltire Society. I attended the Edinburgh launches for both. There were hundreds at each including many from well outside the orbit of the SWP (like of Angus Calder and George Kerevan). These books were a key part of the process by which the SWP slowly came to support the cause of independence for Scotland. Here, Neil was able to convincingly demonstrate Scotland was not an oppressed nation and there was not an unbroken thread of rebellion as ‘national’ resistance.

It was not until 2008 that he became an academic by gaining a substantial research grant and taking this to Strathclyde University. Though this was a huge accomplishment by a then non-academic, it was also a bold move on two counts. First, it was a massive drop in income, and, second, it was not a permanent job. The issue of income was important. Neil had some of the dour demeanour characteristic of his place of birth, Aberdeen. But in one respect, he very much did not. This was because he reckoned he spent about a third of his income on books. Neil found it hard to enter academia because selection panels did not appreciate his work or its places of publication like Pluto.

In 2013, he finally secured a permanent lectureship at the University of Glasgow. This saw him expand his range of interests and contribution to other areas of contemporary and historical capitalism like neo-liberalism, uneven and combined development, passive revolution and bourgeois revolution, racism and the far-right. It also saw his publication output soar. It was a great shame he could not have done this earlier. He loved teaching because he was able to teach Marxism for which there was often a growing audience. Neil was also a great polemict, sparring constructively along the way with Alex Callinicos, John Foster, Tom Nairn and Robert Brenner. He was a frequent contributor to Scottish Left Review and to all three editions of its book, Is there a Scottish road to socialism? (2007, 2013, 2016).

Personally, I always found Neil to be more measured and non-sectarian than his other SWP comrades. Again, maybe showing the influence of being an Aberdonian, he was less excitable and prone to excess. But he was still very firm and solid, standing his ground on what he thought with more than just a superficial substantiation. He was bookish from an early age, having become ‘politicised’ in the mid-1970s. His working-class background precluded the chance of going to university straight from school (though he did gain an Open University degree and tutored for it in the 1990s). He joined the International Socialists, forerunners of the SWP, in Aberdeen in 1976 but, in his words, ‘did not become serious’ as a Marxist until he returned to Scotland from London in 1984.

So, I have a huge respect for Neil as an individual, writer and thinker. However, there were two things I could not reconcile with him. First, his going along with the SWP’s support for Tommy Sheridan in the destruction of the SSP as a viable political force in 2006. Here, the implosion of the Tommy Sheridan and Solidarity projects tell the tale of misjudgement, especially with the SWP then leaving Solidarity. Second, though Neil engaged in a struggle to democratise the SWP, it took the rape scandal within the SWP in 2013 to make the scales fall off his eyes about the SWP and its exaggeration of the prospects for itself, the class struggle and socialism. In a strange sort of way, because of Neil’s intellectual contribution and stature, he as a public figure almost seemed to be able to stand aside from these things. Maybe there were two Neils – the political activist and the Marxist intellectual.

Undaunted by having to leave his party after so many years, he threw himself into further writing and study as well as into the establishment of the small group, Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century (rs21) and its co-thinkers, the International Socialists (Scotland). He became a teacher and theoretician to a new generation of activists involved in the Radical Independence Campaign. Though Neil is dead, his influence to educate and inform, through his ideas and output, will live on. That is the best legacy such an intellectual could hope for.

Professor Gregor Gall is editor of the Scottish Left Review and director of the Jimmy Reid Foundation.
Midnight Traveller (2020) -
Director: Hassan Fazili, Editor: Emelie Mahdahvian
Reviewed by Jackie Bergson

Increasingly soaring refugee numbers within recent years elicited a tranche of thematic documentaries by filmmakers moved to reveal some of the stories behind them. Midnight Traveller (2020) is a particularly personal, involved account which documents its filmmakers’ need to flee from their home in Tajikistan (after fleeing from Afghanistan 14 months earlier), in hope of reaching safety in Europe. Their precarious voyage was shot entirely using cellphones.

Taliban death threats against journalist, Hassan Fazili, in 2015 are revealed to be the spur behind his and his family’s necessary voyage. Their many failed asylum applications (in Afghanistan) following those threats intensified the urgency and necessity of their escape through consequently ‘illegal’ means. Hassan relates these government rejections to his past ownership of a cafe in Kabul, where staff and customers were not discouraged from openly voicing discontentment about oppressive Taliban rule and during a time when his documentaries were aired by Turkish broadcasters.

Midnight Traveller features a blend of joyous family imagery combined with spoken reflections which echo their individual suffering. Hassan’s quiet proclamations that they are embarking on ‘...a journey to the edge of hell’ sound in our ears from the earliest stages. He later painfully reflects upon happier footage filmed as ‘mirage’.

Despite knowing that the Taliban has put a bounty on his head, the composure and presence of mind which he maintains almost conceals the nightmarish quality of his family’s perilous and desperate circumstances. His film does not, however, shy from truths of raw emotions and shocking experiences encountered by himself, his wife Fatima and their young children, Nargis and Zahra.

We learn that, in search of ultimate safety, the family relied on vehicles afforded to them by both known and unknown helpers; on occasion, faceless smugglers who contact Hassan by cellphones to arrange next stages and routes; in one instance, smugglers who threaten to take his children if he does not pay the fee they demand. United in their resolve to reach safety by any means, the family perseveres together through these gruesome incidents.

During moments of reasonable calm, we come to recognise the articulate ease with which the family communicates; we observe the children’s carefree joy while playing in a rare Christmas snowfall; we understand when they complain about being bored; we glimpse moments of spontaneity, including a skilful dance routine by Nargis. Within cramped refugee camp conditions, cooking duties and food are shared with others; as if as usual, the adults tease each other about their attractiveness to the opposite sex and their abilities as filmmakers. A parasite infestation in one refugee camp bedroom is coolly dealt with.

An instance when the youngest child, Zahra, wanders away and cannot be found is vastly more alarming; when she eventually returns unharmed, Hassan’s impassioned voiceover clearly expresses how far from normality the context of refuge is for him and his family. Episodic fragments appear to shorten the family’s agonising 594-day timeline, while they traverse Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, Bulgaria, Serbia and finally Hungary, where the film, but not their voyage, ends.

Whereas award-winning film For Sama (2019) documented a family’s heartbreaking existence within horrifying conditions of being terrorised through daily bombings wrought upon their home in Syria, Midnight Traveller similarly connects us to the numbness and relentless hopelessness of reaching for freedom from such unthinkable circumstances. Both films were released prior to the 2020 global lockdown; both portray peculiarities of inevitable-seeming norms which appear to have evolved amongst people fleeing from terror; meaningful within political narratives concerning human migration and exile.

In the Covid-19 spring and summer of 2020, science and politics joined in fortifying our planet’s boundaries for the evident protection of all. Post-crisis, people used to living in freer circumstances may think about the meaning of Hassan’s plight; some may think how to shape more equal societies.

One high-profile New York newspaper commented thus on Midnight Traveller: ‘When a nationalist protest breaks out near one refugee camp, you are bluntly reminded that behind the accounts of the migration crisis are concrete, real-world choices that those of us with homes make each day about the lives of others. In 2018, an estimated 70.8 million people were forced from their homes ... over 50% younger than 18 years old.’

Talking about his successful career, Scottish actor, Brian Cox, recently stated that ‘...socialism is about suffrage and equality’. Midnight Traveller may heighten general awareness that such ideals could dispatch the need for freedom from merciless terror and gross oppression. Films like this educe profound reasons to be viewed and remembered.

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.
Murray Armstrong The Fight for Scottish Democracy: Rebellion and Reform in 1820, Pluto Press, 2020, 9780745341330, pp228

Reviewed by Sean Sheehan

The Fight for Scottish Democracy is a strictly historical account though it begins with a scene that would not be out of place in a lurid Victorian novel: two women in the dead of night opening a recently dug grave in the 'paupers' ground under the walls of an ancient church. But the specifics of place and time are not imagined. It is August 1820, the ecclesiastic building is Glasgow’s cathedral, the road they drive down in a cart carrying the coffin is the city's deserted High Street and their destination, Strathaven, is a very real 25-mile journey to the south.

One of the two women was the daughter of James Wilson and, with the help of her cousin, she was bringing home the decapitated body of her father who had been executed earlier that day. They recognised him, after forcing open the lid of the coffin, by the bloodstained hanky that covered his head: it was the one he had dropped on the scaffold to signal to the hangman he was ready to die.

The attention to empirical detail in this carefully researched book is intrinsic to its worth and a reader alert to the geography of Glasgow and the west of Scotland will gain much in following its narrative. We learn that it was in Glasgow’s Saltmarket that two men made illicit use of their employer’s shop to compose type for printing the first batch of posters calling for strikes and a provisional government to ‘Sweep from our Shores that Corruption which has degraded us below the dignity of Man’.

Some 60,000 people in the five counties around Glasgow heeded the call and downed tools. We learn that it was at the corner of High Street and Duke Street that citizens gathered to read the proclamation on the morning of 2 April. A Lanarkshire magistrate tried to tear it down with the point of his umbrella but, after failing to show any badge of office, he was prevented from doing so by a young weaver named Andrew Hardie. The Star Inn, 57 Ingram Street, became headquarters for military officers who called in extra troops and posted artillery at either end of the town bridges.

Andrew Hardie along with John Baird was executed ten days after James Wilson and, significantly, all three were weavers. Independent weavers around Glasgow formed an educated community aware of political forces shaping their world. Janet Hamilton, a villager near Coatbridge, described how groups of weavers in a locality would meet in the evenings to read newspapers, discuss events and ‘talk[ed] of Bonaparte on the stone seats beside their doors’.

With the defeat of Napoleon, concern shifted to domestic affairs and petition after petition asked for extensions of the vote and reform of parliament with its ‘rotten boroughs’. Demobilisation of 350,000 troops in 1815 brought an economic slump that heralded misery and starvation. The 1819 massacre at Peterloo, graphically depicted in the book, made clear to many that petitions were a waste of time - a lesson still there for the learning - and earlier in the same year the Cato Street conspirators had resorted to trying to murder the entire British cabinet and Prime Minister.

Murray Armstrong provides a detailed account of the bungled insurrection that took place in early April the following year. The bigger plan was for rebellion to break out in northern England at the same time but this never happened and one small group on their way to capture weapons was attacked by mounted troops at Bonnymuir, west of Falkirk. Arrests and searches continued into May and ninety-eight people were indicted for high treason; three were executed and the remainder transported across the world to Sydney Cove.

Chartists and radicals erected a memorial to James Wilson on the site of his cottage in 1846. Following the crumbling of the memorial to Andrew Hardie and John Baird, a new monument was erected at Sighthill cemetery in Glasgow. When their bodies were exhumed and reinterred there in 1849, thousands turned up to pay their respects. Armstrong ends his book by noting that their struggle for democracy is still commemorated at the cemetery each September.

Hardie and Baird clasped their hands together on the scaffold. When they swung by their necks those at the front of the crowd could see them attempting to grasp each other in solidarity for one last time.

The Fight for Scottish Democracy earns a vital place in remembering those who struggled at such tremendous personal risk for democratic rights now taken so unquestionably for granted.

Kenny MacAskill Radical Scotland: Uncovering Scotland’s Radical History - from the French Revolutionary era to the 1820 Rising, Biteback, 2020, 9781785905704, pp352

Reviewed by Gordon Leggate

This year marks the two hundredth anniversary of the 1820 Radical Rising, a perhaps lesser known period in Scottish history. On 1 April, proclamations were posted across many towns in Scotland calling for a general strike and for an armed insurrection. Its estimated up to 60,000 workers headed the call to cease work and there were attempts by Glasgow radicals to march on and seize the Carron Company Ironworks at Falkirk in an effort to acquire guns and other weapons. Weavers in Strathaven (my hometown) also attempted to join the uprising upon hearing rumours that the Glasgow strikers had taken control of the city, marching under a banner proclaiming "Scotland Free or a Desert". Government control was lost in some weaving towns and villages in Ayrshire, Renfrewshire and Lanarkshire with strong support for the radical cause in Paisley and Glasgow. The threat of a general rebellion was in the air. However, in a short time it became clear that the insurrection was not proceeding to the Radicals’ plan as the British state mobilised to crush the uprising. Government troops and Yeomanry forces quickly overran the poorly armed Radicals marching to Falkirk at what became known as the Battle of Bonnymuir, ending any hope of widening the rebellion. The repression after the uprising was put down was brutal with leading Radicals Andrew Baird, John Hardy and James Wilson all executed for treason by hanging and then beheading.

MacAskill actually focuses on a much broader timescale than just the events of 1820 – he tells the story of the tumultuous period following the American and French Revolutions, and the leading figures of the subsequent movements fighting for political reform. He attempts to tease out the twists and turns between the various movements, from the Friends of the People through the United Scotsmen to the later Radicals. He argues that the events of the French Revolution in particular were instrumental in awakening the desire for radical political and constitutional change, in the same way the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 inspired explosive post first world war period of class struggle. He introduces the book with a reflective piece about the Political Martyrs Monument on Calton Hill in Edinburgh. While the landmark obelisk might be easily recognised by many, fewer will know the history of the people commemorated. The book is an attempt to flesh out these characters and the history of their movement: the fight for political reform.

The rotten and corrupt nature of politics within the time period is richly illustrated by the example of the election for the constituency of Bute, Ross and Cromarty in 1788. On the day of the election, weather was so poor that travel to the Isle of Bute was impossible, therefore only one candidate was on the island when the vote took place. He was nominated (by himself) and seconded (by himself in the role of Chairman) and voted for (also by himself as sole voter on the island). He even administered the oath of office on himself and declared himself elected. One man, one vote indeed!

The desire for political reform was, therefore, obvious. The goal of universal (male) suffrage and annual elections formed the heart of all the movements discussed in the book. Perhaps surprisingly from the SNP MP for East Lothian, the nationalist nature of the struggle is downplayed. MacAskill argues convincingly that the struggles in Scotland formed part of the wider struggles in England (even though they were not formally linked). The movements were mostly for political reform of British parliament, not for overthrowing the Treaty of Union. Throughout, MacAskill attempts to get beyond some of the mythologising surrounding the movements of this era, and look at the material economic and class roots of the struggles. Excellent explanations of the roots of the subsequent movements within the friendly societies (a proto-union movement) and clarity navigating the religious ideas of the time are most useful in understanding why the radical movement flourished in the highly literate and often religious dissenting weaving communities.

MacAskill manages to shine a light on some of the hidden, or not so well known, aspects of the time period. There are presumably few readers of Scottish Left Review that are not aware of the events of the Peterloo Massacre in Manchester of 1819 but perhaps not so many will be familiar with an equally shocking massacre in Tranent in August 1797. Following a protest against the Militia Act (see below), Government Dragoons ran amok indiscriminately attacking protesters and people from the surrounding countryside. Eleven people were killed and many seriously injured. The subsequent military coverup to the atrocity meant no soldier or any member of the authorities were charged.

In a very timely way, MacAskill highlights the well-known fact that history is written by the winners. The current Black Lives Matter campaign to pull down statues or rename streets shows there is a desire to reassert who we commemorate. Throughout, he questions why there are statues and monuments to leading government figures at the time but very few to leading figures in the radical movements for political reform. The book is a piece about the Political Martyrs Monument on Calton Hill in Edinburgh. While the landmark obelisk might be easily recognised by many, fewer will know the history of the people commemorated. The book is an attempt to flesh out these characters and the history of their movement: the fight for political reform.

The rotten and corrupt nature of politics within the time period is richly illustrated by the example of the election for the constituency of Bute, Ross and Cromarty in 1788. On the day of the election, weather was so poor that travel to the Isle of Bute was impossible, therefore only one candidate was on the island when the vote took place. He was nominated (by himself) and seconded (by himself in the role of Chairman) and voted for (also by himself as sole voter on the island). He even administered the oath of office on himself and declared himself elected. One man, one vote indeed!

The desire for political reform was, therefore, obvious. The goal of universal (male) suffrage and annual elections formed the heart of all the movements discussed in the book. Perhaps surprisingly from the SNP MP for East Lothian, the nationalist nature of the struggle is downplayed. MacAskill argues convincingly that the struggles in Scotland formed part of the wider struggles in England (even though they were not formally linked). The movements were mostly for political reform of British parliament, not for overthrowing the Treaty of Union. Throughout, MacAskill attempts to get beyond some of the mythologising surrounding the movements of this era, and look at the material economic and class roots of the struggles. Excellent explanations of the roots of the subsequent movements within the friendly societies (a proto-union movement) and clarity navigating the religious ideas of the time are most useful in understanding why the radical movement...
welcome addition to understanding the radical movement in Scotland and putting in context with the movements in Ireland and England.

Gordon Leggate is a climate activist and member of Socialist Workers’ Party. He hails from Strathaven, Lanarkshire and so has a particular interest in the local history surrounding the 1820 radical rising.

And Colin Darroch adds

According to Tom Johnston ‘the histories of our land have been mostly written to serve the political purposes and flatter the conceits of our aristocracy’. Kenny MacAskill’s book is devoted to the workers’ struggles in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. There are prominent statues to Henry Dundas (who was instrumental in delaying for 15 years William Wilberforce’s parliamentary monition to abolish the slave trade), Admiral Nelson, and the Duke of Wellington in Edinburgh city centre but hidden away in Old Calton Cemetery on the east side of Princes Street is a memorial to the political martyrs Thomas Muir, Thomas Fyshie Palmer, William Skirving, Maurice Margarot, and Joseph Gerrald. Erected by the Friends of Parliamentary Reform in 1844. Muir was a successful advocate who favoured a Scottish Republic and had a reputation for defending the poor. Palmer was born in Bedfordshire and educated at Eton and Cambridge before becoming a religious preacher. Skiving was a farmer’s son from outside Edinburgh and Margarot was born in Devon and was in France when the Revolution broke out in 1789. Gerrald was born in the West Indies and became a lawyer in the United States before moving to Bath in England. All five martyrs supported the Friends of the People in their campaign for parliamentary reform and universal suffrage at a time when only 4,500 land owners had voting rights out of a Scottish population of 1.6m. The ruling Tory cabal were so alarmed by the martyrs’ campaign that they were arrested and charged with sedition. They were found guilty and transported to Botany Bay. Only Margarot returned home alive.

In 1797, the Militia Act was passed to raise a conscripted army of 6,000 based on lists of 19 to 23 year-old males compiled by local schoolmasters. Those on the lists had the option of paying a substitute to take their place. This ensured that the rich could dodge conscription while the rest were too poor to do so. This provoked widespread anger and over 40 riots erupted throughout Scotland. Bringing troops from England to quell the disorder didn’t help matters, but the uprisings eventually petered out. 80 ringleaders later faced trial on charges ranging from mobbing and rioting to sedition. However, the majority were acquitted or simply ‘disappeared’.

There are also 1820 monuments at Woodside Cemetery, Paisley and at Bank Street, Greenock. Events to mark the bicentenary of 1820 had to be postponed this year due to Covid-19. Hopefully these can go ahead next year and details should be available at www.the1820society.com

Colin Darroch is a former Glasgow District Councillor
Kick up the Tabloids

T

eleven weeks into lockdown, and our through-the-looking-glass ‘new normal’ becomes ever more bizarre. While everyone’s lives seem identical from one week to the next, like some never-ending Groundhog Day, other things appear to change dramatically on a day-to-day basis. UK government policy, for example, carries on being made up ‘on the hoof’.

One minute, free school meals will not be extended into the summer holidays, only for them to be rolled-out UK-wide, because of the intervention by Marcus Rashford, saying it was essential to provide the service.

Johnson must have thought that the return of live football would take the public’s mind off the crisis. Instead, the opposite has occurred. As the Premier League has been suspended for three months, and Euro 2020 postponed for a year, it has given the England football team time to become a thinktank, coming up with a better policy ideas than the Cabinet.

By the time, you read this, I fully expect Harry Kane to issue a press statement about facemasks on public transport, and Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain to urge a relaxation of the two-week quarantine.

The only certainty in that we live in strange times. Who would ever have predicted that Boris Johnson would acknowledge fatherhood of a child. I reckon he thought it would get him more time off after he taken two weeks’ sick leave pretending he had Covid-19. He does appear to be doing the job part-time. Perhaps, he thinks that he is on furlough.

Every day, an endless succession of new faces steps up to give the government coronavirus press briefing. I genuinely think some of them will be new faces to Boris, whom he can’t remember appointing.

The only consistent thinking in Johnson’s clique is its unwavering support for Dominic Cummings. Remarkably, Johnson appears to have weathered this for the time being, although he probably wishes he’d waited a while before playing his ‘I’ve got the virus’ card, as he could have done taking a week off in hospital when the shit hit the fan over Cummings.

There is something worrying about a Prime Minister who publicly backs a man who said he drove thirty miles to see if his eyesight was okay. Anyone who would make that claim is either a liar or homicidal psychopath. Or Michael Gove. It all goes to show how standards have slipped in politics in the last twenty years. David Blunkett would never have got behind the steering wheel to check if he could see okay.

The press office at Number Ten must have heaved a massive sigh of relief when Vera Lynn’s death was announced, knowing that for the next few days the headlines on BBC News would not be about the bumbling incompetence of Johnson or whatever random member of his third-rate cabinet had volunteered to ‘take one for the team’ at the daily briefings.

Of course, one does not need to be overly paranoid or prone to buy into conspiracy theories to think that Dame Vera may have actually snuffed it several years ago. Successive governments may have been keeping her death under wraps waiting until they were totally up shit creek before announcing her demise, but never felt they had dug themselves into such a hole that they had to play their ‘Forces Sweetheart Is Dead’ card. Finally, some bright young spin-doctor must have realised that the only way of averting the public’s attention away from whatever shambolic shitstorm was likely to happen next was to get on the phone to Broadcasting House and tell them to play ‘We’ll Meet Again’ on continuous loop for the next five days, to give them time to work out what the hell to do about the total disaster that had taken place under their watch.

Prime Ministers quite frequently can be characterised by one single event, quote, story or photo opportunity, as with Theresa May in the driverless car which proved the metaphor for her utter lack of vision or control. For Tony Blair, it was the ridiculous interview where he came out with a whole load of nonsense about being a Newcastle United fan since childhood, and his claim to having watched games that had actually happened before he was born, which was a reflection of his disengagement from reality. For David Cameron, it was the photographs of him fucking a pig’s head during his student days at Oxford, which can be seen as a metaphor for… erm… him having fucked a pig’s head when he was a student.

Johnson’s premiership may well be summed by the incident in June when his ministerial car was involved in a crash outside Parliament with his own security out-riders, leaving his limo with a huge dent in its rear end. It spoke of a leader blustering on regardless of what direction of travel everyone else is taking and when his government was left with its arse hanging on by a thread. Or, maybe it was its elbow. He and his Cabinet seem unable to tell the difference between the two.

VLADIMIR McTAVISH’S

Vladimir McTavish
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 Caife, president
Kevin Lindsay, ASLEF’s organiser in Scotland