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
 Asking an awkward question and needing an honest answer: What’s left of the left?

The May 2022 local elections were an important staging post for politics, especially those of a radical nature, in Scotland. On the one hand, they took the temperature of the voting populace on important matters, both local and national. On the other hand, the timing of this temperature taking was the occasion of the SNP being in government at Holyrood for 15 years. The SNP’s position — in electoral terms at any rate — still seems to be pretty unassailable.

Though the 5 May 2022 local government elections saw Scottish Labour increase its first preference vote share and number of councillors, the SNP saw its first preference vote share and number of councillors rise more than Scottish Labour did. The SNP was not threatened by any left parties, with Scottish Greens more than doubling their number of councillors but only to 35 with 6% of first preferences. Led by Alex Salmond, Alba, which lost 11 candidates but had none elected. This included losing all its existing 13 councillors and gaining just 12,335 (0.7%) first preferences.

The radical left did very poorly again, making no discernible impact. The Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) stood just eight candidates, gaining just over 1,000 first preferences but its post-election analysis stated: ‘In seats where we can compare results with the last council elections, we DOUBLED both our votes and our share of the votes’. Meanwhile, the Scottish Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (STUSC) stood 16 candidates, also gaining just over 1,000 votes and noted: ‘The first preference votes, while modest, increased in the seven council wards that Scottish TUSC had contested in Glasgow compared to 2017’. We need to recall that the proportional representation system of Single Transferable Votes for local elections is an almost ideal voting system for the left to do well under.

Widespread discontent with the SNP-led Scottish Government over a legion of issues did not lead to any electoral backlash. Though the turnout was a lamentable 45% (down from 47% in 2017 but up from 40% in 2012 but having been 53% in 2007), the SNP had success into turning the election into a referendum on Boris Johnson and the Tories and a future independent Scotland. Gordon Munro examines the deliberate ignoring of the plight of what the local elections should have been about in his article in this issue, namely, local authorities and their diminishing resources at a time of increasing demand and need. Many will be worried that COSLA, the body representing all local authorities in Scotland, will now be headed by an SNP councillor, Shona Morrison, as President.

And though, as former Labour PM, Harold Wilson, was wont to say that ‘A week is a long time in politics’, by early July is the situation any different in terms of the radical left making a significant advance? It should in some way be but the situation does not seem to be despite a litany of SNP lamentable actions.

It has made it clear that it supports NATO as a nuclear military alliance and is ambiguous to say the least on whether an independent Scotland would be non-nuclear in the light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. For a party that has prided itself on its managerial competence, the return of Scotrail to the public sector has been shambolic in the extreme. Then Finance Secretary, Kate Forbes, announced a package of cuts to the public sector in the Scottish Budget, amounting to 30,000 job losses. This was dressed up in the neo-liberal language of being about a ‘reset’ that, in her words, ‘consider[s the] scope for innovation that embraces entrepreneurship, improves value for money, offers opportunities for commercialisation, better manages assets and brings benefit to the public purse’. No sign of setting a ‘needs budget’, echoing the London Poplar council in 1921 when its then leader, and future Labour Party leader, George Lansbury, proclaimed: ‘Better to break the law than break the poor’. Conter, part of the left-wing independence supporting commentariat, characterised the SNP’s move as the return of the party to being ‘Tartan Tories’.

This was then followed by the relaunch of the SNP’s independence prospectus with the Independence in the Modern World. Wealthier, Happier, Fairer: Why Not Scotland? document. Much has already been said about it but the key points are undoubtedly that there is nothing manifestly new or innovative in it compared to previous
SNP/Scottish Government documents, and crucially, it does not lay out how such comparator countries (Denmark, Finland, Sweden) will be emulated in and by Scotland. Following this and assuming no Section 30 Order is granted for another constitutional referendum, the date of 19 October 2023 was set for a consultative referendum should the Supreme Court judge this not to be ultra vires.

The case for independence is necessarily 'jam tomorrow' but the new so-called prospectus seems to show we'll be lucky to even get 'I can't believe it's not butter’ to put on our piece. Indeed, as Sturgeon said in the Foreword: ‘Independence in itself does not guarantee success for any country. For Scotland, the aspiration of a wealthier, fairer and more successful country will depend on democratic decisions made post-independence and the good stewardship of governments elected’. The SNP’s record in government does not inspire any confidence that it will be the first party in government after independence that will make society in Scotland, fairer, wealthier and happier based upon its record since 2007 (or 2014 when Sturgeon took over from Salmond).

As previous editorials have charted, the situation with Scottish Labour and British Labour has been and remains pretty woeful. Both are critical components in explaining why a lacklustre and unradical SNP remains in the dominant position it does. Anas Sarwar is more than a competent performer but does not outclass the Tories’ leader, Douglas Ross, despite some of Ross’s missteps over Boris Johnson and the like. But that is not even the half of it. Sarwar is not able to articulate a convincing, positive vision of society in Scotland no matter how many criticisms he makes of Sturgeon, the SNP and the Scottish Government.

Sure, it’s hard to get the airtime and an ear to do so when you’re the third party of Scotland, not the official opposition and weighed down by the past (Better Together, Scottish Labour as a branch office of British Labour, a succession of twelve leaders since devolution etcetera etcetera). But that does not get away from not articulating a robust and holistic social democratic agenda. On top of that, Scottish Labour has the problem of a leader of the British Labour Party not only underperforming in populist parliamentary terms – despite the Wakefield by-election success - but also being bereft of the same credible ‘vision’ thing. It says a lot about Starmer when his ratings are lower than those of Johnson and while Labour itself is more popular than the Tories. None of this gives those with progressive anti-independence, pro-Union views much of a cutting edge against the SNP. As many media and social media commentators have pointed out, RMT general secretary, Mick Lynch, has a lot to teach Starmer as a public performer with a clear vision of what is right and decent.

The Scottish Greens seem to be increasingly captured organisationally and ideologically by their cooperation agreement with the SNP, whether over issues of the environment, free school meals or public sector spending cuts.

All this helps explain why the theme of this issue is ‘why hasn’t the left – the radical left that Scottish Left Review is proudly part of – done better than it has?’. The radical left has a long tradition of talking up the prospects for advance with a somewhat scant evidence base for doing so. It’s good at identifying the opportunities but not so good at explaining why these advantages were not or could not be taken advantage of, especially where this concerns its own choices and actions. It is only through robust and rigorous self-reflection that the radical left can map out the way forward and then deliver upon the (reasonable) claims it makes are possible. Here, we need to also reflect on the lessons we can learn from Melechon’s relative success in the National Assembly elections in France and Labour ending Tory rule in Australia. In both cases, the situation has a lot more ‘grey’ than it has ‘black and white’, be that the fragility of the NUPES coalition after the election or the conservatism of the Australian Labor Party. The prospects for the left in Europe will be examined in the next issue.

Pain protest over pay

The TUC demonstration on 18 June 2022 for was estimated at between 50,000 and 100,000 marchers. As Roz Foyer reports in her article, the defiant spirit of the march was infectious. Yet the turnout was well down on the TUC's 'Britain needs a pay rise' demo on 100,000 on 18 October 2014. Does this matter? Yes, for two reasons. First, it gives an indication that the process of anger>hope>action has not yet kicked and even may not on a scale that is needed to secure employers and the government concede on inflation proof pay rises. Second, it seemed the TUC and its affiliates engaged in an unprecedented level of public mobilisation for the 18 June 2022 demonstration, holding countless town meetings throughout the land to build for the London turnout. Kate Ramsden picks up on some of these issues in her article in this issue. We wait to see if the stimulus to strike occasioned by the rail strikes after the aforementioned demonstration will help the process of anger>hope>action amongst much wider number of workers in both public and private sectors. In this regard, many unions have stated that interest in joining them has increased as a result of the RMT strikes being seen as popular.
Whither the Scottish left?

George Kerevan surveys the scene, suggesting the SNP’s dominance results from a lack of choices

How often have you heard someone say: ‘The Scottish left has never been so weak or divided?’ But how true is this in actuality? Indeed, what does the question mean? And, who counts as left-wing these days? We might look for some concrete answers in the results of the May local elections in Scotland. Voter turnout was a modest 44.8%. However, this was up on 2017 (46.9%) and on 2012 (39.7%) – which suggests that voter apathy, while high, is not the reason the left might be losing ground.

The obvious winner in these elections was the ruling SNP under Nicola Sturgeon. The party won convincingly, increasing both its vote share and seat numbers, compared to the 2017 council elections – despite being in power at Holyrood for 15 consecutive years. The SNP captured 34.1% of first preference votes, a full 12 points ahead of its nearest rival (Labour). The avowedly anti-capitalist parties (SSP, TUSC, Communist, Socialist Labour) did not register at all on the political Richter scale. True, the pro-independence Greens scored 12% and increased their seat numbers. But their de facto coalition with the SNP at Holyrood suggests they are enjoying the same favourable political wind as Sturgeon.

For some on the anti-capitalist left, the hegemonic hold of the SNP on Scottish politics is explained by mechanistic factors. Principally, the clientelism the Sturgeon administration has pursued, providing direct financial subsidy for much of Scottish civil society including the STUC. In 2018, official statistics showed the SNP government had provided no less than 63% of the union body’s overall finances. But explaining the political dominance of the SNP this way is too crude.

It is certainly the case that the SNP has used its political dominance to penetrate deep into civil society and this raises serious questions about the independence of that civil society, especially as the Sturgeon government moves to the right. But the local election results show – if anything – an increased enthusiasm by working-class voters to back the SNP. Note that the party won outright control of Dundee City Council, a key working-class district, under an STV voting system specifically designed to stop such monopolies.

A better explanation of the SNP’s political longevity and hegemony over the Scottish working-class lies in the simple fact that working-class voters are pragmatic. Faced with an incompetent, rampaging Tory government at Westminster, plus a looming cost-of-living crisis, Scottish working-class electors chose the only show in town that might offer a scintilla of protection – the SNP under Nicola Sturgeon. A national election is a mass event. The workers voted en masse for the SNP when offered a binary choice between Nicola and Boris. With the avowed anti-capitalist parties remaining miniscule and irrelevant, what alternative did the working-class have?

Here we need to consider Scottish Labour. The other big difference ushered in by the 2022 local elections was the fact that Scottish Labour under new leader, Anas Sarwar, knocked the Tories into third place and won an extra 20 council seats. The party also won outright control of West Dunbarton council and took minority control of Edinburgh from the SNP. We can exaggerate the extent of the Labour revival – the party was still a quarter of a million votes behind the SNP. But there are certainly signs here of a return to class politics. Polls continue to show that at least 40% of Labour voters in Scotland support independence. We might interpret the local election results as showing some working-class independence voters are willing to return to Labour in order to express disgust with the Tories at a UK level.

The SNP still considers itself on the social democratic left. If we add the SNP, Scottish Labour and Green votes in May, they total 62% of the entire poll. That is the largest social democratic bloc in Europe. By contrast, Melenchon’s NUPES alliance won only 31.6% of the vote in the second round of the French legislative elections in June. The combined Socialist, Green and Die Linke vote in last year’s Federal election in Germany was a good 46 per cent, but still less than half.

Of course, the class nature of the SNP remains a contentious question on the Scottish left. Some refuse to see it as a party of the left, claiming it is either bourgeois nationalist, social liberal or even on the populist right. Such a characterisation risks suggesting that a majority of the Scottish working-class now vote for a party of the right, which seems unduly apocalyptic. The SNP and the majority of its membership consider it to be centre left. It is hard to deny that most working-class voters agree with that subjective viewpoint. And this is why – on the electoral terrain at least – the Scottish working-class continues to vote SNP as a bulwark (if an inadequate one) against the Tories.

The other big story from the local elections is that the Alba Party - which sees itself to the left of the SNP - failed to make any gains and lost all of its sitting councillors, even after fielding around one hundred candidates. Alba’s combined vote was 12,335 – a mere 0.7% of the total. It is possible to explain this as a rejection of Alba’s leader, Alex Salmond; or due to the lack of media coverage of the party during the campaign; or a bit of both. Salmond views Alba as a way of keeping pressure on the SNP leadership to deliver an independence referendum and there is evidence that the First Minister is sensitive to criticism from that direction. But with these results it is hard to see Alba becoming a significant force any time soon, despite its recruitment of some thousands of old SNP party cadres and avowed leftists such as Tommy Sheridan (whose remaining supporters also joined) and former Labour MEP, Hugh Kerr.

Meanwhile, the anti-capitalist left in Scotland remains in disarray. Back in the heady days of 2003, the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) won six seats at Holyrood. Since then, schism and disorientation have weakened the SSP considerably. Yet it managed to stand eight candidates across Scotland, mounting a modest propaganda campaign. However, with a total vote of 1,058, it can hardly have been said to register in working-class consciousness. The Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), which is associated with descendants of the old Militant group, also ran a few candidates, garnering a negligible 1,022 votes. The Communist Party, which is showing a modest revival in Scotland among young folk, might have had a
campaign in Glasgow but for a technical foul-up which saw it get wrong the date for registering candidates.

What is curious in this saga of left-wing ineffectiveness is that local politics in Scotland are actually the locus of significant working-class resistance – to the SNP government, to council cuts, to assaults on local communities, and to excess capitalist development. Witness the Living Rent Campaign in Glasgow and Edinburgh. Arguably, local popular campaigns against rising bus fares have forced the SNP government to introduce free fares for the young. It is surprising that this growing grassroots anger was not channelled into some form of community electoral campaigning or candidates, in the May local contests. This suggests that the Scottish anti-capitalist left lacks the vision to move beyond its secure ideological laagers and give some sort of collective political voice to the existing popular and grassroots resistance.

This is far from being an abstract question. The anti-capitalist left has embedded itself deeply in the independence movement over the past decade, successfully providing the campaign energy that the bureaucratic SNP leadership lacked. For instance, it was the original Radical Independence Campaign - associated with the group who now run the Conter website, of which the author is a member - that helped launch and prosecute the popular campaign for independence that was so effective in Glasgow and Dundee. And in the couple of years before Covid, All Under One Banner organised mass demonstrations that kept the movement alive in the face of passivity from the conservative Sturgeon leadership.

However, we are in a new conjuncture when inflation and the crisis-of-living standards are increasingly central to working-class resistance. Witness the RMT strikes. As a result, the Scottish anti-capitalist left seems even more bemused than usual, unable to find a way of linking the national question to prosecuting the new economic demands. It is not just that the left is organisationally fragmented. Rather, it lacks a coherent political strategy to link the national movement and the economic struggle.

This stasis is only likely to increase. In the aftermath of her local election success, Sturgeon has launched a campaign for a supposed second referendum in October 2023. Few people think this vote will actually transpire but, in the meantime, it will serve as a political cover to keep the pro-independence left in line while the SNP government imposes swinging real pay cuts in the public sector. For how can the independence left attack Nicola when she is demanding Boris grant a Section 30 order?

We can expect increasing industrial action on the pay front over the next 18 months. This will return a certain amount of agency to the Scottish working-class – agency which was lost after the demise of the All Under One Banner mass demonstrations with the onset of the pandemic. The Scottish left needs to relearn the lessons of how to do solidarity with striking workers - lessons that we knew so well a generation ago. This will bring an inevitable confrontation with the SNP. It is important that the pro-independence left does not capitulate to calls to ‘go soft’ on the SNP leadership. Instead, we need to demand that the SNP government breaks with Treasury rules and pays Scottish workers what is needed to protect living standards.

In Scotland, the existence of the national movement (combined with the failure of Scottish Labour to back self-determination) understandably reduced the impact of the Corbyn upsurge and the popular influence of organisations such as the People’s Assembly Against Austerity. We probably need the equivalent of the People’s Assembly north of the Border, especially in today’s conditions. It might serve as a bridge between the nationalist left and grassroots Scottish Labour.

Here we come back to the electoral support that the Scottish working-class has traditionally lent the SNP. The May local elections showed that the Scottish working-class expects the Sturgeon government to protect its immediate interests. Instead, SNP Finance Secretary, Kate Forbes, has talked about ‘responsible’ wage demands and the need to ‘modernise’ the public sector – code for more spending cuts. The Scottish left now has a duty to oppose such cuts while demanding real action on independence. We are not the ‘loyal opposition’ – we are the opposition.

George Kerevan is a writer, journalist and former SNP MP

A right royal rectitude

You’ve got to hand it to the British ruling class ... they get their subjects – not citizens - to celebrate the inequality in wealth and power that they are the victims of by having street parties and marching along the Mall for the Platinum Jubilee party. Starmer puts his tuppence worth in by telling us it is our ‘patriotic duty’ to celebrate Lizzie’s big day.

We must not forget that Sturgeon was equally fawning of Lizzie. She praised her ‘selfless commitment to duty’ and said she benefited from her ‘wisdom’ and ‘knowledge’ without a slightest hint of irony, adding: ‘I support the Queen and her successors remaining head of state - it is the policy of my party’. We can take some comfort, as Graham Smith does in his article in this issue that this is likely to be the last big hurrah for the House of Windsor. She got a peak TV viewing figure of 7.5m for the BBC’s broadcast of trooping the colour and 5m for the BBC’s broadcast of the lighting of beacons. Phil the Greek’s funeral got a peak of 13m last year and William and Harry’s weddings hit 26m (in 2011) and 18m (in 2018) viewers respectively. In Scotland, as with the 2012 jubilee, we were less madly monarchist and hopefully more radically republican. Of course, it might have been that we could not plan such events given the unreliability of good weather or the hassle of getting down to London.

As it turned out, there were no COVID restrictions preventing us from gathering and the weather wasn’t too bad so many thumbed up their noises to the monarchy to catch up on some much-needed rays. But then the Guardian revealed in late June 2022 that on 67 occasions that Lizzie had used the Queen’s consent mechanism to alter Bills for the Scottish Parliament before they were even laid before the Parliament. It’s enough to make you a republican if you were not already one.
For five and half a years, we were Scotland’s municipal socialists, putting together one of the most ambitious political programmes in Britain with a large expansion in council housing, delivering council-owned renewable energy and democratising our economy through Community Wealth Building (CWB). Now, we fight for those policies from opposition. The popular Scottish election and polling blog, Ballot Box Scotland, described it as a ‘peculiar result’. It was disappointing not just for us in the Labour Party in North Ayrshire but also to the wider left who offered their support to our campaign.

But we in North Ayrshire Labour are not despondent, and neither should anyone on the left. Far from being a rejection of our popular municipal socialist policies, local circumstances meant we fought a campaign against an electoral cocktail of unique boundary changes, retiring long-term incumbents and general apathy towards the transformative potential of local government.

Following the Scottish Parliament passing the Islands Act, North Ayrshire has become the only authority in Scotland to have a one-member ward – the Isle of Arran. To accommodate this change, whilst retaining the same number of councillors on the council, the Boundary Commission reshaped our mainland wards giving us three five-member wards – leaving us as the only authority in Scotland with five-member wards. These unique changes have favoured the Tories who experienced a drop in their vote share, like they did in most council areas, but gained three seats.

In the two wards Labour lost seats, we had long-term incumbents retiring. In both our vote share fell considerably, despite strong local campaigns, with the loss of the incumbent’s personal vote. If we had retained both seats, the result would have been the same as 2017 – Labour tied on seats with the SNP. In many respects, these are circumstances outwith our control. But there are important electoral lessons for the left too from our result.

Whilst our transformative political agenda was taking shape in the council chamber, there was not an organised left operation in our communities building support for the agenda. We ran an excellent election campaign, with some incredibly talented activists and organisers, but it started too late to really embed the progressive political message.

If we were going to retain power, it was always going to be fundamentally important for us to distinguish North Ayrshire Labour from Scottish Labour to win votes from those entrenched on both sides of the constitutional debate. We tried to do so with consistent branding and messaging across our leaflets, social media and in the local press and in some wards, combined with our door knocking efforts, it worked. But in others where the local circumstances were different - traditional Tory areas, strong independent candidates, the loss of our incumbents to retirement - it did not cut through enough. We canvassed too many independence supporters who said they supported our local policies but said they could not vote for Labour given the leaderships position on a second referendum, and although fewer in numbers there were staunch unionists who have shifted to the Tories in recent years.

The one ward where we did not have many of these problems was my own ward, Kilwinning. In Kilwinning we benefitted from the direct correlation between me being council leader and the council administration. And the result? Our vote share increased to 46%, the highest vote share for any party, in any ward, in North Ayrshire.

If I were to pass on one lesson to the left from our result, it is that having popular policies, whether in power or opposition, is not enough. There is no substitute for the hard work of long-term organising in our communities for transformative politics. That is deeply frustrating for me to accept because I come from a political tradition of organising, but tough lessons need to be learnt. Yes, a constant cycle of elections and then the Covid pandemic did not help, but in many respects being in power and having the ability to implement policies rather than having to organise for them becomes too easy.

I have always been one for self-reflection, and never shy to be self-critical. And the classic example for me on the difference between introducing a policy and organising for a policy is our Period Poverty initiative. Yes, we were the first Council in Britain to provide free sanitary products and received many plaudits for that. But to do that took one conversation with the Council’s Chief Executive to let them know that is what we wanted to do – we did not work with a group of young women to build a campaign for the policy. For me, that is what municipal socialists should do, whether in power or opposition.

And that is why we are not despondent about the result. Whilst recognising the need for a proper organising strategy, we did build institutional support for our policies within the council. For example, we do not expect CWB or the ambitious scale of our house building programme to be abandoned because we are no longer the administration. Just as importantly, we were the only party to publish a local manifesto in North Ayrshire and that gives us the political framework to continue implementing our political programme from opposition.

We have started that already with North Ayrshire Council agreeing to introduce a ‘Safe Home’ clause in its Licensing Statement, encouraging late-night licence holders to provide safe transport home for their staff.

The main difference is we will be working alongside our communities to implement our manifesto, with all nine members of the North Ayrshire Labour Group ready to act as community organisers in their wards. Taking that approach, and armed with the policies in our manifesto, we will continue setting the political agenda in North Ayrshire over the next five years.

Joe Cullinane is a Labour councillor for Kilwinning on North Ayrshire Council. He was the leader of the council from 2017 to 2022.
National utopias and local myopias - local government is the poor relation of Holyrood!

Gordon Munro looks back on missed opportunities to advance local democracy and delivery

The left in Scotland has been a useful prophylactic for the SNP. While the SNP continues its independence fetish, UNISON called out the ‘silent slaughter’ in local government. The Fraser of Allander Institute put the job losses at 30,000.

The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), which represents all of Scotland’s 32 councils, tried to make this an election issue by getting council leaders of all parties to sign and send a letter to the Scottish Government pointing out that councils faced a real term cut of £371m for 2022/23. It being an election year, £100m was found down the back of a sofa to placate the angry mob. The SNP needn’t have bothered given the local elections results: SNP 453 councillors with 34.1% of preferences compared to Labour’s 282 (21.7%), Tories 214 (19.8%), Lib Dems 87 (8.8%) and Greens 35 (6%).

These results show the cuts’ size and scale matter as the SNP received solid backing. This is further emphasised by the 44.8% turnout. Voters are not bothered about the cuts to their Councils. This will have informed the thinking behind the Scottish Finance Secretary recent announcement that up to 2025/26 councils can expect a 7% real terms funding cut. Westminster will be blamed. Many on the left will repeat that soundbite but this is not the whole story.

In 2017-18, the Scottish Government had a budget £34.5bn and underspent it by £339m comprising resource of £287m and capital of £52m. In 2018/19, it had a budget of £36.1bn and a record underspend of £778m comprising resource of £508m and capital of £270m. In 2019/20, it had a budget of £36.8bn but due to Covid it had a resource overspend of £899m but still had a capital underspend of £230m. In 2020/21, the budget was boosted by 27% in the main thanks to UK Covid monies to £50.7bn but still in the year of Covid managed a resource underspend of £373m and capital underspend of £207m.

So, COSLA’s demands on behalf of all Scotland’s councils could have been met each year. The financial position in each year was known when budgets for councils were set by Holyrood and COSLA formulated its demand in response. A choice was made to pass on cuts to councils. Therefore, what needs to be done?

The left need to organise around a campaign for fair funding for councils. This needs to be done within communities, within unions and trades councils, within political parties, within councils and also in support for councillors opposing cuts. Even the business community could get involved especially when you tell them that their council’s collected business rates which are directly passed to the Scottish Government but in turn received less back - £156m in 2017/18 and £165m in 2018/19 - than was collected.

The SNP was elected on a promise to end the ‘unfair’ Council Tax in 2007 and has failed to deliver. It was dodged as part of the compact with the Tories for the 2007-12 Parliament. However, the SNP government of 2012-16 could not avoid the pressure from councils and public sector unions to act upon the promise of 2007.

Aping the Westminster tactic of an ‘inquiry’, a Commission into funding worked to produce the ‘Just Change’ report in 2015. Issued jointly between the Scottish Government and COSLA, it stated there was ‘an unarguable case for change’ which was expected acted in the 2016-21 Parliament. There is no sign that this will be tackled by the current SNP-Green Scottish Government. It will take pressure from outside Holyrood to make that change happen as Holyrood has made it quite clear it prefers to pass on cuts than take the responsibility for which proclamations are issued when pressed but action avoided.

The warning has been given with the Ministerial statement on the ‘Resource Spending Review Framework’ on 31 May 2022. The Minister proclaimed: ‘We need to focus on how the public sector can reform to be more efficient ... so reform will focus on maximising revenue through public sector innovation; reform of the public sector estate; reform of the public body landscape; and improving public procurement’.

This language actually means job losses, asset stripping, and contracting out culture not public service provision. In its review of local government finance in Scotland, Audit Scotland pointed out that: ‘Councils are operating in a difficult and uncertain strategic context and face longer term financial pressure’ and that this is due to a ‘real terms reduction in funding from the Scottish Government ... since 2013/14 larger than the rest of the Scottish Government budget over the same period’.

Public service provision has been built up over time with demands and struggle from the shopfloor with a legacy of parks, libraries, leisure centres, council housing, community centres, jobs with recognised terms and conditions all of which will play a key role in our communities in the recovery from Covid.

However, given the funding framework in which Councils have been placed, they will have to be ‘more efficient’. They will have to ‘maximise revenue through innovation’. They will have to ‘reform the public sector estate’.

The inheritance of council’s from their predecessors is one that has taken generations and struggle to build but like Lidl says, ‘once it’s gone, it’s gone’. So, will it be flag waving or service saving? Which side are you on? Gordon Munro was a Labour City of Edinburgh Councillor 2003-2022 for the Leith ward. He is also a member of Unite and was Labour candidate for Edinburgh North and Leith in the 2017 and 2019 General elections.
To demand better, we must ourselves be better

Kate Ramsden casts her eye over the health of the union movement as it gears up for an almighty battle

I attended the TUC ‘We demand better’ march and rally on 18 June in London. It was uplifting. 100,000 people on the streets to protest the cost-of-living crisis that is impacting so badly upon working people and the poorest. The speakers inspired and what was really great was the numbers of women leaders. The TUC’s Frances O’Grady, UNISON’s Christina McAnea, UNITE’s Sharon Graham, STUC’s Roz Foyer, and Shavannah Taj of the Welsh TUC. A huge change in the face of the union movement, reflecting - at last - the change in the workforce, which has so many women members, especially in public services.

There was clear messaging too: about the power of the collective to stand up for our members; the key importance of our members’ jobs throughout the pandemic; the need to recognise how essential those workers are and to drastically increase their pay and status; and the need to be strike ready. Inspiring words to galvanise for the struggles to come.

But as activists, we have to be really careful not to believe our own rhetoric. We need to recognise that for most of our members we still have a huge job of work to do to spur them to action. We are still struggling to engage with ordinary members except on a servicing model basis. Membership in UNISON as in many other unions, is going down. Strike ballots amongst big groups are hard to win.

You would think that there has never been a better time to promote the importance of collective action. Workers are facing yet another serious attack on their living standards, and facing impossible choices between eating and heating. We hear grim stories of members going without food to make sure their children are fed. The demand on food banks has soared. More and more of our children are growing up in poverty.

As with austerity, it is working people and the poorest that are paying the price. Yet we are still one of the six richest countries in the world. Just take a look at the Sunday Times Rich List. 250 people in the UK are worth between them £710.723bn, that’s an 8% rise on last year. The money is there.

Austerity and now the cost-of-living crisis is about political choice. The money is there to fund public services, for decent pay and benefits that allow people to live and not just survive. If the richest paid their taxes and contributed their fair share that would go a long way towards it. After all, how much money does one person need?

And funding decent pay and public services would not only be good for individuals but would also be really good for the economy because we are the people who spend in local shops and businesses and public services are in the front line of tackling poverty. There are many eminent economists pointing that out.

But we are still not getting that message across. We are faced with a government whose every move is to protect a capitalist agenda, that has demonised groups, setting poor people against each other and promoting a culture of divisiveness and discrimination. Our mainstream media punts out that narrative and that’s what our members hear.

We are, perhaps, seeing a bit of a sea change on that score with ‘party-gate’ incensing many. As a movement, we may have a window to start getting some key messages out there. It would be great to see every union leader give the same message over and over about why it makes economic sense for more money to be put into the pockets of our members.

When it comes to organising within our unions, we must do more to engage our low paid, hard to reach members many of whom have never seen the value of a union or collective action. Mainly women, and often Black, many working for private companies, they are currently working all hours to make ends meet.

Time off for trade union duties, though an entitlement, can be all but impossible to achieve, especially in today’s recruitment crisis in several sectors. Yet many of these workers are potential leaders and as a union movement we need to support them to get the time, confidence and support to step forward.

Listening to UNISON’s Lyn Marie O’Hara, a low paid woman who led the Glasgow equal pay strike, you can hear how she was identified as a leader amongst low paid women in Glasgow. The branch then negotiated full-time time off for her, supported and mentored her. That allowed Lyn Marie to get out there and talk to women (and men) who could fully relate to her as one of their own, someone who understood their issues because she had lived and breathed them.

It didn’t happen by magic. It took patient organising with a clear goal of getting equal pay compensation for low paid women. And they won. And when this win was challenged, they balloted members and they won again. We need to learn from this and other successes.

There is no magic bullet for the union movement to engage with all our members and to recruit and organise. The days have gone when everyone understood the power of collective action to defend jobs, conditions and services; where everyone paid their taxes as a social contract; and joined a union as a matter of course. But as the late Bob Crow said: ‘If you fight you might lose, but if you don’t fight you’ll certainly lose.’

Kate Ramsden is the Chair of UNISON Scotland’s Communications and Campaigns Committee and a member of UNISON’s National Executive Committee.
It’s no game: Playing the cost-of-living fightback both home and away

Having taken the fightback to London, Roz Foyer says we’ve also building it in our workplaces and communities

We’re now experiencing a cost-of-living emergency and one that will only get worse. It is an emergency particularly for those on low pay and on benefits and is about how we provide ourselves with affordable (warm) housing, food, transport and childcare. It is caused by a financialised, market-led economy that for decades has been stacked in favour of the rich and powerful. There is no shortage of wealth in our nation. Rather, a fundamental issue with how unfairly it is distributed. As trade unionists and community campaigners, we have a key role to play in ensuring that it is distributed more fairly.

That’s why the STUC organised a cost-of-living summit alongside the Poverty Alliance on 17 June, where union activists and community activists came together to build a strong alliance and set of demands to address the issues our communities are facing. The key message to the summit was we cannot allow this wealth gap to keep on growing and accept government complicity in this. We need to be angry to get even.

The STUC put demands on the Scottish Government: i) Pay rises for all public sector workers that at least match inflation and make urgent progress on the creation of collective bargaining in key sectors; ii) Abandon the commitment not to raise tax on the better off for the next four years, and explore options for wealth and inheritance taxes, as well as increasing business rates for those making record profits; iii) Urgently reform the Council Tax and invest significantly in local government and support the policies listed in the STUC’s Council Election Manifesto; iv) Introduce an urgent rent freeze and bring rent controls forward well ahead of the current timetable; v) Introduce universal free school meals for all; vi) Properly fund a publicly owned National Care Service, delivered free at the point of need; vii) Fund local government to deliver an urgent greener homes retrofitting programme to increase energy efficiency; viii) Invest in publicly owned bus networks delivering low-cost sustainable travel; and ix) Invest in and grow our newly publicly owned railways delivering lower fares for more users.

But we also came to the summit to listen to and support the ideas and demands of others. We emerged from the summit with a shared vision of what needs to be done and how we can work together; what practical actions we can take and, most importantly of all, what we need to do to win. With our partner organisations, we will soon launch a shared cost-of-living charter and will be using this as an organising tool to mobilise and movement build around our demands.

This building can start with national organisations working together, but it will ultimately be delivered in our workplaces and communities because without building that strong grassroots collective we won’t be able to move government decision-makers in government or employers to give us the fair deal we deserve.

Meantime, across Scotland the industrial action has already started. We must do all we can to give support and solidarity to these workers taking action. It is vital that we support the rail workers to win, because when they win, we all win and the confidence of workers to fightback rises.

While we rightly demand more from Scottish Government, we also understand many of the main levers to tackle poverty and inequality lie at Westminster. The Chancellor’s so-called ‘rescue package’, for all that it was a small step in the right direction, was more spin than substance, doing the least they could get away with in the hope of saving the PM’s skin. We call on the Westminster Tories to: i) Increase public sector wages, at least to match inflation, and substantially increase the Minimum Wage to at least £12 hour; ii) Reverse the National Insurance increase; iii) Reduce the energy price cap as seen in France, where the government has enforced a price cap of 4% on the publicly owned EDF energy; iv) Implement a more substantial windfall energy company tax; and v) Immediately increase Universal Credit to reverse the real terms drop in income, reinstate the £20 uplift and remove the Benefits Cap.

That’s why the STUC joined with the TUC in its ‘We Demand Better’ 18 June London demonstration. I was proud to help compere this rally at the end. We sent a strong message that our movement is together, we are united and we are ready for a fight. Scottish contingents were out in force in London and the turnout was massive. You could feel the anger and the energy. I have no doubt the mobilisation with local meetings leading up to this demonstration played a key role in its success. In my view, we need to learn these lessons and adopt a similar ‘roots up’ based approach when mobilising across our own communities and workplaces towards national actions in Scotland, as we press our demands and build the pressure on the Scottish Government in the lead up to their budget.

Roz Foyer is the general secretary of the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC)
#Metoo must also mean men speaking up and fighting back against sexual harassment of women

Here we reprint the speech of Rob Noakes from the Musicians’ Union moving Motion 64 at the 2022 STUC congress in Aberdeen.

The sexual harassment of women is a scourge in many workplaces. It’s severe bullying, with a sharp contaminated edge. It’s perpetrated by men. It’s witnessed by men. It’s excused and covered up by men. Well, ‘males’ is more accurate. I’m not so sure they are deserving of the term, men. It should come as no surprise to see a man move this Motion. It is absolutely crucial that we get involved in the issues. Tackling sexual harassment cannot be left to women.

We men must reflect on our own behaviour and challenge our colleagues and friends. People say ‘not all men’, but all women or most women have experienced or know someone who has experienced some sort of sexual harassment. Not all men are predators but all men have a duty to call it out. Males are the ones that need to change their behaviour.

So come on, when you see it, call it out. When you see it covered up, call it out. Let’s banish the nonsense surrounding it that still consistently refers to ‘banter’. Let’s stop women suffering a further layer of victimhood when they speak out. Let’s put an end to ludicrous assertions that how a woman is dressed has any relevance.

You know what I mean by that – ‘well she was wearing a short skirt and black stockings’ and ‘She was a bit tipsy’. So what? So were you, probably, too. We do know that her being tipsy may well be fuelled by a spiked drink or some other such method of reducing a woman’s ability to challenge unwanted advances.

This is where harassment takes on yet another layer. That being the very popular pastime known as ‘Blame the Victim’. The woman involved is often subjected to an extraordinary level of interrogation. She invariably has to make her case in front of her attacker. Is it any wonder many women don’t call it out at all?

Sexual harassment, of course, has nothing to do with sex per se. It’s not sexual relations in the way we recognise in a loving relationship. There’s no love here. It’s an assertion of power. Well, a vague notion of power. Wee insignificant males trying to give themselves some sense of importance. Unfortunately, all too often the perpetrator is an influential gate-keeper of some description.

Our union has created a Safe Space for vulnerable women and those experiencing harassment. This is a good, positive thing but the heart of the matter is the behaviour itself. I’m not addressing men with a wagging finger here but a genuine request to create an end to this, once and for all. Don’t do it, and don’t ignore it.

Sexual harassment in the entertainment industry is nothing new. Many of you will recall I have, on occasion, brought personal and close family into STUC presentations. Today, it’s my mother, Elsie Ogilvie. She was always a really good singer. In 1941, as a 21-year-old WAAF (Women’s Auxiliary Air Force), she broadcast from the BBC in Glasgow on the ‘Forces Fanfare’ programme. We asked her why she didn’t follow it up and make a career of it? Her reply was, there was too much attention of the ‘hand on the knee’ variety and that repelled her. That was eighty years ago, comrades.

In the folk and traditional music world, there have been reports of some serious instances. Some of them virtually amount to casting-couch behaviour, where young women are offered slots on festival bills, or other prestigious bookings for sexual favours. Women who are being put up overnight by male organisers, often find themselves being subjected to the small hours tap on the door and a most unwelcome visitor, expecting sexual activity. Can you imagine what it feels like to anticipate that possibility, never mind experience it?

We at the Musicians’ Union were, of course, delighted to see Iona Fyfe deservedly being the recipient of the STUC Equality Award. The STUC Women’s Committee also recently launched a new report on tackling sexual harassment at work. It made for grim reading. But we, as trade unionists, reps, activists and officials must all support the STUC Women’s Committee in their fight to eradicate sexual harassment at work in all its forms.

Let’s keep drawing attention to it, and let’s identify the predatory protagonists if necessary. This is not a patronisingly protective role for men. It’s an essential act in the interests of a fully functioning, civilised society. Call it out, and stamp it out. I move, please support Motion 64: Sexual harassment of women

‘That this Congress notes that the Musicians’ Union, along with other organisations such as the BIT Collective and SWIM, continues to carry out work to stamp out sexual harassment of women in workplaces. However, there is still a long way to go. There is an urgent need to address harassment within the Scottish music industry to ensure women musicians are treated with respect and dignity.

‘Congress further noted that a significant number of women Musician...
Union members, particularly in the folk and traditional music sector, have been reporting current behaviour/abuse from males that is appalling and needs to be highlighted, stopped and have steps put in place to stamp out harassment.

Congress asks the General Council to lobby Government to improve processes for:
1. women who are being subjected to sexual harassment; or
2. anyone who witnesses sexual harassment, including those who work on a freelance basis, to easily report the alleged behaviour and get a quick response to investigate the issues, stop the behaviour, and ensure other women are not affected by the continuation of predatory activities by repeat offenders into the future.

Mover: Musicians’ Union
Amendment: Para 3, insert third bullet ‘Continue to press for the speedy implementation by the Westminster Government of a preventative duty on employers to shift the onus from the individual to the employer. There should also be a statutory code of practice specifying steps that employers should take to prevent and respond to sexual harassment’.

Mover: Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers’ Union (Usdaw)
The motion and the amendment were unanimously passed.

Rab Noakes is a long-time singer songwriter in the folk tradition and an activist in the Musicians’ Union in Scotland. His website is http://rabnoakes.com/

Scottish musician hits a high note for equality at union awards
Scots folk singer and union activist, Iona Fyfe, wins the STUC Equality Award

One of Scotland’s leading folk singers has been recognised in her campaign for equality within the music industry by scooping a top trade union prize. Iona Fyfe of the Musicians’ Union received the Equality Award at the 2022 STUC Annual Congress in Aberdeen. The award praised Iona’s tireless advocacy for fairness within the industry, highlighting her personal experience of exploitation as a survivor of sexual harassment. Speaking bravely about her experiences, Iona works hard to encourage women and men in the music industry to also stand up and call out discriminatory behaviours which are prevalent within the sector.

Iona is one of Scotland’s leading activists in seeking further government funding for artists during the COVID-19 pandemic. Iona said: “It’s a great privilege to have received the STUC Equality Award with all praise and gratitude going to my colleagues within the Musicians’ Union. The pandemic has highlighted the continued exploitation that occurs within the industry, disproportionally impacting upon female artists. No one should experience or fear sexual harassment, abuse, bullying or discrimination at work. That’s precisely why I’m a proud member of the Musicians’ Union. We’re seeking to root out discrimination and abuse in all its forms within the sector, leaving no stone unturned in our collective fight for fairness and equality throughout the Scottish music scene.”

Commenting, STUC General Secretary, Roz Foyer, said: “Right across Scotland, in every sector of the economy, our reps and shop stewards are the face of our trade union movement in our workplaces and in our communities. Our annual Union Rep Awards celebrate these stalwarts and all those who have gone above and beyond this past year. This year was no exception and Iona thoroughly deserves her recognition as the recipient of the Equality Award for 2022. She has fearlessly held to account rogue employers who sought to exploit and abuse people within the music industry. Her bravery in speaking out, especially on her own experiences, empowers people throughout our movement to seek positive change in their workplaces, free from harassment and coercion. Our reps are the lifeblood of our movement; an incredible force for good in helping others in need. Every single one of them deserves an award for the amazing work that they do and they have my utmost praise as they ingrain trade union values throughout their workplaces.”

#MeToo
For days and days, a four-day week has been our favoured fix for work-life balance

Ruby Gibson explains the evidence-based case for the shorter working week in the Scottish civil service

Working time can and should be reduced. This is what PCS union members who work in organisations across the devolved Scottish civil and public sector have been saying for years, largely due to implementation of labour-saving technologies that workers should benefit from. And so, the four-day, 28-hour week – with no loss of pay or terms and conditions – has been a longstanding element of the PCS Scottish sector pay claim.

In recent years, there has been a growing movement and support for the four-day week, with the Welsh social enterprise, Indycube, being one of the first organisations to implement a four-day, 32 hour working week in 2016. Across the globe, others followed suit so that the global four-day week campaign has been born.

When faced with this demand from PCS members, employers have laughed and rolled their eyes at negotiators. “It’s just not possible, it’ll never work” they say. Then, in March 2020, practically overnight, civil servants and office workers started working from their kitchens and bedrooms, in ways that we had been told were ‘not possible’. Throughout the first part of the pandemic, mixed in amongst the feelings of angst was the collective re-evaluation of life. Shut off from family, friends, and communities, and working in a way that offered a level of flexibility that many workers had never experienced, the status quo started to be questioned. So, the four-day week came in from the margins to become a mainstream topic for media outlets and politicians. From Nicola Sturgeon to Jacinda Ardern, the social, economic and environmental benefits were being realised, with the four-day week touted as a potential solution to the post-pandemic recovery. People everywhere realised work can be better. When the political will is there, change happens. But, as has so often been the case before, change will only happen when there is organised power demanding it.

In this context, PCS Scotland decided it was time to further our agenda on the four-day week. In April 2021, activists and staff worked with the thinktank, Autonomy, to conduct a research project into the feasibility, desirability and impact of a shorter working week in the Scottish Government. The scoping project was conducted over 3 weeks and included three modes of engagement for consulting with workers: survey, interview and workshop. These methods were used to engage over 2,300 PCS, Prospect and FDA members (as well as non-union members) from a variety of job roles and working patterns across Scottish Government Directorates. This project placed workers at the heart of the discussion. Job roles included policy advisors, reception staff, security guards, fishery officers, social security advisers and meat inspectors, as well as examining those who worked part-time, had disabilities or caring responsibilities and were partially retired.

The project found a high degree of collective support and buy-in for a shorter working week, with 87% of respondents agreeing they’d be in favour of the Scottish Government exploring its introduction. Further to this, 84% of respondents were confident they could adapt their current work processes to fit the demands of a four-day week and the current flexi-system, with the successful implementation of home working demonstrating the organisational ability to adapt to change. It was clear from workshops and interviews that access to sufficient technological resources, management buy-in and increased staff numbers across some job roles are essential requirements for enabling the successful implementation of a shorter working week.

The perceived benefits of a reduction in working time included improving health, supporting caring responsibilities, and a better work-life balance. Employer benefits covered areas such as reduced absences, increased productivity and retention, and the potential contribution towards reducing the carbon footprint. The main obstacles that needed to be overcome were identified as the development of a more efficient and inclusive working culture, utilising labour-saving technologies and gaining collective buy-in for the initiative across all Scottish Government directorates.

The project concluded that a shorter working week is not only desirable in the Scottish Government but it is also possible. The project’s report gained wide media coverage and was sent to all MSPs. It has been a key tool for negotiators at strategic levels with Scottish Government officials and with individual employers across the sector and has had an industrial impact. The 2022/23 Scottish Government’s pay policy allows employers to create a business case to trial the four-day week and, further to this, the Scottish Government has committed to a public sector trial of the four-day week, currently planned to start in autumn 2022.

However, our campaign for a four-day week is for all workers across the Scottish sector. For our members in organisations that come under the remit of the Scottish Government’s pay policy such as culture, justice and enterprise agencies, there is a demonstrated lack of will from some employers to implement tangible initiatives that look to reduce working time. PCS members’ engagement, the level of interest in the project and membership participation in events we’ve held since are testament to this. Only with members continuing to progress this issue will we win the four-day week. During the national consultative ballot PCS conducted in February-March 2022, 97% said they support the national pay claim that includes a demand for a reduction in working time. With the recent publication of the Scottish Government’s resource spending review, PCS knows we are heading into an industrially difficult period, but we also now the current political climate means that change can happen.

Ruby Gibson is an industrial officer for the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union
Dear Boris and Nicola: This really is the best way to ‘Build Back Better’

Alex Rowley shows how the Scottish Parliament can together tackle climate change and fuel poverty

I have introduced a consultation for a Private Member’s Bill that would change building standards and require all new build housing in Scotland to be built to Passivhaus standard or a Scottish equivalent. The aim being to significantly reduce the need to consume energy and, therefore, the cost of keeping your home warm.

The main features of Passivhaus are high-quality insulation, heat control, and robust windows, creating an airtight building, heat recovery and ventilation and thermal bridge free design. Whilst there is a need to retrofit the worst of Scotland’s poor housing, it makes no sense that we would build new housing to anything less than the gold standard to reduce costs and the need to consume energy.

The recent increase in global energy prices has put the issue of fuel and energy insecurity at the top of the political agenda. Inflation-busting increases in wholesale gas prices and the collapse of a number of energy companies supplying the domestic market combined with years of austerity, pay cuts and restraint along with the removal of the 20% uplift in Universal Credit has created a ‘perfect storm’, driving more and more people into fuel poverty.

The main causes of fuel poverty are listed as poor energy efficiency of the dwelling, low disposable household income, and the high price of domestic fuel. Fuel poverty is a blight that has long plagued Scotland and will only get worse during the current cost-of-living crisis. In December 2021, fuel poverty campaigners Energy Action Scotland released startling figures showing the Scottish average for people living in fuel poverty was 24%. In the remote rural areas of Scotland, this figure could be as high as 43% of people living in fuel poverty. On average, almost 1 in 4 people in Scotland were living in fuel poverty, defined by the Scottish Government as any household spending more than 10% of their income on energy after housing costs have been deducted. This was before the price cap rise in April which added an average £700 per year to a household’s energy bills. And this is before an estimated further rise of £800 in October.

So, I would contend that reducing the need to consume energy is a key tool for the eradication of fuel poverty for the decades to come and indeed it is also a key tool if we are to meet the climate targets and achieve the goals of the Glasgow COP26.

Which leads to the second benefit of building energy efficient homes – addressing the climate crisis. Scotland is rightly setting ambitious targets to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2045, and the only way we can achieve these targets is by matching ambition with action. With household emissions contributing an estimated 20% of all emissions in Scotland, tackling inefficient housing is absolutely crucial to the fight against climate catastrophe. If housing remains in its current state, households across the country will simply continue to pay ever-increasing rates to contribute to emissions with little in the way of benefit from themselves.

The impact of inefficient housing is already here, and I absolutely recognise the immediate need to retrofit properties to ensure existing housing stock is providing as close to a comfortable and affordable living experience as possible. But for every day we continue building to inefficient standards when better is available, we condemn future generations to the same old retrofitting debate, the same search for funding, the same misery of fuel poverty impacting more households year-on-year.

So, there is only one way forward – we must break the retrofit cycle. We have the tools, the skills, the experience, the materials, and the method to create homes adhering to the gold standard of energy efficiency, reducing household emissions by 65%. Passivhaus is a tried and tested building method that provides solutions to deliver net zero housing. The construction method creates air-tight, non-draughty properties with increased amounts of insulation combined with triple glazed doors and windows and eradicates cold bridging and heat loss. Homes built in this way provide a high level of occupant comfort and use very low amounts of energy for heating. They have a mechanical ventilation system designed into them to allow for cooling and the removal of stale air to be replaced by fresh air.

Passivhaus building is an accredited and certified process that goes through a stringent quality assurance process before being passed. It is carried out and signed off by trained assessors.

With these standards available to us, it makes little sense to continue building to a lower standard. Long gone are the days where a well-insulated home was a luxury many could not afford – now it is an absolute essential and we must remove the option to build and offer low quality housing in the name of cost saving and profit.

This is why I have introduced a consultation for a Private Member’s Bill to change building standards that require all new build housing to be built to Passivhaus standard or a Scottish equivalent. This bill will not solve today’s retrofit problem, but it will solve tomorrow’s, and the next day’s, for generations to come.

Scotland has the potential to be a trailblazer in clean, green, comfortable, and affordable housing. I appreciate the Scottish Government’s recognition of the problem posed by inefficient housing. Unfortunately, their proposed solutions do not go far enough. If we are to tackle the twin problems of fuel poverty and climate crisis, radical action is required. I believe my Private Member’s Bill is a radical approach to the housing issue, but with tried and tested methodology that means this is entirely achievable if we are willing. I hope I can count on your support.

Alex Rowley is a Labour list MSP for Mid Scotland and Fife. His Bill is called the ‘Domestic Building Environmental Standards (Scotland) Bill’ and can be accessed here https://www.alexrowley.org/private-members-bill-consultation/

14 - ScottishLeftReview Issue 130 July/August 2022
Power to the people right now
Stuart Fairweather recounts the new initiatives to connect different types of poverty into one campaign

Recent Scottish Left Review editorials have asked an important, if uncomfortable, question: why has the public response to the cost-of-living crisis demonstrations been so limited? We are not involving enough people, so to increase involvement we need to be timely and relevant, and people need to believe that we can make a difference. This means action on energy prices needs to be more than defensive. Fuel poverty is a reality now but it’s impact on the many looks set to increase further. The production, distribution and sale of gas and electricity have been in profiteers’ hands for too long.

On 21 May in Glasgow, a ‘Socialist Energy Summit’ was opened by Maggie Chapman MSP, highlighting the need for a ‘just transition’, particularly in north east Scotland. But Boris’s broken Britain is anything but just. So, what do we do? At the event, there were those who recalled relatives that had taken direct action in the 1940s and 1950s to ensure people in their community did not freeze. There were others that drew upon direct experience of the anti-poll tax campaign. Others attending employed in the energy sector added important insights while others linked the need to respond to the climate crisis, land reform and international solidarity. They heard Maggie speak about the urgent need to think about freezing prices, not wages. About the future. Renewables might be the technical answer to the energy crisis but at present the big companies dominate the sector and see profit as a right. Every part of Scotland has elected politicians that can sign-up to a list of demands that contributes to putting people before profit. Local councils can ensure there are warm buildings in every community where people can come together to discuss and take action. In some cases, this will mean reversing closures and limited opening hours. Work in itself, but not a distraction. MPs and MSPs need to support policies that challenge the profiteers’ stranglehold over the food on our tables and warmth for our homes. But it is not solely about politicians, although they have a role. If we are to respond to the question that this magazine posed, then we need to talk about the future. Renewables might be the technical answer to the energy crisis but at present the big companies control these too. We need to challenge the moral authority of those that justify capitalism. We need just jobs on a living planet. We need control of emerging industries. We need shorter working weeks and working lives.

We need to start from where people are, being on their doorsteps, reflecting the diversity of the working-class, and listening to and making space for new voices.

Stuart Fairweather is chair of Dundee Trades Union Council and a member of Democratic Left Scotland

Important lessons were learnt about the impact of credit, the hierarchy of spending, and clarity on who it is actually pays the bills. When household incomes are squeezed, other things are likely to go before heating and lighting. But when households are really squeezed people are likely to ‘self-disconnect’. The left needs to re-familiarise itself with the mechanics of debt collection.

The summit, organised by Socialists for Independence, was a positive event. Post-Covid, it was good to get people back together discussing the politics of real life. Discussion is not enough. So, what happens next? A Glasgow Labour politician suggested knocking doors and collecting people’s views. This work has started with some interesting feedback. Concern is being felt and not just in the most likely areas, those statistically defined as our poorest. People want to talk about their understanding of what has become known as the cost-of-living crisis. People are open to discussions about freezing prices, not wages.

On 24 June in Dundee, a Trades Council-called demonstration drew on the work of the local Unite Community branch. It was the first in a series of events. Here the City’s councillors have already passed a motion condemning the impact of Westminster’s cost-of-living crisis on Dundee. But those at food banks and larders voiced their view to the Community branch that this was of limited effect. Condemnation needs to be allied to developing alternatives and action now. Profits and prices should be cut rather than wages, benefits and pensions. Easier said than done without a movement to push for it. So, can further connections between workforces and communities be made? Mike Arnott, the STUC Vice President’s contribution to the Dundee event suggested this possibility.

Welcome as these events in Glasgow and Dundee are, they can only be seen as a start if the Left is to regain and develop its relevance. ‘Power to the People’ type events, groups and activities need to take place across the country, discussions are starting. We need to develop a response to fuel poverty and the extraction of profit by building in our communities, workplaces and unions. We need to make demands of politicians at local, Holyrood and Westminster levels. We need to find genuine allies where we can, but we also need to know who our enemies are.

We need to take the campaign to the door of the big energy companies that dominate the sector and see profit as a right.

On 21 May in Glasgow, a ‘Socialist Energy Summit’ was opened by Maggie Chapman MSP, highlighting the need for a ‘just transition’, particularly in north east Scotland. But Boris’s broken Britain is anything but just. So, what do we do? At the event, there were those who recalled relatives that had taken direct action in the 1940s and 1950s to ensure people in their community did not freeze. There were others that drew upon direct experience of the anti-poll tax campaign. Others attending employed in the energy sector added important insights while others linked the need to respond to the climate crisis, land reform and international solidarity. They heard Maggie speak about the urgent need to think about freezing prices, not wages. About the future. Renewables might be the technical answer to the energy crisis but at present the big companies dominate the sector and see profit as a right. Every part of Scotland has elected politicians that can sign-up to a list of demands that contributes to putting people before profit. Local councils can ensure there are warm buildings in every community where people can come together to discuss and take action. In some cases, this will mean reversing closures and limited opening hours. Work in itself, but not a distraction. MPs and MSPs need to support policies that challenge the profiteers’ stranglehold over the food on our tables and warmth for our homes. But it is not solely about politicians, although they have a role. If we are to respond to the question that this magazine posed, then we need to talk about the future. Renewables might be the technical answer to the energy crisis but at present the big companies control these too. We need to challenge the moral authority of those that justify capitalism. We need just jobs on a living planet. We need control of emerging industries. We need shorter working weeks and working lives.

We need to start from where people are, being on their doorsteps, reflecting the diversity of the working-class, and listening to and making space for new voices.

Stuart Fairweather is chair of Dundee Trades Union Council and a member of Democratic Left Scotland

Power to the people: no to fuel poverty

Collecting people’s views. This work has started with some interesting feedback. Concern is being felt and not just in the most likely areas, those statistically defined as our poorest. People want to talk about their understanding of what has become known as the cost-of-living crisis. People are open to discussions about freezing prices, not wages.

On 24 June in Dundee, a Trades Council-called demonstration drew on the work of the local Unite Community branch. It was the first in a series of events. Here the City’s councillors have already passed a motion condemning the impact of Westminster’s cost-of-living crisis on Dundee. But those at food banks and larders voiced their view to the Community branch that this was of limited effect. Condemnation needs to be allied to developing alternatives and action now. Profits and prices should be cut rather than wages, benefits and pensions. Easier said than done without a movement to push for it. So, can further connections between workforces and communities be made? Mike Arnott, the STUC Vice President’s contribution to the Dundee event suggested this possibility.

Welcome as these events in Glasgow and Dundee are, they can only be seen as a start if the Left is to regain and develop its relevance. ‘Power to the People’ type events, groups and activities need to take place across the country, discussions are starting. We need to develop a response to fuel poverty and the extraction of profit by building in our communities, workplaces and unions. We need to make demands of politicians at local, Holyrood and Westminster levels. We need to find genuine allies where we can, but we also need to know who our enemies are. We need to take the campaign to the door of the big energy companies that dominate the sector and see profit as a right.

Every part of Scotland has elected politicians that can sign-up to a list of demands that contributes to putting people before profit. Local councils can ensure there are warm buildings in every community where people can come together to discuss and take action. In some cases, this will mean reversing closures and limited opening hours. Work in itself, but not a distraction. MPs and MSPs need to support policies that challenge the profiteers’ stranglehold over the food on our tables and warmth for our homes. But it is not solely about politicians, although they have a role. If we are to respond to the question that this magazine posed, then we need to talk about the future. Renewables might be the technical answer to the energy crisis but at present the big companies control these too. We need to challenge the moral authority of those that justify capitalism. We need just jobs on a living planet. We need control of emerging industries. We need shorter working weeks and working lives.

We need to start from where people are, being on their doorsteps, reflecting the diversity of the working-class, and listening to and making space for new voices.

Stuart Fairweather is chair of Dundee Trades Union Council and a member of Democratic Left Scotland
The moral corruption of nuclear blackmail

Peter Lomas surveys the contours of an increasingly dangerous and unstable Europe

Someone once said that nuclear weapons make the world safe for conventional war. This was certainly what Vladimir Putin thought when he declared, on launching the Russian invasion of Ukraine, that ‘whoever tries to interfere with us, and even more so to create threats for our country, for our people, should know that Russia’s response will be immediate and will lead you to such consequences as you have never experienced in your history’. Three days later the Russian President publicly placed Russian strategic nuclear forces on heightened alert.

Former Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, recently called for a Nuremberg-style trial of Putin for war crimes, led by the crime of aggression. This was described, in Judgment I of the Nuremberg Tribunal, as ‘the supreme international crime, differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole’.

Goodness knows, enough crimes already have been committed by Russian forces in Ukraine to merit the indictment of their leader for war crimes: violent invasion of a peaceful sovereign nation; bombing and shelling of civilian homes, hospitals and schools; deliberate revenge killings of civilians; use of thermobaric weapons – the list is growing and to us, growingly familiar.

But the point of Putin’s nuclear blackmail is that it made all this infliction of horror possible – even after Western leaders had said that NATO forces would not intervene to defend Ukraine. Ethically as well as logically, therefore, the threat to use nuclear weapons as a means of deterring opposition to the Russian invasion ‘contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole’ which ensued.

NATO leaders’ response to Putin’s nuclear threat was, in the event, rather measured – dismissing it as rhetoric, a sign of desperation by an aggressor who glimpsed at the last moment the possibility of failure. This was surely wise. Partly because, as the Bible says, ‘a soft answer turneth away wrath’, so avoiding the risk of a provocation. But also, a counter-nuclear threat would have further normalised these weapons as the basis of international security. And arguably, the Cold War had disproved this assumption simply by coming, in 1989, to a peaceful end.

Much has been made recently of overlooked instances of the Russian leader’s evil interventions: the destruction of Chechnya, the invasion of Georgia, the KGB poisonings in Britain of Litvinenko and the Skirpals (preceded by that, in Ukraine in 2004, of President Yushchenko). But all this was eased by the cynical reconstruction, in 1991, of independent Russia as Soviet inheritor-state, in which Western governments were at best passive observers, at worst purblind accomplices.

The demagogic nationalist Boris Yeltsin, having been expelled from Gorbachev’s Politburo, became breakaway Russian President, thereby seizing the command-and-control, in Moscow, of former-Soviet nuclear weapons. He proceeded to the dismemberment of the Soviet Union at Belovezhskaya Pushcha in Belarus, making provision for the (inoperative) former-Soviet nuclear weapons outside Russia to be ‘returned’. But not before he had run to the UN Security Council – warning historians of nuclear chaos if the weapons were to be ‘dispersed’ out of his own hands – in order to press for the recognition of Russia as successor-state to the USSR, with all former Soviet rights and privileges. This was the first act of Russian nuclear blackmail. Vladimir Putin was Yeltsin’s last Prime Minister and chosen successor.

Many international conventions have been broken since then, with the connivance of other Security Council members. The Vienna Convention on the Succession of States (1978) insists on ‘the replacement of one State by another in the responsibility for the international relations of territory’. But the Russian Federation hardly corresponds territorially, ethnically or demographically to the USSR, a multi-ethnic polity occupying the largest legal space in the world. So why was Russia (never previously a UN member) accepted ‘back’ into the UN in the Soviet Union’s place?

Moreover, Article 1 of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) (1968) stipulates that: ‘Each nuclear-weapon State Party to the Treaty undertakes not to transfer to any recipient whatsoever nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices or control over such weapons or devices directly, or indirectly’ [emphasis added]. So how did Soviet nuclear weapons get officially into Yeltsin’s (and now Putin’s) hands? There should simply have been one fewer nuclear-weapon state in the world. Finally, the great majority of nations had agreed to sign the NPT and never seek nuclear weapons, on assurances from the ‘official’ nuclear-weapon states never to use or threaten to use such weapons against them. This being the last taboo that Putin, in respect of Ukraine, has violated.

How did all this wrongdoing come about, allowing all the aforementioned atrocities against martyred Ukrainians? Through Russian nuclear blackmail. As Hobbes remarked, to threaten unarmed strangers with violent death undermines all civilised society. Nuclear blackmail, then, must be included in the charge-sheet of the Russian President’s arraignment, followed by measures to put nuclear weapons permanently beyond use.

Dr Peter Lomas is the author of ‘Unnatural States: The International System and the Power to Change’ (Routledge, 2017). He was Rockefeller Research Fellow in Nuclear Non-Proliferation at the Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels, in 1987-1990.
A Scottish independent economy in 'the new normal'

Raphael De Santos looks at the implications of high inflation, rising interest rates and a contracting economy for Scotland after independence.

Nine months ago, I wrote in Scottish Left Review (September/October 2021) prior to the full impact of Covid-19 being known, outlining the challenges facing a Scottish economy under independence. Since then, we have seen that Covid-19 has brought inflationary pressures into the world economy. On one side, supply chains were broken and, on the other side, there was a pent-up demand as well as a further stimulus from government rescue packages. This saw the price of commodities and goods rise with the price of oil going from $60 a barrel a year ago to around $90 a barrel at the start of 2022. This inflation started to eat into people's spending power with the UK economy seeing zero growth in February 2022. Then in late February 2022, the invasion of Ukraine happened and the oil price has now risen to around $120 a barrel. The world is heavily dependent on Russian oil, gas, coal and fertilizers as well as wheat from Ukraine. This has had a major impact on inflation which is now approaching 10% in Britain, Europe and the USA.

Central banks have reacted in the classical way to dealing with inflation by raising interest rates. Some have carried it out more gradually like the Bank of England, a 0.25% rise over many months. Others like the US central bank have been playing catch up with a blunt hammer, raising interest rates by 1.25% over two months. They both have the same outlook in fighting inflation; they will do what it takes to quell inflation even if it means pushing economies into recession as people and companies face higher costs from their mortgages, credit cards and loans. The period we are entering has been compared to the stagflation of the 1970s and early 1980s. Stagflation was a bit of a misnomer as over a ten-year period there were two recessions lasting a combined total of nearly five years and a 6% contraction in the world economy with inflation at over 11% on average in that period. Inflation was only finally killed off when the US central bank raised interest rates to 20% in the early 1980s!

Inflation in the 1970s was like inflation now, caused by a war. In 1970s, it was a 1973 war between Israel and the Arab countries which lasted 19 days. The Arab oil producers put an embargo on selling oil to those countries supporting Israel in this war which was primarily the USA. The oil price tripled in price from around $20 a barrel to $60 a barrel and stayed at that level till the end of the 1970s. There was another upward price move in 1979/1982 with the Iranian revolution and the Iran/Iraq war.

This time, we have a war in the Ukraine which has lasted over four months and there is no end in sight. Partial sanctions have been applied to Russia but the aim is to completely replace Russia as an oil and gas supplier by the end of 2022. Taking Venezuela out of the equation, Russia is the seventh largest oil producer in the world just below the United Arab Emirates. Taking them out of the supply side while the demand side remains unchanged would mean oil and gas prices will remain elevated for some time. This means inflation will be at these high levels for years and central banks will keep raising interest rates further. A recession globally is certain - the UK economy has already contracted in March and April and the USA economy shrank in the first three months of 2022.

In 1973, unsold goods built up in warehouse as people's spending power was reduced by rising inflation. Companies cut production and services laying off workers. Unemployment in the major economies averaged 9% during the 17 months of the 1973-75 global recession. We are already starting to see the same pattern being repeated now. Global trade in 2021 was at staggering $28.3tn, up 13% on the pre-pandemic 2019. These goods are building up in warehouses worldwide as consumer demand wanes.

What does this mean for the prospects and nature of Scottish independence? A planned referendum in 2023 will be held in the middle of this black economic winter with actual independence, if achieved, taking place in this 'New Normal' economy as well. This amplifies the problems around dealing with the deficit, the currency and how we engage with Europe.

In my Scottish Left Review (September/October 2021) article, I discounted the contribution of oil to an independent Scottish economy. The price of oil was not much above its cost of production which for North Sea oil is around $44 dollars a barrel. I advocated running production down and moving to renewable energy, owned and controlled by the Scottish people. The 'New Normal' has changed all that. We can expect oil to trade at over $100 a barrel for several years. Scotland literally has been landed a golden egg. We have enough oil to last seven years and produce over a million barrels a day. At a conservative price of $100 a barrel this would mean oil profits of £18.5bn a year. Even at the 30% current tax rate that would mean revenues to an independent Scottish government of £5.6bn. This would put a dent in our pre-Covid-19 deficit of £15bn pounds. It would still leave us with an annual deficit of 6% which is well outside what is required for EU membership as well making it difficult to borrow on the international markets. In this economic climate, growing the economy would not be plausible. The other options are cuts in public finances and tax rises which are favoured by the SNP. But in this economic downturn tax revenues would be falling making the deficit larger.

There is a bolder approach: A super tax on oil revenues while we run the oil reserves down. A tax of 75% would produce revenues of £14bn a year for seven years. This would allow us to shrink the deficit while allocating money to build a national renewable energy company; invest in a green public transport system; and build sustainable affordable housing. All these projects would create jobs to more than replace those lost in the oil industry as well as providing much needed services and infrastructure.

These projects need engineering experts in all the relevant fields employed to oversee them. In addition, the projects must be fully costed by economists and accountants. Regular audits and report backs on these projects on how they are making progress in construction and financial targets must be made available and the whole process must be transparent to the Parliament and public. We cannot allow a repeat of the recent ferry and rail fiascos.
The oil super tax would also take away the need to raise taxes or cut public finances. It would help shield the Scottish people from the worst economic effects of the ‘New Normal’. This would give us some space in the decisions around what our currency should be and how we engage with the European Union. It would give us instant stability around our economy rather than have a longer transition period were we gradually reduce our deficit and prove our financial competence.

Initially, as I have shown previously, because we carry out so much trade with the rest of Britain and our loans and mortgages are all in pounds, it would be sensible to initially retain the pound as our currency. This would be especially so with our larger dependence on oil using the super tax. A Scottish currency introduced immediately would become a so-called petrocurrency. It would be highly volatile and rise and fall with price of oil making any planning of the economy difficult.

It would allow us, post-independence as a country, to debate how we interact with the European Union (EU). Should we go for full EU membership or take the route Norway has pursued and become members of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and European Economic Area (EEA) or take the current approach of the UK government of being fully independent with no manifest ties to Europe. There is no need to attach our colour to one mast as part of the campaign for independence. I set out the various arguments of how we engage with Europe in Scottish Left Review (November/December 2021).

Decisions about the currency and our interaction with Europe can be taken after independence with a full debate and a referendum on the issues. This is how you can obtain buy in from the whole population, instead of handing down decisions from above prior to a future independence referendum. If the Yes campaign puts forward a clear strategy of how independence will proceed, it can win over a majority of voters including from the poorer sections of society who have previously not fully participated in the referendums. In summary, this would comprise: i) A super tax on oil profits to improve our finances and fund; ii) Renewable energy, transport and housing projects; iii) No tax rises or cuts in public spending; iv) Use the pound initially; and v) After independence a full debate and vote on our currency and EU membership.

A failure to have such a bold and clear approach in the midst of this coming economic storm plays right into the hands of the ‘No’ campaign. They will exploit all the contradictions and any fuzziness of the ‘Yes’ campaign’s approach. They would argue Scotland needs to shelter under the wing of the UK to survive this storm. Our chance for independence could be gone for decades. This ‘New Normal’ provides a once in a life time opportunity to build a fair and sustainable country. Let’s not pass it up.

Raphael De Santos has been active in left politics since the late 1970s. He was a supporter of devolution and now independence. He has worked in the financial sector for over 30 years, leading teams in research and strategy advising governments and central banks. References for all the statistics are available on request.

---

**Pleasing political poems aplenty**

*Dr David McKinstry Teaches History at Holyrood Secondary in Glasgow.*

---

**The Financial Crisis**

From Prime Minister
To Downing Street cat,
All could smell greed
From a city rat.

Sell, Sell, Sell
Was the market mantra
On Sub-prime,
But no-one took stock
Until the fall
Of Northern Rock.

The public demanded
That someone had to pay,
So bankers duly served up
‘Fred the Shred’
Then retreated to their old boys’ club
With no blue bloodshed.

Tough talk on bankers pay
Was only government teasing,
Instead they were treated
To quantitative easing.

The financial crisis
Caused by light touch regulation,
Allowing the corrupt
To punt sub-prime,
A system rotten to its core
And living on borrowed time.

---

**Jimmy Reid**

Like his ancestral brothers in arms
James Connolly and John MacLean,
He fought for workers’ rights
And their labour gain.

Their work-in was
Not for luxury to savour,
But common decency
And respect for their labour.

He reminded them
That dignity and discipline
Would get government thinking,
That meant sober purpose
And nae drinking.

He took his authority
From the Upper Clyde community,
But understood the world was watching
A display of workers unity.

Asylum Seekers boating
Across the channel,
Then forced onto a Boeing
Rwanda bound,
Someone pray tell
The home secretary,
Such naked premiership ambition
‘Is not pretty, Patel!’

---

**No space in our sceptred isle**

To honour international law
And play fair,
Unless the city can launder
Your dirty money
Whilst you reside in Mayfair.

No room at the inn
In our little Britain
To give the desperate a new start
Unless, ‘Of course come in’
If you are a Russian oligarch.

Post-Brexit Britain
Has shut up shop
And closed its compassion doors,
Unless you have enough dirty cash
To buy at our Oxford Street stores.
If people make Glasgow, here’s kind greetings from Kenmure Street

We reprint the speech Tabassum Niamat gave to open the first Festival of Resistance

Good afternoon, everyone. I hope you are all enjoying the day so far. Today, we remind ourselves about what took place in Pollokshields a year ago. I look at this crowd and see those familiar faces that stood together shoulder to shoulder. I see my friends, my colleagues, the amazing community that is Pollokshields, my Bowling Green Family but most importantly I feel that solidarity that was ever so present that day.

Pollokshields has been my home for as far back as I can remember: I have felt the highs and lows of being in such a culturally rich neighborhood. The one thing that has remained constant is the unity because this community has always come out to defend their neighbors. It was the same when the Scottish Defense League thought they could come up to stir some tension; it was the same when the Home Office sneaked in thinking it was perfectly sound to snatch our neighbors Lakhvir Singh and Sumit Sehdev. We may not fully understand what the lives of our friends or our neighbors look like, but we do understand that our needs are no different to those who do not share our culture or race.

What kind of world is it that we want, living and working here in Pollokshields? I can tell you that almost everyone here has the desire to listen and understand. We celebrate our differences here and we try to learn from each other.

This Government and the media will have us all believe that we are so different and that the racist, hostile treatment towards migrants, refugees and asylum seekers is justified because their humanity and their dignity does not matter. They are not quite human enough. The recent Nationality and Borders Bill has further created a two-tier system of who belongs in this country because people like me, people like you who were born here are not British enough, so if the Government so chooses, it can strip us of our citizenship. This Government has pandered to the racists so much so that it is speaking the same language. No longer is it just the white supremacist screaming go back to your own country: now our government is saying the same. So, if you imagine this is how they feel about us, what must their plans be for refugees and asylum seekers. Well, we know now. They want to send them to Rwanda with no hope of returning. Families will be torn apart. Lives will be destroyed. If this is their plan to save the taxpayer money because illegal immigration is taking its toll, well that is a bare faced lie. They are not being truthful with the real cost of sending people to Rwanda, and that is the crux of this policy. These are human beings, people like you and I who want the bare minimum from life which is safety, security, food in their belly and a roof over their head. It was never the refugee or asylum seeker that took billions from your taxes and wasted it on failed PPE. It wasn’t the refugee or migrant who caused the banking crisis. It wasn’t your Muslim neighbour who started wars that created refugees and asylum seekers in the first place. At every point this failed government tries to divert attention from their mismanagement and failure of running this country squarely on the shoulders of those who have very little power and sway.

Well, they failed here because we never bought into that lie. They failed here because we all understand that our neighbors and the beauty within our cultures is what makes our lives richer.

I’m going to speak about the Bowling Green and what this incredible space means to me and those who come through our gates all the time. We have a simple message: everyone is welcome! Everyone who has ever come through those gates has left feeling hopeful and believing that another world is possible because we are creating that world. We listen, we try to understand and share what we have.

We leave all judgment to one side and going back to that fateful day last year. All our volunteers, friends and coworkers were there. I recognized faces from Govanhill, Pollokshields and those who I met during our many events. Today, we have so many of our partners and groups who have all helped in bringing this festival to life. They have all played a vital part and we all share the same core values that all humans are deserving of respect and dignity. We work together to bring communities together and there is no further testament to that then what we are seeing today. You are all an integral part to the story of Pollokshields. People make Glasgow but our people are paving the way for a new world, one which does not discriminate or hate. We all belong! That is the message here!

Postscript: The Kenmure Street 3 were all southside residents who were protesting on the day like everybody else. For some reason they were singled out. One of the arrested was a single mother who has the serious charge of assault looming over her when in fact she was left with two broken fingers when the police arrested her. The other two have the lesser charge of causing obstruction. There is an online petition that has started asking Police Scotland to drop the charges. We are all fully behind them and feel there was no need for the violent arrest since the day had gone by so peacefully.

Tabassum Niamat is the Project Manager for The Bowling Green (www.thebowlinggreen.org.uk). See our previous article on the Kenmure Street protest (July/August 2021) https://www.scottishleftreview.sot/fight-for-humane-immigration-continues/
The Kenmure Street site of resistance against racism

Fatima Uygun and Tabassum Niamat reflect on how a community stood up to be counted

Kenmure Street in Pollokshields on Glasgow’s Southside is a quiet street, almost a leafy suburb. But events there last year echoed around Britain and the world. What happened on Thursday 13 May 2021 attracted the world’s media and became an inspiration for many actions elsewhere since.

Despite, it’s seemingly quiet residential look, Pollokshields and Kenmure Street are no strangers to political action or to community solidarity. Successful previous organising against planned visits by the fascist Scottish Defence League (SDL), strong community reaction to racist murders in the Southside, community’s involvement in the 2001 occupation of nearby Govanhill Baths and widespread local campaigning against the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and occupation of Palestine means this is a community that is already politically aware and organised.

That locals sprung to action was not a surprise to those who live there when the Home Office and police decided to come to Kenmure Street to arrest two local residents on the day of Eid 2021. The two were two Indian Sikh men but to the people of Kenmure Street they were simply neighbours who needed help.

Strong community networks have been built up over the years in Pollokshields by people also getting together to take over local spaces such as The Quad and the former Bowling Green, in gardening projects, and everything from chess clubs to knitting groups. It is these groups that create the spaces where people come together, from different backgrounds and ethnicities, to share and to talk. The local schools are very active in their community as are churches and mosques.

Much has been written about the events of 13 May 2021 since, but perhaps the most important element was that, when various political groupings and activists came to lend support, they found a community that knew how to organise, knew what to do, and a community that left no space for the political sectarianism that often prevents effective, coordinated and cohesive action. Community leaders joined with Marxists, anarchists and politicians from mainstream political parties to make it a successful anti-racist action.

The pride in defeating the Home Office that day was palpable. Local people did not want this to be one-off event and immediately set about organising events and spaces that would bring people together to carry on the work in fighting the Tory’s hostile environment and its cruel Nationalities and Borders Bill.

One immediate reaction was a group of local women coming together to hold a gathering in the local Maxwell Square Park under the banner of ‘We All Belong’. People came together in the park after many gatherings online and in person at the Bowling Green to share food, music, to talk and to pledge to the

should not just be a celebration but that it should also be a show of political strength in the community, prepared to fight again and to keep fighting.

The festival began on Friday 13 May, exactly one year from when the police van doors were opened and our neighbours set free. Closing that part of the street where the protest took place, we sat in silent protest then marched, chanting slogans, to a community space on Melville Street where a symbolic tree planting took place - a tree that will grow to represent solidarity and resistance.

The next day, the streets were alive once again celebrating resistance. Stalls filled the pavements with refugee groups, political campaigns and unions able to engage with the local population and hundreds of festival visitors. In the park ‘Love Music Hate Racism’ organised a stage where performers and speakers joined in, to call for action against the Borders Bill and to sing and dance together. If hate can be defeated by love and solidarity then there is no better example than what happened that day. The sun came out, people laughed, hugged, danced, talked and ate together. It was a joyous and defiant occasion.

Strolling down Kenmure Street, you will see a lovely green residential street, you will see people enjoying the company of others. But you will also see windows adorned with posters showing solidarity with struggles here and elsewhere from ‘Black Lives Matter’ to support for striking workers. The events of 13 May 2021 have since been repeated in Edinburgh, in Dalton, and Peckham in London. We hope that what we achieved is an inspiration to others. We, as a community, will continue the fight and we will mark the occasion every year from now on to make the ‘Festival of Resistance’ and the spirit of solidarity as much a part of Scotland’s calendar as any religious or national event. See you there next year and every year.

Fatima Uygun is Trust manager at Govanhill Baths and a resident of Kenmure Street. Tabassum Niamat is the manager of the Bowling Green project in Kenmure Street.
Monarchist v Republicans: Off with their heads as we keep ours

Graham Smith takes comfort from the continuing long-term decline of the monarchy in Britain

Observers from overseas might be forgiven for thinking the British are unanimous in their love of the monarchy and all things royal. Coverage of recent Platinum Jubilee celebrations focused almost entirely on the voices of those who are enthusiastic about the celebrations, yet the truth is the British monarchy is on borrowed time.

Recent polls consistently show support for the monarchy has dropped sharply over the last five to ten years, from 75% to as low as 58%, while support for abolition has jumped to more than one in four. Interest in the jubilee was also pretty low, with 54% saying they’re not interested and just 11% saying they’re ‘very interested’. With only 14% saying they were planning to do something that weekend, Britain is a nation largely indifferent about the royals and which supports the monarchy more out of habit than affection.

All this spells serious trouble for the institution over the next decade or two. The support the monarchy still holds onto is almost entirely down to the Queen, who is by a mile the most popular member of the royal family. The Queen is ninety-six, so we can safely assume that before the decade is out Prince Charles will succeed her as Britain’s monarch. It is certainly true that if support for the monarchy is dropping during the Queen’s reign, it will drop further without her at the helm.

Part of this fall in support surely comes from the tectonic shifts in social attitudes over the past decade and a half. From gay marriage to BLM and MeToo and a growing awareness of Britain’s colonial past and royal involvement in slavery, people are moving away from the staid and unbending attitudes that underpin hereditary monarchy.

Accusations of racism levelled at the royals by Meghan Markle, the ongoing Prince Andrew scandal – in which he remains accused of serious offences in London and New York – and the significant social and economic challenges the country has faced over the last few years have all played their part in chipping away at royal support. That fall in support is most noticeable among younger people, with various polls showing a majority of under-35s and especially the under-25s now wanting to abolish the monarchy.

This is all bad news for the royal family, but it’s good news for Britain and for those of us who want to embrace a more democratic future. As attitudes change and old assumptions about royalty evaporate, it will be very hard to turn back the tide, because when we look at the monarchy in the cold hard light of day, it is a grubby, self-serving institution that weakens British democracy and harms our reputation abroad.

By any measure the monarchy fails to live up to the standards expected of public bodies. It has been variously described as more secretive than the CIA or MI5. The royals use this secrecy to lobby government in pursuit of their own interests and their political agendas. Prince Charles famously bombards government ministers with letters demanding support for his pet subjects while the royals have successfully persuaded the government to give them very generous financial terms.

The cost of the monarchy is scandalous, hitting the taxpayer for more than £345m a year, according to estimates by Republic and other experts such as David McClure, author of books on the subject. That money could cover the cost of 13,000 new police officers or nurses, but instead it is spent on eighteen royals. That figure includes more than £22m a year paid to Prince Charles from the Duchy of Cornwall, a property portfolio that he claims is a private estate, but which is state property. That means Charles is awarded an income six times the combined salaries of all democratically elected heads of state in Europe, or eighteen hundred times more than Ukraine’s president Zelensky.

I’ve never been as optimistic about the demise of the monarchy than I am today, with the jubilee only serving to boost Republic’s profile and reach. While the political parties are, officially anyway, all pro-monarchy (with the exception of the Green parties), there are plenty of republicans within their ranks, and sooner than one might think they will start to shift their stance on the issue.

It will happen, and when it does the abolition of the British monarchy will be a historic moment, watched by people around the world. It will show Britain for who we truly are, a modern, vibrant and forward-looking nation, not one obsessed with the past and class servility. It will also allow us the opportunity to build a better democracy, not a US-style republic, but a parliamentary republic with a fully elected parliament, a written constitution and an elected head of state who would enjoy limited constitutional power. It is a system that works well in Ireland, Iceland, Germany, Finland and many other nations around the world.

So, when you look back at the fawning coverage of the jubilee weekend, remember that this is the last hurrah for a declining institution. Thomas Paine famously said: ‘A long habit of not thinking a thing wrong gives it a superficial appearance of being right.’ That’s a habit we’re starting to break, and sometime, probably sooner rather than later, a majority of British people will want to bring down the monarchy and embrace a democratic future.

Graham Smith is the Chief Executive Officer of Republic (www.republic.org.uk) which is a membership-based pressure group campaigning for the abolition of the monarchy and its replacement with a directly elected head of state.
Carillion’s collapse and the accountancy oligopoly

John Barker exposes those that are effectively judge and jurors in their own malfeasance

Earlier this year there were reports of a Financial Reporting Council (FRC) tribunal in which a partner of KPMG and layers of managers below him shifted blame for a forgery onto each other in the case of Carillion’s bankruptcy. Despite being ‘masters of the universe’, we got ‘Not-Me-Guv’ pleas. Forgeries, manipulation of the key to a spreadsheet, generating retrospective spreadsheets and creating of false meetings were all elements in the auditing of Carillion aimed at the keeping the client happy. Carillion collapsed in 2018 with £7bn of debts despite being showered with public contracts. In May this year, KPMG as an entity was fined £14.4m as a consequence and given ‘a severe reprimand’. The individuals involved were also fined and their credentials removed.

KPMG is one of the ‘Gang of 4’ global scale auditor/consultants with fingers in pies big and small, private and public. It is a worldwide ‘partnership’ with all the tax advantages that brings. In the case of Carillion, all four have taken their slice. This oligopoly does not need price-fixing as ‘Everyone knows what everyone else’s rates are’. All four took in around £40bn last year with partners averaging £600,000. There are no serious rivals to undercut them despite what have been so far ineffectual political noises to open the business up to smaller entrants. They are rather, ‘too big to fail’, or rather the world they have created is too complex to do without them. Given too that auditing is a legal requirement in most countries, it’s in effect a state-backed oligopoly.

KPMG has form when it comes to crimes and misdemeanours. They’re not alone. PWC (Price Waterhouse Cooper), EY (Ernst & Young) and Deloitte’s are the other oligopolists, auditing all the top 100 companies in Britain, China and USA. They have form too. In the past they have been found out: PWC (Robert Maxwell, Barings Bank); Deloitte (Autonomy before its sale to Hewlett-Packard); and EY (Wirecard, NMC Health). Each time the outcome is the same: million pounds fined and no more is said.

In 2009 in Variant, I looked at these highly profitable intermediaries which showed the conflicts of interest at work as auditor and consultant and the cases against them as a consequence. These have continued in the years since including Carillion. The Variant article also attempted to show the full extent of the pies and where the four’s fingers were. They ranged from carbon markets we know to have little or no impact on global warming emissions to Academy schools and world health schemes that replaced state involvement. As auditors with access to senior managements, they were able to offer ‘bolt-on’ services like consultancy that became a bigger source of revenue than the auditing itself, and tax avoidance services. At the time, KPMG had the biggest client list in the UK and offices in 26 tax havens. As described by Sue Bonnely, the relevant KPMG partner at the time: ‘Tax is a business cost to be managed like any other’ and ‘tax avoidance is legal’. More insidiously on the grounds that tax and tax schemes were too complicated to be properly understood by outsiders, personnel from KPMG and the rest were seconded to the HMRC tax authority on these grounds. Manifest conflict of interest that comes from these ‘revolving doors’ was to be found in the case of the 2013 Patent Box: a tax relief to encourage innovation and attract foreign capital and retrospective on anything containing an old patent. Who was the lead policy adviser? It was Jonathan Bridges, a KPMG corporate tax adviser. Once returned to KPMG, he then sold himself as ‘The Patent Box-what’s in it for you?’

In the USA, tax avoidance at least was not taken so lightly though it needed a 2003 whistleblower to reveal a set of illegal US tax shelter varieties (Blips, Flips, Opis and SOS) set up by KPMG. These shelters helped wealthy clients avoid paying $2.5bn. This is a criminal offence, and in 2005 the US member firm of KPMG International (KPMG LLP) was accused of fraud. In 2007, by paying a fine of $456m and agreeing to some minor conditions, the criminal charges were dropped. The instigators of the tax shelters were not, however, low-level employees who could be given the rotten apple treatment but senior partners. With the help of Judge Lewis Kaplan and the selective application of constitutional rights, KPMG was not convicted. The response of KPMG CEO, Timothy Flynn, echoes the narrative provided by every official wrongdoer in recent years, whether it be failed bank or criticized prison governor: ‘KPMG is a better and stronger firm today, having learned much from the experience’. Shameless because the wrongdoing was not motivated by any desire for improvement.

The government insider role has been even more insidious with the role of consultant. KPMG and PWC have been ‘beneficiaries of the state feeding of consultants’ as Prem Sikka described. He pointed to KPMG’s role as consultants to the Ministry of Defence for the development of the RAF’s air-to-air refueling fleet, the largest early PFI and one that ran for years. At the time KPMG had privatization mandates worldwide from the UK Ministry of Development (DFID) and for example as consultants to a World Bank-backed electricity privatization in Orissa in India, later described as a ‘fiasco’ by the investigating Kanungo Committee, as well as a host of advisory roles for electricity contracts in Africa.

At the same time, KPMG became advisors for reform of existing regulatory systems or the creation of new ones to regulate privatized services. This is when Bill Michael – recently resigned as KPMG UK chief after working-from-home-is-for-wimps remarks during the COVID lockdown – had declared regulation was no good he said because ‘complexity was here to stay’. KPMG’s 2007 Effectiveness of Operational Contracts on PFI Survey is full of self-praise and pre-emptms any criticism with an elitist sneer: “We hope this survey will help to inform the debate – all too easily hijacked by politically motivated and emotive soundbites – about how to deliver the best value for money public services”.

The business of privatizations, PFIs, PPPs and outsourcing and the conflicts of interest it brings when a company’s auditor is in a position as an advisor/consultant to recommend it for contracts brings us goes to the heart of the economic-political culture within which Carillion operated. There are distinct advantages especially in a financialized world for a company’s accounts to look good and strong: it is how to attract more money and puffs up the value of the share options its directors and mangers are paid with. Despite the strength of
their oligopolistic position, it would seem these auditors do not like to annoy their clients and so accounts may look better than they are.

Looking at the history, the pattern repeats itself. In 2002, KPMG ‘settled’ charges with the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) for ‘improper professional conduct’ as auditors for Gemstar-TV Guide International Inc, which had overstated its revenues by $250m. This settling meant neither admission nor denial, but in the wake of Enron’s collapse such not-proven deals were worth a lot to the oligopoly and have continued to do so. A year later in a case of ‘improperly booked revenues’ for Xerox, KPMG LLP’s CEO complained of a great injustice and fell back on complexity, how it was ‘At the very worst ... a disagreement over complex professional judgments’. Nevertheless, when the dust had settled, KPMG paid out $80m in compensation three years later.

The falsification of revenues is one thing but the wishful thinking as to future revenues another when it becomes the kind of strategic wishful thinking auditors are supposed to be checking for. The subprime mortgage initiated financial crisis of 2008 brought all this home. Many years afterwards, KPMG got a ‘Not Guilty’ in the case of the HBOS bank collapse. Not so in the case of New Century, a collapsed US mortgage lender with an accusation from liquidators on the grounds that as the Financial Times said: “it allowed the lender to use inappropriate accounting that led it to underestimate the provisions it needed to cover bad loans. This made its position look better and gave it access to more funds”. Numerous examples were given by the court examiner to demonstrate KPMG’s lack of ‘due professional care’. While admitting nothing, a private agreement was made with the liquidators who had been looking for $1bn.

‘No-guilt’ fines have been frequent since, such as in 2019 in relation to Lloyd’s syndicate 218 and the Co-op Bank in terms of strategic wishful thinking and in conflicts of interest like the collapsed Dubai-based Abraaj private fund equity. In the UK, KPMG’s work with Rolls-Royce was investigated and recently has been fined in the case of the misnamed Conviviality and its collapse. In China, it has refused to co-operate with liquidators in the case the case of China Medical in which KPMG’s letterhead was used on the audit report and they didn’t do the work.

It went a step further with China Forestry whose liquidators claimed that during a pre-IPO (Initial Public Offering) audit, KPMG failed to detect executives had falsified the company’s assets and revenue by submitting forged bank statements and customer records and that KPMG staff had themselves had falsified papers. This time in July 2021, they paid out $84m. This ‘step further’ has an equivalent in the recent case of the selling of Silentnight to Hig when it was revealed that KPMG had agitated to put Silentnight, a client, into insolvency which allowed HIG, another client, to buy it up without the ‘burden’ of its £100m pension scheme. In most cases, we might say: ‘So what? Some investors with all their privileges have lost out’. But these were the pensions of low-wage workers just as at Carillion jobs were lost and elsewhere the PWC-audited Kabul bank collapse contributed to the Afghan government corruption message of the Taliban. Though it was pushed onto a ‘rotten apple’ partner and the fine in August last year, the FRC was pushed to talk of the ‘untruthful defence’ of the partner involved in the Silentnight scandal.

With pensions KPMG also has form. When Visteon was spun-off from Ford in 2000, workers were given contracts mirroring those of Ford car workers. This would mean that they would get 12-18 months’ wages as redundancy money. When Visteon in the UK was liquidated, KPMG as its administrators started from the position that the workers were not entitled to anything other than a cash payment equal to 16 weeks’ pay, whether you had worked there 15 years or not. Its argument: Visteon was a separate entity from Ford, and had been so since 2000. In the case of Carillion, PWC appointed as administrator on the grounds of being the only one not to have had previous roles with the company and taking £20m for an initial two weeks work was alleged to have failed to supply axed Carillion workers with basic information, which they required to receive redundancy payments from the Insolvency Service and needed a reminder.

Back in 2015, Simon Collins, KPMG’s head told the Financial Times: “I would trade any advisory relationship to save us from doing a bad audit. Our life hangs by the thread of whether we do a good audit or not”. Until now that has manifestly not been the case. And, given what sounds like a self-designed version of reform and a history of rebukes, non-criminalised fines, the failure of a 2013 directive from the Competition Commission to crack open the oligopoly, and the likelihood of if throwing up barriers of complexity, we should be cautious about the prospects for significant change. But the profligate nature of Carillion – outsourced public works with its claims of superior efficiency involving hospitals and roads as well as worker livelihoods and pensions – and its collapse might just have this effect. This was soon followed by the collapse of the Ponzi-nature, Greensill, and its operation inside government and the subsequent investigation into PWC’s auditing of Wyelands Bank that was integral to the scheme.

But there is more. Rather more serious money maybe involved as the Official Receiver acting as liquidator of Carillion is looking for compensation to creditors from KPMG with the figure of £1bn in the air for its many failures such as allowing £200m of dividends to be paid even as the company was collapsing. In response, its spokesman said: “We believe this claim is without merit and we will robustly defend the case. Responsibility for the failure of Carillion lies solely with the company’s board and management, who set the strategy and ran the business”. At the same, appeals have been made to partners to chip in millions should the liquidator succeed.

The government would appear to have been shamed out of dropping proposed legislation from the Queen’s Speech in May that may impinge upon the oligopoly’s powers and privileges. Financial Times and Bloomberg reports say this caused outrage among vested interests. What is proposed is not high priority but allows for replacing the FRC with another an ARGA (Audit, Reporting and Governance Authority) that would ‘change the culture’. Until now the oligopoly has been told they must submit plans to separate their consultancy and auditing operations by 2024. Whether the proposed legislation would make any of this enforceable is questionable. For this, the ‘embarrassment’ of Carillion has to be the lever. What has not yet arisen are the necessary questions of the invited infiltration of government by oligopoly with its own self-interests, trading on expertise in the complexities they have gainfully contributed to making and tired claims of private sector efficiency.

John Barker is an independent socialist researcher whose work also goes into fiction and work with visual artist, Ines Doujak.
Working-class communist leader elected rector of an ancient Scots university

Then University of Glasgow student, Dougie Harrison, recalls Reid's election fifty-one years ago

In summer 1971, with every active communist in Glasgow, I was aware that something was fomenting in the shipyards on the upper Clyde. I was also very aware that we had a university Rectorial election that October. We needed a candidate. The two events were to come together to an extent.

The most highly articulate and widely-reported – though not by any means the only able – spokesperson of the shipyard workers was then-communist, Jimmy Reid. His ability ensured that he was a well-known public figure in Glasgow long before the workers of Upper Clyde Shipbuilders became, with good reason, internationally famous.

I recall visiting Jimmy in his council flat in Swallow Road, Faifley, above Clydebank, to discuss whether it would be helpful if he were nominated as a candidate. He simply said: ‘Aye’. The initial meeting of left-wing students agreed to nominate him – he was very deliberately not proposed by a Communist Party member. Jimmy’s first encounter with some of his student supporters was held in the Criterion pub in Dumbarton Road, Partick in Glasgow, but moved just along the road to a ‘posher’ pub, rare in Partick then, at his request. I think these all took place in June 1971, in the hiatus between me sitting my ‘finals’ exams, and the publication of the exam results. Some weeks before, the letters UCS were known to everyone in Britain, and in time internationally, as eight thousand or so Scots shipyard workers became heroes for one of the most audacious, and successful, workers’ actions in recent history.

By August, two months before the Rectorial election, the shop stewards had announced the work-in. The Rectorial campaign was fascinating, and to our delight, successful. I am not being immodest when I claim I played a wee role in its success. I drafted the final campaign leaflet, ‘Reid for Rector’, and did a few other things. Including a lot of fly-posting, a largely nocturnal (because of its illegality) art in which I perforce learned to become fairly proficient.

At some stage, before term started in October, we had wind that the right in the university, worried that we had a strong candidate who had at least a chance of winning, was seeking a credible candidate who might split the leftist vote. We heard that Michael Parkinson, widely known as an able interviewer and attractive TV celebrity, was their choice.

Parkinson had interviewed Jimmy for his programme, and we hoped that if he knew big Reid was a candidate, he wouldn’t stand against him. So, on behalf of the campaign, I wrote to him, inviting him to speak for Jimmy in the Rectorial debate. During a subsequent phone-call to his office, I was told he couldn’t attend the debate, but would have been proud to do so, or some such supportive comment. It was the only phone call in my life which I tape-recorded, although I never had to use the tape. Parkinson was not an opposing candidate – for some strange reason, his application was wrongly completed. I leave the reader to speculate why a normally meticulous man should have wrongly completed something of importance.

It must have been one of the most tightly-fought Rectorial elections ever. Reid won and his ‘rat-race’ speech after his election became, deservedly, world-famous. To the best of my knowledge, and I’m more likely to know than most folk, he wrote it all himself. The New York Times published the speech in full and called it ‘the greatest speech since President Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address’.

Dougie Harrison is a former STUC Assistant Secretary (1976-1990). He has been a school teacher, student union president, bus driver and director of a number of charities and campaigns.

---

Pleasing political poems aplenty continued

Based in Arbroath, Matthew Knights is a writer and creative writing tutor (www.matthewknights.co.uk) and Artistic Director at the Knights Theatre Company (www.knightstheatre.co.uk)

Jennie Lee

Nothing like Jennie Lee
History then leaned in
And growled
‘Act now, and institute a lasting truce’
Which has yet turned out to be
A dream just like the one before
And the one before that.

The old ghosts stir,
We do not see her type
They are relentlessly held back
Even as they strain to make
This century the women’s century.

---

Mary Brooksbank

There is no truth
Just what you believe
And are taught
And she
Was one who knew
And lived and breathed
The workers’ art
Which like the workers’ heart
Is a battered and bruised
And terrific weapon.
True stories which are told in first person throughout a feature length film are unusual. *Flee* is just such an unusual film. Formed as a virtual documentary, this story is brought to life through mixed media animation, archive footage and original sound recordings. The interrogator who elicits the narrator’s harrowing yet tender tale of fleeing from Afghanistan is the protagonist’s close friend and director, Jonas Poher Rasmussen.

Opening scenes take the form of seemingly therapeutic discussions between these two friends. The protagonist, Amin, is introduced as an animated character who is caringly coached to reveal the details of his traumatising journey as a refugee child from Kabul.

In interviews, Rasmussen explains that his decision to create an animated character, whose pseudonym is Amin, was to protect his friend’s privacy and anonymity. Animation director, Kenneth Ladekjær, further explains: ‘Initially, Jonas wanted the film to be like a radio interview … But then later, he really wanted to keep Amin [the main character] anonymous. The decision to make an animation mostly came from that: Animation added a layer of anonymity to it. We never wanted it to be a caricature of a location or people’.

To empathise with Amin is to understand his world and, therefore, the context of pseudo-therapeutic discussion and first-person narration affords informative intimacy. Rasmussen begins by asking his friend: ‘What does home mean to you?’ and Amin replies: ‘When you flee as a child, it takes time to trust people’. As his story unfolds between the two men, we thus gain insight into why this may be.

With growing capacity for open self-reflection, Amin is comfortable about sharing the fact that he is gay, which would have been impossible in his homeland. This factor is almost incidental, however, as we come to understand why, as a boy, he had no choice other than to be trafficked from Afghanistan. Kinetic combinations and juxtapositions of monochromatic drawings and colourful, animated images, strategically intercut with documentary clips, evoke a range of painful, poignant and also happy realities. In places, the film echoes similar artistic techniques which were used in a ground-breaking music video from the mid-80s, which was created for a Swedish song about love breaking through barriers in both real and imagined time and space. No coincidence perhaps, that *Flee* contains similar themes of achieving love and success against almost impossible odds.

As this evocative tale unfolds, we learn that Amin’s backstory was only revealed to Rasmussen after years of friendship. Finding safety and, ultimately, love and a settled life in Denmark seems more than remarkable when we learn of this backstory. Its significance within the bigger picture is that many children and adults were forced to flee from Kabul in the 1980s. Most had no choice other than to be trafficked to Moscow.

One particularly heart-breaking memory for Amin is that he and his friends and brother were powerless to intervene when corrupt Russian police raped a young female refugee. During his telling of this part of his story, it becomes clear that Amin battles with his conscience and cannot relieve the guilt which he feels in relation to this horrific incident.

He clearly recalls his family’s escape to alien places far from home, whilst elucidating on the exploitation of their vulnerability and their desperation. He retells these experiences with raw honesty, whilst, with coaching from Rasmussen, he relates the inner conflict involved in his more recent journey of finding contentment and relative happiness in his present life. Small moments, such as the story of a stray cat who lived in his new garden until Amin and his partner finally moved in, and their domesticated cat, both of which become part of the household, add to the priceless beauty of the film. Touches like these subtly convey themes of home, for the trafficked boy who is by now a settled adult.

_*Flee* conveys the truth of a child having to learn to live a lie just to survive and
to be accepted as an ‘unaccompanied child refugee’. By contrast, the tale of Hassan Fazili’s family seeking refuge in Midnight Traveller (2020) was filmed in real time on the family’s mobile phone cameras. Their filmed journey ended in a refugee camp in Hungary, with no sign of being settled in a new family home. *Flee* reflects a happier resolution for Amin, from the settled perspective of his Danish home, where he currently lives with his partner. In some ways, it comes closer to being an adult fairy tale. A beautiful and rare film experience which is highly recommended.

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.

Javier Blas and Jack Farchy,

*The World For Sale: Money, Power And The Traders Who Barter The Earth’s Resources*,


Reviewed by Will Podmore

Blas and Farchy are journalists at Bloomberg News. Previously, they covered commodities for the *Financial Times*. They have produced a fascinating account, based on more than a hundred interviews with commodity traders, of those who profit hugely from exploiting those who produce the goods they buy and sell.

For example, they describe how ‘from 2004 to 2006, the Jamaican government would have received $370 million in additional revenue if it had been selling its alumina on the spot market and not Glencore. ... Thanks to their unprecedented financial firepower and mastery of the commodity markets, traders such as Marc Rich were able to seize on the economic weakness of countries such as Jamaica’.

In the 1970s, traders assisted the countries of the Middle East sell their oil on the world’s market: ‘The nationalisation of Middle Eastern oilfields had cracked open the oligopolistic system that had been carefully built and nurtured by the Seven Sisters for decades. As OPEC nations seized control of their oil resources, they diverted the flow of petrodollars from the companies’ coffers to their own. Western countries began to worry about their dependence on Middle Eastern oil, a concern that would be a major driver of foreign policy for the next half century’. This brought about ‘one of the great geopolitical and economic revolutions of the modern era: the seizure of their natural resources by oil-rich nations, the rise of the petrodollar as a crucial element of international finance, and the rise of the petrostate as a force in global politics’.

The authors show how commodity traders have the power to affect the destiny of whole countries. Traders supplied the Libyan rebels with the oil without which they could not have overthrown Libya’s government. The head of Vitol, the company involved, said: ‘Obviously, I got permission from the Brits to go in’. The authors add: ‘In the UK, a covert ‘Oil Cell’ in the Foreign Office worked to prevent Gaddafi’s forces from obtaining fuel or selling crude internationally. Washington granted a sanctions waiver to allow US companies to buy Libyan oil from Vitol’. As the authors note: ‘Almost immediately, Vitol’s intervention shifted the balance of the war. Securing sufficient fuel had always been a crucial determinant of victory in North Africa’s empty stretches of desert’.

Earlier, at the other end of the continent, traders had helped South Africa’s apartheid regime to defy UN sanctions for decades. A trader like ‘Marc Rich was among those who didn’t have any qualms about dealing with anyone, including those under economic sanctions. ‘In an embargo, only the small people suffer ... ‘We did business according to our own laws and not those of others’ said Eddie Egloff, a senior partner at Marc Rich + Co. As the authors note: ‘Without the traders, the economy of apartheid South Africa would almost certainly have collapsed many years earlier than it did. Chris Heunis, a South African minister, admitted that Pretoria had more difficulties buying oil than arms, and that the oil embargo ‘could have destroyed’ the apartheid regime’. Rich ‘made astronomical profits from subverting the oil embargo against apartheid South Africa in the 1980s’. Rich himself said: ‘The South Africans needed oil, and people were reluctant to sell it to them because of the embargo. We agreed to do it because we felt it was nothing illegal’. Similarly, ‘in Russia, the traders’ cash very directly flew in the face of Western policy, by helping Rosneft and Putin weather the impact of US and EU sanctions against them’.

Countries at different stages of development have very different needs for commodities. Rapid industrialisation and urbanisation drive what Blas and Farchy call commodity super-cycles: ‘The first modern commodity super-cycle, for example, was triggered by the industrial revolution in the nineteenth century in Europe and America; the second, by the global rearmament before the Second World War; the third, by the economic boom of the Pax Americana and the reconstruction of Europe and Japan in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The fourth began around the turn of the millennium, as China and other emerging economies entered the commodity sweet spot’.

In countries with annual income per head below $4,000, people spend most of their income on the basics: food, clothes, housing. These
countries’ governments don’t have the money to make big investments in commodity-intensive public infrastructure like power plants and railways. Likewise, in countries with annual income per head above $18,000, people spend most of their income on services that need fewer commodities: education, health care, recreation, entertainment. These countries’ governments have usually built most of the infrastructure they need. So: ‘In between the two extremes, there’s a sweet spot for commodities demand. After per capita income rises above $4,000, countries typically industrialise and urbanise, creating a strong, and sometimes disproportionate, relationship between further economic growth and extra commodity demand. China hit the sweet spot … in 2001’. The traders exploit countries’ demands for commodities: ‘Even as the traders had accumulated unprecedented financial power, their activity remained almost entirely unregulated’. But the free movement of capital, on which the traders depend, undermines the conditions of its own existence, as shown by the crash of 2008-09, and the current slowdown of the world economy, which is paving the way to the next crisis.

Will Podmore is an author, who has just published his seventh book, ‘Capability Britain’, and a recently retired college librarian and UCU member.

Mike Phipps,

Don’t Stop Thinking About Tomorrow, OR Books, 2022, 9781682193693, £13, pp230

Reviewed by Dexter Govan

When the storm cleared after the 2019 general election, there was wreckage in its wake. Much of it now is the flotsam accounts of prominent individuals from the labour left, published as monographs, and often accusing former crewmates of negligence at sea. These works analyse what went wrong in 2019, and it is a shame that most contain more recriminations in their pages than lessons on what is now to be done.

Mike Phipps’ Don’t Stop Thinking About Tomorrow, marks something of a welcome departure from this genre. While reflecting on the Corbyn era, it is primarily focused on what has followed - two years of pandemic and Starmerism in the Labour Party. While Phipps’ effort might ultimately prove unsatisfying, it nonetheless marks an important bridge among works on the Labour Party. As the author argues, the time has long since passed for those within the Party to turn their focus to what is to come.

Across 200 pages, the work offers a chronological reprise of events within and without the Labour Party from the general election. It binds together internal Labour reports, articles and tweets lucidly, though at times it could be more assertive in its interpretation of events and in describing how the left might counter its recent misfortunes.

Don’t Stop Thinking About Tomorrow’s first chapter addresses the 2019 election directly. It highlights some mistakes which were made by the Labour leadership, but its conclusion appears to be that Labour was scuppered either way on the Brexit question, or else that it was the victim of more acute structural tensions within British society. Here, whatever the author’s own sympathies, he provides a relatively balanced and honest account of the difficulties faced by the Party going into the election; difficulties which are likely to continue unless the Party is able to change tack from its current course.

Chapter two considers how Keir Starmer won the Labour leadership and his subsequent attack on the left within the Party. Unfortunately, here the work becomes rather descriptive: an account of what has occurred rather than a productive analysis of it. By focusing on the plight of left-leaning members within the Party, the book neglects any detailed account of the right and its motivations. This is surely crucial if we are to understand how its grip on the Party is to be loosened.

In the third chapter, Phipps continues to analyse the Starmer era, but considers Labour’s future more directly. This includes charting routes through demographic challenges and the supposedly rough currents of patriotism and nationalism. For readers of Scottish Left Review, there’s a lack of substantive discussion on Scotland and the national question, though there are a few astute quotes from Tommy Kane and Stephen Low. Broadly, the work argues that only through a renewed focus on local ‘grassroots’ organising can Labour and the Labour left recover.

At its strongest, Don’t Stop Thinking About Tomorrow collates a variety of important ideas and developments within the Labour Party. It highlights that to begin any renewal, the Labour left and the Party itself must be prepared to do the hard work of building genuine community support. Phipps also succeeds in demonstrating that the Corbyn project and its legacy is evidence of the importance of organising through the Labour Party, not evidence of its futility. For socialists outside the Party, he makes a convincing case that the Labour Party must be understood as a terrain of struggle, not yet the vehicle for its advance. Whatever the Labour Party is, it is certainly not a signifier of moral integrity, to be boarded or to disembark when one agrees or disagrees with its leadership.

There are criticisms to be made of Phipps’ account too, though. In particular, the book maintains the idea that Labour’s membership is inherently sympathetic to the left of the Party. It cites members’ continuing support of much of the policy from the 2019 general election as evidence for this and seems to suggest that were...
it not for the right’s manipulation of supposedly democratic processes, Labour would naturally swing to a democratic socialist bearing. Much of the evidence of the Labour Party’s history does not suggest this. Without resorting to tedious quips of Methodism and Marxism, it seems clear that the Labour Party’s membership is composed of a great mixture of people. Some of these are socialists, some now ardent Blairites, but a great many appear to sway in time to rather vague appeals to hazy ideas of values and power. An underappreciated aspect of Jeremy Corbyn was that he offered a pallet cleanser to the indistinct Blairite politicians who surrounded him, now he has been swallowed by the party membership, perhaps we are returning to that fare.

In any case, Don’t Stop Thinking About Tomorrow does not make a course for the left or the Labour Party, but that it begins to think about such routes makes it a welcome shipmate on the journey.

Dexter Govan is a historian and writer of unionism and the left.

Arnold Weinstein.

The Lives of Literature: Reading, Teaching, Knowing, Princeton University Press, £14, 9780691177304, pp352

Reviewed by Sean Sheehan

The Lives of Literature, a valediction by a retiring academic who taught at an Ivy League university for over fifty years, has a lot not going for it. Prone to platitudinizing, paternalistic at times and peppered with autobiographical snippets, it is irksomely old-fashioned in its approach to literature as a series of individual books deserving to be singled out for their exemplary insights into the human heart.

What saves the day is Arnold Weinstein’s conviction that literature seriously matters and that the serious reader is like the character in William Faulkner’s Go Down Moses who has to track the footprints of a fleeing bear before it can be seen. Faulkner’s novels do not make for easy reading – ‘a Hieronymus Bosch of prose’, as one critic put it – but Weinstein makes a strong case for tracking their convoluted contours in order to bring to light the ethical rot of the antebellum South and its racial poison that has not been eradicated. Growing up in Memphis, the author remembers seeing Confederate statues every day but ‘we white youngsters rarely thought twice about them’.

Though no mention is made of Faulkner’s suspect personal politics, a moral imperative is traced in his novels and it connects with Weinstein’s reading of Kafka’s ‘Metamorphosis’, the tale of a man who finds himself transformed into a giant insect. The man never tries to make sense of his plight but the reader learns what it looks and feels like to be cast out, not recognized as human by his own family: ‘the abyss between life’s monstrous events and reason’s pitiless procedures’.

Weinstein quixotically ignores literary/cultural theory on the grounds that it is ‘too much a head-game’ and while this protects him from jumping on hip-proclaiming bandwagons, it also allows him to reduce literature to a set of his personal favourites. His range is a wide one – from Baudelaire and Proust to Strindberg, Joyce and many others – and readers will be drawn into wanting to read some of the books he discusses, even if disagreeing with his opinions.

He is strong when paraphrasing works of classic American literature, like those of Faulkner, Mark Twain, Emily Dickenson and Toni Morrison, but he risks straight-jacketing English writers in pursuance of the thesis that literature is centrally concerned with the difficulty/impossibility of knowing another person and the pain that often accompanies the act of knowing. Too much is sidestepped by his reading of Emily Bronte’s Wuthering Heights as a fiery love story about two people struggling to comprehend one another and using King Lear to illustrate the cost of knowledge is too baldly presented to take us very far. One wishes at times like these to present Weinstein with an old copy of Terry Eagleton’s Literary Theory or his latest book Critical Revolutionaries. What emerges as deeply admirable about The Lives of Literature is the author’s humility in coming to acknowledge his shortcomings. Toni Morrison’s Beloved forces him to confront the raw experience of a black person living under slavery, as opposed to Faulkner’s white-man perspective that examines it in terms of ownership, dispossession, emotional entropy and cognitive torpor. Weinstein finds himself admitting that most of the issues he has previously discussed, ones of justice, love and empathy, seem by comparison ‘quaint, perhaps abstract, academic and elitist’.

A similar moment of enlightenment occurs when in 2017 he teaches Coetzee’s novel Disgrace. The sexual abuse in the protagonist’s affair with his student some thirty years his junior incenses Weinstein’s own students and their indignation is not mollified by their teacher’s picture of a man in his fifties taking male privileges for granted. It would seem that Weinstein draws an inept parallel with the event in the novel when the teacher’s own daughter is raped by three black African men. A formal complaint is made about Weinstein’s teaching of the novel. In his account of this uncomfortable episode, what is sensed is the limitation of his liberal humanist approach to literature. Coetzee’s mapping of the female body’s subjection to violence onto the social landscape of post-apartheid South Africa is complex and finessed but the nature of this complexity was
The Lives of Literature will not shake the foundations of literary criticism or memoir writing but it is to be warmly applauded for its sincerity and its insistence that particular works of literature can take readers on journeys of self-discovery that will become important parts of what it means to be a human being in a fallen world.

Sean Sheehan writes for The Eye of Photography, Lens Culture, The Prisma and other publications.

Patrick O’Hare


Reviewed by John Wood

Whether from an environmental or geopolitical perspectives, waste management is on the political agenda in 2022. O’Hare – a young and influential activist academic – takes the reader on an impressive journey through the politics and notions of waste as a ‘commons’ through the stories of Uruguayan waste pickers called clasificadores.

Within his academic discipline of social anthropology, O’Hare proposes a new conception of waste as commons, exploring how waste management ties in with broader anti-capitalist debates on dispossession, class power, sustainability and how the developed world perceives and deals with its waste. Within a turbo-charged capitalist system, access to waste commons is often denied to the poor by large waste management corporations and the (normally local) authorities responsible for waste services. This dynamic plays out at a local level with an impact on those who would make a living from waste commons as well as at a global level reflecting the relationship between the global north and south.

Grounding the book in his close experience of clasificadores in Uruguay, O’Hare – perhaps unusually for a social anthropologist – likes to roll his sleeves up and immerse himself in this community. Indeed, O’Hare’s affection for Uruguay and the communities who make a living from trawling landfill is an infectious bonus to this book.

While painting a vivid picture of reality on the waste heap, O’Hare traces the historical role of clasificadores as ‘lumpen-proletariat’ or ‘rag pickers’ in pre- and post-Marxist conceptions of the proletariat. Themes are explored such as the displacement of waste pickers serving to help racialise the working-class (as with treatment of Irish immigrants to Britain) which carries on today as both Afro-Uruguayan and white Uruguayan pickers are called los negros de la cantera (‘the blacks from the dump’).

Although the text has its roots in academic social anthropology, the book is accessible and engaging from the outset and traces of a Scottish perspective on a global subject are refreshing. O’Hare is from Glasgow and is based at the St Andrews university. Fundamentally, the power of this book is in its matching of theoretical discussions of waste as a commons with intimate accounts of life on the front line as a Uruguayan waste picker.

Any inquisitive reader unsure about what a book about waste-picking on the other side of the globe might hold will not only enjoy the socio-political themes explored within but will find that a sense of joy, humanity and appreciation shines through as O’Hare recounts his time spent embedded within this community who find themselves emblematic of capitalism’s ills.

John Wood works in the public sector and continues to support Scottish Left Review by voluntarily proofing its contents.

Gregor Gall (ed.)

**A New Scotland: Building an Equal, Fair and Sustainable Society**, Pluto, £14.99, 9780745345062, pp352

Reviewed by Matthew Crighton

I both applaud and am deeply disappointed by this book. As a collection of pieces on the main issues regarding inequalities in Scotland, it has clear analysis and prescriptions from a constellation of excellent authors. As Roz Foyer says in her Foreword, it is a must-read for anyone interested in the steps needed to shift Scotland to a fairer and more socially just society.

But the New Scotland envisaged here won’t be a sustainable one, at least not without a lot of additional work and thought. The inclusion of a ‘Key Issues’ chapter on climate justice, good though it is, does not make the book’s content sustainable. This is for two reasons. First, sustainability is about a lot more than climate change. And, second, the statement in the climate justice chapter that ‘climate change is the greatest existential threat to society’ is not followed through into the rest of the book. With the exception of passing references in the chapters on housing, transport and wealth, there is hardly a mention of climate change, nor specifically of climate justice.

This is a weird disconnect. Every one of the issues dealt with in this book will likely be made worse by climate change and its consequences. Indeed, the entire project of social justice and socialism is threatened if climate catastrophe happens. Conversely, the struggles to create solutions to climate change create enormous opportunities for making progress against social injustices. However, in a neo-liberal state, climate policy will be implemented in ways which impose...
new costs on working people unless we are vigilant and united.

Building the power to achieve progress on social justice will need broad alliances, notably with the growing climate justice movement. Yet there is no consideration of the climate movement in the book. Written in the year in which COP26 brought the largest working-class mobilisation in Scotland in decades, the oversight seems more than careless.

Why then include sustainability in the title? This seems to be the same pattern with which we are familiar from the Scottish Government, where the rhetoric about climate emergency and alleged ‘world leading’ responses is scattered liberally in the introductions and visions of many a document but not followed through in the delivery sections.

It’s not as if there is nowhere to go for arguments and actions linking social justice and climate change. They are there for the taking from the Just Transition Partnership, from the STUC, which framed its industrial debates at Congress this year around just transition, and from the comprehensive policies set out in Common Weal’s ‘Our Common Home Plan’.

These are sources for the easy-to-make linkages between climate action and social justice around housing, transport, energy, industrial policy, economic strategy, community development, fair work, equalities. The list goes on and there is not space to spell them out here. Some thought needs to be given to understand these omissions and the reasons why some sections of the left still don’t accept that climate justice and sustainability have to be integrated into any programme for social justice.

Perhaps, to understand this we have to move from climate change, which is mentioned as a key issue but without any follow-through, to the other environmental issues which are the core of sustainability. These get no attention in this book despite its title. As well as a climate emergency we are facing a nature (or ‘biodiversity’) crisis and we are exceeding many of our planetary limits (including soil, ocean acidification, freshwater withdrawals - see Doughnut Economics). As the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) points out, we are taking resources as if we have three planets and we need to aim for One Planet Prosperity.

At the incremental level, there are plenty of straightforward and socially-just measures to alleviate environmental destruction. However, at the system level, these sustainability issues do raise questions about consumption, growth, wellbeing and economic management which are too challenging to the mindsets of both the economic mainstream and to parts of the socialist movement.

Actually, we must accept that some of them are not easy for anyone! However, the central point for socialists is that they require putting social goals, seen only as externalities by mainstream economics, at the very centre of the management of the economy – to make it achieve opposite outcomes from those which would arise without intervention. Whether top-down or bottom-up, whether social-democratic or revolutionary, the state and public interventions are essential. (These are, of course, insights which the environmental movement as a whole has yet to embrace).

These are the truths behind the slogan which it is so inspiring to hear at climate justice demonstrations: ‘One struggle, one fight - climate justice, workers rights!’. It would take another book to explore all this - now there’s an idea! - but at the core is that the climate emergency provides some of the strongest arguments for system change.

All this is missed. Even easy stuff like Green New Deal, just transition, circular economy, as well as work being done on related questions about economic strategy and role of finance. As is the work on these issues of Wellbeing Economy Alliance Scotland, Common Weal and Friends of the Earth Scotland.

However, to return to the many positive features of this book. There has to be a flow of ideas, insights and passions between the labour and social justice movements and environmentalists. The chapters of this book provide a great starting point on social justice issues but which must integrated into Scotland’s plans for just transition and climate justice. Let the two-way learning continue and broaden!

Matthew Crighton was a NALGO and UNISON union activist, working in local economic development and inclusion before becoming a climate change campaigner.

- There will be a short response to this review in the next issue of Scottish Left Review.
When issued with a fixed penalty by the Metropolitan Police for breaking Covid rules, Boris Johnson said he was not going to resign and that it was important to move on and do the job the British people wanted him to do - which was tackling the cost-of-living crisis, which he started in the first place.

When the Sue Gray report lambasted the Prime Minister for his lack of leadership over ‘partygate,’ Boris Johnson said this was no matter for him to resign on, and that it was important for us to draw a line under the matter and move on. He had to deliver on the things that were important to the British people, such as changing the Ministerial Code so that he would never have to even consider resigning.

When forty per cent of his own MPs voted against him in a motion of no confidence, the PM said that this showed he had the full backing of his party and this was no reason to resign, and that we should draw a line under the matter and move on. He had to do the things that the British people wanted him to do, such as sorting out the war in Ukraine, whether it was any of his business or not.

When he lost two by-elections and the Tory Party chairman on the same day, Boris Johnson said that this was no reason for anyone to think that he should resign. The whole idea itself can be seen as metaphor for this current government. A clapped-out old banger stuck in first gear veering from one side of the road to the other before ploughing into a brick wall. But, of course, the Tories are still trotting out the tired old line that now is not the time for a second independence referendum. What better time could there be? Do the Scottish people really want to stay a colony of a third-world dictatorship that rips up international treaties, ignores climate change agreements, cuts international aid to the most needy countries, sends asylum seekers fleeing torture to a country with a dubious human rights record and whose government breaks their own laws and then lies about it. Time to launch the lifeboats and get the hell off this sinking ship.

Vladimir McTavish’s Edinburgh Fringe Show ‘2022, The Beginning of the End?’ is at The Stand’s New Town Theatre, 5th-28th August at 7.10pm Tickets on sale now at edfringe.com

When issued with a fixed penalty by the Metropolitan Police for breaking Covid rules, Boris Johnson said he was not going to resign and that it was important to move on and do the job the British people wanted him to do - which was tackling the cost-of-living crisis, which he started in the first place.

When the Sue Gray report lambasted the Prime Minister for his lack of leadership over ‘partygate,’ Boris Johnson said this was no matter for him to resign on, and that it was important for us to draw a line under the matter and move on. He had to deliver on the things that were important to the British people, such as changing the Ministerial Code so that he would never have to even consider resigning.

When forty per cent of his own MPs voted against him in a motion of no confidence, the PM said that this showed he had the full backing of his party and this was no reason to resign, and that we should draw a line under the matter and move on. He had to do the things that the British people wanted him to do, such as sorting out the war in Ukraine, whether it was any of his business or not.

When he lost two by-elections and the Tory Party chairman on the same day, Boris Johnson said that this was no reason for anyone to think that he should resign, and that we should draw a line under the matter and move on. He had to do the things that the British people wanted him to do, such as sorting out the war in Ukraine, whether it was any of his business or not.

But I think Johnson is right about one thing. I think it is time to draw a line under the matter and move on. And I think he should do what the British people want him to do, because the British people obviously want him to fuck off.

At least, Neil Parish, the MP for Tiverton and Honiton, did the decent thing and resigned when caught watching porn on his phone in Parliament, which is more than the current Prime Minister would have done in similar circumstances. If Boris Johnson was caught on camera masturbating in a public place, which is not beyond the boundaries of plausibility, one suspects he would still refuse to resign. He would doubtless try to bluster his way out of it, saying it was important that he focussed on the issues that matter to the British people and got on with the job in hand, no pun intended.

The reality is that Johnson is never going to be able to draw a line under the matter and move on from ‘partygate’ because the public are never going to forget how often he has lied about the issue. At first there were no parties, then there may have been parties that he didn’t know about, then they were explained as being a Zoom quiz, and after that they were dressed up as ‘work events’. But finally, thanks to ITV News, we have photographic proof of the PM at a very drunken party. The fact that everyone else at the event was blurred or pixilated can be explained in three ways: 1) They were so drunk they actually looked like that in real life; 2) The person who took the photo was so wasted they couldn’t hold the camera straight; or 3) Boris was so blootered that’s what everyone else looked like in his eyes.

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. Then Transport Secretary Grant, Shapps, came up with a marvellous piece of ‘blue sky’ thinking to tackle the issue, namely, changing the need for an annual MOT to a test every two years. That really will give succour to the millions in grinding poverty to know that as they walk to their local foodbank, they could be run over by a car with defective brakes.

The whole idea itself can be seen as metaphor for this current government. A clapped-out old banger stuck in first gear veering from one side of the road to the other before ploughing into a brick wall. But, of course, the Tories are still trotting out the tired old line that now is not the time for a second independence referendum. What better time could there be? Do the Scottish people really want to stay a colony of a third-world dictatorship that rips up international treaties, ignores climate change agreements, cuts international aid to the most needy countries, sends asylum seekers fleeing torture to a country with a dubious human rights record and whose government breaks their own laws and then lies about it. Time to launch the lifeboats and get the hell off this sinking ship.

Vladimir McTavish’s Edinburgh Fringe Show ‘2022, The Beginning of the End?’ is at The Stand’s New Town Theatre, 5th-28th August at 7.10pm Tickets on sale now at edfringe.com
'MON THE WORKERS

A new book commemorating 125 years of the Scottish Trades Union Congress

This book by Daniel Gray demonstrates past achievements, explores the ideas trade unionists have fought for and rouses the movement towards future victories. 75 trade union members, reps and officials share experiences of union life from the anti-apartheid movement to Wick Wants Work. Alan McCredie’s charismatic portraits of 50 other activists from the trade union movement provide a complementary visual narrative.

To listen to interviews from the book, search for the ‘Mon the Workers podcast on Apple and Spotify.

Available in all good bookstores. Head to www.luath.co.uk/product/mon-the-workers to buy the book directly, or scan the QR code. Don’t forget to follow STUC on social media at @ScottishTUC or visit www.stuc.org.uk