

# Scottish Left Review

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## Working out where we go from here

The outcome of the general election last year means Scotland enters yet another critical period in its modern history and its continuing search for a just and decent social democratic society. Though politics is about much more than just constitutional options, it is becoming increasingly clear to many that the advancement of progressive politics in Scotland is only likely to happen under a different, future constitutional settlement. But which one is that and how does the left develop a consensus on the issues at hand? That is a matter of continuing and fierce debate on the left in Scotland.

In line with the joint statement released by the *Scottish Left Review* and its sister organisation, the Jimmy Reid Foundation, in February, we would hope that the right to have the means by which people in Scotland can democratically and legitimately decide upon that future for Scotland is of far less contention. The statement reads: 'We assert our belief in the right of the people of Scotland to determine their own future and therefore, whilst maintaining our stance of not taking a position on the specific question of independence for Scotland, that is, being pro- or anti-independence, we support the right of the people of Scotland to determine that future through a constitutional referendum'.

The relevance of the STUC and unions in Scotland to this process and eventual outcome should be obvious. As still the largest voluntary membership organisations in Scotland and representing the organised working classes, the STUC and its affiliates have played a leading role in helping establish and sustain the Constitutional Convention of the 1980s and 1990s. And as the debate will show at the STUC congress in April in Perth, this will be the case again. But exactly how remains unclear at this point. One suggestion

is for the union movement to have its own constitutional convention. Another is that the STUC makes sure the new convention to be set up by the Scottish Government goes much wider than just having its membership composed of elected politicians so that it would include civic society organisations (like the one in the 1980s and 1990s). In many ways, this is to re-assert and re-apply The Claim of Right to a situation some forty years later.

The *Scottish Left Review* and the Jimmy Reid Foundation will be part of this overall process by providing much needed balanced and informed materials in this on-going constitutional debate. The first examples of this will be the hosting on a fringe event at the 2020 annual congress of the STUC (see advert on p23). The second will be the publication of an educational pamphlet by Professor James Mitchell of the University of Edinburgh assessing each of the constitutional options for Scotland. In the pamphlet, for example, to the supporters of independence, the searching questions of independence 'from what and whom?' and independence 'for what and whom?' will be starkly posed. And, this will be on top of the continuation of publishing articles in each and every issue of *Scottish Left Review* by leading voices from different parts of the left. In this issue, we have Stephen Smellie, Kenny MacAskill, Jim Sillars and Alex Rowley.

After we have gone to press, two events will have happened that will have a great bearing on these matters. First, the Alex Salmond trial. Whatever the outcome and with the political stakes so high, it is inconceivable that the SNP and Scottish Government will not be hugely affected. And, all this with the next Scottish Parliament elections just over a year away – and ones that some say could represent the mandate for independence.

Second, the Labour leadership elections. The prospect of Corbynism without Corbyn is manifest most obviously because Keir Starmer is very much ahead (and because Rebecca Long Bailey is not as leftwing as Corbyn on a number of issues like Palestine or nuclear weapons). This could mean that Labour becomes more electable but the prospect of a British 'road to socialism' will have retreated into the far distance. In Scotland, it looks as though going into the Scottish Parliament elections next year, Richard Leonard will have right-winger, Jackie Bailey, as his deputy. Recall he sacked her for undermining his leadership in 2018. Not exactly the dream ticket and a reminder of how difficult it will be for Scottish Labour to have and prosecute a radical platform in those elections. But underlying Labour's woes north and south of the border is the issue that changing leaders is not synonymous with addressing a set of more systemic and structural problems that the party has (over membership activism, dysfunctional staffing, over-reliance on a parliamentary focus, a low level of industrial class struggle and so on).

Put all this together and it's not exactly clear what the significance of the first polls since 2014 showing relatively consistent (but slight) majority support for independence is ... which brings us back to this, our 'STUC' issue. We asked the union affiliates of the Jimmy Reid Foundation to tell us what they are doing - and will be doing - to 'take back control' from hostile employers and governments on the industrial and political fronts. So, we hear from the UNISON, UNITE, EIS, Usdaw, PCS, FBU, UCU, RMT and POA unions, where their concerns are not just jobs, pay and pensions but also the right to strike and under what constitutional arrangements progressive politics can best be advanced.

# Unions work: planning for growth to tackle pressing problems

*It won't be 'business as usual' as Rozanne Foyer leads the STUC to get its 'business' done*

I begin my role as General Secretary in challenging times. The rise of right-wing populism across the developed world is terrifying. But it is a symptom of the distrust that many people have in our economic and political institutions. The growing sense of exclusion that so many of us feel is not just a consequence of the most recent financial crisis but of the past four decades of deindustrialisation and free market, neo-liberal, economic policy. There is an urgent need for change in how our economy and society is shaped and how wealth and power is distributed.

Across the country, and in every community, poverty and inequality is rising. We know the reasons only too well. Brutal cuts in national and local services; fundamental changes to social security; the rising cost of living, with wages lagging far behind; and the growth of insecure and precarious work. While we know 'austerity' was just a smokescreen for reconfiguring and slashing the support and services we can expect from the state, it doesn't ease any of the cruel hardship for those who are losing out: workers in poverty; single mothers struggling against mighty odds; disabled people who are already marginalised; and the hundreds of thousands of children who are being locked into a cycle of poverty that is difficult to escape.

We are also facing a climate emergency – another clear consequence of the excesses of neo-liberalism – which passes the costs on to working people, with no offer of better jobs or services, and lets the big polluters off the hook. As unions we must get to grips with this agenda, build collective campaigns and find solutions to the climate emergency that protect and empower the working class. It is a disgrace that Scotland has one of the largest wind resources in the world but next to no manufacturing jobs in renewables.

It is also a disgrace that the Scottish Government talks grandly of a climate emergency while failing to take the radical action needed. Where is the commitment to transform our public transport system to provide free services

for everyone? Where is the commitment to local sourcing across all sectors of the economy? We need to address the uncomfortable reality that we haven't been reducing CO2 but outsourcing it by producing what we consume in the global south?

With the UN's international climate conference, COP26, taking place in Glasgow later this year, the STUC has a responsibility to set a clear vision of what a just transition truly means for workers and the Scottish economy. It is crucial workers get organised, stand up and fight back together for a greener, fairer world.

As a movement we have a lot to say. We are, and has always been, brimming



with ideas about the society we want to build and the steps we need to take to do this. With 540,000 members across Scotland, 37 affiliated unions and 20 trades councils, we cannot be dismissed as an irrelevant or dying movement. We are bigger than the membership of all the political parties in Scotland put together and already have a presence in every community. I want the STUC to build on this strength so we can engage up and down the country and defend our class.

Growing our movement has to be at the core of everything that we do. Even an optimist like me recognises we need all the strength we can muster to meet the scale of the challenges facing us. Alongside rising poverty and inequality, and tackling climate change, we are dealing with the most draconian anti-union legislation in our lifetime. We need to organise in every sector of the economy, and we must reach out to a new generation of workers and show them the strength and empowerment that comes with being in the union. And we aren't short of ideas on how to do it. Let's start with reinvigorating our trades

councils.

I'm encouraged. We don't need to rely on the tales of grand mobilisations of old to demonstrate we can win. 30,000 teachers marched through Glasgow in 2018 on their way to secure a 13.5% pay rise and improved conditions. 10,000 women home carers, caterers, cleaners and school workers took industrial action over equal pay last year, after years of fighting for equality. Having taken eight days of industrial action in 2019, university lecturers are continuing their fight with a further 14 days of action right now.

Unions work. We are the most effective vehicle to advance working class interests and tackle the tough questions of our day. I want us to learn, listen and adapt but also have confidence in our movement's tried and tested methods to build worker power. Our priority must be building our collective strength, empowering workers in every community through our trade councils and union branches, and creating the space for workers to organise, collectivise and fight – to win.

*Rozanne Foyer is the General Secretary Designate of the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC)*

**Cover:** Nadia Lucchesi  
(nadia.shemail@gmail.com)

**Proofing services:**  
John Wood and John Daly

**Editor Email:** Gregor Gall  
gregorgall@outlook.com

**Web:** www.scottishleftreview.org  
**Tel:** 0141 424 0042

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# Unions: first, last and best line of defence

Mike Kirby surveys the terrain on which the battle to defend public services and their workers will be fought

The famous adage, originating from Marx (Karl not Groucho) that 'we make our own history but not in circumstances of our own choosing' retains its relevance today. Few, indeed, are the trade unionists who would have chosen any circumstance involving Boris Johnson as PM. Whilst no one is going to accuse him of being a model of consistency, there is no doubt that many of those around him are in thrall to a free market ideology that is hostile to the very idea of collective rights and organisation.

Our response has to be what unions should be doing whenever and wherever we are faced with a government looking to attack working people – and even when we are not – and that is building our power in the workplace. This cannot be the sole response, of course, but without it very little else is possible. We must be alert to the changing nature of the workforce – as services, society and the economy change, we must ensure that we are recruiting and organising in the areas where the workforce is expanding. Two very obvious examples of this are social care and early learning. A strong union presence in these areas is important, not just to protect the workforce from exploitation but also to provide pressure to maintain the quality of the services provided.

There will, of course, be a certain amount of holding the Westminster Government to account on the promises that they did make. It's worthwhile bearing in mind that to win the Tories did need to promise extra spending on infrastructure, the NHS, and policing in order to win. Indeed, almost all of the extra money the Scottish Government proposes to spend in its budget comes from the Barnett formula consequential of this, rather than the Scottish Government utilising its own revenue raising capacity. Continued pressure on the Tories to deliver on these pledges will be necessary.

It also seems likely that we will need to mount a defence of fundamental rights. Tory plans for a ban on strikes on the rail network put transport unions in the immediate front (or is it 'main'?)

line. There can though be little doubt that should the Tories succeed in this stripping of rights, it will be used as a wedge issue. The same logic, rhetoric and legal sanction will be deployed to strip workers in other essential services of their rights.

While a Johnson-led Westminster Government seems to be the source of many of our problems, we must work at getting the Scottish Government to be more than their delivery mechanism. We will be arguing for the Scottish Government to use the extent of its powers to sustain public services and investment. The full range of possible and necessary steps they could take is outwith the scope of this article – but the annual £700m giveaway through business tax exemptions is surely well past the time to be re-examined.

The impact of the Scottish Government's contradictory aim of quality services and low tax rates is most obviously seen in local government. The Scottish Government maintains that the budget for councils has increased. The real picture, however, is that the discretionary spending capacity of councils remains almost unchanged – but councils are being given additional spending commitments by the Scottish Government which amount to an extra £590 mn – amounting to a real term cut of around £95m. This comes with a strict control from the centre on potential council tax increases.

All this will mean councils attempting to make cuts. We will, of course, work to maintain the terms and conditions of our members, and sustain the quality of the services that they deliver. One aspect of this has to be a robust defence of the quality of working life. This goes beyond a defence of core terms and conditions, although those too may

need to be defended. In the last decade across public services cuts have left in their wake an over stretched and demoralised workforce. Workload has increased as numbers employed have dropped. What's labelled 'efficiency' is often merely attrition. Stress-related illness and depression have reached epidemic levels. Sickness absence has gone from being a tool to maintain a healthy workforce to a weapon to seeking to define people as weak and target them for dismissal.

While of necessity opposing some aspects of its agenda, we will work with the Scottish Government where we can. Fair Work is a Scottish Government commitment and the principles concerned (that work should provide opportunity, fulfilment, security, respect and effective voice) are applicable

to every workforce. Specifically, the vast majority of UNISON members work in devolved services which rely ultimately upon public funding. They should, therefore, not be beyond the influence of the Scottish Government. We will be pressing the Scottish Government to deliver further on this programme – a move towards sectoral

bargaining in the care sector is an obvious, and overdue, objective.

The precise nature of the threats facing us, in this post-Brexit Boris moment, may not be known. What is certain though is that, whatever they are, the greater our strength on the ground, the easier they will be challenged.

Mike Kirby is the Scottish Secretary of UNISON



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# Unions defending workers' jobs and their communities: doing what it says on the tin

*Pat Rafferty lays out what governments can do but only if they are pushed to do so*

Scotland is being hit with job losses, factory closures and firms going bust. Unite has been involved in a long line of fights to save jobs including the Caley rail depot, Michelin (Dundee), RBS branches, Jamie Oliver restaurants and Thomas Cook. We've been campaigning hard to save jobs at BiFab's Arnish and Fife yards and CS Wind (Campbeltown). Our officers and reps have worked flat out to develop alternative plans to save jobs at Cummins in Cumbernauld and API Foils in Livingston. The scale of these losses is devastating for everyone involved.

If things weren't tough enough, there is an ongoing destructive tit-for-tat trade war between Europe and the US which will significantly harm jobs in Scotland's whisky and textile industries. With up to 25% tariffs being imposed on the £1bn Scotch exports to the US from previously 0%, hundreds of jobs and communities built around the industry are now on the line. Now the Trump administration is threatening to further increase tariffs.

A new Tory majority Government, trade wars – and a still possible 'no-deal' Brexit. It's difficult not to feel overwhelmed at the strong head winds facing us in the union movement. We need to ask not only what kind of country do we want Scotland to be but how we can make that happen now. What powers does Scotland need to protect working people and how do we ensure workers are treated and paid fairly?

Unite believes Scotland should have control over employment law, and health and safety. We have also criticised the unacceptable delay in Employment Tribunals operating on a devolved basis. We need to hold the Scottish Government to account, which is why we have asked for clarity on how its new Fair Work First criteria are being applied. There remains a great deal of confusion on what now determines whether a company gets public funds through an enterprise agency grant or on what grounds will a company be refused a public procurement contract.

Unite has made repeated representations to Scottish Government Ministers, including the First Minister, in order to clarify what the new criteria means in reality. For example, what

are the conditions regarding the £1.7m award to Bhagat Holdings Limited? The company has taken over the site of the former Pinneys of Scotland seafood plant in Annan but to date we have received no assurances that in return for taxpayers' money, zero-hours contracts will be banned and unions will have access to the workforce. In contrast, the criteria remain that there should be 'no inappropriate use' of zero-hour contracts.

The Scottish Government's Fair Work Convention, therefore, must start to show its teeth rather than be caricatured as a talking-shop. Job creation should come with guarantees around collective bargaining and union recognition. Companies should face sanctions when they renege on such promises. Bad employers including those that have blacklisted workers should be denied procurement contracts.



It's also important to highlight the majority of work paying less than the living wage in Scotland is in the private sector: 343,000 people or 25% of workers still earn less than the living wage compared to just 3% in the public sector. In reality, there is no current mechanism which can compel private sector companies to pay the living wage in the absence of employment law being devolved.

The debate around the new economy should also be focussed on how the Scottish Government can use and enforce the existing powers at the parliament's disposal. We need to

call out the false claims made by the Scottish Government alongside praising it when it does get things right (such as saving BiFab and Ferguson Marine). In 2010, John Swinney said that developing a low-carbon economy would create up to 28,000 direct jobs in off-shore wind by 2020. This has turned out to be a fantasy. The fact is that there have been fewer than 2,000 direct jobs created. Scotland has lost out on billions of pounds worth of contracts to foreign based firms. Even more scandalous is the work that has been denied to local and regional supply chain firms based in Scotland, while outsourcing the manufacturing work to Asia.

Unite welcomed the Scottish Government's intention to ensure that local and regional supply chains would benefit from contracts in the renewables sector. Yet, just several days later, American and Dutch-owned companies were feeding off the Neart na Gaoithe (NnG) contract when this work should have been going to locally based companies such as BiFab. SSE is also set to announce the contract work on the Seagreen project in the Forth. Shockingly, supply chain jobs for this project are reported to have been lost to China. The irony should be lost on no one that a company with 'Scottish' in its corporate name is rumoured to be awarding work to companies based in China who are supported by the state.

The Westminster Government's Contracts for Difference scheme is in need of urgent reform. However, the Scottish Government for years should have been doing more to effectively use consent, planning and procurement powers in coordination with the Crown Estate and Marine Scotland. The Scottish Government has for too long passed the blame on to Westminster, while absolving itself for the failure to act. Failures by both governments have resulted in the exporting of thousands of jobs and billions of pounds which should have stayed in Scotland. In these dangerous and unstable times, Unite is determined to hold every government and company to account.

*Pat Rafferty is the Scottish regional secretary of UNITE the union*

# Making sure ‘education, education, education’ still means ‘education, education, education’

Larry Flanagan lifts the lid on how the EIS is defending teacher, lecturers and education

As a Scottish education union, the EIS operates in a relatively unique situation given that education is a wholly devolved area for the Scottish Parliament, with New Joint Negotiating Committee for Higher Education Staff (New JNCHES) being the only UK-wide negotiations with which we are engaged. Notably, in that context, we have secured significant pay deals for members in both school and colleges, with the Scottish Government being involved either directly or indirectly in those negotiations. In these negotiations, teachers were taken to the brink of strike action while lecturers had to engage in protracted striking.

Although our university lecturers (in our university lecturers’ association, EIS-ULA) have also taken strike action, the simple fact is that the British context is more challenging given the succour which employers draw from the indifference, at best, of a Tory Government.

Unions operating in Scotland enjoy a significantly more positive environment as a result of devolution and, also, from the predisposition of the SNP-led Scottish Government to work in social partnership with the union movement. Some individuals, viewing life through party political perspectives, find it difficult to acknowledge that reality but as a non-affiliated union, the EIS, frankly, seeks to exploit every opportunity offered to us by that circumstance.

That does not mean failing to challenge the Scottish Government when required and our record on that, be it around pay or on matters of education policy, will survive any level of scrutiny. The teachers’ pay deal was realised only when the Scottish Government was convinced that the EIS could and would deliver threshold-breaking strike ballot results.

There are limits to the advantages potentially offered by the devolved scenario, however, and the actions of the Westminster Government on pensions is a prime example. No amount of discussion with the Scottish

Government can resolve the pension injustices which the Tories have ushered in because, ultimately, the Treasury makes the rules! The only glimmer of hope since the ignominious retreat from the public sector pension strike peak of 2011 is offered by the recent success of the FBU in the courts.

Westminster budget decisions also create significant limitations to the money available to the Scottish Parliament. Recent new fund-raising powers to the Parliament have sharpened the debate a little but UK decisions are still significant, not least in terms of the debate about the levels of



funding available to local authorities.

So, where does that leave us, looking ahead to the next few years? On pay, firstly, for the EIS and for most public sector unions, multi-year settlements mean that 2021 is likely to be the next big pay round. Our strategy has yet to be finalised but, in common with the message which the STUC has been giving to Scottish Government, there is an absolute need to continue on a path of restoration with regard to the austerity-driven pay cuts of the past decade.

Previously, the EIS has moved resolutions at both STUC and TUC congresses calling for public sector union unity and joint campaigning, including potentially coordinating industrial action, on pay claims. The run-up to the 2021 Scottish Parliament

elections might seem like an opportune time to re-examine options around such an approach. The EIS would be keen to explore support for this from other unions.

On policy issues, we are in the middle of a workload campaign where we have advanced a 20/20 claim (class size maxima of 20 and class contact maxima of 20 hours), which is resonating with a membership still feeling empowered from the pay campaign. Even in a sector with a high union density, the EIS grew its membership significantly through its recent campaigning work and through utilising an organising approach to member engagement. We’re in a stronger position now to tackle workload.

We are also engaging with political parties ahead of them drawing up their 2021 manifestos. Education has become a party-political football, which might be regarded as inevitable given its prominence in public life, but for practitioners, that can have a negative outcome. Too easily, an attempt to criticise the Scottish Government’s handling of education is founded on a ‘narrative of failure’ which is a complete disservice to everyone working in or being served by our education system.

Certainly, there are legitimate areas of criticism – poor levels of support for pupils with additional support needs might jump out as one – but, on balance, we have a strong comprehensive education system which is focussed on the right issues in a way it never was before.

A significant EIS priority over the next period will be looking ahead to the 2021 Scottish elections and trying to ensure that political party manifestos are focussed on the critical education issues. It’s hugely disappointing for unions to be facing a further period of a hostile Tory Government, but we’ve had to face that for most of our history so we should know how to do it – solidarity and unity.

# Stopping shopworkers from being the poor relations

Stewart Forrest outlines what Usdaw is doing to fight the jobs and violence crisis in retail

Usdaw is one of Scotland's largest unions, with members mainly working in retail. We also have significant membership within road transport, distribution, food manufacturing and call centre operations. In recent years, the retail sector crisis has devastated many high streets and seen household names such as Mothercare, BHS and Thomas Cook disappear. In 2018, 16,000 retail jobs in Scotland were lost with most recent figures suggesting that at least 18,000 Scottish retail jobs were lost during 2019. The crisis in retail has made headline news but the focus of government policy and decision makers, in both Westminster and Holyrood, has not yet followed. Given the economic importance of retail, it is difficult to understand why retail is treated differently to so-called traditional industries such as manufacturing.

Usdaw launched our 'Save Our Shops' campaign last year with a number of high-profile campaign days across the country. In Aberdeen, Glasgow and Edinburgh, the union mobilised our activists to run street stalls and engage with the public. Over three separate campaign days in each city, the union was able to deliver strong public support for our campaign.

In June last year, we published our own industrial strategy for the sector in Westminster. The strategy, which has been welcomed by the British Retail Consortium, looks at a comprehensive range of issues which are holding the sector back. Within Usdaw's strategy, there are significant opportunities for the Scottish Government, and councils right across Scotland, to help alleviate the issues facing retail workers. From planning reform that ensures the right mix of residential and commercial properties to tackling excessive car parking fees and unreliable public transport so that people are able to visit high streets, there are many areas of our campaign which will have a Scottish focus.

The Scottish Parliament recently passed a *Non-Domestic Rates Bill* looking at the important issue of business rates. High

street retailers pay approximately 25% of the entire business rates bill despite only making up 5% of the economy. As a result, business rates have become a huge burden on the sector and create an uneven playing field between traditional bricks and mortar retailers and online competitors.

As the Bill was passing through Parliament, an amendment was added which would have devolved authority over setting business rates to local authorities. Usdaw was clear that, based on previous evidence in Scotland and the current system in Northern Ireland, such a proposal would have seen a significant increase in the cost of business rates, exacerbating the retail sector crisis. Usdaw campaigned with the Scottish Retail Consortium to oppose this amendment. The union provided evidence to the Local Government and Communities



Committee which was scrutinising the Bill and subsequently wrote to all MSPs highlighting our concerns. Showing that the entire industry (employers, employer representatives and worker representatives) was united in opposition to the proposal helped to ensure the amendment was eventually defeated.

The broader issues behind the retail sector crisis, as well as the need for a comprehensive industrial strategy, have been raised in the Scottish Parliament. In response to specific questions, Jamie Hepburn, Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills has committed to producing an industrial strategy for the retail sector in consultation with stakeholders. Usdaw has contacted Jamie Hepburn to ensure Usdaw is fully engaged in plans to develop an urgent response to the crisis.

In recent years, the levels of violence, threats and abuse against shopworkers has increased significantly. As part of our 'Freedom from Fear' campaign, each

year, Usdaw surveys workers across Scotland on their experience of retail violence. The interim results from our 2019 survey show that: more than 6 in 10 Scottish retail workers experienced verbal abuse; 32% were threatened by a customer; and 2.3% were assaulted, which amounts to more than 15 assaults every day across all of Scotland's shopworkers.

Age-restricted sales, and the requirement for shopworkers to ask for proof of age from anyone who looks under the age of 25, is one of the most common flash points for retail workers. In effect, shopworkers are required to enforce the law but are given little or no protection by the law when doing so.

In response to the issues faced by shopworkers, Usdaw has been campaigning for the creation of a specific offence of assaulting a shopworker. To achieve this we have worked closely with Daniel Johnson MSP on the creation of the *Protection of Workers (Retail and Age-restricted Goods and Services) (Scotland) Bill*. This Bill, is currently at Stage 1 of the Parliamentary process

and has received broad support as part of the consultation process. We remain hopeful that a *Protection of Workers' Bill* will soon be enacted in Scotland providing greater security for shop staff.


Our work on an industrial strategy and tackling violence against shopworkers shows that, despite the Conservative Government in Westminster, there will still be opportunities to deliver for our members here in Scotland.

*Stewart Forrest is the Divisional Officer for Scotland for Usdaw*

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# Comrades, come rally – the cuts are Cumming

*Cat Boyd shows how the PCS union is preparing to fight further austerity*

Austerity has done more to reshape Britain than any policy programme since Thatcher. Yet by last December's election, barely a single politician was speaking up in its defence. Labour built its campaign on a promise to end it. The SNP boasted of having opposed it from the start. Even Boris Johnson, convincingly or not, told us he'd spent a decade urging colleagues to ditch it.

It's a remarkable shift from five years ago, when anti-cuts voices could barely get a hearing in mainstream politics. During those days, parliamentary opposition to cuts was a fringe affair, and it was down to students, community groups and unions to point out the blindingly obvious: cuts were wreaking havoc in working class communities and, eventually, something was going to snap.

My union and its leaders were central to bringing the anti-cuts activism to life back in 2010. We were striking and organising when nearly everyone else had buckled to the cuts consensus. This was essential because, as civil servants, we are among the public sector's worst paid, most hidden and, thus, most easily victimised workforces.

For us, austerity rolls on regardless, despite the undoubted shift in political rhetoric. Our members' wages haven't just fallen – everyone's wages have in the public sector – they've also even fallen by public sector standards. On top of that, job cuts mean working harder for less pay. Our members are set for below inflation pay rises for the next five years, and more job cuts, so living standards will decline further. All of that's happening under a PM who claims to have known since 2010 that austerity 'was just not the right way forward'.

It was Brexit that, ultimately, served to make austerity politically toxic. Regardless of how anyone views leaving the EU, the vote represented a deep democratic deficit and an impatience with the *status quo* of declining services, shrivelling opportunities and soul-destroying, low paid jobs. The same could be said of the Scottish independence movement. Questions about social class are increasingly being expressed in 'constitutional' terms: who is in charge, who makes decisions, and

does my voice really count?

Our members are keenly aware of these questions too. There's a growing impatience with the failure of politics to offer effective choices, a problem that will worsen if Labour moves back to the right.

Just as we're denied agency in politics, so in our workplaces. In last year's national ballot, PCS achieved a resounding vote for striking, with the highest turnout in our history. But we still fell short of the draconian 50% threshold imposed under recent anti-union legislation. The aim of Tory governments has been to enforce a permanent, inescapable logic of hopelessness and fatalism, and often it seems to be working.

But we now know that we'll have to fight for ourselves and for our lives. The failure of establishment politics means we must turn our union into a fighting machine again. To break the back of draconian laws, we've got to win super majorities through mass participation. That means we've got to fill the democratic void and give members the agency they lack in everyday politics. Many PCS reps I speak to acknowledge that some things must change. Currently, PCS policy is made by UK-wide conferences, yet many legislative decisions like housing and welfare are devolved. In the coming AGM season, branches will be debating motions to tackle this democratic deficit and take on overbearing centralism in all its forms: importantly, we back the right to self-determination that Westminster denies to people in Scotland and our motion to this year's STUC congress wants to see the establishment of an alternative to the SNP's Citizen Assemblies.

Austerity, digitalisation, and the government's estate strategy are fundamentally changing the British civil service. In many areas, PCS reps feel confident and branches are well organised. But with tens of thousands of workers moving into multi-employer hubs, PCS is changing tact as well. We need workplace organisation that brings our members together in maximum unity, on a local basis. We're building a union of 'place' so that where you work, regardless of your employer, gives you a say in campaigning for better pay and job security.

Our members want immediate action on pay and conditions, as our ballots demonstrated. So we are launching a pro-active campaign on fair pay, pensions and redundancy terms. With Dominic Cummings re-imagining our future, we can't afford to wait and act defensively. From helping reps recruit and retain new members to developing local action teams to bring union democracy closer to home to rolling out new digital organising platforms, we're preparing for an inevitable showdown.

Politically, we'll lead against the Tories, working with allies in Labour and the SNP to disrupt Johnson's agenda. Workplace by workplace, using new technology and old lessons, the civil service will be the key battleground for the unspoken, ongoing austerity agenda of this emerging Tory government. Once again, it's up to workers and communities to organise the fight against an all-powerful right-wing agenda.

*Cat Boyd is the Acting National Officer for the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union Scotland and Northern Ireland Hub*



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# Unions must lead the fight back

*Denise Christie shows how the FBU is fighting back and calls for coordinated action to support sister unions*

There have been many articles written since the crushing defeat for our movement at the General Election. Trade unionists pounded the street and campaigned for the most radical and progressive manifesto we have seen in decades from any main political party. Now, as before, our job is to reorganise and rebuild our workplaces and communities but there is no quick fix in doing this. The Tories are no friends of workers yet we need to ask ourselves why workers voted for them and how we can win those workers back. We can now expect further attacks on pay, pensions, health and safety, equalities and further draconian changes to laws governing industrial action.

Jane McAlevey, union organiser, author and scholar, has been instrumental in changing the way unions organise and build power. Her *No Shortcuts* book is powerful in its analysis of practical steps to turn unions into democratic forces again. She explains the neo-liberals and far right have built up decades of misinformation and our movement's only option to combat this is to organise person-to-person, street-to-street, school-by-school, and workplace-by-workplace. Jane's work is essential reading for everyone involved building power with many activists having benefitted from her training through the STUC.

The FBU in Scotland is benefitting from these organising techniques as part of our current campaign to defend pay, terms and conditions. Members in Scotland are being urged to reject a pay offer linked to broadening the role of firefighters to plug gaps in other over-stretched services – including the crisis-hit adult health and social care sector. The offer is dependent upon firefighters taking on new roles, including non-emergency co-responding with adult social care and health teams in attending 'slips, trips and falls'. Firefighters fear this will dilute the core services they provide to the public as professionals and will add pressure to an already over-stretched fire service.

FBU officials have been crossing the country, addressing up to three branch meetings a day, to ensure members are properly informed before they cast their vote on a prospective pay deal

that could have a huge impact on the working lives of firefighters in Scotland, now and in the future. From those branch meetings, it is clear many do not want to do the work of paramedics – or see appliances tied up while waiting for paramedics to arrive. On one occasion, firefighters had to wait for nine hours before help arrived, and these occurrences are on the rise.

The Scottish Government has a role to play in helping to secure a deal that firefighters are fighting for if the willingness is there. Given that fire and rescue is devolved and given the differences of approach on such issues between the Holvrod and Westminster



governments, over the last year the Scottish Government has diverged from Westminster in pay deals for teachers, NHS workers and civil servants. It would be remiss if it wished to make an exception of firefighters.

The FBU wants to see members get a pay deal they deserve – but not at any price. We have always made it clear that we want to get back to negotiations – and will get back round the table if members reject these proposals. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) has said the funding invested by the Scottish Government will no longer be available if firefighters reject the current proposal: this is contrary to what the FBU was told at a meeting with the STUC and Scottish Government Cabinet Secretary for Finance.

The SFRS and Scottish Government must listen to the concerns of why

firefighters are against the proposal and commit to continue the funding and negotiations so that firefighters get a deal that they deserve. The FBU will be continuing its political campaigning with members writing directly to their MSPs to highlight the concerns it has with the SFRS proposal and making the case for continued investment to support further negotiations.

Previous successful lobbies of the Scottish Parliament by firefighters resulted in an increase into the SFRS budget after many years of cuts. We will be lobbying the Parliament again, where firefighters from all over Scotland will making their voices heard.

Whilst this is the current campaigns the FBU is involved in, our movement has got some serious decisions to make if we are truly to defend every single right we have fought for and won. If there ever was a time for a coordinated response to the attacks on our pay, pensions and working conditions, then the time is now. Our movement must not sit back and take the attacks and the pain sustained with them. We have been guilty in the past of allowing sister unions to 'go it alone' when they have taken on the fight. We can't abide by our motto 'unity is strength' if we are only playing lip service to those words. We have never been handed any of our gains on a plate. We have had to fight politically, industrially and legally to keep what is rightly ours. We need to energise and organise our members, be ready for the attacks that will be coming, prepare coordinated campaigns, and organise to fight like we've never organised before.

*Denise Christie is the Scottish Secretary of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU)*

# 4f + 1f = 5f (where 'f' stands for FIGHT)

Mary Senior does the maths and comes up with the right answers in the fight for fair pay and pensions

The University and College Union (UCU) is in the midst of two bitter industrial disputes: the first on the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) pension, a long running battle to defend the pension scheme from further cuts and secure its long term viability; and the second 'four fights' dispute for fair pay, and address precarity, pay inequality and spiralling workloads across the sector.

The *Trade Union Act 2016* and its punitive approach to industrial relations is fundamentally shaping how the union approaches negotiations and our campaigning work. Ironically, the punitive ballot thresholds have meant the union has had to 'up its game', run forensic well-resourced ballot campaigns, which enabled it to smash through to win countless ballot mandates, making our union democracy stronger and ensuring the union leadership is plugged into the views and experiences of our grassroot members. It really is the case that what doesn't kill you makes you stronger.

However, the fact that ballot mandates expire after six months can make it more challenging to prosecute prolonged disputes, and potentially gives more powers to employers to simply hold out if we let them.

That said our union won't be put off by the 2016 Act, nor the threats from the Johnson government to further tighten anti-union laws on striking. We may be leaving the protections offered by European Union social policy, but Britain remains a signatory of the European Convention on Human Rights. Article 11 on the Freedom of assembly and association, and the right to join a union, continue to be fundamental human rights. Unions are going to be pivotal in making these arguments and defending these intrinsic values for citizens, workers and the labour movement.

So, for UCU, we are now escalating our industrial action, with fourteen more days of striking to defend pensions, to fight for fair pay, and to demand equality

and decent terms and conditions at work. And employers are faced with the threats of new ballots opening as soon as staff return from the picket lines, so we can be ready to continue the action, should the employers continue to fail to offer any meaningful resolutions.

The Johnson election victory underlined for us that the only way to improve pay, pensions and working conditions is for strong unions, effective collective bargaining, and targeted industrial action by union members. Workers and unions are not going to get any help from the PM or Westminster government, rather they will make it even harder for us. For UCU, this is about reinforcing our collective bargaining abilities, both nationally and locally, ensuring our branch reps are well



equipped and supported to negotiate with employers at a local level to secure sector-wide standards, and maximising the leverage within their branch. It's also about focusing on the future of the union, and ensuring early careers staff are joining and playing a role at the heart of the movement.

What was most heartening about the last eight days of action in November-December 2019 was the very visible impact of younger, casual and early careers staff on picket lines. It was their activism and anti-casualisation planning that was taking place during the strike action and beyond. And it was the solidarity with students – and the National Union of Students – who know that our working conditions are their learning conditions. Unions must continue to embrace new technology too, using it to our advantage, and not just viewing it as a threat in workplaces. New text messaging apps helped get us over the line in ballots, and in local negotiations reps have ensured employers cannot use new

technology to circumvent strike action. However, there's more to do, to ensure automation is enhancing the learning and working environment, and not undermining it.

It's not just about using industrial action as the only tool in our armoury either. We need wider leverage to achieve our industrial goals. For UCU, the alliances with students is key, as well as working together with other campus unions, and getting government and funders on our side too.

With the First Minister's commitment to Fair Work and increasing collective bargaining coverage, we do have opportunities to use the policy environment to enhance and improve working conditions, and to create leverage to get better outcomes for

university staff in Scotland and across Britain. It is important also not to undermine the value of Britain-wide sectoral bargaining for a sector which operates globally across international boundaries, and not simply as a local employer.

So, as we approach the next wave of industrial action, in the face of a galvanised Johnson government, we can have some hope that as a union we're strong, we're united and we are planning for the future to be ours.

*Mary Senior is the Scotland official for the University and College Union (UCU)*

# Minimum service levels – defend the right to strike

*Mick Cash lays out the reasons for the Tories' new assault on striking and how to beat it*

In the run up to the 2019 General Election, the Conservatives, apparently not satisfied with the draconian restrictions imposed by their *Trade Union Act 2016*, made clear their intention to further curtail the right of transport workers to go on strike by introducing legislation which would require a minimum level of service on the railways during strikes.

We await further detail on the legislation, but it is apparent this constitutes nothing less than a brazen attack on the right to strike. The RMT is unequivocal in our opposition to Minimum Service Levels (MSLs) legislation. It will worsen industrial relations, risk passenger safety and conversely, is likely to lead to more industrial action being taken.

The Tories have made much of the fact that similar arrangements are in place in much of Europe – yet this ignores that in many cases, what is in place elsewhere is in fact already a requirement in the UK – for instance, notice periods in advance of industrial action and providing information to employers so that they can redeploy resources during strikes.

The Westminster Government's approach also fails to recognise that across Britain, there are devolved authorities, such as the Scottish Government, with varying degrees of responsibility for the rail passenger services in their area, and who do not wish to conduct their industrial relations in this provocative and unreasonable manner.

In December 2019, when questioned on the Scottish Government's view of the UK Government's MSL proposals, the Transport Secretary Michael Matheson said: 'I completely oppose that approach. The best way to deal with industrial relations is to nurture and cultivate positive industrial relations, rather than resorting to legislative changes and the punitive approach that the UK Government is intending to take. I assure the member that that is not in our thinking or in the approach that we will take'.

The RMT, of course, welcomes the Scottish Government's opposition to MSLs and will seek to work with Ministers to oppose the legislation and make the case for why, given the Scottish Government's opposition, the Westminster Government should not seek to make its MSL legislation apply to Scotland.

While the current plans relate only to the transport sector, there of course, remains a threat to the wider union movement that the government would seek to extend it to other 'essential services' in the future. Therefore, it is vital that we build a broad coalition within and beyond our movement to resist these measures from the outset.

At this year's STUC Congress, I will be speaking at a fringe meeting with the Institute of Employment Rights and other allies about how the labour movement can work together to resist the Tory anti-union laws in Scotland.



Debates around MSLs are, of course, framed by the privatised and fragmented structure of our railways – a structure which is not fit for purpose. To mask the failure of privatisation, in early 2019, the Westminster Government commissioned Keith Williams, former BA CEO, to chair an 'independent' review of railways. Despite having a supposedly wide-ranging brief, he appeared to rule out full renationalisation very quickly.

For the last few years, the Scottish Government, unlike the rest of Britain, has had the power to put in a public sector bid to operate the Scotrail franchise, although it must still go through a franchise competition and compete with private operators. Rail passengers in Scotland have experienced years of disruption, delays,

cancellations and overcrowding on Scotrail – the franchise which runs the majority of rail services in Scotland. Scotrail is currently operated by Abellio, a company owned by the Dutch state railway.

For over a year, Scotrail has been operating under a remedial plan due to its poor performance, and thankfully, in December 2019, under pressure from MSPs, the RMT, passengers and other campaigners, the Transport Secretary announced Abellio's franchise would end in 2022, and not extended to 2025 as had been expected.

The RMT resolutely believes Scotrail's failure to provide reliable rail service means that, when its contract expires in 2022, it must be run in the public sector and the Williams Review must give the power to do this without needing to go through a bidding process. Meantime, the RMT's priority remains our members at Scotrail, who have faced massive difficulties due to Abellio's poor management, not least because the company has cut 25% of its station staff since it took on the franchise.

We don't just need a public railway in Scotland - we need a fully accessible Scottish railway with a guard on every train and fully staffed stations across the network.

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

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**Mick Whelan, general secretary**

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**POA(Scotland) send fraternal greetings to all delegates and visitors to Congress, Perth 2020.**

# Protect the right to strike and enshrined it in law

*Andy Hogg says while the experience in Scotland has been different there is still the need for basic rights*

There are few unions that understand more the impact of losing the right to strike than the POA. There are, perhaps, even fewer who can point to the chasm of disadvantage that persists in an industrial sector when one half of a union has the protection reinstated and the other must continue to fight with its hands tied firmly behind its back.

So exists the situation for the POA across Scotland and our colleagues in the rest of Britain. Having previously enjoyed the general protection afforded to other unions, the introduction by the Conservative Government of Section 127 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 made it an offence to induce a prison officer to take industrial action including the withholding of services as a prison officer. In effect it removed any existing protection and banned prison officers in both public and private sectors from taking industrial action. It is not without some dismay to read accounts of the period and those subsequently from Jack Straw, when the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice of a Labour Government, comparing the work of prison officers to that of the armed forces and police, not apparently a view shared by his colleague Lord Hutton some years later when condemning prison officers to work to the age of 68 through his reforms to public sector pensions.

Despite a short repeal of the powers based on an enforced 'voluntary' no strike clause in dispute arrangements, the union remained hogtied to arbitration or the mercy of the courts. Angered by the government decision to break their side of the bargain and phase in a pay award from the pay review body, withdrawal from the voluntary agreement and direct action followed. Whereupon 'Jack the Knife' was so swift to establish the reintroduction of the ban in 2008 that even some Tories were prompted 'to congratulate the Secretary of State on his conversion to Thatcherite trade union reforms ...' (as recorded in Hansard HC Deb, 9 January 2008, c336)

In Scotland, under the newly elected SNP government, the approach could not have been different. The power to implement the ban or otherwise, having been delegated to the Scottish Ministers, meant that the reintroduction in Scotland could be halted and so it came to be. The view taken was that there was enough protection in place to protect the public through the partnership and voluntary industrial relations arrangements that POA (Scotland) had with the Scottish Prison Service (SPS). Enforceable action in the courts, however, remained a feature of the agreement.

Although faced with direct action taken by prison officers on the 12 May 2012 in protest at the aforementioned attack on pensions, the clause was never utilised by the employer or Scottish Government. By 2015 such was the faith afforded to the industrial relations model in the SPS and the relationship with the POA in Scotland that the Voluntary Industrial Relations Agreement saw a number of amendments introduced but none more significant than the removal of the paragraphs enforcing action through the courts in response to industrial action by prison officers.

After 21 years of restriction, Scottish Prison Officers finally had the rule preventing POA (Scotland) from inducing, authorising or supporting any form of industrial action by their prison officer members removed. Despite such progress for the POA in Scotland, this came at a time when our colleagues across the rest of Britain and its union movement were facing the introduction of further draconian legislation from the Tory's contained in the soon-to-be *Trade Union Act 2016*. The introduction of debilitating measures designed to make it very, very hard for unions to conduct successful industrial action ballots.

So why is this sorry tale of two cities, London and Edinburgh, relevant today? Because at the heart of the matter is the protection of workers' rights and the threat that is posed from a British Government under the charge of a PM likely to pursue employment deregulation with a vigour

unparalleled to that of the brutal days of Thatcherism.

Having stripped any commitment to the protection of workers' rights from the Brexit Withdrawal Bill, the announcement in the Queen's Speech of the inclusion of an Employment Bill in the programme for government to replace this pledge, is enough to ring alarm bells and does nothing to dissuade the more cynical amongst us that there is yet another cunning plan afoot to do the exact opposite.

By contrast in Scotland, the civil service unions reached an unprecedented agreement with Scottish Government in 2018 around a range of principles 'governing the conduct of employee and industrial relations in line with the principles of the Fair Work Convention's Framework'. Contained within that agreement under the heading 'Respect and support for a positive right to strike as a fundamental principle' is the commitment that 'Scottish Ministers recognise the rights of trade unions and their members to undertake lawful industrial action and will not seek to interfere with the exercise of those rights when undertaken lawfully.'

As a signatory, the POA (Scotland) sees this as a significant step forward in protecting the agreement reached bilaterally and guards against reverting back to our previous precarious position. But as welcome as this step is, the nature of agreements can be as fragile with the fickleness of government and the machinations of political parties. What the good lord giveth, the bad Boris can take away. That's why workers' rights will never be truly secure until withdrawing labour is a fundamental right underpinned by statute, and the right to strike is treated not only as a worker's right but as a basic human right.

*Andy Hogg is the Assistant General Secretary, POA (Scotland), the union for prison, correctional and secure psychiatric workers*

# Can independence be built on trade union principles?

*Stephen Smellie lay out the critical questions the left needs to be asking of the independence option*

A second independence referendum will take place. Maybe not this year or even next but it will take place. With current opinion polls now giving independence a small majority, there is a strong possibility that the referendum will result in a 'yes' vote. Facing up to that possibility trade unionists can dig trenches and join with those people and interests of all stripes to defend the continuation of the United Kingdom. That means defending a Tory led Brexit-distorted country and institutions where inequality is central to the capitalist project being further developed by the current Prime Minister.

Alternatively, they can face the prospect of independence as a project worth attempting to shape into a movement to create the kind of Scotland that meets the aspirations of the working people that make up our unions.

In 2014, unions like UNISON sought to do something similar by staying neutral on the question but raising the level of debate to one about what kind of Scotland we were looking for. Indyref2 will be fought out on different territory and the argument is already underway. Now is the time for the union movement to enter the debates to influence the offer of independence that will be voted on.

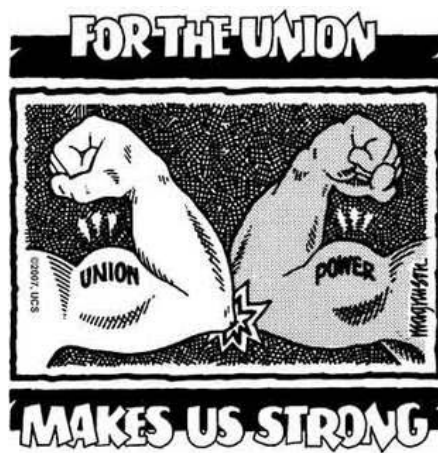
If unions refuse to engage with the independence movement, and that means more than talking to a few SNP politicians, then the offer of independence will be shaped by other forces, with different interests and principles. We will then have a choice between two very unattractive options.

Union members may decide at the end of this, and despite the best efforts to influence what is on offer, that the risks of independence are still too great or that, despite the Johnson/Cummings regime at Westminster, we would be better taking our chances and praying for a Labour government, sometime. However, the opportunity to consider voting for an independence based on union principles should be seized upon to see what the independence offer could be.

These union principles of democracy, equality and solidarity based on human

rights, environmental sustainability and peace are worth fighting for in any circumstances. So, what would an independent Scotland look like based on these progressive principles and can we get them adopted by the independence movement before the referendum?

There are many policies that we could argue for, in other words, a shopping list of left-wing socialist policies. However, a referendum on independence should be based on principles and none are of a higher moral and ethical character than union principles.



The focus, therefore, should not be on the detail of what the government of a future independent Scotland should legislate for but what the foundations of the new state should be. What is the purpose of the state, its institutions and its elected representatives? These would be agreed in the constitution of the independent country. It is on this issue that unions have an opportunity to influence the future of the proposal for independence.

The constitution of an independent Scotland should confirm that the people are sovereign and enshrine the democratic rights of all people living in the country to participate in our democracy, to be able to hold politicians to account and to organise to do this. That would include the right to join a union that has, in turn, a right to represent workers without restrictive laws to weaken their ability to organise. It would state clearly the equal rights of all people regardless of gender, race, ethnic origins, place of birth, disability, age, sexuality or class.

It would recognise the solidarity of

the country towards everyone and guarantee a right to a health service free to all, the right to an education, to a warm home, to food and an income to guarantee a decent standard of life. It would enshrine that taxation would be fair and progressive and that all citizens would have the right to these universal benefits. Public services would be run and be democratically accountable for the public good without the profiteering of individuals or corporations.

It would confirm that government would be responsible for economic and industrial development that put the interests of working people and a zero-carbon sustainable environment ahead of profit. It would guarantee minimum wages that were living wages. Finally, a Scottish constitution would enshrine and make it a requirement of government that foreign policy and relations with other nations would be in pursuit of peace at home and abroad and seek to promote economic, environmental and scientific co-operation based on internationalist solidarity.

In order to take forward these ideas, unions do not need to commit to support independence. They do, however, need to commit to seek to negotiate the best deal possible for their members to decide upon.

A union initiated and led 'constitutional convention' involving civic society, environmental groups, students from schools, colleges and universities, representatives from all our diverse and minority communities, business, academics, and political parties would be an opportunity to debate and discuss what the foundations of an independent Scotland should look like and what the constitution should include. Within such a forum, the different interests of union members could be represented with the aim of making sure that all voices are heard and not just the loudest, or the richest or the ones with the biggest salaries.

*Stephen Smellie is the Depute Convener for UNISON Scotland and a members of the Scottish Left Review editorial committee*

# So where now for the independence left?

*Kenny MacAskill offers a welcoming hand to those now seeing independence as a credible option*

**B**oris Johnson's rejection of a Section 30 Order was hardly unexpected and the First Minister never possessed a Plan B as some hoped. So where now for the independence left? In many ways, rather than being seen as a set-back, it should be considered as an opportunity. It allows for the campaign base to be built, the policy platform to be secured and - most of all - the necessary unity to be forged.

This is a unity that is necessary not just to achieve the goal of independence but to protect the Scottish people from the threat that's looming from the 'transformative agenda' for post-Brexit Britain - a euphemism that all on the left know to be the privatisation of the social infrastructure built up over generations. Moreover, that unity does not require all to support independence. That's a matter of personal choice but as alternative options appear unpalatable or unachievable its growing amongst many, even some diehards who renounce nationalism. For it's about Scotland's right to choose whatever that may be. As in Catalonia, it's becoming as much about democracy as it is about identity. For that reason, the 'nationalist left' should welcome all comers, irrespective of the final position they take on independence.

For, as others have recently argued, no party has the monopoly on independence: the more the merrier whether entire parties, wings of them or simply individuals. Likewise, it's not just about political parties but unions and civic Scotland. The cause is bigger than any individual group and wider than simply those who operate in the political sphere.

For that reason, the First Minister's call for a constitutional convention is welcome and hopefully will be embraced by most on the left. It mustn't though be restricted to the suits and usual suspects. A far wider not just audience but participation is needed. Moreover, it cannot simply be a central and one-off gathering of the 'great and the good'. Instead, it needs to be an embryonic body that can bring together progressive opinion in Scotland, forge agreement and prepare both a way forward, as well as building defences to the threats we face.

Nationalists, rather than questioning motive or berating past positions,

should simply welcome new allies and the shared agenda. It has also to be replicated locally, reflecting not just the strength of the 'yes' movement in 2014 but also the historic basis of the labour and trade union movement in Scotland. This must be a popular movement in defence of the people and ground up, not top down. It has also to be about protecting rights and services as much as discussing constitutional issues. Independence must be relevant to people's daily life's and not esoteric political theory.



A constitutional convention isn't an alternative to or substitute for the Citizens' Assembly. It is a separate institution focusing on people and their opinions on a wide range of issues. It's to be supported as well as welcomed. It's long overdue and will compliment other activities with an evidence base and, perhaps, even surprising views. A constitutional convention is a separate institution based on coordinating political strategy amongst the organised political forces that already exist (though beyond parties). It's not either or but both that are required.

Political strategy is, therefore, required but so is practical action. Marching and flag waving are all good and well. But votes they don't win and services they don't protect. Work has to start in communities. Engaging with people, feeling their pain as austerity bites and offering hope to those simply enduring. It's not glamorous and its mostly political 'grunt' work. But it needs done.

The greatest danger to our cause, whether independence or socialism, comes from defeatism and that's why direct engagement not just marching through is needed. Folk need to know we care and that we're acting to defend them. There's a place for marches and demonstrations but fewer and bigger ones will have far greater effect and achieve more coverage.

It's for the constitutional convention to prepare the strategy for going forward. But to paraphrase Canon Kenyon Wright, Boris Johnson may say 'no' but we are the people and we say 'yes'. Parties supporting the right to choose require to be ready to move after the 2021 election.

The Tories can bluff and bluster but that cannot continue indefinitely. A decade of victories by independence parties may well see them acknowledge the inevitable. History is littered with British pledges of irredentism on constitutional matters that have always seen the sun set on the empire's outpost. Scotland's no different and, frankly, a growing number of English Tories now see it not just as inevitable but positively beneficial.

If that doesn't happen then action needs taken to progress Scotland's right to choose. Many believe, whatever the First Minister may think, that a consultative referendum is legally possible. There may well be judicial approval for it. But even if there isn't then the organisation of one is also a democratic right. Test it legally and see and if not, then it's Plan B. For, as Parnell said, no one can restrict the march of a nation. But to achieve that and then deliver it, unity and organisation are required - which is the role of the convention and why unions, councils and others need to be on board. So, defending locally but preparing nationally aren't mutually exclusive but essential factors.

*Kenny MacAskill is the SNP MP for East Lothian. Previously, he was a SNP MSP from 1999 to 2016. He is author of 'Glasgow 1919: The Rise of Red Clydeside' and 'Jimmy Reid: A Scottish Political Journey'.*

# Is Scotland ready for its federated future to infinity and beyond?

*Jim Sillars says independence supporters are woefully under-prepared for a federated frontal-assault*

Nicola Sturgeon has taken those in the independence movement into a mental and emotional trench. I had hoped they would clamber out of the trench when her speech on 31 January 2020 indicated acceptance of reality – no indyref2 this year. But they stayed in it, and she has joined them again, saying, as reported in the *Sunday Times* (16 February 2020), it is still possible.

In that trench they shout encouragement to each other, and seize on any implausible idea of how they might circumvent the requirement of a Section 30 Order denied to them by Boris Johnson. It would be useful if someone popped a head above the parapet and looked at the reality.

All the chatter in Scotland is about Holyrood's right to hold indyref2. But of the two parliaments – Holyrood and Westminster – only the latter faces no legal or constitutional barriers to legislate for, organise and hold a referendum on Scotland's constitutional future. As I have noted elsewhere, while Nicola has been marching 'yes' banners up and down the country for three years, others have been thinking.

Down south, the Constitutional Reform Group produced an Act of Union Bill, tabled in the House of Lords by Lord Lisvane, the former Chief Clerk of the House of Commons, no slouch on legal and constitutional matters. It aims at a 'federal' type of fundamental change to the way Britain is governed – with separate parliaments for Scotland, England and Wales, Northern Ireland continuing with its assembly, abolition of the House of Lords and replacement with a revising body partly elected. It's first clause gives each nation the right to opt by leaving the union. Never meant to become an Act, its purpose is to start people thinking. And they are.

The 'federalist' idea has been picked up by several Tory thinkers and columnist opinion formers as the way to stymie Scottish independence. Right now, federalism is not a runner. Johnson has obviously adopted the other idea coming out of Tory thinking: that the British government should exercise its authority under S28(7) of the *Scotland Act 1998* to 'love bomb' us, and by-pass the Scottish government with projects

it will fund. The idea is replete with difficulty, not least of which is that we don't like the suitor. Whatever is tried will not scupper the demand for independence.

Given that Johnson and Cummings, as the Treasury has found, can think and act outside the orthodox box, it is not beyond the bounds of the possible that, when the love bombing fails, they will turn to the federalist idea. If that happens, and Downing Street decided to give us the much demanded indyref2, it could hold the referendum itself on 'independence v federalism', or make that question a condition of granting Holyrood a Section 30 Order. Could the independence movement complain about either, given the ballot would include independence?

What argument could we mount for independence against the federalist offering with its attraction of no border, continued membership of a single market and customs union, no currency problem, no state pension or nationality problem, and all with the add-on of more powers to Holyrood?

We need to start with what 'federal' means. Is it the division of sovereignty, where the central authority can exercise it in only certain areas, while the constituent parts exercise it in others over which the central authority has no power? That requires a written constitution, and a clear division of sovereignty. That is the case with the US constitution, although even there a tussle exists between federal and state governments on many matters, with the Supreme Court, a federal institution, the final arbiter.

Sovereignty is different from power. The Lisvane Bill allocates much more power to Scotland, but emphasises that 'sovereignty' is retained by Westminster. So, it is isn't really federalism at all – but an extended

'Devo-Max'. Whatever the new powers so allocated, the people of Scotland would not be able to act as they wish, and as they could, with the sovereignty denied them. In policy areas such as international relations, defence, Bank of England control of monetary policy, trade, some direct and other indirect taxes, labour law and corporate law, a 'Devo-Max' Scottish Parliament would still be shut out of crucial areas of importance to our economy and society.

But we should not kid ourselves that the argument for genuine sovereignty through independence, against the seductive allure of what Jack McConnell (a supporter of the Lisvane Bill) once called 'Independence in the UK,' is going to be an easy one unless people in the movement start thinking about it now. Yes, of course, Johnson may keep 'love bombing' us and not reach for that alternative. But if he wants it, it is there, and we should be well prepared, just in case.

*Jim Sillars is a former Labour and SNP MP and is currently writing his memoirs*

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## Constitutional options for Scotland - which way for progressive politics?

*The outcome of the general election last year means Scotland enters another critical period in its history. Though politics is about much more than just constitutional options, it is becoming increasingly clear that the advancement of progressive politics in Scotland can only happen under a different constitutional settlement. But which one is that and how does the left develop a consensus on the issues at hand?*

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# Home rule for the new century

Alex Rowley explains why Scottish Labour supports a revised devolution settlement

Scotland remains divided on the question of independence, but on the question of holding a second referendum anytime soon, polls have shown a consistent and overwhelming majority saying now is not the time.

The Scottish Labour Party recognises the sovereign right of the Scottish people to determine their own future and we respect the fact that at this moment in time there is not support for a second referendum. Given the uncertainty around Brexit and the SNP policy of independence within Europe, it would be difficult for any government to put a clear proposition to the people with the level of detail that would rightly be required.

Scottish Labour's view is that the current standoff between the unionists and nationalists over a second referendum is simply smoke and mirrors and takes away from the more fundamental question of what is best for Scotland moving forward. The SNP is clear it wants independence whilst the Tories and illiberal Liberals want no change.

The no change parties constantly call for more investment from within the Scottish budget whilst advocating lowering taxation and supporting failed Westminster austerity. They have the nerve to call on Scotland's Parliament to mitigate the worst effects of welfare reform like the inhumane bedroom tax that they, the Tories and Liberals, were responsible for introducing.

On the question of independence and what that would mean for Scotland, the SNP seems incapable of answering the big questions. Its Sustainable Growth Commission was established by Nicola Sturgeon in September 2016 with the purpose of providing the economic case for an independent Scotland. The final report lacked ambition, was about more of the same and was officially adopted as SNP policy in April 2019.

The Commission Report calls itself 'a strategy for inter-generational economic renaissance'. However, this

in reality is nothing more than a fancy way of endorsing the current ongoing *status quo* politics of austerity. The uses of terms like 'flexicurity' when talking about labour markets and the commitment to match Westminster in its corporation tax levels are examples of the 'business as usual politics' where working people are overlooked in the drive for economic growth within an independent Scotland within Europe.

The report commits to an independent Scotland paying its share of Britain's existing national debt amounting to an 'Annual Solidarity Payment' of £5bn a year. On top of this, it recognises that an independent Scotland would start out with an annual budget deficit of just under 6%. For comparison, the current Westminster deficit is 2.3%. The plan is to reduce the projected unsustainable deficit rate, over a 10 year period, to a

years on to set out the next steps on the devolution journey.

We need a new framework for continued devolution in Scotland, guided by the principle that where Scotland needs powers to deliver social and economic change to benefit the majority of people, then the Scottish Parliament is the lead body in negotiating to bring the powers from Westminster to Scotland. A new devolution settlement that increases the powers of Scotland's Parliament for the twenty first century challenges our country faces.

These are complex issues that will take time. A small proportion of welfare is now devolved to Holyrood and that has taken years longer than was envisaged due to the complexity of unravelling the system at the Westminster level and designing a system fit for Scotland's needs.

But to be clear, it cannot be in Westminster's gift to refuse to transfer powers – Boris Johnson's dismissal of Scotland's request for a separate Scottish visa

system is an example of why Scotland's Parliament must be in charge of the devolution process.

Richard Leonard is encouraging Labour members to have this discussion on the way forward in order that we can come to a view and set out a clear socialist vision that will transform Scotland in the decades to come.

*Alex Rowley is MSP for Mid Scotland and Fife and Scottish Labour's spokesperson on constitutional matters*



SCOTTISH LABOUR  
FOR RADICAL DEMOCRACY

rate of just under 3% of GDP per year. This approach would see spending on public services and benefits fall by about 4% of GDP over that decade - in other words, not only more cuts, but much deeper and more damaging cuts.

It is no wonder that many on the left who support independence were quick to distance themselves from this report but in truth, the report exposes not just the risks but also, the inherent problems with independence.

Labour must move beyond simply criticising others no matter how justified this may feel. We must be in a position to set out a bold alternative to both the 'no change' parties and the more of the same neo liberalism wrapped up in tartan parties.

We can and should be proud that it was a British Labour Government that delivered Scotland's Parliament and be equally proud of the achievements of the parliament over its short lifetime. We should also have the confidence 20

# Challenging the climate crisis and COP26: getting ready for Glasgow

*Stuart Graham lays out what needs to be done in the unions in the run up to the November conference*

The lack of urgency among unions about the climate crisis is concerning. In mid-February, after a fortnight of yellow/amber weather warnings causing widespread damage and flooding, increasingly what is happening on the news is likely to be happening outside your window.

Despite the youth climate strikes marking a year of action in February, the presence and visibility of unions on these is still not enough. Union leaders, if vocal at all, seem unwilling or unable to find the words to instil the necessary confidence in their members that this is *the* fight of their lives. And yet, most members are concerned about what the changing climate and increase in extreme weather means for them. So, what, if anything, are the unions actually doing about it, apart from repeatedly telling the climate strikers what we can't do? Instead, we need to start talking about what we can do.

At this year's STUC congress, Glasgow Trades Union Council (GTUC) is putting forward a motion calling for unions in Scotland to mobilise strategically and effectively for COP26, and to create a dedicated resource to develop those strategic aims throughout 2020. As the STUC will form part of the ITUC delegation to COP26, it makes sense we have the debates in advance given the divisions amongst us.

Clarity and consensus from within could help create the political will to move to renewables on a large-/whole-scale basis and identify the necessary jobs which would allow workers in dirty and polluting industries to begin transitioning to them, as well as agreeing strategies for workers in other polluting sectors such as transport.

The Campaign Against Climate Change's *1 Million Climate Jobs* publication, supported by 8 unions, set out a proposal for jobs that lead directly to cuts in emissions in greenhouse gas as new government jobs: building and delivering renewable energy power, retrofitting existing homes and buildings, and building and operating a massive public transport system powered by renewable electricity. Long-standing climate commentators advocate instilling a military efficiency to our climate agenda, similar to during

the two world wars when all industry contributed to the war effort. Only this scale of ambition will see us adapt to the anthropocenic reality of which we are still just seeing the beginning.

Opportunities exist to place the climate crisis at the heart of the union movement. GTUC has already decided on a climate-themed May Day for 3 May 2020. If this approach was taken by all trades councils across Scotland, it would provide the necessary platform for the climate conscious to better speak to and connect with local workers. But with 1st May also falling on a Friday this year and in sequence with the monthly 'Fridays For Future' climate strike calendar, we should seize on the global significance



of international workers' day to make unions relevant to young people.

We also need to recognise the radical changes to society that are required to survive in a world where carbon production levels will be the determining factor, like introducing free public transport. Indeed, there is an ongoing campaign by the Campaign Against Climate Change Glasgow, Get Glasgow Moving and GTUC to have this in place for COP26. Because delegates' transport costs to the official conference will be subsidised by the UN, this means that a 2-tier system with local communities once again losing out and having the COP as something that happens to their city and then moves on.

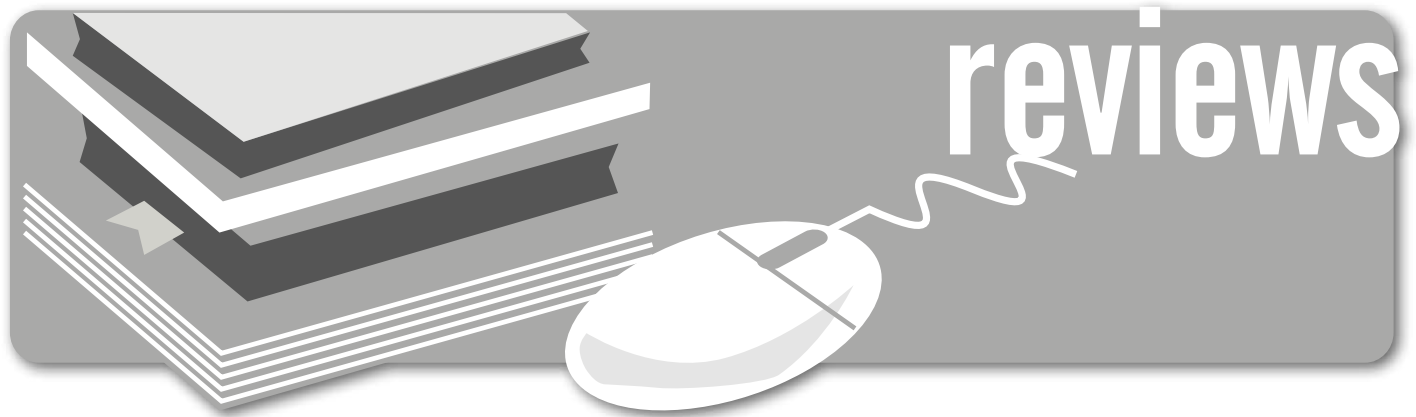
There is a manifest risk that without the necessary investment in Glasgow's (and surrounding local authorities') public transport systems, the number of delegates to the official conference (c30,000) in conjunction with the

anticipated number of protestors/activists from across Britain and the globe (c100,000) could cause them to collapse. The necessary investment in sustainable, low/zero carbon electric buses and trains with an increased number of routes would require significantly more jobs to create the necessary infrastructure, while providing an opportunity for car owners to be incentivised out of their cars without any additional cost. And if people got the chance to experience this in practice, it would inevitably generate a demand upon its removal which would likely seek to have this reinstated. Lessons on mobility and social justice from places such as Dunkirk, Tallinn and Changning, where public transport is free, are all positive. Luxembourg plans to join them as the first country to do so this March.

Presently, a local campaign aimed mostly at buses because of the re-municipalisation powers granted to local authorities in the Transport Act 2019, free public transport is one over 60 recommendations Glasgow City Council will be voting on in April, after its declaration of a climate emergency last June. Wider participation in a national campaign backed by Scotland's unions would lead to questions about the inclusion of free rail travel too. With the Scottish Government's December decision to strip Abellio of its franchise in 2022, but remaining opposed to nationalisation, such a campaign could help focus the mind of the SNP Scottish Government that these are the types of bold moves required if it wants to live up to its own rhetoric as a world-leader in responding to climate change.

Organising for COP26 should be seen as building for the reality which is going to occur on or around 2030, and for which we are sorely unprepared. If the weight of numbers is to be a determining factor then unions need to give their members the confidence that their presence in Glasgow will have a positive influence on the decisions made inside the conference, and start booking trains and buses to get them there in the thousands.

*Stuart Graham is a Glasgow City Unison delegate to Glasgow Trades Union Council and a member of the Campaign Against Climate Change Glasgow group.*



## **Gaza (2019),**

directors: Garry Keane and Andrew McConnell

*Reviewed by Jackie Bergson*

The 25km by 7km Gaza 'strip' represents one of the worst conflicted places on earth. It is globally renowned for its political and religious unrest and its consequent, war-torn existence. In our own lifetimes, news broadcasts have informed us about its 1967 occupation by Israel during the six-day war; its 1993 direct control under the new Palestinian authority; its continually debated occupation by Israeli military until 2015 and its present conditions under Hamas regime.

*Gaza* affords us an opportunity to take a closer look at some of the two million civilians who live amongst the confines of this tiny area's ruined streets. The clear intention of Keane and McConnell's documentary is to give voice to these people's fears, hopes, dreams and realities.

In the film's opening scene, teenage boys raft upon Gaza's Mediterranean seas; they swim underwater, seemingly carefree. The natural light and energy of this imagery is instantly uplifting; whereas realistic focus follows the same boys' stories, which are mainly conveyed through 18-year-old, Ahmed Abu Alqoraan. Unlike most teenagers living in the free world, he faces the daily grind of surviving in what another adult citizen calls an 'open prison'.

Thus, from his position as an undeserving captive, Ahmed steadily explains the reality of not being able to continue his family's tradition of fishing to eat and live. He and his fellow citizens explain that a three-mile restriction on fishing territory is imposed, monitored and enforced by Israeli border control; and that fly-fishing transgressors are instantly charged and imprisoned. Joining older, experienced fishermen on their boat later in the film, together,

they evidently resolve to sustain and develop their working relationships and traditions, despite crippling restrictions and the lack of fish within permitted territory.

Ahmed's 36 brothers and sisters, for whom Deir Al Balah refugee camp is home, represent a young workforce for Gaza, according to their father's beliefs. The 18-year-old is more in touch with the painfully confining circumstances in which he, his siblings and cousins are forced to grow up. He plainly realises that his dream of someday owning a big fishing boat and of employing all of them is unlikely to become reality under the present regime.

Identical hopes and realities are not limited to large refugee families. Originally from Jerusalem and of Istanbul heritage, lawyer, Manal Khalafawi, and her 19-year-old cellist daughter, Karma, share their stories about being trapped in a place where their educated, cultured minds and hearts have no chances to thrive, grow or take flight. They recognise that the only realistic option is for them to do humanitarian work in Gaza, which may open opportunities for future generations, if not their own.

We observe taxi drivers, shopkeepers, textile machinists and a disabled rap artist maintain active, working, sociable communities despite being continually caught between opposing agendas of power and destruction. We also join young people taking part in daily protests at the Israeli-Palestine border; we learn that their shouting and stone-throwing sometimes triggers bombings by Israeli military. Gaza's citizens tell and show us why those responses are inhumanely disproportionate.

The hardest challenges of getting a film made and screened in, or about, Gaza have been articulated by such as human rights activist, Jen Marlowe. In 2018, she explained these involving such as:

'Getting an entry permit from the Israeli army, securing permission to screen ... from Hamas ... and [preparing] for inevitable power cuts [and in prospect of organising screenings for... films] Israel bombed the Al-Meshal Cultural Centre ... reducing the potential [screening] venue to a pile of rubble'.

*Gaza*, therefore, must represent an exceptional achievement by its filmmaking team, who explain: '... we knew that Gaza was so much more than its portrayal in the media. This unique and vibrant land, rich in culture and history, is home to a people who are oppressed and dehumanized but who are also resilient and strong, and who want nothing more than to live normal lives'. Their documentary clearly owes much to the tremendous spirit and humanity of its filmmakers and of the Gaza citizens they have come to understand.

This once-idyllic land and sea have been rendered almost worthless, due to Gaza's position as a war pawn. Its bordering waters are strewn with garbage and its potential as a sustainable source of life, industry and ecology for Gaza itself is miserably repressed. Other films may not have captured the resilient hopefulness of its civilians' ventures, which persist against all odds, obstacles and cynicisms. This documentary does.

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



Philip Taylor and Sian Moore with Robert Byford,

**Cabin Crew Conflict –The British Airways Dispute 2009-11**, Pluto Press, 2019,

pp224, £20.00, 9780745339917  
Reviewed by Dave Sherry

This book is about one of the bitterest industrial disputes in recent times. In 2009, cabin crew, members of British Airways Stewards and Stewardesses Association (BASSA), part of Unite, began what would become a historic battle to protect their working conditions and save their union. Facing unprecedented legal obstruction; Labour government opposition, worried about bad press before the 2010 general election; intensive management surveillance and counter-mobilisation; and media hostility, cabin crew took unprecedented levels of strike action in a two-year campaign of resistance. BA initiated legal proceedings against BASSA leading to a High Court judgement in December 2009, being one which threatened the legality of unions being able to strike. So, resistance took place within the most challenging of contexts – but it took place.

The authors made sure it tells the fascinating story from the perspective

and in the words of the cabin crew: ‘The principal aim ... Was to write a book for BASSA members, activists and representatives, which would provide a meaningful account of events and their involvement in them ... and also to deliver an analysis that would appeal to a number of audiences simultaneously’. The book will be very useful for those interested and active in trying to build, extend and strengthen organisation in workplaces and sectors with little or no tradition of union struggle.

Based on extensive testimonY and access to BASSA meetings and its social media network, the book reveals the developing solidarity forged in a workforce diverse in gender, sexuality, race and nationality. As the authors say: ‘Gender, particularly, should be commented upon in terms of the resilience of the cabin crew, who had been stereotyped as middle-class, union-lite ‘trolley-dollies’.

The dispute cost BA £150m in lost revenue. The issues being fought over were the attempt to impose major changes to crew’s working conditions, changes that threatened the very existence of BASSA. Of particular relevance to activists is the focus on BA’s legal challenges to the right to strike. It considers the company’s ‘counter-mobilisation’ measures to try

and break the strike; to polarise the workforce; to ‘decapitate’ BASSA; to victimise activists and its use of sinister surveillance tactics.

The BASSA branch secretary during the dispute writes in the foreword: ‘This was a dispute engineered by BA to bring about the end of a ... union that had long been a thorn in [its] side, a union that over the years had fought tooth and nail to protect the terms and conditions of workforce prepared to stand by their union. BA failed. BASSA is alive and ... kicking. I’m proud of what ... members did’.

A later chapter looks at the dispute’s aftermath: the proliferation of industrial action in civil aviation and unionisation of the new ‘mixed fleet’, providing an account of their remarkable action against poverty wages and conditions, which saw the workforce take 85 days of strikes in 2017. The struggle to unionise the industry continues. In 2018, Ryanair recognised Balpa, the pilot’s union, after 32 years during which its CEO, Michael O’Leary, refused to deal with unions, previously boasting: ‘hell will freeze over before Ryanair is unionised’. Six months later, Unite secured recognition at Ryanair so that cabin crew have full collective bargaining rights.

*Dave Sherry is a member of the editorial committee of the Scottish Left Review*



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Campaign for Socialism (CfS) is the left-wing, democratic socialist organisation for Scottish Labour Party members and supporters. It was formed in 1994 as part of the left's campaign to retain Clause 4 of the Labour Party's constitution.

The group continues to promote socialist ideas and policies within the labour movement. It is the Sister organisation of Momentum.

[campaignforsocialism@gmail.com](mailto:campaignforsocialism@gmail.com)

# Kick up the Tabloids

We are now in the third month of the year of 2020, and it is fairly safe to say that the world is probably in a worse state than it was twelve months ago. Despite this, I keep hearing the same pedantic argument about whether 2020 marks the start of a new decade or the end of an old one. For those on both sides of this ridiculous debate, I would simply say this: 'Grow up and get a life, for fuck's sake'.

I couldn't give a toss one way or the other. We should be hoping that 2020 is better than last year.

Personally, I'm not holding out a lot of hope about that. I'm currently in Australia, and when I got here three weeks ago, a quarter of the country was on fire. I don't think many people who saw their homes burnt to a cinder were particularly bothered as to which decade it was when their entire lives went up in flames. Having said that, I was prepared to fly halfway around the world to enter this burning inferno of a country rather than to stay in Britain on 31 January and be witness to the grotesque waving of Union Jacks and the bunging a bob for the Big Ben bong on Brexit day.

As the bells bonged (or more accurately didn't bong) a month beforehand and 2019 came to a close, many people in Scotland were more preoccupied by the fact that our cousins South of the Border had been taken in by the promises of a verbally-incontinent philandering sociopath who had lied to the country, lied to MPs, lied to the Queen, and attempted to shut down Parliament. I don't think anyone was that concerned at the time as to whether New Year's Day was the start of the Twenties or not.

Incidentally, for what it's worth I don't think we should even have had that election in December. Instead, we should have been given a second referendum on Europe. Because Boris Johnson said he would rather die in a ditch than postpone Brexit. And I think that should have been the choice on the ballot paper: 'Do you want to postpone Brexit or see Johnson die in a ditch?' We all know how Scotland would have voted

on that question.

In fact, we should also have had another referendum with a multiple choice of whether:

- A: 2020 is the start of a New Decade
- B: 2020 is the end of an Old Decade
- C: 2020 is the Start of the End of the World

Scotland, of course, is seen as a beacon of hope to the rest of Britain. I have lost count of the number of times since the election that friends, family, vague acquaintances and total strangers from down South have been in touch with messages such as 'Do you take in English refugees?' I am sure I am not alone. Scotland, as Nicola Sturgeon constantly has stated, wants immigration. Our economy needs it, and our ageing population requires an injection of new people from outside our borders. However, if every single person in England and Wales who is pissed-off with the prospect of five years of a Johnson government were to up sticks and move to Scotland, I'm not sure our infrastructure would be able to cope. We could be looking at forty per cent of the population of England, plus almost all of Wales deciding they would like to re-locate up here. That's coming on for twenty million people.

Of course, we could make space by chucking out some of the Scots who don't really buy in to what our small country holds true. Here would be my list:

- 'Sir' Iain Duncan-Smith: Boris's promise to 'love bomb' Scotland in 2020 proved to be yet another lie before 2019 had come to a close, when he awarded a knighthood in the New Year's Honours to this odious bag of shit. It was a real kick in the teeth to those who'd had to queue up at food banks for their Christmas dinner. This is the man who thought up Universal Credit, the Bedroom Tax and the Rape Clause. He is probably responsible for more suicides than the Japanese air force in World War II.
- Ruth Davidson for her spineless resignation speech as Scottish Tory leader when she cited 'family matters'

as the reason rather than her loathing of Johnson and his cronies.

- Michael Gove, for obvious reasons. Seriously, I have less than 1,000 words for this piece, so there's no point in starting on a list of what makes him such an arsehole.
- Jackson Carlaw who voted Remain in 2016, but was out campaigning for Boris three short years later. The man is totally featureless save for his overly-florid complexion. If it were scientifically possible for a potato to suffer from high blood pressure, it would look exactly like Jackson Carlaw.
- Rod Stewart, for tweeting his delight at the Tories' election win. Celtic should either ban him for life from Parkhead, or chuck him in with the bamsticks from the Green Brigade and see if he manages to still be alive by half-time. Hopefully he won't.

So here we are at the start-or-end of the new-or-old decade. Britain, at the moment, could only be more messed-up if enough members of the royal family were to be killed in a plane crash or wiped-out by Coronavirus to put Prince Andrew on the throne. England has now voted twice in the space of three-and-a-half years to commit increasingly masochistic acts of self-harm. I'm still unclear which was the worse: voting for Brexit or voting to put Boris Johnson in charge of the whole doomed project. Either way, if you're vaguely compassionate and don't live in Scotland, the prospect for the next ten years is bleak. At least we have a potential way out of this mess. Let's take it this time. Then we will be able to look forward to a bright new future, regardless of what decade we happen to be living in.

*Vladimir McTavish will be performing his solo show '60 Minutes To Save The World' at The Stand Comedy Club, Glasgow on Sunday 22nd March, as part of the 2020 Glasgow International Comedy Festival [www.thestand.co.uk](http://www.thestand.co.uk)*



## We need to champion public services if we are to end austerity

UNISON, Scotland's largest public services union, is calling for fair funding of public services and says it is essential for a decent society,

The trend of the last decade has been one of austerity driven by Government at Westminster and passed on by Scottish Government at Holyrood. Over the years, the balance of funding for public services through local government has shifted from approximately 50% coming from national government and 50% being raised directly by local authorities; to 85% of funding coming from central government and just 15% being raised by local authorities. Together with an overall reduction in funding, this has resulted in severe financial pressures and severely impacted upon the quality and delivery of vital public services.

Mike Kirby, UNISON's Scottish Secretary, said:



"It is the role of government, at all levels, to be the champion of services, not the administrators of austerity.

"Ensuring adequate funding of public services is a prerequisite of a decent society and the recent Jimmy Reid Foundation report on alternative sources of funding for local government is a useful starting point for debate. Politicians in all spheres must create the time and space for a fundamental review of funding local government."

### UNISON is calling on the Scottish Government to:

- use all of the powers at its disposal to increase the funding available for public services;
- review its Small Business Bonus Scheme, and other reliefs from Non-Domestic Rates;
- abandon its determination to maintain business taxes in Scotland at the lowest level in the UK;
- explore and encourage the refinance of PFI/PPP projects and other public body debt using prudential borrowing and bonds

**To find out more contact our team on 0141 342 2811 or [www.unison-scotland.org](http://www.unison-scotland.org)**

**Join online [joinunison.org](http://joinunison.org) or call free on 0800 0 857 857**

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e: [info@allanmcdougall.co.uk](mailto:info@allanmcdougall.co.uk)

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[www.allanmcdougall.co.uk](http://www.allanmcdougall.co.uk)



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