As Scotland prepares to host the next UN Climate Change conference, how do we use it push an agenda that is both green and socialist?

PLUS - the decline of traditional class-based voting. What does it mean for the left?
This is an editorial of two parts. The first parts deals with the strange non-death of neo-liberalism and the second with the changing class alignments and voting patterns, especially in terms of Labour. So, nothing much about the new SNP Scottish Government or independence as nothing much has happened on these in ‘big picture’ terms since 6 May 2021 and is not likely until the summer is over at least.

So, with extensive - and sometimes unprecedented - economic and social state intervention for well over a year now, it would be easy for anyone with left-wing political inclinations to think that the neo-liberal, ‘free market’, Thatcherite economic model has had its day. That’s certainly what many people hope. But unfortunately, it’s just not true. The leopard of capitalism has not fundamentally changed its spots. Indeed, it’s a bit like expecting that Boris Johnson would be a more considerate and compassionate human being after recovering from his near death COVID illness.

It’s not just because the considerable state intervention is temporary, whether in terms of lockdown movement restrictions, emergency business funding or the job furlough scheme. It’s really more of a case of state intervention being used to support capitalism in order to get it through the pandemic and then return to what it once was – a free market version.

There is an obvious recent historical parallel. In Britain, after the Global Financial Crisis of 2008-2009, huge sums of public money were used to support the financial system especially. This led to talk of ‘nationalisation’ and even ‘socialism for the bosses’. Not only did the use of public money not bring about popular control of the banks like RBS and Lloyds-TSB but government shares were returned to private ownership as soon as possible.

If we can talk of a particular period of ‘COVID capitalism’, we are still, nonetheless, talking about an economic and social system where power and wealth lies in the hands of a tiny minority of people. Here, the state has been colonised and taken over by their friends and advisers so that the state supports the interests of this tiny group of people.

This is to be able to see the ‘wood’ rather than the ‘trees’ because you’d think at times that BoJo’s government was anti-business and even anti-capitalist given the howls and shrieks coming from some companies, whether exporters to mainland Europe or those in the tourism, hospitality and leisure sectors.

Going a bit further back in time provides us with an even more illuminating illustration of the power, adaptability and resilience of capitalism. After the Second World War, British capitalism was on its knees. In 1947, it was bailed out by the Anglo-American Loan Agreement – effectively Marshall Aid – for Britain from the United States. In return for a low interest loan, finally paid off in 2006, British markets at home and abroad were opened up to US capitalism.

But British capitalism as a system was also bailed out by domestic state intervention. This was the great reforming Labour government led by Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, and the intervention took the form of the nationalisation of the railways, coal, steel and so on along with the creation of the welfare state and NHS. While there was an obvious benefit to workers as the ‘five evils’ of want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness were attacked, it was also the case that key sectors of the economy were stabilised and modernised for the benefit of capitalism overall.

Such state intervention laid the basis of what was known as the ‘post-war consensus’ where both Labour and Tory parties, in and out of office, agreed on the balance between private and state activity. In amongst all this, there were price controls on the likes of food and rent. Indeed, the consensus led to a new political term to be created in the 1950s called ‘Butskellism’ as the Tory’s Rab Butler and Labour’s Hugh Gaitskell, when Chancellors of the Exchequer, pursued similar economic and fiscal policies.

Yet, capitalism endured as property rights were protected. The protection of property rights meant that wealth, in turn, meant power. Despite rent controls, much rented private housing was very inadequate. And so much so that the notorious behaviour of London slum landlord, Peter Rachman, gave rise to the popular term, ‘Rachmanism’, for flagrantly ripping off tenants. He pioneered avoiding rent controls and subdividing houses many times over into flats. Sound familiar today?

These limited incursions into the freedom and power capitalism were not permanent features of society in Britain as Labour MP, Anthony Crosland, predicted in his influential book, The Future of Socialism, in 1956. We all know about the spectacular success of Thatcher and the Tories in dismantling the limited controls on capital that had been previously introduced.

When we look back at COVID capitalism in years to come, alas, we will not have seen a return to something akin to the constraints that existed under the likes of Clement Attlee. This will not have been a return to some kind of halcyon days of social democracy where there was a mixed economy. Capitalism may at times take on different complexions but fundamentally it is defined by the freedom of a minority of capitalists to pursue profit at the expense of the majority. From the 1800s onwards when capitalism first emerged in
Britain, the period of 1945-1979 was the exception and not the norm. If there are any differences to emerge between pre- and post-pandemic capitalism, they are more likely to be about the terms of trading for capitalists of different nations in terms of customs and tariffs. Social inequalities will continue to grow and workers’ rights be kept in check. Those are the main things that the competing capitalists certainly do have a consensus on.

What other conclusions can be drawn here? Neo-liberalism is not over by a long way; state intervention has been to support, not supersede, neo-liberalism; the state and neo-liberalism are not anathema to each other. Indeed, the state can be used to create new markets (in the likes of care). Lastly, Keynesian is not solely synonymous with state intervention – here the key issue is which class is the beneficiary from the intervention.

Let’s now turn to the issues of voting patterns and class alignments. It seems both red northern and blue southern walls are starting to fall apart where the common denominator is Labour’s poor performance. The debate rages as to whether Labour’s decline is secular or cyclical. In the Chesham and Amersham by-election in June, saying that there were idiosyncratic, local factors is not enough to explain Labour getting just 622 votes (1.6%) - less than Greens and less than there are Labour members in the constituency.

This built pressure on Starmer after the Labour lost Hartlepool in May. In a Piers Morgan interview in early June, Starmer predicted the easing of restrictions would allow the political space to open up for Labour and that this summer was potentially make or break for the party. It seems he was wrong on the first and the jury is still out on the second. Indeed, since the Covid-19 vaccination programme began, Labour has slumped in the polls and that’s despite Hancockgate, cronyism and the like.

Winning the Batley and Spen by-election in July by just 323 votes meant Starmer survived what would have amounted to vastly increased pressure to resign. And though a by-election result is not synonymous with preceding general election results in the same seat, the trend is ever worsening for Labour. Its majority over the Tories fell from 8,961 votes in 2017 to 3,525 in 2019 (albeit having risen from 6,057 in 2015). Even if we attribute the better performance in 2017 to Corbynism, and pan out from Batley and Spen to the rest of England, the evident trend still suggests something very worrying is going on for Labour at a more deep-seated level. The wild card in Batley and Spen was George Galloway. It would be too easy to say that all of his 8,264 votes would have gone to Labour had he not stood. Many were likely to have been anti-Labour votes from the Muslim community and the left.

This journal has covered the situation in Scotland in the last editorial and, in this issue, Darren Williams analyses the situation in Wales. So, let’s return to what’s happening in England and how does this relate to class? Are the Tories becoming the party of workers (at least by voting support)? Leading political scientist, Professor Matthew Goodwin of the University of Kent, makes the following type of argument: Labour was built by and for organised labour based on being the left to the Tories’ right. Even with that, and setting aside 1997 (which was no red revolt), Labour has not won a solid majority for more than half a century. This then raises the issue of why so many workers – the biggest social class – do not vote Labour if it is the party of labour. Today, Labour is strong in the metropolitan areas amongst the more middle-class ‘cosmopolitans’ but not amongst the more working-class ‘traditionalists’ in urban areas, highlighting, he argues, not so much class fissures but those of age, education attainment and geography. This is why some say we live in an age of identity politics. The Tories are no longer just the party of the rich and Labour is no longer the party of the poor.

Other analysts suggest the situation is even more straightforward. In fact, they suggest that it is the voting behaviour of older people (65+) who are home-owners, more numerous and more likely to vote than 18-24 year-olds that explains why the Tories are eclipsing Labour. This analysis says talk of blue and red walls is fatuous as it’s a grey wall that is the main determining factor. Some indication of Labour’s widening woes was revealed by the membership survey conducted by the Labour-affiliated Baker and Food Workers’ (BFAWU) union in June. Still treated as an embarrassing relative at a family gathering, the BFAWU has been angered the absence of any consultation with it over Labour’s policy to Covid workplace regulations. Its survey showed that while 88% voted in the 2019 election only 53% voted Labour. Only 24% ‘felt strongly’/’felt’ that Labour represented their values and interests while 51% ‘felt strongly’/’felt’ it did not. 53% felt the union should disaffiliate from Labour. Alongside Labour’s decline, we also must consider the relative rise of the Greens. Save for first-past-the-post, the Greens could replace the LibDems as the fourth largest party in Britain overall. In early June, voting intentions amongst among 18-24 year-olds showed Labour was at 35% (-21 since 2019 general election), and the Greens on 27% (+23), according to YouGov.

The importance of focusing upon Labour’s leadership is often misplaced. If Starmer stood down and was replaced by Angela Rayner, who is hardly of the left, only a very slight positive difference might be made in as much as she is perceived as a northern traditional whereas Starmer is perceived as a southern cosmopolitan. Identifying Labour’s 44 most vulnerable seats, Matthew Goodwin calculated 39 are outside of London and the south and calls them ‘Red Wall 2.0’. Without at least securing them, he argues Labour has no route back to office if it has any prospect of winning the popular vote in England (which it has not done since 2001). For Labour to win the next election, it needs about 125 seats, eclipsing the swings Attlee and Blair achieved in 1945 and 1997. Labour needs to be 12 points ahead when it is, on average, 10 points behind.

The paradox of Starmer is that he is ‘new’ Labour having progressively ditched Corbyn-era policies (which he claimed he would not do in his manifesto for the Labour leadership). And yet, he does not have the cutting edge or elan that Blair gave ‘new’ Labour. Hence, many voters say they do not know what Labour stands for anymore. So, policies are important but they are in themselves not the full picture. We could be witnessing a long-term and deep-seated class realignment of party politics.
Calling out the climate emergency: creating concrete outcomes at COP26

Mary Church and Niamh McNulty lay out what the conference needs to do and what will be done in Glasgow to push it towards that progress was made at the recent virtual intersessional talks, while attempting to hold complex multilateral negotiations online with power cuts and poor connectivity hampering discussions demonstrated why an in-person summit (when safe to do so) is necessary.

The 2015 Paris Agreement represented an important step forward in terms of enshrining the critical 1.5°C threshold. But the price of securing almost universal ratification was a voluntary pledge-and-review approach to bringing down emissions rather than a science-based cap, with the remaining carbon budget allocated equitably between states. Countries were supposed to submit updated and enhanced pledges for action under the agreement by the end of 2020. Few met this, with the latest UN synthesis report showing that pledges submitted to date put the world on track for a 3-4°C increase in warming. New research shows more recent targets announced by parties (including the US) would limit increased warming to 2.4°C though the policies to deliver them - assuming they were implemented - would fall short of that inadequate goal and take us to a 2.9°C increase.

COP26 will, therefore, see a reckoning of the Paris regime which is failing to deliver the urgency and ambition needed, with the science showing that, at present, emissions rates for the remaining carbon budget of an 1.5°C increase will be used up in as little as five years.

Most of the issues arising at COP centre around questions of equity, historic responsibility and capability to act - principles that are enshrined in the UN Climate Convention and that are at the heart of climate justice. Long-term tensions between the rich historical polluters of the global North and the poorer countries of the global South - who have done least to cause the climate crisis - focus on these questions which are key to unlocking essential global cooperation. These questions are present across numerous negotiation tracks.

Drawing on these principles, international civil society organisations have come together as the Civil Society Review to publish a series of reports assessing global climate action under the Paris Agreement through a ‘Fair Shares’ lens. This work shows rich historical polluters are not taking anywhere near their fair share of climate action, in terms of emissions reductions and climate finance, while many global South countries are committed to taking up their fair share - or more - of action. The fair shares model is increasingly cited by global South parties in the UN talks.

Analysis based on this methodology shows how bringing emissions to real-zero in Britain is barely half the story when it comes to doing our fair share of climate action. We need to make substantial emissions cuts happen internationally to fulfil the other part of our fair share. Climate finance and other forms of support (including, for example, technology transfer) for global south countries are central to this. If Britain was to reduce its own emissions to real-zero by 2030 (the current target is net-zero by 2050), it would still be responsible for an estimated £1trillion equivalent in support for developing countries, with Scotland being responsible for a portion of this in terms of mitigation and finance.

At Copenhagen in 2009, global North countries promised $100bn pa by 2020 to support global South countries mitigation and adaptation efforts. This nice round figure was plucked from thin air rather than based on any robust analysis, such as the fair shares methodology, of what was needed or owed. Progress towards even this inadequate goal has been painfully slow. The OECD put climate finance at $70bn pa in 2017, however only a fraction of this is grant-funding, the majority being in the form of interest-accruing loans or private finance. Oxfam analysis demonstrates even these figures are grossly inflated, based on significant over-reporting, and that climate finance is taking a growing share of overseas development assistance. Climate finance...
- and the lack of anything like the sums needed on the table - is always a hugely contentious issue at COP. This year’s summit will see discussions on a new long-term finance goal begin. Success will be judged on whether progress is made towards ensuring the new long-term finance goal is based on science and the needs of global South countries, unlike the current unfulfilled goal.

As the reality of climate change at only 1°C warming starts to hit home, adaptation to impacts and support for loss and damage are becoming ever more pressing. The Paris Agreement requires action on adaptation, including financial support for global South countries, but action to date is hugely inadequate. COP26 needs to secure progress towards a new global goal for adaptation, including ensuring that 50% of climate finance goes towards adaptation.

Loss and damage addresses what happens when countries can no longer adapt to the impacts of climate change, encompassing both economic and non-economic losses. Ultimately, it is about identifying liability for causing climate impacts and providing compensation to those at the sharp end. Key to global South countries’ demands is that additional resources for loss and damage are required - otherwise the risk is of the finance cake simply being cut into smaller slices. A key COP26 test will be whether it ensures the rapid and effective operationalisation of the Santiago Network, the purpose of which is to catalyse technical assistance on loss and damage, in line with global South needs.

One of the main issues on which a concrete outcome is sought in Glasgow is under the Paris Agreement’s Article 6 which deals with voluntary cooperation between parties to help achieve emissions reductions. This may sound positive, but it is the part of the Paris Agreement that Shell boasted it wrote. It opens the door to global carbon markets that would allow polluters to continue emitting greenhouse gases, for a price, either through trading or offsetting. It is the last part of the Paris Agreement on which more detailed rules need to be established. Both the 2018 Katowice talks and 2019 Madrid talks failed to agree here, and there will be huge pressure on COP26 to secure an outcome, with the success or failure of the UK Presidency being assessed in no small part on it.

Carbon markets have no role to play in responding to the climate emergency. Given the carbon budget for 1.5°C runs out in a few years, there is no time left to trade emissions anymore. All countries need to reduce emissions to zero urgently. Even if time wasn’t an issue, there is no evidence that carbon markets are effective, with both the EU emissions trading scheme and the Kyoto Protocol’s Clean Development Mechanism failing to reduce emissions. Crucially, the Paris Agreement fails to set the science-based cap necessary for ensuring carbon trading could work, even theoretically. On top of this, offsetting and trading schemes are associated with serious human rights abuses and land grabs, particularly impacting Indigenous peoples. Because of the pressure to secure an outcome on Article 6, the danger is of bad rules getting through, like those developed in Madrid which would have seen huge amounts of ‘hot air’ carbon credits being carried forward, busting an impossibly large hole in remaining carbon budgets. Opposing carbon markets will be a major focus for climate justice groups at COP26.

For progress to be made at COP26, Britain needs to show leadership by acknowledging and taking steps towards delivering its fair share is key to this. But it is a distant prospect under the current Government, with its focus on loophole riddled net-zero targets, and inadequate climate finance further undermined by hypocritical support for fossil fuel expansion and cuts to overseas development aid. Meanwhile, the Scottish Government is adept in the language of climate justice and just transition - the latter of which will be a major theme for its work around COP26 - but neither ambition nor action yet live up to the rhetoric. That’s why climate justice groups will be using the summit to pressure both governments to do their fair share of climate action: by reducing emissions to real zero, by paying their carbon debt, by ending support for oil and gas expansion and by moving beyond the rhetoric to deliver a just transition.

Glasgow hosting COP26 presents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for building the climate justice movement here in Scotland. Activists and organisations have come together under the umbrella of the COP26 Coalition to organise around the summit in a way that centres transformation and climate justice, and to create space for hope.

The COP26 Coalition includes unions, direct action groups, students and youth, migrant and racial justice groups, NGOs, faith groups, and grassroots and international climate justice networks. We have established an International Committee to ensure we are accountable to international climate movements. Our aim is to use the summit as a moment to strengthen the climate justice movement to build power for system change. We also seek to use the COP as leverage to advance climate justice at the domestic level, including by securing wins from the Scottish and UK Governments, and to exert pressure on the UN process itself to ensure the best outcome possible.

Furthermore, we are coming together to deepen our understanding of the root causes of, and the common solutions to, the multiple inter-connected crises of climate and nature emergency, poverty and hunger, racism and neo-colonialism, sexism and gender violence to name but a few. In doing so, we seek to grow, strengthen and connect justice movements for the struggle that will continue long after COP26 has left town. COP26 will see powerful decentralised mobilisations, with a focus on Glasgow, as part of a global call to action (5-6 November), and a hybrid in-person/virtual Peoples’ counter-summit (7-10 November) taking place as the focal point of the climate justice movements activities. Our mobilisations and events will connect to, hear from and exert pressure on what’s going on inside the talks. An important part of our work is centring the voices of those most impacted by the climate crisis including frontline and Indigenous communities in the global South. This involves practical action like creating spaces and providing platforms as well as support for visas and travel. It is also an important moment to connect global struggles to local issues, building support for local campaigns such as Free our City and Glasgow Calls out Polluters to put pressure on the local, Scottish and UK Governments to move past the rhetoric and towards concrete action on climate emergency and just transition.

Find out more about how you can get involved in our ongoing work for climate justice at: www.cop26coalition.org

Mary Church is Head of Campaigns at Friends of the Earth Scotland and Niamh McNulty is co-founder of Climate Camp Scotland.
Freeports or greenports: Guantanamo Bays of neo-liberalism or marrying economic and environmental concerns?

Peter Henderson surveys the dangers of freeports and wonders whether the SNP’s ‘greenports’ policy can square the circle.

The latest UK Government proposals to regenerate the economy are freeports while the Scottish Government’s alternative has been labelled ‘greenports’, incorporating aspects of its Fair Work and Net Zero agendas. The freeport concept is, of course, not new and has been tried in many jurisdictions before. In essence, goods and materials can be taken into an area (which is much larger than the port itself), manufactured, and then re-exported without the payment of duty or tax. Elsewhere in the world, the nomenclature is normally ‘free trade zone’ and, sometimes, ‘export production zone’.

Notwithstanding the differences in emphasis between the Scottish and UK governments’ version, there are no union recognition agreements that are enforceable and no stipulations where companies are registered. This is important in terms of accountability if things go wrong - as experience shows, they often do. If the operators are not registered in the UK, how can they be meaningfully acted against? How can employment rights be pursued? There are no guarantees that at least the Scottish living wage will be paid, no guarantees that UK health and safety regulations and laws will be applied. How will environmental rules and regulations be applied? And if so, how will they be enforced?

Freeports can work and provide employment, but they also require to be strictly controlled. Examples are rife of counterfeit products being transferred through them. Goods such as stolen artwork, smuggled goods, goods that have infringed trademarks have been trafficked though freeports. Freeport, therefore, have potential undermine trade and with it the wider economy.

As such we must ensure that HMRC has the powers to intervene, and that environmental health, Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), trading standards and port control can all apply all their appropriate controls. Freeports could be hugely damaging to the environment with the possibility of heretofore banned substances leaking into the surrounding area or passing into local economies.

There is a major danger of employment displacement not only in the locality of the freeport but in areas far from their actual location. There is, of course, an immediate threat to local jobs and local economies and local workers’ rights, but the freeports invidious reach is much greater. The attraction to concentrate industry in one centre for tax benefits is easily understood but all of the downsides need to be considered.

There are security issues too - not only local but national ones too. There is the obvious risk to goods being fed into the economy. Goods from freeports, being duty, VAT and tax free, could be diverted to the home market and not exported, so undermining revenue and taxation income, and the domestic industry leading to loss of employment. Freeport companies still make their profits but their cheaper goods into home markets have major effects if there are no checks and controls. For example, goods can be ‘lost’ in transit between sites, with environmental risks if there are not adequate controls. For example, there are potential threats in terms of illegal goods, counterfeit goods, illegal chemicals, firearms and other potentially hazardous materials. All could leave the freeport unchecked or unverified as such because they were ‘never there’.

Then there are the challenges faced by the local authorities in the places where the freeports are located. On the environmental front will they have responsibility for cleaning up any mess if things go wrong or worse? What future for local regeneration planning in the face of such unfair competition? Crucial also is the potential to misunderstand what a twenty-first century ‘freeport’ actually is. It’s not just a coastal port as it can include airports and sites quite far inland too. Often, they are industrial estates, usually a fenced-in area of up to 300 hectares.

While research and development of green technology and net zero targets may benefit from freeports, is there not an alternative system that can be put in place under existing controls and protections? On enquiring if there would be recruitment for additional control staff and inspection, I am informed that there are no plans to do so. It’s ironic that the freeport model is on the retreat in other parts of the world and the EU, though possibly another consequence of Brexit. After a career in customs and excise in the UK and overseas jurisdictions and now a senior local government elected representative, I appeal to all involved, both at UK and Scottish levels, to think through all of these issues.

SNP Councillor, Peter Henderson, is the Leader of South Ayrshire Council. He continues to be a Prospect union member. He was previously a lay official for a number of civil service unions and is currently a Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) representative.
Annie Morgan takes the Scottish Government to task for not sinking the proposal to profit from environmental destruction

Scottish Enterprise, owner of the land, recently withdrew from the potential planning application by the Lomond Banks, a subsidiary of theme park operator, Flamingo Land, after Lomond Banks submitted a request for an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) or ‘screening and scoping option’. This request represents a preliminary step towards a proper planning application. Scottish Enterprise’s withdrawal should not be taken at face value as it was done without consulting or informing local campaigners.

In this context, this article calls upon the Scottish Government and its relevant ministers – primarily, Kate Forbes, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy, and Michael Matheson, Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport - to intervene with reference to the impact upon the environment, specifically with regard to the Drumkinnon Woods, the National Park reserve and local communities.

The Save Loch Lomond campaign seeks to give voice to the local communities’ concerns and to halt the conditional missive, that is, the exclusivity agreement (EA) with the developers. Some 13,000 signatories have called for it to be scrapped. This follows the 60,000 objections to the original planning application from Flamingo Land, amounting to being the most unpopular planning application for land use in Scottish history. In cases where developments are controversial or of national significance, they can be taken out of local planning authorities to be decided by Scottish ministers. This potential development is undoubtedly both.

The EA is contrary to Scottish Government policy on community involvement as set out in its Programme for Government of September 2020. This programme emphasises community-led place-based renewable programmes. Community-led land acquisition should be supported, in the various words of the programme captured in its statements: ‘Harness the energy of communities to ensure they are a core part of how we do economic development in Scotland’; ‘Critical value of community power and local economic energy’ and ‘Democratic decision deficit that afflicts so many of our communities who are often excluded from participation in local decision making about their places’. The EA is also flouting the Scottish Government’s own policy and the statutory objectives of the National Park, a policy which has the declared aim of ‘Protecting Scotland, Renewing Scotland’.

The Scottish Government has declared an intent to protect and promote biodiversity and the First Minister states that Scotland must lead the way in facing challenges to biodiversity. This then is the ‘national significance’ flag. The conference of the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP) emphasises that biodiversity is essential for human life. The Inter-Governmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) stated in its 2019 report that ‘the loss of species and habitats poses as much danger to life on earth as climate change does’. In the Scottish context, the 2019 state of nature report, containing the best available data on Scotland’s species and habitats, shows a 49% decline in the studied species and that one in nine species are threatened with extinction.

The immediate environment of Drumkinnon Woods would be impacted negatively and the National Park Reserve has a statutory responsibility to protect – as a haven for wildlife. Wildlife, insects, birds, trees, water-species, woodlands, and rivers, are especially vulnerable. Noise, light, traffic emissions, increased pollution, are all exacerbated by a high concentration of visitors in one area. Jet skis and speed powered boats currently add to the problem.

The main artery to the loch, the A82 is constantly busy, often congested with resulting particulate pollution for the local and surrounding communities. It is reported that over 80% of visitors to Balloch come by private car. Yet the Dumbarton Chamber of Commerce CEO recently calls the proposal an ‘appropriate development’, inviting a holiday park to give visitors ‘more reasons to come, stay longer, spend more’.

To subordinate environmental interests in concern for profit contradicts the biodiversity ‘intent’. Agri-tourism, and sustainable tourism encourages movement, public transport use, rover tickets, visits to the many unique aspects of our history and natural heritage. To offer the development to a theme park operator with no knowledge of history, culture, or landscape, demonstrates a lack of respect.

Fostering a strong connection with the natural world can be the heart of protecting the environment. Agri-tourism can foster this protection. Sustainable tourism, in its truest sense, recognises the fragility of tourism and its importance to the Scottish economy. The pillars of sustainable tourism include social justice, environmental integrity and fair work principles.

The hospitality sector is fraught with practices which the Fair Work Convention (FWC) must address. Loch Lomond hotels often use zero-hours contracts, seasonal work with no career pathways and low pay. The Flamingo Land proposals do not contain re-assurances on fair work adherence. The touted large number of prospective jobs (600) in construction and hospitality do not provide a lasting legacy in employment prospects for the local and surrounding communities. The Jimmy Reid Foundation recently highlighted the failure of the FWC to regulate (without statutory underpinning) to ensure employers offer regular hours, career pathways, decent pay and job security. There is no mention of ensuring the 600 jobs will offer the aforementioned.

The local community has alternative concepts best outlined by themselves. Other regeneration examples, for instance, Raploch in Stirling, point to a community-based campus offering training in keeping with local interests and retro-fitting and regenerating the housing stock. Regenerating agriculture, growing spaces, climate jobs, just transition, are all key aspects for recovery from the pandemic and central to climate, environmental protections.

Overcrowding plagues most tourist hotspots, including Loch Lomond, and threatens the careful management of the National Park to support a whole range of animal species, flora and fauna. The message is clear – take care of our natural world and ‘no’ to Flamingo Land.

Annie Morgan is a climate activist with ScotE3 and a member of the Unite union retired section.
End the overcharging for Scottish renewable energy

Gordon Morgan exposes the crazy circumstances in which green energy is unnecessarily made more expensive

Far from encouraging renewable energy in Scotland, Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (Ofgem) and which supports the Gas and Electricity Markets Authority, actively discourages any new generation in Scotland. Moreover, it is consulting on increasing the amount of electricity imported from Europe rather than from Scotland. These facts are highlighted in a February 2021 report from Scottish and Southern Energy Networks (SSEN) Transmission and a May 2021 Renewables UK report (see links at end). Electricity generators are charged for connecting to the grid and separately for distribution to customers. There are four tariffs, the most significant being the wider geographical tariff.

The SSEN report states that under the wider geographical tariff, an offshore wind farm such as Beatrice off Aberdeen is charged £11.5m pa (£4.50/Megawatt hour (MWH)) to connect to the grid, whereas a similar sized wind farm off London, Greater Gabbard, receives £2.1m pa (£1.09/MWH) for a similar connection. Taking all the tariffs into account, ‘North Scotland’ is charged £7.34/MWH and ‘South England’ around £0.40/MWH. This situation is forecast to get worse and by 2025 the north of Scotland could be charged £10/MWH and the south of England around £0.08/MWH.

This can result in the costs of a windfarm in Scotland and, hence, the price of its electricity being 15% higher than an equivalent in England. Moreover, these charges vary year by year and are unpredictable more than a year in advance. The result is that prospective developers of wind farms are discouraged from making what could be 10-year investments.

This is not a new situation. Since 2005, Scotland has been part of the single UK transmission network which costs around £2,400m pa to maintain, including profits to the three energy networks (SSEN, Scottish Power Energy Networks and National Grid Energy Transmission). However, rather than a single per megawatt charge per customer across Britain, each generator is charged based on a combination of the four tariffs including the wider geographical tariff which splits the UK into 14 regions (excluding Northern Ireland). It is this that specifies the cost difference between the north of Scotland and the south east of England. The situation is even worse for island communities which could easily build wind farms but are prevented by high connection charges even although all the power is used on the island.

The system may once have made sense. It was designed to discourage new generation in unsuitable locations, e.g., new coal or gas power stations. This works in a situation where most of the energy cost was the cost of fossil fuels: coal, oil and gas. It makes no sense to continue these charges year-after-year for free energy produced by wind or solar where the only significant cost apart from the construction of the wind or solar farm itself is the up-front cost of cables to the grid, being an initial connection cost. Moreover, one of the major disincentives to ‘repowering’, i.e., replacing old turbines with larger new ones, will be these ongoing charges. These wind farms are already connected to the grid, so there is no additional cost to continuing the connection. However, faced with the cost of replacement turbines combined with ongoing connection charges often no ‘repowering’ takes place as it is uneconomic to do so. In a situation where the UK needs to triple its generation capacity, this makes no sense and explicitly disadvantages new generators in Scotland and, indeed, industries attracted to the potentially low cost of energy in Scotland.

All this puts the objective to make Scotland the lead generator of green electricity at risk. Given the price of recent auctions, large wind farms energy is expected to come in at £47/MWH and may fall to £35/MWH later this year. However, if £5.50 has to be added in connection to the grid plus whatever is charged by Scottish Crown estates, Scottish consumers could pay 20% more for electricity unless capped.

The underlying tariff system charges are set by Ofgem which has so far been given no instruction by the UK Government to ensure Net Zero carbon emissions are reached. According to the UK Government’s Net Zero white paper published last year, the issue of transmission charges was supposed to be issued for consultation. Yet Ofgem has done nothing so far. This has subsequently been raised by Scottish Wind, and MPs in the Commons, with the UK Government as an issue preventing the auction of the new round of offshore wind permits – which is due soon - as well as the projected next round of Contracts for Difference auctions – which are due in December. It seems likely that charges will continue for this year and that any consultation will be designed to conclude before the end of this calendar year.

As the total cost of the transmission system is set to fall marginally per MWH as its capacity triples, it makes far more sense to charge businesses and consumers on their electricity bills rather than the generators for providing the transmission cost of this power. Consumers and most businesses already have this in their bills as charges to generators are passed on to the electricity companies who in turn charge customers. Overall, no additional net charge across the UK will result. Although there is a cap on end user bills, on average bills are higher in rural ‘North Scotland’ communities. An initial connection charge could be made for laying cables to new generators, but this would be predictable prior to starting the project. Clearly where projects have commenced generation under Contracts for Difference which guarantee a fixed payment, the removal of connection charges could result in super-profits so an adjustment to the guaranteed price could be made.

However, the principle that a consumer or home in the south of England should pay the same per MWH as the north of Scotland is one that surely can be instituted under a unified electricity system or else the case for Scottish Independence is inescapable. Resultant increased bills in ‘South England’ could be phased in over a year. Given the overall cost of £2.48 any variation is likely to be less than £10 per year.
Savings in Scotland could be much higher. The reduced costs to generators and encouragement for renewables would more than compensate.

A revision to the rules could be combined with an increase in the Carbon Tax floor to around £50/CO2 ton as recommended recently by the International Energy Agency and under discussion at the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This would complete the divestment from coal, end coal generation completely and ensure that gas and oil power stations are only used in extreme cases. Consumer gas prices could be fixed and increases phased in slowly in line with boiler replacements.

The aforementioned Renewables UK report goes further in highlighting the effect of interconnectors which transmit electricity from Europe to the UK and occasionally the other way - to date 90% is imported compared to 10% exported.

It is projected that by 2030, 30% to 36% of electricity could come through interconnectors. However, European generators do not pay the same price to connect to the grid. Indeed, in 20 countries generators are charged nothing. The report calculates that on average European generators pay £0.46/MWH whereas generators in ‘North Scotland’ pay 16 times as much: £7.36/MWH. Thus, we are importing electricity from often coal fired generators or gas generators rather than from expanding clean Scottish generation. It also means electricity consumers in Scotland pay more to heat their home.

On the issue of interconnectors, Ofgem seems to have dug their heels in. They seem determined to expand their use over the next 10 years. It argues that they have kept the lights on over the last years and are cost effective. Ofgem has, however, had to try and justify this into the future. To this end they set up 4 workstreams to assess: 1) the cap and floor system; 2) socio-economic models; 3) wider issues of interconnectors; and 4) multi-purpose interconnectors. The first two of these have reported and the other are out for consultation, having been published 18 June and closing on 16 July.

The review of cap and floor projects states that two new interconnectors are operational and another 2 under construction which will increase grid capacity by 4.8 Gigawatts (GW) at a cost of £4.1bn. Five further interconnectors are under development with projected capacity of 6.1GW and cost of £6.1bn. This would provide a total of 10.9GW capacity through interconnectors.

It is worth pointing out that the first set of connectors are being built by National Grid Ventures, an unregulated part of the mega-profitable National Grid PLC which as well as running the electricity network in England and Wales runs much of the US network as well. The cap and floor regime guarantees the owner of the interconnector will recover their costs and profit at an internal rate of between 4.5% and 6.7%.

Ofgem has been forced to concede that the economic case for new interconnectors has been undermined, particularly for peak demand. Indeed, it shows a total welfare loss of £682m for the three proposed interconnectors to France, Germany and Norway. The socio-economic models are based on a report by AFRY which concludes that over time the UK could export more energy than it imports, thus, damaging the domestic case for interconnectors by raising bills but making money for National Grid PLC among others.

Despite this, the Ofgem consultations state: ‘We recognise that the allocation of benefits from the modelling suggests a negative impact on GB consumers from a socio-economic standpoint, however we consider that the modelling methodology and assumptions underplay interconnectors’ socio-economic value. It is also important to consider that in our modelled scenarios GB prices are materially lower than present day, so consumers are already better off; the role that interconnectors play in these scenarios is therefore different. The wider benefits that we expect interconnectors to deliver in the future, as discussed in workstream 3 of the review, are not captured in this socio-economic assessment’. This is sophistry - it commissioned the AFRY report and then choose to ignore it. As many as possible need to respond to these two consultations by 16 July.

To sum up, interconnectors distract from developing adequate generation capacity in the UK. They also divert cable laying boats which are in short supply from connecting wind farms. They may have helped meet a need over the past years. However, building 40GW offshore windfarms by 2030 and the much greater capacity from other technologies to reach net zero requires no distractions and greater investment in Scotland and the UK.

Reform of transmission charges to remove geographical charges and provide certainty to developers and lower costs to Scottish consumers is a must. We must continue to press the UK Government to instruct Ofgem to adapt their cost allocation formula (Transmission Network Use of System, TNUoS) to ensure Net Zero. The principle that a consumer or home in the south of England should pay the same per MWH as the north of Scotland must be included in the new formula. This will provide equity in energy bills between consumers in England and Scotland where most generation will be located.

Gordon Morgan is a member of the Scottish Left Review editorial committee

https://www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/media/5261/ssen-transmission-tnuos-paper-february-2021.pdf

What is the significance of Welsh Labour’s election success?

Assessing and explaining Labour’s new high tide in Wales, Darren Williams points out the continuing challenges

Welsh Labour won an impressive set of results in the Senedd (Welsh Parliament) elections on 6 May, securing exactly half of the institution’s 60 seats - equalling the party’s best previous performance – and ensuring a further five years in government. Since the previous vote in 2016, the institution had changed its name from the National Assembly for Wales and extended the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds, as well as to foreign nationals resident in Wales. Of course, that five-year period had also seen momentous changes like the Brexit saga; the defeat of the Corbyn project, two changes of Prime Minister and the Coronavirus pandemic. It is remarkable, then, how stable Welsh Labour’s support has proven, its Senedd presence registering a net increase of one seat. The party won almost 40% of the total vote for the 40 constituency seats and 36.2% in the second, regional vote – in both cases, a roughly 5% increase in its vote share over 2016.

The Tories were in second place with 16 seats (a net gain of five), overtaking Plaid Cymru, but taking only one seat directly from Labour. They failed, however, to repeat their success in the 2019 general election, where they took all but one of Labour’s North Wales seats, plus Bridgend in the south. Labour’s one constituency defeat was compensated by an additional regional seat and the party also recaptured the Rhondda from former Plaid leader, Leanne Wood, who had won it in 2016 - the departure from the Senedd of Leanne, a fiercely principled socialist, is one of the election’s negative outcomes.

Although Plaid secured one more seat overall than five years before, its performance has been reckoned a disappointment, given the extravagant promises of major electoral gains that have regularly come from Adam Price, who ousted Leanne as leader in 2018. The LibDems narrowly avoided a complete wipe-out, losing their one constituency but gaining a regional seat. The hard-right populist parties also failed to win any seats – again, contrary to the poll predictions – which represents a welcome reversal of UKIP’s success in 2016. Welsh Labour also won three of the four Police and Crime Commissioner elections, the party’s best result since the posts were created.

Welsh Labour’s success, especially in comparison to Labour’s dismal overall showing in England, has occasioned much comment – and much celebration within the Welsh party and the wider Labour left. Its total of 30 seats confounded expectations, exceeding the predictions of all but one pre-election opinion poll. By common consent, the greatly enhanced public profile of the First Minister, Mark Drakeford due to Covid and the widespread appreciation for his reassuringly serious and responsible approach to the pandemic - in contrast to Johnson’s criminal irresponsibility - played a significant part in Welsh Labour’s success. This probably complemented the longstanding general approval among the party’s traditional base for its implementation of a recognisably ‘Labour’ policy programme over the last 22 years.

In the 2000s, Rhodri Morgan (with Mark Drakeford as his policy chief) famously pledged to put ‘clear red water’ between his administration and the then Blair leadership in London and this was manifested in policies like the abolition of the NHS internal market, the scrapping of prescription charges and maintenance of the comprehensive principle in secondary education. This year’s manifesto played to Welsh Labour’s strengths in this respect, promising modest but valuable gains for ordinary people (such as the real living wage for social care workers and a programme of low-carbon house-building for social rent), informed by the same progressive, egalitarian ethos as the party’s governmental record to date. The slogan, ‘If you value it, vote for it’ probably had some resonance in this respect. While hardly a mandate for ‘socialism’ or ‘radicalism’, therefore, the election result represents a sufficient degree of popular consent for continuation with the same incrementally reforming programme.

The other card that the party seems to have played to some effect was its affirmation of its ‘Welsh’ credentials – reassuring voters of its patriotism and political distinctness from the UK Labour leadership and, thereby, squeezing the Plaid vote. While support for Welsh independence is at record levels, with membership of the cross-party/non-party, Yes Cymru, movement rising from 2,000 to 17,000 in twelve months, this was not translated into electoral support for Plaid Cymru. Not only is independence almost as popular among Labour’s voters as among Plaid’s but attitudinal research by psephologists has revealed that Mark Drakeford is very popular among Plaid supporters – perhaps understandably, when it has fallen to him to defend the interests of Wales against the Westminster government, week in and week out – on a public platform furnished by the pandemic.

We should be careful not to exaggerate the scale of Welsh Labour’s victory, however. The net increase in the party’s tally of seats won was only one, giving it the same number of members elected as in 2003 and 2011; and while there is no question about Labour’s right to govern, the Drakeford administration will still be dependent to some degree on the support of other parties. Labour’s vote-share was higher than in 2016 but lower than in 2011 and 2003, on both of which occasions it exceeded 40% of the constituency vote. The Tories also increased their vote-share and both they and Plaid increased their Senedd presence. Furthermore, while the turnout was the highest yet under devolution – albeit only marginally
above the 1999 figure – at 46.6% it still means that more than half of the electorate did not feel sufficiently engaged to participate in the vote.

The relative position of the left in the Senedd Labour Group has been strengthened slightly by the Senedd election results, inasmuch as two of the three new Labour Members of the Senedd (MS) are members of the left-wing activists’ network, Welsh Labour Grassroots, although neither has a long history of involvement with the organised left. But even with these two new members, the left (broadly defined) accounts for barely more than a third of the thirty Labour MSs and fewer than half of these could be considered as anything more than ‘soft’ left in their politics. The right has pretty much the same strength, leaving a centre-ground consisting of those with less coherent views. The influence of the Labour left in the Senedd, however, is at least stronger than in the Welsh PLP, where Beth Winter is its only standard-bearer, and in Welsh local government, where the number of ‘left’ councillors in most Labour groups could be counted on the fingers of one hand.

Most of the Senedd Labour left are in their 60s and 70s and the majority can probably be expected to step down at the next election in 2026, representing a significant cumulative loss of knowledge and experience, albeit also an opportunity to bring forward a new generation of radical political leaders - if the left can successfully mobilise for this. Even before that, we will have to address the leadership succession to Mark Drakeford, who has consistently said that he intends to step down part-way through the current Senedd term, allowing his successor a reasonable ‘run-up’ to the 2026 elections. While we cannot, of course, be sure who the candidates will be, it is widely assumed that the Economy Minister, Vaughan Gething, Education Minister, Jeremy Miles, and Health Minister, Eluned Morgan, will stand – the first two of these being clearly on the right and the third in the centre. The left does not have a huge choice of potential champions, not least because of the age profile of its members, and might end up having to give critical support to a candidate seen as the lesser, or least, evil.

In the meantime, the election result represents an enhancement of Mark Drakeford’s personal political authority within the Labour Party and he could make use of this to back a renewed effort to improve party democracy. Mark’s election platform as a leadership candidate in 2018 included a commitment to strengthen accountability and empower members and in his first few months there were a few positive initiatives in this regard – most notably, the introduction of ‘one member, one vote’ (OMOV) elections for the ‘Wales’ seat on the Labour NEC, which had previously been in the Welsh leader’s gift. Other priorities subsequently intervened, however, and the snap general election in 2019 disrupted the progress of the Welsh Labour Democracy Review. This has now been re-launched, with a view to any changes being agreed at next March’s Welsh Labour conference. The left needs to push hard for democratic reforms, including greater accountability in the make-up and election of the Welsh Executive Committee; a more transparent policy-making process; and reduction of the threshold for an open selection in trigger ballots for Senedd Members.

A significant element of the Labour manifesto was the commitment to push for constitutional reform across the UK and greater devolved powers for Wales. With the respected left-winger and proponent of ‘radical federalism’, Mick Antoniw now in the Cabinet to drive this agenda, there is a much greater chance that Welsh Labour will finally conduct the meaningful debate within the party and Welsh society that it should have led years ago. Alongside this, there is growing support among well-placed left-leaning elements within the Welsh party for a push to devolve responsibility for the party rulebook from the UK to the Welsh level. The arguments for this include the principle that, if we are to push for deeper devolution within the state, then we should do the same within the party; and the suggestion that devolution of disciplinary procedures would result in fairer outcomes. These arguments are likely to find a sympathetic hearing among at least a section of the Labour left, at a time when a growing proportion of party members are at least ‘indy-curious’ and when the Welsh leadership is to the left of the UK leadership - conversely, there was little appetite on the left for intra-party devolution when Jeremy Corbyn was UK leader and Carwyn Jones Welsh leader.

There are some caveats to bear in mind, however. There is, first of all, a question as to whether it would make sense for the rules governing members in Wales on non-Welsh-specific issues to be different from those applying in England, if Welsh Labour was anything short of a legally distinct and autonomous party. Then there is the practical point that any such change would require an amendment to the UK party rulebook, which it is hard to imagine Keir Starmer and the current NEC majority agreeing to grant. Finally, and most importantly, a clear-headed assessment needs to be made of the likely political consequences of the change. There is simply no reason to believe that the collective leadership tier of the Welsh party – comprising the MPs, MSs, local government leaders, union officials and full-time party officers, as well as the elected leadership – is any more progressive than its counterpart at UK level. While Mark Drakeford might be able to exercise some leftward pressure as long as he remains leader, that positive influence might well be brought to an end and reversed in a couple of years depending on the outcome of the subsequent leadership election.

Nevertheless, the debate about the constitutional future of the party and the government will undoubtedly be taken up by the Welsh Labour left, alongside the issues of pandemic recovery and rebuilding the economy on fairer and more sustainable foundations, over the months and years ahead.

Darren Williams is the Secretary of Welsh Labour Grassroots and co-author of ‘Clear Red Water: Welsh Devolution and Socialist Politics’ (Francis Boutle Publishers, 2009).
From Glasgow Girls to Kenmure Street – 16 years on, the fight for humane immigration continues

Roza Salih calls for rebellion against Westminster’s inhumanity and the creation of a Scottish system

It has been 16 years since I first gained notoriety as a teenager with the Glasgow Girls, but all these years later, Britain still has an immigration system deprived of heart and lacking even basic humanity. At just 15, my fellow teenage campaigners and I saw first-hand the callous UK Border Force in action as they attempted to deport our school friend in a dawn raid in 2005. Our actions shone a light on the horrendous way the immigration system treated those who seek safety or a new life in Britain, and on that day, we won the battle, but my campaign for a fair immigration system went on.

Fast forward over a decade and it is heart-breaking for me to know that any progress my friends and I made has been systematically torn up by a right-wing Tory Government’s anti-immigration rhetoric, its hostile immigration environment policy, and a Brexit created out of false narratives about immigrants coming to Britain.

However, even in this darkness that brings so much misery to so many, there can be a bright spark that helps reignite the fires for change. What happened in Kenmure Street on 13 May 2021, for me, brought chills and gladdened my heart. The similarities between what has locally been known as the ‘Kenmure Street Rebellion’ and the Glasgow Girls are striking – a dawn raid which saw the community come together in solidarity to tell the Border Force ‘not in our name’.

At the time of the Kenmure dawn raid, I was working from home but knew I had to join my fellow campaigners on the streets and use my profile as a rallying call. I was only too aware of how small actions can have such a positive change for good. Turning up at the protests, I was overwhelmed by the community and campaigner’s response – led by the No Eviction Network and other campaign groups.

The streets were full of people surrounding a sole Home Office van, where the two men who had so coldly been dragged from their homes during Eid were being held. The ‘star of the show’ was the brave man who managed to block the van with his bicycle and get underneath – risking his own life for others.

The energy was high, and so many people chanted, ‘Roza, do your chant!’ Someone passed me the megaphone – I chanted, ‘Refugees are welcome here!’, ‘Power to the people because the people have the power’. Hours later, Police Scotland intervened and made sure that the two detained men were released back into their community. The feeling of euphoria was palpable in the street.

Like in 2005, I was part of a group that had again won the battle and like then the campaign for change must go on. People have been inspired to join their local refugee support charity or campaign group, and if you see Immigration Enforcement vans on your street, please don’t just walk by. You can take a photo and tweet it to the Anti-raids network and the No Evictions campaign. These actions show asylum seekers and immigrants that they are valued and are welcomed here.

While powers remain with Westminster, it will always be a challenging system for migrants because of the deliberate adversities built into the system, ranging from education barriers to eviction and lock changes, destitution, and no recourse to public funds. Asylum seekers are not allowed to provide for their families – which isolate and separate them from the communities they live in. Let’s not forget the amount of time that asylum seekers must wait for a decision or just to be interviewed about their claim. Their lives in limbo for years.

The system is intended to be a deterrent to be used as anti-immigration propaganda to play to the right of the Tory party. Since Theresa May’s ‘hostile environment’, asylum seekers have been seen as data, and their stories of war, torture and famine disregarded. Home Office policy fails to recognise that asylum seeker and immigrants are some of the most vulnerable groups in society.

This leads me to only one conclusion: Scotland must have the powers to create an immigration system that reflects our values here – dignity for everyone should be at the centre of all our decision making. Caseworkers should meet the asylum claimants they work with; there should be no raids and no detention centres.

A Scottish immigration system needs a more humanistic approach that could celebrate the enormous contribution asylum seekers, and immigrants make to our country. Other nations in the world could look to Scotland as a model. Scotland has already led the way, giving asylum seekers access to higher education through scholarships. And, in Scotland, we are the only nation of the UK that gives asylum seekers the right to vote in devolved and council elections. That is why we must as a nation take the opportunity to secure our independence, so we have the powers to lead the way with a humane immigration system here in Scotland. Until then, we all must stand against the hostile environment approach to immigration and asylum.

Roza Salih is a Kurdish-born human rights activist based in Glasgow. At the age of 15, she co-founded the Glasgow Girls with fellow pupils from Drumchapel high school, and prevented the deportation of their friend.

Scottish Left Review Issue 124 July/August 2021
Human dignity and honour:
Remembering the Warsaw Ghetto

Henry Maitles recalls the armed battle to save the last of Warsaw’s Jewry against the Nazis

In May 1943, one of the most inspiring events of WWII took place. The Warsaw Ghetto uprising stood no chance of success but was a moral crusade. As the Jewish Fighting Organisation (in Polish, ZOB) announced: ‘All of us will probably perish in the fight... it is a fight for our human dignity and honour, as well as yours’.

In November 1940, the Nazi occupation in Poland moved to its ghetto stage, and the area for Jews, the Warsaw Ghetto, was created and walled in. All Warsaw’s Jews were moved in. Initially, nearly 300,000 Jews, one-third of Warsaw’s population, were forced into 2.5% of its space. Massive overcrowding and drastic shortage of food, sanitation and medicines meant a high death rate from disease and malnutrition. As today, there was much talk of ‘we’re all in it together’ and, unlike today, there was some truth in it. Yet Emmanuel Ringelblum, who kept a diary in the ghetto, noted whilst people dying of starvation in the streets, smugglers and black marketeers and those with money could get fine wine and food in the cafes reserved and protected for them. In the ghetto, whilst life was tough for all, for the poor it was catastrophic. Class existed even in this situation.

Nonetheless, Jews were not dying fast enough so the Nazis began clearing the residents to Auschwitz from 1942 onwards. By early 1943, there were only 60,000 left – some 200,000 had already died in the ghetto or been transported to the camps. A mixture of disbelief about the death camps, stories of Auschwitz being a work camp with best accommodation reserved for those who turned up first – a lie not countered by the Judenrat (the Nazi appointed Jewish Council) who knew it to be untrue - allied to starvation meant that the promise of bread led to more Jews turning up at Warsaw railway station for transportation to Auschwitz on some days than the Germans could deal with. Marek Edelman, a ZOB leader, said: ‘Do you have any idea what bread meant at that time in the ghetto? If you don’t, you will never understand how thousands of people could voluntarily go with this bread to the camp at Treblinka’.

The first victims of the uprising were the Jewish police and Judenrat, who it was argued, collaborated with the Nazis rounding up Jews. Most of the Judenrat went to their deaths, but there was also outright collaboration from some Jewish leaders like Chaim Rumkowski of Lodz ghetto or Rudolf Kastner, President of the Budapest Judenrat, who was accused in 1953 at his trial in Israel of negotiating with Nazi chief, Adolf Eichmann. But most Judenrat were aiming to save Jews where possible but saw passivity and compromise as the way to do this. Edelman is scathing about the suicide of the Warsaw Judenrat leader, Adam Czerniakow, accusing him of taking the easy way out instead of leading a fight against the Nazis.

When the Nazis surrounded the ghetto in spring 1943 for the final round up, ZOB resisted by force. ZOB was a mix of Zionist and socialist organisations, with big differences in politics - their point of unity being that all Jews, regardless of their political outlook, would end in Auschwitz. Their differences would need to be debated in the arena of action against the Nazis. The largest group in ZOB was the Bund (Revolutionary Jewish League of Lithuania, Poland and Russia), formed in the area known as Yiddishland, from where many of the leaders and members of left-wing parties across the world came. Indeed, the uprising is the last great moment of what some have called ‘revolutionary Yiddishland’.

ZOB was completely outnumbered and outgunned as they only had a few rifles and pistols, smuggled into the ghetto, and some homemade weapons. The German army, with thousands of troops, machine guns, tanks and some air support, was taken by surprise and startled on the first day and withdrew, with dozens of casualties and a damaged tank. It was the start of something of great meaning for all observers of the events.

In May 1943, Joseph Goebbels, Nazi propaganda chief, fumes in his diary about Jews fighting back and with captured German weapons. What makes it even more important was that Nazi theory held that Jews – men and women fighters – could not fight back like this, that they were incapable of any, let alone armed, resistance, as they were subhuman. At the end of May, the Nazis decided that they could not defeat the uprising without larger loss of life and decided to burn the ghetto to the ground. Some survivors fled through the sewers; most were captured and killed.

The ghetto fighters left a universal message of humanism and hope in the face of barbarism. It was an inspiration understood by some of the leaders of the Polish resistance, one of whom commented that ‘the blood of the ghetto fighters was not shed in vain ... it gave birth to an intensified struggle against the fascist invader’. ZOB issued their ‘Manifesto to the Poles’, one of the greatest socialist appeals, proclaiming the uprising as not exclusively a Jewish fight, but a much wider Polish and universal struggle against fascism. We need to take this message to our hearts as we confront racism and fascism wherever and whenever.

After George Square’s dangerous disorder: Rangers supporters and anti-Catholicism in Scotland

Pat Kelly analyses the roots of the bigotry and sets out what now must be done to rid us of it

There was nothing new about Rangers fans engaging in hooliganism, thuggery and violence after they had been presented with the Scottish League trophy in May. And there was nothing new about the same fans engaging in anti-Catholic abuse, not just in George Square but at targeted Catholic Churches. It has happened with a weary regularity and they have largely escaped anything other than token censure. Politicians and journalists would usually condemn the violence and sectarianism, only to add some false equivalence of Celtic supporters singing republican songs or deflecting the conversation to the existence of Catholic schools as the root of the problem.

However, what was new after the George Square event was the Government’s unequivocal condemnation, not just of the violence and vandalism but the anti-Catholic nature of much of the behavior. Nicola Sturgeon, John Swinney and Humza Yusef all denounced the vile anti-Catholic prejudice and bigotry and the police joined in to attack the anti-Catholic and anti-Irish behavior of the supporters. Journalists had sometimes tried to tackle the problem in the past, but the George Square events gave them an opportunity to write columns about Scotland’s problem of anti-Catholic prejudice without having to look to the other side of Glasgow to ‘balance’ their reports.

Rangers once represented the dominant tradition of Scotland, and were seen as the football club of the establishment. Its fans were mostly white, Protestant, and working class and the club boasted of never signing Catholic players. When Graeme Souness took over as manager in 1986, he insisted on changing that policy, but the distinctive Protestant culture of the club remained and with it the anti-Catholic atmosphere. Terry Butcher, one of a number of Englishmen who played for the club in those years, described how he got sucked into the ‘religious stuff.’ Although he was not religious, he found himself singing anti-Catholic and anti-Irish songs at supporters’ functions, and referring to people in derogatory sectarian ways. He admitted it was his wife who forced him to look at his behavior and he was embarrassed about the type of person he had become. A decade later, despite a number of Catholic players joining the club, Walter Smith, who took over from Souness as manager told Graham Spiers of the Herald, ‘there is a Protestant superiority syndrome around here, you can feel it’.

Politically, Rangers’ fan base ranges across the spectrum. In the past, Communist union leaders and Labour MPs could be counted amongst the core support, as could an abundance of Tories. There are Rangers fans who support independence but they are likely to be, proportionately, a lot less than the national average. They are certainly not as vociferous as the ultra-unionists, many of whom are members of the Orange Order, an organisation that can mobilise large groups through formal and informal networks. The club’s new head of public relations, David Graham, who left his position as a Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) councillor on Belfast City Council to take up the job, is a ‘worshipful master’ of the Orange Order.

And there are the far-right descendants of the Billy Boys, the notorious street gang of the 1920s and 1930s who were used by fascists to break up unemployment marches and events organised the left. Their leader, Billy Fullerton, was a member of the British Union of Fascists, led by Oswald Mosley, and set up a Scottish chapter of the Ku Klux Klan. The song about the Billy Boys continues as one of the Rangers anthems and has provoked UEFA, European Football’s governing body, to close sections of their stadium for European matches for its line about being ‘up to the knees in Fenian blood’. It is perhaps this faction David Graham had in mind when his press release, in the wake of the George Square rampage, stated that a ‘small minority … besmirched the good name of Rangers Football Club’. Of course, it was a minority of the massive Rangers crowd base but 15,000 fans, nonetheless, marched from Ibrox to George Square with the expressed intention of taking over the city in defiance of Government Covid restrictions. That is a fairly sizable proportion of their active support.

The far right, ultra-unionist, bigoted element of the Rangers’ support is a problem not just for Scottish football. Similar groups attacked the independence supporters in George Square in 2014, and were in evidence as ‘The Loyalist Defence League’ in George Square in 2020, ‘protecting’ the war memorial and other statues. There have been calls for the football authorities to apply sanctions in a similar way to UEFA. This might work within the stadiums but away from football, anti-Catholic prejudice is all too evident in Scottish society. Now that the Scottish Government has called out the problem, action has to be taken by the police and the judiciary.

Writing in the Times, Kenny Farquarson pointed out that when London police received reports of anti-Semitic slogans allegedly being shouted from a convoy of cars flying Palestinian flags, Metropolitan police launched a city-wide hunt. Within hours a number of arrests had been made, four men being charged with racially aggravated public order offences. These offences were mild by comparison to what happened in Glasgow, but, so far, we have not seen the same response. There are enough laws to tackle the issue but there has to be a willingness to implement them. The government should now instruct the police authorities that anti-Catholic prejudice should be given top priority and there should be an expectation that the judiciary would follow convictions with the stiffest possible sentences. The time for anti-sectarian summits and well-meaning initiatives has past. The disgraceful events in George Square have shifted the debate about religious bigotry and the deeply embedded anti-Catholic stain in Scotland.

Pat Kelly is a former Scottish Secretary of the PCS union and is convenor of editorial board of the Scottish Left Review.
Scotland’s drug problem: tackling the symptoms never tackles the causes

Calum Rosie argues that only deep-seated, radical action can address this scourge in our society

It has recently been announced that Scotland is, yet again, the ‘drug death capital’ of the world, with over double the number of drug-related deaths than any other European country. This is a damning statistic, but for anyone living in Scotland, it is not a surprising one. Hard drugs have been a part of Scottish life for decades now, and the associated death count has been rising year after year. It is an undeniable healthcare and human rights scandal that continues to be ignored by the government and underreported by the media, with too many causes and too few solutions.

Of these solutions, many are implemented by private citizens and charities without the support of the government or the Scottish legal system. Activist, Peter Krykant, was charged with obstruction after refusing to allow police access to his mobile overdose prevention centre, where addicts can use sterilised equipment safely with trained staff on hand in the event of an overdose. This is just one example of how the Scottish Government is currently standing in the way of progress – if we treat those attempting to reduce the death rate in our country as criminals, how can we hope to address the problem fully? Similarly, many voices – like the SNP conference in 2019 - are calling for the decriminalising of drug use, which would allow us to treat drug addicts as patients rather than as criminals.

But these proposals, admirable and deserving of support as they are, merely treat the symptoms of addiction and drug deaths, and do not address the root of the issue: mental health. So often, drugs are used as self-administered medication to deal with mental illness caused by present stresses and past traumas, and the Scottish and UK-wide governments have repeatedly shown little desire to support meaningful mental health reform.

So, what needs to be done? If you ask anyone who works in social care or the mental health (or healthcare at large), they’ll tell you the same thing: that while our social care sector is staffed by incredibly selfless and hardworking people, the system itself is full to bursting. There just aren’t enough resources, bodies, or funding to fully address the mental health crisis that our country is facing. Step one would, therefore, be to fully fund this section of our society.

One way to do this is to address how healthcare is funded in Scotland, and where responsibility for it lies. Currently, each council area is liable for its own healthcare – which means that the Scottish Government does not have to take effective responsibility for the high number of drug deaths. This needs to change. Scotland must treat this as the national emergency that it is, and make sure that funds and resources to tackle the problem are made available in every area they are needed and as soon as possible.

Beyond this, we need to address what is causing the mental health problems in our society, and why it seems to be particularly bad in Scotland. One undeniable exacerbation of the problem comes from the fact that the shame surrounding addiction is palpable in Scotland. The term, ‘junkie’, is tossed around with abandon, and people who use drugs are looked down upon as worthless members of society. By educating the rest of the country in drug addiction and drug use, this stigma can be reduced, and we as a society will not be contributing to the worsening of this health crisis.

What’s more, studies show that poverty and mental illness go very much hand in glove, which means that poverty is very likely an early step on the road towards addiction. Scotland’s drug problems really took off in the 1980s, which also saw widespread poverty and inequality, and until Scotland can address the cancer of poverty, we will continue to see thousands of Scottish people die at the hands of drug addiction.

Luckily, there are plenty of ways to tackle poverty, if only government would take the first steps – which, interestingly, it already has during the lockdown. Introduction of a government subsidised wage has given security to millions of people, while the UK government provided housing for thousands of unhoused people across the country, albeit briefly. An extension of this post-pandemic would be the introduction of a universal basic wage and investing heavily in social housing, providing a secure social safety net to help assuage some of the most common causes of depression and anxiety among our nation’s most vulnerable.

While universal basic income is an idea that has floating around the Scottish Parliament recently, the government has recently announced a cut to housing spending, which will only increase the pressure on our society’s poorest, with widespread adverse effects on mental and physical health.

So, while the Scottish Government’s £250m commitment to tackle the drug problem may seem like a good start, all of this money is going towards treating the symptoms of drug addiction, and not the cause. Systematic change needs to occur to address the economic needs of the Scottish people, to bring our nation’s poorest out of poverty, and give them help above and beyond the bare minimum. Because if we don’t, Scottish citizens will continue to die in their thousands, something that will weigh heavy on the conscience of the nation.

Calum Rosie is a writer based in Edinburgh, and correspondent for Immigration Advice Service (https://iasservices.org.uk/).
To jab or not to jab: skewed Covid vaccination priorities and problems

Andrew Watterson asks who judged who to jab and why in Scotland, and with what effect

Vaccination policies to protect various groups in the population in Scotland - including its workforce from Covid and its variants - have raised many questions over the last twelve months. These involve medical, scientific, public health, political and legal considerations, vaccine budgets and supply, ethics as well as what is practical and effective. Global issues too may impact directly on public health and workers in Scotland. The World Health Organisation (WHO) mantra of ‘no one is safe from Covid until everyone is safe (with vaccinations)’ remains as true in late 2021 as it did before. Scotland does not fully control its own borders and cannot currently prevent travel into it from countries and areas where new Covid variants continue to emerge. The border problems present pressing needs to offer new or reformulated vaccines to continue to protect the population in Scotland.

This article explores what Covid vaccination priority policies should be for workers in Scotland and the communities in which they live. It challenges the view that there are substantial limits on many actions the Scottish Government could take to protect those workers and their communities. It also challenges the view Scotland has always been wise to accept the blanket advice of the UK’s Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) and that such advice reflected an international consensus on vaccine prioritisation because it did not. The Westminster Government is legally obliged to follow JCVI recommendations for England but the Scottish Government is not. The Scottish Government paradoxically produced a very detailed prioritisation matrix for a whole range of key worker groups to be tested for Covid in May 2020 that has been regularly updated yet still simply repeated JCVI advice on vaccine prioritisation with blunt tool of age used to argue all workers will eventually be vaccinated anyway.

Many arguments were put in the Lancet and British Medical Journal in 2020 for a re-ordering of UK and Scottish vaccination priorities to protect society at large, public health and worker health. There has also been a global consensus since late 2020 about the medical, public health and ethical need to prioritise vaccination for older age groups and those in poorest health in the first instance. Vaccine supply sometimes initially meant only these groups could be vaccinated in the UK. However, later priority occupational groups varied a good deal from country to country and diverged from WHO guidelines. Surprisingly, JCVI dithered at an early stage about the need even to vaccinate some key health workers and decided against vaccinations for other groups of workers by using much narrower criteria than the WHO and other European countries.

Across the UK and within Scotland, there has been a perceived lack of transparency about the evidence base used for Covid decision-making and a lack of communication with workers and their organisations. Trust in UK Government Covid policies including vaccination prioritisation has frequently been lacking. It seems occupational health and safety and the related public health consequences for some workers being given low vaccination priority were downplayed and equity was ignored. The position in the WHO, Germany, France and even some US states and federal agencies in 2020 has differed from Scotland’s position at times. This is, perhaps, further evidence of a general UK neglect of occupational health and safety monitoring, inspection, and regulation during and before the pandemic that extended to Scotland where large clusters of early occupational Covid cases occurred in, for example, food production and office workers.

WHO vaccination priorities focussed on workers in its guidelines depending on vaccine supply and aimed at reducing death and disease burdens and social and economic disruption while protecting essential services and maintaining national equity. WHO advised the following when supplies of nationally available Covid-19 vaccines were limited for the general population: if only 1% to 10% of vaccines were available in a country, then health workers at high or very high risk would be vaccinated; if 11% to 20% vaccine availability applied, vaccinators, high priority teachers and school staff would also be vaccinated; if 21%-50% vaccine availability existed, then the following would be vaccinated: low to moderate risk health workers, vaccine producers, high-risk lab staff, other essential workers like police officers, municipal services, child-care providers, agriculture and food workers, miners and food processors, transportation workers, and government workers essential to critical functioning of the state not covered by other categories. The UK had vaccines available for these groups at a relatively early stage but neither England nor Scotland chose to vaccinate school staff, food workers, transport workers, construction workers and police officers despite calls by unions and a number of medical and public health researchers to do so.

In France, by November 2020, the public health, economic and social importance of ensuring early vaccination for a wider group of employees was widely recognised based on workers’ significant public contact. These occupations covered shops, transport, and schools (teachers and other school workers). It further included priority for workers in confined spaces, meat processing workers, construction workers, and migrant workers. The second phase added firefighters and police to the priority list.

Several US states approved school staff vaccination long before most teachers in Scotland would have been covered by the roll out of vaccines on the basis of age. In contrast, the Scottish Government vaccination policy showed a frequent lack of concern about inequalities in health, and protection of what the WHO regarded as ‘key’ workers and vulnerable groups. In Scotland, groups of care workers in community settings and at high risk did not receive early vaccines. At risk construction workers have not been vaccinated. Schools were re-opened during the pandemic but younger school staff were denied vaccines. Some
Scottish emergency services at the beginning were denied vaccines. Shop keepers running essential community services were denied vaccines.

Following the second wave, it has looked like younger workers in pubs, clubs and catering establishments who may not yet have been vaccinated would be at greater risk. This was at a time when there was more evidence about the likelihood of precarious and vulnerable workers in deprived communities suffering significant long Covid effects. Serious fault lines in UK and Scottish-specific health and workplace policy making and evidence gathering were exposed. Vaccination, of course, in itself will not end the pandemic but it has an important role to play along with other upstream zero Covid strategies to supress the pandemic.

Dilemmas exist for unions too. Unions argued for collective action to press government, employers, and regulators to raise and apply the best possible Covid health and safety standards available. Many unions like UNITE pressed for vaccines to be made available as a matter of priority to essential and key workers exposed to Covid in the workplace and more widely to all workers. Unions argued for greater efforts to reach those workers and communities that had either been effectively neglected by vaccine programmes, marginalised in siting of vaccine centres or were fearful for good historical reasons of past vaccine policies. Assuming vaccine delivery and vaccine hesitancy problems have been addressed sensitively, unions are now faced with new problems. In the form of workers choosing to refuse vaccination. Employers may well decide that if such workers refuse vaccination and cannot be redeployed to other work, then dismissal will result. This is a matter for employment tribunals and the courts to resolve. If employers do not move or dismiss ‘refusers’, will unions then argue on health and safety grounds that refusers put other employees and the public at risk and so will not work with them? Additionally, if ‘equitable’ vaccine passports are introduced, will unions argue that those who choose not to get vaccinations and hence lack passports, as distinct from those unable to get vaccinations who lack such passports, should not be admitted to clubs, pubs, shops etc where they may put employees at risk of contracting Covid?

Finally, questions will need to be asked by unions about who owns, controls, invests in, markets, and profits from Covid and other related vaccines. Unions would be expected to challenge excessive profiteering and government handouts to pharmaceutical companies. Hence, vaccine development, supply, and availability locks into other important debates now well underway in Scotland. These include ones about just transition, ‘socially useful work’, fair work, employer and governmental accountability and good health and safety at work that should benefits employees and their communities.

At last, there is growing recognition of the threat zoonotic diseases such as Covid now present to global public health, and may do so at any time. The principles and practices of vaccine policy raised by Covid, therefore, need to be, if not resolved, at least more fully addressed in the future to protect public health including all employees but especially precarious and economically-disadvantaged workers. The UK JCVI and the UK Group of Chief Medical Officers should not be the supreme arbiters in the future for pandemic vaccination policies. The Scottish Government has almost formulaically followed the lead of UK decision-makers on some issues in ways that have had serious consequences especially during the early stages of the Covid pandemic.

Future transparency, communication and engagement by the Scottish Government need to reflect best international practice in the future on vaccine prioritisation for workers, drawing - if necessary - upon WHO guidelines. This would reflect the important principles already embedded with the Fair Work Convention established by Scottish Government. It would further recognise the fact that although occupational health and safety is reserved to Westminster, the pandemic has opened up the topic and provided the Scottish Government with the means to act on worker health and safety for public health reasons. Establishing better practice on worker vaccination during this and future pandemics is, therefore, not only possible but vital and necessary.

Andrew Watterson is Professor of Health in the Occupational and Environmental Health and Public Health and Population Health research groups at the University of Stirling.
Growing jaggier shoots from the briar’s roots: The UCS work-in at 50 and beyond

David Betteridge recalls how men and women were made on the Clyde into fighting fortresses

Here did the statesmen and women of the yards come from? Where did they acquire the necessary skills, values and knowledge? These are questions worth finding answers to, and adapting to our own times, because these were the statesmen and women that so powerfully made the case for the work-in that saved them, so persuasively inspired a worldwide network of working class and union support, and so courageously pursued their struggle through to victory.

Partly, they acquired their skills, values and knowledge from their total immersion in the yards, and in the unions, and in their working-class hinterland and history. Yet immersion is not sufficient. Lessons learned informally must be firmed up, and tempered into weapons of thought and structures of feeling that can withstand prolonged battering. It was often through their membership of the Communist Party and involvement in its educational and cultural activities over many years that a critical mass of workers achieved this firming and this tempering. It was a long labour.

There is a portrait of Jimmy Reid, commissioned by his daughter for his 75th birthday, that gives us a hint of the great weight and variety of past influences operating on one brain, and one heart. The artist, Barry Atherton, places his subject at the centre of a storm of people and ideas, a small selection from the library-loads that Reid mastered. He believed and practised what Lenin was eloquent in furthering the work-in through its ups and downs - because doing so reminds us of the hydra-headed nature of any cultural formation, and its reliance on complex networks of learning and influence.

But now? Here we are, in 2021, with a right-wing coup under way and us giving too little resistance to it. How can we recover the fighting spirit of the work-in of half a century ago? Maybe, if a composite Ghost of Actions Past might speak, it might say:

Do not under-estimate the enemy, who has out-classed us down the ages, maintaining its property rights and its rule over us; but do not over-estimate it, either.

Build and rebuild and extend - like a spider working on its web - both union and party, and community and nation, throwing multiple cross-links to others.

Get the boxes of books down from the attic; re-read them, and then write your own; similarly with films, songs, and art-works of all kinds, packing into them all you know plus all you imagine, thus creating a culture that makes sense of your lives, and educates desire.

Emulate the briar, digging down deep with your sustenance-seeking roots, and climb high towards future’s light, spiralling up and up, following a trajectory similar to Tatin’s Tower, and similar to the briar’s, making sure that your older, stronger, jaggier shoots support the younger ones.

Even in the present valley of the shadow, prepare for government, and with it, good governance, too.

David Betteridge is the editor of a compilation of poems, songs, prose memoirs, photographs and cartoons celebrating the 1971-2 UCS work-in called ‘A Rose Loupt Oot’ (Smokestack Books, 2011)
The brutality of empire: The ethnic cleansing of the British periphery

Adam Charlton recalls a genocidal episode of internal colonialism from Britain’s past

When we think of the British Empire, we think of distant territories separated from the British mainland by vast expanses of sea. As such, we think of Britain’s colonial policies as directed at people in far off regions like Bengal and Kenya. In recent decades, the genocidal policies of Britain in Ireland have gained domestic recognition, but Britain’s equally racist policies in western Scotland remain widely undisputed.

In 1707, a century after England’s first colony was established in the New World, the Acts of Union joined England and Scotland under one monarch. Like so much of the language and history surrounding Scotland’s position within Great Britain and the British Empire, the term ‘union’ is somewhat disingenuous. Although the acts were ratified by both English and Scottish Parliaments, the latter had little choice in the matter. Inspired by England’s growing empire overseas, the Scottish Kingdom had attempted to forge a colony in modern day Panama at the end of the seventeenth century. The plan was to control an overland route linking the Atlantic to the Pacific, and the Scottish Crown invested about 20% off all the currency circulating in the Kingdom into establishing ‘New Caledonia’. As you may have surmised, this plan failed, in part due to an English trade blockade. This left Scotland bankrupt, and it was in this context that a predatory England entered into ‘union’ with a financially ruined Scotland.

Union proved to be hugely profitable for some lowland Scots, who already had deep links with England. Glasgow, Edinburgh, and the Central Belt underwent some of the most rapid industrialisation of the Industrial Revolution, whilst the Clyde became one of the great commercial basins of imperial Britain. Yet there were, and had been for some time, two Scotlands. During the previous centuries, cultural and ethnic divisions had grown between Gaelic-speaking peoples of north western Scotland and the Scots-speaking people of the south. From the twelfth century onwards, Norman-English began to replace Gaelic as the common tongue in southern and eastern Scotland. Scottish monarchs took Anglicised names, and English became the language of the royal court. In the two centuries following unification, the Anglicised Scots of the lowlands would fit into the new imperial Britain built upon capitalism, expansionism, and Protestantism. In contrast, the Gaels of west Scotland’s Highlands and Islands would be violently eradicated, along with their clan-based way of life and Celtic Catholicism. In their place, their ancestral lands would be monetised to serve the colonial centre, and the brutally depopulated islands and dells would be mythologised as gloriously empty get-away destinations for those seeking an escape from life at the centre of empire.

This is a story we are more familiar with in Ireland, and the Gaelic peoples of Ireland and western Scotland are closely connected. Catholicism reached mainland Britain via Ireland, and England via Scotland. The Hebrides were an influential if peripheral part of the Catholic world, and the monastery at Iona – a small island off the coast of Mull - was important enough to lead a dispute with Rome over the date of Easter. This division, among others, lead to the development of a distinct kind of Catholicism, known as Celtic Christianity, which distinguished the region from the rest of mainland Britain. Gaelic society was organised into familial tribes, known as clans. Clan members owed their loyalty to a chieftain. In return for their fealty, the clan’s folk had access to the land and sea off which they could live and trade. Clan identity superseded the individual, and the majority of Gaels lived a subsistence lifestyle that has given Celtic Christianity a new age appeal to spiritual environmentalists. In the century following the Acts of Union, this thrust Gaelic society into conflict with the ideas of Protestant lowlanders, David Hume and Adam Smith, who provided an intellectual underpinning for Britain’s brand of individualistic capitalism, based on land ownership and growth.

In the first half of the 1700s, many clan chiefs made the fateful decision to participate in the Jacobite uprisings. Although often characterised as a movement solely for the restoration of the Stuart dynasty, the reality of the Jacobite movement was more complicated. In Ireland, many Jacobites sought autonomy from England rather than restoration. In Scotland, the movement was as much a response to the encroachment of Protestant England and the modernising forces of capitalism as it was about the Stuarts. In 1745, Bonnie Prince Charlie – last of the Stuarts - landed in the Hebrides and rallied the clans to him. They took Edinburgh without resistance, and won a series of battles in Scotland and northern England. Poised to take London, however, the divisions within the Jacobite movement came to the fore. For Charles, England was the prize, but the Gaels that constituted the bulk of his army had little interest in fighting beyond Scotland. Having pulled back to the Moray Firth, a bolstered British army caught up with them in April 1946, and massacred the remaining Jacobite forces at the battle of Culloden. Bonnie Prince Charlie escaped to France, and the Jacobite era came to an end.

These events had an enormous impact on the English psyche. The current national anthem was written to rouse the spirits of Londoners facing the prospect of a Jacobite siege, hence the verse, ‘rebellious Scots to crush’. More importantly, it contributed to a narrative about savage and irrational Gaels, and provided a rationale to deal with the last un-Anglicised corner of Britain. In the decades following Culloden, a campaign of ethnic cleansing was carried out in the western Highlands and Islands. This began with the erasure of Gaelic identity. Clan tartans were banned, as was the playing of the bagpipes. Such policies were intended to destroy Gaelic identity, born of an inherent racism held among the English and Anglicised Scots towards the Gaelic way of life. They also served the practical purpose of diminishing clan identity and, thus, destroying the clans as a political force. The collectivist farms were broken up, and replaced with capitalist land farming - an approach familiar in the lowlands, but incompatible with the clan system of the Highlands and Islands.

19 - Scottish Left Review Issue 124 July/August 2021
As in other parts of the burgeoning British Empire, local inhabitants considered an obstacle to economic growth were either destroyed or removed. Personal ownership of land was anathema to Gaelic society, and this made it easy to expel crofters from their ancestral homes. The population of the Hebrides was decimated. On Rum, about 87% of the population was forcibly removed to Nova Scotia, Canada. On Mull, thousands of islanders were cleared to make way for sheep farming, deemed the only profitable use of the land. As in the Americas, biblical verses about making the land productive were employed as justification. In many instances, crofters had their houses burnt, giving them no choice but to emigrate. Other times, Gaels were ridden down, bound with rope, and put on boats to Glasgow, from where they were sent to Canada. Many died on the journey. Such stories are reminiscent European slave catching in West Africa. Whilst the scale of the clearances is dwarfed by the racist excesses of the British colonial project elsewhere in the world, it ought to be considered among them. Causing serious mental or bodily harm, and deliberately inflicting conditions intended to bring about the physical destruction of an ethic group are both considered forms of genocide, according to the UN. Like Ireland, the Scottish islands are among the only places in western Europe now home to less people than at the start of the eighteenth century. The Clearances were not only an act of genocide, but an extremely successful one.

For many Gaels however, the Clearances were not the end of their relationship with Anglo-supremacist Britain. More Scots would die in the Seven Years Wars than either Englishmen or Americans, as the British Army hoovered up displaced Gaels, many of whom had grown up in a strong martial tradition. Like Indian Sepoys in East Africa, England used the oppressed people of western Scotland to oppress others in America. Gaels were considered particularly adept at communicating with Native Americans, one savage to another, as the theory went. From there on, Scots would make up a disproportionate component of the British Army, and the First World War resulted in a secondary decimation of what was left of the old clan nobility, 250 years on from Culloden. A visit to any clan burial site in the Highlands and Islands will reveal a constellation of headstones engraved with dates between 1914 and 1918. Yet despite the numbers of Gaelic Scots at the cutting edge of the British Empire, the benefactors were the English elite and their Anglicised cousins. The British Empire was no more Gaelic than it was Indian. It was at its core an Anglo-Empire, and the ethnic cleansing of the British periphery is evidence of this.

In the wake of the Clearances, the newly uninhabited landscape of the Highlands and Hebrides was mythologised in Britain, as though it had always been this way. The changing weather, shining beaches, and above all enormous emptiness of the place was marketed, and wealthy Englishmen purchased swathes of territory for hunting estates.
A case to leave NATO and for Scottish neutrality

Kailash Kutwaroo says independence opens up progressive policy positions for Scotland on the world stage

Should an independent Scotland leave the NATO military alliance? It’s possibly not the most pressing issue for the Scottish independence movement at present, when compared to the more demanding issues such as how Independence can be achieved, the timing of a second referendum, and what kinds of trading and border relationships with the EU and post-Brexit Britain might the new state have. Yet the question of Scotland’s future membership of NATO is an important one that will need to be addressed at one stage or another. Let’s evaluate some of the arguments advanced for and against continuous NATO membership.

Firstly, assuming it attains independence, Scotland will need to i) dislocate itself from its current integrated relationship as part of the UK armed forces system, and ii) identify a new set of defence needs and purposes for the Scottish state’s armed forces. In both areas, there is room for significant drift away from NATO. For example, the present British military is designed not to defend the home islands but to fight offensive European wars in conjunction with its NATO allies in specialised battle groups. Since that is the case why would any newly developed Scottish Defence Force (SDF), especially its army element, look to reconstruct such a position?

Breaking apart from this structure of UK defence would, thus, foster a new set of defence needs and purposes for the Scottish state’s armed forces. In both areas, there is room for significant drift away from NATO. For example, the present British military is designed not to defend the home islands but to fight offensive European wars in conjunction with its NATO allies in specialised battle groups. Since that is the case why would any newly developed Scottish Defence Force (SDF), especially its army element, look to reconstruct such a position?

The post-independence alternatives for Scottish defence have been the subject of much fertile national debate both within the Scottish political establishment as well as related think tank communities. Various models from the Nordic approach of cooperation to Irish neutrality have been advocated. The parameters suggested by commentators like Dorchá Lee, a retired Irish Army Colonel, include, for example, a numerically smaller two brigade Regular-Reserve Army. The latter would focus on home defence and the former on offering first line terrain protection and expertise for humanitarian, military observer and peace building missions with an integrated Special Forces element for counter-terrorism tasks and protecting North Sea oil areas. Within these capabilities, a Brigade dedicated to Cold Weather fighting would accurately meet Scotland’s defensive needs over its own landmass. It would also be worth exploring as an optimal solution with the remaining UK an integrated air defence system covering both countries. In parallel, an enlarged Scottish Naval-Coastguard with air support built around the US model is another route by which the country’s defences could be bolstered to deal with issues such as organised crime, threats to its significant fishing stocks and illegal trafficking of people and goods.

Whatever the final formation agreed, the basic aims would be protection of Scotland itself. Thus, the persistent belief that any SDF will need NATO as a guarantor of its security, even without the need for nuclear weapons, is wrong. Scottish membership of NATO could be seen as important to reinforce NATO’s overall strategic disposition especially in the Arctic and the Greenland Gap but that offers little to an independent Scotland re-examining its future European and global security needs. Indeed, re-joining NATO would replicate the damaging Cold War mindsets of seeking an external ‘enemy’ and risk the building of a genuinely defensive military model for Scotland. Hence, NATO’s emphasis on ‘interoperability’ and ‘standards’ bias member states towards ever higher levels of military spending that emphasise large proportions of expensive weaponry like advanced tanks and artillery. Little of this would be of any use to a Scotland no longer viewing the world in such adversarial terms and whose own physical geographic interior is a barrier to any (unlikely) attacker.

By moving towards a Scottish defence based on its own interests, Scotland could start to discard the overhangs of NATO membership. For example, rescinding the Nuclear Trident programmes would mean it no longer having to serve the two large Naval ports of Faslane and Coulport. Both could be closed or alternatively used as part of the enlarged Scottish Naval-Coastguard HQ with the freed-up staff being redeployed elsewhere. The country could also abandon any use of submarines that would be inappropriate for a nation of its size - neither New Zealand nor Ireland, countries of comparable size, have a submarine fleet - or instead keep a very small deterrent fleet.

All of this is suggestive of a move towards a neutral Scotland. It is but we should not incorrectly interpret such a development as a future SDF withdrawal from the world per se. The
latter’s expertise in areas drawn from its British experiences could be elaborated in international military policing, UN peacekeeping, logistical expertise in emergency relief including pandemics and field hospital work, all of which can offer much needed services at times of international and regional crises. For instance, retaining a satisfactory air transport fleet including a portion of the Hercules planes after independence could help in all these respects. Specialised forces could also be used on a UN Security Council approved basis or as part of EU missions to deal with acts say of international terrorism if Scotland re-joins the latter. It would be a neutral Scotland but one that is firmly humanitarian and externally outlooking in its orientation.

A final argument for NATO withdrawal is, of course, financial savings. These have the potential to be considerable and would be in addition to the economic benefits in removing the Trident submarine fleet and weapons. Various investigations have shown that if Scotland adopted Ireland’s average GDP expenditure on military spending (as a non-NATO member), it could save over £2bn pa from its new defence budget. At the very least, the cost of defending Scotland itself would not need be anything like NATO’s aspirational 2% of GDP spending on membership or the over 4% that it currently stands at within the Scottish budget. The nation could very reasonably be protected with only 1.4%-1.7% of GDP (approximately the EU average) dedicated towards defence. It would also not be starting anew, obtaining some of its share of the military hardware from the old UK for its Air and Naval elements (Two frigates, possession of RAF Lossiemouth etc.). Moreover, a well-planned Defence Transformation Fund could offset the losses of the arms manufacturing industries (though indigenous capabilities should not be entirely forsaken) in Scotland towards a programme of investment in alternative peaceful production with tax raising potential to mitigate the anticipated loss of NATO related expenditure in the economy.

The struggle over Scottish disengagement will be waged politically especially in the international sphere and with the rUK government at the same time. An expressed desire by Scotland to seek, at best, a different relationship with NATO through say the Partnership for Peace (PPF) scheme may well be regarded as a prelude to a fully detached connection with the Alliance and that does not even include the complex issue of the safe removal of nuclear weapons. NATO would make a strong effort to re-secure full Scottish membership. It is an open secret after all that NATO lobbied the SNP vigorously behind the scenes of the 2014 independence referendum for such an outcome.

It’s possible that any new post-independent Scottish Government could explain through its existing diplomatic channels that its neutrality policy was not initially a fundamentally non-aligned policy. This would still indicate that it was sympathetic to the West and would not be openly pro-Russian (or equally unnecessarily hostile to Russia) or whatever orientation that might generate unnecessary disquiet among its various European neighbours. A not dissimilar stance has helped Finland, a non-NATO member, in its relations with Russia to convince the latter not to push it into the NATO orbit whilst Iceland which is a NATO member has no standing military of its own, thus, placating Russian concerns in the Artic shipping channels. Another northern neighbour, Denmark, has been cited by former SNP MP, Stephen Gethins, as one Scotland could emulate as the nation has no submarine fleet but has conversely paid an often-overlooked human price as a NATO partner in military interventions such as in Afghanistan and Libya.

None of this should underestimate either the geo-political repercussions of an exit from NATO. The undermining of its presence close to Arctic routes would be felt by NATO as would the hole in its nuclear umbrella, but we should not exaggerate these points. It’s possible that new agreements could be formed by the SDF to undertake tripartite exercises with NATO and UK forces to bolster the former’s cold weather fighting expertise and other military-naval exercises on a need-by-need basis. Tensions with the rUK, which would stay within NATO, could be improved by a sensible division of military assets and liabilities and the aforementioned common air defence system with Scottish defences focusing heavily upon protecting urban centres and pivotal areas like its main sea ports.

The outcome of the 2021 Holyrood elections saw the anti-NATO Greens increase their number of seats and reinforce those who seek within the SNP to have a reconsideration of NATO membership. Yet this situation is complicated by SNP divisions with conservative elements, expressed in statements by the party’s Westminster defence spokesperson, Stewart McDonald, seeking a more hawkish pro-NATO stance whilst SNP CND see no logic in discussing NATO membership prior to the removal of the Trident submarines. The latter, again inspired by the Finnish example, see the ‘prospect’ of NATO membership as a lever to extract diplomatic ‘good behaviour’ both from NATO and Russia, which is what Finland achieves and does so admirably. Yet the truer prize for Scotland outside of NATO remains arguably though a security policy wedded to both peaceful co-existence and not confrontation behind regionally armed blocs. This is an opportunity to be seized and not diluted on the path to independence.

Kailash Kutwaroo is an independent researcher with a public policy background in local government, NGO and public sectors. He is planning to undertake doctoral study into the role of the UN safe areas in the Bosnian civil war of 1992-1995.
The social and national are one: Labour and Scottish independence

Chris Sutherland makes an impassioned plea to develop a radical agenda for independence

On the eve of the 1916 Easter Rising, Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington, the wife of the pacifist, Francis Sheehy-Skeffington, asked James Connolly: ‘Tell me, Jim, have you ever any hope of anything on the other side?’ Both her husband and Connolly were to lose their lives during the Rising. At least the prospect of an after-life offered some comfort for a doomed uprising. Quick as a flash, Connolly replied: ‘The British Labour Party? Oh no, they won’t lift a finger to help us’ (from Samuel Levenson’s 1973 ‘James Connolly’ biography, p291).

Connolly had no illusions as he set off for the General Post Office that Easter Monday. By committing his tiny ‘Irish Citizen Army’, he was staking Labour’s place in the struggle for Irish independence in the full knowledge that the British labour movement would remain largely silent. To Connolly the ‘national’ and the ‘social’ (which he used for socialist) were one and the same struggle. What would be the point of an independent Ireland if the same forces of exploitation and appropriation continued under a new native ruling class, swapping one set of bosses for another?

Think back now to 2014 during the referendum when, languishing in the polls, Alex Salmond suddenly made his ‘left turn’ with its vision of a more egalitarian, less class ridden society. Suddenly, the campaign was electrified with a groundswell of ‘Yessers’ warming to the notion of a socialistic Scotland. This then produced the panicked response of the three unionist parties in defence of ‘Scotland plc’, wrapped in the Union Jack.

Not only did Labour ‘not lift a finger’ in the struggle for an independent Scotland, it attempted to squash the independence movement with its collective thumb. But it backfired spectacularly when all three parties were decimated in the 2015 General Election, leaving the SNP the dominant force in Holyrood and at Westminster, a situation which persists seven years on.

I used to be a life-long Labour voter. I celebrated when 18 years of Tory government ended in 1997 with the election of a Blair government but, like millions of others, I quickly became disillusioned as Labour became the party of privatisation and war – a final humiliation was Thatcher describing Tony Blair as her ‘finest achievement’. Labour’s share of the vote collapsed from 13.5m in 1997 to 8.6m in 2010 (albeit with 12.9m in 2017). In 2007, I switched to the Greens out of desperation and on my return to Scotland in 2010 I switched to the SNP whom I’ve voted for ever since.

The 2014 ‘left turn’ was as exhilarating for me as it was for thousands of others. As the campaign rolled on, it was ‘debate night’ every night on TV. I remember the faces of the 16-year olds who suddenly got the vote for the first time. I travelled down to Edinburgh for mass rallies and watched the impromptu meetings in Dundee’s City Square. There were even rallies in the car park outside my flat in Cupar. I remember being stopped by a Dutch TV crew intrigued that an Anglo-Scot would be voting for independence.

Despite all the weaknesses of the ‘Yes’ campaign, I was hit by the sudden realisation that the need for democracy trumped all other considerations. I hadn’t expected that. These included the trumping of economic factors, warnings of financial melt-down, firms relocating to England, lack of a central bank, lack of a currency, collapse of pensions and the value of savings, the break-up of the BBC, plans for a 15,000 Scottish defence force with a couple of ships and a few planes, even the daft idea of sharing the Queen.

None of this mattered against having the freedom to decide our own affairs. For decades, Scotland had been on the receiving end of governments it had never voted for. We all remember how Thatcher piloted the Poll Tax, shut down many industries, stole our council housing, squandered North Sea oil receipts to wage war against the working class, sold off the ‘family silver’, transferring wealth to the rich from the poor and decimating public services.

But ‘what if independence made things worse?’, I heard people cry. I was working as a hospital cleaner in 2014 and a work-mate summed things up when she said: ‘Well, at least it’ll be our fuck-up!’ How could it get any worse was a common response. If you’re poor and at the bottom of society, what’s there to lose? ‘What if it all falls apart?’ I asked a porter. ‘We’ll do what we always do,’ he replied in a thick Fife drawl: ‘we’ll invade!’ Some wag wrote to the local paper saying ‘if you give us independence, we’ll give you back Berwick Rangers!’

What a tragedy, therefore, for Labour to desert its pro-independence supporters. By doing so it completely misread the national mood. Many ‘No’ voters still supported greater devolution. It wasn’t a blank cheque for unionism and when promises of devolution did not happen - at least in popular perception, the SNP began to hoover up votes. A whole generation of Scottish careerist Labour MPs was wiped out in an instant.

With Labour trapped in the past, it still clings stubbornly to the unionist cause, now into its fourth leader in seven years. Anas Sarwar, held on in May 2021 but he’s still part of the ‘old guard’, caught in the quicksand of the ‘ghost of Gordon’ and his infamous ‘pledges’ now threatening a comeback. Scottish Labour’s renaissance never materialised, despite its organic links to the union movement, and all this with the sure knowledge that Labour as a national force can never expect to be elected to office without its ranks of Scottish MPs, and me, like thousands of former voters stuck to a right-moving SNP. We too are trapped, like political exiles without a home, afraid that if we break ranks with the SNP, it’ll be the end of our one chance of independence, even if it might mean an independent Scotland trapped in neo-liberal austerity with the SNP like a one-party state (as it was in Ireland during the post independent period, inward looking with its Magdalene laundries).

I looked at the Scottish Growth Commission’s 2018 Report with dismay as I glimpsed an independent Scotland trapped in permanent austerity with fiscal and current account deficits, its tax...
income and investment resources way short of any post-Covid, post-carbon capacity to green the Scottish economy, dependent upon foreign lending markets with pressure to cut and privatise and still no sign of a Central Bank, no answers on currency and how Scotland would cope with a flight of capital.

What I also discovered from the hospital shopfloor in 2014 was how few of my workmates were union members, and how many opposed independence because they were afraid of what would happen to their terms and conditions, wages, pensions, mortgages and savings. ‘Project Fear’ especially amongst the elderly worked because it resonated, just as ‘Hope not Fear’ surged amongst newly enfranchised teenagers. The divisiveness of 2014 is still very much with us in 2021 despite a belated pro-independence shift in the polls. For me, a narrow majority will not be capable of delivering long-term independence. A 55%-45% split in favour over a long period would probably be a more reliable tipping point. Otherwise, we could be in for years of warfare at the hustings. Yet all the SNP/Green coalition offers following the 2021 Holyrood election is two years post-Covid consolidation … in other words ‘business as usual’ and political heel-kicking. Who knows where the pendulum will have swung in that time, with Alba waiting to feed on any pickings?

There is also another contradiction to be addressed, namely, the SNP’s attachment to the EU. If the driving force for independence is democracy, being free from Westminster and having the power to run its own affairs, how democratic is it to attach Scotland to the EU which is moving inexorably to political union? How does that place a small country like Scotland, subsumed as a tiny region in a huge political and economic bloc in which Scotland would only have a tiny number of seats?

To my mind, there needs to be a more decisive shift in the independence movement, one that is spearheaded by the ‘Under One Banner/Now Scotland’-style mass presence on the streets with its more radical ambition for an independent Scotland, driving the debate and setting the agenda. Labour needs to be part of this. It needs to abandon its attachment to unionism and attach its colours to the radical independence movement. The Greens on their own might have influence as coalition partners, but theirs is still a junior role. A united front of SNP/Left Labour/Green might give us the balance of class forces needed for a breakthrough to 55%.

And the battleground is one of ideas – the greening of the Scottish economy, generating jobs and investment, a universal basic income, free public transport, the drive for mass council housing, rolling back forty years of privatisation, re-nationalising utilities, rail and telecommunication; land reform and a revolution in community ownership; a state care system embedded into a well-funded NHS, an end to the marketisation of health; a universal state and higher educational system; an end to Trident and nuclear mass destruction and the proud affirmation of a Scottish republic. There needs to be a frank and honest discussion about the role of the state and the individual in a newly independent nation and also what sort of political system emerges at Holyrood. Do we keep or ditch d’Honte for full-blown PR or go backwards to FPTP? What sort of institutions replace the old? These are arguments for the here and now and not for two years down the road.

We go back to James Connolly on the eve of the Easter Rising – ‘the social and the national are one’. Socialists need to stake their claim to a new nation. Without it, progressive nationalism can go in directions we might not like. The interests of the Scottish working class should be at the forefront of an independent Scotland and for that we need a pro-independence Labour Party marching alongside AUOB and Now Scotland, in alliance with other progressive forces - the Greens, Extinction Rebellion, Black Lives Matter, Palestine Solidarity, the Women’s movement and LGBT+ and the thousands of marching, chanting teenagers.

Chris Sutherland is a lifelong socialist, living in St. Andrews, a member of the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign but not of any political party.

---

The Jimmy Reid Foundation

The Jimmy Reid Foundation reaches its tenth birthday on 10 August 2021. It was launched a year after the death of Jimmy Reid by the *Scottish Left Review* magazine which Jimmy founded. Over its life, the Jimmy Reid Foundation has produced nearly 100 publications (policy paper, pamphlets and briefing notes) and organised dozens of meetings and our annual lectures. In order to help continue with our work for the next ten years, please donate to the Foundation:

i) Donate via Paypal on our website: https://reidfoundation.scot/ (bottom righthand side)

ii) Send a cheque payable to ‘Reid Foundation’ to The Reid Foundation, 14 West Campbell Street, Glasgow G2 6RX

iii) Make a payment to our bank account: Co-operative Bank, Sort Code: 08-92-99, Acc No: 65491722

---

The Scottish Left Review Issue 124 July/August 2021
Amazon, Uber and union recognition ballots

Nigel Flanagan calls for a radical shake-up in how unions mobilise to gain collective bargaining rights from employers

Whilst union decline continues, the chances of organising a union recovery in membership and density appears to get worse. In the wake of the catastrophic failure to gain union recognition at US Amazon plant in Alabama in April 2021, there are still opportunities turning up. But we run the risk again of missing even them.

The defeat in the campaign in Alabama has become almost an essay in denial. The unions involved are now refusing to own the failure. The fact that the US movement could not win a vote in a workforce of 6,000 low paid, mainly black workers - with the active support of the whole of the ‘Hollywood Left’, the President of the United States, and the leader of the alternative left, Bernie Sanders - is a disaster. But instead of owning it, the organisers of the failed campaign are claiming it was a dirty tricks campaign by Amazon that has defeated them. What did they expect? Citing many obviously unlawful practices by the company, the campaign has now moved into court claims and social movement leverage. In reality, it has nowhere else to go. With US union density now lower than 7% in the private sector and after 30 years of ‘guru organising’, it’s time for the US movement to give it up as far as this guru organising style is concerned.

Recent announcements that the Teamsters are going to escalate their Amazon campaign with a plan of disruption and confrontation give us more hope. As Randy Korgan, the Teamsters Amazon Director, told The Guardian (24 June 2021): ‘everything is on the table’. Rather than pursuing the union recognition vote strategy that backfired in Alabama, the Teamsters – still a powerful union of 1.3m members and a rich one at that – is planning a long campaign based on the use of the union infrastructure and the hinterland of the US unions in cities like Los Angeles and New York.

There is still the legacy of the gurus, however. There are some who insist the Alabama defeat was simply a matter of not being committed enough to the details. Thus, within days author of books on organising, Jane McAlevey, was writing in The Nation (9, 15 April 2021) about the failures of the campaign with regard to the use of lists, the gate campaign and so forth. She even claims that support for unions in the US is ‘at an all-time high’ and that by implication the failure of the campaign was entirely down to not following ‘the plan’.

This nonsense has to stop. The numbers involved in union decline are massive and down to forces way beyond the scope of union gurus. Organising has to take place on fertile ground and we should be nurturing out hinterland and our infrastructure so that both are aligned to organising.

The other recent major development in union organising was the announcement of the union recognition agreement between Uber and the GMB in Britain in May 2021. It has been denounced in some quarters as a ‘sweetheart deal’ that contains no provision for bargaining on pay but this is not to see the wood for the trees. The GMB now has access to 70,000 drivers. It has to organise and recruit them, but that requires pushing the employer back a little to make some space. That is precisely what the GMB has done.

The Teamsters have struck the right note in seeing Amazon requires all the forces to work out a strategy based on them is to ignore the best weapon in our hands. Unions need to work out a strategy that involves all the groups and layers of socialist activists in Britain.

This is our hinterland. There were 600,000 Labour members under Corbyn only three years ago. We need to get them together and on board for a socialist union recognition campaign in Amazon. The Peoples’ Assembly can command forces into extra-parliamentary activity. It’s time this conversation started. The Black Lives Matter movement in Britain has thousands of progressive activists. Their energy and focus upon social justice are precisely what are lacking in the movement. Someone once said workers of the world unite. More unity, more action – and no gurus. It’s still in our hands.

Nigel Flanagan is a Global Union Organiser and activist currently based in Liverpool.
Capernaum (2018)
Reviewed by Jackie Bergson

Capernaum is a devastatingly captivating drama which overflows with ingenuity and social realism. From the outset, in casting non-actor, Zain Al Rafeea, to play the main role of Zain El Hajj, the filmmakers gifted their audiences with an outstanding, heart-and-soul character. Real-life Syrian child refugee, Zain, effectively carries the entire film. He embodies his fictional character with heart-breaking aplomb. Not since Ken Loach cast teenager, David Bradley, in Kes (1969) has there a character conveyed such powerful emotional and cultural relevance and truth.

Set in Beirut, the film opens with shocking images of Zain – whose age his parents cannot confirm, but who looks no more than nine years old - being taken prisoner and having to explain himself before a court judge. We learn as the film progresses that his crime was to stab a male landlord who was given his eleven-year-old sister, played by Haita ‘Cedra’ Izam, as a wife. The revelation that this trade-off was agreed by their parents, in order that they are able to keep living in their shoddy apartment, is genuinely harrowing - as is much of the film. Yet, there are touches of humour and lightness. There is also a surprising abundance of warmth and humanity.

We come to realise that the strategic reasons which compel such an audacious act by Zain are driven by his worldly-wise integrity. Somehow, amongst the dark tragedy of events, his character has evidently developed into that of a sceptical, strong-willed, protective, intelligent youngster who is knowledgeable beyond his years. Consequently, he articulates his purpose to the court judge with charismatic directness: he wants to sue his parents for bringing him into this world, and he wants to stop them from bringing more children into the besieged, miserable world into which he and his sister have been born.

The street-smart boy shines amongst the backdrop of adults who are conditioned to survive amidst abusers and con artists who feed on their children and treat them as disposable commodities. As the narrative of Capernaum progresses, it becomes clear that Zain is the voice of reason and justice, and his message is amplified when he calls a live broadcaster while he is incarcerated to tell them why he wants to stop what is happening to him and around him.

The emotions we witness in the film are often glaringly true because many of the indigenous characters in the film have witnessed identical realities. Distressing events which actually happened in real time indubitably emphasise this verisimilitude. For instance, ‘illegal’ Ethiopian immigrant and mother, Rahil (Yordanos Shifera) who agrees with Zain that he will look after her infant, Yonas (Treasure Bankole) is arrested and imprisoned in the film. In interviews, director Nadine Labaki spoke of how this happened in reality to the actor and her child whilst they were filming Capernaum. Labaki has also explained in interviews that the court judge in the film appears as himself.

Exceptional in its power and impact - with real events paralleling those on screen as the film was being created, Capernaum is truly matchless. It is undoubtedly extremely moving. Yet, its reason to be is heartening. The effectiveness of Capernaum goes beyond audience satisfaction. When their film was in the can, real-life partners Labaki and producer, Khaled Mouzanar, set about creating a charitable foundation to support, assist and educate youngsters in Syria and Beirut. Their ultimate aim is to make the lives of children and young people who are in similar or identical situations as those in Capernaum significantly better.

Zain Al Rafeea, in particular, is consequently resident, and being educated at schools, in Norway. This was achieved with the approval of his real parents, whose lives in Lebanon are impoverished and beyond tough and whose love for their son contrasts markedly with his ‘heartless’, fictional parents in the film.

There are several interesting Q&A videos and ‘making of’ documentaries and information online for those who would like to learn more about Capernaum from the cast and crew. Significantly, reports consistently state that in May 2018, it received a 15-minute standing ovation when it premiered at the Cannes Film Festival. The film was entered to compete for the Palme d’Or and won the Jury Prize.

Capernaum will stay in the hearts and minds of its audiences for a very long time. It will forever be impossible to discuss how and why fiction mirrors reality and vice-versa, without now referring to this incomparable, heartrending film.

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.
David Bleiman,
This Kilt of Many Colours,
Dempsey and Windle, 2021, 9781913329457, £8.00, pp50.

Reviewed by David McKinstry

This Kilt of Many Colours is a poetry pamphlet which explores cultural identity, memory and the tensions between alienation and assimilation and how they shape individual and group identity. It is written from the perspective of a Scot of Jewish heritage, whose family has suffered the fate of many European Jews, were viewed as outsiders and treated with outright hostility in Christian Europe. Bleiman writes from personal and collective frames of reference in this superb collection, exploring culture and identity and how the past shapes us on a personal level, whilst not shying away from directly addressing the larger issues of Europe’s long history of anti-Semitism.

His poems subtly address historical injustices from the forced conversion and expulsion of Spanish Jewry, to Russian pogroms and the Holocaust. Bleiman’s verse blends his personal family journey with wider historical forces and examines what it means to have multiple cultural identities and experiences whilst retaining the essence of being both Jewish and Scottish.

The collection reminds us that the Holocaust was not an isolated historical apparition, which can only be laid at the feet of the Nazis, but was part of long European tradition of murderous anti-Semitism. In Lacquer Wood, Bleiman uses English and German to illuminate intersectionality between several cultures and the multiple identities experienced by those who live and navigate these worlds. He effectively blends both languages to lay bare the human condition of despair and hope being strange bedfellows: ‘I feel your pain of bloody words, your Wortschmerz [pain] spelling Welttschmerz [world weariness], your open wounds – open worlds’. This succinctly expresses how the despair of the past can recede and give hope for a liveable present. He further explores the themes of endurance and survival in Nasos Vayenas, 1978 ending with the lines: ‘I am writing now, forty years on, to help us, as you say, to endure everyday life’.

Throughout his work, Bleiman uses the exit lines of his verse as device to bring his poems to a dramatic climax and to give his words a deeper profoundness. Whilst this technique could be deemed as clumsy and repetitive in less skilful hands, he employs it to great effect giving his work added solemnity. This can be seen in the end lines to Place Markers: ‘Five hundred years of sun won’t clear the dew from the gardens where the pomegranates grew’. Again, his use of imagery and wordplay goes beyond the decorative to have a compelling impact of the gravity of the Jewish persecution across the continent throughout the centuries.

As the title suggests, This Kilt of Many Colours, examines the themes of multiple cultural identities through the prism of heritage and explores not only the persecution of European Jewry, but also the rich Yiddish language which has contributed to Scottish culture. The Trebbler’s Tale is reminiscent of Hugh MacDiarmid, blending Scots and Yiddish to good effect and a reminder that Yiddish was still to be heard in Glasgow’s Gorbals as late as 1970s.

Although, the poem on first reading is difficult because of its extensive use of Scots and Yiddish tongues, nevertheless, perseverance with it reveals a richness of language which blends the Ayrshire soil of Burns and the fertile earth of eastern European Yiddish culture. The poem was a worthy winner of last year’s Scots Language Society Sangschar Prize.

This technique is again employed in Alphabet. Bleiman’s more personal poems such as Dream Mash Lullaby, whilst touching, lack power of his verse when it deals with historical forces and how they shape identity. Bitter Fruit Ripening focuses the destruction of the Great Mosque of Cordoba and returns to the theme of Jewish expulsion from Catholic Spain after the fall of More and ending with the lines: ‘Oranges here will ripen again and we shall make marmalade from bitter fruit’. Here, he makes use of the imagery of the quintessentially Spanish orange to potent effect. The fall of Granada ended 700 years of relative religious tolerance and directly led to the Inquisition which originally focused its attacks on Spanish Jewry. This religious persecution was fervently supported by joint monarchs, Isabella and Ferdinand V, who were known as the Catholic Monarchs. Again, when the writer returns to the theme of European anti-Semitism is where his verse has the power to move.

In the space available, I cannot hope to capture all that is extraordinary in this collection. This is an essential read for anyone who loves poetry and words and is interested in how history and culture impact and shape personal identity.

• For more information, see https://www.dempseyandwindle.com/davidbleiman.html

Dr David McKinstry Teaches History at Holyrood Secondary in Glasgow.
Publications, 2020, 145pp, £8

Independence & Socialism

the British State: Scotland,

Stott. P. and Taaffe, P.

(Bookmarks, 2021, 436pp, £12) and

the other hand, argues that ‘a new mass wing of the independence movement’.

beyond the timidity of the parliamentary mobilise the collective social power of organisations such as All Under One

great emphasis on building grassroots Breaking up the British State

improvement of working-class lives and without raising demands for the radical for independence cannot be fought Scottish National Party will result in two capitalist blocs with austerity policies facing each other on one island. They also agree that the fight for independence cannot be fought without raising demands for the radical improvement of working-class lives and arguing for a socialist future. But there the agreement ends.

Breaking up the British State places great emphasis on building grassroots organisations such as All Under One Banner and Now Scotland ‘to fully mobilise the collective social power of the working class, the only force capable of confronting state power and moving beyond the timidity of the parliamentary wing of the independence movement’. This united front should include unions as well as anti-racist and climate campaigners.

Scotland & the National Question, on the other hand, argues that ‘a new mass workers party in Scotland’ is necessary to ‘lead a mass working class movement for independence while campaigning against all cuts and for public ownership and socialist policies’. It advocates a new Labour-type party, to be established by Scottish unions, ‘not necessarily from its inception having a Marxist programme,’ but which would allow ‘the forces of the Socialist party [to] … seek to be a powerful Marxist influence.’ This seems to be the old Militant policy of entryism in new clothes. In the meantime, if a new referendum is refused by Westminster, a ‘Constituent or National Assembly’ should be called, similar to those in France in 1789 and Russia in 1917. ‘Marxists would call for such an Assembly to have a revolutionary character and to be convened and made up of delegates from mass workers’ organisations, trade unions, neighbourhood assemblies, mass youth organisations and so on.’

In dealing with the national question, the methods of the two publications could not be more different. Breaking up the British State has an erudite and elegantly written essay by Bob Fotheringham and Donny Gluckstein entitled ‘Scotland, the National Question and Marxism’, which outlines the historical development of the modern nation state and the attitude of Marx and Engels to the national question at the time of the European revolutions of 1848. They compare that with the fresh insights of Trotsky in 1905 and Lenin in 1917, when colonial imperialism was at its zenith. They then ask how these theories might be applied to Scotland today. Their chapter is followed by three substantial essays: ‘The Formation of Scotland’, ‘The Making of the Scottish Working Class, 1787 to 1850’, and ‘Red Clydeside’. Taken together, these four chapters provide a map to the present day and the ‘twin souls of the independence movement’ - nation and class - together with the democratic challenge for an independent state: ‘the potential to ‘grow over’ into something more ambitious’.

The difficulty with the arguments of Philip Stott and Peter Taaffe is that they are tangled with disagreements in their own party. Their chapter, ‘Applying the Method of Marxism’ is in two parts. The first is a document written by Taaffe in 1992 when he was general secretary of Militant. It was in response to the rise in popular support for a Scottish parliament. The ‘Scottish turn’ led to the formation of Scottish Militant

Labour and split the parent party. Those who opposed it are described as ‘self-appointed ‘bolshievic historians’ [who] do not understand the history of the Bolshevik Party’. Quoting Trotsky, Taaffe describes the ‘confused consciousness’ of Scottish workers as the ‘outer shell of immature Bolshevism’.

The second part of the chapter, by Stott, was written in 2003, and is a criticism of the leadership of the then Scottish Socialist Party, which he accused of ‘promoting illusions in capitalist independence at the expense of socialism’. Scottish Militant Labour split again over the formation of the Scottish Socialist Party. Stott writes that this was a ‘squandered opportunity to build a sizeable left party in Scotland’, and that the leaders of the Scottish Socialist Party ‘abandoned Marxism and went down the road of left nationalism and reformism, with calamitous consequences.’ Stott was in the minority in this split and with others formed the Socialist Party Scotland, publishers of Scotland & the National Question. For any new reader looking for clarity on the national question, this is not the place to start. Lenin and Trotsky are quoted often, but in a fashion more akin to scriptural dispute than political analysis.

The sidelining of Labour is of central importance to any analysis of Scotland today, and Dave Sherry and Julie Sherry in Breaking up the British State devote nearly eighty pages to the party and the unions. Their chapter, ‘The Decline of the Labour party in Scotland’, takes us through many important industrial disputes from the 1970s onwards, as shop-floor trade unionists were forced to overcome the hesitancy or opposition of Labour-leaning union officials to
secure even minor advances. Beginning with the mass solidarity shown for striking workers at East Kilbride’s BSR factory in 1969, they guide us through a near comprehensive history of modern industrial relations in Scotland. The unfortunate legacy of a failed ‘popular front’ strategy around the ‘work-in’ at Upper Clyde Shipbuilders in 1972 is closely followed by the miners’ strike, which smashed Tory wage controls. We are taken through the second miners’ strike in the 1980s, the closure of car manufacture at Linwood, the occupation by the women in Lee Jeans at Greenock, and a wave of occupations and sit-ins that they generated in other places. The theme running through this and most of the disputes up to the present is that, as at the Uddingston Caterpillar fight against closure in 1987, ‘Despite official passivity, the workers mounted a terrific fight. They defied the law, stayed solid, and won widespread support.’

Labour in government is also dissected to find the origins of its decline. We are reminded of the wage freezes and welfare cuts of the Labour governments of 1964-1970 and 1974-1979, which led to the ‘Winter of Discontent’ in 1979 and ushered in the government of Margaret Thatcher. Scotland was a guinea pig for her Poll Tax, introduced in 1989, which a Scottish Labour Party conference in 1988 refused to fight, and it was implemented by the biggest councils, mostly controlled by Labour. Local opposition was overwhelming, leading to the creation of the Anti-Poll Tax Federation, led by Tommy Sheridan. Labour leader Neil Kinnock called them ‘toy-town revolutionaries’. The former Labour MP, Jim Sillars, won a spectacular ‘no poll tax’ by-election victory for the SNP in Govan with a 33% swing from Labour.

The ‘new’ Labour government of 1997, led Blair, overturned the long-standing policy of nationalisation and his chancellor, Gordon Brown, declared: ‘The Labour Party is now the party of modern business and industry. For the first time it has set down its commitment to a market economy’. He introduced the Private Finance Initiative, again taken up by Labour-controlled councils, affecting the finance of schools, hospitals and housing. The government also failed to reverse Thatcher’s ‘reforms’, including anti-union legislation. And, of course, there was mass opposition to the Iraq war. ‘New’ Labour did, however, introduce devolution, which had been mooted by Tory Prime Minister, Ted Heath, in 1974 to counter a growing SNP. The 1997 referendum saw 74% vote yes to a parliament in Edinburgh.

The Tory years from 2010, which began with Labour winning 42% of the vote in Scotland and 41 Westminster seats, saw utter defeat in 2015. Even Jeremy Corbyn and the Momentum movement made little impact in the Blairite Scottish Labour Party. ‘The weakness of Labour’s opposition to austerity at both national and local level,’ argue Sherry and Sherry, ‘and the absence of a lead from the union leaders … its role in outsourcing and privatising council services, and its attacks on workers’ conditions and pay all … combined to weaken Labour’s fifty-year hold on Scottish politics. The final straw was its rush to wrap itself in the Union Jack alongside David Cameron in the 2014 referendum’.

The SNP and the wider independence movement came to be seen as the only way to resist Tory attacks, and they are given an equally rigorous analysis in the three concluding chapters of the book. SNP policy is for an independent Scotland in which very little structural change would take place. The Holyrood government’s 2020 Report of the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery following the Covid crisis, for example, recommends ‘a top-level Council of Business Advisers’ to determine economic priorities. So, argue lain Ferguson and Gerry Mooney in ‘Neoliberalism with a Heart? Life Under the SNP’, independence is not the end goal. ‘Rather, independence would provide the opportunity to reject Tory policies of austerity, privatisation and racism and to build a different kind of society, free from poverty, inequality and oppression’.

How to get there? The contributions of various leftist writers and activists are scrutinised in Bob Fotheringham’s chapter ‘Scottish Independence: Beyond the Limits of Nationalism’. He examines the writings of Stephen Maxwell, who in the 1970s formulated the case for ‘left-wing nationalism’; Tom Nairn and his many contributions including his book The Break-up of Britain; Kenny MacAskill and Lesley Riddoch, who both look to the Nordic model; Robin McAlpine of Common Weal and its impressive range of policy papers; and George Kerevan, with his policy of a new leadership elected by a national convention and a post-independence workers party ‘embracing the unions, Labour supporters, and the left of the SNP, and a broader left sentiment released from its old constitutional commitments’ (his words). It also discusses John Foster’s contribution for the Scottish Communist Party on ‘Radical Federalism’. Fotheringham’s main conclusion is that ‘we cannot leave the argument for socialism and workers’ self-emancipation out of the case for Scottish independence. To do so would condemn Scottish workers to the continued exploitation by the bosses, with all the consequences of poverty, exploitation and racism which we are subject to under the British state.’

Scotland & the National Question is something less than its subtitle, A Marxist Approach. It is more a collection of papers and articles that might interest a future historian of orthodox Trotskyism and the Scottish question, although the points of its manifesto are spelt out clearly at the end of the chapter, ‘SNP’s White Paper Will Not Deliver Change’. They include public ownership of industry and utilities, reversing social and benefit cuts, no to NATO, and abolition of anti-trade union laws. For anyone wishing a clear and historical exposition of Marxism and the national question in Scotland, Breaking up the British State is pertinent and timely.

Murray Armstrong is author of The Fight for Scottish Democracy: Rebellion and Reform in 1820’ (Pluto, 2020).


Reviewed by Sean Sheehan

A history of censorship is a history of the world and the author of Dangerous Ideas wisely adds the word ‘brief’ to his book’s subtitle. That still leaves plenty of ground to cover and chapters attending to the ancient world and pre-Gutenberg Europe are followed by five devoted to the centuries that came after and a final one looking at the contemporary world. The historical stories that fill the pages...
are variations on what should not come as a surprise for, as Leonard Cohen sings it, ‘everybody knows’.

Everybody knows that those with power like to control other people and that silencing what has been or might be said is half way to controlling what can be thought. Everybody knows that technology designed to monitor and stifle communication plays a catchup game with technology facilitating communication and everybody knows that the ongoing attempt to put Julian Assange on trial is not politically very different to the trial of Socrates that took place two and a half thousand years earlier. Everybody knows that Israel would like to equate criticism of its treatment of Palestinians with anti-Semitism.

But what is more nuanced and trickier to handle goes beyond a simple polarisation between freedom of expression (good) and censorship (bad). Such binaries are comfortable when they allow the positioning of ourselves on what seems clearly to be the right side but situations are not always neatly classifiable. Having a right to watch snuff movies is not on a par with the right of Edward Snowden to leak classified documents revealing secret mass surveillance programs. The creating of new offences on the stirring up of hatred – as proposed in Scotland’s Hate Crime and Public Order Bill – has the potential to impact negatively on freedom of expression.

Berkowitz’s book is at its most engaging when looking at conflicts of interest between the right to say or print what one wishes and the harmful consequences of, say, hate speech, pornography or fake news. Then there are complications arising from publishing material like cartoons of Muhammad. Dangerous Ideas argues that censorship doesn’t work even though the author acknowledges that limitless toleration of harmful rhetoric comes at a price and that free expression can be irresponsible and dangerous when the consequences are ignored. But he also concludes that ‘the elimination of harmful rhetoric protests the well-being of some in the short term, but there is no evidence that it eliminates the darkness behind the words’.

Sean Sheehan writes for The Irish Times, LensCulture and The Eye of Photography.

Two political poems by David Bleiman

Get Brexit, Donne?

The grass grew green again
over the rust and richer dust,
where leaders’ lies concealed.

That turf was turned for further use,
a people buried in the mass, ashen,
making their piece of the continent.

The grass grew tall and
this time would be tended well,
a continent divided,
packet for holidays and peace.

Where east I crossed beneath the Wall,
declaring Human Rights
in pants concealed,
an iron curtain rose
on hopeful nations looking west
until again the lights went out.

In Caledonia, north of Rome,
we’d seen it all before,
when garrison and gods were gone,
each tribe robbed out a local creed.

New spectres haunting Europe stalk
the ancient walls of Berwick, facing
south across the Tweed.

Think only this: that if a parting tide
should suck this clod of earth away,
still in some corner of a foreign field we
stay,
not dust, not cliff edge, clod nor
precious isle,
protected by a moat that serves as wall,
for we are part and parcel of the main
and though today for gain or pain, we
leave,
yet we remain.

Bring gently to the boil

Take wisdom of youth, impatience of age,
stir in exhausted hunger’s appetite for change,
add a pinch of common sense, an ounce of compassion,
America battered but back in the game,
and half the people, half the time,
coming to the boil at a rolling simmer
and whisk the mix to a stiff resolve.

MarinadeWeltschmerz in rage and time,
add idealism, green, raw and ready,
the fruits of science, bruised and ripe
to patiently declaim this globe’s demands,
blend in your refugees and help them settle,
add hope and ginger up, but sparingly,
for this is a season to taste not waste.

Ignore the instructions on wrappers,
don’t do what it says on the tin,
bin Escoffier, anarchist cookbooks,
ban cocktails, for toffs and Molotovs,
don’t do what it says on the tin,
bin Escoffier, anarchist cookbooks,
all banners bright will burn tonight
if you once take your eye off the heat.

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,
lost and found or gone to ground,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,

Now fold in all your leftovers,
lost and found or gone to ground,
your punks and social media junkies,
huddled masses, middle classes,
The problem with having to file copy over a week in advance of publication day means that sometimes what I write in this column can be superseded by events. So, I have to choose between voicing outdated opinions or making wild speculative predictions. Or both. So, I’m going with the wildly speculative this time around.

By the time you read this, Matt Hancock will have resigned or been handed his P45. And the very minute I typed that sentence, he had quit. I fully expected him to still be hanging on by his fingertips, still receiving Johnson’s full backing, with the PM doubtless trotting out his familiar mantra that ‘the matter is now closed’.

Hancock had already survived several scandals that would have prompted any politician with integrity to fall on their sword. Let’s recall: from the utter failure to source enough PPE for the NHS, to the abysmal fiasco of track and trace, to over 125,000 deaths on his watch as Health Secretary, to the doling out of government contacts and trace, to over 125,000 deaths on his watch as Health Secretary, to the doling out of government contacts to friends and family members. Somehow, he managed to survive, like a cockroach emerging from the rubble of a nuclear war. And, if we are to believe Dominic Cummings, Johnson reckoned back in March 2020 that Hancock was ‘fucking useless’.

So having screwed over the whole country, it should come as no surprise that Hancock would end up screwing his aide. Of course, the sexual relationship is not the scandal that it was intended to be – certainly not in the post-pandemic world. The scandal was that he breached guidelines for social distancing in the workplace. And I admit I actually have some sympathy for the ‘poor man’, as the Queen calls him. It must be bloody difficult shagging a work colleague while staying two metres apart. After all, Matt Hancock may be a massive prick, but that doesn’t mean that he has one of similar size.

So, why was Johnson so keen to stand by him? I’m guessing the PM was worried that if he sacked the Health Secretary, there could be a domino effect and he himself could be the next to go. In the words of the old joke, he is scared that his government could end up being like a piece of Ikea furniture: one loose screw and the whole cabinet falls down.

Basically, the whole scandal could have been averted if Matt Hancock had changed his last name to ‘Handjob’ and kept his cock in his pants until 21 June, when all restrictions were to be lifted, and it would be completely legal to get your end away in the broom cupboard or on top of the photocopier. However, as it turned out Freedom Day was postponed until 19 July, so I guess the ‘poor man’ just couldn’t hold out for that extra month.

The relaxing of all restrictions in England may have been put back by four weeks, but it appears no-one told the Tartan Army about this. We all saw the scenes on our TVs of Scotland fans flooding the streets of London, packed like sardines onto EasyJet flights, drinking the city dry and then buying massive carry-outs in the hope they might see the game despite having neither tickets to Wembley nor guaranteed seats to watch it on telly in a pub. The impromptu street parties, celebrated a nil-nil draw as the greatest victory in Scotland’s history.

Sadly, after that 23-year wait, the dream ended in the same predictable disappointment. All Scotland is going to take away from the Euros is a potential new strain of the virus caused by 20,000 idiots getting pissed, hugging each other and generally behaving like, er, football fans. Watch out for ‘The Wembley Variant’ or ‘The Gamma Variant Thought to Have Originated at Kings Cross Station’.

Malta and The Balearic Islands were added to the UK’s Green List at the end of June. However, after floods of unvaccinated British tourists descend on these Mediterranean hotspots taking a Greek alphabet’s worth of variants with them, it’s reasonable to assume that infection rates will soar. By the time you read this, the chances are that they will be put back onto the Amber List before most Brits arriving in Mallorca have had enough time to order their first pints of San Miguel.

Of course, by the time you read this, the UK may be at war with Russia - which would prove Boris Johnson’s biggest challenge in office so far. But he has the weapons to deal with. He could put Black Sea resorts onto the Green List, so all the same Brits move their holidays to Sochi. Then a week later move Russia’s status up to Amber, leaving the Russian authorities to deal with thousands of angry, disgruntled, drunk, sunburned Daily Express readers. Or, he could send the newly unemployed Matt Hancock to Moscow as a special health envoy. Sounds like a win-win situation.

Vladimir McTavish will be performing at the 2021 Edinburgh Fringe with his solo show ‘2020 Re-Vision - A Comedy Review of The Year That Was Cancelled’. Time, date and venue to be confirmed. Details will be advertised nearer the time on his Facebook page https://www.facebook.com/Vlad-McTavish-Comedy

**Remembering the UCS work-in**

Celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders’ work-in and Jimmy Reid with a new song, sung to the tune of the Wellerman sea shanty, and a lament read by various members of the U3A: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJ5LPGoDlTI&ab_channel=U3AGlasgowWestEnd

The film and song were produced by the Glasgow West End and Paisley U3A (University of the Third Age) Local History Research Project. Alan Dickson wrote the song and lament. Our thanks are to him for explaining the rationale for doing this at the end of the film.
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

Britain’s specialist transport union
Campaigning for workers in the rail, maritime, offshore/energy, bus and road freight sectors

www.rmt.org.uk
General Secretary: Mick Cash
President: Michelle Rodgers