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# EDITORIAL: HOW TO IMAGINE SCOTLAND'S FUTURE

It is hard to dispute that Scotland's governments since devolution have been more left-wing than the UK's. The Scottish Government's condemnation of Israel's genocide was recently followed by the First Minister's objections to the use of Prestwick Airport by US bomber planes en route to Iran. Such interventions from a relatively centrist leadership are gestures, but good ones. The risk is that they encourage us to see Scotland as a left-wing place; a country pregnant with potential to be more socialist, less imperialist, and less susceptible to far-right sympathies than other North Atlantic nations. Sceptics are not completely misguided in criticising such left optimism for focusing on hypothetical ideals of an unreal future Scotland, rather than the material reality of the existing one.

But the left optimists are not necessarily more unrealistic than those we might call national realists, nor are they less grounded in the matters and experiences that make up Scotland today. Rather, they are much more imaginative. Constantly contrasting the Scotland that exists with an image of a better world takes real imagination. It is the Left that invites the country to imagine that the factories in Edinburgh cease producing parts for planes that bomb the homes of Palestinians, that wind and wave are no longer sold off once-and-for-all to offset some corporation's thirst for cheap and dirty profits, that migrant workers are no longer persecuted on false grounds of public safety, and that digital life fosters radical communities rather than coaxing people into sipping cocktails of racist and reactionary poison. In the austere glare of reality, it takes imagination and determination to envision the ways that another Scotland can be possible.

A new future is always being created in the shell of the old and the Left always has a role in creating it. Our movements both helped produce and were the products of the past. Historians are wary of counterfactuals, but who knows how different Scotland would be were it not for organised labour? For a century and more our political and social life has been shaped by the labour movement and by the Left to an undeterminable degree. To fudge a line or two from our folk revival: 'If it wisnae for the unions, where would we be?'

This creative work is done through organisations including two that feature on our 150th edition cover. We are proud that the Educational Institute of Scotland is sponsoring this issue. Since 1847, EIS, the oldest teachers' union in the world, has fought both for teachers' rights and conditions and for the best education of the country's children. The STUC, meanwhile, has since 1897 annually convened Scotland's unions to share their stories and successes, reimagine their vision for the country, and agree lines for the year ahead. This year each STUC delegate receives a copy of this edition courtesy of EIS.

In a new history of Scottish Labour, the historian David Torrance charts the early party's rise against the backdrop of late-Victorian Scotland. Torrance suggests that socialist candidates in the Independent Labour Party were often out of kilter with the public, and he is sceptical how far the vision of the Left informed the values of the nation. Yet he shows how the individualism and imperialism of an older generation gave way to a new movement that harnessed

working people's will for control and change. Although he focuses on parliamentary politics, his account reveals that then, as today, many of the most impressive socialists put their energy not into the parliamentary cycle, but into education and organising, weaving deep-dyed fabric that survives the electoral wash.

In these pages, STUC General Secretary Roz Foyer urges us to treat the stories of past struggles as inspiration to write the script of Scotland's future. This issue provides many illustrations of struggles in our time. Karren Morrison and Charlie McCarthy describe how Serco was steamrollered by a union coalition in Forth Valley NHS whose campaign was fuelled by imagination and fun. Rachel Crawford recounts the resilience and tactics of creative workers when their employer, video games company Rockstar, fired dozens of union members in October. Irene Graham tells how Sammy Morris's legacy is changing the lives of many pensioners in one Unite Retired Members Branch. Greig McArthur describes the work to unionise the high voltage energy sector, while Jake Molloy shares how he went from winning better health and safety for offshore North Sea rig workers to contributing to Greenpeace's Just Transition campaign. Looking to future struggles, Neel Sengupta describes the kind of education that unions need in this digital world, and the value of deep inquiry into working systems and conditions.

Meanwhile, beyond the shop, the Left is organising in solidarity with migrant workers who are targeted and persecuted. The darker side of Karren and Charlie's story is the sudden change of scene from fighting Serco in the shop to fighting the far-right on the streets. Jim Slaven reflects on the legitimacy of working class anger that the Left should not confuse or conflate with hate. Christopher Silver's review of Everybody to Kenmure Street explores how laying our bodies on the line can both achieve practical wins and strengthen heartening myths that help us amplify our image of a better Scotland.

Work to reimagine Scotland must always be accompanied with empowerment in the here-and-now. Kate Campbell of the SNP and Katy Clark of Scottish Labour share their priorities for the next parliament when it comes to tackling work injustice, from extending Fair Work beyond its narrow limits, to developing a Scottish strategy to rein in the exploitation that is rife in the expanding gig economy. Despite Scotland's pretensions to being a fairer place to work than England, Udinyhiwe Unity describes the clunky and complicated Scottish system of support for migrant care workers who are arbitrarily displaced by Home Office enforcers. Xabier Villares details how deeply precarity can penetrate the psyche of those the public fails to see and fails to support. The solution lies in fostering solidarity across all boundaries and around every division.

While this issue takes Scotland as its focus, the onslaught on Iran is bringing shouts of anger to our streets. But as Margaret Elphinstone writes, these cries are nothing to the cries of parents and children, friends and comrades living under the rain of cruelty. As we hope and march for peace and justice, keep imagining a time when all the nations of the world are done raising hell on earth, and all the weary people of the world will rest.

# ABSOLUTE WARRIORS

When Forth Valley Unison won a spectacular victory over Serco, there was to be no honeymoon. Straight after their success, anti-migrant protests flared in Falkirk, with UNISON members on both sides of the divide. **Cailean Gallagher** and **Stephen Smellie** talked to **Karren Morrison** and **Charlie McCarthy** about the highs, lows, and lessons of an exceptional year.

As far as Karren and Charlie know, Serco was never beaten by industrial action before some of Scotland's lowest-paid NHS staff resisted its attempt to restructure their pay. When the multinational announced its plan to shift workers from monthly-paid to weekly-paid contracts, "people were terrified", Karren recalls. "We had people crying, they were really upset, and then very, very, very angry."

What was the issue with these plans? "If you understand low pay, you know how difficult it is to budget. People who are not low paid don't really see what the issue is with monthly pay, because they don't understand poverty. A lot of people in low pay budget to the penny and need the income weekly. And if you need to buy something quickly, you might do an overtime shift, but you only get that money fast if you are paid weekly."



Not only were Serco imposing the change on people who did not want it. They also proposed to give workers a loan, making them indebted to the company. Some might manage to pay off the loan from future income, but for others that debt would linger.

Serco's people were flummoxed and frustrated by the refusal to accept the change: "people in ivory towers", Charlie said, "who had no idea what it's like to live on the bread line". Karren recalls how "one of the lassies, an HR head in London, actually lost it".

She was like, 'I just don't understand. I just don't understand. We've imposed this on all our workforces and it's only Forth Valley where this is an issue. I just don't understand the problem.' I remember saying to her, 'do you know what, it really worries me that you don't understand what the problem is here, because we know what it is', I said, 'and I'm really concerned about that'. So she shut up.

But still HR refused to listen to the workforce. "They did consultation", Karren said, "which meant they told people what they were going to do. Their workforce were telling them that this was not a good idea. And they just kept ploughing on and on and on."

The scene was set for a struggle that united hundreds of NHS Forth Valley workers.

### Scales in Our Favour

From Indonesia to England, Serco has imposed its "unicorns and bunny rabbits, or what we call fire and rehire", to shift workers into monthly pay and debt, and threaten to use scab labour to replace those workers who object. Why was Scotland different?

Scottish legislation has something to do with it, by making it more difficult for private companies to use anti-union tactics or alter contracts at will. The requirement for disclosure and PGVs before recruits start work makes it much harder to hire scabs or replace workers. Meanwhile, the Two-Tier agreement means staff working for private providers contracted to the NHS are entitled to terms and conditions no less favourable than directly employed staff. In England, Serco contracts do not have to offer NHS rates. In the Scottish NHS, Serco could not fire and rehire the workers with impunity. In a Scottish NHS environment, workers have a bit more power than south of the border.

Meanwhile, Serco would potentially breach their contract and face enormous fines if a strike damaged their ability to deliver their contracted service. For that reason, a strike might even have led to getting rid of Serco because they would have breached contract. As it turned out, workers' action hit their target before a strike was needed. The reason for this success? "Imagination and fun, I think that sums it up", said Charlie, describing the series of stunts that empowered and emboldened the workers for the fight. A new Serco manager had already been imposing things that workers didn't like, so by the time workers met "everybody was raging: they were weak, and we came on pretty strong."

### The Struggle Against Serco

There hadn't been an NHS strike since the pensions dispute, and the determination to prevent one was also powerful for the union. And the members were all on-site, in the acute



hospital, face to face. There were boots on the ground, facility time, and joint union working.

Everybody wanted to get involved. And we also had the best people ever you want to be on strike, and that is low paid part time female workers. They are warriors. They are absolute warriors. Sometimes we were \*\*\*\*\* them off because we weren't going fast enough for them. We had that in our favour.

There were weaknesses too – "it's a 24/7 service, we were bloody knackered" – but the scales were favourably balanced and the team "was just phenomenal." One stunt involved a postbox occupied by an anonymous union branch chair. Another involved placard-making in the atrium. Members in the rest of the branch got engaged, signing big boards, and even people who were not union-minded were heard saying they had signed the petition. Politicians got involved, and the wider community were emailing MPs and MSPs. A favourite stunt involved tarring Serco with the slogan 'led by donkeys'.

**Karren:** "No idea became too ridiculous. Except for Charlie's when he actually looked into getting a real donkey."

**Charlie:** "So, I was going to get a donkey and I was going to put devil's horns on it and get the staff to follow it."

**Karren:** "And I put my foot down because I had visions of it rampaging through the hospital. But I think if we'd asked members to get naked and run round the hospital grounds, they would have just been like, all right, let's do it, because they were so engaged and everybody wanted to be part of it."

And all this energy and engagement among the 690 affected staff culminated in an industrial action ballot, with an 82% turnout of members and a spectacular 99% for a strike among a ballooning membership. "Between GMB and ourselves, we effectively unionised the whole workforce from that campaign. I think there was hardly anybody that was [not in a] trade union by the end of it."

The victory was not immediate: first of all, they didn't even speak to us, which was really weird. They were speaking to Unison in London, and the Chief Executive, and the First Minister, but I said: 'We're the elected representatives of the people here. You can speak to whoever you want. We're the only people that can resolve this dispute.' It was very strange. As if they didn't even un

derstand how trade unions work. At the beginning we thought maybe we'd negotiate, you know, about money and stuff like that. By the end of it, we were like, we're no budging on this. Because we had them at that point. And I think they knew that. And eventually they backed down.

Is there a chance that the victory could lead Serco to exit the contract and to bring the work back in-house? While that is the hope, the problem is that the contract still has 14 years to run, and buying Serco out is too expensive, so they would have to leave. But the branch will keep fighting – they are making a film, putting pressure on the contract, trying to persuade them to walk away. “They don't want to be in this contract. It's such a pain in the neck for them”, Karren concludes. The struggle against Serco continues.

### A Different Kind of Protest

But meanwhile a different form of protest was spreading in the Falkirk streets. The same August that the union won its campaign, the first protest sprung up outside the Cladhan Hotel. This hotel, like others used by the UK government to accommodate asylum seekers, became a focal point for far right and anti-migrant protest.

The branch officers were still on a high from winning as these charged and violent protests became more frequent and intense. Charlie remembers:

I think we were entitled to expect a honeymoon period of members seeing how effective their union had been and a growing belief in trade unionism. And we never got that at all. You know, within days it was effectively stolen from us, and we were put on the back foot straight away.

At the first counter-protest that Karren and Charlie went to, one of the former UNISON reps was on the other side of the road. While UNISON was not there formally, Karren said that they were “clear as a branch that this [counter-protesting] was the right thing to do”. But soon after, people were coming to the UNISON office angry about the union being at the Cladhan protests.

This was the same people that we had just spent the last however many months [campaigning with]. They know us, they trust us. We've just had this win and they're coming in and telling us, what are you doing? Why are you spending our money on this [counterprotesting at the Cladhan]? ... I was horrified.

A bit of me felt in those few weeks that we'd failed. We'd failed as trade union to help people understand what we do and what we stand for. Because people were saying, why is a trade union getting involved in politics? ... And I'm sitting thinking, 'Oh my God, we've got members who don't think that trade unions get involved in politics'. That's our failure. That's not their failure.

On some reckoning, these protests in August amounted to the biggest far-right gathering in Scotland's history. Charlie remembers looking at the people on one side and the other, assessing who could defend the hotel, because “the police were well outnumbered, they had totally underestimated this, ... [T]here were at least five professional fascists. ... I still don't understand why they never attacked the hotel. I'm really surprised, and really thankful, for whatever stopped them doing that.” For Karren, “terrifying physical violence was one thing”, but more terrifying was that people in the protest were “people in my community, folk that I know, our members that I've had conversations with.”

The situation raised challenges for the branch and its approach to tackling the issues in the workplace. Speaking to people one-to-one was easier than deciding what to do as a branch, especially with it being targeted because of its stance. The branch invited

other sister-branches to sign a statement. One union agreed, and another refused, but UNISON remained the target after its officers put their head above the parapet. UNISON'S building in Falkirk had its window smashed twice.

Members of hospital staff have also targeted UNISON inside staff areas. “We've had stuff stuck on our doors, stop the boat stickers, and folk vandalising our stuff,” Karren explained.

“We've had a lot of stuff online. I have been threatened, and they know who I am. But there's a lot of people who've had a lot worse than me. When I say we are under attack over this, this is what I think trade unions need to understand: ... It's in the first playbook of the far right, isn't it? You attack trade unions. That's what you do. And you drive a wedge between the people that we represent and have been representing, and the trade unions.”

What didn't happen, however, was a decline in membership in response to this firm stance. “I think that is what trade unions are worried about”, Karren wagers.

### Union Power Beyond the Workplace

In recent months, union organisations and the STUC have held events to confront this challenge in the unions. For Karren, while such events are vital, there is more to do. “I want training on how to manage these conversations that me and Charlie were having. I wanted the STUC to promote counter-protest. I want people to put their name to it as a trade unionist. I wanted training about how to handle the digital stuff, because it's really tricky if you don't know what you're doing. I want some kind of evidence base on how I respond to trolls.”

There is, for Karren and Charlie, a fundamental issue about how far unions focus exclusively on workplace issues, and how far to build beyond the workplace. As these events unfolded, plans were developing to establish a Trade Unions in Communities Centre. Gary Clarke, a retired Communications and Workers Union branch secretary, was the driving force behind it, and he and others did most of the work to get it going.

“What we realised at the time”, Karren said, “what came out of it for me, was that we do spend a lot of time on workplace stuff. We've lost that bit of trade unions being in the community, being involved in stuff. And that's the bit we needed to get back to, because that's how we are trying to get our community back. It's no use shouting you're a racist over the street. ... So we looked at getting involved with Trade Unions in the Community, to help people to engage with local groups, charities, whatever, to bring trade unions together, help people understand what trade unions are, and do that education piece in our community. We will try and do something different.”

On 28th February, Unison Forth Valley opened up a Trade Unions in Communities Centre, adapting a model pioneered in Lothian at the TUIC centre in Craigmillar.

*We continue this conversation in the next issue where Karren and Charlie discuss in depth what they see as the next steps for the union movement in Scotland, and why Trade Unions in Communities are a vital part of this solution.*

# FACILE ANTI-FASCISM

Anger is rational in this economy, but it will take working class militancy to prevent this anger hardening into a politics of hate, writes **Jim Slaven**.

Bertolt Brecht's Galileo likes to drop a pebble from one hand to the other. This is used to show us that Galileo observes, in a very simple way, what is actually happening in the world. Brecht is contrasting this with others, such as theologians, who learn through theory and reasoning alone. Galileo drops pebbles to remind himself that pebbles do not fly, they fall. By trusting the evidence of his senses, he gains knowledge through his experiences as well as theory and reasoning.

There has been much discussion over the rise of what has been variously described as Fascism or far-right or anti-migrant politics in working class communities. I am old enough to remember the National Front and the BNP and the battle for control of the streets. The situation today is very different. It is much more dangerous.

It is different and more dangerous because of the material conditions on the ground. Across the country we have seen working class institutions destroyed and our culture denigrated. After decades of underinvestment the physical and social infrastructure in working class areas is near collapse. There have been huge cuts to vital services, and displacement, deindustrialisation, privatisation, a mental health crisis and drug addiction (prescribed and not) are through the roof. We have Victorian levels of inequality with people unable to get a decent job, or a house, or even a medical appointment.

Recent life expectancy data from the National Records of Scotland shows that women in the most deprived areas can expect to spend 26.7 fewer years in good health than women in the least deprived areas. With men, the difference is 25.6 years. This system is literally killing working class people. None of this is inevitable. It is not the result of natural phenomena. It is a wrong actively done. It is the result of choices made by the political class. In their class interests, not ours. If you live in working class areas anger is not the sign of a racist person, anger is the sign of a rational person.

And what is the response from the dominant classes? They demand more of the same. More growth, more cuts, more bullshit. And yes, more cheap migrant labour. The capitalist migration system does not work for what Alain Badiou calls the 'nomadic proletariat'. There is nothing progressive about exploiting migrant workers. This system does not work for working class people. Whether they be migrant or otherwise.

These material conditions, as they are lived, by people, are driving the politics. They have created a powder keg because the political class, and the left, abandoned the working class. This created a vacuum that is real and dangerous. Reform and others on the right are trying to occupy that vacuum. They are exploiting people's legitimate concerns, and disgust at the system, and yes, they are also scapegoating migrants and stoking racism. There is a battle for hearts and minds going on in working class areas.

So far, the left has not engaged in the battle. Preferring to respond, from a distance, to the echo of the battle, with slogans not solutions. The multiracial working class are sick of moralising and performance. We have had enough of the political class shouting No Pasaran! before going back to the suburbs. Such interventions might make the participants feel better (and superior) but they exacerbate the problem. If the left is to play a meaningful role it must stop talking to itself and start listening to the working class.

In reality the political solution lies within our areas and within our class. To win this battle we must devise a strategy to replace the politics of hate with a politics of solidarity. To do that we must correctly analyse the problem and its political content. The immediate task for working class anti-fascists is to disentangle the racism from the other causes. Not to engage in what Pier Paolo Pasolini described as 'facile anti-fascism', which serves a political purpose for the dominant classes by portraying working class anger as motivated, not by their material conditions, but by hate. The working class analysis of our situation is then silenced and delegitimised. We hear a lot about the importance of lived experience, until the working class speak up.

The crises we face in working class areas are multifaceted and extremely serious. They were not caused by migrants. They were caused by fifty years of neglect and greed. The political class who created these crises cannot be the political beneficiaries. Only working class anti-fascists can win the battle of ideas within our areas and our class. Nobody can do it for us. Least of all the political class and the State. Just as experience shows that pebbles do not fly, they fall, experience shows working class militants there are no shortcuts and no saviours.

# TAKE BACK CONTROL OF SCOTLAND'S STORY

Work, struggle and solidarity have shaped Scotland's story. It is up to us to create new history with working people in control, writes **Roz Foyer**.

From the 22nd to 26th April, Scotland's trade union movement gathers once again in Dundee. We meet at a time when our members continue to face huge challenges with living costs here at home, and at a time when too many people across the world are facing much worse. The terrible impacts of war and conflict are not of people's own making but are forged by corporate greed.

The gangster capitalism we see being played out on the world stage is also alive and well here in Scotland. At Grangemouth, at the whim of a billionaire tax exile, a century of refining was ended like the flick of a switch. A thousand workers were cast aside and a community's future was erased, not because it had to happen, but because someone in a boardroom decided it would. At Mossmorran, a multinational fossil fuel giant threw hundreds of skilled workers on the scrapheap while handing out \$12 billion in dividends. And in the North Sea, operators extract vast profits, undermine health and safety, and cut jobs in the supply chain, using the transition to renewables as an excuse for further profiteering, not a plan for reconstruction.

These are not isolated scandals, but the logical outcome of forty-five years of deregulation, privatisation and underinvestment, a political class in thrall to corporate interests, and an economic model built on dividends, not dignity. The impact of that model is not just economic. It is cultural and psychological. Bathgate, Linwood, Methil, Irvine, no more. Now we are told Grangemouth, Mossmorran, Aberdeen must go the same way.

These are communities where work was not just a wage, but an identity, with stories we still celebrate. You see this link between people and place in the global appeal of the Paisley pattern or Harris Tweed designs, born of Scottish hands and now worn across the world. You see it when the steelmen run out at Fir Park on a Saturday, and generations stand together in the terraces. You see it in Wick's exhibition on the Herring Girls, the gutters and packers whose work fed nations. You see it in the gravestones of the Calton Weaver martyrs, who died so others might have a voice. Our history is written in work, struggle and solidarity. But too many of our stories now live in museums.

## Who Holds The Pen?

Over the last century our economy has been turned upside down. We buy what we once made. We import what we once forged. Our industrial capacity has been hollowed out, sold off, shipped away. Two thirds of what you need to build a wind farm cannot be made in Scotland. We are told we are a renewable energy superpower yet we do not make the towers, the blades, the cables, the steel. Politicians left global markets to write the new story of our economy, and they forgot to write us in. If our shared history was written in shipyards, mills, pits and factories, then new history can be written in green energy, advanced manufacturing, care and culture. The question is simple: who holds the pen?

Right now, Scotland's industrial script is being written by distant financial interests, like asset managers who have never set foot in our communities, and pension funds who see our infrastructure as nothing more than a revenue stream. Across Scotland, key assets are no longer rooted in the communities they serve. City Quay in Dundee is owned by a Canadian pension fund. Edinburgh Airport is owned by overseas investors. Car parks in Glasgow city centre are state-owned – by Japan. Our offshore wind is controlled by global asset managers such as BlackRock and Vanguard. Our gas networks, train carriages, transmitters and care homes are owned by overseas pension funds and private equity. These interests do not build Scotland. They leverage it. They acquire assets, extract value, load them with debt and move on. The results are higher prices, lower wages, stagnant productivity, and communities left behind.

The Scottish trade union movement has a proud history of fighting to take back control from these interests. In 1972, after the UCS dispute, the STUC convened a Scottish Assembly to demand the devolution of power to tackle Tory deindustrialisation. For more than twenty years our movement campaigned for devolution until, in 1999, 292 years after it was abolished, Scotland had its Parliament again. In that moment of pride and possibility, working people believed we would never again allow our communities to be decimated in the way they had been under Thatcher. That feeling of hope has evaporated.

## Make Them Feel Our Presence

The Scottish Parliament has delivered gains: a better-paid public sector than elsewhere in the UK; the Scottish Child Payment; rail brought back into public ownership; progressive tax changes; rent caps. These things make a difference, but they did not fall from the sky. They were fought for, by rail unions, anti-poverty campaigners, Living Rent, public sector workers and the STUC. Where the organised working class led, politicians followed. But our victories paper over the cracks of a Parliament that is too unwilling to challenge corporate interests.

And it is that failure of mainstream politicians to challenge corporate interests that means the ground is shifting under our feet. With Reform polling at 20%, we can no longer comfort ourselves that Scotland is different or that our Parliament is slightly better than Westminster.

Westminster austerity has done enormous damage, but so too has Holyrood's cowardice in refusing to challenge it. We do not want Scotland's politicians to administer cuts while announcing the droopy mantra, "it wizny me". We want our politicians to govern. To chart Scotland's own path trodden by our people, not by big business, bond markets or banks. Scotland is a wealthy country. We have vast renewable resources. We have a skilled and committed workforce. We have world-class universities and ingenuity. But wealth here is hoarded not shared. Two families own more than a

quarter of our population combined. That is not the way things have to be. It is a political choice made by governments of various stripes to protect the fortunes of the few while telling the many there's no money.

Our Congress theme is 'Workers United Demanding Better'. That absolutely includes demanding better from our politicians in a year when they are seeking our votes in the Scottish Parliament elections. Twenty-seven years on from the re-establishment of the Scottish Parliament, it falls once again to the trade union movement to demand that it works for us. That means taking back control.

Those words 'Take Back Control' have been completely twisted, corrupted, and emptied of their meaning by the Tories and the far right. But take back control we must. Not from migrants, or from those on benefits, or from ethnic minorities, but from the blind economic forces that have shaped our country for nearly half a century. Forces that have stripped our industries, hollowed out our towns, and told working-class people to accept decline as destiny.

For the Scottish Parliament to take back control means:

- Raising the taxes needed to close the £5 billion funding gap, not cutting 12,000 public sector jobs and calling it efficiency savings.
- Replacing the unfair council tax system, still based on property values from 35 years ago, with a system that asks more of those who have most.
- Ending the £3 billion annual profit drain from outsourced public services; money that should be invested in schools, hospitals and communities, not siphoned off to shareholders.
- Extending sectoral collective bargaining to care, to culture, and every publicly funded sector, so that every worker can

benefit from union agreements.

- Using public money to create good jobs and domestic supply chains, not blank cheques for business with no conditions attached.
- Taking equity stakes in offshore wind, so that turbines built off our shores create jobs in our yards, our factories, our communities.
- Investing in ferries and rail here, not exporting contracts overseas while our own infrastructure crumbles.
- Bringing buses back into public hands, so profits are reinvested in routes and services, not extracted by shareholders.
- A Scottish Parliament with greater borrowing powers and control over employment law.

That is what taking back control means. Not flag-waving, scapegoating, or nostalgia for a past that is never coming back. Control over capital, control over investment, and control over the wealth we create.

Let's demand better from our politicians, hold them accountable, and make them feel our presence. And let's remember that a political party wants your vote once every five years so they can have power; a union wants your voice every day so you can have power. It is not just a service you pay for. A union is the organised expression of working-class control. It is people, together, deciding that our labour has value, that our voices matter, and that our futures are not for others to decide. So don't just vote for change. Build it, organise in your workplace and your community, strengthen your branch, and stand with the worker beside you. Because when we come together and refuse to be divided, when we recognise that our struggles are connected, we take back control.



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

**Mick Whelan, general secretary**

**Dave Calfe, president**

**Kevin Lindsay, ASLEF's organiser in Scotland**

# BUYING TIME FOR OTHERS

*Everybody to Kenmure Street*, a new film by Felipe Bustos Sierra about a community's resistance to Immigration Enforcement, demonstrates the power of laying our bodies on the line, writes **Christopher Silver**.



*Credit: Glasgow Film Festival*

Just after 9am on Thursday 13 May 2021 a member of Glasgow No Evictions Network left his morning muesli unfinished, got on his bike, and proceeded to spend the next eight hours clinging to the axle of a Home Office Immigration Enforcement van.

This anonymous 'Van Man' – whose words are, improbably, performed by Emma Thompson – correctly takes the lead in Felipe Bustos Sierra's *Everybody to Kenmure Street*.

The film makes 'Van Man,' and his split-second decision to dive beneath the vehicle at an early moment, central to everything that followed. Without this action, without that vulnerable body within the machine, the state's planned detention of two long-term Pollokshields residents would have gone on uninterrupted.

With this unlikely protagonist, the film makes one of the confusing things about competing accounts of that day's events clearer. Look online and you will find multiple references to the Kenmure Street protests. And yes, many of the familiar aspects of protest – chants, banners and a megaphone – were vividly present. But the actual power of that day was a far more contested form of radical politics – direct action.

The difference might seem pedantic, but the significance of this film is its insistent portrayal of a thorny truth: without the contingency created by bodies on the line, radical action is doomed to replay itself as empty spectacle.

I couldn't watch *Everybody to Kenmure Street* without comparing it to Vincent Bevins' influential account of street politics in the 2010s, *If We Burn*. Despite an unprecedented decade of mass contention, Bevins argues, communicative protests aimed at existing elites have overwhelmingly failed to deliver substantive social change. In the 2020s, with the banning of Palestine Action and the

neutering of Extinction Rebellion and its various offshoots, acts of civil disobedience have been demonised and criminalised to a degree previously unknown in peacetime. To an extent, this is because these actions are amplified by ubiquitous smartphone use. It is also because many institutional forms of counterpower that aided 20th century movements for global justice – in civil society, the labour movement, or local government – have been hollowed out. Streets and communities are what we have left.

"Everybody put a day in that day and a day in your life is nothing," notes one local who arrived early on the scene. The film does not pretend, nor could it, to suggest that this was a victory for an ever more constrained politics of mass mobilisation. Instead, it invites us to consider our own agency, and to ask ourselves what we might do *today* to advance the freedom of others.

Scotland's sometimes overstated reputation for radicalism makes many people want a slice of the kudos that these events radiate. Fewer are willing to place their bodies on the line or risk arrest to see a radical politics realised before them. In this sense Kenmure Street was the opposite of the many vast, unanchored, and rudderless marching movements of recent decades. But on that May morning in 2021, just the right number of people who knew the stakes and were willing to play for them arrived at precisely the right moment. The work of generations of political educators and community leaders converged on a state apparatus of detention and removal that could only, in the end, concede.

In 2023 then Scottish Green co-leader Lorna Slater's clunky slogan "Let's be the Scotland of Kenmure Street not Downing Street" rightly drew pelters from many of those who participated in the action. To have witnessed those events up close, as I did, was to

see a vast public order operation unspool with all the inevitability of blind authority, to see desperate attempts to reconcile the state within the van with the state outside it, and witness hundreds of officers poised, on a hair trigger, to deploy the whole sorry escallatory repertoire that peaceful political actions are often subject to. Sierra's film pays close attention to the particularly brutal arrest of a young woman who sought to emulate Van Man's tactics as parked cars were cleared from the street. Those decisions to escalate, although reversed at the eleventh hour, were made in Scotland too.

That said, there was something present on Kenmure Street which channelled various streams of radical tradition into one. This reached back across decades: the city's vote to leave the United Kingdom in 2014, the Glasgow Girls and the campaign against child detention, Pollok Free State in the nineties, the anti-Poll Tax networks, and occupations at Lee Jeans and Caterpillar in the eighties, back to and beyond UCS in the seventies.

The latter is arguably the moment when modern Scottish politics as we practice it today came into being. Like Kenmure Street, it was a defiant *action*, not a protest filled with pious speeches. Jimmy Reid's words, which are movingly referred to in the film by his daughter Eileen (a Kenmure Street resident who filmed some of the key viral videos of the day) underscore that if radical politics is not pragmatic, disciplined, moral, and visible, it is nothing. It is this laser focus on the dignity of the people that day which makes *Everybody to Kenmure Street* a landmark work of radical independent film making. People came out to defend their neighbours not for a political cause or to engineer a stunt, but because it is simply what you do in a living community.

Sierra's film is a powerful testament to the importance of an independent film sector. This was evident in the absence of establishment talking heads providing the 'balance' that many mainstream producers demand. There is a lesser story to be told about lawyers, cops and politicians hashing out the niceties of the Scotland Act and the leeway granted to Police Scotland's top brass in operational matters. But that is a story for a dying political class. Sierra's lens never leaves the street because it is there, ultimately, that history must be made.

Like UCS, Kenmure Street can easily be cast as a pyrrhic victory. Both moments of struggle are largely symbolic: emotionally potent stays of execution rather than strategic advances. The sole active shipyard on the upper Clyde and the establishment's ongoing concessions to a neo-fascist immigration agenda are hard realities unshaken by even the most vibrant festivals of the oppressed.

But this is perhaps to misunderstand the power that made Kenmure Street. Cast aside the clear overlaps with left-nationalist, anti-racist and anti-capitalist movements, and you see a community made stronger by the wounds of past division. Without the activist and WhatsApp groups nurtured by the need for mutual aid during the pandemic, the community in East Pollokshields would have struggled to find the critical mass necessary to halt the raid. Nonetheless: the action hinged on one of Scotland's most cosmopolitan communities marking its boundaries, on a holy day, demonstrating its resilience.

Unlike many areas of Glasgow's southside, Pollokshields was saved from the marauding forces of post-war development that levelled most of Kinning Park, Tradeston and the Gorbals. But like its sister tenement community of Govanhill, Pollokshields has often been a target of tabloid and fascist propaganda. Seventeen years before it became a byword for solidarity, Kenmure Street was notorious as the site where teenager Kriss Donald was abducted and later murdered as part of a gangland feud. This incident brought the British National Party to the area in an effort to inflame tensions.

So, the events in May 2021 can also be read as a final cleansing of that stain by neighbours, old and young, of all faiths and none, queer and straight, engaged in the slow but rewarding work of learning to live together. As in the Rent Strikes of the last century, the film also demonstrates how the dense, deeply interconnected,

tenement community is an affront to authority. While much of Glasgow drifted to sterile suburbs and atomised lives lived in cars and on motorways in the last century, the late Victorian city itself is another key player in Sierra's piece.

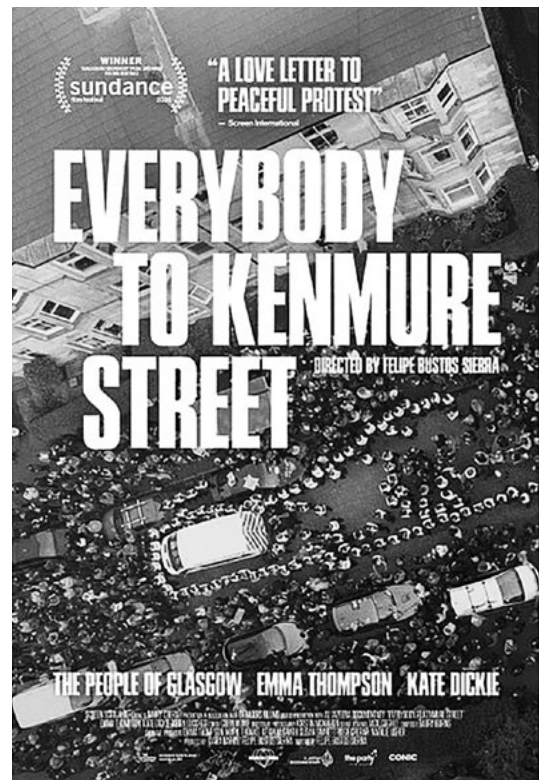
Just as crucial to the spontaneous actions of Van Man, and the strength of Pollokshields as a community, were the leadership roles assumed by Glasgow Girl Roza Salih, activist Mohammad Asif and lawyer Aamer Anwar. This is another key departure from the mass contention approach critiqued by Bevins: horizontal decision making was never an option. The contingency of bodies on the line was too stark.

There was also the unusual make-up of the crowd: those who had just left the peace of Eid prayers in the mosque, babies in prams, cyclists, pensioners, lefty middle-class knowledge workers who'd popped out from their home office, and a sprinkling of highly experienced political organisers. It was the stuff of public order policing nightmares: a group that could neither be provoked, nor battered into submission, but that everyone thought was going to be kettled for most of the day.

Like lots of millennial Glaswegians, I didn't quite imbibe radical politics with my mother's milk, but I was carted about in a pushchair to experience it. Being taken to see Mandela in George Square is an established part of family lore. The ANC leader features in Sierra's film and the connection is explicit. The decision to award the Freedom of the City in the teeth of Thatcherite opposition and British capital's deep entanglement with Apartheid was, as the man himself explained, a specific turning point in one of the world's great freedom struggles. Its impact should not be overstated, but like the day's events that *Everybody to Kenmure Street* pays tribute to, it shows what a city, at its best, can be.

The film does not shy away from acknowledging that Glasgow is also a city of contradictions: of harsh and sometimes terrible contingencies. But out of those struggles the urge to freedom – more resilient than a tenement in an Atlantic winter – abides.

'How might you define the lived reality of freedom?' For Van Man, in the moment, it meant 'buying time for other people'. That is what we did.



# BREAKING DIGITAL GROUND

The workers' movement and the political left have lagged badly behind our enemies in the use of technology. If our class refuses to contest digital terrain, others will occupy it, writes **Neel Sengupta**.

Literacy was once understood as a weapon. In the nineteenth-century British labour movement, access to reading and writing was central to self-organisation. Chartism did not simply demand the vote; it built reading rooms, circulated newspapers like the *North-east Star*, and treated political education as essential to mass participation. The ability to read contracts, follow parliamentary debates and write correspondence was part of the struggle for citizenship. Similarly, the Workers' Educational Association and labour colleges emerged from a recognition that workers required systematic education in economics, history and law if they were to challenge ruling-class expertise. Access to education was not a luxury. It was a demand for power. To change the world you had to understand how it worked.

Today the terrain of literacy has shifted. Reading and writing remain fundamental, but digital literacy has become just as crucial. Workers navigate algorithmic feeds, online booking systems, digital scheduling platforms and data-driven management tools. Political arguments circulate in formats and rhythms shaped by corporate platforms. To organise effectively in this environment requires not only traditional shop-floor skills but an understanding of how digital systems structure attention and influence.

It is important to be clear about what this argument is not. We are not simply reproducing the slander against those workers who resist the control and pressure of technological 'innovation' on the bosses' terms. The original Luddites were not fools smashing machines because they feared progress. They were skilled textile workers defending their wages and community against employers who used new machinery to degrade labour and undercut bargaining power. Their resistance came from a position of class consciousness and collective organisation. They targeted the social relations embodied in particular machines. There is a lesson in that history. Opposition to technology can be rational when technology is deployed to intensify exploitation. We need more critical resistance to coercive and exploitative technology, not less. But passive withdrawal and a refusal to understand and use the tools that structure contemporary politics will not build the power our class needs.

For the better part of fifteen years the workers' movement and the political left have lagged badly behind our enemies in the use of technology. The ruling class and reactionaries have invested in data science, behavioural analytics, targeted messaging, and platform capture. Major institutions of the left have, by contrast, treated technology as peripheral, distasteful or vaguely corrupting. Too often in an attempt to prefigure the kind of society we want we have substi-

tuted moralism for strategy, denunciation for building infrastructure, and grandstanding for organisation. Prefigurative attitudes to technology ignore the current configuration of political life and leave us unequipped to fight in our material reality. We must fight with the same weapons if we aim to win.

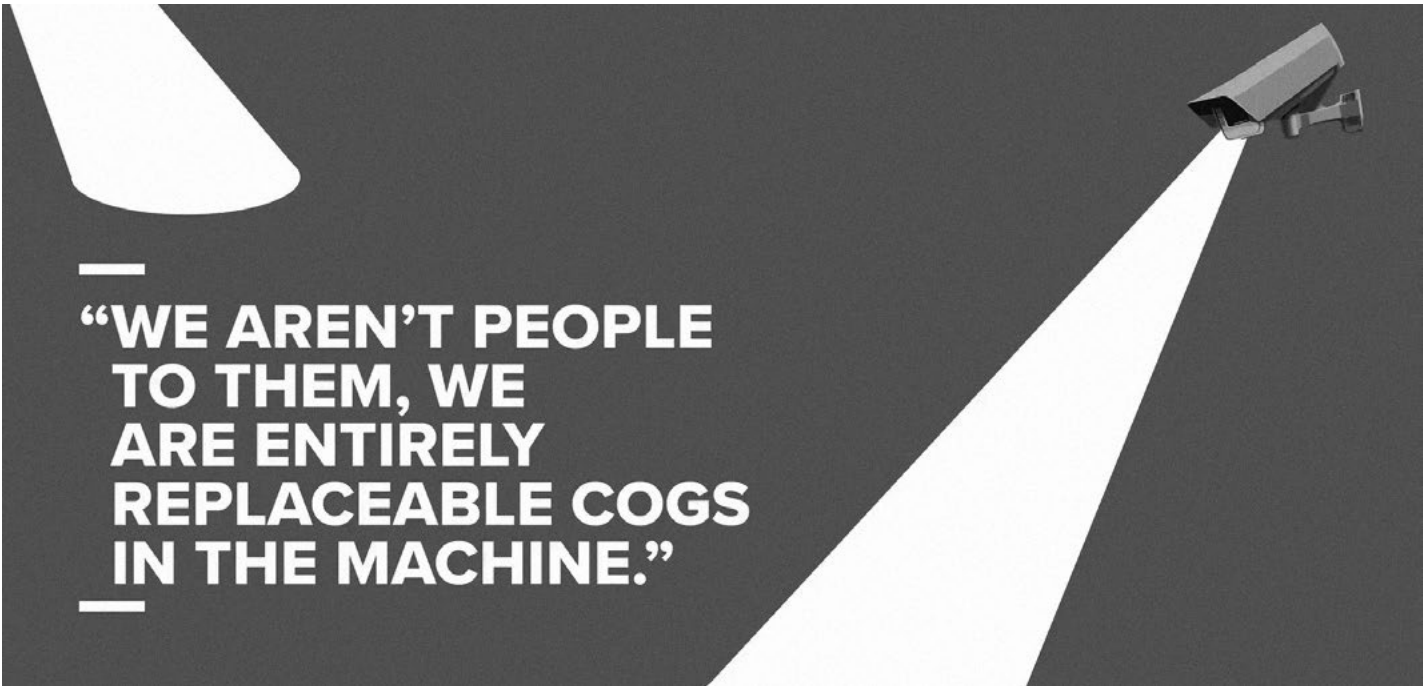
Part of the issue is generational and structural. Large sections of the trade union and political party leadership of all stripes are bureaucratised and ageing; they rose to prominence in a different communications environment and have little incentive to disrupt habits that once worked. Inertia is then dressed up as principle and thus we are outpaced, outflanked and outmanoeuvred in any attempts to organise our class. We need to adapt and use modern technological tools, and engage in professional training in how to use them, or we will continue to have rings run around us by the servants of capital.

At Jarrow Insights we take the opposite approach. We are a worker cooperative with a simple aim: to use data and technology to build the collective power of our class. Our starting assumption is that working-class organisations require the same level of strategic and analytical infrastructure that corporations take for granted. That means understanding digital systems, learning how they function, and applying that knowledge directly to organising in trade unions, political parties, and social movements.

We work in the tradition of the Workers' Inquiry, the method of systematically investigating the concrete conditions of working-class life in order to identify leverage points for collective action. A grievance, in this sense, is not simply a complaint. It is any structured pressure that impinges on a worker's life: pace of work, wage loss, arbitrary discipline, injury risk, insecure hours, impossible scheduling, degraded housing, punitive welfare rules. Grievances are patterned. They can be collected, analysed and organised around.

We collect worker grievances scientifically and we treat them as material political data: evidence of how capitalism organises work and extracts value. We build tools to gather that information systematically, analyse it rigorously and return it in forms that strengthen organisation. The point is not to accumulate stories for moral effect. It is to produce clarity — about structure, about commonality, about where power lies and what it reveals.

Workers do not live in a "digital world" separate from real life. They live in workplaces, homes and communities shaped by material constraints, constraints increasingly mediated, intensified or interpreted through digital systems. Work is scheduled through



**“WE AREN’T PEOPLE  
TO THEM, WE  
ARE ENTIRELY  
REPLACEABLE COGS  
IN THE MACHINE.”**

apps, shifts are allocated algorithmically and political arguments circulate through feeds. What was once discussed on the shop floor or in the break room is now debated in the group chat or the Facebook page.

Just as the workplace is not neutral terrain nor are technological platforms. Both are structured to extract value. The former extracts labour time and the latter extracts views, clicks, and consumer time. But our labour movement was not built in friendly conditions, it was built in mines, mills and yards designed to break our collective backs. The fact that a space is structured by capital has never been a reason to avoid it. It has always been a reason to organise within it and against it. If working class organisations cede digital space, if we treat platforms as beneath serious organising, we forfeit one of the primary sites where political common sense is now forged. If our class refuses to contest that terrain, others will occupy it.

We have been making this case for years. Our analysis of technology and class power has been introduced into unions and political parties, often pushing against scepticism. Digital strategy is still widely treated as an afterthought or a branding exercise. We argue that data collection, narrative discipline and platform literacy are now core components of class organisation. Where we have been allowed to implement our approach, which we call the Digital Mass Line, it has produced significant results. We have won recognition agreements, pay-rises, and grown unions in hostile conditions.

Our work with Uni Global Union for Amazon workers is perhaps our most well known project. Amazon operates as a data regime where productivity is measured continuously: routes and tasks are allocated algorithmically and workers are monitored, compared and ranked. No moment of a shift is unaccounted for, and the labour process is saturated with surveillance and measurement.

To organise the workers atomised by this system we began with structured inquiry. We designed surveys to collect grievances across sites and countries, asking workers to describe how algorithmic management affected their pace of work, their health, their job security and their ability to communicate. The survey did not seek controversy but to understand the structure of working life.

By the end of our survey we had collected more than 2000 responses from workers across 8 countries in 6 languages. The responses showed recurring patterns. Workers in different countries described the same pressures: escalating targets, injury risk, disciplinary systems that felt arbitrary and opaque, high turnover that

weakened solidarity. The particulars of the responses were as important as the wide analysis they confirmed.

The data collected in surveys like this feed directly into organising. Patterns identified across sites can be returned to organisers and worker leaders to develop campaign demands. Talking points are sharpened and unions learn how to speak to workers in their own language. The end result is that workers can see that what felt personal was structural.

Our Amazon survey is not a one-off. We have applied the same methodology across sectors, collecting tens of thousands of responses from workers in manufacturing, care, cleaning, security, call centres and logistics. Across sectors we have taken the data gathered from our surveys and used it to help union organisers and workers build campaigns that win. In each case, the aim has been the same: convert dispersed grievance into structured knowledge, and structured knowledge into organised power.

There is a risk here. Digital methods can easily be severed from material analysis. Without a clear understanding of class structure, online activity degenerates into performance and noise. A clever video or viral post does not build durable power on its own. It must be tied to majority organisation, clear demands and a strategy for escalation.

We are not arguing that digital competence should, or even can be outsourced to consultants. There is a fundamental need for political education about technology and the digital world that goes hand in hand with traditional capacity-building organising.

That conviction underpins our Worker Academy initiative. It is an attempt to build a layer of trade union and social movement organisers who combine materialist political education with practical digital organising skills. They learn how to collect and interpret data, how to test messages, how to integrate digital work into workplace strategy. They also study the political economy of technology and the history of labour struggle. Techniques divorced from materialist analysis will not produce effective outcomes. Tools must be anchored in an understanding of how capital organises work and shapes consciousness. We’re proud to have begun our first courses with the Scottish Trades Union Congress

The historic task of our class has not changed: to build collective power capable of confronting and overcoming capitalism. The tools through which that struggle is conducted have changed. We can either master them or be mastered by them.

# THE ROCKSTAR UNION PURGE

Four months after Rockstar Games fired dozens of union members, **Rachel Crawford** reflects on the workers' struggles following the shocking dismissals.

In late October 2025, Rockstar Games, the company famous for the *Grand Theft Auto* series, fired over 30 employees in the UK and Canada. All were involved in private discussions about unionization. All of the fired workers in the UK were members of the Game Workers branch of the Independent Workers of Great Britain (IWGB) union, and most were on the elected organizing committee.

The IWGB Game Workers branch formed in 2018, at the beginning of an upswell of worker organizing across the global games industry. It has grown steadily in game development studios across the UK, and in October 2025 it secured its first recognition agreement at game developer ZA/UM. Rockstar Games has the highest number of Game Workers branch members of any games company in the UK, thanks to the efforts of our organizing committee. Last October, a few weeks before the firings, we crossed a significant milestone: over 10% of development staff were now members of the union.

When the firings took place we were shocked. Over the course of October 30th, each of us was invited into "catch up" meetings with HR, handed dismissal letters alleging gross misconduct, and escorted out of our respective offices by security. We were devastated, but angry and ready to fight to save our union and try to get our jobs back. As the day went on the IWGB's legal team sprang into action to help us, contacting the company to discuss what had happened (they were, of course, ignored) and preparing both our internal appeals to Rockstar and our tribunal claims. Meanwhile we prepared a petition to be shared with Rockstar employees asking management to reverse the decision. We also began to do something the Game Workers branch had never done before: demonstrate outside a workplace.

Tentatively at first, we pitched up near the front doors of Rockstar North in Edinburgh, with a Game Workers banner, our petition, and some leaflets explaining the situation. At lunchtimes, and on some mornings, we stood and invited our colleagues to come talk to us. There had been very little internal communication about what had happened, so speculation, hearsay and confusion had stepped into the gap. At first most people were too anxious even to greet us, save for the most dedicated union members (including the single still-employed organizing committee member). But as the days went by more and more felt comfortable speaking to us and even standing with us. Soon it seemed like nobody believed the company's line that our dismissals were fair and legitimate.

One week on, to coincide with the submission of our internal appeals, we held our first 'big' lunchtime demonstration, inviting the public and other organizations to stand with us to protest the decision. A large crowd gathered, chants were made, speeches were delivered, and at the protest's culmination a group of Rockstar union members marched into the building to deliver our petition to management. In spite of confusion and fear of retaliation over 200 Rockstar employees had signed it and we printed the same number of copies. I'm sad I didn't get to see it being delivered myself, but the mental image of my comrades barging (politely) into a meeting and handing a stack of papers to the head of the company will bring me warm fuzzy feelings for years to come.

November and December rolled on. We had more demonstrations (including at other Rockstar offices), fundraisers, meetings with MPs and MSPs, interviews with journalists, member organizing to build up a new committee, and much, much legal preparation to do. Then, at the beginning of January, our interim relief hearing loomed.

Interim relief is a special measure which an employment tribunal can grant following a preliminary hearing and *prima facie* reading of a case. If the judge decides that an automatic unfair dismissal claim is almost guaranteed to succeed and rules in favour of the claimants, the respondent (Rockstar) would be required either to reinstate us pre-emptively or at least pay our wages until the final hearing concludes. Representing us in the hear-

ing was John Hendy, a KC who has fought for workers' rights many times, who kindly stepped out of retirement for us. In spite of Hendy's speeches, the evidence presented, and Rockstar's weak defence, the absence of definitive "smoking gun" evidence in our favour at this early stage meant the judge did not have the confidence necessary to grant us interim relief.

To our minds, the evidence should have been definitive: the company had covertly infiltrated a private online discussion forum run by our union on our Discord server, monitored it for weeks while taking no action and then, without warning or following its own disciplinary processes, fired a handful of its participants on spurious charges of disparagement and sharing confidential information. The "disparagement" in question? Criticism of company policy changes around remote work and pay transparency. The "confidential information"? HR and department policies regarding employee sick days or vacations, and overtime. All things that workers would be perfectly within their rights to discuss in a union meeting, so why not in a private union chat?

The laws surrounding unions are behind the times and, while we can expect some improvement as the Employment Rights Act 2025 goes into effect, there is still work to do to make safer the digital organizing that is necessary and effective nowadays.

Ultimately, however, legal protections are no substitute for the true worker power we are building towards long-term in the games industry. Had our union been larger, stronger, and ready when the dismissals fell, we have no doubt that robust strike action would have swiftly reversed Rockstar's decision. That is the kind of strength we must build. It may take many years yet, during which the industry and world will change around us, but if we hold true to the vision we can make it reality.

There is now a new organizing committee at Rockstar Games as members of the

union, which continues to grow, step up to become activists in order to pursue that vision.

As for us among the dismissed, we are seeking new employment while we await our substantive hearing later this year, where we believe we are likely to succeed. The games industry is in a poor state, which makes our hunt for jobs harder: negative market conditions, mismanagement and corporate greed have led to thousands of layoffs and studio closures worldwide. We are fortunate to have been able to raise a fighting fund, made up of donations from all over the world, which our most vulnerable members can dip into. We cannot overstate our gratitude for the support we have received.

*Grand Theft Auto VI* is set to release on November 19th 2026 and make billions of dollars for its investors within its first few months. The story of our union and the dismissals will shadow its marketing campaign, making one question unavoidable: who should benefit most from the labour and passion of workers in the games industry, the workers themselves, or the capitalists who exploit them?



You can support the fighting fund at <https://actionnetwork.org/fundraising/support-rockstar-workers-fighting-unfair-dismissals/>



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# RIGGING UP A UNION

**Jake Molloy** has been a plumber, an offshore safety-rep, and a union General Secretary. He spoke to **Stephen Smellie** and **Cailean Gallagher** about how his journey led to his work for a Just Transition.

Jake Molloy is a member of the Scottish Government's Just Transition Commission that published its latest report in February entitled *No Time To Lose*, which describes how the action needed to achieve a Just Transition had failed to be delivered.

Jake is ideally placed to make that assessment having spent seventeen years as an offshore worker and safety rep before becoming General Secretary of the Offshore Industry Liaison Committee (OILC), the only union to manage to organise workers in the North Sea at the time.

He started out as a plumber's apprentice at the insistence of his father, who didn't think much of Jake's idea of staying on at school to do O levels. He did insist that Jake join a trade union, so he joined the EPIU, the breakaway from the EEPTU. Made redundant after he served his time, he was offered a job offshore, and after his first ever flight on an airplane and then a helicopter, he found himself in 1980 on an oil rig in the North Sea.

There he found conditions were very different for the Americans who were employed by Chevron compared to the contractors who were mostly British workers. Jake recalls:

"If you were a contractor, you slept in the four-man cabins above the gas compression module . . . on the other side of the platform, you had your own wee mess hall for your dinner, your tea breaks and all the rest of it. If you wanted to watch a movie, you come right on the platform into the permanent living quarters where the Chevron guys stayed, a lot of them American at the time. You could go into the cinema, but if somebody come in, employed by Chevron, they can ask for your seat and you to leave. Their mess hall was huge. They had the best of grub. It was just two different tiers. It literally was two class societies on a platform."

There was a big downturn in 1986 as OPEC increased oil production and forced down the price of oil. Jake was unemployed along with thousands of others. "Between 9 and 12,000 were paid off in the

space of three months," explained Jake, "Aberdeen was devastated. All the guest houses, all the wee bed and breakfasts, they were just all wiped out in the space of three months." The cause of the downturn was a glut of oil from Saudi Arabia and OPEC. "The North Sea was never part of OPEC. OPEC decided to hunt the North Sea because it was producing so much. That's geopolitics."

When he got a call to go back offshore, the rates of pay on offer were much reduced. He headed for the Brent Delta where he learned that he was replacing the 45 men who had been killed when their Chinook helicopter crashed in 1986. "We were going into the dead men's shoes, which was the most awful time ever, ever, ever." This led him to get involved in the campaign to replace the Chinooks and the issue of safety in the industry.

Safety was never a priority for the oil companies, and trade unions were not present on the rigs. "If you mentioned the word union, you were finished." They were strong in the construction of the oil rigs and during the 'hook up' of the platform, but Jake never saw a union once the rig was offshore. He explained:

"Once [the] first oil hit the platform, the union agreement ended. So, during the most dangerous phase . . . you've got oil and gas pumping in high volumes, high pressures, all the platforms, you had no trade union rights. There were a lot of unions involved back then, eleven different unions, who competed against one another to try and organise on shore, but there was nobody, nobody prepared to get involved offshore."

The situation changed on 6 July 1988 when the Piper Alpha disaster happened. 165 men were killed when the rig exploded, as well as 2 rescue crew. But that wasn't the only example of where the lack of concern for safety led to disaster. Jake recalled, "everybody talks about Piper, but you also had the Ocean Odyssey which went over belly up and one guy was killed there."

Jake was on the Brent Delta when a cooling module blew apart on 1 January 1989. Luckily no-one was killed as they were inside

getting their New Year's Dinner. An investigation by the Department of Energy said it was due to management being drunk as everyone was allowed a tin of beer with their Ne'erday dinner. Jake said, "We knew it was [because] the pressure was building, because we were maintaining it and the differential pressures were obvious, but it just kept going and going and going and going. It was just poor maintenance."

### Breakaway or Blowout?

It was following these events that the OILC – Offshore Industry Liaison Committee – was formed. Jake explained, "the word was spreading round the North Sea, surprisingly, because there was no phones, no iPads, nothing yet, it was fax or word of mouth, but the words went round, we were going to take a day action, stop work, on the anniversary (of Piper Alpha) on the 6th of July, 1989. They created a newspaper, *Blow Out*. Workers were starting to come out and talk about what was happening offshore."

Ronnie McDonald was the figurehead. He had been sacked and so could be public about organising a union and a ballot was organised. Jake recalls, "the first time I'd ever seen a ballot of any kind. It was a big old coffee tin with a hole in the top and you got handed this wee bit of paper. Do you want a trade union offshore? Yes or no? And then you shoved it in the tin."

The union was called the OILC as the workers wanted it to be a Liaison Committee with all the other unions. They created the logo to deliberately resemble that of the Polish union Solidarnosc. Prime Minister Thatcher had visited Poland and met Lech Wałęsa and said that was a union she could work with. "So we come up with an idea, okay, we'll give you a union you can work with then." This Solidarnosc-inspired logo led to Polish seamen coming to the OILC offices thinking it was a Polish club! "It was funny, and a lot of them joined the union!"



Following the day of action on 6th July, further action was needed and sit-ins took place on the rigs lasting two or three weeks at a time. The main action was training workers on safety issues and safety rights. This involved universities running courses and mass meetings in Aberdeen, Glasgow, Newcastle and Liverpool.

Initially the trade unions were keen to work with the newly formed OILC and attended these meetings. However, in 1991 the unions decided they were going to make an agreement with the employers, without the involvement of the OILC and its activists and members, signalling to the OILC that they were no longer needed. The OILC organised a ballot of offshore workers who voted to form

their own union with 4000 signing up immediately. The new union was refused membership of the TUC or STUC with the reason given that it was a breakaway union. For Jake that was ironic as his first union that his father told him to join was the EPIU – a breakaway union that had been admitted into the TUC! Looking back at that time Jake said, "That was what annoyed me most, because there was nothing to break away from. There was no union established, there was no union trying to get established, there was nothing, there was zero trade union activity in the production oil and gas operating sites."

It was only when the OILC merged with the RMT, forming the OILC Branch, that Jake and the other offshore workers were allowed to become an officially recognised part of the trade union movement.

Jake is clear that the OILC was a success. "I think health and safety-wise, we changed the whole culture, you know, those safety reps, that was what we built. I was a safety rep when I got elected to the post of General Secretary. We were organising training courses. We had a lot of left-leaning academics that wanted to work with us. We did regular events with offshore workers. The HSE didn't say publicly but they welcomed every bit of involvement in terms of submissions we did. We changed a lot of the positions, you know."

The issues facing offshore workers today are very different from when Jake started. The future of workers is threatened by the demise of the industry as investment has declined and the lifespan of the sector reaches its natural end, hastened by the need to reduce the use of fossil fuels. There is much talk now of Just Transition but that was never thought about in the past, despite everyone knowing that the oil would only last forty years or so.

"Everybody thought, we're going to get a couple of years out of this. The installations have got a lifespan, you know, of twenty years, twenty-five years, whatever.

"But really that was that, everybody thought this is going to be a dash for gas, a mad rush, and then it's going to deplete rapidly and then that'll be it. You've got to get in, make as much as you can, because we're not going to be here [long]."

"That [Just Transition] was not really an issue, and it didn't become an issue really in the mindset of members until really around 2018-19 after the big downturn."

### Oil Aboard!

Jake got involved with the Scottish Government's Energy Jobs Task Force which is when he learned about Just Transition. The 2018/19 slump was massive and Greenpeace were climbing onto oil rigs. And that was followed by Covid which again devastated the industry. "The oil and gas industry has been like peak, slump, peak, slump, boom and bust. But this one felt terminal."

It was around this time that links were made with the environmental movement. Jake took the initiative and phoned Greenpeace. He said to them, "You know, let's get together and here a wee chat." Later Jake was invited onto the Rainbow Warrior in Aberdeen Port and was interviewed on a social media livestream, with a Greenpeace t-shirt saying "Oil Workers Deserve a Just Transition."

A few weeks later they, with Friends of the Earth, came up with the idea of surveying oil workers about a Just Transition, and produced the report *Our Power* where workers expressed their hopes and fears for the future. Jake believes that this collaboration was essential. "They got a far better response than we could ever get out of guys doing surveys and questionnaires and all the rest of it."

However, as the Just Transition Commission report states, not enough has been done to build a Just Transition, oil workers are losing faith. "They are losing faith because the way that the job market's going," says Jake:

"I had the National Secretary up here again a couple of weeks ago, and he showed me a guy's contract working on the Sophia



*The Rainbow Warrior in Aberdeen*



*The the first big OILC march in Aberdeen in late summer 1989*

wind farm, part of the Dogger Bank, the biggest wind farm on the planet. This guy's been on the contract for two years. Filipino, £2.95 an hour. That's what they're getting paid. You see the job adverts and all the rest of it for renewables, apart from the maintenance side, the skilled side, the tech side, all the construction phase it's all short-term. It's literally a throwback to pre-Piper days offshore. You know, short-term contracts, casualised, precarious work done through agencies."

There are real challenges for the unions trying to organise this new offshore workforce. Jake argued during the pre-Covid downturn that the future was going to be renewables and that the unions needed to collaborate. He organised a joint union meeting through the STUC in Aberdeen.

"We got them all in one room and I did a presentation for them about the need for collaboration, because the industry, whether it was renewables or oil and gas, they were working collaboratively and they were making mugs of us and we had to come together." Not all unions were prepared to work together, but with the assistance of Pat Rafferty, then Unite Regional Secretary, an agreement in principle was reached at the TUC. "Pat saw the need for change and so we created the Offshore Coordinating Group."

The aim was to get an industry wide collective agreement to future-proof the industry, which led to the Energy Services Agreement, with the support of 26 oil companies and 19 contractors. Jake continues to work on this, trying to extend it to cover the entire UK continental shelf, linked to the European continental shelf by setting minimal standards for the Danish, Dutch and Norwegian sector, "because transition isn't just oil and gas, to renewables. It's the energy sector across the European continental shelf. So we're trying to do that bottom up."

However, Jake recognises the difficulty of trying to organise and deliver Just Transition in an industry that is owned abroad by corporate interests. Frustrated, he argues that "we still don't have a credible plan, and certainly not one which is going to assure workers

in the fossil side. And that hasn't been helped with Grangemouth, it hasn't been helped in Mossmorran." He argues that a Plan for Just Transition must include a collective bargaining model to give workers the basis for skills and employment. His vision includes achieving "some of the promised manufacturing sites, ... some of the public work programmes to retrofit homes and all the rest of it, some of that, some action."

"I'm old enough to remember Tony Benn in a Labour government at the time [of the] North Sea boom... [talking about the] British National Oil Corporation: we're going to set up like in Norway, we're going to take a share, we're going to be involved, be partnering up, we're going to get returns, we'll have lots of cash flowing in here."

Jack believes that in the next phase of the North Sea that ownership is important. He says, "We must have part ownership, not [to] nationalise it all, but we're taking a share of it."

He points to Great British Energy and the TUC-led GBE trade union board where the fight will be taken up, with the RMT OILC branch submitting a paper on the need for collaboration on energy and climate related jobs. But, he says, "We need some quick returns, some really quick, quick returns to turn it around and get that whole environmental trade union movement back together again and take it forward."

With the Scottish election coming he says the First Minister must, "get on board with the North Sea Futures Board as a starting point, because his biggest crisis at this minute is the whole energy side, the whole Net Zero side. The urgency lies with getting that whole plan [worked out] with policy on oil and gas, renewables, jobs, workers' rights. Deal with that and the rest will follow."

As Jake heads towards retirement, he still supports the branch as they try to deliver the bargaining agreement they have been fighting for. And then?

"I'm a pensioner now, I'll head to the garden, but I'll be keeping an eye on things."

# HIGH VOLTAGE ORGANISING TIME

Bogus self-employment is rife and labour policy is toothless in the energy sector. It is time for a new National Agreement for high voltage energy construction, writes **Greig McArthur**.

Scotland stands at a crossroads. The UK's energy costs are amongst the highest in the world, both for industrial electricity production and for domestic consumption. Prices are influenced by several factors, including reliance on gas-fired power stations, standing charges, and green levies, leading to higher energy costs than the USA. Working in the high voltage electricity transmission and distribution sector, I see the potential for low cost energy supply to the people of Scotland. However, this can only be achieved when we realise that to control the cost of energy we need first to control our energy networks. That means ownership for public benefit, not shareholder dividends.

Energy-rich Scotland suffers from private ownership of the industries necessary to free our people from high energy costs. Fuel poverty is one consequence. The lack of good, secure, highly skilled, well paid jobs is another. Governments talk about job creation, but figures show that vast numbers of workers in the sector are engaged via agencies or bogus self-employment. These poor employment models lead to insecurity, a lack of investment in the future workforce, scarce training opportunities and low numbers of apprenticeships. Meanwhile the loss to the UK Exchequer through employee tax avoidance schemes is substantial. Politicians should insist that if companies wish to engage in government contracts, direct employment must be the chosen route. It makes economic sense and is better in the long term for employees.

The UK Government has recently awarded record subsidy contracts for off-shore wind projects, including the massive SSE Berwick Bank project in the North Sea. Combined with other projects including in Wales and off the Yorkshire coast, it is estimated that 7,000 jobs will be created and 12 million homes supplied by the electricity produced. Will these 7,000 jobs be permanent or will most disappear after the construction phase? Will they be agency, self-employed, or directly employed with apprenticeships? And if 12 million homes are to be provided with green, renewable electricity, why is there a push for nuclear, and why aren't energy bills getting cheaper? With foreign companies like RWE of Germany and the global investment firm KKR owning and profiteering from our coastlines and onshore production, is it any wonder we're still being ripped off?

The alternative, of course, is nationalisation for the benefit of the people. But here in Scotland, energy is reserved for Westminster to do with as they see fit. People are suffering the consequences of failed planning. Will the next generation of politicians have the courage and strength of character to carry through these socialist policies?

I have first-hand experience working as an electrician in the renewables sector with various companies over the past couple of decades. In a previous company and in my current company in the High Voltage Energy Networks Construction sector, my colleague and I have won union recognition and been elected as shop stewards and health and safety reps. We are making gains, representing both members and the wider industry. But bogus forms of employment and insecure agency engagements are allowed and even encouraged by agency clients, Scottish Power and SSE. This results in low union density, since self-employed and agency workers face

legal and practical barriers to joining and engaging with unions. The Scottish Government lacks control over employment law and has abysmally failed to put in place robust frameworks for conditions around public contracts procurement and employment practices. There is dire need for this lucrative sector to be brought under stricter UK rules whereby workers can be involved in major decisions affecting their terms conditions and employment, and trade union membership becomes the rule and not the exception.

As Branch Secretary of the Unite the Union Greater Glasgow Electrical, Mechanical and Plumbing Branch I have made the case for a brand new Union National Agreement for the High Voltage Energy Networks Construction sector, through Unite's democratic structures, and also with Scottish Government Minister's via their Fair Work Convention and Construction Accord. However, whilst our Branch continues to lobby both Unite and the Scottish Government, we have faced unnecessary roadblocks. The Fair Work Convention should have been a force for good, but it lacks teeth, and fails to involve workers who understand the sector. STUC General Secretary Roz Foyer stated in 2021 in the *Morning Star*: "this is a make or break time for the fair work agenda in Scotland". She argued: "in the meantime there are a range of other levers already at the Scottish Governments disposal. We cannot wait for further constitutional change before we start to put those measures in place". So what happened?

Workers cannot wait while politicians and unions procrastinate, particularly when our major industries are closing down with devastating losses to communities where workers gave years of toil and effort. Closures at Grangemouth and Mossmorran, and talk of more job losses at Sullom Voe, highlight the inability to date of trade unions and governments to agree and implement a strategy focused on fair work and community benefits. Our Branch believes that with concerted effort from government, unions, and workers' representatives, we can create a sectoral strategy fit for the years ahead, with a National Agreement for a real Just Transition that transfers workers and skills over to the renewables sector with agreed rates of pay, good conditions of employment, safe workplaces, a complete end to blacklisting and, most importantly, a bright future for our kids' generation and the generations to follow. Key officers and elected lay members of Unite's Scottish Executive Council are prepared to work with our Branch to achieve this.

Scotland's people have no need or appetite for a new generation of nuclear power stations. We have abundant clean, green renewable energy supplies. Scotland can be green and efficient with low prices for businesses and consumers. With the will, we can achieve fair work policies and good quality jobs for our kids' generation. Only the political will is lacking, and we need new faces with new ideas and a drive to do better. This is why I have decided to stand for election to the Scottish Parliament in May 2026 as a candidate of the Alliance to Liberate Scotland, for the Motherwell and Wishaw constituency. As a trade unionist, should I be elected I will give voice to ordinary workers from my hometown and from the workplaces I represent. I stand for Scotland and for the workers.

# THE UNSEEN CRISIS

Migrant care workers in Scotland face displacement and dread at the hands of the Home Office. They must be involved in building the solution, writes **Udinyhiwe Unity**.

At about 5pm, on a routine evening after work, an email from the Home Office arrived in my inbox. The familiar dread associated with official correspondence came upon me. The message I opened detailed the curtailment of my sponsorship due to my employer's licence being revoked. In an instant, the foundation of hard work and aspiration I had built was shaken. As a care worker who had acted with professionalism and diligence, the question was unavoidable: how had I earned this misfortune?

It is well known that the UK's social care sector is under immense strain. Meanwhile, however, a less visible but equally critical crisis is unfolding for thousands of migrant workers who have been displaced due to recent shifts in immigration policy. Closure of the care visa route to new dependants and implementation of stricter salary thresholds have created significant barriers. In this new environment, the Home Office has revoked numerous sponsors' licences from employers, causing employees to lose their jobs and security. While these actions are officially justified on grounds like non-compliance or misuse of the sponsorship system, these policies are part of a broader governmental effort to reduce net migration. The human consequence is a growing population of legally compliant migrant workers left in professional and personal limbo.

I am one of thousands who have found themselves in this predicament. I arrived in the UK on the social care route, diligently fulfilling my role supporting vulnerable adults and children in a Scottish care home. I complied with all Home Office regulations and the requirements of my employer. I was blameless in my employer's non-compliance, yet I faced severe and protracted difficulties as a result of these Home Office measures.

## Stuck in Limbo

Displacement is often caused by an employer's failure to meet Home Office compliance standards, yet the most severe consequences are borne by the employee. The struggle to secure a new sponsor leaves skilled professionals in a state of uncertainty. The immediate aftermath of such displacement is characterised by financial instability. With the prospect of being stripped of the right to work and with no access to public funds, individuals are forced to exhaust their savings. This vulnerability fosters persistent fear and uncertainty. Beyond financial strain and job insecurity, the threat of visa curtailment and forced departure creates profound anxiety. This state of limbo takes a heavy toll on mental health and overall wellbeing.

Navigating this situation in Scotland presented a unique set of challenges. Seeking guidance, I approached the Citizens Advice Bureau and local council offices. However, a significant information gap between these local bodies and the Home Office meant that many advisors were under-equipped to understand or assist with my specific immigration-related employment crisis. In England in 2024, the government established support hubs in every council to act as a bridge between displaced workers and potential new sponsors. Until recently, Scotland lacked such a coordinated system. The Scottish Government announced a £500,000 fund in October 2025 to assist with relocation costs, but its slow implementation left displaced workers in Scotland at a distinct disadvantage, risking their departure from the workforce or migration to England for better support. It was paradoxical and frustrating to learn that Scottish employers were sourcing staff from the displaced worker scheme

in England, while qualified workers already in Scotland were being overlooked due to a lack of local infrastructure.

For those attempting to find another role in the workforce, the criteria set by prospective employers often present another formidable barrier. Requirements such as registration with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC), a full UK driving licence, SVQ qualifications, and access to a personal vehicle, while understandably desirable, can be prohibitive. Many displaced workers are recent immigrants who are building their lives and may not have had time or resources to acquire these credentials, which were not prerequisites for their previous roles. These requirements, which could be attained during employment, now serve to widen the gap between a displaced worker's urgent need for income and their ability to secure a new position.

The sense of isolation is compounded by a confusing support system. Enquiries at various organisations and hubs in Scotland often lead to referrals back to England-based teams or a circular return to one's local council. The lack of a centralised, knowledgeable point of contact in Scotland made the process feel hopeless.

## A Beacon of Support

Amidst this challenging landscape, one organisation has provided a vital lifeline. The Worker Support Centre, an NGO based in Perth, Scotland, has done exceptional work not only by bridging the gap between licensed employers and displaced workers but also by organising, supporting, and empowering workers to unite and advocate for themselves. Discovering the Worker Support Centre was a turning point, not merely for the prospect of employment, but for the solace of finding a community that truly understood the situation.

To anyone currently navigating this unbidden situation, I offer this message: do not lose all hope. You are not alone, and by organising and uniting our voices we can better position ourselves to speak truth to power and demand effective solutions.

To employers across Scotland, I appeal to you to recognise the pool of skilled, displaced talent already within the country. Greater effort should be directed toward local recruitment before sourcing from further afield.

While I acknowledge the Scottish Government's efforts to support displaced immigrant workers, particularly in social care, it is vital that support packages are designed so that the workers are the primary beneficiaries. For these measures to have a genuine and wide reaching impact, consultation platforms between government representatives and the workers themselves must be established. Only by diagnosing, discussing, and reviewing the real issues directly with those affected can we arrive at viable solutions.

In conclusion, being displaced from one's livelihood in a foreign country imposes more than just a financial burden. It exposes profound vulnerabilities and negatively impacts mental health, which endangers not only the individual but the wider community. We must draw sufficient awareness to this subject among licensed employers, government agencies, and all relevant stakeholders in the social care sector.

To everyone facing this challenge; you are not alone, reach out, join your voice with others and do not suffer in silence. There will be light at the end of the tunnel.

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# STAND & DELIVER: THE LEE JEANS SIT-IN



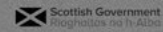
24 Apr – 10 Jun  
Touring to Glasgow,  
Aberdeen, Kirkcaldy,  
Edinburgh, St Andrews,  
Peebles, Mull, Inverness,  
Cumbernauld and Greenock

Written by Frances Poet  
Directed by Jemima Levick

From an idea conceived by  
Paul English and Frances Poet



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# EVERY STEP OF THE WAY

**Irene Graham** shares the story and strategy of one Unite branch's successful campaign to increase pensioners' income, initiated by the late Sammy Morris.

In 2022, when Sammy Morris was in hospital, he was visited by his friend Tommy Gorman, a volunteer at the Clydebank Asbestos Group (CAG). Tommy asked Sammy if he got Attendance Allowance. Sammy replied that he had both his state and work pensions and so assumed he would not qualify. Tommy pointed out that Attendance Allowance is not means tested and is tax exempt. He supported Sammy to apply. When Sammy received the higher rate, he was amazed. The allowance made an enormous difference.

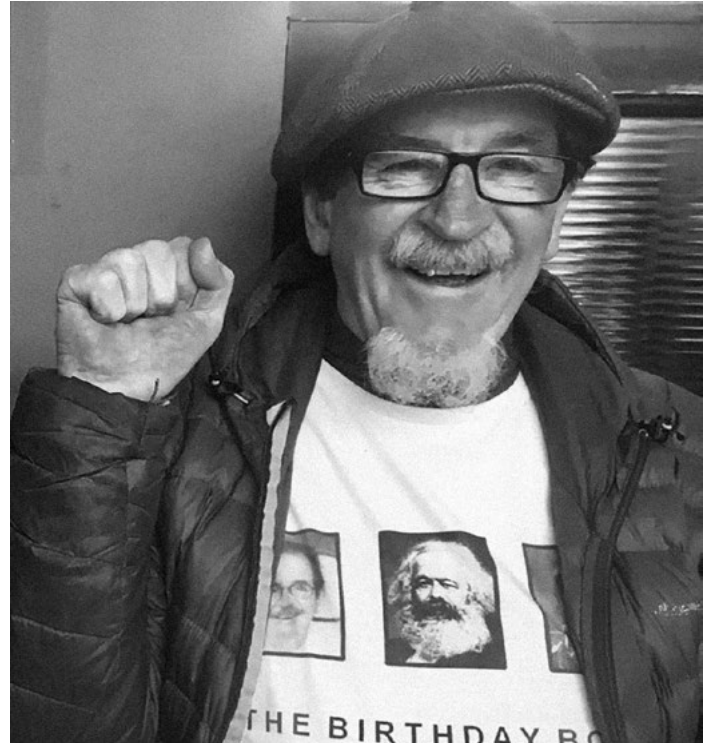
Being a staunch trade unionist, Sammy entreated Unite Retired Members Glasgow and Renfrewshire Branch to learn more about the entitlement and to let all members know about it, encouraging them to apply. The branch took up Sammy's call. We invited CAG to address the branch and share their expertise with us and we reached out to our members, just by word of mouth at first. Those were the seeds of our partnership with CAG and our project to support members to claim the income that they are entitled to, enabling them to ease the financial cost associated with ill health and disabling conditions, and to improve their quality of life.

Pension Age Disability Payment, which replaced Attendance Allowance in Scotland in 2025, is a benefit for adults of State Pension age or over who live in Scotland. Its purpose is to assist with the extra costs of a long-term physical or mental health condition. Yet many eligible households do not apply. This can be because of the difficulty of trying to navigate a benefits system which is new for many pensioners. It can be down to lack of awareness, or the fear of filling lengthy forms which take a long time to complete for those without experience. Some worry about disclosing personal information, while others fear being caught up in a scam. That is why accurate advice and information is so important for those who are approaching retirement, to ensure that they do not lose out on money they are entitled to.

When Attendance Allowance became the Pension Age Disability Payment and the responsibility of the Scottish Government, the previous 29-page form became 89 pages, and there is now a two-step process for applying. The application form looks daunting and can take up to three hours to complete. This is why the main activity of our joint project has been to assist members with claims at every stage of the process. Members of the branch attended training run by CAG and we now have a team of volunteers ready to assist members with the application process. We aim to reach every member, inform them, and encourage them to apply. With 4421 members, most of whom are not on email, we know that we have a challenge.

Our chairperson Jake McLeod and representatives from CAG met with Unite's Regional Secretary to discuss potential support for this project, initially as a pilot based in Glasgow but with the ultimate aim of reaching all retired members in Scotland. One idea was that Unite employ a Welfare Rights Worker, but that was not possible. Instead Unite Scotland agreed to cover the cost of sending letters with reply-paid envelopes to retired members on a staggered basis, first targeting Clydebank and its surrounding areas.

By reaching members by post, word of mouth, and emails we have so far made 140 successful claims for this and other benefits. These include several claims for Pension Credit, Carers Allowance and Adult Disability Payment; but the focus has been on Pension



*Sammy Morris*

Age Disability Payment claims, which is paid at two levels that increase annually in line with other welfare benefits. In April 2026, the higher rate increases from £110.40 to £114.60 a week. Before the increase, this amounted to £5,740.80 per year. Several couples have successfully made claims, resulting in additional annual incomes of £11,481.60 for these households. The total financial gains so far have exceeded £870,000. The awards made are not one offs, but annual.

## **Branch Commitment**

The Branch has invested heavily in this project. It has covered catering costs of training sessions with CAG volunteers, which over twenty members have attended. Training will continue to ensure we remain up to date with changes and to add to our cohort of trained members. We now aim to build capacity of other retired members branches to take on similar projects. Not all branches have the capacity to mirror Glasgow, but all can play a significant role in reaching, informing and supporting members to apply. For example, when the Glasgow branch secretary visited the Ayr branch to talk about the project, the Ayr branch agreed to inform members and encourage them to use the range of welfare advice experts in their area to make an application. The branch also agreed to compile a list of welfare advice agencies in the area and to circulate this to members. The Borders branch is now beginning its own pilot.

When the project first began, we were concerned that many members were facing severe financial hardship caused by Conservative austerity policies. We were all having to deal with an increase in the cost of living, especially in food and energy prices. We were anxious that the Triple Lock was in danger and that the value of pensions would diminish. With the election of the Labour Government, the austerity policies not only continued but got worse when the new government announced that the universal Winter Fuel Payment would now only be awarded to pensioners in receipt of Pension Credit, a vastly underclaimed benefit. Unite nationally and locally was at the forefront of the campaign to force a government U-turn on Winter Fuel Payment. Energy and food prices have continued to rise and, thanks to fiscal drag, many pensioners are worse

off now due to paying more tax. The job of ensuring members get their due entitlements is needed more than ever.

Retired members branches can play a key role in raising awareness, signposting, and providing one to one support for members to complete the application process. In our branch, we are proud that we have raised over £870,000 for our members. We know we have only reached a small fraction of those who could make a successful claim. We are redoubling our efforts to reduce pensioner poverty and win the money to which retired union members are entitled. Shared knowledge will be key to our success. Without the foresight of Sammy Morris, this project would not have happened. It is a fitting legacy of dedicated, fighting trade unionist who sadly passed away in August 2024.

# STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES OF PLACE

The latest paper from The Jimmy Reid Foundation set out the challenges facing place-based communities, writes **Dave Watson**.

Even in a digital world, communities of place still matter for our well-being, resilience, democracy and the economy. From funding and inequalities to exploitation by the far-right, these communities are under threat as never before.

Community has been an important theme for the Jimmy Reid Foundation in recent years. There are many types of communities, and all are important. However, there is a risk that we forget the importance of place. Many communities of people are bound together because they reside, work, visit, or otherwise spend a continuous portion of their time in the same place.

We explain that despite our digitally connected age, communities of place still matter. Social networks of family and friends are crucial, and links to wider networks are also important for health and wellbeing. The Scottish Government calls this 'social capital'. This requires local services, or 'social infrastructure'. When social infrastructure is robust, it fosters contact, mutual support, and collaboration among friends and neighbours. When degraded, it inhibits social activity, leaving families and individuals to fend for themselves. This is anchored in local democracy and in the shared action that is possible when communities campaign together.

Place has served as the basis for social movements, protests, and the formation of trade unions. The Tolpuddle Martyrs and the Calton Weavers are just two historical examples. More recently, the Kenmure Street protest showed how communities can rally in this way. Shared experiences and loyalty help build that solidarity. When local institutions break down, it leaves a vacuum for the far right to exploit through culture wars and unfounded conspiracy theories.

Community also matters for the local economy. To function properly, a healthy, supportive community is needed, rooted in Community Wealth Building rather than reliance on global corporations. Despite promises of devolution, Scotland has some of the largest local government units in the world, and 67% of Scots report having little or no influence over decisions affecting their local community.

We highlight the challenges faced by communities of place, including the long-term degradation of our social infrastructure caused by cuts to local government funding and the centralisation of services. While Scotland as a whole faces deep-seated inequality, those living in the most deprived parts of the country are four times

more likely to die early. Because Scotland's councils are so large, this can mask real communities of place with high levels of inequality. Although the incidence of poverty is higher in urban areas, there are still pockets of high inequality in rural areas.

Finally, we set out a new approach to communities of place, grounded in global research on what works. These include:

- Strengthening social infrastructure to offer opportunities for connection, belonging, and shared experiences.
- Creating a good neighbourhood design and maintain physical spaces.
- Developing accessible ways for local people to share information.
- Challenging the culture wars exploited by the far-right.
- Decentralising power to communities to involve more people in the governance of our lives, and reform local government finance to fairly fund local services.
- An education system that builds capabilities and expectations of civic participation.
- Incentivising the private sector to direct its social and net-zero strategies towards transformational outcomes for vulnerable communities.

This approach recognises the value of communities of place and the practical measures needed to rebuild them. It also recognises the value of social infrastructure and public services, devolving power, and building the local economy through Community Wealth Building. We also need to better understand the practical measures that help build stronger communities, including neighbourhood design, high-quality public spaces, local events, and improved information sharing. Most importantly, we need to provide residents with greater opportunities to influence decisions affecting their neighbourhoods and to encourage engagement.

*You can download the paper 'The Policy of Place' from the Foundation's website.*

# FAIR WORK: WHERE'S THE EVIDENCE?

In the next session of the Scottish Parliament, tackling work injustice and delivering Fair Work should be urgent priorities, writes **Katy Clark** MSP, Scottish Labour candidate for Cunninghame South.

For too many workers across Scotland, fair work is little more than a slogan. Their reality is an economy which doesn't serve their interests. The SNP Scottish Government spoke of Scotland being a fair work nation by 2025, but work injustice and in-work poverty remain significant problems across the country. Up to six in ten of those living in poverty are in households where someone works. Low pay, insecure work, poor terms and conditions, and a lack of union recognition are still all too common in many sectors.

Around 12% of workers are still paid less than the Real Living Wage. Over 100,000 workers in Scotland are believed to still be on exploitative zero-hours contracts. Sectors like social care, renewable energy, and hospitality are rife with poor terms and conditions, from unpaid overtime to a lack of reimbursement for travel and uniforms.

Union recognition and membership remain heavily concentrated in the public sector, in large part due to restrictive anti-union laws passed by successive Conservative governments. Thanks to tireless campaigning by trade unionists and the broader labour movement, the Labour Party committed itself while in opposition to the New Deal for Working People, which represented the largest potential expansion of workers' rights in a generation, promising the roll-back of years of anti-union and anti-worker measures.

We should recognise that Labour has begun to deliver on the New Deal for Working People through the Employment Rights Act. Workers will have access to sick pay and maternity leave from the first day on the job. The anti-union laws passed by the last Conservative government have been repealed. Trade union reps will have greater protections in workplaces, and balloting will be modernised through the introduction of electronic voting. Redundancy pay has been improved, and the caps on unfair dismissal compensation have been abolished. Workers will have the right to reasonable notice of a shift, any changes to a shift, or a cancellation of a shift. Workers who find their jobs outsourced will no longer see their terms and conditions eroded as a result.

These changes will have a real and lasting impact for workers across Scotland, and will I hope begin to help address the problem of work injustice. However, we have to recognise that the Employment Rights Act has not delivered on all of the New Deal for Working People. That is why the next Scottish Government, irrespective of party, must work alongside trade unions and the broader labour movement to make sure that future UK Government legislation delivers on initiatives like the outlawing of fire and rehire practices and a ban on zero-hours contracts.

It would however be wrong to suggest that, simply because employment law remains reversed to Westminster, the Scottish Government has no role in tackling work injustice.

While the Employment Rights Act and delivering on the New Deal for Working People in full are steps for the UK Government to take, Scotland has significant devolved powers at its disposal which are currently not being used to their full potential. The SNP set out the Fair Work agenda over a decade ago, yet we see near daily reminders that this agenda has largely been unsuccessful in many sectors of Scotland's economy.

Many higher education institutions continue not to engage in meaningful consultation with trade unions, while threatening job cuts. Workers in the hospitality sector continue to face a range of issues from workplace harassment to lack of safe transport home. Progress on delivering sectoral collective bargaining in the social care sector remains stubbornly slow.

In the next session of the Scottish Parliament, we must make tackling work injustice and truly delivering on the Fair Work agenda an urgent priority. That means delivering collective bargaining in the social care sector and expanding it to other sectors as well. In the public transport sector, the assault of workers should be made a specific offence and treated as aggravated assault, recognising the unacceptability of violence against workers. Women workers in all sectors, including teachers and classroom assistants, are facing an increase in violence, sexism and misogyny, and far more action is needed to tackle this.

Continued receipt of Scottish Government grants and public funding should be conditional not just on agreement with Fair Work principles, but actual regular evidence that these are being adhered to. Commissioning and procurement processes should give greater weighting to Fair Work principles, particularly union recognition, and should also include additional conditions like paying the Real Living Wage or collectively bargained rates, and abiding by national agreements like that covering engineering construction. Fair Work principles should also be updated to include greater focus on improving the rights of young, women, ethnic minority and disabled workers, and to promote flexible working practices.

If re-elected to the Scottish Parliament, I will continue to work with trade unions and the broader labour movement to make the case for such action to tackle work injustice across Scotland.

As the gig economy grows, the next Scottish Government should expand the rights of these precarious workers, writes **Kate Campbell**, SNP candidate for Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent.

Eradicating child poverty is the priority for the SNP Scottish Government. Policies like the Scottish Child Payment are central to achieving it. But so too are deeply connected measures to tackle in-work poverty and make sure that people who are working are paid a decent wage.

In the UK 72% of children living in poverty have at least one parent who is in work. Over the last few years the cost of living crisis has made life harder. Prices have risen. The breaking down of the international rules based order – unprovoked wars, irrational and unpredictable tariffs – has created global instability, disrupting supply chains and international trade. It feels like we are hovering on the brink of another worldwide recession. Energy prices are set to soar further as we await the outcome of the US-Israeli war on Iran.

In this tumultuous world, the least that people need is stability in their employment.

Fair work is not just a slogan. It is a set of principles which can transform working lives. Work should offer security. It should offer respect. It should give people opportunity and a voice. The Scottish Government's Fair Work approach aims to make Scotland a leading fair work nation. Fair Work is also part of the National Strategy for Economic Transformation. Scotland's economic strategy recognises that a strong economy depends on good jobs.

Employment law is the UK Government's responsibility and, to be fair, the Employment Rights Act is one rare area where the UK Government has made some progress. But workers in the most unstable, precarious and insecure work are barely covered by the new legislation. Undefined action on zero hours contracts has been kicked into the long grass until an unspecified date in 2027.

In the gig economy, workers' status is critical to what rights they are afforded. Sick pay, holiday pay and the minimum wage are all contingent on having the right status. Self-employed people have the least rights, employees the most. The majority of gig economy workers fall into the middle category of 'worker' – the least well defined.

The Employment Rights Act is unclear how the status of gig workers will be determined. Unlike in EU countries where the Platform Work Directive makes a presumption of employee status, based on clear indicators, the UK continues to rely on case-by-case determination. This often requires workers to take employers to court; a high barrier for anyone, but especially someone in precarious work dependent on that employer for their income. UK growth sits at a sluggish 1.2%. Still the gig economy continues to grow – by 16.5% in the UK last year. As our economy suffers, more people are likely to find themselves transitioning from 'employee' to 'worker' status, shedding rights along the way.

One of the biggest criticisms of the gig economy is the way platforms use 'black box' algorithms to manage workers. HR functions are outsourced to an algorithm that has no sense of responsibility, let alone humanity, as it makes decisions about workers' lives. It determines who gets the good jobs, who gets the bad jobs and who gets no work at all. AI is making decisions which an HR manager should be making and, crucially, should be accountable for. This 'black box' element means workers have no idea what factors are influencing decisions being made. It fuels a sense of powerlessness for workers, and could be masking decision-making that would land a human in an employment tribunal. Again, the EU directive will enforce transparency on algorithmic and human oversight of decision making. UK workers have no such protections.

With no powers over employment law the Scottish Government has still to find ways to fill these gaps. Through Fair Work First it uses what powers it has to incentivise employers not to use zero-hours contracts, to tackle gender pay gaps, to offer flexible work and reject practices such as 'fire and rehire.' It does this by attaching conditions to public grants and contracts.

It's hard to see too many gig economy platforms bidding for government contracts, so the next Scottish Government will have to be inventive and agile to really get to grips with the gig economy. But there are things we can do.

We know from the history of the trade union movement that voices are so often only heard when they are collectively raised. For gig economy workers, dispersed around our cities with no base, and few means of talking to each other, creating those connections is critical. And once connected they must be empowered to influence decisions which impact them.

We should consider what enhancements we can make under digital transparency laws to open up the black box algorithms to scrutiny. We must also use regulatory frameworks to push platforms to recognise the status, and the rights, of their workers. Gathering data will be critical to this. We need to understand the gig economy much better in order to regulate it.

Given that we are a devolved nation, there will be limitations on how much we can change. This is frustrating, especially when we see the choices other countries are free to make. Of course, as an independent country we could go so much further. Aligning with the EU Directive would have the added benefit of keeping Scottish businesses internationally competitive, while also enshrining workers' rights. We have yet to see which way the Labour UK government will go in relation to the Directive, but it does not look positive. That's why independence, and the freedom to chart our own course, must remain the number one goal.

# PRECARITY'S ANTIDOTE

Precarious migrant work is experienced as an individual struggle which poisons solidarity, but community collaboration is the cure. **Xabier Villares** reviews *The Precarious Migrant Worker* by Panos Theodoropoulos (Polity Press, 2025).



This book by sociologist Panos Theodoropoulos had the power to speak to me directly as an organiser and, even more, as a migrant worker myself. In fact, any migrant who has felt the weight of a precarious job on their shoulders will see themselves across its pages. The piece could not be timelier, posing questions that are gaining traction and relevance. It specifically addresses key and intertwined matters such as the absence of unions in many precarious occupations, the fragmentation of struggles due to racist and xenophobic narratives permeating the working class, and the self-organisation of migrant precarious workers in Scotland.

Furthermore, it is a very engaging and entertaining read. Set mostly in Glasgow, you can follow its stories almost like a novel, from La Dama's restaurant dramas to the radiator factory friendships. It is impossible not to empathise with the lives you learn about. The twist is a sharp analysis of race, class and power dynamics which, conceived as a whole, explains how oppression operates upon migrant workers.

The whole book revolves around what Theodoropoulos calls the “socialisation of precarity”. This central notion encompasses “multiple complex mentalities, tendencies and behaviours” that precarious workers develop due to their constant exposure to the harmful consequences of working in precarious occupations. Under its influence, workers prioritise competition with each other rather than collaboration. They overexert themselves to be more productive, whilst simultaneously reducing the need of the employer to hire them (Theodoropoulos calls this the “good worker paradox”), and developing a survival mindset under a constant threat of dismissal and deportation. However, it takes more than workers’ subjectivity for this framework to operate effectively. A national economic structure that allows zero-hour contracts and gig work in its present form elevates employer de



*A Migrant Justice Edinburgh workshop in Craigmillar, November 2025*

mands over workers' basic needs. Combined with a migration law that perpetuates insecurity, this structure leads to migrants becoming highly exploitable and profitable subjects for capital.

Under these circumstances, for precarious migrant workers, capitalist realism takes the stage, with no chance to envision a horizon of change beyond our own situation. And here is another crucial factor: when collective problems are naturalised as individual struggles, reality appears as immutable and eternal for those under this spell. Exploitation then exists, independently of how we perceive it, because there is an objectifiable transmission of surplus produced and not received. This is something acknowledged by virtually all of the workers featured in this story, regardless of their position: from George, a Scottish head chef with some remorse, to Suzanne, a warehouse employee who managed with her co-workers to strike a collective bargain. Yet the intersubjectivity created under conditions of precarity does not allow us to see the big picture, poisoning all our relationships to the point of making precarious even the manifestations of solidarity. You notice it when the radiator factory worker wonders: are my colleagues helping me because they want me to succeed, or because they don't want me to be a burden around them?

Luckily, the author also offers hope. He mentions the migrants' "dual frame of reference", which enables workers to comparatively evaluate conditions between their origin and host countries. While in some ways this dual frame disempowers migrants, it can also be decisive in fostering political action when migrant workers bring previous experience into the field. Moreover, the same drives that lead to individual resistance, such as the hunger for dignity, security and autonomy that precarious employees use as a survival strategy, can become material for a "socialisation of solidarity", the ultimate opposite of the book's ominous subtitle, "the socialisation of precarity".

In this analysis, "community embeddedness" arises as the only effective way to fight back. If subjective conditions (internal, personal experiences) are the great challenge we face, structures need to pre-exist and be accessible to migrant workers to build upon the predisposition to take action. Social movements and unions need to develop strategies that go beyond tokenism and "ticking boxes", recognising the specific characteristics of this segment of the working class.

While Theodoropoulos focuses his efforts on describing the phenomena, the clues offered about how to achieve social change align with my own experience with the Workers' Observatory. In Edinburgh and other Scottish cities, the Observatory has built spaces for gig workers' self-organisation among racialised food delivery riders. Through this work, we reached an enlightening conclusion. If the precarious work we have to perform atomises and divides us, including through isolation-by-design in the case of delivery apps, we must foster solidarity across boundaries to find a way around these divisions. In line with some of the author's notes, by going beyond the initial scope of organising in specific kinds of gig work, we are now striving to foster safe spaces for broader migrant communities, as part of Migrant Justice Edinburgh (MJE). The long-term plan is to create a network of migrant worker communities across the city, facilitating grassroots collaboration in neighbourhoods, leveraging what unites the myriad of communities that shape Edinburgh, bypassing top-down charity, and ultimately empowering ourselves to take action as a group.

All in all, as someone on the battleground, the magic of the book resides in its effort to grasp the messy and complex subjectivity of the migrant worker, and in its intention to catalyse structural change, fuelled by those who know what it feels like to work on the fringe of Scottish society.

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# DOVE TALES

## because they are not

Margaret Elphinstone

*A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children; she refuseth to be comforted for her children, because they are not. (Jeremiah 31.15)*

Your cries are muffled by distance. You are too many to imagine easily: you are News huddled in noisy points of view about what the old men have decided.

Only your screams are real. You are here, not reduced through distorting telescopes, but here beside me among these stones, the ruins of ordinary lives like mine,

because it is ordinary to love your children, ordinary to feel this twist of the knife when they suffer, when they die; ordinary not to bear thinking of life when they are gone.

It is not ordinary for any mother to watch her children starve and die because of what the old men have decided from their cruel distance.

Your screams are real. You are here, and all I can do today is hear them echo because life holds nothing stronger than our children, nothing we live for more.

*Our regular poetry slot from Dove Tales, a registered charity which uses the arts to campaign for peace and against the increasing militarisation of our society*

*Dove Tales are always looking for contributions to their blog and online projects. To submit poems, stories, music or artwork email Jean Rafferty ([fireopal.jeanrafferty@outlook.com](mailto:fireopal.jeanrafferty@outlook.com)).*

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Very knowledgeable and a great service for our union members.

What a great boost of confidence it was to know that Allan McDougall Solicitors and my trade union were there, on our side, when we had thought the system was going to walk all over us. A great big heartfelt thank you.

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