

SCOTTISH LEFT REVIEW

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WHAT STARMER MEANS FOR SOCIALISM • POST-POPULISM
PALESTINE ACTION IN SCOTLAND • TWO VIEWS ON THE UKRAINE WAR

CLASS AND THE CRISIS



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CONTENTS

STARMER AND SCOTLAND

Editorial

Against Faint-Heartedness pg. 3

Lauren Harper

Fighting Back Against the Starmer Project pg. 4

Fanny Wright

Labour's Evangelical Moment pg. 5

Bob Thomson and Stephen Smellie

Labour's March for Power Alone pg. 6

CLASS AND THE CRISIS

Roz Foyer

Real Change, not Spare Change pg. 8

Francis Stuart

A Course Through This Crisis pg. 9

Arianna Introna

Welfare Struggles as Class Struggle pg. 10

Alan McIntosh

More Advice to Tackle Poverty pg. 11

Diarmuid McDonnell, Xihua Chen, and João Rafael Cunha

Collaboration or Collapse pg. 12

Emma Brown

We Don't Want Paper Straws pg. 14

CONFRONTING WAR

Huda Ammori

Stopping Scotland's War Machines pg. 16

Bill Bonnar

The Unwinnable War pg. 19

Colin Turbett

Ukraine's Popular Resistance pg. 20

Jen Stout

Unexploded Ordnance pg. 21

CULTURE AND REVIEWS

Ali Zaidi

Beyond the Crimson Tide pg. 22

Coll McCail

From the Ashes of Left Populism pg. 24

David Green

Strategic Alliances pg. 25

Vladimir McTavish

Kick Up the Tabloids pg. 26

Hazel Marshall

Solidarity of a Lifetime pg. 27

Neil Gray

Reigniting Radical Culture pg. 28

CONTRIBUTORS AND CREDITS

Contributors

Huda Ammori is a co-founder of the direct action network, Palestine Action, and has conducted extensive research and campaigns targeting British complicity with Israeli apartheid.

Bill Bonnar is the International Secretary of the Scottish Socialist Party.

Emma Brown is a former librarian and an activist with This Is Rigged.

Xihui Haviour Chen is an Assistant Professor in Accountancy at Edinburgh Business School, Heriot-Watt University.

João Rafael Cunha is a Lecturer in Finance at the University of St Andrews.

Roz Foyer is General Secretary of the Scottish Trades Union Congress.

Neil Gray wrote regularly for Variant (2006-2012) and was latterly part of the formal editorial group from 2011-2012.

Dr David Green is a social science lecturer at City of Glasgow College and a member of Socialists for Independence.

Lauren Harper is a member of the Scottish Executive Committee of the Labour Party, and a branch secretary of Unite Hospitality.

Arianna Introna is a disabled researcher, activist, and Associate Lecturer with the Open University (Scotland).

Hazel Marshall is secretary of East Kilbride and South Lanarkshire Trades Union Council

Coll McCail is a Glasgow University student. He writes for Progressive International and represents young members on the Scottish Executive Committee of the Labour Party.

Diarmuid McDonnell is a Lecturer in Social Sciences at the University of the West of Scotland.

Alan McIntosh is an Approved Money Adviser and blogs at www.advicescotland.com.

Vladimir McTavish is a BAFTA-nominated stand-up comedian and satirist.

Stephen Smellie is a UNISON NEC member and co-convenor of the Climate Justice Coalition Trade Union Caucus.

Jen Stout is a correspondent, writer and radio producer from Shetland. She left Russia at the outbreak of the invasion and moved to Romania and then Ukraine. Her book of stories from Ukraine, *Night Train to Odesa*, will be published by Polygon in Spring 2024.

Francis Stuart is a Senior Policy Officer at the Scottish Trades Union Congress.

Bob Thomson is a board member of the Jimmy Reid Foundation and a former Chair of the Scottish Labour Party.

Colin Turbett is a lifelong trade unionist and socialist who spent 40 years as a social worker in the West of Scotland. He writes about social work matters and 20th century social history.

Fanny Wright is a writer and historian based in Dundee. She occasionally writes for *Heckle*, the magazine of the Republican Socialist Platform.

Ali Zaidi is the Director of Publications at the Transformative Studies Institute. He was the Vice-President of the Southeast European Studies Association (2009-2013).

Credits

Editor: **Cailean Gallagher**

Subeditor: **John Wood**

Design: **Mitchell F Gillies**

Cover art: **Jennie Bates**
[instagram.com/jenniebates](https://www.instagram.com/jenniebates)

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Editorial Committee:
Pat Kelly (Convenor)
Stephen Smellie (Vice-Convenor)
Bob Thomson
Maggie Chapman
Lilian Macer
Dave Sherry
Dexter Govan
Bill Bonnar
Bill Ramsay
Gordon Morgan

scottishleftreview.scot/subscribe
contact@scottishleftreview.scot

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EDITORIAL: AGAINST FAINT-HEARTEDNESS

Since Keir Starmer was elected in April 2020 at the low-point of the Covid recession, he has spawned a Labour culture that feeds on economic stagnancy. ‘This is clause four – on steroids’, he said, two months before he shared a stage with Tony Blair this summer. The wages of the working class have shrunk, and any hope that Labour will introduce policies to redistribute wealth has evaporated too. Sixty years ago, in his study of the Labour Party, Ralph Miliband identified the old and peculiarly sticky idea that socialism can (only) be advanced in Britain through the Parliamentary Labour Party winning Westminster. The lumbering figure of parliamentary socialism sometimes takes on a lovable form, when there is a decent honey-pot for taxing and investing on a massive scale. But now, once again, that friendly old bear called parliamentary socialism is back in hibernation.

It doesn’t take a Marxist to observe that economic contexts tend to determine political prospects. We shouldn’t be beating our heads against the wall, saying if only we did things differently we could get hold of the honey-pot. As Coll McCail explains in this issue, the European wave of anti-austerity anger that brought Corbyn and other left leaders closer than ever to power failed to generate a durable belief in the possibility of economic transformation. The Labour left will continue urging Starmer towards the democratic socialist policies spelled out by Stephen Smellie and Bob Thomson. But in the undertones of its rightward shift, former Labour member Fanny Wright detects an echo of the anti-red, anti-welfare, family-first evangelising of the US right that shaped a generation of reactionary politics.

Starmer’s offer of nothing but a better-managed version of the current state will have deadly consequences. Labour’s social security policies like keeping the two-child benefit cap are symbolically and materially dire. They mean that whatever party governs at Westminster, the welfare state will provide some meagre support with one hand, while the other pinches back every coin it can and pares back every layer of support. As ever, it is tempting to suppose that Scotland might be insulated by more social-minded institutions, but the administrative systems that can mitigate Westminster policies are dependent on money, not good will. Alan McIntosh describes how cuts to financial advice services will undermine any poverty-focused policies of the Scottish Government, while Xihui Chen, Diarmuid McDonnell and João Rafael Cunha show how charities are now so co-dependent with local authorities that cutting either would be catastrophic. The austerity of the early 2010s generated a widespread belief, however superficial, that Scotland could go a different way. This decade, economic hardship has stirred no mass conviction that we have a special route out. It has induced the same sense across the UK that we must all drift through the same doldrums, basically alone.

Yet the left acts in the knowledge that the individual’s struggle for the means of life is part of a class struggle that depends on building solidarity across workplaces and communities. In the face of hostile and punitive reforms by the DWP, Arianna Introna calls for a revival of worker and welfare-claimant solidarity. Lauren Harper takes heart from the boldness of those in the labour movement historically, including those in the Labour Party, who have stood in solidarity with others who lack work, or lack a home, or lack a country, even as they are marginalised and villainised by

leaders who make the laws. In this same spirit, different movements of resistance in Scotland are uniting and aligning. Emma Brown explains why climate activists who stopped the oil flowing out of Grangemouth six times and brought the Cycling Championships’ wheels to a halt between Falkirk and Fintry are now turning their energy to challenging the cost of living crisis. They are taking up James Connolly’s old rejoinder to the faint-hearted politicians: our demands are moderate, for we only want the earth.

Alongside solidarity and direct action, education is another source of hope, with the potential to generate common class understanding for a new generation. Continuing a theme of political education that we have fostered in recent issues, STUC General Secretary Roz Foyer writes about STUC’s priorities to turn class-based campaigns into a sustained movement for change. Francis Stuart explores how people have used the STUC’s Cost of Living course to learn about the history of class consciousness, and to share stories of workers and communities struggling as one.

These stories do not stop at the border. People’s struggles in other nations are connected with the work that is done in Scotland. Palestine Action, a campaign group that includes people from many different movements in its ranks, has recently been targeting sites in Scotland which produce military equipment that is used against the Palestinian people. Huda Ammori, its co-founder, describes the way that communities around the factories responded to their actions. Folk understand that sending bombs and bullets from Scotland to Israel cannot be right, however many local jobs are created.

Other conflicts have resulted in more divergent views across the left and across society. In this issue, we broach the debate about the war in Ukraine. Bill Bonnar presents the case for a peace settlement as soon as possible, to prevent an unwinnable war from resulting in more and more horrendous consequences. Colin Turbett argues that solidarity with the people of Ukraine should be the paramount priority, and that our attitude should be shaped by the testimony of Ukrainian people and the reports of witnesses like Jen Stout, whose battle-field photography we also publish.

Despite its disagreements, the Scottish Left shares a common language of solidarity, and a common cause with people across the world in their struggles for freedom. The poetry of the Pakistani socialist Faiz Ali Faiz expressing his love and action for a long-suffering land, is honoured by Ali Shehzad Zaidi, who writes of Faiz’s connections with the Borders bard Howard Purdie. This living stream is never stagnant. It keeps flowing here and everywhere through boldness in action, and sharpness of critique. Recently, two people died who throughout their lives had stood against faint-heartedness in thought and action. John Keenan, stalwart of East Kilbride and South Lanarkshire Trades Union Council, was one of the stars of Nae Pasaran whose courage stopped weapons reaching Pinochet in Chile. Leigh French, editor of Variant, poured his creative life into political critique that bequeathed a radical culture to a new generation. The issue ends with tributes to them both.

STOPPING THE STEAMROLLER

Changing the direction of the Starmer project depends on the combined pressure of many campaigns, writes **Lauren Harper**.

Every other week, 'Labour Twitter' is ablaze with people lamenting Keir Starmer's latest U-turn. Recently it transpired that his shadow ministers took £10,000 in gifts from Google and Youtube soon before the party U-turned against increasing the Digital Services Tax by 10%. The irony of Starmer's leadership slogan 'integrity, authority, unity' cannot be overstated.

But he has still to U-turn in the right direction. A hard line on the two-child benefit cap led many people to believe that Starmer has taken to the idea of starving children. During his visit to Blantyre's David Livingston Centre to promote Labour in the Rutherglen and Hamilton West by-election, he made a half-hearted capitulation to critics of the hardline policy. Yet he is still maintaining that it is too expensive to reverse the policy.

You would struggle to find a socialist who doesn't think the two child cap is repugnant. Removing it would lift 250,000 children out of poverty almost overnight, and significantly improve the circumstances of some 850,000 children. It disproportionately affects children from minority ethnic backgrounds and children in single-parent households. Which perhaps makes it rather fitting that the Labour Party chose to hold the event in a centre dedicated to a renowned colonialist rather than, say, the still-thriving miners' club.

The two child cap fuels the misogynistic dogma that women who claim welfare are actually lazy sluts who would rather pop out babies to claim more money in order to pay for their nails and iPhones on the state's money. Yet the policy is incredibly popular amongst the sections of the public that Labour is targeting, so Labour has taken to the idea.

What should the left do when Labour adopts policies that track principles and prejudices of sections of the public that are opposed by many socialists? Fortunately the party's history provides examples of struggle that can set a precedent for socialists today.

In 1985, Labour Conference in Bournemouth passed a resolution committing the party to gay rights. At the height of AIDS panic, the topic of equal rights for gay communities was deeply unpopular within the country. But this was the Labour Party at its best, with leaders who stood in the face of criticism and said that what was happening was wrong, and that the dominant cultural norms are wrong. As a political party we are at our best when we do this.

So what is the key difference between the party of the 80s that struggled for gay rights and the party today that adopts policies in line with the dominant culture norms? There are many answers, but one is clear: solidarity. The 1985 resolution was only passed due to block support from the National Union of Miners, which later became one of the most outspoken critics of Section 28 in the fight against it in 1988. This stance followed the solidarity offered to the miners' strike by Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners, a group who raised over £20,000 to support miners and their families in Neath, Dulais and the Swansea Valleys.

Today, Labour likes to virtue-signal about how it is the party of gay rights. But the principles that led the party to take its stance in 1985 have been almost entirely forgotten in recent years. In the struggle for trans rights we have succumbed to the culture wars of

the right-wing press and thrown one of the most-attacked minority groups under the campaign bus.

As socialists and trade unionists it is imperative that our movement builds solidarity amongst minoritised groups in order to force the party leadership back to left-wing progressive policies. Trans solidarity is one example. In Glasgow, groups of people funded by American anti-choice organisations have been standing outside abortion clinics in order to intimidate women accessing reproductive care. Trans women have been some of the most vocal and active against these groups. There are parallels between the campaign to remove abortion access and the campaign of bigotry against trans rights. Trans women are putting themselves in dangerous situations to fight for cis-women's rights to abortion.

Within Labour there are diverging opinions on trans issues. Fortunately, within trade unions, solidarity with trans rights is strong. At Unite's policy conference I was part of an effort co-ordinated by young members and the LGBT caucus to go against the Executive Council and speak against a motion that was designed to be a Trojan horse against the multitude of equalities motions passed only the day before.

Migrant solidarity is another example where solidarity shows the power of the progressive left. In Erskine, trade unionists have been out in force demonstrating against fascist groups who have been vocal about their displeasure that refugees are being housed in a hotel in the area. One of the protests that unions demonstrated against has been linked to the banned group Patriotic Alternative. The opposition to fascists has been so strong that the fascist groups have been routinely outnumbered by anti-racist groups, and on some occasions have simply not shown up at all.

Meanwhile, at the top of the Labour Party, Keir Starmer wishes, once again, to steamroll over Scottish democracy, to overrule the Scottish leadership on trans rights, and to continue housing migrants on barges as a form of temporary accommodation. Given Labour's bleak positions despite the solidarity from below, you would be entirely forgiven for asking: what exactly is the point of the party? In previous years, socialists in Labour could point to the better prospects under a Labour government. Even under our most right-wing leaders workers' rights were strengthened, and it was easier for trade unions to organise in the workplace and society. In truth, we can't sincerely say that anymore. You know times are bad for socialists in Labour when you find yourself in a situation in which you start your points "well at least Blair...". Starmer stands for nothing, blowing whichever way the wind takes him that week.

So in our resistance to the Starmer regime we must be organised. The left needs to be united in resistance to the leadership. Starmer's unease about the two child cap has shown he is not static, and with enough pressure the wider socialist movement can still change the direction of the party. From the gay rights struggle in the 80s to our presence as Erskine and at abortion clinics, and our campaign against the two child cap, it is through solidarity that we fight back against the Starmer project.

STARMER THE EVANGELIST

Keir Starmer's Labour is becoming a vehicle for the right-wing politics of US evangelicalism, writes **Fanny Wright**.

Addressing the National Association of Evangelicals in 1983, Ronald Reagan endorsed the push by the anti-abortion movement to require parental notification for abortions procured by those under the age of eighteen by asking: "Isn't it the parents' right to give counsel and advice to keep their children from making mistakes that may affect their entire lives?" Addressing Mumsnet in 2023, Keir Starmer said: "I feel very strongly that children shouldn't be making these very important decisions without consent of their parents. I say that as a matter of principle. I say that as a parent."

These parallels tell a fascinating story about the state of the Labour Party and its rightward turn. Four years before Reagan's address, the US was deep in the doldrums of the Carter presidency. The humiliation of the Vietnam War and the temporary enshrining of abortion rights in US law by *Roe vs. Wade* were not so much specks in the country's rear view mirror, as mushroom clouds threatening to engulf the horizon. It was then that televangelist Jerry Falwell (and his deep-pocketed financial backers) established Moral Majority, an organisation dedicated to campaigning against the joint evils of communism and social liberation, and for evangelical supremacy.

Through capture of mass media and other levers of the culture industry, the organisation worked to conflate anticommunism with evangelical social mores. By tethering anticommunism to Christian conservatism, the evangelical movement leveraged liberals' consuming hatred of communism against their lacklustre commitment to social progress. It was thanks to Moral Majority and the collapse of a robust liberal opposition that Reagan was swept into the White House, a debt he worked tirelessly to repay.

The influence of the evangelical movement on Reagan's regime was never clearer than in his 1983 address. Now known as the "Evil Empire" speech for its extensive diatribe against the Soviet Union, it began with a survey of the ills done upon God-fearing Americans by abortion and opposition to prayer in schools, and ended with the proclamation of a holy crusade against communism. To the evangelical movement, no difference exists between the movement for abortion rights and the communist state; each erodes the fundamental morality of mankind. These were the domestic politics of the Reagan administration: the calculated malice of its response to the AIDS crisis went hand-in-glove with supermassive cuts to the welfare state. Each gay man who breathed his last was as mighty a blow against the Evil Empire as every dollar looted from the social safety net. For eight years, evangelical priorities sat at the fore of American policy, leaving an indelible mark on modern history.

Despite their accumulated power, evangelicals found themselves unable to conjure a Reagan presidency at will. From the late 1980s, they made a strategic turn to soft power strongholds in the media and corporate America, exporting evangelical politics to near allies like the United Kingdom, and cheerleading right wing successes in distant Russia. At home and abroad, evangelicals became some of the most important funders of right wing politics, bankrolling a series of crusades against queer liberation, in support for Israel and against Palestine, and against action on climate change.

It is impossible to ignore the conditions under which Keir Star-

mer came to power. After a ruthless multi-year campaign against Jeremy Corbyn by the British establishment (replete with some of the most comical examples of modern anti-communism), Starmer positioned himself as a sensible alternative to the paper-hawking Soviet who came before. Brooking no welfarism in his shadow cabinet, Starmer reneged on a veritable cornucopia of promises to improve Britain's welfare system, firmly shutting the door on the possibility of a Labour government lifting working-class people out of poverty. On this, as on every major social issue on which the left comes into direct conflict with the US evangelical movement, Keir Starmer has conceded without complaint.

For the left, full-throated opposition to evangelical influence is non-negotiable. Evangelicalism's dismantling of the last vestiges of an American welfare state and its attempted re-subjugation of women and queer people are two sides of the same coin. To any sensible person, it would appear impossible to spend only one side of the coin while retaining the other.

Yet Keir Starmer is not sensible – if there is one word to define his leadership of the Labour Party, it must be "insensible". We will afford him the grace of assuming that his insensibility is that of a man asleep at the wheel rather than a man who just doesn't care that he's hit someone with his car. But just as a court looks no more fondly on recklessness than outright intent, thus we must judge Sir Keir Starmer KC's overtures to the evangelical right through his opposition to abortion rights, his support of anti-gay evangelical churches and his U-turns on trans rights.

A Labour movement which refuses to reckon with the influence of the US evangelical movement on global politics is doomed to failure. In a part of these isles that Keir Starmer is no doubt incapable of identifying on a map, an ostensibly-progressive mass party narrowly avoided inaugurating the gruesomely right wing evangelical Kate Forbes as its leader. Begrudgingly, we must congratulate the SNP for doing what Labour has thus far proved itself unwilling to do.

It is deeply troubling if Keir Starmer does not care whether he has hit someone with the political car that is the right-wing evangelical movement. It is even more troubling if he is simply asleep at the wheel and has become a powerful ally for the vicious right-wing politics of US evangelicalism through his own unshakable apathy. Starmer's inability to recognise and confront this enemy leaves the whole labour movement exposed. This vulnerability will not go unnoticed by powerful reactionary forces if he finds himself stepping into Downing Street next year.

A MARCH FOR POWER ALONE

Labour's current plan will lead them towards irrelevance and decline, write **Bob Thomson** and **Stephen Smellie**.

Keir Starmer's march towards 10 Downing Street, according to recent opinion polls, seems to be going to plan. That is, if the plan was not to upset business leaders by rolling back on workers' rights, not to upset financial markets by pledging any more for benefits, public services and a Green Economy, and not to upset people attracted by the Tories' pledge to stop immigration and Stop the Boats. They are sticking to the plan to use the pre-election, don't-rock-the-boat-for-party-unity-ticket to attack the left, ensure 'safe' parliamentary candidates are selected, and concentrate power in the hands of the Leader and associates. The plan is going well to remove working-class MPs with a trade union background and replace them with career politicians.

Labour should be fighting to win, not for its own sake, but to implement change for the benefit of the majority of the population, the working class. That would require significant structural changes to where power lies in the UK, as well as significant spending on public services and a green economy, funded through taxing the better off, the profits of big companies, and the wealth of the rich.

During his leadership election Starmer promised to deliver that kind of change. Now he has ditched all those policy pledges. Effectively he is saying that he will run capitalism more efficiently than the Tories. His strategy is to do nothing that could upset the press, and to wait for the Tories to implode and become unpopular. The Tories have been keen to assist in that strategy, and Labour currently has a healthy lead in UK-wide opinion polls. We will come to Scotland later.

There are risks in such a strategy. The Tories can't be relied upon to keep making a mess. They could do something popular. Inflation is falling and Sunak will hope that he will get the credit, restoring his ratings. Neither can the press barons be relied on to give Labour a helping hand. They could easily turn against Starmer and use a range of scare stories to harm Labour, as happened to Gordon Brown and Ed Miliband during their general election campaigns.

Getting people to vote Labour usually means more than just getting them not to vote Tory. Voters who voted Tory in the past but think that Labour will do nothing for them might just stay at home. What are they being promised if they are a family with

more than two kids? No change on the two-child rule. If they are waiting on a hospital procedure? No additional funding until the economy improves. If they work in the gig economy? No new workers' rights. Nor is Labour offering anything to younger voters, who are less motivated to vote and turning increasingly to single-issue causes and organisations.

Labour relies on members enthusiastically delivering leaflets and knocking doors to overcome the Daily Mail-driven barrage of lies and pro-Tory messaging. Many of these members have not been allowed to select the candidates they wanted, and in some cases have had popular sitting MPs and councillors barred from running for Labour. They have seen the popular, radical policies agreed year-after-year at conferences being ditched. Will they be enthused to get onto the streets to knock doors?

If Starmer gets into Downing Street, he will be tied down by his own promises – to the market, to business, to the press – not to do anything that will cost any more money. Is getting him elected really worth getting up in the morning?

While the first job of Labour is to win, the second is to win for a purpose. A Labour government should empower working people, in their workplace, communities and in the marketplace. It should also try to stop the Tories getting elected next time. That means more worker and trade union rights, improved health and safety legislation, and greater environmental and consumer rights. Rather than rowing back on promises to invest in a green economy, Labour should be campaigning to explain why it is needed. And since all the good of a government can be undone when the Tories win again, Labour needs to commit to proportional representation (PR), as agreed at Labour's conference. Analysis of general election results for the last fifty years show that under PR, the Tories would not have had a majority government to ignore the wishes and interests of large numbers of voters.

In Scotland, Anas Sarwar is not playing to a Tory-voting electorate. He is competing with the SNP who remain committed to the kind of social-democratic policies in Scotland that Starmer finds too radical for the southern or northern English electorates. He has disagreed with some of Starmer's policies, pledging to urge a Starmer government to abolish the two-child rule. But Sarwar's strategy, similar to Starmer's, has been to wait for the SNP to im-

plode, and they, similar to the Tories, have been willing to oblige. And yet Scottish Labour is still behind a weakened SNP in the polls. This is not a reliable strategy. Humza Yousaf will no doubt think of something popular. He will continue to highlight the disastrous consequences of Tory policies, which might give his party a boost in the polls.

In response, Scottish Labour needs a clear set of radical policies for achieving a Just Transition and green economy, investing in health and care and public services generally, and devolving powers including employment law. Gordon Brown promised more powers in the 'Vow' made during the 2014 Independence Referendum, when the establishment panicked that they could lose the vote. As Roz Foyer, General Secretary, STUC pointed out recently, promised reforms on workers' rights are not enough and they don't stop the Tories reversing them in future. Scottish Labour should also demand PR at Westminster in order to break the cycle of Tory Governments imposing policies that were never supported in Scotland. They should be insisting that a Labour Government would entrench the powers of the Scottish Parliament on devolved matters so that Westminster cannot block them as has happened too often recently. On constitutional reform and decentralisation of decision-making from Westminster, it needs to offer more than

promises of reviews. Currently Labour is offering no change in the constitutional relationship between the UK and Scotland. This is a gift to the SNP.

Voters need hope, and a party they can trust. Talk of a new party is fanciful: the general election will be next year, and the recent history of new parties is one of feuds and sectarianism. The PR system in the devolved nations makes things different, but at a UK level, left parties face the overwhelming hurdle of the first-past-the-post electoral system. A political party needs vision and passion, and Labour must find it or face irrelevance and decline.



Tenth Jimmy Reid Annual Lecture, 7pm Thursday 26 October 2023

The Foundation is delighted to announce that its 2023 annual lecture will be given by the First Minister of Scotland, Humza Yousaf MSP, on Thursday, 26 October 2023.



The lecture will be a physical event, staged in the Banqueting Hall at the City Chambers, George Square, Glasgow, at 7 pm. Humza Yousaf will deliver the lecture, followed by a Q&A session, with proceedings closing at 8.30 pm.

"I have the great honour of representing Govan in our Scottish Parliament, the home of the iconic Jimmy Reid. The actions of Jimmy Reid stand as an enduring example of how trade unions empower people; of how they provide a voice for those who might otherwise go unheard. I look forward to discussing his legacy, and how his philosophy of human-centred economics inspires leaders towards purposeful economic growth now more than ever." Humza Yousaf MSP

Further details about the lecture and how to acquire tickets can be found at:

<https://reidfoundation.scot/2023/09/tenth-annual-jimmy-reid-lecture/>

CLASS AND THE CRISIS

REAL CHANGE, NOT SPARE CHANGE

Roz Foyer explains how the Scottish Trades Union Congress is countering the right with political education on the cost of living crisis.

We live in an age of misinformation and fake news. With the majority of the media still owned by corporate interests and the right, the ability of trade unionists to win our political and economic case relies on our ability to counter the propaganda of the right and to have workplace conversations which arm our members and activists with the arguments they need. It also requires trade union leaders and reps to listen to workers and to build our understanding of the issues they face.

Nowhere is this truer than in building our response to the current cost of living crisis. We know that the current economic crisis is a product of bad policy as well as of the deeply entrenched inequalities of power and wealth which scar our society. We also know that there are alternatives to austerity, to wage depression and to the politics of fear.

There is a growing collectivism among workers. Workers are leading strikes and engaging in broad-based working-class campaigns around the cost of living. A key priority for our movement is to translate these high levels of solidarity and activity into the growth of a sustainable and angry movement for change.

At the height of the COVID pandemic, the STUC published its People's Recovery manifesto. It stated:

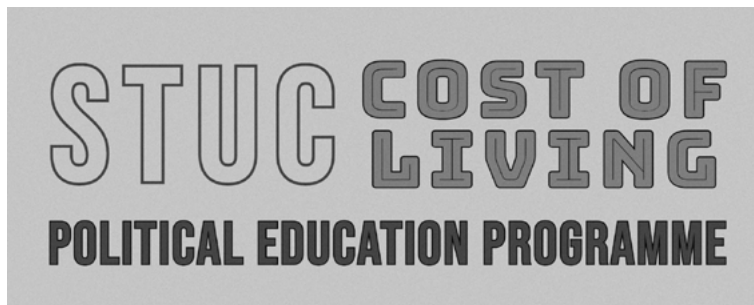
When trade unionists speak of recovery, we do not mean reverting to life in 2019. We mean recovering, for working class people, the income, wealth and sense of collective purpose stolen from them by decades of political bias towards the rich and powerful.

What was true then is even truer now. The STUC's Cost of Living political education course examines the history and causes of the cost of living crisis specifically and of our political economy more generally. It examines key global and local factors as well as the arguments, strategies and tactics we need to collectively win the case for change. It is particularly useful for workers involved in current disputes and campaigns, but also looks at how as a movement we can broaden our reach and engage in joint community campaigns by building a shared analysis and vision of the alternative.

Their class is powerful and well-funded, but we have the advantage of numbers. When we are educated, agitated and organised we are more powerful than they dare to imagine. This course, and future courses we hope to run, will help to further build that power and the movement we need to deliver change.

A COURSE THROUGH THIS CRISIS

Francis Stuart introduces a radical education programme that uncovers why capitalism isn't working.



In 2021 STUC Congress resolved to “bring forward a programme of political education designed to win a deeper understanding of the case for the ‘People’s Recovery’ and work with affiliates to ensure sharing of best practice across the Scottish Trade Union Movement.”

This, and further Congress resolutions in 2022, were recognition that while there is a vast range of important education undertaken within and by the trade union movement, there is a lack of collective, political and economic education. This wasn’t always the case. Political education has always been integral to producing generations of trade union activists and leaders. If we fail to plant the seeds of political education, we fail to nourish and grow our movement.

We are at a crossroads. The last eighteen months have seen a resurgence of trade union activity. In Scotland, workers have won more than £1.2 billion through taking or threatening to take strike action. Workers would not have received that money had they simply accepted what bosses and governments first offered. But the success of this strike wave won’t only be counted in the numbers of pounds won into people’s pockets. It will be counted in the numbers of people who become politicised, develop their class consciousness, and begin to organise within and across workplaces and communities. That is why the STUC’s Organising Group has begun a programme of political education starting with a course on the cost of living crisis.

Rather than the traditional teacher/student model, the course has been designed on the basis that everything we do, we do together. The course includes a mix of games, videos, photos, artefacts, presentations, and case studies, all of which can be delivered in-person or online, over the course of a day or in three separate modules.

The first module covers the drivers of the cost of living crisis: prices, pay and profits. We look at what has happened to prices and wages over the last year, examine the difference in inflation indexes, and discuss the problems with the ruling class response of raising interest rates. We examine how social care companies, rolling-stock train companies and big energy companies are extracting profits through ever-more complicated financial engineering. Then we look at the language we use to fight back against this.

The second module situates the cost of living crisis in historical context. We use a photo-wall exercise to look at significant political and economic events as well as workers’ disputes over the past seventy years. We hear from Stiofán Ó Nualláin of Trademark Belfast, the anti-sectarian arm of the Irish Trade Union Congress, on globalisation, the banking crash and capitalist crises. We discuss the pros and cons of the post-war social democratic consensus, New Labour,

and devolution.

The third module maps wealth and power in Scotland. We explore how money flows in and out of our communities, look at who holds wealth in Scotland (and how we can get our hands on it), and learn how to influence decision-makers by developing model campaigns on issues such as night buses in Glasgow, care homes in Aberdeen, and free school meals in Edinburgh.

In conjunction with Unite, Glasgow Trades Council, South Lanarkshire Trades Council, Glasgow Strike Solidarity, and Edinburgh Trade Unions in Communities, the course has now been delivered to more than 100 people. Recognising the need to build the pool of tutors in our movement we have also delivered tutor training and briefing sessions on the course materials.

The feedback has been tremendous. In the words of participants, the course is an ‘eye opener’ that helps ‘explain why capitalism isn’t working’. It ‘lays bare the ideological propaganda people are forced to believe around “there is no money”, and exposes the system with concrete examples.’ It ‘underlines the situation we currently face and provides possible solutions’, and ‘is exactly what we need as an introduction to political education and to political economy.’ It draws on examples from the Scottish economy that are ‘educational and tangible’, while the module on what drives the cost of living crisis reveals ‘the logic of neo-liberal capitalism on our day-to-day lives’. Meanwhile, ‘the people’s history photo exercise showed possibilities achieved by working class solidarity’ and was a great way to exchanged ‘embodied stories of class struggle.’

The STUC has plans to develop more political education on topics such as a Just Transition as well as Race, Class and Imperialism. But in the immediate term we want to roll the Cost of Living course out as far and wide as possible. Because of the importance of political education to our movement – we are offering the training up for free.

If you would like to have the course delivered in your branch, workplace or community, or to volunteer to help tutor the course or simply find out more, contact Francis Stuart at fstuart@stuc.org.uk.

WELFARE STRUGGLES AS CLASS STRUGGLE

Arianna Introna reports on the resistance to increased harassment of benefits claimants.

In March 2023 The Glasgow Keelie reported an escalation in the harassment and threat of sanction-induced poverty faced by Universal Credit (UC) claimants in Glasgow. A new DWP pilot in 11 Glasgow jobcentres had been in operation since the 27th of February 2023, forcing ‘thousands of Universal Credit claimants to compulsorily attend jobcentres 10 times over a 2-week period’.¹ Because failure to attend jobcentre appointments constitutes ground for sanctions, the risk for UC claimants to have benefits stopped increased exponentially. The Keelie also reported how the PCS union condemned the pilot scheme, and that claimants’ solidarity group Edinburgh Coalition Against Poverty (ECAP) described the pilot as a punitive measure aimed at forcing people to accept poor wages and working conditions by making the claiming of Universal Credit more difficult.

ECAP’s analysis positions the current intensification in conditionality and harassment of claimants within an anti-capitalist standpoint of class antagonism and struggle: any attack on people claiming Universal Credit, or disability benefits, is ultimately an attack on the whole of the working class.

How this is the case is captured by the simultaneous attack on in-work Universal Credit claimants and claimants of out-of-work disability benefits.

When the former are concerned, more claimants have been forced to attend jobcentre appointments by an increase of the Administrative Earnings Threshold (AET), which divides UC claimants into a ‘Light Touch’ group and an ‘Intensive Work Search’ group based on earnings and working hours. This increase has meant that more claimants have been moved into the ‘Intensive Work Search’ group and been forced to undertake activities and attend jobcentre appointments, with the attendant risk of sanctions. While the DWP Press Release of the 30th of January 2023 presents the increase as an opportunity for ‘additional claimants’ to ‘benefit from more face-to-face time with a work coach, allowing them to access opportunities to increase their earnings’,² the real effect has been an expansion in claimants’ vulnerability to harassment and sanctions.

Most importantly, the same DWP Press Release introduces the actual erosion of the divide between ‘Light Touch’ and ‘Intensive Work Search’ groups. It anticipates that ‘In Work Progression support’ would become mandatory for claimants in the ‘Light Touch’ group as of September 2023, exposing increased numbers of low-paid and part-time workers to the possibility to be sanctioned.

Where the attack on disabled claimants is concerned, the DWP Press Release of the 5th of September 2023 has announced ‘new welfare reforms to help thousands into work’, targeting ‘Disabled people and those with health conditions, who are currently being held back from improving their lives through work’.³ The reforms revolve around changes to the categories of the Work Capability Assessment, which decides claimants’ eli-

gibility for out-of-work welfare support. While the DWP justifies these changes as warranted by the ‘rise of flexible and home working and better employer support for disabled people and people with health conditions’. Disabled People Against Cuts have denounced them as an outright attack on disabled people and, specifically, out-of-work benefits for disabled people.

In response to the rise in sanctions and conditionality imposed on UC claimants, claimants’ solidarity and mutual aid is a fundamental tool of the class struggle that runs through the delivery and claiming of social welfare. Groups such as Edinburgh Coalition Against Poverty gather information to provide people with practical ideas for avoiding and challenging sanctions, for making sure that one’s claimant’s agreement is reasonable, and for being accompanied to any tricky appointments by a friend or advisor.

This antagonistic framework of claimant solidarity action is captured by ECAP’s message ‘RESIST SANCTIONS! LET’S ACT TOGETHER AND MAKE SANCTIONS UNWORKABLE! Seek solidarity from us and others ... CARRY ON CLAIMING! Do not be intimidated into giving up your claim’. It issues from an anti-capitalist perspective which reads poverty as no natural disaster but an inevitable part of an economic system based on exploitation and profit.

Appreciating that welfare struggles belong at the core of class struggle is the second step in developing forms of coalition building and organising that connect claimants’ and workers’ struggles. The first step is challenging working class hostility to claimants of UC or out-of-work benefits, and recognising this hostility as the unfortunate effect of the divide-and-rule tactics that capital deploys against us.

Find out how you can support ECAP at edinburghagainstopoverty.org.uk/

Notes

- 1 ‘Glasgow Target of Universal Credit Shakedown’ (March 2023) <https://glasgowkeelie.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/new-keelie-39-final.pdf>
- 2 DWP Press Release, ‘Hundreds of thousands more workers to receive job support boost’ (30 Jan 2023) <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/hundreds-of-thousands-more-workers-to-receive-job-support-boost-in-spring>
- 3 DWP Press Release, ‘Government announces new welfare reforms to help thousands into work’ (5 Sept 2023) <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-announces-new-welfare-reforms-to-help-thousands-into-work>

MORE ADVICE TO TACKLE POVERTY

Alan McIntosh explores why Humza Yousaf needs to fund advice and assistance services to address the cost of living crisis.

If Humza Yousaf wants to tackle poverty he cannot be faulted on his ambition, but the Scottish Government is going to need a joined up and inclusive strategy to do it. There are certainly easier challenges he might have picked in his first Programme for Government, especially during a cost of living crisis. Poverty is a complex problem and its impact is multi-faceted, from food and fuel poverty to low-income life, from poor performance in schools and poor diets to a higher proportion of those in poverty being affected by disabilities, addiction, and inadequate housing.

It certainly feels like Yousaf may be inadvertently setting up a multitude of metrics that in years to come his opponents will hold him up against to say that he is failing. This is especially true given current economic conditions. Thirty years of historical statistics on matters such as reposessions, bankruptcies, evictions, sheriff officer and court related debt actions, all show increases for at least three or four years after an economic crisis. Whether it's the early 1990s or the post credit-crunch years, stats all show the same thing: a bell curve that rises after the initial crisis occurs and continues to grow for several years, before beginning to subside. There is no reason to believe the current cost of living crisis will not similarly plunge tens of thousands of people into economic distress as the 'new poor'. However, there is hope for Yousaf. The speed with which that bell curve rises, and the period it spans, depend on several factors, and not all of them are about giving people more money (although that helps). There are two factors that are to his advantage. First, in the areas of bankruptcy, repossession, eviction and debt areas, the relevant laws are devolved to the Scottish Parliament, so many of the solutions that would give Scots increased protections can be granted in Holyrood and not Westminster.

Another factor is the potential for advice and assistance to help mitigate the worst effects of many of these crises, while also generating financial gains for clients. Evidence from 2021/22 shows that every £1 invested in local advice agencies results in £11 in more social security benefits and written-off debt. Important figures like these have to be considered when you have limited funding available to invest in anti-poverty initiatives. Local advice can also help to reduce the number of people presenting as homeless, requiring emergency help in the form of crisis grants, food bank and fuel bank vouchers, or even turning to their GPs for help with poverty related health issues.

Although much impaired since the post credit-crunch years, Scotland still has an extensive network of local authority advice services, Citizen Advice Bureaux, local independent advice agencies and law centres where people can turn for advice regarding money, benefits, and housing. The problem, however, is that Scotland doesn't really have a joined-up strategy for delivering this type of advice. There are two main large funding

providers, in the shape of the Scottish Government and local government, but no integrated system that avoids duplication or waste. Also, the Scottish Government prefers to fund big national charities that tend only to provide advice rather than assistance such as helping people to fill forms or negotiate with creditors. This often means people have to be referred on to local advice agencies and other local services, who do much of the work that generates the financial gains for clients. The Scottish Government also tends to fund third sector providers without having any regard to what services are already being provided by local authorities, and what other services already exist in localities.

By far the largest funders of advice in Scotland are local authorities, and therefore most of the advice in Scotland is provided by them or their delivery partners. In 2021/22, for example, the Improvement Service reported local authorities spending £24.8 million on local money and benefit advice, with £13 million being provided to internal services and £11.8 million being spent on external services. The Scottish Government, in contrast, reportedly invested only £11.7 million in 2023/24 in funding money and benefit advice services.

If the Scottish Government is serious about targeting poverty, it will need a joined-up strategy that involves both the public and third sector. It makes no sense to pursue a funding strategy, especially in relation to advice, that does not involve discussions with local authorities to ensure that everyone who wants advice can access it locally if they require it.

There can be no doubt about the scale of the task that Humza Yousaf has set himself. Tackling poverty is a huge challenge at any time, and he will be trying to do so at a time when the wind will be in his face. However, a joined-up advice-first strategy, utilising all the powers of the Scottish Parliament, may put the wind at his back and get him part of the way there.

COLLABORATION OR COLLAPSE

Charities are now critical to the support that local authorities must provide to tackle the cost of living crisis, find **Diarmuid McDonnell, Xihua Chen, and João Rafael Cunha.**

Charities play an important role in the ‘mixed economy of welfare’ in the UK. Originally seen as supplementary or superfluous to the aims and activities of the state, charities are now partners in the delivery of essential public services in the form of care homes, hospices, employment and income support, citizens advice, dementia support and more. There has been rapid change in central and local government funding of charities as public bodies move from being providers to purchasers of public services. The involvement of charities in supporting local government to tackle the cost of living crisis is therefore unsurprising. However, a number of features of this crisis mean the partnership between the public and charity sectors warrants a closer look.

Rising inflation is the critical context for understanding this partnership. The increase in the prices of goods and services affects individuals, businesses, charities and governments alike.

The Consumer Price Index (CPI) peaked at 11.1% in October 2022 and this recent increase in inflation has multifaceted implications. It has decreased the purchasing power of consumers, putting pressure on the cost of living. In turn, the rise in interest rates to fight inflation has put an even greater pressure on households’ budgets. Local authority budgets are also at the mercy of inflationary pressures, with sharp increases in employee salaries, maintenance, utilities, capital projects and service provision (especially to vulnerable groups).

This summer, we have been researching the characteristics of charities that offered their services and infrastructure to local authority residents in an effort to ease the impact of the cost-of-living crisis.¹ This often took the form of offering a warm space (such as a village hall, café) or food aid (like food banks and pantries). In some instances, charities received funding from the local authority to provide these services and in others they relied solely on their own resources. Our emerging findings suggest that the organisations that offered their services and infrastructure were larger, older, conducted a wider range of activities, and were less impacted financially by the pandemic than their peers.

Divergent views of managers and workers

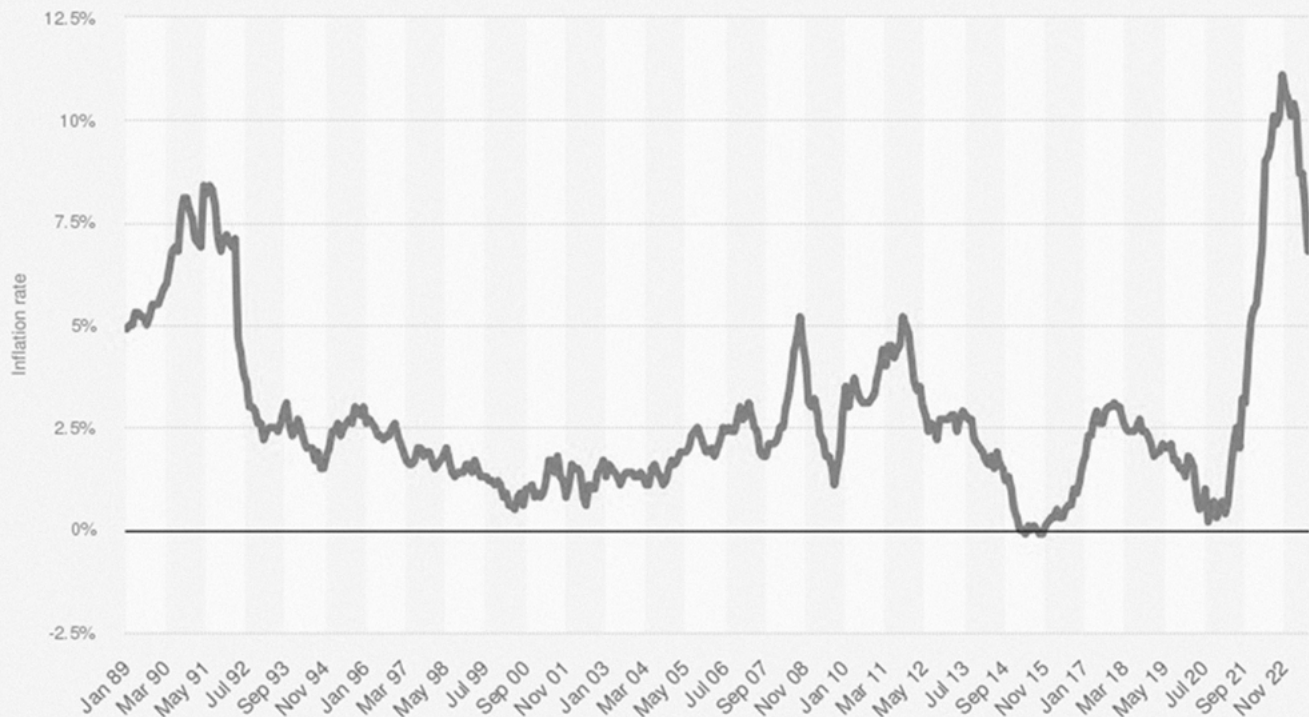
Our interviews with managers, staff and volunteers of some of these charities revealed divergent viewpoints on the role and ne-

cessity of charities in supporting local authority residents. Managers emphasise the need for increased resources, especially in order to train volunteers and hire full-time coordinators. Current funding from cost-of-living policies is viewed as insufficient, leading charities to seek supplementary financial support from various sources. Managers advocate for transferring more funding from local governments to charities, asserting that charities possess unique insights into local communities and can efficiently target funds to specific needs. They stress that their agility and direct connection to local areas allows them to engage effectively with people in need and to operate with less bureaucratic burden than local councils. In essence, they want to be commissioned by the local government to fulfil their roles effectively.

Conversely, workers and volunteers express concerns about the use of charities to tackle the cost-of-living crisis, viewing it as unsustainable. They question why individuals seeking warmth and meals must depend on charities or churches instead of direct government assistance. The primary focus of the organisations we spoke to is to support individuals finding employment rather than merely to provide warm spaces.

How do these findings and perspectives relate to the prospects facing charities in Scotland? Scotland’s local authorities face a constrained or shrinking funding environment throughout the mid-2020s² and this will affect charities in a number of striking ways. Firstly, local authorities are important funders of charities directly and it is likely that these grants and contracts will be put under pressure – the case of bankrupt Birmingham City Council is likely to be instructive in this regard³. Secondly, research from England demonstrates how austerity is downloaded from central to local government in the form of spending cuts, impacting the finances of charities that receive funding from local authorities: this process is patterned by deprivation, as charities in the most deprived local authorities suffered the largest reductions in income.⁴ Thirdly, local authorities’ increasing reliance on charities to support efforts to tackle social need offers an opportunity to form and deepen these relationships: the rapid construction of lists of charities offering support to local authority residents during the cost of living crisis is likely to prove longer-lasting than initially thought. Fundamentally, the

Inflation rate for the Consumer Price Index (CPI) in the United Kingdom from January 1989 to July 2023



Source
Office for National Statistics (UK)
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Additional Information:
United Kingdom; January 1989 to July 2023

essential needs of local authority residents are likely to be met by the charity sector for longer and more intensely than councils or charities would perhaps like.

Collaborative or co-dependent?

This mutual reliance creates a relationship between charities and local authorities which brings both risks and possible solutions. The risk is that a co-dependent relationship emerges through which local authorities are locked into allocating funds to charities in order simply to maintain basic services, without efficient, meaningful, or accountable improvements in service provision. The prospect of imminent cuts as the cost of living crisis continues could result in a crisis for charities themselves, particularly given it follows the substantial financial shock of the pandemic.⁵

What solutions exist to support the capacity of charities to play an important role in addressing the needs of local authority residents? Charities' responses to the pandemic were insightful: voluntary organisations 'showed up' and 'stuck around' at the onset of Covid-19, tailoring their services to different groups experiencing complex social issues. In return, local authorities and other state bodies offered an ear and support to charities, including smaller, community-based organisations that had previously struggled to be heard and included in projects. Funding and reporting requirements were loosened, and there was top-down permission to 'break the rules' of normal public service delivery. [6] While it seems as though the status quo ante is returning, we would urge local authorities to continue to proactively seek the involvement of charities in addressing the needs of their residents, and to think twice before seeing support to these organi-

sations as a cost to be cut.

- 1 For example: <https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/directory/10258/other-warm-and-welcoming-locations/category/10512>
- 2 Institute for Fiscal Studies (2023). Scottish Budget 2023–24: further analysis. <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/scottish-budget-2023-24-further-analysis>
- 3 Birmingham Voluntary Service Council (2023). Statement on Birmingham City Council's Section 114 Notice. <https://www.bvsc.org/news/bvsc-statement-on-birmingham-city-councils-section-114-notice>
- 4 Clifford, D. (2021). Disparities by deprivation: The geographical impact of unprecedented changes in local authority financing on the voluntary sector in England. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0308518X211034869>
- 5 Clifford, McDonnell, Mohan (2023). Charities' income during the COVID-19 pandemic: administrative evidence for England and Wales. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279422001015>
- 6 Rees et al. (eds). COVID-19 and the Voluntary and Community Sector in the UK: Responses, Impacts and Adaptation.

WE DON'T WANT PAPER STRAWS

Emma Brown explains why climate campaign group This Is Rigged is shifting its focus to the cost of living crisis.

'This is Rigged' is a new youth-led movement based in Scotland agitating for change through direct action. It was formed in response to the lack of connection between the climate crisis and the other crises destroying our communities (the cost of living crisis, the housing crisis), and on the understanding that we need defiance, risk-taking, cheekiness, creativity, humour, and above all a fucking sense of urgency about the radical changes needed to stop the deadly suffering issuing from a crisis perpetuated by wealthy and faceless corporations, and abetted by incompetent and impotent governments.

Formed at the beginning of this year, 'This is Rigged' has two core demands of the Scottish Government. First, that they develop a backbone and oppose all new deadly oil and gas projects in our North Sea. Considering that Scotland is Europe's biggest oil producer and second-biggest gas producer, this would increase political pressure on Westminster and the companies hiding under bogus arguments for jobs. The truth is that oil is a finite resource, so even if it was not frying the planet, the number of jobs in oil has been declining and would continue to decline. Our second key demand is that they provide a fully-funded and fair transition for our fossil fuel workers. There is £500 million sitting there for the 'transition' which the Scottish Government has complete control over. There is nae reason whatsoever for fossil fuel workers to end up in the situation that miners did with Thatcher, when there are four potential jobs in renewables energy for every one job currently in fossil fuel production. At the moment we are in the bonkers scenario where if oil workers want to get a job on offshore wind, for example, they have to pay out of their own pocket for the retraining. If Scotland can't lead the way on this, as a territory with vast renewable resources and what should fundamentally be a more accountable political system as a small country, we are fucked.

In the spring, we made our voices heard in Parliament, showing just how disruptive ordinary people can be when they refuse to sit down, shut up, and watch politics happening. In July, we escalated to a series of sustained actions, targeting Grangemouth and the oil terminal in Clydebank Oil, blocking 70% of fuel distribution from the sites. From 20-year-olds climbing tankers to 70-year-olds disabling tankers, from trespassing and climbing pipework to blocking the single road where all fuel leaves the Grangemouth site, we demonstrated that ordinary people can shut down the businesses killing us. And we didn't just do it once. We did it six times. This was material disruption targeting the source of harm, with major cost to the companies. We combined this with cultural actions, based on Scotland's history of radical resistance: accosting King Charles, scaling the Kelpies, painting parliament, and disrupting the cycling world championships. The combination of material and cultural disruption spreads the message to a wider audience, forcing people to engage. It's all fair game when we're in this much trouble. Some people might like some actions and not others but we're not going for the Turner prize here, we're throwing everything at a society that feels stuck and frozen and seeing what breaks through.

Now we're moving into demanding action on the cost of living crisis. While supermarket profits are protected, food banks can't cope with the numbers of people who can't afford to eat. Direct action is the best way to show that we won't comply with this situation. It's not just unsustainable, it's intolerable, so we will show that we won't tolerate it by taking collective restorative action. The climate crisis is exacerbating food insecurity and existing inequality, as extreme weather events like floods, heatwaves and droughts decimate crops, food prices rise in the UK and internationally (enriching those profiting off scarcity and price inflation), and the poorest suffer first. Governments



This Is Rigged activists at Grangemouth

are supposed to act in the interests of the population, serving us. We need price caps on essential items. Hunger will never be eradicated by individual acts of charity. We need collective action to demand solutions so that people can have what they need to live with dignity.

Our actions this year showed how serious we are. We're willing to take collective risks that jeopardise our own liberty. Why? Because it's all rigged. Sometimes you still hear the opinion that the climate is a separate issue that we'll get round to when we've sorted out all the other issues - of housing, poverty, inequality, food insecurity, crap jobs, and asylum seekers being put on a prison boat. That idea is nonsense. It's all one crisis: exploitation of people and resources for the motive of short-term profit above everything else.

This year, This Is Rigged has shown a sense of fucking urgency. No, we can't just watch as things slowly get worse and worse. We need to fight back, and that means not just trying to get back something we had last week. We want the huge changes that are actually going to make a difference. We don't want paper straws, we want the world. To me it's more unreal to imagine we're going to all carry on obeying the rules that are making us poorer and more miserable, while the earth beneath us is being destroyed. That's a more bizarre ending to the story than the one where we get our act together and collectively demand changes through our non-compliance, channeling all the lessons we've learnt from history.

This goes beyond the old books and left wing theories. It's what a child can tell you about what's right or wrong. We don't need to know what we'll find when we get there, or have some perfect theory. We need to act, to stand up against injustice, to take a chance, to DO something, so that something has to happen, and then something else, to shake and challenge the system, to cause crises for those exploitative businesses or

sleepwalking governments or out-of-touch judiciaries who are causing us to be in crisis.

We will refuse to play by the rules as the waters rise over our neatly obedient crossed legs. We will refuse to pay extortionate prices for food and energy so that shareholders can keep killing us, driving us into poverty, and having a bloody good laugh at us. We will not let ourselves be gas-lit, because nature is telling us what is wrong: the rich fly in jets, while poor countries are decimated by a crisis they did not cause. The game is rigged, but the reality of the climate crisis is the trump card against every rigged argument for neo-liberal free-market business-as-usual. And if we don't look away, we can make this critical decade the start of a better society.

CONFRONTING WAR

STOPPING SCOTLAND'S WAR MACHINES

In November, Palestine Action activists who took direct action against weapons producer Thales in Govan will stand trial. **Huda Ammori**, a founder of Palestine Action, discusses the campaign's Scottish targets. This is part of a longer interview which you can read online.

What are Palestine Action's main targets in Scotland or with Scottish connections?

Our main targets in Scotland are Thales, which has a factory in Govan, and Leonardo in Edinburgh. Palestine Action started out in England and Wales, where our main target is Elbit Systems, Israel's largest weapons manufacturer. They supply 85% of Israel's military drone fleet and 85% of their land-based equipment. They provide the ammunition, the bullets used to massacre Palestinians, and they supply tear gas, parts for aircraft, parts for tanks. A lot of Elbit's work is done in England, and they work closely with companies like Thales, which is one of the world's biggest weapons manufacturers and a target in its own right.

There is a factory in Leicester called UAV tactile systems. This factory is part-owned by Thales and part-owned by Elbit. We have seen licences from this factory which are evidence that UAV are sending drone equipment directly to the Israeli state. These are used to constantly surveil the population of Gaza, one of the most densely populated areas on Earth. The majority of the population in Gaza are children of families displaced from other parts of Palestine. Because Israel has put Gaza under a brutal air and sea blockade for over a decade now, it has basically turned Gaza into one of the world's largest open-air prisons. Every time Israel bombs or strikes Gaza, they are massacring Palestinians who live there. Elbit use these attacks as opportunities to market their weapons as 'battle-tested'.

Our other key Scottish target, Leonardo, is an Italian weapons company with a huge site in Edinburgh employing 2000 workers. These workers are building laser targeting systems for F35 fighter jets. Israel is the main buyer of these jets, which are used to constantly attack the people in Palestine, as Leonardo admitted after one of our actions at their site this year.

These are our key targets, but there are numerous other companies and operations in Scotland that are complicit in what is happening in Palestine, despite pro-Palestine sentiment amongst Scottish people, and supposedly even within the Scottish Government.



Palestine Action activists on the roof of Leonardo in Edinburgh

Yes, there is a notional solidarity with Palestine associated with Scotland. What has the response to your actions been like in Scotland compared with across the rest of the UK? How does Scottish politics connect with your objectives?

One surprise has been that media outlets in Scotland actually cover our actions, which is very different from media in England. We've also seen huge amounts of community support in Scotland. When activists targeted Leonardo, there were hundreds of comments from people in the area about the fact that this company is going into schools recruiting workers, and bombarding communities and children with propaganda. When PA took its action, you could see how unhappy people were with the factory being there, despite the propaganda about the jobs it provides, and so on.

In the past, Humza Yousaf has supported the Stop Arming Israel campaign and called for a two-way arms embargo. His wife Nadia El-Nakla has family who've had to live through assaults on Gaza. Yousaf should be helping people to understand that these companies are producing components in Scotland for weapons to go to Israel. He should at the very least acknowledge that activists should not be going on trial and facing prison for disrupting the production of weapons.

In Scotland, we've got a case coming up in November of three activists who occupied the Thales factory in Govan and caused some damage to the building, forcing the workers to evacuate, so they had to shut down the whole building and put down the tools they were using to make weapons. That was an incredible action, and I think Thales are arguing that it cost them over £1.5 million on one day, which is a good day's work.

Overall we are quite clear that all of these actions are justified. They are necessary for preventing the loss of lives. That's the core basis for our defence. When you compare dismantling a weapons factory to the lives taken by that weapons factory, then it is an easy calculation to choose which one is right. Activists like [Trident Ploughshares founder] Angie Zelter, who have taken action numerous times against weapons companies in Scotland, have always been allowed the necessity defence. But PA activists facing trial in Scotland are being told there is a high chance that they will not be allowed to make defences of

necessity, which obviously means that jurors will not be able to see as much of the evidence about these companies' involvement in war crimes. Jurors are the people who, in a democratic society, are supposed to decide if you're guilty or not guilty. But whatever happens, guilty or not guilty, we know that history will vindicate us, that we are on the right side.

Stepping back from current and recent examples, how does Scotland fit into the history of the situation of the Palestinian people?

One Scottish connection with Palestinian history is the Balfour Declaration. It is named after a Scot called James Balfour. When Balfour was UK foreign secretary in 1917, he issued a declaration that called for a Jewish homeland in historic Palestine. Prior to this, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Palestinians used to live as one people. Shortly after the 1917 Balfour Declaration cemented the first steps for creating the apartheid state of Israel, British soldiers were on the ground. Under what they called the British mandate, they were arresting Palestinians, killing Palestinians, suppressing the indigenous population who were uprising against the colonisation of their lands by the British. One of them was my great-grandfather. He was shot and killed by a British soldier shortly after the Balfour Declaration.

There were instances where they would destroy indigenous villages. In essence, these soldiers were paving the way for the Nakba, which was when Zionist militia who were armed and trained by the British went in in 1948 and forced out more than 750,000 from their homes, destroyed over 500 towns and villages, and massacred many families. After 1948, even though the British were not on the ground, Scottish, English and Welsh diplomatic links, financial links, and other ties were maintained with the Israeli apartheid state. What is happening in Palestine is extremely connected to where we are in the imperial centre.

Palestine Action is part of a tradition both of Palestinian solidarity and of struggle against the arms trade. Are your tactics and methods informed by previous campaigns?

Many of us have been inspired by ploughshares activists, who broke into nuclear weapons bases in Scotland, and who

broke into BAE systems facilities in England and stopped the Hawk jets from getting to Indonesia in 1994. Then there were the Irish activists, the Raythen Nine. While Israel was bombing Lebanon in 2009, they went inside the Raythen weapons factory in Derry, smashed the computers and threw them out the windows, smashed the whole site up, and then sat down to play cards and wait for the cops. They were arrested, they all went to court, and they were found not guilty by a jury. And then nine women did the same, and they were found not guilty too. This meant the company had to leave, because the fact that no one would convict these activists meant that the company had no legal protection, and so the factory was forced out of Derry.

We started Palestine Action right after Extinction Rebellion launched. XR made it culturally more normal to take actions which might lead to arrest. Now, obviously we are quite different in our approaches. We take direct action which we see as directed to the source where these weapons are being made, to stop their production, whereas their action is more public disruption. But what they did was change culture, and also made it more acceptable to say, 'you know what, the democratic process is broken, and there are other ways we can go about this'. And so I think the groundwork was kind of set for Palestine Action to launch, and also I think we had a strong amount of faith that a lot of people were willing to risk their liberty when it comes to taking action. So we have had lots of people come over from climate action to action for Palestine – and so many who are doing both.

Where do you draw your courage from when you develop, plan, and carry out your actions?

The main inspiration is the Palestinian people themselves, and how they resist day in and day out. Despite all the odds, despite the strength of the Israeli military, they continue to find new ways to resist. So, for us, when we're facing court cases or

charges under the legal system, when you see what Palestinians are going through, and see their strength, it's easy to draw inspiration from that strength, and to know that you're acting in solidarity with them.

After one of our actions, Palestinians painted a mural on walls in Gaza depicting Palestine Action stopping the war machine, and writing 'Thank You Palestine Action'. It confirms that you are doing the right thing, and that you are on the right track. There was also an action where people threw a red substance on the Balfour statue in Parliament, and a group from Gaza wrote a letter thanking Palestine Action for doing it. It's really, really good to see how they feel about those actions. A motivation for us all is solidarity with those who are at the other end of these weapons that are being built on our doorstep.

The interview continues with an exploration of how Palestine Action views the developing cultures of resistance in Scotland and the UK, as connections continue to grow between climate resistance, anti-imperialist struggles, and the trades union movement. Read the full article on our website.



ASLEF

For train drivers, trade unions & the Labour Party since 1880

Mick Whelan, general secretary

Dave Calfe, president

Kevin Lindsay, ASLEF's organiser in Scotland

AN UNWINNABLE WAR

Bill Bonnar sets out a socialist case for a negotiated peace in Ukraine.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine represents an attack on a sovereign country and is in violation of international law. This principle has been front and centre of every statement produced by the Scottish Socialist Party on the subject. However, we reject much of the narrative around the causes of this war and what will form the basis of an eventual solution. Failure to understand its causes will make a solution impossible to find. The result will be the continuation of an unwinnable war in which hundreds of thousands of innocent young Ukrainian and Russian soldiers are slaughtered in scenarios resembling those of the First World War, alongside mass killing of civilians and blanket destruction of large parts of Ukraine.

The background factor ignored by the western media has been the complete and total failure of capitalism in Ukraine. The imposition of capitalism in 1991 following independence has proved a disaster by just about every definition of disaster one can think of. The Ukrainian economy collapsed into a catastrophic crisis from which it never recovered. Compared to Soviet times, the economy today is around half the size it was. Living standards for most people are lower than in the 1980s, and Ukraine was listed as the poorest country in Europe in 2020. Spending on everything from health care, education, social care and even culture and sport is significantly less than when it was part of the Soviet Union, while average life expectancy is lower today than forty years ago. Ukraine has become a failed capitalist state. Ironically, so has Russia. All of the figures outlined above equally apply to Russia since 1991. In fact this has been a war between two failed capitalist states.

When Ukraine became independent in 1991 it was governed by a number of different and volatile regimes, yet for twenty years these regimes agreed on two basic principles. The first was that in terms of relations between Russia and the West, Ukraine should be neutral and non-aligned, seeking positive relationships with both. Second, given that Ukraine contained large ethnic and regional minorities, the new Ukraine could not simply be an ethnically-based Ukrainian state. An element of concerted nation-building was necessary.

This changed in 2013 when a mass popular protest, fueled by a severe economic crisis, was hijacked by right-wing nationalist forces who staged a coup and overthrew the elected president. This brought to power a radically different regime in Kiev. Strongly nationalist, and interlaced with elements of fascism, it was pro-western, virulently anti-Russian, awash with American money, and surrounded by American advisors. When Russian regional forces rose up in support of the former president, a civil war quickly developed in which an estimated 14,000 civilians were killed and hundreds of thousands were forced to flee their homes. These were mostly Russians; often the victims of ethnic cleansing carried out by Ukrainian fascist forces like the notorious AZOV Battalion. While this was going on the government in Kiev made no secret of its desire to join Nato in an anti-Russian alli-

ance, while Nato was pouring vast amounts of military hardware into the country. Almost overnight Ukraine became a member of Nato in all but name.

Moscow viewed these unfolding events as a direct threat to its national security. The SSP holds no truck with Russia's gangster capitalist regime. Yet the simple truth is that no government in Moscow, not even a socialist one, would tolerate Ukraine becoming a vehicle for Nato expansionism.

Since 1991 Nato's aggressive drive eastward has been relentless. Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria have all joined Nato, pushing this nuclear-armed military alliance to the borders of Russia. For Russia, the prospect of Ukraine joining Nato would take this threat to a whole new level as even the most superficial reading of modern history would show. In 1917 after the Brest Litovsk Treaty, Germany occupied large parts of Russia; the occupation was channeled through Ukraine. During the civil war following the Russian Revolution, fourteen countries invaded Russia; most invaded through Ukraine. In the Second World War, the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union was primarily through Ukraine. Ukraine joining Nato is seen as an existential threat to the Russian state.

Why is all this important? Failure to understand the reasons for the war makes finding a solution more difficult. The conflict has now reached horrendous proportions. An estimated 200,000 innocent young Russian and Ukrainian conscripts have died on behalf of their respective regimes in a conflict which already has parallels with the fighting of the First World War. It is a war with no end in sight that is unwinnable on either side. Russia has failed to overthrow the government in Kiev, while Ukraine cannot regain control of the Donbas Region or Crimea.

There can only be one solution; a negotiated peace settlement. The vast majority of the international community have already arrived at this position, in contrast to the United States which is carrying out a proxy war against Russia and is willing to fight to the last drop of Ukrainian blood.

What would be the basis of such a peace agreement? An unequivocal recognition of Ukrainian sovereignty by Russia and a withdrawal of its armed forces from the country. An end to the Nato arming of the Ukrainian government and a general demilitarization of the region. A categorical rejection of any attempt by Ukraine to join Nato. Plebiscites to be held, under international supervision, to allow the people of the Donbas Region and Crimea to decide their futures.

These form the core of a number of peace proposals doing the rounds, and are self-evident routes towards ending this conflict. The fact that they fail to appear almost anywhere in the British media will soon change as more and more people realise there is no alternative. An unwinnable war lasting years, or a peace settlement? For socialists, there can only be one choice.

UKRAINE'S POPULAR RESISTANCE

Resistance to Russia is the choice of the Ukrainian people,
and deserves the support of socialists in Scotland, writes
Colin Turbett

Bill Bonnar and I were Scottish Socialist Party comrades but parted company at the 2023 National Conference when a majority of the sixty or so present resolved the position on Ukraine that he outlines. Bill describes this as a 'principled socialist' position which I believe is wrong on both counts. It lacks principle because it will not be heard in Russia and therefore serves Putin's purpose by calling for no arms supplies to Ukraine, and it is not socialist because it denies to the people of Ukraine the right to self-determination and the choice to resist invasion by any reasonable means available.

Whatever was agreed between Gorbachev and Western leaders at the end of the Cold War is of marginal relevance today. Poland and other former Eastern Bloc countries joined NATO because they wanted to, and although I don't like that and see NATO as serving capital's global interests, Putin's actions have served to confirm their fears about greater Russian imperialist ambition. Now Sweden and Finland have been brought into the fold. Ukrainian membership had been denied prior to the invasion and Volodymyr Zelenskyy was amongst those against it. NATO countries had provided basic hand-held weaponry, armour, and other military equipment, but were very reluctant in the period after the invasion to provide more. Germany, for example, would only provide helmets and body armour. What changed things was the Ukrainian popular resistance that stalled the Russian blitzkrieg attack on Kyiv and Kharkiv with simple hand-held anti-tank weapons, and the sinking of the Russian Black Sea flagship the Moskva in April 2022. From that time on, with Russia's expected quick regime-change operation no longer on the cards, resistance was not a case of martyrdom, but a means for Ukrainians to defeat Putin's plans and win a future for their country.

To ask the Ukrainians to sue for peace on the basis of territorial status-quo represents nothing short of Munich-style appeasement of Putin. The Russians have pulverised Ukrainian

communities quite indiscriminately, committed mass murder in Bucha and elsewhere, kidnapped Ukrainian children, and of course lied to their own people about it all. Through non-total control of the media, and brutal quelling of anti-war opposition, the Putin regime ensures that this 'special operation' is swallowed wholesale by most Russian citizens. To suggest that UK-based journalists of the calibre of David Pratt and Jen Stout are telling us similar lies from the other side is not serious.

The people of Ukraine are not nazis or extreme nationalists. Those elements exist but are a small minority and pale into insignificance compared with the rise of Putin's openly fascist support-base in Russia, and his brutal suppression of any semblance of opposition that followed the start of his "special operation" (calling it war is a criminal act). Ukrainian nazis certainly don't include Zelenskyy, whatever his faults: his background is that of a Russian-speaking Jew whose family fought fascism in the Red Army along with millions of other Ukrainians in the Second World War. Socialists, anarchists, and free trade unionists in Ukraine support the resistance and are strongly represented in particular fighting units. The Ukraine Solidarity Campaign, and its sister organisation in Scotland, were set up to make the links between their struggles and ours and to win them practical support for their fight for survival. They also need support to resist the neo-liberal reconstruction of Ukraine.

Defenders of the neutral (effectively pro-Putin) position also quote the popular "Maidan" revolution of 2014 as evidence of western intrigue; the fact is that two free and open elections have taken place since, and there should be no doubt now that the majority of Ukrainians see their future lying in a European rather than Russian direction. Even the previously pro-Russian mayor of Kharkiv has condemned the invasion and supported resistance, as have the majority of Russian speakers in the country – preposterously described by Putin as facing genocide.



Unexploded ordnance, Lyman, March 2023 - Jen Stout - www.jenstout.net/photography-ukraine

Stop the War and their supporters are one end of a continuum (I exclude genuine pacifists) who want to stop arming Ukraine; it includes those who swallow Putin's line on everything despite the rise of his totalitarian regime in gangster-capitalist Russia. Their position will do nothing to support the beleaguered opposition in Russia (who support Ukraine's right to self-determination), or Ukrainian socialists who support the resistance.

Of course Stop the War, the CPB, SWP, SSP and others rightly fear a descent into global, even nuclear war. However, it is simply an arrogant idea that the people of Ukraine, in whose interests peace is paramount, are wrong in their majority view. It is ridiculous to suggest (as I heard at SSP conference) that 40 or 50 SSP members have a "socialist duty" to correct 40 million Ukrainians. Resistance was their choice, and they deserve our support.

Developments since the start of the war confirm that they were right to fight. The insulting suggestion that "NATO will fight to the last drop of Ukrainian blood" came from Putin, and ignores the agency of Ukrainians themselves. This might have become a proxy war between NATO and Russia, but it is above all a genuine freedom struggle. Our rulers may have their own reasons for sending arms to Ukraine, but that should not obscure our view on the need to support its people.

We are delighted at the position on Ukraine taken by the majority of trade unions at the last STUC congress. Support from the left needs to be stepped up and USCS welcomes individual membership and organisational affiliation. No one wants peace more than the people of Ukraine and they should collectively de-

cide what are acceptable terms for any negotiated settlement – including questions about the territories annexed and invaded militarily by Russia since 2014. A simple call for an end to arms supplies and for peace sounds warmly persuasive, but betrays Ukrainians if they are denied the means to defend their right to self-determination. Ask any and see what they tell you.

BEYOND THE CRIMSON TIDE

The poems of Pakistani exile Faiz Ahmed Faiz reflect the people's longing for a just social order, writes **Ali Zaidi**.

It ought to be more than a passing concern that, according to a 2011 survey, malnutrition has stunted the growth of nearly 44% of children in the world's fifth most populous nation. Furthermore, among the 186 countries surveyed in 2015, Pakistan had the highest rate of stillborn births, spending a mere \$36 per capita on healthcare that year. Underscoring its fiscal priorities, Pakistan possessed an estimated 165 nuclear warheads by 2021. These contradictions exist in a country whose official name, as adopted in the 1956 constitution without any apparent sense of irony, is the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

During the first decades of Pakistan's existence, the military gradually imposed authoritarian strictures in all aspects of life. Those strictures found an effective challenge in the Urdu poetry of Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911-1984). In "Ash Flower," Faiz highlights the paradox of a fertile land full of hungry people:

Why do my people –
the doomed inhabitants
of these beloved
shimmering cities
always live in the fervid hope
of death?

Mountain-stream
cleaved
in two
by a dark boulder.

And
why does
only hunger
grow
in these fecund
voluptuous fields?

The dark boulder represents the forces that thwart the natural course of the nourishing mountain-stream that represents mercy and succor. The mountain symbolizes spiritual heights and the water that flows from it recalls the diminishing glacier melt that

irrigates Pakistan's farmlands while providing drinking water for its people. The shimmering lights of unrealized possibilities and unfulfilled dreams gives rise to frustration and a cult of death.

Financed by the United States and Saudi Arabia, Pakistan's military, allied to feudal lords and rightwing religious groups such as the Jamaat-e-Islami, crushed democratic and progressive movements, targeting the courageous few who dared to speak up. It carried out extrajudicial killings of labor organizers, scholars, trade unionists, journalists, dissidents, human rights activists, workers, farmers, and the incooperative, with near total impunity, imposing press censorship and crippling cultural life in Pakistan. Under the regime of General Zia-ul-Haq, showy religiosity became the norm for public officials, and retrograde education that masqueraded as patriotism mystified the past.

Faiz's career as a newspaper editor ended when he was imprisoned and later forced into exile. In "Amnesia," Faiz describes the malaise that afflicted those who longed for a just social order:

A strange disease –
people no longer know how to walk
with their heads held high.

The love-possessed avert their eyes
and move through the streets
like shadows.

Ultimate absurdity –
bricks and stones chained down
and vicious dogs absolutely free.

As the poem's title suggests, memory was erased from public consciousness. The military suppressed civil institutions that might counterbalance its rule, such as universities, unions, the press, and human rights organizations, leaving itself as the default institution for providing order and stability.

Faiz did more than anyone to counteract the destructive forces reshaping Pakistan. In the seventies, during a brief interlude of semi-enlightened civilian rule under Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Faiz developed the National Council of the Arts and the

Institute of Folk Heritage, and served as cultural advisor to the Ministry of Education, to name but a few of his worthy endeavors. In "Two Loves," Faiz writes,

Blood gushes out
from the night's ruptured veins:
the crimson tide swells
without abatement.
Agony of stars
resolved in the sky's oblivion:
my hopeless passion for you
and this our long-suffering land.
They branded me an infidel
from the pulpit:
they screamed at me
in the market-place.
Inquisitors. Prison-cell.
Torment in the desert.
Banishment. They condemned me
to loneliness, alienation, despair.
I did not complain.
They stretched me on the rack.
I did not repent.
My heart is sick
but not with remorse.

The explicit love for "our long-suffering land" contrasts with the absence of specification of the 'you' whose ambiguity reminds us of our collective identity and prompts us to action. Beyond the crimson tide that swallows stars and annuls possibilities, the moon still shines.

Note on the essay and translations

The translations of Faiz's poems in this essay are by Daud Kamal. The copyright is owned by the Kamal family, who granted me permission to publish them. Kamal also translated poems by Munir Niazi which will feature in an essay in the next issue of the Scottish Left Review.

What brought me to the Scottish Left Review is the memory of the Scottish poet Howard Purdie, who wrote a couple of articles about Faiz, which were published in The Scotsman in the eighties. Purdie visited Pakistan more than once, and in 1983 he met both Faiz and Daud Kamal. Kamal was my professor at the University of Peshawar during the early eighties, at which time I edited the English department literary journal. We published a beautiful poem by Purdie in the 1983-84 session issue entitled "Echo, River, and Cloud".

In 1985, Kamal gave me a manuscript of his poems and translations, some of which have never been published, owing in great part to his untimely death in 1987. A few translations remain unpublished, while others, including the Faiz translations in this essay, circulated only within Pakistan during the eighties. Some were published in our department journal or in English language newspapers such as The Muslim and The Pakistan Times, often in truncated form with missing lines because of censorship or editorial incompetence. I am publishing this essay and the essay in the next Scottish Left Review at the request of Kamal's family.

WRITE TO US

We want the magazine to be a place of discussion, debate, and dissent. If you have any reactions, reflections or perspectives on what you are reading, send a letter to the editor:

editor@scottishleftreview.scot

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We want to publish work by those who don't usually write, as well as those who do. This issue has writing both from people who have never had their words published, and from acclaimed and established authors. You do not need to be a writer to write.

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FROM THE ASHES OF LEFT POPULISM



Coll McCail reviews *The Populist Moment*
by Arthur Borriello and Anton Jäger
(2023, Verso Books)

“My own Party, in a previous incarnation, had a degree of populism in it coming from the left,” said David Lammy, “I worry about that.” The Shadow Foreign Secretary aired his concern during an interview with Lewis Goodall this September. Earlier that morning, Lammy held a breakfast meeting with George W. Bush’s Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice.

Few encounters better illustrate the contrast between today’s Labour Party leadership and its “previous incarnation”. In a past life, Jeremy Corbyn’s “populist” leadership opted to neglect the counsel of war criminals. But that was then and this is now. Corbyn and 125,000 members are out of the Labour Party. The technocrats are in, eager to comply with capital’s ‘fiscal rules’.

In the short term, the left in Labour must now wait to see how hawkishly Starmer will behave, and how completely they take their economic policies from businesses and banks. Longer term, any prospect of restoring left policies and principles in Labour depends on new political strategy. In searching for a left strategy to resist the Starmer-induced malaise, interrogating the rise, fall and legacy of the leadership he replaced is imperative. Arthur Borriello and Anton Jäger’s latest contribution to this discussion, *The Populist Moment: The Left After the Great Recession*, charts the arch of five left populist projects that emerged in the last decade. In Greece, Syriza took power. Podemos shook up Spanish politics and eventually entered government. Bernie Sanders took socialism to the masses in the US. Jean-Luc Mélenchon almost entered the French Presidential run-off. Against this backdrop, Jeremy Corbyn seized the Labour leadership in 2015.

Populism erupts, argue the authors, amidst a ‘crisis of representation’. In the aftermath of 2008, swathes of society rejected a politics that bailed out the banks, privatising profit and socialising their losses. Young people bore the brunt of rentier capitalism, burdened with debt and employed in precarious work. A threat to their living standards forced dissent among the “squeezed middle” class. What was left of the industrial working class objected too, although it never sat comfortably within this new cross-class alignment.

Left-populism mobilised those alienated by social democracy’s concession to capital. The driving force of left politics changed from ‘the working class’ to ‘the people’. “We are the 99%,” cried Occupy Wall Street. All of a sudden alliances were broader. In Britain, the resulting mass engagement was one of Corbynism’s greatest strengths. However, it was a gamble. “Corbyn ultimately failed to bridge the gap between a metropoli-

tan middle class... and a post-industrial working class”, write Borriello and Jäger. Populism bred shallow politics unable to unite these disparate interests. Corbynism, like other projects of its time, was a “product of the void”. These insurgent, often unplanned reactions to a global austerity agenda did not have sufficient time for the development of politics or raising of consciousness.

The complex social content of their coalitions was one of two major dilemmas faced by the left-populist projects, suggest Borriello and Jäger. The second was their new organisational form. Jeremy Corbyn inherited the machinery of a mass, social democratic party, but as we know, it was never really on his side. Left-wing organisations were founded to redress this factional imbalance in Labour’s bureaucracy. Successful deployment of digital media saw Momentum, for example, quickly attract thousands of members to become the largest socialist organisation on these islands. While vital to preserving Corbyn’s leadership at critical junctures, these campaigns were ultimately victims of their own success. Unable to replace the networks of traditional social democratic parties, Borriello and Jäger argue that “clicktivism” – activists could simply “click their way in and out” of organisations – contributed to populism’s transience.

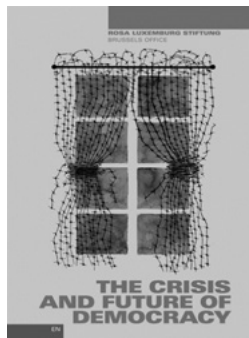
Discipline was in short supply among those politicised during the ‘populist moment’. In the case of Corbyn, “these fair-weather friends remained far more committed to the EU than to socialism.” There was not the time or the appetite to build class politics amongst those freshly brought into the fold. How could there be? After all, Brexit illustrated how difficult it was to marry the divergent elements of Labour’s coalition. For Borriello and Jäger, then, populism is the form that progressive politics takes “in times of (relative) disorganisation.”

Now we’re entering a new political chapter. Across Europe and the US, the flame of left populism is waning, if not extinguished entirely. In Britain, the likes of David Lammy have their hearts set on locking out the left. In a further display of Corbynism’s transience, so far they have succeeded. On the verge of Government, the Labour leadership readily accepted the framing of Britain’s ruling class by offering only a ‘better-managed’ decline.

As things stand, Keir Starmer will stroll into Downing Street carrying the votes of a disengaged, unenthused public that is convinced that a radical break with the economic orthodoxy is impossible. Yet the conditions are similar to those under which the left took charge of Labour. For Borriello and

Jäger, this is evidence that “without waging a war of position to consolidate the gains of the digital vanguard, left populism will be remembered as little more than a wasted opportunity.” Since “very few people are involved in the kind of organised conflict” that established the sides of 20th-century politics, the task of the left must be to develop and enhance the politics of those mobilised by the ‘populist moment’. Only then may the transitory clientelism that has captured mainstream politics be challenged once more.

STRATEGIC ALLIANCES



David Green reviews *The Crisis and Future of Democracy*, edited by Ada Regelman (2022, Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung)

A cursory glance around European parliaments today demonstrates that liberal democracies are in crisis. Only seven countries have no right-wing influence in government, and the spread of authoritarian populism seems as tenacious as it is pervasive. It is the right which, electorally at least, has benefited most from rising inequality, instability in working practices, and states’ perceived failures to deal with worldwide threats such as global warming. Optimistically, however, declining trust in oppressive state institutions has generated alternative models of democracy, with grassroot responses to the Covid-19 pandemic and the disruptive spread of information and communication technology renewing hope in a transformative renewal of democracy.

In this context, the most recent publication from the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, *The Crisis and Future of Democracy* (Regelman, ed., 2022), is a welcome addition to the discussion on

democratic decline and the potential for change. Divided into fourteen chapters across five sections, and drawing upon different theoretical approaches, methods and case studies, the book explores the nature of the current crisis and the new political order that seems to be emerging.

The book initially focusses on the precarity of liberal democracy and the extent to which democracy is even compatible with the values it claims to promote. In section one, Márk Losoncz’s discussion on hybrid regimes and the comparative analysis from Tiedemann et al. complement each other in demonstrating the ‘riskiness’ of liberal democracy, with participation necessarily ‘limited to the political sphere’ (p. 21). In effect, this means we have ‘liberal representative governments’ (p. 153) rather than radically democratic politics. This makes society vulnerable—as in the cases of Hungary and Serbia—to populists’ ‘subtle strategies’ (e.g., manipulation of the media and elections) (p. 153), which reshape familiar institutions to their own ends. But as Teppo Eskelinen points out later, democracy is about the ‘political community learning how to govern itself without hierarchies’ (p. 204), meaning we must learn not to be afraid of democracy, and must resist attempts to limit it in the face of such populist threats. This is surely a lesson many left-wing activists would do well to remember.

Section three discusses the contradictory forces at work in liberal democracies, largely in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, with section four offering a clear link between research and activism. Cotarelo and Cutillas’s contribution, in particular, is a considered case study of three attempts to democratise left-wing populist movements in Spain using information technology. Despite often employing such tools with the intention of removing the very hierarchies Eskelinen previously mentioned, the case studies show us that technology on its own cannot do this. Activists, they warn, require considerable thought, planning and resources before embracing new technologies as a panacea for low levels of participation.

The volume finishes with a provocative discussion of the future of democracy and the tactics needed for a transformative shift in society. In the chapter ‘Future? What Future?’, the authors attack the left’s tacit support for the mainstream liberal centre, which they call ‘a source of menace for political anti-racism’ (p. 474). The answer, apparently, is to ‘demand the systems crash’ (p. 501). What happens once everything is burning is left for the reader to imagine. The authors here strike a highly condescending tone, leaving the reader feeling more insulted than provoked. This moralising only serves to highlight the weakness in the final chapter’s argument that the left needs to give its values and morals a central place in its activist and research base. It is not the lack of morals that is holding the left back, but rather strategic questions of whom alliances can be built with and how this is done.

As with any edited collection, some chapters will reward more than others. But the volume’s broad scope and diversity of cases will give the persevering reader a much clearer overview of the state of democracy today. The book adds significantly to our understanding of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic upon democracy, and will hold relevance for activists wanting to position their own struggles against the threats of neoliberalism and authoritarian populism.

Free hard-copies of the book, as well as its electronic version, can be requested from <https://www.rosalux.de>

VLADIMIR MCTAVISH'S KICK UP THE TABLOIDS

Who's shocked there was a Chinese spy at Westminster? Liz Truss for one. In parliament, she described China as "the biggest threat to the UK". She should know, as this time last year, she herself was the biggest threat to the UK.

It must be a dawdle spying on Tory MP's and ministers, as most of them are far too pre-occupied with their second jobs. It seems loads of these guys look on their MP duties as a sideline.

Boris Johnson earned an incredible 4.8 million pounds from speeches and book advances in his final year as an MP. No wonder he made such a ham-fisted job of being Prime Minister. He was obviously far too busy lining up book deals to care about trivial matters like the economy, the NHS, and stopping people dying of Covid.

He's not the only one. Jacob Rees Mogg made an eye-watering 350 thousand pounds last year over and above his ministerial and parliamentary salaries. This begs one very obvious question. Exactly what skills does Jacob Rees-Mogg possess to tempt anyone to pay him over three hundred grand? To most impartial onlookers, the man has very few visible talents. Unless, of course, someone were casting for the part of Lord Snooty in a stage musical based on the Beano or looking for someone to play a Gestapo officer in a remake of the 1980's sitcom *Allo Allo*.

Like a lot of posh people, Rees-Mogg tries to dress up his shortcomings by quoting Latin. Like a lot of expensively-educated posh folk, I suspect Rees-Mogg uses Latin as an attempt to disguise the fact that he's actually not very bright.

I've never quite understood why the ability to speak Latin should be seen a sign of intelligence. After all, not everybody in ancient Rome can have been a genius. And all of them could speak Latin.

This is why people like Education Secretary Gillian Keegan expect to be congratulated for turning for work. She spat the dummy on Sky News, when she was off-air but still being recorded, ranting "Does anyone ever say, 'You know you've done a fucking good job?'" No, of course they don't say that. For the very good reason that nobody thinks she is doing a fucking good job.

We have had some dreadful Tory ministers since 2010, but nothing to compare with this current crop of talentless chancers. None of the current Cabinet would look out of place as contestants on *The Apprentice*, Sunak himself included. They all have the look of small time con artists aspiring to work in retail management.

Take the new Defence Secretary, Grant Shapps, about whom many former military big-hitters have expressed concern. Not only is he unlikely to know one end of a tank from another, Shapps looks like he really ought to be the manager of a branch of Carphone Warehouse in Slough. However, beneath this unbelievably dull, bland exterior lurks a would-be snake oil salesman. A few years ago, Shapps lied in an LBC in-

terview about not having a second job, despite owning a number of companies which operated get-rich-quick schemes. This included a web sales business *HowToCorp* which claimed that clients who paid \$ 200 for its software would "make \$20,000 in 20 days or your money back".

This is the kind of hokum which would set off anyone's scam alarm. At the time he denied that he had a second job as he was trading under an assumed name, Michael Green.

Perhaps he should also have used an assumed name for his political career. Through no fault of his own, he has an utterly laughable surname. It sounds like Cockney rhyming slang for an unpleasant bowel condition. I can imagine it being used as an excuse to phone in sick for work. "I'm sorry I can't come into the office today, I've been up all night with a dose of the Grant Shapps". Equally it could be the sales pitch for some quack remedy claiming "We'll rid you of the Grant Shapps in ten days or your money back guaranteed."

This is the guy in charge of defence? No wonder the military are shapping themselves.



VLADIMIR MCTAVISH

SOLIDARITY OF A LIFETIME

Hazel Marshall pays tribute to John Keenan and his contribution to the trade union movement in South Lanarkshire.



John Keenan (left) with Bobby Somerville, Bob Fulton and Rolando Drago, Chilean Ambassador to the UK, during an awards ceremony in Glasgow, where the three Nae Pasaran stars received the Order of Bernard O'Higgins medals. The medals are named after one of the country's founding fathers who freed Chile from the Spanish in the 1820s.

John Keenan, the Chair of East Kilbride and South Lanarkshire Trades Union Council, recently passed away at the age of 83 after a short illness. John was a trade union activist all his working life, known throughout his union, the AUEW, and the wider trade union movement, particularly in Scotland. As a shop steward and convenor in the East Kilbride Rolls Royce plant he was active on the shop floor and at a national level. As a member of the STUC General Council, and its President in 2006, he was a respected stalwart of the movement.

John was one of the key figures in the Rolls Royce workers' boycott of the production of engines for Chile in 1974 that grounded most of the Chilean air force for a time, demonstrating real solidarity with the people of Chile. John and his comrades' solidarity became more widely known in recent years through the film *Nae Pasaran*, and along with Bobby Somerville and Bob Fulton he was honoured by the Chilean government at a ceremony in Glasgow City Chambers.

John was an active trade unionist to the end, serving on the STUC Disabled Workers Committee, where his knowledge of benefits and pensions was invaluable. He continued working with the Citizens Advice Bureau where he was a valued adviser, dealing with benefit appeals and winning thousands of pounds for disabled people.

At our Trades Council meeting the Monday after his death, we discussed John's involvement and history. None of our delegates could work out how long John had actually been involved with the trades council. In fact, no-one could recall a time when he was anything other than the Chair. We worked out that his

time in this role alone spanned more than four decades.

My involvement in the trade union movement is a blink of an eye compared to the lifetime John contributed. His is a legacy that few others' can compare with. Beyond that, however, I feel gratitude towards the man who was kind, gentle, and always patient with those less informed than himself who sought his advice and knowledge. He was always willing to listen to your opinions, and to provide an alternative theory if he felt you needed another perspective, but he was always non-judgmental.

Never one to take the limelight, John was content to allow others to step forward while he worked tirelessly on projects that affected working people. Equally, he wouldn't shy away from speaking up and imparting his knowledge in public forums. In April, for International Workers Memorial Day, John laid a wreath on behalf of the Trades Council along with STUC Vice-President Lillian Macer and other dignitaries at the memorial outside South Lanarkshire Council HQ. Afterwards he spoke about the Bill proposed by Mark Griffin MSP to establish a Scottish Employment Injuries Advisory Council (SEIAC). As always, he was knowledgeable and able to explain to his audience what the key issues were. This was to be the last time I heard him share his wisdom on a public forum.

Many people will write far more eloquently about John and his myriad trade union achievements than I could ever do, and I will not attempt to do so.

John will be sorely missed by all in our Trades Council as well as across the wider trade union community.

REIGNITING RADICAL CULTURE

Neil Gray and the Variant editorial board pay
tribute to Leigh French, writer and editor.

Leigh French's death on Sunday 28 May, aged 53, was a devastating blow to his partner, family and many friends and acquaintances. Leigh was a writer, researcher, artist and cultural worker, renowned as the brilliant editor of Variant magazine (1996-2012). Leigh will be remembered as a tremendously vital, wickedly funny, convivial, generous, supportive and kind man whose rigorous criticality was a powerful antidote to prevailing 'common-sense', whether on the right or the left. Leigh made us think harder and better, whether we agreed with him or not. He set a standard for non-academic research rarely matched in contemporary Scottish cultural and political life.

According to Leigh's father Eric, in news that will amuse his friends, Leigh was a 'very strong-willed' child. Eric was a civil technician in the RAF. The family moved from North Wales to Fife and eventually, after a marital breakup, to Darfield, South Yorkshire. There Leigh lived with his mother, Margaret, who worked as a postwoman, his younger brother, Craig, and soon his stepfather Tom, with his father living in a neighbouring village. A teenager in South Yorkshire, Leigh remembered both the solidarity and community division of the 1984-85 miners' strike.

By the time Leigh finished school, students were no longer invited to visit the pit en masse as an introduction to a coal-mining career. He left Darfield in 1988 to study at the Slade School of Fine Art in London. The artist John Beagles, a close friend and former flatmate in Hackney, said that his life drawing was the finest he'd ever seen. However, Leigh rarely followed an obvious path, choosing instead to specialise in sculpture. He enjoyed new encounters and discussion in London and developed lifelong friendships with other students from similar working-class backgrounds also disaffected by the 'symbolic violence' encountered around the art student milieu. After spending a year at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague, he became a student at Glasgow School of Art (GSA) in 1993, where he developed an avant-garde practice of critical reflection on art and society, transgressing the individualised production of art objects within reified art settings.

This practice chimed with the first incarnation of Variant magazine (1984-1994) under Malcolm Dickson's editorship. In 1996, with William Clark, Leigh revived the magazine as an art-

ist-run project in a new free tabloid format, with Paula Larkin (advertising, distribution and editorial input), Ian Brotherhood (editorial assistance) and Kevin Hobbs (design). Daniel Jewsbury took on a co-editing role with Leigh in 2003. A wider Variant editorial group was formalised in 2011 for what would be the final two issues. The magazine's focus was on 'cross-currents in culture', and besides its written form it held numerous events. Variant held an affinity to the radical left but challenged consensual ways of thinking on left and right alike, questioning the very nature of what a 'cultural magazine' might be. If the content was serious, Leigh carried it lightly: being involved in Variant was an exercise in 'difficult fun', inspired by Leigh's playful, dissenting mode of discourse. It was a pleasure to meet Leigh in The State Bar or The Doublet, proudly patting a new 'hot-off-the-press' edition of Variant while wearing a mischievous grin as he contemplated the effect of the latest issue on the magazine's readers. Variant was a labour of love for Leigh; it is also no contradiction to say that the exploitation of artists' labour or cultural production was an abiding theme.

For Leigh, art and culture were always political, always classed. In a contemporary Scotland where the blogosphere is often consensus-affirming and anti-intellectual, Variant helped to produce the theoretical grounds for genuinely radical social transformation. It's a lazy truism to say that criticism is easy, but it's much easier to follow prevailing common-sense.

The quality of the magazine concealed the constrained circumstances of its production. When I moved to Glasgow in 2008 and got to know Leigh and others associated with Variant, I realised it was a kitchen space endeavour motored by huge amounts of enthusiasm and very little money. Without Leigh's unpaid labour and dedication, it wouldn't have been possible to maintain the magazine. I have abiding memories of his spartan but neat flat on Maryhill Road, with stacks of Variant lined up against the wall and Leigh ploughing into his curious diet, equal parts allotment vegetables turned curry, diet coke and ready-salted Golden Wonder crisps.

Leigh's articles for Variant remain vital reading on the purpose of arts funding, cultural 'regeneration', and the role of the critic. This work can be found in Variant's online archive



and deserves careful re-appraisal. In Variant's latter years, he focused more on editing the magazine, but an article we co-wrote for Scottish Left Review in 2010 provides a glimpse into some of his ongoing concerns. 'The Empire in Miniature' argued that the personalised 'scandals' associated with Stephen Purcell's fall from grace as a Labour Party City Council leader were symptomatic of the city's neoliberal politics, replete with an 'elaborate system of political patronage'. For us, Purcell's demise obscured the neoliberal restructuring and marketisation of local government at public expense. This was typical of Leigh: dissatisfaction with topical political ephemera, and a stringent dissection of the material relations obscured by popular common-sense debate. This attitude was to the fore in his writing with long-term collaborator Gordon Asher on the 2014 Scottish Referendum. 'Crises Capitalism and Independence Doctrines', written in 2012, undermined the content and form of independence as an unexamined good, shredding the 'plodding redundancy of positivism' and consensus-making in favour of critical scrutiny, open discussion and anti-capitalist participatory democracy.

Variant eventually paid for its bold critique of institutions like the Scottish Arts Council, Glasgow Life and Creative Scotland, when the latter withdrew funding in 2012. This was a major blow to Leigh, wresting from him a beloved project and depriving Scotland of its premier magazine for self-reflexive critical cultural and political debate. Nevertheless, he continued developing new projects, often involving his long-term partner, Gesa Helms. One was the Strickland Distribution, an artist-run group (developed with former Variant associates) supporting the development of independent research in art-related and non-institutional practices; another was his PhD on Scottish cultural nationalism and cross-European curatorial practices on nationalism, for which he organised a series of events. Leigh's frequent email exchanges were legendary for their care, depth of discussion, and masses of links and references; and alongside his work as editor and proof-reader in Higher Education, he continued doing editorial work for friends and acquaintances, contributing to dissertations, articles, chapters and books, often gratis. Since Leigh's death a host of people have stressed

how much these discussions and collaborations meant to them.

Following a lengthy process of complaint, Variant received funding from Creative Scotland to review cultural democracy in Scotland, publishing in 2016, 'Divergence and Agonism', co-authored with Gesa Helms and Lisa Bradley. This was Variant's final piece of funding. In 2017, Leigh moved to Lochwinnoch after a new factor violently intimidated fellow residents in his Maryhill tenement close. Contracting Covid during the first UK wave, and struggling for a year with its long-term effects, the rural setting provided welcome respite, distance and air. His editorial work, mentorship and support for numerous colleagues, comrades, friends and students was then based within a flourishing back-yard garden in Lochwinnoch—many of the fruits of which are now treasured by friends far-and-wide. He maintained a close cross-border, post-Brexit relationship with his long-term partner, Gesa, now living in Germany, welcomed guests to Lochwinnoch and regularly undertook long-haul cycles to see friends in Glasgow and tend to Gesa's plants in her absence. Numerous plans were afoot with friends and allies, not least a move to Northern Germany with Gesa and a potential one-off issue of Variant, so it was a major shock for us all to hear of his death.

Leigh loved plotting new schemes and I will miss that pleasure greatly, as will many who have worked with him over the years. His impact on politics and culture will be remembered long after his passing. Variant is his greatest cultural and political testament. Under Leigh's guidance, Variant was at the centre of much that was genuinely radical in Scottish culture and its archive remains a treasure trove for contemporary researchers looking to reignite critical cultural and political debate and practice. Leigh is survived by Gesa; his father, Eric; his mother, Margaret; and his brother Craig. His unique, passionate and forceful personality and his mischievous sense of humour is sorely missed by all.

On 21 October, Broadside Studio on Allison Street, Glasgow, will hold an event to celebrate Leigh's life and legacy through the variant archive. Explore the archives and other writing and resources at variant.org.uk.

**SOME MEN, FAINT-HEARTED, EVER SEEK
OUR PROGRAMME TO RETOUCH,
AND WILL INSIST, WHENE'ER THEY SPEAK
THAT WE DEMAND TOO MUCH.
'TIS PASSING STRANGE, YET I DECLARE
SUCH STATEMENTS GIVE ME MIRTH,
FOR OUR DEMANDS MOST MODERATE ARE,
WE ONLY WANT THE EARTH.**

JAMES CONNOLLY