

SCOTTISH LEFT REVIEW

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The Scottish Left Review is a bi-monthly magazine that provides a place for thought and discussion on the Left.

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The Scottish Left Review would like to thank **Mitchell F Gillies** (@mitchellfgillies), our designer since the start of 2023, whose rebrand and redesign of the magazine you are looking at just now. Issue 139 was his final issue, and we are grateful for his skilful craft, stylish suggestions, and general support over this last year. Mitchell has handed the baton to **Lois Paton** (@_loispaton_), who we are excited to have on the team.

EDITORIAL: HOW MANY STRUGGLES MAKE A MOVEMENT?

It is twenty-five years since the reinstatement of our Parliament. By the time of its second sitting, a colourful crew of socialists was elected to its ranks. It is ten years since the independence referendum and the surge of debate that sent a roch wind through the country. In terms of electoral engagement, early devolution and the energetic referendum days were a far cry from what the General Election will bring. Westminster parties and indeed the post-Bute House SNP are jousting on ground so far from the Left that the colours of the flags blur almost into one. Whoever wins in July, we will have to fight on other ground.

Away from the spectacle, the Scottish Left Review is joining with media platform Skotia to launch Redgauntlet, a new podcast that throws down a challenge to everyone who wants to see a Scotland where colours of our causes are flying from community halls, windows, and balconies. In the first episode, Cat Boyd and Kenny Farquarson settle their differences about what has led Scotland ever-further into an independence impasse, and spar about whether political realignments or social and economic ruptures will break that impasse. Future episodes will challenge more of Scotland's sharpest critics about what we need to do next.

With the end of the Bute House Agreement, while Jen Bell is confident the Greens will return to more radical ground, it is still too early to tell how far the SNP will relapse to the right. But beneath the gloom of centrist electioneering and John Swinney's new glaze about a Scotland for all, you might notice our politics is fracturing along deeper fault lines. Some of these were forecast during the debate a decade ago. Writing in August 2014, Ray Burnett warned against any fixation on one particular story of Scotland and its peoples' struggle. He urged the Left to engage with the 'plurality of our exploited cultures' and recognise that collaboration was core to extractive and exploitative processes, just as solidarities and a sense of common cause across binaries are key to successful resistance. He was responding to an article by Dòmhnall Iain Dòmhnallach in the Oxford Left Review suggesting the Left should pay particular attention to the Highlands and Islands. Their debate worked with a lively language of hope, courage, and a resurgent spirit of solidarity and commonality.

A Left resurgence would mean overcoming certain binaries. One is the division of interests between the central belt and the rest of Scotland. Highland and northern interests are now higher up the agenda with Swinney in a Perthshire and Forbes in a Gàidhealtachd seat. But neither will present any kind of radical agenda for the North, and it falls to others, as Neil Mackay writes, to develop alternatives to Edinburgh's extractive economics. Closely related to regional empowerment is the challenge of building the capacity to struggle for land justice. Heather Urquhart and Tara Wight explain what must be fought for, starting with the soil itself.

Land is the ground on which growers work. It is also the basis of rent, resource extraction, geographic concentrations of power, and struggles for justice. In principle, and irrespective of Westminster, the Scottish Parliament could reform land ownership in Scotland. In practice, recent land initiatives are weak, and the end of the Bute House Agreement make their fate uncertain. Holes are appearing in long-promised rent caps even before they are forced onto landlords, while Scottish Labour has recently said that it would stop legislating against landowners. The Land Reform Bill, far from amounting to a deluge that could redivide the land, has disappointed land activists and will dribble through parliament without wetting anyone with wellies. No-one pretends the Land or Housing Bill will cause radical reform.

Tempting as it is to believe that the people are sovereign over land, it must be remembered that the land is not our land. We may have rights to roam across it, but it is private. Ray Burnett's 2014 article played with Woody Guthrie's 'This Land is Your Land' to ask 'Whose Land Is It Anyway?', but we might learn a harder kind of satire from US land activists:

So take your slogan and kindly stow it
If this is our land you'd never know it
Let's come together and overthrow it
Yes, this land is made for you and me

Jennie Bates' cover artwork imagines that coming together. Land demands are not only rural or urban, northern or southern, global or local, but can encompass many communities. Land is the underlying issue in Torry, where Scott Herret updates on Big Oil's efforts to eat up St Fittick's Park. It is the issue in Otago Lane, Rory MacLeish discovers how its stoic booksellers have weathered many development efforts. It is landowners, as Esmond Sage finds, who leveraged the New Urban Left into handing Manchester to Blairite developers, blazing a trail that Scotland's cities soon followed. A people dominated by landowners and developers can be stirred to resistance. Equally, they can become listless as the architecture of their lives turns homogenous and humdrum, as Beth Ansell warns is happening in the North of England, and James Barrowman incites against through resisting the binary of the 'outward-bound' and the 'stay-at-home'. Is community resistance the cure? How do little struggles mobilise and build momentum in the interest of the masses as a whole?

It is unsurprising that a host of articles present Living Rent as the most effective vehicle for advancing disparate land-related struggles on the Left. While some of its members describe it as a renters' union, Living Rent calls itself 'a mass-membership union of tenants, carers, workers and residents', and part of ACORN international, a federation of community unions. One question its structure raises is whether the communities it seeks to represent are building their own power separately through this union, or else acting through and under its central control and democratically elected structures? What would each option mean for the union's capacity to unify land- and property-related struggle across Scotland? How can different communities be unified in action? For all these questions, there are lessons still to be learned from the miners' strikes forty and fifty years ago, which depended on achieving unity and overcoming division, as John Doolan and Margaret Petrie describe in detail.

While the Left advances onto some of this new ground, there are other positions that will not shift. Scotland's civic and social support for Palestine remains a point of pride, as Ryan Swan discusses, while the Justice for Palestine Society at Edinburgh University explains its purpose in setting up their encampment on the lawn of 'Balfour University'. Colin Turbett explores the work of unions in Ukraine to stand by their communities in a war that capital is all too ready to exploit. And Mark Brown reports from Portugal where, fifty years on, the agenda set by the Carnation Revolution is still sewn into its politics. In every land, there is one thing that can incorporate these different causes into one. That thing is called the Left.

THE GREENS ARE BACK ON BETTER GROUND

The SNP's decision to scrap the Bute House Agreement stung,
but the Greens will bounce back once they find their
real friends, writes **Jen Bell**

Stop me if you've heard this one. A frog and a scorpion meet at a river bank. The scorpion needs the frog's help to cross the river because he cannot swim. The frog has misgivings and so do her friends, but there's so much yummy food on the other side of the river, and the scorpion gives his promise not to sting her. How could she say no? So she carries the scorpion on her back. Mid-swim the scorpion stings her, dooming them both. When the frog cries "Why!?", the scorpion responds: "I'm sorry, but I couldn't help it. It's in my nature!"

When the SNP ended the Bute House Agreement, Humza Yousaf said it was "in the best interests of the people of Scotland to pursue a different arrangement." Serving what it saw as Scotland's best interest was simply the SNP's nature. It planted a sting in the back of the Greens, and the Cooperative Agreement was dead in the water. The SNP's and Greens' government journey together was over before it had reached most of its legislative objectives.

This is no surprise from the self-styled Scottish National Party that claims to represent everything and everyone in the nation. As long as such an attitude persists, the prospect of future cooperation is tenuous at best. By acting according to its nature, the SNP doomed the cooperative project and sank the pro-independence majority.

Despite the sting that came with the end of the Bute House Agreement, the Scottish Greens are better positioned in opposition now. When our grassroots membership launched the petition on whether to leave the BHA, some of us feared a 2015 Lib Dem style wipeout if we stayed on in government after conceding on the vital 75%-cut-by-2030 climate targets which we had pushed for in the first place. We're now best positioned to avoid that fate in 2026, though it's not guaranteed.

In our 2.5 years in government, we made progress, securing vastly increased Scottish Child Payments, free school meal expansion, and scrapping of peak-time rail fares. But in 2.5 years out of 25 years of devolution, we've at best stemmed the flood of austerity and privatisation rather than reversed it. £250bn in wealth has been extracted from the Scottish working class in those 25 years. It's no coincidence that the SNP has been at the wheel for 17 of those 25.

The veneer of progressivism under Sturgeon and Yousaf is coming off. The tartan Tories are running the show now. John Swinney can claim to run a 'progressive centre-left' government, that serves 'all the people of Scotland'. Anyone can look 'centre left' compared to the new Deputy First Minister Kate Forbes, whose ideology sits somewhere between Milton Friedman and Mary Whitehouse. As for the 'all-Scots' approach — it sounds cosy on the surface, but it's hopelessly naive to the inequalities of wealth and power lying underneath.

Take the many marginalised and exploited groups in Scotland and the world over: the working class, women, queers, migrants from the Global South and myriad others. These are the people who have been locked out of the corridors of power for centuries,

while the cabinets of the world operate as committees of the rich to manage their balance sheets. The fiscally and socially conservative elites that the SNP flirt with will continue to try to marginalise and exploit these groups from their position on the inside, and the people on the outside will always use collective power to oppose them. These are two diametrically opposed forces: numbers in the bank versus numbers on the ground. The Government cannot be a neutral umpire. It must decide whose Scotland they are fighting for.

If you're not for the tailors, you're repping the suits.

As the General Election approaches, no one is in any doubt what side Labour will be on. The Greens have an opportunity to do a wee bit of upcycling: to claim the mantle Labour tore up and cast aside long ago, and be the radical voice of the working class.

This will mean getting used to shouting again. Years of using our indoor voice in government have made us timid. The Greens have experienced a considerable membership surge and polling boost following the end of the BHA, but at the same time, we've lost dedicated senior activists because of our silence and diffidence in class struggle. I've known many Living Renters — enthused by the Greens push for rent controls — who left when their faith in us wavered. I've known EIS colleagues who've lost faith in our ability to fight for teachers' working conditions and students' learning conditions. My friend and former fellow co-convenor on the Rainbow Greens, Ryan Donachie, also left due to the Greens' failure to stop the decimation of the further education sector by the SNP. The departure of folk like Ryan on the left of the party should stand as a warning.

We want to avoid the fate of Podemos and its journey from core of the movement to its margins. Riding the wave of Spain's anti-austerity indignados movement in the mid-2010s, Podemos emerged as a chimera — a 'party-movement' of the people — that wanted to enter the halls of the elites to turn their institutions against them. At its peak, their leader Pablo Iglesias was Deputy Prime Minister. Nowadays they have four deputies and have been eclipsed by the green-left alliance Sumar.

The Greens as a political force have always worked best when combining principle and power, by understanding that we are one part of a tapestry of movements. Our constituency is the dispossessed, the despondent, and the betrayed. Our voice must echo those shut out of the fortress whose sound cannot carry through the walls. Tenants extorted by landlords. Lecturers and students whose colleges are being vandalised by the employer class. The young and the unborn whose future is being stolen by climate criminals day after day. We know whose side we are on. It's time to join our place alongside them and fight for them again.

BIG OIL IN GREEN CLOTHING

The same interests that bulldozed Old Torry's harbour are coming for Torry's thriving park. **Scott Herret** is involved in the struggle to save it.

The Friends of St Fittick's Park campaign fights to protect Torry's last accessible greenspace from encroachment or eradication by an Energy Transition Zone. It has grown over the past four years, attracting support from trade unionists and climate activists, academics and artists, and receiving national and international coverage. Some argue the fate of the park serves as a Just Transition test case. Torry has seen no benefit from the black, black oil, and for many locals the proposal to turn the park into an industrial zone is just the latest in a long series of corporate land grabs from this working-class community on the edge of Aberdeen. Over half a century ago the historic harbourside of Old Torry was bulldozed to make way for big oil. Now the same people in new green clothes are wanting Torry's emerald, St Fittick's Park.

The dominance of the oil and gas industry in Aberdeen means local politics is heavily corporatised. Councillors sit on the board of corporate development organisations, while the oil tycoon Sir Ian Wood chairs Opportunity North East (ONE), a private investment initiative which the Scottish Government calls 'a key delivery partner catalysing public and private sector partnership'. There are joint public and private ventures such as the 2016 Aberdeen City Region Deal which sees public power over local economic planning passed between elected officials who come and go over time, while ONE remains ever present and ever powerful. Meanwhile, party-political norms are not upheld in Aberdeen. After the 2017 council elections nine Labour councillors were suspended from the party after forming a ruling coalition with the Tories.

In 2020, the ruling coalition decided to redesignate St Fittick's Park from a 'greenspace' to an 'opportunity site' in the draft local development plan (LDP). It was to become part of Ian Wood's proposed 'Energy Transition Zone'. SNP and Lib Dem councillors opposed the move, but it was approved by one vote, backed by Labour, Tories and one independent. As the consent process for the final adoption of the LDP has see-sawed between the council and Scottish Government, campaigners have had to regularly pivot between attempting to influence councillors and ministers. The customary response from local and national government implies that they do not have any power to intervene and stop the redesignation, even though it is almost universally opposed throughout Torry and beyond. Government ministers often say, 'it's a local planning issue, we cannot get involved', even though they have handed out over forty million pounds to ETZ Ltd to pursue its plans.

In early 2023, however, the planning minister did have the power to intervene when the draft Local Development Plan arrived on his desk for approval. A demonstration was held outside the Scottish Parliament to demand that the Scottish Government stand by its self-proclaimed 'world leading' policies on tackling poverty, health inequality, biodiversity loss and Just Transition. St Fittick's Park is in the heart of a community already suffering badly from multiple levels of social deprivation, but the minister, Joe Fitzpatrick, chose corporate interests over the direct interests of ordinary

people in deciding not to use his powers to remove the park from the ETZ. The Scottish Government's fine words are entirely hollow.

Similarly, when we asked many Aberdeen City councillors to support our campaign they refused, saying that any support may mean they would have to declare an interest in future planning votes. This is confusing given that the co-leader of Aberdeen City Council sits on the board of ETZ Ltd's parent company, Opportunity North East. It seems the planning process game is rigged for the Ian Woods of the world. Meanwhile we must wait for the final planning consent, by which time the developers will have produced a plethora of documents and compiled masses of 'evidence' making it very difficult for councillors to vote against the plans.

There was a glimmer of hope for a council intervention in September 2023. A full council vote was held on whether to lease land to ETZ Ltd. This was effectively the first time SNP and Lib Dem councillors (now the majority) who originally opposed the plans could use their power in a meaningful way. But to our dismay, the SNP and Lib Dems voted in favour of the lease agreement and against an amendment tabled by the Labour group to remove St Fittick's Park from the ETZ plans. That's right – the same Labour group that approved the plans in the first place.

Following the vote the SNP councillor representing Torry, who also stood on a ticket to do all he could to protect the park, was asked at a community council meeting why the SNP didn't vote for the amendment. His response was quite starting. He basically said that there was nothing they could do now that the project had been set in motion by the previous administration. Asked what consequences the council would face by refusing to enter a lease agreement with ETZ Ltd, he told us that the council would be at risk of legal action. If true, it effectively means that the council would be taking itself to court, given the co-leader's place on the Opportunity North East board. The web of influence runs deep.

Fittingly the council are being taken to court by the Friends of St Fittick's Park. On Monday 29th April, 2024, Lord Fairley of the Court of Session accepted a petition for Judicial Review which focuses upon Aberdeen City Council's failure to exercise its duties under the Equality Act 2010, and its apparent structural bias based on an apparent interest in ETZ Ltd resulting in consent for the Park to be leased and developed for industrial purposes by ETZ Ltd.

The hearing will be on July 19th. We will be there outside and inside the court in Edinburgh. Please join us. And irrespective of that decision, the campaign is already preparing to make the park's fate an issue in the forthcoming UK elections. Labour has eyes on Aberdeen South and the big scalp of Stephen Flynn, who until now has given the campaign no support. We'll see if that changes in the coming months.

WILL THE SCOTTISH LEFT STEP UP FOR LAND JUSTICE?

Struggles in Colombia and across the world can help guide us to build a land justice movement in Scotland, write **Heather Urquhart** and **Tara Wight**.

“This is not a liberal space. This is not a space where all perspectives are welcome. This is a gathering for scholars and activists of the left.”

With these words, one of the organisers of the Land Deals Politics Initiative (LDPI) conference in Bogota, Colombia, welcomed the social movement delegation to a conference anchored in the left. The gathering brought together activists and scholars from struggles for land justice around the world to share collective learnings and strategies for resistance to land grabbing. We joined as a scholar-activist and a campaigner from the land-based workers’ movement in Scotland. Familiar with the administrative exercises and slow consultation processes of the Scottish land reform, we had not expected the conference to be quite so inspiring, insightful, and unapologetically leftist.

Colombia was the perfect choice of venue for a conference focused on resisting land-grabbing. Following a 2016 peace agreement between the state and FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejercito del Pueblo, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army) and the recent election of a left-wing government, the country appears to be full of hope and potential. FARC was founded by peasant farmers and indigenous people in the 1960s in response to large-scale dispossession. Land remained central to their struggle through decades of conflict, and their actions included breaking up large ranches and redistributing land to local subsistence farmers. A peace agreement was only reached once the state agreed to large-scale land redistribution, with the current government promising to give more than 3 million hectares to small-scale farmers, and committing \$4.35 billion to purchasing land for redistribution.

The conference fieldtrip took us to a large cattle-ranch confiscated from a drug lord and given to 91 ex-FARC combatants and their families. The farmers showed us around their new land, where they are building homes and growing food to feed themselves and to sell. Since their recent arrival, they have begun undertaking plans to generate a collective income and build social community by eating together in their new garden. We sampled their first harvest of delicious tropical fruits while their children ran around the gardens and swimming pool that had once belonged to a drug cartel.

Colombia’s history of socialist and anarchist struggles have centred questions of land in a commitment to liberation from domination and oppression. This commitment, driven by anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal and anti-colonial ideals, ensures land justice movements are rooted in ambitions to reclaim stolen land, and dismantle concentrated patterns of land ownership, but also chal-

lenge extractive relationships with the land. The influence of feminist and indigenous cosmologies in this struggle emphasise the importance of recognising land, not only as the means of production, but also the means of social reproduction. Therefore land is the necessary means not only to accumulate profit, but also to engage in what Italian ecofeminist Stefania Barca describes as ‘the work of sustaining life in its material and immaterial needs’. When the critical role of land in the reproduction of ecological and social life is the focal point of struggles, the function of land in supporting subsistence and wellbeing economies is prioritised over extractive and profit-driven ones.

This was made clear by delegates from La Via Campesina, the international peasants’ movement, who shared experiences of fighting for and occupying agricultural land as a pivotal part of the battle against corporate control over food systems, nature, and life itself. This perspective emphasises sustainable and equitable land management practices that benefit communities and future generations, contrasting with exploitative approaches that lead to environmental degradation and social inequality. Centering land in these struggles prioritises policies and practices that ensure land rights for indigenous peoples, secure tenure for local communities, and promote sustainable use of resources, thereby fostering a more just and sustainable future.

Stories from left land struggles worldwide offered a stark contrast with the narratives of the modern left in Scotland, where rural affairs and land issues are often background concerns. But land injustice in Scotland is a class issue. Scotland has the second most-unequal distribution of land ownership in the world, with more than half the country owned by just 433 people. Major landowners like Anders Polvson accumulated the corporate wealth they used to purchase their land through the exploitation of land, nature, and labour. They now control how and for whom land is managed across Scotland, setting land aside for the leisure of a few and greenwashing their sins at the expense of the rural working class.

In a country where most people were dispossessed from the land more than a century ago, the passing of time conceals the abnormality of land ownership in Scotland and infringes on our collective capacity to imagine the possibilities of a more equitable relationship with the land. It is no wonder our social movements, including climate, rent, and labour movements, are unusually disconnected from the land. The rallying cry of ‘Land to the Tiller’, which has accompanied revolution in many parts of the world, has little resonance in a country where just 1.2% of the population actually work the land. While alienation from land has become normalised, the excessive disparity in wealth and power held by land-



owners in Scotland cannot go unchallenged. And addressing this imbalance is essential for reestablishing connection to the land

The Land Reform Bill making its way through parliament certainly doesn't mount that challenge. Discussions about land in Scotland are largely led by the Scottish Government through a series of lacklustre land reform bills padded with empty rhetoric. Of course, there are examples of valiant efforts from communities fighting corporate control of land at the local level, and a few well-written treaties on land reform from prominent Scottish thinkers, but land redistribution is certainly not a central concern for the Scottish left. Given the tiny fraction of land workers in Scotland, the power to challenge the 443 people who own most of Scotland will only come when the left joins land-working communities to mount a resistance to green land-grabbing, capitalist rewilding, and Government complicity. With political education urban and rural class struggles can collectively organise in resistance to capitalism.

One central priority is challenging the positioning of land-grabbing as environmental. The LDPI conference heard examples of how the global north is increasing pressure on countries in the global south to sacrifice land to new extractive economies. With more than 50% of the rare minerals needed for renewable energy infrastructure found on indigenous land, the neoliberal green renewable revolution continues to dispossess and displace people across colonial fault-lines. Colonial violence is also emerging from demands placed on countries in the global south to set land aside for conservation and carbon credit markets in a bid to outsource the responsibilities of the climate crises. Despite contributing the least to the climate crises, countries in the global south are rapidly losing their land and the means of reproducing their social worlds to maintain the high polluting lifestyles enjoyed in the global north.

Rural Scotland knows all too well that green land grabs are not isolated to the global south. With a sparse population, centralised control of land and high potential for restoration, many of the locations identified for rewilding and reforestation map on to historic fault lines of displacement and dispossession. This is evidenced by Alladale Wilderness Reserve and Wildland Sutherland, both developed on sites where the rural poor were cleared to make way for extractive economies. Presenting private land ownership as the ideal model for habitat restoration and carbon sequestration conceals what Malcom Ferdinand describes in his work on 'decolonial ecology' as the integrated histories of land grabbing, clearance, and extractivism, and denies the possibility for land to be held in common to support the collective flourishing of ecological and social life.

For all their empty rhetoric about land reform, the Scottish government is selling our country's 'natural capital' to neoliberal interests. In 2023, the Scottish government agreed a £2 billion deal with private investment banks to plant trees and capture carbon. All of the government's plans for meeting climate and environmental targets rely heavily on increasing private investment in land to offset carbon emissions and biodiversity loss. Returning to stories of displacement, enclosure and extraction in Scotland's history can make us aware how Scotland is now being used to offset the environmental costs of the ongoing clearances in the global south that are the means by which the global north is preserving its lifestyles.

These parallel stories can also remind us that wherever there is displacement, there is resistance. For inspiration on how to resist this new form of enclosure, we can once again look to international movements. Peasant farmers across Africa have been organising against REDD+, a UN-backed carbon offsetting mechanism whereby countries of the global north use forests, agriculture, and other natural resources as sponges for their emissions rather than reducing carbon outputs. They have also been resisting other dubious tree-planting schemes for well over a decade, with tactics including street protest, rioting, legal challenges, and occupation and cultivation of contested land. Indigenous leaders from Nicaragua, Guatemala and other parts of Latin America spoke at the conference about their fight against 'green' extractivism. Closer to home, comrades from 'Save Leitrim' in Ireland staged a mass direct action last year in which they pulled up thousands of conifers that had been planted on peatlands as part of a green-washing exercise. A culture of direct action in resistance to greenwashing and other tactics. The tactics and traditions of resistance are shared across the global North and South, and engaging in global left dialogue can provide valuable reflections and lessons for the land struggle in Scotland.

A land struggle in Scotland capable of challenging the concentration of ownership depends on the left developing a broader movement with and beyond of Scotland's land working communities. Such an urban and rural, national and international, anti-capitalist and anti-colonial movement would not only be a means for repairing Scotland's rural communities still broken by the clearances. It would provide a node in the global resistance to the use of land as the means of insurance and indemnity for the extractive appetite of those who, like the 443 who own most of Scotland, treat land as a thing to grab and possess. The challenge for the left in Scotland is to engage with land workers and urban communities to develop a movement that can reclaim workers' right to land.

A NEW STRATEGY FOR THE NORTH OF SCOTLAND

It's time for the Left beyond the central belt to shift from national to regional priorities and organising structures, writes **Neil Mackay**.

Over the last century the debate around resources found within Scotland's national and in some cases nominal boundaries have largely centred on the tensions concerning Scotland and its place in the United Kingdom, with unifying polarities around nationalist or unionist positions. Seventeen years of SNP government and one independence referendum have further cemented this situation.

The privatisation of industry and natural resources in the UK, and not least Scotland, offers a more interesting reality. It's not Scotland's oil, it's Total's and BP's oil. Key developers in the offshore wind sector have large national interests, just not Scottish or British. Many on the left laud Nordic models, although Norwegian and Faroes' ownership of the Scottish aquaculture sector is much less acclaimed.

The left can largely agree that Scotland is struggling to curb extraction from resources found within the country's borders. This predates devolution and devolution has not helped it. Foreign direct investment and a multinational private sector confuse the ownership of resources in an already bewildered stateless nation.

For those of us living in the perceived periphery, who are proponents of community and regional perspectives, the answer to the question of custody over resources may not feel particularly Scottish or British. As many of the left in Scotland embrace the shift to politics centred on creating a Scottish border, driven by ideas of greater probability of achieving results through an independent Scotland, one solution for those of us living in the hinterland areas is a push to a much more regional approach, one that rejects the formation of resource wealth around a nation which shares many of the same faults as the state it's trying to break away from.

There is a certain degree of empathy towards Scottish Government aspirations to build a case for independence on quick policy wins in energy, climate, and short-term economic growth. It is currently failing, but even the achievement of meaningful national wealth building would still beg the question of how to deliver just outcomes for resource-rich regions in Scotland beyond the M8.

Just over half of Scotland's population lives within ten miles of the motorway that connects Edinburgh and Glasgow and acts as the arterial road route for the Central Belt of Scotland. Extend the boundary to 20 miles and the population increases to 65%. Include the rest of Fife, and from Dundee up to Aberdeen, and the area covers 4.2m people, or 77% of Scotland's population, leaving only the Highlands and Islands, the rural northeast, and the southern extent of the south of Scotland.

Against the backdrop of a nation where population and power are concentrated across a relatively small and resource-poor area, and a history of policy and legislation that works against the resource-rich periphery, the 'remote and rural' left could take a leaf out of the Scottish nationalist book and organise around more local and regional structures. The Highlands and Islands is the region where such proposals are developing most depth, not least because of the region's increasing voice in challenging Ed-

inburgh-based decision making. But many of the same arguments can be made for other largely rural areas or regions, particularly the south of Scotland.

These ideas may cause some concern for those who feel, not without good reason, that solidarity should be international, or at least extending across the UK, and that Glasgow and Manchester share many more similarities than differences. The case that Bangor and Fort William share more similarities with each other than with Cardiff or Edinburgh respectively is interesting to debate.

If the last ten years have taught us anything, it's that a mass left movement built on hope of a better future for a more closely defined geographic area isn't without its benefits. Regions are not nations and various structures such as distinct legal structures – Shetland and Orkney Udal law notwithstanding – do not offer the same level of distinctiveness as exists between nations. But many similar lessons can apply.

The Highlands and Islands are home to resources similar to those that make it an attractive proposal for Scotland to become an independent nation. Setting aside the obvious questions about current ownership, should benefits from Orkney's waves, Caithness' wind, Speyside's whisky, Lewis' peatland, Shetland's gas, Argyll's forestry, and Wester Ross' salmon, sit with the five million majority of a largely 'remote' nation, or at the centre of a region of half a million? That the £700 million raised from Scotwind is being used to plug the Scottish budget shortfall, rather than deliver transformational change in coastal communities, should hint towards an answer.

The First Stepping Stone

One route forward is to conduct a strategic retreat from national movements in the near term, recognising that many of the opportunities they sought have now passed. Time is being wasted on issues over which Scotland currently has little control. Immediate firefighting of local social and economic issues can continue unburdened, without wasting human capital where it appears to have little constructive impact. Successful protest at poorly handled national policy proposals, such as the centralisation of Highlands and Islands Enterprise board, island bonds, and Highly Protected Marine Areas, can continue to be resisted with responsive and well-organised campaigns.

The key aim is that time can be used instead to better build alternative locally based and regionally sensitive policy, from the ground up. Competent local administration and innovative social initiatives – such as in Eigg, for example – can showcase best in class. Operating within the dearth of public sector finance and a lack of meaningful policy progress on issues like housing and land, this may sound like a pipedream, but it's already being done, at prospective scale under the auspices of community landowners and organisations like the Community Housing Trust. The key is

to increase competency across the region. Many Highlands and Islands areas also have some tools they can use against public sector finance cuts through private sector community benefit schemes.

There is an entirely compelling case that local communities and the wider region lose out because of prosperity being extracted from the privatisation of natural capital and foreign direct investment. That case has not yet been won, and the immediate effects are becoming clear. There is scope only for some reprieve through capturing community benefits from energy developments and the nascent natural capital sector.

This may sound defeatist, especially for areas denied the day-to-day income that comes from these schemes. But there are opportunities to deliver legitimate and meaningful community wealth building initiatives underpinned by the community benefit funding being received by small communities. Soirbheas in the communities of Glen Urquhart and Strathglass, or the Shetland Charitable trust, are two of many examples.

Many existing community benefit schemes need radically overhauled. The scale of community benefit being extracted from private profit must greatly increase. But on any scale, these forms of finance offer building blocks and firefighting equipment where national policy is failing. It may not be socialism, but the second tenet of Community Wealth Building is 'making financial power work for local places' and this is the first stepping stone.

Creating a Competent Movement

Shifting onto slightly longer-term timescales, there is scope for initiatives such as the leveraging of small amounts of the multi-billion pound Highland Pension Fund, whose bodies also includes island organisations, into an investment vehicle for local communities. Profit extracted by the pension fund itself will largely remain in the region, in the pensions of the civil servants who are regionally based, the majority of whom will retire in the region.

Competency, transformational community initiatives, and a shift to regional investment, would lay a good foundation for the future devolvement of power and finance. A short-term retreat into local and regional initiatives should enable a regrouping ahead of a gradual re-engagement with national debates on devolution and decentralisation.

There should not however be a total abandonment of engagement on national issues. Strategic exceptions should be made where the results will be both materially beneficial and a means of empowerment. Obvious examples will involve engaging with legislation on crofting reform and pushing the implementation of recommendations from the Shucksmith report into crofting. Communities with increased financial control could invest community wealth into existing national organisations with sector-specific knowledge. Small percentages of community wealth funds could also be invested into paying full time officers, embedded in nation-

al organisations like Living Rent, focused on specific localities.

Financial capital is scarce. Human capital is growing scarcer, particularly because of the skilled working-age demographics. Alongside a core focus on building strong local and regional competency in community wealth building initiatives there must be a plan to develop the people and resources required to do so. In addition to funding being spent on embedding officers in key national organisations, there should be a regionally driven skills programme for training community development managers.

The University of the Highlands and Islands already offer undergraduate and postgraduate programmes which have helped retain talented individuals in many communities across the region. Community wealth funds should be used to ensure that pay remains at adequate levels to keep these individuals in their demanding roles and grow numbers in more communities. Succession planning is also vital, with a strong pipeline of new people coming through. There is a wealth of younger professionals operating across private but particularly public sector organisations in the region, with a strong sense of public service to the region engrained in their working motivations. More should be made of these people through informal networks, sharing best practice, and showcasing the region as an attractive place to live and work, particularly for peers looking to move or return to the region.

Any push from a younger generation to deliver 21st century solutions to what in many cases are 19th and 20th century problems which still prevail, should recognise the phrase 'standing on the shoulders of giants'. Murmurings of a space to debate regional policy from within should be pursued to enable an intergenerational acceleration of policy development. Initiatives like the Community Landownership Academic Network should be welcomed. Paraphrasing Jo Grimond, policy decisions should not be dictated by Glasgow trade unionists and Edinburgh lawyers. However, there is some mileage in decisions being made by Highland trade unionists and island lawyers.

These key proposals – disengagement with centralised national movements, building competence at a community level from the ground up, and development of resourceful people – should be the first steps in a developing strategy to promote progressive regional perspectives instead of extractive economics. Wealth extraction leans heavily in favour of private and foreign interests. Yet any shift to nationalised industries will see that extraction shift from private ownership to a public heavily centred around the M8 corridor.

Proponents of progressive local, community, and regional development in the north should pay no heed to inevitable criticism from peers in the south. There is an alternative route that shifts from an existing extractive private economy and a prospective extractive nationalised economy, to one that builds a strong, coherent and competent movement that delivers for the people and place of the resource-rich north.

A LOVE LETTER TO VOLTAIRE & ROUSSEAU

Rory MacNeish finds out how Otago Lane's independent bookshop benefits the biodiversity of Glasgow's West End.

A tumbling sound and rustle of flapping paper causes all, aside from the shop's owner ensconced behind the desk, to glance over. The customer who removed the critical piece smiles sheepishly as she gathers the fallen books and reconstructs the Jenga tower of paperbacks.

Such mishaps are a common feature of a visit to Otago Lane's Voltaire & Rousseau bookshop due to the bulging piles of loosely categorised stock which appear to grow out from the shelves to form two subterranean passageways. Customers must delicately remove titles which catch their interest to prevent the shelves from caving in.

The shop is owned by the McGonigle brothers who initially opened in a premises on Park Road in 1972. Edmond mentions what first motivated his older brother to become a bookseller: "He wondered why some books were sought after and some books weren't and started to study the whole idea of rarity. Why some books were rare and why some weren't, and that's how it started."

After a few years on Park Road they moved to the shop's current location where, aside from the churn of stock, it appears largely unchanged ever since. "The place got redone in... 1999. Not really modernised, but there were some improvements made to it," says Edmond.

Sleeping on a stack of hardbacks by him is the shop cat, BB. "We originally called it PP but somebody said you can't call a cat PP, so we called it BB after BB King." Also populating the shop are several busts of composers and a death mask of Shakespeare hanging opposite a wooden carving of a native American. Edmond is uncertain of its origin: "We've had it so long. My brother doesn't want to sell it, but people keep making offers."

The interior might look like the aftermath of a landslide of books, but the McGonigle brothers apply a mysterious logic to order the shop. Edmond squeezes past some browsers in the aisle, whispering: "I'll just get through here." Picking up two hardbacks sitting on a stool, he then pulls back a fleece covering a nearby heap of books and adds the hardbacks in his hand to the pile. He covers this all back up with the fleece and returns to the desk. I am desperate to ask for an explanation of how this system works, but within the heady silence of the shop's dreamlike atmosphere it seems somehow rude to question it.

A friend believes that Edmond keeps an index in his head. She mentioned once popping in to look for a long out-of-print book about the Jacobite Risings. Glancing at the jumbled history pile, she asked if he knew if it was in stock. Edmond reached over his shoulder and pulled a copy off the shelf, "That's, eh, £3.50." On another visit, I asked if they had any Jean Rhys novels in. Edmond frowned as he jogged his memory and replied, "I think I saw one in the literature section."

A little digging was required, but this can unearth strange rewards. That afternoon I came across a book about Classical Hollywood comedy legends the Marx Brothers — written in Spanish. Though catering to a highly specific customer profile within Glasgow, one day this book will delight someone. The shop also appears indifferent to commercial practices such as meeting fluctuations of demand to drive sales: "Every day we're getting asked for the Dune books and we know we haven't got any," says Edmond. "I did go and see the first film and I thought it was very, very dull. I tried to sit through it and I was falling asleep. So I haven't seen the second one."

Stock is often bought from home clearances, and over the years the shop has seen instances of people recognising books which formerly belonged to family members. Edmond describes: "One guy, he found a Jewish book here that belonged to his uncle. He just came across it by accident." Another customer found a children's book his father had owned. "He said: 'I want to buy that back, because I realise it was my father's.'"

Part of the shop's charm is in observing Glasgow's 'book-drunk freaks' who potter inside, absorbed in some obscure text unearthed from a pile. One such punter, overhearing Edmond discussing commonly requested titles — Sylvia Plath and Charles Bukowski — chimes in: "Ooof, of course! The kind of stuff people are looking for is sex, death and perversion. Nabokov, Bukowski... sex and... death. There's always some Dostoevsky, bit of murder thrown in."

"Yeah, a lot of the time we get asked for Dostoevsky," agrees Edmond. The man rubs his hands and continues: "And, eh, they'll want something kinky as a nightcap, an aperitif. A lot of young students are exploring, exploring themselves — finding their buttocks [grabs his behind] 'Oh, look at that! Oh wow!'" It is hard to imagine this conversation taking place in the queue in Waterstones.



Shop owner Edmond McGonigle and BB the cat



Voltaire & Rousseau sits alongside neighbouring Otago Lane outlets including the vinyl shop Mixed Up Records and, until its closure last year, the teahouse Tchai Ovna. Together these shops form an oddball microclimate within the West End's otherwise manicured professionalism and (at times, curated) cool vibes.

A recurring threat looming over the lane has been the scheme to construct three tower blocks on an adjacent brownfield site. Objections registered against this plan were that it would threaten the biodiversity of the green corridor along the River Kelvin, and the proposed seven-storey towers would block out one of Glasgow's scarcest resources – sunlight – from pouring into the lane.

After an initial rejection, an appeal was then approved by the council last year, but some unruly spirit of the lane, and an active group of locals, have so far prevented its development: "We haven't heard officially, but from other people, that they've given up any idea of building here," says Edmond. More recently, new plans submitted propose the construction of a block of student flats, signalling the possibility of the lane being transformed into a transient, anonymous non-place. Perhaps this stubborn nook will outlast these plans too. "So many things have been proposed over the years," Edmond tells me.

It is in some way reassuring that an outlet where VR means Voltaire & Rousseau, which sells second-hand material objects, and where contemporary blockbusters sedate its owners but books about Hollywood's Golden Era can be found in a foreign language, has survived encroaching speculators and continues a quiet trade.

Languid though it can seem, the lane gathered 753 letters of objection and a petition signed by 82,842 people opposing the tower block plan. Let us hope these many devoted patrons prevent us from being deprived of this precious haven in the West End, and lets lend our voices if any developer threatens to impose on the lane's community.

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ALWAYS DIFFERENT, ALWAYS THE SAME

If we think of our towns differently, writes **James Barrowman**, we can think of our world differently too.

At the start of this year, I returned home to Cumbernauld after a decade of life in Dundee. Family circumstances encouraged the relocation, but it turns out I was needing the change. Any disorienting feelings were quietened not only by the intimacy of the town I grew up in but also by the familiarity of a new job in a certain high street retail coffee outlet that previously employed me for five years, in a new post-industrial east coast town known for its funny accents: Falkirk.

On one of my first shifts, a particularly charming and sharply-dressed regular was quick to notice the fact ‘that isnae a Falkirk accent.’ When I told him I originated a few towns over, in Cumbernauld, he answered ‘you’ve done well for yourself, son.’ It reminded me of a workshop I attended at the Women’s Library a few years back, when I introduced my joint Cumbernauld-Dundee heritage and the organiser replied that I was ‘really moving up in the world’. I joked back that one day I hoped to graduate to the dizzying heights of Paisley or Kilmarnock.

Slagging off rival towns, even and especially the ones strikingly similar to our own, remains a national pastime. It is often diagnosed as a symptom of a particularly Scottish sickness: parochialism. That being said, the parish has been of interest not only to Scottish writers. John Berger wrote that for the peasant who ‘considers his village the centre of the world, it is not so much a question of parochialism as a phenomenological truth.’ For Italo Calvino, in his *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, Cyrano de Bergerac’s visions of the moon are illustrative of how ‘the sluggishness of the human consciousness in emerging from its anthropocentric parochialism can be abolished in an instant by poetic invention.’

It is remarkable then, that for a country so rich in poetic invention we are still beset by this peculiar malady. Pillorying it was certainly a driver for Hugh MacDiarmid’s polemical efforts to prove our infinite, multiform Scotland anything but small. Even Shug’s less caustic contemporaries viewed the parochial mindset as an immense hurdle for us to overcome. William Soutar thought it ‘inevitable’ that parochialism ‘should spread like a national blight’, naming specific political conditions we still find ourselves in a century on: ‘severed from our continental ties’, our national traits ‘withered into idiosyncrasies’, and our types ‘degenerated into characters’. He concluded that a tracing-back to the roots of our ‘assumed meanness’ could be one of Scotland’s ‘most sanitifying exposures’.

Today, even the more sharp-tongued rebukes of our regional origins rarely cross the line into downright meanness. They are often delivered in good humour. This also is a Scottish speciality; our most cutting remarks are met with mutual laughter and a pat on the back. Perhaps when we still had industry the enmity between our locales had higher stakes, when competition had tangible effects that went beyond a knowing nudge and wink. It is hard to take them so seriously now, especially when they are delivered in retail spaces that bear such close resemblance to their equivalents in thousands of towns and cities across these islands, with near identical decors and atmospheres. In the wake of the

well-documented decline, or death, of the high street as we know it, we can only speculate as to whether our reconstituted town centres will make our communities feel smaller once again, or more expansive.

One quirk of Scotland’s specific form of parochialism is that the largest urban centres are where it is most keenly felt. There is none more inward-looking than the long-term inhabitants of our major cities. A citizen of a town like Falkirk may spend a great deal of time there, but they will also travel around the loose conurbation of adjacent but distinct towns that surround it: to Camelon, to Grangemouth, even as far afield as Cumbernauld or Linlithgow. Glasgow and Edinburgh are much greedier polities. If you are within their reach, you risk being subsumed. Even when you lie too far from them to be entrapped within their borders, you may well be called up as an ally in a proxy war. Cities are assumed to be worldly places where the people have greater concerns than the petty grievances of villagers. There’s something about ours that overrides this. It’s telling that Mark E. Smith, who wrote countless songs about restless leg syndrome, about those who ‘talk of Chile while driving through Haslingden’, finds true settledness through the eyes of his ‘Edinburgh Man’. He who don’t want to be anywhere else, he who proudly proclaims you can leave me on the shelf.

While thinking about Falkirk during my short-lived tenure there, I reached to my shelf for the work of James D. Young: the town’s most eminent radical historian. In his *Women and Popular Struggles*, he elaborates on Christopher Harvey and Tom Nairn’s distinction between two types of Scot, ‘the red outward-bound’ and ‘the black stay-at-home’. In women like Sophia Jex Blake, Helen Crawford, and Mary Brooksbank, Young finds examples that shatter this binary. The history he wrote of his beloved hometown is entitled *The Two Falkirks*. It wasn’t intended to establish another binary but rather to encourage a pluralistic and dialectical approach to place, one not typically found in works of local history. There aren’t just two Falkirks then, but Falkirks up and down the country: multiform, infinite Falkirks.

Perhaps figures like Blake, Crawford, and Brooksbank, or even Young himself, can aid us in developing a new way of being, some combination of outward-bound and stay-at-home. In her *Hope in the Dark*, Rebecca Solnit writes: ‘The embrace of local power doesn’t have to mean parochialism, withdrawal, or intolerance, only a coherent foundation from which to navigate the larger world.’ Solnit arrives at something akin to the old ‘think global, act local’ maxim of Patrick Geddes, both ‘an identity embedded in local circumstance’ and ‘a role in global dialogue’ that she believes can be the ‘antithesis’ of the homogenisation ushered in by retail chains and corporations. By thinking of our village differently, we can think of the world differently. Doing so, we all end up like Marco Polo in Calvino’s *Invisible Cities*, who describes 55 fantastical cities to the Khan, but every time is fundamentally ‘saying something about Venice’. By these means, whether you are a bairn of Falkirk, or Cumbernauld, or Dundee, or Venice, your surroundings can become your very own Neighbourhood of Infinity.

ACID AND PHLEGM: INGREDIENTS OF A FUTURE NORTH

Beth Ansell reviews *The North Will Rise Again: In Search of the Future in Northern Heartlands* by Alex Niven (Bloomsbury, 2023).

After his re-election as Mayor of the South Yorkshire Combined Authority at the beginning of May, Labour's Oliver Coppard called for people across the North of England to "join together" to call out the government for their "failure to level-up our country". While not the only one of Labour's newly elected or re-elected mayors across the North to cite the electorate's anger over the lack of levelling up, he seems the only one looking beyond the scope of his own combined authority for a way forward.

In *The North Will Rise Again*, Alex Niven recognises that the people of the North must come together if there is any chance of overturning the decline and decay which has become the norm in so much of the region since the collapse of the industries which created it. However, he argues that the North requires something much more radical than just 'levelling-up' to truly thrive.

To show us what that something is, Niven guides us through several decades of recent history, pinpointing occasions where a turning point for the North seemed within reach. It is a varied list. From modernist literary and civic movements in the 60s, to the late 80s/early 90s boom of garish American —style capitalism in the shape of giant out-of-town shopping malls, to the musical awakening which culminated in the mid-90s with the 'Madchester' movement, and finally to the atmosphere of hope for change fostered by New Labour. Despite their potential, these movements never managed to be anything more than brief periods of "fleeting luminosity" for the North. None was based on solid enough foundations to create a sustained revival.

For Niven, the idea of a 'Northern Psychology' is at the heart of all of these failed attempts of the North to reinvent itself. The idea is amusingly characterised an oscillation between brash overconfidence and terminally low self-esteem. This, he argues, fuels the tendency of the episodes of Northern brilliance to self-destruct, preventing any lasting change.

Before moving to Scotland three years ago, I had lived in the North of England my whole life. The notion of a kind of Northern Psyche is familiar to me. In my own hometown of Sheffield, brash, hyperlocal pride combines with a fatalism about the future to create a damaging form of comforting nostalgia. This is perhaps most apparent in the huge popularity of local artist Pete McKee. His distinctive cartoons depict old working class men in flat caps and women in headscarves, and homegrown musicians Alex Turner and Jarvis Cocker drinking pints of bitter together in the pub. McKee's pictures adorn living rooms and terrace ends across the city.

Worryingly, this nostalgia is creeping into policy making; in a recent anti-litter campaign, Sheffield City Council adopted the McKee style to decorate public bins around the city, with cartoon waste depicted alongside the demand in the local dialect to "Purr-it int bin". Unlike in Scotland where clichés of an identity gone by are packaged up and sold to tourists, the North's recent past is being sold back to its own citizens, stifling their ability to imagine new ways of being.

Regional cultural attitudes across the North serve to further entrench this mindset. As Niven references, the (justified) bitterness of the populations of former mill towns and mining villages



The Phlegm artwork on Snuff Mill Lane, Sharrow, Sheffield.

towards the region's major cities – the main beneficiaries of the regeneration there has been across the North in recent decades – is a barrier to Northern unity. Whereas in Scotland, a historical claim to nationhood can at least unite in spite of similar issues, the North's collective identity – whatever that might be – has not yet proved strong enough to overcome its regional rivalries.

Niven's solution to this malaise and mistrust is to get weird. Reflecting the sort of unsettling yet captivating psychedelic mood which underpins the whole book, he argues that the North already has the tools necessary to reimagine itself. Its bleak landscape, backstreets, and futuristic industry have been the inspiration and catalyst for so much radical art, music, science fiction, and poetry, and once again we must draw on this sense of place to break free from the curse of our psychology and imagine a new collective future for the North. Niven calls this movement "Acid Northumbria".

Reflecting on this, I think back to Sheffield once again. On the flat end of a terrace on Snuff Mill Lane used to gaze down five strange, spindly, otherworldly creatures, creations of the street artist who goes by the name of Phlegm. To me, this work embodied the spirit of Acid Northumbria, drawing on the city's industrial landscape to create something completely radical and new. It has recently been painted over. A random assortment of cartoon images by McKee knock-off Luke Horton now cover the wall; the logos of the city's two main football teams, a famous local nightclub, two long-demolished cooling towers, and perhaps most bizarrely, a stopwatch displaying the city's '0114' dialling code. I can't help but think that Niven's dream of Acid Northumbria is a long way off.



Acid Northumbria under the railway arches, Manchester.



Acid Northumbria above the railway arches, Manchester.



Hilarious George Orwell quotes on the windows of a new luxury apartment block, Neepsend, Sheffield.



Preston. Photos credit: Lauren Ansell

CAN RENTERS ORGANISE BEYOND THE BLOCK?

Esmond Sage reviews Isaac Rose's *The Rentier City: Manchester and the Making of the Neoliberal Metropolis* (Repeater, 2024)

How did we get here? The Nineteen-Eighties. Thatcher. Neoliberalism. Reaganomics. Right to Buy. A graph where the proportion of people living in public housing is suddenly stretched into a thin safety net. Thatcher.

You don't have to be involved in housing struggles to know this story. As a gospel, it has synoptic siblings that get told from a slightly different perspective (such as labour) and it has been regularly reinforced as the main historical line to counter right-wing explanations and 'solutions' for the housing crisis.

The problem with establishing watersheds in history is that they obscure views of the land either side of them, their lead-up, and what happened next. Pinning it all on Thatcher has fed into a kind of complacency when it comes to understanding what happened and what to do about it; a brutalist's nostalgia for the post-war consensus which yearns for days that are acknowledged to be irretrievable.

Perhaps this simplicity of framing is what accounts for some of the unease underlying the tenants' movement in Scotland, spearheaded by its national union, Living Rent. Despite our victories – we have slowly clawed back rights for renters, letting agencies are acceding to our open-shut member defence cases without a fight, and tenants' rights were, for a time at least, a ministerial brief – there is uncertainty ahead. Our cry for nearly the last ten years, RENT CONTROLS, has finally been tabled before Parliament in the new housing bill, but in a vague form that we are now intensely campaigning to improve. Setbacks for branches of Living Rent in the course of their struggles against developers in Edinburgh and Glasgow are forcing the union to reconsider what is required to continue growing its movement, rather than become another flashpoint of resistance, which has been all too common in the history of housing struggle.

Isaac Rose, an organiser with Greater Manchester Tenants Union, finds the same problem in Manchester and his diagnosis is that our analysis is short, stale and skewed. That it's absurd to blame Thatcher as if she invented capitalism, and that a more complete investigation of Manchester's political economy and historical struggles before the 1980s (but also after) is far richer and more useful in understanding the cycles of gentrification which have happened since then and which are now the conditions that tenants struggle against. The main body of *The Rentier City* outlines this expanded revision.

From Cottonopolis to the New Urban Left

The history is organised according to two eras when the city was inserted first into primary and then secondary circuits of capital; that is, circuits respectively of commodity production and

of urbanisation, following David Harvey's theory. As commodity production slows down, capital 'switches' into land speculation. These circuited eras are separated by an 'interregnum' which, like most interregna, proves more interesting than the reigns of apparent stability either side of it.

The first era spent in the primary circuit is what initiates Rose's convincing case that Manchester's early incubation of industrial and imperial capitalism is an ideal starting point for his revision to urban history. His account begins by rehearsing a well-known narrative: Liberal Manchester, Cottonopolis, 'Shock City' – Rose takes Howard Platt's term – is the city which beguiled and repulsed nineteenth-century observers and perplexes us today. Rose cites the breathless observations of Carlyle, Dickens, Faucher, Marx and, of course, Friederich Engels. From here, under the toil of slaves and then workers, the economy accelerated towards the crises of the World Wars, before the post-war settlement nationalised industry, nationalised the right to develop land, and rolled out public housing at scale.

Rose emphasises the fate of the rentier during Manchester's phase in the primary circuit. Private landlords reigned over vast Victorian slums before being 'euthanised' by the state from the 1940s onwards. Skipping ahead, it is their return which defines Manchester's contemporary era within the secondary circuit, and which is also reasonably well known: the Arndale bombing and the New Labour government coming together in the mid-1990s to initiate waves of 'urban regeneration' and land speculation that have driven rents up and long-time residents out. Rose draws on his own experience and contacts as an organiser to pull together the stories of groups disparate in time, space, and even class which have rallied against this injustice. At the end of the book, it is this disparateness which continues to trouble him.

But before that, there is the 'interregnum' of the 1970s and 80s, when Manchester stepped into post-industrial decline and exited the circuits of capital. This gap is the core of Rose's critique of bogey-Thatcher, and the alternative sources he finds for Manchester's – and by his extension the UK's – housing crises are more discomfiting. By the 1960s, cracks were emerging in an increasingly rigid and brittle post-war consensus. When clearing slums, the municipal Labour right did not seem to care about the localised obliteration of working-class social connections which followed. The traditional economic base of the Labour Party was declining and its members were deproletarianizing. Out of this emerged the 'New Urban Left', which emphasised a new 'grassroots' and 'community' orientation to socialism that entailed greater openness and democracy at the heart of Labour's approach to local government, which they won in the 1980s following a protracted struggle with the old Labour right.

The 1980s! I hear you say — but then it is Thatcher! Neoliberalism, Reaganomics, Right to Buy, a graph where the proportion of people and so on. While it is true that the left, when governing Manchester City Council struggled against and was subject to Thatcher's laissez-faire urban policies particularly after 1987, Rose demonstrates how their 'transparent' and community-based approach to governance, with an increasingly 'proto-Blairite' focus to grow the service sector and leverage private investment, dovetailed all too conveniently into the municipal entrepreneurialism that has defined Manchester's entry into the secondary circuit after 1996. This is underlined by the ease with which certain personalities from the New Urban Left transformed into the entrepreneurialists, especially Pat Karney and council leader Graham Stringer.

Local Militants

The main question that this entire analysis raises, further hinted at throughout the book with each fleeting appearance of a housing action group or neighbourhood council, and finally posed in the last few pages, is: what is to be done, and who is to do it?

The final campaign group Rose introduces is Block the Block, organised in Hulme against the proposals for the latest iteration of Purpose-Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) on the site of a closed pub, in a neighbourhood where social facilities had been extinguished one by one and picked over by developers and universities.

Between the book's completion and its publication was the January meeting of the Manchester City Council planning committee which, after numerous previous refusals, finally granted permission to the mixed PBSA and commercial development that Block the Block had campaigned against for over three years. Like a premonition, the book's account contains feelings of dismay and hope intermingling like oil and water. Rose bitterly acknowledges the near inevitability of such losses under the present planning system, a feeling shared as already mentioned by community campaigns in Scotland. The book ends with an uncertain note of hope out of this dismay, rooted in the *militant particularism* theorised by Raymond Williams and David Harvey.

Militant particularisms are described as 'ideals formed out of the affirmative experience of solidarities in one place [that] get generalised and universalized as a working model of a new form of society that will benefit all of humanity'. That the term can be used as a countable noun '—ism' is telling, relating it to speech phenomena like 'colloquialisms' and 'spoonerisms' which pass on the tongue but don't tend to last. The problem which Rose identifies along with Harvey is: it seems common enough that the people in a particular place can mount a particular struggle against particular capitalists. But it then follows that the victory or defeat will also be particular, and the problem becomes one of how these struggles might be 'scaled up to a greater level of abstraction and universality' where they can sustain struggle elsewhere and elsewhere, beyond themselves.

It could be questioned whether this is a fully accurate model of what moves and constrains localised struggles. It forecloses the possibility that a struggle's particularity could be an entry point towards universality, by assuming instead that particularity is an obstacle. Scaling up struggles from particular to universal is presented as a kind of alchemy, and one which is perhaps just as likely as alchemy to succeed.

For Rose, a critical analysis of the rentier city (beginning from outstanding examples like Manchester) provides a framework in which the scaling up of militant particularisms can concretely take place without a process as mystical as turning lead to gold. Militant particularisms will be scaled up when they demonstrate how they are 'always produced in and through' global relations of capital. From there, the problem then becomes *who* will struggle to achieve this transformation, which Rose freely admits

to having no clear answer for. His hope is that analyses such as his will 'contribute towards the crystallisation of a *general force* [my emphasis]'.

Living Rent's Risk

Unmentioned but unlikely to be absent from Rose's mind when asking this question to the reader is the contradiction for tenants' unions in the UK, including Scotland, that has opened up and sharpened since the mass expansion of private landlordism and Right to Buy. That is: living cheek by jowl with many tenants can be just as many homeowners. This contradiction, when questions of rent return to being questions about land and the intangible quality of *home*, is not lost on him when he describes the Trees Not Cars campaign. Here, the protagonists are not social tenants in a dilapidated estate but the renting and home-owning gentrifiers of gaudy 'new Ancoats', who have fought with some success against proposals for a temporary car park. This car park was proposed on a site whose development had stalled in the very same scheme which was being 'regenerated' for the likes of them to move in to. Living Rent's response to this kind of contradiction has been to grit its teeth and transform into a 'tenants' and 'community' or 'mass-membership' union that mobilises on the fundamental basis of spatial rather than economic relations; on the basis of neighbourhood rather than tenure.

This itself is an attempt to identify militant particularisms and universalize them by connecting them together before they isolate themselves. The struggle must be a sequence of victorious militant particularisms which grow the movement like a hermit crab shedding itself ever larger, ever more universal, until it outgrows militant particularism altogether and becomes powerful enough to become the 'general force' that will take the fight to Poseidon.

The risk is that Living Rent becomes a mass organisation without the intermediate analysis which leads to a true mass line, that is, a line which advances the interest of the masses. As its own experience and that of campaign groups in *The Rentier City* demonstrate, the power which tenants or communities pursue must be grounded in something more than just the number of people who can be rallied to the cause. The politics of 'community' and local democracy, as demonstrated by the New Urban Left, are not immune to capture by capital.

Rose concludes with what seems to be a sincere but optimistic uncertainty about the next steps. His historical analysis and critique of Manchester's political economy, as well as the Manchester left, point to the need for everyone who is involved in the struggle for housing and for land to understand the history and present state of their exploitation and to deploy this understanding to critically develop the movements for our liberation.



Union Evangelical Church, Hulme, January 2020. The second half of Rentier City analyses poorer neighbourhoods in southern Manchester under the shadow of encroaching skyscrapers.

GORBACHEV'S PORRIDGE

Sanny Doolan contributed more than most to the tremendous unity of Ayrshire's striking miners. His son, John Doolan, speaks to **Cailean Gallagher**.



Nicky Bird, Donald Fulton, East Ayrshire III. Courtesy of the artist and National Galleries of Scotland. From the exhibition 'Before and After Coal', which will also feature in the next Scottish Left Review.



John Doolan in the Red Lion, Prestwick.

John Doolan is a child of the political culture of Scotland's mining unions. From his early days he absorbed the stories and strategies of the communist miners who worked in Ayrshire's coalfields. When his father Sanny joined the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1960, John and his brother feared that the rest of the street would stop talking to them. But Sanny went on to earn enormous respect as local NUM secretary during the struggles of the following decades. Stories of these years often miss the importance of his party's ethic in generating the structure and unity of the strongest strike in Scotland's history.

1984 is remembered as the last great struggle and ultimate defeat of the miners, but the height of the miners' power in Scotland was during the previous decade, culminating in the victory of 1974. I met John last year with Sarah Collins, SLR's newest editorial board member, and he told us of the strikes that took place during these years. 'I can always remember what some miners told me after 1974', he said, freshly poured pint in hand.

We were standing talking, waiting on the pit bus, and some miners said to me, "we'll pay for this one day". It was true. It took a few years of course, but when the woman won an election in 1979 she made sure she would destroy the backbone of British trade unionism and of course she went ahead and carried that out.

So it is not the strike of 1984 —5, nor 1974, that he said should be remembered above all.

As a great Welshman said to me one day — his name was Dai Francis, he was general secretary of the South Wales area of the NUM. He was an old red as well. He said, we can say what we want about 1974, but 1972 was the time, he said, because there was a tremendous unity.

In an anniversary year, analysis of defeat and the deindustrialisation that followed risks distracting from the far more extraordinary fact that through the course of the earlier decades — since the war, since the general strike, since the turn of the century and before — the labour movement had created the structures and the strength to engage in open class struggle. What had made this tremendous unity possible, and what ultimately undermined its power?

John's father was one part of it. Nobody embodied miners' power in Ayrshire more than Sanny. If every leader has a lineage, what had brought him into the Communist Party? The answer: the comrades he met on the local NUM committee, and perhaps one in particular.

Nationalisation was on the 1st January 1947, and at that time there were two full time officials of the NUM in Ayrshire. One was a boozier and no user, and the other was Guy Stobbs, this wee rigid communist. And I'll tell you something, he was bloody tremendous. You couldn't bribe him, and you couldn't push him. I always remember the first time I heard him speaking. I thought, who's that wee guy there? And see when he stood up... This wee man, he stood up, and by God was he great.

Stobbs was a product of the British Communist culture well-described by Raphael Samuel as a 'lost world'.¹ He was a teetotaler who learned Russian, visited the USSR, and 'never forgot his politics'. But histories of individuals do not explain the working class unity that Doolan described and there is more to learn from the organisation of the union during times of pressure and struggle. Some of the declining degree of unity was reflected in the reduced use of democratic processes in the series of strikes between 1972 and 1984. One major issue of the time was whether miners would be balloted,

or whether the NUM executive ought to use its prerogative to call strikes. For John, even if the NUM was well within their constitutional right to call strike action without a ballot, the weakening of the NUM's muscles of engagement had an effect on the strength of the strikes.

In 1972 the miners won the strike ballot. It wasn't by much, but they won. At that time they required 55% to win the national ballot for industrial action, and [they won] only by 58% or something. By 1974 they were much more confident, and at the ballot there was a far greater majority in favour of coming out, and the strike at that time lasted for four weeks.

Ballots strengthen unions like dumbbells strengthen deltoids, but in 1984, there was no ballot.

[A] great deal of miners didn't get over the fact they didn't ballot. The national assembly of the NUM used its constitutional right to call a stoppage. But although they recognised the problem of pit closures, the miners themselves were resentful of the fact it should have been our decision, and they felt they were being commanded and it was not their democratic decision.

In the face of disgruntlement with the democratic process, the question for local NUM leaders in 1984, John said, was 'how to try and achieve, if you like, some sort of unity'. The answer was through a welfare operation that was tight and trustworthy, efficient and egalitarian. In Ayrshire, this operation was administered by around twenty-five strike centres, and coordinated by Sanny Doolan at the HQ, 22 Miller Road, in Ayr.

It was a phenomenal situation, when all these strike centres had to be supported as best we could.

There were rotas for the distribution of any funds that came in. Every centre had facilities to prepare and provide food, parcels, Christmas presents. Money came from Belfast which collected for Ayrshire, from communities, and from weekly lifts at factories organised by convenors like Alex Baird at the Wallacetown Engineering factory in Ayr. There was also support from the state. As Margaret Petrie explains elsewhere in this issue, local authorities defied the UK government by distributing benefits to striking workers' families. When Thatcher discovered that these payments were being made to miners' families, she insisted that miners pay the money back. John was still paying 50p a week well into the 1990s.

Despite the best efforts of the internal operation, pressures were building outside the union to urge workers back to work. In '72 and '74 the Orange Lodge didn't interfere but '1984 was a different story'. The strike had started in March. By June 'there were some rumblings. Then it comes July and people are running out of funds despite all the efforts.' The story of one Saturday underlines the erosion of unity. The most vociferous return to work organiser, Hugh Robertson, was based in the village of New Cumnock, and he organised a return to work meeting one Saturday afternoon, which soon turned ugly.

All these people turned up and one of the things was the more militant among the striking workforce wouldn't argue with him logically. It was just a howl, they wouldn't let him speak. It was ugly because they weren't really getting to the bottom of it. I said at the time, "just let the man say what he wants to say", but the other militants, they booed him and they jeered him, and he never got what he wanted to say, and the police were there to protect him. So things were really getting fractious.

This meeting was also recorded by Rob Wilson, whose new book contains a diary which provides a perspective on the degree of miners' unity from a position outside the organised structures of the



We've Won, photographs from the Miners' Strike 1972, from John Doolan's collection.



Milton Rogovin, Alex and Jeanie Doolan, 1982, from John Doolan's collection.

union and party. It describes how difficult it was keep striking from the point of view of someone not integrated into the networks and structures of the class. His entry about this meeting detected growing class division:

The community centre was packed with men from Kirkconnel, Cumnock and Dalmellington there, but when Hugh Robertson got up to speak he was howled down by the militants. ... There was a lot of ill-feeling and the meeting broke down in disarray about 11.15am.²

There were also divisions emerging within the union. Antipathy between different areas of the NUM was longstanding, with animosity between Yorkshire and Nottingham going back to the General Strike. In the 1970s the CPGB were the dominant political influence in the NUM. By 1984 that had changed. Divisions erupted with the election of Arthur Scargill as NUM leader and his decision to move the HQ from London to Yorkshire. 'My father said that was a mistake, because here was Arthur building his castle.' Before Scargill's time, 'when the different constituent bodies of the union all met, it was a sort of common task. Now the different groups had to come to Yorkshire.' In John's eyes, and in Community Party eyes, Scargill was not a symbol of unity. 'In modern times you might call it the cult of the individual.'

The effect of individuality and individual interest seeped into the local level too, corroding the commonality that held striking communities together. 'Let me tell you this wee story', he said.

Ayrshire had 25 strike centres; it might have been 25, 26. There was an NUM rep from Cumnock strike centre who came and said to me, what's going on with this strike, because I want to know why Cumnock strike centre is very limited in what we can do to support the guys, but up there in Netherthird, it's unbelievable what the striking miners are being issued with, in terms of rations, food, drink. How come they've got all that money, this phenomenal amount of gear, which includes drink and all, while there's not another strike centre in Ayr can match it?

It turned out that while most of the strike centres had funds distributed centrally from the Ayrshire office, those running the centre at Netherthird were accumulating their own funds through collections and donations. 'Here was Netherthird in a far, far better financial position than all the other strike centres, and it sowed the seeds of a great disunity.' The moral of the story was clear. 'See if you have an industrial dispute, it really becomes quite critical that everybody feels they are treated the same way.'

While the lack of unity locally caused difficult rifts, the lack of coordination across a global movement had a tragi-comic dimension. John laughed as he described the substance and the timing of one offer of solidarity. 'You know something,' he chuckled. 'We even got porridge oats from Gorbachev. These porridge oats arrived in big packs with the hammer and sickle on them. We got these pol-ythene bags to hand them out in. I'm so sad about it.' 'Why sad?', I asked through our laughter. 'Because by the time the porridge oats arrived,' John explained, 'the big back to work movement was already going.'

There was less unity, too, across workers in different sectors of the economy by 1984 than there had been in the early 70s. In Kilmarnock in 1972, the engineering workers came out in solidarity. John shared an example of the cross-class solidarity across Britain that year.

In 1972, a few hundred miners were turning up at the Saltley Gate in Birmingham, and they were getting absolutely nowhere. But one particular Friday afternoon, the second last Friday of the strike, here's what happened at the Saltley Gate. Probably a couple of hundred thousands of engineering work-

ers all round about Birmingham stopped work early, and all marched – it makes my blood run cold – they all marched to the Saltley. And the chief constable, standing there, when he saw all these people marching to support this thin picket line; the chief constable says, "close the gate". By the time you come to 84 that didn't happen in Birmingham any more. There had been a change.

I asked how he compares the strikes with those of today. John answers with another question:

Where are the engineering unions? This is how I look at it. You can have postmen, you can have doctors, you can have nurses, you can have schoolteachers, you can have telephone engineers, they can all be taking industrial action, but the difference between now and the 1970s in my opinion is, where are the engineering workers? There's got to be a reason. See in England, and to a certain extent in Scotland, so much of the economy is the manufacture – of what? Arms and munitions, aircraft, weapons. And where does it all go? It goes to places like Saudi Arabia. Where are the engineering unions? They're all doing alright, that's why they're not on the forefront.

There are material and cultural reason for declining unity too. Certain workers kept doing alright and 'as the decades wore on,' John said, 'things were changing quite drastically.' Cars, televisions, consumerism, all affected the potential for a party to sustain community and unity. 'The CP are not there,' he said. 'The CP are not there. The workers have all got cars now, you know. Who needs the CP when we're all consumers now? There is no political leadership any more and the ideological battle is not there. Would you agree with that Alex?'

I didn't mention before that while John had been talking, Alex Baird (who I interviewed for the last issue) had joined us. While John's answer to my question about strikes today had more than a touch of pessimism, Alex was a little more stoic about the structural and pedagogical reasons workers are losing the battle. 'The whole world's changed', he said.

It's alright for John to say how the NUM was, and for me to say how the engineering union was then. But the establishment learn quicker than us, they move quicker than us, they have more than us. To have strikes like we had in the 70s and 80s isn't going to work now. ... They are winning the battle because they were educated to govern, whereas folk like us weren't educated to govern. We had to learn, think about it, and organise people.

We still do. And John's answer also resounds today, as engineers make weapons for Israel to bomb Gaza and Saudi to bomb Yemen. What can bring engineers back into solidarity with other workers whose jobs and lives are under threat? How can unions' strikes today advance the wider effort of communists and socialists to build a world that may in some way vindicate the struggles of Scotland's twentieth-century communists? Perhaps in this anniversary year, as well as telling the story of 1984, the answer is to look back – not to 74, 72, or even the general strike of 26, but to a time when the structures and parties of the working class were weak, uncertain, disparate; when the challenge was learning and thinking anew about how to organise; and when the striking workers' porridge bowl was filled not with late Soviet oats but with a fresher variety.

1 Raphael Samuel, *The Lost World of British Communism*, Verso, 2006

2 Rab Wilson, *Collier Laddie*, Luath, 2024, p.47. Wilson's book will feature again in the next issue.

STRUGGLES OLD AND NEW

In 1984 –85, miners and mining communities overcame the divisions sown by the state and challenged their own prejudices in the process, writes **Margaret Petrie**.

Forty years ago, the UK government led by Margaret Thatcher went to war with the National Union of Mineworkers. Her goal, working alongside the National Coal Board, was not only to close unprofitable pits but to sow division in communities and neutralise trade union unity.

While one part of the state was mobilising to erode workers' capacity to defend their interests, another part, Fife Regional Council, decided to use Section 12 of the 1968 Social Work (Scotland) Act to support miners and their families. This law made local authorities responsible for ensuring the welfare of people living in their area, including helping them if they were destitute. The Council initiative was supported by one local Labour MP, a young Gordon Brown.

I was 24 years old in 1984 and was part of a team employed by Dunfermline North Social Work Department to distribute food vouchers to mining families during the strike. We visited mining communities every week, generally hosted in miners' welfare buildings repurposed as soup kitchens, to meet miners and their families and give them the vouchers. Over six or seven months, I got to know many miners and their wives and heard their perspective on the developing strike.

Miners' and women's involvement in the action changed their attitudes. They would come in each week with stories from the picket lines, clearly shocked both by the hostile actions of the police and by the reports they read in newspapers they had previously trusted which printed accounts they knew to be untrue. They were stunned by the forces being mobilised against them. The state was using the police and the army to defend the interests of the National Coal Board at the expense of miners and their families. Some couldn't quite believe what they were seeing. One woman saw 'her laddie on the telly in a police uniform on a picket line in England!' He was in the army and, as far as she had known, was on an army base in Northern Ireland.

Miners in Scotland were twice as likely as those in England and Wales to be arrested by police officers, and three times more likely to be sacked by the National Coal Board¹. The injustice of the Scottish criminal justice system towards striking miners was acknowledged by the Scottish Parliament in 2022 when it provided a collective pardon for more than 500 people with strike-related convictions. During the strike, however, these convictions bolstered

Thatcher's narrative that striking miners were greedy law-breakers unjustifiably disrupting ordinary people's lives, rather than men trying to defend their livelihoods. Drawing on Gramsci's theories, Jim Phillips has argued that Thatcher fought both a 'war of position' and a 'war of manoeuvre' — positioning the miners in a negative light to justify government actions to a wider public, and outmanoeuvring them with the criminal justice system. The government uses similar tactics today. The new Public Order Act 2023 will increase the police's ability to restrict and criminalise public protest by groups like Just Stop Oil and Extinction Rebellion. Once again, the narrative presents activists as unruly law breakers disrupting public peace, rather than campaigners against the excesses of business which threaten the future of the planet for us all.

Mining communities in 1984 had a different narrative, and learned different lessons. Miners saw that the police and the criminal justice system were not just and neutral arbiters to protect us all from crime, but could be used specifically to defend the interests of capital — in this case the NCB — and its allies in government. Miners saw that print and broadcast media did not provide an unbiased account of events but was slanted to portray them negatively. They also saw that central government intentions could be disrupted locally by a regional authority choosing to interpret the law in miners' favour. Meanwhile, their own prejudices and perceptions were challenged when support came from places they had not expected, like those in gay and lesbian communities who stood in solidarity with the miners, as the 2014 film *Pride* celebrates.

Women who were initially engaged in organising soup kitchens gradually became involved via alliances like Women Against Pit Closures with those in other mining communities across Britain. Their lives expanded as they travelled and engaged in public speaking to rally support for the miners. They became politically knowledgeable and gained confidence, as Jill Miller has documented in Wales. Traditional patriarchal communities were no longer being tolerated, and during our weekly discussions in communities, we heard about some of the tensions this created in families. As Amber Ward recently highlighted in this publication, this was part of a tide of change that would continue with the rise of identity politics and social movements that argued that class politics had not taken enough account of gender and race discrimination, or indeed discrimination based on



Scottish miners, their wives and children on a demonstration during the 1984 –85 miners strike. Credit: Marx Memorial Library/Mary Evans

sexuality, disability or age.³ Ward argues that the notion of self-autonomy – the freedom, or choice, to be who you want to be – should be incorporated into future strategies to defend democracy. Of course, identity issues have sometimes served to deflect attention from the widening gap between rich and poor. If you have money, irrespective of the multiple identities you inhabit, you have more choices. As Nancy Fraser has argued, we simultaneously must develop strategies to address redistribution (of wealth and resources), recognition (of multiple identities), and representation (equity in political participation).⁴

Working class communities have always incorporated a multiplicity of identities: Black and White, gay and straight, women and men, disabled and non-disabled. Communities have also absorbed dominant messages about which identities or ways of being are afforded the most value, creating power struggles, inequality, and division within communities. Division was created in mining communities by miners breaking the strike by working or returning to work, either because they considered the hardship too great, or because they were led to believe their jobs to be more secure than others', such as those working in pits in Nottingham.

When capital and the state sow and encourage divisions, communities must recognise and challenge them. No artist explores the capacity of working class communities to overcome such divisions better than Ken Loach, whose latest film, *The Old Oak*, draws on the 1984 strike to highlight the importance and challenges of building

community and solidarity to counteract right wing narratives of division and hate. It tells how the pub owner sets up a food kitchen with Syrian refugees and community organisers that ultimately enables new alliances to overcome the divisions sown by disaffected racists. It brings old and new struggles into one narrative that shows how community building, united action and collective learning can challenge division and hate. Moments of collective action like the 1984 strike are vital in the long process of realising what social justice means and motivating communities to make a more just, united world.

1 Jim Phillips, 'Strategic Injustice and the 1984 –85 Miners Strike in Scotland', *Industrial Law Journal*, Vol 52, No.2, June 2023

2 Jill Miller, 'You Can't Kill the Spirit: Women in a Welsh Mining Valley', London: Women's Press, 1987.

3 Amber Ward, 'In With the New', *Scottish Left Review*, Issue 138, February 2024

4 Nancy Fraser "Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition and Participation." pp. 7 –109 in *Redistribution or recognition? A political-philosophical exchange*, edited by N. Fraser & A. Honneth. London: Verso, 2003.

LONG LIVE BLACK/RED BRAVERY

Viola Liuzzo reviews *Black Scare / Red Scare: Theorizing Capitalist Racism in the United States*, Chicago University Press, 2023

There can be a strange tendency to consider our present moment the best of times and the worst of times. The vague noun ‘progressive’ implies a belief that the arc of history is bending towards justice. Yet when new laws or moral panics are cast as shocking reversals, the fact that they are part of the same old playbook often seems to be forgotten. Charisse Burden-Stelly’s new book *Black Scare/Red Scare: Theorizing Capitalist Racism in the United States* (University of Chicago Press) is a timely reminder that the repressive tools of this millennium, from the US PATRIOT Act to the UK Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, from the right-wing media’s demonization of immigrants to their demonization of antifa, are nothing new. Her well-researched history of the conflation of Black and left-wing organising by authorities determined to defame both is a welcome addition, methodically examining the tactics used by those in power to maintain their grip.

The interconnectedness of Black Power and left-wing movements such as anti-Vietnam war organising in the 1960s are commonly-known trends in US history, as are the simultaneous presence of McCarthyism and the burgeoning civil rights movement in the 1950s. Burden-Stelly shows that the House Committee on Un-American Activities, established in 1938 to investigate alleged disloyal and rebel activity, was in fact highly precedented in the Lusk Committee of the late nineteen-teens. The new threat of Bolshevism provided a means to lump together radical union activity and Black campaigns for racial justice as sinister machinations by an outside enemy. Whereas in Germany, the smear was Jew = Red, preparing the ground for Hitler, in the USA the original Black/Red scare (which forged what is now the FBI) set a trend that only intensified in the 1940s and continues to set the tone today. Burden-Stelly highlights the particular persecution of the Industrial Workers of the World, the only significant interracial union, though without mentioning another ‘Black’ scare, the anti-anarchist repression of the 1800s, when Italians and Germans were tarred as ‘outside agitators’, and often considered non-white. She explains that African-Americans in the 1920s were not considered intelligent enough by the white establishment to organise themselves, an attitude that regrettably lives on today in the stereotyping of Black people and conspiracy theories that rich Jews such as George Soros are pulling the strings of social movements.

Throughout the book, Burden-Stelly demonstrates how the ‘superexploitation’ of racialized workers is used to divide the working class by playing on implicit and explicit notions of white separatism. While the UK case is different from that of the US, the same mechanics occur here, whether in a Windrush context (remember that employers and unions were maintaining a colour bar here well into the 1960s, such as in Bristol) or with the anti-immigrant rhetoric once again ramping up today. Service and domestic workers are less likely to be included in traditional labour organising, and more likely to be racialized. Burden-Stelly also argues that to an extent Black people have been able to ‘buy’ safety within society by adhering to anti-communism (compare the notion of the ‘good immigrant’). Of course, this only goes so far, and her analysis of the Black liberationist Marcus Garvey’s trajectory is particularly instructive. His strategy of upholding ‘American values’, to the point

of speaking out against socialist Black activists, did not prevent his being categorized as a subversive and fully persecuted. Single-issue campaigners ignore intersectionality at their peril.

The fact that counter-histories such as *Black Scare/Red Scare* are currently being targeted as Critical Race Theory, as though the term were a slur, makes their publication vital. Burden-Stelly offers essential context for today, underlining that fights for freedom and equality are not only about redressing residual oppression but intervening as it is renewed. Fights for minority rights and workers’ rights will always be tied together by the state as ‘the antithesis... of citizenship’. Published by a university press, this is not a book for the general reader. The argument could have been strengthened by more quotation from primary sources, and the quotes are rarely introduced, occasionally causing confusion as to the positioning of the source and whether we are confronting fact, policy or opinion. The epilogue does good work in tying the argument to today’s world, but packs a lot in a short space, and signposting some further references would have been useful. Burden-Stelly argues that whiteness will continue to be weaponized against class solidarity, because Black campaigns for justice are ‘blamed for increased race hostility – not their mistreatment’ and ‘Black assertion [is] deemed a threat to national security while white terrorism and white supremacy [are] not’. Leftists are tarred as the dupes of foreign influences, while anti-racists are smeared as merely subversive pawns of the left. While general readers will find the book overly dense, the shared threat is addressed by many organisers and commentators today – for example, Naomi Klein discusses the use of ‘cultural marxism’ and CRT as joint attack words by the right in her interview on the Blind Boy podcast from October last year.

Despite Burden-Stelly’s avowed Marxism, the book carries an unresolved tension between the desire to radically change society and the desire to be treated fairly according to its terms. Historical reappraisals like this face a bind. It’s quite true that government, state and media scares unjustly smear campaigners of all stripes through polarising finger-pointing that divides society into ‘good citizens’ – those who accept the status quo – on one side and ‘subversives’ on the other. However, an emphasis on this fact can play into similar logic: by strenuously decrying the persecution of all those targeted with this broad brush, we can end up with no room for them to be, well, subversive, which seems to reaffirm the state’s own framework of ‘good citizenship’. Sometimes, a cigar-smoking revolutionary is just a cigar-smoking revolutionary. State repression isn’t just a sign of reactionary policy by those currently in charge, it’s also reflective of a genuine fear of radical politics. Radicals must balance the need to appeal to liberals’ sense of justice by calling out the truly repressive nature of the state, from which no-one is safe, with pushing the window of political possibility beyond civil changes and the existing rule of law. Happily, this is precisely what BLM and other recent anti-racist movements have achieved, putting abolition on the table in a move that brings together class and race in a direct reversal of the oppressive combination so thoroughly surveyed by Burden-Stelly. Living in the legacy of the Black/Red scare, long live Black/Red bravery!

IS SCOTLAND PRO-PALESTINE?

Scotland can be an ally of Palestine even without statehood of its own, explains **Ryan Swan**.

With the ongoing genocide of Palestinians by the Israeli state now in its seventh month, it is worth reflecting and reassessing not only what can be done to stop it but who can do it. In identifying support for Palestine at the global level, we usually refer to states as being ‘pro-Palestine’ or not. We could argue, for example, that Ireland is pro-Palestine while the UK is pro-Israel. However, the question ‘Is Scotland pro-Palestine?’ is more difficult to answer, with the analytic sticking point being that Scotland is not a state. Unlike a state, it cannot recall ambassadors, impose an arms embargo, or vote against the Israeli state at the UN General Assembly – all effective, non-violent forms of opposition. Despite only having a devolved government, the Scottish polity is comprised of many bodies and organisations, endowed with economic and political power. But when it comes to Scotland’s behaviour, what do we point to? What actions constitute solidarity with Palestine?

Palestine is a cause that unites internationalists and is often a litmus test of commitment to ending social injustice. It’s worth setting out some forms of solidarity that can work in such a struggle. Firstly, there are forms that foreground Palestinian voices in media and academia, particularly in regard to their lived experiences and national aspirations. Less effective methods here often support Palestinian narratives but in reference and opposition to Zionist narratives. Such narratives seem on the surface to speak in solidarity, but they imply the primacy of Israel. Secondly, having educational institutions, trades unions and public bodies recognise the racism of Zionism as a constituent part of their principle and practice of anti-racism. Thirdly, working on boycott and divestment campaigns from the grassroots level upwards, targeting companies complicit in the oppression of Palestinians, including academic boycott, which focuses on breaking relationships with Israeli academic institutions. Palestine solidarity work, then, is an effort that requires a plethora of skills combined to apply pressure to agents which support – indirectly or otherwise – the Israeli state’s regime of occupation, colonisation and apartheid.

Scottish Government Inconsistencies

Until now, the Scottish Government has not taken a position on Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against the Israeli state one way or another. Last year however, it took a commendable position on the issue by rejecting a UK Government bill which, if passed, will ban public bodies from carrying out BDS work.¹ The Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill is an attempt by the most reactionary sections of the British establishment to prevent

any democratic challenge to the Israeli state in the UK. It not only revealed how much of a threat BDS is to such a powerful state, but it showed that the Scottish Government harbours some sympathy for Palestine, permitting BDS but not promoting it. And in November 2023, the Scottish Government donated £750k to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency’s (UNRWA) ‘Flash Appeal’,² in response to the genocidal campaign on Gaza.

However, the Government’s positions on Palestine are discordant when we look elsewhere. It has stated its support for a two-state solution, based on the 1967 borders drawn as a result of the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. If this ‘solution’ were to be implemented, the Right of Return – enshrined in international law – will be made impossible for the third or fourth generation Palestinian refugees expelled from cities like Yafa and Haifa in 1947-49. A core step in restitution for Palestinians cannot be guided by colonial approaches to land and belonging.

The Scottish Government’s approach to foreign affairs remains underdeveloped and this is partly due to lacking ‘state experience’. However, expertise on international relations is available at home. In April, Scotland’s International Development Alliance (SIDA) – funded in part by the Scottish Government – set out in a report how Scotland could take a significant role in “shifting the power to achieve global justice.” The language used is radical and anti-imperialist, the report states that it draws from the doctrine of “inclusivity, feminism, anti-racism and decolonisation” to analyse the power imbalance between the Global North and South. In their criticism of the Scottish Government, they suggest that the policy of supporting the arms trade with public funds should be scrapped. As for Palestine, the report makes one approving reference to the Scottish Government being “willing to stand in support of Palestinians in the face of Israeli state violence.”³ An almost hollow compliment, given the Conservatives’ and Labour’s unconditional support for the Israeli state’s genocidal campaign.

Civil Society’s International Impact

Scottish civil society deserves recognition for acting in solidarity with Palestine. Students of Scottish universities have played a leading role in protests and campaigning for BDS. The biggest student solidarity network – We Are All Hana Shalabi, named after the Palestinian hunger striker – was formed in 2012 and comprised student groups from five universities. Ten members of the network occupied the roof of the Scottish parliament in protest against the then First Minister Alex Salmond’s meeting with the Israeli ambassador. In

April 2024, students at the University of Glasgow voted overwhelmingly for Dr Ghassan Abu-Sittah, a Palestinian war surgeon and university alumnus, to be their rector. Earlier this year, the University of Dundee divested from Barclays bank due to its business with Israeli arms companies. More recently, the University of Edinburgh became the grounds for an encampment by students who joined the global wave of student solidarity to call for the university to divest from companies complicit in the occupation. Trade unions have also consistently supported Palestine, with the Scottish Trades Union Congress reaffirming its commitment to BDS and calling for the Palestinian Right of Return.

Similarly, Scottish city councils have a notable role in Palestine solidarity. Dundee and Glasgow reached beyond UK borders by creating a twinning relationship with Nablus and Bethlehem (both in the West Bank) respectively. The Dundee-Nablus twinning in 1980 has developed through the decades, building trade union links, educating citizens and enabling skill sharing. In 2015, a University of Dundee student group had the city council name a street 'Nablus Avenue' in honour of their Palestinian twin. The Palestinian flag continues to flag above the city chambers. Glasgow's twinning goes back to 2007 and has similar programmes to Dundee. It hosted a cultural tour of youth from Aida refugee camp in 2012, and staged a Bethlehem Cultural Festival. Like Dundee, the Palestinian flag has been raised above the city chambers.

If there is a small yet flourishing civil society movement, what happens in the Scottish parliament? Of the four largest political parties in Scotland, the Scottish Green Party is the only one to formally support BDS. In November 2023, all MSPs voted for a ceasefire in Gaza, except the Conservatives, predictable but nonetheless deplorable.⁴ The parliament also hosts the Cross-party group on Palestine, which aims to "establish a forum for Palestinians living in Scotland" and "promote a solution for the Palestinian people recognising the justice of their cause and the need for the Israeli and Palestinian leadership to adhere to UN resolutions and International Law."⁵ While the former aim is piecemeal but positive, the latter equates the struggle of a colonised people with the legal obligations of their oppressor. There can be no moral or political equivalence between a genocidal state and its victims, and with national sovereignty as the *raison d'être* of the SNP – the parliament's largest party – it is

jarring to see such a lack of dedication to Palestinian freedom.

Scotland's university groups, trade unions and city councils have demonstrated their ability to have an international impact, which suggests that SIDA could also consider them partners in order to build pressure on the Scottish Government from various quarters. Together they can produce a discourse of liberation, and provide political support for Palestine by countering Zionism at local and national levels. This has become urgent after the change of First Minister to John Swinney, who despite his public self-identification as "moderate left of centre" (a sufficiently opaque label) signifies a step to the right. While it may be an exaggeration to say that the Scottish Government will clamp down on Palestine activism, pressure upon it needs to be pursued. City twinning offers a foundation for this task, but it must be forged from below, establishing relationships with trade unions and universities, with the aim of expanding twinning to include university bodies and implementing BDS. These are options for a polity working with a limited devolved government. This year marks 25 years of Scottish devolution. During this past quarter century, Scotland has shown that even if it did not gain statehood for itself, to be an ally of Palestine, it doesn't have to.

1 <https://theferret.scot/scottish-government-rejects-bill-israel-apartheid/> Billy Briggs, 'Scottish Government rejects Tory bill which "backs Israel's apartheid regime"', *The Ferret*, 09/08/2023

2 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/foi-202400403361/> 'Scottish Government donations to UNWRA between October 2023 - March 2024: FOI release', Scottish Government, 18/04/2024

3 <https://intdevalliance.scot/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/SIDA-report-From-talk-to-transformation-1.pdf> Kate Nevens and Iffat Shahnaz, 'From Talk to Transformation: How Governments can really 'shift the power' Towards Global Justice, Scotland's International Development Alliance, April 2024

4 <https://www.gov.scot/news/scottish-parliament-votes-for-immediate-israel-gaza-ceasefire/> 'Scottish Parliament votes for immediate Israel-Gaza ceasefire', Scottish Government, 21/11/2023

5 <https://www.parliament.scot/get-involved/cross-party-groups/current-cross-party-groups/2021/palestine> 'Current Cross-Party Groups: Palestine', The Scottish Parliament, n.d.



The encampment on the Old College lawn at the University of Edinburgh.

NO REST TILL THEY DIVEST

The Justice for Palestine Society is untiring in its effort to rid Edinburgh University of investments that fund the genocide in Gaza.

At approximately 12:30 pm on the 5th of May we, the Justice for Palestine society at the University of Edinburgh, led a storm-in of the Old College quad, a notorious setting in the history of Palestine's colonisation. We swiftly established an encampment on its historically untouched lawn, protesting the university's institutional complicity in Israel's genocide of Gaza.

Our encampment is a part of the global student movement urging academic institutions to disclose and divest. As with other university encampments across the globe, the significance of this student action lies in its effect on our education, re-education, and reform of our campuses, student body, and administration's financial decisions. While encampments at Columbia in the US and Trinity in Ireland have honoured Gaza by naming buildings and libraries after six-year-old martyr Hind Rajab and martyred poet Refaat El Areer, we have chosen to underscore our university's history by branding it Balfour University, slandering its continued colonial legacy.

The college's historic walls whisper ongoing histories of colonial violence and are tainted by the portrait of the bigoted and antisemitic white supremacist, Arthur Balfour, who advocated the colonisation of Palestine while he was Chancellor of the university in 1917. While this fact has been intentionally unacknowledged by Balfour University's administration thus far, it is the driving force of our decision to liberate this specific location, on which he founded the wider colonial Zionist project which was instituted in Britain by the Balfour Declaration.

While Balfour University attempts to weaponise the Jewish faith against our actions for justice, labelling them antisemitic, our own anti-Zionist Jewish student group, Edinburgh University Kehillah, represents the opposite. It is our university's continued colonial legacy, power-hungry corrupt leaders, and war crime investments which represent institutional Zionism and thus antisemitism. Our encampment action must be understood as part of a collective fight for justice that unites all against the fascist, capitalist, Zionist enemy, as we demand divestment.

When one enters the Old College lawn, they are initially welcomed by our encampment's Walid al-Daqqqa library, named after the political prisoner and martyr. Whereas Balfour University administration attempts to boast its superficial and selective projects of inclusion, diversity, and 'decoloniality', the strength of our movement stems from our collective commitment to the Palestinian cause. We have consolidated a campus presence that truly represents, protects, educates, and acts in the anti-colonial interests of the student body and general public. We deem our cultivation of

such a space essential in enabling our university to cease its investments, holdings, and corporate complicity in Israel's corrupt action against Palestine. Unfortunately, an aggravated assault by an outsider on one student camper took place on the 9th of May and surrounding university security who surveil us twenty-four-seven stood by and witnessed it without any involvement. How can we feel protected when our administration not only demonises our actions but also does not protect its students from physical assault?

As in the case of student action and encampments globally, our actions have been met with inadequate responses by Balfour University's administration. Regardless of geographic location, the Zionist entity has exposed its operation through academic institutions whose irresponsible investments shamefully implicate their students in these corrupt acts, necessitating our unified course of escalated action across the globe. We act as one. Our encampments represent a unified rejection of our universities' corporate complicity in the ongoing terrorist Zionist project. Just as these complicit universities form one guilty Zionist entity, our student encampments form one movement in favour of Palestinian liberation. This begins with our effort to force the university to act in line with its Responsible Investment Policy and make a wider institutional, moral, and financial commitment to divest.

Twenty-two students in Edinburgh have undertaken a hunger strike in solidarity with Gaza and in protest against Balfour University's inefficient, incompetent, and unstable responses to our straightforward demands. The administration has stated no more than its "concern" for these students, perpetuating its unproductive rhetoric which initially necessitated this escalated action. Edinburgh students' action has inspired a hunger strike by students at Maastricht University, again proving the interconnectedness of the student fight for the Palestinian cause, in pursuit of ridding our universities of investments that fund the genocide of Gaza.

Our university is perfectly capable of committing to our demands and, most importantly, executing immediate and complete divestment from Israeli armaments, just as it immediately divested from Russian bodies in 2022. We demand that our university commits to the following: (i) an academic boycott, (ii) the reduction of policing on campus, (iii) the open denouncement of its colonial ties, (iv) combating antisemitism through the removal of the IHRA definition, (v) financial reparations, (vi) scholarship grants to Gazan students (as with Ukrainian students), and (vii) hosting no students who have served in the Israeli Occupation Forces.

We will not rest until Balfour University divests.

THE ROLE OF TRADE UNIONS IN UKRAINE

Colin Turbett reports on how Ukrainian trade unions believe solidarity can help them build their potential to support the country's workers during and after the war.

I recently visited Kharkiv in north-eastern Ukraine, the country's second-largest city and a centre of metallurgical and defence manufacturing going back to Soviet times. When there I met with trade unionists and community activists who are intent on building a better Ukraine, free of the corruption endemic since the break-up of the USSR over thirty years ago. Whilst successive governments have turned to neoliberalism as an answer to Ukraine's economic problems, the hope of the people I met is that a different country might emerge from the ruins of war. That hope is a long shot: the price of the arms supplies from the West that are their only hope of freedom from Russian domination, is likely to be deeper marketisation of their troubled economy, and everlasting debt repayment. These problems and issues are now being discussed between trade unionists in the UK and in Ukraine. The idea of calling for an abstract peace on the basis that this is a "proxy" war that we should not take sides in (or even taking the view that "our enemy's enemy is our friend" and supporting Russia), and consequent rebuttal of Ukraine's pleas for aid, is being rejected by a majority within the movement. This is witnessed at recent STUC and TUC congresses, and trade union conferences, and has opened up dialogue.

Kharkiv is itself interesting: a Russian speaking city whose population were expected by the Russian invaders to welcome them as liberators from a mythical Nazi domination. That never happened and after fierce popular resistance around and within the city, Russian forces were forced back to their border 30 kilometres away in April 2022. However, their attacks have increased again in intensity in recent months and the city is again under siege from missiles fired from within Russia, some targeted and some not. Such terror tactics have resulted in fear and anxiety, and again people are leaving for safer areas. The people I met seem determined to stay for as long as possible, and all support the resistance of their army as they genuinely fear the alternative of Russian occupation. According to Medvedev, the former Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, whose outspoken media comments are thought to echo Putin's thoughts, Kharkiv is one of the regions of Ukraine that Russia believes to be historically its own, regardless of the views of its people. The political leadership of the region, who are said to enjoy popular support, have worked hard to protect the population and maintain services, despite the total absence of air defence. Public transport is largely free and some of the social services I saw demonstrate innovation that we could learn from here in Scotland.

Ukraine's trade union movement needs some brief explanation: the largest trade union federation is the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FPU), the reconstructed successors to the trade union federation that existed in USSR times. At the time of Ukraine's formation as an independent nation it had 25 million members, but that number had reduced to 4.5 million by 2021. Reasons for this reflect creeping neoliberalism, populist anti-trade union rhetoric, decline in industrial production, and the growth of 'free' trade unions. Under the Soviet system the trade unions were responsible for welfare, leisure and general support for workers, and not for collective bargaining and the defence of workers' interests. The transition to the type of trade unionism we know in the UK has not been easy, particularly when the social benefits and guarantees enjoyed by workers in the USSR were all removed with its fall in 1991. The USSR origins of the FPU are also an important factor in that it inherited a very considerable property portfolio, including palatial trade union offices, holiday centres and sanatoriums, which are all the subject of ongoing litigation as the government seeks ownership. This throws up issues about the repair needed to properties damaged by the war. The massive city centre Palace of Labour in Kharkiv was very badly damaged by Russian missiles in 2022 and most of it still lies in ruins.

The other large trade union grouping is the KPVU (Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine) whose origins lie in the free trade union movement that began in the final USSR years; emulating others in Eastern Europe, they were established with the clear intent of fighting in the interests of workers. They have fewer members than the FPU but incorporate some strong trade unions in particular industries like coal mining and, in Kharkiv, the defence industry. These two federations represent most unionised workers in Ukraine and come together in the JRB (Joint Representative Body) that negotiates with government and employers at national level. Both are also represented on the principal international and European trade union organisations: the ITUC and ETUC.

I met with representatives of both the FPU and KPVU and found both helpful and keen to further relations with trade unions and solidarity organisations here. Their activities are curtailed by a series of emergency decrees that were passed by Ukraine's parliament at the start of the war. These outlaw the right to strike and withdraw labour, and curtail certain other freedoms that could benefit Russia. This should be no surprise given the infiltration of Russian covert



The author with Ivanna Khrapko and Yuri Pizhuk of the State Employees Union in front of the Motherland Statue in Kyiv. The flag is at half mast in tribute to the deaths of 18 people that occurred the previous day in the city of Chernihiv.

forces at the start of the war whose aim was to spread disinformation and even assassinate the Ukrainian President. Leading Ukrainian politicians also argue that at a time of war and the need to focus on the production of arms, there is no money to spare to address social protection and labour rights issues. This argument is not without foundation – the war has already cost the economy hundreds of billions of pounds. As in the UK during the Second World War, where similar laws were operative, this makes trade union organisation problematic but seems to be generally accepted as a necessity at this time. The other side of that, however, is that businesses (including defence industries abroad) have profited from the war and the absence of labour rights has pushed forward the neoliberal agenda in Ukraine itself.

Trade unions still have a role in Ukraine and have risen to the challenge of supporting their members in a time of war. I saw evidence of this, and the problems they encounter, in Kharkiv. The KPVU Kharkiv Region convenor, Igor Prihodko, took me to his own workplace – or what was left of it. The sports academy he heads was totally destroyed in a multiple missile attack two weeks previously. Quite why is a mystery as it had no military purpose. Fortunately, the students were dispersed at the start of the war and are being taught online and in other centres that are safer. His main concern was in ensuring that their work can continue and that the promising athletes they were teaching can be kept together in training and study even though dispersed across Europe. His own son, a young footballer, is now abroad. Igor took me to other workplaces organised by other KPVU affiliates, including industrial settings. One was the Kharkiv Coking plant, on a sprawling site outside the city and in private ownership. Most of its 350 production workers, men and women, were laid off at the start of the war despite its important contribution to the city's metallurgical manufacturing. The supply of coking coal from the Donbas dried up and although supplies from Poland were a possibility, there is simply not enough electricity available to keep the process going on the 24/7 basis required. The main concern of unions and management, I was told, is the welfare of the laid-off staff.

Igor's members are busy in the area's defence plants where health and safety and work conditions are the main considerations for the union. Although there is unity of purpose in support of the

ability of the country to effectively defend itself, Igor was clear to me that the interests of workers do not always coincide with those of their managers, and negotiation over industrial issues is still required. Due to security issues, it was not possible to visit any defence plant.

I also met with Ivanna Khrapko, an official of the State Employees Union (SEU) which is affiliated to the FPU. She introduced me to city officials and trade union representatives from the education and social work unions. Again, the main concern was maintaining work under wartime conditions where pressure is great and resources scant. Regular power cuts (particularly after the Russians knocked out the main power supply to the city shortly before my visit) are highly disruptive to work and home life. Large capacity generators and powerbanks are in short supply as there are not funds to purchase them in the quantities needed. Everywhere I was asked if we in Scotland could help with that problem.

Ivanna is the chair of the FPU's national youth committee, and also has an education and international relations role in the SEU. She uses all of these to promote training and education for members and representatives, and visits Kharkiv regularly from her base in Kyiv. She takes very seriously her role to build for the future, and imbue young people with a trade union consciousness and knowledge about the role they will play once the war is over. She is young, enthusiastic and keen to learn from comrades across the world. Like Igor from the KPVU, she is fully behind the country's defence and committed to peace on terms that are just and give no concessions to Russian aggression.

I found this to be the view of all the people I met in Kharkiv despite the worry that lies not far beneath their good humour and resilience. Their lives are set against the regular wail of air raid sirens, and missiles that can explode anywhere at any time. They all want to lead a normal life but count on our support to make this a possibility. The leader of the SEU, Yuri Pizhuk, gave me a message for Scots: value your own lives and those you love, but also help save the lives of his people by continuing and increasing aid to Ukraine – including the arms needed to do just that.

PORTUGAL 1974: WHEN EVERYTHING WAS POSSIBLE

The Portuguese Revolution of April 25, 1974 smashed the fascist regime, but it could also have achieved real socialism, writes **Mark Brown**

And still they came! More than four hours after the Lisbon march commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Portuguese Revolution of April 25, 1974 departed Marquês de Pombal square, people were still streaming down Avenida da Liberdade and into the Rossio square. Even the police estimated the demonstration at more than half-a-million people.

The great march of April 25, 2024 was noticeably young. There were large and vibrant contingents from a number of Portuguese trade unions and various groups on the Portuguese left, including the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), Bloco de Esquerda (the Left Bloc) and the new left-ecologist party Livre (Free). Palestinian flags could be seen up and down the length of the vast procession. Young LGBTQ+ people were also there in numbers flying their rainbow flags.

The march was a confident and joyous affair. Marchers sang 'Grândola, vila morena', the song that was played on Portuguese radio as the signal to the rank-and-file soldiers of the insurgent Armed Forces Movement (MFA) to make their move against the power centres of the fascist Estado Novo (New State) of Marcelo Caetano (who had taken over from the state's founder, the despised António de Oliveira Salazar, after the dictator's health failed in 1968). There was also a perceptible and resolute anger. The far-right party Chega (Enough), a rancid coalition of fascists and quasi-fascists led by the demagogue André Ventura,² had won a worrying 18 percent of the national vote in the general election in March.

"Fascismo nunca mais!" (fascism never again!) chanted the marchers. It was clear that they had made history. More than 500,000 people in a nation with a population of 10.5 million had participated in the biggest demonstration in Portugal since the Revolution itself. The gargantuan turnout far exceeded the best hopes, even of people on the Portuguese left. It reflected, of course, the tremendous and justified pride most Portuguese people feel in the Revolution. However, it also spoke to a sense of urgency where the Chega menace is concerned. If the vote for Chega in March had been worrying and disappointing, the great procession on April 25 gave cause for hope. The huge numbers on the streets showed that the forces exist to create a broad-based united front against fascism.

Following the march on April 25, I met with Odete Cavaco, a retired primary school teacher, and her husband Francisco Cavaco, a retired dockworker, to talk about their experiences under the fascist regime. With justified pride, Francisco shows me his union membership card which confirms that he is member number 1 of the dockers' union established after the Revolution. "Before the Revolution, the dockworkers had some associations, but they were very controlled by the state", he tells me. "We were not allowed to have meetings of more than two people. There were also informants among us, who would pass information to the regime", he adds.

Odete remembers the misogyny of the Salazar regime. "Many female state employees, such as telephone operators and nurses, weren't allowed to get married", she recalls. "If they got married, they had to leave their jobs." Growing up, Odete was aware of the hated and feared secret police, the PIDE (International and State Defence Police). "My father was a writer and a journalist", she says.

I remember him burning some documents because he heard that the PIDE had been told that he had political propaganda from the Communist Party... [T]here was always a fear of being discovered by the PIDE.

My mother died when I was three years old. So, my father felt a great responsibility not to get arrested, because he worried about who would look after me if he was taken away.

It was against such repression that Portugal's Revolution was made. It is known as the Carnation Revolution on account of the red carnations that the soldiers carried in the muzzles of their rifles as symbols of their refusal to turn their guns on the workers and students.

Although the Revolution exploded in Portugal on April 25, 1974, the death knell of the fascist regime had begun to toll, not in Portugal, but in its African colonies some years before. In 1974, the Portuguese Empire was similar in size to western Europe (some 22 times bigger than Portugal itself). As Peter Robinson writes:

[N]early half of the Portuguese government budget went to the military, at the cost of education and the public services. A country of nine million inhabitants was supporting an army of 200,000, which suffered 8,300 casualties over 12 years. At least ten times that number of Africans were killed.³

From 1961 forward, the liberation movements of the people of Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde were engaged in bitter wars against the Portuguese Army. The Carnation Revolution is often described as "near bloodless". However, it must be remembered that tens of thousands of Africans – not least fighters of the MPLA (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola), FRELIMO (Mozambican Liberation Front), PAIGC (African Party for the Liberation of Guinea and Cape Verde) and other organisations – died in the wars of independence that gave rise to the Portuguese Revolution. It is impossible to conceive of the MFA, the revolutionary movement led by radical junior officers in the Portuguese Army, without the struggle and sacrifice of the liberation movements in Portugal's African colonies. The revolt within the largely conscript Portuguese Army against the colonial wars was the lightning conductor for the Revolution that ended 48 years of fascist dictatorship.

In the 19 months that followed the Revolution, everything was up for grabs. Millions of workers – from industrial workers, to transport workers and, significantly, socially marginalised farm labourers – felt themselves suddenly freed from the shackles of fascist oppression. Consequently, there was a great explosion of self-organisation as working-class people began to realise that they could take their workplaces, industries and communities into their own hands. Workers' commissions, similar to the workers' councils that made the Russian Revolution of October 1917 and built the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, numbered in the thousands. In the months following the Revolution strikes and workplace occupations spread

like wildfire. As Raquel Varela documents in her magisterial book *A People's History of the Portuguese Revolution*, one of the most famous occupations was of the French-owned Sogantal garment factory in Montijo, where the female workers prevented the company boss, Pierre Lardet, from seizing the machines before proceeding to occupy the plant and demand its nationalisation.

There were also more than 100 residents' commissions, which sought to address the dire living conditions of many working-class people, ranging from lack of access to clean running water to desperately substandard housing. The commissions often superseded local authorities. In many cases they organised occupations of vacant properties. Many of the occupations were authorised by residents' tribunals, which were established in direct opposition to the new, bourgeois democratic 'revolutionary' state that had been established by the MFA. The actions of the workers' and residents' commissions were also reflected in land occupations by often desperately poor agrarian workers. All of these examples of working-class self-organisation were accompanied by demands for saneamento (sanitation or cleansing) of operatives of the Estado Novo from workplaces, which led to the purging or suspending of more than 12,000 identified fascists.

All of this threatened the provisional governments, of which there were six between the Revolution of April 1974 and April 1976, with a situation of dual power. In many places the new forms of working-class organisation seemed increasingly capable of taking over the functions of the state. There was a very real possibility that workers' self-organisation could have challenged the authority of the provisional governments, which contained representatives of various parties - including the reformist Socialist Party (SP) and the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) - and were appointed by the revolutionary council of the MFA.

Levels of radicalisation varied within the armed forces. As Varela details, significant numbers of the rank-and-file were organised in the SUV (Soldiers United for Victory), a revolutionary left formation that considered itself entirely independent of the MFA. For them, rank-and-file soldiers were 'workers in uniform', their senior officers 'the bourgeoisie in uniform.' At one stage, SUV soldiers re-routed 1,000 automatic rifles to the revolutionary left group the PRP/BR (Revolutionary Proletarian Party/Revolutionary Brigades). On September 25, 1975 an SUV-initiated demonstration in support of the Lisbon residents' and workers' commissions attracted 100,000 people. On that occasion, as Robinson notes: "A group of 4,000 demonstrators requisitioned buses to drive 15 miles and free soldiers imprisoned for possession of SUV leaflets."

The city that came closest to workers' power was Setúbal. A powerful Comité de Luta (Committee of Struggle) was established there. Its deliberations were in many ways a model for new forms of workers' democracy. Indeed, as Varela explains, the Comité only rejected a plan for a revolutionary insurrection because there was no network of similar organisations that would have spread workers' power throughout the country.

Ultimately, across Portugal the revolutionary left was too small and divided to transform the workers' commissions into alternative locations of power. The dominant forces on the left were the PS and the PCP. In their political competition with each other, the two often vacillated tactically in their relations with the workers' commissions. The PS was thoroughly committed to establishing a western European-style social democracy. The PCP, for its part, held to the 'socialism from above' model of the Stalinist USSR and Warsaw Pact. Consequently, it was generally hostile to attempts to achieve workers' power from below.

Ultimately, Portugal achieved not the socialism that was a very real prospect in 1974-75, but social democracy. Many workers' demands were sewn into the fabric of the new, democratic system.



Photographer Eduardo Gageiro's iconic image of soldiers with carnations in the muzzles of their rifles, Lisbon, April 25, 1974. This picture was shown as part of the exhibition of Gageiro's work, celebrating the 50th anniversary of the revolution, at the Torreão Nascente da Cordoaria Nacional gallery in Lisbon.

1 Salazar finally died in 1970.

2 Ventura founded Chega following his expulsion from CDS-PP (Democratic and Social Centre - People's Party) - the more right-wing of Portugal's two conservative parties - for inflammatory racist comments he made about the country's Roma community.

3 Peter Robinson, 'Portugal's Forgotten Revolution', Red Pepper (February 29, 2024): <redpepper.org.uk/global-politics/portugals-forgotten-revolution>. Peter Robinson was Lisbon organiser for the UK organisation the International Socialists (forerunner of the Socialist Workers Party) in 1975-76, and editor of Raquel Varela's *People's History of the Portuguese Revolution*.

5 Raquel Varela, *A People's History of the Portuguese Revolution*, Pluto Books, 2019, pp.87-88. Much of the following history is drawn from this book and Robinson's introduction to it.

**AS I WAS WALKING AN ENDLESS BREADLINE
MY LANDLORD GAVE ME A TWO-WEEK DEADLINE.
THE LOCAL PAPER PUBLISHED ITS HEADLINE:
THIS LAND IS NOT FOR YOU AND ME.**

ANONYMOUS