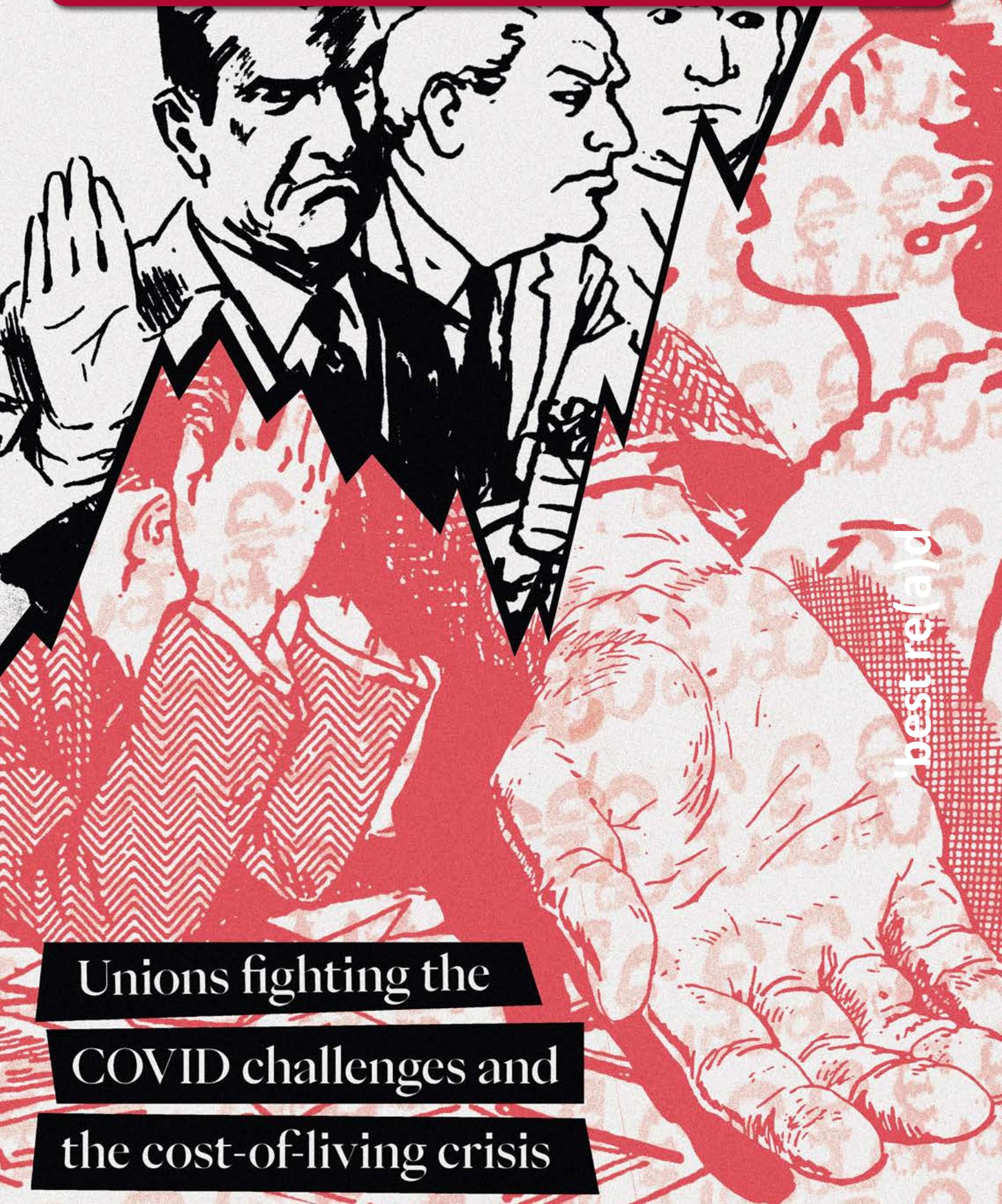


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Unions fighting the
COVID challenges and
the cost-of-living crisis

Allan McDougall

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comment

The hope of humanity?

There is a relatively well-known saying on the left that ‘the cause of labour is the hope of the world’. It is one which the left-wing magazine, *Tribune*, for example, continues to promote. Labour here is not the Labour Party but workers whose labour creates the wealth of the world but who never receive anything approximating to its fair share of that wealth. Walter Crane in 1894 created the illustration of the ‘The Workers’ Maypole’ for the socialist newspaper, *Justice*, from which the dictum is derived. Amongst the demands adorning the maypole are ‘socialisation’, ‘solidarity’ and ‘humanity’. These are expressed in the aforementioned saying along with another one on the maypole being ‘the hope of labour is the welfare of all’.

More than one hundred and twenty-five years on from then – and certainly from the founding of the STUC in 1897 and which, thus, celebrates its 125th anniversary this year – Crane’s proclamation still seems significantly true in two senses. First, that labour is the hope of humanity. And, second, it is not Labour that is the hope of humanity. On the occasion of the STUC’s 125th congress in Aberdeen at the end of April, this editorial examines the veracity of the latter contention first.

May local elections

We have two articles on the forthcoming local government elections by James Mitchell and Ellie Harrison on 5 May plus a range of contributions from candidates standing for election and looking to attract your vote. The article from those on the left in Scottish Labour did not materialise.

Labour in Scotland and Britain is a party which is no longer social democratic. ‘New’ Labour was the death knell to any social democratic aspiration and it was not rescued or resuscitated by Corbyn. The highpoint of social democratic action by Labour in office was the 1945-1950 Attlee-led Labour government. Its actions led to the creation of the NHS, modern welfare state, widespread public ownership and so on. Some of its acts were relatively uncontroversial given that the popular mood had swung in a leftward direction and there was consensus from across the political spectrum (including many Tories) that the state needed to intervene in the economy to resuscitate British capitalism. But there were limits to these progressive actions such as resistance to demands for an end to British imperialism and development of nuclear weapons.

Nonetheless, Labour was willing to use the state to intervene in the market’s processes to alter its outcomes for progressive ends. Looking at the policies of Starmer and Sarwar, this is no longer true. Whilst both may advocate state intervention on occasion, it is not with socialising the means of production, distribution and exchange in mind (and which continue to be in the control of private ownership). Like Blair and Brown before them, both Starmer and Sarwar are in favour of making capitalism more efficient (by using the state) in order to pay for social provision. It means the foundation of society continues to be fundamentally unequal and, where there is any benefit to be had, it is through piecemeal amelioration.

Quintessentially, this makes Starmer and Sarwar no different from Sturgeon, Swinney and the SNP. When we look outside of Labour and the SNP, neither the Scottish Greens nor Alba seem to offer something substantially and progressively different. For the Greens, they seem to have at this stage given

Welcome to Derek McKechnie

Our new cover designer is Derek McKechnie. Derek is a graduate of the Gray’s School of Art at Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen. He previously contributed a graphic commemorating the UCS work-in for the back cover of the *Scottish Left Review* (May/June 2021). We look forward to other striking cover designs from him. His website is <https://www.derekmckechnie.com/> and he can be contacted at Derekmc90@icloud.com

up a lot to be in government with little evidence of much in the way of return – see Stella Rooney’s article in this issue. Others may say that even if the Greens and Alba did offer something substantially different, both are too small to make a positive difference. At a time when the 10% richest in Scotland are 200 times better off than the 10% poorest in Scotland, this shows up the poverty of political ambition of these mainstream parties.

The highpoint of the radical left in Scotland has long since dissipated. After the splitting of the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) in 2006 by Tommy Sheridan forming Solidarity, Solidarity has now deregistered itself as a political party and now operates as a network within Alba. Meantime, the SSP has not been able to regain its prominence, with RISE folding after its failure to make a breakthrough in 2016. Other continuing left offerings like the Scottish Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (STUSC) have not managed to create any lift-off for themselves.

So, the political parties of the centre-left and left in Scotland offer very little of worth to address the multi-faceted crisis of contemporary capitalism. We do not have the glimmers of hope that a radical left offers (or did offer) in

the likes of small states like Belgium, Denmark and Portugal. Therefore, this brings us back to labour and the second contention that labour is the hope for humanity. This is not to suggest a form of syndicalism, whether formal politics is eschewed. Rather, it is to suggest that political parties and governments can be influenced from without if unions are organised in a united, powerful and effective way.

That would seem to require a coherent and comprehensive strategy based upon mobilisation of members and resources – and which is much more multi-faceted than simply calling for a general strike (though that would have its place too). In response to the emerging cost of living crisis, it is easy to call for mass mobilisation – or as Roz Foyer, STUC general secretary did in the *Sunday Herald* (23 January 2022): ‘We need to build a big, bad, angry movement for change. Working-class people have more power than they dare imagine and we need to start exercising it’. It is, however, one thing to have the ambition and quite another to have the capability to do so.

Such calls for resistance were made by many when the Con-Dem coalition in 2010 began its introduction of austerity. Very little effective resistance materialised. Why should this time round be any different? The protests called by the People’s Assembly Scotland on 12 February in Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow were not auspicious starts if their size is any barometer. We can’t let console ourselves with ‘the weather wasn’t good’.

The hope is that the cost-of-living crisis will affect more people more sharply and more detrimentally and at the same time. Austerity involved different groups of people – but not all people outside the wealthy and power- being affected in different ways and at different times depending on what services they needed to access. Now, the situation may be different as rising inflation with stagnating wages produced a more generalised effect of declining real wages. But this is not to say the worse it gets, the better it gets because there is not automatic or mechanical response to declining living standards. Added to this is the sense that a government of toffs for toffs is in crisis, meaning a hated enemy is seen as weakened, thus, making resistance

seem more worthwhile.

So, this is where the unions come in, starting with the STUC and its 550,000 members through its affiliates. This, many would think, is already a movement and a fairly big one at that. But it is a passive actor until it is not. It is the challenge for the left to find ways to motivate and mobilise these members (and their families and friends) in alliance with like-minded allies (anti-poverty campaigners, the left and the like).

The last time round that unions successfully rose to this challenge was the early 1970s but they did so from a much higher base. Fifty years ago, the miners broke through the Tory government’s pay policy with mass, militant action. Saltley Gates on 10 February 1972 was the clincher.

So, labour can be the hope of humanity again but it will not be easy. Indeed,

we did not turn Saltley in Orgreave in the miners’ strike of 1984-1985. We know that the sources of workers’ power and influence are associational (collectivising through organisations like unions), structural (being capable of causing disruption at key points in the system of production, distribution and exchange), coalitional (through alliance building with others), institutional (within the institutions of government and state regulation) and discursive (by framing narratives). Yet going about creating them is another task entirely. *Scottish Left Review* would welcome thoughts on how such working-class power can be reimagined and regenerated. And, of course, if there is hope for the left making advances in any of these aforementioned parties, then also please give us your thoughts here including what role unions have to play in doing so.

Anniversaries abound and celebrations continue

First of all, many happy returns to the STUC on its 125th birthday. The spring and summer hold other important anniversaries, whether they be Workers’ Memorial Day on 28 April 2022, the fiftieth anniversary of Jimmy Reid’s rectorial address at the University of Glasgow on 28 April 1972 (see https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media_167194_smx.pdf for the text of the full address) and the aforementioned Saltley Gates. Of course, May Day follows soon afterwards. The earliest date in this diet is International Women’s Day on 8 March. We are glad that in this issue of *Scottish Left Review* we have a majority of women contributors. Our sister organisation, the Jimmy Reid Foundation, held a successful virtual meeting on advancing the rights of women in unions with women leaders of the STUC, UNISON and Wales TUC on 2 March. We are grateful to Lilian Macer stepping in to replace Christina McAnea at the last minute.

Ukraine

We will carry full analysis of the situation in the next *Scottish Left Review* issue as restrictions on space prevent us from doing so in this issue. Suffice it to say here, we are glad to see much of the left has not only condemned the Russian invasion but in going beyond the platitudes of ‘no war but the class war’ and ‘a plague on both your houses’ has also avoided the position of ‘my enemy’s enemy is my friend’ by making two key points. First, the Russian state’s actions are part of continuing imperialist rivalries, where NATO has expanded eastwards. This does not justify the invasion but it does in part help explain it. Second, these imperialist actions can only further threaten the interests of workers, humanity and the environment, whether in Ukraine, Russia or elsewhere. These imperialist actions constitute moves to secure strategic assets to protect the interests of the various ruling classes in each country. We applaud the brave anti-war protestors in Russia as well as the courageous citizens defending themselves in Ukraine. We must hope that Russian troops become mutinous as a result of demoralisation due to their poor treatment and disagreement with Putin’s plan. Readers can support unions outside Ukraine helping unions in Ukraine help workers in Ukraine by donating at <https://petitions.ituc-csi.org/support-ukraine?lang=en>

STUC'S masterclass in building back better for a fair and green Scotland



Roz Foyer critiques the 'business as usual' thinking and rallies us for a fight

Last year in *Scottish Left Review's* STUC congress, I argued for a People's Recovery, setting out our demands for a different track for Scotland's economy. Now as our class faces the worst cost-of-living crisis for decades and the Scottish Government has finally launched its long anticipated National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET), it's a good time to reflect on what progress we've made and what working people need to do to win a fairer share of the wealth and power in our economy.

Launching the NSET, Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Kate Forbes, said the next decade will be the decisive one when governments will stand or fall based on the long-term economic decisions made to rebuild economies post-Covid and set them on a journey to net zero. She then laid out the five pillars of the government's ten-year plan: i) embedding an entrepreneurial approach across our society; ii) identifying and attracting investment to new market opportunities; iii) supporting increased productivity and innovation; iv) improving skills with a lifetime approach to upskilling and retraining; and v) building a fairer and more equal society through developing a Wellbeing Economy and Fair Work approach.

As a member of the advisory group helping inform NSET, on behalf of the STUC, I argued hard for the kind of transformative economic measures that were set out in our People's Recovery plan. Instead, the Scottish Government's plan is more a strategy for deepening the economic *status quo* than economic transformation.

NSET has a sprinkling of good ideas around the lifelong skills agenda and we have successfully argued for some strong lines on the importance of Fair Work, decent pay and the role of unions, with welcome statements being made around Fair Work conditionality, the key role of collective bargaining and the need for sectoral bargaining to be developed in sectors like hospitality where low pay is endemic. But overall, it is a missed opportunity to address the challenges before us and make manifest, transformational change.

The Scottish economy's main engine is the foundational economy, being it biggest employer and encompassing transport, retail, energy generation, distribution and, importantly, education and public services. So, at the NSET's heart should have been a strategy to increase pay and improve terms and conditions in these sectors. Investing in public services offers huge opportunity to support sustainable growth while tackling poverty and inequality.

Over the coming years we face enormous challenges, none greater than the journey to net zero, a journey that must be carefully planned to ensure we create good, secure jobs that do not leave communities abandoned. Whilst the NSET talks about the potential for future development in the renewables and low carbon economy it fails to acknowledge previous failures or, more importantly, how we can learn from them and build a new industrial strategy.

Scotland is not immune from global economic shocks or Downing Street's self-inflicted economic damage. Financialised capitalism embeds structural inequalities as evidenced by the escalating cost-of-living crisis. Addressing these structural inequalities is fundamental and it will certainly not be solved by prioritising Scotland becoming a 'magnet for global private capital' nor through the appointment of a 'Chief Entrepreneurship Officer'. While genuinely building new business start-ups is good, flooding the economy with new start-ups, too many of which then fail, is not.

The public sector has an enormous role to play in our economic transformation yet it is barely mentioned in NSET. Neither is there any mention of tax – which is crucial to tackling inequality and raising revenue. Paying lip-service to community wealth building and the desire for a well-being economy will not deliver the change needed. Serious planning for economic transformation means the Scottish Government must develop a green industrial strategy and invest in our public sector and the local authorities that make our vital services a reality.

So, the STUC will continue to engage with Scottish Government both on taking forward the more positive elements and aspirations of this strategy and to ensure the foundational economy is not left behind in Scotland's economic future. But the question remains: what must working people do to deliver a People's Recovery? Politicians, corporations and the billionaires aren't going to listen to our proposals or give up their grip on the country's wealth unless we make them.

So, we need to build a big, broad and angry alliance - we need to mobilise and build people power. That has to start with a strong organising and collectivising approach in our workplaces and in our communities. It starts with local and relevant issues and showing folk that by acting collectively on issues like cuts to libraries, or acting through tenants' unions, or taking strike action for a decent pay rise at your workplace, you can make change happen.

Then it requires political education and movement building to go broad and build alliances across a range of divides; it needs us to find winnable issues that can unite us; it needs us to demand better from our political parties and meaningful manifesto commitments; it needs us to motivate people to have hope, have confidence, and get actively involved in piling on the pressure and visibly backing our demands. It needs leadership and for organisations like the union movement to knit together a diverse range of interests into rising class struggle.

It isn't an easy option. It will take time. But there are no alternatives if we want to see radical change to our economic system and how it works. So, let's put our energy into movement building like never before and build people power. When we do that, we will be heard because standing together and demanding our fair share with one strong voice will make us more powerful than we dare imagine.

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

'Unite and fight': It's why we're a success story during the combined COVID and cost-of-living challenges

Pat Rafferty outlines how UNITE turned challenges into opportunities

It's rightly assumed – though often goes without saying like many things – but a union is nothing without its members. The last two difficult years have really brought this fact to the fore. The union reps, shop stewards, convenors and the individual members who give up their time to turn up to meetings: it's these people who literally make a union work. We have never taken this for granted but throughout the pandemic perhaps all of us have come to value and appreciate this remarkable contribution to workplace and union democracy even more.

Unite representatives have continued to work selflessly for our members throughout the pandemic as we have all had to adjust to the new 'normal' particularly in the world of work. While restrictions have curbed our lives the fact is that for the vast majority of our members going to the workplace has continued. This has certainly been true for our heroic social carers, offshore workers, local government, transport, food processing and manufacturing workers.

In contrast, many finance sector workers, call centre staff, and workers in the hospitality and catering sector were either furloughed or had to adjust to the new normal of working from home. This change has brought major challenges and anxieties in terms of their mental and physical well-being, financial concerns along with trying to deal with the blurring lines between work and home life. A number of issues have grown in importance due to workers rightly feeling concerned about their well-being at home, getting to and from the workplace alongside being safe if they have had to be in the workplace itself.

We have had to develop new ways of communicating with our members. In many cases this has been in the form of holding virtual meetings, and increasing the frequency of electronic ballots. It has also involved hosting meetings within the workplace in line with Covid regulations and procedures.

It goes without saying that this has

been an extremely difficult period for all unions to operate in. It's been an environment which many employers have attempted to exploit by conditioning workers into believing that they should somehow be 'grateful' for even having a job - an attempt that has often been accompanied by the scandalous practice of 'fire and re-hire'.

There is always the misconception perpetuated by the mainstream media which is that all unions want to do is strike. Anyone who knows anything about unions is acutely aware that it's often the most difficult decision to take. It requires bravery and sacrifice. But doing this during the pandemic requires extra strength.



We have seen workers in offices, plants, depots and factories across Scotland stand up time and time again during the pandemic. Our members have confronted bad and rogue employers head-on to say 'enough is enough'. Example after example demonstrates workers will not tolerate being treated in a derisory and insulting way by employers under the cloak of Covid.

Bus drivers, warehouse workers, logistic drivers, manufacturing workers, engineers, and North Sea workers have fought and won in the battle for better jobs, pay and conditions. Millions of pounds have been secured in pay rises, and better shift pay. More than 1,300 Stagecoach bus drivers across Scotland took a stand after supporting strike action, and forced the employers back to the table winning on average a £1,700 rise. Pay rises of up to 21.5% over the next two years were also secured for more than 1,300 First Bus Glasgow drivers.

Unite's members at Carntyne Transport achieved an inflation busting pay rise of

19%. Warehouse workers at Tennent's lager in Cambuslang won 11%, while DHL workers in Bellshill secured a pay increase of up to 19%. Unite's members who provide specialist services at the Royal Naval Armaments Depot Coulport won a significant victory after bravely taking strike action. The ABL Alliance workers will now receive backdated pay in their pockets of up to £1,700.

In the offshore sector, Unite has been organising and mobilising our members to defeat major oil and gas contractors. Around 100 members working on the Canadian Natural Resources contract for offshore contractor, Petrofac, had their 10% salary reduction reinstated, and in doing so, they secured a new pay deal which amounted to a 17% salary increase. Strike action by around 300 members working for Ponticelli and Semco Maritime also forced the employers back to the table with a new improved offer which was accepted by our members.

There has also been a string of notable victories for our members at Abellio Scotrail, in the local government pay dispute, and at the Dalkeith-based print firm, FLB. Through strike action, our members at the University of Dundee also forced management to think again over proposals which would have plunged our members into pension poverty. Pressure from our members in the Scottish Ambulance Service forced the Scottish Government to invest an extra £20m into the service on top of £20m announced in September 2021.

So, the last two years has been one of major challenges but also of major wins. It is with confidence and belief that we look towards the future in our communities and workplaces as the restrictions are lifted. We salute and applaud the brave stand our members have taken in fighting back. If there is one story of this pandemic which really strikes home for me it is that old adage: when workers stand together everything is possible.

Pat Rafferty is UNITE Scotland Regional Secretary

In the face of adversity, in unison we have shown strength, resilience and adaptability

Lilian Macer says only unions have offered - and continue to offer - the hope of standing up for workers

The rhetoric from the UK Government is that Covid pandemic is over. However, as unions, we've all now seen the changeability of this situation and know that the virus remains a threat. As we look back over what has been two very tough years of the pandemic, I hope the Scottish Government see what we can all see: that it was public sector workers who carried this country through.

UNISON members have worked tirelessly to keep everyone safe at huge cost to their own well-being and are now physically and mentally exhausted. We knew that the current health and care system was going to be overwhelmed regardless of Covid. The winter plans for the past number of years failed to deliver the capacity required to meet the demand and the virus has simply brought this into much sharper focus.

UNISON Scotland, staff and activists, certainly upped our game during the pandemic seeking to support thousands upon thousands of our members affected by furlough; attending working environments which were a heightened risk to life; or who were forced overnight to turn their homes into workplaces.

A Unions21 report commissioned from the Sheffield Political Economy Research Institute (SPERI) at the University of Sheffield concluded: i) The pandemic has led unions to review all aspects of their work. Unions have transformed their working practices and embraced remote working; ii) Unions have adapted to create new digital ways for workers to act and speak together, and developed new forms and methods of campaigning, negotiating, lobbying, training and representation, blending on and offline work; and iii) Unions have a renewed sense of purpose. A survey of union staff found that 70% think their union is stronger now than before the pandemic began.

All the messages from this study ring true in UNISON Scotland. Union organisers and activists have always been flexible about how we access our members

individually and collectively (shopfloors, coffee shops, yard gates, streets, homes and gardens, cars and vans). Whilst our union offices are key hubs, they are now more open and accessible on digital platforms. This is a huge opportunity and like many our own workplaces will never be the same. However, they will also remain a safe haven for the right to assemble and combine in person. That's often where our strongest work begins!

Technology though also helps us to reach out to workers in workplaces in new and exciting ways. Residential homes, social care workers, outsourced catering and cleaning staff are good examples of this. Organising campaigns and strikes have been carried out without anyone ever being in the same room, and under the noses of employers without their knowledge.

New cohorts of activists in the union have also been brought into the life of the union via digital portals. Flexible activist training, 'bite sized sessions' and modular learning have made the journey into activism easier and often quicker. This 'new model/new technology' army are the future lifeblood of our union so we are wired for activism.

Like the COVID spikes, membership levels have ebbed and flowed. Many treated their membership like the vaccine: a one-off hit for protection. Many who feel less in danger, having been protected by the efforts of our union (and others) in local government, schools and early years, social care, health services, are cancelling union membership as the demographic of an aging (retiring) workforce becomes a reality and workers scrutinise their household budgets. This is a challenge for all the unions to sustain and build our strength at a time of greatest challenge in the shape of the cost-of-living crisis

The pandemic has shown the worth of collective bargaining and helped potentially to expand its reach in social care in the context of reform of that sector. Facilitated furlough use across the college sector saved jobs; the Scottish Living Wage, though not enough, was rolled out quicker into social care; sick

pay schemes extended in NHS Scotland for those with short service as well as 'long Covid' sufferers; and health and safety at work scaling the priorities on COSLA employers' desks, often through union insistence and perseverance at government and employer levels.

We come out of 2020/21 bloodied but unbowed. We need to be at our strongest yet in order to face the threat to working people's earnings from the cost-of-living crisis, after years of austerity and pandemic. These are years where our living standards have declined whilst at the same time, as Polly Toynbee put it in her recent BBC documentary, *The Decade the Rich Won*: 'A silent class war has taken place during the past decade, as the winners have carried off undreamed of booty. Thanks mostly to the banks' quantitative easing which inflates assets, not productive investment, the decade created billionaires, who's wealth rose by 310%'. Holding wages down will not stop the cost-of-living soaring. We cannot allow workers to pay for yet another economic crisis they did not create. So, we must act as a collective through the STUC to demand that the government deliver the cash so this year's wage increases are above the rate of inflation. Otherwise, the consequences will be disastrous for everyone. Who else will stand up for the workers in this latest battle? If not us, then who?

Link to *Unions21* report: <https://unions21.org.uk/ideas/covid-19-and-the-work-of-unions-new-challenges-and-new-response>

Lilian Macer is the Convenor of UNISON Scotland

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The EIS: Covid-embattled but still 175 years strong

Andrea Bradley recounts how the EIS responded rapidly and radically to the 'new' normal in education

As the world's oldest teacher union, the EIS has faced massive tests of its strength and resilience throughout its 175-year history. Covid's capacity to shake education's foundations to their very core - not only in Scotland but worldwide - could have been startling. But there was simply no time to be stunned. Seeing the size and scale of the challenges facing our members in every education sector, the EIS's reflex action was swift, deft and sustained.

As a union formed in the nineteenth century and whose systems in many ways were a legacy of the Victorian era, the urgency of moving operations online when meetings and mailings abruptly ground to a halt during the first lockdown, could have been a test too great. But in a matter of days, the EIS was using digital technology that prior to the arrival of Covid had only been fledgling and had been regarded with more than a degree of scepticism by members and staff alike.

The acuteness of the need became the antidote to any technophobia and Teams, Zoom and Webex fast became our meeting rooms. This is where we examined, debated, and strategised to tackle the vast array of challenges that Covid immediately brought to a sector whose work pre-pandemic was almost exclusively grounded in face-to-face interactions of large numbers of people within physical buildings.

Quickly impressive to see was the relentless commitment of EIS activists and staff to EIS members, no matter where in the country they were working or in which rooms of their houses. The strength of that commitment is an asset that the EIS is now, perhaps, more acutely conscious of.

Campaigning throughout the pandemic to secure critical health and safety protections, and acceptable remote learning arrangements both for teachers and pupils, the EIS has utilised both traditional means - letters and emails, press and media - and digital to lobby government and local authority employers nationally.

To ensure the EIS's national body and Local Associations (LAs) were in-step,

regular meetings of EIS LAs Secretaries, Organisers, Area Officers and national officers and officials took place to co-ordinate the emergency response. All had to adapt at pace to the online environment: the mechanics of the technology, the altered dynamics of human interaction, and the increased frequency and range of meetings enabled by the absence of travel time, in the context of an entirely new set of threats to our members. What was originally expected to be a very short-lived crisis response, due to the prolonged nature of the pandemic, has remained unchanged.



A lesson well-learned is that digital technology - while not necessarily first choice - can be used well to facilitate the democratic processes that sets our campaigning objectives and strategy, and then enables the associated actions. So, whilst virtual meetings might not be first preference for some, for others, such as disabled and BAME members, and women with younger children to care for, it has enabled much greater participation. This is something we will keep in mind as we move towards the restoration of the in-person dimensions of organising and campaigning: inclusivity of approaches. The capacity to adapt and to deploy creative thinking has been essential- another key learning from the Covid experience so far.

As well as battling on health and safety across all sectors from nursery to universities, we provided a raft of online union learning opportunities for members as part of our organising strategy. We intuitively understood the need to stay connected with members in this way, making sure that the learning was directly responsive to member need.

Two very comprehensive all-member surveys, with strong supporting communications to elicit exceptionally high response rates, enabled us to stay in touch with members' views in order to inform national and local

campaigning. More than ever, we understand how essential this kind of data collection is to strategy.

On the industrial relations front, we've supported LAs to declare local disputes on Covid-related health and safety issues and organised a series of successful ballots and industrial action campaigns in higher and further education, with Teams, Twitter and email substituting where they've had to for in-person branch meetings and demos; and where industrial action coincided with buildings being open, socially distanced workplace picketing. Traditional tactics have continued where possible and been adapted to fit the context where they could not.

We've learned from this situation that while the methods might have to differ, the underpinning principles of any campaigning or organising activity should be the same: the grievance must be widely and deeply felt if members are to be sufficiently engaged in action towards winning; that sufficient time is needed to do the work in talking with members, building the grievance and engagement, particularly where ballots are involved; and that staying in control of the narrative is critical to outcomes.

A consultative ballot at the turn of our 175th year on our Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT) pay claim, supported by largely online and social media organising and campaigning, came at a point in time when teachers were thoroughly exhausted. But we beat the anti-union support thresholds and delivered almost unanimous rejection of an unacceptable pay offer. That's testament to our union's strength. That ballot result tells us, though, we have more to do to support members' recovery from the pandemic, build the grievance and willingness of members to act on pay restoration, and to shift into campaigning mode on class contact time, class size and workload reduction. We have more to do. And 175 years strong, and two Covid years wiser, we will do it.

Andrea Bradley is an assistant general secretary of the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) union

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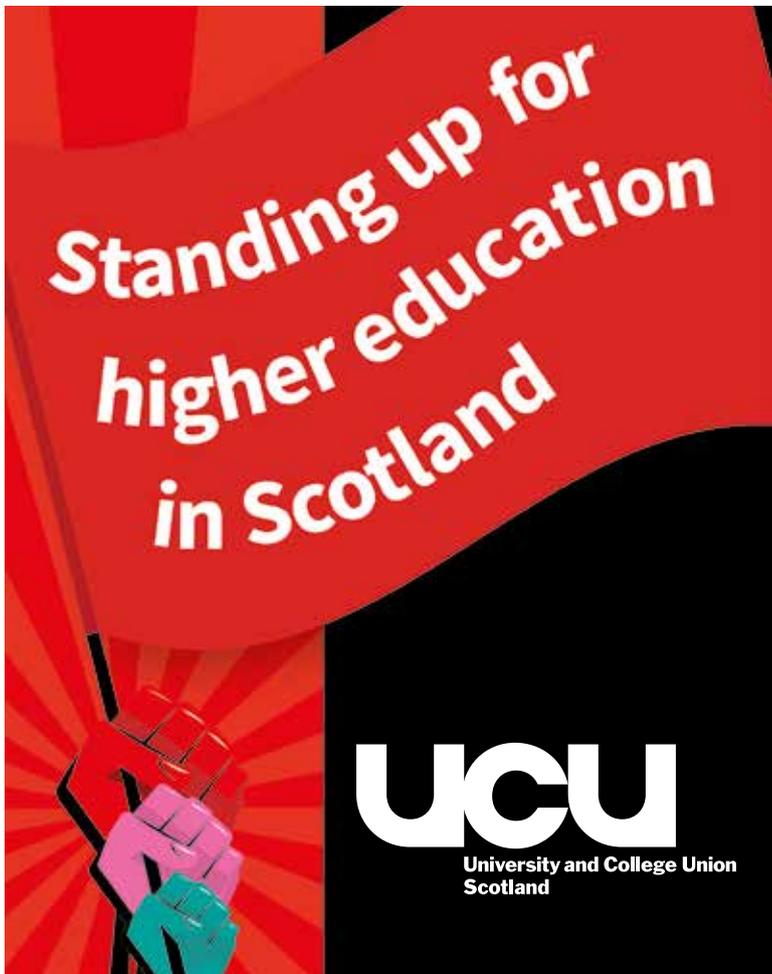
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Fighting for fairness in retail when ‘every little helps’ is just not enough

Tracy Gilbert recounts how Usdaw has risen to the challenges workers face in the retail sector

After almost two years since the first lockdown, and as we are ushered into the ‘living with Covid’ era, it’s perhaps a good time to reflect on one of the most tumultuous periods in Usdaw’s history. Like every other organisation, Usdaw was thrown into a crisis situation not seen for generations. Overnight, we had to figure out how to best communicate remotely, prevent mass redundancies, keep our members safe and provide an uninterrupted service to Usdaw reps and members who would be working on the frontline.

Usdaw worked closely with its sister unions and the TUC to lobby the Westminster Government to ensure that the concerns of workers were taken into account when policy decisions were made. Our lobbying resulted in key worker status for the majority of our members and the furlough scheme which prevented millions of redundancies.

We also worked closely with employers to ensure improved safety measures were implemented in workplaces with enhanced social distancing, plastic screens and limiting the number of customers in stores. In addition, we also won 10% pay bonuses, sick pay from day one, shielding for vulnerable colleagues and enhanced colleague discounts.

However, the last two years have taken a toll. We are a member-facing union so not being able to see our reps and members was a huge challenge. Recruitment took a hit because Covid restrictions made it more difficult to access inductions, and our academy and standdown programmes were cancelled which are vital to our recruitment success.

As things return to some kind of normality, our union will once again be prioritising recruitment through our academies and standdown. A large part of our work will include supporting and developing our reps and making sure every rep knows how to recruit and has the confidence to do it.

Usdaw’s campaigns have been a great way of engaging with members. Reps who tend to run the campaigns use

them as a way of raising awareness, getting a temperature check on issues, collecting signatures for petitions and recruiting non-members. Our campaigns are rooted in our members’ experiences which ensure they resonate with workers. This also means that thousands of members participate which has been instrumental in helping us achieve some long-standing goals.

Our recent survey results showed that over 90% of retail workers have been abused in the last year and 1 in 7 have been physically assaulted. Thanks to Usdaw’s campaigning and the work reps and members did in highlighting this problem through the media last year, Scottish MSPs voted through a new ground-breaking law to give shopworkers the protection they deserve. This came into force in August 2021. In addition, the UK Government has finally agreed to stronger legislation that could lead to stiffer sentences for those who assault shopworkers. We are currently waiting to see what this will look like.



Our recent cost-of-living survey found spiralling inflation and rising fuel, energy and food prices were pushing many household budgets to breaking point. Usdaw members were skipping meals to make ends meet or they were struggling to heat their homes. Usdaw will continue calling for the National Minimum Wage to be immediately increased to at least £10 per hour for all workers, for workers to be given a right to a normal hours contract, job security, an end to zero-hour contracts and better sick pay. Usdaw negotiators have had some fantastic wins in recent months which include Morrison’s, IKEA, Sainsbury’s and Argos all agreeing to pay at least £10 per hour.

Usdaw’s ‘Christmas is Not Working’ campaign calls on retailers to give their staff a proper Christmas break and allow them some much-needed family time. An Usdaw survey of over 12,000 retail

workers found that 97% think shops should be closed on Boxing Day. In 2021, Usdaw ramped up its campaign and more retailers than ever agreed to close on Boxing Day including Sainsbury’s, Argos, Habitat, Morrisons, Poundland and Central England Co-operative, giving hundreds and thousands of Usdaw members a decent break. Other companies reinforced the voluntary status of working Boxing Day and New Year’s Day.

Usdaw has been campaigning for 14 years for large retail stores in Scotland to close on New Year’s Day. Our survey results could not be clearer with 99% of members agreeing that large stores in Scotland should close on New Year’s Day and three-quarters saying they spend too little time with friends and family. Scottish Ministers have the power to prohibit large retail stores from opening on New Year’s Day but have chosen not to do this. With the help of Usdaw members signing our petition in droves, we managed to persuade the Scottish Government to launch a consultation on closing large stores on New Year’s Day. We are now waiting for the Scottish Government to respond.

The pandemic brought into sharp focus the inequalities in our society. Workers around the world are sick and tired of companies making millions in profit yet paying staff wages they can barely live on. They’ve had enough of stagnant pay, long hours, deteriorating terms and conditions and little flexibility. Globally, we have seen a resurgence of the union movement with millions demanding better pay and conditions. This has been mirrored south of the border, with increased industrial action involving rail workers, civil servants, bin workers, lecturers and Usdaw members in Weetabix, BCM and Tesco distribution. Labour shortages caused by resignations and supply chain issues have, for the first time in decades, given workers the upper hand so now is the time to demand change and a fairer more equal society.

Tracy Gilbert is the Scottish Regional Secretary of Usdaw

Knowledge is necessary but power is absolutely essential for protecting workers

Mary Senior argues an alliance of staff and students is the surest foundation for protecting higher education

It's two years since the pandemic hit, and university staff and students shifted online overnight. In the higher education sector, we've experienced more than our fair share of challenges, from Covid, health and safety, and from recalcitrant employers determined to use the pandemic and the economic climate to attack workers' terms and conditions.

In lifting the remainder of Covid restrictions in England, Johnson appears to think he can signal the end of the pandemic. Indeed, our own Scottish Government seems set on following the same path. UCU has taken a safety-first approach from the start and been clear you cannot gamble with people's lives. It is far from evident that the virus has dissipated, and high levels of the virus remain in the community. This is not to mention the unanswered questions on vaccine wane, the uncertainty of new variants emerging, and thousands of forgotten people suffering 'long Covid'.

Given recent outbreaks on university campuses, we'll continue to demand safety first, and that sensible protections remain in place, including face coverings, enhanced ventilation and physical distancing - keeping students and staff safe. Union health and safety reps really stepped up to the plate, and will continue to do so in the face of bosses and governments prioritising profits over safety and wellbeing.

And our movement's input into the Scottish and UK-wide Covid inquiries is going to be critical in ensuring workers' voices are heard, there is no cover up, and that lessons are truly learned for the future. Not least, we need to ensure the decade of austerity is exposed for its decimation of lifeline public services and essential infrastructure, leaving services struggling before the pandemic hit. Coronavirus has not been a leveller: it has magnified the inequalities in society today. We have some investing and rebuilding to do, to better support our vital public services.

In the university sector, we cannot underestimate the impact lockdown and the shift to online and hybrid working has had on a creaking education

system, where workloads were already unsustainable. A UCU Scotland survey of university staff last summer revealed over three quarters of respondents' workloads increased over the pandemic, many of them to dangerously high levels. Over a fifth of academics work an extra two days a week on top of their contracted hours. The unsafe workloads and precarity in the university sector mean that up to half of all staff are showing signs of depression and almost a third are feeling emotionally drained by work every day.

This anger over unsafe workloads, and the frustration over insecure contracts, unequal pay, and the fact that university workers' pay has lost over 25% of its real terms value since 2009, makes for a workforce that feels demotivated, undervalued and furious with university bosses. These frustrations have been compounded by the brutal attacks on university workers' pensions.



The anger and disenchantment of workers, with staff at breaking point, has been channelled through UCU's statutory industrial action balloting and campaigning on pensions, pay and working conditions, in the two UK-wide disputes that, unfortunately but necessarily, rumble on.

UCU has proved once again that it is one of only a handful of unions able to mobilise members on a UK-wide scale in a strike ballot and win a strong mandate for action. This has been secured through dedicated reps and activists, and their sheer hard work and systematic approaches to engaging with members. Contacting them over email, Teams calls, text messaging and face-to-face where possible. This, complemented by UK-wide campaigns where thousands of members joined Zoom sessions with our general secretary, Jo Grady, was able to harness the frustration, concern and anger from workers at the treatment being meted out by university bosses. Bosses are on six figure salaries and perks, far

removed from the reality of workers struggling with unsafe workloads, or hourly paid temporary contracts. Bosses are simply not listening to staff over the issue of pensions, instead just pushing through brutal cuts to workers' deferred pay, which are resulting in workers on average having a pension 35% lower in retirement.

The importance of building alliances of people in struggles is key, transcending individual disputes and the pandemic. For UCU representing academic and professional support staff in universities our natural allies are the students. Working together with the National Union of Students (NUS) in the recent 'Rally for Education', where hundreds of staff and students protested outside the Scottish Parliament, helped to cement our relationship and co-dependence. Staff and students are stuck with a broken education system which is leaving students in poverty and fails to value staff. The rally hammered home the message that we must change a sector that leaves students homeless, relying on food banks or needing to drop out of their courses. The same failing system is exploiting staff, attacking their pensions, undervaluing their work, and leaving gaping equality pay gaps.

The cost-of-living crisis is simply compounding these grievances, and only bolstering workers' resolve to get a better deal for university staff and students. As the union comes away from ten days of strike action in February and early March, to regroup and consider our next steps, nothing is off the table. With the prospect of further strike days, continuing action short of strike, including the possibility of marking boycotts and more, UCU will be considering the most effective levers to win change. This means inspiring more workers to join us, continuing to work with the NUS and students' associations - our working conditions are students' learning conditions - and demonstrating to employers that there is a better, fairer way for higher education that values those delivering the learning, research and student support.

Mary Senior is the University and College Union (UCU)'s Scotland official

The eyes have it: eyeing the opportunities over the coming period to surge ahead through struggle

Cat Boyd says the PCS union is developing its bargaining agenda and wants to work with others to achieve this

When pundits and politicians say that the pandemic has changed everything, I can only hope that they are right. The global Covid-19 crisis made clear the systematic inequalities in our economies, societies and politics. The pandemic hit the poorest hardest and the richest least. As we emerge from this crisis, as inflation soars across Britain, the union movement can be at the forefront of forcing change, to make sure that we do not go back to the way things were. The changed world of work, the cost-of-living crisis and the political situation in Scotland are the three key issues.

First, since March 2020, working life has changed drastically for huge parts of the workforce. The civic duty to 'work from home' was adopted by thousands of organisations, and many, such as the Scottish Government and related public bodies where we have members, have continued to support working from home where possible. In January, the PM announced that workers should head back into their offices, and that the civil service should 'lead the way'. Typical of the Westminster Governments' callous attitude during the pandemic and towards the civil service in general, the PM's comments infuriated. However, as circumstances change, there are opportunities for working people and their unions to negotiate a better settlement than either continuing to work from home or returning to the office like its 2019.

Working from home, like working from an office, has its benefits. But long hours without colleagues, inadequate space and the blurring of work-life boundaries bring different problems. Working from an office for some means having a richer, more social, and more interactive working life than working from home, with only digital contact with fellow staff. But the environmental and productivity impacts of home working are also undeniable. That's why ideas like hybrid working, a blend of office time and working from home, are essential. PCS will be negotiating

principles on hybrid working with the Scottish Government in the coming weeks and months. Central to our vision is that solutions be tailored to individual's needs: that no one is forced to work in a way that is impractical, arbitrary, isolating or anxiety-inducing.

In addition to hybrid working, PCS are continuing our campaign for a significant reduction on working time, without loss of pay. Demands for more free time are a cornerstone of the labour movement tradition: now more than ever, the union movement can revive it. Overwork and long hours – both endemic in the civil service – contribute to ill-health, burnout, stress and low productivity. Working with Autonomy, whose comprehensive research on working time provoked a debate on the post-pandemic recovery ideas, our union is exploring the possibilities of a shorter working week in parts of Scotland's civil service.

Second, the cost-of-living crisis is the gravest threat our members have faced in over a decade, and the union movement must show leadership and fight for every victory. Workers in the civil and public services saw their wages fall faster than any other group following the 2008 financial crisis. In Scotland, members have been promised a journey towards wage restoration since 2018, but none of this has materialised. Now, soaring inflation means any gains in wages will be obliterated by National Insurance rises, energy price rises and the rising cost of goods.

Civil servants, like all public sector workers, need a proper pay rise if post-pandemic recovery is going to work for workers. But this will not happen without a sustained and targeted industrial campaign, including strike action across the movement. Our job as trade unionists is to fight for improvements to wages, terms and conditions, to build solidarity in order that we can gain more financial freedom, and freedom from toil. If we do not fight for these gains now, we will not uphold our historic purpose.

Last, there is a clear political crisis in Scotland. Our current government has a questionable domestic record on nearly every important front: health, education, housing, local government funding. The bold and radical actions that were promised by the SNP after the 2014 referendum have not happened. Instead, drugs deaths soar, policies like the National Energy Company have been mothballed, private companies consult on our National Care Service and prized green assets are sold to oil companies.

And of course, there's still the question of a prospective referendum on independence. But what we cannot accept is the use of that prospect to forestall criticism of governance failures issuing from Edinburgh. A re-politicised and reenergised union movement can make inroads to challenging these political failures as part of the broader movement. But we also need working class voices in a parliament which, on all sides of the constitutional divide, has become a byword for complacency.

Cat Boyd is the PCS National Officer for Scotland and Northern Ireland

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If music be the food of love and life, then musicians need state support to play on

Caroline Sewell shows what the Musicians' Union has done during the pandemic but demands state support to go further

The music industry, and indeed the wider creative industries, have been amongst the most deeply impacted as a result of the global pandemic. The music industry relies on the ability to tour both domestically and internationally, and to perform live in front of audiences of all sizes. Musicians work from small rehearsal, recording studio or lesson spaces and are in close contact with other musicians, be they students or fellow players in bands, ensembles, orchestras or studio settings. During the pandemic all this work disappeared and the playing of some instruments – specifically voice, brass and woodwind were effectively banned from being taught and being performed out with very specific circumstances.

The music industry in the UK was already facing certain existential catastrophes in the form of Brexit and in the face of disappearing sales of recorded music, paltry music streaming revenues and, of course, the all too familiar expectation for artists to work for free ... or the promise of exposure which amounts to the same thing. As the world took an enforced simultaneous hiatus, further stories of sexual exploitation, harassment and abuse came to the fore. The pandemic exacerbated all of this by shining an unescapable light on these issues and ensured the continued decimation of the work and ability to earn for the artists and music creators. It further exposed the sheer vulnerability of the industry and the all too often toxic nature of the culture surrounding it.

When all of this is put into context, perhaps we should not have been surprised when instead of haemorrhaging members - which would have been understandable with so many no longer able to work and earn – the membership of the Musicians' Union (MU) is currently at its highest since the days of the closed shop. This achievement was no doubt assisted

somewhat by the provision of MU Hardship Fund and subscriptions fees holidays but still, it speaks volumes.

Whilst there is no doubt that the pandemic has been devastating for working musicians, in terms of organising and campaigning, it has also acted as a catalyst in some respects as the urgency to address these pre-existing issues became even more pressing. Solidarity with fellow unions and similarly minded organisations has never been more important or, indeed productive as it has been in the last two years.

So, the MU joined forces with the Ivors Academy to 'Keep Music Alive' and #FixStreaming. This campaign seeks to address the issues which mean that artists earn very little from streaming royalties – even when achieving



significant numbers of plays. As a result of the campaign, the issue became the subject of a Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Inquiry and study by the Competitions and Markets Authority.

In Scotland, we now work with more of our fellow creative unions than ever before – and more regularly. Previously established as the Scottish Federation of Entertainment Unions, the MU, Equity, BECTU and NUJ are now joined by Scottish Artists Union, Scottish Society of Playwrights and Writers Guild of Great Britain in our regular meetings with the STUC and Scottish Government officials. These levels of engagement had never previously existed, and it is essential that they remain to ensure that we achieve not only a recovery, but a

vastly improved landscape for working creatives.

We need meaningful ongoing support for low earning artists. Hardship funds have been made available by many unions and arts organisations and have been welcomed by many – after all, they helped pay the bills and kept the wolves from the door. However, something more substantial is required which speaks to the intrinsic value of art and culture to society and also to the low paid precarity of this work and everything that comes with that - including a mental health crisis with musicians being three times more likely to suffer from depression as the general public. The 2021 MU Biennial Conference passed a motion in favour of Universal Basic Income (UBI) and many other unions are calling for the same. A pilot basic income scheme for

artists is being trialled in the Republic of Ireland and we will be watching closely to see the results which will hopefully determine whether this could be the future here.

As we emerge from the pandemic, we are more acutely aware than ever of the importance of solidarity with fellow creatives and unions. Art and culture provided a

lifeline for many during the lockdowns of the past two years which would for the vast majority have been unbearable had it not been for online concerts, theatre and television. Yet, those who work in these spheres suffered the most acutely. If the past two years has taught us anything, it is that it's vital we continue to protect the existence of our arts and culture for ourselves and for future generations as our achievements have been hard won; and when we lose these gains, there's no guarantee they will return.

Caroline Sewell is the Regional Organiser for the Scotland & Northern Ireland Region of the Musicians' Union

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The POA wish to thank those uniformed staff who have worked tirelessly and with great commitment throughout the pandemic.

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Phil Fairlie Assistant General Secretary.

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Keeping the connection through a global pandemic in the prison, correctional and secure psychiatric system

Phil Fairlie says staying in touch has meant doing things differently in order to provide representation

Working out how best to stay in touch with your members during a global pandemic has been testing. Finding ways of keeping them informed at a time when they are desperate for information, on matters that are a bit more serious than some of the day-to-day bread and butter issues is a challenge that all unions have been grappling with. In our case like many others, having a membership who had no option but to attend their work and for whom working from home wasn't an option, means telling them you cannot attend the workplace to address their concerns doesn't go down too well with some.

Prison is a 24/7, 365 days a year environment where staff need to be in attendance. With that in mind, members who have had to endure that environment have also had a specific set of fears and concerns that they want some assurance on and answers to from those they elect to be their voice. Being told branch meetings are not an option, or that face-to-face dialogue is forbidden, are responses that were generally understood, but did nothing to quell the fears or anxiety of the members.

To that end unions including ourselves had to look at making a better use of the alternative means of communicating and getting really important messages and answers out to the members so as to be timely and helpful. Social media, of course, has its part to play, and most unions have some element of social media presence. However, it is not a good medium for certain work groups, and prisons is one of those groups. There are matters involving prisons that simply cannot be safely, or effectively communicated on social media and the kind of regurgitated coverage prisons generally get in some print media quarters is all the evidence we need to know that.

It's astonishing how many who have never been in a prison in their life could reel off exactly what the Xmas menu is in every prison such is the medias

obsession with telling you. When it comes to how many staff have been assaulted, how long they are off their work for, or are suffering from work-related stress, predictably not so much.

The volume of circulars to the membership has increased enormously through COVID, as you would expect. The local branch officials in each prison have had to do the same locally, as well as deal face to face with members, often on issues that would be matters for the national reps, except for the fact they were for long periods, unable to attend the prisons.



During periods when the rules were relaxed, our national reps were in the establishments as often as was required, trying to provide a presence for members and answers to their backlog of queries and enquiries. That face-to-face contact helped. It always does.

The POA has spent considerable sums on its website in an attempt to utilise it in a way that quickly and accurately gets information out there. It is slowly drawing more hits from members as they become aware of its wider content. National officers and officials doing video messages seems to be popular and an area for greater use going forward. It is set up in a way to allow for more interaction and a two-way sharing of information, which has allowed for members to feel more included, more involved, and to provide them an opportunity to communicate in a more immediate way with the trade union.

The partnership arrangements we have with the employer in the Scottish Prison

Service (SPS) is arguably one of the best in the country in terms of resources afforded to the union. That has helped enormously during the pandemic for having reps available across the country that members could contact. We have someone in each prison who is the recognised daily point of contact for members, and it is fair to say they have never been busier than during the pandemic in fielding the issues being brought to them.

The partnership also has a shared communication strategy where we jointly agree messaging to the staff groups in the service, which gives us a very helpful influence on what the key information is that needs to go out, and an influence on the language used to convey the messages. This has been extremely helpful to the union and the employer when communicating with the staff during new, untested periods of high anxiety.

As a union, we regularly use workplace ballots for elections or for matters such as pay offers. Ironically, the prison service has just come through the last of a 3 year pay deal so there has been no need to attempt a ballot during the various lockdown periods. Having seen this year's public sector pay policy and comparing it to the cost of living each and every one of us is living through at the moment, there is no question that we as a union will be fully utilising the pay ballot procedure on any offer that makes its way on to our table. I can confidently predict that neither the SPS nor the Scottish Government are going to get the same overwhelming support achieved in the 3-year deal with anything that is offered this time round. Once we reach that point, I think it is highly likely that our next ballot will not be a workplace one but one required to be conducted through an external balloting agency.

Phil Fairlie is the Assistant General Secretary for the POA (The Professional Trades Union for Prison, Correctional and Secure Psychiatric Workers) in Scotland



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Dispensing workplace justice: the PDA union is the new kid on the block with ambitions and aspirations

Paul Flynn records the success of a young union for pharmacists

This year the Scottish Trade Union Congress (STUC) celebrates its 125th anniversary: 125 years of Scotland's workers standing united to support one another to achieve improvements in their lives and livelihoods. This has seen more sectors being organised and new unions created, bringing more workers into the movement.

In 2021, the PDA Union affiliated to the STUC and many may not have heard of us because we have only existed for 13 years. We emerged from the Pharmacists' Defence Association, itself a not-for-profit organisation created for pharmacists by pharmacists in 2003, to provide an independent voice for employed and locum pharmacists, free of employer control.

The PDA Union is the only independent union exclusively for pharmacists and has already grown to around 2,500 members in Scotland, and over 32,000 across the UK, making it the largest pharmacist membership body and 22nd largest union. We are the 6th largest union exclusively for health professionals and we continue to grow in numbers and influence by developing the capacity of our reps and active members.

Pharmacists are most visible to the public when working in a community pharmacy, but PDA Union members and reps are also found in hospitals, GP practices, health boards, prisons, academia and elsewhere. Pharmacy is a Masters' degree qualification and the profession is c.65% female and significantly BAME. We do not allow pharmacy owners into membership as we believe there is a potential conflict if a union represents both employer and employee. As part of the PDA's focus on equality, diversity and inclusion there are four active member networks (National Association of Women Pharmacists, the LGBT+ pharmacists, BAME pharmacists and 'Ability' the network for pharmacists with disabilities).

In some European countries, pharmacies may only be owned by pharmacists. In Britain, they are often owned by retailers and the community pharmacy sector is

dominated by a few very large employers that have multiple branches and lots of influence. The very largest employers are UK-wide and headquartered in England, including global pharmacy chains and the supermarkets. They have a UK-wide business model, but should take account of funding levels and job specifications in Scotland which are significantly greater. English funding levels are significantly lower because of spending cuts in Westminster.

Both the largest pharmacy chains, Boots and LloydsPharmacy, are for sale. McKesson, the US-based owners of Lloyds, recently announced a proposed sale to pan-European investment group, Aurelius UK. Boots is yet to announce a purchaser and currently remains part of the US-based, Walgreens Boots Alliance.

Community pharmacies have a lot in common with GP practices. Both were excluded when the NHS was created and so are not owned by the NHS, although they display the NHS logo and are contracted to provide NHS services. Both may generate other income from private services too and both have patients seeking help with health issues. However, many often think of GP practices as within the health service and community pharmacies as outside.

Herein lies the roots of many workplace issues for community pharmacists. They are the most accessible point of contact in the health system, where even those are not registered with a doctor can see a health professional in the heart of their community and without an appointment. However, they are often employed and managed by retailers with sales targets to achieve and shareholder dividends to generate. As technology drives many high street retailers online, there is a critical division emerging between those who want pharmacies to become even more of a retail transaction and those who recognise they are set in a clinical health setting. The patient interaction undertaken by pharmacists is critical to positive outcomes for patients as they do much more than provide medicines, they provide advice, administer vaccinations,

undertake reviews and consultations and increasingly, pharmacists are qualifying as independent prescribers too.

The PDA Union forced union recognition on Boots after an eight-year campaign ended in 2019 and pay is now negotiated. This is where some may have heard of the PDA, as their members are the only trade unionists to ever apply for a ballot to remove a sweetheart union. The PDA had to then win two postal ballots, the first to remove the management backed sweetheart union and the second to subsequently secure recognition; each postal vote involved more than 6,000 workers spread across 2,500 workplaces. We won both ballots. LloydsPharmacy subsequently avoided being beaten by the union when it voluntarily agreed to collective bargaining. Now that the two largest employers are negotiating pay, the PDA want increased rates to spread across the sector, something which is desperately needed because pharmacist pay has been reduced in real terms for more than a decade.

The Government meets regularly with representatives of community pharmacy employers and agree funding for community pharmacy to deliver more NHS services. However, the voice of the pharmacist workforce has not been listened to nearly as much in Holyrood, so we are taking steps to see the voice of employers and employees balanced, in line with the Fair Work Convention.

Throughout the pandemic our members across the health system have been in the front line, from community pharmacies remaining open through the strictest lockdowns to members working on Covid wards. Our other hot topics include stopping violence in pharmacies, ensuring patient safety and despite there being record numbers of pharmacists registered, some employers still claim there is a workforce shortage when in fact the fundamental issue is that many pharmacists will not accept the poor working conditions and environment they offer. As a new STUC affiliate, the PDA union is proud to add the voice of thousands of pharmacists to our contemporary workers in Scotland.

Paul Flynn is the recently appointed PDA Union National Officer for Scotland (paul.flynn@pda-union.org)

The battle for our buses – get on board the double-decker for the fight for our future

Ellie Harrison outlines how progress is possible

The forthcoming local elections are set to become the battle for our buses. New powers – which we fought for and won in the *Transport (Scotland) Act 2019* – will become available later this year. These include the power to re-regulate private bus companies for the first time since Thatcher’s disastrous policy of deregulation in 1986. Known as ‘franchising’, this power will enable us to cap fares and plan routes in the public interest so that our bus networks are no longer shaped solely by where companies can make most profit. Then, we have the power to set-up new municipal bus companies capable of providing Scotland’s other regions with the same great service people enjoy on Lothian Buses.

Our task now as campaigners is to put pressure on all political parties to seize these powers following the local elections and to implement them on a regional level. Earlier this year, we worked with the STUC to launch ‘Take Back Our Buses’ campaigns in three of Scotland’s biggest City Regions: Glasgow, Aberdeen and Dundee. There was obviously no need for a campaign in Edinburgh as it has the ‘holy grail’ of one near-monopoly municipal operator, which is democratically-accountable (jointly-owned by four of the region’s councils), run in the public interest, and committed to reinvesting all profits in expanding and improving the public transport network (£20m of Lothian’s profits funded Edinburgh’s trams).

Buses in the other three lag far behind – having lost millions of miles of routes since deregulation and some of the most expensive fares in Britain. A single on privatised First Glasgow is £2.50, £1.80 on Lothian and £1.55 on buses regulated by Transport for London. In Scotland’s rural areas, bus fares can get into double digits.

We have to address these problems at a regional level, to connect the rural areas surrounding our big cities and enable easy and affordable commutes in-and-out, with the same flat fares for all no matter where you live. That means our local councillors working through the Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs) which exist to cover each.

In Glasgow, that’s Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT, bringing together 12 councils), in Aberdeen that’s North-East of Scotland Transport Partnership (NESTRANS, bringing together 2 councils), and in Dundee it’s Tayside & Central Scotland Transport Partnership (TACTRAN, bringing together 4 councils). These public bodies are democratically accountable with local councillors from their constituent councils represented on their boards. To deliver the world-class, fully-integrated and affordable public transport networks which our City Regions urgently need – our RTPs must step up to the plate and start to take a leading role.



For NESTRANS and TACTRAN, this means becoming ‘Model 3’ RTPs, the most powerful of the three RTP models defined in the *Transport (Scotland) Act 2005*. Both have currently elected to be the ‘do-minimum’ Model 1 RTPs, which means they are almost completely insignificant. SPT is one of only three ‘Model 3’ RTPs in Scotland with responsibilities for directly running services, such as Glasgow Subway.

Then we need our RTPs to re-empower themselves further by seizing the aforementioned new powers under the *Transport (Scotland) Act 2019*, starting by setting up their own municipal operator. These could be arms-length companies (like Lothian) jointly-owned by the RTPs constituent councils. They can start off small, providing a cost-effective delivery of essential services which private operators have long-since abandoned. But the ultimate aim should be to take over more of the newly re-regulated network, eventually reinstating the regional municipal monopoly as in Edinburgh.

This would also open up new funding streams, with access to all the Scottish Government subsidies which currently benefit private bus companies. Their

income from the National Concessionary Card Scheme, the Bus Service Operator Grants, the Scottish Ultra-Low Emission Bus Scheme and more totals £326m annually, with much being hived off to shareholders.

But this much-needed municipal takeover can only be achieved by curbing the power of the big private bus companies. And it’s only the new ‘franchising’ power, which can finally force them to dance to our tune. Re-regulating the buses using this power would enable each RTP to plan its network and coordinate its timetables to the mantra ‘one network, one timetable, one ticket’, which has proved so successful for delivering full-integration in Munich City Region.

Under franchising, sections of the network can then be offered out to tender to any private companies which are prepared to meet all the standards and requirements the RTP sets. This is the system that London uses (as it was spared from full deregulation). And this is what Manchester is now rolling out – last year becoming the first UK City Region to commit to re-regulating its bus network since 1986 and which will be completed by 2024.

Our new municipal operators can also bid to run services within a franchised network, or have them directly awarded using the EC Directive 1370 (used in Munich and most other European cities with municipal operators), which has been (for the time being) translated into UK law under the *European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018*.

It’s vital that we undertake these steps to start to undo the profound damage caused by years of deregulation and privatisation. So, wherever you live – in Strathclyde, Grampian or Tayside – please use our online tool to write to your councillors, especially those who sit on the RTP Boards, and demand they help us to take back our buses!

Ellie Harrison is an artist and activist based in Glasgow (<https://www.ellieharrison.com/>). She is founder and co-ordinator of Bring Back British Rail and the current Chair of the Get Glasgow Moving public transport campaign. See www.getglasgowmoving.org/campaign/election2022



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We have devolution from Westminster but not from Holyrood: Scotland as a centralised state

James Mitchell decries the lack of local power in local government and advocates radical reform

Somewhere along the way, debate on how Scotland should be governed splintered and narrowed. Perhaps, the roots of the splintering lay in separate Royal Commissions on local government and the constitution in the 1960s. There was certainly overlap in the deliberations of the Wheatley (local government) and Kilbrandon (constitution) Commissions but they largely talked past each other. Local government was reformed in the 1970s and again in the 1990s with little attention to the implications for wider constitutional reform. Many local councillors felt that the new system needed to bed down in the 1970s and worried that a Scottish Assembly would usurp local government powers and resources. They feared that an Assembly without tax raising powers would cut local government grants as the only way to increase its own finances. Local authorities would be forced to increase rates to pay for Assembly services as well as their own.

Ironically, the change to single tier authorities in the 1990s under the Conservatives facilitated the establishment of a Scottish Parliament though that was clearly not the intention. But the abolition of the regions removed powerful strategic bodies that were capable of standing up to central government, as witnessed with Strathclyde Region's water referendum. Community councils were set up in the 1970s and survived the reorganisation twenty years later but remained patchy across Scotland.

Debate on establishing a Scottish Parliament in the 1980s was influenced by the deteriorating relationship between central (Scottish Office) and local government. In the words of the Constitutional Convention's blueprint *Scotland's Parliament Scotland's Right*, published on St Andrews Day 1995: 'The creation of Scotland's Parliament will mark a distinct change of approach by placing a culture of stability at the heart of the relationship between the Parliament and local authorities'. Appointments to quango Scotland, especially under Michael Forsyth as Scottish Secretary, contributed to

demands for a more democratic system. This led many previous opponents to embrace devolution and broadened debate. Devolution 1970s-style had been a response to nationalism. As it developed in the 1980s, reform was broader, about creating a system of government designed to encourage more openness, transparency, subsidiarity, participation and was envisaged as more than planting a new elected institution on top of the existing system of government.

The 1998 devolution white paper was explicit: 'In establishing a Scottish Parliament to extend democratic accountability, the Government do not expect the Scottish Parliament and its Executive to accumulate a range of new functions at the centre which would be more appropriately and efficiently delivered by other bodies within Scotland. The Government believe that the principle that decisions should be made as close as possible to the citizen holds good within Scotland as it does within the United Kingdom'. This thinking was reflected in the Constitutional Steering Group's key principles to guide the implementation of devolution: *sharing power* between the people, the legislators and the Executive; accountability of the Executive to the Parliament and both accountable to the people; access and participation of the people and legislators in decision-making; and promotion of equal opportunities for all.

Taken together, these principles would have amounted to a radical change in how Scotland was governed, suggesting a participatory form of democracy. A Commission under Sir Neil McIntosh was established following the 1997 referendum to consider relations between the new Parliament and local government. A new era beckoned. But McIntosh's recommendations were only partially implemented. And while central-local relations improved in the early years of devolution, lubricated by public spending growth unseen outside wartime, the fundamentals had not changed. Local government remained 'mere tenants at will of the legislature' - just that the legislature was now

Holyrood rather than Westminster. Even a study in the honeymoon period after devolution's establishment found that neither local authorities nor Scottish Executive officials saw evidence of the 'parity of esteem' McIntosh called for. The forward march of centralisation was not halted.

Perhaps if we had paid more attention to what had happened in Spain and Belgium where regional governments were centralising power, then this might have been anticipated. Instead, European experiences were scanned to find evidence that supported the claim of right to a Scottish Parliament and avoided anything that raised awkward questions. Warnings had been made which in retrospect should have been heeded. In April 1991, John Stewart of Birmingham University's School of Public Policy and one of the leading authorities on local government privately expressed disappointment that: 'radical principles stated were not always developed as far as I had hoped in practice. The approach to taxation powers for example seemed unduly cautious, although I can understand the politics of the situation that made it necessary. More fundamentally I saw the statement that sovereignty rests with the Scottish people as very important, but was disappointed that it had not been more developed in practice. I would have liked to have seen the Act constituting the Scottish parliament requiring the consent of the Scottish people before it could be changed. I would like to see a commitment to local government more strongly expressed'.

In May 1991, Bruce Black, secretary of the Constitutional Convention, expressed a 'continuing worry that very little detailed preparatory work, either administrative or conceptual, seems to be in hand for the establishment of the Scottish parliament and its consequences for many other sectors of Scottish life, including not least local government'. But these concerns were kept private for fear of undermining the efforts, enthusiasm and hope invested in the Convention.

It was probably inevitable that attention focused on the new Parliament and Executive in the early years of devolution. The exceptional levels of public spending helped hide weaknesses and the improvement in central-local relations contributed to wider reforms were not pursued. There was a brief, but passing, revival of the spirit of 1999 in 2007 but the Scottish Government-COSLA Concordat was a false dawn. The language describing the Concordat by the Scottish Government and COSLA at the time suggested momentous change: historic, ambitious, ground-breaking. But, as so often, soaring rhetoric was not matched by practice. Many controls were lifted, single outcomes agreements adopted, ringfencing removed allowing for more autonomy. But it would not be long before micro-management returned and this time with a vengeance. Local government experienced cuts greater than anything the Scottish Government itself experienced from UK Government and the long march of centralisation recommenced. It was the public finance version of trickle down. The situation was worse than councillors had in the 1970s feared. Not only were grants cut but authorities were prevented from raising revenue and how money was spent increasingly determined by the Scottish Government.

And then came the independence referendum. The levels of civic engagement far surpassed anything previously seen. On its first anniversary, Nicola Sturgeon described the independence referendum experience: 'We discovered our voice - and found that as a nation we could make the world listen. We surprised ourselves'. This discovery led to proposals and high hopes for a more participatory democratic system of government. The lack of community empowerment had been criticised prior to devolution and despite the rhetoric of self-government that imbued the Constitutional Convention's deliberations was never really embedded in the new devolved system. But community empowerment has been partially and inconsistently applied. Participatory budgeting is required of local government but not across all public services. A Government that accumulates, hoards power and undermines alternative sources of democratic authority and legitimacy lacks credibility in demanding evidence of community empowerment in others.

Power has not been shared between the people, the legislators and

the executive. We inherited the Westminster system of government. Relations between the Parliament and Government are more imbalanced than at Westminster. The very features of the old system that led to demands for change have become all too obvious in post-devolution Scotland. The Scottish Parliament's committee system is much weaker than that in the Commons. Accountability may have improved compared with pre-devolution times but that is hardly a high hurdle.



us is the silo approach to local decision making. Local government grew out of amalgamations of diverse *ad hoc* arrangements. Education authorities were merged with public health bodies, including housing, in recognition of the need for collaboration and joint working. Local government was the local embodiment of joined-up government but we are slowly drifting back into functional silos. We are witnessing a return to nineteenth century. Once more the rhetoric points in the one direction but revealed preferences, i.e., what is revealed by action, point in another.

In February 1992, Jean McFadden, former leader of Glasgow City Council and academic public lawyer, argued for a power of general competence for local authorities allowing local government to 'act and innovate freely on behalf of their communities without specific parliamentary approval', thus widening the scope beyond being 'creatures of statute'. She also suggested that local authorities should have 'constitutional recognition': 'At the moment, a simple majority vote in both Houses of Parliament could ensure the abolition of all local authorities in Britain ... Constitutional recognition would guarantee the existence of local government. It could also mean that major change could not be brought about by a snap parliamentary decision, but only after the communities concerned had been fully consulted'.

Scottish local authorities now find themselves in the same situation. There may be no intention to abolish

local authorities but a process of disempowerment has been underway and there is little they can do about it. McFadden also argued that local authorities ought to be able to raise a 'significant proportion' of their own revenue: 'We need to raise that locally controlled proportion from 14% to around 50% if local authorities are to have an appropriate degree of local autonomy. And, of course, centralised capping powers should be dismantled'.

The failure to address these deficiencies makes Scotland stand out as an outlier along with the rest of the UK in European local governance. For all the talk of being more European, of abandoning the Westminster model of government, today's Scottish polity looks as insularly British with a Holyrood cherry on top of that which existed pre-devolution.

How we constitute ourselves is one of the most basic, if multi-faceted, issues in politics. It has to be about more than creating a Parliament and accumulating power for the executive in the Parliament's name. We have lost sight of the ideals of self-government that animated earlier debates and stuck with a Scottish variant on the system that was supposed to be rejected. For all the talk of popular sovereignty, what has emerged is a mini-Westminster in which the executive is dominant, Parliament is compliant and any other potential sources of legitimacy are denuded of authority. The central paradox of Scottish politics has been that in the desire to find an alternative system we have ended up with a system of government that is essentially the same as the Westminster system. We have neglected deficiencies in our system of government, in how we constitute ourselves with this narrowing focus. Relations with the rest of the UK are important but there is so much more that demands attention. May's local elections will likely become another referendum on whether we should have a referendum, negating the principles on which the new system was supposed to be based. We need fresh thinking, prioritising local issues and evidence that power is shared from parties.

James Mitchell is Professor of Public Policy at the University of Edinburgh. His Jimmy Reid Foundation pamphlet which examines some of these issues is called 'The Scottish Question Revisited' and is available for purchase at: <https://reidfoundation.scot/the-scottish-question-revisited-pamphlet/>

Council choices and credible contestants

With the local government election on 5 May 2022, we asked a number of left candidates from different parties to tell us why they are standing and what they hope to gain from doing so. Each party was given 600 words to do so. Alba was given its opportunity in the Jan/Feb 2022 issue. Scottish Labour was asked and agreed to provide an article but it did not materialise.

Greg McCarra, Scottish National Party (SNP)

'One more heave and we're in government' is the rallying cry of centre-left parties scenting power. Variants have been used by Liberals and Labour to achieved a bit of power for a bit of time ... with most of their radical achievements being reversed later by the 'natural' return to the Conservatives in England. In Scotland, however, there has been a more social democratic consensus in place since the 1950s and devolution has acted as a slight defence against reversing radical policies. That might not last long, though, as the Tories seem keen to begin dismantling devolution, using Brexit as a pretext.

'One more heave and we're independent' might look superficially like a similar argument to the above, but there is a difference. Different parties will always vie and alternate in their grasp for Westminster power. An independent Scotland stays independent. I have long believed that little of significance and durability is feasible in Scotland without independence. Employment law and most fiscal and economic powers will largely remain with innately conservative Westminster. Some may ask why I stay actively (and electorally) engaged in the SNP. Although constitutionally defined as a 'left of centre party', nonetheless, it strays frustratingly into territory which doesn't fit well with that definition.

I see us as being in a transitional phase. Most on the left see that independence is coming - trade unionists voted for it in 2014 - and we fully expect a realignment of Scottish politics and alliances after independence. This should certainly be the case at local government level where there is a bizarre dividing line

which forces similarly-minded parties to tear lumps out of each other simply because of differing stances on the constitution (which is usually irrelevant to local government anyway). When first elected a councillor in 2007, I had hoped that STV would see Labour and SNP increasingly working together to create a combined, radical majority. Instead, we have seen Tories throughout Scotland being allowed a share of power and influence by Labour, simply to 'defend the UK'. Sadly, this year is Independistas vs Unionists.

I am seeking re-election to West Lothian Council to help put into practice locally what I hope will become the norm nationally after independence: improved cooperation between progressive parties, allowing them to make - and sustain - the changes needed to help make Scotland a better country.

We have recently seen the starting of this at national level, with the Shared Policy Programme of the SNP/ Scottish Greens Government. Very little detail of any party's local government manifesto is currently available, but the Policy Programme hints at a few local opportunities for change, including: i) establishing a National Care Service: this will impact considerably on existing integrated joint boards for health and social care; ii) Just Transition: with the example of a ten-year £500m Just Transition Fund for the North East and Moray - areas where a replacement for the oil industry is needed; and iii) Transport: return to public ownership of Scotrail and new free travel entitlements - allowing transport to be seen as an essential service rather than just a business opportunity.

The starting point in bringing about independence is for the people to assert their 'right to choose' their future. It is not uncommon for larger countries to deny that right for smaller neighbours - Ukraine being a recent example - but those on the left must promote that fundamental right if they hope to see sustainable and progressive change. Waiting for Westminster to deliver that change is a forlorn hope.

Greg McCarra is a former EIS-University Lecturers Association President, former Convener of SNP's Trade Union Group and an SNP councillor in West Lothian 2007-2017. He currently plays a leading role in several national pro-Independence organisations.

Bryan Quinn, Scottish Green Party

To me, local politics is the thing which has the largest day-to-day impact on a number of people's lives. It impacts the schools your kids go to, the roads you drive on, your bin collections, the facilities you use and so much more. Often local elections do not get the same kind of coverage as national elections - which is unfortunate as this contributes to fewer voters turning up for local elections than national elections.

I grew up in Clackmannanshire, I went to school here and now I am living and raising my kids here. Politics for me has always been about making things better for everyone, not just the people at the top, as is often the case. I enjoy campaigning to try and make things better and by being a councillor it would allow me to have more influence over the kind of decisions that impact people's daily lives. That is why I am standing as a Scottish Green candidate in these local elections. To put it simply: I want to make life a bit better for everyone. With my years of campaigning experience, and professional experience working in finance, I believe I have the expertise and skills needed to make a positive impact on the council.

Local elections are about local issues. While some people use their vote to try and make a point about national issues, a lot of voters who I talk to on the doorsteps are focused on local issues and want a local person who can deliver results for them. Here in Clackmannanshire, we have some issues that people are extremely unhappy with. We are now the only council in Scotland that does not have a swimming pool, we have empty buildings, increasing energy costs and a council pension fund still invested in fossil fuels.

The council's reactionary, and often lacklustre, solutions leave people wanting more. One recent example of this is that after the closure of the local swimming pool, with little provision in place, is to offer a temporary swimming pool costing more than £700,000 in the town hall car park. I have yet to talk to a single voter who is happy with spending this much money on such a solution and numerous people have brought up their dissatisfaction with the plan. Another issue we have is that the council sold a lovely listed building, Greenfield House,

to a developer who sat and did nothing with it, only to buy it back again, in a much worse condition than before. On the doorsteps, it seems to me there is a feeling of staleness and lack of ambition in the council generally.

If I get elected, hopefully joined by some other Green councillors, there is a lot we want to achieve to challenge the *status quo*. We want to look at creating a district heat network in order to create local jobs, be more energy efficient and save people money on their bills. We want to build on our campaign to divest the pension fund and make it a reality. We want the community to be empowered by giving them a say over the future of great buildings we have now sitting empty, like Greenfield House, rather than letting them go to waste. We want people to feel like they have hard-working, accountable and transparent local representatives. We will do this by making a public record of organisations we meet, having council meetings broadcast for all to see and being the most accessible councillors on the council by holding regular surgeries in a variety of formats and times to suit people's life circumstances.

Bryan Quinn is the Scottish Greens candidate for Clackmannanshire South Ward

Colin Fox and Bill Bonnar, Scottish Socialist Party (SSP)

Colin Fox: I am standing for election to Edinburgh City Council in the Liberton/Gilmerton ward on an anti-cuts programme that promises to oppose privatisation and extend public services instead. In 40 years as an activist, I have never once voted for cuts to public services or for privatisation. Edinburgh Council is currently run by a Labour/ SNP coalition that has repeatedly cut essential public services and is widely seen as being more interested in promoting corporate vanity projects like the trams than serving the city's working-class majority.

This is Scotland's most ill-divided city. It has the least affordable housing in the country, yet a quarter of its pupils attend private schools that can charge £30,000 per annum. Liberton/Gilmerton, on the other hand, contains some of the city's most disadvantaged communities. Both Edinburgh's new flagship NHS hospitals are in the ward; the Royal Infirmary - privatised by Labour and the Royal

Hospital for Children and young people sold off by the SNP. Like most citizens, the SSP wants to see both hospitals returned to public hands immediately.

Liberton/Gilmerton ward has also seen more Covid deaths than any other in Scotland – it has 6 nursing homes within its boundaries. The SSP uniquely advocates a National Care Service that is free at the point of need, publicly-owned and run with services fit for the 21st century.

I hope to win one of the four seats in the ward by enlisting the support of voters, activists, trade unionists and campaigners who agree with the programme I advocate. I hope in the process to encourage working class people in South Edinburgh and beyond to resist the political attacks raining down on them from the Tories, Holyrood and Edinburgh City Chambers. Edinburgh needs a socialist councillor more than ever. To get one people will have to vote for me.

Bill Bonnar: I am standing for the SSP in the Glasgow Govan ward. As a parliamentary candidate I stood

for the SSP in Glasgow South West including Govan in 2015 and have worked in the ward for many years. I stand on an unequivocal socialist programme and pose the question; if we had a socialist majority on Glasgow City Council: what would be our programme? This programme would include bringing the privatised bus services back into public ownership as a prerequisite for establishing a system of free public transport for the city. It would include replacing the unfair and inadequate Council Tax with a more progressive and effective Service Tax. It would involve a programme to reverse many of the cuts to services imposed on the city

over the years and rigorous opposition to any future cuts. It would mean adopting a much more supportive and benign attitude to asylum seekers and refugees who have come to live in our city; none more so than in Govan.

Across the country the SSP is standing in several seats. As well as promoting a local agenda we also embrace a range of national policies towards our overall aim of an independent Scottish socialist republic. These include bringing many key industries such as the railways and the electricity and gas industries into public ownership, radical interventions to eradicate poverty and inequality and a Red Green New Deal to tackle climate change. Above all it is about demonstrating that Scotland needs a socialist party, and that party is the SSP. In these forthcoming elections, we will keep the red flag flying.

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A marriage not made in heaven: marking the SNP-Scottish Greens coalition scorecard

Stella Rooney critically assesses what the parliamentary pact is about and what it has delivered and not delivered

Following last year's Scottish Parliament elections, a green and yellow alliance between the SNP and Scottish Greens was forged. Working towards the aim of a 'Greener, Fairer Independent Scotland', the shared programme for government contained significant gains for tenants and workers, such as rent controls and collective bargaining in the care sector. Months on, while we have seen some movement on these promises, progress is slow and cautious. In the face of a cost-of-living crisis, soaring rents and rising poverty, tepid politics is not good enough. The Scottish Government's agenda falls short of articulating the bold economic agenda that Scotland's working class deserve.

Last year's Holyrood elections were dominated by the constitution, with tactical voting for pro-independence and unionist parties seen across every part of Scotland. In aligning themselves with the Greens, the SNP are theoretically able to pass a referendum bill and present a united front on independence in Parliament. But the grounds for an alliance also run deeper than the constitution. The Greens have set tackling the climate emergency and furthering social justice as key priorities in their parliamentary agenda. As a part of the Scottish Government, the Greens may well feel closer to the decision-making powers that be, and more able to influence policy. In their choice to go into government, they face a dilemma: does working closely with those in power move you further away from those outside the Parliament?

This strategy is not without risk for the Greens. Could entering partnership with the Scottish government deliver an outcome akin to that faced by the Liberal Democrats as part of the Coalition? Though unlikely to be as catastrophic as getting into bed with the Tories, it is undeniable that a degree of responsibility for the Scottish Government's actions must now be taken by the Greens.

So how is the building of our greener, fairer, independent Scotland progressing? To its credit, the shared programme for government did

propose ambitious plans to invest in decarbonising rail, retrofitting, and a Just Transition fund for the North East of Scotland. Although these proposals are positive, the lack of detail falls short of tackling the challenges we face. Vague mentions of 'green jobs' and the 'Scottish supply chain' will not fill workers with confidence when considering the SNP's past failures to harness Scotland's manufacturing capability for green energy (e.g., BiFab).

Recent figures on the creation of green jobs in Scotland are not promising: new statistics from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) reveal that the number of full-time jobs in the low carbon and renewable sector fell from 21,700 in 2019 to 20,500 in 2020 – a drop from 23,200 in 2014. As the world faces rising global temperatures, and Scotland sees endemic low wages at home, workers in Scotland are crying out for good quality jobs in the green economy. Yet again, the Scottish Government neglects to invest in publicly-owned infrastructures for job creation and instead, looks to the free market for solutions.

A new development in the green economy is Scottish Government support for two Westminster backed 'green freeports' to be established in Scotland. Proposed as part of the UK government's levelling up agenda, these ports are created with lower tax rates and tariffs and are notorious for low wages and poor working conditions. Support for green freeports has not been without backlash, becoming one of the first major disagreements between the Greens and SNP in government, with greens outspokenly criticising the policy. While the greens may rightly disagree, the question remains, will they be able to change anything about it?

The recent auction of ScotWind, a significantly large offshore territory for the development of wind energy, has followed a similar trajectory of privatisation. While the development of new offshore wind sites is promising, a massive opportunity was missed by the Scottish Government for these profits to be shared with the people of

Scotland. By auctioning the site off to the highest bidder, we are effectively witnessing the selling off of future renewable energy assets before they have even been built. The answers to our current energy and fuel poverty crisis require the vast profits generated by energy production to be distributed fairly, not hoarded by the rich. For the people of Scotland to reap the benefits of the green economy, public ownership is a necessity.

Apart from rail, the SNP and Greens shared programme on transport is also entirely reliant on the private sector. The huge potential of free and municipal-owned bus travel, as championed by Glaswegian campaign 'Free Our City', is a missed opportunity to meet both working-class communities' and climate emergency needs. Months on from COP26, which saw the introduction of free integrated transport tickets for delegates, Glasgow City Council has been informed there is no funding for a pilot scheme for free public transport. In this instance, the council's Greens group presented the proposal which was supported by council leader, Susan Aitken of the SNP, but which was then blocked by the Scottish Government. This exposes a dynamic where, despite the good intentions of both SNP and Green politicians, transformative policies for social and environmental change are blocked by the political tumbleweed of post-devolution Scotland.

One of the most significant policy proposals is within housing, where rent controls, protections against illegal and winter evictions, and the right to own a pet in private lets were announced. These policies would demonstrate a significant transfer of power from private landlords, making an undeniable difference to the lives of tenants. But this advance was not handed down to tenants as a kindness: it is the result of years of campaigning and branch-building by Living Rent, Scotland's tenant union.

This articulates something crucial about the political landscape of devolution. When consistent, strong pressure is applied from below, the SNP can

be pushed to the left and important concessions can be won. But we should be under no illusion: the long timeframe for these reforms to be implemented, with rent controls not due before 2025, demonstrates that the SNP will not be moved an inch too far.

These reforms are already facing resistance from Scotland's sizeable landlord lobby, but tenants cannot afford to wait for change. There is no reason that emergency measures could not be introduced sooner while so many Scots face unaffordable rents and eviction. Is it any wonder that there is no urgency to protect renters when so many members of the Scottish Parliament are landlords themselves? Hesitation by policy-makers will only push more people into desperate and unsafe housing situations. When you have a secure and comfortable house live in, enough money to pay the bills and put food on the table it must be easy to approach legislation such as this with little haste. The fight continues to make sure the measures are far-reaching and delivered with a sense of urgency.

On economic recovery, another opportunity was missed. The SNP/Greens policy document proposed a condition of real living wage for all employed through public sector grants. However, this is already supported by the Fair Work Convention, the issue being it is simply not enforced. The document also stops short of outlawing zero-hour contracts and only criticises their 'inappropriate use', which is not language that gives any significant power back to workers. In publicly-owned and funded workplaces across Scotland, such as the SEC in Glasgow, workers are employed in precarious conditions where unionising efforts are met with hostility. These proposals fall very short of improving the reality for low paid workers in Scotland; it will not make their wages higher or their lives more secure.

On independence progress continues, but at a slow pace. The promise of a new referendum being sought after the Covid crisis presents a number of political problems, particularly the unlikelihood the pandemic will be resolved soon and the vagueness of this promise. When faced with possible new waves and variants, a recovery which priorities eradicating

poverty and restoring dignity to workers cannot be separated from the question of Scottish independence. The case for independence presented by the shared programme is also predicated on membership of the EU, presenting issues on public ownership and currency which must be urgently resolved. The potential independent Scotland toward which the Greens and SNP are jointly working for has some glaring omissions concerning private schools, NATO, drug and alcohol addiction policy and, significantly, principles related to economic growth are excluded from the programme.

This gets to the heart of the predicament socialists face when assessing the pact and the record of the Scottish Government. While advances on housing, the green economy, and bargaining for care should be celebrated, they fall short of meeting the challenges of modern Scotland. Absent from this co-operation agreement is any serious attempt to reckon with the key questions of economic ownership and class conflict. Tinkering around the edges will not redistribute wealth and power from the millionaires into the hands of the millions.

The Greens may feel they are contributing towards a fairer and more progressive Scottish Government but without addressing the contradictions of class society, their good intentions are merely a plaster over a capitalist crisis. Politicians will never be able to please everyone while class conflict exists between bosses and workers, landlords and tenants, capital and labour. While the Scottish Government attempts this balancing act, a gap

emerges for genuine working-class representation. Scottish Labour in its current form, is unable to fill this gap. Its inability to carve out a meaningful political identity for itself, one that relates to the political landscape of modern Scotland, undermines the work of its MSPs in holding the government to account. Strong hostility to the right to a referendum, a position supported across the socialist and union movement, alienates the party from much of its former electoral base.

Independence, though still a key political issue, should no longer be a dividing line amongst socialists. The potential for an independent Scotland cannot be separated from the economic circumstances it will inherit. Any proposals which signal genuine independence must address the burning issues: who owns the economy, and who is it run for? Socialists on both sides of the national question must confront the cosy relationship between the Scottish state and capital, or else we risk becoming unable to influence the future. Thus far, the record of the new SNP/Greens Scottish Government does not meet the challenge of our economic and climate crises with the urgency and ambition required. When socialists build power in workplaces and communities, we can achieve significant and meaningful change. We shouldn't be under any illusions about the scale of the challenge ahead. We cannot rely on the promises of politicians: it is down to our collective movement to transform Scotland in the interest of the working class.

Stella Rooney is an artist, college lecturer and trade unionist

Rhetoric or reality?



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