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

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

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

www.rmt.org.uk
General Secretary: Mick Lynch
President: Alex Gordon
UK to Ukraine and back again - conflict and class

For the left, the ‘test of war’ is said to be the ultimate test of their politics. This phraseology follows the collapse of socialist internationalism at the beginning of the First World War in 1914 when nearly all socialist parties in the countries of Europe dropped their commitment to defend the interests of their fellow workers in other countries. Instead, they supported their own ruling classes in what turned out to be the one of the bloodiest episodes of the capitalist imperialist epoch.

Today, radicals in these same countries and many others face the same test with Russian invasion of Ukraine - albeit it is for most a ‘cold’, rather than ‘hot’, test of war. They have exhibited a fault line. While all condemned the invasion of Ukraine by Russian military forces, there has been an often fierce and acrimonious debate on the issues of responsibility and blame (and their proportionality) in terms of NATO and Russia. Put simply, some that condemn Putin and Russia also argue that their actions – legitimately or otherwise - result from the expansion of NATO eastwards led by the United States and that this expansion is part of continuing imperialist rivalries between America and Russia. In other words, NATO is trying to encircle Russia in Eastern Europe so Russia’s response is understandable and explicable if still not justified.

There are, of course, other issues alongside and underlying this fault line. One is the continuing nature of the regime in Ukraine, with its banning of radical left (socialist and communist) parties in 2015 and now in 2022, the treatment of ethnic Russians in the Donbas, is failure to adhere to the Minsk agreements, and the domination of Ukrainian nationalists by far-right forces. Another is that - following Biden’s announcement that Putin must go in a clear declaration of intent for regime change and no matter how hard the challenge is - the only people that have the right to remove Putin are the people in Russia. Just as the ‘de-nazification of Ukraine’ that Putin claimed was one of his objectives is the responsibility of the Ukrainian people to deal with and not Putin and Russian forces. If Putin is removed as a result of the failure to achieve the invasion’s objectives, this will be welcomed by many but the further weakening of Russia as an imperial power will have geo-political consequences. Indeed, Russia’s diminishing military prowess means it has become more reliant upon, and closer to, China. The Russian economy is far, far smaller than those of the US and NATO countries combined, meaning that its military spending is much, much less. The starkness of this is highlighted by its GDP being the same size as that of Italy. We carry four articles on Ukraine in this issue, highlighting a number of the issues and perspectives.

None of these types of issues are entirely new for the left. We have seen them played out most recently in Syria, Turkey and Kurdistan and a bit further back in Iraq. But lamentably, Britain has its own special and specific contemporary contribution to make here. 2 April 2022 was the fortieth anniversary of the beginning of the Falklands/Malvinas war. The Argentinian junta was headed by General Galtieri as President who staged a coup to assume power and office. Galtieri, was authoritarian in the extreme, with the junta being a military dictatorship in essence, and increasingly unpopular as economic conditions worsened due to the introduction of what we now call neo-liberal measures. Relying on what turned out to be faulty intelligence from the US, Argentinian forces seized the Malvinas over which Argentina has a rightful claim, believing that Britain would not use military force to recapture the islands. Initially, the war was popular with Argentinians and shored up support for Galtieri. Upon its bloody recapture by Britain led by Thatcher, her popularity soared, ensuring a landslide Tory victory in the 1983 general election. The Falklands were a far-distant and age-old vestige of the British empire upon which it was said the sun never to set because it covered at its height a quarter of the world. Britain has no right to own and control a set of islands some 8,000 miles away. It was not sheep farming that interested the ruling class of Britain to support Thatcher and the Tories but the prospects of oil exploration in the south Atlantic as well as defending the reputation of British’s continuing imperialist desire. That said, the retaking militarily of the Malvinas by Argentinian forces against the wishes of the resident population also created problems in terms of the use of force and the rights of minorities.

The left in Britain was again somewhat split. Despite hating the Tories while also detesting Galtieri as some kind of proto-fascist, some reluctantly supported the British operation to recapture the islands. Some others called for the defeat of the British forces in what Lenin terms ‘revolutionary defeatism’ while others adopted a ‘plague on both your houses’ attitude. Such a situation
has parallels with today. So, some tried to side with the ‘least worst’ option or support the defeat of the worst option. Some argued the main enemy is always at home. While many might rightly point out that whether the left supports this or that force makes little material difference to what is essentially a military affair often many thousands of miles away, it does matter politically. Politically, such decisions about whether such wars were imperialist adventures, whether the right of nations to self-determination is sacrosanct and the like do matter for the credibility of the left and whether the left can garner around itself popular support for its other policies. The outcome of the Falklands/Malvinas war was that Galtieri was deposed and liberal democracy restored in Argentina while the Tories restored their popularity and bedded in for the next ten plus years in office. What unites the outcomes in both countries was not only their subservience to US imperial interests but also their implementation of anti-worker and pro-capitalist neoliberalism under Margaret Thatcher in Britain and Carlos Menem in Argentina.

But when all is said and done, there is another test of war that socialists and the left must pass and it is ordinarily the more important one. This is the test of the class war, presently in its neo-liberal phase. Though shrouded in and crowded out by the language of the ‘cost of living crisis’, ‘bleak Friday’ etc, after a decade of austerity, workers – the working class - in Scotland and the rest of Britain are experiencing another form of more open of class warfare. Not only do the rich – the ruling class and their acolytes and lieutenants - keep getting richer while the rest get poorer but the rich can easily insulate themselves from any threats to their living standards. There is no ‘levelling up’ going on here. There’s not even any ‘levelling down’ of the rich but only further ‘levelling down’ for those at the bottom of society. The issues of unions fighting this war were covered extensively in the editorial of the last issue (March/April 2022).

In that editorial and of extra-workplace resistance it was stated: ‘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 console ourselves with ‘the weather wasn’t good’. On 2 April, the weather was much better – sunny if cold as opposed to rainy and dreich – but still the attendances were not any better. This was true of those protests south of the border and is especially noticeable after the price hike in domestic energy prices on 1 April. The left must ask itself why such protests are not – yet - connecting with the masses of people if we are to avoid a re-run of the failed resistance to the age of austerity of the 2010s following the global financial crisis. This is not to indulge in defeatism or miserabilism but to ask ourselves to seriously self-reflect on what we are doing, how we are doing it and where we can improve. Calling on Rishi Sunak to ‘rethink’ is to suggest he is open to persuasion and rational argument, in other words, the force of argument. He is not. But he is open to the argument of force if we can create that force. Maybe, the sense of injustice caused by the ‘cost of living crisis’ can more easily be opened by using the likes of ‘partygate’ to frame the issue as ‘one law for the many and other for the few’.

Some of these issues are discussed in our podcast where Pat Kelly, chair of the Scottish Left Review editorial committee, interviews Roz Foyer, STUC general secretary. The podcast was released ahead of the STUC congress (25-27 April – see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xpq99GmQUtU).

Indeed, if the unions and the left are to make progress, they will need to ‘take back control’ highlighting that Brexit under the Tories has not led to this change for the majority. Indeed, the Tory -determined Brexit is a further continuation the neo-liberal agenda in Britain, highlighting the significance of another key date in the history of these isles – ‘new’ Labour under Tony Blair won office 25 years ago on 1 May 1997. When Thatcher was asked in 2002 what her greatest achievement was, she said: ‘Tony Blair and ‘new’ Labour. We forced our opponents to change their minds’. Then in 2013, Blair himself said: ‘I always thought my job was to build on some of the things she had done rather than reverse them’.

The theme of this issue of Scottish Left Review is building a new Scotland given the publication of the new Jimmy Reid Foundation book called A New Scotland: Building an Equal, Fair and Sustainable Society. We have a specially written introduction to the book and two abridged versions of the chapters. The book is for sale from Calton Books – see https://www.calton-books.co.uk/books/a-new-scotland-building-an-equal-fair-and-sustainable-society/

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**Scotrail – rightly waiting for another episode of Scotfail?**

Some sections of the left seem to have a dose of myopia on Scotrail. Rightly, they have welcomed its return to the public sector but then hope against all the evidence that the SNP-dominated Scottish Government is going to run it in a social democratic way. This will only lead to a rude wake up call for them and the sowing of illusions in unfortunate others. Former (left-wing) Labour MSP, Neil Findlay, tweeted on 1 April 2022 when the return to public ownership happened: ‘Game, set and match to the trade union movement’. If that was true, the conditions under which Scotrail will operate would not include attacks on Scotrail workers’ terms and conditions nor the continuation of service cuts or the keeping of the Caledonian Sleeper service with privateer, Serco. Public ownership - in and of itself - is necessary but very far from sufficient – just look at the nationalisation of South Eastern Trains (2003–2006, Oct 2021–present), East Coast (2009–2015), London North Eastern Railway (2018–present), Northern Trains (2020–present). Here, state ownership was used and is being used to prop up and support the marketisation and privatisation of public transport. You don’t have to have a crystal ball to credibly state public ownership will not be manna from heaven under the SNP. The SNP Scottish Government’s handling of two state enterprises - Calmac’s new vessels from Ferguson Marine and Prestwick airport - already indicate there may well be trouble down the track for Scotfail. Let’s hope against hope that the date of the 1 April transition does not turn out to be an April Fool as this will only make the case for public ownership even harder to make.
Can we set sail the good ship Scotland on a new course for social justice?

As the Calmac crisis continues to push the SNP Scottish Government further towards the rocks, Gregor Gall introduces a major new book on facilitating a future society in Scotland from the Jimmy Reid Foundation

We are now one year into Nicola Sturgeon’s third SNP Scottish Government. Barely a week goes by without a new, regressive development in society in Scotland at the behest of the Scottish Government being reported, whether concerning the deplorable state of our under-resourced NHS, the missing of the Scottish Government’s own poverty reduction targets, the sale of public resources to privateers (e.g. windfarm licenses), failure to progress on stopping the destruction of our environment or the use of private companies instead of the public sector (e.g. consultancy on the National Care Service). This regression deepens and reinforces the inequality and inequity that still scars society in Scotland since – even despite – the devolution settlement of 1999. It is clear that the Scottish Parliament is not proving to be the shield to protect the majority of people from the cold winds of economic change that many hoped it would. This amounts to a crisis of social democracy and, therefore, of social justice too. It is not just about the competence of Scottish Government – this goes much, much deeper and is much more profound than that.

The Scottish Parliament was premised on the core principle that state action could produce a more civil and decent society by intervening in the processes and outcomes of market capitalism. Fairness and equality were the watchwords. Yet in a process begun by preceding Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition Scottish Governments under the tutelage of ‘new’ Labour, each consecutive Scottish Government has now retreated from this core belief, increasingly succumbing to the ideology of neo-liberalism – essentially, the belief that the capitalist free market is the best means for organising society. The SNP-led Scottish Government is just the latest re-incarnation of this. Boiled down to the essentials, it believes that a successful capitalist Scottish economy is necessary to provide the wealth – especially in the form tax revenue – to provide for increased living standards and a welfare state. Woe betide anything that gets in the way of capitalism being allowed to provide this role – even if it means pain and sacrifice for the many and riches and influence for the few. There is, of course, a mountain of evidence to show this is wrong and immoral but such is the hold of the neo-liberal ideology that our political-managerial class deem there to be no alternative and are inured to any pleas to be ‘nice’.

At the same time, barely a day goes by without some mention of the continuing constitutional crisis in Scotland. For example, in the pages of the Herald, by far Scotland’s most serious and widely read broadsheet newspaper, the case for and against independence is endlessly debated and poured over. Yet there is a significant social stasis as despite loss of the referendum on 18 September 2014 to the argument for independence, the issue of independence has never gone away, especially as the SNP has continued to form the Scottish Government since then with its popular but as yet stillborn mandate to hold another referendum. Political polarisation over independence versus enhanced devolution is - and has been - the endless name of the game and will continue to be so for some time to come. Each political issue is viewed through the lens of being for or against independence. In the meantime, what is obscured in particular is the nature of the prospectus of independence – it could be many and varied from the SNP’s neo-liberal version to social democratic one or even a socialist option. Independence in and of itself is a nefarious concept unless we start asking the very basic questions: independence from what and for who? But by the same token, this polarisation also obscures what continued or enhanced devolution would look like, what it would be used to deliver and for whom.

This is the context of the publication of A New Scotland: Building an Equal, Fair and Sustainable Society. Scottish Left Review’s sister organisation, the Jimmy Reid Foundation, has brought together over fifty leading voices on the left to produce a book of twenty-five chapters on pretty much all the essential components of the past, present and – crucially – future of society in Scotland. Although the writers express their respective perspectives on independence and enhanced devolution, they do not let these get in the way of their diagnosis and prognosis of what can be done in the here and now with existing powers to set society in Scotland on a new course of genuine social, economic and political justice. While they do no lay out any roadmaps as such, they do lay out the principles and polices that are needed to make society for the people in Scotland equal, fair and sustainable. They all want the ship of Scotland to set sail on a new course within local seas and global oceans.

The Scottish Government as head of the Scottish state is rightly the focus on most of their attentions, whether that be over health, housing, transport or education to name just a few areas. But many of the chapters also look at what can be achieved in civil society, especially through community campaigns and unions. Not only is there something for everyone who is on the left or looking to the left in this book but together the chapters provide a comprehensive guide to the key questions of our age: what is wrong with society in Scotland and how can we put it right? They show how our ‘good’ ship Scotland can set sail on a new course and arrive at a destination of equality, fairness and sustainability.

We showcase a couple of the chapters to whet your appetites for reading the book itself. Below are the contents by chapter and we remind readers that a number of the contributors have already showcased their chapters in the previous issues of Scottish Left Review. They are:

How can SNP and Greens end the housing crisis in Scotland? Regina Serpa
https://www.scottishleftreview.scot/safe-warm-affordable-home/

Can the Greens green the SNP on transport? David Spaven
https://www.scottishleftreview.scot/transport/

Rebuilding the Scottish economy through worker ownership - John Bratton and David Erdal
https://www.scottishleftreview.scot/worker-ownership/
A New Scotland: Building an Equal, Fair and Sustainable Society

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5 Economic democracy and public participation Andrew Cumbers and Robert McMaster

6 Re-thinking public ownership for an independent Scotland Alex de Ruyter and Geoff Whittam

7 Can democracy go hand-in-hand with efficiency? David Erdal and John Bratton

8 Towards an effective right to housing in Scotland Regina Serpa and Emma Saunders

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Where to purchase: https://www.calton-books.co.uk/books/a-new-scotland-building-an-equal-fair-and-sustainable-society/
Towards gender justice in Scotland

Kirsty Alexander and Jenny Morrison argue for enhancing participation, reimagining economics and ending gender-based violence

Three inter-connected aspects of distributive gender injustice in Scotland are: unequal gender representation and participation in public life, gendered divisions of paid and unpaid labour, and gender-based violence (GBV). These are among the most historically and structurally entrenched and, thus, enduring and inter-connected manifestations of unequal social relations in Scotland. Of course, they are overlain by and with by class, ethnicity, race, and disability. We recognise the need to attend to the complexity of gendered inequalities in different spheres of life.

We understand ‘gender’ as a social structure rather than a synonym for woman or an expression of embodied identity. Specifically, gender refers to the hierarchical relations between the social groups, men and women, and, as a concept, allows us to identify and critique forms of regulation and stratification which create unequal power relations and constraints in individuals’ lives. Indeed, there are normative social and cultural expectations about ‘men’ and ‘women’ which are (re)produced in law, public policy, cultural meanings, and everyday social relations. Reading gender through the lens of institutionalised heterosexuality is useful here because it helps to explain cultural and social constraints with respect to embodied gender identity and expressions of sexuality. And, it also shines a powerful light on the enduring but often normalised gendered divisions of labour and relations of violence which suffuse Scottish society.

The first form of gender injustice concerns unequal decision-making power and responsibility in Scotland’s public political institutions. This impacts upon what is considered a social need and who has access to key resources. Ending the over-representation of men in decision-making has long been a high-profile area of equalities work under devolution. Stalled progress meant the once record levels of women’s representation in Holyrood were almost matched in Westminster – sitting respectively at 34.9% and 33.9%. However, the 2021 election saw women’s representation rise to 45%. While the 50/50 Cabinet under Nicola Sturgeon is welcome, it remains to be seen whether this equality will become embedded in Scottish political life, and special advisers to the government remain two thirds male.

High levels of women’s representation in the Parliament’s early years were often also associated with a turn towards professional middle-class representation. As of 2021, only two women of colour have ever been elected to the Parliament, both gaining their seat in the 2021 election.

Parties of the left have generally achieved parity. Nonetheless, women on the left have faced resistance in promoting gender balance and men often remain over-represented in social movements and campaigns. Meanwhile, there is the risk a few high-profile women mask the actual picture of representation in public and political life with just 29% of local councillors being women. While women make up more than half of union members, only 27% of STUC-affiliated unions were led by women in 2019.

For the problem of representation to clearly come to light, it matters where we look and who is visible. Often, disadvantaged social groups remain unseen and unheard in public discussion about representation. For instance, progress has been made in gender representation in the past decade on company and public boards while women’s poverty and collective bargaining power has stagnated, raising issues about the relationship between ‘glass ceiling’ and ‘sticky floor’. This in itself brings into sharp focus inter-connections between unequal participation and representation in public life and the second form of gender injustice: gendered divisions of paid and unpaid labour.

The gender pay gap currently stands at 10%. Enduring gendered patterns in the labour market show women are more likely than men to be employed part-time and in socially devalued sectors where low pay and precarious contractual arrangements are standard. Perpetuation of workplace discrimination, low pay and access to employment are shaped by racism, agism and ablism, highlighting the importance of recognising the ways that structural, historical inequalities in power and resources shape labour market practices.

Feminist economists view these inequalities in the formal labour market through a lens which encompasses social relationships and activities that are excluded from neo-liberal and traditional socialist economics. People’s experiences of labour market participation are not viewed in a bubble, divorced from activities and relationships in other spheres of life. On the contrary, activities in the formal and informal markets and in paid and unpaid labour patterns are foregrounded in this analysis. How we use our time, the caring activities we give and receive, and the quality of our lives, also ‘count’ in feminist economics; activities that are invisible to mainstream economic approaches become visible in feminist economics. This approach helps illuminate the inter-connected gendered cycles of inequality between different spheres of life. With respect to labour market inequalities, these are recognised as being linked to the unequal distribution of responsibility for unpaid care work in Scotland. Childcare, elder care and care for people who experience disability is disproportionately borne by women. In turn, for those who care, gaining and maintaining secure paid employment or self-employment is a challenge.

The third form of injustice is gender-based violence. It remains a significant injustice for women, acting as a barrier to women’s participation in the public sphere and re-embeds inequality in the labour market. Recent data shows 1/3 of women have experienced some form of physical or sexual abuse from a male intimate partner with high levels of sexual harassment in public spaces. Reported crime statistics offer only a partial view of the prevalence of GBV in Scotland because they focus upon incidents reported to the police. They do not account for forms of abuse which are not criminalised, such as all forms of sexual harassment and some types of online and digital technology-enabled abuse.

In order to transform the injustices discussed and for Scotland to become a democratic society, there is a need...
to redistribute power towards women. The Scottish Parliament currently lacks the power to legislate for gender quotas in parliament. This means that until electoral law is devolved or there is independence, political parties should be encouraged to adopt gender-balancing measures in candidate selection and formal gender quotas for elections. The success of legislation for equality on public boards also points to a key strategy for the private and third-sector given mandatory quotas have been more successful than voluntary schemes globally.

Given women represent the majority of union members, removing the anti-democratic restrictions on union action would allow for women’s democratic action and participation in the workplace. This is the case even in the midst of resistance and protest. While employment is reserved to Westminster, Scottish campaigning in this area speaks to a different form of women’s participation not limited to a relative elite but which, nonetheless, can wield power to change society. Westminster also retains legislative powers with respect to employment law and overarching economic policy. Within the limits of devolved powers, the current SNP Scottish Government does recognise the need for a more holistic approach to economic gender justice. A stream of initiatives to close the income gap, address occupation segregation, and create childcare and social security infrastructure, along with other issues, are set out in the Government’s report A Fairer Scotland for Women.

The Scottish Budget (2021-2022) includes an ‘Equality and Fairer Scotland Budget’ statement, outlining funding provision for initiatives to address a range of inter-connected inequalities, including those based on sex and gender. Importantly, it takes into account the impacts of the pandemic on disadvantaged groups of women and low-income households. In this sense, the advocacy of gender budgeting has made an impact, representing an important step in cultural change with regards to imagining what the Scottish economy comprises. Gender budgeting is one part of a broader, substantial re-conceptualisation of economics now happening in Scotland. Public discussions about the care and well-being economies, wherein inclusive growth and a revaluation of care are centred, are part of the political firmament. Feminist economists have long argued for the need to move away from standard measures of economic activity like GDP and the limited focus on formal labour market activity. Traditional accounting approaches do not tell us much about the health of ourselves and our ecology. Alternative feminist visions of economics foreground the democratic sharing of paid and unpaid labour not only as a privatised activity but within the public sphere, the redistribution of care, respite and leisure time, and meeting human physical, emotional and social needs. These ideas are now part of the Scottish political firmament and government narrative about economics and distributive justice. Yet, while the National Performance Framework sets out a holistic approach to economics, gender issues still seem to be a somewhat forgotten aspect of policy.

In terms of GBV, a fundamental transformation of the criminal and civil justice processes is necessary, including specialised courts for sexual crime trials and improving civil justice processes. Currently, the joint Scottish Government and COSLA ‘Equally Safe’ strategy for action on all forms of abusive behaviour and violence directed at women and girls has led to important advances in the ways the criminal justice system operates for women. Laws against coercive control, stalking, and image-based sexual abuse have been introduced in recent years. Additionally, the Scottish Government has committed funding for the provision of specialist legal support through the Scottish Women’s Rights Centre, and created a joint protocol between Police Scotland and the Crown Office Procurator Fiscal Service to respond to dual and malicious reporting in domestic abuse cases. However, again, while these are welcome steps, deeper systemic changes are needed to increase women’s confidence in the system. Some outstanding work includes: eliminating the ‘Not Proven’ verdict (a third verdict unique to Scotland); implementing Lady Dorrian’s recommendation to introduce a specialist Court for serious sexual offence cases and expanding specialist courts for other forms of GV; addressing rape myths and stereotypes at all levels of the justice system; and reforming criminal justice process in order to increase convictions. All of these efforts must centre the experiences of victims/survivors.

Additionally, deeper systemic changes are needed and carceral approaches to gender justice are limited. Gender inequality has structural causes and is, therefore, preventable. Organisations like Zero Tolerance and Rape Crisis Scotland (RCS) have led the prevention work in Scotland through nationwide research and training with early years’ practitioners and parents, as well as workshops with children, teachers, university students and staff addressing sexual violence, consent and healthy relationships.

While the Scottish Government has recognised the success of prevention and its importance in achieving gender equality aims, efforts in this area are ongoing. Recently, the First Minister’s National Advisory Council on Women and Girls recommended high-level and far-reaching changes in education, leading to the establishment of the Gender Equality in Education and Learning (GETEL) group. It is expected that GETEL will propose actions to encourage engagement at all levels of the education sector in collaboration with violence against women organisations. If society in Scotland is serious about achieving gender justice, it must continue to have prevention at the heart of its policy and action.

Over the past two decades, Scottish Governments have taken steps towards reducing gender injustice, even if there are areas where feminists press for further policy change. Nonetheless, noted throughout are key areas outwith the current powers of the Scottish Government. Thus, there is also a need for increased governmental power to allow us to address the full interconnected range of issues and realise distributive gender justice.

Kirsty Alexander has worked as a social researcher and taught Politics and Applied Gender Studies in higher education for a number of years, most recently at the University of Strathclyde. Jenny Morrison, a socialist activist in Glasgow for the past 15 years, works with violence against women organisations. If society in Scotland is serious about achieving gender justice, it must continue to have prevention at the heart of its policy and action.

Where to purchase: https://www.calton-books.co.uk/books/a-new-scotland-building-an-equal-fair-and-sustainable-society/
Institutional power no longer delivers for citizens. It always struggled to do so but did so much better before. The ‘golden age’ of representative democracy in Britain was probably the post-war consensus, one brought about by recognising sacrifices made by millions of working-class people in war, their unwillingness to accept the status quo. The British state bent to popular interests. Since then, the state and political parties have broken almost all ties with the citizens. The structures that connected them – mass political parties, responsive local government, civil society, unions and so on – have declined or been dismantled to such an extent that the political classes float free of the electorate, connected only very loosely and distantly by an electoral system failing to equate votes cast with representation.

Where stands Scotland here? Scotland is different in that the current and longstanding governing party has been part of a social movement in the shape of the independence campaign. As power and influence hardly ever enjoy being fettered, there are ongoing attempts by SNP politicians to shake off the ‘yes’ movement and party democracy despite these being the main connections back into the lives of the people they should be acting for. What can be gleaned from this is the constraints and counter-balances that social movements place upon political parties are vital in ensuring parties cannot be overly influenced by elite groups – such as the ‘corporate lobby’ or professional-managerial class - seeking to access state power to protect and advance their own narrow interests which often conflict with those of the wider population.

Add to this the most profound revolution in how information is communicated so institutions of government find it hard to evolve anywhere near rapidly enough to keep up. This would be true even if they were not largely conservative in defence of hierarchy and privilege connected with the British state. One approach to these pressures on the proper functioning of democracy is to ‘reinforce the citadel’, namely, centralise power back to the centre by dint of Boris Johnson’s authoritarian populism. The Scottish Government is at least trying to open up an alternative route with a flirtation with citizens’ assemblies. Though we need the state on our side, we cannot become dependent upon it. Consequently, we need a movement built upon the interests of local causes and communities linked together by unions, insider activism within the state, local and national, and community campaigns and organising. This would be the beginning of a means to claim the state for its citizens and to institutionalise new forms of democratic control.

Here, and some fifty years on from the UCS work-in, unions look very different now. Now in Scotland they have been transformed from being predominantly skilled, male and industrial to being dominated by public sector women workers delivering essential services. They are winning victories utilising both industrial power and widespread community and service-users support, with levels of membership having now stabilised and union density in Scotland remains higher than the UK average.

While the workplace remains the unit of most union organising, the practice of the community of solidarity is of increased importance where a more feminised workforce in care work, health and teaching extends across all of society. We’ve seen this in the 2018 Glasgow equal pay strike, 2017 janitors’ strikes, and 2018 teachers’ pay dispute. Linking workers’ power in the workplace directly to the communities they serve as well as getting them active in their communities as parents, carers, members of churches, political parties and community organisations means every worker can find solidarity in their community and build power in their community to bring about change.

Moving on from unions, popular participation in local representative democracy is essentially limited to voting in periodic elections. For most, that is the beginning and end of their encounter with local democracy. The next five years see the small band of elected representatives agree budgets, set priorities and decide the political direction in our winner-takes-all democratic marketplace. The model is transactional: a vote is traded for a promise. There is no collaborative decision-making, no participatory process and no transfer of power to communities. Disempowerment follows as decisions about key public services are taken without recourse to those who voted and rely on these services.

Yet a Scottish Government review of local democracy told a different story where submissions showed people want more control of decisions on issues that matter to them. The absence of formal structures and resources – in the form of institutions - to facilitate challenging decisions and initiate positive changes has not prohibited communities taking action. Across Scotland, local people have acted collectively to stop school closures, defend community centres, halt demolitions, demand better bus services and take ownership of local buildings no one else wants. The commitment and tenacity required to succeed cannot be underestimated as communities have to navigate opaque bureaucratic processes without formal training, knowledge or support. The measure of successful campaigns is not entirely objective for the process of engagement, building capacity, knowledge, confidence and agency of those involved is a powerful legacy even when campaign aims are not fully achieved. And, the power created when individuals work collectively, and ideally with other working-class organisations, to make change can resonate beyond local boundaries.

Edinburgh council was forced in 2012 to abandon plans to privatise over 2,000 jobs after ‘Save Our Services’, a community campaign led by groups of local women combined with UNISON’s local government union branch. The decision also halted the council’s ambitious project to sell their outsourcing model, developed a cost of £4m, to other local authorities. Marshall Ganz outlined as strategy of turning the resources possessed into the power required to achieve goals. This model of leadership and community organising focuses upon creating a shared commitment, story and structure to distribute power and develop leaders.

So, when faced with a proposal to demolish a much-loved red sandstone building on Leith Walk, Edinburgh, and build six stories of mixed accommodation, mainly student flats, the local community responded with anger and hostility. Careful campaign management ensured from day one the opportunity to build power to make change was central. The usual format of ‘listen and leave’ meetings were replaced with network building
sessions to agree shared objectives, examine where power lay, identify skills and agree tactics. There were no committees or rigid structures and the inevitable rise of informal hierarchy was acknowledged and kept in check. The ‘Save Leith Walk’ campaign successfully stopped the demolition and forced the developer back to the drawing board, utilising community organising tools, consensus decision-making and distributed responsibility to develop capacity, agency and ambition of local citizens resulting in a crowd-sourced alternative plan for the site and a bid for a community buy out.

Communities have the ability to create institutions of power that can influence outcomes and deliver positive change. Yet such campaigns are usually temporary and in response to outside agents which have objectives contrary to local needs. Creating a fairer Scotland which represents the aspirations of local communities requires new institutions and methods to shift structural power and devolve decision-making to those most familiar with impacted services, place and space. Community organising as both a method and movement is key to this. It is a challenge to local authorities and national government to replace the talk of community empowerment and invest in a sustainable community organising movement that creates networks of trained community organisers. Local democracy thrives when people can see a strategy for transformation in their communities, and their central place within that process.

So, how can local politics be reconfigured to allow for this empowerment? We already have in Scotland an impressive narrative surrounding community empowerment and engagement, and the pandemic highlighted the value of community responses as well as the need for networked approaches to tackling the crisis. But to generate resilience and well-being, engagement and participation needs to be ‘built into the bones’ of how we do politics in Scotland.

Innovative practices such as citizens’ assemblies and participatory budgeting have been readily adopted by the Scottish Government. Participatory budgeting is now being institutionalised by all local authorities in Scotland. This offers citizens the chance to decide how local funding should be spent, which has the potential to change the relationship between communities and institutions. The Scottish Government hosted two citizens’ assemblies on the future of Scotland and on climate change. Instead of polarisation and conflict generation, these processes managed to facilitate consensus from differing ideological perspectives on issues of social justice, tackling poverty and health and wellbeing. How the Scottish Government will implement so many policy recommendations, given the danger of cherry-picking those which suit their agenda whilst appearing to take the recommendations seriously, remains to be seen.

These innovations require committed actors, participants, organisers, facilitators and experts to enter into a laborious and time-consuming process. Citizens’ assemblies and participatory budgeting moved online during Covid which was daunting given the previously perceived importance of face-to-face interaction. Yet, this move appears to have been successful, allowing organisers and practitioners to flex their muscles using digital innovations and change the face of democratic innovations for the future.

From this, we can see that beyond electoral politics the desire of citizens to engage exists and that decision-making can be made legitimate. Similar attention has been paid to community engagement. In addition, people can be offered a greater stake in their community through community ownership and development trusts.

Asset transfer is a key component of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 and the Scottish Government further supports this venture with the Community Ownership Support Service. Ownership of assets can help empower communities by making them stakeholders and decision-makers. We are at an early stage so it would be wrong to prejudice the outcomes of these various initiatives and innovations. But at least a course is being set out upon.

For democratic and participative innovation to penetrate local levels and connect the local to the national, we have to think more carefully about embedding and institutionalising these initiatives and innovations into a dense network of inter-linkages that take many forms involving people as workers and as citizens. This would include issues of form and shape like utilising referenda or our upskilled citizens to become advocates for activism in their local areas. Whatever form this takes, this will require investment in the lives of communities and people. If citizens are struggling to live, political participation is not a priority for them. Good practice must be linked beyond standalone processes and one-off innovations. Innovative practices such as citizens’ assemblies and participatory budgeting need to be linked with local initiatives. The media also has a role to play in publicising participatory processes and reporting its outcomes.

Public engagement must be built into the decision making-process beyond consultation and deliberation so that it includes the implementation and evaluation stages of the policy process.

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A negotiated settlement is the only way to bring about an end to the Ukraine war. Neither the Russian nor NATO-backed Ukrainian forces can be simply defeated militarily because of the scale of the forces and weaponry available and the seeming willingness of both sides to escalate the conflict through both threats and heavy weaponry on the ground. But a negotiated settlement can only be achieved when both sides want the war to end, and although there is doubtless a desire for an end to the war from within Ukraine, both Russia and US/NATO have incompatible war aims that they are not currently willing to compromise on. Indeed, it is hard to see how the fundamental issues at stake – the meeting of the legitimate security interests of all sides – can be met within the ‘security’ structures as they currently exist in Europe and beyond.

The current conflict has been three decades in the making and has been long anticipated in this or similar form; those observing post-Cold War geo-political and military trends have been alert to the tensions and imbalances caused by NATO expansion. Despite the horror with which the political establishment currently responds to criticisms of NATO, it is absolutely impossible to understand how this war has happened without looking at what the US/NATO has done in the last three decades, during which it has been without question the dominant global superpower. What was to follow was apparent very early on. Despite the dramatic changes across Europe after 1989, with the demise of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, NATO – under US leadership – began the process of expansion into eastern Europe. Although promises had been made to the Soviet leadership that this would not happen, the US proceeded to fill the space vacated by its previous rival; hopes by many for a new world order of peace, with a concomitant peace dividend, were not forthcoming. The expansion continued to include former Soviet republics and NATO has gone on to become a global military force, abandoning its ‘defensive’ remit and engaging in war far beyond the North Atlantic. NATO expansion has caused significant regional tension and its continued expansionary plans are in large part responsible for this devastating war which risks engulfing much of Europe. Its refusal to take Russian security concerns into account and to rule out membership for Ukraine is now a block on a negotiated settlement. The role of the British government in respect of peace negotiations is shameful. British political leaders have denigrated diplomatic initiatives throughout and engaged in inflammatory rhetoric, even as the conflict intensifies. But, as is obvious, dialogue is essential to resolve these issues – war is not the answer, particularly when continued escalation threatens to bring nuclear weapons use.

Both NATO and Russia are nuclear-armed – totalling around 12,000 warheads between then, fairly equally balanced – and any war between the two would be catastrophic. While three NATO members – Britain, France and the United States – directly possess nuclear weapons, five European states – Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey – host US/NATO nuclear bombs and are committed, under ‘nuclear sharing’ arrangements, to use these weapons of mass destruction upon command from NATO. As a nuclear-armed alliance, which threatens the use of nuclear weapons, NATO cannot create genuine security and should be dissolved. Europe needs a new type of security policy, based on cooperation, mutual respect and trust.

Rather than refusing to engage with the Russian leadership, the US administration must get to the negotiating table, to address all the fundamental issues in this conflict, including how to make the Minsk agreements work. It may be that a new form of agreement is necessary as the Minsk agreements were not enacted, but whatever it is called, the rights of minorities within Ukraine – as in all countries – have to be not only respected, but enshrined in law and constitution to ensure that language rights and regional autonomy are guaranteed. The question of the rights of minorities – or regional majorities – within multinational states or federations, is one of the great and urgent issues of our age and cannot be subject to resolution through the barrel of a gun, whether it’s in western or eastern Europe.

The war has already altered the political balance in Europe and is accelerating its militarisation. This will have a profoundly negative impact on our societies, engendering a culture of violence and national chauvinism. For years there had been talk of the increasing militarisation of the EU, encouraged by the US, basically to pour more resources into NATO. For years, however, there had been little progress. That has now changed. Germany for example, has undertaken a huge about-turn towards war and militarism. Massive increases in military spending are the pattern in almost all NATO states. So more and more of the people’s money will be squandered on weapons and war, instead of being invested in health, jobs and education.

It has often been said that NATO is the means by which the US makes Europe pay for its wars and its drive for global military hegemony. That is more so the case than ever, and it brings with it ever greater dangers of nuclear annihilation. CND – along with the rest of the international peace movement – has long argued instead for a new common security framework in Europe, not massively increasing militarisation. New structures of cooperation are needed to ensure that a war such as this cannot take place in future, and these structures must also enable effective ways of dealing collectively with the multiple crises that humanity faces today. Above all, these are the two existential threats of climate catastrophe and nuclear war, identified by the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists when they set the hands of the Doomsday Clock at 100 seconds to midnight last year – the closest they have ever been, even at the height of the Cold War. But there is also the unfolding disaster of the coronavirus pandemic and its many variants, together with the likelihood of subsequent zoonotic diseases which are themselves often given access to human populations via bad agro-industrial practices that give no consideration to essential ecosystems. Other crises, in migration, food, water and other vital resources, often caused or exacerbated by war, need to be urgently addressed.

One of the foundations for the concept of common security within the peace movement – as well as more widely in civil society – is to be found in the work of the Palme Commission which
marks its fortieth anniversary this year. The essence of Palme’s work can be summarised as ‘nations and populations can only feel safe when their counterparts feel safe’ and this is being carried forward this year, in the most timely fashion, by a new common security commission, led by the ITUC, International Peace Bureau and the Olof Palme International Centre with a team of experts from around the world. Key themes are asserted: that all nations have a right to security; that military force is not a legitimate means for dispute resolution; that reductions and limits on arms are necessary for mutual security; and that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.

Of course, it is one thing to list desirable outcomes and quite another to succeed in bringing them about – as long histories of treaties and international law have shown. The case of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) is one such case. For over forty years, the deal between nuclear and non-nuclear states - that those with nuclear weapons would disarm and those without them would not acquire them – has resulted in a situation where only one signatory has abandoned the treaty to secure a nuclear arsenal, yet all the nuclear weapons states at that time still have nuclear weapons and are currently in the process of modernising – and in some cases – increasing their nuclear arsenals.

Ensuring treaty compliance is exceptionally difficult – some would say nigh on impossible – when it comes to the world’s most powerful states. Yet those of us who want to see a different world, free from the fear of war and nuclear annihilation, are not going to throw our hands up in despair and stop working to that goal. So, what are the concrete steps that the new common security commission recommend? What is striking to me is how much their proposals are to do with empowering and building upon existing initiatives, often from the global south, much as the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, ratified in 2021, was led primarily by the states of the global south in order to cut through the logjam of the NPT. Proposals include: encouraging regional bodies like the African Union, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Gulf Cooperation Council, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), to develop frameworks that incorporate the principles of common security rather than creating new military alliances, with an emphasis on mediation and confidence building. One thing that has been learnt over the years as that there is no point in just beseeching powerful forces to do the right thing – alternative processes have to be developed and enacted. After all, no system or structure lasts forever, no matter how powerful.

There are many other elements to the new commission’s report, which rewards careful scrutiny, but one that will not be unexpected is the reference to the Helsinki Agreement, which in 1975 laid the foundations for the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and proposed that human rights and freedom of expression should be the foundation of peace. Almost fifty years on, the new commission calls for the renewal of the global and regional peace architecture, building on the OSCE model which comprises 57 countries from Europe, Central Asia and North America, including both the USA and Russia. No one can doubt that the Helsinki principles are at the heart of what is required to bring lasting peace, to Ukraine, the wider region and, indeed, to the world. The rapid degeneration of many supposedly democratic and economically advanced societies, with regard to increased poverty, inequality, attacks on civil and human rights, and in many cases the rise of the far right, is deeply disturbing. It needs to be fought on many levels, including understanding its inextricable link to the imposition of neo-liberal economic reforms onto our societies 30 years ago and their exacerbation after the 2008 financial crisis.

However we may choose to locate our own sites of political struggle, having a vision of new ways of conducting foreign and security policy has to be part of that process – and it has to be articulated in concrete ways that mainstream civil society and institutions can engage with. There is no silver bullet that can deliver a new world order of the type we can want to see. It can only be brought about by painstaking work and argument – and ceaselessly making the case for peace and human rights.

Despite the fog of war, it is vital that we work towards outcomes that enable a just and lasting peace for Ukraine – and for the wider world too. Only dialogue and negotiation, taking into account the wider context of this conflict – and the legitimate security interests of us all - can bring that about in a way that will enable a genuinely secure future for humanity. A new vision – and new inclusive, genuinely democratic and enabling structures – must be at its heart.

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Putin’s game of Russian roulette at the intersection of rival imperialisms

Bill Bonnar examines the background to the war in Ukraine

To be clear from the outset: The Russian invasion of Ukraine should be completely condemned as should the appalling consequences of that invasion in terms of the death and destruction which has rained down on the people of that country. Whatever justification the Kremlin offers, there can be no excuse for this attack on a sovereign country. However, as we are being swamped by anti-Russian propaganda which has reached a state of mass hysteria, it is important to look at the background to this conflict. To recognise that the Russian invasion is not the cause of the crisis but rather a dramatic response to a much wider crisis that has been developing since 1991 and more particularly since 2013. It is a crisis in which NATO and the current Ukrainian government carry heavy responsibility.

Much has been made of Ukraine’s sovereignty, yet it should be recognised that Ukraine as a modern nation state is a recent construct. Ukraine as we know it today was a by-product of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and first emerged as the Soviet Republic of Ukraine in 1918 before being incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1922. Ukraine only became an independent country in 1991 after the breakup of the Soviet Union. The country which emerged was very varied with a large ethnic Russian population in the southeast with only tenuous links with the Kiev and other ethnic minorities. Or if one looks at the situation with Crimea which was annexed by Russia in 2014. Crimea only became part of Ukraine in 1956 following a deal between the Ukrainian Communist Party and Nikita Khrushchev. Before it was a separate autonomous republic.

When an independent Ukraine emerged in 1991, it was based on two firm principles. The first was that Ukraine should be a neutral, non-aligned country which would develop equally friendly relations with both Russia and the West. The second, recognising the multinational nature of the new country, was that a degree of nation-building was necessary to create a state for all the peoples not just ethnic Ukrainians. For more than 20 years this two-fold strategy was carried out bringing about a period in which there was little or no international or internal conflict.

This came to an end in 2013 when a ‘revolution’ overthrew the elected president Victor Yanukovych and brought the current regime to power. This ‘revolution’ was part nationalist movement, part coup and with a significant element of foreign interference. The new, nationalist regime effectively tore up the protocols that had been established in 1991. It abandoned the idea of neutrality, adopting a fiercely anti-Russian and pro-western position including a clear statement of intent that it wished to join NATO. It also abandoned the aim of a Ukraine for all the peoples replacing it with an essentially ethnic Ukrainian agenda. This immediately alienated the largely Russian population in the Donbass Region prompting mass protests in support of the former president which quickly escalated into an insurgency and the formation of two breakaway People’s Republic. This was met by an aggressive military campaign by Ukrainian forces in which an estimated 14,000 people were killed and hundreds of thousands forces to flee their homes. Most of those killed were ethnic Russians at the hands of the Ukrainian army and Ukrainian militia groups; many with strong fascist links dating back to the Nazi occupation of the Second World War. In the current situation with Ukraine the victim of a brutal Russian invasion, this can make uncomfortable reading, but it needs to be said. The present regime in Kiev are not simply the innocent victims of this crisis. It has been many of their actions since 2013 which has precipitated current events.

Another factor has been a campaign of aggressive NATO expansion pushing the western military alliance to the borders of Russia. Since 1991 Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Czech Republic and Slovakia have all joined NATO. This has been followed with a massive expansion of military bases, troops and missile sites all pointed at Russia. From a Russian point of view, they have been the victim of NATO aggression which has severely undermined their sense of national security. This is a key point. Any visitor to Russia and before that the Soviet Union would be struck by the constant references to the Second World War and with little wonder. The Nazi attack on the Soviet Union left 26 million people dead, destroyed thousands of towns...
and cities and devastated Soviet society. Anyone who reads about the sieges of Leningrad or Stalingrad would feel they were reading about the apocalypse. For the Nazis, this was not simply a war of conquest; it was a war of genocide and is deeply burned into the collective memory of the Russian people. When the Russians talk of a threat to their sense of national security, it is not empty propaganda. It really means something; particularly when most of the German invasion was through Ukraine. After 1945 Soviet policy towards western Europe was based on a simple principle that they would never again be left so vulnerable yet with the NATO expansion in the last 30 years that is exactly what has happened. Then Ukraine stated their intension to join NATO. To believe there wouldn’t be a Russian response to this threat was naïve in the extreme.

Of course, none of the above justifies the Russian invasion and scale of death and destruction now being witnessed. So why has Russia taken such extreme action? This has a lot to do with the nature of the current Russian regime and the need for Vladimir Putin to secure his legacy. The fact is his tenure in office can be categorised as almost complete failure both in terms of defending Russian security and in building a successful capitalist economy. The Soviet Union ended 31 years ago and with it the attempt to build a particular model of socialism. The collapse of that system was a disaster for the peoples of Russia by just about every definition of the term disaster. Of that system was a disaster for the peoples of Russia by just about every definition of the term disaster. The peoples of Russia by just about every definition of the term disaster.

As for the establishment of democracy, what emerged was an overt capitalist dictatorship - government by the oligarchs masquerading as a democracy. At the same time, Soviet Russia has gone from a world superpower to a weak and vulnerable country encircled by hostile western powers. Putin came to power replacing Boris Yeltsin; a weak, alcoholic, mentally unstable character who quickly became a puppet of the West, with the task of restoring Russia to something like its former self. He has failed completely to achieve this and his military adventure into Ukraine has perhaps been an attempt to salvage legacy. That failure has extended to the war in Ukraine. What was clearly planned as a quick decisive victory has descended into a brutal war of attrition. At its heart has been a series of miscalculations. The Russian armed forces are clearly not as strong as believed while the Ukrainian resistance, bolstered by massive military support from the West, has been much stronger than anticipated. More alarmingly for the Kremlin has been the re-invigoration of NATO. If one of the aims was to weaken NATO and push it back, then the exact opposite has happened. Non-NATO countries are now queuing up to join while others, like Germany, are taking on a more active role. The invasion has also given NATO a new reason for existing. Prior to these events one of the main arguments against NATO was its post-Soviet role. Before 1991, its declared purpose was to defend Western Europe against the aggressive intentions of the Warsaw Pact. This was never true. The Warsaw Pact was a defence against western aggression, yet this was not how it was presented to the public. With the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and many former Warsaw Pact countries joining NATO, this argument collapsed. Now a new narrative has developed. NATO is needed as a deterrent against modern Russian aggression.

All of this will have seriously weakened Putin’s position. His power rests on two foundations; the oligarchy and the army. The oligarchy, because he protects their wealth and interests and the armed forces because he keeps levels of military expenditure high. If either or both withdraw their support, then he is in trouble. At some point there will need to be a negotiated end to this war given the failure by Russia to inflict a decisive defeat and the inability of Ukrainian forces to achieve victory. What would be the basis of such a negotiated settlement? This must be based on the following principles; Russia must recognise the sovereignty of Ukraine; Russian must pay reparations for the massive damage inflicted on the country by its invasion; the principle of sovereignty must be extended to those parts of Ukraine who may not wish to continue as part of that country. This particularly applies to the Donbass Region; Ukraine must not join NATO. It could be argued that as a sovereign country it has the right to apply for membership. This is true but NATO could refuse that application. Particularly as Article 6 of the NATO Charter states: ‘member states should settle any international disputes which they may be involved by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security is maintained’; and there should be an end to all foreign intervention in Ukraine both Russian and Western; of which the latter has been significant over the past decade. Only an agreement based on the above can be the basis of a settlement in the interests of the peoples of Ukraine and the international community. The alternative is a war with no end in sight.

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A left divided: Anti-war, anti-imperialism and the Russian invasion of Ukraine

Gilbert Achcar dissects the differences as well as their origins and their outcomes

The anti-war, anti-imperialist left worldwide has been deeply divided on the war in Ukraine along quite unusual lines, due to the novelty of the situation represented by Russia’s invasion of a weaker neighboring country as part of Russia’s openly stated nationalist-expansionist ambitions, along with NATO’s active and substantial support for the invaded country’s resistance. The same left had already been facing division over Russia’s murderous intervention in Syria after Iran’s, but the conditions were very different.

Moscow intervened on behalf of the existing Syrian government, a fact that some took as a pretext to justify or excuse it. Support to Russia’s military intervention in Syria or, at best, refusal to condemn it were in most cases predicated on a geopolitical one-sided ‘anti-imperialism’ that considered the fate of the Syrian people as subordinate to the supreme goal of opposing US-led Western imperialism seen as supportive of the Syrian uprising.

The war in Ukraine presented what looked like a simpler and more straightforward case. Russia waged a war of invasion in Ukraine similar to those waged by US imperialism in various countries since World War II, from Korea to Vietnam to Iraq and Afghanistan. But since it wasn’t Washington but Moscow that was invading, and since those fighting against the invasion weren’t supported by Moscow and Beijing but by Washington and its NATO allies, most of the anti-war anti-imperialist left reacted very differently.

One section of that left, taking its neo-campist single-minded opposition to US imperialism and its allies to the extreme, supported Russia, labelling it as ‘anti-imperialist’ by turning the concept of imperialism from one based on the critique of capitalism into one based on a quasi-cultural hatred of the West. Another section acknowledged the imperialist nature of the present Russian state but deemed it to be a lesser imperialist power that ought not to be opposed according to the logic of the ‘lesser evil’.

Still another section of the anti-war anti-imperialist left, acknowledging likewise the imperialist nature of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, condemned it, and demanded that it stop. However, it fell short of supporting Ukraine’s resistance to the invasion, except by piously wishing it success, while refusing to support its right to get the weapons it needs for its defence. Worse still, most of the same people oppose the delivery of such weapons by the NATO powers in a blatant subordination of the fate of the Ukrainians to the presumed ‘supreme’ consideration of anti-Western anti-imperialism. Or else they claim that such deliveries turn the war into an inter-imperialist war, which justifies opposing them.

There is no dispute that the Ukraine war has turned into a proxy confrontation between Russian imperialism and Western imperialist powers. Now, let us imagine that the United States invaded Venezuela, as it contemplated doing for a while under Donald Trump, and that Russia decided to supply the Venezuelan government of Nicolás Maduro with weapons to help it fight the invaders. This situation would clearly be one of a just war waged by Venezuela against a US imperialist invasion, against the background of an ongoing conflict between US imperialism and Russian imperialism. Venezuela’s just war would, therefore, be at the same time a ‘proxy war’ between two imperialist powers, in the same way that most conflicts during the Cold War—such as the Korean war or the Vietnam war—were wars of national liberation as well as ‘proxy wars’ between Washington and Moscow.

What would the right position be for internationalist anti-imperialists? Unless you are an absolute pacifist believing in ‘turning the other cheek,’ you would support arms deliveries to the Venezuelan resistance to enable it to defend its population and achieve a position from which it could avoid capitulation and lessen the price to pay in the negotiations. If anyone said, ‘We support the Venezuelan resistance, but oppose both Russian arms deliveries to the Maduro government and economic pressure on the United States,’ this attitude would rightly be regarded as not serious.

For such a position would be proclaiming support to the Venezuelans while depriving them of the means to resist and opposing that economic pressure be put on their aggressor. At best, this would be an utterly inconsistent position. At worst, a hypocritical position disguising an indifference to the fate of the Venezuelans—seen as sacrificial lambs on the altar of anti-imperialism (Russian imperialism in this case)—behind a pretence of wishing them success in their just resistance.

This brings us to the key distinction between a direct war between imperialist countries in which every side is trying to grab a part of the world, as was most classically the case in the First World War, and an invasion by an imperialist power of a non-imperialist country, where the latter is backed by another imperialist power using it as a proxy in inter-imperialist rivalry.

In the first case, working-class internationalism requires that workers, including workers in uniform (i.e., soldiers), oppose the war on both sides, each opposing their own government’s war, even if that would contribute to its defeat (this is the meaning of ‘revolutionary defeatism’). In the second case, revolutionary defeatism is required only from workers and soldiers who belong to the aggressor imperialist country, and in a much more active way than indirectly. They are required to sabotage their country’s war machine.
Workers of the oppressed nation, on the other hand, have every right and duty to defend their country and families and must be supported by internationalists worldwide. It is through the angle of such practical consequences of political positions that the attitude towards the ongoing war must be defined.

The most hypocritical iteration of the refusal to support the Ukrainians’ right to defend themselves and get the means they need for that has consisted in feigning concern for them by representing them as being used by NATO as cannon fodder in a proxy inter-imperialist war. Hence, a phony show of pity for the Ukrainians depicted as being cynically sent weapons by NATO powers so that they carry on fighting until total exhaustion. This allows those expressing such views to oppose NATO governments’ delivery of defensive weapons to the Ukrainians in the guise of humanistic concerns about them.

This fake sympathy, however, totally obliterates the Ukrainians’ agency, to the point of contradicting the most obvious: not a single day has passed since the Russian invasion began without the Ukrainian president publicly blaming NATO powers for not sending enough weapons, both quantitatively and qualitatively. If NATO imperialist powers were cynically using the Ukrainians to drain their Russian imperialist rival, as that type of incoherent analysis would have it, they would certainly not need to be begged to send more weapons.

The truth is that key NATO powers - not least among them France and Germany, both of them major suppliers of weapons to Ukraine - are eager to see the war stop. Although the war has substantial benefits to their military industrial complexes, such specific sectors’ gains are far outweighed by the overall impact of looming energy shortages, rising inflation, massive refugee crisis, and disruption to the international capitalist system as a whole, at a time of global political uncertainty and rise of the far right.

Finally, there is a section of the global anti-war anti-imperialist left that rejects the provision of weapons to the Ukrainians in the name of peace, advocating negotiations as an alternative to war. One could believe that we were back to the time of the Vietnam war, when the anti-war movement was split between pro-Moscow Communist Parties who advocated peace and the radical left that openly wished for Vietnam’s victory against the US invasion. The situation today is quite different, however. At the time of Vietnam, both wings of the anti-war movement were in full solidarity with the Vietnamese. Both supported the Vietnamese’s right to acquire weapons for their defence. Their disagreement was tactical, about which slogan to put forward in order to most effectively build an anti-war movement that could help Vietnam in its national struggle.

Today, on the other hand, those who advocate ‘peace’ while opposing the Ukrainians’ right to acquire weapons for their defence are counterposing peace to fighting. In other words, they are wishing for the capitulation of Ukraine - for which ‘peace’ could have resulted if the Ukrainians had not been armed and hence not been able to defend their country? We could have been writing ‘Order prevails in Kyiv!’ today, but that would have been the New Order forced by Moscow on the Ukrainian nation under the most deceitful pretext of ‘denazification’.

Negotiations are going on between Kyiv and Moscow, under the aegis of NATO member, Turkey. So, it is certainly not like some side is refusing to negotiate. Now, it doesn’t take much expertise in war history to understand that negotiations depend on the balance of forces achieved on the ground. The ongoing negotiations won’t lead to a peace treaty except in one of two ways. One is that Ukraine will no longer be able to carry on fighting and will have to capitulate and accept Moscow’s diktat, even if this diktat has been considerably watered down from Putin’s initially stated goals due to the heroic resistance of the Ukrainian armed forces and population. The second possibility is that Russia will no longer be able to carry on fighting, either militarily because of the moral exhaustion of its troops, or economically because of widespread dissatisfaction among the Russian population - in the same way that, in the First World War, the difficulties encountered by Czarist Russia’s troops and the economic consequences of the war on the Russian population led the latter to rise up and bring Czarism down in 1917. A similar cause led to the failed 1905 Revolution in the wake of Russia’s defeat in its war against Japan.

True internationalists, anti-war advocates, and anti-imperialists can only be wholeheartedly in favour of the second scenario. They must, therefore, support the Ukrainians’ right to get the weapons they need for their defence. Supporting Ukraine’s position in negotiations about its own national territory requires a support to its resistance and its right to acquire the weapons that are necessary for its defence from whichever source possesses such weapons and is willing to provide them. Refusing Ukraine’s right to acquire such weapons is basically a call for it to capitulate. In the face of an overwhelmingly armed and most brutal invader, this is actually defeatism on the wrong side, virtually amounting to support for the invader.

Consequences of war configured through politics reveal ever greater hypocrisy and inhumanity

Arthur West argues that double standards have outflanked diplomacy but peace can be secured

The tragic war in Ukraine has caused considerable suffering and loss of life. It’s appropriate to positively acknowledge the support many people across the country have given to humanitarian appeals supporting people in Ukraine affected by the conflict. It has also been impressive to see members of the public and organisations offer to house refugees fleeing the conflict. This is despite the UK Government taking minimal responsibility for coordinating efforts to get refugees into the country as quickly as possible. Hopefully, a stable ceasefire and peaceful long-term solution to the conflict can be found in the near future. It also seems important to examine some of the issues which have come into sharp focus as a result of the war in Ukraine. It will be the job of the peace movement in Scotland and the UK to argue that the legacy of the war in Ukraine should be a peaceful and diplomatic approach to resolving tensions between countries and political blocs. In today’s troubled world the sane and rational voice of the peace movement is needed more than ever. It seems the Ukraine War means that the following issues require reflection.

The first is Britain’s automatic support for US foreign policy. In the run up to war and since, Britain has slavishly followed the US position. By contrast, some reports suggested that Germany and France were taking the view that diplomatic and political approaches to resolving tensions with Ukraine were their preferred options. In Germany’s case, the main reason for this was because they did not want to jeopardise the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline which would have pumped Russian gas directly into Germany. In the case of France, it was anger over the Australian-UK-US nuclear arrangement which saw the aborted submarine deal with Australia. So, at the end of 2021 and beginning of 2022, there was good reason to think about Britain aligning with Germany and France in seeking a diplomatic solution to the situation in Ukraine rather than following in behind the US.

We’ll never know if aligning more closely with German and French approaches would have prevented the war. And, we now have the depressing sight of Germany committing more funds to military expenditure and both Germany and France publicly aligning themselves with the US and Britain. Germany now also appears to have dropped its policy of not supplying weapons to conflict zones and has agreed to supply Ukraine with surface to air missiles and anti-tank weapons.

The second is the double standards at play. At a recent Stop the War Conference, Jeremy Corbyn said that the concern for Ukrainian refugees and support for people affected by the conflict should be given a positive welcome. However, he also observed that equal amounts of public concern and support would be welcome for victims of the war and conflicts in places such as Palestine and Yemen. While the Tory Government seems anxious to raise awareness and encourage action in relation to Ukrainian refugees, at the same time it is trying to develop a scheme to send refugees to Rwanda. MPs who speak out about the conflict in Ukraine are in some cases part of Friends of Israel groups. So, while speaking up for the people of Ukraine, they appear to be uncritical supporters of Israel - a country recently described as an apartheid state by Amnesty International.

And, Saudi Arabia, supplied with Britain and American arms remains embroiled in an eight-year war in Yemen. Saudi-led military action and a Saudi-led blockade have created a disastrous humanitarian situation. Unlike Ukraine, very few Yemenis are able to flee the war. There were some 3.6m displaced people in Yemen in 2020 and the World Food Programme estimates at least half of Yemeni children under five years of age – 2.3m kids - are at acute risk of malnutrition. The UN estimates 377,000 deaths have occurred, with the main cause being malnutrition. It seems inconceivable a Western ally responsible for so much suffering has still not been sanctioned.

There are also double standards at play in relation to calls to deal with Putin for breaches of international law. The International Criminal Court was set up in 2002 to investigate and, where warranted, try individuals charged with crimes relating to areas such as crimes against humanity and genocide. It is a permanent institution and it can investigate crimes submitted to it by the UN Security Council. It can also investigate crimes by nations which have signed and recognise the Treaty which set up the International Court. But Russia, US, Israel and Sudan, despite signing the Treaty, say that they will not abide by its jurisdiction.

Another important international mechanism for making the world a safer place is the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. It is the first legally binding international agreement to comprehensively prohibit nuclear weapons with the ultimate goal being their total elimination. The Treaty opened for signature at the UN on 20 September 2017 and entered into force on 22 January 2021. There are currently 86 signatories and 60 state parties (being countries which have signed the treaty and ratified it through their national parliamentary processes). Countries who support the treaty agree not to produce, develop, test or acquire nuclear weapons but nuclear weapons states such as Britain refuse to engage with it. If nuclear weapons states wish to sign, they have to get rid of their nuclear weapons or commit to doing so in a time bound, verifiable plan. Given that the threat of nuclear weapons use has arisen during the Ukraine crisis, this multi-lateral framework for getting rid of nuclear weapons is perhaps a very useful addition to international law.

The third concerns attitudes to, and treatment of, refugees. The public’s supportive response to Ukrainians seeking refuge has been very positive. It hopefully provides a way forward.
for building on a permanent basis a more compassionate approach to asylum and refugee issues. However, the Tory Government continues to be insensitive on matters relating to refugees and asylum. There is mounting evidence that those fleeing have been met with bureaucracy and delays when trying to get to Britain. This government is also taking minimal responsibility for co-ordinating the details of the sponsorship scheme announced by Michael Gove.

The Refugee Council has criticised the Government’s response to Ukrainian refugees as mean spirited. However, it is not only in relation to dealing with them that the Government is mean spirited. Proposals to send some asylum seekers to Rwanda and Government attempts to continue with their ill-advised Nationality and Borders Bill do not give any suggestions that the Home Office will display any humanity and compassion any time soon. Facilities could be provided at embassies and consulates at countries of origin and at channel crossings and, following the charity, Safe Passage, new safe routes for people seeking asylum could be opened along with a new relocation scheme for unaccompanied children. Safe Passage research showed that of the 12,248 unaccompanied children granted protection in Britain between 2010 and 2020, only 700 arrived through official government schemes. Most were forced to travel irregularly to find protection, often in the back of lorries.

The fourth concerns ways forward towards peace in Ukraine. Peace movement organisations have made the point that the break-up of the Soviet Union represented a missed opportunity to foster peace and co-operation in relation to European security. George Roberson, former NATO General Secretary, recalled Putin actually asked him about Russia joining NATO in the early 1990s. Dan Plesch, professor of diplomacy at the SOAS, University of London, also said: ‘The Soviet Union managed a relatively peaceful end to empire, which is almost unprecedented and for which they go no credit’. Declassified documents maintained by the National Security Archive at George Washington University show a pattern of promises US negotiators made to their Russian counterparts in relation to not expanding NATO in Eastern Europe. That said, debates about the causes of the war and NATO expansion will not address the current suffering of Ukrainian people.

Dy drawing on recent statements made by Scottish CND and the Movement for Abolition of War, the following steps as a way forward to delivering a peaceful solution to the war in Ukraine seem sensible:

- Clear support across the Scottish political spectrum for Scottish CND’s call for an immediate ceasefire and withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine;
- Support for building on a permanent basis a more compassionate approach to asylum and refugee issues. However, the Tory Government continues to be insensitive on matters relating to refugees and asylum. There is mounting evidence that those fleeing have been met with bureaucracy and delays when trying to get to Britain. This government is also taking minimal responsibility for co-ordinating the details of the sponsorship scheme announced by Michael Gove.

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Dy drawing on recent statements made by Scottish CND and the Movement for Abolition of War, the following steps as a way forward to delivering a peaceful solution to the war in Ukraine seem sensible:

- Clear support across the Scottish political spectrum for Scottish CND’s call for an immediate ceasefire and withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine;
- • Clear support and solidarity across the Scottish political spectrum with the Russian and Ukrainian peace movements who are making a stand against this dreadful war;
- • Clear support from politicians across the Scottish political spectrum to call for Russia and Ukraine to continue good faith negotiations to end the current conflict;
- • As suggested by the Movement for the Abolition of War, discussion of issues such as military deployments and regional arms control could be helpful in reducing tensions in the future;
- • The convening of a Europe-wide consultation via the OSCE - the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe - to draw up a new Common Security framework for the whole of Europe. It is the largest regional security-oriented organisation in the world with 3,500 staff, has observer status at the UN and Russia and the US within its membership. Its mandate includes issues such as arms control, promotion of human rights, press freedom and promoting fair and free elections; and
  - Supporting the framework of the Minsk Agreements as a way to move peace talks forward. They were drawn up in the Belarus from 2015 and focussed upon ending conflict in Donbas, being signed by Russia, Ukraine, separatist leaders and the OSCE and endorsed by a UN Security Council resolution. Its components were: i) OSCE mandated ceasefire; ii) pullback of heavy weapons and foreign fighters from line of conflict and an exchange of prisoners; and iii) special status was granted to so called separatist areas - allowing them to create their own police force and have a say in appointing local prosecutors and judges.

Arthur West is the former chair of Scottish CND

Useful weblinks are:
Movement for the Abolition of War - https://abolishwar.net/
Safe Passage - www.safepassage.org.uk
Scottish Peace Network - www.scottishpeacenetwork.org.uk
Disabling and deactivating the discrimination against disabled workers

Alison Mitchell explains why UNISON has dedicated 2022 to be a 365-day disability campaigning agenda

The union’s strength lies in its recognition of the value and unique experiences disabled people bring to the workplace and to our union. UNISON recognises that people are disabled by societal and environmental barriers rather than their medical condition. So, society’s institutions, structures and processes are designed to meet a ‘norm’, with no obligation on it to adapt for those that fall outside this. The consequence for disabled people is exclusion arising from poor inaccessible design in all parts of their lives.

Attitudes towards disability and disabled people have been shaped by history, influenced by religion, astronomy and culture. Throughout our history, disabled people have been criminalised, segregated into colonies, institutionalised, excluded from education, and excluded from the workplace. They have been denied welfare, being forced to rely on family and charity, or worse beg. They have been targets of ridicule and of entertainment. They have been victims of Eugenics and Witchcraft, being tortured and killed.

This has given rise to deep-rooted assumptions, attitudes and prejudices that continue to disadvantage and discriminate against disabled people in all parts of their lives. It’s a national shame, a history of profound cruelty and violence, but equally of resilience and hope.

Attitudes towards employing disabled people began to shift post-WWII. However, this was not due to a fundamental shift in attitudes towards disability but borne from a sense of obligation towards ex-servicemen disabled through war and to address the levels of unemployment created by war. In fact, there had been similar attempts post-WWII, providing limited employment opportunity for men returning from war, but that quickly waned.

Even in the 1940s, the opportunity for employment was limited to segregated employment, or reserved occupations and quota scheme employment in low skill menial roles, attracting low pay. These employment policies perpetuated a view that disabled people had limited capability creating barriers to employment and careers progression that persist today.

Today, our disabled children begin their education with the same aspirations as non-disabled, but by the time they leave school they are half as likely to be in employment, training, or education. We’re failing disabled people before they even enter the workplace, reinforcing a belief that they have less worth and bring less value.

One in five people of working age are disabled, yet disabled people are less likely to be in employment and more likely to be in lower graded, low-paid roles far below their aspirations or abilities compared to the non-disabled. The employment prospects for those people with certain disabilities is even poorer, and those who have learning disabilities or mental health conditions being least likely to be in employment. This has led us to a situation where many disabled people do not enter or disengage with employment.

We regularly hear reports from disabled members of managers refusing reasonable adjustment requests. At the top of their refusal list are: ‘IT difficulties’, ‘data protection issues’, ‘we can’t knit you a job’, and ‘it wouldn’t be fair on the others’. Managers’ proposed solutions are: ‘can you not reduce your working hours’, ‘you may need to rethink your work options’, and ‘have you thought about ill-health retirement’.

Covid-19 has demonstrated that you can overcome perceived IT difficulties and data protection issues, Archibald v Fife Council in 2004 demonstrated you can ‘knit a job’, and the Equality Act 2010 demonstrates that reasonable adjustments are to create equity. Covid has also presented an opportunity for people to view the world through the eyes of a disabled person, experiencing the limitations caused by poor design that did not work for the way we were living.

In 2016, the Scottish Government made a commitment to at least half the disability employment gap by 2035. At that time the gap was 35.8%. Fast forward to 2020, and the gap is 33.4%.

To be on target the government needs to reduce the gap by at least 1% each year until 2035, or 3,362 additional disabled people into the workforce annually.

This leads into the next issue: the disability pay gap. In 2020, the Scottish Government reported that non-disabled workers earn on average 16.5% more per hour than disabled workers. The pay gap is worsening, rising from the 2016 baseline of 13.8%.

The crux of the problem is there is a lack of compulsion across all employers to commit to positive employment practices, and to report on disability employment. There’s a need for compulsion on employers to report on disability employment and a need for robust measures that are open to independent scrutiny. To be genuinely inclusive, employers need to measure what they do, and meaningful reporting on disability employment can help them do this.

The Scottish Government also needs to look at why our education system is failing disabled children and young people. The Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions to Adulthood) (Scotland) Bill is a significant first step to ensuring that there are structures in place to support children and young people through their educational journey to support equity on a par with their non-disabled peers.

We also need properly funded personal care to provide those who require it with the finance they need to support them into and to remain in employment.

So, the ‘2022 Year of Disabled Workers’ is an opportunity to focus on disability employment: to lobby our governments to introduce mandatory reporting of meaningful disability employment measures; to advocate and press for properly funded personal care and supported education plans; to educate in order to challenge entrenched societal and environmental barriers; to press for progressive workplace policies. And, to celebrate the successes and contributions disabled people have made in the workplace and beyond.

Alison Mitchell is secretary of UNISON’s Scottish Disabled Members Committee.
Why did we abandon social eating for the food bank?

Bryce Evans recalls a time when food poverty was not privatised and individualised as it is now

In the last twenty years, the food bank has become the staple response to food poverty in Britain. Most food banks are run by the Trussell Trust and most insist on recipients producing a written referral before receiving an 'emergency food parcel'. The Trussell Trust claims to want to eradicate food poverty. Interestingly, it recently cemented its place as the market leader on the UK food poverty scene by forming a corporate partnership with Bank of America, a company associated with the financial meltdown of 2008 and the ensuing economic troubles which, ironically enough, aggravated food bank dependence.

The rise and rise of the food bank has ensured that our recent history of public dining rooms offering price-capped, nutritious meals to people has been rapidly forgotten. In 1936 William Beveridge, Director of the London School of Economics, composed a landmark memorandum anticipating war and calling for the re-establishment of emergency feeding schemes. During the Second World War, the British state duly funded mass canteen dining, known as ‘British Restaurants’.

The name was coined by Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, in 1940. Churchill thought the Ministry of Food’s preferred title - Communal Feeding Centres - was redolent of Dickensian poverty or Soviet monotony. The British Restaurant had been pioneered in the First World War as the ‘National Kitchen’ and the goal remained the same: to combat food and fuel price inflation and boost morale, the state would subsidise attractive yet cheap urban social eating spaces. After receiving a start-up grant from the Treasury, local government was responsible for recruiting a paid staff and restaurant management. Central purchasing ensured economies of scale, ensuring meals were cheap. The ensuing popularity of social eating meant that most of these canteens turned over a profit.

When it came to menus, a balance had to be struck between the Ministry of Food’s nutritionists, who were eager to get the British public eating more vegetables, and a general public resistance to healthier fare. State-sponsored social eating was accompanied by anxieties over its civilisational and cultural value and many British Restaurants, therefore, placed a premium on cleanliness and pleasant surroundings. Many of these sites incorporated specially commissioned artwork and some in London even featured invaluable paintings loaned from the Royal Collection. At their ubiquitous peak, there were 2,160 British Restaurants. The extent to which they were a high street fixture is illustrated by comparison to the number of McDonald’s restaurants operating in Britain currently, which is around half that figure. These were large prominent city centre sites, for example Glasgow’s occupied a prime spot on Argyle Street. The British Restaurant outlasted the war and post-war rationing, with some continuing to operate into the 1960s and 1970s.

Far from an historical oddity, cheap yet nutritious social eating was a successful way of combating what is today termed ‘food poverty’. These were popular cross-class venues and there was less stigma attached to their use than is commonly associated with food bank use today. While it might be assumed that the political left would champion communal feeding and the political right dismiss it, the political reception was more nuanced and examples of its proponents - from Churchill himself, to the writer, Barbara Cartland, Margaret Thatcher’s father, grocer, Alf Roberts, to millionaire emigré, Flora Solomon of Marks and Spencer - demonstrate this.

Often, wartime exigencies are quickly forgotten or dismissed, and communal dining is no exception. One of the great champions of the British Restaurant, Flora Solomon, would reflect ‘restaurants existed, and so did communities; but put the two together and you were introducing a practice so alien to the mentality of the British people it could be likened to replacing the brick walls of the Albert Hall with glass and turning the place into a nudist colony’. Yet Solomon and others successfully revived a First World War experiment in the 1940s, establishing the British Restaurant as a vital supplement to the ration book with tangible psychological and health benefits. Perhaps, it is again time to rescue canteen dining from its Orwellian image problem and recognise, in times of hardship, its social and economic use and supplementary benefit.

Amidst the orgy of individualism in Margaret Thatcher’s Britain, social eating was increasingly seen as passé. While the Greater London Council drew up plans for the revival of British Restaurants in the 1980s, these were never implemented.

And yet rising food and fuel poverty today present a case for the reintroduction of social eating, a less stigmatising and more nutritious alternative to the basic food bank. When it comes to feeding people, the British state’s comfort zone has always been to leave this to private enterprise or charity, hence the current situation. This changed during the world wars, when the state subsidised experiments in social eating. It has often taken celebrity pressure to highlight how the state can do more to feed people and push it to do so, whether from Charles Dickens’ criticism of the Poor Law or Marcus Rashford’s campaign on school holiday hunger.

Now, with rising fuel and food prices, maybe it is time to embrace social eating once again. Not in the form of the pandemic’s ‘Eat Out to Help Out’ scheme, but as part of a sustainable effort to ensure people are eating healthily and affordably: one which improves on the dehumanising features of the basic food bank and makes social eating spaces once more ‘centres of civilisation’.

Bryce Evans is Professor of Modern World History at Liverpool Hope University, author of ‘Feeding the People in Wartime Britain’ (Bloomsbury, 2022), blogs @ http://drbryceevans.wordpress.com/ and tweets @drbryceevans.
Making arguments and action to build working class support for an independent socialist Scotland

Kevin McVey reports on a new initiative to build socialist support for independence

Scottish politics is dominated by the debate about independence. It colours all the discussions about Scotland’s future. Across the left there are many shades of opinion on how Scotland can determine its own future and what that future should look like.

Socialists for Independence was formed in late 2021 to be part of that debate. It aims to be a positive and dynamic network that will provide a welcoming space for people to have a dialogue about a range of issues, from how to secure an independence referendum, to what a progressive Scotland may look like in the future. We are non-party political and welcome people from any party and none, who want to be part of the building of a fairer Scotland.

We want dialogue but we also want action. We want to be part of the broader independence movement and we want to work constructively with others in shaping the direction that movement might take. We recognise that central to the question of how to achieve independence and to what a new Scotland might look like is the reality of the everyday lives of working-class people in Scotland. It is in the working-class heartlands of Scotland that support for independence is highest, reflecting the hope that with independence comes change. For the same reason a majority of young people back the independence cause.

We believe, therefore, that there is a constituency out there of people who reject capitalism and the values it represents. It was significant to see at COP26 the demand for ‘system change, not climate change’ as people identified the rapaciousness of the market with environmental destruction.

There are thousands of Scots who identify with the ethos of socialism that values the collective provision of goods and services for the common good. These are the people who can be the backbone of a movement rooted in communities throughout Scotland.

We have five main aims under the headings of: independence, ecology, equality, community and socialism. It is a vision of a Scotland which is a democracy free from the trappings of feudal power, where there is public ownership and democratic control of our energy, transport and banking networks and where nature is protected from the ravages of the dash for profit. Socialists for Independence is an exciting addition to the broader independence movement and to left politics in Scotland and we look forward to collaborating with those who share our socialist vision.

Kevin McVey is a founding member of Socialists for Independence (https://socialistsforindependence.scot/) who has been active in the socialist and trade union movement since the mid-1980s.

The Jimmy Reid Foundation is now operating as a charity

The Jimmy Reid Foundation is delighted to announce that, from 1 April 2022, it has begun operating as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO). Previously, the Foundation and Scottish Left Review (which set up the Foundation) operated as a not-for-profit company called Left Review Scotland Ltd. This company is now in the process of being wound down. Our registration number with the Office of the Scottish Charities Regulator (OSCR) is SC051331. The purpose of the Jimmy Reid Foundation SCIO is the advancement of education, and it has two activities.

The first is the Jimmy Reid Foundation, the left thinktank, and the second is the Scottish Left Review magazine. Although SCIO status was granted on 8 October 2021, the delay in beginning operating as a SCIO was due to the impact of COVID restrictions upon undertaking the necessary financial and organisational changes.

While the websites of both the Jimmy Reid Foundation and the Scottish Left Review have been amended to reflect this new status, they will continue to operate as before – with the same addresses (web, physical and email) but now under the direction of the mother organisation, the Jimmy Reid Foundation SCIO, which itself is directed by the five Trustees of the SCIO (Gregor Gall, Lynn Henderson, Pat Kelly, Lilian Macer and Bob Thomson). The ‘Object’ (i.e., purpose) of the JRF SCIO and its guiding principles can be found at https://reidfoundation.scot/2021/10/scottish-charitable-incorporated-status-scio-granted/ Those wishing to support the work of the Jimmy Reid Foundation SCIO financially can do so at https://reidfoundation.scot/
P&O = Profit & odiousness

Mick Lynch says the RMT will stand firm against gangster capitalism and to defend workers

The sacking of 800 P&O workers in March shocked and appalled the entire union movement. The callousness of the decision with no thought towards the livelihoods it would destroy or the inevitable damage it would wreak on a struggling industry was not something we’d seen in Britain for many years. CEO Peter Hebblethwaite admitted under a grilling examination by exasperated MPs that he knew the company was violating the law. He went on to justify this flagrant breach of employment law by saying no union would have accepted the company’s terms. This is one thing we can agree on.

These gangster capitalists then proceeded to hire handcuff wielding private security firms to board ships and force our crews to disembark. This ruthless and intimidatory behaviour represents a new low in UK industrial relations. Other companies across the economy will look at the example set by P&O, the fact there was no real sanction applied to them and wonder if they can get away with that kind of industrial vandalism against their workforce.

The RMT has not taken these developments lying down and has launched a series of protests at ports across the country and staged rallies outside parliament with strong support from across the political spectrum. Transport Secretary, Grant Shapps, has blustered his way through the crisis while refusing to take the action necessary to secure the jobs of the 800 sacked seafarers. RMT has worked closely with Nautilus and the International Transport Federation (ITF) to keep up the pressure on the Dubai-owned company. And we will continue our ‘Fair Ferries campaign’ so we can achieve justice for all maritime staff.

The problems for P&O do continue as we predicted. New agency crews, some paid as low as £3 an hour, are unable to crew and operate the vessels safely. Some P&O ships have been prevented from sailing due to among other things, failing structural integrity, fire safety equipment not being properly installed and evacuation mechanisms not being up to standard.

ITF inspectors, who routinely assess ships for welfare issues, have been prevented from boarding, in unprecedented moves by port authorities and P&O has sacked under-trained, under-paid crew members, exacerbating this crisis of their own making. As a union, we question seriously if P&O ships are safe for the travelling public to use. You cannot sack 800 skilled professional staff in a safety critical industry like maritime and expect everything to be smooth sailing afterwards.

The only language a company like DP (Dubai Ports) World (which owns P&O) understands is the one of profit and loss. That’s why we are calling on the travelling public to ‘Boycott P&O’ and to support our protests at ports across the country. Companies must know that where workers are threatened and badly treated, the union movement will respond in kind. And, in the case of P&O, it has shown how desperately our unions need to be unshackled so secondary action by trade unionists in solidarity is allowed. Until such a day, we will keep fighting and organising and with the unity of the entire labour and union movement, we can achieve justice at P&O and across the maritime industry.

Mick Lynch is the General Secretary of the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union

Communist commemoration - Jimmy Reid on alienation

28 April 2022 was the 50th anniversary of Jimmy Reid’s rectorial address at the Bute Hall at the University of Glasgow (see https://reidfoundation.scot/2022/04/fifty-years-ago-today-jimmy-reid-made-his-the-rat-race-is-for-rats-speech/ for the full text). The knock-on impact of Covid restrictions meant the Jimmy Reid Foundation was unable to stage an event on that day to reprise the address. So, we reprint the opening paragraphs:

Alienation is the precise and correctly applied word for describing the major social problem in Britain today. People feel alienated by society. In some intellectual circles it is treated almost as a new phenomenon. It has, however, been with us for years. What I believe to be true is that today it is more widespread, more pervasive than ever before. Let me right at the outset define what I mean by alienation. It is the cry of men who feel themselves the victims of blind economic forces beyond their control. It is the frustration of ordinary people excluded from the processes of decision making. The feeling of despair and hopelessness that pervades people who feel with justification that they have no real say in shaping or determining their own destinies.

Many may not have rationalised it. May not even understand, may not be able to articulate it. But they feel it. It therefore conditions and colours their social attitudes. Alienation expresses itself in different ways by different people. It is to be found in what our courts often describe as the criminal anti-social behaviour of a section of the community. It is expressed by those young people who want to opt out of society, by drop-outs, the so-called mal-adjusted, those who seek to escape permanently from the reality of society through intoxicants and narcotics. Of course, it would be wrong to say it was the sole reason for these things. But it is a much greater factor in all of them than is generally recognised.

Society and its prevailing sense of values leads to another form of alienation. It alienates some from humanity. It partially de-humanises some people, makes them insensitive, ruthless in their handling of fellow human beings, self-centred and grasping. The irony is, they are often considered normal and well adjusted. It is my sincere contention that anyone who can be totally adjusted to our society is in greater need of psychiatric analysis and treatment than anyone else.
Generation X: Young, convinced and loquacious and joining the Young Communist League

Louis Gibson explains the process by which he became interested and active in left-wing politics

I attribute my interest in politics to two factors. The home I grew up in, and the turbulent political period I became a teenager in. I grew up in a house in which politics was on the discussion table. My mum a member of the Militant in the 1980s, a former Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) staffer and trade unionist and my dad, an angry ‘Yes’ voting, Labour supporter. I became a teenager in 2014, the year of the Scottish Independence referendum, a ‘once-in-a-lifetime’ vote for Scots. This alongside the year of 2016 with the Brexit vote and the election of Donald Trump, both upsets to the liberal status quo, provided my Modern Studies classes with plenty to chew on.

In terms of left-wing politics, this is a fairly similar story to a lot of young left-wing Scots, comprising Scots who discovered their political allegiances through the prism of viewing the Scottish independence movement as a progressive force, the Tories as a party Scots have never voted for (in large numbers) and the SNP as the force to combat the Union and the Tories. However, this nationalist path was disrupted by the rise of Jeremy Corbyn and his social democratic policies aimed at radically altering the balance of power in Britain. In 2017, I couldn’t vote for Corbyn if I had wanted to but by 2019, I was 18 and cast my vote for Labour candidate, Gordon Munro, in the Edinburgh North and Leith constituency. Unfortunately, neither Munro nor Labour won, with Boris Johnson winning a landslide on the mandate of ‘getting Brexit done’.

At the time of Labour’s 2019 defeat, I was studying for an HNC in Social Sciences at Edinburgh Granton College. This course included sociology in which I learned about Marx and Engels and political history detailing the legendary Jimmy Reid and the UCS work-in. This course along with Corbyn’s defeat made me interested in getting involved in politics in one way or another. I considered getting involved in the Labour Party. However, its Scottish youth wing didn’t seem particularly strong and exciting. At this time (and still to this day) I heavily used twitter for political news and noticed the Young Communist League’s (YCL) twitter account popping up a lot on my feed. I had also seen a few boys I used to muck about with when I was younger were in the Edinburgh branch. While small the YCL seemed to be a fairly active and militant organisation, it was one with a proud socialist and working-class history. In February 2020, I sent my application in.

In my short time in the YCL, I have been on various picket lines, involved in regular collections for foodbanks, distributed care packages to rough sleepers, written numerous articles for the League’s magazine, Challenge, and was kettled by the police during the COP26 demonstration in Glasgow. There are very few other political youth organisations in Britain where forty years of neo-liberalism. As Nathan Czapnik, the editor of Challenge, wrote in February 2022: ‘We are a generation who cannot be bought off by the Thatcherite promise that one day we will own our own home; when we spend on average a third of our income on rent, it’s impossible to save seriously – which means in a very material sense, it is impossible for us to keep faith in the system. We know we are paying off a mortgage – it’s just someone else’s’. Young people are seeking an alternative to a system that exploits workers, has consistent economic crises and commodifies arts and culture.

The YCL remains under no illusions about the state of the left in Britain today. The media and establishment onslaught against Jeremy Corbyn, a man simply advocating for a set of social democratic policies, highlights the immense struggle the British left has on its hands if we want to see a left-wing government in our lifetime. For the YCL, we know that this struggle starts in our communities, workplaces, colleges and universities as we attempt to develop campaign work locally, nationally and even internationally on the basis of our programme, Britain’s Road to Socialism, which calls for a ‘popular democratic anti-monopoly alliance’ based in the labour and progressive movements and on the interests of the working class.

For the broader left-wing movement in Scotland and Britain today, the next few decades will be some of the most critical in our history. Humanity and our planet cannot survive much longer under an economic and political system that burns our forests, pollutes our air and empties our oceans. It is the working-classes and the youth that will own our own home; when we spend on average a third of our income on rent, it’s impossible to save seriously – which means in a very material sense, it is impossible for us to keep faith in the system. We know we are paying off a mortgage – it’s just someone else’s’. Young people are seeking an alternative to a system that exploits workers, has consistent economic crises and commodifies arts and culture.

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Proportional representation = proper political representation

Lynn Henderson argues for radical change in our electoral system to ensure radical political outcomes

Twelve years of Tory rule has seen workers’ wages stagnate, their basic employment protections ripped up and they now face a crippling cost-of-living crisis that is plunging families into poverty. The need for a progressive government that stands up for working people has never been more pressing. Yet, the greatest barrier to achieving the changes people desperately need is now Westminster’s distorted voting system. First-past-the-post (FPTP) is a grossly unbalanced system that increasingly gives the Tories an artificial electoral advantage, gifting them and their corporate backers lengthy stints in office against the wishes of the majority. It is now becoming so slanted towards the right that Labour, the best vehicle for furthering the aims of the union movement, can only aim for sporadic periods in office. This reality is why replacing Westminster’s winner-takes-all system with a fair and proportional one must be an urgent priority for the union movement.

The last few elections have laid bare exactly how steep an uphill struggle the left now faces to win power under the current system. The 2019 election showed that Labour’s vote is becoming increasingly inefficient, piling up votes in dozens of safe seats it already holds. This means millions of working people’s votes are being wasted and ignored.

Current analysis shows that the FPTP system means the Tories now only need roughly a 3.5 point lead to secure a majority while Labour needs a massive 12.7 point lead to win. Put another way, even if Labour and the Conservatives win the same number of votes the Conservatives would end up with a 23-seat advantage. This system is only going to get worse. The boundary review is set to reduce the number of MPs in Labour areas while the Tories’ Elections Bill and discriminatory voter ID rules could disenfranchise as many as 24 million voters without traditional forms of identification.

In short, the most successful election-winning strategy the Tories have is for unions and Labour to continue supporting FPTP. If they do, they will be choosing a future that abandons the country to many more years of needless Tory rule and regressive, anti-union policies.

Yet a better and fairer future is possible. The way to achieve it is for trade unionists and then Labour to back sweeping away FPTP and replacing it with a voting system that doesn’t suppress the voices of millions of people. This is something that is already supported by more than 80% of Labour members and a growing number of unions. At its last conference, UNITE withdrew its support for FPTP and other unions are now moving towards supporting proportional representation (PR).

The Scottish union movement is already challenging the outdated orthodoxy around FPTP, with STUC policy advocating that the burden of proof rests on those who want to keep the system rather than switch to PR. Meanwhile, the arguments for maintaining the status quo are increasingly threadbare. Bringing up PR would mean that the left’s vote would be accurately reflected at Westminster and that would mean more Labour and Labour-led Governments. For instance, under the single transferable vote (STV), which is already in use in Scotland, the 2019 election would have resulted in Labour and progressive parties getting 317 seats to the Tories’ 315 – rather than handing Boris Johnson an unassailable 80-seat majority with just 43% of the vote.

Scotland is already leading the rest of the UK when it comes to democratic reforms. Holyrood already has PR and its local elections are decided by STV, widely considered the gold standard of proportional electoral systems. Yet even though the SNP, the most widely supported party in Scotland, supports PR it is only Labour with the support of the unions that has any chance of changing the Westminster system.

PR is not a shot in the dark. Most democratic countries use a version of PR rather than the Britain and America’s antiquated winner-takes-all voting systems. For a vision of the brighter future unions should be fighting for what New Zealand offers as a striking example.

The country, which inherited a parliamentary system in the British mould, ditched FPTP for PR in 1996. Prior to PR the right-wing National Party held power for 74% of the preceding 47 years, but since the switch Labour has been in government 52% of the time, most lately under Jacinda Ardern. PR has directly led to more union-friendly governments in office in New Zealand that have made continued strides in improving conditions for workers.

Among the measures New Zealand has introduced since PR are paid parental leave, equal employment opportunities, proper rest break and flexible working relations.

But any argument for PR on the left will be met with the familiar barrage of tired objections. Chief among these is that it supposedly lets in the far right and gives them a platform. This is not borne out by the facts. In most countries with PR, the far right has not managed to get a foothold in the national legislature.

This line of argument also ignores that FPTP is often a Trojan Horse for the hard right. Only this month, we have seen the government announce plans to deport desperate refugees and asylum seekers to Rwanda in one of the most vicious anti-migrant policies in recent memory. With government policies like this can anyone credibly argue that FPTP is keeping the populist right out of power? Another charge is that PR is a ‘losers’ charter’; it is the left admitting it can no longer beat the Tories. This is a busted logic that traps the left into supporting the only electoral system that guarantees majority Tory rule – the very thing it is committed to preventing.

Now is the time for trade unionists to ditch this self-defeating mindset and break up the right-wing electoral racket.

Lynn Henderson is spokesperson for the ‘Politics for the Many’ campaign, a Senior National Officer for the PCS union and a former STUC president.
SLAPPs and the news and information supply chain

Carole Ewart reports on the campaign to prevent the rich and powerful remaining unaccountable

Curiosity in - and scrutiny of - supply chains has resulted in exposures of and improvements to the food industry, clothing manufacture, PPE production and a host of other issues. The news and information supply chain also deserve rigorous scrutiny because the UK has nurtured complex institutional and legal mechanisms which have successfully operated in the shadows, protecting elite reputations and business. The effect is to stop authors and journalists writing stories of public interest and publishers shying away from text that they instinctively recognise will result in legal warfare. Rarely will the public know what they are missing, which negatively impacts on our ability to form an opinion about all sorts of daily concerns.

In 2021, the UK Anti-SLAPP Coalition catalogued growing evidence on the use of abusive legal threats and strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs). It pointed out that the ‘impact goes beyond those directly subject to these legal tactics, posing a wider challenge to society and the principle of public participation’. The problem is self-made as the UK has established a welcoming legal environment of enforcement with global consequences unlike the US which has identified the fight against corruption as a core national security interest.

‘SLAPP’ describes a lawsuit where the primary objective is to harass, intimidate and financially and psychologically exhaust one’s opponent via improper means. In some cases, there is no litigation process since the initial, formidable legal correspondence can very quickly lead to a retraction and apology from the target.

From the many cases members of the UK anti-SLAPP coalition have studied and worked on, common hallmarks include:

- The courts draw in people and business based in a variety of continents.
- The lawsuit or legal threats are generally based on defamation law, though an increasing number of lawsuits invoke other laws concerning privacy, data protection, and harassment.
- There is an imbalance of power and wealth between the complainant and defendant.
- The complainant engages in procedural manoeuvres or exploits resource-intensive procedures such as disclosure to drive up costs.
- The lawsuit often targets individuals instead of/as well as the organisation they work for.
- The complainants often have a history of legal intimidation and use many of the same law firms to facilitate their SLAPPs.
- Cases of legal intimidation and SLAPPs in the UK are frequently linked with investigations into financial crime and corruption. Law enforcement bodies, such as the Serious Fraud Office, have also been subject to lawfare tactics that share similar characteristics.

A 2020 Foreign Policy Centre report called ‘Unsafe for Scrutiny’ in November 2020 included a survey of 63 investigative journalists in 41 countries working to uncover financial crime and corruption. It found 73% of all respondents stated they had received legal threats because of information they had published, with more than half saying it had made them more cautious as a result.

After Russia invaded the Ukraine, the UK Government issued an emergency consultation on SLAPPs, relating to England and Wales, which closed on 19 May. A range of reform options are considered to preserve legal remedy for those who allege they are defamed as well as root out SLAPPs including establishing a statutory definition, introducing an ‘actual malice’ threshold for SLAPP claimants and introducing a costs-capping system in SLAPP cases.

Anyone who has been on the receiving end of a SLAPP, or who has been subject to abusive legal threats, is encouraged to participate. Recipients of legal threats can share their correspondence to help build a full picture of legal intimidation in the UK. Redacted letters are acceptable too if key information is readable such as threats to reputation, property owned and income. Those organisations who have an interest in SLAPPs are also encouraged to share their experiences and that opens the consultation to all of us whose right to freedom of expression, by receiving and imparting information and ideas, is compromised through secrecy and silencing scrutiny. Set out in Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, domestic enforcement of the right is enabled by the Human Rights Act 1998.

SLAPPs are, of course, only one part of the architecture of legal intimidation which also includes whistleblower victimisation by employers determined to stop those who speak up in the public interest. The Scottish Government commissioned short-life working group on public interest journalism reported in November 2021 and agreed on ‘the public benefit of a strong and diverse media ecosystem with both small and large participants.’ The Scottish Government has made a commitment to respond to its eight recommendations and we await implementation.

Given that the UK is ranked 33rd out of 180 countries in Reporters Without Borders’ 2021 World Press Freedom Index, a range of measures are necessary to ensure we have a free press domestically so that wherever we live, public interest reporting is enabled, treasured and read.

Carole Ewart is Convener of the Campaign for Freedom of information and a member of the UK Anti-SLAPP Coalition.
Poignant political poems

Dr David McKinstry Teaches History at Holyrood Secondary in Glasgow.

The Brexit Boat

HMS Enterprise was launched
With great fanfare
by his majesty Rees-Mogg,
On the post Brexit economic seas
With Gove as Captain Ideologue

Captain Gove’s ship O’ fools
Sails towards Asian shores,
Too woo investors
From the land of silk and money,
But Chinese memories are long
Filled with opium wars,
Gunboats and the
annexing of Hong Kong.

Whilst fool Britannia allows Huawei
To rule our airwaves,
All our captain can offer are freeports
And workers’ rights graves.

Our ship limps on
And docks at US port
Shoring up the ‘Special Relationship’
Is our goal,
But we are firmly retold
We have lost an Empire
And yet to find a role.

West Indies is the Enterprise’s
Next port of call,
Trying to find new trade
Other than old time molasses,
But they remind us of Windrush
And giving their ancestors fifty lashes.

Our ship is taking in water
In a globalization storm,
But the captain of HMS Enterprise
Is too financially astute to go down
With Britannia’s sinking boat,
Having an offshore account
Keeping himself financially afloat.

The 70s

A more naïve and innocent time
Where no one scratched the head,
Whilst Eric and Ernie
Were sharing a double bed.

The miners were still underground
Whilst the Wombles were overground
And wombling free,
Virginia won Wimbledon
In the silver jubilee.

The only platforms
Were of oil and of shoes,
Whilst ‘Love Thy Neighbour’
Broadcast racist views.

Woolies and Pick ‘n’ Mix
Were our weekly treat,
Whilst thirteen lay dead
On Derry Street.

The seventies, a decade
Of riotous bad taste,
Whilst working people had rights
Before Thatcher’s industrial waste.

Echoing The Arch: In memory of Desmond Tutu (1931-2021)

He was portrayed as a dancing man,
and one given to laughter,
but he marched as often as he danced,
and he wept.

He marched at risk of his life
for justice and for peace.
He wept at their denial,
and at their breach.

How long, he cried, echoing the Psalmist,
how long shall I take counsel in my soul,
having sorrow in my heart daily?

He is remembered for his consoling
and for his reconciling;
but he as often challenged and confronted,
saying to his allies, when he thought
them wrong, as to his foes,
Stop and No and How long?

A poor boy, he became rich in talent;
he out-scholared his teachers;
a servant of his God, he led peoples
and nations; not proud,
he boldly assumed the role of Moses
facing down Pharaohs;
he made his words a sword,
and the course of his life
a long battleground.

Look to the rock from which
you were hewn, he exhorted,
echoing Isaiah.
He became that rock,
hard, resistant, a sure place
on which to build.

His arch spanned great divides;
he embraced spectrums of folk,
seeing them as one;
his was a rainbow of hope,
even when others saw none.

Lighten mine eyes, he prayed,
lest I sleep the sleep of death.

Dead now, sleeping now,
he lives on, lightening our eyes,
still dancing and marching,
and laughing and weeping
as we remember him,
still consoling and reconciling,
and challenging and confronting.

It falls to us and others now
to look to our own rock
and become it,
and to echo the arch
that was this great warrior.

David Betteridge is the author
and editor of collections of poems
and examples of his other poems
can be found at https://www.
culturematters.org.uk/

Union leaders in Belarus jailed
- support the campaign to free them

On 19 April, the Belarusian KGB
arrested more than a dozen union activists, including
almost all the union leaders. Among
them were President of Congress of
Democratic Trade Unions (BKDP),
Alexandr Yarashuk, its vice-president,
Siarhei Antusevich, the head of the
Free Belarusian Trade Union, Mikalaj
Sharakh, and the head of Free Trade
Union of Metal Workers (SPM),
Aliaksandr Bukhvostau. For decades
the independent union movement
in Belarus has taken a strong stand
against the dictatorial regime of
Alexander Lukashenko. Despite a
severe political crackdown, the BKDP
has openly condemned Russia’s
invasion of Ukraine and demanded the
withdrawal of the Russian troops from
the territory of Belarus. Global unions,
the ILO, Amnesty International, and
others have already condemned
the arrests. Send your message of
protest to the Belarusian government
demanding the immediate release of
the jailed union leaders: http://www.
labourstart.org/go/belarus22
James Bluemel, director (2020)

**Once Upon a Time in Iraq,**

KEO Films
Reviewed by Jackie Bergson

Award-winning documentary series, *Once Upon a Time in Iraq,* focuses upon the experiences of civilians, journalists and soldiers who were actively involved, or involuntarily trapped, in the midst of war conflicts in Iraq during the past two decades. James Bluemel directs unobtrusively, giving respectful space to interviewees to express their emotions, memories, rationalisations and viewpoints. Andy Serkus partially narrates.

The period surrounding, and including, the UK and USA invasion of Iraq in 2003 is clearly identified as a historical point of ‘no return’. The official, political perspective that Iraq was made safer and more stable as a result of this military action is consequently revealed to have been misleading.

We learn that six weeks before large-scale war erupted in Baghdad, coalitions of UK and USA troops were deployed to Iraq, to clear the way. US Lt Colonel Sassaman speaks of the consequent invasion as being ‘God-like [in deploying soldiers who were] programmed to kill’; that ‘Iraq should not be connected to 9/11 but unfortunately it is’. He concedes: ‘I was out of control ... [and] will never use a weapon again’. His particular account exposes the normalised psychology which many soldiers adopted in those circumstances.

Similarly, when Bluemel asks elite US Marine Sgt Rudy Reyes if he thinks the invasion was worth it, the soldier responds: ‘Yes, it’s worth it ... I mean it has to be ... What’s the alternative?’ He openly downs a fair amount of Tequila during his interview, for reasons which he does not share with the viewer.

We learn that Baghdad was considered to be liberal and advanced, before Saddam Hussein became a target for the Coalition. Iraqi filmmaker and rock musician, Waleed Nesyif, explains: ‘You [had] to say ‘may God protect him’ [whenever you said Saddam’s name] ... children believe him to be immortal, a grandfather [which they learn] at school’. Nesyif recalls his reasons for rejecting the tyrant, who he knows killed innocent people.

Iraqi comedian, Ahmed al Bashir, tells of having to hide his interest in the West from his religious father and his family while he was growing up. He uses the metaphor that he and his friends shared a love of Western tastes to ‘hide the darkness around’ them. He describes being surrounded by pro-Saddam propaganda, which triggered resentment and mistrust amongst followers and non-followers of the regime.

Tikrit farmer’s wife, Um Qusay, does not hold back about her hatred of President Bush and his invasion of her country. She states that: ‘he [Bush] has the devil in his face’ and that his predecessor, President Clinton, ‘bombed Iraq because he hated Iraq’.

American war correspondent, Dexter Filkins, reflects on feelings of foreboding from civilians who he encountered in Iraq; thoughts of ‘what are we getting into here’; of events that changed the world; and of a hell from which there would be no way back. By contrast, Australian journalist, Ashley Gilbertson, conveys feelings of guilt about the cost of ‘getting the picture’. This relates to the killing of his friend, soldier Billy Miller, as he tried to clear the way for Gilbertson to photograph an insurgent who was hiding out. By contrast, a former adviser to Saddam admits that he ‘misses’ his leader, despite understanding where he went wrong.

It becomes clear that when Bush ordered Saddam and his sons to leave Iraq in 2003, this triggered an influx of their supporters into Baghdad. Bombings then occurred all over the city; banks and shops were looted; oil stores were set on fire; and ‘the skies literally going dark’ signified doom to its citizens. Iraqi Bathists were targeted by Bush to be removed from office: al Bashir asserts that ‘everyone in Iraq is a Bathist... [the] USA agenda [therefore] put people on the street’. We are also reminded of the shocking broadcast by US Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld, who called the resulting chaos in Baghdad ‘an acceptable phase’.

Footage of native translator, Samir Al Jassim, uncovering the dishevelled tyrant’s hideout in a shallow bunker in 2006 is a powerful reminder. As is that of Saddam being tried and convicted for crimes against humanity; and of his sneering arrogance and lack of remorse. His consequent, unceremonious hanging in the presence of western and Iraqi officials in November 2006 is also aired.

*Once Upon a Time in Iraq* was released when Biden was elected as USA President. In 2021, the mass evacuation of western coalitions followed an expansion of aggressive takeovers of Iraq by armed insurgents and Taliban. Bluemel’s documentary exemplifies the insightful value of free speech in these contexts. Gold standard, unmissable.

Jackie Bergson has worked in the voluntary sector and commercial business development in technology and creative sectors. Educated in and living in Glasgow, her political and social views chime left-of-centre.

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Richard Seymour,

**The Disenchanted Earth: Reflections on Ecosocialism and Barbarism,** Indigo Press, 2022, £9.99, 9781911648413

Reviewed by John Wood

Capitalism is a ‘multi-species affair’ whose success is fortified by its ability to produce a superficial ‘screen’ distracting from its...
destruction from man and the environment. This trait, usually in the form of material goods or perhaps digital experiences like the Metaverse, leads to disavowal among society and now poses an existential threat to our planet. It is a recurring theme in Seymour’s new book. The capitalist system, he writes, ‘obscures its own conditions of possibility, even as the screen image of capital as a sleek, immaterial, weightless spirit is perpetually obscuring its vulgar agrarian origins, its basis in the exploitation of plant, animal and human labour’.

Meanwhile, the era is over in which democracy can co-exist with capitalism’s limitless quest for growth and there is no real sign of the revolution. The realisation that democracy as we know it will not deliver the radical action required to save our planet from ourselves has led some to imagine a benevolent technocratic dictatorship as the answer.

Or worse, but perhaps more likely, could the failures of social democracy give rise to ‘ecofascism’? The right’s climate denialism cannot hold out forever. Early signs of this tradition’s global resurgence can be seen as Fox News’ Tucker Carlson talks of immigration ‘polluting the country’ and Marine Le Pen spitefully decrees migrants’ inability to care for the environment as they ‘have no homeland’. Ecofascism may not thrive while the climate debate is focused on challenging our economic addiction to fossil fuels, but it may find traction in anti-racism and carbonism to quench the thirst for constant profit and growth, our system does not allow us to be responsible. Instead, taking responsibility will mean liberating all species from capital.

Lachlan Munro,

R. B. Cunninghame Graham and Scotland: Party, Prose, and Political Aesthetic, Edinburgh University Press, 2022, £85, 9781474498265

R. B. Cunninghame Graham (1852-1936) was, and remains, the great enigma of Scottish politics. Graham was a quarter-Spanish cowboy in South America; a large Scottish landowner who was the first declared socialist MP in Westminster; and a Justice of the Peace who was badly beaten by the police and jailed while leading a riot in Trafalgar Square on behalf of the unemployed. Graham was also an aristocratic élitist and ‘The Miners’ MP’, who was expelled from parliament on three occasions; an anti-racist and anti-imperialist, who at the age of 62 volunteered for military service and was appointed a ‘colonel’ during WWI; and a friend of the rich and famous, who supported Irish and Scottish Home Rule.
The greatest enigma, however, was how quickly he disappeared from the public consciousness. In 1926, Hugh MacDiarmid described Graham as ‘potentially the greatest Scotsman of his generation,’ and in 1927, The Sunday Post remarked: ‘There are few men nowadays so well known as Mr R. B. Cunninghame Graham.’ However, by 1950, a mere fourteen years after his death, the cultural-revivalist Hamish Henderson asked the question: ‘Who remembers Cunninghame Graham?’

Graham’s extraordinary life and paradoxical personality have inevitably exposed him to exaggerated or simplistic claims, often sponsored by those who wished to promote or justify their own political agendas. Claimed by some to be the founder of the first party of labour - The Scottish Parliamentary Labour Party - although he has been consistently ‘written out’ of early Labour histories, and by others as the founder of the SNP, here, for the first time, Graham’s true roles and significance are examined.

Describing Cunninghame Graham as ‘the most contentious, controversial, and contradictory Scot of his generation’, this thoroughly researched book is the first attempt to untangle the Graham legend, both as a rabble-rousing politician and as a prolific author. Also, for the first time, it examines his political influences, which included William Morris, Engels, and Marx. It examines contemporary local and national newspaper reports, Graham’s speeches, his socialist journalism, but also the memoirs of those who knew him, particularly his early socialist, and later nationalist, colleagues. Most significantly, for labour historians, the book unearths Graham’s close relationship with Keir Hardie, and upturns the belief that Graham was a mere political dilettante. Bruce Glasier, for instance, wrote that Hardie and Graham were close companions for six years, and that ‘went about in harness’. Sifting through reports and memoirs, Munro concludes that it was the high-profile Graham, inspired by Morris, who had the first idea of a party of labour, and it was he who groomed and persuaded a reluctant and unknown Hardie to forsake the Liberals, and against bitter opposition, especially from the unions, to take up the leadership.

Graham and Hardie’s support for Scottish home rule is examined in detail, as are Graham’s evocative Scottish writings, which were deeply political. Most illuminating, however, was Labour’s crucial role in the Scottish home rule movement, particularly standard-bearers like Tom Johnston, Rev. James Barr, Ramsay MacDonald, and Jimmy Maxton. Anyone interested in the early labour movement in Scotland, and how a significant part of it ‘morphed’ into the National Party, then the SNP, as political circumstances and priorities changed, will find this book an eye-opener.

Gerry McCarthey is a community, political and union activist. Previous employment working with a number of Third Sector agencies. Since 2013, he has worked as a freelance researcher, editor and ‘ghostwriter’. He is a co-founder and former Chair of The Cunninghame Graham Society.

Reviewed by Bill Ramsay

Cockburn powerfully evidences the theory that where western weaponry is deployed and used is not driven by rational operational far less strategic considerations. Often, what is passed off as strategy are really post-facto ‘rationales’ to explain away gargantuan procurement schemes for very exotic and, consequently, very expensive weapons systems that do little to enhance the real security interests whether collectively or individually of these states. This often results in the creation and deployment of tools of war looking for military conflicts in which they can be used rather than the other way round. If these conflicts can be extended, even better, at least from the perspective of those companies who manufacture them.

Cockburn’s inside knowledge of the personalities and institutions, political, industrial, and cultural, of the planet’s only global military hegemonic power is extensive. This allows him to throw light on the underlying causes of why the United States seems to constantly seek to make war then prosecute it with no successful outcome. He goes on to explain how the Military Industrial Complex (MIC) is now even learning to monetise, what the often quoted nineteenth century military theorist, Clausewitz, would class as military failure.

We all know that these twenty first century expeditionary wars our forces embark on - his primary focus is Afghanistan - are more destructive and longer lasting. Consequently, ‘recovery’ plans, such as they are, will take longer to resolve and be costly. The MIC has realised that these increased costs present even more opportunities to establish even more profit streams. Cockburn describes how the initial plans of aid organisations are sometimes suborned and even privatised.

In short, Cockburn lays before us a compelling case that we are witnessing the emergence of new all-encompassing business model for ‘forever war’. The MIC can manufacture the casus belli, an act or situation that provokes or justifies a war. Then, as donors to the political class, particularly but not exclusively in the USA, promote the casus belli. Then through friendly media outlets and others in the think tank community, to sell the casus belli to the public.

The MIC sells, maintains and trains in the use of the kit. It has even successfully re-introduced the private contractor, done away with in large part in the nineteenth century, into not only war fighting but the logistical ‘tail’ of the fight. Interestingly former generals-come-spokespersons for the arms firms commonly quote the adage, ‘professionals do logistics and amateurs the operations’, without any hint of irony.

Cockburn reveals how outlandish procurement programmes often fail to deliver what the sales teams promise. That many of these threats could be resolved through diplomacy matters not. The ‘kinetic’ option tends to find favour, after all it invariably more profitable. The sums involved are affordable for some. For others, efficiencies can be achieved elsewhere. Cockburn reveals that when Romania joined NATO, sacrifices to achieve interoperability with NATO kit had to be made, resulting in some cases of some Romanian hospitals ending up without running water.

He examines the F22 stealth fighter. Purchase and operational at a cost of $400m per plane. Even the US Senate Armed Services committee baulked, and production ceased after ‘only’ 187 were built. Some F22s though have seen action of a sort against adversaries whose principal weapons were the roadside bomb and the Kalashnikov. We too in the
UK have some of the hugely expensive F35s. So expensive are they that our carriers must rely of additional F35s and pilots supplied by the US Marine Corps.

When the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, we were told, and I passed it on to my Higher Modern Studies class, that we were all to enjoy a ‘Peace Dividend’. President Reagan’s Secretary of State, James Baker, and Margaret Thatcher assured Gorbachev and Yeltsin that NATO would not expand eastward. Turns out that ‘dividend’ was for the shareholders of arms firms though a shiver went up the MIC’s collective spine initially. Then the arms companies rallied and sent their sales task forces into the former Warsaw Pact states of Eastern Europe. Recent events in Ukraine show the legacy of this, typified by the creation of millions of refugees and the economic blowback of sanctions being only the start of. For example, Germany’s new defence budget is now, according to some, the world’s third largest.

The only winners in this latest in a very long line of wars in a region, which the historian, Timothy Snyder calls ‘bloodlands’, will be the arms companies. But only if a mistake in nuclear escalation miscalculation, their shareholders, along with the rest of us, do not become ‘collateral damage’.

Bill Ramsay is Convener of Peace Education Scotland, a charity set up by Scottish CND.

Adam Tooze,

**Shutdown: How Covid Shook the World’s Economy,**

Allen Lane, 2021, pp368, 9780241485873, £25

Reviewed by Will Podmore

This is an exceptionally useful study of the impact of Covid. Tooze is a noted economic historian, author of *Crashed: how a decade of financial crisis changed the world* and is the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Professor of History at Columbia University. He notes: ‘There has never been a moment in which close to 95 percent of the world’s economies suffered a simultaneous contraction in per capita GDP, as they did in the first half of 2020. Over 3 billion adults were furloughed from their jobs or struggled to work from home. Close to 1.6 billion young people had their education interrupted’. He continues that by early February: ‘the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) did sound the alarm, but neither the United States nor the EU threw their weight behind those warnings. Nor did China put itself in quarantine or constructively advocate for movement restrictions. The WHO cononded that position, arguing against unnecessary travel bans. On all sides February 2020 delivered a staggering demonstration of the collective inability of the global elite to grasp what it would actually mean to govern the deeply globalized and interconnected world they have created’.

On 9 March, the US stock market crashed. By then, the virus had been reported in 110 countries. On 11 March, the WHO officially declared a pandemic. The International Labour Organization estimated that by early April, 81% of the world’s workforce was under some type of restriction. On 25 March, the US Senate approved the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act. Its provisions amounted to $2.2 trillion, the largest fiscal support package ever delivered to any economy. By January 2021, the total fiscal effort worldwide had reached $14 trillion.

Tooze points out: ‘The fiscal-monetary synthesis of 2020 was a synthesis for the twenty-first century. While it overturned the nostrums of neoliberalism, notably with regard to the scale of government interventions, it was framed by neoliberalism’s legacies, in the form of hyperglobalization, fragile and attenuated welfare states, profound social and economic inequality, and the overweening size and influence of private finance.’ Here, ‘Worldwide, the wealth of billionaires rose by $1.9 trillion in 2020, with $560 billion of that benefiting America’s wealthiest people’.

The IMF reported that by October 2020 the average advanced economy managed a discretionary fiscal effort of almost 8.5% of GDP for coronavirus measures. The average for middle-income emerging market countries was just under 4%. Low-income countries generally mobilised less than 2%.

The China-centred Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, unveiled on 15 November 2020, was the biggest trade deal in history. It had a larger combined GDP than the ‘China-containment’ Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, the North American Free Trade Agreement or the EU. The RCEP includes China, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand. The 15 member countries account for 30% of the world’s population (2.2bn) and 30% of world GDP ($29.7tn), making it the largest trade bloc in history.

Any member of the G20 could have borrowed the funds needed to meet the entire projected cost of vaccinating the whole world, estimated as of May 2020 at $25bn. The IMF estimated that doing so would add $9tn to global GDP by 2025. Nevertheless, not one of the governments of the richer countries was willing to fund a global programme.

South Africa and India launched an appeal at the WTO calling for all intellectual property protections to be lifted on Covid vaccines and treatments. But a coalition of the USA, Britain, Canada, and the EU defeated this proposal. They supported cooperation but only on the terms set by the pharmaceutical industry. Similarly, proposals to expand the crisis-fighting capacity of the IMF and to embark on large-scale debt relief got nowhere.

In 2020, eurozone GDP fell by 6.7%, far more in the 2008-2009 crash, and far more than in the USA, whose GDP fell by 3.5%. Gross fixed capital formation in the eurozone fell by more than 10%, but only by 1.7% in the USA.

Tooze concludes: ‘Europe’s failure in the years after 2010 was of historic dimensions. The year 2020 could have been the same. It was not. In a conscious determination to avoid a disastrous repetition, Europe’s political class defined the 2020 crisis as new. The least that you can say for them is that they found new ways to fail. They took on the task of a common vaccine policy and turned its launch into a legitimisation crisis. They constructed a new fiscal capacity that was undersized for the job. Another intervention by the German constitutional court, this time on the legality of the joint funding of the NextGen EU fund, served notice that the legal foundation of Europe’s federal institutions remained unsteady. Meanwhile, not only was the United States rolling out an effective vaccination program, but Biden’s Rescue Plan promised to catapult America’s economic growth far into the lead. Europe faced the prospect of having to relaunch its relaunch’.

Will Podmore is an author, who has just published his seventh book, ‘Capability Britain’, and a recently retired college librarian and UCU member.
Two very strange thoughts have been running through my mind since the start of March. One is: ‘Thank goodness for the common sense of American people’. The second, somewhat to my own surprise is: ‘I really hope Boris Johnson stays in his job, at least until August’.

Let me explain. Point One. We can all thank our lucky stars and stripes for the outbreak of rational thinking amongst US voters fifteen months ago, when they elected Joe Biden. As the horror in Ukraine continues, the planet does seem a frightening dangerous place right now. Imagine, however, how scary it would feel if Trump were still in the White House. The only thing worse than one unhinged megalomaniac on the world stage, would be two unpredictable, unhinged maniacs with their fingers poised over the nuclear button. It is distinctly believable that Trump would either have teamed up with Putin in attacking Kyiv, or have launched a nuclear strike on the Kremlin by now.

Joe Biden, on the other hand, has probably forgotten where he left the nuclear codes, while it is surprising that Boris Johnson didn’t swallow the UK’s button in some drinking game at a Christmas party or ‘work event’. Johnson has dealt with this crisis with characteristic Wooster-esque bluster, claiming Russia will feel the full force of Britain’s reaction. Yet there is a limit to how intimidated an ex-leader of Britain’s reaction can be by someone who has ham-fistedly blundered through the twin crises of Brexit and Covid by pretending to be a slapstick buffoon cannot be trusted with steering us through World War Three. In one of his many ‘apologies’, Johnson mumbled that it was vital that he stayed in Downing Street so that he could tackle the cost-of-living crisis. Would that be the cost-of-living crisis that you created, Boris? Johnson’s only hope is the paucity of viable options.

This current bland cabinet would not look out of place if they were to be contestants on The Apprentice. Vacuous, interchangeable and instantly forgettable. However, there is one basic difference. If you lie or fuck up on The Apprentice, you’re fired. Seldom can there have been a Foreign Secretary quite so out of their depth as Dominic Raab. Until, along came Liz Truss, another faceless lightweight. She doesn’t even look the part. She reminds me of a particularly nasty letting agent I had when I rented a flat in North London in the late nineties, who kept on coming up with different excuses not to pay us back our deposit.

And therein, amidst the massive tragedy of Ukraine, is the minor tragedy that Johnson is desperately using the suffering of the victims of genocide to hang on to his job. The mantra of his supporters is that the time is not right to get rid of the PM, with Europe teetering on the brink of Armageddon. Really? I can think of no better time for him to go. Someone who has ham-fistedly blundered through the twin crises of Brexit and Covid by pretending to be a slapstick buffoon cannot be trusted with steering us through World War Three. In one of his many ‘apologies’, Johnson mumbled that it was vital that he stayed in Downing Street so that he could tackle the cost-of-living crisis. Would that be the cost-of-living crisis that you created, Boris? Johnson’s only hope is the paucity of viable options.

Which brings me to point two. Why do I want Johnson to stay in his job until August? Blatant self-interest. I’m currently writing my 2022 Fringe show, and if he goes before the summer, I’m going to have to re-write half the script. And there’s no point in changing the Johnson material to be about Rishi Sunak. He’ll have buggered off to the States by August. What a shower of shits.

Vladimir McTavish’s Edinburgh Fringe Show ‘2022, The Beginning of the End?’ is at The Stand’s New Town Theatre, 5-28 August at 7.10pm
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