

# Scottish Left Review

Issue 103 January/February 2018 - £2.00

**I'M THE NEW SCOTTISH LABOUR LEADER...**

**GET ME OUT OF HERE!\***



**'best re(a)d'**

**\*AND INTO BUTE HOUSE**

**Where should Richard Leonard take his party now?**

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## **ASLEF CALLS FOR AN INTEGRATED, PUBLICLY OWNED, ACCOUNTABLE RAILWAY FOR SCOTLAND**

*(which used to be the SNP's position – before they became the government!)*



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# comment

## 2018: here we go

**S**cottish Left Review wholeheartedly welcomes the election of Richard Leonard to the leadership of Scottish Labour. As outlined in the last editorial, his election was we argued to be a benefit to all of the left in the age of the hegemony of austerity and neo-liberalism. How much worse off the left would have been without his election can be gleaned when one considers not just his competitor's personal behaviour and past voting record but also his opportunism in trying to move to the left during the course of the leadership campaign in order to outflank him. We hope to be able to work with him in further advancing a radical left agenda as per his manifesto for his leadership campaign. That is why we approached him to conduct an interview for this edition, and are delighted that he accepted.

That said, it is not *Scottish Left Review's* job to be an uncritical cheerleader for any leader, party or cause. And to that extent this editorial notes a number of important points. These are laid out in the spirit of a fraternal and comradely exchange. It is also why, alongside the

interview with Richard, we have asked others to lay out their perspectives on what difference his election makes and what difference he may make in future.

He won by a sizable margin (57% to 43%) overall but not amongst individual party members (52% to 48%) or registered supporters (48% to 52%), indicating that despite progress being made the right is still a considerable force within Scottish Labour. Where he won handsomely was amongst affiliated (union) supporters (77% to 23%). Membership rose in the run up to the election but one should not assume these were all Leonard supporters. For example, in Glasgow Southside, Anas Sarwar's own Constituency Labour Party, the membership nearly doubled with a 600 increase. Of the electorate for the vote, only 64% voted and party membership of some 35,000 is still way down on the SNP's membership of just under 100,000 - it has fallen from its peak of 125,000 - and is considerably less than the 50,000 it should be given that the population of Scotland is about a twelfth of that of the rest of Britain and Labour membership in Britain is 600,000. Moreover, during the

campaign, it became clear that Leonard did not command a majority of support from his parliamentary colleagues in the 24 strong Labour group at Holyrood. Indeed, the composition of his front bench team reflects this, with the likes of Jackie Ballie, Sarwar and Iain Gray in its ranks.

What this all means is that the task of Scottish Labour under Leonard's leadership to move to the left and to gain popular credibility is going to be difficult to say the least because Scottish Labour faces something of a Catch-22 situation. It needs to grow more (members, elected representatives etc) in order to exert more influence but that can only be done when it becomes more credible and it will not become more credible until it grows more. Not talking of becoming First Minister on 7 May 2021 would have been an own goal but outside the election campaign, this is a tall order from the now third party of Scotland.

Slow and steady progress against resurgent Toryism in Scotland and a more politically adept and stable Holyrood (than Westminster) government is more on the cards. For example, two Survation polls in early December indicated the Labour could put the Tories back into third place in Holyrood. But that requires a party that is not disunited and where the leader's mandate is respected and effectively prosecuted.

If Scottish Labour is to break out of its decline, then it will need to address the constitutional question in a more fulsome way than Richard has. In a tweet right at the beginning of the leadership campaign, he stated: 'For the avoidance of doubt, let me make it clear. There will be no ground ceded to nationalism at the expense of progressive socialism under my leadership. No coalition, pacts or deals with the SNP. And no second independence referendum'. This suggests that Leonard believes that Corbyn entering Downing Street, with his own arrival in Bute House, will extinguish the remaining flames of independence. This calculation seems somewhat faulty on

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at least several counts. First, the Tories are determined to hang on with the help of their natural DUP allies until 2022 so the damage they wreck will continue. Second, a hard Brexit or even a no deal Brexit will only make the sense of political grievance in Scotland against the Tories greater. Labour's position on seeking to a job-protecting Brexit hasn't made much difference here. Polls show voters are not clear what Labour's position on Brexit is. And, third, there is no sense that a return of Britain-wide class struggle will make a dent in austerity or neo-liberalism.

But there are other issues Scottish Labour urgently needs to address. The local government elections last year resulted in Labour being in a coalition of governing parties in 9 councils and in majority or minority administrations in another seven of the 32 councils. The Westminster budget settlement was not kind to Scotland but with the new *Scotland Act* now in, the SNP Scottish Government can raise taxes on the rich and better off. Now the SNP Scottish Government is set to pass on more cuts to local authorities. So whilst Scottish Labour will attack this at Holyrood, in all these 16 councils Labour must adopt a 'no cuts' stance but especially in the seven it must implement 'no cuts' budgets. Leonard must make sure this happens.

This then leads on to the issue of Labour's relationship with the SNP. Labour can, with the Greens, push the SNP to the left over various issues like renationalisation and taxation but that will take the establishment of some kind of working relationship with the SNP. A party with just 24 MSPs cannot just hold a gun to the SNP's head and keep threatening to pull the trigger. Risks come with cooperation in terms of inter-party competition but maintaining tribal contestation will not do Labour any favours either. We should recall here that John McDonnell has made clear Labour's support for Chris Stephens' Westminster Bill (see his article in this issue). At the same time as this, Labour needs to become the voice not just for radicalism but for the working class so that 'class' becomes Labour's lexicon. That will allow ample room for differentiation from the SNP with mantra of the (classless) 'nation'. This point is important as Kevin McKenna (*Sunday Herald* 24 December 2017) forcibly argued that Scottish Labour should spend at least as much time and energy attacking the Tories as it does the SNP.

This approach is a quite a different one from others, where not all on the left have enthusiastically welcomed the

Labour left's recent advance. Writing on the new radical left website, *Conter*, in early December 2017 in a piece entitled 'The Challenge For Young Radicals', Róisín McLaren and Hugh Cullen, both SSP members, opined:

*Having a socialist as leader of the opposition in Westminster is not enough. ... Corbyn is hamstrung by a party that is wedded to the establishment. The same is true for ... Leonard, who has been at the top of corrupted, unionist politics for decades and does not represent the radical force that many new Scottish Labour members hope for. ... Aside from the small number of far-left entryists in ... Labour ... most new Corbynistas support his liberal values or social democratic reforms. He's not building the class-conscious support needed to implement socialist change in Government. Socialists who are swept up in Corbynism are perhaps guilty of looking for shortcuts – understandable after decades out in the cold.*

By contrast, an earlier contributor to *Conter*, Alasdair Clark, argued 'maybe it's time for ... young radicals to look again at Scottish Labour' given the demise of RISE, that 'many socialists have never quite felt comfortable in the SNP' and because 'Scottish Labour will be the home for socialists who want to achieve the political aims so many of us spoke about in 2014 - a radically altered Scotland'.

The last edition of *Scottish Left Review* led on the forthcoming battle to break the 1% public sector pay cap. As we now know, the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union's consultative ballot of members on breaking the cap gained, on a 49% turnout, a 79% vote to take industrial action if the government refuses to scrap the cap. PCS states it is now moving towards being 'strike ready' as it looks at the areas of weakness in the ballot to make sure it gets over the 50% turnout threshold under the Tories' *Trade Union Act*.

In his Budget in November, the Chancellor promised only to provide new, additional funding for nurses if a pay review body for their pay recommends it. Before the Budget, police and prison officers were told they will receive a pay rise above the public sector pay cap (although that will still represent a cut in the real value of their wages when set against inflation and has to be paid for through efficiency savings aka job cuts). In the documentation released for the Budget, Hammond made clear that the only other public sector workers that *might* get a pay

rise above the current 1% cap are those whose pay is set by a Pay Review Body and that would be for 2018-2019. This meant that for civil servants, teachers, firefighters, local government workers and the like (covered by Westminster) there will be no change whatsoever.

The challenge facing PCS is to coordinate with other unions so that each strike delivers a bigger punch. The CWU looks like it will reach a deal with Royal Mail so it will be out of the frame. Meantime, the UCU union is balloting for national strike action over an attack on members' USS pensions and the UNISON, UNITE and the GMB unions are considering a 2% per annum offer for local government for 2018-20 for England, Wales and Northern Ireland (where there is more for lower paid) after the government released more cash to the local authority employers. The TUC has named 12 May 2018 as the day for a national demonstration against the pay cap. This should be a massive demonstration if various unions called strike action for that day and this was the beginning of a concerted fight and not the effective end point of any campaign.

Lastly, the SNP Scottish Government presented its first Draft Budget under the new Scotland Act. The final vote on it will take place on 19 February 2018. Superficially, it looks good in terms of lower taxation for low earners, and higher taxation for higher earners. But scratch beneath the surface and it is a timid budget, with just 1p less per pound for the lowest earners and only 1p more for highest two bands. The latter will only raise £164m, highlighting that this is an income tax and not a wealth tax. In these regards, it is like the SNP's 'A Penny for Scotland' policy of 1999-2002 and Dugdale's policy in 2016. But worse still is that although Scottish Government civil servants will receive an average 2%-3% pay increase (which is still less than inflation), there is no funding for a pay increase for local government workers in Scotland and there will still be massive council cuts with no real increase in council funding.

- We will address the situation in Catalonia in the next edition once this becomes clearer. Suffice it to say that while Rajoy did not gain the outcome he, his Popular Party and the Spanish state wanted, the cause of independence did not advance that much either. The result shows the complexity of politics on the right-left and unionist-independence spectrums.

# Feedback: Immigration controls

Immigration is a central question for both left and right, in the main centres of Western capitalism. In recent issues of *SLR*, John Foster and Peter Lomas have addressed some of the issues. Both contained points I agree with. John pointed out that EU immigration policy is racist. It allows for free movement within the EU but rigidly excludes immigrants and refugees from the rest of the world. The EU currently pays Turkey 6bn euros to hold millions of asylum seekers and to stop them entering the EU. Refugees fleeing war, oppression and economic destitution find the EU has a closed border and consequently many of them die in overcrowded and inadequate boats trying to cross the Mediterranean. During the EU referendum campaign, UKIP and pro-Brexit Tories used EU immigration in a highly divisive way, arguing Britain was being flooded with EU immigrants seeking to obtain benefits and misuse the NHS. John argued: 'We need a non-racist immigration policy'.

By contrast, Peter says that the responsibility of Northern societies should be 'to help reconstruct the poorest post-colonial societies – those ruined countries – beginning with sub-Saharan Africa' using increased foreign aid. I agree rich capitalist countries have a major responsibility to show solidarity and give support to countries ravaged by imperialism, global warming and the impact of neo-liberal economic capitalism. But northern aid to the poorer parts of the world usually comes with massive strings. I doubt if it could provide anything other than increased exploitation and levels of oppression.

While their intentions were honourable, both ignored the central reason why immigration has become so important. Both sought to address economic questions without considering the central political issue which dominates discussion on immigration and free movement. In Europe, the far right has achieved a measure of electoral success. For the case of Germany, see Victor Grossman's article in this issue. In Poland, fascists organised a demonstration attracting tens of thousands calling for a 'White Europe of Brotherly Nations'. Trump unapologetically retweeted the

Islamophobic posts from Britain First as part of his ongoing campaign to scapegoat Muslims and immigrants for America's economic ills and American imperialism failure to dominate the world with its military superiority. In Britain, the Football Lads Alliance (FLA), using issues of 'terrorism and extremism, attracted thousands to a demonstration in London. The FLA has fascists such as the EDL's Tommy Robinson at its core.

What lies behind the scare stories and the targeting of asylum seekers and immigrants? As the mainstream capitalist economies have floundered, with falling profits, stagnant growth and declining living standards, those politicians and business people whose responsibility it is to organise the system and make it work, for the benefit of business, have used cuts and austerity in an attempt to restore profitability. Racism is central to how this works.

The racists and their right-wing supporters say that problems with the NHS in Britain can be put down to too many immigrants using resources. Free movement from the EU, for them, is simply about people coming to Britain to gain access to better welfare benefits. They say wages are falling, and jobs are being lost because British workers are being undercut by foreign workers who will work for less and work longer hours.

Socialists' starting point should be to challenge the myths put forward by politicians and media about the so-called problems of immigration. Low wages, unemployment, rising inequality and poverty are the consequences of decisions made by capitalists and politicians whose class interest is to increase levels of exploitation while finding ways of minimising resistance. Throughout the history of the socialist movement, activists have fought to find common class interest between immigrant and indigenous workers, recognising they have a common enemy and can gain more by fighting together.

For most of human history, people have been able to travel the planet unhindered by borders and border controls. Only with the advent of the nation state, itself a product of capitalism, have restrictions on the movement of people, along with

colonialism, imperialism and modern racism come into existence. Money, commodities and capital are free to move around the world at will, without undue interference. Indeed, the same applies to the wealthy who own and control these things. It is the poor, the dispossessed and exploited who are forced into refugee camps or undertake what for most are dangerous, enforced journeys into an uncertain future to try to better their situation.

The problem with the notion of immigration controls, of any type or however well intentioned, is the idea that somehow it is the immigrants to blame for the economic woes of a particular country. The idea for example of 'British Jobs for British Workers' (Gordon Brown's slogan), rests on the assumption that there is a common interest between British workers and British bosses, which there is not. Socialists have a responsibility to stand with those oppressed and exploited by the impact of neo liberal free market capitalism. The notion of non-racist immigration controls is a delusion.

*Bob Fotheringham is a member of the Socialist Workers' Party in Scotland*

## **Cover:**

Nadia Lucchesi  
([nadia.shemail@gmail.com](mailto:nadia.shemail@gmail.com))

## **Proofing services:**

Bob Thomson and John Daly

## **Communications and organisational development:**

Carole Ewart

## **Editor Email:**

[G.Gall@bradford.ac.uk](mailto:G.Gall@bradford.ac.uk)

**Web:** [www.scottishleftreview.org](http://www.scottishleftreview.org)

**Tel:** 0141 424 0042

## **Address:**

Scottish Left Review,  
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# Beating a path to Bute House

Richard Leonard was elected leader of the Scottish Labour Party in November 2017. We interviewed him in late December.



Richard Leonard supporting the anti-cuts demo outside the Scottish Parliament on Budget Day, 14 December 2017.

*You've said you're too old to be a Corbynista, so how would you describe your political views in the context of the Labour Party?*

'It is an abiding and indisputable truth that a people which does not understand the past will never comprehend the present, nor mould the future'. So wrote Tom Johnston in his foreword to the 1946 edition of *The History of the Working Classes in Scotland*. Thus, my influences come from the Labour and socialist traditions going back to Keir Hardie, Harold Laski, the Red Clydesiders, RH Tawney, William Morris, Jennie Lee, the post-industrial utopians and the New Left. Personally, my early politics were forged on the anvil of the Thatcher years and the clash between state and society. It was a brutal time and an important, defining point in our country's history.

I have also been hugely influenced by Labour's founding father, Keir Hardie. He was a committed egalitarian and for me Labour principles are founded on equality - of ensuring the economy works for all, that wealth and industrial and political power resides with the many rather than the few, and that women are treated equally across all

sectors of society. Hardie also had a radical vision for how the country should be changed and it's that radicalism which I believe Scottish Labour needs to adopt once again. It is only by offering real change – and by working as a party across the UK to do this – that people will believe Labour can actually transform their lives.

*The slogan of your campaign was 'real change'. How can this be achieved in the context of the limited powers of the Scottish Parliament?*

The Scottish Parliament has huge powers over housing; industrial policy; manufacturing; education, skills and science; local government; local government finance; and health, not just the NHS but public health. Moreover, there are huge powers over public procurement. So, in my view, I would suggest that political will is limited rather than the Scottish Parliament powers.

We know that the richest one per cent in Scotland today already own more personal wealth than the poorest 50 per cent put together and, going back to Hardie, that is obviously unequal, unjust and irresponsible. Of course, the

ability to introduce new, income tax bands has only just been made possible, but already we've seen the Scottish Government baulk at going far enough and raising the money that's needed to properly fund Scottish local authorities and the lifeline services they deliver.

It has also failed to scrap the council tax and give councils the ability to raise money through tourist taxes or land value taxes. The SNP has proved itself to be an exceptionally timid government. Scotland is a rich country and we should look for radical alternatives to tap into the wealth of the few who hold the most land and property. A windfall tax on the top one per cent could deliver a transformational boost to the budget which could be used to tackle the deep seated inequalities which exist.

Similarly, the SNP has refused to lift children out of poverty by raising child benefit by just £5 a week – a power the Parliament now has. It's failed to close the attainment gap in our schools because it won't fund education properly and as a result schools are being forced to use that attainment gap money to employ core, rather than additional, staff. The government also goes out of its way to avoid using

the power it has over public contracts the government puts out to tender to ensure that companies which blacklist employees, which use zero hour contracts, which fail to pay the real living wage cannot receive public monies. The Scottish Parliament has many levers to drive the economy, to drive up employment standards for working people, to drive up people's wages. Yet this current government chooses not to use them.

*Do you support 'devo max' and if so what extra powers would that entail?*

'Devo Max' is an idea which seems to change depending on who is talking about it. My view is firm that the radical change that Scotland needs, is the same radical change that is needed across the UK in terms of a shift in the distribution of power and in democracy. That is why Scottish Labour's position is one of federalism – something I've argued for over many years - which allows disparate parts of the UK to find solutions to their own regional economic needs, while at the same time being part of a greater whole with all the benefits that entails. The Party's constitutional convention, which I know my interim deputy and Shadow Scottish Secretary Lesley Laird, is keen to get going, will forge that radical change.

*Can you foresee a situation where Labour, with yourself as its leader, cooperation with the SNP and Greens to form a progressive political consensus in the Scottish Parliament on issues such as progressive taxation, the return of Scotrail to public ownership, fracking, social security, procurement and promoting the living wage?*

Scottish Labour is always willing to work with other political parties if we have a common aim. It's worth remembering that the history of the Scottish Parliament has been one of partnership – from the constitutional convention which campaigned for the Parliament to the coalition governments, in the first instance between Labour and the Liberal Democrats until 2007. So when there is common ground we will work with those who, like us, want to change Scotland for the better.

*As you know many of the Labour Party's traditional supporters have deserted it for the SNP. How do you propose to win them back?*

I believe that our message about ending poverty including poverty pay, promoting the Living Wage and secure work, tackling rogue private landlords and the need to embark on a massive social housing building programme will win people's hearts and minds. We need economic transformative change, which will in turn change the balance of power and wealth. During my leadership campaign I said that my role as leader is to make Scottish Labour a campaigning movement for socialism once again, and to give people hope. This means taking more chances. Labour is in third place, and unless we are audacious now we will never win back the support of the people of Scotland.

We also need an industrial strategy for the 21st century, re-empowered and properly resourced local government and a renaissance of public and co-operative ownership with new and innovative public investment in public services. We need a radical redistributionist policy that taxes wealth as well as income more progressively. I believe all of these radical ideas can reach out and win back those voters that Labour has lost in Scotland. It is an approach which will build a bridge to young voters, and it will bring renewed belief to Labour voters who have stuck with us through thick and thin.

*You've said that Scottish Labour needs to be like the 'Yes' movement. Can you explain what you mean?*

The 'Yes' movement was very good at offering people an alternative vision of Scotland and a message of hope. To my mind that is what won voters round during the referendum, not independence *per se*. People felt excited and enthused by the energy around the movement. And, of course, asking people to make a positive choice and vote 'Yes' to something is far easier than asking them to vote 'No'. A similar thing happened for Labour during the 2017 General Election campaign. Too many people feel powerless because of the lack of equality in our political and economic systems and Jeremy Corbyn's message was a clear alternative to that. It gave people hope. So Scottish Labour needs to be clear in its message of radical change to engender that same reaction in people; that things can be different, that they can get a good education, they can get a decent job with decent pay, they can afford a house

and to feed their families. Thus, we change the way our economy works and in whose interests. And Scottish Labour needs to be a real grassroots movement again, not just focused on what's happening at Holyrood. We need to get people involved, to be a campaigning movement, to get our message out across Scotland.

*After the announcement of your election victory on Saturday 18 November in Glasgow, you travelled through to Fife to support the workers in occupation at BiFab. Can you tell us what part the extra-parliamentary struggle will play for Scottish Labour under your leadership?*

Labour at its best has always been a movement for social change, not just a political party. We need to get back to grassroots campaigning, being seen in Scotland's communities and taking our message out beyond Holyrood. Engaging with our members, working with unions in workplaces and communities across Scotland and the co-operative movement, is vital to re-energising Scottish Labour and the electorate alike. That's why it was important for me to have someone in my Shadow Cabinet who would take a lead on campaigning, and ensuring the communication between the Party and the parliamentarians is strengthened further. Neil Findlay will be responsible for unearthing the issues that our members and affiliates believe we should be campaigning on and bringing them to Holyrood, but also ensuring our campaigning agenda outside Parliament.

*Notwithstanding some differences, the similarities between yourself and Jeremy Corbyn are many and varied. One of these is that the parliamentary Labour groups in Holyrood and Westminster are not wholly on board with a return to what can be described as 'old Labour' traditional values like importance of public ownership, the redistribution of wealth and so on. How do you intend to deal with this political challenge?*

I believe that listening to people and giving them the opportunity to express their views is part of the process of working as a team. It's an opportunity to get a broad section of opinion and find common ground. The leadership election has showed us that a re-energisation of our politics is needed we need a vision of a better future, a vision of hope again. In the last few



Richard Leonard supporting the BiFab demonstration in Edinburgh, 15 November 2017.

years Scottish Labour has led the way with what some would describe as 'old Labour' values, such as seeking to extend public ownership, campaign to end austerity, redistribute wealth and power, and these are all policies which the Scottish Labour team has fully supported.

*Can you say where your twelve policy reviews fit into this?*

These reviews are about making our policies relevant, distinctive and aligned with our Labour values. Our values must always underpin our purpose including policy priorities and electoral goals. Our goal of ensuring that our policies are for the many and not the few is central to our mission. Having a clear sense of purpose similar to Corbyn's plan motivates activists and wins back voters.

*In the leadership election, you stated that your leadership would see no concessions to nationalism and the constitutional issue in Scotland was little mentioned. What do you think will happen to the independence movement?*

I make no apology for saying that the only coalition I want to see is the one between the Labour Party and the union movement. There will be no ground ceded to nationalism at the expense of progressive socialism under my leadership. No coalition, pacts, or parliamentary deals with the SNP. And

no second independence referendum. The democratic will of the people of Scotland was to remain part of the UK. The referendum is now more than three years behind us and we all need to move on and look at the radical change that can be accomplished as part of the UK. There will always be people who will believe that independence is the answer but nationalism is not a liberating ideology. Rather, it is an inhibiting one. While the creation of a separate Scottish state is perfectly feasible - it would defeat rather than advance the higher cause of economic democracy that we so badly need to strive for. Nationalism is not a short cut to socialism.

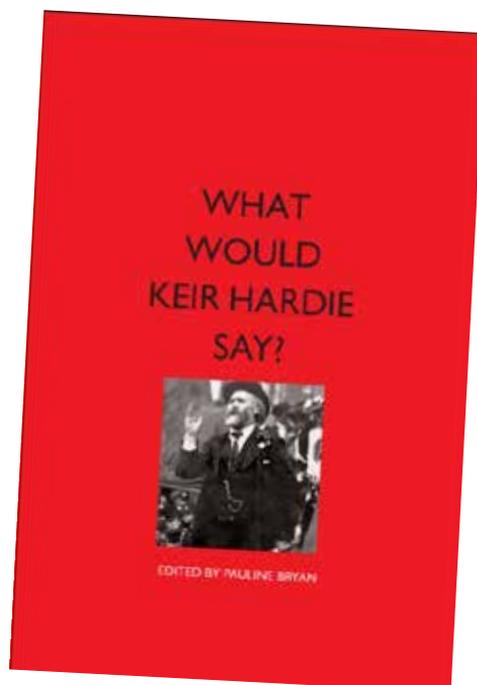
*Is Brexit an opportunity or threat in your perspective, and how will it fit into the peculiarities of politics in Scotland as well as international trends like the austerity, neo-liberalism and reactionary populism?*

I was a Remain voter. I do believe Britain should retain access to the single market. However, I am clear that we need to be tough, uncompromising and principled on any Brexit deal. The Tories handling of negotiations have been a diplomatic and negotiating disaster. And if it continues in this vein - and if this Tory Brexit deal is a detrimental deal for jobs and the Scottish economy, for our manufacturing base, for workers' rights, equal rights and the protection

of our environment; and if the rights of EU citizens living and working here are not safeguarded - then we should without question reject the Tory Brexit deal when it is brought before the UK Parliament.

The current challenge is not to stop Brexit but to shape it and under this heading there are now plenty of opportunities. The repatriation of powers returning from the EU to Edinburgh is also an opportunity. The Scottish Government has regularly justified a course of action by claiming that it was obliged to do so by Brussels and Brexit would end that. The use of these new opportunities can ensure the maximum progress for communities, for example from procurement.

- Our thanks are to Lesley Brennan for organising the interview.



Richard Leonard contributed a chapter to 'What would Keir Hardie Say? Exploring his vision and relevance to 21st Century politics' (Luath, 2015).

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# Haven't we been here before? Corbynism, England and the British road to socialism

*Jim Sillars sounds caution over Corbynism and what this means for independence*

The next Westminster election in Scotland will see Labour repeat the tactic used in the years leading up to the 1990s: people told that they must vote Labour to get a Labour Government, and nothing else matters. Therein lies a problem for the 'independent left' and the large number of people who have been regularly voting SNP, and for the SNP itself. It is a problem because if Corbyn's Labour, in the last week of the campaign, is polling in the 40%, Leonard's claim will look like unvarnished truth – the SNP cannot form a UK government, but Labour can.

We can expect another socialist manifesto from Corbyn's Labour, creating considerable energy and enthusiasm among activists and supporters who will believe he is within touching distance from power. We have been here before. In 1992, Neil Kinnock's Labour looked like a winner, and Labour did well on that belief in Scotland. But winner it wasn't, because England voted Tory again.

I think that will be the case at the next Westminster elections. Today, even after a disastrous election campaign, on English votes for English laws, the Tories have a majority of 61. That is the mountain Corbyn has to climb down there. While I am sure Corbyn will be able to mobilise a big Labour vote in England, he will also mobilise a big Tory vote to make sure he doesn't win. Unlike the last Westminster election, when no one believed he had a chance, the next one will be fought on the basis that he does. That will be the Tory cry to their voters.

It will not be difficult between now and the Holyrood, then Westminster, elections for Labour to outflank the SNP on the Left. The gross inequality in Scotland, the social evils of poverty, no housing, bad housing, the deliberate state directed humiliation and destitution delivered to people by sanctions, and the prevalence of low wages, all call for socialist answers. In the context of Holyrood, the lack of extensive taxation powers, and limited welfare powers, means that an effective comprehensive attack on these evils

is not possible, even if the SNP was a genuine left party, which it is not. Having wrongly described itself as a government (a description enshrined in legislation), it is now being judged as a government in the full sense of that word, and so wide open to a left critique, which we can expect the Leonard/Corbyn party to apply.

The next Holyrood and Westminster elections will be fought across the Central Belt, which has now resumed its role as the decisive power base in Scotland. It just happens to be the place where most of those economic and social evils are to be found in spades and, thus, open to a socialist message and programme as the only means of significantly altering the living conditions of the people, while the SNP will take the blame as the 'Government'. The SNP mantra that Westminster is to blame for all Scotland's problems becomes less legitimate the more often it is called in aid.

So, we can expect Labour gains at SNP's expense across the Central Belt. What would such an electoral blow do to the SNP and the independence movement still hitched to its wagon? Initially, it would be drowned in the noise of Unionists rejoicing, crowing with glee at the certainty of no second referendum on independence. The independence movement as a whole would seem to have been delivered a death blow. But that sorrowful scenario would depend

upon one political factor over which Scottish Labour has no control - how the English vote. If Corbyn cannot win there, then the first rule of the Union kicks in - that we again get again a Tory Government we rejected, against which devolution's limited powers provide no defence.

The Leonard claim will be shown false, and disastrously so. Faced with another Tory Government, and we have again the political equation that was the breeding ground for the independence movement. The movement might find within itself an independence that unhitches it from the SNP's electoral fate, and so be much stronger. Or it may stay hitched and see its first priority to help build the nationalist party to take control in the elections that come after 2021 and 2022. Whatever the relationship between the movement and the SNP, the failure of Corbyn to deliver England, which will reveal the emptiness of Leonard's position, will be the basis of a new drive to independence. The weakness in my argument is if Corbyn wins in England. Pigs will fly first.

*Jim Sillars is a former Labour and SNP MP*



**"Scottish separation is part of the process of England's Imperial disintegration and is a help towards the ultimate triumph of the workers of the world."**

**John Maclean  
1879-1923**

# Scottish Labour's leadership election and the 'elephant in the room'

Bob Thomson argues Scottish Labour cannot assume Corbynism will solve the national question

I first met Richard Leonard when we both campaigned in the Stirling constituency during the 1983 election. I voted and campaigned for him in the recent leadership election. I read his manifesto and media releases carefully as I did those of his opponent, Anas Sarwar. Both their manifestos dealt in detail with economic regeneration, jobs and improving public services. However, there was an elephant in the room that was hardly mentioned and often only in answer to questions – the constitutional issue that has dominated Scottish politics for the last 30 years - independence, 'devo-max' or the *status quo*!

This was strange as only in February 2017 there had been a major debate at the Scottish Labour Party conference at Perth on setting up a People's Constitutional Convention by UK Labour to look at devolution of powers to constituent countries, regions, local government and communities. This was I believe a reaction to Labour's catastrophic defeats by the SNP at the 2015 General and 2016 Scottish elections and to have a policy position for a likely indyref2 sometime after the 2021 Scottish election. Jeremy Corbyn has said that if Holyrood voted for a second independence referendum he would not oppose the decision of a democratically elected parliament.

There now appears to be a belief of many in Scottish Labour that with the Corbyn bounce, Labour's radical manifesto, a modest increase in Scottish Labour MPs and a reduced vote for the SNP that the constitutional issue is hardly even on the back burner. We just need to concentrate on bread and

butter issues, jobs and public services to win back the voters we lost to the SNP. But many of the policies in Richard's manifesto require additional powers for Holyrood to be able to implement.

The mathematical and political reality is that Scottish Labour is third to the SNP and Tories at Holyrood and Westminster. The SNP is just short of an overall majority at Holyrood and still well ahead in polls. If Labour is to win back the voters who deserted it for the SNP, it must come up with constitutional answers as well as a genuine Labour manifesto. Most of these voters were not, at least at the time, nationalists *per se* but were fed up voting Labour in Scotland and getting Tory governments in Britain. The SNP's record on social issues has been relatively progressive and it is seen as having protected public services from Tory excesses.

Labour's record on constitutional change has been inept, timid and self-interested. Witness Tony Blair's imposition of the second question on tax raising powers in the 1997 referendum which he thought would be lost. This was deliberately to try to diminish the status of the new Scottish Parliament, the commitment to which he had inherited and was never an enthusiast. Then in the 2014 independence referendum despite arguments from many in Scottish Labour, including myself, Labour failed to argue for a second question on the ballot paper on 'devo-max', only immediately after the referendum taking part in the Smith Commission to agree additional devolved powers for the Parliament!

During the referendum campaign,

despite warnings, Labour disastrously went into bed with the Tories in 'Better Together' which was based on misinformation, scaremongering and belittling Scotland as a nation unable to survive on its own unlike hundreds of other small countries. The obvious example was if we voted 'yes' we would be forced to leave the EU! You did not have to be a rocket scientist to realise there would be a reaction from ordinary Scots to this denigration of their country. Deservedly most of the senior figures involved have taken their directorships and consultancies and disappeared. Labour was never going to out-union the Conservative and Unionist Party and should have had a more thought out, more inclusive strategy.

Richard has consistently argued that nationalism and borders separate workers and reduce solidarity but unions have organised both in Britain and Ireland for many years and have a proud record on international solidarity. Notwithstanding the 'Scottish Question', Britain's unwritten constitution is a democratic disgrace with a hereditary head of state and an unelected House of Lords. It is deliberately unwritten so that politicians can interpret it to suit their own interests at a particular time. The advisory referendum on Brexit must be treated as sacrosanct while the PM tries to use the medieval powers of the royal prerogative to deny Parliament any say in the outcome. It is in need of radical revision.

The Tories' refusal to allow the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly have any meaningful involvement could lead to a constitutional crisis late this year or early in 2019. A hard Brexit will likely re-energise the independence movement. Scottish Labour needs to have something new and consensual to say to voters on the constitution and not just vague talk of federalism but something more radical to attract voters on all sides of the debate.

*Bob Thomson is a former Chairman and Treasurer of the Scottish Labour Party. He advocates a confederal system for Britain – see SLR 94 (July/August 2016) <http://www.scottishleftreview.org/article/confederacy-of-the-british-isles/>*



# New leader, same old battles

*Mick Cash says the RMT will continue to work with all progressive politicians whatever their party*

**R**MT supports public ownership of our railways and it is hoped that the election of Richard Leonard as a Labour leader in Scotland whose platform included a commitment to this policy will move this agenda in a positive direction for rail workers. And, Richard is also a member of the RMT cross party group of MSPs and so will have an understanding of many of the concerns of transport and offshore workers. But RMT members will also remember too well the days of 'new' Labour in Scotland who presided over and embraced a privatised railway and forced the tendering of our vital lifeline ferry services.

The lesson here is that regardless of who is leader, workers and their unions are engaged in constant struggle to defend and advance their interests. Of course, our political strategies require us to be principled but that does not mean we have to be one dimensional. So the RMT has good campaigning relations with Green and SNP as well as Labour politicians and many socialists outside the main political parties. We would not be acting in the interests of our members if we did not do so.

Under the SNP Scottish Government, the RMT has achieved some victories such as stopping the privatisation of CalMac, preventing the extension of Driver-Only-Trains and ensuring enforcement of the National Minimum Wage on ships of shame. These have been down to the industrial and political and campaigns ran by the union and, critically, the skill and determination of our Scottish activists and officers and primarily the tremendous solidarity and determination of our members who have often taken strike action. But we have also been able to have constructive dialogue with some SNP, Labour and Green politicians as well to help achieve our aims. It is objectively better to have politicians that you can have some sort of sensible conversation with and importantly you can also put pressure on.

But there are complex and challenging issues ahead that all our political leaders need to address. Take rail. There now seems to be a growing consensus that rail in Scotland should be taken back into public ownership as soon

as possible. Whilst the public sector bid being proposed by the Scottish Government for the Scotrail franchise is better than nothing, it still requires a tendering process that could both drive down workers' conditions and end up with another private operator. The SNP, Labour and Greens need to call on the UK government to repeal the 1993 *Railways Act* which requires the tendering and privatisation of rail passenger services. But even that only moves us so far. The big problem facing the railways is not just privatisation but also fragmentation. Network Rail which is publicly owned on a UK-wide basis needs to stay like that and any attempts to break it up must be opposed. That is an important precondition for our railways to be reintegrated to bring trains and tracks back together.



Then there is maritime and offshore which in Scotland is worth some £9.3bn in turnover and supports nearly 40,000 jobs. It was welcome that Transport and Islands Minister, Humza Yousaf awarded the 2016-24 contract to public sector incumbent CalMac in May 2016. The next step is to ensure the now record investment in Scotland's lifeline ferry services does not continue to prop up the finances of Serco or similar 'outsourcing specialist'. In December 2017, sustained political and legal pressure from RMT and supportive MSPs persuaded the Scottish Government to adopt a new legal position on tendering. Yousaf announced the emerging findings of his ferry law review. These shy away from legally exempting tendering across the Scottish ferry network whilst

state direct award of these contracts is the Scottish Government's preferred policy. The Scottish Government seems determined and confident of persuading the EU of the merits of a fully compliant exemption on the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services contract (which CalMac already operates), there is pessimism over the case for direct award in the Northern Isles. This means we will have to redouble our efforts to nationalise all Scottish ferry services including NorthLink.

Regardless of political leaders, we also face another struggle offshore, especially on the safety of helicopters. This is an area of concern that our activists and officers are working tirelessly to highlight. Since 2009, 33 offshore workers and crew have died and 65 have been rescued from the North Sea following six accidents involving Super Puma 225 and AS332 L2 helicopters. Investigations in Norway and Britain on fatal and non-fatal Super Puma accidents since 2009 have uncovered similar mechanical failures.

Worryingly, the Civil Aviation Authority lifted official restrictions on these helicopters in July 2017 without properly consulting offshore workers or their unions. The RMT firmly believes that Super Pumas should not return to the North Sea without the prior agreement of a majority of offshore workers. Shockingly the UK Government rejected the Transport Select Committee's July 2014 recommendation for a public inquiry into commercial pressures on offshore helicopter safety. 2018 is the 30th anniversary of the Piper Alpha disaster and a reminder of the necessity for the highest possible standards of offshore safety. RMT is calling on all politicians to support its call for the Government to launch a public inquiry into the offshore helicopter safety concerns that are consistently raised by offshore workers.

Let's welcome progress when it happens and work with those who support workers. But regardless of political leaders, the New Year will see us fighting to win old - and new - struggles.

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

# Democracy and democratic leadership

*As current political culture overly emphasises leaders, Michael Keating looks at what constitutes political leadership*

The sociologist, Max Weber, identified three types of authority. Traditional authority is rooted in the past. Rational-legal authority is about predictable rules and reason. Charismatic authority is based on the personal appeal of an individual leader. The left has always been against traditional authority as a prop of deference, privilege and inequality but it persists in Britain in the hereditary monarchy and the media worship of all things royal. Rational-legal authority is often seen as the mark of a modern society, embracing the rule of law and the application of science. Yet, in the wrong hands this can degenerate into technocracy, the search for purely technical solutions to what are essentially political problems. Some of the early Fabians, such as the Webbs, were prone to this, as was 'new' Labour with its emphasis on 'delivery' and 'what works'. On the other hand, disdain for scientific knowledge can lead easily to Michael Gove and his dismissal of 'experts' or to Donald Trump's fantasies about climate change.

Charismatic leadership can lead to the suspension of critical judgement and leader worship. The left has historically been prone to this and to the creation of unlikely revolutionary heroes like Che Guevara, Mao Zedong or Hugo Chavez. Nearer home, there is the extraordinary cult of Jeremy Corbyn, from the t-shirts to the ritual chants. It is difficult to know why some leaders are seen as charismatic or how they become so. Often it is less to do with the leaders themselves than to the need of followers for a visible focus and personification of their deeper feelings.

A distinct feature of modern politics is that of populism, a style of leadership rooted in the people but, in fact, detached from popular control. Instead, the leader sets himself (and sometimes herself) up as the embodiment of 'the people', an entity credited with a singular will and placed against various enemies or elites. It is ironical but no accident

that the populist leader is often drawn from the most privileged sectors of society and dedicated to persuading poor people to vote against their own self-interest. Think of Donald Trump, Silvio Berlusconi, Marine Le Pen - or Vladimir Putin with his roots in the Soviet secret services and network of business oligarchs. Populist movements are notable for their lack of internal democracy or tolerance of dissent. Italy's Five Star Movement is notorious for its lack of transparency or internal democracy and for the domination of its leader, Bepe Grillo.

Populism was also at work in the Brexit campaign, which appealed to different audiences on different grounds, while carefully avoiding setting out a coherent programme or even stating what Brexit meant. Another modern tendency is focus-groupery, trying to find out what people want and then 'triangulating' around it, a 'new' Labour favourite. While seemingly bringing politics close to the people, this may just close off radical alternatives and encourage governments to avoid hard choices. It is also open to manipulation.

Yet, for all its problems, leadership is an inescapable element in progressive politics. Political movements need to articulate a message and a programme and to explain complex ideas in simple language. Bill Clinton and Barack Obama at their best showed how this could be done and that political communication does not have to be reduced to the inarticulate rantings of a Donald Trump in order to be effective. Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela changed the terms of political debate in their countries and the world. Faced with the hegemony of neo-liberal ideology and facile comparisons of the national economy with a household, someone in our times needs to present a convincing counter-narrative. Winning elections depends on convincing voters that there is an alternative. Progressive politics also depends on re-establishing the idea of a shared public domain and showing how,

in the long run, economic growth and reducing social inequality are complementary and not competing aims. Leadership can change the terms of debate on matters like migration, where populists have found it easy to create division and false enemies. It can be shown that individual interests and the public good are not antagonistic and that individual liberty and prosperity are possible only in a cohesive society.

Democratic leadership is not the same as charismatic or populist leadership and is much more difficult. Its essence lies in deliberation where ideas are thrashed out and then translated into policy. Specialist knowledge comes in, not because 'experts' know more than the public, but because they possess different, and complementary, forms of knowledge (for the record, I never describe myself as an 'expert' on anything).

In their day, the political parties played this role but they have since been hollowed out. The recent revival of membership does not seem to have been matched by a rise in deliberation and bottom-up policy-making, as all the parties in Scotland and across Britain show. Instead, there is reinforcement of leadership and control from the top. New social movements, around gender, environmentalism, poverty and other issues, have been the ones to generate new ways of thinking but are weakly linked into our political parties. Social media and the 24 hour news cycle might have served to revive public debate and deliberation but appear instead to have made political leaders increasingly risk-averse.

In his recent memoirs, Gordon Brown repeatedly regrets his inability to convince the public of the merits of his policies on addressing poverty, public spending and fiscal stimulus in response to the global financial crisis. Instead, a cabal of senior civil servants and the Conservative Party, with the help of the Liberal Democrats, created a story about persistent over-spending and deficits and the need

for drastic retrenchment. It only took two years for austerity to fail and seven years later, balancing the budget has effectively been abandoned as an objective but the neo-liberal narrative remains in place.

Reforming governments in the past (the first Gladstone government, the 1906 Liberal government, the 1945-1950 Attlee government) combined the willingness to think radically with the leadership to carry through their programmes and to explain them. This was not the work of single individuals but of strong leadership teams. They saw their opportunity in the changing world and they took it.

Politics in Britain is currently leaderless, as the parties manoeuvre for short-term advantage. Politicians are increasingly drawn from a closed and self-referential group of career politicians who know everything about tactics but little about strategy. To be effective, political leadership also needs to link into leadership on other spheres, as a strong civil society is an essential feature of pluralist and deliberative democracy. Perhaps, we could award a prize for leadership on two critical issues. First, can any politician in Britain show the way out of the current mess that is Brexit? Without it, we are heading towards the worst of all worlds. Second, can any politician in Scotland tell us that, if we want to save our public services, we will have to pay more taxes? They might be surprised to find that taking what Sir Humphrey Appleby would call 'courageous' decisions could gain them a lot of respect.

*Michael Keating is Professor of Politics at the University of Aberdeen*

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# Rebirth of social democracy?

*Dave Sherry cautiously welcomes the phoenix rising from the ashes but there is still a sting in the tail*

Labour's resurgence should be seen alongside the recent advances for the left internationally: the movement generated around the indyref campaign; the election of Syriza and the OXI referendum in Greece; Bernie Sanders's success in the Democratic primaries; electoral breakthroughs for the left in Ireland and Portugal; the La France Insoumise movement led by Melanchon; Podemos in Spain and the mobilisations for Catalan independence. The 2008 crash and its aftermath are polarising society, shrinking the centre ground and tearing at the neo-liberal consensus. Trump symbolises this. Like the great depression, the present crisis is strengthening both the radical left and, ominously, the hard racist right across Europe and the US. But presently in Britain, it's the right who are on the back foot thanks to a divided ruling class and May's catastrophic gamble in June, which saw the collapse of UKIP. Unlike Greece, France and Germany, the beneficiary of the popular anti-austerity mood in Britain has been an older politics that seemed to be on its last legs - social democratic reformism, albeit its resurgence comes in unfamiliar guises.

The SNP made great play of positioning itself to the left of 'new' Labour under Blair, Brown and Milliband. When Salmond became leader again in 2004, he declared: 'Independence is our idea, our politics are social democrat'. This fusion of Scottish nationalism with an invocation of social democracy saw the SNP scoop up all but three of Scotland's 59 MPs in 2015. Despite electoral setbacks since, it remains Scotland's largest party at Westminster. Of course, the SNP claim is contested. A recent *Scottish Left Review* editorial described the SNP as being 'social democratic in name but not in deed' and the magazine seeks to encourage debate on this issue with the aim of bringing the Scottish left together to fight austerity, wherever it comes from - Tory, Labour or SNP.

Labour's remarkable bounce back in the June election can't only be explained by May's disastrous campaign. Labour offered what, in

the heyday of post-war Keynesianism, would have been hailed as a solid social democratic programme of reform - taxing the rich, a National Investment Bank, ending NHS privatisation, bringing rail, water, electricity and the post back into public ownership, improving workers' rights and ending zero hours, preserving pensions, abolishing tuition fees and so on. Hardly revolutionary but forty years of neo-liberalism and a decade of Tory austerity make such proposals seem radical. If in June 2017, Labour had guaranteed the right to a second referendum it would have won more seats in Scotland. Instead, its Unionist stance was a gift to the Tories and a beleaguered British nationalism.

To understand social democracy we need to look at its origins. It was founded at the end of the nineteenth century and for a long period the terminology had a much different connotation than at present. Symbolically, the Second International was founded at a special congress in Paris in July 1889, the centenary of the storming of the Bastille. It proclaimed itself heir to the First International in which Marx himself played a leading role. Launched six years after his death, with what appeared revolutionary intent, the International became the focus for a host of flourishing workers' parties, which called themselves social democratic - a term synonymous with Marxism but a term Marx disliked, preferring instead 'communist'.

Social democracy grew to dominate the labour movement in the years leading up to the First World War. Influenced by the defeat of Chartism, the failure of the European revolutions of 1848 and the crushing of the Paris Commune in 1870, its leaders did not feel strong enough to directly challenge the state. Instead, they followed a strategy pioneered by socialists in Germany, taking advantage of limited electoral reforms to win votes and seats in local councils and parliaments. Alongside this electoral approach but subordinate to it, they focused on building unions and other forms of class organisation like co-operatives and sports clubs. The German SPD was the model for others.

An illegal organisation until 1890, by 1912 the SPD was polling 4m votes and had 112 deputies elected to the Reichstag. In 1914, it had 1m card-carrying members. 'Marxist' social democratic parties won members, votes and deputies. In Tsarist Russia, the Bolsheviks were a faction inside the Russian Social Democratic Party. The American Socialist Party was an affiliate. Weaker but significant movements developed in Britain, Chile, Spain and Uruguay, all of them affiliated to the Second International and apparently committed to the socialist reconstruction of society and opposition to imperialism and war. It was an illusion.

There were differences between the various parties but basically they combined a verbal hostility to capitalism with a practical activity that was limited to winning members and votes albeit the British and Australian labour parties were exceptional in lacking Marxist rhetoric and revolutionary pretensions. Karl Kautsky, theoretician of both the German party and the International, had long argued the downfall of capitalism was inevitable. His mechanical, 'do nothing' Marxism contradicted Marx's insistence on the centrality of class struggle and working class self-activity.

The impressive party apparatus became an end in itself. Confrontation with the state, or even the employers, was avoided where possible. As a political force social democracy was increasingly passive. The politics of the SPD - and most other parties that took their lead from it - claimed to be Marxist but the SPD was a reformist, not a revolutionary, party. It was geared to the patient work of convincing the workers to vote socialist in elections.

In Britain, the Labour Party, to quote Ernie Bevin 'came out of the bowels of the TUC'. In most of Europe, it was the other way round. In either case, it meant the separation of politics and economics. Though the German unions were strong, they were assigned an auxiliary and subsidiary role. By 1913, the SPD had a layer of parliamentarians, senior union

officials and full time workers. Having painstakingly built up a stake in bourgeoisie society, they were scared of losing it. Its leaders had a lot more to lose than their chains.

With the outbreak of war in 1914 the shadow boxing was over and the party bosses had to choose; maintain internationalism, oppose the war, face imprisonment and the seizure of their assets; or support their own state. Over a decade earlier, a section led by German right-wing social democrat Bernstein moved to reject Marxism, arguing society would be changed not by revolution, as Marx argued, but through winning parliament and using the state to bring about gradual reform.

‘Reform or Revolution?’ was how Rosa Luxemburg, the leader of the SPD left put it, saying: ‘People who pronounce themselves in favour of legislative reform in place of and in opposition to the conquest of political power and social revolution, do not really choose a more tranquil, slower road to the same goal, but a different goal’. Bernstein’s revisionism was rejected at the time but it was purely rhetorical on the part of SPD leadership- as the collapse of the Second International on the outbreak of war was to prove. Aside from the Bolsheviks and a few other brave souls, the leaders of European social democracy collapsed, ditching their internationalism and capitulating to the war drive of their own ruling classes.

As Tony Benn said: ‘The Labour Party has never been a socialist party, although there have always been socialists in it.’ It’s a party that, despite sometimes declaring its belief in a different sort of society, has when in power acted to manage capitalism and the British state. While the impetus for radical change has tended to come from below and from outside Labour, it has run into the sand once channeled through parliament.

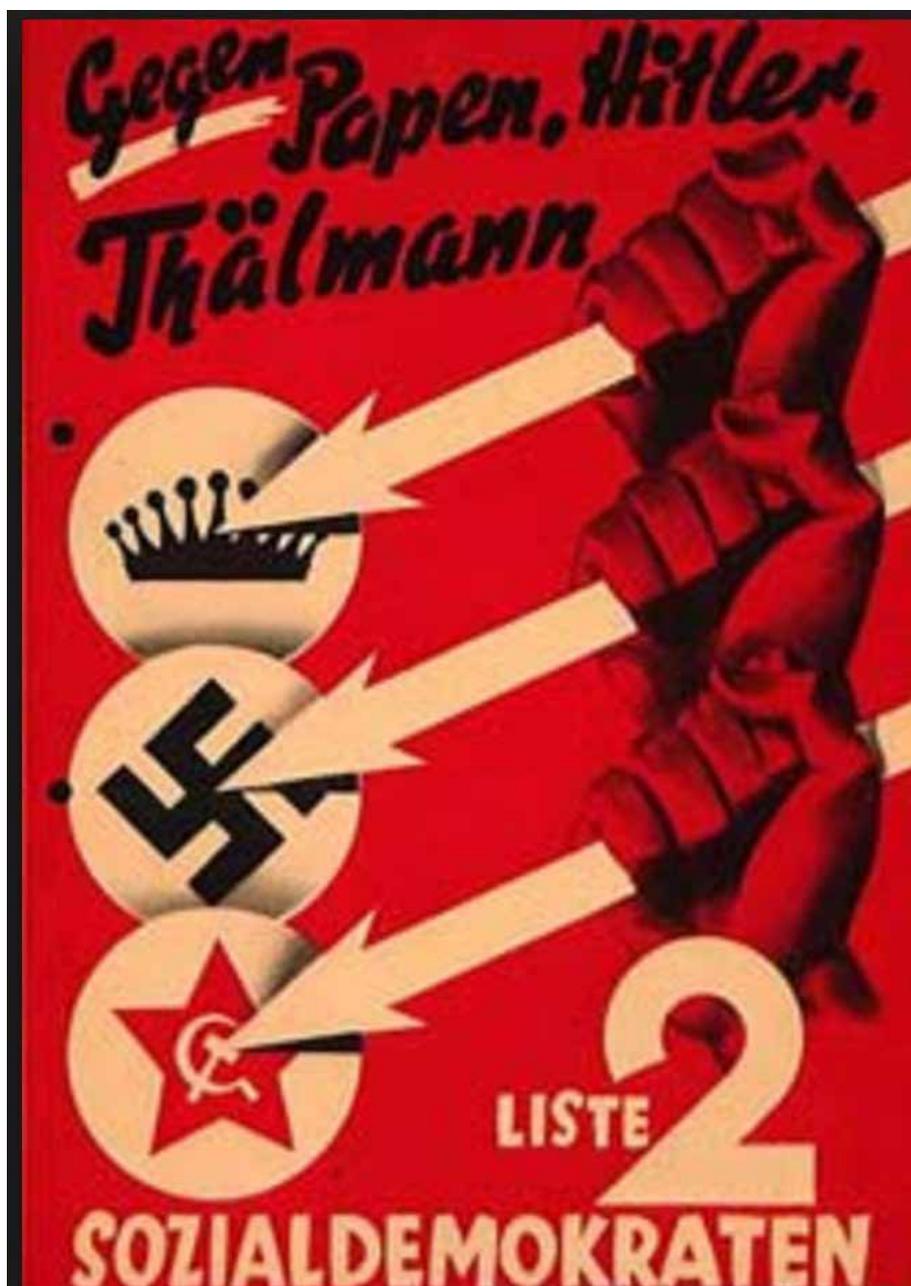
The most important Labour government was Atlee’s 1945 administration. It did carry out major popular reforms -the NHS, the welfare state and the nationalisation of basic industries. But during wartime, a consensus had developed at the very top that a reconstruction of British capitalism was necessary. As Tory Quentin Hogg conceded about

the balance of forces: ‘If we don’t give them reform they will give us revolution’. For the same reason very similar reforms were introduced in France under the De Gaulle’s far from radical regime and, lest we forget, it was the Atlee government who gave us the nuclear deterrent. The general pattern of social democratic governments everywhere since is that they are either destroyed or forced to abandon the modest reforms they were elected to implement – either by state terror like Chile in 1973 or by sabotaging the economy like the IMF in Britain in 1976 or the Troika in Greece in 2015.

Today, we are experiencing a revival of left reformism in Britain and that’s a good thing. Jeremy Corbyn and John

McDonnell honestly and consistently argue society can be transformed through the parliamentary framework. So do the leaders of the other left currents – La France Insoumise, Podemos and Syriza. A big section of the SNP rank-and-file argues it can happen quicker in an independent Scotland. The only thing that can defend a left government anywhere is popular struggle and mass resistance from below. If in doubt, watch the film ‘A Very British Coup’. But putting struggle first means breaking with the methods Labour and social democratic leaders have followed for a century.

*Dave Sherry is the author of recent books on the Russian Revolution (2017) and The First World War (2014) and is a member of the SWP.*



The three arrows represent social democracy smashing monarchy, fascism, communism in a German election poster of 1932.

# Death of the Fourth Estate as we know it?

Having just moved from Glasgow to Liverpool, Paul Holleran reflects upon the Scottish media

THE view from here is a different one than I had a few weeks ago, although I do, of course, retain specific knowledge and experience of 37 years as a journalist and national organiser for the NUJ. It is a different view but strangely similar to the one I had when worked my way through an apprenticeship and development as a skilled printer working in magazines, books and newspapers. I started in Liverpool in Seel House Press, a publisher of quality books and magazines - as well as the Liverpool and Everton football programmes. I am now back in my hometown after 41 years away.

My view of the media and the press, particularly in Scotland has been adapted and tempered by my work and political experiences, mostly out-with party membership influences, but an active decade in the Labour Party throughout the stormy 1980s can't be totally ignored.

In those days, I was a print union activist and shop steward or Father of the Chapel (FoC) as male representatives in the media are historically known. Women, of course, were Mothers of the Chapel (MoCs) and I am honoured to have worked with many very effective women reps and organisers in my time in what is still a male dominated industry. The print unions wielded power in the Labour Party and I was encouraged to join and participate by stalwarts such as Jim Friel, who went on to become President of SOGAT.

Dennistoun branch was active in many campaigns, supporting union and community battles at home and abroad. The Campaign for Press Freedom was one such affiliation and we set up a group which explored the relevant issues such as press ownership. This became pointedly personal when I was arrested on a picket line outside the *Stockport Messenger* during a dispute in 1983 triggered by owner Eddie Shah

attacking the print unions. The campaign was to become specifically topical then when News International then decided to take on the print unions, set up scab workforces in Wapping and Kinning Park and print their *Times*, *Sunday Times*, *News of the World* and *Sun* under new rules, with no union agreements.

This had a profound influence on me as the reality of worker versus publisher became more focussed. I was by this time active in joint media union negotiations and campaigns and when the Scottish unions reached a sensible agreement on the right to follow the job, over the technological changes and move to single key strokes, I was fortunate to be part of the re-deployment from print production to print journalism.

My employer was probably glad to get rid of their Group FoC (convenor) and encouraged me to wash the ink from my hands and step into the soon-to-be computerised newsrooms. I worked for Scottish & Universal Newspapers who were owned by George Outram & Co (*Herald*, *Evening Times*), a Scottish based company which traditionally had good relationships with the unions. However, the group was sold to the up and coming Trinity, an ambitious firm who went on to expand dramatically, taking over the *Liverpool Echo* and the Mirror Group. It was a time of change, technological change and ownership accruals and takeovers. There was massive de-recognition triggered by anti-union legislation introduced with gusto by Margaret Thatcher's governments. Newspaper owners jumped on the bandwagon and most employers took full advantage, de-recognising the NUJ in many parts of the industry.

In many ways it created the opportunity for the NUJ to make a fresh start. All bar two major companies had broken off relations with the unions and we went back to basics. We took two years but our strategy to establish the NUJ as the

representative body for journalists and as a major player in industry training processes paid off. The union took employers by surprise with massive votes in favour of restoring union rights. Every employer with the exception of DC Thomson was welcoming the NUJ back into negotiations within an impressive timescale. As companies consolidated their ownership credentials, smaller companies were swallowed up by the growing newspaper groups such as Trinity, Johnston Press and Newsquest as they built up massive portfolios of local newspapers.

The anti-union attacks of previous years had created disparities in staffing levels and salary levels among rival companies. This, in turn, triggered a high level of activity and organisation with chapels digging in for better terms and conditions and an on-going battle for fairer salary structures. At the same time, the union had to fight hard to maintain staffing levels as employers attempted to cut back the number of journalists, while closing print centres across the country. It was a great pity that the joint unions did not work together at that time as leverage could have been strengthened in joint actions.

The impact these battles had on the industry was severe with stark warnings of what was to come, falling circulations and advertising revenues, led to more job cuts and a further deterioration in quality of news provision, despite the efforts of the journalists fighting their corner. Specialist writers were lost, decent columnists were displaced from their jobs as costs were cut and circulation continued to fall.

In the last ten years, there has been more stability in Scotland, although redundancies are still regularly haunting newsrooms. There is less than half the number of journalists working on the major titles compared to 1994, although there has been a tangible increase in the number of journalists working in the online versions of the newspapers and broadcast outlets such as BBC and STV. The arrival of online news provision has had an obvious effect on the industry and public, in both the gathering and consumption of news. All news companies have attempted to make



their mark on online news, some with more success than others. Advertising revenues have grown, but not at the rate aspired to by employers. However, it is having some positive consequences as employers vie with each other for hits on their sites.

News gathering and the use of video journalism could be done better by newspapers, if they are to compete with the broadcasters. However, they need to keep investing as it is an important part of the media set up, if only the managing editors would hold their ground in face of demands from number crunchers in head offices for savings.

Many managing directors have told me over the last year that much of the advertising revenues are being swallowed up by companies such as Google and Facebook as they struggle to attract local businesses to take out space in their paper and or web site. The NUJ argues that relevant local news along with investigative reporting is essential for the survival of a local press. Indeed it is essential for local democracy.

The number of local newspapers that have closed in London, for example, is quite frightening and is at last alerting politicians to the democratic deficit. The Grenfell Tower fire disaster is a classic example of where the local accountability of the housing office and

local authority is almost non-existent since the closure or demise of the newspapers on their doorstep. The NUJ organised a conference in Edinburgh last March to explore the future of local newspapers, as part of a UK and Ireland wide campaign. Keynote speakers included Iain Stewart, *Scotsman* editor, Culture Minister-Fiona Hyslop and a leading author and academic from Illinois University, Bob McChesney.

Other speakers included Fiona Davidson from the NUJ who spoke about the role of women in the media, Paul Wood from the employee-owned West Highland Free Press, Michael Gray of Common Space and community activist, Jack Ferguson.

Bob McChesney spoke at length about the demise of the local press in the USA. He was convinced that this downturn in local accountability had indirectly led to the election of Donald Trump. He painted a frightening scenario about the lack of journalists in reporting on essential issues and a diminution in answerability of politicians and powers that be.

Much of the conference debated the ownership issue and the need to ensure every community has access to local journalists who can report on what is happening in their areas. There is a manifest threat to Scottish newspapers

as we were alerted by Johnston Press that at least 24 of the titles they own in Scotland are at risk in the foreseeable future, because of falling revenues.

These titles are mainly profitable but just not making enough money to be part of a corporate company like Johnston Press or their rivals Trinity or Newsquest. The NUJ has started the ball rolling in exploring ways of maintaining the future of local papers. Recently, I held talks with Paul Wood and some of his Trust colleagues at WHFP in Skye, discussing the model that has worked well for them as well as exploring other models operating in Scotland. There is a future for newspapers but not all under the ownership of major companies who have made massive profits over the years, have failed to invest sufficiently as revenues fell and do not have the civic responsibility to keep them open. Worker and employee ownership works with some titles and we have to examine the possible co-operative ownership model with others. I also believe there are potentially great opportunities for working in community type partnership with the BBC, but this requires interaction and engagement now. Next year may be too late for some.

*Paul Holleran is the former national organiser for the NUJ in Scotland. He now works for the GMB on Merseyside.*

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## Scottish Futures Trust is no magic panacea

*Jim and Margaret Cuthbert show the Scottish Futures Trust creates more problems than it solves*

In October 2017, we published a report on the Scottish Futures Trust (SFT). This report, 'Scottish Futures Trust and Hub Activities', was commissioned by the Labour Party but is actually a research report which could have been produced for any, (or no), political party. In this article, we summarise some main findings of our report. We then outline wider conclusions on the downsides of the increasing trend for government to rely on various types of external agency for delivering public services, based on our experience not just in relation to SFT, but other agencies.

The SFT was set up by the SNP Scottish Government in 2008. Its primary impact has been through the development of a number of policy initiatives for delivering public infrastructure, such as the Non Profit Distributing programme, the hub programme, and

the Growth Accelerator model. Most of these initiatives involve the setting up of various forms of public private partnership, designed so that the relevant capital expenditure is off the government's books. The impact of the SFT has been considerable – over £7bn of capital expenditure has been delivered or is in the pipeline. A major part of our report concentrates on the operation of the SFT's hub programme.

Some background first. Scotland has been divided into five hub areas, in each of which a company called a hubco has been established. Each hubco is a partnership between public sector bodies in the area (local authorities, health boards, police, fire), and private sector companies specialising in construction, finance, and facilities management. The hubcos were set up under 20 year contracts and are

designed to act as a first port of call for the provision of public infrastructure in their areas. When a requirement for new infrastructure is identified, for example for a new school, the hubco will develop a costed proposal. If this is accepted by the public sector client, then a special purpose vehicle company is set up to undertake the construction and management of the facility.

The special purpose vehicle is then funded by unitary charges paid by the public sector body throughout the life of the project. A key role in the operation of the hubs is played by what are known as the Tier 1 contractors: these were appointed at the time each hubco was formed – and in many cases the Tier 1 contractors are private sector partners in the hubco. The Tier 1 contractors tend to be large companies, in many cases headquartered outside Scotland, with

expertise in construction and facilities management. The Tier 1 contractors play the main part in the contract, and are responsible for any sub-contracting to small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs).

A major complication in carrying out our study was secrecy. The operation of the hubs is regarded as being beyond the scope of Freedom of Information, (FOI). This effectively puts the operation of the hub programme beyond adequate scrutiny. This is in itself an unacceptable state of affairs. But the situation is made doubly unacceptable because the terms of the original contracts under which the hubcos are set up were designed so that aspects of hubco activity would, in effect, be within the operation of FOI.

Those indicators which are published in relation to hub activities are limited: they are often not backed up by clear definitions: they suffer from the lack of an audit trail to enable the data to be checked: and are sometimes of a non-standard form. In our report, we recommended that the information produced by the hubs requires to be refined in order to be meaningful and more useful in determining how Scottish based SMEs are faring under the hub initiative.

It is widely recognised that public procurement is one of the fundamental levers which government has for influencing the development of the economy. However, the way in which the hub initiative has been designed raises important questions about the long run structure of the construction industry in Scotland, and has potentially important implications for the vitally important small business sector. In particular, we pose the following questions:

- Does the advantage which Tier 1 status will inevitably confer on a particular group of firms mean that they will inevitably come to dominate the large scale construction sector in Scotland, and will it effectively prevent other firms from growing?
- Does the fact that the group of Tier 1 contractors is so heavily dominated by firms which are not headquartered in Scotland mean that Scotland will lose out on certain high quality types of employment – e.g., headquarter jobs, research etc?
- Does the hub structure provide a good environment for encouraging

organic growth in the economy, particularly since the hub approach will tend to limit SMEs to a subcontracting role to other private sector firms?

The report highlights a number of technical financial issues surrounding the funding of the hub programme, which need to be reviewed. To give just one example, there is a good deal of secrecy surrounding the terms under which bank lending is secured for hub projects: is this degree of secrecy justified?

More generally, our study identified a number of major concerns about the Scottish Government's role in relation to the SFT. One such concern is whether the Scottish Government is exercising adequate scrutiny over SFT activities, in particular in relation to the question of whether the SFT is still fulfilling the Scottish Government's strategic objectives. Our study shows that policy tends to be developed in an *ad hoc* and incremental fashion. An example of this is the response to the new accounting rules introduced under the European System of Accounts 2010.

Another major concern is whether the financial commitments being entered into in relation to SFT projects will be sustainable in the long term. SFT financing, in effect, largely boils down to the public sector borrowing against future public sector income streams. Current safeguards are inadequate, so it is important that appropriate ones are put in place to ensure that the revenue consequences of SFT projects are indeed sustainable.

All in all, these, and other issues identified in our report require attention – and we recommended that there should be a thorough review of SFT activities. However, there are also wider lessons to be drawn. Our experience in researching other areas (like water, economic development, PFI, and utility regulation) indicates that the kind of problems we identified with the SFT are typical of what is likely to happen when Government chooses to exercise its functions not directly, but through agencies.

There are a number of reasons for this. Too often, when public services are delivered by means of agencies, the relevant expertise within government itself becomes hollowed out – so government is unable to exercise a proper scrutiny role. In addition,

government often uses the existence of an executive agency as an excuse to shuffle off awkward questions – and to not get too involved in the detail of what may actually be going on. Agencies themselves are likely to develop a culture and agenda of their own: and, importantly, we have evidence that agencies may well not co-operate adequately with each other, for example in the vital area of progressing overall economic development. They are also likely to attach little priority to developing adequate information systems. And where the agency, or network of agencies, crosses over into the private sector, then Freedom of Information will not apply – and the whole question of commercial confidentiality raises its head.

This is why problems like secrecy, poor information systems, lack of accountability, and *ad hoc* development of policy arise with agencies. What can be done? The fundamental requirement for any improvement is that government must adopt the right attitude towards the agencies through which it operates. It cannot regard the setting up of an agency as a means of making life easier for Ministers, and for avoiding responsibility for awkward questions about service delivery. It has to remain firmly in charge of policy development, and ensuring accountability. Once government accepts this self-imposed discipline, then the rest should be relatively easy, provided the following three critical requirements are met, namely:

- That the agency, or network of agencies, is operating proper information systems, capable of producing auditable data, and also capable of being flexibly interrogated to illuminate all aspects of agency activity.
- That the agency is required to adhere to the principles of FOI: and that periodic checks are made to ensure that these principles are being adhered to, not just in the letter, but also in spirit.
- That government maintains, in-house, real expertise in the relevant policy area: so that it can meaningfully scrutinise agency activities, and take the lead in periodic policy development.

*Jim Cuthbert is a former Scottish Office Chief Statistician, and Margaret Cuthbert a former business consultant.*

# License to profit and plunder

*Campbell Martin exposes the corruption in North Ayrshire over a PPP deal*

It will come as no surprise to most people that a whiff of controversy still surrounds the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and Public Private Partnerships (PPP). PFIs were introduced by the Conservative Government led by John Major, and were touted as a way of funding public sector capital projects, without the money having to appear as public expenditure. The private sector would take care of the funding for new schools and hospitals, with councils and health boards repaying the money as revenue expenditure over 30 years. We were told it was a 'win-win' deal for the public.

In opposition, the Labour Party strongly criticised and opposed PFI, but when Tony Blair and Gordon Brown entered office in 1997, the funding scheme was warmly embraced and given a new name. Labour rolled-out Public Private Partnerships with the evangelical zeal of the truly converted. Councils and health boards across Britain were told there was only one game in town – PPP – but that funding was available, so they should fill their boots. New schools and hospitals began to spring up in virtually every part of Britain, with Labour Party MPs, MSPs and councillors all claiming to be delivering new facilities for their constituents. On the face of it, Labour was performing an economic miracle, but, in reality, it was little more than an economic con.

Recently, in a documentary by MacAulay Gibson Productions, I reported on what happened in one PPP project, where North Ayrshire Council entered into a contract to build and maintain four new schools. Again, on the face of it, all seemed fine. The Council had two bids, providing the 'genuine competition' required by European Union Procurement Regulations, and the whole thing was scrutinised by civil servants in the then Scottish Executive's Financial Partnerships Unit, which, in turn, was overseen by Partnerships UK. The latter body was staffed by civil servants seconded from the UK Treasury and by former employees of large corporations involved in delivering construction contracts.

However, as revealed in the documentary, the reality of the North Ayrshire procurement process was very different. Investigations showed one of the bids received by North Ayrshire Council came from a company formed after the local authority had invited tenders for its contract to build four schools. Comprehensive Estate Services Limited (CES), as a newly-formed company, had no accounts and had issued share capital valued at just £2.00. In addition, CES had no office. The headquarters it listed in bid documents was actually the office of a chartered accountant in the Fife village of Strathmiglo. The accountant said he let CES use his office as a postal address.

The bid documents submitted by Comprehensive Estate Services Limited, copies of which were secured under Freedom of Information legislation, indicated that CES was a subsidiary of a major Singapore-based construction company called CPG Corporation. Documents stated that CPG Corporation was the major shareholder in CES, at 56%. However, when the Singapore corporation was contacted, President and Chief Executive, Mr Pang Toh Kang, replied: 'Comprehensive Estate Services is not a subsidiary of CPG Corporation', adding, 'there is no cross-shareholding between CES and CPG'.

North Ayrshire Council was told about this lie in the bid submission of Comprehensive Estate Services Limited. Indeed, the local authority was made aware of further blatant lies and misrepresentations in the paperwork submitted by the Fife company. The Council, though, took no action and continued to publicly state that the bid from CES was credible and viable, and provided the

required 'genuine competition'.

The reality was that North Ayrshire Council only ever had one credible and viable bid for its school-building project, valued in 2006 at £380m. There was no 'genuine competition'. In fact, there was no competition whatsoever. By allowing the CES bid to remain until the very end of its procurement process, North Ayrshire Council gave the pretence of competition. The matter was raised with the Crown Office Procurator Fiscal Service, which instructed the then Strathclyde Police to carry out an investigation. Less than two weeks after the police investigation commenced – and without the complainers being interviewed – the enquiry was concluded. The Crown Office Procurator Fiscal Service then stated the matter was closed as it had been found there was no evidence of criminality.

In the MacAulay Gibson documentary, two former senior detectives reviewed the evidence originally presented to the police and Procurator Fiscal. In the opinion of one ex-detective, the evidence showed 'criminality from start to finish'. The other former officer stated a common law crime of Forgery and Uttering should have been pursued. All of this information relates to a PPP contract now costing North Ayrshire Council over £1m every month.

Full details of the investigation into the North Ayrshire Schools PPP Project are revealed in 'The Only Game in Town' (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=paLSPNPfQXM&t=3s>).

*Campbell Martin is a journalist and former SNP MSP*



# Measuring economic democracy

Andrew Cumbers introduces a new tool to advance debate and policy

How do we develop a democratic economy, driven by social justice, rather than exchange value? For me, alongside tackling climate change, this is the critical economic question of our time. The alienation and marginalisation felt by many from three decades of increasingly autocratic neo-liberal economic governance is becoming politically manifested in different ways. The on-going march of the far right across Europe, North America and further afield should be a warning about the dangers of neglecting social justice and democratic engagement. We need to fashion a left politics that gives people meaningful control of their lives, rather than the elite self-serving faux populism of Trump, Farage and others.

There is, however, a more hopeful and inspiring economic narrative emerging through the Sanders and Corbyn insurgencies on the left, as well as movements such as Podemos in Spain, which involves the rejuvenation of alternative economic thinking. In Scotland, this has been partly invoked by the radical independence campaign, the Common Weal and the intriguing recent commitments by the Scottish Government to a new public bank and public ownership in the energy sector. Although, this new economic thinking is still nascent, it does build on important alternative and longer established new left traditions of a more participatory and democratic economics from the 1960s and 1970s.

Developing a left progressive economics for the twenty first century means coming to terms with dramatically changing global conditions, which include the restructuring of work, deepening inequalities and an increased concentration of wealth, the gig economy and the collapse of secure employment, and the decline of unions as a powerful countervailing force to corporate and financialised capitalism.

The alienation from neo-liberal globalisation, which is fanning the flames of reactionary economics and xenophobia of Trump and his ilk, is driven by growing individual economic insecurity, and has been produced by disciplinary neo-liberal labour policies around welfare and labour

market deregulation under the guise of a flexible economy. Combating this requires new thinking and policy around how we generate individual economic freedom - not freedom just to exercise property rights and exploit the labour of others - but freedom to choose how you exercise your own labour.

This is an important but neglected agenda for economic democracy, bringing together the enlightenment liberalism of John Stuart Mill with radical political economy, remembering that freedom from economic servitude was the animating core of Marx's thought. In an increasingly automated economy, where decent, secure and well-remunerated work becomes scarce, there is a need to rethink how individuals, families and communities secure the income and resources needed to live decent lives. This needs new thinking around the redistribution of work, new initiatives around working time, and a rebalancing of work and leisure to advance individual economic freedoms and rights to decent sustainable livelihoods.

A second key component of a revitalised economic democracy is the need to open up the economy and in particular decision-making to broader public participation and engagement. Here, one might compare favourably Denmark's associational economy or Germany's federalised system, where there are high levels of grassroots and cooperative traditions, strong unions and business associations, with countries such as Britain or the US where elite corporate interests dominate the economic discourse, often with the result that policy-making becomes very restrictive and tends to favour established vested interests (e.g. property owners, financial elites, media moguls).

Taking on board these themes - in rethinking how economic democracy becomes a broader agenda to democratise the economy in its entirety - with colleagues at the University of Glasgow, Nottingham Trent University, Oxfam and the New Economics Foundation, I have recently developed an international index of economic democracy (EDI), funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

The Index is novel in developing a broader definition of economic democracy – beyond the usual focus on union rights or levels of cooperative enterprise (what we term 'associational economic democracy') to incorporate also individual economic rights, levels of public participation and the nature of economic decision-making. The index looked at 32 OECD members. The main findings can be summarised as follows:

- There is a stark difference between the 'social' model of northern European capitalism and a more market-oriented Anglo-American model. Hence the Nordic countries score among the best, with their higher levels of social protection, employment rights and democratic participation. The reverse is true of the more deregulated economies of the English-speaking world; Britain performs relatively poorly, while the US ranks bottom. Japan also ranks near the bottom.
- The best performing countries tend to be Nordic, with Sweden and Denmark clearly ahead of the rest; Iceland and Finland also feature strongly. Austria also performs well. Notably, the top ten countries all have relatively small population sizes (under 20m), although our statistical analysis suggests it is not population size *per se* that is responsible for this result but particular institutional configurations and regulatory frameworks.
- Countries from Eastern Europe are among the worst performing countries with Southern European countries, especially Greece, also performing relatively poorly. Slovenia is something of a geographical outlier, the best performing country from Eastern or Southern Europe, recording an EDI comparable to the Nordic countries. This is largely because, in its transition to capitalism, it pursued a more managed and social democratic model, rather than the extreme 'shock therapy' imposed elsewhere by free market enthusiasts and consultants.

Following the construction of the index, we have used statistical analysis

to explore the relationship between economic democracy, inequality and poverty. A striking finding is the strong, negative and statistically significant correlation between the EDI and poverty and inequality measures. In other words, as EDI rises, poverty rates and inequality fall. Econometric analysis also suggests that there is also a relatively strong causal relation between the EDI and inequality (as measured by the Gini Coefficient). In other words, high levels of economic democracy help to reduce inequality.

These findings suggest that a combination of individual employment

security, decentralised economic decision-making, and greater transparency and democratic engagement in macroeconomic decision-making enhance economic democracy and counter inequality and poverty. This challenges much of the conventional policy wisdom of the 1980s onwards regarding the perceived benefits of Anglo-American style flexible labour market policies, employment and financial deregulation, and 'independent' central bank-led macroeconomic management, suggesting such approaches may contribute to poverty and inequality.

The findings raise concern about the EU's approach to economic management in terms of Greece's low ranking, and the impact of the Troika's policies on Greek national income (and, hence, poverty levels). Moreover, there is also a warning for French president, Emmanuel Macron, who has been a recent advocate of Anglo-American style flexible labour market policies. His labour market reforms could play into the hands of Marine Le Pen and the far right next time around.

*Andrew Cumbers is Professor in Regional Political Economy at the University of Glasgow*

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## Why we need a Workers' Rights Bill before leaving the EU

*Chris Stephens outlines the rationale for his Bill*

On 12 December 2017, I spoke in the House of Commons in the aptly named debate, 'Regulations to deal with the deficiencies arising from Withdrawal', in relation to an amendment that sought to bring a measure of protection on workers' rights post-Brexit. Specifically, the amendment stated that no changes were to be made to workers' rights unless this was signed off by the Joint Ministerial Committee. There were other amendments on workers' rights which we supported - however, this one was designed to expose the scant respect for the devolved administrations if ruled out by the government. It was and, thus, provided us all with yet another example of the blatant Tory power grab back to Westminster.

It wasn't much of a surprise to discover the government had no intention of even pretending to consult or involve the Scottish or Welsh Assembly governments in any changes to employment law. What about Northern Ireland? Well, that's one of the reasons I found it odd that no parties apart from the SNP and the Greens called for the devolution of employment law when the Smith Commission was looking at further powers for Scotland, given that divergence already exists in this area as employment law is devolved in Northern Ireland.

As I said in the debate, you can't trust the Tories on workers' rights, given the

appalling statements made during the passage of the *Trade Union Act 2016* - the *Anti-Trade Union Act* as I call it - when their true colours broke through the facade that some in that party had been trying to construct about being the real 'workers' party.

When he was an MEP, one of the Lords' ministers who was moved to the 'Exiting the EU team' in October, Lord Callanan, is on the record as stating that in order to help business 'we could scrap the working time directive, the agency workers' directive, the pregnant workers' directive and all the other barriers to actually employing people'.

Perhaps, I shouldn't have been surprised when only a few days after making my speech about the threat Brexit poses to workers' rights, I woke up on the following Sunday morning to find my twitter feed full of threads incredulous about the latest Tory spin on the golden opportunity and pay bonanza that awaits workers post-Brexit when the Working Time Directive is abolished! In the *Sun* and *Sunday Times*, this has been touted as a welcome freedom for 'millions of families the chance to top up their wages and help small firms eager to cash in on the new global trade market'.

With seven other MPs, I pressed Theresa May on this when she made her statement on the 18 December on the outcome of the latest European Council. I asked her to confirm that

there have been no discussions (planned or actual) in Cabinet or in the European negotiations about scrapping the Working Time Directive, Agency Worker Directive or Pregnant Workers Directive. None of her answers ruled out cabinet discussion on the issue.

One of the questions I believe all would-be parliamentarians should be asked is what piece of legislation would they want to table to affect change, should they have the opportunity to bring in a Private Members' Bill. I have had a workers' rights bill at the top of my wish list since I first thought

about standing for parliament. I haven't been fortunate enough to win the annual ballot, although my SNP neighbour, Stewart McDonald did this year and he has tabled a Bill to end unpaid work trials, the *Unpaid Trial Work Periods (Prohibition) Bill*.

There are other mechanisms available, and I used the Ten Minute Rule Bill route to lodge a Workers' (Definitions and Rights) Bill when it became clear that Brexit was going to provide the hard right wing in the Tory party with the opportunity they crave to reshape society and the economy in the way they want.

Supporters of a hard Brexit have a vision for the world of work that hard wires inequality even further into an already deeply unequal society. With the exception of a small coterie of bonus

rich executives, sport/entertainment stars, and some highly skilled people (unable to be replaced by a robot or an algorithm), their vision if fully realised would result in the vast majority of jobs becoming low paid, insecure and highly dependent on the worker being totally flexible. Dismantling social protections is the key to maximising the opportunities for exploitation, whether it be eroding employment rights or dismantling the welfare state.

I would highly recommend Jacques Peretti's book 'Done; the secret deals that are changing our world', a follow-on from the excellent documentaries he's produced for a fuller analysis of what is being done to remove any power or choice we have left and leave workers exposed to the full rigours of market forces.

In the aftermath of Brexit, there was bewilderment from many who supported 'remain' about the motives of the right wing 'leave' campaign. One of the most puzzled laments from remainers is 'why would they want to destroy jobs and the economy?' as the cruel fiction that leaving would provide millions to spend on the NHS has been exposed for the 'Big Lie' that it is. That mystery is easily solved if you accept there are those seeking money making opportunities that can only come from a country with a destroyed manufacturing base, heavily debt dependent

population and with the fastest growth in jobs in the 'gig' economy.

The Taylor Review on the gig economy is little more than a plaster facade to cover the government's unwillingness to improve workers' rights in the most exploitative work environments. It's a weak set of proposals and talking points that leaves the balance of power with employers and big business, and falls well short of addressing the manifest issues facing those in insecure employment. Not only is it a fig leaf, the report has been put out for 'consultation', code for 'kicking into the long grass'.

One of the most chilling interviews I ever saw was with a food delivery cycle worker who admitted that she never met anyone from the company on a day-to-day basis and all her deliveries were computer generated. It was a perfect example of how to keep a worker isolated as she admitted she had no sense of whether business was busy or slack or how anyone else was doing.

So, now more than ever we need to fight to protect the rights workers have and seek to bring the isolated and marginalised workers under the umbrella. The Workers' Rights Bill I'm campaigning on has been informed by many discussions I've had with unions, academics and the third sector and is going to focus on four specific areas, namely 1) A clear definition of what

is a 'worker'; 2) zero hour contracts only to be allowed once agreed with a recognised union; 3) appropriate notice of shift changes; and 4) that a claim can be made against a principal contractor if subcontractor ceases trading.

Linked to the first item - a definition of worker - should also be a statement of employment on the first day of a job. This is in addition to a full contract to be signed by both parties and which details pay, terms and conditions. However, a simple requirement for the employer to provide a written confirmation that someone is employed on day one shouldn't be too much of a burden and is a reasonable minimum.

I hope for a measure of cross party support for the Bill and will work with anyone who shares this concern for what we are facing in the coming months and years. It is frustrating to have the sense of the clock being turned back to Victorian standards of employment, with technology being used as the modernising twist on basic exploitation. However, I strongly believe that the party who promoted the Master and Servants Act in days gone by shouldn't be allowed to ride roughshod over hard won protections, and that workers' rights need to be safeguarded as never before.

*Chris Stephens is the (SNP) MP for Glasgow South West and chair of the PCS union parliamentary group.*

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## The art of occupation

*Gregor Gall analyses the BiFab occupation, showing the conditions under which the workers won*

**T**he occupation, accompanied by a work-in, undertaken by hundreds of workers at BiFab (Burntisland Fabrications) in late 2017 to successfully save their jobs serves as a useful prompt to reconsider the utility of the occupation tactic and its frequency of usage as the size of the manufacturing sector continues to contract and as public sector workplaces continue to shut in the enduring 'age of austerity'.

So, for a week in late November 2017, workers at three fabrications yards (Burntisland and Methil in Fife, and Arnish on the Isle of Lewis) staged a work-in and occupation of the yards in response to BiFab

announcing it was about to enter into administration (as a prequel to receivership) as a result of only being paid 40% for the 77% of work it had carried out for its client, Seaway Heavy Lifting (SHL), which had been contracted by energy provider, SSE, to build an offshore wind turbine farm. Workers faced both not being paid their due wages and mass redundancy. The workforce at the yards comprised 250 workers employed by BiFab and 1,150 sub-contractor workers, and were organised by the GMB and Unite unions.

In order to put pressure on SHL and SSE as well as the Scottish Government (which has a green

energy policy and licensed the offshore farm), the workers agreed to work without wages with the purpose of continuing production of the jackets for turbines while also taking control of the yards so that, in the words of Gary Cook, a GMB Scottish organiser, 'Nothing will come and go without the say so of the action committee' in order to maintain control of their key bargaining chip, the wind turbines jackets, and prevent asset stripping. The workers pledged to continue to carry out the occupation and work-in until Christmas and beyond if necessary to secure their jobs. In a joint statement, the regional secretaries of Unite Scotland, Pat

Rafferty, and GMB Scotland, Gary Smith, then said: 'Make no mistake these yards would be closed today if it wasn't for the dignity and determination of the workers and their families in Fife and Lewis to save their jobs and industry. With their futures on a knife edge they worked for nothing, stayed strong and resolute and by staying united they have won their future'.

The work-in was used as a legitimatising tactic for the occupation, whereby the workers sought to show that they were the victims who remained willing to work. Management did not obstruct the occupation and work-in, owing to their temporary alignment of interests with the workforce, namely, to gain payment from SHL and SSE for the work done. A high profile, large demonstration was held outside the Scottish Parliament, crowning extensive media coverage during the week. The two unions, working together, called for BiFab to be taken into public sector ownership if the company did go into receivership. These pressures forced the Scottish Government to intervene in order to broker a deal between SHL and SSE to solve BiFab's liquidity problem with the effect that wages were paid and employment guaranteed until April 2018. The Scottish Government also pledged to provide commercial loans to BiFab if necessary.

The *Solidarity* newspaper (24 November 2017) opined: 'The message from the dispute, short as it was, is: direct action works' and the *Scottish Socialist Voice* (25 November 2017) ventured: 'It is [a] timely reminder to workers battling low or falling pay and lousy working conditions of the potential power of united action to protect jobs and living standards. It signals the truth of the old adage, 'If you stop running they'll stop chasing you'. Meanwhile, *The Socialist* (22 November 2017), like other left newspapers, quoted Gary Smith, speaking to workers at the demonstration outside the Scottish Parliament: 'If you had not occupied those yards then your jobs would

have gone and the yards shut'. In doing so, the left press has showed a deficiency in understanding the interaction of processes and outcomes at work and the specificity of the conditions under which they take place. The message that direct action is 'possible' and 'works' in the case of BiFab particularly does not take into account the factors of group cohesion, generation of a usable bargaining asset, ability to create political pressure, buoyant product demand, and the strategic importance of energy infrastructure.

For example, the aspect of group cohesion was highlighted by solidarity strikes in 2013 and 2015 when directly employed workers at BiFab struck in support of contractor workers, and the intersection of public and private interests provided for the opportunity for both economic and political power to be exercised by workers. Identifying and understanding the existence of such factors as well as their inter-relationships is as vital to understanding why collective resistance is possible as it is to how it can be successfully deployed, and whether such successes can be replicated in other instances because struggle *per se* is not guarantee of success.

Public awareness of the occupation tactic has been kept alive to some extent in Scotland by the celebration of previous occupations. The manner of these celebrations has given both profile and legitimacy to the tactic. Thus, similar to the earlier thirtieth celebration of the Lee Jeans occupation in Greenock of 1981 involving the production of a BBC documentary and a motion in the Scottish Parliament in 2011, generating sympathetic news coverage, the Caterpillar occupation

of 1987 was also marked by a BBC documentary and a motion in the Scottish Parliament in 2017 laid down by Richard Leonard. The Lee Jeans occupation also experienced further iconisation when it was became the subject of a musical performed by members of the former workforce in 2017. The fortieth anniversary of the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders (UCS) work-in occupation was also widely commemorated in 2011 in Scotland with similar celebrations (exhibition, gala concert) and widespread sympathetic publicity. Such celebrations kept alive some popular historical memory of the tactic for the last major occupation of a workplace was the successful seven-week Glacier occupation in Glasgow in 1996.

This suggests, in line with the analysis above concerning group cohesion, bargaining assets, political pressure, product demand and strategic importance, that historical knowledge and public awareness are far from being necessary, let alone sufficient, to generate the usage of the occupation or sit-in. So it is in this context that, while the actions of the BiFab workforce can rightly be applauded, a hard headed analysis shows why – compared to the 1970s and 1980s – that the tactic of the occupation or sit-in has not been widely used by workers since. The hard headed analysis consists of assessing the balance of power between capital, labour and the state with regard to workforce group cohesion, bargaining assets for workers, political pressure, product demand and strategic importance of the work undertaken.

*Gregor Gall is professor of industrial relations at the University of Bradford*



# Universal Credit equals misery for all those dependent on it

*Sandra Webster says it's time for the left to organise against this injustice*

The roll-out of the Tory government's flagship policy is woefully behind schedule. However by this time next year all of Scotland and the UK will be covered with individuals and their families in work age benefits having to apply. It is the responsibility of the left to not only support all who are affected by this cruel regime, but help organise a campaign against it and offer an alternative.

It was Frank Field and 'new' Labour which first mooted the concept of Universal Credit – a single payment instead of having to claim for different benefits. This was over six years ago. After the Tories came to power, Iain Duncan Smith announced this as their flagship policy stating it would make 'work pay'. Individuals and families would receive a single monthly payment, one per household as working families did. Even at this early stage, the third sector and charities warned of the dangers of paying housing benefit directly instead of to landlords and of concerns for children and partners who would no longer receive any payment. It has long been accepted that child benefit should be paid to the main family carer of children, providing a very basic safety net of regular income. As a remnant of a decent welfare state, this is likely to be demolished as we move towards the Americanization of state benefits.

'Work must pay' according to the Tories and, if this means single parents having to travel long distances and be unable to care for school age children, so be it. In the areas where Universal Credit has been trialled, there have been reports of individuals and their families facing extreme poverty. This is an online system and, without access to a computer, people face a harsh sanction system. Although a phone line free of charge will be up and running in January after a public outcry, many report trying to stand in a free Wi-Fi area to speak to a human on the helpline which can take hours.

It is the most vulnerable in our

society who face cuts in local services as well as these at a national level. Duncan-Smith at the beginning said families with a disabled person would not be affected but this has been conveniently forgotten and never announced. People with disabilities and unpaid carers will face the firing squad which is Universal Credit. So will people who receive housing benefit both in and not in work. This will include social landlords. Councils and housing associations have made public their dismay that in the many areas piloting Universal Credit many tenants have gone into arrears and their income from rent is being reduced. Private landlords who prop up a system with insufficient social housing have threatened to not take on or evict tenants on Universal Credit.

Like many of the binary policy choices of the Tories, Universal Credit is more than just a payment - it is propaganda promoting the concept of the 'feckless poor'. If an emergency happens and no other help is available, people may use their Universal Credit payment and face arrears in housing. What will happen to them during the assessment process when a new claim is made or during the sanction regime? Those on Universal Credit may find themselves facing the fear of losing their home.

The left has known about the impact of Universal Credit for years. Nowadays, the murmurs of 'down with this' are increasing as even Tory MPs and Frank Fields are seeing what is

happening to actual people, not just statistics on a piece of paper, alarming. We all know by now that anyone moving to Universal Credit before last Christmas will not receive a payment until the New Year. Some people have waited much longer and face having to apply again if there is a change in income.

Many of us work in our local communities helping fill out forms and applications as statutory services are overwhelmed. It is time to form a resistance rather than trying to help and plug gaps. Like the poll and bedroom taxes, this should lead to a campaign by all on the left. We need to provide education in order to be effective in supporting those affected. A Citizen's Income and a decent minimum wage are essential to our message as our stronger unions with greater coverage. We have to hold both Holyrood and Westminster governments accountable and let them just blame each other. Fine speeches are good but action is essential now. By this time next year, Universal Credit will be rolled out over all of Scotland and Britain. It is now time for action and time to do what we do best by standing with those affected.

*Sandra Webster is an unpaid carer. She is an anti-poverty campaigner and writer as well as member of the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP).*



# Cuts to addiction services in England and Wales since 2010

*Paul Harrold lays out the devastating impact of Tory austerity on the vulnerable*

Since 2010, successive Tory governments have aimed to save public money by cutting addiction services. Since addiction is often stigmatised, perhaps these politicians feel justified in cutting these unarguably essential services. These cuts really started to take hold following the enactment of the *Health and Social Care Act 2012*. This Act meant addiction services is now solely commissioned by local authorities and not the NHS.

Before 2012, long-term government investment in addiction services saw year-on-year decreases in drug-related deaths. These improvements have now been utterly wiped out. Why is this? Because under the NHS, local authorities' spending on addiction treatment isn't ring fenced. Most local authorities have seen their own budget reduced by the government, and so addiction services have been chopped to help local authorities make savings required by these cuts. An example of this injustice is in the City of Birmingham. Addiction services saw their budget cut from £26 to £19 in 2015-16.

Following the enactment of the *Health and Social Care Act 2012*, drug-related deaths have sharply increased:

- Deaths involving heroin and/or morphine doubled between 2012 and 2015 from 579 to 1,201. That's a 107% increase. The mortality rate for deaths involving heroin/morphine declined between 2008 and 2012, with a particularly sharp fall between 2009 and 2011. The recent reversal

means the mortality rate in 2015 was the highest since records began in 1993.

- There were 2,479 drug related deaths involving both legal and illegal drugs registered in England and Wales in 2015. This was 48% higher than 2005, and the highest since comparable records began in 1993.
- These increases have occurred despite an overall decrease in the number of people using illicit drugs. In 2005/06, 10.5% of adults aged 16 to 59 had taken an illegal drug in the last year. This decreased to 8.4% in 2015/16.

Staffing levels have been hit hardest by these cuts. Staffing cuts mean fewer psychiatrists, psychiatric nurses and clinical psychologists are available to assist people suffering from addiction issues. Addiction services are instead relying on doctors without specialist qualifications and volunteers. The number of trainee addiction psychiatrists has reduced by 60% since 2006. In 2006, there were 52 trainee psychiatrists. In 2016, this number has decreased to 21. This means addiction services find it difficult to access sufficiently qualified staff members. This has decreased the quality of addiction services and diminished the safety of patient care.

Harm reduction is used to describe the methadone programme. This is when those addicted to heroin are given methadone as a 'replacement'. Whilst the merits of this approach are

debatable, thousands of people have come to depend on methadone to control their addiction to opiates, and going without really forces these people back onto street heroin. Since 2012, local authorities have begun to limit the amount of time patients may stay on a methadone programme. Also, 'payment by results' contracts mean many local authorities are unwilling to offer the methadone programme to patients with complex mental health needs.

This overall state-of-affairs means many people are seeking out the assistance of A&E instead of specific addiction services. The number of hospital admissions in 2015/16 relating to drug poisoning was 15,074. This represents a 51% increase compared to 2005/05. The Royal College of Psychiatrists proposes a three-part solution:

- A return to joint addiction service commissioning between the NHS and local authorities
- There must be at least 60 addictions psychiatrist training posts in England
- There can be no further cuts to local authorities' budgets for these services

All this information is visually represented in an infographic which can be found at [https://www.cassioburycourt.com/article/102/cuts-to-addiction-services-since-2010-\[infographic\]](https://www.cassioburycourt.com/article/102/cuts-to-addiction-services-since-2010-[infographic])

*Paul Harrold is an addiction worker at an alcohol rehab in London known as Cassiobury Court.*



The Jimmy Reid  
Foundation

## Update from the Jimmy Reid Foundation

The programme of work for 2018 for the Foundation includes papers on sport in society, education, energy, the Fair Work Framework and public sector reform. All these will be published in due course on our website (<http://reidfoundation.org/>). The Foundation is also undertaking research work for a number of unions in Scotland like the EIS, FBU and UNISON. It is also pleased to welcome Professors Ruth Dukes and Graham Watt from the University of Glasgow and Dr Kathryn Burnett from the University of the West of Scotland to its project board which oversees the work of the Foundation.

# No Jamaican joy in sight for German political establishment

*Victor Grossman reports on the political machinations on rightward moving terrain*

It's not so nice to say it but Germany is in an almighty mess! It's not had a proper government since the September 2017 elections. Perhaps some agreement will have been reached by the time you read this. But as yet the old deposed ministers still rule as temporary 'caretakers', leftovers after the uncomfortable four-year wedlock, like divorcees stuck in the same flat. The Social Democrats (SPD) are junior partners. Their seniors and colleagues - though traditional foes - belong to the 'Union', Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its single-state sibling, the Christian Social Union (CSU) from Germany's biggest, most right-biased Bavaria. All three were trounced, the SPD so brutally - at an all-time low of 20.5% - that its leader, Martin Schulz, who led the way to defeat, swore: 'The coalition was our undoing! Never again! We must now opt for opposition and reassemble our ranks'.

The Union lost even more voters but, still the strongest with 33%, it faced the task of finding enough deputies to achieve a 355 majority in the 709-seat Bundestag. The 69 from the LINKE (Left), still 'nasty Reds' for those conservatives, were out of the question. The Alternative for Germany, (AfD), new in the Bundestag, frighteningly, with 92 seats, included so many hate-ridden neo-Nazis that political hygiene required their ostracism (at least for the time being). This forced the Union, to take that 355 seat hurdle, to win the two remaining parties, the big-business-oriented Free Democrats (FDP) and the Greens for a so-called 'Jamaica coalition' - like that distant island's flag it would combine the Union's symbol color black with Green and the FDP's yellow symbol color. But this jolly flag defied hoisting. The four wrangled and bickered, with the FDP opposing environmental or any other regulations, which were the Greens' main stock in trade aside from welcoming and accepting refugees.

What to do? New elections might end up much the same or bring even worse losses, most likely enabling

the menacing AfD to profit from the muddle. Then what about a novelty, a minority government? Merkel rejected this as to pass any measures requires appeals for support from changing partners, eager for new bargains. Now a reluctant savior has re-emerged. After all, someone must preserve Germany's solid, respected reputation! Pure patriotism caused the SPD to offer succor. To assuage its leftwing and its pride, SPD leaders are demanding at least two policies. One is a change in the national health system, cutting out privileged private health insurance schemes. The other would enable young Iraq or Syrian refugees whose stay in Germany is permitted to fetch family members as well. To both, the Union says 'Never'!

What gets the scantest attention in the negotiation? It's the urgent needs of ever more working people, forced into unstable, temporary, part-time jobs or, if jobless, into menial tasks at hungry dole rates. The SPD deplores all this, but aside from a weak new minimum wage law gets little accomplished.

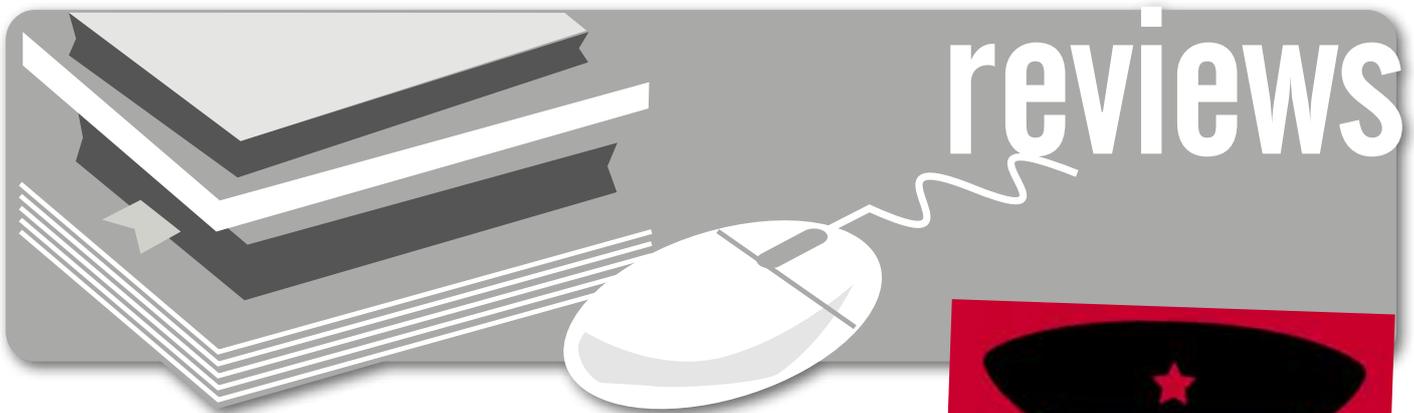
The Union and the SPD do already agree on one issue; creating a strong European military force separate from the USA-dominated NATO, with new EU headquarters, marine headquarters in the Baltic, a military academy, mobile medical facility and more joint maneuvers to guarantee 'constant deployment readiness'. 'The United Army of Europe - that is our long-range political vision', SPD politicians declared. With Germany its strongest, guiding element, it would represent one more step in century-old ambitions of its financiers, Industrialists and generals to extend their might globally. Even without an established government, the new Bundestag has voted to keep German soldiers in Afghanistan and Mali; only a few SPD MPs defied their leadership, voting 'no' or abstaining.

It seems all the parties are sliding rightwards. The Bavarian CSU replaced its long-time state governor candidate with a man even further to the right - to win back voters from the

AfD. Merkel's seemingly generous immigration policies have long been discarded as she tries to keep her footing. The Greens, their radical past long since forgotten, may soon drop the one 'fundi' plus one 'realo' co-chair tradition, with the former still concerned with social conditions, while the pragmatic 'realists' are happy to join with anyone to get a few warm cabinet armchairs. And even the LINKE has its troubles. It still opposes sending troops to Mali or Afghanistan, but one wing still dreams of a national coalition with the SPD and the Greens and, to overcome obstacles to that goal, seems to be down-playing opposition to NATO and stationing troops abroad, while even joining the chorus which calls all critics of Israeli policy 'anti-Semites', a particularly nasty accusation in Germany.

Meanwhile the 92 AfD MPs are laughing at others' troubles while hailing heroes of Germany's 'great past', viciously attacking anyone preferring a crescent to a cross, and rejoicing that most of Eastern Europe and many in the West are veering rightward, most recently with the new Austrian government. With 12-13% in polls in Europe's strongest power, it calculates how many more will join them with the next economic nose-dive. The urgent response is the left to offer working people convincing explanations of the causes of their worries and hardships, and leadership in getting at their roots in new solidarity. Troubled Germans took heart at news about Bernie and Jeremy; a good portion of that enthusiasm in their campaigns is urgently needed here.

*Victor Grossman, McCarthy-era ex-pat from New York to East Berlin, writes books and Berlin Bulletins in English and German. His autobiography is 'Crossing the River, A Memoir of the American Left, the Cold War, and Life in East Germany' (U. of Massachusetts Press).*



## ***The Death of Stalin (2017), directed by Armando Iannucci***

*Reviewed by Jackie Bergson*

**T**he *Death of Stalin* is a satirical romp of stellar magnitude. Its outstanding cast, protracted storyline and sparking dialogue together compellingly depict the farcical chaos of a political and social situation which takes place in the Soviet Union within the time leading up to, during and following Josef Stalin's death in 1953.

Satirical humour interjects throughout the film, being riotously overt or disturbingly, wryly accurate, in turn. In masterfully representing cleverly crafted work within its genre, the film reveals more serious parallels and subtexts. Both the outrageous humour and tragedy of events depicted, although sitting uncomfortably alongside each other, are thus equally unavoidable.

The satirical genre traditionally reveals sometimes obscene, usually discordant incongruity at individual and collective levels. *The Death of Stalin* through its smart use of grotesque wit, thus, unquestionably reflects the true horror of dehumanisation, killings and violent oppression which existed in the Soviet Union during Stalin's reign as premier of the Soviet Union.

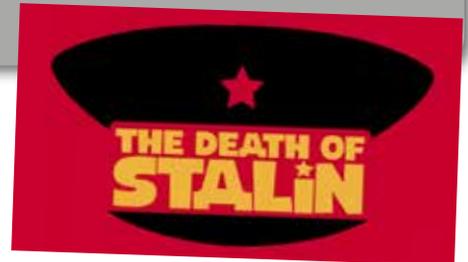
The film's context of historical realism in relation to the secret police, the NKVD's 1952-53 Doctors' Plot plus the regime's Great Terror and Great Purge enactments against political and religious dissidents is no coincidence. Within this context, whilst Steve Buscemi's Khrushchev is portrayed as working frantically to ensure that the politburo's collective story fits, Simon Russell Beale's Beria plots to bring himself to power as an apparently liberating force. In the process, Beria

threatens to expose his NKVD colleagues as brutal arbiters in the imprisonment, torture and execution of innocent people.

Armando Iannucci's intentionally truncated screenplay and direction maintains his audience's and his players' unwavering attention. In one interview with Iannucci ([theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com)), he describes the timeline plan within the action being a main feature which he used to speed up pace compared with Nury and Robins' graphic novel, upon which the film is based. He, thus, directs absolute focus upon the grim, ludicrous irony of somewhat microcosmic power struggles within Stalin's internal politburo.

Stalin's funeral, which Buscemi's Khrushchev is tasked with organising by his colleagues in the film, represents a significant peak in satirical alchemy. Heavily drizzled with grimly hilarious nuances which display the need of Stalin's chaotic politburo to put on an acceptably organised public face, the funeral scene also represents the zenith of Iannucci's own idea of climactic farce to his own audience.

However, it is the appearance of Jason Isaacs' Zhukov which delivers with raucous full force. In the knowledge that Zhukov was admired by Stalin for his 'straightforward qualities', Isaacs chose to vitalise the role through using a blunt Yorkshire accent. Stating that he was simply using an idea for portraying Zhukov's straightforward character, the actor commented: 'I was talking to David Cameron and when I told him what I was doing, he could barely contain his surprise and horror and joy at how the film's story paralleled exactly what was going on in Downing Street' ([theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com)). Current audiences' collective living memory could, subliminally or otherwise, also consider the irony that most of this pugnacious Yorkshire character's fury is directed



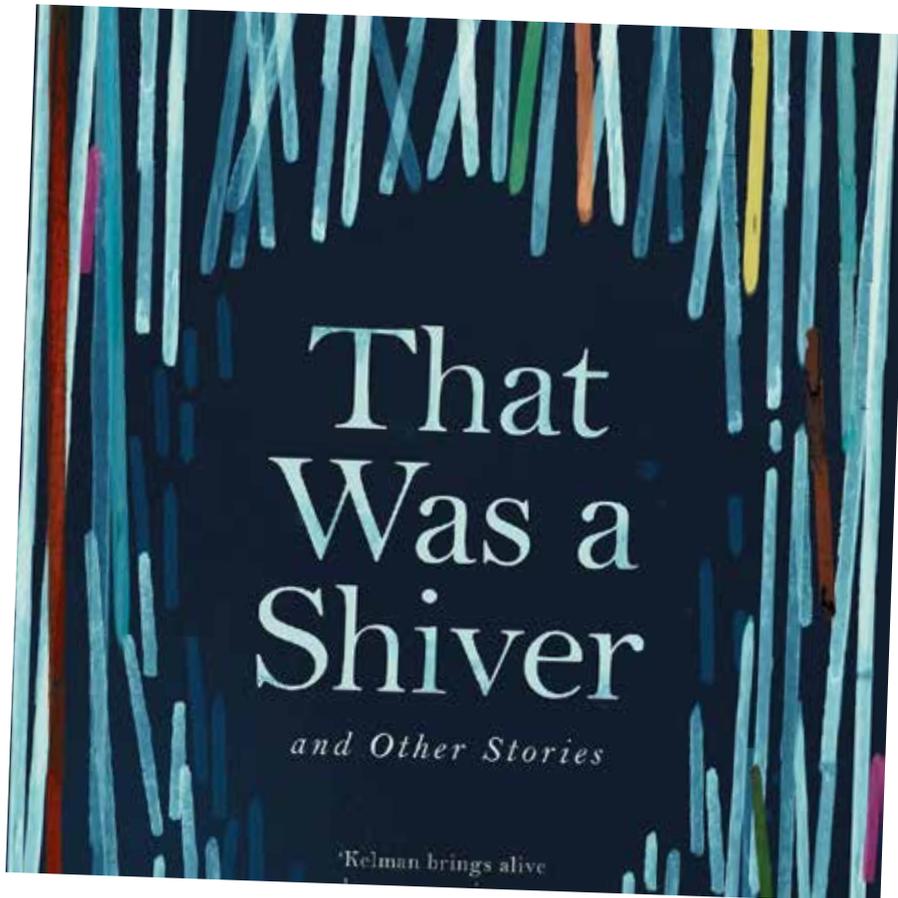
not at a member of the general public who throws eggs, but at people who were guilty of horrific atrocities against thousands of their own countrymen.

Earlier in the film, Paddy Considine's Andryev, who is consciously aware that organised terror drives the need to comply with Stalin's every wish, frantically meets his leader's demands to receive a recording of a particular Mozart concerto. In doing so, Considine's organised yet wantonly hapless Andryev is unable to avoid becoming first in a chain of events which lead to the dictator's practically unintentional demise. The harassed Andryev is touchingly portrayed as being both unintentionally funny and judgementally flawed.

By comparison, Michael Palin as Molotov (whom Churchill thought to have 'outstanding ability and cold-blooded ruthlessness') portrays a ridiculous character whose true abilities lay in complying with the stupefying yet cunning, ruthless dictatorship. Similarly, Rupert Friend's hilariously ineffectual Vasily Stalin is seen to fail spectacularly in achieving the kudos afforded to their deceased head of state.

The film's dialogue and action distinctly override any lack of geographical precision, with regard to such issues as perfected Russian accents. The satirically ludicrous tone is steadily maintained through creative genius. *The Death of Stalin* is a must-see film for the thinking world and its human generations.

*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.*



## James Kelman *That Was a Shiver and Other Stories*,

Canongate, 1786890909

Reviewed by Sean Sheehan

Fiction is make-believe but only in one sense is it not true. Fictional characters and their world – what they do, think, feel and say – do not exist in the physically real world but we can recognise a fabrication as a palpably genuine engagement with our own existence. Storytelling, however imaginatively it goes beyond the constraints of everyday experience, can be a form of cognition and good fiction does this more powerfully than not-so-good fiction. Philip Pullman's alternative universes in *His Dark Materials* and *The Book of Dust* explore our need for knowledge in ways that leave J. K. Rowling's boarding-school tales of wizards in the realm of juvenile escapism.

James Kelman's fiction is in a class of its own. He doesn't do allegory or seductively enticing prose and ethical clarity has no place in his metaphysical landscape. In *That Was a Shiver*, his latest collection of short stories, nothing moves in a straight line. If there is progress its contour has a crab-like

vector. But this is fiction with the bite of reality: the fragile messiness of life and the uncertainty that glues itself to the process of living is what makes up his subject matter.

In the opening story, 'Oh the Days Ahead', a man and a woman have gone to bed but no sex has occurred. The morning after, the man's body is sexually alive but his mind tells him that the woman's priorities lay elsewhere, though where exactly is beyond his ken. Not knowing is what perplexes him but a male reader of this story suspects that a women reading the same text brings another level of understanding to the story.

Rueful reflections by an older man make up the second story, 'The Cartwheels of Life', and he could be the narrator of the first tale 30 years on: naebody can plan simplicity. It does nae matter how hard you try. That the character of 'Pick up the Pieces' may have recently been released from prison may account for his strange exuberance as he wanders through an urban centre. He remembers, cogitates, regrets, imagines, fantasises a meal. His grip on reality is tenuous tenuous; he can't live off his thoughts – but he'd like to.

Men are the central characters in most of these stories. They think about

themselves, study other people, misunderstand them and sometimes themselves. In 'This Has No Title', a man is returning home on a bus, thinking about his fellow passengers and philosophising: 'always returning, attempting to, dragging ourselves. What is our condition? We cannot recognise our condition.' Kelman can be unsettling because the passenger's musings are not unlike yours or mine and yet they add up to very little of any consequence and border on nonsense. This is how 'This Has No Title' ends:

*My jaw ached: I had been smiling. That sense of futility. We persons, and doing our best. I, therefore, was glad to be on this bus, to be returning alongside them. and then*

The 'and then', constituting a paragraph of its own, signals a refusal to offer the kind of closure or consolation offered by the formal conclusion of the traditional short story. Some of the tales develop slowly over many pages but 'A Friend' occupies a single page: this is all it takes for Kelman to evoke the sense of loss that hurts when the absence of someone loved is remembered. It prevents the narrator from completing his own understanding of what absence is doing to him:

*And I can not get to it, and to her, what of her? I can not reach her. It is too painful; memories, image, neither an image, not a thought. She was a friend. Her smile was to me.*

Wittgenstein -- 'what we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence' – would have approved of the necessarily short word count for recounting a memory of the past.

*That Was a Shiver* is not a page-turner, a time filler to while away a journey, but a book for slow reading, as night approaches, when you're alone and able to dwell on the unspoken thoughts that punctuate passages of dialogue between the characters. Kelman is a writer whose greatness is only intermittently unappreciated by the literary Establishment. Maybe he would not want it any other way. It might be worrying if his work could be cut and dried, shrink-wrapped and put on display. His prose is not a commodity.

*Sean Sheehan is author of Žižek: A Guide for the Perplexed' (Continuum, 2012) and 'A Guide to Herodotus' Histories' (Bloomsbury, 2018).*

**James Mitchell,  
Hamilton 1967 -The  
By-Election That  
Transformed Scotland,  
Luath, 9781912147229**

Reviewed by Donald McCormick

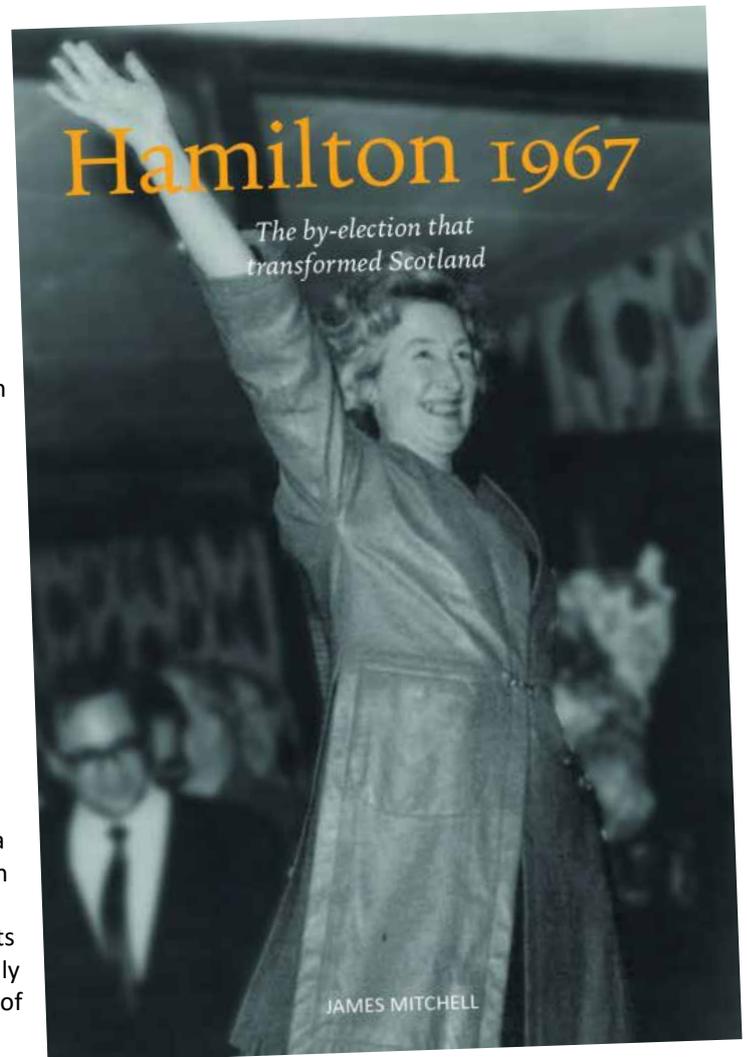
**A** first thought: at the moment anything with the word 'Hamilton' in it is bound to be a runaway success and, given a competent composer and librettist, I can envisage the at times dramatic, at times downright charming story of the Hamilton by-election of 1967 transferring to Broadway as a hit musical. There is a touch of the mouse that roared about this mostly forgotten snippet of Scottish political history. This is because I doubt very much that Winnie Ewing's success transformed Scottish politics quite as much as James Mitchell asserts given that the SNP, having achieved an unexpected and dramatic victory as a minority party at a by-election, continued the time honoured tradition of losing the seat at the next general election three years later.

I was a callow youth at the time, becoming aware of politics at home and abroad, and cannot recall that my friends and I took much notice of the events not many miles from Glasgow as we were focused on bigger issues such as Harold Wilson's seemingly socialist ambitions and the war in Vietnam - this being what real politics was all about at the age of sixteen. It didn't help that in our eyes transformation was meant to come about through the swashbuckling actions of a guy with a cool hippy beard and a beret with a red star on it. We thought of a Che - we were presented with a Winnie. Not only did Winnie sound like one of your mum's friends, she looked like one too. With all due respect, I doubt she had much to do in converting so many of the 1960s generation in the coming years leading to the SNP emerging as a serious player in Scottish politics three decades later when the newly elected MSP, Winnie Ewing, could state to the newly opened Scottish Parliament 'I want to start with the words that I have always wanted to say or hear someone else say - the Scottish Parliament which adjourned on 25 March 1707 is reconvened'. More enduring success came even if it took a while.

Yet the story of by-election makes interesting and even entertaining reading. At times, Mitchell presents us with a plethora of statistics - all relevant - and of names most of us have never heard of and so it might seem that Hamilton 1967 is a work of interest only to political anoraks. I enjoyed the concise survey of the history of Britain and Scotland in the 1960s and how a variety of progressive issues such as legalised abortion and the decriminalisation of homosexuality had a different effect north of the border as a background to events even if not specifically linked to the events of the by-election.

There is also a salutary reminder of the part religion played in our national politics though the author is too polite to point out its pernicious aspect which is, regrettably, evident to this day. There were uniquely Scottish issues such as the drain of youth and talent through emigration as high as 45,000 Scots in 1965 as well as more specific concern about Lanarkshire, a post-industrial area with little sign of the newly lauded 'white heat of technology' transforming the economy. What I found particularly noteworthy is the way Mitchell's account of the story of various by-elections in the 1950s and 1960s contradicts Charlie Brown's famous dictum that 'Winning isn't everything but losing isn't anything' in that SNP strategists found positive signs even in a series of defeats.

Some were good defeats where winning 18% of the vote was an encouraging sign. Voting figures and patterns were poured over, strategies refined and activists inspired and retrained. There was an identifiable base of support for Scottish home rule - possibly even more - to be exploited by a sophisticated and enthusiastic campaign. Apparently



all this minute attention to detail paid off and in 1967, a whopping 74% of the electorate turned out to vote in the by-election with almost 50% voting for Ewing. Mitchell asserts that: 'Even when a by-election tells us less about underlying trends than might immediately be apparent, such interpretations can themselves create change ... There had been periodic spasms of support for home rule with Government reactions developing Scotland's position in the union, but the reaction to Hamilton set Scotland on a long, though far from certain, route to the establishment of the Scottish Parliament'. If this is the case then it must be conceded that the Hamilton by-election did play its part in transforming Scotland after all. Hamilton 1967 is recommended reading.

*Donald McCormick is a retired history teacher, anti-ideologue and a grumpy optimist*

## **Kim Moody, On New Terrain – how capital is reshaping the battleground of class war,**

**Haymarket, 9781608468461**

*Reviewed by Gordon Morgan*

This is a detailed and provocative study of how capital has changed since the 1980s and its effects on the working class and political parties in the USA and across the world. It rejects the notion that we live in a post-capitalist world or that the 'gig economy' dominates industrial relations. Instead, it presents a classical Marxist analysis that painstakingly shows how the composition of the 'core working class' has changed in its occupational, industrial and ethno/racial composition under changing business practices since the 1980s linked to increasing concentration of capital.

Much of the productivity gains achieved over this period especially the 1980s and 1990s result from reduced breaks in the 8 hour working day amounting to 24 minutes which allied to streamlined work practices added 2 hours production at no extra cost. Similar gains apply in nursing and other services. Add in the privatisation of child and elder care, health insurance, food preparation, the increase in the hours worked by women, the official 'low wage' rate paid to 43% of USA jobs and the increased profits of US corporations are all too explicable. From 1975 to 2011, the real profit/wage ratio grew by 68%. By contrast, the percentage of people holding multiple jobs has barely altered.

The concentration of capital into fewer mega-corporations has resulted in massive logistics hubs around major ports and cities. Increasingly, these act as distribution and final manufacturing centres taking standardised products and tailoring them. In almost all the US hubs, hundreds of thousands of increasingly African American, Latino and women workers are concentrated in low paid dead end jobs. In theory, this gives these workers enormous power given that moving a hub would take decades and too much capital has been sunk into it. The fact that many of these workers are in unions and traditionally have voted Democrat should increase

this power. The fact it has not exercised this is the subject of the second half of the book.

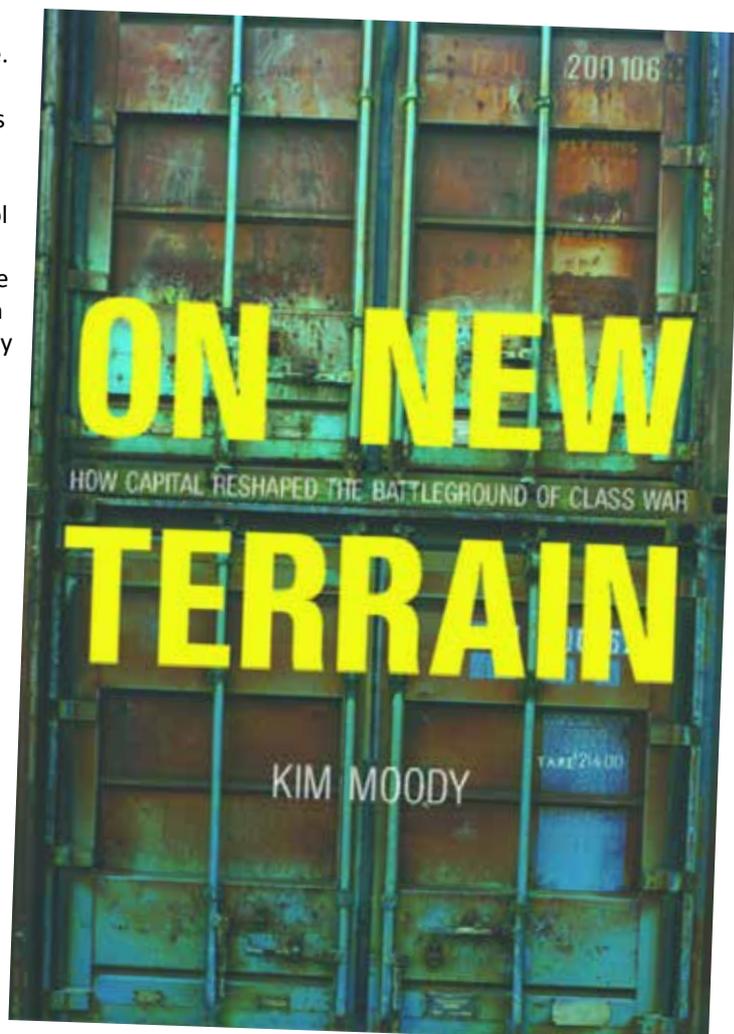
The adherence to neo-liberal priorities, promotion of free trade and abandonment of the working class under Obama led to a shift of sufficient number of working class voters to the Republicans to elect Trump. This, however, is not a new phenomenon. Even in 1976, 38% of households with union members voted Republican. In 2016, this was 43%. In 1980, only 48% of union households voted Democrat and 45% for Reagan's Republicans.

The Democratic party machine is largely beholden to business donations and even the 'crowd-funding' introduced by Sanders' 'Our Revolution' organisation has been incorporated into the Democratic National Convention (DNC) multilayer fund-raising controlled by a party apparatus that effectively chooses the candidates who largely share their pro-business stance. Moody is gloomy about the prospects for changing this given the way corporations control Congress and State apparatuses and the increasing spend on election and primary campaigns.

Nor are unions acting to defend workers' rights, many have adopted the same pro-business model as the corporations. Moody worked for years as editor of *Labor Notes* a group which advocated, educated and promoted grass roots movements in communities and unions. He describes the struggles in the AFL-CIO as well as initiatives such as the Labor Party formed in 1996 from frustration with Clinton, the Richmond Progressive Alliance which won elections in opposition to Chevron the major employer, the Working

Families Party a pressure group within the Democrats, a left 'tea party' which stands its own candidates. He highlights a strike by US prisoners, overwhelmingly African Americans, against working as 'slaves'. He draws lessons from the Occupy Movement and Black Lives matter. Overall he believes a revolt in US cities is inevitable. However, its success depends on the working class having learned the lessons of all these partial struggles to become in Marx's terms a class 'fit to rule'. There is much more in the book than this including a discussion on the disconnection between strike waves and Krondatieff long waves, extensive references, a detailed description of how *Labor Notes* functioned. I thoroughly enjoyed reading it and would recommend it particularly at the discount rate of \$9 including e-book.

*Gordon Morgan is a member of the Scottish Left Review editorial committee.*



# Kick up the Tabloids

So here we are at the start of 2018, and not only is Theresa May somehow still Prime Minister of the UK, but world peace has somehow managed to survive the first year of a Trump presidency. If anyone had gone to a bookies last June to place bets on May being in power at Christmas, Trump not launching a nuclear strike on North Korea before the end of the year and Celtic's unbeaten run coming to an end in December with a 4-0 defeat by Hearts, there is little doubt that the third of those three punts would have been quoted the longest odds. The only bet that would have attracted longer odds would have been Kezia Dugdale winning 'I'm a Celebrity! Get Me Out Of Here!', or indeed Kezia Dugdale winning any vote of any description.

As long ago as last July, I was filming an improvised comedy show for BBC Scotland. I was cast in the role of a fanatical pro-independence campaigner, but was actually left to make up the words myself. On the first take, my character went on a long rant about Theresa May. The director called for a cut in filming, and asked me not mention Theresa May on the second take. When I complained about this being heavy-handed censorship, the director then explained: 'No, it's not that we don't agree with what you're saying, it's just that this isn't scheduled to be broadcast until January and we can't be certain she'll still be around by then.'

Let's give credit where it's due to the PM, as she has pulled off a couple of fairly remarkable tricks during her eighteen months in office. Firstly, she has managed to look both evil and incompetent, which is quite a unique achievement. She almost appears to have been assembled in some Frankenstein-esque manner from

the parts of previous Tory leaders. It's as if the heart and compassion of Margaret Thatcher have been allied to the personality of John Major, the wit and humour of Iain Duncan-Smith and the political nous of Michael Howard.

Secondly, she has against all the odds stumbled on in power, like a marathon runner who has hit the wall at fifteen miles and wobbled their way over the finish line with all four limbs flailing in opposite directions. In truth, she has probably hung on because no one else wants the job, but few captains have stayed so long at the wheel of such a sinking, rudderless ship with so many rats either leaving or being pushed off, in a storm of sleaze, dodgy business deals, sexual harassment, porn on work computers and the like.

Some Tories tried to switch the focus of the Damian Green scandal by bleating about police misconduct in the Damian Green case. This kind of misses the really important point in this particular case. Namely, that any minister's position becomes untenable when the public cannot look at him without imagining him masturbating in the office.

Speaking of which, Boris Johnson has somehow also managed to avoid losing his job, almost certainly because May is scared of sacking him. Only through the British class system could such an educationally-challenged moron end up as Foreign Secretary, due to his parents paying to send him to the right school. One can only imagine what kind of a job, if any, Boris Johnson would be doing had he been educated in a state school, but it certainly would not entail protecting the rights of British citizens wrongly imprisoned abroad.

Looking back over 2017, one is left

with many abiding comic images of this slapstick government, but sadly the best image of all never happened. At the very last minute, Theresa May and Phillip Hammond were persuaded by their PR team not to go ahead with a planned photo opportunity where they were to take a trip in a driverless car. What a shame that photo never made the front pages, as I can think of few more appropriate metaphors for this current government than two people driving off into the middle of nowhere with nobody in control - which is pretty much how many of us feel as we drive off into the future. Happy New Year and good luck for 2018! I think we may just need it!

*Vladimir McTavish will be appearing at Yes Bar in Glasgow on Friday 12 and Saturday 13 January 2018 and in a Burns Night Comedy Show at The Stand Comedy Club, Edinburgh on Wednesday 24 January.*



Vladimir McTavish



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