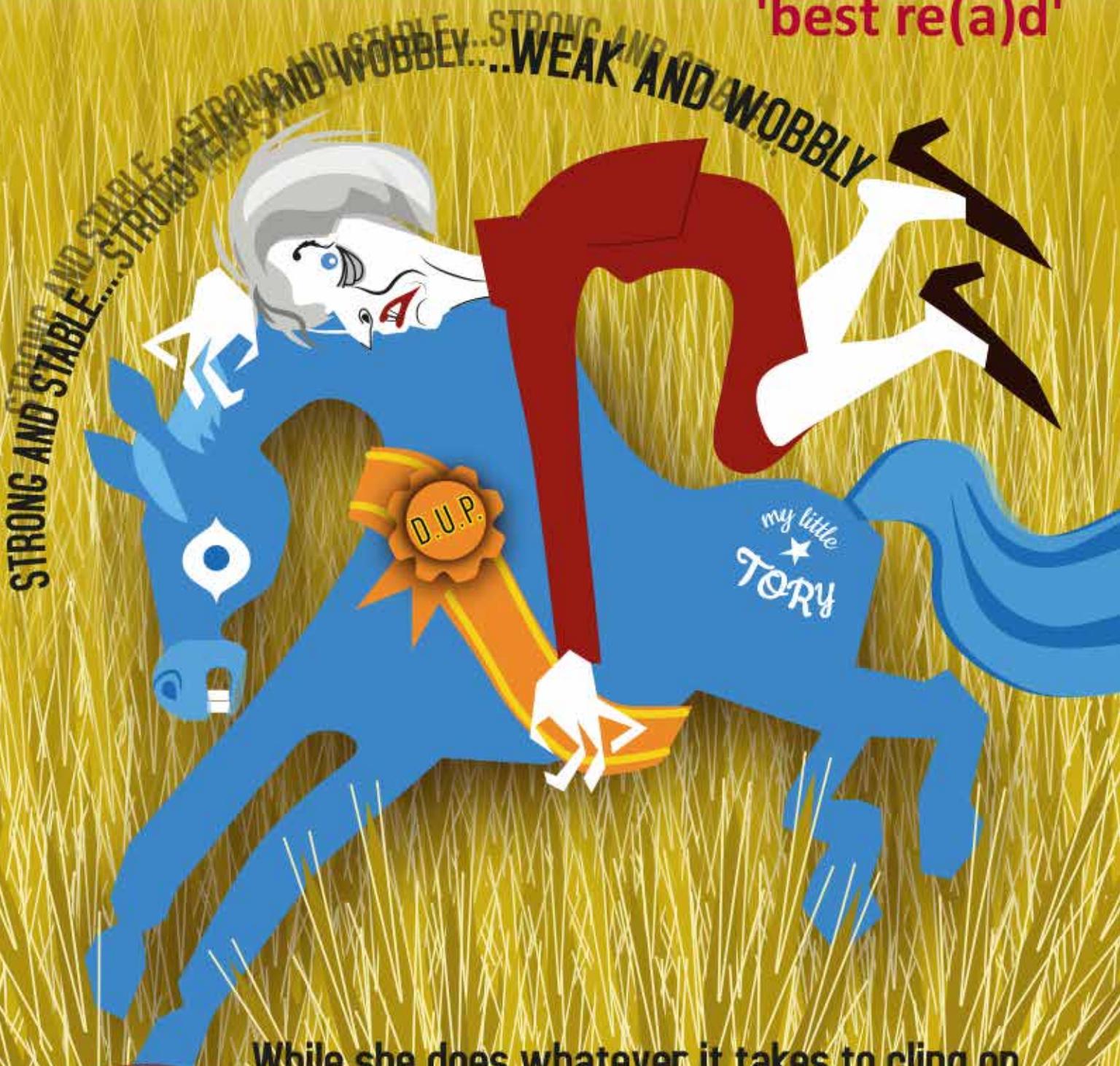


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Where we are now

May didn't quite end in June but her mantra of providing 'strong and stable' leadership turned into the actuality of being 'weak and wobbly' while Corbyn went from being (allegedly) unelectable and an electoral liability into something akin to a conquering hero – certainly if his reception at UNISON annual conference and Glastonbury were anything to go by. Just as with after the independence referendum in September 2014, it seemed that the vanquished were actually the victors. But there are also other historical parallels to be cited for the Tories did as much to lose their slim parliamentary majority as Labour did to bring about this situation. The same

situation has afflicted the SNP – still the biggest party by seats and votes in Scotland but looking and feeling a lot like Labour after its involvement in the 'Better Together' campaign – somewhat dejected and on the back foot.

Serious left analysis must start by asking two fundamental questions, namely, why did Labour do much better than any of the polls (including its own) indicated it would, and why did Labour not actually win? The exposure of Theresa May as weak and wobbly as well as cold, austere and without any common touch certainly helped but so too did Labour's programme. Under the heightened exposure of

an election campaign, under which reporting had to be more balanced, Labour's pledge to govern for the many and not the few resonated widely. Jeremy Corbyn was more at home and a much better performer at the countless mass street rallies than in the Westminster chamber. And, Labour was able to create its own direct link to voters, especially younger ones, via social media without being reliant upon the mainstream media. Its organisation of activists especially via a dedicated app used by Momentum in particular was also notable. But Labour still received just under 800,000 votes less than the Tories, with the Tories gaining 5.5% more votes than in 2015, and it is doubtful

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that Labour would have won had the election campaign run for another two weeks as John McDonnell claimed. In other words, 'Jez he did' but by not quite enough.

The ecstasy and exhilaration of moment of advance for Labour will surely dissipate – not so much as the Tories are still in government but because Labour is not and it is not clear how, when and where it can act to bring the Tory government down. This means Labour is likely to something of a bystander, waiting for the Tory-DUP coalition to tear itself apart. Meantime and no matter saying that it will remain on a war footing as well as boosted by tens of thousands of new members recruited during and after the election, Labour could easily return to the narrow confines of the parliamentary arena. Here, and despite the fillip to his personal confidence and stature with weakened Tories and a becalmed Parliamentary Labour Party, Corbyn is on weaker ground as he was before in the last parliament. Indeed, the last *Scottish Left Review* editorial argued that Corbyn needed to be ten times better than May – it turned out that he easily was but that was during an election campaign when normal rules did not apply.

Since he was elected leader, Corbyn has endured vilification from the right and soft left of the Parliamentary Labour Party. Some of these figures have indicated they are now willing to serve in his Shadow Cabinet, but he should be very careful in his choices. He may find it prudent for the sake of party unity to invite some to join the cabinet, but their numbers should be limited.

Yet only if Corbyn looks to act where he is strongest, namely, outside parliament, can he seek to replicate the strength and support he had during the election campaign. Here, rather than saying what a future Labour government would do, he should be putting much more emphasis on what citizens can do

for themselves through collective struggle in their workplaces and communities. The message should be 'Rise up!'

Like many others on the left, the *Morning Star* has become an uncritical cheer leader for Corbyn. This is not helpful and it serves no positive purpose for the left to suspend its critical faculty when it comes to Corbyn. Yes, he should be defended from attacks from the right but his support should be not be unconditional and without criticism. One of Corbyn's weak points is the absence of the use of the vocabulary of class. In an age where working class consciousness is at such low ebb, 'for the many, not the few' could too easily be interpreted as the 99% against the 1% following the Occupy movement. The ruling class and its functionaries are much bigger than 1% and the working class does not comprise 99% of the population. In similar terms, Corbyn must explain his socialist vision because, while to be welcomed, what he sets out is merely social democracy albeit a progressive version.

The left in the Labour Party, especially Momentum in England and Wales and Campaign for Socialism in Scotland, must seize the initiative with the increase in popular support and membership and take control of the Party constitution, structure and organisation in order to hand power back to ordinary members and isolate the right wing careerists who have ruined it. This should start with a radical agenda for change at this year's National Conference in September.

For Labour, Scotland continues to provide a particular and continuing conundrum. If Labour had done much better than its extra six seats and 2.8% vote increase – like winning Aberdeen South, Renfrewshire East, Stirling and the Ochils (which they held before but which the Tories took) as well Airdrie and Shotts and Motherwell

and Wishaw, the Tories would have had difficulty forming any kind of government. Compared south of the border, neither the Corbyn effect (10% vote increase in England) or a popular Labour devolved administration (12% vote increase in Wales) existed in Scotland. The legacy of 'Better Together' and a politically and personally woeful leadership in the form of Kezia Dugdale are the critical explanatory variables. So it is all very well saying, as left Labour MSPs Alex Rowley and Neil Findlay and others have said, that Labour would have done better in Scotland with more radical approach, namely, empathising Labour's manifesto, and one less based on opposing indyref2. Logic then dictates that Labour can't win in Scotland with Dugdale so the left needs to move to remove her and do so soon. Not doing so is to ignore the elephant in the room.

We asked eight of the leading voices on the left in Scotland to give their thoughts on 'where now for the left?' The plurality of perspective is evident over Brexit and independence. What is common though is that the SNP over-estimated, as this editorial has argued before, its impact of, and importance to, the cause of independence. Since the SNP's parliamentary retreat on 8 June, many have pointed out that the SNP is not synonymous with independence movement. That has always been the case but it cannot hide the essential truth that the SNP is the major – and controlling- part of that movement and so what happens to the SNP does have a significant impact on the prospects for independence. Its defence of access to the Single European Market and the freedom of movement for labour have not gained the degree of traction with voters as the SNP thought – certainly not being the material change Sturgeon regarded Brexit to be. Just like the neo-liberal version of independence that the SNP offered in 2014, it provided

no compelling social democratic reason for people to vote for it to hasten independence on 8 June. In consequence, Sturgeon has had to accept that the mere possibility of a second indyref has been put out to pasture for the foreseeable future.

(As an aside, the Socialist Party (formerly Militant) has characterised the Labour Party as two parties in one since Corbyn was elected leader in September 2015. While there has always been some truth to this – and well beforehand too – it seems that the characterisation is also apt for the SNP. Its setback on 8 June ever more indicates that it is (or was) two parties in one, with a thin veneer of social democratic illusion for those in the Central Belt and a Tartan Tory base in the North East.)

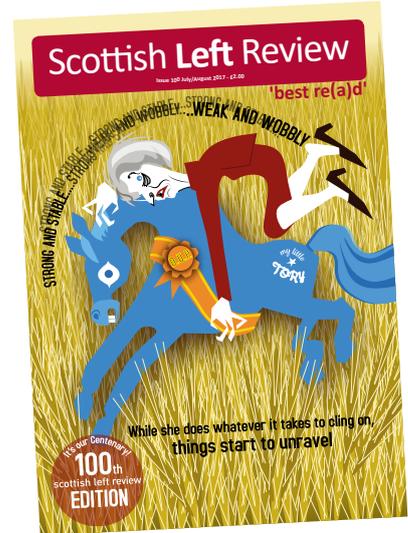
Where does this leave the independence movement? It leaves the Scottish Independence Convention, Commonweal, the Radical Independence Campaign and those that marched on 3 June in Glasgow in the biggest show

of support for independence, at best, just treading water. It might provide others with an opportunity – if not a sense of coercion – not to view all economic, social and political struggles through the lens of independence. Indeed, just a week before the election and rather ironically, Nicola Sturgeon said independence was not the solution to every problem.

The view of the *Scottish Left Review* is to support the call for another referendum on independence as an expression of the democratic will of the Scottish Parliament. However, this mandate for holding another referendum needs to be reviewed in either 2020 or 2021 depending upon when the next Scottish Parliament elections are held. As before *Scottish Left Review* does not take a position on how people should vote in a forthcoming referendum.

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The electorate: surprisingly strong, unsurprisingly unstable

Malcolm Harvey surveys the wreckage, identifying the victors and the vanquished

The recent past has indicated that inviting the public to participate in the political process in elections and referendums leads to unintended consequences. Theresa May's decision to call a snap election in an attempt to secure a clear mandate for her premiership and the 'hard Brexit' her party have been championing undoubtedly falls into that category. As the exit poll was announced on the stroke of 10pm on Thursday 8 June, it appeared that a surprising result was once again on the cards. Indeed, Mrs May had lost her majority.

The Prime Minister's reluctance to enter into television debates and the uncertainty over the start of Brexit negotiations appeared to weaken the Conservative claim that they would continue to be a 'strong and stable' government. By contrast, Jeremy Corbyn – who has faced down several mutinies from within his own parliamentary party – extended his popularity from the wider Labour membership to the electorate at large. The Corbyn surge, it appeared, was quite real, but the momentum came a little too late to propel Labour into power.

Nevertheless, momentum creates perception. Despite returning just 262 seats (albeit 30 seats more than in 2015), the fact that Labour had polled 40% of the vote meant that the election looked to be a success for Corbyn's Labour. The fact that opinion polls early in the campaign had the Conservatives much further ahead – in some, by as many as 18 points – meant that the narrowing of that gap was treated as a major victory. By contrast, despite winning 55 seats more than Labour, and taking over 13.5 million votes, the inability of Mrs May's Conservatives to achieve a majority was perceived

as a defeat – both for her party and the Brexit plan they had proposed. The losers were winners, and the winners were losers.

Across the UK, the picture was similarly mixed. The tension between perception and reality, between winning and losing, was blurred. In Wales, polls early in the race had suggested the Conservatives were in line to be the largest party. However, the 'Corbyn surge' propelled Labour to 49% of the vote, three seat gains from the Conservatives and a significantly buoyant mood as they continue to govern in the Welsh Assembly. Plaid Cymru took Ceredigion, the last remaining Liberal Democrat seat in Wales, but that gain aside it was a disappointing night for the Welsh nationalists, with their vote share down 1.7% and expected successful challenges in Ynys Mon and the Rhondda failing to materialise. So, an increase in representation, but more broadly, a backward step for the Welsh nationalists. And while UK-wide the Liberal Democrats increased their seat total, the loss of their sole Welsh MP, coupled with the loss of former Deputy PM, Nick Clegg, in Sheffield Hallam, meant that their night was one of mixed fortunes too.

In Northern Ireland, 17 of the 18 seats were won by the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Sinn Féin, with only (former Ulster Unionist and latterly Independent Unionist) Lady Sylvia Hermon able to break the polarized duopoly. The more moderate parties on both sides of the constitutional divide – the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) and the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) lost three and two seats respectively as voters fell back to entrenched positions. The collapse of the Northern Irish Assembly – which, after March's elections,

remains without a government – had an influence on how voters cast their ballots, and the outcome had significant implications for how the UK will be governed for the next five years.

With Sinn Féin continuing their policy of abstentionism and not taking up their seven seats in the House of Commons, this reduced the effective threshold for a majority to 322 seats. Although the Conservatives were short of this figure, an agreement was reached with the DUP to secure the votes of their 10 MPs for the Queen's Speech. The DUP won the most seats in Northern Ireland, and achieved a deal with the UK Government to the tune of £1bn extra in the Northern Irish treasury. However, their inability to reform a Northern Irish government against the backdrop of the 'cash for ash' scandal and the improving electoral performance of Sinn Féin makes it unclear as to how influential this position will be.

In Scotland, the revival of the Scottish Conservatives continued unabated after their return as the second party in 2016's Scottish Parliamentary election. Twelve gains from the SNP saw the party's most successful return since 1983. Scottish Labour too, made six gains from the SNP, recovering to a more secure position, while the Liberal Democrats added three to their solitary hold in 2015. The SNP's high water mark of 56 out of the 59 Scottish seats in 2015 was always going to be an impossible task to replicate. Despite the loss of 21 seats, the party still returned 35 MPs, second only to the 2015 election as their best-ever result and, crucially for them, still a majority of Scottish seats.

The 'Corbyn surge' in the final

weeks of the campaign convinced many former Labour voters in west-central Scotland to return to the party, while in areas where the party lacked strength, unionism trumped socio-economic concerns, and tactical voting for the Conservatives helped to squeeze the SNP vote. The implications for the SNP - the party running the Scottish Government, and attempting to secure a second independence referendum - were clear. The winners of the most seats were regarded as losers, while the parties who had finished well behind them in both votes and seats were perceived as victors.

Socio-economic themes generally took a back seat to the constitution in this election, with the looming Brexit negotiations casting a shadow over proceedings, while the prospect of a second independence referendum in Scotland dominated election debate there. As a result, a significant measure of tactical voting was apparent. In Scotland, this meant voting against the SNP if you did not want a second independence referendum – and in no fewer than nine of the Conservatives’ 12 gains was it apparent that these tactical votes swung the seat in their favour. In England, the collapse of support for UKIP split between core-leave voters, who returned to the Conservatives, and those who were more sceptical on Brexit that voted Labour (with a smaller portion returning to the Liberal Democrats). The first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system utilised for UK elections lends itself to tactical voting of this sort, with voters often selecting the candidate best-placed to beat their least favourite option rather than actively supporting their preferred candidate.

As a result, a further paradox emerged from this election. Despite the effective return to two-party politics in terms of vote share – the combined Conservative and Labour vote breached 80% for the first time since 1970 – we

still emerged with a minority government. One of the perceived advantages of FPTP is that it produces strong governments with working majorities – yet two of the last three elections have seen no party secure such a mandate. Thus, we see a situation where the two main parties have increased their vote share – in Labour’s case, significantly – but a requirement to rely on smaller parties to secure parliamentary support. Thus, the perception appears to be a return to two-party politics, but the reality is not quite the same.

And so, now to the aftermath. The Conservatives sought and achieved a deal with the DUP to pass critical legislation, but will operate as a minority government. An extra £1bn for Northern Ireland, the continuation of the triple-lock on pensions, and the universality of winter fuel payments were the key extractions made by the DUP. Theresa May has been weakened by the loss of her majority, but will continue as a lame-duck

Prime Minister. The poisoned chalice of EU negotiations makes a Conservative leadership contest an unappetising proposition for potential candidates. In opposition, Jeremy Corbyn has increased his popularity beyond his party, and his performances during and since the election have seen significant improvement on the past – he even appeared on stage at Glastonbury. However, he still has some way to go to secure the unwavering support of his parliamentary party. For the SNP, their progress towards a second independence referendum has

been checked – the Conservative revival in Scotland was based predominantly upon their opposition to such a vote – and a rethink of constitutional strategy appears imminent.

The prospect of a second independence referendum dominated the election in Scotland, while Brexit appears to have dominated elsewhere. Constitutional politics continue at the forefront of UK politics. But with multiple terrorist attacks in recent months and the tragic events that unfolded in the fire at Grenfell Tower, politicians will have to widen their focus as the more immediate issue takes precedence. Minority governance provides opportunities for the opposition to influence government policy, in these areas and many more. The election provided a surprising outcome – now politicians need to make the best of what they now have.

Dr Malcolm Harvey is a Teaching Fellow at the University of Aberdeen

Scottish Left Review

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Warning shot given and received

Chris Stephens recounts his experience of the campaign

With two weeks before polling, myself and my agent were discussing our strategy for the count and when we'd call for a recount. We both thought I was in danger of losing, because despite some positive canvassing, we were picking up warning signs. Early on, more people were self-identifying as Tory voters. This was over and above the normal 'Unionist' vote. We found solid 'No' voters whose main issue was the prospect of a second referendum voting Tory in the belief they were best placed to defend the Union. The Tory vote share jumped from 5% to 15%.

From my own experience and observing material Labour put out in Glasgow South West, and in stark contrast to its national campaign, the constitutional issue was barely being mentioned. In the more prosperous areas where voters heard that message it opted for the Tories, to the detriment of some experienced and well-known SNP MPs. I've also heard tales of tacit nod and wink agreements where Labour stood back and didn't run campaigns firing on all cylinders precisely to bring down SNP candidates where the Tories, or in some cases LibDems, were the main challenger - something that Dugdale tried to deny she implied in a Sky News interview but the slip-up is on the record.

There were two Labour campaigns in Scotland - one led by Dugdale, the other promoting Jeremy Corbyn and his anti-austerity message and the latter only kicked in towards the end of the campaign but was sufficient to attract enough indy left supporters to switch to Labour that cut majorities and cost my party seats. It wasn't the only factor though. Although May wanted the election to be about Brexit and political commentators thought it would be about the constitution in Scotland, we ended up with an election about public services and trust.

The British Tory campaign was complacent and arrogant, giving the distinct impression it was blissfully unaware what actually happens in workplaces, public services, homes, and for those relying on social care.

Yet they still managed to get 43% of votes. But Tory austerity came back to haunt them because it's clear voters are fed up being told what cannot be achieved, or that the austerity vision of workplace practice is the only game in town.

The brutal reality is that no matter who the Labour candidate was, in certain constituencies many people were voting for Corbyn. Even if the candidate had signed a letter calling for Corbyn to go, and even where a candidate had consistently voted for outsourcing and privatisation as a councillor, that didn't matter.

There has been some talk of hitting a reset button since 8 June, but I wonder how much was beyond anyone in Scotland's control in that in a Westminster election has historically been Tory/Labour contest. 2015 has now to be seen as an outlier rather than a trend - 'yes' voters translated into SNP votes in 2015, when we were the insurgents, but this didn't happen in June on the same scale. What we have learned is that in British general elections, we must update our offer into a radical and bold vision of what we can do at Westminster.

In Glasgow South West, we campaigned to re-elect a left wing, anti-austerity candidate, who had argued the trade union corner, consistently represented the Waspi women, argued for shipbuilding on the Clyde, and for funding of public services and the benefits this has on the economy and everyday life. So where do we go from here?

Our opponents' biggest mistake is to say this was a setback for independence. Independence support still remains consistently higher than support for a referendum. We cannot allow ourselves to be boxed into process arguments and must make the case as to why independence will deliver for people in Scotland. The 'yes' coalition can do this by articulating a vision of why independence rather than Westminster dependence can achieve this

Sturgeon pressing the 'reset' button

was the start, but most exciting for me is the promise of a bold and radical programme for government. Every political party and government needs a refresh at certain points, and this should allow the SNP to present a more attractive offer to the electorate.

The first opportunity is to present a vision of a fairer, more respectful vision for delivering social security. I welcomed the promise to make phone calls to the Scottish social security service free - it will be a relief to those currently pay over the odds to contact the DWP when sanctioned, chasing up claims and payments.

Returning to a parliament of minorities, the opportunities for MPs like myself are limitless and this should now be the justice parliament. Justice for women who are now having to work in some cases an additional 6 years before they reach retirement. Justice for those who are victims of, or family members who have lost loved ones to contaminated blood. Justice for former miners and those blacklisted.

This parliament should pursue fair rights at work to be protected in the Brexit process. And, we need to make the case for socialism and social protection in a Scottish context and need to do more to communicate what we can do if given the opportunity.

Both the general election and council results have proved there are voters in Scotland who will vote for the detoxified Tories, and there are enough 'Labour no matter what' combined with young voters with no direct memory of 'new' Labour to give Labour a second look. Internal Labour contradictions cannot be papered over as Brexit takes place and the powerlessness of Scottish Tory MPs has already been exposed by the DUP grubby deal. However, the SNP must not focus on the failings of other parties but present a bold vision to generate enthusiasm for independence as a positive choice worth making. The results in June are a warning shot, message received and understood.

Chris Stephens is the SNP MP for Glasgow South West

Getting back in the socialist saddle

Lesley Brennan argues that Labour is now on its way back

Two years on from the most cataclysmic defeat of Labour in Scotland's history, Labour is back in play. The six new MPs and umpteen new SNP/Labour marginals defied all the odds and contradicted all those who prematurely reported the permanent demise of Labour in Scotland. Importantly, the outcome of the election demonstrates another step forward in the revitalisation of Labour in Scotland. This revival has potentially profound implications for the future and the Scottish political landscape.

The 2015 General Election was undoubtedly unique. Shortly after the referendum in 2014, Labour was punished by a still emotionally charged electorate for the ill-fated decision to work alongside the Tories in the Better Together campaign. For many, Labour's decision to do so confirmed their suspicions that Labour had compromised its values once too often.

Thirteen years of Labour Government did make the lives of many better, including lifting millions out of poverty. However, we were still seen as being too close to big business and too comfortable with the political and economic orthodoxy that saw huge bubbles of super wealth being accumulated by too few with a parallel inequality and poverty for far too many. Alongside an apparent comfort with the increasing hollowing out of the state and – tragically - of a gung ho, interventionist foreign policy, Labour was seen as being part of the establishment rather than as a challenge to it.

By 2017, under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership, the Party is transformed and as a result has presented Labour with a huge opportunity in Scotland. Our resurgence under Jeremy has rattled the SNP, which seems confused about how to tackle the Corbyn phenomenon, illustrated by its approach during the election, which started with Corbyn being too inept to be PM to before the end of the election telling voters in Scotland vote SNP and help get Corbyn in!

Labour is now rediscovering its purpose and its soul. People in Scotland and beyond now know exactly what Labour stands for: dignity, decency

and opportunity and that achieving this will be paid for by government investment – paid for by redistributive taxation policies – in health, education, housing and jobs; public ownership and control of our public services; full employment, fair pay and security at work complemented by a humane social security system.

Labour provided hope, which resonated. Many people who voted 'yes' 2014 in the hope that independence would create a fairer society and saw independence as a means to creating a socially just Scotland have been given a lot to think about. In 2014, they simply assumed the discourse that said big bad Westminster could never again be the catalyst for any kind of transformative change and that only an independent Scotland offered the potential for a fairer society.

Now with Labour's programme for government, the choice is either the road to fairness and equality led by Jeremy Corbyn, or support for – albeit tacitly – the reactionary SNP, whose record in government is woeful and fails to protect Scotland when in power despite their hollow rhetoric of progressiveness at Westminster where they have no power.

Corbyn's manifesto related to the material realities of people's lives, which represents a refreshing shift from the almost total focus on constitutional politics that Scotland has been consumed with in recent years - albeit granted the constitution continues to be a factor, evidenced by the resurgence of the Tories in Scotland. Their revival is in part due to a realignment of Scottish politics back to days of old when people did vote Tories in as MPs in Scotland. The return of the Tories also exposes the shallow argument of Scottish exceptionalists, who deny the evidence of history with the false democratic deficit claim that Scots never ever got/get the

Government they voted for.

All of that said, there is still much for Labour to do in Scotland. Yes, we are regaining in heartland seats and giving people much to think about but we still have to convince many more to ensure we take the next steps on our road to government. This must necessitate positive messaging coming from all constituent parts of our Party. Labour must, front and centre, offer a vision of positivity that moves beyond the divisiveness of 2014 and distinguish itself in full from the competing nationalisms of the SNP and Tories. From here on in, there must be no ambiguity and at all times we must make clear that it's the politics of Labour and trade 'unionism' that provides our ideological bearings and inspiration. We must provide all those people who have in recent times drifted from Labour reasons to vote for us again not excuses to stay away.

If Labour in Scotland follows the lead of Jeremy Corbyn, vis-à-vis campaigning with positive messages, then we can take our next steps to turning the very many SNP marginal seats into Labour seats. This is vital in electing a Labour Government. When at that point, having elected the most transformative and progressive Government since Atlee, the focus on constitutional politics will become peripheral and confirm how another world really is possible.

Lesley Brennan is a former Labour MSP and councillor who now works for Labour MSP, Neil Findlay, and is a constituency representative on the Executive Committee of the Scottish Labour Party.



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Many new flowers are beginning to bloom

Clare Haughey sees hope emerging as a phoenix from the bonfire of political certainties

The 2017 general election will go down in history as one of the great mis-steps of Conservative Governments, and the beginning of the end of the hegemony of the right in the UK. With the short campaign pitched as an opportunity to reaffirm the Conservative's catchphrase-reliant 'Brexit means Brexit', deliver a personal mandate for Theresa May and secure a stronger majority of Conservative MPs in the Commons – it actually failed dramatically on all three counts.

Parties with a left-of-centre agenda were expected to be cowed by an unstoppable Conservative force, but instead the results showed that no one party had a majority. What the election did do, however, is show that the values and aspirations of the left are alive and well, despite the crystal ball gazing of those in the Conservative government and the crossed fingers of the wider mainstream media.

It's no mean feat to get a hung Parliament in a first-past-the-post system, but when gerrymandered boundaries across Britain favour the Tories, when the mainstream media favours the right wing, and when the current government is almost on a 'war footing' with the EU, the Conservatives failure to get a majority with this structural advantage is, perhaps, a sign that the tide is turning.

It's a sign that the electorate – after years of being saturated with regressive messages - are beginning to see through the rhetoric of stability and 'tough decisions' to reveal the class warfare that is raging beneath. It is a collective realisation that austerity is not the 'only' option and that there are alternative economic policies which do not involve making the poorest in our society pay for the bankers' mistakes.

A growing sense of economic solidarity is being fostered despite

the prevailing rhetoric, and this can only be good for the left. It may have taken eight years of austerity and an increasingly doomed Brexit programme, but left-of-centre voices are becoming louder.



**Paraphrasing Mao -
Let a thousand flowers bloom ...
and let's see what flourishes**

And, there is a plurality of views on the left – no longer are we represented by a monoculture Labour party as we have been at a national level for the past fifty years. Many would argue until the rise of Corbyn, Labour was anything but left in its views and policies. It is not enough to be merely 'anti-Tory' or to speak in generalities about human rights when the grassroots resurgence of left politics has been fuelled by many issue-specific groups that are largely aligned to values of the left rather than any one single part of the left.

Issues such as pensions inequality for women born in the 1950s, Trident and those suffering benefits sanctions have all had their champions and local activist groups which have given rise to a left defined not from the top-down, but from the bottom-up. The left is no longer solely dominated by a single national figure, although leaders such as Nicola Sturgeon, Caroline Lucas - and notably in the last month - Jeremy Corbyn, have, of course, had

a positive effect. It is also driven by an alliance of involved and motivated activists who are increasingly educated and motivated to reform those issues that are close to their hearts.

When faced with the realities of devil-in-the-detail legislation from the political right – most notably the Rape Clause - the left have had to become policy experts themselves, and many new entrants to activism have become energised by small-p rather than capital-P politics. Because the explosion in left wing fervour has happened both inside and outside parties, the left is now a broad church with no one single owner. Being of the left is a belief system, a state of mind not a one-party membership card.

It's about believing in humanity, in social justice, in equality and in human rights. It's about believing we are all equal and that our society should reflect that. It's about protecting those less fortunate and asking those of us with broader shoulders to carry the load. It's about looking after each other.

The future for the left is in harnessing the energy of the growing army of single-issue campaigners and activists into the party system. Not merely by co-opting policies, although I would point out that the SNP has been largely in sync with many of these movements including WASPI, Trident, the Rape Clause and anti-austerity – but by harnessing the energy and personalities who champion these causes to bring authenticity and passion to party politics. The left hasn't found its voice, it has instead found its voices.

Clare Haughey has been the SNP MSP for Rutherglen since 2016. Prior to that, she trained as a mental health nurse and worked as a clinical nurse manager.

The Corbyn connection

Lynn Henderson argues Corbyn has seized the zeitgeist and can do more

Three summers ago, remember the air of excitement across Scotland? Heady heightened political confidence rose in the belief that another Scotland was possible. People felt that this might be the time for a true alternative to austerity imposed by successive Tory and Labour governments. 45% of us voted Yes to Independence as a vehicle we hoped could deliver that change.

Something similar is happening with Corbyn's rise that the most hardened Blairite, died in the wool Tory or lifelong Scottish nationalist cannot deny. Another world is again possible. And this time not just in Scotland or for Scots. The chant of 'Oh, Jeremy Corbyn' might still have a mostly English accent, but it is catching, and Scots are joining in.

If ever a PM had a weakening 'win' it was the Theresa May. The general election called to deliver a 'strong stable' hard Brexit mandate is now propped up by DUP confidence and supply'. May found her own magic money tree to buy the support of a party weakened in Assembly elections by accusations of corruption at the highest level. Even with DUP buy-off, it might only take seven Tory dissenters to bring the whole house of cards down.

When Corbyn calls out the juxtaposition of Grenfell's burnt-out tower of poverty, homelessness, unnecessary death caused by cuts, surrounded by uncaring extreme wealth and vacant properties of the rich, it is not mere rhetoric. He is no spin-politician but the real deal. We are Corbyn and he speaks our truth. 'For the many not the few' has been reclaimed from the *faux* morality of Tony Blair's speech writers of twenty years ago.

With humanity, with strength and commitment to an alternative, Corbyn reaches out to the victims and survivors of terror in Manchester and London and the victims who paid with their homes and their lives for public sector neglect. Another world is again

possible. Young people revelling in hedonistic Glastonbury singing 'Oh, Jeremy Corbyn' is only the tip of the iceberg.

The 2017 Labour manifesto is a crystal clear programme for an alternative to austerity. Labour's costed commitments to invest in infrastructure, rebuild public services, social security, housing and end pay restraint remains sharp compared to the blurry SNP manifesto mildly listing things on which it would 'press the UK government'. Whilst the SNP sought to fan the embers of the Remain camp to the independence cause, Corbyn has been resolute that Brexit, indeed, means Brexit, and seeking the best deal.

There is something deeply troubling and counter-democratic to a liberal elite seeking to rerun referendums over and over until the people finally capitulate. That Sturgeon has now thrown indyref2 into the longer grass, perhaps some of the dogs will come to heel for a while and we can focus on class over nation.

A bewildered Welsh sister asked 'Scotland, what's with the Tory thing?' Who would have thought that a growing momentum of unity on the left for a Corbyn government might be hindered by a dozen Tory gains in Scotland? Corbyn has revolutionised Labour in England and Wales. In Scotland the party is trapped in its own 2014 nightmare. Neither the Scottish leadership nor the Party machine has even had a Corbyn makeover. With a few notable exceptions, the Scottish Labour beast is the same one that served Jim Murphy as leader. Its 2017 election strategy scored a complete own goal. Scottish Labour remained at odds with those that wanted to support Jeremy Corbyn. His attempts to engage those who voted Yes to independence in 2014 displayed an understanding that was either absent or ignored by those in charge in Scotland. He said he would talk to the Scottish Government about Indy Ref 2, Kezia

said Scottish Labour would never do that. This leaves too many people still saying they support for Corbyn in England but not here.

Scottish Labour's entire energy seemed determined to keep the debate away from progressive policies and on to attacking independence, or defending the Union. 'Stronger Together' was used more prevalently in Scotland than 'For the many'. While it is necessary to debate and expose contradictions and limits of SNP anti-austerity rhetoric, Scottish Labour's obsession with independence and the SNP let the Tories off the hook.

Peak SNP is over. The supersonic 2014 SNP surge was never one that could be sustained. Winning 56 of 59 MPs in 2015 was remarkable, and no one, if they were honest even in their own ranks would expect or want that to be sustained. Now the myth of no Tories in Scotland is busted. There have always been Tories in Scotland and a Tory vote. There is little evidence of Labour voters tactically voting Tory to undermine SNP. The percentage swings from SNP to Tory sit at around 13%, but there is also an upturn in the Labour vote in the same seats. The gains made by Tories are in natural and previous Tory territory. Tory voters have voted tactically for years either to keep Labour out by voting SNP or this time to burst the SNP indy bubble. The Tories feel emboldened and this is dangerous. Let us remember, if Scotland hadn't voted those additional 12 Tories in, then there would be no Con-DUP. Labour, SNP and others would have found common ground.

I voted 'yes' in 2014, 'remain' in 2016 and Corbyn in 2017. Everything has changed. It is time to look forward. We, the Scots left must prepare to work together as never before in class solidarity over national identity.

Lynn Henderson is a national officer for the PCS union with responsibility for Scotland and the vice-chair of the Jimmy Reid Foundation

Could the left have done more and, thus, better?

Helen Mcfarlane reflects on her near miss to be a left Labour MP on June 8

I am now back in my NHS day job after a rollercoaster experience. Despite losing by only 195 votes and seeing a hardline Tory/DUP government in Westminster, my political and feminist standpoints are strengthened. As should those of the left be. The left and the union movement had a rare opportunity to unite behind a winnable socialist manifesto. What if the left had the vision and confidence to truly unite around this class agenda? That's what the Labour manifesto was and that's what inspired so many - especially young people - to unite behind Jeremy Corbyn. Regrettably, many so-called left comrades in Scotland persist in prioritising national identity politics.

As a left activist, feminist and former Unite EC member, I was already committed to Unite's political strategy to 'win back the Labour Party to working people and to win back working people to Labour'. I agreed, following a 'please stand' phone call, to fight the Airdrie and Shotts seat. I was motivated by the left aim for a gender-balanced slate and by Corbyn's ten pledges that hinted at the socialist manifesto that was to come including nationalisation of public transport, £10 minimum wage and workers' rights.

My approach was to work alongside elected councillors, MSPs and Constituency Labour Party officers and members connecting 'Labour' to communities; to take the manifesto to people's homes across the constituency; and to be highly visible at campaigns, events, street stalls and through the press/social media. Early on in this short campaign, we started to sense successes with this approach connecting particularly with former Labour voters. Good conversations on doorsteps bred an increasing confidence amongst our small but growing group.

My recent grassroots Unite electioneering for left executive council and general secretary candidates meant I was already in campaigning mode in left politics. Reflecting on my

experience as a left working woman Labour candidate -not working or living in the political bubble -but doing an NHS job in an already highly politicised arena, with commonplace family and neighbour carer responsibilities taught me that the left needs to demonstrate not just talk about solidarity and equality - specifically gender equality.

The left needs to show solidarity by having a duty of care to the welfare and well-being of candidates selected to champion the left cause. Equality of opportunity should not stop at generating a gender- balanced slate but must be demonstrated e.g. in the allocation of support and resources. In Lanarkshire, despite having four women and three men as Labour candidates, it was the three men who got paid staff from the Scottish Labour Party. All the men got a shop front office rented for them to use and the women got none. There appears to be no statistical justification for this in terms of other election outcomes or margins – indeed, the majority in Airdrie and Shotts of 8,779 was the smallest of the seven seats to be overturned. I have to question if sexism provides a potential explanation about this stark contrast of resource allocation? Two of the men got elected. Meanwhile, two of the women came a so close second, reducing the majority to 195 in Airdrie and Shotts and from 11,800 to 318 in Motherwell and Wishaw.

Solidarity during the election can best be shown by joining the candidate in door knocking, leafleting and displaying posters. Being the candidate can feel lonely and vulnerable, never knowing if anyone will respond to the mass call to members and affiliated organisations to help. I am deeply thankful to everyone who did volunteer to help - particular thanks to the solid crew who came rain or shine- and, unlike my sister in the neighbouring constituency, I was fortunate never to have no-one turn up.

The absence of formal support from my union and other affiliates to dedicate staff and members as volunteers, to win a Labour government committed to delivering so many of our union campaign ambitions, was a major disappointment. Could this be perceived as a lack of confidence in fully backing a socialist agenda or just a sign of caution wrongly worrying about non-Labour supporting member resignations?

If only the left both in the Labour Party and the wider union movement had truly done all it could! If there was ever the need for the three main Labour affiliates in Scotland to go beyond the call by issuing, for example, a joint statement to 'Vote Labour' to remove the anti- union legislation, ban zero hours contracts and end bogus self-employment, this was that time. A missed opportunity indeed!

So after my experience I am left wondering ... if the left had strived for equal opportunity, fully demonstrated solidarity and been bold and confident in the Labour manifesto, could we have gained more left MPs and secured a Corbyn led Labour government? What now for the left? A serious conversation about where we go collectively is long overdue. My hope is that the left is bold and recognises the opportunity that may still be there to back a government in waiting, committed to an undeniably socialist manifesto and that the left in Scotland shows solidarity by supporting and joining Labour.

Helen Mcfarlane stood as the Labour party candidate in Airdrie and Shotts for Westminster. She works for NHS, is a member of the People's Assembly, a unite member and activist and is vice chair of United Left both in UK and Ireland and in Scotland.

SNP climb down over indyref2 presages new realignment

Colin Fox argues for a return to socialist struggles to lift up the fight for independence

In the latest edition of the *Scottish Socialist Voice* (issue 496), I suggest it may be argued no one won the 2017 General Election. The 'victor' Theresa May lost a perfectly good majority and a 22% lead in the polls to emerge as the least stable Government in forty years. Her campaign will undoubtedly go down as one of the most incompetent any party has run in the post-war period. So much for Lynton Crosby's invincibility! On the other hand, Labour also lost – its third defeat in a row. And all the other parties trailed in far behind, including the SNP, as 'the big two' hoovered up 85% of all the votes cast.

The Tories, having reached a deal with the DUP, will try to hold on, of course, because they fear a second election would see Jeremy Corbyn sitting in Downing Street, a prospect that both alarms and galvanises them. But the Parliamentary arithmetic and divisions inside their party over Brexit, the central issue facing her Premiership, suggest May will not last five years.

Whilst 2017 will be remembered as 'the Brexit election' – with indyref being the central issue in Scotland - Corbyn's vote shows there is a deep reservoir of discontent in Britain; over austerity, poverty wages, public sector pay caps, workplace insecurity, widening inequalities, greater indebtedness, the lack of affordable housing and the uncertainty Brexit brings.

At the same time, the Tories saw a marked revival in their fortunes north of the border particularly in rural and conservative Scotland at the SNP's expense. Tactical voting against indyref2 galvanised them. The Nationalists meanwhile lost 21 seats and held on, just, in a dozen more. Their grip on Scottish politics is slipping badly because dis-satisfaction with their lacklustre record in Government at Holyrood is widespread. They were once the beneficiaries of an anti-Labour mood but patience is now fast running out with Nicola Sturgeon's failure to

improve the things that matter.

Indyref2 was the main issue and frankly the SNP's tactics were inept. The Unionist parties were able to show how unpopular the SNP's proposal for a second vote at this time and on the EU issue was and gained ground; the Tories took 12 more seats, Labour 6 more and the hapless Lib-Dems took another 3 in their old fiefdoms of Caithness, East Dunbartonshire and West Edinburgh. Nicola Sturgeon's response has been to retreat even further on indyref2 and to reiterate her neo-liberal view that 'a soft Brexit' and membership of the European Single Market is now more important than independence.

A new realignment of Scottish politics is now under way with allegiances shifting on both right and left. Conflicts are emerging within the SNP with the leadership foolishly claiming, as Mike Russell did in *The National* on 17 June that this was their second best general election result ever, inferring the strategy will be to simply 'carry on regardless'. The left in the party, such as it is, disagrees. Former MP George Kerevan, for example, speaking at a Radical Independence Campaign meeting in Edinburgh I attended on 20 June insisted the result was a very significant setback. The correct response, he argued, was now to decouple the independence movement from the SNP.

The SNP has not made the case for Independence for three years. Moreover their fiscally conservative prospectus has been undermined by the collapse in North Sea Oil prices, the deficit in the Government Expenditure and Revenue figures [GERS] and by an economy which, as Jim and Margaret

Cuthbert have demonstrated, is effectively in a recession masked by consumer spending fuelled in turn by unsustainable credit card debt.

What the pro-independence left needs to do now is to construct a far more compelling economic case. We must also press for initiatives at Holyrood and beyond to tackle the grotesque poverty, inequalities and social injustices rife in Scotland today. The SNP has done next to nothing to address these scandals. The left could then take a leaf out of the SSP's book and promote legislation at Holyrood to guarantee the legal right to affordable housing, a living wage and to lift people out of poverty. The Scottish Socialist Party put forward more Bills – to scrap the Council tax, to return the railways to public ownership, to introduce free school meals, to abolish NHS prescription charges and to introduce free public transport - in our time at Holyrood than any other party pro rata.

But, as the SNP and others have found to their cost, work inside Parliament is not enough. The pro-independence left must also mobilise resistance to neo-liberal orthodoxy in Scotland and to do so on the streets, workplaces and in working class communities throughout the land.

Colin Fox is the Scottish Socialist Party national spokesperson



Independence is still the game changer

Carolyn Leckie argues for continued work on the cause of independence

In 2017, radical and progressive ideas are more popular in Scotland than for many decades. Yet the left is more diffuse and fragmented than ever before. There are radical leftists in the Scottish Green Party, RISE, the SSP, the Labour Party, the Communist Party and in groups like Common Weal and Women for Independence. And, there are more socialists in and around the SNP than in all of these organisations combined.

There is, in addition, the great fault line that divides the majority pro-independence left from the minority pro-United Kingdom left. And just to complicate matters further, there is within the pro-independence left a wide spectrum of attitudes towards the SNP, ranging from those who believe the SNP can do no wrong to those whose hostility to the SNP matches that of the *Daily Mail*.

These divisions won't easily be overcome, and I certainly have no grand plan to bring about left unity. But as an independent left-wing activist who has no tribal allegiance to any political party, I would raise the following points.

First, I have great admiration for Jeremy Corbyn, who has electrified British politics. But Scotland is a different country, and the national question is here to stay. Even if Corbyn had won the general election – and perhaps especially if Corbyn had won the general election – the independence movement would have been strengthened rather than weakened.

Why? Because a Corbyn government, trying to run a capitalist economy while dealing with enormity of Brexit, and surrounded by hundreds of sullenly hostile MPs from his own party, would have run into serious difficulties. Even Attlee only lasted six years, while Harold Wilson, elected in 1974 on a far more radical manifesto than Corbyn, was forced to resign within two years while the IMF forced his successor to carry out drastic

spending cuts. The result was the 'Winter of Discontent' and the rise to power of Margaret Thatcher.

When Kezia Dugdale says that independence is dead, it betrays her lack of any sense of Scotland or its history. Even five years ago, the idea that the SNP would hold 35 Westminster seats in Scotland would have seemed unthinkable. Of course, there will ebbs and flows, as there have been over the past half century, but the trend of history is that the flows are becoming stronger and the ebbs weaker.

In one way, those on the Labour left who argue that independence is a diversion from class politics have a point. But that debate won't go away. For much of the past 50 years, Scotland has been consumed with conflict over national autonomy versus unionist centralism. Independence would allow to us move on, leave the endless constitutional debates behind us and move towards the usual class politics of left and right.

A Scottish Labour Party fusing the principles popularised by Corbyn with support for independence could look forward to shaping a brand-new nation state. But if the party continues to stand with the Tories and block the will of the majority of the working population of this country, it will end up on the wrong side of history. And that is a grim place to be for a party whose founding leadership was a century ahead of its time when it came to standing up for autonomy and democracy for Scotland.

The prospects for the left in Scotland are stronger than south of the border. In the general election, 64 per cent of Scots voted for the progressive left-of-centre manifestos offered by the SNP, Corbyn's Labour Party and the Greens. In England, the figure was 44 per cent.

That differential political balance of forces also demonstrates where the SNP and the wider independence

movement must now orientate if it is to succeed in delivering a majority 'yes' vote sometime between 2019 and 2022. Some SNP members have argued with me that most of the left is already in the bag for independence so we now need to concentrate on the middle ground. But politics is always in a perpetual state of flux. Attitudes in Scotland and across the Britain have polarised since 2014. The right is stronger – but so too is the left. It is the middle ground that has collapsed.

Finally, I would suggest that much of the non-SNP radical left avoid what Lenin called the infantile disease of ultra-leftism. Even after ten years in power at Holyrood in a time of austerity, the SNP has established itself as the main party of the Scottish working class. Yes, the SNP leadership has made mistakes and the Scottish Government has had failures as well as successes – but without the role of the SNP, the intense politicisation of the past few years would never have happened. The 2014 referendum campaign, ignited by the SNP, changed everything.

If the SNP sells out the independence movement, then shrill denunciation will be justified – but that is not where we are today. The biggest enemies of progress in Scotland are the Tories, and those in the Scottish Labour Party who deny our nation its right to self-determination. We need open, honest debate. But to overcome the might of the British establishment, we also need unity of the forces that stand for the most radical next step forward for Scotland – independence.

Carolyn Leckie is currently working as a trainee solicitor, is a member of Women for Independence national committee, is not a member of any party, and was a former SSP co-chair and SSP MSP. She writes a weekly column for The National.

Our movement, our future

Maggie Chapman looks at the roots of the current political impasse

The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear. Antonio Gramsci, Italian revolutionary

As time goes on it becomes clear that the 2008 crash was the end of an old world, yet a new world is struggling to be born. To paraphrase Gramsci, now is most certainly the time of monsters. The situation in Britain is an exemplar of a global situation where neoliberalism has died and cannot yet be replaced. Rather than the world being haunted by a spectre, we are lumbered by a corpse of a dead economic system. But this corpse cannot yet be buried because the alternatives have not yet emerged in a coherent way.

This has produced reactions of the right: most notably Trump and Theresa May; of the left: Sanders, Corbyn and Melancon; and even from the centre: Macron. All have one thing in common - their reference points are in a revival of *Les Trente Glorieuses* or 'The Glorious Thirty', the three decades of economic prosperity and improved social security following World War II. We cannot see British or Scottish politics outside of this context.

And we must also remember that this crisis is not just a crisis of finance or of politics: it is a crisis of resources and the environment. Climate change threatens our very existence, but technology is beginning to point the direction to a world of low carbon energy generated by locally owned installations rather by corporations. The first industrial revolution was driven by a shift from local power sources (water mills and wood burning) to energy from centralised sources and fossil fuels. The capitalist age is the fossil fuel age, and the fossil fuel age is the capitalist age.

The independence referendum in 2014 was one of the first cracks in the hegemony of carbon-fuelled neoliberalism. Through that crack, the light got in, inspiring the Corbyn movement and a new bravery in

British politics. But this crack has been papered over with a continuity politics of managerialism.

The General Election result sits in a context of deep crisis for the British establishment and elites still unable to find a response to the financial crisis of 2008. They have tried continuity managerialism of Gordon Brown; they have tried austerity; they have tried Brexit. And, having tried to crush the Labour Party with the opportunistic General Election, they have run out of options.

The depth of political crisis that followed the financial crash of 2008 is in part due to the failed invasion of Iraq in 2003. The War was always obviously morally wrong, but the inability of the British and American states to successfully stabilise the country after the invasion prefigures Brexit: a project of the British imperial elite intended to restore the country's greatness, but one that instead exposes the lack of strategic, diplomatic and planning capacity of that elite.

In Scotland, the SNP's response to the independence movement and the mandates given to them by subsequent elections has failed to capitalise on the political energy behind the social movement. In the days after the referendum, Women for Independence ran a successful campaign to prevent the Scottish Government placing a women's prison at Greenock: the prison was the wrong thing to do. And the independence movement was able to work with Scottish Government to deliver a better outcome.

This movement approach to politics showed the world what we could have. Corbyn's surprise performance in the election was powered by movement politics. These movements, like the Stop the War movement, have politicised people bringing together political analyses and democratising our politics. The surprise (relative) success of Labour is down to harnessing the power of movement politics.

Placed against this are Tory demands that we stop talking about politics and 'get on with the day job'. This successfully mobilises the anti-political emotions of the privileged. The answer, of course, is to reinvigorate the movement politics of 2014. There are plenty of issues where this approach is more needed than ever: housing has been an issue of increased significance for some time, but the Grenfell disaster puts this into sharp focus. A movement must make the case for new collectively managed housing. The private rented sector has failed a whole generation.

We must find ways to bring democracy to more of our institutions. People have the ability to be much more engaged in decision making and a centralised state designed to control an empire has long outlived its usefulness. And in so many other areas of our lives, from social security and workers' rights to harnessing for good the care and creativity of our people, movement politics show us the way.

The new world that must be born will be prefigured by the movements for social and environmental justice. We can, and must, learn from the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders work-in in 1971, from those who refused to fix bomber-plane engines destined for Pinochet's Chile, from those who developed the Lucas Plan in 1976. Very much like the independence movement of 2014, these people-led social justice movements, showing us the way forward. They showed us how to democratise our power structures and our economy.

In Scotland, we need to re-engage our people and recapture the energy to make the case for a better world. But this cannot and should not stop at our borders - nor, indeed, the borders of Britain. The new world that will be born must share the benefits of the economy with people everywhere.

Maggie Chapman is the Scottish Green Party Co-convenor

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Take note - this is what we are about!

We reprint from the back cover of the first edition of Scottish Left Review (September/October 2000), the founding statement of intent of those that set up the magazine.

The *Scottish Left Review* will be a bi-monthly website magazine that will seek to provide a focal point of thought and discussion for the Scottish Left. It will be non-party but will aim to provide a forum for those on the Left of all parties and none. Such a forum is urgently required at a time when the untrammelled play of market forces is not only tolerated but actively promoted as the only agency that can ensure economic prosperity. This is in sharp contrast to the first 75 years of the 20th century when capitalism was widely believed to have ignominiously failed and was viewed by many as the harbinger of the two most destructive wars in human history, and slumps that paralysed economic activity; creating widespread misery in the midst of human capacity to create an abundance.

When you look at the world today you might well ask: What has changed? Mass poverty and hunger stalks the planet in the midst of actual abundance. Even in the prosperous and developed parts of the planet a seriously underprivileged class exists, cheek by jowl with rampant consumerism. Alienation is rife. The greed, which is supposed to be the dynamic of the free market system, menaces the ecology, placing in jeopardy the very existence of our species. The promoted culture is nihilist. Drug addiction is rife. There were more wars in the last quarter of the last century than in the previous 75 years. The collapse of the Soviet Union and its geographically linked satellites was used to signal the end of socialism, though many socialists had denied that the Soviet model was in any fundamental sense socialist.

In Britain the Labour Party as New Labour, abandoned socialism, even as an aspiration for the long term, but also forsook social democracy, as a guide to formulating policies in the short term. New Labour has embraced free market capitalism with all the enthusiasm of the convert. The years of Thatcherism seem to have engendered different patterns of political thought in the Scottish nation as compared to England. From the very start Scotland rejected Thatcherism.

The Scottish Left has always been diverse, cross-party, and non-party. There is a strong left tradition in the SNP, and the Scottish Socialist Party is emerging as a credible electoral force.

The establishment of the Scottish Parliament is bound to render Scottish politics even more Scottish. It is inconceivable that the present constitutional arrangements are fixed forever. Events and the moving hand of the political development will overhaul them. The SLR must take the view that the Scottish people has an inalienable right of self determination and this will find expression through elections and referenda. There will be different views as to how we proceed from here, but all that envisage change through the democratic process should be considered legitimate.

The SLR wants to stimulate debate. Each issue will have six or more essays dealing with a wide range of subjects, viewed from a Left Scottish perspective. We hope that this will stimulate discussions and forums in the various regions. For those who aren't on the Internet we will try to make some hard copies available. The range of support for this venture can be seen from those who sit on the editorial board. I believe and hope that this initiative will bear fruit in the regeneration of the Left in Scotland.

100 editions down – here's to the next 100!

Scottish Left Review interviewed its founding stalwart, Bob Thomson, on the past, present and future of the magazine

As the remaining founding member of the editorial committee of *Scottish Left Review*, can you tell us what the intention was behind launching the magazine?

It was a vehicle to counter the neo-liberal philosophy and policies of Tony Blair and 'new' Labour which many on the left had swallowed after eighteen years of Tory governments. Jimmy Reid was early in exposing this in his *Herald* columns, famously stating: 'People say that Tony Blair has no principles. They are wrong. He has principles. They are Tory principles. He is in the wrong party.' As Treasurer of the Scottish Labour Party, I had personally experienced Blair's duplicity and contempt for democratic decision making in his interference in the questions on the referendum to establish the Scottish Parliament. Jimmy gathered together an eclectic group of activists and thinkers to start the magazine including Amer Anwar, Campbell Christie, Roseanna Cunningham, John Kay, Cathie Jamieson, Isabel Lindsay, John McAllion, Henry McCubbin, Tom Nairn, Andrew Noble, Alex Smith and myself. Left Review Scotland is the company set up to run magazine.

In the light of this, what has SLR achieved since 2000?

As part of a then small group of often distinguished voices from many parties and none who argued the case for progressive policies for Scotland and the UK, I think we are now a majority. The Scottish Left Review is now the main forum for left politics with an online traffic of over 1500 visits per day. We have also started the *Scottish Left Review Press* which has published occasional books on the political and economic situation. And, we established the Jimmy Reid Foundation, the only left think tank in Scotland. Recent policy papers have included such titles as Public Service Reform, Scottish

Budget Scrutiny, Automation Friend or Foe; Workers Rights are Human Rights and the Case against Trident Renewal. Most major trade unions in Scotland are now affiliated to the Foundation which, together with sustaining members who give regular donations, means we have modest resources to extend and publicise our work.

In the light of this, what has *Scottish Left Review* not achieved?

In the big picture while we have been a forum for all left parties and individuals there has not been any great success on creating joint co-operation in campaigns and policies with left parties and groups. Our print subscribers have not increased significantly. With printing and postage costs rising publishing a print issue could be in danger of not continuing in the not too distant future, something the Editorial Board has so far resisted. However, there has been an increase lately of trade union branches taking out subscriptions so we hope to avoid that situation. Originally, our intention was to have readers meetings throughout Scotland but after a few these stopped because of resource issues. We have tended to be West of Scotland centric and would welcome more volunteers from throughout the length and breadth of Scotland.

How has *Scottish Left Review* managed to sustain itself over the years while other magazines have foundered?

Primarily by the work of volunteers (who have carried out the organisational and administrative tasks), our Editorial Board and, importantly, our contributors who have given their time freely. We have never had the resources to employ anyone full time. Special thanks to past editors, Jimmy Reid and Robin

McAlpine, and to current editor, Gregor Gall. And, of course, also to our loyal band of print subscribers and the labour and trade union movement for adverts.

What has *Scottish Left Review* still to achieve?

Our online traffic has trebled in recent years and we hope to increase this with Facebook and Twitter pages etc. Posting the Review online costs money and our donation button has raised a disappointing amount so this is something we will have to improve upon. As already mentioned we need to increase print subscribers to keep the print issue viable. Subscribers and readers can help by forwarding links to the Review and particular articles to acquaintances by email, Twitter and Facebook. And, after 17 years of publishing are we still radical enough? Do we need more blue sky thinking? This is something we want to hear from our readers on so we invite feedback from them to editorial@scottishleftreview.org

- Many of Jimmy Reid's *Herald* columns are collected in his *Power Without Principles: New Labour's Sickness and Other Essays* (Black and White Publishing, 1999, pp384).
- Gregor Gall adds: 'Bob Thomson is too modest to say so himself but of all the individuals involved in *Scottish Left Review* and its associated projects, it is by far and away the case that we would not be here today without his efforts. Having retired in 1999 as Associate Scottish Secretary of UNISON, Bob has since taken on an almost full-time and never paid role as company secretary, chair of the magazine editorial board, chair of the Foundation and general organiser. Hats off to him!'

Constituting Scotland

We reprint in full and unchanged from issue number two (December 2000), Tom Nairn's contribution to the debate on the future of Scotland

Getting out of Britain is not easy. We mustn't be parochial about this, I agree; it may turn out to be even harder for the English and the Welsh than for the Scots. However, we in Scotland have to do it our own way, and a starting-gate has now been laid down: the new Scottish Parliament. There are both pros and cons to it, much debated around the first birthday celebrations in July. But the most important con was scarcely mentioned then; a sign of immaturity, perhaps, which any new political opposition will have to address?

Scotland had been allowed a Parliament, but not a constitution of its own. The rules guiding the new assembly are a concoction rather than a synthesis: on one hand, the Scotland Act (1998) with its absurd stack of prohibitions delimiting Scottish sovereignty; and on the other, that crumbling Dome of Ages, Westminster's Mother of all Constitutions. It's rather as if Monopoly and Chess had been arbitrarily compounded into a single game, and the players left to get on with it. No-one will ever understand the rules. Few enough affected to grasp the mystique of Great Britain's constitutional lore. That remained the preserve of those who worked it, the former ruling class and their legal gun-dogs: they always believed that tacit knowledge (conventions, etc.) was safer than damned documents readable by any lout off the streets. Blairism inherited this antique and is now striving to refurbish it; for God's sake, a new House of Lords is one of the provisions in the Preservation Order!

Certainly, a faltering semblance of normality has been upheld in Edinburgh over Year One. But this is simply because the same political party is in office in both countries; one machine, run from one place (in spite of occasional squeaks from Glasgow) and harnessed to the one-off dream-state of the Blair Project. In a recent bulletin, Robert Hazell's Constitution

Unit at University College, London, estimated that about half Edinburgh's legislative time had involved measures at least questioning the links with London. But of course as long as Labourism prevails, such questions will be either answered (or drowned) by committees. The smoke-filled rooms are no more; but not what went on in them. The Kingdom is now effectively United by Committee; and not much else. There they are, committee, council, board and quango: Joint, Inter-Ministerial, Steering, Departmental and Planning, ranging from the anachronistic, like the Judicial Committee of Her Majesty's Privy Council (arbiter of matters constitutional) to the out-of-sight, like the Council of the Isles (thought up to make Ulster Protestants feel there will always be a Britain).

As the wind leaks remorselessly from the Project, however, such devices lose their pith as well. Is there anyone at all who seriously believes such a system can endure? In 2005 or (at the latest) 2009-10, there will be the problem of different parties and governments in power at Holyrood and Westminster. Though quite normal in broad comparative terms, our problem will have to be tackled in an hysterically abnormal British context. By that time, I doubt if even Brian Wilson M.P. will retain undented faith in the old unwritten constitution. Actually I suspect that by then the English may be regarding it with greater contempt than the Scots, Welsh and Irish. The question was ignored by Thatcher, flirted with and then cast aside by Blair. But it's bound to impose itself soon. The main hinge of world-stage Britain's has always been the Treaty of Union (1707), and if a British state and identity are to be maintained at all, they will in those circumstances have to be re-negotiated. Much negotiation can only be among equals: Holyrood, Cardiff and Belfast will have to conduct themselves at least as if

they were independent, and able to confront whatever English body (or bodies) will by then have come into existence.

In Scotland, we can't of course legislate for the rest of Britain. But surely we can get ready to legislate for our own part in what will be a great process. That involves high politics, and long-range questions of identity and national direction. When Gordon Brown warned Scots against immature identity politics, what he really meant was: leave my old British identity-politics alone; United Kingdom nationalism would remain safe within his (and Robin Cook's) custody. The Greenwich Dome was a reanimation project for that Brit-nation; meant to demonstrate how unstoppably lively the old Constitution would be under new management. Why, it could even strengthen itself by handing out power around the periphery... just as long as the meek recipients settled down, and concentrated on their low-political nuts and bolts.

As Ross McKibbin has pointed out most acutely in the last number of *New Left Review*, the Blair government's aim of modernisations has come to need and imply depoliticisation. In Bertold Brecht's famous phrase, what it now strives constantly to do is re-elect an alternative British people: those idealised customers of government depicted in its Annual Report. Whenever actual people upset it, however; as in Wales and the London Mayoral contest; a quite different face appears. What we then see is the tetchy, impatient visage of a Great (if regrettably declining) Power. Its fear of farther loss generates ever greater impatience with disloyalty, hence ever more spin doctoring and modernisation rhetoric. The position is summed up by Brown's policy on the Euro, only partly unwittingly: yes, Britain must join; when every one of her five impossible conditions are fulfilled to the last semi-colon, and Middle Britain is quite sure

foreigners have given up deviance. We can be Eurocitizens the day a Paris government stops fearing another Editorial tongue-lashing from The Scotsman.

The Scots and their Parliament badly need to get their own act together, in order to defend themselves against this foundering world. This is why any new political formation must be constitutionally oriented; aimed not just at defending the Parliament but also at constructing a more durable and internationally presentable basis for Scottish government. It is important to notice this is not the same as independence; I mean, in the sense of the Freedom-or-bust single-strike idea traditionally cherished among SNP fundamentalists. That was a way of keeping nationalist spirits up against huge adversity, at the cost of a certain paranoia and tunnel-vision. But it's out of date: adversity in that sense is finished. The ancien régime is falling apart so quickly no-one can keep up with it. We're fully into the rapids of disintegration, accelerating every day that passes, and the question is how Scots can emerge from them intact. Intact and, of course, independent; or at least, much more independent than the Scotland Act permitted us to be.

It's true that most voters and MSPs still think of constitutional matters as somehow abstract, remote or secondary. But this is essentially the residual myopia of Britishness; not surprising in a transitional system where, unavoidably, it has been the old-Brit parties that took over and are still trying to run things. They have borne forward many vices of Westminster, and here is an outstanding one; perhaps the most fundamental, and the hardest to get rid of. Since the defeat of Chartism in 1848, popular constitutional agitation has been marginalized in U.K. political life. The only exception; a great one; was the feminist revolt of Edwardian times, which shook the old order badly. But the ranks were reformed none the less (and it's still happening: I find myself writing this the week after Mo Mowlam's resignation).

The sense that constitutional politics

is for them rather than us may now be a feature of British-Labour politics; it is emphatically not a feature of the older Scottish tradition. The exact opposite is the case. A study called Claiming Scotland has recently appeared and made this point most interestingly. The author, American anthropologist Jonathan Hearn, has got to know us pretty well, but also kept some distance from our dafter notions. He argues that although ethnic Scottishness is largely contrived, the effort to transcend it and to make (or claim) a political and constitutional nation has been the underlying identity of the Scots. In William McIlvanney's famous slogan, we are indeed a country of mongrels on the edge of nowhere. But there is an odd implication to this. The only way we have ever been able to do better is by becoming a civic nation. And what that means is constituting ourselves by choice, as an egalitarian (in today's terms a social-democratic) society. Hearn lists the chronology of the effort: 1638, 1643, 1689 (Claim of Rights Mk.1), 1707 (the Union Treaty, conceived by the Scots as an equal arrangement), 1842 (Claim of Rights Mk 2), 1949 (the Covenant), 1988 (Claim of Rights Mk 3), 1992 (The Democracy Declaration at Edinburgh). Even more amazing, he points out how all these have referred back, sometimes half-consciously, to an event in the later Middle Ages: not the military victory of Bannockburn but the claim made in its wake, the Declaration of Arbroath (1320).

This is what constitutionalism is about in Scotland. It isn't unique. England and other countries exhibit analogous traditions which are not (or not entirely) invented as a current fashion would make us believe. But it isn't unimportant either; and perhaps it's time we went ahead towards Claim of Right Mk 4. After all, it was the 1988 version; the work

of the Constitutional Convention and all that flowed into it; which gave us the Scotland Act and the reconvened Parliament. But in one vital respect things have now altered. From 1979 onwards the initiative for constitutional change lay unavoidably with the Labour Party, even although (as nationalists say) their pressure from outside remained vital. This is no longer the case. Labourism has allied itself fatally and finally with the failing structures of the United Kingdom, and what was new about it in the nineties now risks foundering completely in the wreckage. In Scotland and Wales, the initiative must now surely lie with the genuinely new forces and alliances released by their Parliaments and changed electoral systems.

That's why I think any new left-national movement should put the Constitution in the centre of its ambition. Of course it isn't the answer to all problems (any more than independence). But it is a much more important necessary condition of Scottish political advance than the arguments of Year One have recognised. Combined with reappraisals on other fronts; foreign relations, for example, and escape from the Barnett Formula via taxation powers; there must be a strategy in the making, which I hope this new Review and its supporters will be arguing during the remaining time of the first Parliament.

Tom Nairn has been a leading political theorist and academic and is best known for his seminal 1977 work, 'The Break-up of Britain: crisis and neo-nationalism'.

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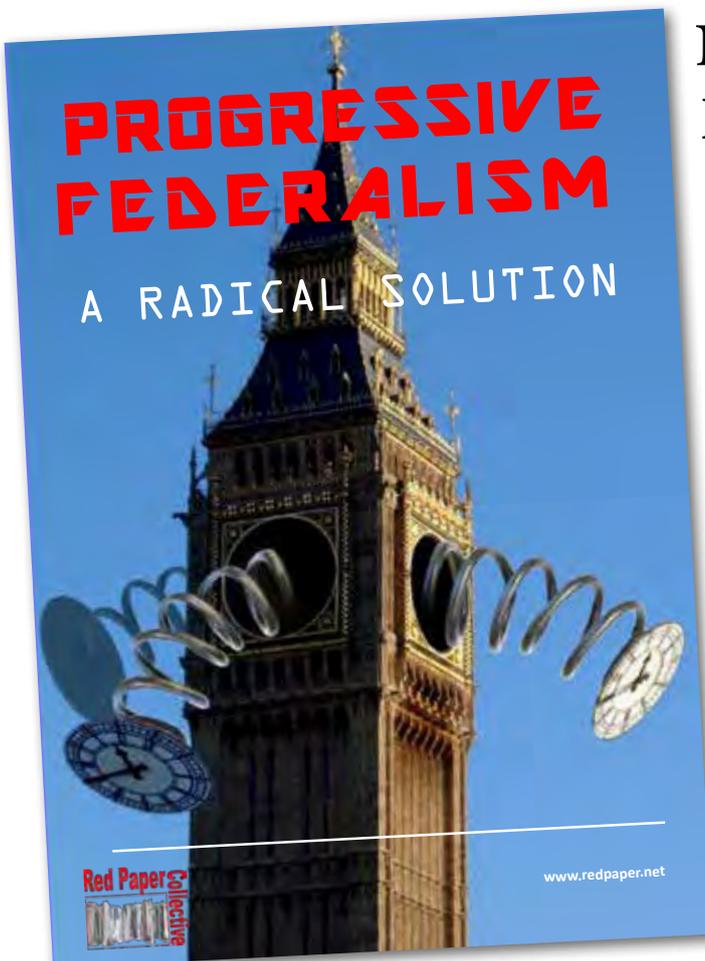


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Eyewitness report from Quito, Ecuador

- In April 2017, a crucial Presidential election was held in Ecuador where the socialist candidate, Lenin Moreno, was up against the US sponsored right wing candidate, Guillermo Lasso. Given some of the setbacks suffered by the left in South America recently, it was expected that Ecuador's socialist government would face the same fate. In fact, Moreno won the election with 51% of the vote. His Country Alliance Party has a commanding majority in the National Assembly.

Jennifer Bonnar and Chris Ruddy travelled in Ecuador at this time following several months teaching English in the south of the country. This is their account:

After six months teaching in the town of Loja, we travelled extensively including time spent in Quito at the height of the election campaign. Tension was high as rival forces took to the streets and airwaves yet it became apparent that these were very different campaigns. The Moreno campaign was characterised by huge popular rallies of ordinary working people, many from an indigenous background with the Ecuadorian flag predominant interspersed with many red flags and banners. These were overwhelming peaceful and inclusive. The contrast with the right wing rallies could not have been greater. Smaller, exclusively white with a strong element of racism and always ready for violence. They also had the media mostly on their side. There was a lot of tension with violence just below the surface but it became clear that most of this was coming from the Lasso campaign and seemed to be very organised.

Moreno came to the campaign to defend the track record of the socialist government and of his predecessor, Raphael Correa. This included impressive social programmes to improve health care, education, pensions and child care; political reforms to make the country more democratic and to give the indigenous people more rights; and a dramatic shift in foreign policy aligning Ecuador with progressive governments across Latin America. However, in more recent times the economy has faltered due to a collapse in the oil price and there was also much evidence of economic sabotage by capitalists and political interference by the United States which appeared to be significantly

bankrolling the opposition campaign.

One sinister aspect of the opposition campaign which we picked up on almost constantly in our travels was its refusal, in advance, to recognise the eventual result. Its position seemed to be; if we win fine; if we don't, we'll continue in our campaign to bring down the government by almost any means. These are not democrats trying 'to restore democratic legitimacy to Ecuadorean politics'; many of its leaders supported previous corrupt, dictatorial regimes in the country and have openly welcomed United States intervention.

On our travels we also witnessed a clear class and ethnic divide in the two campaigns. Moreno draws his support overwhelmingly from poorer sections of society and from the previously under-represented indigenous population. His movement also draws on a broad alliance of unions, community groups, single issue pressure groups and socialist and progressive forces throughout the country. The core of the opposition is white and middle class. It also draws heavily on a legacy of racism towards the newly empowered indigenous people. One thing that shocked us when living and travelling in the country was the level of racism including among poorer working class whites who feel threatened by the rise of those they considered to be inferior.

The new president, Lenin Moreno, seems an impressive figure. In his sixties, he has been formerly the Vice President and, following a shooting at an attempted robbery twenty years ago, is wheel chair bound. He made his reputation in Ecuadorian

politics as a campaigner for disability rights and was nominated in 2012 for a Nobel Prize. He campaigned to protect and extend the socialist programme of the government and to uphold the constitution against attacks by the US sponsored opposition. The contrast with his opposite number could not have been clearer. Guillermo Lasso is a multi-millionaire businessman with close links with the United States. To say he has a chequered past is an understatement and he has been investigated for massive tax fraud - not surprising given that most of his companies are registered abroad.

We were back in Britain when the final round of voting was completed confirming Moreno's victory. Huge crowds took to the streets in all the major cities to celebrate while the opposition, as expected, has refused to recognise the result and continues to campaign against the government. It may well step up its campaign of destabilisation. Whatever happens, we will continue to follow events and wish our many socialist and progressive friends every success in the future.

Jennie and Chris are both 24 and both went to University in Edinburgh. Chris is a member of the SNP. In 2015, they both travelled extensively in South America before returning to teach English as a Foreign Language in Ecuador. Both were active in the YES Campaign in 2014.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon – the French Jeremy Corbyn

Daniel Brillet explains why an old left figure has found new friends and supporters

With the France Insoumise movement led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, we are witnessing a moment of popular awakening. Let me provide some background: Mélenchon has a rich political history. He made his debut in politics as a student activist in the May 1968 movement. Initially a Trotskyist, he moved on to the Socialist Party where he became close to President Mitterrand. For many years, he was a Socialist Senator and later served as a Minister in the Jospin government. In 2005, he broke with his own party line and successfully campaigned against the European Constitution referendum. This saw Mélenchon campaign (and get closer) with different figures to the left of the Socialist Party. Despite a democratic consultation, the French political establishment ignored the referendum altogether and pushed it through parliament nonetheless. It was clear the Socialist Party was a dinosaur unable to change and which had long given up on socialism and moved to the right. Mélenchon left with his supporters in 2008 to found his own political party, the Parti de Gauche (Party of the Left), subsequently creating an alliance of different anti-liberal left-wing parties, the Front de Gauche (the Left Front). The alliance was inspired by the Die Linke German party model and achieved some success in the 2012 presidential election with Mélenchon as its candidate scoring a respectable 11%.

The Socialist Party won the 2012 Presidential election and did so for the first time in over 30 years. In fact, people were so sick of Sarkozy, the Socialists ended up winning everything. Despite controlling all branches of government with a left-wing mandate, it still governed by the same failed right wing policies of its predecessors. There was initially a lot of hope as it was President Hollande who told us that he was ‘the enemy of financial system’. Instead, he became the lapdog of the financial system. The Socialist Party didn’t accomplish anything substantial and left the country in a worst state than ever, propelling the National Front leader, Marine Le Pen, into leading the

polls for months. The failed Hollande government also left some serious questions on whether there are any real differences between the traditional left-right political factions.

President Hollande decided not to run for re-election - it was clear to him like everyone else that he stood no chance. Hollande’s replacement, Benoît Hamon, polled poorly and was overtaken by Mélenchon whose poll numbers kept rising. The 2017 presidential election saw a total of 11 candidates across the political spectrum. Mélenchon presented himself for the second time, formerly as Front de Gauche and now as the France Insoumise movement, inspired in part by Podemos and Latin American movements. The advantage of running La France Insoumise as a movement allowed Mélenchon to step away from the political party structure and become as inclusive as possible.

The France Insoumise movement reaches out to the good sense and logic in us. The programme called L’Avenir en commun (‘our future together’) calls for a 6th Republic where everything will be shaken up. Mélenchon said: ‘we wish to put in place institutions that will prevent the election of a President such as the last one we had’ and this means giving the power directly to the people. Currently, in the French 5th Republic system most of the power lies with the President and it’s often referred to as the Presidential Monarchy. Leaving this 5th Republic can be done with a Constituent Assembly, comprised of elected (and some randomly selected) citizens who will be responsible for drafting a new French constitution to redefine all of the rules of French democracy. The new constitution, the 6th republic, would be subject to approval by referendum.

The programme is also strong on environmentalism, with the aim being for an ecological transition fuelling job growth with 100% renewable energies, 100% organic agriculture, a green rule established directly into the constitution where one cannot take more from nature than it can replenish. The programme is well planned out.

For example, all French pupils would get a free organic and vegan school lunch and would help boost the nascent organic agriculture industry. Amongst other things, the French people will have the permanent choice of recalling any of their elected officials. Salaries over 360,000 Euros per year will be taxed at 100%, Mélenchon has warned employers: ‘you found cheaper labour to do the work, we will find cheaper bosses to replace you’.

Additionally, EU Treaties would be renegotiated and Mélenchon has already signalled to the powers in question, France is not Greece and he will not be pushed around like Tsipras. It’s hard to imagine how you cannot have an EU without France but it’s time to stop the policy of liberalisation and privatisation of public services to satisfy the economic imperatives of Germany. Amongst other things, there’s also a 32-hour workweek, leaving NATO and so on. The programme is extensive and was very well presented by its main candidate.

Mélenchon’s speeches are poignant and honest. He integrates philosophy, poetry, ecology and education into his speeches: ‘It is completely ridiculous to create 5kg of vegetable protein that will only produce 1 kg of animal protein’. Even those who disagree with him can feel his genuineness. His love for the French Republic and its people come across as very natural: ‘Do not doubt yourselves and do not doubt your country’. Mélenchon also integrates ecology into the heart of his dialogue: ‘Do you understand people, if we don’t do anything we will destroy everything!’ He also has a talent for shaming his opponents - during a debate he told Le Pen: ‘You serve no purpose and for 50 years all you have done is distribute hate’. In the same manner, Mélenchon has no problem pushing back against journalists and calls them out when they evade talking about the real issues.

The campaign embraced new technologies such as holograms, social media, video games and despite running on a tiny budget (in contrast to his competition) was very effective.

Mélenchon with his programme and amazing oratory skills attracted record crowds, over 100,000 on Bastille Day! His message was very well received by the working class and young people. Mélenchon not only knows how to connect with people, he really knows how to reach youth too: 'Don't listen to those who say it was better before, the world your parents had is now gone forever and you are the first generation who now have to think about creating a new world'.

Hundreds of groups were set up in France and around the world, to support the movement and Mélenchon's candidacy (including right here in Glasgow - Ecosse Insoumise). Most of the movement relies on volunteers, not just for typical canvassing but for web development, video game programming, social media management and event planning. In fact, the well-organised campaign included a lot of talented people from all sorts of backgrounds who cohesively worked magic with the little they had. The France Insoumise is learning how to federate the French people.

The reaction of the media has been very aggressive. Everyday drowning the airwaves with the narrative about the 'vote utile' - the vote that really counts as Macron is the only candidate

capable of winning against Le Pen. Macron supposedly incarnates political renewal despite being a former Socialist Minister backed by the oligarchy and the worst of the old Left and Right parties. By way of association, they accused Mélenchon of supporting aggressive regimes like Syria, Iran and wanting to instore a Venezuelan like regime as his programme called for French Guiana and the French West Indies to join ALBA - the 'Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra' (the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America). It's a cooperation alliance, France is part of many such organisations and this doesn't seem to be an issue nor is it an issue when France sells arms to Saudi Arabia. It's true, Mélenchon can be feisty but he has to be. This attack was disingenuous and meant to frame him as an angry and dangerous radical by making a connection that isn't there to Iran and Syria (who are former observer countries of ALBA). Mélenchon was very good at responding and made everyone know that the longest border France has is with Brazil in French Guiana and not with Germany, also pointing out 'France is not a Western nation, France is a Universalist nation'.

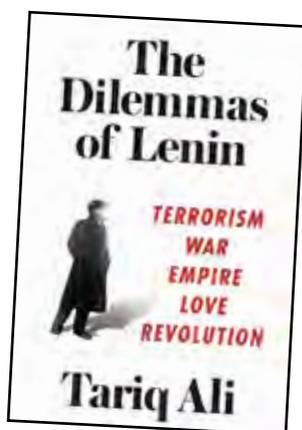
In any case, it's hard to imagine Mélenchon not making the second round of the Presidential elections

had there not been such dirty media tricks. With seven million votes, just a few hundred thousand away from a second round place (polls showed him beating Le Pen in the second round), it's still an amazing accomplishment! Held shortly after, the legislative elections were complicated by record low turnout especially amongst the working class and youth electorate. France Insoumise still managed to make its debut in the National Assembly with 17 deputies including Mélenchon himself elected for Marseille. This is just a start and is enough to constitute a formal group (15 deputies is the minimum, a deputy without a group has no speaking time) and will be a great platform for the movement going forward. The future is bright. Finally, there is a fresh voice for the people of France: an opposition who will speak out loudly and clearly against a failing economic system, the misery and poverty experienced by too many French people.

Daniel Brillet is the creator of the Ecosse Insoumise - Auld Alliance Defiant Scotland support group. It arose from Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Left-Wing movement and its programmeme, 'L'Avenir en commun'.

Tariq Ali *The Dilemmas of Lenin: Terrorism, War, Empire, Love, Revolution,*

2017, Verso, £16.99, 9781786631107



Reviewed by Sean Sheehan

The book is not a conventional historical account of 1917 - *A People's History of the Russian Revolution* by Neil Faulkner (Pluto Press, 2017) performs this task admirably - nor does it plot in detail

the hugely dramatic course of events between February and October - for this there is the incomparable *October: The Story of the Russian Revolution* by China Mieville (Verso, 2017) - but for directing attention to key aspects

of Russia's revolutionary situation and the uniqueness of Lenin's intervention, there is no book more stimulating and more likely to encourage wider reading than *The Dilemmas of Lenin*.

The book is structured around themes and aspects of the revolution, the tensions within them and the resultant dilemmas that confronted Lenin and fellow revolutionaries. The most telling political dilemma - the conflicting claims of libertarian and authoritarian socialism - is well explored, though Bakunin's opposition to Marx is skirted over and there is no mention of how the anarchist communists at Kronstadt found themselves on a collision course with Lenin's government.

Lenin is usually depicted as ruthlessly cruel and dictatorial but Ali counters this caricature with moving accounts of his personal life. A chapter is devoted to his elder brother, who was executed for his part in an assassination attempt on the Tsar, and the nature of his relationship with Inessa Armand

provides a fascinating insight into Lenin's soul. Devastated by her early death, he walked alone at her funeral: 'He seemed to have shrunk; his cap almost covered his face, his eyes drowned in tears held back with effort', in the words of Angelica Balabanoff who observed his behaviour.

Ali is good at noting details: Scotland's John MacLean opened the new Bolshevik consulate at 12 South Portland Street, Gorbals, but was not recognised as consul by the UK government and the post office was instructed not to deliver mail to that address. Britain also sent troops to Russia in the hope of deposing Lenin. Out of the plethora of new books responding to the first centenary of the Russian Revolution, *The Dilemmas of Lenin* emerges as the most engagingly readable account of one of Europe's great political transformations.

Sean Sheehan is author of Žižek: A Guide for the Perplexed' (Continuum, 2012) and a forthcoming guide to Herodotus' Histories.

Sleaford Mods: Bunch of Kunst, 2017,

director Christine Franz, band: Jason Williamson and Andrew Fearn, <https://www.bunchofkunst.com>

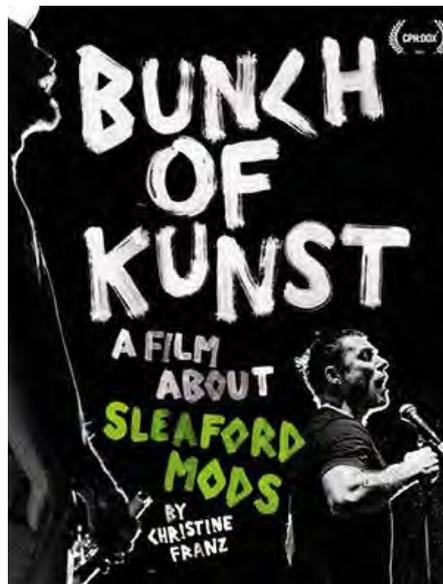
Reviewed by Jackie Bergson

A band of two guys making such an incredible sound that you have to listen is nothing new on the music scene. Of the non-wallpaper variety and probably not busking-friendly, the duo known as Sleaford Mods commands unique attention. The maker of recently released documentary, *Sleaford Mods: Bunch of Kunst*, Christine Franz, describes them as a 'swear-punk duo' in an interview for silentradio.co.uk. Punk rock was, of course, first termed as such by the music press. Their genre classification relates to Sleaford Mods having arrived in no uncertain terms, at a time when societal norms have split and reformed into different shapes and manifestations. Sleaford Mods are irrevocably a living, breathing manifestation of a particular, raging and downtrodden zeitgeist, although in this documentary, their manager, Steve Underwood, insists that they are like nobody he has ever heard and are 'not even zeitgeist'.

Franz's film is led by the story about how the band and their manager work and communicate together throughout their journey to being the 'fifth most listened to' band at Glastonbury and also to being the only Nottingham natives to have played its Rock City venue to fullest capacity three times. The documentary tells of smart guys with understated humour working through European pub gig tours to gain an irrefutable fan base. The idea that 'you do Jools Holland and retire' is talked of, tongue in cheek. The Sleaford Mods made it there and continued. Now with Rough Trade Records, Jason admits that they have 'no idea what will happen next'.

In an early scene, Jason firmly directs the camera crew not to film the street where he lives - his 'missus already had weird fan mail'. The missus also speaks for herself and is markedly present when Jason is hyping himself for gigs, doing breathing exercises and pacing like a caged lion, as well as when he comes home after touring and has to settle down to emptying the dishwasher and making 'baby tea' for their daughter.

Seeing Andrew on his house boat with his little pedigree dog and throughout the film, where his articulate, reflective honesty contrasts with the tremendous power of the beats-driven, often anthemic tracks he creates for the band, he tells of his own journey into becoming half of Sleaford Mods. Before this, his music was 'too spiky' for producers' tastes.



There is a consistent sense that the duo have lived through what they are saying through their synth-rock-ranting brand of music, which is why music fans who relate to that love what they do. So what explains a fan-following of a different kind - middle class even - which brings the band to appear on such as BBC's *Later with Jools Holland* and keep growing

diverse audiences?

One post-gig female commentator excitedly talks about them in terms of being the new Sex Pistols; a younger, male fan talks about the band not being like the Sex Pistols at all; a male German fan lovingly describes them as 'dirty English bad ass working class'; none other than Iggy Pop waxes lyrical and openly promotes the duo by many means. Whatever words and means are used, responses and reactions reverberate with effusive energy and excitement towards Sleaford Mods' clearly different yet somehow recognisable looks and sounds.

Franz's film is a labour of love: a clever genius that educates its own audience about the band, which is no bad thing, given that it represents one of the most surprising successes of our time. Her camera gaze regularly leans into gig audiences' responses to tracks such as *Jobseeker* and *Human Race*, these particularly causing seismic waves of crowd-bombing, lyric-for-lyric, sound-for-sound shout-backs and an individual brand of controlled hysteria, where fights and dancing are equally not in evidence.

Formerly disaffected and dis-enfranchised? Anti-hedonistic antithesis of rock star glamour, rap-gang brutal, absent of choreography and telling it as it is, Sleaford Mods provide massively interesting documentary subject matter. Franz made the film by following the band for a few years, so it resonates with warmth and knowing detail. The quiet moments are as captivating as the stage performances by virtue of being about the guys who make the music work.

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

Kick up the Tabloids

The three days between Thursday June 8 and Saturday 10 June proved to be a three-day rollercoaster of emotions for millions of left-leaning Scots. No sooner had we digested Thursday's mixed election results north of the Border, we were then taken through the nerve-shredding experience of the events at Hampden Park on the Saturday.

While we wanted to see Theresa May take a pasting at the polling booth, I suspect many of us are quite enjoying the sight of her clinging on to power like a ship-wrecked victim hanging on to a lifeboat, and whose fresh water supply is at a critical level.

The shameful fact we have to face is that she is being propped up by Scottish Tory MPs. When was the last time an English Conservative Prime Minister had to rely on votes in Scotland to stay in power? Shame on you, the voters of Aberdeen and Stirling, you are now officially more right-wing than the people of Kensington.

Writing in the *Evening Standard* on the day after the election, George Osborne described May as a 'dead woman walking'. However, it's difficult to work out whether this was a comment on her tenuous grip on the reins of power, or merely a rather obvious attack on her personal appearance. The longer the campaign went on, the more the PM began to resemble a bit-part player in a trashy 1950's horror movie such as *Zombie Invasion* or *The Bride of Frankenstein*.

This was accentuated by her robotic speech patterns, in which she only appeared capable of saying six words, as if her internal programming had gone haywire. It was a bit like that episode of *Father Ted*, where they try to get Father Jack to say more than three phrases, but all he can utter is 'Drink ! Feck ! Girls' Likewise, no

amount of cajoling or prompting got May to come up with anything other than 'strong and stable' or 'coalition of chaos!'

However, as it turns out, at least three of those six words proved to be prophetic in the extreme, as the country is, indeed, now governed by the coalition of chaos. Fair enough: it's a totally different coalition to the one she predicted, and a much worse level of chaos.

There was seldom a day during the election when nether *The Sun* nor *Daily Mail* would fail to come up with a story about Jeremy Corbyn giving support to extremists groups, or featuring library pictures as evidence of his association with, and love for, terrorists. Now we have the obscene pictures of May posing for photos, shaking hands on a deal struck with the political wing of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF).

Furthermore, it would now appear that the much-mentioned Magic Money Tree actually does exist. Not only has two-billion pounds been found to pay for an aircraft carrier which will be operating without any aircraft (apparently the money tree was not magic enough to conjure up even one plane) but over £6m has suddenly appeared to carry out essential repairs to Buckingham Palace.

What kind of society do we live in where its elected members of parliament vote to pay an unelected monarch to make repairs to one of her six homes but deny pay rises for fire-fighters, less than two weeks after at least eighty poor people were killed because so many corners were cut in the refurbishment of their accommodation that their homes turned out to be as combustible as a box of matches?

Most obscene of all, however, is the £1bn plucked from the branches of

the Magic Money Tree to bribe ten climate change denying, homophobic bigots to keep this discredited bunch of idiots in power.

Ruth Davidson's planned wedding to her long-term partner, Jen, has had to be postponed from October to a date yet to be confirmed. I wonder if Arlene Foster will be getting an invitation. I know it is wrong to judge people on appearance, but looking at Arlene Foster, I do find it difficult to understand that she does not have more sympathy for the transgendered community.

Meanwhile, here in Scotland, a nation that was deeply divided on the morning of Friday the ninth of June had once again become united by early evening on Saturday the tenth. At least fifty per cent of the population went through the entire gamut of Scottish emotion in the space of five minutes, at the conclusion of the vital World Cup qualifier against England. We went from resignation at 0-1 to satisfaction at 1-1 to utter delirium at 2-1 then back to total devastation at 2-2. Ask any Scotland fan before kick-off, and they would all have settled for a draw.

Perhaps, the SNP should use that game as a metaphor for its own fortunes. To lose twenty-one MPs was not good, but the high-water mark of fifty-six in 2015 was never going to be repeated. The day after the 2010 General Election, if you had asked any SNP voter if they'd be happy with thirty-five MPs in seven years' time, they'd have bitten your hand off.

Vladimir McTavish will be appearing in 'Scotland-the state of the nation' throughout the 2017 Edinburgh Fringe at The Stand Comedy Club from Frida' 4 to Sunday 27 August (except Monday 17) at 6.15 pm www.outstandingtickets.com

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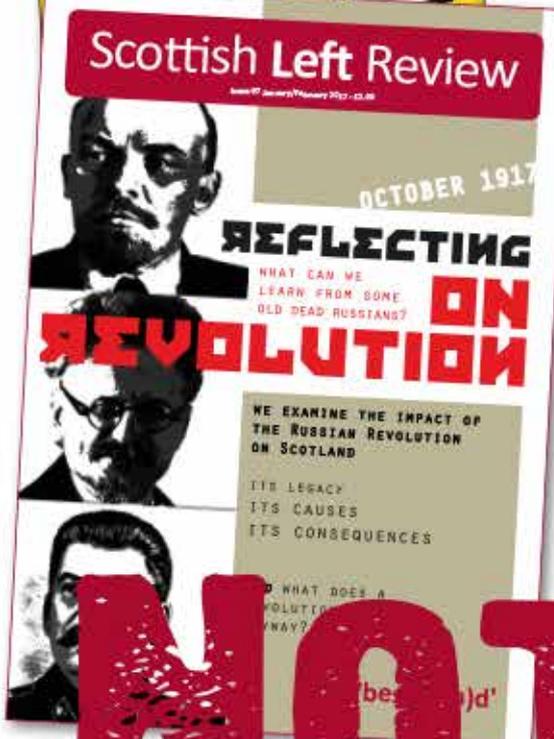
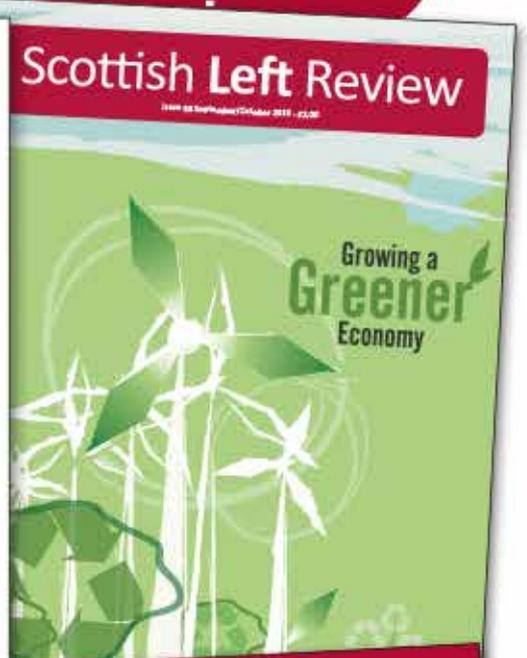
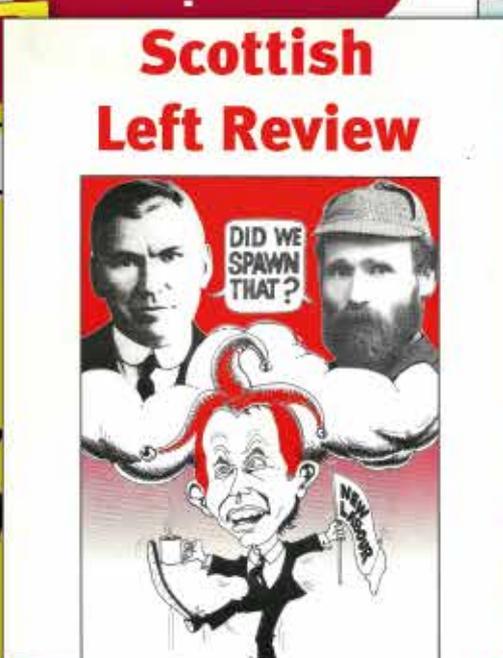
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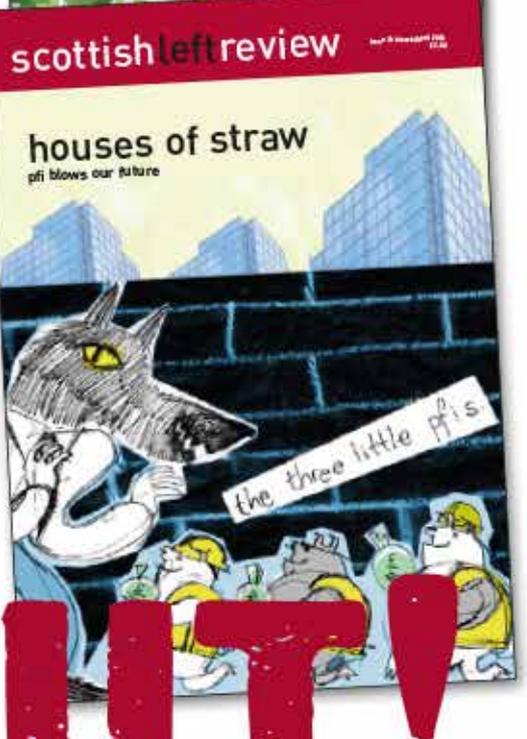
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