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EDITORIAL: RE-ENERGISING THE STRUGGLE FOR A JUST TRANSITION

2026 has seen droughts cover England, and fires sweep across the Cairngorms. Again, the climate movement has been shouting that it is time to realise the dangers of climate change, and seize opportunities we have to make a difference. Every year wasted is a historic failure.

Whose failure is this? What does it mean for the left in Scotland and globally? How will climate change shape the politics of our progressive movements, in particular the trade unions and environmentalists? What do we have to win in this struggle, and what do we have to lose? These are the questions which we hope to raise in this special issue.

The demand for a Just Transition originated from the trade union movement. In Scotland, it has been integrated successfully into climate debate and policy. This is the result of decades of work to bring climate change to the centre of trade union attention, and link it with the struggles on working conditions and the cost of living crisis.

However, we cannot ignore the failures of the transition so far. In the same period of increased co-operation, the contrast between fine words from government and the actuality of unjust transitions for fossil fuel workers have tainted the reputation of the term ‘just transition’. As increasing numbers of workers and communities feel abandoned, there are those who would take advantage of rightful anger and disillusionment to push division and denialism. If the threat from the right is to be met, we need clear eyes and open dialogue to meet those impacted by an unjust transition where they are, to grasp the realities of what they are experiencing and feeling in a political environment that offers them so little.

The left at large has recognised the centrality of climate change (and nature more broadly) to the prospects for a prosperous future, indeed for any future at all. However, it has been slow to assert publicly what is blindingly obvious to most readers: that only socialist solutions which transfer control and ownership away from private corporations can possibly secure that future prosperity.

The climate crisis is a crisis of capitalism and for capitalism. The failure to act is a failure of its system of ownership, governance, market control and regulation – not of individual consumers or workers. An economic system destroying the environment sustaining it, and us, must be replaced – the choice which we confront is still between barbarism and socialism.

The breadth of people and organisations working on the Just Transition is one of our strengths. Differences in perspective must be utilised as an asset, not a weakening of collective strength. We must never forget who and what we are fighting for, the fundamental political principles that guide our work, and that unity always has and will be the most valuable part of collective liberation. We want this edition to help activists in trade unions, climate campaigns and left organisations to find common ground and work together towards a shared movement.

Our issue starts with Ewan Gibbs, who explains how the current unjust transition has enabled the far-right’s toxic nostalgia for the good old days of extraction, but that this cannot hide that oil and gas in Scotland is facing an inevitable decline. Miriam Brett continues our exploration by looking at the increasing fiscal challenges the Scottish Government faces in an age of climate breakdown, and

its “managed downward trajectory” which is putting us on a destructive path. Matthew Crichton looks back at ten years of building an alliance between the labour movement and environmentalists.

Liz Murray looks at why democratic ownership of our energy infrastructure must power any Just Transition worthy of its name. In our interview with Chris Hamilton, we hear about what happens when a Just Transition fails, and how, in spite of everything, trade unions remain the central vehicle to organise power for workers. Mike Sarnecki reports on what it’s like to be invited as an offshore worker to discuss the transition with civil servants and sets out what it would really mean for workers to be involved in a transition that can call itself just.

Gordon Morgan asks the question of when clean energy will finally benefit the people of Scotland. Simon Barrow examines how our new ‘military Keynesianism’, the strategy for growth and development through a warfare economy, will fail to produce good jobs while exacerbating the ecological crises. Sara Cowan explains how climate change is not gender neutral, and that a truly Just Transition must mean a feminist one as well, while Matthew Crichton surveys the experiences of campaigners working in both environmental and labour movements.

What does climate breakdown mean to Scotland and our friends across the world? Colin Brown from the Fire Brigades Union reports on what it feels like to fight a burning Arthur’s Seat. Emma Brown reflects on direct action groups like This is Rigged, showing that attempts to bridge the climate struggle with food security have become more urgent than ever. Amidst widespread resistance against AI data centre plans in Scotland, Kim Pratt points to the international dimensions of how disastrous the necessary mineral mining is for the environment and for communities affected. Patrio Mesa reports on how indigenous communities in Ecuador are struggling against a new alliance of extractivist industries and the far-right, while the People’s Congress of Colombia shows how only an ecosocialist future can provide a path towards a just energy transition. Our issue closes with a review of “Or Something Worse – Disrupting the Just Transition”, and whether it holds suggestions our movements need.

As editors, we acknowledge the disappointment of industry workers who have not seen evidence of a “just” transition. The disillusion is shared by many climate activists, although we are not as deeply affected by the failures. But over the years we have learned that our movements share many values and interests in a sustainable planet, decent work and the need for a radical transformation of the economy, with wealth created being shared with workers and society on a far greater scale than ever before. We are better, stronger and more likely to succeed if we build stronger alliances between climate and labour movements. We hope this issue can serve as a starting point.

Matthew Crichton
Anh-Quân Nguyen
Catrina Randall

THE UNJUST TRANSITION AND OIL DELUSION

Fossil Fuel lobbyists and the far-right have channelled North Sea discontent into a toxic nostalgia for the good old days. **Ewan Gibbs** shows how this cannot hide the inevitable decline of oil and gas.

Oil and gas have re-emerged as dominant themes of Scottish political debate on a scale perhaps not seen since the heady days when the SNP contended that 'it's Scotland's oil' following major offshore petroleum discoveries in the 1970s. The nationalists ran on a poor imitation slogan — 'It's Scotland's Energy' — at May's Scottish Parliament election when they topped the poll on a reduced majority. Energy in this context was effectively a stand in for oil and gas.

SNP messaging focused on the demands that the UK government withdraw its objections to future licensing and remove the Energy Profits Levy charged on proceeds from North Sea production. This is remarkable given that these matters are entirely reserved issues and the myriad challenges related to the cost of living and the public sector. Oil has become a convenient rallying point for the SNP as well as for the Tories and Reform. It is a means for the SNP to shift tack having previously supported a pause on licensing, and to do so in such a way which implied 'standing up for Scotland' and oil workers against Westminster.

North Sea oil has become centrefold once more in a very different guise to 1970's projections of wealth and prosperity which were revived in 2014 when a petro-fuelled economic case for independence undergirded the White Paper. Now, the oil and gas industry is presented as a threatened aging sector which nevertheless remains a valuable source of employment in Aberdeen, the North East, the Highlands and the Northern Isles. For Reform and the Tories oil is a culture war weapon brazenly wielded against climate change commitments. Debates over licensing have been framed as a contest between the supposedly luxury beliefs of the urban middle classes on the need to act on climate change against the hardheaded need to preserve jobs and reinforce our energy security.

Reform have quite literally produced memes depicting the platforms which could produce bountiful riches that red bureaucrats and 'woke' eco activists are preventing us from enjoying. A toxically nostalgic vibes-based argument is the best means to understand the affective but incoherent case for more drilling. It doesn't stand up to a scant glance at stubborn geological, economic or political realities. North Sea oil and gas production peaked around the turn of the millennium but has fallen to around a quarter of peak levels. Employment has also shot downwards for decades. In each case, the downturn has only accelerated since the price crash of 2014.

When BP announced that they were selling the last of their North Sea assets this summer, it was seized upon by industry lobbyists, opposition politicians and John Swinney to put the boot into the UK government. The argument ran that BP was leaving the North Sea because the profits levy made production unprofitable. It ignored the fact that BP has been slowly exiting the North Sea for the best part of twenty-five years, having sold the giant Forties field to the Houston-based 'independent', Apache, in 2003. Since then, BP has divested from the Grangemouth complex, the Forties Pipeline system and given up running the Sullom Voe terminal on

Shetland too. Other oil majors have followed a similar trajectory. The decline in North Sea employment continued even when the sector became a net fiscal drain on the UK Treasury in the 2010s, long before the profits levy was introduced after the uptick in oil prices following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

The debate on future licensing has become a convenient red herring for forces on the right and the business lobby. It appears to present a perfect case of climate ambitions standing between Scotland and the buried treasure lying waiting for us beneath the seabed. Focusing on the fields we haven't yet licensed ignores the rate of closure of those that we have. Robert Gordon University's Energy Transition Institute estimates oil industry job losses could be as high as 400 per fortnight, whilst the NGO Uplift estimated that more than 200,000 industry related jobs were lost in Britain from 2014 to 2024. Even if the major projects currently in contention, Rosebank and Jackdaw, were both licensed, the commensurate impact would be highly limited in the face of these overwhelming trends which would continue unabated.

Swinney and his allies are confronted with the problem of past failure. They endorsed a 'just transition' to renewables strategy in the 2010s but the promised well-paid manufacturing jobs in renewables have not materialised in anything like the numbers anticipated. In the meantime, foreseeable closures offshore have been accompanied by visible industrial disasters onshore. Most prolifically, the closure of the Grangemouth oil refinery in 2025 which was followed by the partial closure of the Mossmorran petrochemicals complex across the Forth in Fife earlier this year. Like the abandonment of North Sea production platforms, these closures weren't provoked by the transition to renewables but by the profit margins of multinational owners. Grangemouth's refinery has been replaced by a fuels import terminal, locking Scotland into the global carbon economy but leaving it with fewer industrial benefits and diminished energy security.

All the evidence on the ground and historical experience points to the need for a planned phaseout of the North Sea oil industry under government leadership but this is not forthcoming from either Edinburgh or London. The current approach is leading to the replication of the disasters visited on industrial regions in the 1980s and 1990s despite the explicit just transition commitment that this would not happen. Grangemouth workers pointedly insisted that they did not want to become the coal miners of the 2020s. Yet the political pivot is in the opposite direction. Embracing the chimera of new oil and gas production will not create jobs but it could mortally delay any attempts to effectively capture advantages from moving towards renewables. This suits the corporate interests who dominate both sectors with relative impunity. We are already witnessing an unfolding economic disaster in areas most dependent on oil and gas marked by growing dole queues and emigration by skilled workers. Failure to act now could lead to an even grimmer future.

TACKLING SCOTLAND'S FISCAL GAP IN AN AGE OF CLIMATE BREAKDOWN

How the Scottish Government closes the looming fiscal gap is a political choice. **Miriam Brett** argues that climate breakdown dramatically increases spending needs and actively steering the economy towards a just transition is not only necessary, but Scotland's greatest opportunity.

Scotland sits at the precipice of a challenging fiscal landscape, necessitating an urgent array of difficult decisions for the Scottish Government. Without action, the resource fiscal gap is expected to grow from a balanced budget in 2025-26, to £2.6 billion in 2029-30. To try and mitigate this, the Scottish Government has set out a “managed downward trajectory” for the devolved public sector workforce, aiming to cut the workforce by 0.5 per cent per annum on average over the next five years.

The widening gap between planned expenditure and funding has called into question the Scottish Government's ability to deliver on its four core objectives: eradicating child poverty, growing the economy, tackling the climate emergency, and delivering high-quality and sustainable public services.

At present, the government's approach leaves more questions than answers. For example, how can it align with increased future spending needs, like social care? How can the government avoid a target-driven approach increasing spending further down the line? And how will trade unions, impacted workers and communities meaningfully shape decision-making?

As Scotland navigates the next steps, it must reflect on the past decade and a half, and ensure lessons have been learned. Over a decade of UK Government austerity corroded vital public services and infrastructures, aggravated gross imbalances in income and wealth, stifled demand, undercut productive capacity, and squeezed living standards. As Scotland tackles a challenging fiscal backdrop, attempts to balance the budget must learn from the profound damage of austerity.

How the Scottish Government chooses to close the fiscal gap – and who benefits from those decisions – will lay the foundations

for Scotland's economic future. Importantly, the fiscal crunch coincides with unprecedented challenges, from the soaring cost of living and unacceptable levels of poverty, to escalating climate and environmental breakdown.

The causes and distributional consequences of climate and environmental breakdown are unevenly felt both between and within global regions and countries. Analysis by Future Economy Scotland shows that the richest 5% of households in Scotland have a carbon footprint four times that of the poorest 5%.

This summer alone witnessed prolonged droughts and successive heatwaves. In July, a wildfire in the Cairngorms burned its way through 25 sq km of moorland and forestry, requiring over 500 firefighters and necessitating evacuations. As Scotland's chief fire officer states, “If we are serious about protecting lives, livelihoods, infrastructure, our natural environment and the resilience of our nation, we must act now – together, with purpose, and with a long-term commitment to prevention, as well as response.”

Few aspects of Scotland's economy require strategic direction like the labour market transition. Our research found that total employment in Scotland supported by oil and gas fell by 32% since 2014, despite hundreds of new oil and gas licenses being awarded during this period. With strong ambition and targeted policy, the transition can create up to 40,000 more energy jobs than will be lost. However, this will require a much more proactive industrial strategy and labour market planning.

As climate breakdown-related events escalate, there is an inescapable reality: public funding needs will exponentially rise to grapple with mitigation, adaptation, and damages costs. While the implications of climate breakdown are far-reaching, the need to bol

ster capacity and resilience in public services is clear.

The preparedness agenda required is extensive. It means a step-change in funding for areas like the fire service coping with wildfires and the NHS preparing for more patients during heatwaves. It means accelerating retrofitting housing stock to offset poor health outcomes, afforestation to tackle flooding, and measures to cope with food supply chain disruption as crops fail.

Real-terms capital budget reductions and planned reductions to the public sector workforce coincide with increased need for a step-change in public spending and investment – all while operating in a constrained fiscal framework with limited borrowing powers. Addressing this mismatch through fiscal consolidation alone risks repeating mistakes of the past.

Strengthening public services while meeting the future spending and investment needs means confronting an uncomfortable truth: most Scots will need to pay a little more tax, and relying exclusively on increases at the top of the income distribution is neither sufficient nor sustainable. Future Economy Scotland has set out an ambitious yet credible package of reforms to raise an estimated £2.3 billion per year in revenue. These include income tax changes, replacing council tax with a recurring Progressive Property Tax based on up-to-date property values and replacing the existing system of Non-Domestic Rates with a Green Land Value Tax.

In addition, what measures can the Scottish Government take to maximise value for public money? The reliance on outsourcing to private consultancy firms hollows out public sector capabilities, often extracts value, and obfuscates democratic decision-making processes. While strengthening public sector capabilities in Scotland

cannot happen overnight – particularly in a challenging fiscal context – the Scottish Government should prioritise it going forward.

Finally, the Scottish Government must shift from one that intervenes in market failure to one that actively stewards the economy. This should involve the mobilisation of strategic public assets, with a focus on securing recurring revenues. The next round of ScotWind, for example, offers an opportunity to ensure benefits don't flow overseas. This includes strengthening local supply chain development and stronger conditions to guarantee workers fair pay and securing equity stakes in future leasing rounds to create an enduring source of public revenue.

Going forward, as Scotland navigates a challenging fiscal landscape while the climate crisis rages on, one thing is abundantly clear: the cost of delayed action will far outweigh the costs of action today.

While inevitably challenging, delivering a just transition is also Scotland's greatest economic opportunity. Delivered effectively, it has the potential to create a new generation of well-paid green jobs, raise living standards, reduce poverty, and tackle deep-rooted inequalities. There is, however, a narrow window of opportunity to achieve this, and it means tackling systemic problems embedded in the current economic model and hardwiring climate justice into every aspect of Scotland's economy.

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10 YEARS OF AN ALLIANCE FOR JUST TRANSITION: CULTIVATING COMMON GROUND

After ten years of working on the Just Transition Partnership, **Matthew Crighton** reflects that we cannot solve our major environmental problems without changing the economic system which is driving them.

When the STUC General Council in 2016 agreed to the proposal from Friends of the Earth Scotland (FOES) to establish a partnership around “the industrial changes needed to achieve a just transition to a modern low-carbon economy” it was taking an unusual step. There were not many precedents anywhere for unions having formal relations with environmental organisations. Indeed sometimes the two movements had been perceived, incorrectly, as enemies.

The decision represented a recognition of the importance of climate change, following the Paris Agreement in 2015 and in light of government targets; and the importance of a specifically union-based framing of the issues. Both STUC and FOES thought that it was likely that bringing their voices together would get more attention than speaking separately and that was soon confirmed.

One of the first proposals by the Just Transition Partnership (JTP) was the creation of a Just Transition Commission and that was soon Scottish Government policy, though it took a few years to then actually start meeting. The framing of Just Transition, a concept which came from the unions, soon became adopted across the climate movement in Scotland and then in Scottish Government policy.

In the climate and environment movement FOES was unique in recognising the potential value of a strong trade union voice on these topics and it was open to the benefits for its own advocacy of a just transition narrative. It took care to frame its proposal for the partnership specifically around industrial change and employment. These are not topics on which the environmental movement had a lot of expertise but it was willing to learn from the experience of its new partners. The work of the JTP has involved learnings in both

directions and a look at these can help both movements address future challenges, within and without Scotland.

At the start of the process we were following the lead of the International Trade Union Confederation and some trade unions in the UK in applying the concept of Just Transition to climate change – it can logically be applied to many kinds of environmental problem. Examination of the initial Joint Statement on Just Transition reveals the core elements of the framing agreed then by the partners:

1. The seriousness and urgency of climate change
2. Recognition of the need to move to a ‘modern low-carbon economy’
3. Economic justice, foregrounding fossil fuel workers but covering all of society
4. Industrial policy – rebalance the economy; sectoral plans; new jobs; investment
5. Social justice — climate policies should deliver social benefits and a more equal society
6. Leadership and intervention by government is needed

Implicitly, the Statement refers to both the supply and demand of energy and therefore to the impacts on the whole economy, not just energy sectors. In retrospect it is a little surprising that it doesn’t mention either UN agreements or Scottish legislation but perhaps these were the assumed context of a statement which sought brevity. Certainly, as the work of the Partnership developed, the social consensus around the targets set in the 2009 Climate Change Act provided an important baseline.

Circumstances which are specific to Scotland have influenced significantly this framing. The primary one is the juxtaposition of a large oil and gas sector which is approaching the end of its life with enormous renewable energy potential. This has perhaps enabled Scotland to capture clearly some central features of a progressive vision of a just transition, even if the results in workplaces have so far been disappointing.

All partners accepted that meeting climate targets requires large-scale decarbonisation but within that framework they held differing views about the extent and the pace of change. For those reasons, the JTP hasn't taken a position on the place of negative emissions technologies like Carbon Capture and Storage in climate change plans; nor the support from some unions for continuing oil and gas exploration. The ground-breaking work which FOES did with oil and gas workers was not done through the JTP. However, the relationships of trust established within the Partnership were vital to it and the resulting Our Power report, a just transition plan for the sector, which received support from the trade unions.

Since the start of the JTP in 2016 many additional elements of its platform have been added. Some are straightforward developments from this starting point, for example a focus on sectoral planning, drawing attention to the investment gap and to the offer of support which should be available to affected workers. Others developed in response to experience, in particular drawing attention to unjust transitions for the oil and gas workforce, at Grangemouth and at Mossmorran. The outstandingly poor record of job creation in Scotland from the large-scale investment in renewables has drawn attention to the neo-liberal foundations of Scottish Government policy, which asks little of private capital and gets less.

Ten years ago there were some prospects of action by the Scottish Government which would match its positive statements in sup-

port of a just transition. The record has in fact been poor and doubts about whether the current system is even capable of delivering on these promises have come to the fore. Hence the strong advocacy by the Partnership for public ownership in the energy system, from nationalisation by the UK government, through a Scottish public energy company to municipal enterprise.

The current focus of the Partnership is to show the opportunities for extensions of public ownership. It has contracted with the Centre for Local Economic Strategies to produce a toolkit which local authorities can use to drive forward rapid transformations on the ground, for example on housing insulation, local energy generation, heat networks and bus companies. Alongside this it will publish Let's Go Public, a report which will make recommendations about how the Scottish Government can encourage this and remove barriers put in the way.

Lastly it should be noted that there are aspects of policy which would be given much more prominence if being developed at UK level, such as the importance of high quality social protections and the fiscal and monetary policies necessary to enable delivery of JT policies.

My summary of what can be learnt from this rich track record is: Abandon neoliberalism or continue to fail! We won't solve our major environmental problems without changing the economic system which is driving them. Public agencies, not the private sector, have to direct the radical and rapid changes which are needed. The just transition approach links long-term solutions with tackling immediate needs in ways which ensure justice, equality and social benefits. The current system will not deliver these changes. We need to build a movement which understands all this and can grow strong enough to ensure change happens.

LET'S GO PUBLIC!

Practical routes to taking back control of energy, transport and retrofit

Public ownership of energy and transport can energise Scotland's just transition. The launch of our new Report and Toolkit on what Councils, public bodies and the Scottish Government can do to make public ownership a reality is scheduled on 27 October.

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DEMOCRATIC OWNERSHIP MUST POWER SCOTLAND'S JUST TRANSITION

Liz Murray looks at the crossroads between private equity and community power that Scotland faces when building and repowering its windfarms - and why democratic ownership of our energy infrastructure must power any Just Transition worthy of its name.

Since it opened in 2008, Whitelee windfarm – the UK's largest on-shore wind farm, just 10 miles south of Glasgow – has become a symbol of the shift to renewable energy in Scotland. It's now due for repowering: replacing and upgrading its older turbines with newer, more efficient technology. ScottishPower Renewables recently announced its plans spend £1.5bn to do this, taking Whitelee's generating capacity from just over 500MW to double that at around 1GW.

This moment of Whitelee's repowering, and of many other wind farms across Scotland, offers a huge opportunity to make the issue of ownership central to the next phase of the build-out of renewable energy. It represents the chance to shift the balance from private capital towards public and community ownership.

ScottishPower Renewables claims that Whitelee will “set the repowering standard”. So far though, it's not clear what that “standard” will mean. Will it repeat an old story: communities host the infrastructure, private companies make the profits, and the public is asked to be grateful for a meagre community benefit fund? Or will Scotland's biggest onshore wind farm change that relationship and really set a new “standard” – one of genuine ownership opportunities for the surrounding communities?

This new standard must be ownership over tokenism, equity over compensation, and long-term, local control over ad hoc grants. While community benefit funds can support good projects, they leave the basic power relationship intact – with ownership concentrated in private hands. Local and community ownership of renewables challenges and changes that relationship. It gives communities a durable asset that they control and which can fund services, tackle fuel poverty and build resilience.

A just transition must mean greater democratic control over the wealth that Scotland's energy resources create. That means shifting economic power, not simply changing the fuel source while leaving ownership, pricing and decision-making untouched. Scotland's renewable resources are national assets, but too often they are treated as opportunities for extraction by multinational companies, distant investors and shareholders.

Research by the Centre for Local Economies showed that between 2019 and 2024, Scotland's onshore wind sector made an estimated £5.6 billion in post-tax profits. Around 73% of that profit – £4.1 billion – is estimated to have been paid in dividends to corporate shareholders, with £729 million of that to companies owned by private equity or based in tax havens.

If there had been even a 20% shared ownership stake in those commercially owned onshore wind farms, as is the norm in Den-

mark, communities would have made around £827m in total income over the same five years, or £165m per year. However, just 0.4% of Scotland's entire onshore wind capacity was in shared ownership as of last year. That's a huge missed opportunity for community wealth building in Scotland – and something that we need to work together to turn around.

This is where the Our Power campaign comes in, with a central argument that is simple and popular: the people of Scotland should get a fair share of the nation's renewable energy wealth. Its demands give everyone a practical programme to rally around. More communities should have the chance to own energy projects, rather than being passive hosts. Councils should be funded and enabled to invest in local renewable energy projects, so that income from clean power can support local services. The Scottish Government should take a public stake in all future offshore wind projects, with a 20% equity share funded through bodies such as the Scottish National Investment Bank. And Scotland needs a secure wind manufacturing base so that the transition creates stable, unionised, well-paid jobs here rather than exporting manufacturing work elsewhere.

These are not technical tweaks for policy papers, they are organising demands. They connect the household struggling with bills to the worker demanding secure employment, the community fighting for local services to the climate campaigner pushing for rapid decarbonisation. Other countries have used public stakes, community ownership and cooperative models to retain more value from renewables. Scotland has examples too: community and local authority renewable energy projects from Orkney and the Western Isles to Aberdeenshire, Edinburgh and the Scottish Borders already show how income from these projects can be invested in housing, transport, care, local employment and climate action. The problem is not a lack of evidence – it's a lack of political action.

The left should be clear: ownership of energy is climate policy, industrial policy and anti-poverty policy. It determines who pays, who benefits, who decides and whose lives are improved as we transition away from fossil fuels. Scotland's renewables transition can either become another chapter in the long history of resource extraction, or it can become the basis of a more democratic economy. The difference will not be decided by turbine technology alone. It will be decided by whether we build enough power—political, economic, community and workplace power—to make that democratic economy happen.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN JUST TRANSITION FAILS?

In this interview by **Cailean Gallagher** and **Stephen Smellie**, **Chris Hamilton** sets out how the disappointments and failures after the Grangemouth Oil Refinery Closure has impacted workers, community, and any prospects of working together with the climate movement.

The Just Transition Partnership was established in 2016 bringing together Friends of the Earth Scotland with the STUC and a number of trade unions, including Unite, UNISON, PCS and RMT. It was a significant initiative to bring together trade unions and environmental campaigners who agreed that achieving a transition to a low-carbon economy would mean planning to ensure that workers in oil, gas and other fossil fuel sectors would need to have alternative employment in greener industries.

The JTP called on the Scottish Government to set up a Just Transition Commission to advise on how to plan for a Just Transition, which they did.

And yet, when in 2023 Petroineos announced the closure of the Grangemouth Oil Refinery, there was no plan and workers were made redundant, while the oil which continues to be piped to the site is sent south or abroad to be refined.

Chris Hamilton was the Unite Convenor at the refinery when the closure announcement was made. He reflected on the experience.

“With the benefit of hindsight, you can look at trends and events that happened that led to the eventual closure. But when they eventually announced it, it did come as a shock to the workforce. The site is so integral with this area. It is seen as a constant, it's been there for 100 years. I think everybody recognised that the oil refinery was going to be different by 2050. But where the site was going next was typically always seen as tomorrow's problem. There were problems today, the usual problems that we face as trade unionists in our workplaces with jobs, conditions and that type of stuff.”

As owners of the site, Ineos had a responsibility to plan for the future. The future they decided on didn't involve most of the workers or the continuation of processing oil on the site. Chris recalled talk but little action from the company. That talk was usually about “projects that might or might not happen on the site. To my knowledge, before 2023 it didn't appear that anyone was looking at an overall big project for what the site could look like. It wasn't as if anyone was looking at transitioning the site for transition's sake.”

Instead, the company were looking at it commercially. They talked about hydrogen and bio refining technology, as other companies have done in other sites, but the talk never produced a plan to transition the site to protect jobs.

Post closure announcement in 2023 Unite met with the company and sought discussions about alternative uses for the plant but, as Chris points out, “there was maybe less said or done in the early days after the announcement of the closure about the site transitioning. These things take years and years and years.”

Talks with the company produced no positive results so the union campaign focussed on leveraging governments to save the site and its 3000 direct and indirect jobs.

In Chris' part of the Grangemouth industrial complex 430 people were made redundant. 18 months after ceasing production, not even 10% of that number of new jobs have been created.

“It highlights that even if we had started this conversation a long time ago, with political urgency and all the money that was promised, they would still not have managed to deliver it.” He continues: “I think what that's done for us as a union is highlight the failure in the trajectory of the just transition at present. It's not that anybody's against the concept of just transition. It's just that for the ordinary members, at Grangemouth and then Mossman, we have seen mass job losses and very, very, very slow progress.”



Unite sought direct government intervention to save the plant, arguing that they should take a transitional stake in the company. That didn't happen, but Chris points out that a different approach was adopted with the Scunthorpe Steelworks where the government did intervene.

Unite also discussed the possibility of a furlough scheme, to allow more time. That didn't happen either, but Chris says, "I was pleased to see that it did transpire in principle at Alexander Dennis." At Grangemouth, however, "there was absolutely no evidence whatsoever of government playing any role, whether that be subsidising or taking a form of ownership in the enterprise."

For many, the villain of the piece is Ineos and Jim Ratcliffe. For others it is the government for failing to save the refinery. Amongst the workforce there are mixed views. "When I speak to workers who've lost their jobs about the closure of the refinery some point the finger in the direction of the company, some towards the government and many point in both directions."

"It isn't of course just at Grangemouth. Throughout the oil and gas sectors, workers are scunnered at the failure of governments to protect jobs."

Chris recognises that "other political parties" are opportunistically trying to take advantage of workers' concerns and blame government policies on Net Zero to promote themselves. Amidst Unite's campaigning to protect the oil and gas jobs, the Tories won the Aberdeen South by-election on a ticket of standing up for the North Sea, and Reform and far right parties have sought to use the issue of redundancies in the sector to stir up division. How does Chris see Unite resisting Reform's approach?

"I see it less about what Reform are doing, because I believe what they are doing is actually secondary. I think the primary thing is the failure to deliver. If the SNP and Labour were handling these big industrial issues in the way working class people want them to, in my opinion, Reform or anyone else wouldn't have a word to say on the issue."

Over many years, trade unions have worked with the environmental movement, becoming "more green" while the other side became "more red," as Roz Foyer, STUC General Secretary once urged them to be. As unions adopted policies recognising climate change and the need to take action, environmental campaigners joined the protests against the closure of Grangemouth and worked with offshore workers to champion Just Transition policies. In Chris's view, that alliance has broken down.

"I would say we're probably back to being entrenched in two different positions and I see it probably more hostile now than it was before. I think there's a number of reasons for that. I've absolutely nothing against anybody who's got the point of view or the opinion that we need to do X, Y or Z on any issue. I know what they're saying they want to achieve, but they're lacking an explanation of how we do it. And you might argue that's also the same for other things like trade unions, but my point is it's difficult for us as a movement when it results in job losses at present."

Unite has tried to work with some environmental groups. Chris has personally been involved in events alongside climate campaigners including speaking at an event in Westminster with them. "We were speaking about the fact that workers should be put front and centre. And these organisations appeared to support that view."

"As just an example, not long after that specific event, activists from some of these organisations abseiled off the Forth Road Bridge in a staged protest. It stopped all shipping going to Grangemouth and there was a threat that day of the site needing to close because of production issues. Understandably events such as these put me as an individual in a precarious position because I've now got to face these workers after sharing platforms with these groups not long before."

Chris recognises that stunts like that get coverage, and that climate groups and campaigners have increasing influence. He argues that this is what his sector in Unite have been trying to replicate with public facing campaigns so that the narrative is not controlled by groups who appear not to be on the side of the Unite members whose jobs are at risk.

But for now, he sees little scope for joint campaigning with the environmental campaigners, whilst Just Transition doesn't deliver.

Chris lives in the Falkirk area where last year there were protests outside a hotel housing asylum seekers. These protests involved individuals from known far-right and fascist groups alongside locals. Chris was not surprised that the failures of Labour and SNP to protect working class communities had left a void which far-right organisations try to fill.

"I was disappointed to see Falkirk become the focus point for this specific issue. At the same time that was happening Grangemouth was closing, Alexander Dennis was up for threat of closure, and I don't recall these so-called defenders of working people protesting then."

Chris recalls a local campaign to save the swimming pool in Bo'ness. A protest was organised.

"I went along and there was 1000 people standing outside the local community centre with the placards to stop this closure. I don't believe that got the same publicity as the anti-immigration one did. And there were probably more folk at that community one. As a movement, more generally I believe that's the stuff that we need to do. Promote the consistent good work we are doing across communities, in and out of the workplace."

"We know some organisations will select certain issues, make them big, come in, and then present themselves as if they are the ones that are going to change it. If I take the example of the community centre, we as trade unionists and or community campaigners have clearly got the ability to organise and elect councillors of our persuasion if we really wanted to, but we're not doing that. If anybody's best placed to solve some of these problems, in actual fact, it's probably us. So, I think as a movement there's a general acknowledgement that we should be demonstrating this to working people – not leaving it to anyone else."

Chris's message is that working people need their unions to speak up for them. He says. "If it wasn't for the Unite union, who would we have had to champion a workers' perspective about Grangemouth? We couldn't rely on the company. We couldn't rely on the SNP. We couldn't rely on Labour. When all was said and done it was the trade union that was there to represent their views and be their voice."

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR WORKERS TO BE INVOLVED IN JUST TRANSITION PLANNING?

How does it feel to be invited to discuss the Just Transition in Whitehall? After a decade working offshore, **Mike Sarnecki** reflects on his experience challenging London's civil servants, and what it would look like for workers to really be involved in the transition.

Earlier this year, my colleagues from Platform and I travelled to London for a meeting at the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero. We had come to talk about what North Sea workers need, what we fear, and what a fair transition would actually look like from the deck of a platform rather than a desk in Whitehall. Partway through the conversation, it became clear I was the first oil and gas worker these civil servants had ever sat around a table with.

Sit with that for a moment. These are the people working on the North Sea Jobs Service, the flagship scheme launching early next year, which is meant to carry tens of thousands of workers like me from a declining basin into whatever comes next. They are considerate and they were listening. But the transition of my industry had been underway for years before a single one of us made it into the room.

I've spent over a decade offshore as a contractor. I didn't arrive as a driller or an engineer. I got in through catering, feeding crews through long shifts and hard weather, and I learned fast that offshore your life sits in the hands of the person next to you. That trust is the one thing the industry has never managed to cut. Everything else has been shrinking around us for years. Jobs, budgets, salaries, paid training, and the patience of the people waiting at home for the phone to ring.

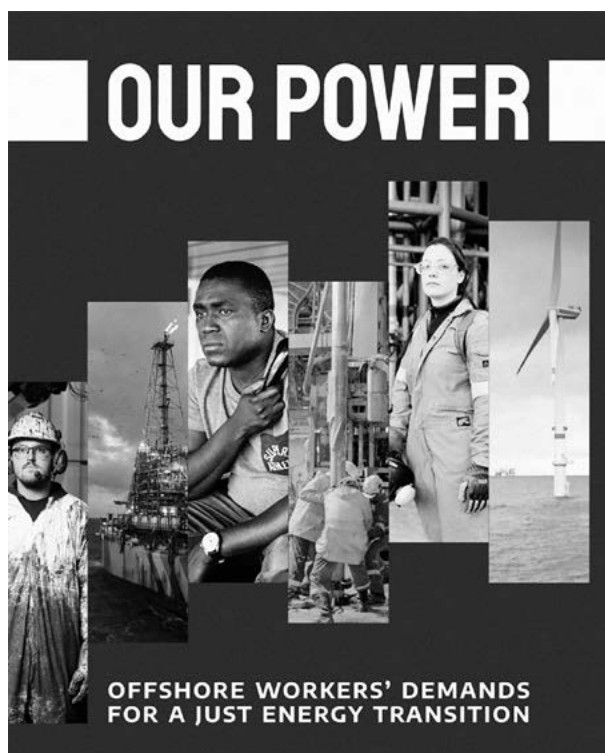
So when I hear of workers being put 'at the centre of the transition', I measure it against that meeting in London. What involvement currently means, in practice, is this: plans are drafted, announcements are made, and somewhere down the line workers are invited to respond to decisions already taken. A consultation after

the fact is not involvement. It's preaching to a captive audience.

Grangemouth is the proof. The owners confirmed the refinery's closure in September 2024 and only then did the statutory consultation with the workforce begin. It covered redundancy terms and the next steps, not the future of the site. Workers got a say on the severance package, never on the decision around the closure itself. And Grangemouth is not a one off. The North Sea Transition Deal, the central agreement shaping my industry's future, was struck between government and industry with not a single worker representative in its governance. Only this January, after years of pressure, did unions finally win seats on the new North Sea Future Board. It should not have taken half a decade to win such basic recognition. The test now is whether those seats carry real weight.

Real involvement means something else entirely. It means workers helping to design the retraining pathways, the timelines and the safeguards before the ink runs dry, because we're the ones who know which skills actually transfer, which promises have been broken before, and what happens to a town when the company walks away.

And here I have to say something that may feel uncomfortable to a readership that includes a lot of trade unionists. Our unions are not doing enough to get us into that room. Offshore workers are split between several unions, while many contractors and agency workers, who make up the majority of the workforce in some roles, belong to no union at all. The divisions between and within unions are real, and every demarcation dispute, and turf war is a gift to companies and a closed door in Whitehall. When there's finally a

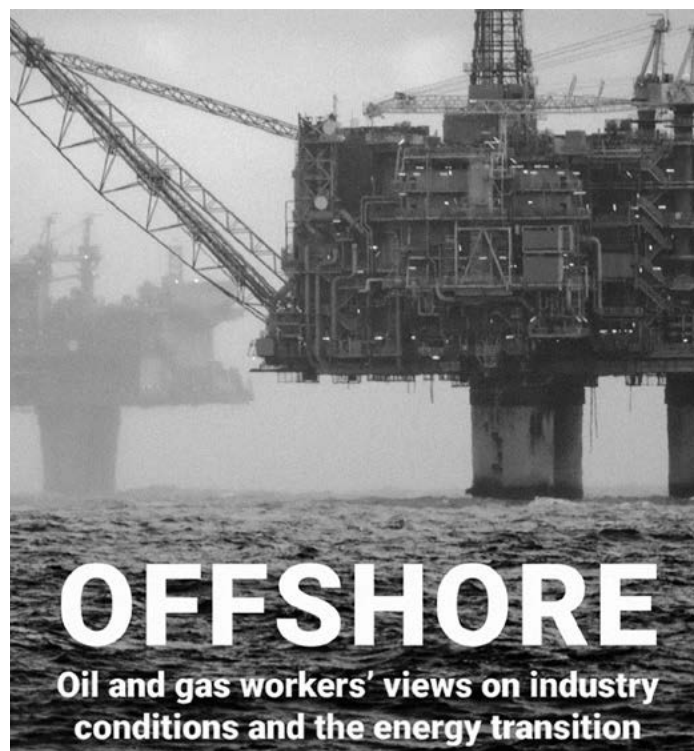


Friends of the Earth Scotland report cover.

seat at the table, who gets to sit in it? The solidarity we practise offshore, watching each other's backs because nobody else will, is exactly what trade unionism is supposed to be. Workers need our unions to match it onshore with one coordinated offshore voice organised across union lines, taking into account contractors and agency workers, as well as direct employees. Without that, 'worker involvement' will remain reduced to whoever government officials find most convenient to invite.

I got tired of waiting to be asked. So, in my worker organiser involvement with Platform, I spent weeks building a workers' survey to gather the evidence that should shape the Jobs Service, because a launch is a starting point, not a finished design. It's now live with an impressive volume of responses from workers across oil, gas and renewables. Getting there has meant real outreach: in canteens, offices and corridors, over calls, messages and emails, and inclusive of people who've already left the industry and never get asked anything once they're gone. What those conversations tell me is that workers have detailed, practical, sometimes brilliant ideas about how this transition should run. The expertise exists. What's missing is a gateway to carry it into the rooms where decisions get made. So here is my answer to the question in the title. Four tests that any transition plan should pass before it gets to call itself just:

1. Workers at the design table, not the feedback stage. If the workforce first hears about a plan at its launch, it isn't our plan. The Jobs Service is the test case. Will it be built with us from the start, or announced to us at the end?



2. Recognition of the skills we already have. Offshore workers are exactly who should be building and maintaining renewables, with funded, accessible retraining rather than a queue behind school leavers for entry level jobs.
3. Honest timelines. Jobs that arrive before the redundancies, not years after. Workers can handle hard truths. What breaks trust is promise after promise that never lands.
4. A public stake big enough to last. Through Great British Energy and public ownership, decisions should answer to workers and communities, not to shareholders who are first to protest a windfall levy and first to walk when the going gets tough.

There is a bigger prize here too. If the UK is serious about setting an example for net zero, it must do so by demonstrating a successful transition in which workers' welfare and our futures are central to the planning, not an afterthought. No country will follow a model that leaves its workforce behind.

I shouldn't have been the first oil and gas worker those officials had hosted. I'd better not be the last. If you're reading this as an industry worker, fill in the survey. If you are a union member, share it with your branch and ask your union what it's doing, with the others rather than against them, to get workers into the room. The North Sea was built by our labour. Its decommissioning, and what succeeds it, should be shaped by our voices too.

HOW CAN RED AND GREEN UNITE TO SAVE OUR PLANET AND CHANGE THE WORLD?

What are the experiences of those working to build unity between environmentalists and the labour movement? **Matthew Crighton** surveys a diverse range of activists, and shows how the alliance is more urgent than ever.

In 2015, Eurig Scandrett and I asked ‘Can green and red unite?’ in SLR issue 89 which we co-edited on the theme of Growing A Green Economy. We now have over a decade more experience and we know that climate campaigners and trade unionists find common ground and work together on many issues, if not all. On the left the importance of this question has become apparent to more people as the climate and nature crises have developed. In green movements and climate campaigns, at least some sections have realised that organised labour is a necessary ally not just a desirable one.

Perhaps now we can reflect on those experiences in order to plan ahead for a movement which unites environmentalists, trade unionists, movements for social justice and the left in general. We know we can co-operate, we now need to tackle the bigger question of ‘*How can red and green unite to save our planet and change the world?*’.

There are two unique things on which Scotland can draw here. One is the creation in 2016 of the Just Transition Partnership (JTP) by the STUC and five affiliated unions, Friends of the Earth Scotland, other environmental organisations and supportive think tanks. The other is the experience of decline of the offshore oil and gas industry and efforts to map a pathway forward for its workforce – the publication of the Our Power report by three environmental organisations which received the support of the relevant trade unions is perhaps a key milestone.

To capture a wide range of conclusions from key participants we invited short statements from the contributors to SLR 89 and from the people most involved in creating and sustaining the JTP and in related initiatives. Here’s the question:

From your experiences of working with trade unions and climate campaigners towards a strong enough movement to end the causes of climate change, what’s your main message to SLR readers looking to the future? What do you hope for or worry about?

Eleven years ago, most articles were mapping out the territory. Some were excavating from the past examples where workers had been engaged on environmental issues rather than with environmental organisations. Eurig’s article on environmental justice shows that some environmentalists have supported working class communities but not that they had engaged with workers organisations.

The responses today show a changed landscape in which each draws on the diverse practical experiences of the contributors.

There are differences of approach but taken together it starts to look coherent. I’ve taken what I think is a core message from each and put them together:

- Climate activists and trade unionists are both campaigning for the same thing – better lives for all of us.
- A call to action from both climate campaigners and trade unions is very hard for politicians to ignore.
- Adopting polarised, ideological positions, rather than an actual “plan,” only detracts from our efforts.
- It’s important for the working class to win on its own terms and by its own hands.
- The transition away from fossil fuels must be ‘just’, workers having a real say over what comes next.
- Bring more workers into collective action by making it as easy as possible for them to take low-level steps that can lead to long-term engagement.
- We need to work in places, with people, on things that matter to them.
- Engage with communities most harmed by the prevailing economic system.
- Where effective mass mobilisation and political strategy are brought together, the potential for a social and ecological transformation exists.
- Challenge the way the old economy is run and to win support for the alternatives – we need to be green, but we need to be red as well.

It’s not a rigorous approach but it illustrates some consensus over the direction of travel for a combined movement for climate justice. And not just on climate.

In previous decades, ‘environmental issues’ would have been read to cover a much wider set of problems. We have to tell our allies that climate change is only one of the environmental limits which are being breached – there’s a nature crisis too, which stems from multiple ways in which our economic system is attacking the capacity of our environment to sustain our civilisations. What we have learnt in addressing the challenge of decarbonising our economy we now have to apply to these issues to – to a just transition to an economy which protects nature in order to protect ourselves.

Contributors' Reflections on How to Build a Strong Movement:

"My hope is that our collective work has been sufficient to create a cohort of engaged people who can seize the opportunities in the coming years to radically change our economy through, and outside, parliament, such that the economy is put in service of people and planet. My worry is that the far right have equally strengthened, and may similarly take the opportunities to bring about neo-fascism." — Professor **Gerry McCartney**

"While there is certainly loads to worry about, one of the most hopeful trends that needs to be built on is activists working to engage with communities most harmed by the prevailing economic system. Taking their concerns seriously, exploring the economic roots of those concerns, and working together to build engagement in reshaping the economy so that it better serves people, and planet." — **Katherine Trebeck**

"In my opinion we won't influence the global phenomenon of climate change without firstly achieving unity of action. Adopting polarised, ideological positions about the North Sea, rather than an actual "plan," only detracts from our efforts. The publication "Our Power" came close to a 'plan,' a model that might serve as a template for us and other regions of the world." — **Jake Molloy**

"It is more important now than ever for the working class to win on its own terms and by its own hand, regardless of how marginal any single victory may be against the full scale of a climate crisis which is global and systemic." — **Trade union official**

"When climate campaigners and trade unions disagree about the way forward, politicians have the perfect excuse to do nothing. Recent experience shows that a joined-up call to action from both climate campaigners and trade unions is very hard to ignore. The challenge now is turning a seemingly positive response from politicians into real action." — **Richard Dixon**

"Despondency is understandable in the current political environment and given the power of vested private interests. But opinion polls suggest the Scottish public are more open to alternative policies than the political class with continued strong support for public ownership and green policies. Changes elsewhere — a global deprivatisation trend and the rise in the US Democratic Socialists — show that where effective mass mobilisation and political strategy are brought together, the potential for a social and ecological transformation exists." — **Professor Andy Cumbers**

"Our task remains to challenge the way the old economy is run and to win support, not least inside the labour movement, for the alternatives to militarising the economy, and nuclearising our energy system. That means leading with principle, extending political and economic democracy, being international in outlook, creating sustainable and socially useful work for all. It means we need to be green, but we need to be red as well." — **Richard Leonard**

"We demand a future for workers: secure, safe and well-paid 'green' jobs. The transition away from fossil fuels must be 'just', workers having a real say over what comes next — a real 'workers' plan', investment into green technologies, increased manufacturing in green industries and of course, political will." — **Trade union official**

"The challenge is to bridge the gap between the level of concern and the proportion of the population engaged in collective action to reduce climate change. Individual action matters, but we must bring more workers into collective action by making it as easy as possible for them to take low-level steps that can lead to long-term engagement with the issue." — **Dave Watson**

"A dangerous line is being drawn between social and environmental action that we need to resist at all costs. That means we need to work in places, with people, on things that matter to them. We need to move to delivery and stop talking and thinking only at national scale as the focus of activities, and instead think a little more 'hub and spoke' — what can the particular tell us about the possibilities for action at the national level? Each area has its own possibilities and barriers and people deeply care about their local environment so we need to connect to that more. Deeds not words!" — **Gemma Bone-Dodds**

"The necessary responses to the Climate Emergency needn't be a fight over environmentalism versus workers nor must it be a sacrifice for the sake of the climate. To give just one example, climate-ready housing means lower fuel poverty, more comfortable homes AND better jobs for housebuilders. I've found that when it comes to it, climate activists and trade unionists are both campaigning for the same thing — Better lives for all of us." — **Craig Dalzell**

GUNS VERSUS GREENERY: THE FALSE PROMISE OF A WARFARE ECONOMY

As European governments invest billions in arms and weapons for growth, skilled labour and industry, **Simon Barrow** shows how this new “military Keynesianism” won’t develop good jobs but it will drive climate breakdown.

As geopolitical tensions flare globally, western governments are pivoting sharply toward rearmament. Defence budgets are swelling, state mandates are shifting towards military production, and political rhetoric increasingly frames national security almost exclusively in terms of hard power, supposed deterrence, and force projection. Yet this surge in militaristic posturing highlights a glaring structural trade-off: every unit of capital, energy, and human intellect directed toward the mechanics of war is a resource diverted from the existential crises of climate breakdown and the collapse of biodiversity.

The maths of state funding capacity is unforgiving. Governments like the UK operate under fiscal constraints within neoliberal framing. When public funds are reallocated towards rapidly expanding arms procurement, subsidising arms exporters, and sustaining the ever-growing cost of a faltering replacement programme of the UK’s nuclear-weapon system, this happens at the direct expense of social and environmental security – and especially the rapid decarbonisation required to keep global temperatures within liveable thresholds.

Building a low-carbon society demands unprecedented public investment. By prioritising military expansion over ecological resilience, policy makers implicitly signal that preparing for hypothetical conflicts takes precedence over surviving guaranteed ecological disruption.

This rearmament doctrine is increasingly justified through ‘military Keynesianism’. That is, the belief that military expenditure can serve as a primary engine for economic growth, industrial strategy, and high-skilled employment. However, recent analysis published by the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) and the IPS Journal show why military Keynesianism is a dead end, both economically and ecologically.

Framing defence investment as a path to broad prosperity ignores its remarkably poor ‘multiplier effects’. Capital spent on modern arms production is concentrated in low-volume, capital-in-

tensive manufacturing that creates surprisingly few jobs. For example, modelling indicates that UK Ministry of Defence procurement supports roughly 9.4 jobs per £1 million spent, whereas equivalent investment in healthcare, education, or green energy yields dramatically higher employment returns.

Furthermore, military spending yields non-productive output. While public infrastructure, clean transport networks, and green energy grids lower long-term economic costs and enhance structural productivity, arms hardware yields no ongoing social or economic utility once manufactured. Relying on military-led ‘moonshots’ in deep tech or artificial intelligence to drive civilian innovation is a costly gamble. If the goal is civilian technology, direct public investment in green industrial development is far more effective than hoping for incidental spillovers from weapon design.

Crucially, rearmament actively exacerbates the very ecological crisis it displaces. Militaries are among the world’s largest institutional consumers of fossil fuels. Expanding military capabilities locks economies into carbon-intensive technologies and supply chains at the precise moment when fossil fuel reliance should be being dismantled. In Europe, this dynamic presents a profound geo-political irony: because petrostates, including Russia, derive their power from global fossil fuel demand, building a war machine powered by fossil energy leaves nations structurally dependent on the very fuel exports that finance aggressive foreign adversaries. There are also the emissions which a war like that on Iran, involving UK strikes, create directly. Decarbonising energy grids and eliminating fossil fuel addiction is therefore a far more direct blow to autocratic petrostates than procuring additional conventional weaponry.

The capture of key parts of the trade union and labour movement in backing military expansion creates a profound political paradox. Organised labour was founded to protect working-class interests, yet working people bear the heaviest burdens of climate disruption, energy poverty, and underfunded public services. Chan



Image Credit: The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)

nelling political support behind illusory promises of defence jobs anchors working communities to volatile geopolitical cycles and corporate arms lobbies.

A genuine Just Transition must redirect advanced engineering, technical skills and manufacturing capacity away from legacy ‘big weapons’ projects and toward the urgently needed shift away from carbon dependence. The industrial competencies used to produce military hardware are directly transferable to offshore wind, marine energy, green hydrogen, and zero-carbon transport systems. However, remarkably little attention and investment has gone into the kind of industrial transition that will be required over the next two decades to avert impending climate catastrophe. Indeed, arms lobbyists, fossil fuel companies and nuclear power proponents are now working in lockstep to maintain ‘business as usual.’

What we need in Scotland and elsewhere on these islands is a green industrial revolution. One with workers and communities as its driver, democratic local economies at its heart, and a radical rethink about military defence as a dimension – but not the hegemonic claimant of – human, economic, social and environmental security. This includes the question of how to wrest back control of AI and use it in ways that enhance rather than destroy our human and ecological future.

The agenda is massive, but our starting points need to be focussed. Building on past work on defence diversification among trade unions and the 2025 Alternative Defence Review, Scottish CND is currently engaged in research on precisely how Scotland, first with existing powers and then with the much more extensive ones required, can create a meaningful Scottish Transition Agency, rethink real-world security and defence needs, and support local participatory action research on the alternative economic, industrial, energy and environmental future we all need.

Among other things, this involves mapping where jobs are and where and how they can be transitioned, and building bridg-

es between those trade unions who see through the lie of military Keynesianism and those in the defence sector who do not yet see a workable alternative.

It also entails spelling out why the Trident nuclear-weapon programme is the great white elephant of our moment (and an existentially dangerous one, militarily and environmentally), and how nuclear decommissioning could be an enormous economic boon for Scotland. The aim is to produce an initial report in April next year, with proposals for government, trade unions, civic and environmental groups which set the stage for a continuing project for engaging people in solutions rather than just protest.

Looking at the larger picture, governments cannot escape the fundamental trade-off between guns and greenery, though they can defer, obfuscate, and bow to wealthy corporations and interests. That is why political pushback is so vital, along with the plans and proposals which demonstrate workable alternatives.

The central truth behind all this is that security cannot be bought with artillery shells and fighter jets if the ecological foundations of human civilization are allowed to collapse. Reclaiming public capital for a green industrial strategy and opposing a war economy is not merely a moral preference, it is the only rational foundation for shared prosperity, sustainability and long-term security.

WHEN WILL CLEAN ENERGY BENEFIT SCOTLAND?

While both UK and Scottish governments concentrate renewable energy profits in private hands, **Gordon Morgan** asks what it will take to break the Thatcherite legacy and put power into the Scottish people's hands.

Labour was elected with a policy to remove fossil fuels from electricity in Great Britain by 2030. They are largely on course to achieve this. Most of the generation required and the grid network upgrade is being built. This is good for the climate!

However, there has been little immediate benefit for the people of Scotland.

First of all we have to note that Scotland has not used coal and hardly any gas in electricity since 2016. Labour's pledge was to make England's electricity gas free.

Scotland has exported electricity to England every year since 2000, and this has increased as wind farms were built. Scottish electricity consumption has remained the same so Scotland now exports over 40% of what it produces. This is expected to rise to 55% by 2035.

Scottish consumers have not benefited from this as wholesale electricity prices are set at a GB level and the price of gas used in England drives up the overall price. Were prices set in Scotland they would be lower.

The price of electricity across Great Britain is set every half hour. Suppliers submit bids and starting at the lowest, they are accepted until the demand is met by bids under a price — which is then paid to all accepted bids. Even though it is more expensive than renewables, gas sets the price around 90% of half hour periods.

Gas prices were hit by the Ukraine conflict and rose from 21 to 34 p/kWh in 2021 then fell to 26p/kWh in 2026. Electricity prices followed the price of gas. Ending this reliance on gas requires a grid upgrade to move electricity to where it is needed.

The cost of the pylons to transport the energy South are added to everyone's bills. Between 2020 and 2025 a total of £100 was added to household bills, making network costs £339 a year.

A new charge this year, RAB, adds £12 a year for 10 years to every household to build Sizewell C nuclear plant in Suffolk for electricity which Scotland does not need or want. Hinckley Point C will be paid £133/MWh, twice the price of solar. Labour wants to build more nuclear, including in Scotland. The Scottish Government and the public must continue to oppose this.

Household electricity costs are higher in Scotland as households need more heat and light and have older properties so use nearly 20% more electricity.

The problems can be traced back to Thatcher's privatisation of energy and the fact that electricity is a reserved power. Labour inherited this, but has chosen to avoid challenging the private ownership of electricity but rather to regulate it better: the National Grid, which manages both gas and electricity supply was nationalised and renamed NESO; the owners of the pylons and cables have to

get government approval to extend them; generators of electricity increasingly are subject to competitive contracts.

Labour in Government has held annual Contract Bidding Rounds to ensure sufficient generation is built to meet the Clean Power pledge. In each round the government lists groups of energy which it wants e.g. offshore wind; onshore wind and solar. Suppliers place a bid and the amount of energy they can produce each year. To this a sum per MW to use the grid will be added based on their location. The Government accepts the lowest bids and contracts are price indexed for 15 years. Around 25% of electricity is supplied under these contracts, this will rise to 50% by 2035.

The location price added to a windfarm in Scotland is much more than one off the South East of England. Thus in the last round West of Orkney Wind Farm bid wasn't accepted, one off Dogger Bank was. Energy from Orkney Mainland still remains unconnected to the grid.

NESO, responsible for strategic energy planning across the UK, is now drawing up plans for where new industries can be built and where new power is needed up to 2050. This is being done alongside forecasts that electricity demand could rise 60% by 2035 through electric cars and industries electrifying.

The first draft of the Scottish Regional Energy Plan (RESP) was published earlier this year, with the final due next year. It is important the plan is fully discussed particularly with Local Government and trade unions and in the Scottish Parliament. New industries should be subject to scrutiny as to their employment intentions and the skills required and the Scottish Government must ensure educational establishments can meet these. The governments should consider taking a stake in them. All areas having suffered recent loss of major industries should be considered within the RESP. It is unclear these factors are being considered.

The Scottish Government has said little about this apart from announcing in May Scotland's first AI Growth Zone in North Lanarkshire. This in itself is controversial and we know little about the water, energy and other restrictions that are being placed on this, nor who benefits from the data used. It is necessary that AI and other heavy electrical users are where appropriate incorporated in the RESP.

In its North Sea Future Plan the UK Government claims the North Sea is Britain's greatest asset for offshore wind, hydrogen, and carbon storage. This chimes with the Scottish Government's role for Aberdeen's Energy Transition Zone. Both Scottish and UK Governments, unions and the public must work together to develop these new industries and an open discussion be held.

TACKLING INEQUALITY WHILE BUILDING A GREEN AND CARING ECONOMY

Sara Cowan argues that the effects of climate breakdown will disproportionately affect women. Climate Change cannot be seen as gender neutral, but the Scottish government has failed to address this.

A Just Transition must reimagine who our economy works for.

That includes a move away from the neo-liberal market-driven dominance that we've witnessed in the last half century, towards an economy that protects both people and planet. This shift provides the opportunity to not only move from a carbon intensive economy but also work to tackle structural inequalities that continue to hold so many people back and perpetuate women's inequality.

Climate change is not gender neutral.

The recent heatwaves in Europe have also shown women, particularly those on low incomes, being hit harder by the impacts. From greater risk of health complications in high temperatures, rising likelihood of domestic violence associated with temperature rises, to the knock-on impact of transport cancellations or school closures on unpaid care.

Globally, women are more likely to go hungry when food is short at home. They are also more likely to rely upon unsafe work when harvests fail. During droughts women are more likely to be walking further to collect water, often at risk to their own safety.

Scotland is no different. Yet action at the national level is failing to make the connection between climate change and women's inequality. The Scottish Government's Climate Action Plan and Just Transition Plans make some recognition of data on societal inequalities. However, they fail to translate data into concrete action, particularly in relation to tackling women's inequality. Nor do the plans consider women's unseen circumstances and their disproportionate share of unpaid labour, when designing appropriate, gender-informed, policy responses.

The risk is that, by failing to see women, actions taken to respond to climate change will not only miss an opportunity to tackle women's inequality but also risk further entrenching it and ultimately leading to less effective climate policy. For example, if changes to school timetables and closures due to extreme weather events became the norm, this will impact on women's share of unpaid care, or if health research and advice fail to acknowledge the specific risks that higher temperatures pose to women their needs will not be met..

Let's look at an important area in the just transition – transport. There are clear gendered differences in the use of transport systems, stemming from the reality that women take on a disproportionate amount of unpaid care across our society, and their use of public transport reflects that. Women are more likely to use transport outside the 9-5 commuting time and in cross city routes, rather than the more typical outskirts-to-city-centre routes that men are more likely to take; women are more likely to use buses than trains and women are more likely to have multi-stop journeys. Women also experience different views of safety from men, and this is heightened for wom-

en from black and ethnic minority communities who experience both sexist and racist abuse on public transport.

These issues are recognised in Scottish Government literature but action to respond to them fall short of addressing the problem. We hope spending on public transport will increase in the coming years to support the shift away from private car use. However, if this spending is not invested in ways that support the diversity of uses and life experiences then the benefits will be unevenly felt.

There is a need for an expanded view on what investment in green jobs, and the nature of these, can look like across the country. The UK Women's Budget Group research has found that care creates more jobs per pound than construction or energy. Those jobs are already low-emission, and a society that meets its care needs well is one that has begun to organise itself around wellbeing rather than consumption, thereby addressing some of the drivers of climate change.

What should happen? The Scottish Women's Budget Group has been calling on the government to ensure that gender budgeting is part of the decision-making process. This approach would highlight any potential policy shortcomings, inequalities and differences, thereby promoting gender-informed decisions that tackle inequality.

Through our participatory work, women across the country have shared both the challenges and hopes they have for improved transport systems, better access to energy efficiency schemes, and enhanced food security. These are voices that need to be heard.

Most recently, these discussions have looked at the intersections of gender and race, highlighting concerns that, as we move to a much-needed greener economy, greater consideration should be given to unpaid care and housework roles. For instance, if tasks involving repair, re-use or recycle, as well as cooking seasonably end up falling on women, reinforcing existing inequalities in terms of who continues carrying the burden of unpaid labour.

The just transition offers an opportunity to tackle long-term inequalities and recognise the role of care in our economy. It provides an intersectional framework to help reshape the conversation around climate action. The Just Transition Commission have made this clear in their reports.

However, government responses to date appear more narrowly focused on the existing, male-dominated, energy industry rather than the wider communities that need to be part of the change. Both elements are vital for the just transition to succeed.

The climate movement, women's and equality organisations need to work together to widen the vision of a just transition and scrutinise the actions taken by public bodies, ensuring that the opportunities presented by this shift in the economy can be fully realised.

WILDFIRES MUST END SLASH AND BURN OF THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Colin Brown from the Fire Brigades Union reports on what it feels like to fight a burning Arthur's Seat and calls for investment into Fire and Rescue Services to prepare for increasing wildfires and the effects of climate change.

On 25 August firefighters gathered at the Glasgow necropolis to remember the 7 firefighters who lost their lives at Kilbirnie Street on 25 August 1972, in one of the country's deadliest post-war fires. This annual memorial gives pause to reflect on the sacrifice those firefighters made, but also on what Scotland and the UK now ask of their firefighters in what looks certain to be a future of changed risks, blighted by increased extreme weather events including devastating wildfires.

Across Scotland and the UK firefighters have been at the forefront of driving down trends on domestic dwelling fires (house fires) through safety initiatives and relentless pressure from the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) demanding improvements to building and furniture safety, legislation, and training. This success in reducing fires and loss has illogically led repeated governments and, in many cases, Chief Fire Officers to cut budgets and enforce cuts to firefighter numbers. Between 2010 – 2024 the UK has lost over 12000 firefighters (21%). Since 2013, Scotland has seen 1239 firefighter posts slashed leaving frontline appliances and specialist resources uncrewed and unavailable to respond to emergencies.

These cuts have come whilst large-scale weather-related emergencies have increased across the globe. Publicly, attitudes across the UK have been sympathetic for the plight of others, whilst taking misplaced quiet comfort that these events happen in other countries like America, Greece, Australia, Spain, Turkey, but not in the UK and not at the scale others have seen. Now when fire does take hold here, the emergency service we rely on has suffered two decades worth of cuts.

Western Europe has just experienced the hottest June on record with temperatures over 3°C higher than normal. Throughout the summer of 2026 the UK has declared multiple heatwaves, much of England is in drought and we have experienced some of the most significant and protracted wildfires on record across England, Scotland and Wales. In Stourbridge in the West Midlands 19 homes were destroyed, a further 13 damaged and 20 people hospitalised as fires spread from a field engulfing over 500 acres. Chief Fire Officers in the south of England were forced to make calls to fire services as far north as Scotland for support to tackle wildfires.

In Scotland, whilst Arthur's Seat burned on the doorstep of the Scottish Parliament, over 500 firefighters and hundreds of volunteers from across Scotland battled for four weeks to control the fire raging across the Cairngorms that forced the evacuation of areas around Glenmore and Nethy Bridge, burning through around 25 square kilometres of some of Scotland's most important and scenic landscapes.

Whether people believe human activity is driving increased global temperatures or not, the reality of climate change is on our doorstep now and as a country we need to sit up and take note.

As Europe, America and other countries have learned, when wildfires begin to encroach on populated urban areas, it's already

too late. So, what of Scotland and how we as a country prepare for and respond to a future that looks almost certain to be blighted by an increasing number, scale, and severity of wildfires burning ever closer to where we live and work?

For many years the FBU have been at the forefront of calls for greater investment in Fire and Rescue Services. In 2023 the FBU published *Scorched: Firefighters and Resilience to Wildfires*. This report highlighted the impact of cuts and how fire services across the UK were woefully under prepared for the increasing scale, ferocity and regularity of wildfires.

On the 24 August 2026 Scotland's Chief Fire Officer (CFO) issued an open letter commending the work of all that were involved in firefighting and supporting responders to the Cairngorms wildfire, calling for "collective action to strengthen Scotland's wildfire prevention and preparedness, following a series of devastating incidents at home and across the world". In his statement CFO Stevens highlights the need for prevention and preparedness to sit at the heart of a national approach to preventing and responding to wildfires.

Much of CFO Steven's statement echoes calls from the FBU for a national conversation on how Scotland prepares and responds to wildfires.

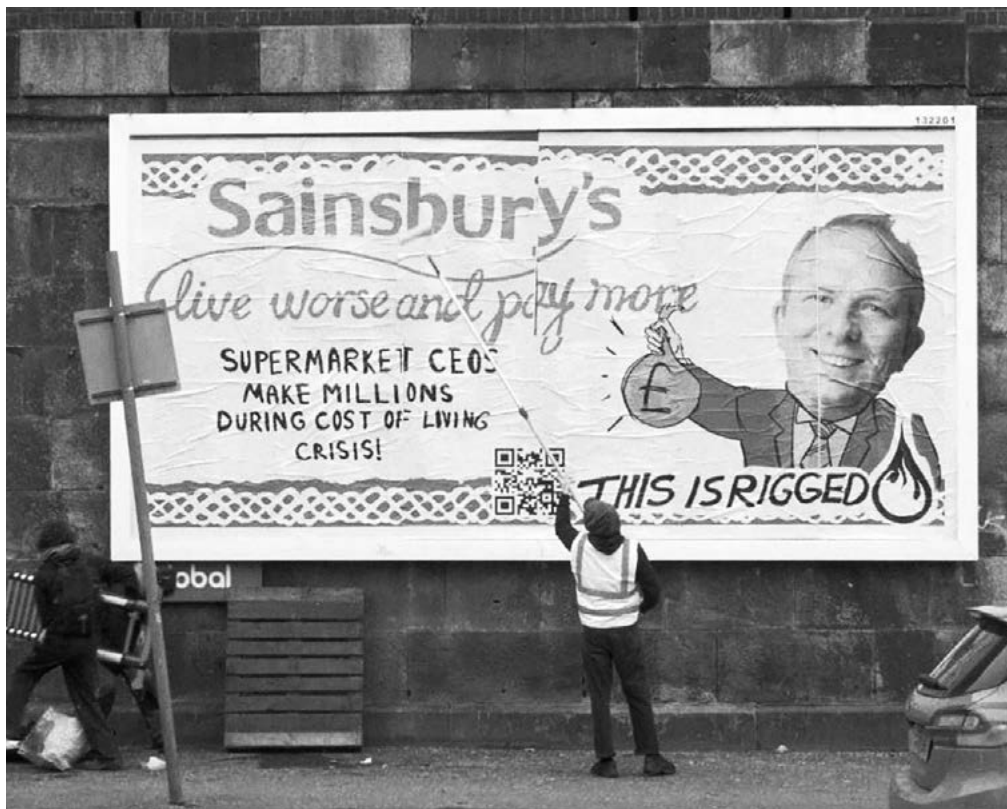
A genuine national strategy must begin with open, honest dialogue in what is often a divisive debate. The often polarised views between grouse and sporting estate managers, who champion muirburn as a means of reducing fuel loading, and conservationists and those who believe rewilding Scotland's often ecologically barren landscape is a better long-term strategy to prevent wildfires, will be difficult to reconcile. The one agenda that all parties share is the desire to prevent the devastation and risk to life and habitat that comes with large scale wildfires.

The Fire Brigades Union have called for a national conversation between the Scottish Government, The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and the FBU before bringing in other parties. Funding for the fire service must be a top priority. To equip all of Scotland's firefighters with light weight PPE will cost in excess of £2 million. When the FBU demand increased funding for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, it isn't just about demanding fair pay for our members, it's about securing their safety to operate in some of the most hostile environments.

Scotland needs this conversation to start now, in preparation for next year and years to come. For all the talk, recognition and commendations that will undoubtedly come from politicians for all wildfire responders, their words will be meaningless without recognising their cuts have savaged the Fire and Rescue Service. They must now listen to those on the frontline demanding genuine real terms investment to build a Scottish Fire and Rescue Service that is truly fit for the risks we face today, and those that will clearly form a significant part of our future.

THE NEXT WAVE OF CLIMATE ACTION WILL BE PART OF A COLLECTIVE STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

After many direct action groups failed to sustain their climate activism, **Emma Brown** reflects on how the attempts by This is Rigged to bridge climate justice with food justice is becoming more urgent every day.



*Direct action group This is Rigged spraying messages connecting climate and food justice.
Credit: This is Rigged*

This is Rigged were a youth led movement that worked to unite the struggles of the climate and cost of living crises through direct action. Over two years we targeted the fossil fuel industry driving climate breakdown and the supermarket CEO's profiteering from the massive inflation caused by climate disruption and fossil fuelled wars.

During our actions we took a lot of risks: we climbed the Kelpies, shut down the INEOS fuel facilities in Grangemouth demanding a fair transition for workers, stole and redistributed overpriced baby formula, and covered Glasgow in cheeky posters that showed we are on people's side. Climate activists are often characterised in opposition to workers, dismissed as naive, idealistic or fatalistic, so we made our messaging immediate, direct and class conscious.

We focused our final wave of direct action on the cost of food — pushing for price caps and community food hubs for every neigh-

bourhood to protect access to food now and for the years ahead. This was an important link to make at the time; by 2024, 1 in 4 Scots had experienced food insecurity in the past year and we'd all experienced the shock at the price of our food shop at the till. One third of the yearly increase in the cost of food was a direct result of extreme weather damaging food production back then.

This summer has been a perfect storm of droughts and extended heatwaves. The entire European continent is experiencing catastrophic harvests, especially of grains and staple vegetables, while historically low water levels in shipping channels and rivers have exacerbated bottlenecks in transporting those goods, making our just-in-time supply chains more precarious and expensive. Figures from Ireland expect a family's annual food shop to go up at least another £500 this year.

It's obvious it's going to get worse. The UK relies on imports for 40% of our food, with those countries we import from also experiencing climate shocks. Meanwhile, the UK Government is refusing to confirm or deny whether it has *not* maintained strategic food reserves. In the face of the state abandonment which already leaves millions struggling, and with a real risk that the global food systems could collapse with no alternative in place, leading to mass starvation due to climate change, it's imperative to build the resources — the social and material infrastructure we will need within our communities to support each other through the initial destabilising disruption to food and energy supplies.

As 'This is Rigged' we couldn't sustain the movement long enough to have a real chance at succeeding in our demands but I do think that we found ways of campaigning for the climate from a bridging perspective to people's lives. That was by first showing up for the struggles people face now (something tangible and easy to relate to their own life experiences) — and *then* talking about the future suffering that will be caused by climate breakdown. This shifted our role as climate activists from the lonely position of a Cassandra to being a militant supporter of local campaigns — which felt much more connecting and empowering.

These are psychological barriers around facing the horrible problems that are caused by climate breakdown. The scale and intensity is difficult to imagine and connect with before it becomes a reality, but there were other issues that we faced that made it difficult to continue the campaign. I share these so that other people, and emerging movements, can learn from our experiences — the insights, tensions and mistakes.

Although we did have networks of support and a strong community we didn't really have the numbers to sustain the amount of actions that we did. This put an increasing strain on the small num-

ber of people who were willing to take arrestable action. And even though we were still breaking the law, there was a distinct lack of interest from media outlets to report on more sympathetic redistributive actions: many would only platform activists when they could vilify the disconnect between our action and our cause.

As we saw the scientific reports getting worse and the necessary revolutionary changes to get out of this mess becoming more and more unrealistic, there were also tensions on how to balance our work of movement building (holding weekly open meetings, building coalitions, sharing food and political education, visiting community pantries, food banks and policy makers etc) with the urgency of Climate Collapse. Some in the group wanted to instead channel trusted activists to go bigger, higher risk and more unaccountable. This tension created a pull in two very different directions.

It's strange to watch TV and see the train tracks warping and dry straw covering England and Wales, instead of green grass, and to not see a climate activist climbing something. We are in a different position now. Just Stop Oil Scotland and later This is Rigged emerged from the surreal worldchanging lockdowns. Now it's harder to believe a swift revolutionary fever can sort out all the complex broken systems that are teetering on collapse. Some are putting energy into disaster preparedness in our neighbourhoods, which is more complex than a single demand. Many of my comrades are dispersed in different struggles and spheres of action.

If we give up entirely on the headline-grabbing tactics favoured by the recent climate movement we risk ceding the public narrative on scarcity to the right. But I hope that the next wave of climate action will be indistinguishable from the struggle for food, energy, shelter and justice - a collective struggle for survival.



Direct Action Group This is Rigged blockading the INEOS Oil and Gas refinery in Grangemouth. Credit: This is Rigged

THE LOOMING MINERAL DISASTER FACING SCOTLAND'S DATA CENTRE PLANS

Big Tech plans over 20 hyperscale data centres in Scotland. Amidst widespread resistance, **Kim Pratt** points to the international dimensions of how disastrous the necessary mineral mining is for the environment and for communities affected.

Plans for data centres are mounting in Scotland. Our mild climate and plentiful renewables mean that Scotland has caught the eye of developers desperate to start their next supersized project. There are plans for over 20 'hyperscale' data centres across the country and both the UK and Scottish Government have jumped on the AI bandwagon with supportive strategies and funding promises. Communities and environmental groups are crying out for these plans to be paused until their impacts on people and nature can be properly assessed.

There is another reason to be concerned about Scotland's data centre boom. These projects will require thousands of tonnes of materials to build and operate. Many of these materials are known as 'critical minerals', which are vital for the development of modern economies but difficult to obtain. They include materials like copper, which is needed for data centre electrical and cooling systems, and gallium, which is essential for their servers. The copper required just for the proposed Auchtertool data centre is enough to build 1,000 onshore wind turbines.

The global supply of copper is struggling to meet growing demand. There are about 700 copper mines operating around the world, with major sites located in countries like Peru, Chile and Indonesia. The UN has projected that 80 new copper mines will be needed by 2030 to avoid shortfall.

When the UK Government published its critical mineral strategy, one that fails to account for the human and environmental costs of using these materials, mining-affected communities in the global south spoke out.

Rosanna Caldana, from a Chilean movement against mining highlighted recent charges and millions of US dollars in fines on the giant Anglo American firm for severe violations in the Los Bronces and El Soldado projects, including serious deficiencies in contaminated water management, uncontrolled acid drainage and failure to protect vulnerable wildlife. She said, "The lives, social cohesion and dignity of the peoples of the global South, in this case Chile, cannot continue to be sacrificed for the illusion of progress in the global North."

Rising Global Tensions

Demand for critical minerals is creating a geopolitical scramble between governments who want to stockpile these resources before others get their hands on them. In February 2026, the Trump administration launched Project Vault, a US\$ 12 billion plan to build strategic domestic reserves of critical minerals. Supply disruptions are becoming increasingly common as China, the country where most of the world's critical minerals are processed, restricts exports in response to US tariffs.

Like many rich nations, the UK has signed critical mineral agreements with other countries in order to improve the security of its supply. Recently the UK has made trade agreements with In-

donesia, Kazakhstan and Zambia. A deal with Greenland is being negotiated. Whilst the exact content of such agreements are kept private, it is believed that they are often deeply uneven, manipulating existing power dynamics to allow richer countries to suck mineral wealth out of poorer ones.

Global south countries are starting to recognise the leverage power of their mineral reserves. In 2025, African countries came together to adopt the African Green Mineral Strategy, which aims to transform its exports from raw materials to clean technology as part of a just transition. Such partnerships are emerging in Southeast Asia and Latin America too and they are the first steps towards a more balanced, fairer future.

Big Plans From Big Tech

But more will be needed to fight back against the AI boom being driven by Big Tech. Global data centre capacity is set to double by 2030, with the total investment expected to be around US\$ 3 trillion, in what has been described as the largest infrastructure investment in modern history. Tech giants, such as Microsoft, Amazon and Meta are using their immense wealth and power to expand AI into every sphere of our lives. Whilst these companies promise AI will solve the world's problems, their true goal is to maximise their own profits.

These plans depend on the undemocratic expansion of data centres, hoarding critical minerals and fragile supply chains. Such an unfair and harmful approach, driven by growth and greed, cannot lead to an equitable and sustainable future.

Data centre plans are being pushed not just in Scotland but across the world. We must stand together if we are to resist the exploitation of ordinary people and nature.

This resistance has already started happening. In the US, over 500 local bans or restrictions have been enacted and there are now dozens of cities, and local government bans internationally. For example, Amsterdam has banned all new data centre developments and in Malaysia public marches have stalled several mega projects.

In Scotland, no data centre developments should be approved until proper safeguards that protect people and nature are put in place. Any that are constructed must serve the needs of people in Scotland, not Big Tech.

The UK and Scottish Government data centre plans must include fair and sustainable use of critical minerals if they are to protect people and nature in a meaningful way. This should be bolstered by a new UK law on corporate responsibility which would hold corporations to account for the harms here and in their supply chains.

Our communities have more in common with those fighting data centres globally and the impacts of critical mineral supply chains than we do with the elites pedalling AI slop and writing secret trade agreements.

THE NEW EXTRACTIVE ASSAULT ON ECUADOR

Ecuador's Indigenous people faces a new alliance between the far-right and extractivist mining industries. **Patricio Mesa** reports back on the fight on the frontline of the climate crisis.

Ecuador is entering a new phase of even more intense entrenchment of extractive industries. The current reopening of the National Mining Register, the new oil licensing rounds, together with reforms aimed at strengthening so-called strategic sectors, show that the state is once again expanding the boundaries of natural resource exploitation.

Extractivism is part of Ecuador's economic history. For decades, oil was one of the main pillars of the country's economy. Today, metal mining is promoted as a new source of investment, employment and foreign exchange. However, replacing or supplementing oil with gold, copper and other minerals does not mean moving beyond the primary-export model; it simply means diversifying extractivism.

The gradual reopening and expansion of the National Mining Register is one of the clearest signs of this new phase. For several years, it had been suspended due to resistance from local communities. Now, the state has resumed the process for applications for new concessions. This is happening while countless communities are already facing the pollution and silting of their rivers, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, damage to their water sources and land conflicts linked to mining. The key question should not be just how much mining can contribute to the economy, but which territories will be affected, who decides on their fate, and who will bear the social and environmental costs – in other words, which territories will be sacrificed next.

The same approach can be seen in the oil sector. The government has proposed new bidding rounds for the South-East and the Sub-Andean region. This plan represents a further expansion of the fossil fuel frontier into Amazonian territories home to forests, water sources and Indigenous peoples and nationalities.

This new assault is taking place against a backdrop of the strengthening of the right in Latin America. In various countries, conservative and far-right governments and movements are prioritising legal protection for transnational corporations, private investment and the removal of barriers to business activity. The militarisation of territories is becoming the norm, while social and environmental safeguards are rolled back.

The dispute over Ecuador's natural resources is becoming increasingly intertwined with trade and geopolitical relations with the major powers. The Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Canada, signed in 2026, strengthens the framework for trade and investment, against a backdrop of growing Canadian interest in mining and critical minerals. With the United States, Ecuador is deepening a trade and economic security agenda linked to the diversification

of supply chains, in a global landscape characterised by competition for critical minerals and rare earths. At the same time, the FTA with China, in force since 2024, has deepened trade relations and cooperation in strategic sectors such as mining, energy and infrastructure. Ecuador is thus becoming increasingly important in the global contest for access to strategic resources.

Peasant and Indigenous territories in Ecuador, as in some other countries in the region, occupy a strategic position in this dispute. Their forests, rivers, biodiversity, knowledge, minerals and oil are viewed as resources of economic and geopolitical importance. For the market, they may represent reserves of raw materials; for the peoples who live there, they are territories of life and memory, upon which the future of humanity depends.

In the face of this assault, the struggle and resistance of the peoples and communities have been fundamental in holding back, for decades, the advance of extractive industries into their territories. Although the current situation is extremely difficult, this resistance continues and shows that the Indigenous Peoples and local communities have not given up their struggles; still less have they relinquished their right to decide on their territories and ways of life. However, defending life and territory comes at an ever-increasing cost today. The criminalisation of protest, the persecution and prosecution of leaders and land defenders, the economic strangulation of activists and organisations, as well as direct physical threats and attacks – in some cases leading to the murder of those who oppose policies and projects that put their territories at risk – have all intensified.

There is an urgent need to strengthen community organisation, territorial monitoring and control, the integration of ancestral and scientific knowledge, independent media and communications, legal defence, social mobilisation, and national and international solidarity. In this regard, Peoples Against Extractivism provides a concrete platform for international coordination, enabling the struggles of peoples and communities to join forces against the advance of extractivist policies and new forms of imperialist domination, which seek the dispossession, plunder and control over natural resources and territories.

The defence of territories is, therefore, at the same time a struggle for a different vision of society: a society where nature is not seen as an inexhaustible source of resources in the service of accumulation, but as an essential part of life; where peoples can exercise their self-determination; and where development is subordinated to collective well-being, rather than life being subordinated to the needs of capital.



Image Credit: Patricio Mesa

ANOTHER ENERGY TRANSITION IS POSSIBLE

This is an edited extract from a longer contribution to the discussions of **Peoples Against Extractivism**, an international coalition of social movements resisting predatory, extractive projects on their territories.

The reconfiguration of US imperialism has once again turned the spotlight on Latin America. The 2025 National Security Strategy sets out a shift towards what might be described as an open recolonisation of the Western Hemisphere, reviving the Monroe Doctrine under the so-called 'Donroe Doctrine'. This doctrine, which predates Latin American independence, redefines the region as an exclusive reserve of raw materials and a subordinate labour force, and is complemented by a strategy of direct military coercion, which has manifested itself in the militarisation of the Caribbean, the intervention in Venezuela and the economic strangulation of Cuba.

This process is facilitated by three structural conditions. Firstly, the historical subservience of the Latin American bourgeoisies, which are financially intertwined with Wall Street and reduced to agents of recolonisation. Secondly, the relative failure of the progressive cycles, which, whilst promoting redistributive and educational reforms, did not alter the primary-export production structure nor break financial dependence, thereby eroding support among the popular base and facilitating the far-right's offensive. So-called 'gangster capitalism' describes a mode of operation in which executives of major military-technological corporations act as geopolitical agents with decision-making power over nation states and their regulatory frameworks. This decision-making power manifests itself in a growing tension between the logic of transnational accumulation and the institutions of bourgeois democracy, a tension which corporate actors resolve through strategies of capture, circumvention or deregulation, as exemplified by the deregulation policies promoted by the Trump administration, Musk's influence on electoral processes, or Peter Thiel's funding of far-right candidates who subsequently award multi-million contracts to companies such as Palantir in countries like Argentina and Ecuador, where their mass surveillance systems operate in conjunction with these technology firms.

In the face of this power, the response requires, from an eco-socialist perspective, the socialisation under workers' control of strategic technological infrastructures and the building of inter-

nationalist networks that prevent artificial intelligence and digital surveillance systems from becoming entrenched as mechanisms for disciplining labour and displacing populations. A discussion amongst social movements regarding the technological horizon is essential, as is a deeper exploration of experiences of democratisation and technological sovereignty for the management of data, educational and productive processes, but also to promote prefigurative processes in energy generation and territorial management, in a context where the multiple structural crisis demonstrates that there are no solutions within capitalism.

In this context, as the Latin American Left, we have shown ourselves to be fragmented and lacking a shared vision of liberation, oscillating between conciliatory reformism and symbolic protest without practical application. Faced with the ideological and cognitive war waged by 'surveillance capitalism', and in the face of the energy and ecological crisis that capitalism cannot resolve without deepening dispossession and extractivism—as is the case with the so-called 'energy transition', which merely shifts devastation to new territories and the commons—the only way forward is to overcome historical divisions and build a popular bloc which, from an eco-socialist perspective, confronts transnationalised capital. The link between the climate crisis and the class struggle thus becomes an inescapable strategic axis. Young environmentalists and organisations defending a historic socialist project are called upon to recognise one another as participants in the same anti-capitalist struggle.

Against a backdrop of intensifying conflict, it is imperative to reaffirm the conviction that peace is not limited to the signing of agreements with armed groups, but arises from popular power and from overcoming the structural conditions that impoverish us. We must strengthen the prefigurative processes that shape our vision for the country, the world and life itself, based on human dignity and on the care of nature and the ecological processes upon which life on the planet depends. We cannot wait to carry out the socialist revolution before addressing the climate and environmental crises;



Image Credits: Congress of Peoples, Colombia

we must build eco-socialist revolutions today through popular power. In the face of a capitalism based on extractivism, war, drug trafficking and the techno-financial apparatus, it is essential to deepen our internationalist strategies and coordination so that we may recognise one another and build bridges between the processes we are constructing day by day, with an eco-socialist vision, an economy for life and the self-management of the territory. We must overcome the limitations of representative democracy to build a participatory democracy with bodies of real power, one that engages in dialogue with the national aspirations and life plans of our peasant, Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, with 'buen vivir', 'sumak kawsay', 'vivir sabroso' and a life of dignity.

As the political and social movement that is the People's Congress—which brings together trade unions, indigenous, peasant and Afro-Colombian organisations, as well as student groups and broad sectors of the Colombian popular movement—we have forged our internationalist character out of an urgent necessity: to confront the crisis of civilisation facing the world. On this path, we recognise that our struggles do not occur in isolation, but are interwoven with those of other peoples, shaping solidarities that span territories and fuel proposals for our country and the world. We recognise the urgency of moving towards territories free from extractivism, where

communities and ecosystems no longer bear the cost of mining and oil extraction. We also recognise the need to strengthen the leading role played by indigenous peoples, people of African descent and peasant farmers—who are the guardians of the land, memory and life—in the construction of Latin American eco-socialism. We must also engage with workers in the energy sectors.

No transformative process can take place in isolation; that is why we reaffirm the importance of forging a solid alliance between the world's eco-socialist movements – a network capable of transcending borders and sustaining common struggles. For Colombia, this means driving a just and people-centred transition that embraces clean energy, agroecology and food sovereignty. We remain convinced that social movements must preserve their autonomy, continue to mobilise, and defend nature and life above all economic interests. We champion direct action.

Because ecosocialism, more than a concept, is a vision, a commitment to building another possible and urgent world, where just energy transitions engage with ancestral and community knowledge. And where our prefigurative proposals—or embryos of popular power—such as self-managed economies, Peasant Agri-Food Territories, alternative popular media, and centres for training, research and independent thought flourish as seeds of the future.

REVIEW: OR SOMETHING WORSE — WHY WE NEED TO DISRUPT THE CLIMATE TRANSITION

Jim Walker reviews *Or Something Worse* by Nic Beuret (Verso, 2025) and examines whether it holds ideas our movements need to disrupt the unjust transition.

I was recently introduced to the concept of Verso Slop by a friend of mine. In Sunny Lu's *Bad nonfiction, part 1: Verso Slop*, she lays out a scathing taxonomy of political nonfiction books; slam poetry/memoir, manifesto, and literature review but bad. Something about this must be true. The rapidity of underwhelming book publications can be bewildering. How can so many people have such profound ideas all the time to warrant so many books with such intriguing and promising titles?

Nicholas Beuret is an activist turned academic. Formerly of Friends of the Earth England, he now teaches International Business Environment and Innovation and Sustainability at the University of Essex, a fitting establishment for an established radical. Although this is the first book he has written, much of his earlier writing deals with similar themes, and as early as 2019 he was asking “A Green New Deal Between Whom and For What?”

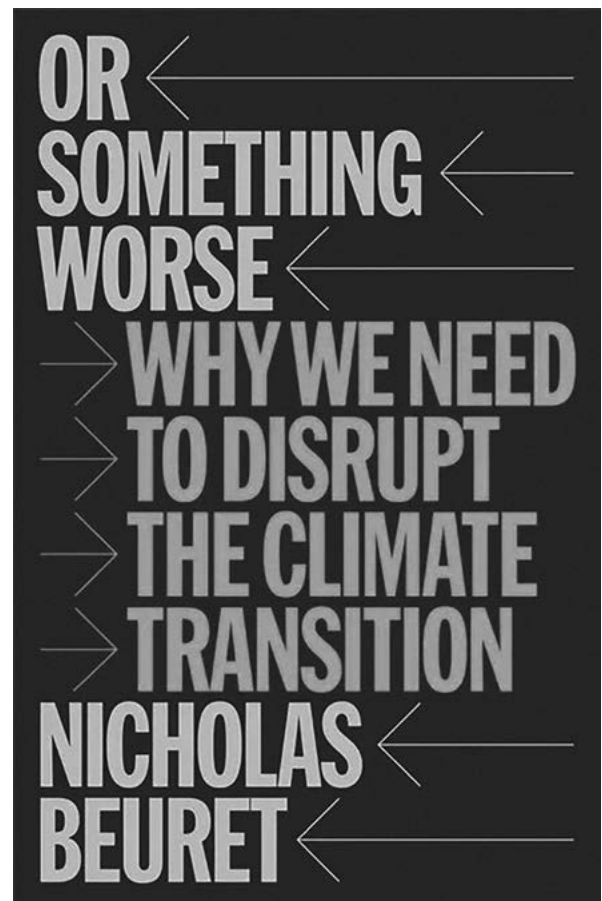
Or Something Worse develops this question into a full critique of the current transition to a lower carbon world, and then somewhat unconvincingly lays out a proposed solution. The first half of the book is an onslaught of negative statistics, pushing the reader's head deeper into their chest. “Only two-thirds of households have insurance”, in 2023 “food inflation peaked at 19 per cent” and “British households saw energy bills increase by up to 80 per cent”. There are so many of these statistics, from all around the world, that it's sometimes hard to know which countries or nations exactly Beuret is talking about, but the point is made. (The worst statistic, “‘Incremental innovation’ constitutes around 75 per cent of all innovation work” is uncited.)

Beuret's important contribution is his identification of the transition's installation economy, which covers jobs like solar panel and heat pump installation, glazing and insulation. This sector is especially vulnerable to political patronage, and tends towards small, precarious, location bound businesses, which echo patterns of deprivation rather than push against them, as a reshored manufacturing economy was hoped to do. It is often mistakenly assumed that a transition will lead to more, better jobs, but that was never guaranteed. The structurally enforced norms of neo-liberal capitalism, with its low wages and insecure jobs, will reassert themselves in a neo-liberal capitalist transition. Beuret does well to point out that many of the jobs being created, both outside and within the installation economy, are jobs which are traditionally done by women, such as education and care, and that these jobs will have some of the worst wages and the worst precarity.

To take control of the transition, Beuret proposes three strands; blockades, refusals, and community-based counter planning. There are heartening case studies and good proposals, but unfortunately Beuret falls foul of the siloed organising he argues against, by calling for political strikes, which are illegal in many countries (UK, USA, France, Spain) and severely curtailed in the few nations where they are. The political strike is a potent weapon for the work-

ing classes, which is why it has been so heavily repressed. Beuret also calls for a fuzzily defined radical municipalism, like transition towns combined with platformism, but with very little on the strategy or tactics of movement building. Beuret tacitly acknowledges this, saying there “are no easy victories to be claimed”. However, for those looking to take action, the listed case studies should provide ample inspiration.

The designation of which books are indeed Verso Slop is ultimately a limiting one, relying too heavily on the reader's prejudices and is such a damning label that it is almost a thought terminating cliché. There is a grain of utility to it, and it's fun to say, but reading *Or Something Worse* through such a cynical lens only serves to shield the reader from the truth: that rather than a climate change induced collapse of society, we are more likely to see a re-entrenching of the neo-liberal's state's worst impulses towards fascism as the world burns around us. The fight against it seems impossible and yet, fight we must.





Matthew Crichton reviews of *Start from the Level* an exhibition of photographs by **Sandra George** at the City Arts Centre in Edinburgh.

Sandra George's photographs are a poignant reminder of a previous period of social activism in the working class communities of Edinburgh. As Councillor Margaret Graham says, they "offer an invaluable record of Edinburgh and its communities, seen through the eyes of someone deeply committed to social justice, equality, and human connection". It's important to add that they are carefully observed and beautifully crafted.

Born in Nottingham and raised between Jamaica and the UK before settling in Edinburgh, she became widely known for her work as a community organiser and advocate. The exhibition explores themes of identity, activism, motherhood, belonging, and social justice. If you didn't get to see the exhibition, buy the catalogue!



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Cailean Gallagher, Editor

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