

# Scottish Left Review

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# comment

## Living *la vida* ~~loca~~ lockdown

**B**oris Johnson, for his Tory government, proclaims how ‘incredibly generous’ it is being to those affected by the impact of the lockdown restrictions. Not only is this a barefaced lie – with the added pizzazz that you’d think it was his own (and not taxpayers’) money being ‘given’ out – but everything has been granted so grudgingly, with limited concessions having to be wrung out of the Tories. In the last issue, we characterised the furlough scheme as a Boots’ ‘meal deal’ – cheap but not very cheerful for those put on it because they ordinarily lost 20% of their wages. The ending of that scheme on 31 October and the rolling out of a more sectorally based short-time working scheme from 1 November is financially even worse for those covered by it – and employers contribute even less to it than before they did in the previous scheme.

Add to this, the issues of lack of free school meals in holiday times, ludicrous plans for retraining those whose jobs are now deemed ‘unsustainable’ (at the same time as defunding Union Learning) and continuing but groundless bombast about world-beating test, track and trace capacity and it’s not hard to see why more and more people – even in the Tory ‘red wall’ areas – are coming to see Johnson and his ilk as super-spreaders of so much misery. This is, indeed, *la vida loca* – the crazy life. Labour under Starmer has maintained its overall neck-and-neck position in the polls with the Tories. But, despite Starmer’s polished performances, not only is there a lack of righteous anger in his delivery but Labour should also be away ahead in the polls. After the killing of the Corbyn leadership, Starmer was presented as the acceptable and necessary face of an electable Labour. He’s certainly delivered on that on a host of fronts, from abstaining on the likes of the Tories’ *Overseas Operations*, and ‘SpyCops’ (*The Covert Human Intelligence Sources (Criminal Conduct)*) Bills – to preventing criticism of Israel. These all seem to do with proving that Labour is patriotic. If it is the case, as

the Labour right argues, that this is the patriotic path to power, then something has come badly unstuck. Maybe ferocious attacks on a Tory toff PM who believes his own bombast would resonate a lot more allied to advocating huge tax increases on the super-rich for the benefit of the poor.

As we go to press, we do not know how Brexit and the US presidential election will play out on these matters. But they are unlikely to ease the Tories’ travails or Labour’s lethargy. As is often heard in these times and in this context, it’s not ‘rocket science’ to understand why support for the SNP Scottish Government and for independence are at all-time highs. Though Starmer may be savaged by the ‘Save oor swally’ brigade, her government’s real ‘missteps’ can be found elsewhere – like allowing universities to re-open halls of residence and conduct face-

to-face teaching in order to protect their revenue streams or subcontracting out the test and trace service to the private sector. As Scottish Labour continues to dither in the electoral doldrums, the Scottish Greens have made a pitch for many of Scottish Labour’s remaining traditional working class voters by endorsing proposals which are found in the STUC’s *Peoples’ Recovery* report – see Roz Foyer’s lead article in this issue.

In these circumstances, all those on the left will benefit from reading the Jimmy Reid Foundation commissioned pamphlet by Professor James Mitchell of the University of Edinburgh. Called ‘The Scottish Question revisited’, he

asks searching questions of all sides on the union-independence divide. The pamphlet can be bought from the *Scottish Left Review* website - <https://www.scottishleftreview.scot/>

### **STOP PRESS:**

As we go to print, Jeremy Corbyn has been suspended from the Labour Party. The reason given was Corbyn’s statement that the problem of anti-Semitism in Labour has been ‘dramatically overstated for political reasons’, an observation shared by the SLR. It is a grave attempt to restrict the right of reply and open debate. This spurious charge constitutes a continuing declaration of war against the left as was predicted in the last issue of our magazine (see <https://www.scottishleftreview.scot/analysing-the-contours-of-the-one-of-the-most-successful-political-campaign-of-recent-years/>). We will fully cover the issues in our next issue.



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# The People's Recovery: A different track for Scotland's economy

Roz Foyer introduces the Scottish Trades Union Congress's response to the COVID calamity

We face the biggest economic crisis in living memory. The immediate cause may have been Covid-19, but the virus drew its strength from a generation of injustices. Coronavirus may not technically discriminate on class lines – but its effects are clearly exacerbated by inequalities in income, wealth and power. When we speak of recovery, we do not mean reverting to 2019. We mean recovering, for working class people, the income, wealth and sense of collective purpose stolen from them by decades of political bias towards the rich and powerful. This is where we take issue with the Scottish Government's response. For all the welcome rhetoric of government intervention, we must also abolish the built-up conditions that made this crisis so virulent in the first place.

Mass privatisations, short-term investment and dominance of multinationals placed workers in a position of weakness exacerbated by attacks on unions. This has led to the growth of precarious work through bogus self-employment, zero hours contracts and unwanted part-time working. Nearly 50 years after the *Equal Pay Act*, the gender pay gap remains while workplace injustice is a daily fact for BAME and disabled workers, and both groups have suffered disproportionately from the coronavirus crisis.

Alongside this, we have lost the power to guarantee basic rights such as good quality affordable housing, a living income for the sick or unemployed, and a dignified care system for young and old alike. According to data from the *Sunday Times* Rich List (May 2020) and the ONS Wealth and Assets Survey (January 2020), this has led to Scotland's two richest families now having as much wealth as the poorest 20% of the population.

The private sector has shown itself woefully inadequate to meet the challenge of the crisis and there is no prospect of a green recovery without massive public sector intervention. But this public sector intervention must come with conditions. In return for financial support, employers must provide fair work and recognise unions. In areas such as health, care, education, energy and housing, we need to rebuild public services and

democratic public ownership. While the Scottish Government's Programme for Government offers the potential for fundamental reform in care and the introduction of a National Care Service, on topics such as rent controls, wealth taxes, public ownership, collective bargaining, and state support being conditional on fair work practices, it has little or nothing to say.

Ahead of the 2021 Scottish elections, *The People's Recovery: A Different Track for Scotland's Economy* combines short-term measures to rebuild our economy with medium and longer-term measures to create a democratic and green economy and a society in which workers and their families have fair work, decent housing and a proper safety net. It calls for a fundamental rethink on the purposes of growth and the introduction of a number of urgent measures.

Roz Foyer is the general secretary of the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC). The full report can be found at <http://www.stuc.org.uk/files/Policy/Research-papers/peoples-recovery-full.pdf>

## Industrial democracy and fair work

We need to make the Scottish Government's Fair Work policy a reality and give meaning to its laudable aspirations. With the pandemic having already radically altered work patterns, the guiding principle should be to give workers greater control of their own labour and their own data. We need a four-day week with no loss of pay, so that rising productivity enables full employment and greater leisure. We should regulate home working so that it becomes a system of greater freedom rather than one of employer control, cost-cutting and surveillance. Central to this should be the concept of industrial democracy and a fairer distribution of the costs and benefits of work. Strategies to eliminate poverty must address the workplace conditions that produce low pay. All this means we need to:

- **Devolve employment law**, remove curbs on union freedom and give right of access to unions to all workplaces. Strengthen employment rights and make them legally enforceable from day one in order to end precarious work in all its forms, including through zero-hours contracts, umbrella contracts and bogus self-employment.

- Implement an immediate £2 pay rise for all key workers and raise the national minimum wage to £10 an hour.
- Introduce **sectoral collective bargaining agreements** in childcare, social care, hospitality and tourism.
- Only provide government funds – through procurement, contracting and commissioning – to employers that **recognise unions in their workplace and apply union negotiated rates of pay**. Place effective voice at the heart of corporate governance and encourage sustainable and ethical business models.
- Establish **regional and sectoral forums** to provide economic information to workers, trade unions and citizens to enable them to organise workers and engage in local economic development.

## Green recovery

A Just Transition to a low carbon economy remains a slogan rather than a reality. Markets, corporate slogans and individual behaviour change are no means to achieve either social or environmental justice. The Scottish Government has adopted the language of a Green New Deal but not the reality of it as it promotes 'market-ready projects' by offering 'strong commercial returns' to private capital. A just, green future can only be built on public investment, democratic ownership, and a strong domestic supply chain, beginning with energy and transport. All this means we need to:

- Fund an emergency **green infrastructure stimulus** to support Scotland's economic recovery, including a comprehensive housing building and deep-retrofit programme to drastically reduce building emissions and tackle fuel poverty and support public transport while usage recovers. Invest in local authority led **public works programmes** and apprenticeships to provide meaningful employment opportunities to support and upskill young workers in new jobs.
- Require **local content in all green energy leases and planning consents**, shortening supply chains and providing manufacturing jobs in Scotland.
- Establish a **publicly owned energy company and publicly owned construction and infrastructure**

**company** to drive forward green energy development and strategic infrastructure while supporting high health quality employment.

### Democratic public ownership and community wealth building

Decades of political sloganeering established the principle of 'private good, public bad'. Yet the banking and coronavirus crises served to illustrate that businesses are substantially dependent on public investment. Yet, too often, state intervention has been bailouts for shareholders paid for by cuts to public services. But public ownership has a positive, entrepreneurial role. High-tech, innovative products rarely emerge without massive public subsidy. This means addressing the gaps in accountability that have allowed privatised firms to ignore democratic norms. And it means ensuring that public ownership increases the autonomy and power of workers. There have been welcome moves to public ownership in Scotland, but these remain small scale and focused on bailing out failing enterprises. A strategic approach to address climate change and unemployment would involve developing profit-making enterprises. To address the decline of regional town centres, and to ensure wealth does not flow out of our communities but circulates within them, we should draw on the concept of community wealth building. All this means we need to:

- Establish a **publicly owned energy company and publicly owned construction and infrastructure company** to drive forward green energy development and strategic infrastructure while supporting high quality employment.
- Support community wealth building initiatives by providing greater powers and funding to local government to **insource local services** and address issues of corporate control.
- Create a Scotland wide **Highstreet Taskforce** to regenerate towns, protect jobs and improve shared community space.

### Public Finance and investment

Public services have been neglected, regional economies have declined, and firms have put short-term profits over research and development. These problems existed long before 2008, but austerity made matters much worse, leaving a run down and divided society. But now traditional limits on public spending and investment have been abandoned. Superficially, the political

consensus has moved towards job guarantees, infrastructure projects and support schemes for businesses. However, this will not be enough to put our economy back to normal. All this means we need to:

- Rebuild tax: Introduce **wealth and progressive income taxes** to address economic inequality.
- Rebuild borrowing capacity: **Devolve borrowing powers** to the Scottish Parliament to allow it to pursue expansionary economic policies and restructure our economy.
- Rebuild investment: Enable the Scottish National Investment Bank to **invest in a more socially just, resilient and low-carbon economy**, via state holding companies and public sector companies such as Lothian Buses. Reverse the cuts in local authority funding and offer a **debt amnesty for Scottish councils** as part of a package of measures aimed at easing the financial crisis facing Scotland's local authorities.

### Equality for all

The effects of coronavirus do discriminate against certain groups, be they BAME people, women, disabled workers, the young or those from the LGBT+ communities. All this means we need to:

- Devolve equality and employment law and ensure a **day one right to flexible working** for all workers.
- Take action to reduce the disability employment and pay gap and the race and gender pay gaps, including through introducing **sectoral bargaining arrangements in sectors such as care and hospitality, where women and BAME women are over-represented**. Ensure 10% of all apprenticeships go to disabled workers and ensure proportionate numbers of women and Black and minority ethnic people access job guarantee schemes.
- Rebuild equality in pay: Conduct an **equal pay audit** across the public sector in Scotland and resolve all outstanding equal pay claims.

### Social security and housing

Damaging welfare reforms were forced through by governments intent on rolling back social security regardless of the costs. The sick, unemployed and vulnerable have been effectively criminalised and forced onto society's margins, subsisting on meagre benefits and faced with arduous and humiliating means tests. Social housing has been transformed by deliberate government policy from a normal fact of everyday life into an emergency system for isolating the extremely poor and vulnerable.

Responsibilities have been passed down to private individuals and private firms. The results are growing homelessness, exorbitant rents and a generation of younger people forced to live with parents into their thirties. All this means we need to:

- Provide a **Minimum Income Guarantee** for all. Raise the weekly level of statutory sick pay to £320 a week and removing the lower earnings limit, end benefit sanctions and the benefit cap, replace the Work Capability Assessment with NHS medical assessments, and end the DWP's target-based culture and the outsourcing of contracts to the private sector. Enshrine in law a right to access healthy, affordable and nutritious food and properly fund public services to do this.
- Redistribute working hours across the economy through a **4-day week with no loss of pay**. Provide opportunities for young people and those out of work, paid at the real living wage or union bargained rate for the job by augmenting Job Guarantee schemes with local authority led **public works programmes**.
- Massively expand the supply of publicly owned housing through **municipal housebuilding** and protect private renters with **rent controls**.

### Universal public services

Austerity has left our public sector poorly equipped to plan for and deal with emergencies. Systems for supplying and distributing PPE and testing have been found seriously wanting. Thousands of people in care homes have died, with almost half of all of Scotland's deaths being in care homes. For those facing a sudden loss of income, a lack of social security advisers has meant lengthy waits to access social security support. All this means we need to:

- **End outsourcing** across public services and properly fund health, education, emergency services and central and local government recognising their essential role supporting a wellbeing economy.
- Create a **National Care Service**, rooting out for-profit care provision and levelling up terms and conditions through collective bargaining.
- Commit to **publicly provided early learning and childcare**. Value teachers by **reducing stress and over-working**. Support Universities and Colleges with a **support package which enhances democratic accountability and fair work practices**.

# Community Wealth Building – the beginning of a new economic order

Joe Cullinane explains what North Ayrshire council is doing to roll back the neo-liberal tide

We are in the midst of the biggest economic and social crisis of our lifetimes. Coronavirus has exposed the fragilities of our prevailing economic model which for decades has been based on extraction rather than production. An economic system where 'economic growth' has not resulted in higher wages and raised living standards for the many, but rather the massive accumulation of wealth by the few.

The last decade of austerity accelerated the disinvestment and disempowerment that has entrenched poverty in communities across Scotland and the current pandemic threatens to make it even worse. How we respond to the crisis will shape Scotland for decades to come – and now is not the time for more empty rhetoric. Vacuous proclamations like 'Inclusive Growth' or 'Community Empowerment', that have so easily rolled off the tongue of national politicians in recent years without any semblance of action or practice, will not suffice. We need a complete reset on the economy, from national government but also local government.

In North Ayrshire, my Labour administration is seizing the moment to press reset and to create a new local economy. North Ayrshire is an area with some deep-seated problems. Deindustrialisation in the 1980s ripped the heart out of Ayrshire's proud industrial heritage. Big employers left and alternative employment never came. Local economic development has been largely limited to the pursuit of inward investment in the hope that, if the investment ever came, the benefits would trickle down to our citizens and communities. But readers of *Scottish Left Review* do not need me to tell them that trickle-down economics does not work. Instead, all it has done is rapidly increase wealth inequality, and in North Ayrshire its pursuit has resulted in up to 1 in 3 children in some of our communities being brought up in poverty.

It was clear before the Covid pandemic that we needed to break from the traditional economic development

approaches that got us here in the first place. And in May, in the middle of the first lockdown, we launched Scotland's first Community Wealth Building (CWB) strategy, setting out a new approach to the economy that will intentionally use the economic levers available to the local state to redirect wealth and economic control to the local economy and our communities.

Those economic levers include our public procurement spend, which totals over £1bn pa across the public sector in Ayrshire, the land and assets that we own and the power we can exert on the local labour market as the largest employers in our local and regional economy. But what is at the heart of our CWB strategy is more democratic control of the economy.

Take procurement for example, our intention is to support and create new local supply chains with more procurement spend, helping to create more local employment - but that's not the limit of our ambitions as we want to use the spend to expand democratic forms of ownership by supporting co-operatives, social enterprises and worker owned businesses.

Similarly, we want to use the land and assets that we own for the common good. Too often, as a result of austerity, public bodies over the last decade have seen the land and buildings that they own simply as financial assets to be sold to manage budget cuts. That approach fails to recognise the actual economic and social value of those assets and through CWB we want to start realising that value by putting our land and assets into productive use to benefit the community. We will do that by pursuing policies that will transfer ownership to the community, convert vacant buildings in our towns into council housing and allocate land for rewilding and renewable energy generation to aid our fight against climate change.

As Ayrshire's economy declined following deindustrialisation, family-owned businesses became the backbone of our economy. Those business have sustained employment for many through difficult times but

so few family-owned businesses have succession plans in place representing a massive risk to our already weak labour market. That's why our CWB strategy sets out the intention to work with those businesses on succession plans, and where possible to support their transition to worker ownership as the most viable option to protect the business and the employment it provides.

In total our strategy contains 55 actions. It is not a short-term project but a long-term intention to create a fairer, more inclusive, sustainable and democratic economy from the bottom up and that means it includes longer-term actions. One such action is to explore the creation of a West of Scotland Community Bank. It would be a mutually-owned bank that has a full banking licence from the Bank of England, enabling it to use its customers deposits to create new investment to support the regional economy it serves.

CWB is more than just another concept or term. Rather, it is economic practice that has the potential to turn the dial on our current economic model and to create new local economies that tackle the big issues we face such as poverty and deprivation, the concentration of wealth and the stagnation of living standards. It is a growing movement across the globe which should give us hope that a different economy is possible and the seeds of it are being grown by progressive municipal governments around the world.

*Joe Cullinane is the leader of North Ayrshire Council and Cabinet Member for Community Wealth Building. He is a member of Scottish Labour.*

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# A nuclear weapons free world is still possible

*Arthur West makes the case for a non-nuclear future ahead of the Scottish Parliament elections*

**D**uring the Covid 19 crisis Scottish CND (SCND) and the wider peace movement have been organising online meetings and discussions. During these, activists have expressed the view that the crisis has probably resulted in the case for abolishing nuclear weapons and not renewing Trident becoming even stronger. This was because the last few months have illustrated how useless nuclear weapons are in dealing with threats such as a pandemic. Prior to the lockdown, SCND ran the 'People not Trident' campaign. Its main demands were an end to austerity policies and the scrapping of Trident. Campaign materials illustrated how the money used to maintain the current Trident system and the huge sums earmarked for its replacement could be better spent in other areas. One of these was health. During the Covid 19 crisis, it became clear that years of cuts to the NHS and other public services presented major difficulties in responding to the crisis.

Given the threats to peace and stability in the world today, it is crucial that SCND and the wider Scottish peace movement emerge from the crisis ready to continue the struggle for a peaceful world. As a contribution towards the struggle for a nuclear weapons free world, the SCND Trade Union Network will be highlighting the following five good reasons for scrapping Trident and not renewing it

- **Nuclear weapons have become militarily irrelevant**

Major Patrick Cordingley, leader of the British Forces in the First Gulf War, argued: 'Strategic nuclear weapons have no military use. It would seem the Government wishes to replace Trident simply to remain a nuclear power alongside the four other permanent members of the UN Security Council. This is misguided and flies in the face of public opinion - we have more to offer than nuclear weapons'.

- **Nuclear weapons are useless in dealing with cyber-terrorism**

The last national security risk assessment carried out by the government identified cyber terrorism as a tier 1 security threat. Quaker peace activist, Tim Wallis, pointed out in his *The Truth about Trident* book,

former Defence Minister, Des Browne, claimed in 2015 that Trident could be vulnerable to cyber-attack based on evidence he had received from an US Department of Defence report. Wallis also said this report warned that the US and its allies could not be confident that their defence systems would be able to survive a concerted attack from a sophisticated opponent such like Russia or China.

- **Nuclear weapons are a health and safety disaster for the planet if they were ever used**

Nuclear weapons today are at least five times more powerful than those dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They have a capacity for irreversible and global destruction of innocent victims and can cause irredeemable poisoning of land. Medact, the campaigning organisation for health professionals has said: 'Unlike natural disasters, the consequence of nuclear weapons use would include lethal harm from radiation and climate disruption to millions of people who are not party to the conflicts in which they are used'.

- **Nuclear weapons are illegal and immoral**

International humanitarian law forbids indiscriminate attacks on civilians. Treaties are supposed to be binding on states that sign them. The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons already prevents those who sign it from developing new nuclear weapons and commits states in possession to disarm as soon as possible. Another treaty called the Treaty to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons, more commonly known as the Global Ban Treaty, was passed at a special session of the United Nations in 2017. It forbids countries to possess, use, threaten or assist other countries

to develop nuclear weapons. Now, 50 countries had ratified this important treaty so it has passed into international law.

- **Nuclear weapons militate against diversifying the Scottish economy**

One of the ways to make progress is to set up an adequately staffed and resourced Scottish Defence Diversification Agency. In 2016, a Jimmy Reid Foundation report made a compelling case against Trident renewal: it showed that only 600 civilian jobs are related to the existing Trident system at Faslane. Annual running costs of Trident are between £2bn-£3bn and renewal will cost £205bn.

This is money which could be used to decommission Trident, retrain workers and develop jobs in areas such as health, housing, education and social services.

In the run up to the 2021 Scottish Parliamentary elections, it will as always be important to raise nuclear weapons related issues. SCND Trade Union Network will be presenting these '5 Good Reasons' to candidates during the campaign and asking if they agree with them. We will also be asking for electors to vote for candidates and parties who are in favour of scrapping Trident and not renewing it. There is confidence in the Scottish peace movement that parties in favour of scrapping Trident will gain voter support for this. We also hope Scottish Labour will highlight its policy of opposition to Trident replacement as agreed at its party conference in 2015 – but this will require Scottish Labour to distance itself from British Labour's support for renewing Trident under the Starmer.

*Arthur West was the former chair of Scottish CND and is the Joint Convener of Scottish CND Trade Union Network*

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# Testing times – human rights should not be an afterthought in the pandemic

*Mhairi Snowden stress tests our human rights practice and finds our governments wanting*

If COVID-19 has been a fundamental test for our societies as Michele Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has insisted it is, how have we done? How have human rights and dignity been respected, protected and fulfilled during the pandemic? At the outset, it is worth reminding ourselves that human rights are not abstract or theoretical, and though they are internationally agreed, they are intensively local and practical. Human rights are very much about power – about ensuring that no government body has too much power but that this power is shared, and that use of power is restricted and characterised by dignity for individuals and communities.

It is true that COVID-19 has seen the restriction of human rights for all of us. Our rights to liberty, to association with others and to family life have all been drastically curtailed. Both Westminster and Holyrood governments have been at pains to point out – at some times more than at others – that the human rights principles of proportionality, necessity and lawfulness all must be applied if such restrictions are to be legitimate. However, these are principles which must be backed up by rigorous assessment. They are not to be easily assumed, or to stand still in time. Rather, they must be constantly assessed for their efficacy. Restrictions must remain in place not one day longer than necessary. For example, it may be that restrictions not allowing visitors to care homes back in April may have been proportionate but as the pandemic changes and time goes on, when does this become a disproportionate and discriminatory impact on the right to family life of care home residents?

It is this rigorous consideration of human rights in decision-making that appears to have been lacking in many aspects of COVID response (or possibly was non-existent in the first place). For example, research by the Scottish Human Rights Commission shows that

a considerable proportion of people who use social care support at home experienced either a reduction or complete withdrawal of support during COVID-19. People were suddenly left unable to get out of bed, unable to get to work, unable to leave their homes, leaving their sense of dignity in tatters. There needs to be an emergency decision making framework for social care which is grounded in rights-based principles of inclusion and participation in decision making, and transparency.

Emergency coronavirus legislation reduced the duties of local authorities to assess care needs on the basis of ensuring flexibility to councils to be able to respond in the midst of staffing crises. However, the prerequisite for use of this new weakened provision was set far too low, stating that needs assessments do not need to be carried out if 'it is not practical to do so'. Allied to this,

emergency coronavirus legislation also reduced duties to consult individuals and their advocates around decisions on mental health detention and accommodation. Agency over where you live is so very much bound up with dignity.

There have been some positives. For example, the UK Government increased Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit by approximately £20 per week – this increase was needed before the pandemic, and it is welcome that it has happened now. However, in contrast, asylum support rates are barely 40% of the allowance people over 25 receive on Universal Credit. People with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) and EU citizens with pre-settled status were particularly at risk of infringements of their right to an adequate standard of living during COVID-19. As BEMIS, the organisation for empowering Scotland's ethnic and

cultural minority communities, stated the NRPF immigration policy 'represents a direct derogation of the prohibition of racial discrimination as set out in the International Convention to Eliminate Racial Discrimination'. It is time for the NRPF system to be publicly shamed and ended, and in the meantime, for the Scottish Government to use all of its powers to mitigate it.

During COVID-19, in prisons, short scrutiny visits by HMIPS and HMI Prisons found that many prisoners were locked in their cells for more than 22 hours per day, with some only allowed out for 20 minutes per day. This meets the internationally accepted definition of solitary confinement, thus, contravening the Mandela Rules and amounting to inhuman and degrading treatment in breach of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Alongside recent damning criticism of Scotland's

prison conditions by the Council of Europe, this is a significant human rights concern during the pandemic and beyond.

I have only touched on a number of

human rights impacts of the pandemic response. Human rights now need to be at the heart of COVID recovery – this means a rejection of any UK Government attempts to replace or water down the *Human Rights Act*. In Scotland, it means incorporating our international human rights into Scots law, making sure that people with lived expertise are at the post-COVID decision-making table, making sure we recognise the impacts on particular groups such as BAME communities, and making sure that the way we set priorities and budgets leads to the realisation of rights for all. The more we get this right during recovery and, yes maybe even in 'normal' times, the better we will have a dignity-respecting response in times of crisis.

*Mhairi Snowden is the coordinator for Human Rights Consortium Scotland ([info@hrcscotland.org](mailto:info@hrcscotland.org)), Twitter @HRCScotland, and <https://hrcscotland.org/>*







**ASLEF**

## **For train drivers, trade unions & the Labour Party since 1880**

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

**Mick Whelan, general secretary**

**Dave Calfe, president**

**Kevin Lindsay, ASLEF's organiser in Scotland**

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# A 'Scottish Question' time for Scottish questions

*In his new pamphlet, James Mitchell highlights the complexities we must comprehend for mature discussion*

**D**ebate over Scotland's constitutional future is stuck in a rut. Public opinion is roughly even on whether Scotland should be independent. Small movements in these polls are fought for in a form of trench warfare. The constitutional question dominates and Scotland's constitutional status has become the singular lens through which so much else is discussed. Even in the midst of the pandemic, differences in Scottish and UK Governments' approaches are seen in terms of the constitutional question. A crude Manichean choice, trading insults, exaggerated and heated claims by-pass an actually wide range of possible political choices. The variety of forms independence or union might take are glossed over in this hyper-adversarial battle.

This contrasts with the extraordinary levels of public engagement and rich discussions that animated the first independence referendum in 2014. And yet, debate on the future of Scotland culminated in a grossly over-simplified binary choice that could never capture all that had been discussed. That choice forced apart many who were otherwise on the same side on a wide range of policies and forced together many who would otherwise rarely agree. While the main campaigners and media focused on the set piece and highly predictable debates, the referendum provoked much wider deliberations.

The appointment of the Smith Commission was an odd postscript to the referendum. In place of a long open debate, a tiny group of politicians hurriedly agreed a scheme without serious public input or ratification. A more open process would likely have come up with a more robust and coherent set of proposals. This is neither a criticism of those involved nor a comment on whether more or fewer powers should have been agreed but that the process after the referendum was the antithesis of what had gone before.

It was never likely that Smith would settle much for long. Indeed, the very notion of the 'settled will' is absurd for anything other than the short term. Each generation has grappled afresh with the issues involved. Even without

Brexit, the complex fiscal proposals required more time and reflection than had been available to the Smith Commission. Brexit changes the context beyond anything imagined back when the Scottish Parliament was created or even during the 2014 referendum. COVID ought to awaken us to the limitations and weaknesses of the form devolution now takes.

## The other 'Scottish Questions'

The 'Scottish Question' is itself a misnomer. There are many Scottish Questions and it is their interaction that is usually meant when talking about it in the singular. At its heart is the relationship Scotland has with the rest of the UK (rUK) but it has broadly four elements (in no particular order): national identity, constitutional preference, party politics, and public policy/ideological position.

It is wholly legitimate to see Scotland's constitutional status as of paramount importance and all else secondary. Nationalists on both sides of the debate are unmoved by any other considerations. They provide ballast to the debate but the dynamic lies amongst those who are instrumental in their view of the constitution. In other words, those who are more concerned with outcomes than institutional structures have long determined the course of Scotland's constitutional journey. For instrumentalists, the key question, in the broadest sense, is which constitutional arrangement is most likely to deliver social justice, well-being, economic security or whatever public or private good is desired. And, people have different, including diametrically opposite, goals which need to be taken into account in making sense of the debate. Campaigners might agree on the likely consequences of union and independence but find themselves on different sides of the Yes/No divide because they have very different policy goals.

Of course, part of the answer will depend not only – indeed, far less – on constitutional arrangement than political will and political choices. As we have seen over the last two decades, having the legal capacity to act does not mean that action necessarily follows (or even particular actions necessarily

follow). There is much that the Scottish Parliament could have done within existing powers across a wide range of policy areas but has chosen to be cautious under successive Executives/Governments. Equally, there is ample evidence that a different path has been followed than would have been the case without devolution.

A large part of the problem with current debates is that the start and end point is constitutional preference. An alternative approach would be to first consider *what* kind of Scotland is desired then *how* this is best to be achieved. There is no weakness in acknowledging different views on how best to achieve a common outcome. This would allow for a mature discussion. There are people with progressive views on both sides of the constitutional question just as there are conservatives and reactionaries on both sides. But portraying those with whom we disagree on *how* as if we disagree on *what* is not only unhelpful but dishonest. It should not be beyond us to conduct a respectful debate recognising these distinct dimensions. It would also help insulate much current policy debate from the heat of the constitutional question.

Scotland's constitutional status will never be 'resolved' in the sense of being settled for all time. It has always lurked in the background even when it appeared to be settled. Changes in Scottish society and economy drove demands for changes in government and public policy with implications for how Scotland should be governed. Scotland was never assimilated into a greater England and there has never been any serious effort to do so. There have been tensions between those who saw the need for uniformity in service provision and those who thought it necessary to allow for Scotland to pursue its own path.

'Administrative devolution' allowed a limited degree of autonomy but only to Scottish Office Ministers appointed by the Prime Minister. It recognised Scottish distinctiveness but not Scottish democracy. But it provided the basis for the new elected form devolution took in 1999. Devolved government provides some autonomy. The creation of the Scottish Parliament owed much to



opposition to 18 years of Conservative Governments. It was sold as a means of stopping Thatcherism at the border, as a protective shield. The extent to which devolution today successfully performs that function is part of today's debate. There is a desire to strengthen the shield and, indeed, to reform it to allow a more ambitiously progressive society. But there is also a belief that a common UK framework, even uniform policies and rights, are necessary to defend and develop progressive policies. This gets to the heart of the issues for those on the broad progressive wing of politics.

### Relationships

The classic understanding of sovereignty is that a state has unlimited, undivided and unaccountable power to any higher authority. The rhetoric of sovereignty is a fiction but creates impossible and undesirable expectations. It assumes states can operate in isolation when all states must, in the interests of their citizens, engage with others. The very notion 'sovereignty' has mystical roots and has had greater rhetorical value than offering a serious guide to options beyond superficial ones. It proves easier to mobilise people in support of sovereignty than use it as a guide on good government and public policy. Acknowledging and engaging with different and complex *relationships* is a better way of framing discussion.

A further dimension of the limitations of the binary choice is the failure to appreciate the complexity of relationships involved. Campaign rhetoric might suggest a simple choice between union and independence but, in fact, a vast array of relationships is involved. Nuance is required. The simplicity of a clean break belies these complex relationships. Even the most hostile neighbouring states have some interactions with each other. Brexit should have taught everyone that clean

breaks are not possible or, at least, not without massive cost.

Interesting possibilities open up when we consider these debates in terms of relationships rather than simple binary choices. Situations are conceivable in which far greater autonomy exists in some areas while cooperation or even uniformity and shared services exist elsewhere. It's difficult to imagine Scotland without some common institutions with the rUK such as shared services and deep cooperation. The question is: which areas should be independent, cooperative, shared or uniform? And, crucially, whatever may be decided at any point must be open to challenge and change in the future. Relationships evolve over time. They are never static for long.

Regardless of constitutional status, relationships will continue to exist. If Scotland voted for independence in 2014, institutions would still have been required to manage relations between Scotland and the rUK. Part of the problem is that discussing these relationships is limited when only one party to the relationship engages in debate on their nature. And there is little prospect of serious consideration in the heat of a referendum. Discussion that would normally be conducted amicably on such relationships become part of the campaign as was witnessed when opponents of independence claimed to oppose a common currency, against their own best interests, in 2014.

A distinction needs to be made here between formal legal independence and meaningful autonomy. A polity may attain so-called 'sovereignty' but for a variety of reasons may be no more autonomous than before. Equally, it might be possible to have considerable autonomy in choosing alternative social and economic paths without having formal independence.

Shared institutions or common regimes, involving a diminution or even abnegation of 'sovereignty', may empower a polity. Belonging to the EU has weakened member states in some respects but has increased each member state's ability to deliver wellbeing to its people. As in any relationship, membership involves trade-offs.

In much discussion of inter-governmental relations, there is an emphasis on areas of disagreement and conflict ignoring business transacted on an everyday basis that fails to grab attention because it is not seen as exciting or newsworthy. But serious students of public policy will be aware that much that goes on that does not attract attention is vital and important work. Focus on the dramas of Ministerial meetings and visits gives a false impression. And, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that much of the drama is manufactured. Additionally, there is far more to the relationships than those between politicians and officials.

### Options

Independence and union come in many forms but this is often obscured in much debate today. While clear legal constitutional definitions of independence exist, these can only be a starting point. We need a much richer debate that recognises this diversity. The possibilities are endless when debate is framed in terms of relationships.

Even options that may not appeal can provoke ideas and open up what has become a stale debate. Amongst the many options that might be considered include what have been referred to as Partially Independent Territories (PIT), confederations, federations and different forms of devolution. But incantation of soundbites on 'DevoMax', 'Devo+', 'home rule' is not so much old wine in new bottle as no wine in new bottles. A case can be made for what the Scottish LibDems refer to as a 'third way' but this has barely got beyond a soundbite or series of principles.

Federalism has frequently been mentioned in debates over many decades. It recurs regularly as an option but is rarely developed. As with other options, federalism can come in a number of forms. If it is to become a genuine alternative and not a convenient slogan for those seeking to avoid serious engagement with the issues, then more information will be required on the form and function of the

federalism proposed. A key challenge that cannot be avoided, regardless of which federalism might be proposed, is to take this debate beyond Scotland and provide evidence that it has support throughout rUK. Even if there was significant support for federalism in Scotland, it could not be imposed on the rUK. But leaving that aside, there is much in the literature on federalism and rich experience of federalism across the globe to draw upon and inform debate in Scotland.

The UK at present offers a range of intriguing models with the special relationships between London and the Channel Isles or the Isle of Man. As Crown Dependencies, the islands provide residents with UK citizenship. In 1973, the Kilbrandon Royal Commission on the Constitution described them as 'like miniature states with wide-ranging powers of self-government', having no representation in Westminster, making 'annual voluntary contributions towards the costs of defence and international representation by the UK' and with Westminster not legislating for them without their agreement (and not being members of the EU). Few are likely to be attracted to such an arrangement for Scotland, not least UK Governments especially as far as 'voluntary contributions' for services, but this model may provoke thought and debate on other possibilities.

The case of Northern Ireland and the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) also highlights what is possible within the existing UK. There is much that is remarkable about the GFA not least that it brought agreement to a part of the world that had witnessed a deeply entrenched binary divide that was presumed to be intractable not so long ago. The three strands to the Agreement include one addressing the establishment of the Northern Ireland Assembly and executive; another on relations with the Republic of Ireland; and the third on relations with the rUK. Leading authorities on the GFA have noted both its consociational and confederal aspects. There is merit in considering the Scottish Question in terms of strands because they provide evidence of what is possible with some creative thinking.

Confederation has been the constitutional option that dare not speak its name. Yet, that was what senior members of the SNP, along with Plaid Cymru and Common Wealth (a small socialist party founded in 1942 with a handful of MPs briefly)

openly advocated in the 1950s. An argument can be made that the Scottish Government White Paper published in 2013 offered confederation rather than independence though the rhetoric surrounding it emphasised independence. Leaving aside semantic debates which can descend into pedantics, the key point is that there is considerable scope for a more nuanced debate on alternatives.

### Choosing Scotland's future

There is one area in which agreement is essential. Agreement is needed on how authoritative decisions are made and will be implemented. Absence of such agreement can only stoke up resentment and grievances. Using raw power to enforce an unpopular policy is dangerous and undemocratic. We now have rules on the conduct of referenda but no clarity on whether or when a referendum can take place. A case for a third option on the ballot paper can be made but that requires far more detail as to the nature of that third option and who would draw up such a proposal. Failure to provide such information means that such an option will not be available. Again, there are various possibilities that can be considered. Research is clear; it makes little sense to use the simple plurality voting system when three options are on the ballot paper for the possibility exists that the option with most support falls short of 50%. There are ways of avoiding such an outcome such as ranking preferences or forms of approval voting but whatever system was adopted would require agreement.

But even more pressing is the issue of what constitutes a mandate for a referendum, whether simple binary or other. The battle on mandates continues with the Scottish Government arguing it already has such a mandate and UK Government insisting equally that it does not. This highlights the absence of clear constitutional rules of the game. The 2012 Edinburgh Agreement between the Scottish and UK Governments might be seen as setting a precedent that an overall majority in Holyrood is a mandate but precedents can count for little in the UK constitution. While constitutional conventions may be, as a leading scholar once stated, 'somewhat vague and slippery - resembling the procreation of eels', they are as good as it gets under the UK constitution and some new convention is needed. The nearest equivalent is the Addison/Salisbury Convention in which it was agreed after

the 1945 election that the Lords would not block any legislation passed by the Commons that had been set out clearly in a manifesto of the elected party. An overall majority achieved at a Holyrood election would be more challenging given the electoral system but is a likely contender for cross-party agreement.

### Conclusion

Ensuring that the proportions of light and heat are balanced more in favour of the former will be challenging in our hyper-adversarial politics. Heated assertions put off many voters and are all too often substitutes for lack of answers. There are many people, perhaps a majority, who will not change their mind on Scotland's future split between supporters of independence and the union. This leaves a significant group who will play a decisive part in any decision. But no decision can ever be final. Today's electorate has no right to disenfranchise those not yet on the electoral register by making a decision for all time. Change is inevitable though change may come slowly, incrementally or in significant and substantial forms. It is all our responsibility to make the information and knowledge for that process of change as robust and rigorous as possible.

*James Mitchell is Professor of Public Policy at the University of Edinburgh. His Jimmy Reid Foundation pamphlet, 'The Scottish Question Revisited', is available at:*

[https://reidfoundation.scot/publications\\_trashed/the-scottish-question-revisited-pamphlet/](https://reidfoundation.scot/publications_trashed/the-scottish-question-revisited-pamphlet/)

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# Only by having constitutional choice can Scottish Labour's radical reasoning be realised

*Katrina Faccenda says the roadblock must be removed so socialist policies can become attractive again*

The fightback against the latest attacks on Richard Leonard, Scottish Labour leader, has energised the party's left activists. The Campaign for Socialism (Cfs) organised one of our biggest events in years to rally people behind Richard and more importantly to defend a left policy agenda for Scottish Labour as it looks towards the elections of May 2021. Online meetings have given us a chance to include activists from the Shetlands to the Scottish Borders in our meetings and discussions, and we have been using this time to promote political education. We will emerge from the pandemic with a stronger group of core activists.

But keeping that energy going when we are in lockdown is difficult considering the level of disillusionment with UK Labour. The recent abstention in Westminster on the 'SpyCops' Bill led more members gave up their party cards. For those of us active in the Labour left, we are fighting on two fronts: to hold on tightly to our activists and to defend our socialist agenda. For the Cfs, our tasks are clear, we have to keep fighting the internal battles but we need to be more outwards looking. We need to encourage our members to organise and revitalise local party structures. This is hard work when many find their local party hostile to debate and any political activity outside of elections. Fundamentally, we must give people a reason to stay by building campaigns and leading the fightback against austerity. The degree of the recklessness of those trying to oust Leonard is astounding. Scottish Labour's right-wing still push its 'let's make the party as right-wing as it used to be and people will vote for us' rhetoric and is evidently prepared to burn the house down as long as it is control of the ashes.

As we unite behind Leonard, we cannot ignore the fact that he does not always represent the developing position of the Labour Left on constitutional issues and it is disappointing he does not share our position on the matter of Scottish sovereignty and a second referendum on Independence. We understand his position as socialists who put international solidarity at the top of our agenda but we believe that only

Scotland – and not Westminster – must decide upon a second independence referendum. His reasons may be radically different from those who want to wrap Scottish Labour in a union jack, but the outcome is the same. We will continue to be seen as a party which prioritises defence of the union when the majority of people in Scotland no longer do.

With the shambolic, reactionary Tory government under Johnson, the only viable position is to recognise that power within the union needs redistributing and how much we need further devolution of power away from Westminster to the rest of the UK. Arguing for a nebulous version of federalism just is not enough. One of the successes of the Corbyn project was to revive the sense of pride in standing for radical, redistributive policies. That strength of emotion seems hard to replicate around a federalist agenda. By accepting the democratic argument around any future referendum, we can start to talk about why we know that the SNP version of independence will not bring manifest improvements to working people's lives. When you are living in poverty or exploited on a zero-hours contract, and when the balance of power is in the hands of the bosses and big business, there is no freedom. It is up to us as socialists in Labour to articulate these ideas. It really should not be that difficult as we face up to the economic consequences of the pandemic.

In the same way that our electoral success in Scotland continued when we were losing in England, I don't think that Starmer's popularity or success nationally will make a significant difference to Scottish Labour at the ballot box in Scottish or Westminster elections. We saw that in 2017 when despite our gains nationally and an increase in the number of Labour MPs in Scotland, our vote increased by only 9,000. We saw it again in 2019 when

on the doorsteps people told us how much they liked our manifesto but they were still voting SNP.

What could make a difference? Beyond a better constitutional position, we need a transformation of party structures. We need to increase the active membership; the unionist conservative rump holds too much power on local party structures. We need our local parties to be active campaigners not just electioneers and to select fighting socialist candidates.

We need to focus on issues where only our party which gives a vote and where a voice for organised labour will deliver. The crisis has shown the importance of unions and their strengths in organising workers for better, safer conditions. Although employment law is not devolved, we need to make the arguments for getting rid of all anti-union laws and expose the weaknesses in the Scottish Government's business-orientated approach to industrial relations, where the power imbalance is never properly addressed. There needs to be more emphasis on how organisation empowers workers and how businesses exist to make a profit, not to serve the interests of workers. Basically, we need people to know that Labour in Scotland stands for the change that is much more radical than breaking away from the rest of the UK.

*Katrina Faccenda is Cfs chair and Labour candidate for Edinburgh Northern and Leith in the May 2021 Scottish Parliaments elections*

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# Smoke and mirrors: 'The Great SNP Enigma'

*Campbell Martin unravels the continuing battle for the soul of the SNP*

In years to come, students of Scottish politics will look back on this time as 'The Great SNP Enigma'. They will try to unravel how the SNP and party leader, Nicola Sturgeon, could have been achieving record-high support in opinion polls, yet a large section of independence supporters was calling for the leader to be replaced. Looking back on today from the vantage point of a future independent Scotland, will students and others understand why so many on her own side turned on the leader of the SNP?

As First Minister of Scotland, Sturgeon has been outstanding: so impressive has she been during an unprecedented global pandemic that only partisan, political opponents would attempt to contrive criticism of her performance. If Scotland was already an independent country, few candidates could come close to matching Nicola Sturgeon as an ideal First Minister. However, we are not, yet, independent, and the current SNP leadership's 'gradualist' approach to restoring to Scotland the sovereign powers of a normal, independent country is what generates the criticism of Sturgeon and those in her leadership-bubble.

My membership of the SNP came to an end 16-years-ago; a decision made by the party, not me. At the time, I was an SNP MSP and I spoke-out against the 'leadership' of John Swinney, who had replaced Alex Salmond as National Convener in 2000. I was a 'fundamentalist', generally described as people who want independence, and want it 'now'. Swinney and the small clique around his 'leadership' were 'gradualists'. Essentially, 'gradualists' were prepared to 'park independence' and, instead, they sought to gradually – and very slowly – build the powers of the devolved parliament in Edinburgh. Swinney once told me he was impressed with what Tony Blair had done with the Labour Party – creating 'new' Labour and turning the former party of the working class into a clone of the Tory Party. His vision was the creation of a 'new' SNP, and under his 'leadership' the party moved from its traditional moderate, centre-left position to a moderate, centre-right position.

Under Swinney's 'leadership', party members on the left were marginalised and found themselves attacked by anonymous party spokespeople. It became a trait of the 'gradualists'

that, despite being frightened to fight unionists, they did not hold back in putting the boot into fellow SNP members of the left. In 2004, shortly after I was expelled for calling on Swinney to resign and for Alex Salmond to return as leader, Swinney resigned and Alex Salmond returned as leader. The purge of 'fundamentalists' and the left was ended as Alex Salmond reunited the SNP and transformed it into a party of government.

Sadly, today, under Nicola Sturgeon's leadership, the 'gradualists' are once again in positions of power within the SNP. Criticism of the leader and her advisors stems from a perceived lack of urgency, on their part, in delivering independence. There appears to be no plan to take Scotland forward, other than asking a Tory Prime Minister in London to give his permission for the Scottish Government to hold an independence referendum. Theresa May and Boris Johnson have both refused such permission and, given majority support for independence in opinion polls, why would a Conservative and Unionist Prime Minister change their mind? Why does the party that styles itself 'the party of independence' have no clear-cut plan to actually deliver independence?

Against this background, in the Sturgeon-led SNP, prominent party activists on the left of the party are, once again, being marginalised and attacked, even blocked from standing as party candidates. The difference, this time, is that much of the often vicious attacks come from young, sycophantic, leadership acolytes using social media.

The SNP's new 'gradualists' are clearly being manipulated and used by some of the old guard who still advocate the parking of independence and slowly building the powers of the devolved parliament. What the young members

have added to this mantra is placing 'identity' issues ahead of delivering an independent Scotland. The young 'new' SNP activists place greater emphasis on self-identity in relation to gender, than on delivering a better, fairer, more equitable Scotland for all the people who live here. Their gender obsession could be delivered by an SNP Government in a limited, devolved parliament, but a better, fairer, more equitable country for all Scots requires independence, so they appear willing to settle for running devolution.

In addition to the new 'gradualists' down-playing independence, and putting the boot into 'fundamentalists' and the left, today's SNP also has to contend with the possibility that some around the Sturgeon leadership may have colluded to try and jail former SNP leader, Alex Salmond. Serious charges relating to sexual offences were presented against Salmond, but a jury at Scotland's High Court in Edinburgh listened to the evidence and acquitted him of all charges. Still, though, concerns remain that some senior SNP members might have played a part in trying to jail Salmond. Information that could split the SNP wide-open may emerge as a Scottish Parliament Inquiry into the Scottish Government's handling of actions against Alex Salmond takes its course.

However, much of this has played-out below the general public's radar, which is why we have the apparent enigma of soaring support for a popular First Minister, her party and independence, while criticism is levelled by those in the SNP and wider movement who are aware of what is happening.

*A former SNP MSP (2003-2007), Campbell Martin is now broadcast journalist and factual programme director. He is not a member of any political party.*



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**Care After COVID: Constructing an adult social care service fit for purpose** The private sector model of providing care is badly broken and needs replacing. But 'with what?', 'what form should it take?', and 'how do we go about doing this?'. In this paper, the salient issues are laid out and a suggestion is made for how the process to resolve these issues can be undertaken. Most obviously, this involves the care workers and their unions. This particular path is advocated in order to provide a much-needed balance to the Scottish Government's own review of adult social care militating against the necessary radical change. See <https://reidfoundation.scot/2020/10/4645/>



# All change at the top of the big unions?

*Stephen Smellie surveys the field and asks whether change at the top will presage change beneath*

Over the next 18 months UNISON, UNITE and GMB, our biggest unions, will be electing new general secretaries. Consequently, the landscape could dramatically change, or it could pretty much stay the same. All three ballots will have similar contexts within which they will be conducted. These include the pressures of austerity, Brexit, the crisis of political representation that the current Tory majority and the failure of Labour presents, and Covid-induced economic collapse. Adding colour will also be the political groupings and cliques within each union.

None of the three unions has ever had a woman general secretary. This is an issue that will play a significant role, even before the exposure of the culture of sexism and harassment in the GMB. UNISON, with 1m women members, is the most likely to break this particular glass ceiling with a woman candidate, current Assistant General Secretary (AGS), Christina McAnea, receiving far more nominations than any of the others, including the NEC and several regions including, by a large majority, Scotland. The other three candidates, Roger McKenzie, also an AGS, and NEC members, Paul Holmes and Hugo Pierre, are competing to be seen as the best 'left' candidate to offer change whilst McAnea is being described by some of their supporters as the 'continuity' candidate, a charge she refutes and points out that as a woman she offers the greatest possible change.

As in many unions, a UNISON broad left grouping has existed for years. This has rarely reached beyond a core of activists of the Labour left allied to Socialist Workers' Party and Socialist Party members, who occasionally have rallied to form an anti-Prentis alliance in NEC elections, recently under the banner of UNISON Action (UA). As in previous years, they have failed to agree on a single left candidate.

Hugo Pierre, elected to the NEC in the Black Male seat, is accused of splitting UA to promote the Socialist Party. His programme of demanding national action to fight pay and cuts is the same programme that, in theory, many people support but which no-one in the union has been able to

deliver or even explain how it could be delivered. Paul Holmes, male NEC Local Government representative, is the candidate for the remaining UA faction. Pierre's supporters claim Holmes' current suspension by the union and his employer, on charges not officially made public but subject to discussion on social media, make him an unsuitable candidate for the 'left' to rally round. Holmes promises that, if elected, he would move UNISON HQ out of London and give branches 50% of all subs paid by members (compared to the 20%-25% they currently get). With commitments to lead from the front and organise national campaigns and strikes, his programme is questioned on how he can achieve this with significantly less funds available for the national union.

Both Holmes and Pierre promise to take

General Secretary candidate were dashed when McAnea won double the number of branch nominations and Holmes achieved more nominations than any previous lay member candidate.

McAnea, from Glasgow, has been a lead negotiator for the union in many sectors and currently heads up bargaining in her AGS role. She launched a detailed manifesto focussing on better organised campaigns and more visibility in the media, including as the leader of the biggest organisation, never mind union, of women members in Britain. She proposes establishing a UNISON College to deliver training for members. She points out that, unlike the others, she recognises the union is led by lay members on the NEC and other committees and she would work with them to achieve her aims.

Scottish branches overwhelmingly supported McAnea's nomination and she is well known among activists here. The Scottish constitutional position has not featured in the debates, with the union having a clear policy position that it is up to Scottish members and

the Scottish union to determine its position. McAnea is the favourite to win, based on the number of nominations. However, with Holmes having support of many of the bigger branches in England and McKenzie's profile as AGS responsible for Organising at a time when Black Lives Matter has raised greater awareness of racism, nothing can be taken for granted, except that Pierre cannot win. Whether McAnea emerges as the first woman General Secretary, McKenzie as the first black General Secretary or Holmes as the first lay member to be elected as General Secretary, UNISON will look different in future. Whoever wins it is possible that the bi-annual NEC elections due next year will be the determining factor as to whether the union not only looks different but acts different in future.

- The UNISON ballot opened on 28 October, closes on 27 November and the results will be announced on 11 January 2021.

*Stephen Smellie is Depute Convenor UNISON Scotland*



only a 'worker's wage' although with differing figures in mind.

Holmes received significantly more nominations than Pierre, including the big Local Government Executive and North West Region, leading to suggestions that Pierre should stand down to allow Holmes to be the one 'left' candidate. However, the UA faction actually split 3 ways with some of their supporters preferring to support Roger McKenzie as a 'left' more likely to win than either of the other two.

McKenzie, whose nominations are around the same level as Holmes, has been an AGS for 10 years, despite which he is presented as a change candidate. His responsibility is for Organising which he presents as his main issue for the union. He is well known in the union movement as one of the most senior black trade unionists and his election would be the first time a black person has led a major union since Bill Morris was General Secretary of the TGWU. Any hope amongst his supporters that he would emerge as the leading 'left' candidate or even the leading Assistant

# Tackling the epidemic of gender-based violence in the midst of a global pandemic

Natalia Equihua reports on continuing campaign to protect women from male violence

This 25 November marks 29 years since the *16 Days of Action Against Gender-Based Violence* was first launched, a global campaign started by Rutgers University's Center for Women's Global Leadership to demand an end to violence against women and girls. It unifies the efforts that women's organisations and feminists around the world throughout the year. Despite almost three decades of campaigning and the activism before that, 2020 has been particularly challenging for women's equality. The unprecedented global health crisis we are facing has laid bare the scale of the problem, making this global call to action feel ever more pressing.

When the pandemic was declared and governments around the world introduced 'stay at home' measures to contain the virus, the epidemic of male violence against women came into sharp view. It confirmed what at women's organisations we have been saying for years: home isn't a safe place for everyone and abuse is rapidly moving to online platforms and mobile technologies. Since lockdown started, in the UK there has been a 50% increase in calls to domestic abuse helplines, and 1 in 2 women and non-binary people have experienced online abuse, with 29% reporting abuse has worsened during the pandemic.

The current crisis is also having a huge impact on women's ability to access justice. If before Covid-19 women already faced an uphill struggle to bring their perpetrators to account, let alone to do so successfully, the barriers have exacerbated with lockdown. At the Scottish Women's Rights Centre —where we provide free legal and advocacy services to women affected by abuse—we hear women are finding it harder to get legal representation. At the same time, we have helped more women than ever before to apply for legal protections against their perpetrators. We are also acutely aware of the long delays in domestic abuse and sexual violence criminal cases brought on by the pandemic which, according to a recent Equality and Human Rights Commission report, could lead some victims/survivors to withdraw from the process — not to mention the huge toll these delays are having on the mental health

of women already living with trauma.

The increased risk of abuse for women and children has led to a higher demand for support from front-line services like ours. And in a time when the women's sector (especially local services and those supporting minority women) have faced insecure funding, the pressures are enormous. Despite the difficulties, women's services in Scotland quickly adapted to continue providing vital support. At our Centre, we launched an online contact form to ensure women living with their abusers could safely get the advice they needed; we increased our capacity to help them apply for legal protections; and aware of the changes in the justice system and the dynamics of abuse, we have published practical information so women know what to do if, for example, they have child contact arrangements with an abusive ex-partner during the pandemic. Like us, sister organisations have had to rethink their services in order to continue providing what can be lifesaving support.



In the midst of this complex landscape, the international theme for this year's *16 Days of Action* makes four concrete asks to governments 'Fund, Prevent, Respond, and Collect'. It asks to prioritise flexible funding for violence against women (VAW) organisations; to create national and local plans to tackle gender-based violence during the pandemic; ensuring the continuation of VAW services and an adequate criminal justice response; and collecting data to help women's services improve. In Scotland, there have been some positive steps in this direction with Equally Safe, the national strategy to eradicate violence against women. As a society, however, we must ensure this strategy addresses the current circumstances and make our government accountable as much as we need to take action in our own lives and communities. So what can you do this year? Support women's organisations: follow the

events and campaigns and make sure you spread the work. If you can:

- Donate to your local Rape Crisis centre or Women's Aid group.
- Keep informed: check what services are available in your area for women living with abuse. You never know when you might be talking to a survivor. When you do, let them know they don't need to deal with the abuse alone.
- Believe, listen and support survivors: this is the single most important thing you can do. Abuse can happen to any woman at any point in their lives, and coming forward takes incredible courage. When someone discloses to you, let them know you believe them and ask how you can best support them.

Gender-based violence existed before the pandemic and it will not go away once it ends. We must strive to engage in actions beyond these 16 days, to advocate for meaningful systemic change and, above all, to be there for the women and girls whose lives have been irrevocably changed by their abusers.

References [https://equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/equality\\_and\\_human\\_rights\\_commission\\_how\\_coronavirus\\_has\\_affected\\_equality\\_and\\_human\\_rights\\_2020.pdf](https://equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/equality_and_human_rights_commission_how_coronavirus_has_affected_equality_and_human_rights_2020.pdf)

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/take-action/16-days-of-activism>

- If you have been affected by the contents of this article, please contact the Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage helpline on 0800 027 1234 (open 24/7) and [helpline@sdfmh.org.uk](mailto:helpline@sdfmh.org.uk) or Rape Crisis Scotland's National Helpline 08088 01 03 02 (open daily 6pm-midnight) and [support@rapecrisisScotland.org.uk](mailto:support@rapecrisisScotland.org.uk) For legal advice and information call the Scottish Women's Rights Centre on freephone 080880 010 789 (see <https://www.scottishwomensrightscentre.org.uk/helpline/> for opening times).

Natalia Equihua is the Administration and Communications Worker at the Scottish Women's Rights Centre (<https://www.scottishwomensrightscentre.org.uk/>)



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# Feeding the thousands: the right to food in Scotland

*Elaine Smith outlines the progress on her bill to enact the right into law*

In *Scottish Left Review* (111, May/June 2019), I argued the Scottish Parliament emerged partially as a response to the rampant injustices inflicted upon Scotland during Thatcherism, and that it had not lived up to its potential as a left-leaning defence against cruel Tory policies. Improving access to healthy, nutritious food has been an area where parliamentary progress has been painfully slow and this is highlighted by the lack of progress of free-school meal (FSM) provision in the last 20 years.

During the second session of the Scottish Parliament, I co-sponsored Frances Curran's Bill on FSMs which outlined a universal approach and would have extended entitlement to FSMs to all children in state primary schools in Scotland and given Scottish Ministers the ability to expand this entitlement to secondary schools. The 2007 SNP manifesto committed to 'the introduction of free school meals, beginning with our youngest children and expanding free entitlement for children in poverty'. More than 13 years on, only primary 1-3 children have a universal entitlement to FSMs.

The need for a radical and transformative approach to food has never been greater, yet the Scottish Government is prone to tinkering around the edges and resisting radical change. Many other countries, such as Cuba, guarantee all their children FSMs every day. Misplaced priorities and a lack of ambition are all that prevent us from following the same path in Scotland.

The *Good Food Nation Bill* was an opportunity to make meaningful progress in tackling the issues in our food system, yet the Scottish Government ignored the strong campaign for a right to food, and ruled out including the right to food as part of that Bill. It then announced that the whole bill had been shelved due to the pandemic – even though action to tackle poverty-related hunger has never been more needed.

While the issue of food insecurity has been brought much more sharply into focus by the pandemic, with some unable to leave their house or access supermarket delivery slots, thousands of jobs lost and many workers finding their income gone or reduced, the pre-Covid situation was already shameful. Food bank

usage has surged with nearly 600,000 food parcels handed out in Scotland between April 2018-September 2019 and has significantly increased during the pandemic. Emergency food aid cannot be a permanent solution and it's appalling that we need foodbanks at all.

My proposed *Right to Food (Scotland) Bill* seeks to enshrine the human right to food into law, giving effect to our international commitments in domestic legislation and ensuring that no one living in Scotland goes hungry. The issues we face are systemic. That is why my proposal takes a cross cutting approach, seeking to address the current disjointed approach to food by proposing the creation of an independent statutory body to oversee our food system, bringing together key stakeholders from across the food sector and the various government departments and authorities who have responsibility for aspects of food policy, and placing clear duties upon the Scottish Government.



The proposals have been supported by members of the public, unions, academics, local authorities, public health bodies, charities and community organisations. One of the main causes of rising food insecurity has been the rise in precarious work and wage stagnation resulting in increased in work-poverty. In responding to the *Good Food Nation Bill* consultation in 2019, the STUC called for legislation to incorporate everyone's right to access healthy, nutritious and affordable food, and to place a duty on public bodies to contribute to the 'Good Food Nation' ambition. I'm pleased to have received STUC support for my Bill in order to realise those ambitions which appear to have been abandoned by the

Scottish Government. UNISON Scotland has welcomed my Bill highlighting, in its consultation response, support for 'Framework legislation (which) would enable the structural causes of hunger and malnutrition in a wealthy nation like Scotland to be addressed, such as low pay, race and sex inequality, and our inadequate benefits system'. UNITE Scotland, in its submission, emphasised 'Scotland's Food is everyone's business. ... [I]t is therefore important that the right to food should involve Government, public bodies, agencies, business and unions working together in drawing up policies'.

The consultation on my Bill has generated hundreds of responses, with overwhelming support for the principle of enshrining the right to food into law. Most respondents also supported the proposed mechanism of an independent statutory body to provide oversight, and the proposals to enshrine the right to food into law in advance of wider human-rights legislation and to place the responsibility for ensuring the right to food is realised on the Scottish Government.

With this clear support, I will publish a final proposal and seek fellow MSPs' backing to introduce a Bill. Due to the likely end of the parliamentary session in March 2021, it will not be possible to introduce the Bill this parliamentary session. Many of my fellow Scottish Labour MSPs are already actively campaigning on the right to food and reform of our food sector, and my decision to stand down from parliament means that one of them – probably, Rhoda Grant if re-elected - will seek to take this proposal forward in the next session.

As an MSP since 1999, I have promoted a socialist vision for Scotland and fought for a progressive society no longer plagued by the harsh inequalities. Securing a future free from hunger, through the legal guarantee of a right to food, and a government with the will to ensure that every individual and family has access to healthy, nutritious and sustainable food, will be key to ensuring that vision becomes reality.

*Elaine Smith is the (Labour) MSP for Central Scotland*

# Dundonians doing it for a decent Dundee

*Stuart Fairweather looks at the successful creation of the Dundee Action Forum and asks what next*

**D**undee Action Forum (DAF) was established in May of this year. There were two main reasons for this: one, a wish to coordinate campaigning and two, a recognition that the Covid-19 pandemic meant that things would need to be done differently. Experienced campaigners attended discussions via Zoom with newer activists. Early discussions were focused on a desire to see a different sort of city emerge from the health crisis and a decade of austerity. Listening to each other was a key feature of these initial meetings. Social justice, climate emergency and doing democracy differently, including our own democracy, all featured.

After a few weeks this loosely organised group contacted climate emergency activists, and drew upon union links and other connections. There was a shared interest in exploring Extinction Rebellion's People's Assemblies model. This coincided with a recognition that Dundee City Council was likely to produce a recovery plan responding to Covid-19 and this created a timetable for activity.

Following some planning meetings, 12 and 13 August saw 80 people from all eight wards in the city come together to listen to expert views and agree on ideas to present to the council. Those attending listened to Kate Treharne speak about biodiversity, Russell Pepper, Lynsey Penny, and Keith Skene suggest practical ideas relating to transport, food, and ecology. Chris Law MP considered the world we are leaving to future generations while Lorna Slater and Katherine Trebeck talked about wealth, work, and the wellbeing economy.

Those taking part had experience of the city and the surrounding areas. Some were in their twenties while others were in their nineties, and every age in between. People drew on their connections to their work and to their unions – like UNITE, UNISON, GMB and UCU. People spoke about the private rented sector and council housing. Relationships to the two universities, and churches and community groups were all cited. But importantly, people attended both nights not as representatives of organisations with pre-set ideas but as individual citizens.

Additionally, one of the Forum members

took on the role of ensuring that everyone who wanted to speak was allowed to speak and they encouraged all to listen. It was agreed that the initial outcome should be a deputation to the city council timetabled for 24 August. School grounds growing more food, environmental education, better bus services, and useable cycle lanes were all amongst the demands called for. These along with the retro-fitting of housing, making use of the docks for energy generation, and stimulating the local economy would be issues raised with the council.

In planning the presentation, it became clear that many points raised at the assembly aligned with Dundee City Council's Climate & Biodiversity Action Plans. All 29 councillors were reminded of this directly and via the press in the run up to the meeting. What was also made clear was the almost entire absence previously agreed policy within the recovery plans. Therefore, on the night the on-line deputation demanded on behalf of the assembly that the Council:

- Reassert the climate and ecological emergency;
- Reaffirm commitment to and accelerate the Council's Climate Action Plan and Biodiversity Plan, strengthening them with specific goals, targets and timescales;
- Revise the restructuring phase of the current Recovery Plan to include specific environmental and ecological goals;
- Ensure that no action within the recovery plan puts any aspect of the climate and biodiversity targets at risk; and
- Establish a mechanism for ongoing engagement and collaboration with the Assembly and green groups to progress jointly on the green recovery.

In response, Dundee City Council leader acknowledged the deputation on behalf of DAF and the People's Assembly. He acknowledged that the authority's Covid-19 recovery plan did not do enough to ensure a green future for the city. SNP councillors put forward an amendment to: i) reassert the commitment to the climate and the ecological emergency; ii) publish a detailed report in the coming months on what can be done to accelerate and

enhance the plans; and iii) continue ongoing engagement with local groups and the assembly. This was supported by all the councillors.

Although it had been signalled to the deputation earlier in the day that amendment would likely carry, it was still an emotional 'victory', representing an important step forward, so thanks are due to all who attended the assembly, lobbied councillors and put forward arguments that built on previous policy advances. DAF's first venture into supporting local campaigners ended in success.

Since that high point in late August, it has been recognised that the hard work has just begun. Links have been made with those using the assembly approach in Aberdeen and at a Scottish level. The outcome of the deputation has been shared on the DAF Facebook page and established environmental groups have been included in discussion. Two key questions remain on DAF's agenda. First, how can the overlapping environmental and social justice agendas be addressed? Plans for holding an assembly in each of the city's eight wards might help address this question. Second, how can an alliance be constructed with the power to move us beyond policies based on trickle-down economic and environmental destruction? Doing this effectively and inclusively will hopefully encourage many more Dundonians to get involved in delivering the recovery the city desperately needs.

*Stuart Fairweather is a UNITE union rep and member of Democratic Left Scotland*





# The other October revolution – reflecting on a counter-revolution

*Victor Grossman argues much was lost and not much gained by East Germans under the new Germany*

Despite being the thirty-year anniversary of German unification, this year's 3rd October speeches seemed more restrained, without balloons, laser shows and packed auditoriums. The blame lay largely on the virus but also reflected fears about the economy, the environment, the EU and eastern Germany. I thought back to that fateful autumn in 1989 when people in Leipzig poured into streets to voice anger at shortages, a scarcity of fashionable, modern goods, restrictions on western travel, misleading reports on the economy, falsified electoral results and the weakness of a new leadership.

Then standing in Leipzig's main square in late November 1989 and reflecting on the choruses of 'We are the people', I noticed threatening-looking young men shouting instead, 'We are one people', a clear call to join West Germany and terminate the GDR. Later, I saw similar young men unloading bundles of leaflets from a van with a West German licence plate. Within two weeks, I read of attacks by young men in Leipzig on students carrying a GDR flag and against a Somali woman student.

Until then I think that many, while demanding changes, improvements and new leaders they could trust, did not wish to give up the GDR. But in the tumultuous months which led up to the decisive 18 March election, a powerful, highly experienced, well-financed campaign by Westerners, headed by Helmut Kohl, had its effect. While calling movingly for freedom and democracy, their undertone offered other prizes: Hershey bars, Cokes and Big Whoppers as well as hitherto scarce bananas and oranges, Opels, VWs, maybe Mercedes, foreign travel and the key to all such delights, the 'West (Deutsch) Mark'. When Kohl promised a quick realisation of this dream, it brought election victory to his Christian Democratic Union. A big majority in the East German parliament approved unification for 3rd October, while the successor to the GDR's leading party, despite its pledge to abandon all traces of 'Stalinism' and which received only 16% in the election, stood almost alone in opposing unification. Those promised delights did become available. Many are doubtless happy with them. But jubilant East Germans soon discovered that the magic marks (and

later euros) must somehow be earned. No easy matter; within three years the entire GDR economy was closed down.

Despite distortion, it had much to be proud of. Built up without millions based on wartime slave-labour, or Marshall Plan aid, but paying over 90% of war reparations, possessing almost no resources beside crumbly lignite coal, it had created a broad industrial base, a product of gritty sacrifice and dedication without profits being pilfered. But in the 1980s, confronted by the need to build an electronics industry with no aid from Sony, IBM or the USSR, a mounting military threat, and engaged in a giant effort to provide cheap, modern housing for everyone, it could not match super-wealthy West Germany, especially in its consumer goods sector. This, plus some planning missteps, lay behind most difficulties and dissatisfaction leading to 3 October.

The price paid was a heavy one. Not only were small out-dated factories shut down, often a town's main basis, but also modern industrial 'Kombinats' producing top-quality goods, the centres of whole new communities, were taken over for a song by former rivals. Some became low-wage adjuncts making parts; a high proportion were purchased by speculators, West German or foreign, who dismantled the machinery and let the buildings rust away. Almost all the 8,400 publicly-owned enterprises were eradicated; millions were thrown out of work.

Soon West Germans seized every administrative job, from waterworks to sewage control, traffic planning, law courts and police officialdom. For their sacrifice in moving to the 'Wild East', they received a so-called 'bush bonus'. Universities and scientific institutes were cleansed by mass firing exceeding that by Hitler against Jewish intelligentsia. Newspaper, magazine, radio and TV staffs were replaced by Western journalists, and every positive mention of GDR life was tabooed.

There had been many positive features. Workers were secure in their jobs. Even when a pit ran out of coal, or a factory moved, all were guaranteed new jobs. Evictions were legally outlawed. Unchangeable rents cost less than 10-15% of income. I never saw one person

sleeping in the street – or begging. One tax covered all medical and dental expenses, prescription drugs, four-week rehab trips, six months paid maternity leave, free abortions, child care and summer camps, three-week holidays at lakes, mountains or beach for thirty marks – and much more. The cultural scene was also hit hard; cheap books, theatre and opera seats became sad memories, libraries and youth clubs were defunded.

Worst of all, the evil giants returned; the Deutsche Bank, Hitler's financier, Krupp, Siemens, Auschwitz-profiters Bayer and BASF, the producers of Hitler's tanks, bombers and guns regained lost sites. The GDR had aided ANC and Algeria, Vietnam and Allende, Cuba and the Sandinistas; it represented a moral anti-pole to neo-colonial exploitation and expansion. After its demise a monolithic Germany, eager to build its military might and extend its power, joined unashamedly in bombing chemical plants and bridges in Serbia, sending soldiers to battle in Afghan mountains and Saharan deserts and heavy weapons to Near East aggressors.

And what is next? The GDR's holiday military marches are constantly ridiculed. Yet today, almost every weekend in Germany, East and West, neo-Nazis march with banners, jackets and tattoos, frighteningly demanding a return to an earlier past! Will the approaching crisis strengthen them? October 3rd is praised as a democratic revolution – though somewhat less jubilantly this year. Is perhaps 'counter-revolution' more apt?

*Defecting to the GDR in 1952, Victor Grossman writes the 'Berlin Bulletins' and his autobiographies are 'Crossing the River, A Memoir of the American Left, the Cold War, and Life in East Germany' (2003) and 'A Socialist Defector: From Harvard to Karl-Marx-Allee' (2019)*



***Hiroshima (2005),***  
produced and directed by Paul  
Wilmhurst

*Reviewed by Jackie Bergson*

**P**remiered on British terrestrial television earlier this year, *Hiroshima* recounts and illuminates one of the most horrific war atrocities of the twentieth century. Beloved actor, the late John Hurt narrates in passionate detail; his rich, authoritative tones conveying absolute depth of commitment to describing and explaining details and facts about events before, during and after the USA dropped a four-ton atomic bomb upon Hiroshima on 6 August 1945.

Seventy-five years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki began their almost impossible recovery from the deadly radioactive devastation wrought upon them during the closing stages of WW2, *Hiroshima* delivers powerfully clear reminders of how bad things can get when humans decide to stop at nothing to control and win the spoils of war. Fifteen years after its release, the stunning relevance and command of this documentary have not diminished. Its wealth of hindsight delivers unforgettable memories.

In freshly witnessing images and memories conveyed by this film, we rediscover and discover both forgotten and never before recounted, heard or seen emotions and facts about the inconceivable horror which befell Hiroshima in 1945. Through juxtaposing these revelations in stark, glaring contrast to news archive images of jubilations around the western world as a result of the announcement that these horrific events effectively ended WW2, we also come to fully understand how tragically hollow those celebrations were in retrospect.

Through expertly combining dramatised, re-enacted and real, archive footage, Wilmhurst throws light upon all

perspectives of this profoundly catastrophic tragedy of war. For instance, through intercutting real and dramatised footage of President Truman aboard the presidential yacht, taking charge in war rooms and attending political meetings with Churchill and Stalin, Wilmhurst conveys an acutely tangible sense of how terrifyingly quickly war leaders came to the 'momentous' decision to drop the A-bomb.

The last living person present during discussions in the White House map room, duty officer George Elsey, gives an honest interview about 'top secret' meetings. Paul Tibbets, commanding officer and pilot on the host warplane, *Enola Gay*, and his logistics colleague, 'Dutch' Van Kirk, are given space to talk openly. Weapon test officer, Morris 'Dick' Jeppson talks of realising that he was the last person to put his hands on the nuclear bomb they dropped. Tibbets talks in ordinary-seeming tones about how he named *Enola Gay* after his mother, so that history would remember her.

John Hurt's gripping voiceover accurately describes the minutely exacting, nerve-wracking procedures involved in dropping the bomb. Hurt's incredible tones add even more gravitas to the film's telling of the unfolding nightmare of events on the ground in Hiroshima before, during and after the bomb landed.

One of the few survivors of the blast, Dr Hida recalls that in 1945, all Japanese civilians, including schoolchildren, were drilled in taking up arms against the American enemy. He reveals that during those war years, he taught medics to become suicide bombers. Other blast survivors equally describe their personal experiences with awe-inspiring power and overwhelming depth of detail. Some, such as then bank teller, Akiko Takakura, explore reasons why they were targeted by the USA as an

experiment to measure the effects of the bomb. From their direct experiences, we learn about radioactive fallout - black rain - being swallowed by burned victims, desperate for water; about hollowed out people who were evaporated or instantly roasted to the bone; about beyond heartbreaking journeys to find signs of humanity amongst the devastation.

This astounding documentary more than successfully showcases why and how Japan's civilian population was targeted by USA military. It also gives an entirely human perspective on Hiroshima's staggering readjustment, to become the thriving, democratic, pacifist city that exists today. Japan's current economic successes and its fight to remain independent from China may influence the way that audiences who watched this film now respond to it. So too may their awareness of the fact that in 1945, the country was governed by imperial dictators.

Enormously profound changes which shaped Japanese society and politics between those years arc across the unimaginable yet real impressions we can acquire through watching Wilmhurst's outstanding documentary at any time. Moving, traumatising, deeply absorbing and enlightening, its storytelling thoroughness honours and respects its subject matter to the nth degree. As harrowing as the effects of seeing this film will be upon all who view it, the importance and weight of its anti-war message is one from which no moral being should shy away.

*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.*



Lesley Riddoch,

## *Huts: a place beyond - how to end our exile from nature,*

Luath, 2020, £9.99

*Reviewed by Hamish Kirk*

Looking back upon the heady days of 2014, I remember Riddoch's book, *Blossom*, which engendered some debate and discussion. I hope *Huts* will do the same. She asks: 'Why are attitudes to using the great outdoors so different in Norway and in Scotland?' In Norway, at weekends and in holidays, many head for their huts in the countryside and use them as a base to relax and commune with nature. This exodus is made by Norwegians of differing classes and ages. Activities like this in Scotland are done differently. Aristocrats go hunting and shooting, the middle classes rent a holiday cottage, and the lower orders are more likely to head to a caravan park or a successor to Butlin's holiday camps.

Riddoch traces this 'apartheid holiday' system in Scotland to land ownership. Land ownership in rural areas in Scotland is still dominated by feudal lairds like Buccleuch, Sutherland and Bute. Norway does not have that to contend with. It seems that the Scottish Government is busy making pals of our feudal lairds rather than dealing with this blight on our country. There are great differences culturally and socially between Norway and Scotland. In Norway, there were few voices for maintaining the union with Sweden in the 1905 referendum. As a major cultural figure, Norway had Ibsen with his very radical outlook on his native land. Scotland had Walter Scott whose views have created images of Scotland for outsiders and for ourselves for 200 years. Facing the problem of language, Norway saw a linguistic revival led by Ivar Aasen who created 'New Norwegian' or Nynorsk using a variety of Norwegian dialects to create a consciously 'folky' form of language. He did for Norwegian what Hugh MacDiarmid tried in Scots with minimal effect.

Nynorsk is now one of the two accepted forms of written Norwegian. The idea of using Lallans as a written Language creates hilarity in our ranks. You may remember the 'The Broons' in *The Sunday Post*. They often headed off on a holiday to their 'but and ben'

somewhere in the Scottish countryside. Lesley's vision of the hut is we return to that. Perhaps, some of us will. But will many urban Scots turn their backs on the Spanish and Turkish holiday packages for this? I fear this a romantic dream akin to those who long for a Gaelic-speaking life on a croft, but actually live in a flat in Strathbungo!

*Hamish Kirk is a retired teacher, linguist and translator living on the Isle of Bute*

## *Poems penned during the pandemic*

In the last issue, we featured two poems from history teacher, David McKinstry, who had been engaged in home schooling and dealing with the effects of COVID-19 on family and work. Here, we bring you several more.

### *THIS IS WHAT I VOTED FOR*

When the dust settles  
And the campaign is over,  
You can sit back  
With a malt and say  
This is what I voted for.

When the pound is safe  
And the food banks  
Are doing a roaring trade,  
You can say  
This is what I voted for.

When free higher education  
Once again is a privilege  
Rather than a right,  
You can say  
This is what I voted for.

When health is in private hands  
And waiting lists grow longer,  
You can say  
This is what I voted for.

When your gran kids  
Are leaving to take  
Jobs on a distant shore,  
You can say  
This is what I voted for.

When America demands  
Cannon fodder for  
Another oil war,  
You can say  
This is what I voted for.

When overworked minimum waged  
Assistants close your costly  
Care home room door,  
You can shut your eyes and say  
This is what I voted for.

### *LOVE AND LOCKDOWN*

People love and are shrill  
By accident of proximity  
Fulfilling Napoleon's observation  
That emotions like politics  
Are dictated by geography

Some succumb to loving  
Others release by hating  
But most by location

We compete in closeness  
Friendship lends distance,  
Kinship claustrophobia  
Some are family Von Trapp  
Others are family Von Trapped.

### *GLASGOW GREEN*

Battalions of women  
Washed their sheets  
At a swift pace  
Loading them in prams  
With love and rough grace.

A thousand sheets they pinned  
In the Glasgow wind,  
Keeping hearth and home in union  
Whilst their men staggered hame,  
Two sheets to their own divine wind.

Countless washings in the wind  
Memories of weans tucked up in bed  
Thousands of sheets they'll dry  
Carting back and forth  
With a communal sigh.

### *DIGITAL DICKENSIAN AGE*

Whilst tearing the social fabric  
Out of the nation,  
Brexit jingoists wrap themselves  
Round the union flag,  
Whilst packing their jewels  
In a Fagan SWAG bag,  
Welcome to the Digital Dickensian Age

The financially revered  
Are artful tax dodgers,  
Whilst the bedroom tax  
Force some to take in lodgers  
Welcome to the Digital Dickensian Age

Scrooge gets rich off  
Sweat Shop labour,  
Never playing host  
To the conscience  
Of Marley's ghost,  
Welcome to the Digital Dickensian Age

Bill Sykes runs drug mules  
Over home county line,  
To serve up Coke  
To suburbanites as they dine,  
Welcome to the Digital Dickensian Age

Politicians refuse free school meals  
Though food is in plenty store,  
Turning a deaf fat ear  
To the communal cry  
"Please, Sir, I want some more",  
Welcome to the Digital Dickensian Age.



# Kick up the Tabloids

**W**e have now reached the beginning of the last two months of 2020.

The world, at least my admittedly fairly unimportant part of it, looks remarkably similar to how it did at the end of the first two months of the year. Namely, there's nothing going on right now, and on the horizon, I can glimpse the tantalising prospect bugger-all else happening any time soon.

These are tough times for the performing arts in Scotland. Normally, when writing this column, I would add a strap-line at the bottom informing readers of any forthcoming performances in the Scotland. There is now no need, as I have not stood on a stage at home since mid-March. Nor has any other Scottish performer.

Reading through my 2019 diary, I find out that I did over two-hundred live gigs between March and October. In the same seven-month period month this year, I have made a couple of forays over the border, playing a weird version of Russian roulette with drunk audiences in the Covid hotspots of Northern England, which is a risky strategy.

It looks very possible that comedy clubs and theatres will not be able to re-open before the end of this year, which is a disaster for the industry and a huge loss to the general public. It could mean no pantomimes this winter. Although I think panto could work with both audience and cast being socially-distanced, it may require the altering of some of the old traditions. For example, the audience would maybe have to warn: 'He's TWO METRES behind you!!'

The only certainty right now is uncertainty. That, plus the knowledge that while the entire planet may be enduring some rough times, we in the UK are almost certainly ensured our own particular version of Hell come the start of 2021. Let's face it, if we thought Brexit was the biggest

shitstorm that faced us last January, Brexit plus Johnson's muddled approach to the pandemic promises to provide us all with a perfect clusterfuck to start off the New Year.

Less than a year ago, BoJo proudly announced that he had an 'oven-ready deal' with Europe, which would have been all well and good had he not spent the last twelve months fumbling about and trying to work out how to turn the gas on. Someone who can't even strike a deal with Manchester is hardly likely to be able to do so with the European Union. Can't negotiate with one city in your country? Best of luck trying to get any kind of agreement from twenty-seven other nations.

The PM now seems to be taking the attitude that if he ignores the EU, it will go away. As we all remember, he took a similar approach to Covid back in March, and we now all know how successful that turned out to be.

If you had asked me at the start of this year which issues concerned me the most, Brexit aside, I would have answered, not necessarily in this order, the following: climate change, Trump in the White House and the state of the Scotland football team.

Then along came a global pandemic and a worldwide shortage of toilet paper to put everything into perspective. We are so focussed on the one crisis facing humanity that we are in danger of not remembering what a parlous state the world was in before Coronavirus struck. But in the cases of some of those huge problems facing the planet, we may be beginning to see some glimmers of light at the end of this year-long dark tunnel. At least, climate change has been partly aided by a drop in foreign travel and a temporary fall in road traffic.

Deadline dictates I file this copy before the end of October. However, I hope by the time you read this Trump will

be history. If he isn't, please let's all give up and go home. I honestly can't believe even his stunt of pretending to have the virus (seriously, how many morbidly-obese 74-year-olds recover after two days?) will not have saved him from the wrath of the American voters. To claim to be 'immune' to a plague that has claimed the lives of a quarter-of-a-million of your citizens is just plain bonkers.

But, coming to the last of those issues, the Scotland football team has been going about its job quietly, and now stands one game away from its first major tournament since 1998. Not only that, it has done so without any fans to cheer them on. It did strike me that this could be the very reason the team is doing so well. Maybe us loyal foot-soldiers of the Tartan Army aren't such a valuable twelfth man and have been holding them back all these years. Maybe Scotland should carry on playing behind closed doors - as long as we can all meet in socially-distanced groups of six to piss in fountains.

*Vladimir McTavish may be performing somewhere before the end of 2020.*



Vladimir McTavish

# LET'S START TODAY TO REBUILD TOMORROW



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# The pandemic reminds us all of the importance of public services

Scotland's public services have been at the heart of this pandemic, supporting and protecting communities throughout the country. But it hasn't been easy. The public service workers that we all relied on to keep our services running have been undervalued, underpaid and mainly invisible for far too long.

Years of neglect made the effect of the pandemic so much worse. One example of that neglect was the PPE shortage that emerged when the pandemic hit. Another is the fragmented nature of care services for the elderly and vulnerable - where staff frequently experience low pay, insecure employment and impossible workloads to manage. In our NHS a shortage of nurses and other key staff means there are fewer people to look after patients.

This is the result of more than 10 years of spending cuts and austerity. The damage to all the vital services that make our communities strong and resilient, including schools, policing and local government, is plain to see.

Despite all this, key workers in our public services pulled through for all of us. As we look ahead to rebuilding the country following the pandemic, it's crucial for all of us that the same mistakes aren't made again. We can not return to undervaluing our public services and the people who provide them.



**Mike Kirby**  
**UNISON's Scottish Secretary**

Mike Kirby said: "Scotland depends on key workers to keep public services running and everyone protected. But it's taken a pandemic for their worth to be properly recognised.

"Everyone is desperate to get back to normal. However, 'normal' cannot mean a return to low pay, penny-pinching and public services staff being under-valued. For too long, this has been the reality for those providing vital amenities including health and social care, policing, education and local government.

"The government must invest properly in public services and respect workers by paying them fairly and keeping them safe. It must reverse a decade of neglect - and start right now."

**#NoGoingBackToNormal**

**[www.unison-scotland.org](http://www.unison-scotland.org)**

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