SCOTTISH LEFT REVIEW

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HISTORY IS IN THE STREETS • STRANGE ENCOUNTERS WITH JOHNNIE WALKER

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THE REVIVAL OF RADICAL EDUCATION

A couple of years ago, deep in the pandemic, a group of trade union and community organisers, arts workers, and teachers met to discuss how to develop political education in Scotland. Since then, radical learning networks and schools have emerged across the country, many of them outside established institutions. There are schools channelling counter-capitalist currents old and new, from Marxism, which helps critique how capitalism shapes the world, to Jineology, the philosophy of the Kurdish women's movement that invites self-critique of how capitalism shapes our lives. There are schools educating workers and tenants in histories of boycotts, sabotage, and other tactical alternatives to classic strikes. There are schools sharing theories of global solidarity and struggle in the face of environmental crisis, and schools where climate activists are learning to use tools of protest and assembly that can pierce the underbellies of carbon-belching corporations.

This kind of political education is often seen as separate from the formal education that happens in schools, colleges, and universities. When we engage in political education, we start by inheriting lots of ideas about what education is and should be, how it works, what it feels like, and what can be expected from it. We encounter those who see education first and foremost as a means of self-improvement, rather than a way to become able to improve society as a whole. This ideology is part of a long hangover from what happened to adult education decades ago. Many radical education projects developed in the years before New Labour, and when Blair came to power, they received funding that turned socialist initiatives into established organisations. Funding that was at first a blessing turned into a curse as organisations became reliant on resources that were eventually cut back. With time, lots of people lost their original momentum in committing themselves to education as a means of struggling for a free society. As socialist education networks disintegrated, a different kind of culture developed in its place. Adult education became a means of personal advancement and a route to the individual freedom that comes from working in a higher paying job.

But the seeds of radical education are planted deep in the labour movement. A rep training course is sometimes the first class that a new steward has been in since they left secondary school. In courses on subjects like organising, equalities, just transitions, and technological change, participants can easily depart from the curriculum to connect up each other's ideas and experiences and piece together a collective consciousness of the power of their class, the way their work produces capitalist systems, and the part they play in the struggle for a better society. On the other hand, legacies of the collapse of radical education under the veil of self-improvement endure wherever unions, operating as an upskilling service, bid against third sector organisations and private companies for government funding to run skills development courses focused on employability and career advancement. Even still, there is rarely a course that cannot be turned upside down in search of a radical kernel in the self-developmental shell.

Left education is for collective gain. It is the kind of education offered in this year's spectacularly successful Glasgow May Day programme, which incorporated a whole range of forms of political education, from workshops on internationalism to radical tours and theatre productions. Its organisers nurtured seeds of education that bloomed into a radical ecology of ideas and inspirations. It does not take much to imagine this ecology blooming in every corner of the country. At the same time, it is easy to imagine the spring being cut short, the projects trimmed and tidied after No Mow May by union funders, universities, arts councils and third sector administrators. Yet no one can doubt the fierce determination of those involved in this year's May Day to keep cultivating these wild gardens. This issue brings together a number of pieces that share the secrets of Scotland's Left education revival. First, organisers of the recent Popular Education Network residential school show how education can nourish our appetite to understand a changing world and empower us to take control of it. Then we go into the street, where Katherine MacKinnon shares stories of the past that show us the radical inheritance that surrounds us. Some of these histories are tattooed into our towns and cities, like the mural by Mack Colours in the Calton, commissioned by Claire Peden to be both a tribute to the recent strikes and an invitation to passers-by to learn about the past. Then, back in the present, Lucia Harrington recounts how a group of activists learned organising methods and worked together with Unite the Union to win a major campaign to write off school meal debt in Glasgow.

The next section explores how thinking and learning and acting collectively is our greatest hope of preventing the social catastrophes of climate change. Niamh McNulty explores how queer politics can teach responses to climate change that envision the potential for Scotland to play an autonomous role in a global struggle. Calum Hodgson considers how protesters armed with knowledge can expose the gap between rhetoric and reality in the agenda of the Scottish Government, whose indulgence of Ineos and inertia on COP priorities are explored in turn by Climate Camp organisers and by Stephen Smellie. The reviews which follow are full of ways of reading from the past and observing the present that inform our humanity and hope for a better world.

From time to time in history, the Left has managed to sow seeds of education that grow into a radical ecology of ideas and actions. As Malcolm Petrie shows in the case of the labour colleges, there is much to be learned from a previous springtime. In the early twentieth century Scottish radical education developed freely, until it was smothered by political parties and their priorities. Dexer Govan finds that the labour revolt of the same era met a similar fate. Political education is not separate from the struggle, and it never has been.

Scotland has a strong tradition of radical education, and it is no coincidence that John MacLean, one of the icons of the Scottish Left mentioned in two of our articles, was first and foremost a political educator. But for all the 'democratic intellect' mythology, Scotland is not the trailblazer of revolutionary struggle that once perhaps it was. Revitalising a culture of radical education depends on opening our movements as wide as we can, and opening our minds to ideas from elsewhere. All kinds of projects are emerging from their chrysalises, here and everywhere. This issue is focused on creations of radical education at home; in future we want to see what the Scottish Left can learn from projects hatching elsewhere. So, if you are interested in exploring the world of radical education, get in touch. Let's learn together.

IDEAS TO CHANGE THE WORLD

Organisers of a recent weekend of political education, **Frances Curran, Sarah Collins, David Green** and **Suki Sangha,** reflect on the spaces where we can grow anti-capitalist culture.

In February this year, at Crianlarich youth hostel, over 20 people from different backgrounds, generations and political outlooks came together at a residential weekend hosted by the Popular Education Network (PEN). The aim of PEN is threefold. First, to give a space to activists from different political traditions to develop perspectives and analyse real-time issues together in a reflective and non-judgemental space. Second, to introduce those who are new to campaigns to an anti-capitalist, theoretical understanding of the world. Thirdly, to facilitate a programme of work for activists to challenge our own limitations and restrictions in order to ensure our movements are as healthy and strong as they can be.

The residential weekend took place against the backdrop of a period of high levels of industrial action, campaigns against energy price hikes, the growth of Living Rent as a tenants' union, and a varied picture of grassroots organising around issues of race, feminism and LGBTQ*. In contrast to previous years, the PEN weekend took place without an 'anchor' Left party or organisation. The past six years have seen a weakening of the independence movement, a pandemic without an organised Left response, the destruction of Jeremy Corbyn's politics in Westminster, the continued rightward shift of the Tories, and attacks on working class people through a variety of means. As such, while there is no anchor organisation of PEN, organisers believe it is becoming more and more imperative to create space for the Left in Scotland to discuss, analyse and debate ideas.

The weekend gave space to people from trade unions and anarchist traditions, people with backgrounds from Latin America to the Kurdish movement, people from Marxist organisations, Labour, the Greens, and a variety of campaigns, to reflect together on the state of the world today and Scotland's place in it. There was a particular focus on analysing state power in the UK and Scotland, in the context of a broader overview of how our economic system works.

We debated climate change, roleplaying the stereotypes of 'the right' and 'the left', of energy companies, of social democrats and capitalists. Through the process of debate, as each participant played a certain character, the group began to realise how well energy companies and governments can tell a 'common sense' story while right and left simply shout over each other.

Another of the problems we sought to explore was how to challenge the corrosive ideas we all hold. Representatives of the Kurdish women's movement facilitated a session on the capitalist ideas which hold back our movement and drive competition amongst activists. There was a recognition that we cannot simply hope to solve the problems of the world. We must also do some puzzling of ourselves too. As Noam Chomsky said, "the world is a very puzzling place. If you are not willing to be puzzled, you just become a replica of someone else's mind". There was also a lesson on the history of work through lenses looking at different characters – the weaver, the artisan, the factory-worker, the globalised worker, and the future worker. Lastly, we looked at protest movements in Ecuador and turned our minds to lessons of the culture of political education which inspires action across Latin America.

Organisers of the weekend are keen to see workshops take place throughout the year, as in previous years, before another residential weekend next year. This is truly a network for all those interested in developing political education and will work to complement and facilitate other education taking place, such as the STUC's cost of living training, organising networks, reading groups, studies from the Kurdish movement, and any other political education taking place or needing to take place. One of the main, underpinning, priorities for PEN organisers is that the workshops and the residential weekend provide a space to debate ideas on the Left, with an understanding that whilst the learning happens through a lens of anti-capitalist concepts, organisers are not precious about particular ideological theories. Given the seismic events which have taken place in Scotland,and across the world in the past few years, and the heightened pace of activity more recently, it is important to preserve and create spaces for the Left to discuss and debate. This is not a talking-shop. When energies begin to flag, these places provide time for activists to recover a sense of purpose.

We hope this is as organic a process as possible. If you want more information, have ideas you want to share, or would like to join the network, please email penscotland@gmail.com.

The Popular Education Network (penscotland.com) hosted 'Ideas to Change the World: Political Education Residential Weekend' in February this year.

RADICAL HISTORY IS IN THE STREETS

Following the footsteps of folk who made history in our cities, we can learn how to carry on their work, writes **Katherine Mackinnon.**

There are few better ways of getting to know a city than walking through its streets and learning about the histories of activism and struggles that changed the lives of its inhabitants. Walking tours can be powerful tools for informal radical education, even more so if you are playing the tourist in your own city for a couple of hours. It makes you look at the place differently, makes you consider the changing face of the city over the years. Since May Day last year I have been researching and running radical history walking tours around Glasgow, and this summer under the banner of Radical Glasgow Tours with Henry Bell and David Lees I hope to make these a regular fixture in the city.

Radical histories – of women's lives, of the working class, of immigrant lives – are so often lazily labelled as hidden. There are undeniable archival silences and gaps, where often a lack of documentation reflects the risks involved in recording that activism, like LGBT histories of the early 20th century, or the histories of those subject to immigration control. But even in these situations material can be found: in oral histories recorded after the fact, in anonymous or collective writing, in fiction or film or songs. There is no shortage of material. People have constantly been documenting and archiving different aspects of Glasgow's radical history, from Glasgow Women's Library's history walks to the Spirit of Revolt Archive and the extensive collections at the Mitchell Library. Any claims to this stuff being hidden should be treated with a degree of scepticism. The material is out there, but you do have to look for it.

Leading radical walks through Glasgow's streets is a very fast way of demonstrating this, by illustrating how little commemoration these histories receive. Stand on the site of almost any notable moment in the long history of the city as a site of political radicalism and agitation, and there is nothing. The few memorials that we have – the cairn overlooking a dilapidated row of shops, the hard-fought statue – simply remind us of the vast majority of radical history that goes unacknowledged in the built environment. This is compounded by the scale of redevelopment in Glasgow over the 20th century, the demolition of buildings and communities in waves and waves which means that often neither the original building nor the one that replaced it is the one you look at today. Our city streets bear the names of plantations, slave traders, landlords, gentry. Our statues are of monarchs and rich men. Walking along these streets and speaking of their evil deeds, and celebrating those who fought against them, can be a powerful thing.

In *Revolutionary Berlin,* Nathaniel Flakin discusses the city's changing street names over the 20th century, from Prussian kings to Nazi figures to leftists or back to Wilhelm and Friedrich again, depending which side of the city you were on. When the prospect of changing street names glorifying Germany's colonial past is criticised by conservative commentators as too complicated, too much of a hassle, Flakin observes that "it is actually very easy to change street names – they just need to be named after communists." Glasgow's celebrated street name change of St George's Place to Nelson Mandela Place had its roots not in who the street previously commemorated but in what it housed. Home to the South African Consulate, the street's name was changed to honour Mandela, and the Consulate quietly changed its postal address. I did a stop in Nelson Mandela Place in a recent tour. Of course I included the story about the Consulate, which is well-told and for good reason. But the street outside the former Consulate can also tell the story of the picket which happened there every Friday. There is a recording of activist Isabella Porte talking to Neil Rafeek about the hours she spent standing outside the building week in week out, in the driving rain. At the end of the clip she says, "People ask ye, will it dae ony good? And I say, everything you do makes a difference." This is what I want to communicate as much as any of the big-name histories. We should hear about the power and impact of the Speech from the Dock or La Pasionaria's radio broadcasts. But we should also hear about the people who never became famous for their activism, but simply by being present on the streets – organising, demonstrating, intervening – changed the history of the city.

Tours are a two-way process. They are a way of sharing and celebrating radical histories with a wider audience, and they are also a way of learning more about what those sites and events mean to people. This is particularly strong given that many of the events we speak about, from the rent strikes to the Spanish Civil War to later housing struggles to anti-racism campaigns, are still connected to the living traditions of the city. There are Glaswegians alive today whose grandparents went on strike in 1919 for a 40 hour working week, just as there are many Glaswegians who might come on a radical history walking tour who themselves have been part of campaigns and organising in the city for decades. As important as communicating some of the city's rich radical history is incorporating its rich radical present-day into the ongoing work of these tours.

No two tours are ever the same because of the potential for these contributions from people on the walk, not to mention the ever-moving background of the city that loves to throw an unexpected interruption at you. On our most recent tour which followed in the footsteps of John Maclean around Govanhill and Pollokshaws, the cacophony of national emergency alert tests from 30 people's phones drowned out a particularly good piece of information from that tour (the 1907 Education Act ruled that in Scotland if enough of the local population petitioned for an evening class it should be provided at the local school, leading to Maclean being hired by the council to teach night classes on Marxist economics, almost certainly the first state-funded classes in Marxism anywhere in the world). We are a part of the environment, in constant movement and in constant interaction with the life of the city. A tour at its best should give people a feeling of connection to the others whose lives move around us, in space and through time.

The tours also do not just look to the past. I am not interested in presenting history as something that is closed off to us. Rather I want people to feel themselves as inheritors of these struggles of the past. The power of these tours lies in holding up the struggles and actions of ordinary people alongside those who stand on podiums or write books or make headlines. We need to hear those people's stories and we also need the stories of standing in the rain on the picket. Remember: everything you do makes a difference.

THE EARLY DAYS OF THE LABOUR COLLEGES

Malcolm Petrie explores the rapid expansion and radical ethos of Scotland's labour colleges more than a century ago.

The early decades of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of a significant movement for independent working-class education. This movement was, in part, a reaction to – and rejection of – existing paternalistic efforts to expand educational provision for working-class students, such as the residential experience offered at Ruskin College, founded in Oxford in 1899, or the evening classes delivered by the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), established in 1903. These institutions hoped, in effect, to take students from working-class backgrounds and introduce them to subjects and material that had previously been the preserve of the middle and upper classes. The WEA, for example, aspired to replicate both the content and atmosphere of the university-style tutorial, and employed university-educated tutors. In contrast, advocates of independent working-class education insisted that there was more at stake than just the question of widening access to higher education; critical, they maintained, was the matter of what was being taught and who was responsible for teaching it. The result was a combative ethos of independence that, drawing on the influence of syndicalism within the broader labour movement, sought to create alternative educational sites that would be beyond the authority of the state, and would instead be controlled directly by the working class. Initially, this took the form of organising local study groups in which socialist activists worked through key theoretical texts, or the arranging of talks delivered by socialist speakers; by 1909, however, students at Ruskin College, frustrated by the absence of Marxism from their syllabus, had formed first the Plebs' League, and then, with financial backing from the South Wales Miners' Federation and the National Union of Railwaymen, the Central Labour College.

The Central Labour College, which delivered courses in economics and history from an explicitly socialist perspective, provided a model for others to follow. In Scotland, John Maclean, the Glasgow schoolteacher who had come to prominence through his public lectures in Marxian economics, was at the forefront of efforts to launch a Scottish Labour College. In early 1916, while imprisoned for his anti-war activism, Maclean issued his *Plea for a Labour College in Scotland,* which outlined what he believed should be the priorities of any new

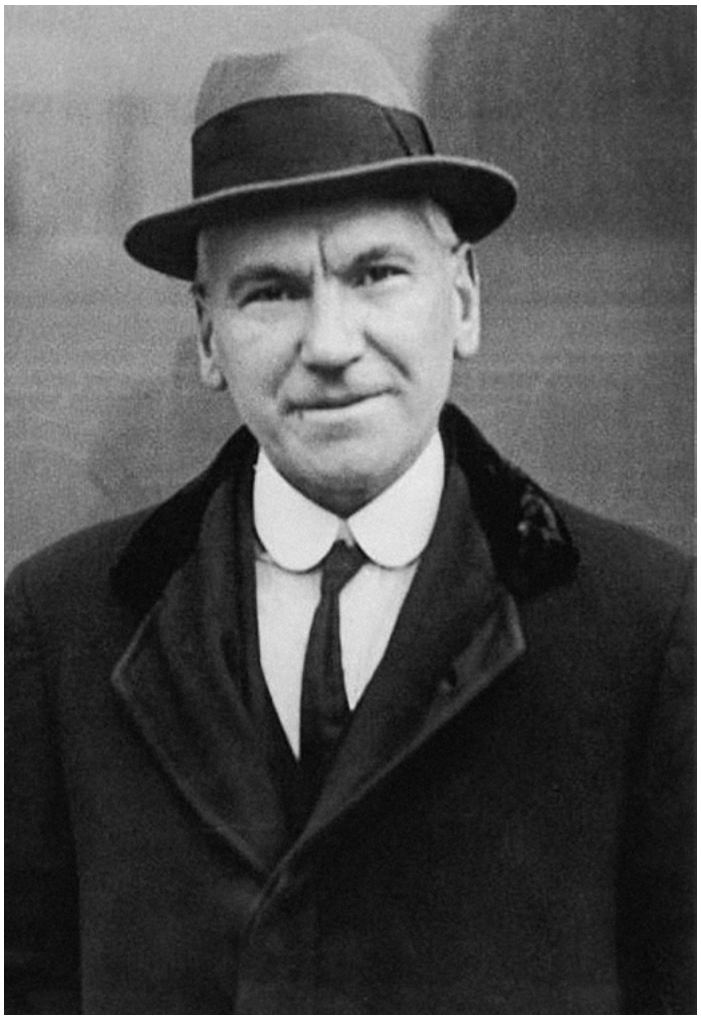
institution; for Maclean, at the heart of any radical curriculum should be economics and history, taught unapologetically from a 'working-class point of view'. In the short-term, Maclean's vision was realised, as a Scottish Labour College was established and appeared to flourish: by 1920 there were approximately 3,000 students taking courses organised by the College; by 1925, this had risen to some 6,000 students, who were enrolled in almost 250 courses at the fourteen district labour colleges that now comprised the Scottish Labour College.

This relatively rapid expansion indicated the potent attraction on the political left of the confrontational worldview that informed labour college education. In 1922, for example, Edinburgh Labour College dismissed the education offered in schools and universities as little more than a series of ideologically driven attempts to justify the social and economic status quo, and declared that the working class needed to be "as independent in education as they are in politics". That same year, Dundee Labour College published a pamphlet stating that there was a basic 'opposition of ideas between the owners of capital and those who own nothing but the power to labour' that necessitated political, industrial and educational 'independence'. This stance was also visible in the courses offered to students, which, in line with Maclean's proposals, concentrated overwhelmingly upon economics and working-class and industrial history: the purpose was not merely to pass on practical skills for political and industrial organising, but rather to affirm and deepen a powerful sense of class identity. Critically, in the early 1920s this framing retained a broad appeal that could surmount partisan divides, especially at a local level, where it spoke to pre-existing provincial traditions of radicalism and autodidacticism. Notably, the district labour colleges were, in this period, settings in which Labour and Communist Party tutors and students could work in tandem, despite the tensions that existed between their respective parties at a national level.

Nevertheless, the labour colleges did not survive long in their original form. By the late 1920s, the National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC), to which the Scottish Labour College had affiliated in 1921, had begun to exert firmer control over the local colleges, with individual Communist Party tutors increasingly facing dismissal. In turn, the NCLC came to be viewed more as the educational wing of a Labour Party that was, following the failure of the 1926 general strike and the collapse of the second Labour government in 1931, focussed on gaining national electoral success; the local class perspective of earlier years began to fade, and was replaced by a sharper national party loyalty. This shift was equally apparent in the curriculum, as the traditional focus on economics and history gave way to a new concern with training students in the workings of electoral politics: there was, by the 1930s, an emphasis on subjects such as public speaking, grammar, electoral law, and how to chair meetings. If the labour colleges had been founded to counter the education delivered in schools and universities, and to provide an alternative, and overtly socialist, conception of history and economics, by the close of the inter-war period this aim had been exchanged for a curriculum that complemented the education offered by the state by providing practical campaigning and administrative skills for Labour Party activists.

Yet despite its short-lived nature, the early labour college movement – and the deeply political understanding of education it bore – remains a tradition rich in lessons for the contemporary Left in Scotland. First, the labour colleges, initially at least, were not narrow party forums, but rather worked to unite left-wing activists from various traditions at a local level; at a time when the Scottish Left finds itself spread across the SNP, the Labour Party, the Greens, and beyond, this continues to be a valuable example. Second, the labour college ethos should remind us – and especially those of us who work within the formal education sector – of the limits of the academy, and of the value of creating spaces in which participants are able to educate themselves and each other; indeed, at its most radical, the movement for independent working-class education collapsed the distinction between tutor and student in favour of a collaborative method of learning in which students would become tutors. Finally, and crucially, the curriculum originally offered by the labour colleges was remarkable in its ambition, shaped as it was by a desire not merely to impart specific skills, but to help workers understand their world, how it had come into being, and how they might change it for the better. Politics, in this view, was about more than elections, or paying your membership dues to a particular party; it encompassed too the books that you read, your relationships with the people you worked with, and the debates you engaged in. That remains a viewpoint worthy of recovery.

John Maclean in December, 1918 upon his release from prison.



BRICK BY BRICK

A bold new mural in the Calton in Glasgow is a striking tribute to working class culture. Artist **Mack Colours** and organiser **Claire Peden** speak to the editor about its story and significance.

What is featured in the mural as an artwork, a symbol, and a statement?

Mack: The mural features, from right to left: a strike, silhouetted in the Unite colours, with six strikers in the foreground representing the six Calton weavers who lost their lives in 1787 to military gunshots during a major industrial dispute. Next to it is a weaver using a vertical loom. The the logo of Unite for a Workers' Economy. And William Morris's 'Strawberry Thief' pattern, with the message, 'Support the Strikes'.

Claire: It represents the strikes, and gives a nod to Glasgow's rich history, and to that of workers fighting back to demand better jobs, pay and conditions. We hope that people look at it and feel inspired to stand with those in struggle or, at least, to find out more about the history of Calton and the weavers.

Why is the mural here, and what makes its location significant?

Mack: The Calton weavers' strike has a significant place in Glasgow's history. Calton (or the Calton) was once known as Blackfauld, possibly named due to the residue left over from surface mining. Even with gentrification, the Calton area is known for being a working class community.

Claire: The key message we wanted to get across was 'support the strikes'. We wanted to connect past struggles with the struggles of today, and honour the first recorded strike in Scottish history. The William Morris pattern is fitting, given our partnership with Fabric Bazaar, who kindly let us use their wall space for the mural. Whatever the thieves represent, it is one of Fabric Bazaar's most popular fabrics.

How did the ideas develop and how was it finally installed?

Mack: The ideas for the design emerged from conversations with local workers in the area and also local residents. During these chats we learned a great deal about the history of the area, what Unite's message meant to them, and their ideas as to what could be incorporated into the mural. I took inspiration from all of the people I interacted with, and began researching the Calton Weavers and William Morris. I found out a great deal about how the American revolution that started in 1765 (with the slogan 'no taxation without representation') stirred the thoughts of working class Glaswegians with 'radical' ideas of equality and democracy. William Morris himself was a fantastic designer and poet with a love for Iceland that led him to travel to Scotland regularly en route to his destination. Later he toured Scotland, giving socialist talks in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee, in venues like the Waterloo Rooms in the city centre and the Temperance Institute on James Street. It is said that Scotland brought out the best and the worst from him. He loved the enthusiasm of the Scottish people but found the slow progression of socialism frustrating.

The installation of the mural took four days with acrylic spray paint. I was given a great amount of support from passers-by, with many of them expressing solidarity with the strikes. I myself have been painting for twenty years, with the last five years dedicated to painting murals and artwork in a public environment.

What is the political significance of artwork like this?
Claire: I work with a campaign called Unite for a Workers' Economy which aims to drive change and shape politics from the workplace to the community. It's about encouraging workers to engage in local community campaigns and to hold politicians to account when they fail us. To do this effectively we use different methods and tactics to engage with communities and talk about what really matters to them, through graffiti art, music, book launches and community-based activities.

This mural is our second in the city. Both have very important messages that tie in with our campaign aims: Higher wages, Freedom from food poverty, Affordable energy, Adequate pensions, Protection for our NHS. The other mural at People's Pantry Govanhill declares: 'Food is not a luxury'.
Mack: Radical art to me is like graffiti with a message. Graffiti itself is used to break down society's illusions of control and restriction. Campaigns in the past have labelled graffiti as 'a danger to the public'. In actuality, radical graffiti art is only dangerous to those in power. Using public art as a medium to spread awareness, solidarity and instil confidence in those who need it most right now is crucial.

I do not think of myself as a political artist. I feel that modern politics is so divisive, and my artwork is meant to be the opposite of divisive. I want it to create joy, confidence, and wonderment. Supporting the strikes to me is not political. It's supporting my friends, my neighbours and my community. The work Unite does in Glasgow and in other parts of the UK is so important, and I could not say no to collaborating with them to create artwork for the public. Any time I have a meeting or even just a conversation with Claire, or with Joe, her fellow organiser, I am always left feeling upbeat, confident and proud to be working alongside truly amazing individuals like them.

What did it take to get the project off the ground, and how do you build from here?
Claire: The mural is part of a project backed by Unite and our General Secretary, Sharon Graham. We have to win people over for projects like this, including our own members. They have high expectations, and so do we, as we continue challenging the profiteers making excessive profits off the backs of workers, and running campaigns in target areas. Working with Mack Colours, Fabric Bazaar, Calton Books, and the whole community have been invaluable to making this project happen, and as with any project I love to see the final piece. I'm proud of it. I think we need to keep building brick by brick. Build on our political education, talk about the past, and let that shape the journey forward. We fight together, shoulder to shoulder for a fairer society for working class people, for higher wages, for suitable and affordable housing, for fairer education. And maybe we find a way to take down the Tories. Now we're talking.

THIS WIN WILL FEED THE WEANS

On March 30th, *Feed the Weans,* won its campaign demand for all £300,000 of school meal debt held by Glasgow City Council and individual schools across the city to be cancelled. Organiser **Lucia Harrington** explains the organising theory and practice they used to serve up success.

Together Against Debt (TAD) aids people who have experienced debt to organise campaigns to tackle the UK's debt crisis. When I was employed as the organiser in the Glasgow local group, my first task was to organise its launch. Twenty-five people attended our first event, and discussed what our communities in debt were facing, and possible campaigns we should focus on. Dylan got involved in the campaign at the meeting. "When I spoke at the first TAD meeting about my experiences of debt," he recalls, "I was very anxious, as talking about debt is a difficult thing; you assume that most people would consider you irresponsible and find it easy to blame any problems you experience as a result of your debt on you. Despite the anxiety, this made me want to speak, as I know how unjust that perspective is and how it is an aspect of the issue that causes people to remain silent through guilt and shame. Debt can ruin your life, and that's why I got involved with *Together Against Debt*."

Cutting the Issue

After the launch, we had to decide on a campaign collectively, based on the problems that were voted as of most concern to the people who came to our launch, including energy debt, rent issues, and food poverty. We needed to cut these big problems into issues we could tackle as a newly formed group. Using an organising strategy from the Midwest Academy, a school for organisers in Chicago, we cut these broader issues into a campaign we could win. The theory encouraged us to choose an issue we could win within six months with a small group, so that afterwards our group would have recognition from other community members who might join and build power for bigger campaigns. It also meant we had to create a strategy around a specific target, and the campaign itself had to feel worthwhile for the people affected by the issue to invest in.

Groups like Living Rent were already addressing rent-based issues, so we discussed whether to focus on energy debt or food poverty. Alan McIntosh, an expert on debt and a keen activist in the poll tax movement, shared his insight into how difficult it would be to create a winnable campaign around energy debt in six months. Since many people facing energy debt also struggle with food poverty, we decided to focus on cancelling school meal debt. We knew this was winnable. Edinburgh council had already cancelled all school meal debt. Glasgow's councillors wouldn't want Edinburgh to seem better than Glasgow.

The strategy

"The campaign's success undoubtedly was down to solid organising and strategy", said the secretary of TAD Glasgow, Jack Taylor. "By choosing a winnable campaign with a clear vision of how the campaign would develop, every meeting felt productive, and the campaign kept the momentum and morale high". Following a model called the Midwest Strategy Chart, we identified Susan Aitken, SNP leader of the council, as our main target. She had the most power to get the council to cancel the debt. But first, we decided to get the Greens and Labour to support us to put pressure on the SNP.

We wanted this campaign to aid the empowerment of people in debt, and to get families in debt engaging with every step of the process. After we identified the communities and schools most affected by debt, we did outreach by flyering at school gates and shopping centres in Castlemilk and Govan, and by speaking at as many community events we could get to. At school gates, we heard many issues around food provision in schools that we fed back to our group meetings.

Eryn was completely new to activism but soon became our outreach coordinator. "I was very comfortable doing outreach", she said. "I had experience in public speaking, which is a different skill but does cross over with organising. Having a strong team with me made outreach more effective, and was one of the reasons it was really quite fun. The other reason for that was my genuine interest in hearing what the people of these communities were going through. Quite frequently people we spoke to would be eager to share their experiences with means testing, or with the quality of the school meals being provided. Some had incomes that fell just above qualifying for free school meals for their kids, but not so far above that they could actually afford to provide those meals themselves. Others said that when they could afford to pay for school meals their kids still came back hungry."

It took a lot of work as a new group to get the councillors' attention. Meanwhile, some of the people that we tried to bring on board the campaign did not feel like our cause was worthwhile to begin with, since they feared that even if the debt was cancelled, it would just rack up again the following year. I also felt this deeply. I decided that if we were going to bring more people on board, we needed to have a way for our current members to believe that by contributing to the campaign to cancel school meal debt, they would be on the path to also increasing access to free school meals in the long run. So I decided to look for allies

who were campaigning for free school meals to see if we could possibly form a coalition for the future.

I contacted Frances Curran, who organises with Power to the People and had been campaigning for free school meals years before the existence of TAD Glasgow. Frances immediately invited me to a Unite Community meeting which discussed forming a campaign with *Unite for a Workers Economy*. Their members had already discussed how they wanted to take action around food poverty, and I was excited that two Unite organisers, Claire Peden and Scott Walker, were unionising the pantry I had previously volunteered at. I signed up to Unite and started inviting activists along to meetings after our outreach at schools. Unite for a *Workers Economy* decided to campaign to end the means testing of school meals, and I encouraged members who wanted to work on free school meals to work in solidarity with Unite. That was how TAD and Unite formed a partnership that developed the *Feed the Weans* campaign, to collaborate on cancelling school meal debt and ending means testing for school meals.

We mapped out communities and surgeries of the councillors, organised outreach at school gates, and flyered at schools. What was so brilliant about working with Claire and Scott is that they instantly showed their genuine care and knowledge for community issues every time they were out on the campaign ground. Rona was one of the Unite Community activists who got involved. She said: "After hearing reports of children having food actually taken away from them in the school canteen because there was an outstanding debt owed by their parent or guardian, it was an easy and quick decision for me to get as involved as possible in the *Feed the Weans,* campaign. Other than thinking about the acute shame a child would feel by having food taken away from them - in front of their peers at school - the simple fact remains that hungry children cannot learn".

The win

As soon as Unite was involved, councillors started listening to our demands. It was obvious that we could not have won without them. As one activist, Daisy, put it: 'Having the union behind the campaign made us feel powerful'. On March 9th, we had our first demo together outside Glasgow City Council on an international day for school meals. We also realised that making ourselves known to councillors by attending their surgeries was another useful tactic. On the day of the win, it was amazing to know that our efforts to get Labour and the Greens to support us had worked, and this pushed the SNP to support us as well. The SNP brought it as a motion to Glasgow City Council, and it was backed by members of the SNP, Labour, the Greens and even a couple of Conservatives.

"To say I was elated is an understatement", Rona said. "I read the updates from the campaign leaders through tears and imagined how the parents who were being relentlessly chased for this outstanding debt must feel upon hearing this news. I expect a huge weight had been lifted from them".

This win will help many families. It was a collective win using the dream combination of community organising and trade union power. It was achieved by the effort of every person who got involved at every step, even those who just turned up to a single meeting. I watched members of TAD like Alessia and Eryn develop from activist roles to taking on coordinating roles in the campaign, and become keen trade unionists too. "My experience with Together Against Debt has proven an illuminating one", Alessia said. "It was my first experience dealing with activism work, and it showed me the work that such tasks require. I've done a lot of pamphleting and speaking with people about the issues that we were fighting for. I've met a lot of lovely people in my group, and with their help I'm starting to get my bearings and understand the steps required for taking local action."

As Scott Walker put it, this was just the starter and now we are on to the main course. We are all still committed to ending means testing to school meals and we have just been successful in holding our new First Minister Humza Yousaf to his manifesto statement of prioritising free school meals and making sure no child in Scotland goes hungry. Keep an eye out for the campaign, as there is more justice to be served.

THE MARKING BOYCOTT IS BRINGING RESULTS

Cat Wayland reflects on the UCU Marking and Assessment Boycott from the perspective of the University of Edinburgh branch.

After yet another renewed national mandate for industrial action, April 20th saw University and College Union (UCU) members embark on a Marking and Assessment Boycott (MAB) as part of the union's *Four Fights* dispute with employers. Covering pay, inequalities, casualisation, and workload, *Four Fights* has shone a harsh light on the urgent need for an overhaul of employment practices in the Higher Education (HE) sector. The dispute is not just about securing a pay increase for lecturers; the current claim covers all university workers, across several unions and at all pay grades, not to mention the immiserating casualisation faced by increasing numbers of higher education sector workers. That said, UCU predominantly represents higher pay grades, and other HE unions are not currently on strike, resulting in further obstacles to a unified response to deteriorating conditions.

Following paltry pay offers and gestures at reform from employers after eighteen days of strike action in February and March, members then voted overwhelmingly to pause further action on the ongoing pensions dispute after Universities UK agreed to revoke pension cuts imposed in 2022. Despite significant divisions among members - along factional lines, between permanent and casualised staff and between universities with significant surpluses and those facing budget crunches and redundancies - UCU members now find themselves at a pivotal moment in the *Four Fights* dispute. As ever, what will make or break the action is whether UCU members can rally in solidarity to push negotiators at the UK level towards firmer commitments on ending zero hours contracts, reforming pay structures, and fixing a system where workloads are at permanent crisis point.

In spite of what may appear to be a gloomy picture from the outside, rank-and-file members are finding renewed pockets of energy to sustain the organising effort. Local branches in universities, and even more localised units such as groups of members in School and Subject Areas in my own University of Edinburgh, are taking the initiative in developing networks and tactics that work to their strengths in terms of membership density and institutional position, both within their local area and the university more broadly. Whilst grassroots work on this scale inevitably brings its own challenges, it is in the nature of the action for these networks and tactics to develop, more so than with a normal walk-out. To cause the necessary disruption required of a MAB, we have to know the conditions on the ground; know who our comrades are in our departments both horizontally and vertically. Only by doing this hyper-local organising can we build the capacity to sabotage the marking and assessment pipeline.

Crucially, MABs have a recent history of success across the HE sector, with branches such as Liverpool and Queen Mary, University of London winning local disputes on redundancies and impositions of strike-breaking measures by management. The knowledge and practical experience these branches have been able to share has been invaluable for enabling others to develop their own MAB strategies, filling in the gaps inevitably left by a national union that represents member institutions with a highly variable range of conditions and resources. At the local branch of the University of Edinburgh, we have been inspired by the creativity and resilience of comrades across other institutions. We have also learned a few useful lessons of our own.

First, one of the most important dimensions of organising strategy that has emerged since we began coordinating the MAB locally is the strategic value of indeterminacy and opacity. Although there is a fine line between indeterminacy and confusion, we have found that the need to work locally has galvanised more members to get involved with organising efforts, developing new channels of communication and solidarity amongst otherwise siloed departments. In an institution with a high level of devolved decision making between Colleges, Schools and Subject Areas, these channels have been essential for sharing tips and strategies, enjoying some camaraderie, and building capacity for future organising efforts. This was made more straightforward thanks to an already well-developed Local Contact network, run by the branch's designated Organising Officer, though ironically, facilitated by the need to ballot members repeatedly under existing anti-Trade Union laws.

Second, we are seeing more and more potential for our local organising networks for the future thanks to new links forged between workers at different points in their work trajectories. We have more and better communication between permanent and casualised staff, for example. As a result, we have more discussion at Subject Area level of issues that we now know we can work on together in the future. In the likely scenario that individual institutions will be left to decide how to implement whatever agreements are arrived at on workload, pay equality, and casualisation, it is vital to have these networks in place and ready to mobilise.

While the offers from employers have been underwhelming so far, the MAB has, to the surprise of some, been a kind of inoculation against some of the most grinding disappointments of the dispute. In spite of the uncertainty, for many members there is a real sense of optimism borne out of working collectively and developing our organising strategies together. Although some argue that a Marking and Assessment Boycott should have been UCU's strategy from the start, there is also the knowledge that this is the nuclear option: the strikes were indeed a warning shot, and now we are loading the main cannon. In this respect again, we are at a pivotal moment in the dispute, and workers at Scottish universities are pushing forward with a strategy to win, in solidarity with branches across the UK.

A COUNTRY IN TRANSITION

Thinking about transgender lives and resource ownership in tandem can help us to see Scottish independence in a different way, writes **Niamh McNulty.**

When Westminster utilised Section 35 to overrule Holyrood on the Gender Recognition Reform Bill, I went down to Holyrood as a queer person and anarchist to hear how people had reacted. I was surprised that a member of the Alba party, which is campaigning to axe the Bill, took and used the opportunity of a protest about gender to speak about oil ownership and wealth. It demonstrated how trans people are being used as political fodder in Scottish sovereignty debates, and displayed a total lack of regard for how devastating this can be. Why would someone at a protest about gender rights raise a demand that Scotland should reap the benefits of its oil? What links were being made between Scottish independence, transgender lives, and resource ownership? That moment revealed something about a Scotland grappling with transformation, autonomy, meaning-making, and living well together. Independence will not guarantee one particular future: we must dream, negotiate and fight for it. In this kind of atmosphere, how could a queer framing help us imagine an independence movement rooted beyond ethnic or civic nationalism?

I think the trans debate has become all-encompassing in a Scotland confronting climate collapse - where oil has been such a pivotal argument for independence - because both issues are about change. Both issues are about saying this is my decision; this is something new that I couldn't have imagined before, and I'm scared; this is me taking my life in my own hands, creating beauty, fun, and throwing the rules away. They are about who gets to decide what change to make, what road we take to get there, and what breaking free of binaries and traditions could offer us. This last part is what queer politics is about. While for many 'queerness' can simply mean being gay or trans, a queer politics involves a liberatory way of viewing and making ourselves and the world through contesting institutionalised hierarchical binaries. Whilst this generally refers to dismantling the

privileging of heterosexuality over homosexuality in institutions like marriage, thinking with queer politics can offer us insight when applied to a range of topics.

Oil and gas are territorially bound, holding a privileged relationship to romantic notions of blood and soil characterised in ethnic nationalism. The energy context of the 1970s enabled certain ethnic nationalisms to construct grievances over the unequal distribution of oil wealth and ownership. As successive Conservative governments have melded the worst of neoliberalism with evermore inhumane policies rooted in nostalgic yearning for when Brittania ruled the waves, Scottish nationalism has evolved to be civic in nature by marking out civic values as an ethnic boundary marker to differentiate an independent Scotland from the British state. The merging of these seemingly contradictory nationalisms, tied through foundation myths of freedom-loving people (and fostered by learning about William Wallace in school), sees 'progressive' civic values as inherent to Scottish people. This falsely constructs Scots as social democratic, universalist, and tolerant by nature in opposition to the closed ethnic character of English/British nationalists. This is despite how divergent many Scots' opinions are, as our recent First Minister leadership debate demonstrated. Imagining independence through queer politics could allow us to transcend nationalist framings.

But first, how does the impending energy transition play into all this? If British nationalism is archaic, and so is the use of oil and gas, then to renewables we turn. Renewable energy sources are transnational, in that no one nation or people can claim ownership over the wind, waves or sun. For mainstream independence thinkers, this could lend itself to an abstract national identity tied to universal civic values, offering the chance to be the 'friendly neighbour' rather than 'the embittered wife' in relation to an 'ageing and out of touch' England. The energy transition itself could be an extended metaphor for an imagined divide between Scottish and English people. However, for this to happen Scotland's role in Empire and fossil fuel exploration must be omitted to present Scotland as a viable and relevant independent country in a world defined by abstract issues like climate crisis.

I began thinking about this in 2019, whilst immersed in that year's environmental protests. During this time I heard environmentally minded Scottish nationalists engage in gross historical revisionism, characterising Scots as Indigenous and England as the sole source of the Empire and the Industrial Revolution. The SNP prided itself on Scotland being first to announce a climate emergency, and positioned itself as a climate leader during COP26. All the while, ministers have held meetings with oil and gas lobbyists over 200 times in the last four years. Here is one nation pulling in two directions, both linked to creating a case for independence. Deluding ourselves by saying this oil is 'ours', but so is a climate-safe future. Yet, the polluting effects of our domestic fossil fuel use are not ours alone. We share them with the rest of people and planet. The ethno-civic nationalism of today's independence movement ultimately fails to provide the framework needed for transformation. It sees us as a bordered nation with no relation or responsibility to others. A queer politics could help us overcome this.

The trans debate, resource use, and independence all have their own stories at play, but thinking about them together allows us to see pertinent questions about autonomy and change. Life as a queer person inevitably entails transgressing boundaries and binaries, so I know it is possible to apply these lessons to imagining Scottish secession. Independence beyond nationalism means taking control of our resource use not because we 'own' anything but because we are inseparable from the earth and this happens to be the bit we live and love and die upon. It means

choosing to see our community in its rich ecological and social diversity, not as imagined ties of blood and thought. It means accountable, engaged, practice-based governance, instead of hierarchy, dispossession and dominance. Scottish independence could mean living in tandem with wind and waves, embracing the fluidity of nature, not because we are better than our neighbours, but because we are always, always in an embrace of living and dying with all others on planet Earth.

THE CLIMATE TRANSITION MUST BE REAL

The SNP's climate politics are a well-directed theatre production. Political change comes not from rhetoric but from struggle, boycott, protest and assembly, writes **Calum Hodgson.**

Whenever we see protesters in the news - consistently interrupting FMQs, challenging the First Minister, delaying or disrupting sporting events - there is a debate about how effective their actions are in terms of their movement's image and their goals. It seems that if activists target public events the backlash centres around their choosing wrong targets, while actions against politicians are met with performative rhetoric that sidesteps real change. Is there space in politics for a real political drive for radical change? And if so, how can climate activists successfully challenge power in Scotland when politics is more theatre than real?

The SNP became a political force and ascended to government through posturing as the new left anti-austerity party of the 2010s, a socially progressive alternative to a tired Labour government, and an ideological challenger to the Tories of Westminster. This image, created by successive party leaders and a well-oiled media machine, survived over 15 years in government. While this strong image allowed for election victory after election victory, the actual figures show a different story. In 2010/11, there were about 15% of the population living in relative poverty. By 2022, that number had risen to 21% of adults of working age.

The SNP has morphed from the party of anti-austerity into the party of climate leadership. We see in their rhetoric an enthusiasm for a green economy that will solve the climate crisis as well as tackle poverty in communities across Scotland. Rhetoric used by Humza Yousaf in his programme for Scotland clearly pinned his colours to the green economy mast. An agenda for a Just Transition, not leaving communities in the North East to the same fate as the coal towns of the 1980s. An aspiration for Scotland to become a world leader in climate mitigation and loss and damage. These are the positions of an outward-looking, ambitious government. The problem, again, is that action has not met the words of the SNP. We were promised 130,000 new green jobs by 2020, but in 2023 the number is around 20,000 and falling. We have a climate plan that is ambitious in its targets, but independent auditors claim that there is not enough detail to know whether it is even possible. Why believe that this party somehow will enact change now?

There are problems in this comparison between anti-austerity SNP and climate-committed SNP. The political debates of this decade are different from those of the last. Where the SNP of the 2010s was built on protest and mitigation, the rhetoric of the 2020s is much more difficult to enact. The requirement for action, not just words of protest, leaves questions as to how the Scottish Government, given its current political power, can embody the image it is desperate to project.

The problem, in my opinion, can be thought of in terms of the divide between politics and the political. Where the former is built around images, symbols, and rhetoric, the latter is created through action. The idea of this divide comes from the post-foundationalism of the French political thinkers Claude Lefort and Jean-Luc Nancy. Nancy writes on the divide:

> politics is a form of technological action and thinking consisting nowadays mainly of institutionalised social management… where all arising problems and difficulties are to be 'resolved' by administrative means, while everything questionable in the radical sense, that is, questionability as such, disappears. [1]

In essence we can view politics as a place of rhetorical performance that happens beyond genuine political struggle. We see this performative nature in First Minister's Questions, other parliamentary set-pieces, and TV debates in which politicians act in set roles, furthering the institutions of parliamentary democracy and 'legitimate' authority over the people. Our role, by extension, is to watch on as a passive audience. We may get to vote once every few years, to buy tickets to a new show, or to carry on watching what is being acted out in front of us. But once the tickets are bought we are expected to take our seats and become the mere spectators of a politics of legitimation and a rhetorical theatre of social change.

The political, on the other hand, is pure action. The political is a space in which individuals enter, as political beings, to challenge power and offer radical ideas of change in society. We can see the political when individuals participate actively in debate and discussion and within public conversations. Pure democracy happens in a participatory space. In opposition to the institutional routes of power and change, individuals can protest, boycott, and assemble groups to enact change. They can do so as part of political action groups within the environmental movement.

GNDRising, a UK wide group campaigning for climate and social justice through the implementation of a Green New Deal, has focused on contrasting the SNP's rhetoric and image management with their failures in climate action. Last month, a group of us challenged the First Minister on his rhetoric during the leadership campaign. His promises of community wealth, green jobs, and a just transition all seem a million miles from the position he has set out in the programme for government.

We need to challenge politicians on their rhetoric and point to its disconnection from the radical action required. We also need to support real action taken by political groups: community assemblies that campaign on local issues, unions withdrawing their labour, and disruptive protests that bring climate climate issues into the public conversation are all part of the ecosystem of the political real. Discussion and rhetoric have a place in changing the minds of society, but to achieve radical change its end goal must be action. We need to take and smash the media managed theatre of politicians who perform a role without action. In a system divided by politics and the political, campaign groups are acting in a way that drags politicians from the safety of 'legitimate' institutional politics to the political sphere of the real, where action and power are legitimated not through rhetoric and image management, but through genuine policy and radical action in society.

[1] Oliver Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 68.

TIME TO STAND AGAINST INEOS'S INJUSTICES

Climate Camp Scotland organisers explain why it is preparing to challenge Scotland's worst polluter and to envision a Grangemouth beyond fossil fuels.

About ten years ago, INEOS launched an all-out attack on their workforce at the Grangemouth refinery and petrochemical complex. After previous attacks on pension schemes and working conditions, INEOS's owner Jim Ratcliffe, the UK's richest man at the time, finally succeeded by getting rid of Unite the Union's conveners and forcing worse conditions, including pay freezes and strike bans, on everyone working at the plants. To this day, the defeat remains a humiliating reminder for workers that, in the words of Brian Parkin, "an ideal position from which to be kicked in the teeth is when you are on your knees."

For the last ten years, INEOS at Grangemouth has also made other headlines. Nowhere else in Scotland comes close to contributing to climate change and environmental harm as much as INEOS's Grangemouth complex. The oil and gas refinery, chemical works, fracked gas mooring, oil terminal, associated heavy industry and power plants are in the immediate area of Grangemouth town, with five of Scotland's biggest polluters on one street. At least 30% of the UK's crude oil runs through INEOS Grangemouth. The site is Scotland's main producer of petrol and diesel, as well as plastic pellets for the manufacture of single-use plastics, produced at a rate of 60-70 billion plastic pellets per day. Fracked gas is imported from the US to the site. According to INEOS themselves, the complex consumes energy "roughly equivalent to Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen plus Falkirk". For this reason INEOS has been consistently ranked as Scotland's worst polluter for years.

While the headlines are dominated by other crises, it is easy to forget that climate breakdown is intensifying by the day. The latest IPCC assessment report (largely ignored by the media) predicts that the 1.5 degrees target will soon be breached, and that an immediate phase-out of fossil fuel usage is needed to have a chance at keeping global warming below 2°C, the limit for irreversible catastrophic climate change. Perhaps ironically, the entire area of INEOS's industrial complex in Grangemouth is threatened by rising sea levels.

Easier still to forget is how climate and social injustices connect, driving pollution and deprivation for those least responsible for causing the climate crisis, both globally and nationally. Employment by INEOS of Grangemouth residents has declined for decades, with labour increasingly carried out by contractors travelling from out of town, while better-paid permanent staff tend to live elsewhere. This has led to depopulation, unemployment and social deprivation in the town, in addition to noise, air and visual pollution through flaring, alarms, and groundshakes. The fossil fuel industry relies on extracting not only from the earth's reserves of natural resources, but from the communities they deem expendable. INEOS is sacrificing the people of Grangemouth, its own workers, and the planet for the pursuit of profit. Here we see fossil fuel capitalism hellbent on destroying the homes and livelihoods of millions on the frontline of the climate crisis.

In the face of such outrageous injustice, Scottish Government responses mostly sustain the same abusive relationship that of the former Unite convenors endured with the fossil fuel giant. Desperate to prevent the site from being closed, Mark Lyon, the former Unite convenor, explains in his book *The Battle for Grangemouth* how every attempt at compromise with INEOS's management resulted in betrayal, including and his own dismissal. Yet the Scottish Government follows the same tactic: afraid of closure and job losses, they choose to believe vague technological promises of carbon capture and storage and a blue hydrogen plant – expansions designed by INEOS to continue fossil fuel usage. Despite INEOS constantly being fined by the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA), and even floating the possibility of a nuclear reactor to power its Grangemouth operations, the Scottish Government continues to treat INEOS as a partner in the 'just transition', inviting them to committee meetings and inquiries, only to be surprised and offended when INEOS doesn't even bother to send representatives. The fear of closures with resulting job losses and further deprivation drives the Scottish Government into a state so toothless and disoriented, that INEOS feel they can get away with just about anything.

In spite of all this, resistance has formed on all levels. Local communities fought back against INEOS attempting to take away Bo'ness Road, with Friends of the Earth Falkirk staging cycles along the refinery and the community council obstructing the takeover. Local residents organise litter picks and nurdle clean-ups of beaches to highlight plastic pollution in the sea. Extinction Rebellion Scotland staged a 12-hour blockade of INEOS headquarters, highlighting "the collusion between government, fossil fuels and finance on maintaining business as usual in the face of catastrophic climate breakdown." And just last autumn, hundreds of workers in the refineries staged wildcat strikes and took to the streets to demand better conditions. The power of corporate giants is fragile and open to challenge on all sides. What is needed is a concerted effort and a big moment to bring all these struggles together.

This summer, Climate Camp Scotland will organise a five-day long camp for climate justice in the vicinity of INEOS's fossil fuel infrastructure. We will bring together climate and environmental activists from across Scotland and beyond, to reflect, strategise, train, and take direct action against Scotland's worst polluter. But we also invite all local people in Grangemouth and the wider area, as well as every worker in the industry, to collectively envision a Grangemouth beyond INEOS and beyond fossil fuels. We want to hear from you what your vision is for a real 'just transition' that is worker-led and community-centred. The struggle for a better future needs all of our movements together side by side, despite our differences and disagreements. The sites of the worst injustices are the best places to stand up and start organising. Let's begin in Grangemouth this July.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BETWEEN TWO COPS

Six months after Sharm el Sheikh and six months from Dubai, the hard struggle continues to push governments to fund a just transition, writes **Stephen Smellie.**

Strange to think that six months ago I was in Sharm el Sheikh at COP27, accommodated, like most other delegates, in a holiday complex with swimming pools, restaurants, beauty parlours and well-watered and manicured lawns. When I walked out of the complex I was in a desert with nothing till the next complex, half a mile down the road. Nothing but a 5-lane motorway with hardly any traffic save the taxis and buses ferrying holiday makers to another complex or delegates to the conference centre. It is bizarre to think that in this environment, world leaders met to try to do what 26 COPs before had failed to do, and what another conference in Dubai in six months time will attempt to do: come up with real plans to reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions from burning fossil fuels. These gatherings receive major media attention every November, but sixth months on, midway between milestones, is a better moment to assess the journey on which they attempt to guide domestic and global policy.

The one big success that was achieved six months ago was the Loss and Damage Fund. The USA and EU seemed determined throughout the two weeks to kick it into the long grass. However, their usual tactics of buying off countries with promises of bilateral aid or trade, or sometimes threats to end current arrangements, didn't work as the 'G77 group, pluswith China', held together and insisted on L&D being a commitment. As Ben Wilson wrote in the last issue of Scottish Left Review, this represents a real success for the Global South countries and the climate justice campaigners who fought a long battle – and Scotland played a significant role in bringing it about. But having a Fund isn't the same has having the funds to compensate those countries who have suffered most from global warming and climate change. That is the next stage in the battle.

The big issue that has dominated COPs for many years is finance. $100 billion a year was promised for the Global South and was supposed to be delivered in 2020. The cash is sStill not on the table, but more promises were made about next year, maybe. Finance will continue to be the hot topic, and there remains the illusion that private financing will be able to be brought to the table. The reality is different. The vast majority of the money already provided to tackle climate change is public money. Private capital, in the form of loans or investments in renewables or the gas to replace coal, does slosh around but all of it is in pursuit or profit or interest payments. The much lauded Just Energy Transition Plan for South Africa to help SA move from coal to renewable energy, launched at COP26, is based mainly on state and private sector loans. The JETP for Indonesia and other countries will be the same. Countries already crippled by debt repayments are being invited to borrow more or to give up their natural assets to offset them or to provide profitable returns on investments.

It is public money that will be required to construct the flood defences and other adaptation measures needed, and the retro-fitting of houses and other mitigation measures. The ITUC and ILO emphasise the need for social protection for workers and poorer populations as a transition to a low carbon economy takes place. In other words, health, social security, education, water, energy supplies and all the other essentials that are needed to protect workers when jobs are lost or health declines. Workers in the Global South, faced with transition away from coal, look to hunger and homelessness when their jobs are lost as none of these social protections exist.

It is central to the Just Transition demands of trade unions, that these services are developed and funding provided to enable them to become a reality. A significant expansion of publicly funded and publicly owned public services is needed to achieve a Just Transition, as well as new jobs in new industries. Of course, that means facing up to the question of where public funds will come from – taxation. Given the emergency nature of the climate crisis, emergency taxation will be needed and some NGOs at

COP27 were raising the idea of windfall taxes on the fossil fuel companies to pay for climate action. The principle of the Polluter Must Pay applies to this crisis and the BP, Shells, etc, and those whose current wealth is based on the 2 centuries of vast profiteering, while destroying the planet, should be taxed to provide the emergency funding needed for the crisis.

These points were not being promoted at COP27, and in between times the debate has gone silent. The $100 billion and the L&D promised, is needed to finance the massive public works needed to save millions of people living in coastal areas, to invest in renewable energy and to build the public services to protect the lives of the billions who will be impacted by climate change and the transition to a zero-carbon economy. Private investors are not going to ride to the rescue. There needs to be a greater drive to promote the public funding and public control of funding that is needed to battle climate change.

Of course, the issue of finance to address the climate crisis and achieve a Just Transition discussed at COP are the same issues that should be central to the debate in the domestic jurisdictions of the world leaders, and that includes the UK and Scotland. We have seen the failure to publicly develop off-shore wind, just as we saw with on-shore wind. We saw private investors brought in to develop Scotland's forests, to allow them to use that to offset their fossil fuel burning. Profits, not public benefits, being their priority. Some in the Scottish Government wring their hands and say they have no choice, whilst the UK government remain committed to private sector profit-making as the only way to meet targets. But either way, the fact is that public money, land and assets are subsidising private profit whilst we cannot find the money to invest in retro-fitting and other alternative sources of energy production. The demand to tax those profits to fund the climate action necessary must now become a key demand, in Scotland as elsewhere,

Midway between COP27 and COP28, a commitment to a greener future with human and labour rights protected seems as unlikely at Dubai as it was at Sharm el Sheikh. Unless, that is, the climate justice and trade union movements develop the strength and determination to challenge the huge, vested interests, and their representatives in governments, that are responsible for climate change and who are resisting change to their economic model and power.

KEEP WALKING: THE JOHNNIE WALKER EXPERIENCE

The whisky industry is marketed with its history, but **Macon St Hilaire** finds its technicolour 'archive tour' is haunted by ghosts of the communities it left behind.

The Johnnie Walker Experience opened in Edinburgh in 2021, to a media fanfare and a flurry of Instagram influencers posting picturesque views from the rooftop bar. I knew immediately that it was not for me. But as a researcher in the history of whisky, curiosity got the better of me, and when the day came for my tour, I was determined to give it a chance. The multi-level destination for international tourists and whisky fans is housed in the former House of Fraser's department store after a nearly £200 million renovation that took four and a half years. Johnnie Walker, originally John Walker & Sons of Kilmarnock, has been a part of a multi-national enterprise since the 1920s. A hostile takeover by Guinness in the 1980s, and then the merger of Guinness and Grand Metropolitan in 1997 to create Diageo, led the Netherlands-based multi-national drinks business to own the iconic brand. I usually give Diageo brands a wide berth, which is difficult to navigate when they own a third of the distilleries in Scotland.

The challenge of protesting with my purse highlights the impact globalisation has had on one of Scotland's most notable products and exports. Scotch whisky was exported as soon as it was industrialised and, with the development of national blended whisky brands like Johnnie Walker, it has played a significant part in generating tax revenues, employment in rural areas, and tourism. Yet in time, corporatisation and bottom lines have driven firms to consolidate production, making distribution streamlined and cost-efficient. In Kilmarnock, that spelt disaster. Living in Ayrshire, it is difficult to not know someone who was impacted by the 2012 closure of Johnnie Walker operations in Kilmarnock, with the loss of some 700 jobs. Deindustrialisation is not new to Ayrshire, and the ghosts of manufacturing jobs can be seen the length of Scotland, but when an industry reinforces its history in its marketing, it becomes even more haunted by the communities left in its wake. It was these impressions that informed my tour experience.

In hindsight, this was maybe not the best way to prepare for an unbiased tour, but before I set off for Edinburgh, I took myself on a self-guided scavenger hunt of Johnnie Walker history. While I could dedicate an entire review to this search for evidence of Johnnie Walker in Kilmarnock, I will limit it to my overall impression. It feels oppressively absent. When Diageo

The statue of Johnnie Walker in Kilmarnock.

pulled out of the town, they made several promises to the community, donating the land the bottling plant was on to Ayrshire College, and donating £2 million to help encourage industry and innovation with the HALO Enterprise and innovation centre. Another parting gift was a pledge to preserve the grave of the brand's namesake John Walker: The grave and an information plaque are impossible to read because both are fenced in, surrounded by a cemetery where every gravestone has been pushed over. The church is now private flats. If Diageo did the absolute letter of what they said they would do, they did nothing more.

I arrived a little early for my tour and entered the palatial gift shop. I am partial to a gift shop, so I was trying to keep an open mind. The merchandising is impeccable, but it felt a bit of a kick in the chest when the first thing I saw was a display of baseball hats, t-shirts, and water bottles with big bold letters "KEEP WALKING". I could not help thinking about the irony of bottles of Scotch whisky walking out of Scotland, and Johnnie Walker walking out of Kilmarnock. I also felt like this targeted hip slogan was aggressively telling me to keep walking: this place is not for you. I kept walking, and found posters by a local artist of "Kilmarnock" depicting a colourful imagined farmland landscape with the added disclaimer for the visitor: "This is an artist impression and not what Kilmarnock actually looks like". In the bank vault-like corner of the shop dedicated to storing varieties of whisky, I had an enjoyable discussion with a welcoming employee about the whiskies we have been enjoying and distilleries we have visited. We shared our love for whisky.

I selected the "Archive tour", a visit to a bespoke archive room hosted by the company's brand archivist. I was eager to see this as it is unlikely that I will ever see the company's real archive. I heard a gentle history of the origins of the firm, and a few historic objects helped tell the story. It was intimate and, while not exactly a true archive tour, it seemed like a special experience for those who care about the brand. Now I was feeling good about things. Maybe, I thought to myself, I was being too hard on Diageo. This experience did not prepare me for what was going to happen next. We were ushered into the next room for a performance of the history we had just heard. We sat on a single row of seats along a wall facing a multi-media screen with other moving screens, a two-row conveyor belt stage, and a narrating performer. This was the first Scottish person I had encountered working there so far – they had cultivated that distinct 'for tourists' accent, you know what I mean? I do not know how to prepare you for what happened next. It felt like I was facing a firing squad, sat trapped in this seat as a literal song and dance about the origins of Johnnie Walker flashed before me. It can best be described as a technicolour Brigadoon. The spinning globe moving across the stage has really stuck with me. Was there music? I am not sure, but the pretty lights wanted me to buy whisky. I think I am still a little bit in shock from it.

We were ushered to another room. This one was fragrant, with a long table with seats for far larger numbers than my tour group. The archive tour package comes with a highball. At the entrance to the tour, we were given a colourful wrist band based on the results of a flavour quiz. Now, we were asked to select the glass with the corresponding wristband and, through the magic of computer chips, we got a bespoke highball that we were invited to garnish at the table. Personally, I am a fan of highballs. Johnnie Walker was one of the few brands in the 1970s that catered for the public taste for cocktails, when single malt advertisers were telling consumers how to drink whisky properly (maybe ice, certainly no soda). As we drank, we were told that the room was a recreation of the original John Walker and Sons grocery, where Johnnie himself created bespoke whisky for his customers. That may be a bit of a simplification of how nineteenth century Scotch whisky was blended and sold, but we are on company time and do not have time for authenticity. We are selling whisky here.

If you are curious, the original grocer building in Kilmarnock has long since been bulldozed, as part of a redevelopment in the 1970s. The links to Kilmarnock were reinforced throughout the experience, but frankly, for the visitor unfamiliar with the geography, you could have substituted any appropriately Scottish-sounding placename and they would not know better. Whatever its origins, the whole package is very successful in creating a memorable destination for international visitors who are willing to exchange their money for whisky. It is certainly a destination I am not likely ever to forget.

NOT SO MUCH A NATIONAL CARE SERVICE

When Scottish Parliament Committees dissected the principles of the *National Care Service Scotland Bill*, they found a dangerous agenda for marketisation and institutionalised insecurity. **Stephen Low** reviews their reports.

What Nye Bevan didn't do when constructing the NHS was base it on the idea that markets were the way to improve services, or the belief that the public sector is the second best way to provide services. Say what you like about Bevan, but he was no Humza Yousaf.

At some point later this year, after a second delay 'to allow for engagement' the Scottish Parliament will be asked to approve the general principles of the National Care Service Scotland Bill that Yousaf introduced last year. Those "general principles" include structures that eviscerate local government and turn over a vast range of services to (ministerially appointed) quangos. These won't provide services directly. Instead they will procure services from public, private and third sector providers and all of the services thus commissioned – social care, all of social work and community health – will be on time-limited contracts. Every few years each organisation involved is going to have to tender to be allowed to continue to deliver the service (if they are allowed to: Section 41 of the Bill allows Care Boards to ban Councils & Health Boards from bidding). The scheme makes permanent provision impossible. It's insecurity for everybody in Yousaf's NCS.

As practically everyone has pointed out, little about this scheme makes sense. It is "a press release that has grown out of control", according to an astute comment from a delegate at the STUC. The Scottish Government does not know if its proposed Care Boards will be liable for VAT. Equally they have no idea whether staff who are transferred out of local government will still be able to contribute to a Local Government Pension Scheme. Private consultancy firms have been given expensive contracts to provide answers to both these questions. This provokes further queries, not just about the lack of thought that has gone into these plans, but about the Scottish Government's preference for big business opinion rather than in-house expertise. In fairness, this is true to the spirit of the legislation – if it goes through as intended, *there will be no in-house public sector provision of social care*, social work, or community health (a concept which, like much else in this process, is ill defined).

Previous SLR articles have looked at the bill and initial reaction to it. Parliamentary committees are now delivering their assessments, which are far from positive. All of the committees criticise the lack of detail, some of them explicitly condemn the 'legislate now – design later' approach taken by the Scottish Government. There are calls for any number of issues to be cleared up or published before the Bill goes any further. The lack of a business case is raised more than once. Similarly the financial assumptions, variously unrealistic or absent, attract the attention of several parliamentary committees beyond the Finance Committee (whose scrutiny I return to below). Again and again it is pointed out that the Bill is opposed by a huge range of bodies involved in social care, social work, and community health.

The Local Government & Housing Committee calls for a full business case for the NCS to be published before the Bill is voted on which. "This should set out how the National Care Service will improve services and outcomes for people receiving social care", it says, "and also how it will improve terms and conditions for the workforce."

The Education Children and Young People Committee "did not hear strong support for children's services being included under a National Care Service". They were also less than comfortable with the proposal that transfer of responsibility for children's services to the NCS would be via secondary legislation. "This is concerning', it said. "The Committee is strongly of the view that the process set out in the Bill is insufficient to allow for appropriate Parliamentary scrutiny."

The Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee are tasked with checking whether proposed powers within Bills to make secondary legislation are appropriate. In the case of the NCS Bill, the Committee doesn't think they are. "The Committee believes the current approach significantly reduces the threshold for parliamentary approval and prevents MSPs from bringing forward detailed amendments. The Committee believes this is unacceptable and risks setting a dangerous precedent, undermining the role of the parliament." Consequently, the Committee "does not believe the Bill should progress in its current form."

All of this pales beside the opinion of the Finance Committee. The delivery of their verdict, had parliamentary procedure allowed, would doubtless have been preceded by the convener (the SNP's Kenny Gibson MSP) donning a black cap. Their task was to examine the Financial Memorandum published with the bill, which deals with its costs. They are critical of almost all of it. They deem currently published information inadequate,

saying that "the approach currently being taken of the Scottish Government responding to individual stakeholders' requests for clarification does not support transparency and proper scrutiny". Amongst other things they say that the lack of potential cost estimates breaches Scottish Parliament Standing Orders. They criticise the lack of a business case, and say that the 'legislate first – design later' approach has "frustrated parliamentary scrutiny".

The report culminates in a demand that the Scottish Government publish a new, more detailed and accurate Financial Memorandum before the Bill is voted on as "The Committee finds itself unable to assess the affordability of the Bill." A new Financial Memorandum has not been produced, so the Committee has repeated a call for this, and invited the new Cabinet Secretary to appear before the Committee.

While campaigning to be leader Yousaf made a few conciliatory noises about allowing staff to remain employed in local government, and about "local contracts, local co-design". It is difficult to make sense of these in the context of both the letter and the intention of the Bill. Saying that staff should remain employed by councils is to suggest, in essence, that councils act as employment agencies for functions that are not theirs. They would become municipal employment agencies participating in local markets for locally outsourced services.

There is no rescuing this shambles on stilts. The Scottish Government should scrap the current Bill and begin a dialogue about creating something that will be – rather than just be called – a National Care Service.

THEY BUILT PROPER SHELTERS

Colin Turbett, *A People's History of the Cold War: Stories from East and West* (Pen and Sword Books Ltd, 2023). Reviewed by **Dave Watson.**

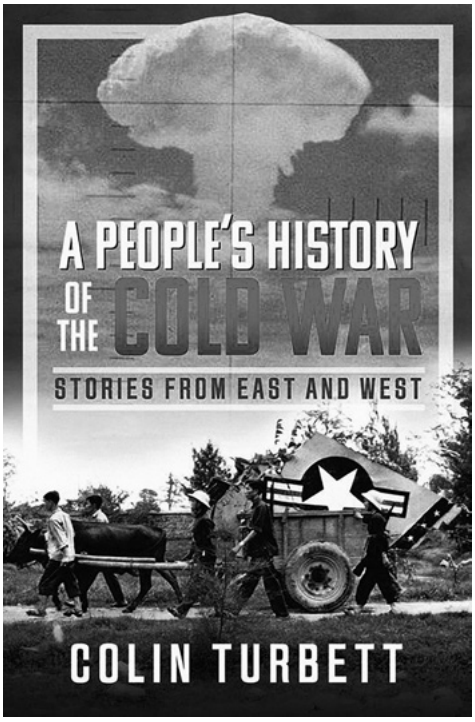
Colin Turbett's new book gives us a different angle on the Cold War, focusing on the stories of the people impacted by the events of the period. This is a refreshing change from the political rants, from left and right, that tend to dominate the historiography. Turbett helpfully looks at many of the books of the period, highlighting just how biased much of the writing was.

Being of a similar age to the author, I felt a warm glow of nostalgia when reading the introduction. As a child in Liverpool, the Beatles song, *Back in the USSR*, was one of my first record purchases (we will pass on Never Mind a Crocodile!). However, unlike Colin, my radio listening never got as far as Radio Tirana, the Albanian-based station which broadcast internationally throughout the Cold War. But, like Turbett, I do recall the nuclear fallout training. As a young organiser with NALGO, one of UNISON's precursors, we were put in the nuclear bunker under the council HQ when our office was being refurbished. On his return from holiday, the Emergency Planning Officer had a fit to find us there, with CND posters on the wall!

It is often argued that the nuclear deterrent resulted in proxy wars across the globe. However, as Turbett highlights, comparable conflicts have continued since the fall of the Soviet Union, suggesting that they were never perhaps about the Cold War in the first place but about the conflicting aspirations of local people versus global interests.

After the introduction, we get a history of the Cold War from its post-war beginnings to the collapse of the Soviet Union. There were many Allied plans on what to do with Germany after WW2, and it was not the Soviet Union that argued for dividing it. The Soviets under Stalin had long abandoned ideas about spreading revolution, preferring to consolidate their power at home. In the USA, the military-industrial complex (MIC) was incentivised to promote military expenditure by emphasising the communist threat. Politically it was also valuable, in pushing the Soviet Union to wreck its economy by playing catch-up. Moreover, the Soviet Union had its own ruling class known as the 'nomenklatura', who often acted out of self-interest in collusion with one another.

The Cold War is associated with nuclear weapons and the concept of Mutually Assured Destruction. By 1980, stockpiles of nuclear weapons for potential use in a nuclear war amount-



ed to enough to destroy humanity thirty times over. There is more nostalgia in the account of the nuclear arms race for those who remember the absurd UK *Protect and Survive* civil defence booklet and the CND counter *Protest and Survive*. Meanwhile, in the Soviet Union, they built proper shelters.

While there was dissent in the West and in the Soviet Union, it was limited. The exception was opposition to the Vietnam War in the west and the Hungarian uprising and Prague Spring in eastern Europe. Membership of the Communist Party in the UK also never recovered from those events, although high-profile Left figures like Jimmy Reid remained members, probably because they supported the ideology rather than the Soviet Union. Communist Party membership also has to be seen in the context of Suez, which happened simultaneously with the start of the Vietnam War and the Hungarian uprising, and which Jimmy also opposed. In 1968, the CPGB publicly opposed the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.

The most original chapters in the book are the people's stories, which are preceded by a look at the propaganda that both societies were bombarded with. These give a fascinating insight into how ordinary folk lived and sometimes bridged the Cold War divide.

Turbett concludes that the Cold War ended in the Gorbachev era primarily because keeping up with the USA became unaffordable for the Soviet Union. There were other social and political factors, not to mention the nuclear disaster at Chornobyl in 1986. Nevertheless, the legacy of the break-up persists today, not least in the Ukraine War.

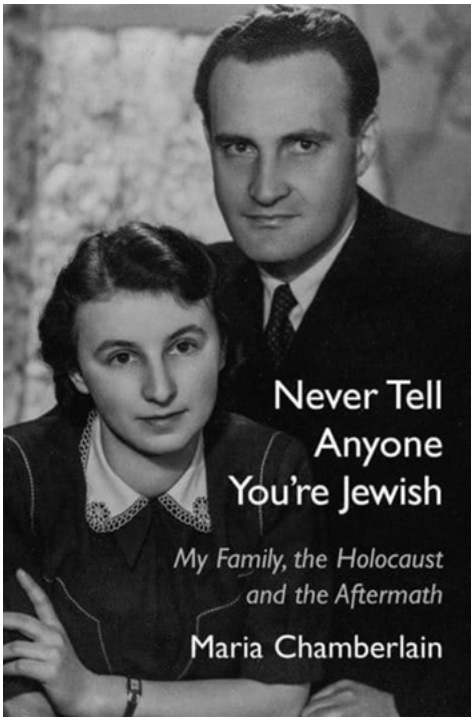
You may not enjoy this book if you are an old Cold War warrior on either side. Turbett makes a particular effort correcting his primarily Western audiences' misconceptions of the period. However, he certainly doesn't let the Soviet Union off the hook. I would recommend the book, and not just for the nostalgia trip.

THE PACE OF MURDER

Maria Chamberlain, *Never Tell Anyone You're Jewish: My Family, the Holocaust and the Aftermath* (Vallentine Mitchell & Co Ltd, 2022).
Reviewed by **Hamish Kallin.**

Never Tell Anyone You're Jewish is a brilliant title for an unsettling and unusual book. The author, Maria Chamberlain, now 77 years old, has lived in Edinburgh since her parents emigrated from Poland in 1958. She tells the story of every close family member from just before the German occupation of Poland at the outset of WWII until their death or survival at its end. The author's rationale is clear – reconciliation with her parents' trauma, a humanising memorial to those lost, an act of rationalising her own memories – but for the reader, the force of this book is its relation to scale and pace. The Holocaust is often impossible to comprehend in terms of its dehumanising scale, but telling a whole family's stories is just *enough* "mass" to make the horror all the more real. You find yourself yearning for each person to survive, even though you know most won't. You find yourself connecting to each person as an individual, even though the death-spiral they are caught up in yearns to crush their individuality into insignificance. More disquieting still is the sense of pace. Genocide progresses through these pages in a series of step-by-step acts of indignity then cruelty then death. Each "then" seems unimaginable from the standpoint of the one before it. The rhythms of everyday life tighten with cruelty. The narrative lightness with which the book conveys this (the ratcheting enclosure of the death-logic of Nazism) is deeply unnerving. Given the focus of the book, I mean that as a compliment. Fascism does not arrive all at once. It steps along under the cloak of a grotesque civility. Rights and laws change bit by bit. Who can do which job? Who can live where? Who is considered fit? These classifications mutate, until we get to a point where it is legal and reasonable for the forms of murder to get faster and more efficient than it is possible to imagine. This is not a book that wallows in horror, but it is unflinching in the details when it needs to be. I had to stop for a while in between each chapter, to breathe, and seek solace from fiction or silence.

Slightly too regularly for my tastes we are led into a story through (cleverly targeted) Google searches. The wealth of evidence is impressive, however. Family testimonies are corroborated with eyewitnesses from other sources, sometimes matched to the same time and place. For example: the memoirs



of the author's mother recall the day she was marched towards cattle trucks at Kleparov Station (having been "chosen for resettlement"). That testimony is then matched with the words of Ben Z. Redner, a Jewish policeman who was also there. The combination sharpens each testimony. You get the feeling the author tried to follow every clue – every named place, event, person, organisation, employer – connected to each family member, and this holds together like a wonderfully patient act of saying "look, they were telling the truth." Despite the emotional intensity of the book's premise, the book is rarely sentimental. It deals with the most horrifying moments with an emotional clarity that feels uncompromising. Her family experienced a grim roll-call of the Nazi death machine: the ghettos, concentration camps, death marches, and so on. Their experiences are general enough to act as an introduction to what 'the Holocaust' meant in practice, and specific enough to add another pillar to the halls of evidence. Occasionally, there are moments of rationalisation that completely floored me. When trying to convey how many people were murdered at Bełżec death camp (herded into "shower rooms", serenaded by an orchestra of prisoners delaying their own deaths, asphyxiated in batches of 800 at a time from the exhaust fumes of a custom built engine), we hear that the number of people killed there *in just 270 days* was "in the region of the population of Edinburgh."

Refreshingly, the author makes no claims to her Jewishness (a religion and a culture she admits to being largely estranged from) nor her belonging (there is no Poland to return to). The chapter 'How was it possible?' is remarkably short considering its topic, but that isn't really what the book sets out to answer. This is not a rigorous history of the era, nor a political exploration of the causes and explanations of the Holocaust. It is a patient, perhaps slightly earnest but certainly loving, detailed and clear attempt to record the fate of one family, which makes it a testimony impossible not to value.

WHO RAISED THE STANDARD?

Ralph Darlington, *Labour Revolt in Britain, 1910-14* (Pluto Press, 2023). Reviewed by **Dexter Govan.**

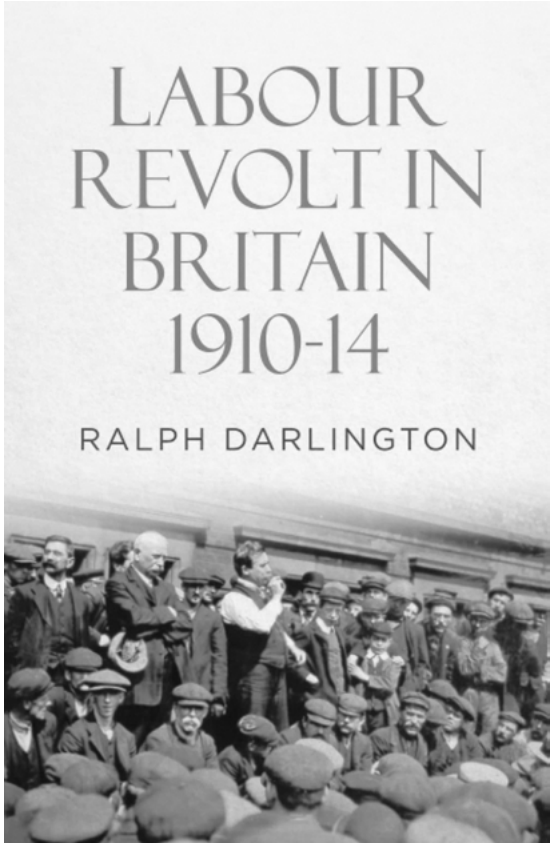
Since the pandemic, the contradictions around us have become ever more visible. The continued decline in our living standards clashes violently with images of billionaires' rockets racing skyward. With each day that passes, reports of soaring inflation and poor growth increase tension. But the pressure has begun to tell.

Across Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom, a welcome return to industrial militancy is both a reaction to these external circumstances and a testament to the quiet revolutions that have been happening for years in our trade unions. There is a renewed confidence in the capacity to strike and win, and public support for industrial action remains high. Yet with a crisis of confidence in parliamentary politics, another contradiction is now clear: growing success in industrial politics has not been reflected by left success within political parties or at recent elections.

Lots has been written on the subject of late. Whether one agrees with Jane McAlevey or not, her supporters have provoked resurgent interest in theories of industrial organising. Debates on the sustainability or suitably of US-style methods and tactics are now common in our unions and political action groups. Meanwhile, the collapse of the Corbyn project and the rapid retreat of the left of the Labour Party has its scholars also. The fractures here are perhaps less productive, but nonetheless, time honoured debates about how to advance a left project in the UK are now more vibrant than they have been in decades. Ralph Miliband has a popular(ish) readership once more.

But amid much reflection and self-criticism, there is also more than a whiff of presentism. The extraordinary years we have lived through and the rapid advance of technology within our workplaces has too often led us into insular thinking. The time is ripe to recontextualise our surroundings and to learn from the history of our movement.

In *Labour Revolt in Britain, 1910-14,* Ralph Darlington gives us just such an opportunity by telling the story of popular industrial action in Edwardian Britain and Ireland. Conventionally referred to by historians as the years of 'Labour unrest', Darlington's central conviction is that these years constituted a revolt, halted only by the onset of the First World War. In this



he is convincing, and after demonstrating that the revolt represented a distinct strain of trade unionism from the New Unionism of the 1890s, he turns to narrating the widespread strikes of the period from 1910 to 1914. Here the statistics are stark: 1911 to 1913 likely saw over a million workers engage in over 1074 strikes, with almost 21 million days lost to action. This is over double the number of strikes in the preceding ten years, with more than four times as many workers involved and days lost to action. These figures dropped during the First World War, before rising again in the more famous disputes of 1919 to 1921.

While the overwhelming majority of workers in these strikes were men (reflecting the composition of organised labour in the period), Darlington does well to highlight women's involvement in all aspects of these struggles. Beyond solidarity actions, he shows women workers as being pivotal in the Cradley Heath Chain-Makers' Strike of 1910 and in intimidating scabs during the West Midlands Metal Workers' Strikes of 1913, among many other examples. More might well be written on women's battles within the movement during this period, but this is admittedly not the central concern of a book which covers much ground.

Were one minded to be critical, they might find that the book reproduces some accounts of Irish history which are beginning to show their age. Larkinism receives a glowing portrait which overlooks its legacy in the Belfast shipyards after its 1907 high-point, and the discussion of Home Rule and sectarianism in Ireland and Liverpool presents a rather reductionist class analysis. Lastly, to entitle a book substantively concerned with Ireland Labour Revolt in Britain is a case of unfortunate shorthand. But despite these criticisms, it is doubtless better to provide an abridged account of such things than to ignore them entirely. Indeed, their inclusion allows the book to touch on the political struggles which coexisted with the labour revolt, namely the advance of women's suffrage and Irish Home Rule.

That the labour revolt did not come to absorb these struggles has often been used as evidence that the disputes of this period were narrowly-defined conflicts, concerned only with pay or terms and conditions. Perhaps the real triumph of *Labour Revolt in Britain* is to highlight that while these interconnected disputes did not aim to overthrow the state, they cannot be defined in terms of narrow self-interest. As Darlington writes: "Underpinning material grievances were more intractable issues related to the desire to retrieve some vestiges of self-respect and dignity, with collective mobilisation often reflecting notions of fairness and injustice rather than mere pragmatic calculation." Behind many of our own long running recent disputes (not least the UCU Four Fights struggle) is the emotional force of a wider claim for equality and dignity at work and beyond.

Darlington neatly sets these desires in opposition to the leaderships of many trade unions during the 1910 to 1914 disputes. Union leaders during the period largely favoured strategies of conciliation and negotiation held over from the New Unionism of the 1890s, which often had a stifling effect on the radicalism of workers. Where economism or narrow mindedness limited the extent or horizons of industrial action, Darlington is clear where the blame lies. Nevertheless, *Labour Revolt in Britain* charts years more of progress than of retreat. Alongside a compelling narrative, the book offers a rich vein of quantitative analysis to fall back on. Despite the eventual defeat of some high-profile disputes, of the workers striking between 1911 to 1914, 42 percent saw victories, 44 percent saw some compromise agreement with the employer and only 17 percent saw victories for those employers. Given that much of the strike action during the labour revolt was offensive rather than defensive, the statistics make for heartening reading.

Another of the book's useful contributions is to offer examples of historic industrial action beyond those we are familiar with. The Upper Clyde Shipyard work-in and the Ford Dagenham Strike are iconic in their way, but they are over-used examples. Darlington instead gives us welcome detail of the Clydebank Singer Strike of 1911, the Dundee Jute Workers' Strike of 1912, and many other instances of exponential private sector union expansion and direct action which resemble the rapid and contagious unionisation in companies like Amazon today.

Meanwhile, the shadow which dogged much of the labour revolt also dogs us today. Despite the success and militancy of the labour movement of the Edwardian era, it possessed a Labour Party which failed to provide political leadership at Westminster. While the Party was embryonic in this period and unable to match the Irish Parliamentary Party in successfully influencing government policy, Darlington argues reasonably that Labour might have done more to support and strengthen the revolt. With the Party's support absent, the revolt often struggled to evolve outside of workplaces. Far from a call to organise inside today's Labour Party, much of *Labour Revolt in Britain* chronicles how the Party failed to properly represent workers in struggle. But reflecting on the revolt of 1910 to 1914, its successes and its shortcomings, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that more energy might profitably have been spent in shaping the Party.

The last year has seen a flourishing of trade union militancy. It is now not difficult to imagine that within months we might be living through our own labour revolt. It profits us, then, to consider our past that we might better our future. *Labour Revolt in Britain* is not a work directly concerned with the politics of 2023, and yet it is remarkably current. The book succeeds not only in informing us about a much-neglected period of history, but also in usefully recontextualising our present.

VLADIMIR MCTAVISH'S

KICK UP THE TABLOIDS

'We may have crowned our King on what was effectively an ancient toilet seat.'

So you thought thirteen years of Tory rule had turned the UK into a banana republic ? Think again. We don't produce bananas and we're more certainly not a republic, more's the pity.

In a country where some people in work cannot afford to buy actual bananas and are reliant on food banks, where most of us are suffering from a severe cost-of-living crisis, somehow the government managed to find 250 million quid down the back of the sofa to pay for a knees-up where an unelected head of state has a ridiculous metal bunnet stuck on his napper by a representative of a god most of us don't believe in.

I didn't watch any of the ridiculous pantomime on TV, but was unable to avoid seeing pictures in the following days' papers. What struck me most about the Head of State was the state of his head. After spending 250,000,000 pounds on a coronation, you would think they would make sure that the crown would actually fit. It looked it might wobble off the top of his head at any moment. In the photos I saw, the pair of them looked like they'd been photographed stickling their heads through one of those old-fashioned seaside aunt sally's. Before they blew their budget on the world's biggest sword, you would have thought someone would have thought it might be an idea to e-mail Charles and ask for his hat size.

The whole shebang started the previous week with a laughably archaic ceremony at Edinburgh Castle involving a bunch of guys in fancy dress despatching the Stone Of Destiny to London. Undersecretary of State for Scotland John Lamont, speaking to a half-empty room at the Scottish Tory Party conference the next weekend, promised that Alister Jack would be guarding the Stone of Destiny to prevent it being stolen by Nationalists. Really? What did he think they'd do with it? Bury it in Nicola Sturgeon's back garden?

A few days later, when interviewed on LBC, Alex Salmond appeared to have lost touch with reality, bizarrely claiming that Humza Yousaf should have ordered Police Scotland to surround the Stone to prevent its removal from Scotland. While the former First Minister's idea is quite clearly deranged, it would have made a very entertaining stunt. However, I suspect that the current FM has more pressing matters to attend to, while Police Scotland are probably more concerned with poking about inside camper vans or trying to find wheelbarrows and women's razors. Talking of which, how did they need to send four cop cars to arrest Peter Murrell? Did they think he was going to do a runner? If so, they could surely have caught him. The man's hardly looks like an athlete.

But I digress. What exactly is The Stone Of Destiny? According to myth and legend, it is Jacob's Pillow on which the prophet fell asleep and dreamed of angels ascending into Heaven. It was then brought to Scotland from the Holy Land via Egypt and Ireland. On that last stopover, it was blessed by St Patrick so it could serve as a coronation stone. When the Irish moved to Scotland to establish the Kingdom of Dalriada, the Stone was moved around the country until it found its final resting place in Scone.

Assuming for one minute that you believe any of this mumbo jumbo, it is important to ask one question. Is it even the original Stone Of Destiny ? Probably not, is the answer. Before it was robbed by Edward I in 1296, it is thought that some local monks, hearing of the impending English theft, swapped it for some random piece of rock.

So what Jug Ears was sitting on at the coronation had about as much mystical significance as any lump of concrete. Rather than spend loads of time and money transporting that rock on a four hundred mile journey from Edinburgh Castle to Westminster Abbey, the British Taxpayer would have been better off spending a couple of quid on a breeze block from a local builders' merchant. There's a branch of Jewson's just across the river in Lambeth. They are open until midday on Saturdays, and they deliver.

However, there exists some historical evidence that the slab which the monks switched for the Stone Of Destiny was a piece of rock used to cover a cess pit at Scone Palace. Basically, we may have crowned our King on what was effectively an ancient toilet seat. Quite appropriate for a life on the throne. If they'd nipped down the Old Kent Road they could have bought an entire lavvy for a hundred quid. And it would at least have had some use afterwards, and much more relevance to the twenty-first century.

VLADIMIR MCTAVISH

‘SOCIETY AS A WHOLE MUST BE CONVERTED INTO A GIGANTIC SCHOOL.’

CHE GUEVARA