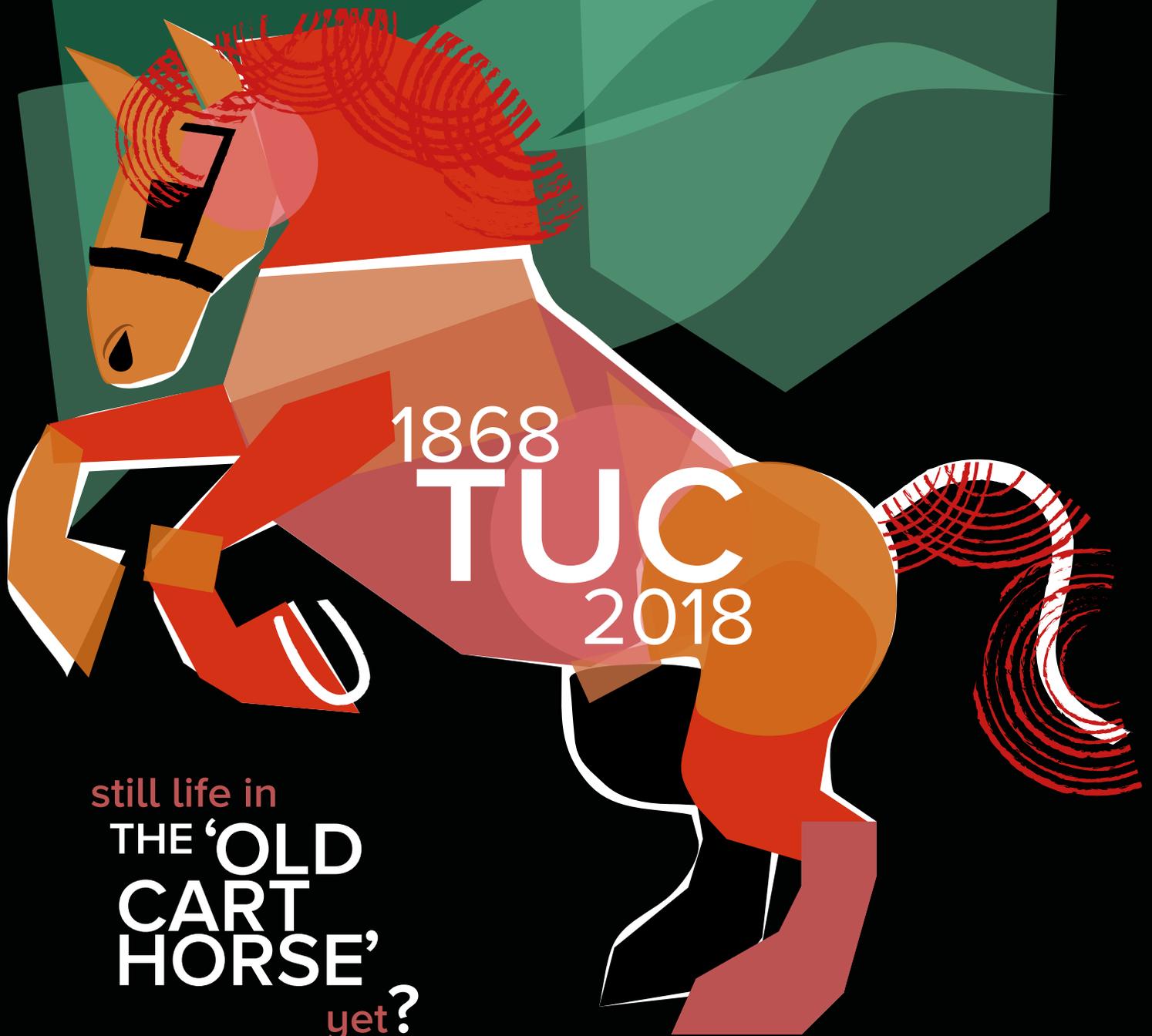


Scottish Left Review

Issue 105 May/June 2018 - £2.00



still life in
THE 'OLD
CART
HORSE'
yet?

celebrating and critiquing the TUC,
and solidarity across borders

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comment

Horses for courses

Why is the *Scottish Left Review* celebrating and critiquing the *British Trades Union Congress* (TUC) on its 150th anniversary? Notwithstanding the foundation of our own Scottish Trades Union Congress in 1897 and the *Scottish Left Review's* annual coverage of its congresses in each March-April edition, it is because we believe that workers' solidarity of interest and action across borders is a vital part of a wider Scottish perspective. This should be a truism for any union member when pitted against employers and their neo-liberal version of capitalism, be they a Labour, Green or SNP supporter. Of course, quite how this solidarity of interest and action does then manifests itself - and should manifest itself - is a matter for debate and dialogue for there is no one true way. Opponents of independence decry supporters of independence for allegedly spurning cross-border class solidarity by creating divisions between workers north and south of the border. In making this charge, they forget that it is not structures that are critical but

rather attitudes and behaviours.

In the relationship between capital, labour and the state under capitalism, there has often been cooperation as much as there has been conflict. Indeed, there has often been more cooperation than many of us would have liked there to have been, given the asymmetry of interests between capital and labour. Capital, through its managers and executives, has not only the right to manage - in law, by conventional morality and through power relations - but it also has the resources and time to do so. Labour, by contrast, has to do its day job of working for a living and then - in its own time - gather together to create and sustain its own organisations to look after its collective interests. There is the double bind.

Historically, these organisations were called trade unions. Although in law and legislation, unions are still referred to as *trade unions*, they are no longer so. They have long since stopped being *trade unions* or even unions of trades for not only have general unions

become dominant but occupations rather than trades are more important now where there is still skilled work. And, of course, there has been a general rise on unskilled or deskilled work. For similar reasons of fact and not fiction, *Scottish Left Review* never uses the nomenclature, United Kingdom. We are citizens not subjects, and are not united in a common ideology and identity under a monarchy.

In the themed articles on the TUC, we have a range of different subjects covered from an array of different perspectives - see, for example, the contrasting emphases of Jim Phillips, Roger Seifert and Ralph Darlington. Despite the differing standpoints, we should recognize the benefit of unions not having divided forms of organization at the peak level as in common in France, Spain and Italy. But this also means we should maybe be looking for a more robust and effective form of peak organization in the form of the TUC. But the rider to this must be that though the TUC has its own organization, in the most important respects, its policies and actions are determined by its affiliates. In equal measure, the TUC and its affiliates are to be held responsible for what it does and does not do. Together, they are to be held responsible for the fall in overall union membership, power and influence.

2018 is not just an anniversary for the TUC. It is also one for PCS being twenty years young and UNISON being twenty five years young. And, then there is the fiftieth anniversary of 1968. It stands out as the epitome of radical movements - of black people, students, workers, women, gays and lesbians - fighting for their collective interests. Going further back, the FBU was founded in 1918. But 2018 is also an anniversary for the loss of fighters - one obvious one would be Red Clydesider, Harry McShane, in 1988. But that can be balanced out by the birth of Karl Marx in 1818.

ScottishLeftReview

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Changing the world of work for good

Frances O'Grady says the TUC is prepared to roll up its sleeves to fight for workers' futures

On the TUC's 150th anniversary, it is tempting to argue that the low paid, zero hours working lives of young trade unionists in McDonalds and TGI Friday's are not so very different to those of nineteenth century match women and dockers. The treatment of labour as a mere commodity - less than human and the cheaper the better - is a familiar story throughout our history.

But, despite the parallels, it would be a mistake to gloss over how capital has radically changed over the last century and a half - not least because the contemporary challenge for unions is to match that pace and scale of change. If we're going to organise the 'new working class', then we must change too. We've done this before.

Throughout our history we have engaged with the world of work as it is, shaping new technologies and ways of working to the benefit of working people. And we've reached out to those working in new jobs and in new ways of working - with the consistent aim of organising workers and driving up the quality of work and quality of life for our members, their families and communities. And that task has never been more vital than at a time when Facebook, Google and the other tech giants dominate the global corporate wealth league, and whose near monopoly of big data poses a threat to not only union bargaining power but popular democracy too.

Today, some 6m people are members of unions. We represent the largest, democratic vehicle for progressive change in Britain's. We're increasingly diverse, and more than half of union members are women. In Scotland, the STUC has been pivotal in establishing meaningful social dialogue and the Fair Work Convention. And the historical achievements we'll be celebrating in our 150th anniversary year - on Saturday 2 June 2018 - sit alongside contemporary wins on pay, equality, health and safety and learning, and the positive material difference we make to working lives, day in and day out.

But for too many workers, unions are not part of that daily life. Union membership in Scotland is the second highest in the nations of Britain and the English regions, after Wales, but even here density is falling - down by almost ten per cent between 1995 and 2016. Fewer private sector workers and young workers are joining unions. In the private sector, only 1 in 7 workers are union members, and many never come into contact with a union. Two-fifths of union members are over 50 years old and less than a quarter are under 35.

When we've asked about why people join unions, the answer is often simply that somebody asked. But unless we turn the tide of declining membership we risk being invisible to a new generation of young workers.

That's why in our anniversary year we want not only to celebrate our history but also to focus our attention on the future too. Over the past two years, we have committed to detailed and innovative research into the lives, interests and motivations of young workers. We have taken the time to ask them what they want from their working lives, and what we can do to change it for the better.

The STUC's *Better than Zero* campaign has brilliantly exposed the insecurity faced by so many young workers in Scotland, namely, being at the sharp end of low pay and modern insecure work patterns. Using practical support for young workers, the campaign has engaged many who would otherwise have been isolated in today's fragmented world of work. These issues came up time and time again in our work, too. While many would like to progress in their careers, workers in low-paid industries tend to have few opportunities to develop skills, gain a higher salary and increase job satisfaction. The barriers to young workers improving their lives at work are structural rather than individual. Supporting young workers to gain the confidence to organise collectively could help tackle some of these barriers.

One of the recent successes of which I am most proud is the evolution of the union role in supporting members' learning and progression. Unions have always helped working people get a second chance to learn. In 1903, we helped found the Workers' Educational Association, educating generations of workers who left school in their early teens. More recently, we set up Unionlearn, which, along with Scottish Union Learning, helps more than 220,000 people a year access new skills and training through their unions.

This experience, and the research we have done since 2016, has shown us that the best way to support and build trust with young workers is to improve their wellbeing at work immediately, and help to put them on a path to a more fulfilling working life through progression and joining a union.

We know that the transformational benefits of trade unionism are delivered when workers are part of a collective bargaining unit. So the goal of our innovation programme is to find a model of collective organising at work that engages young core workers - and that unions or the union movement can adopt, to bring them into our fold. We'll be launching our new initiative to coincide with our anniversary, and I'm delighted that we've been able to build on strong support from affiliates for an innovative new approach.

As well as launching this flagship project, we also want to use the anniversary to show the threads that link our past, present and future struggles and successes. We are using a collection of 150 real stories to tell the overarching story of the TUC - and show how standing up for working people is more relevant than ever today.

The TUC150 collection presents a set of union stories from the last 150 years. It's not a history of trade unionism. Nor is it a definitive list of the great women and men of our movement. Some are pioneers,

stepping out from the cosy consensus of their day. Many are ground-breaking activists. Some did the work that resulted in the rights we have today and resulted in the institutions that protect working people, like the NHS.

Some stories tell of trade unionists living in extraordinary times – and rising to the challenge of their era. Pioneers like Scottish suffragist and trade unionist, Mary McArthur, who almost a century before it became law championed a national minimum wage. And like Emma Paterson, who in the 1870s set out to establish a union in every job in which women worked. Following in her footsteps today are members like former fire fighter Wendy Miller who, when she spotted a fire hazard in the Aberdeenshire supermarket she now works in, decided to put her skills to good use as a health and safety rep.

Today, young workers like Shen Batmaz and Nesa Kelmendi are taking on the global might of corporates like McDonald's and Picturehouse Cinemas to demand a living wage. And at Sports Direct, the workers are steadily growing their union, after years of campaigning that has already seen them win higher wages for the staff, get agency workers the right to permanent jobs, and drag the business owner to Parliament to explain himself. They follow in the footsteps of people like Joseph Williams who was 21 when he founded the Musicians' Union and Rosie Hackett who was 19 when she organised 3,000 Jacob's Biscuits workers to strike.

From our earliest days, unions have challenged stigma and prejudice. As Britain has changed, unions have changed too. Sometimes we've had to challenge our own members' prejudices – but over time we became champions of equality. Our stories include immediate STUC past-President Satnam Ner, who went from being the only BAME worker on his site in Rosyth, to working with his employer to improve diversity in hiring and running training courses for workers from BAME backgrounds.

These stories 150 years on from our founding show that, while much has

changed, the TUC's mission remains the same: standing up for working women and men, and making sure their voices are heard. We're needed more than ever to make sure that every job is a decent job and everyone at work is treated with respect.

We'll continue to do this at every level – in workplaces, in the regions and the nations of Britain, nationally, in Europe and working in partnership with our sister union movements around the globe.

We'll do this in workplaces, building a strong and growing union movement, underpinned by trained, confident reps. Across Britain, we want winning for workers, but also working with a revitalised Labour Party to help ensure that the political voice we established over 100 years ago has the opportunity to deliver the worker friendly agenda set out in that 2017 manifesto.

And in Europe too. Because, as we face the future, our immediate task is to work together to tackle the great political challenge of our time, Britain's exit from the EU. Brexit has laid bare how in a globalised economy it is even more important that we cooperate across borders and align ourselves with a trading bloc that shares our values. Put simply, given the growing global concentration of capital, if nationalism is the answer we are probably asking the wrong question. So, while the Single Market is far from perfect, on balance, it's clear where working people's best interests lie - with a model that enshrines the voice and rights at work that unions

fought for and not as the 51st state of President Trump's obscenely unequal America. I'm committed to ensuring the TUC does all it can to deliver a Brexit that works for working people. But more than that, that we play our part in fundamentally reshaping the British economy so that it truly does work for all.

Frances O'Grady is General Secretary of the TUC. She is its first woman general secretary. Prior to this, she worked for the Transport and General Workers' Union before becoming the TUC Campaigns Secretary in 1994, founding the TUC Organising Academy in 1997 and being elected as the TUC Deputy General Secretary in 2003. She became TUC General Secretary in 2013.

See <https://tuc150.tuc.org.uk/> for stories about the likes of Satnam Ner <https://tuc150.tuc.org.uk/stories/satnam-singh-ner/>



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150 years of changing the world of work for the better

Melanie Simms looks at the challenges for the TUC as it is 150 years young

As the Trades Union Congress (TUC) celebrates its 150th anniversary, it is an opportunity to reflect on the challenges it faces as the peak-level representative body of unions in Britain. The TUC's strapline is 'changing the world of work for good'. Unlike many straplines, that one neatly captures some of the challenges facing the organisation. The TUC has the role of bringing together 49 unions representing members in sectors as diverse as transport, health, and finance. Almost inevitably, uniting such a broad membership base is challenging. Bringing them together to facilitate change is even more so. And changing anything as broad as 'the world of work' is nearly impossible. Yet it is an important and admirable objective and one that the organisation has consistently championed. Looking to the future, some long-standing challenges to achieving those objectives remain, and new ones are emerging.

A common misunderstanding about TUC leaders is that they exercise some kind of direct control over affiliate unions. It would be hard to find a structure less likely to produce that outcome. Rather, the role is one of co-ordination and representation on common issues. TUC policy is decided through structures where affiliates propose, debate and vote on motions rather than instructions to affiliates to adopt particular positions. This opens opportunities for leadership around common issues and it is here that the TUC is probably most successful in its campaign activities. A good example was the speedy and high-profile mobilisation of both legal and campaign resources in responses to the *Trade Union Act 2016*.

Similarly, the TUC has shown considerable leadership over the past 20 years in encouraging affiliate unions to strengthen

their recruitment and organising activities. This kind of activity can fall by the wayside in the day-to-day routines of bargaining and representing members. So providing space and support to develop activities to promote long-term organising objectives has been crucial. These initiatives seek to build expertise and engagement around the labour movement towards common objectives that can be difficult for individual unions to invest in. In each case, leadership has been demonstrated by launching campaigns, providing access to training and deploying the considerable weight of research evidence and campaign staff to link together and support initiatives that were often happening in a patchy way.

One of the advantages of having a single peak level organisation representing unions is that there is a manifest effort to build common interest across sectors and occupations. In other countries, it is common for unions to be divided in their representational bodies between sectors or political positions. Having a single representative body brings strength in unity but also means that the issues on which such a diverse group of unions can find a common voice can be limited.

A central challenge is to unite what can be very diverse interests, namely, between different unions, and also between union members and workers more generally. Building alliances between unions can require considerable effort to emphasise the long-term interests of all unions in building stronger workplace rights that cover all workers. Similarly, the TUC is in the advantageous position to focus on building solidarities between union members and workers more generally. With union membership hovering at around only 23% of the workforce, it is crucially important that there is someone

taking the lead on speaking to and for workers more generally.

The union movement also faces the challenge that changes to the structure of the labour market bring in terms of effective organising and representation. Encouraging affiliate unions to move beyond their existing membership boundaries to organise and recruit new groups is crucially important. Unions in Britain have faced fundamental changes in the labour market meaning that membership is increasingly concentrated in the public sector where density is over 50%, as compared with around 13% in the - far larger - private sector. One issue resulting directly from the dominance of public trade unionism is that large scale job losses in the public sector have directly led to a decline in union density as union members have either moved out of the workforce or into non-union jobs. Rebuilding membership and activism in that context is inevitably difficult and will require long-term action and co-ordination.

Changing labour markets also present the difficulty that some groups of workers are far more likely than others to find themselves in sectors where unions have low levels of membership. A clear manifestation of that is that young workers are disproportionately working in the private sector in areas such as hospitality and retail which have very low rates of unionisation. As a result, it is increasingly rare for young people to experience union representation in their early working lives. The challenges of organising in those sectors which comprise often small, geographically-dispersed workplaces is huge and requires significant investment of time, money and expertise. In addition, we know that workers who engage with unions early in their working lives are far more likely to continue to be involved. So those challenges

risk structuring future patterns of exclusion from unions which may be difficult to overcome in future.

Addressing these challenges requires strategic planning and concerted action. The TUC is often better positioned than individual unions to lead initiatives that require fundamental rethinking of objectives or that go beyond core workplace concerns. Examples such as initiatives to train large numbers of organisers across the union movement show that as a peak level representative body, the TUC can create space and practical support to facilitate action.

Central to the activities of the TUC in addressing some of these challenges has been a focus on building solidarities between very diverse groups of workers. The TUC is well positioned to contribute to wider debates and campaigns about the world of work and has successfully done so through, for example, identifying the challenges of recruiting and representing young workers as one of the three priority areas for 2018. Those campaigns aim to push affiliate unions to co-ordinate activity that is already taking place and to learn from each other as they attempt to reach out both to young workers in unionised workplaces, and to young workers in parts of the labour market that are much more difficult to organise. Importantly, part of the approach has been to emphasise that the issues of concern to a lot of young workers go far beyond the workplace. Integrating issues housing and mental health helps reach out beyond existing workplace representation and leads

to a far wider debate about the effects of poor quality work on other aspects of workers' lives which can be difficult for individual unions to lead.

That said, there is scope to push this approach further. There is good evidence that the quality of jobs is reducing in many sectors and occupations and there can be a tendency in public debate to see job quality as a race to the bottom: 'why should they have good pensions, when we don't?' Paying attention to building solidarities not only between unions, but between unionised and un-unionised workers is an important role for the TUC and is necessary to rebuilding a narrative that labour is valued and should be rewarded accordingly.

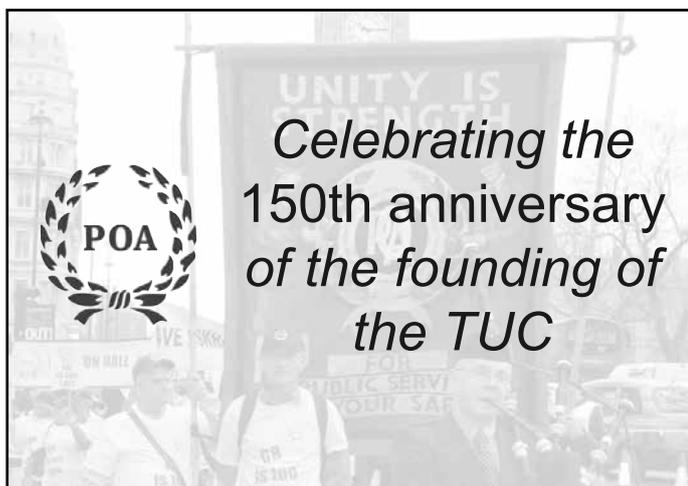
Of course, one of the major changes since 2015 has been a re-emphasis of the important links between the union movement and Labour. Since the election of Jeremy Corbyn, there has been a reinvigorated enthusiasm for acknowledgement of the role the union movement plays in funding the Party and broad questions about the policy direction. What is clear is that workers' rights are central to the current political agenda within the Labour Party and there is considerable opportunity to influence the future direction of policy. There is undoubtedly a role for the TUC in co-ordinating a practical policy response that is more than simply a 'wish list', and the likely pause before the next general election gives time to work through a feasible program to reform labour standards in Britain.

There is also evidence of growing concern in wider public discourse

about poor working conditions in areas of the 'gig economy' and a general downgrading of wages, terms and conditions, particularly since the Great Financial Crisis of 2007. This provides space for many commentators, including the TUC and individual unions, to intervene in debates about the future of work and the regulation of labour standards across the economy as part of a wider public discourse of resistance and discontent.

The challenges facing the TUC and the labour movement in general are considerable, but not insurmountable. Building solidarities within the labour movement and across the workforce in general is a top priority. Further investment in organising and recruitment is also crucial in order to address the challenges of changing membership patterns associated with structural changes in the labour market. And there are good reasons to be optimistic. There has been a change in the political direction, at least within the Labour Party, and the TUC and affiliate unions are well positioned to take advantage of what seems to be a growing public dissatisfaction with deteriorating working conditions. In that context, it is clear there will continue to be an important role for a co-ordinated voice highlighting both problems at work and future solutions.

Melanie Simms is Professor of Work and Employment at the University of Glasgow



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Time to rethink union organising

Jane Holgate reflects on strategy and tactics of organising in a changing labour market

When the TUC was founded 150 years ago workers were organising into trades unions in order to improve their working and living conditions and, in some ways—although not in others—not much has changed. The majority of workers today, as then, are not members of unions, and work is becoming increasingly precarious in many parts of the labour market, as it was in the late 1800s.

The 1970s was the high point of trade unionism in Britain, when there were 13.5 million workers in membership and union density was 57%. At that time, workers had the confidence that high levels of collectivism provided the strength to challenge employers and win concessions—because workers were organised as a class, for itself. If workers today were organised at the same level of union density as they were in 1980 there would be 18.4 million workers in unions. Yet despite the ‘turn to organising’ in the late 1990s to offset decades of decline union density is, in 2018, just 23% and around 6.2m members.

The establishment of the TUC’s Organising Academy in 1998 marked a recognition that unions needed to be pro-active in order to increase density in workplaces where unions had already had a presence, but crucially there needed to be expansion into un-organised workplaces and sectors where density was very low or non-existent. This was to be achieved by a focus on ‘organising’—providing union staff and lay representatives with the skills and tools to teach workers about how to effect change and gain concessions and improvements at work through worker representation, power, leverage and collective bargaining. The ‘organising model’ adopted by the TUC and some affiliate unions wasn’t without some important successes—and things would have been dire if this work hadn’t taken place—but overall the approach has been limited in its effectiveness. As such, it’s time for a rethink of strategy and tactics. What

do unions need to do differently and what can we learn from other unions and social movements in terms of renewal and revitalisation?

One way would be to spread the organising net much wider than the workplace—and at the same time to have a clearer understanding of the distinction between recruitment, mobilising and organising. In many unions, these things—although different—are conflated and assumed to be ‘organising’, but they have very different impacts. More clarity in this regard might help unions adopt a deeper and more sustainable organising agenda.

In recent years, we have seen a growing interest from unions in the notion of ‘community organising’ where the places and spaces in which workers live as well as work are utilised to broaden the terrain upon which unions operate. To some extent we have seen some unions operating in this way and achieving excellent results—albeit at a relatively small scale as yet. For example, in 2011, Unite the union opened up its membership to people not in paid employment such as students, retirees, claimants and carers. In part, this initiative is recognition of the loss of power in the workplace and an attempt to re-create an ‘old’ form of trade unionism where unions were once part of the community as well as the workplace. Since then, Unite Community members (as they are called) have formed 120 union branches in their local communities and 16,000 members have been recruited. As one senior staff member reported, ‘our objective, I suppose, is to collectivise our communities and link our community activity with our industrial activity, so there’s no separation between what we do at work and what we do in our community’. The Unite Community (UC) members that have joined the union have done so for a variety of reasons, but for most it has been the desire to be politically active (outside of party politics) and to be able to

campaign to make a difference in their localities.

The focus of activity has been broadly the same across the country. People are angered about austerity and especially welfare cuts—the attacks on disability benefits, the ‘bedroom tax’, benefit sanctions. UC members have set up peer support groups, training, and advice sessions to help claimants facing sanctions, and have been successful in challenging these at appeals. Other community activities have been around the sell-off of social housing, particularly in London; ethical procurement and living wage campaigns; domestic violence; organising and supporting food banks for people experiencing crisis; removal of disabled passes on public transport, as well as holding Unite publicity stalls at community events. And all this is done locally helping to build strong bonds and to highlight the social justice nature of trade unionism.

Unite Community members have also supported the industrial members and initiated organising campaigns. They have been instrumental in highlighting the issue of zero hour contracts and targeting restaurant chains in a ‘Fair Tips’ campaign. By targeting Sports Direct, a large company using zero-hour contracts, UC members have not only gained huge press coverage of this issue by co-ordinated action at over 40 shops across Britain and attending the company’s AGM to ask questions, but their continuing protests have also resulted in the billionaire founder of the company being forced to face a committee in parliament over working conditions at the company. UC members have supported industrial members by attending picket lines and doing collections for workers out on strike. This approach widens the purpose of trade unionism to advance the interests of the working-class as a whole—whether or not individuals are, indeed, working—and as such has the potential to broaden the ideology of trade unionism from its narrow economic focus to being

more like a social movement.

Similarly, a number of smaller unions, including the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union, and the non-TUC affiliated unions, United Voices of the World, and the Independent Workers of Great Britain, have adopted a more 'in your face' direct action approach to organising workers, which has specifically attracted young workers and migrant workers into membership and activity. In these cases, the unions have recognised that they are, at the moment, unable to win using industrial muscle as the sectors in which they are organising have extremely low union densities. As such, the organising approach is to name, shame and persistently disrupt until their demands are met—and this is proving to be very effective as well as raising the profile of unions among these under-represented groups in the labour movement.

The union movement in Britain could also perhaps learn organising tactics from living wage campaigns, which have been highly successful in increasing the wages of hundreds of thousands of workers. The combination of bringing together communities, including faith groups, schools, and NGOs, to assert moral pressure on companies paying low wages, and at the same time developing leaders in these communities to strengthen their own institutions, helps to build a better organised civil society that is able to assert its power collectively.

If unions were able to rethink what it is to be a 'worker' today, they then might be more successful in not only reaching out to new groups and those currently outside the union movement, but also to consider how the identity of workers, for example, in relation to ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, disability, affects their lived experience. One approach to dealing with these issues is to adopt 'whole worker' organising that understands that workers' lives—including the oppression and discrimination they experience—does not end at the workplace door. People's lives are intersectional and are embedded in a wide range of social networks which can be utilised in deep

organising strategies to build power and to attract the widest range of participants. Jane McAlevey, an advocate of this approach, has said, 'the pressing concerns that bear down on most workers today are not divided into two neat piles, only one of which need be of concern to the union, while the other is divided up among a dozen single-issue groups, none of which has the union's collective strength.' Many workers have already made these connections, and this is an area that unions could profitably tap into should they reconfigure themselves to be a wider social movement.

To meet the challenges faced by neoliberalism, the changing nature of the labour market, the growth of the gig economy, as well as the loss of power in the union movement, there needs to be a transformation in organising practice. There's a need for much more than an adoption of a laundry list of organising tactics, or the creation of adjuncts to traditional union practice. What is required is rethinking of the structures of power in society (not just in the industrial arena) and what sort of tactics are needed to organise around these in the most effective way.

There's a need for the building of new alliances to widen the scope of union activity that can bring in under-represented members, but further, it requires a deep *internal* focus on how to make this happen. Unfortunately, many unions today

are still constrained structurally and organisationally by their past (and the present way that they operate). This creates obstacles to the type of organisational learning and power analysis necessary for the type of deep organising innovation that is necessary for significant renewal and revitalisation.

What's required is a move away from the institutional sclerosis that has held back unions for the last few decades and the TUC could maybe assist with this. To effect transformative change requires leaders that are able to develop strategic capacity and innovation among staff and the wider union membership. This may require unions to rethink the way that they operate and be open to doing things radically different. A transformative leadership programme facilitated by the TUC could provide the space for radical rethinking of the future of trade unionism. The early pioneers of the union movement had a vision in the 1800s that led to the birth of trade unionism, and it's now our responsibility to today's workers to continue to take that forward, but this won't happen without some serious consideration of how to organise our way out of the decline that we have found ourselves in for the last four decades.

Jane Holgate is Professor of Work and Employment Relations at the University of Leeds



The Jimmy Reid Foundation

First notification – Sixth Jimmy Reid annual lecture, Thurs 27 Sept 2018

The Foundation is pleased to announce that its 2018 annual lecture will be given by Frances O'Grady, the general secretary of the Trades Union Congress with over 5m affiliated members, on Thursday 27 September 2018 in the Banqueting Hall of the Glasgow City Chambers.

The subject of the lecture concerns whether the Scandinavian system of social democracy represents a desirable model for Britain to follow after Brexit in March 2019.

Lynn Henderson, national officer for the Public and Commercial Services' (PCS) Union, will chair the event. She is depute convenor of the Jimmy Reid Foundation and the current President of the Scottish Trades Union Congress.

The lecture will be preceded by a civic reception given by the Lord Provost of Glasgow and followed by a Q&A format.

Details about how to acquire tickets, the starting time and solidarity stalls on the night will be forthcoming.

The historic purpose of the TUC

Despite rogue meanderings, Roger Seifert says the TUC has done what it says on its tin

The TUC leadership should not be judged just on its (in)action at major flashpoints of labour movement history. It has also to be appreciated in terms of the daily efforts to shape and articulate working-class interests, and in the importance of bearing witness to workplace exploitation that is manifest at the annual conference.

The TUC appears throughout its 150-year history to be less than the sum of its parts. At many critical moments in the history of the labour movement the TUC has been found wanting, but in so saying it is important to avoid the trap of reification. So TUC decisions are made by delegates to Congress and acted upon by the members of the General Council with advice from its most senior full-time officials (general and deputy general secretaries). Powerful union leaders heading up large and influential unions of trades have deep pockets and large voices. But size is not everything, and policy has been made on other grounds such as political and ideological disposition and alignment. This is in part due to the long-standing contradictions inside the TUC: that it is not powerful enough to lead, and that affiliates are not bound by TUC policies.

Its tendency to concentration and centralisation as large unions increasingly dominate both the wider movement and the TUC is an institutional expression of class unity and solidarity. As such it appears to be more involved in national debates and decisions and appears to have some influence over government. But this appearance is deceptive despite the occasional breakthrough. In reality, its influence over government has waxed and waned, but since the 1980s has been in sharp decline.

The TUC comes into the public eye during major events, usually involving the government of the day, industrial action, and large-scale campaigns backed up with demonstrations. Such events frequently reflect the ebb and flow of the wider class struggle in which the TUC plays a role – neither a leading role nor an irrelevant bystander. In between these events most of the TUC's work remains educational, research,

publicity, some co-ordination, and most frequently referenced by insiders ... the unions face to government and the population.

Over many decades the TUC was depicted as a cart horse in political cartoons – steady, large, cumbersome with strong limbs and a weak brain. Its institutional size representing survival of this stubborn breed, but frequently the lampoonists showed a backward looking and shy-of-change animal.

This article is neither a historical account of the TUC in action nor an attempt to denigrate its remarkable achievements. If the TUC is to be judged by its (in)action in terms of working class struggle and key events then it has rarely risen to the occasion, never really sought to challenge the dominant capitalist system, and the dominant pluralist ideology of compromise and conciliation. In part this is due to its own institutional limitations, in part it reflects the majority view of the member unions, and in part it is a creature of the times in which its subsists.

But it can be judged in other ways as a central part of the working-class movement that has survived when others fell away. In this sense, it has been important and successful in two ways: first in terms of defining and refining working class interests at any time – as both facilitating and contributing to the debate; and secondly, that the annual conference itself allows the expression of the views of thousands of workers caught up in desperate workplace struggles and that itself is part of the process of developing class consciousness.

In 1968, on its hundredth birthday, there were celebrations. Lovell and Roberts in their *A Short History of the TUC* (MacMillan, 1968, p7) noted from a right-wing labour perspective that: 'the TUC is much more than an annual parliament of labour; it is a great national organisation exercising a powerful and continuous influence on governments, employers and public opinion that has become a vital element in the pluralist system of democracy'. They argued that the 1926 General Strike was a disaster made by the

militant left, and that the TUC leaders (Bevin and Citrine) fought to reduce such communist-inspired activity and that the TUC could and should be used to stop any challenge to state power by the organised labour movement. They supported the attacks on trades councils in the 1950s and the witch hunts against communists and fellow travellers. They applauded pluralist consensus in the national interest, and if we fast forward and take on the logic of their arguments the right apologists for TUC policy also backed incomes policies in the 1970s, failed to support the NUM in the 1980s, and retreated in the face of the post-Thatcher onslaught in the 1990s.

In contrast Vic Allen in *Socialist Register* in 1968 noted with approval that the TUC was the longest surviving union centre in the world, and that 'the characteristics of the TUC are derived from those of the unions which comprise it' (p231). This in turn reflects the composition of the working class and its industrial structure. The focus must be on relations with the government for it acts as a pressure group for labour. Most of the time it has campaigned on issues recognisable across the 150 years for all workers – pay and pensions, hours and holidays, health and safety, equality and dignity, worker and union rights, and protection from arbitrary management. It does not challenge property rights, the capitalist system, or the legitimacy of government. It rarely moves on such issues, although in 1967 it did pass a motion at conference for more public ownership and planning. This echoed the radical congress of 1925 preparing the way for the General Strike, but as Allen suggests 'these moments pass all too quickly into moods of acquiescence or cynicism of false optimism' (p235). Even in its most radical moments the result tends to be a very British 'strongly worded letter'. Critically, the TUC leadership has been guilty of both sins of commission (anti-communist witch hunts, support for incomes policies, attacks on trades councils) and the sins of omission (weak support for the miners in the 1980s, and the roaring silences during the New Labour years 1997-2010).

The case for the importance of the

TUC is the case for the future role of unions themselves. Former Transport and General Workers' Union, general secretary, Bill Morris, in 1994 provided a list of 'the need for trade unions': low pay and long hours; health and safety; pensions; unfair dismissal; discrimination. And a list of how this is to be done: negotiation and bargaining, representation, benefits, campaigns on laws, and industrial action. He also emphasised the importance of international links and a core centre.

This need to state and restate common working class interests that evolve alongside the composition of the class as capitalism itself changes is part of the creation of a working class identity that transcends artificially constructed divisions on the basis of gender, ethnicity, age, occupation, nationality, sector, and educational attainment. Thus, class interests are fought for through unions at the workplace and then become part of the larger debate on how these are articulated and achieved. The TUC forms part of that necessary re-alignment of class interests with class consciousness, and however imperfect in practice, it nonetheless has a role to play.

Former TUC general secretary, John Monks, for example, in the 1990s recognised the relative weakness of the movement but nonetheless strove to make union issues and working class concerns known to government and the wider population. In that sense the TUC has most of the time sought to make its voice heard above other noises - steadfastly pushing for better pay and conditions across the board. This pragmatism takes several forms: one is acceptance of positions on various state bodies - being embedded in the decision-making process in order to be heard; secondly, that most general secretaries accept knighthoods and peerages on retirement to ensure that their support for the *status quo* of British society remains intact; and thirdly, that there is no rocking of the boat that conventional wisdom states that capitalism has delivered more for the working class than socialism ever will.

This last point is familiar to those with a broad political paint brush: right-wing labour in theory and practice sides with capitalism and seeks either to re-invent the nature of capitalism into, for example, a more worker-friendly system

in which everyone benefits in contrast with the long gone old capitalism that Marx described; or that the role of the labour movement is to be a sword of justice and a shield of hope under the prevailing system but it is not their job to overthrow such a system. At the same time these apologists also redefine and caricature socialist alternatives as unachievable utopian dreams, unworkable, undemocratic, and unattractive.

A further sleight of hand conflates socialism with public ownership and thereby paves the way for the labour movement to support privatisation, reject renationalisation, and become a low level welfare party - endlessly redistributing monies from the poor to the very poor, from the undeserving to the deserving poor, and from workers to capitalists. The Cold War, attacks on militants, diatribes against Marxists and associated critics of capitalism, all make sense through this particular historical lens.

The TUC, for most of its history has played its part in all of this, even going against strong motions at conference. This is neither a bureaucratic conspiracy nor a simple reflection of the wider mood, but a result of the internal contradictions of the organisation itself and an integral part of the dialectics of working class struggle as a whole.

The attacks and effective dismantling of trades councils was one of the lowest points in TUC history. The ban on communists from 1941-1944 from holding office followed by the anti-communist witch hunts in the 1950s weakened grass roots organisations, reduced the capacity of trades councils to operate locally, and stripped them of political debate and as a result set back various causes decades. In London, for example, delegates to the 1946 trades council 'now showed constant concern lest the policy of wage-freezing while profits and prices were rising, should impose the burden of the crisis on the working people. The Council also expressed alarm at the deterioration of relations with the Soviet Union and the increasing dependence of the Government on the United States'.

In this century, the TUC has overseen a decline in union membership and influence, and a loss of resources as a result. Its headquarters remains a fixed point in London down the road from the

British Museum and resembles most organisational HQs. It is full of busy people, comings and goings, and earnest discussions. It mimics in many respects the centres of most large unions with endless meetings, visitors, calls, press releases, full white boards, fading décor, and dodgy lifts. Its focus is as a pressure group with maximum attention paid to having its views broadcast and its campaigns noticed. In this regard, the 'bureaucracy' does an excellent job, but hardly functions as an assumed alternative centre of power thwarting the wishes of its constituent members. Despite being buffeted by dominate General Council members, the policy direction is not hard to fathom: all the causes of the day faced by workers across the years and all divides.

In recent years it has formed coalitions against public sector cuts, opposition to anti-union laws, championing equality and dignity at work, outing rogue employers, highlighting the need for pay rises, environmental protection, and arguing for decent jobs in the strange world of precarious employment, fake self-employment, agency workers, and the so-called 'gig economy' on the fringes of the increasingly fluid labour market. The campaigns have brought together fractious unions, other pressure groups, and increasingly the new deal Labour Party.

Its other focus is the annual set piece conference. A marathon set of meetings and motions fought out in fractious committee rooms and factional local pubs, and practising the dark arts of fighting over amendments, procedures, and agendas. Each year the floor is full of delegates backing core issues based on a series of heart felt tales of working class working lives. It is a wonderful moment when workers across occupations, regions, and sectors as well as generations, genders, abilities, and ethnicities share their common experiences of exploitation and alienation. While media focus is on big name speakers and any 'controversial' polices, the real purpose of the congress is to renew vows, restate the importance of unity, and develop cadres - to help the working-class become a class of and for itself. In this regard alone the TUC serves its greater purpose.

Roger Seifert is professor of industrial relations at Wolverhampton University

Limits of TUC support for industrial disputes

Ralph Darlington surveys the divergence of policy and practice in supporting striking workers

Historically, the TUC General Council's role in the 1926 General Strike and many other significant industrial disputes has been subject to accusations of 'betrayal' and 'sell-outs', and in more recent years they have been criticised for refusing to organise 'generalised strike action' against government austerity measures. But is such a negative portrayal reasonable given the TUC has demonstrated on numerous occasions its support for many disputes and willingness to galvanise solidarity by the union movement generally?

It has done this through public declarations (recently the #McStrike); encouraging unions' financial support (during the 1913 Dublin lockout chartering food ships to feed strikers and their families); involvement in negotiations with employers and government on behalf of unions; backing solidarity action short of a strike (in the 1972 miners' strike requesting unions not to cross NUM picket lines to prevent movement of coal); and coordinating national strike action by the union movement (April 1925 'Black Friday' embargo of coal; May 1926 General Strike; July 1972 strike against dockers' imprisonment under the *Industrial Relations Act 1971*; May 1973 against Tories' incomes policy; May 1980 against Tories' first *Employment Bill*; September 1982 in support of health workers' strike; March 1984 against banning of unions at GCHQ; and November 2011 in support of public sector pensions strike).

Yet arguably while the TUC has often been willing to formally support industrial disputes by individual affiliates, and on occasion even coordinate much broader forms of strike action across the union movement, it has generally only supported such action in a strictly controlled and limited fashion which on many occasions has had the effect of limiting workers' struggles in ways

that have been detrimental to union members aspirations.

In its early years, the TUC's Parliamentary Committee, as its executive was then called, saw its main function as of lobbying ministers, with industrial disputes the concern of individual unions over which the TUC had no jurisdiction. Only later did it slowly venture into collecting funds for unions involved in major stoppages, and in 1913 called an unprecedented special Congress to discuss coordinating British union solidarity for the Dublin lockout, albeit it decisively voted against sympathetic industrial action and condemned Jim Larkin's alleged 'unfair' attacks upon TUC leaders for acting as 'apologists for the shortcomings of the capitalist system'.

It took the widespread pre-war labour unrest, moves towards industrial unionism and the 'Black Friday' (April 1921) collapse of the Triple Alliance - all of which underlined the lack of effective national coordination to assist affiliated unions involved in industrial disputes - to precipitate the TUC's structural reform. In 1921, its Parliamentary Committee was replaced by a more representative and co-ordinating General Council, although still without centralising powers as individual unions continued to jealously guard their autonomy and prerogatives. But inspired by increasing radical left-wing aspirations for the TUC General Council to act as a 'General Staff of Labour' - mobilising working class forces in outright national conflicts with employers and government - the 1924 Congress amended its Standing Orders so that: a) when requested by an affiliated union the TUC was enabled to intervene if a major stoppage was threatened to attempt to secure a settlement; and b) if such a dispute led to a strike the TUC was required to 'coordinate industrial action' and generate moral and material support from the union movement.

On the face of it this represented a remarkable increase in General Council powers, with the aspiration it could be transformed into a centralised organisation reflected in the lead up to the 1926 General Strike by Communist Party calls for 'All Power to the General Council'. However, it still did not have the power to 'call' strikes in support of workers or individual unions, but merely 'invite' and/or coordinate strikes called by individual affiliates themselves. So the General Strike had to be sanctioned by a conference of the executives of affiliated unions, albeit it then effectively allowed the TUC to conduct the dispute and take control over negotiations with the government. Moreover, there was an underlying tension in the balance between the mobilisation of the resources of the movement in support of the miners' union and the intervention of the General Council to try to agree a deal that would enable it to settle the dispute, with the latter becoming paramount. Calling off the General Strike based on acceptance of miners' wage cuts and a failure to secure reinstatement of strikers was widely viewed as unconditional surrender and bitter betrayal.

Such an outcome dealt a body blow to radical left-wing aspirations that the TUC General Council should act as a 'General Staff of Labour'. It was not until the 1970s that the TUC again felt able to request unions to take national strike action. In most instances, this has taken the form of political 'demonstration strikes' aimed at the government, but on each occasion the TUC has not itself called for strike action by the union movement, but only agreed to support and/or coordinate action that individual affiliated unions have themselves agreed to take. And in more recent years, notwithstanding Congress decisions in favour of 'investigating the practicalities of calling a general strike' in protest at austerity, this has not

been put into practice.

Another contributory feature of the TUC's enormously constrained support for industrial disputes by affiliate unions has been the way in which ideological and political loyalty to Labour, especially when Labour is in office, has encouraged it to dampen down strike action so as not to undermine the government. So while it successfully campaigned against the Labour government's 1969 *In Place of Strife* proposals to enable the Secretary of State to order ballots before major strikes and 'cooling-off' periods for unofficial strikes, with penal enforcement clauses, it subsequently adopted a 'solemn and binding' commitment with the government to strengthen its authority over affiliated unions to try to end 'so-called unauthorised and unconstitutional stoppages of work'.

During the 1975-1977 'Social Contract', the TUC attempted to come to the rescue of the Labour government by urging unions to accept pay restraint and, thereby, curb strike activity, until the policy collapsed with the demand for a return to free collective bargaining. But despite a growing hostile rank-and-file mood towards the Labour government, the General Council refused to mobilise unions in a public campaign against the government's 10% pay limit, support the 1977-1978 firefighters' strike, or give its backing to the 'winter of discontent' strike wave. Instead, it agreed a 'concordat' with the government, with a voluntary code of conduct for industrial disputes involving pre-strike ballots and picketing restrictions.

The TUC has consistently resisted supporting industrial action in breach of employment legislation. So while it campaigned against the *Industrial Relations Bill 1971*, once it was enacted onto the statute book it advised the transport union to pay a £55,000 fine levied by National Industrial Relations Court for unofficial picketing against containerisation. And when five London dockers were imprisoned for continuing unofficial picketing, the TUC very reluctantly agreed, after five days of escalating solidarity strike action by union

members across the country, to support a 'one-day stoppage of work' by affiliated unions for the following week – aware that its strike call would not need to be translated into practice because the dockers were being released that very day.

During the 1983 *Stockport Messenger* dispute, with new employment legislation that threatened fines, injunction and sequestration of assets for mass picketing, the NGA union called a national print strike (that closed Fleet Street) and appealed for solidarity action. The TUC's Employment Policy and Organisation Committee expressed a 'supportive attitude', but this was overruled by the General Council, leading the NGA general secretary, Joe Wade, to complain it had 'been sold down the river'. While Arthur Scargill kept the TUC at arms-length during the first six months of the 1984-1985 miners' strike, following the failure of the Orgreave mass picket, the NUM made unsuccessful attempts to secure TUC support for effective solidarity industrial action. Rank-and-file miners' frustration at the TUC boiled over when a noose was dangled over General Secretary, Norman Willis' head at a public meeting in South Wales. When the High Court sequestered miners' union funds, the TUC again ruled out supporting Scargill's call for industrial action by the union movement rather than risk being in contempt of court

During the 1986-1987 News International dispute, the print unions faced court writs for attempting to 'black' newspaper distribution and 'unlawful picketing' and then the sequestration of union funds, and sought TUC support against the electricians' union whose members (with officials' connivance) had been instrumental in the secret recruitment of staff in the new Wapping plant. But the General Council refused to direct the union to instruct its members to stop performing work previously undertaken by sacked staff – on the basis this would be unlawful secondary action. Again the unwillingness to take a more robust stance was widely condemned.

An additional limitation in the

TUC's role in industrial disputes has arisen because it has tried to avoid challenging the power of the government and state, with an emphatic rejection of *industrial militancy for political ends*. Responding to claims that the 1926 General Strike represented a political attack on parliamentary government, the TUC insisted it was an industrial dispute, and a 'national strike' rather than 'General Strike'. In reality, they were well aware that the logic of the strike did indeed threaten to challenge the power of the state – a key factor encouraging them to call it off.

In sum, the role of the TUC General Council (like that union officialdom more generally) is more complex than the simple 'Brutus' caricature often levelled by the radical left. Certainly there *have* been periods when the TUC opposed practically all strikes from 1940 to the mid-1950s, and after the 1984-1985 miners' strike and onset of 'new realism' argued that strikes were outmoded and counter-productive. But the TUC has often formally been willing to support industrial disputes by individual affiliates, and on occasions even coordinate much broader forms of strike action. The relative balance between these dual roles has clearly varied between different historical periods and contexts depending on the relative contradictory pressures placed upon them from both *above* and *below* and the dynamics of workers' struggles. Yet generally, the TUC has been motivated by the desire to restrict action to a demonstrative or token form, often playing an essentially mediatory role encouraging a compromise to end industrial disputes. Significantly *left-wing* members of the General Council (such as Swales, Hicks and Purcell in 1926 or the so-called 'awkward squad' of the 1990s) have often either been unsuccessful in challenging, or have anyway gone along with, the restrained decisions and actions of their more moderate counterparts.

Ralph Darlington is Professor of Employment Relations at University of Salford and author of Radical Unionism (2013, Haymarket)

Democracy and trade unionism: 150 years of the TUC

Jim Phillips argues relations within and across unions are more complex than usually recognised

The TUC is 150 years old. In leading, marshalling, coordinating and sometimes corralling the forces of labour in Britain for fifteen decades, the TUC has contributed significantly to democratic life in Britain. It has challenged anti-union employers to recognise the value of collective bargaining, and compelled policy-makers to listen to and accommodate the distinct interests of the workers by hand and brain. In bad times and good times, it has sought to counter corporate power, advance the rights of labour and improve the living standards of trade unionists.

Much of this progress has been in alliance with the Labour Party. The link between unions and party has been criticised from left and right. From a socialist perspective, the link has been seen as limiting the advance to the transformation of society, the party constrained by the 'economistic' goals and short-term defensive instincts of unions. The right has routinely characterised the link as undemocratic - the party the prisoner of its union paymasters.

Both left and right criticisms are tiresome because they are so inaccurate. More than 25 years ago, pre-dating 'new' Labour, Lewis Minkin's sensitive and authoritative study, *The Contentious Alliance*, explained in great detail how the relationship really operated from the 1900s to the 1980s, with a series of unwritten rules, customs and practices. Unions, coordinated by the TUC, very rarely intruded in areas of Labour Party policy-making, beyond employment and industrial relations questions. When Labour was in power, under Attlee, Wilson and Callaghan, the unions provided vital economic and social ballast. Wage freezes were conceded in exchange for the economic stability on which the welfare state, National Health Service, full employment and broader material improvement were thought to depend.

In the 1970s, the TUC went even further, agreeing a social contract with the Labour Party to limit wage advances in return for enhanced social wages: subsidies of food and fuel prices, and other important increases in public expenditure. But the political and global economy pressures were too great for this bargain to hold. Famously the International Monetary Fund, called to intervene as public sector borrowing escalated, enforced serious

spending cuts on the Labour government. These hacked away at the social wage and forced the unions back to the wage bargaining table. The subsequent industrial action, culminating in the winter of 1978-79, is usually remembered as 'irresponsible' but the TUC and its affiliates were struggling to protect the purchasing power of their members amid rapidly rising prices. From another perspective, moreover, unions *had* to negotiate on wages because they were given license to negotiate on nothing else, such was the unwillingness of employers to engage with their employees on other issues.

In this connection it is important to recall that the TUC's other ambition in the 1970s, a significant advance towards industrial democracy, was thwarted. The 1977 Bullock report, commissioned by the Labour government and influenced by TUC officials and thinking, recommended the appointment of union-channel worker directors in private sector industrial firms with 2,000 or more employees. But this was resisted and defeated by an alliance of multinationals, the Confederation of British Industry, the Conservative opposition and some dissenters within Labour's own ranks, including future Social Democratic Party defectors.

In stabilising Labour as a party of government across the mid-twentieth century, the TUC also intervened ideologically and organisationally against the Communist Party of Great Britain. The so-called 'Black Circular' of the 1930s barred Communists from holding office in Trades Councils affiliated to the TUC, and prefigured similar positioning and activism during the Cold War. Leading anti-communist union officials, notably Arthur Deakin, General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union, at times moved the TUC well beyond a position of critical opposition to Stalinism. Workplace trade unionism in England in the docks, the car manufacturing industry, passenger transport and the fire brigades was adversely affected by the intolerance of communists exhibited by the TUC and some of its officials in the 1940s and 1950s.

In Scotland, however, different structures and contingencies were observable. The TUC had co-existed since 1897 with the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC), formed largely on the basis of a competing conceptualisation of union democracy.

Angela Tuckett's 1986 account of the STUC's first eighty years demonstrates the extent of dissatisfaction in Scotland in the 1880s and 1890s with the TUC, which was seen by many as unfairly dominated by the interests of a small number of large unions with memberships predominantly concentrated in England. There was little scope for the agency or influence of Scottish trades councils, which formed the initial core of the STUC.

Scottish particularity was a recurrent theme in the subsequent history of the STUC. Contrasting industrial structures in Scotland and England were surely important. The centrality of coal, metals, shipbuilding and heavy engineering to a distinct Scottish industrial identity has been repeatedly emphasised in cultural as well as economic history. The incremental loss of jobs in these sectors after post-Second World War employment peaks in the mid-1950s had a big impact on Scotland's subsequent political and union trajectory. Skilled labour and Communist politics, especially in mining and shipbuilding, combined with deindustrialisation to cultivate union interest in the idea of Scotland as a nation, with particular economic and social interests that policy-makers at British level were unable to recognise or accommodate. The STUC was more critical than the TUC of Labour governments in the 1960s and 1970s from a socialist perspective, but also cultivated and mobilised a cross-class progressive alliance in favour of Home Rule.

The ever-loosening union and the related causal factor of deindustrialisation have contributed since the 1980s to the dwindling role in Scotland's public life of the TUC. The organisation nevertheless remains important, not least in policy debates about employment precariousness, universal basic income, the gender pay gap and the unfolding Brexit crisis. Its conceptualisation of union democracy has at times been crude and intolerant of dissenting voices, but the 150th anniversary is an important expression of the resilience of the labour movement and the continued relevance of its political institutions.

Jim Phillips is co-editor of Scottish Labour History and teaches at the University of Glasgow

Does Labour need to talk about anti-Semitism?

Sarah Glynn looks at why the crisis in Labour has emerged

This question is not prompted by any evidence of a correlation between Labour Party membership and anti-Semitism. Nor – despite a perceptible growth in racist attitudes more generally – do surveys show an increase in British anti-Semitism. But what has grown, and grown at an alarming rate, are *accusations* of anti-Semitism within the Labour Party, and now hardly a day goes by without the Labour leadership being questioned publically on what they are doing about the party’s ‘anti-Semitism’ problem.

Of course, any anti-Semitism is too much, especially when it results in abuse, but a 2017 survey by the Institute of Jewish Policy Research concluded that levels of anti-Semitism in Britain are among the lowest in the world. A YouGov survey commissioned by the Campaign Against Anti-Semitism found Labour supporters less likely than Conservatives to agree with anti-Semitic statements, and while both groups showed a significant fall in anti-Semitic attitudes over the years 2015, 2016 and 2017 (which coincide with Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership of the Labour Party), this fall was greatest among Labour supporters. Another survey found little variation across the political spectrum except for an increase in anti-Semitic views on the far right. This should come as no surprise as right-wing politics tends to blame society’s ills on ‘others’ rather than question the established system.

An unlikely background, then, to have produced a ‘Labour Party anti-Semitism’ crisis, but it is no accident that the rising cacophony of accusations has coincided with the party’s return to a more left-wing politics. For those making the accusations, including Labour’s own right wing and the mainstream media, a left-wing Labour Party poses a very serious threat. What we are witnessing is a classic smear campaign with potentially world-changing consequences.

Socialists have always attempted to champion the oppressed, and not

that long ago it was Israel that was commonly perceived as fitting that role. Many early Zionists believed they were creating a socialist state, despite the fundamental contradiction of Israel’s settler-colonialist basis. Labour Zionists made links with the British Labour Party, and most Labour Party members accepted the portrayal of Israel as a plucky David surrounded by the Goliaths of the Arab states. Israel still has strong residual support within the party, but as Israeli governments have become more unashamedly brutal in their defiance of UN resolutions, their denial of Palestinian rights, and their enforcement of Jewish dominance, many on the left – including Corbyn himself – have recognised Israeli oppression of Palestinians and identified with the Palestinian cause.

This has allowed a tactical alliance to develop between anti-Socialists and Zionists against the Labour left. Zionism seeks legitimacy by branding its political opponents as anti-Semitic, and accusations of anti-Semitism have become the weapon of choice for those looking to wound the Labour leadership and portray socialists as unelectable. These accusations generally rely on a deliberate conflation of anti-Semitism with anti-Zionism, and on guilt by association; but, repeated often enough, they acquire a semblance of truth. And, instead of asking questions, mainstream journalists have joined the attack, diligently reporting every accusation, and especially delighting in those that come from within the party.

The Tories don’t hesitate to refer to Labour’s ‘anti-Semitism’ problem at every opportunity, and welcome this distraction from their own very real political failings. And the Blairites have developed a new McCarthyism with which to purge socialists from their party, ejecting even Jewish party members as anti-Semites if they have criticised Israel. Despite its vaunted left sympathies, the SNP watches Labour’s self-destruction from the wings.

People who make baseless allegations of anti-Semitism are playing a dangerous game. In seriously wounding

the left, they also weaken Britain’s ability to counter actual racism and anti-Semitism in society at large. The resistance of neo-liberal governments to the sharing of economic wealth, coupled with their dedication to eradicating socialist ideas, has created ideal conditions for the growth of new right-wing populisms and ethnic nationalisms. These both appeal to the elites who benefit from the *status quo*, and to those who are looking for reasons as to why their lives and interests have been left behind. We are in desperate need of a strong counter-narrative that can help people to see how growing inequality, thwarted hopes, and deprivation are products of a structural system deliberately imposed by neo-liberal politicians. But, whenever the Labour Party tries to make that argument, it finds itself ambushed by another accusation of anti-Semitism, and criticisms of the neo-liberal agenda are left unreported and unheard.

The toxic political climate also impedes serious analysis of how and how much anti-Semitism may have increased since the foundation of Israel. Condemnation of the Israeli state can sometimes spill over into condemnation of all Jews, but this cannot be addressed without drawing a proper distinction between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism. A great many Jews are horrified at what is being done in their name – and increasing numbers are coming to recognise that the problem is not restricted to the acts of a particularly right-wing and hard-line Israeli government, and is, in fact, intrinsic in the concept of an exclusive ethno-religious ‘Jewish state’. However, Zionism insists that it represents all Jews and is central to Jewish identity, and every time that Israel portrays itself as the home of world Jewry, or Jewish community organisations leap to Israel’s defence, it becomes harder to insist on the fundamental distinction between the ‘Jewish state’ and Jews as a people. When MPs follow suit and decry anti-Zionism as anti-Semitic, they compound this problem.

At the same time, false allegations of anti-Semitism are distracting attention from the real thing. The anti-Semitism wolf has been called so many times that, when genuine anti-Semitism is pointed out, people can be reluctant to recognise it. Smear campaigns may be as old as politics, but social media has added a thick layer of manure to boost their growth. Besides its role in spreading rumours, the internet can prove a very effective tool in their creation. Would-be smearers have become expert at trawling through online histories to unearth any piece of evidence that may support their claim, however indirectly. This might be a carelessly worded comment, or a post that has been shared without thorough proof reading. It could even be something shared by a 'friend', or in a group to which someone has been added. Politicians have generally learnt to be careful in their own posts, but their past history may still be there to be mined, and friends and supporters may be much more careless. There is no shortage of material on the web to trip up the unsuspecting.

Some of this material is genuinely worrying, and it is important to understand why it is being shared. People who have learnt to be suspicious of reporting from mainstream sources, such as the BBC, may not be equally critical of sources that claim to debunk the mainstream narrative. All sorts of stories can take a hold, and appear to be corroborated when they are only being repeated. Common sources of anti-establishment counter-narratives include far-right groups that spread anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, so we have seen the depressing phenomenon of people who consider themselves left-wing anti-racists sharing anti-Semitic memes and articles created by the far right. Holocaust denial used to be limited to fascist groups, but is now alarmingly common among people who are suspicious of any mainstream histories, and particularly of a history that has been used to argue for the Zionist state. Less obviously worrying, but much more pervasive, is the spread of memes depicting the nineteenth-century anti-Semitic trope of a Rothschild conspiracy for world domination. Besides their anti-Semitism, these memes distract from the real cause of world problems. Rather than point at the impact of finance capital, they put all blame on

one symbolic greedy Jewish banker. Responding to such posts can be a depressing experience – any piece of counter evidence may be dismissed as false – but on other occasions people can be glad to have become better informed. Simply dismissing the poster as anti-Semitic could serve to alienate them further. People who are politically engaged tend to have a large number of Facebook 'friends' who may post some surprising things. How many of us could survive being judged by all the posts put up by our 'friends', and who would want to live in a society where that sort of scrutiny was deemed acceptable?

Smears are easy to make and very difficult to get rid of, so what can the Labour leadership do? While any instances of genuine anti-Semitism require firm, fair and proportionate action, it should not have allowed itself to be pushed into any measures or statements that could be taken to suggest that anti-Semitism is a specifically Labour problem. The danger in responding to this sort of attack is that you are pushed constantly onto the back foot, defending your actions and unable to change the agenda. Some specific accusations do require a swift and brief rebuttal, but attempts to mollify the accusers by responding in detail to the charges and not calling them out as a politically motivated smear campaign, only invites further attacks. Carefully nuanced arguments can easily be partially quoted and given a very different twist – as in the *Standard's* commentary about Corbyn's article in its own paper on 24 April 2018. Corbyn's dogged reasonableness served him well on the back benches, but can make him too ready to concede points that should not be conceded.

More positively, the attack on the Labour leadership through the calculated misuse of charges of anti-Semitism has prompted the founding of Jewish Voice for Labour. This is an organisation of progressive Jewish party members who 'oppose attempts to widen the definition of

anti-Semitism beyond its meaning of hostility towards or discrimination against Jews as Jews'. While the Labour leadership still needs to take on the party bureaucracies that are seeking to undermine them, Jewish Voice for Labour is well-placed to assume a bigger role in facing down this witch hunt, especially in countering attacks from outside the party. This would free others to concentrate on promoting the socialist policies that are so desperately needed.

We all (both in and outwith Labour) need to talk about anti-Semitism so that we know what it is and what it is not. We need to recognise and stop it for the sake of those it attacks, and also because if our comrades are in any way seduced by it their other actions will be tarnished and their understanding confused. And we need to be alert to how false accusations of anti-Semitism are being used to attack the left and cut across hopes for a fairer society in which it would be harder for any racisms to put down root.

Sarah Glynn is a Jewish anti-Zionist. She is not a member of any political party.

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Spain 0 - Scotland 1 (half-time score)

Peter Lomas continues our consideration of the Catalanian crisis

There's no necessary connection between Scotland and Catalonia, except that we hired a Catalan architect, Enric Miralles, to design our new Parliament building, and that the independence movements in both 'regions' seek re-entry to the EU as sovereign states. There are also important differences.

First, while Catalonia is Spain's wealthiest industrial region (providing some kind of independence in its own right), the opposite is true of Scotland in Britain. The separatist movement in Scotland, moreover, has always been idealistic and intellectually innovative rather than narrowly nationalist. SNP governments have led the British trend away from fossil fuels; our independence movement looks to Nordic socio-economic models.

Second, there is a different political heritage. Catalonia is a culturally-rich and cosmopolitan region of Mediterranean Europe. Prior to EU entry, Spain was a marginal European society ruled by a military dictatorship, struggling with economic underdevelopment for decades after the wrong side won the Civil War. In that war, the most ardent defenders of the Republic – and most persecuted in defeat – were the Catalans. It is no accident that the post-Franco Spanish constitution, while providing for regional devolution, contains no legal provision for its extension into secession. That is why all the Catalan referendum initiatives have been technically illegal and politically controversial in the Spanish national context. In Britain, by contrast, the idea of a free union of nations, dating from 1603, implicitly contains the possibility of its dissolution. That is why when Alex Salmond, as Scottish First Minister, politely asked the British Prime Minister to co-operate in a binding Scottish independence referendum, the latter had to agree.

Scotland is not Catalonia, *pace* Rajoy's repeated threats to veto independent Scottish membership of the EU. Here, I think that the current First Minister's positions since the Brexit referendum have been perfectly sound. It was only natural to re-open the Scottish independence question after the Scottish vote in 2016 went against the

UK-wide pattern. As long as the Brexit negotiations go on, we need to know what kind of British state will be left after EU withdrawal. What else could the First Minister have done? Inaction, or a snap independence referendum in Scotland, would both have been wrong. Meanwhile, Sturgeon's support for any compromise avoiding a hard Brexit is both logical and responsible – loyal to the well-being of Britain as a whole.

It is British government's actions, based on a paltry (51.8%) majority for Brexit, that are controversial and unconstitutional. Imagine the howls of protest if a Holyrood government had sought to withdraw from Britain on a similar statistical basis. The Tory Party is caught on the horns of its own dilemma. This is a problem imposed on Scotland: an abuse of power as arbitrary and rigid as the Spanish government's assumption of direct rule in Catalonia.

The stand-out exception in all this is fisheries policy, because it was the Tory Thatcher government that exploited the European Commission's liberalisation of fishing licences three decades ago, allowing Cornish fishing families to sell their permits for money. The result was Spanish trawlers hoovering up the North Sea and almost destroying cod stocks along with the east-coast Scottish fishing industry. But the SNP government fought the EU on this (successfully reversing the policy on discards, for example). The North-East voters have no grounds for turning Tory, as they have done, and stabbing the Scottish Government in the back over Brexit.

Meanwhile, it's important to support the Catalans in principle, provided they proceed in a non-violent and legitimist manner. A legitimist move now by the Spanish government, instead of repeatedly sending in the Guardia Civil riot-squads, would be to legislate for a binding constitutional referendum in Catalonia. One of the Catalan rebels, Clara Ponsati (former education minister), still has residence in Scotland as Professor of Economics at St Andrews University. She is resisting extradition to Spain under a European Arrest Warrant, arguing that there is no independent judiciary in Spain and that the grounds of the warrant, that she is guilty of violent sedition, are baseless. The

immediate reaction here to her plight – including a massive crowdfunding campaign for her legal costs – demonstrates both the level of Scottish public support and the democratic superiority of our institutions. The case may well go to the Scottish High Court; let us hope for some independence of mind from our judges on this matter.

The possibility of a democratic Scottish secession from Britain has not been weakened or discredited in the slightest by recent developments; it has simply been delayed - stymied by the illegitimate behaviour of the Conservative government, fearful of its own party divisions and obsessed with imposing its own version of economic austerity.

We expect architects of political change, like the architects of new buildings, to be bold and imaginative. But they must also be sensitive to the style and culture of those who will live with the changes. In this respect, the Tory government's actions since 2016 are as irrelevant and autocratic towards Scotland as Miralles' creation in Edinburgh. After his death, Miralles' widow Benedetta Tagliabue kept on the architects' cabinet, executing public contracts in the Catalan capital. Still, it's no credit to them, and no consolation to us, that key features of the Scottish Parliament building bear more than a passing resemblance to the Barcelona Vegetable Market.

Peter Lomas is the author of Unnatural States: The International System and the Power to Change (London/New York: Routledge, 2017).

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Getting the best out of Brexit

Pauline Bryan argues for combining constitutional and social change for the post-2019 period

What can we hope to get out of Brexit? One benefit has to be sovereignty. But what does that actually mean for Britain today? Devolution in Britain has been piecemeal and fragmented. Politicians have responded to pressure for change without having a clear vision of how Britain could operate with multiple parliaments and assemblies. New powers were devolved in what appeared a haphazard way. Whatever the perceived political differences between the nations there was a limit to how much they could actually diverge, as many of the decisions taken in Westminster, Holyrood, Cardiff and Belfast were constrained by EU rules and regulations. The different nations of Britain were obliged to be aligned because of the EU.

The Scottish SNP Government on a number of occasions explained why it could not introduce progressive policies because of EU regulations. It had to put ScotRail and the Scottish ferries out to competitive tendering. In the case of procurement, it said that it could not prevent blacklists from bidding for government projects or insist upon companies paying the living wage because the EU's internal market commissioner had advised them that the policy suggested by Scottish Labour was, to quote, 'unlikely' to be possible.

In order to achieve a progressive Brexit, we have to ensure that we have class unity that cuts across nations and regions, but at the same time allows powers to be devolved to the level most effective for democracy, transparency and accountability. Not an easy circle to square. That is why we badly need the Constitutional Convention as promised in Labour's manifesto. I would argue that we cannot wait for a Labour Government before starting this process; we need an agreed approach to take into the next election campaign.

There are some immediate issues

that arise out of the repatriation of powers from the EU. While the SNP government has complained about Westminster grabbing powers, it has at same time come to an agreement to establish Common Frameworks. This is likely to involve a number of joint ministerial committees that could come to replicate EU Commissions by being technocratic, insular, power hungry and closed to public scrutiny. So it is vital that we think through the democratic structures for cross-Britain decision making that can take account of the devolved parliaments and assemblies and create democratic structures for the regions of England. We do not want to find, having been released from some of the restrictions of the EU, that they are re-imposed by a British Tory government.

So if we want the best out of Brexit, we need to think further than a list of powers and consider what structures we need to ensure that our economy is democratically accountable, that we can redistribute wealth between the regions and nations and which can retain class solidarity. Jeremy Corbyn stated in his Coventry speech in February 2018: 'As we change our constitutional relationship with Europe, we must also adjust our own arrangements. Just as many felt that power was too centralised and unaccountable in Brussels, so many feel that about Westminster'.

One thing is clear: when powers are repatriated, unless there is the political will to do things differently we will find that the implicit ideology of the EU is repatriated along with the powers. Take agriculture. The Scottish Tenant Farmers' Association is optimistic about Brexit as it sees that there is an opportunity to target support payments to smaller farms rather than large multinationals. The withdrawal from the EU's Common Fisheries Policy will be well received in Scottish fishing communities but without further change the British fisheries management regime will stay in place. The repatriation of

power gives an opportunity to end the marketization of licenses for fish quotas. The Scottish Government could support and encourage cooperatives at both fishing and processing stages and bring much needed investment into neglected communities. We could start straight away by arguing for the right of workers in Pinney's fish processing factory to take over their company.

The requirement for competitive tendering of public services has to be removed so that transport and the utilities can be renationalised. The ability to borrow to invest in infrastructure and to give state aid to industries or different ownership models must be permitted.

Long term, we must look to a different constitutional setup that brings the nations and regions together to ensure that the interests of working people are properly represented. The House of Lords must be abolished and, perhaps, replaced with an elected chamber responsible for cross UK decision making. Getting the best out of Brexit will involve radical change, and we know that the Tories won't deliver it. We have to work together through political and union action and in communities whose needs are ignored to ensure that we win our Brexit, not the Tory's Brexit.

Pauline Bryan is co-author with Vince Mills of 'Getting the best out of Brexit' published by Radical Options for Scotland and Europe

National self-determination today

Neil Davidson explores the basis on which socialists should approach the issue of national self-determination

In 1896, the London Congress of the Second International passed a resolution declaring that it stood 'for the complete right of all nations to self-determination'. Over a hundred and twenty years later, can socialists still make the same confident declaration?

Support for national self-determination should be relatively uncontentious. It does not mean socialists supporting secession by every national group who demands it, but rather supporting them in making an unimpeded *decision* about their constitutional status, which is simply a question of democracy. Socialists need not necessarily support a particular decision and may argue against it, depending on what they see as being in the interests of the working class and the struggle for socialism more generally.

But clearly, there are some cases in which even recognizing the 'right to decide' is always going to be against the interests of the working class, notably where a particular group is aligned with one imperialist power or another. In these examples, socialists could legitimately point to the way in which national demands were directed towards reactionary ends, but this implicitly means abandoning the notion of a 'right', since by definition these are universal and cannot be restricted to those with whom we politically agree. An alternative strategy would be to deny that groups with which we disagree are nations at all, but this involves returning to some variant of the discredited Stalinist 'checklist' method of definition, in which one sets the criteria to get the result one desires: in this case the notion of a 'right' can be retained, but only by denying the existence of certain nations.

It might be more helpful to abandon 'rights' talk altogether. Who or what, after all, could confer a 'right to self-determination'? Assuming it is not an unalienable right granted by the Creator, such as those listed in the American Declaration of

Independence, it could perhaps be one recognized in international law; but as the Palestinians have long since found out, motions passed by the United Nations do not have the force of law, unless they are supported by the US and its allies. It is not, of course, that all rights are completely intangible; they can and have been won, including, most obviously, the right to vote; but these are outcomes of class and other social struggles within the territories of individual nation-states, subsequently enshrined in their laws.

One need not accept Rosa Luxemburg's belief in the ultimate pointlessness of national self-determination under capitalism to recognize the truth of her assessment: 'A 'right of nations' which is valid for all countries and all times is nothing more than a metaphysical cliché of the type of 'rights of man' and 'rights of the citizen'.'

There are, of course, national movements whose struggle for statehood socialists are obliged to support. Perhaps Lenin's most important contribution to debates on the national question was to highlight the distinction was between 'oppressed' and 'oppressor' nations, as a basis for deciding which national movements should be supported and which opposed by socialists. The former were those nationalities held against their collective will within the remaining absolutist or tributary empires of the Hapsburgs, Romanovs and Ottomans, or the colonies and semi-colonies of the Great Powers in Africa, Asia, Latin America and, of course, Ireland. These national movements had to be supported, whatever the exact nature of their politics, which were in most cases uninformed by socialist aspirations. On the other hand, there were the 'oppressor' nations (and the absolutist and tributary empires) which prevented the oppressed from achieving independent statehood. The nationalisms of these oppressor states had to be opposed, above all by the

working class within them.

The distinction between oppressor and oppressed was never an entirely adequate device for establishing the attitude of Marxists towards national movements. It had nothing to say about the attitude of socialists to nations which may have had legitimate grounds for claiming that they were oppressed – as Serbia did in 1914, for example – but which were part of a wider inter-imperialist struggle in which their situation was manipulated by one side. Nor did it provide guidance in a situation in which a socialist revolution in a multi-national empire – like Russia in 1917 – might result in some of the formerly oppressed nations seeking to secede *from* a workers' state, as for example Ukraine attempted to do during the early stages of the Russian Revolution. My argument here is not that the positions adopted by Lenin and the Bolsheviks in these cases were wrong, quite the contrary, but rather that they were based on a wider set of political considerations than simply the oppressor/oppressed distinction. However, it could be legitimately argued that these were exceptional cases and that as a broad distinction the categories of oppressor and oppressed generally allowed socialists to arrive at correct operational conclusions.

Lenin tended to see the question of national self-determination as an intrinsic part of the bourgeois revolution. In other words, it was not one which would remain eternally valid until the global triumph of the socialist revolution, but rather one relevant to a situation in which three remaining absolutist or tributary empires (Austria-Hungary, Russia and Turkey) and eight capitalist powers (UK, Netherlands, Belgium, France, Germany, Spain, Portugal, USA and Japan), had between them reduced the rest of the world outside Europe, North America and Australasia to colonial or semi-colonial status.

The world remains deeply uneven and unequal in terms of power and

influence, but it *is* now one divided into a system of nation-states. The historic formation of this system was accomplished during the sixty years between the opening of the First World War and the end of the post-war boom. The three major national questions still unresolved from the era of decolonization are the reunification of Ireland, and the plight of the Palestinians and the Kurds. The latter are both exceptional in different respects: the former because the Palestinians no longer possess a territory in which to exercise self-determination, having been effectively expelled from it by the Zionist colonial-settler regime; the Kurds because they are spread across the territories of five different nation-states and have different relations with each. The Kurdish example also illustrates the difficulty of simply attempting to apply the oppressor/oppressed distinction, given the quite different political trajectories taken by the Turkish, Iraqi and Syrian Kurds in relation to US imperialism, the internal regimes in the territories they control, and much else besides.

However, the biggest problems for Marxists in deciding what attitude to take to national movements has not been these long-standing struggles for self-determination, but two relatively recent phenomena. One is where former nation-states have entered a process of complete disintegration, as in Yugoslavia during the 1990s and in several states in Central Africa and the Middle East more recently, above all in Syria. What attitude should the left take in these cases, where economic collapse, civil war, invasion, or failed revolutions have left different religious, tribal or 'ethnic' groups struggling against each other to seize territory and resources? It is completely futile for the left to assume there must necessarily be a 'progressive' side in these situations. One can and must oppose Western intervention on behalf of one side or the other without having any illusions that, for example, Assad represents a more progressive option. When Karl Leibknecht raised the slogan 'the main enemy is at home' he did not mean to imply that the *only* enemy was at home.

The other, more relevant to Scotland, is the emergence, or in some cases the re-emergence of 'stateless nations' seeking autonomy or independence in the long-established capitalist states of the West. In some cases these had an earlier history of oppression, in others not; but by the 1980s differences between Catalonia and Quebec on the one hand and Scotland on the other were marginal, compared to what faces the Palestinians and Kurds. *No* nation-state recognizes a constitutional 'right' to secede from it. Some, like the UK, do not refer to the issue at all, leaving politicians and state managers to deal with national issues on an *ad hoc* basis as they emerge, rather than tying their hands in advance with legal constraints. Others, among which the Spanish state is preminent, explicitly exclude the possibility. But simply rejecting Scottish or Catalan demands for self-determination on the grounds that they are not oppressed is to embrace a stultifying formalism which takes no account of the exigencies of the class struggle or the dangers of inadvertently supporting the existing constitutional structures of the leading capitalist nation-states.

For socialists, the question of support for particular national demands (not for particular nationalisms) is determined by their relationship to the struggle for socialism, regardless of whether the nation concerned is oppressed or not. Lenin's response to Rosa Luxemburg is relevant here. He argued that withholding support from national movements seeking to escape great empires, as her native Poland was from Russia, had two detrimental effects: one was to hand over leadership to the bourgeois nationalists in the former; the other was to implicitly endorse the continued rule of the latter. Support for national *demands* should of course be openly undertaken with the purpose of weakening the support of workers for *nationalism*, and in this context several questions have to be asked. Does support strengthen or weaken the capitalist or imperialist state? Does it strengthen or weaken the class consciousness and organization of the working class? Does it strengthen or weaken

the tolerance of people of different nations or 'races' for each other?

Depending on the answers, and without any illusions in the ability of small states to resist the pressures of the world capitalist system, deciding to secede can be seen as both a progressive and democratic option which need not involve nationalism at all. In each case, however, constructing an argument for why a particular group should determine their own future has to be done on the basis of a political argument, rather than the application of a formula.

Neil Davidson is a lecturer in sociology in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Glasgow. He is author of Nation-States: Consciousness and Competition; We Cannot Escape History: States and Revolutions; Holding Fast to an Image of the Past: Explorations on Marxism and History; and How Revolutionary Were the Bourgeois Revolutions? (all Haymarket Books).

Cover:

Nadia Lucchesi
(nadia.shemail@gmail.com)

Proofing services:

Bob Thomson, John Wood and John Daly

Communications and organisational development:

Carole Ewart

Editor Email:

gregorgall@outlook.com

Web: www.scottishleftreview.org

Tel: 0141 424 0042

Address:

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Why the British working class should support Scottish independence

Fraser Coats looks back to 2014 to see where we should be heading in 2018

When David Cameron was overheard crowing that the Queen had 'purred down the line' on being told that Scotland had rejected independence, his delight was not only personal, but echoed the relief being felt that morning by his entire class.

Every national and regional daily paper supported 'no'; military leaders warned of threats to British security; financial 'experts' said banks would abandon Scotland; supermarket bosses predicted price rises while oil tycoons made you wonder why they were involved in oil production at all if there really was as little left in the North Sea as they insisted; the elderly were told of pensions at risk; and immigrants would be forced to leave Scotland. Finally, as late polls showed a narrow lead for 'yes', PMQs was hastily cancelled to allow the three main British party leaders to travel to Scotland, link arms in political unity and cobble together 'The Vow', a promise to grant Scotland more powers if it voted 'no'.

The merits of those arguments have been exhaustively debated. But there remains a question yet to be addressed. Despite the most ferocious defence of ruling class interests in modern times, analysis of the vote revealed that working class Scots and those in the poorest areas had, by clear majorities, voted 'yes'. Like Cameron, they too had figured out where their class interests lay. In the rest of the Britain though, what evidence there was suggested a substantial majority of working class people favoured Scotland remaining in Britain.

Common bonds based mainly on sentiment played a part for sure but that hardly explains the positions of our own, supposedly more class-conscious movement. Labour was of course, hostile to independence while those unions who declared a position were also unanimously opposed, and to be fair, this does seem to have accurately reflected the views of ordinary members. Why then did the wider British working class align themselves with their own ruling class?

Put simply they confused virtue with vice; the unity of our class with the defence of the very institutions which attack us. Class unity doesn't depend upon sharing a government - examples of international solidarity are too numerous for that theory to bear any scrutiny - so it would be illogical to argue that our shared values are threatened by Scottish self-determination. But Westminster, the preferred choice of the labour movement, never seems to run out of ways to divide and defeat working people. And the loss of Scotland, one of its central pillars, would have been a crushing blow to the class system as conditions were created for its collapse and debate began to open up in the other nations. This is what Cameron fully understood and the British labour movement failed to grasp.

It's nothing new. A century and a half ago around a million people were starved out of Ireland in order to undermine wages and conditions in Britain. Although they lived in squalor, they were resented and held in contempt by native workers, whose leaders at the time accepted British policy in Ireland. It was a classic case of divide and rule. In siding with the ruling class on Ireland, British workers were in fact supporting a strategy designed to attack their own living standards, the unthinking architects of their own impoverishment, prompting Karl Marx to write 'the English working class will never accomplish anything before it has got rid of Ireland'.

21st century Scotland is not, of course, 19th century Ireland. Conditions for working people have improved immeasurably, and Scotland never was a colony. But there remain parallels to be drawn and lessons we shouldn't forget. The advances in conditions for working people are not a result of Westminster rule, but of the fight against it. They have been taken, not given. But accepting concessions allowed our ruling class to remain intact, to live to fight another day when conditions turn in their favour. The results are disastrous; poverty and inequality have rocketed, food banks have become an essential

for many, tens of thousands are killed by fuel poverty every winter, others driven to suicide by benefits sanctions, joblessness and despair.

And Labour now claims to represent British workers but like its Liberal predecessor it too has a century-long record of defending, not defeating, British capitalism. Notwithstanding the efforts of genuine and able figures like Hardie himself, Lansbury, Benn or even Corbyn today, no-one can seriously believe a British road to socialism still exists.

It's true that Scotland can't claim the victim status of an ex-colony. Yet that's the point. Unlike Ireland, an independent Scotland would represent the beginnings of the Empire crumbling from within, an irreversible rejection of the British ruling class by a section of its own working class.

The movement however, disorientated by Brexit and Corbyn, now appears divided on the timing of a second referendum. But frustration is the enemy and while support remains stagnant a second vote would most likely end in a more permanent defeat. Like it or not, the dust has to settle on Brexit before a clear vision of an independent Scotland can emerge. If that vision is progressive, if the SNP can be pushed leftwards towards more pro-working class policies - using a Scottish currency to facilitate full employment for example or promoting co-operatives amongst the unemployed as in regions of Italy - then support will grow again. Build it and they will come, you might say. Cameron recognised that the Scottish question is about class not nationality. It should be our duty to make the same crucial distinction.

Fraser Coats is a train driver and chair of ASLEF Bathgate branch. He was previously shop steward in CWU and a long-term member of Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) and chair of its Airdrie and Coatbridge branch.

Carillion collapse highlights need to tame the power of corporations and economic elites

Prem Sikka shows how the rules are rigged for the rich

The collapse of Carillion isn't an isolated event. The British high street is now full of collapses and closures resulting in loss of jobs, pensions, supply chains and destruction of local economies. Big names such as Maplin, BHS and Toys R Us have disappeared. Carpetright, Poundland and House of Fraser are teetering. Inevitably parliamentary committees and media ponder over 'what's to be done?'. Within the contradictions of capitalism, the usual response to unexpected scandals and collapses is to tweak accounting, auditing, corporate governance and pensions reforms. This is welcome but simultaneously misses the bigger picture. The real problem is the power of corporations and how wealthy elites are able to treat corporations as their private fiefdoms. All this is permitted by law.

The laws and policies are introduced by political parties funded by big business and wealthy elites. They control the media and provide jobs to former and potential ministers to advance their interests. In return, laws and institutional structures are devised to appease corporate interests.

Consider the case of Carillion, whose final balance boasted assets of £2.2m. Some £1.6m of this related to what accountants call 'goodwill' which is the difference between the price paid for the tangible assets of acquired companies and the value of their tangible assets. In economic terms, it could be rationalised that Carillion had bought businesses with some economic advantages which it hoped would enable it to earn superior returns and £1.6m represented a kind of present value of those future returns. But Carillion did not have superior returns. Its cash margins on contracts were between 2% and 5% of sales i.e. there was no sign of any superior performance and returns. Therefore, goodwill should not have been shown as an asset in its balance sheet. The entire asset should have been written-down. Instead, the dubious asset of 'goodwill' continued to appear in balance sheet in full right to the end. Accounting rules permitted it.

The accounting rules for treatment of 'goodwill' are not the outcome of any parliamentary debates. Rather the rules were formed by the Financial Reporting Council (FRC), a body colonised by big business and accountancy firms. Inevitably, it delivered the results desired by the elites.

The FRC claims that it consults corporations, investors and elites in order to develop and they all approve its accounting rules. Imagine if in 18th century America someone developed social policies by consulting slave owners and then said that there is widespread support for slavery. If they spoke to slaves, they would have soon learnt that there is no support for slavery. Similarly, the selective consultations of accounting rule makers privilege the worldviews of corporate elites and shareholders. No consideration is given to the consequences of the rules for employees and other stakeholders.

The failure to write off goodwill in Carillion's income statement meant that the company reported artificially high profits which masked its deteriorating financial position. Higher profits justified the payment of higher dividends to appease capital markets and shareholders. Higher profits enabled directors to claim performance related bonuses and shareholders happily approved them. The dividends personally benefitted directors because they held shares and share options in the company. Directors failed to address the deficit of over £800m on the company's pension schemes. No law or accounting rule required company directors to eliminate the deficit. The Pension Regulator does not have powers to demand that companies with pension scheme deficits should not be able to pay dividends without a plan to eliminate the deficits. Britain actually does not have a central enforcer of company law to oversee companies.

The liquidation of Carillion has inflicted losses on employees, supply chain creditors and left the HMRC in the lurch. Some institutional shareholders huffed and puffed about the loss of their investment, but at least their liability is

limited. The same cannot be said about society at large which faces unlimited liability. In common with other insolvent businesses, Carillion's secured creditors, mainly banks, will be at the head of the queue and are likely to recover a substantial part of the £1.5bn owed to them. Carillion owed around £2bn to its 30,000 suppliers, which includes plumbers, electricians, truck drivers, self-employed construction workers, other contractors and HMRC and they will be lucky to recover anything. In British insolvency law, pension schemes rank as unsecured creditors too, but may be bailed out by the Pension Protection Fund (PPF). The bailout for some members will be up to a maximum of 90% of the deficit. This would lead to reductions in pensions for retirees who may have to be supported by the taxpayer funded welfare system.

This state of affairs exists because of the privileging of the interests of corporations and economic elites. From a risk management perspective, in the event of bankruptcy, pension scheme liabilities should be prioritised i.e. paid before any other creditor. With the passing of time, employees simply can't rebuild their pension pots. Pensions are probably the major source of income for most retirees and they cannot afford to forego any part of it. In contrast, banks and financial institutions hold diversified portfolios and are in a position to absorb some of the losses from corporate bankruptcies. But such social logic does not inform laws. The same malaise is present in accounting rule making. The rules advance the interests of shareholders and markets, but are not road-tested to ascertain negative impacts on others. The Carillion collapse should encourage reflections on the fundamental causes of bad policies and reinvigorate calls for reforms which prioritise societal concerns over appeasement of corporations and economic elites.

Prem Sikka is Professor of Accounting and Finance at the University of Sheffield and Emeritus Professor of Accounting at the University of Essex

Gun control – where east could meet west

Victor Grossman recounts how gun control was a state affair in East Germany

My brother-in-law Werner was a passionate hunter. Until his early death he lived in the former East Germany. I lived there, too, for many years, and it was there that my brother-in-law took me with him on a few hunting trips. I made clear that I did not at all like the idea of shooting a deer, a gracefully beautiful animal. As for the wild boars, hardly handsome creatures to any eyes but those of their mates and offspring – I didn't like the idea of shooting them either. I went along partly out of curiosity, partly for the chance to do some bird-watching while he was watching for prey.

Werner had an amazingly sharp eye for distant grazers - he was skilled with his gun but also with words as he tried to convince me that hunting, despite its death and blood, was a necessity. With no natural enemies (until recent years when some wolves were re-introduced) an overgrown deer population would ruin acres of young woodland, and wild hogs can ruin many potato fields. Their numbers had to be kept in check by humans, he insisted. This did not justify excited hobby hunters shooting all that moved but, he claimed, did justify a strictly planned improvement of their ranks.

I suspect that even this rationale would anger vegetarians and vegans, and I will not argue. But the interesting aspect for me was a system which many would see as a restriction of freedom and typical for such a 'communist'-run state. Weapons and ammunition were strictly controlled. Guns, though privately-owned, were stored at the hunting clubs, usually connected with the forest ranger's home and station. To get licenses as club members, hunters had to attend classes and pass exams on identifying wildlife, avoiding unnecessary cruelty or neglect, shooting ability – and some old traditional rules for hunters, once restricted to nobility or men of wealth. The guns had to be picked up and returned on an agreed-upon system, which governed which seasons and which animals were 'okay' for hunting

and which were not: ill animals, yes, for example, but no does with fawns or wild sows with offspring. The rules were strict; every bullet had to be accounted for, whether a hit or a miss!

Corresponding rules were in force for shooting clubs. Schooling and licenses were required, weapons were kept not at home but at the clubs, ammunition was apportioned and had to be accounted for. Yes, these were indeed restrictions on freedom, and most likely had a rationale not only in terms of forestry or sports but also politically, with no unauthorized weapons in possibly rebellious hands. And those authorized for people in uniform were also restricted to their official times on duty.

This recalls, in reverse, the reasons why some Americans oppose controls or limitations even on assault weapons, which are certainly not bought for hunting or sport or to protect against robbers. When some National Rifle Association fans raise posters proclaiming that 'AR-15's EMPOWER the people' we can easily guess what kind of people and what kind of power are meant. No, their proliferating gun collections are not only destined for stags, pheasants or range target stands.

The strict weapons' laws on Werner's hunting were undoubtedly a restriction of his freedoms and a Second Amendment was lacking. This meant that that there were virtually no shooting deaths and not a single mass shooting, in schools or anywhere else – not even, as it turned out, in the course of

regime change, which occurred in 1989-1990 without any bloodshed.

Were the rules far too stringent? My hunting enthusiast brother-in-law never complained to me about restrictions on his hunting rights (whose rules now no longer apply). He was, by the way, a teacher, who never dreamed of having a gun in a classroom. And his death, before he was 65, was not due to any hunting or weapons' mishap but rather, almost conclusively, to his addiction to cigarettes, whose use was completely uncontrolled.

Victor Grossman, a 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).

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Nae Pasaran (2018)

written, produced and directed by Felipe Bustos Sierra

Reviewed by Jackie Bergson

Nae Pasaran is the extraordinary result of Felipe Bustos Sierra's quest to find congruence in a story which stirred his curiosity and passion about Scottish workers who refused to carry out maintenance on aeroplane engines used by the Chilean air force to bomb its own people in the early 1970s. The impact of this action of solidarity by Scottish engineers had never been fully documented and the meaning of the story behind and following that action had, therefore, been all but lost. Uncovering and putting all of the pieces of this true story together with exceptional talent and commitment, the film's young director brings this rousing and compassionate account of events which took place in the 1970s to a wider audience.

Nae Pasaran's cinematic arc began in earnest this decade, when Edinburgh-based Felipe, whose heritage is Chilean, contacted the engineers who had led a four-year boycott from their workplace in East Kilbride's Rolls Royce factory in 1973. 'Tank commander' Bob Fulton and his 'super-shop-steward' colleagues, Robert Somerville, Stuart Barrie and John Keenan were, thus, given an exceptional opportunity to breathe true life into this remarkable story.

Telling how these men's 'moral compass' was their true guide throughout, in making the film, Felipe has since stated that these same men represented 'a true barometer' for him. Thus, an investigative impetus which leads to the discovery of an abandoned, rusting Rolls Royce Avon engine - which was returned from Chile to Scotland early in 2018 - also leads to the reporting of the grave circumstances which existed in Chile during General Pinochet's command.

Evoking Pinochet's four-decades-old military coup against the first left-wing presidency of Chile grounds the storyline of *Nae Pasaran* - as does the responsive action of the film's shop-steward heroes, who acted to stop further delivery of engines for Hawker Hunter planes which bombed La Moneda Palace and President Allende with it on 11 September 1973.

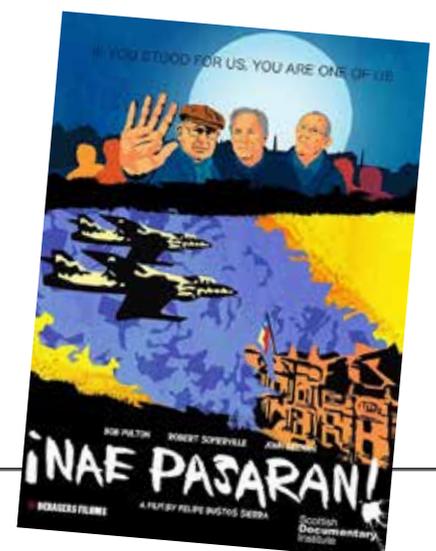
Covering important details through archive footage such as the bombing of La Moneda, the film also chronicles the significance of Judith Hart, a Labour MP who was captured and tortured by Chilean secret police at the time; events such as public gatherings of peaceful protest in Chile by the revolutionary left wing movement MIR - which, amongst other atrocities, suffered the assassination of its general secretary in 1974 by Chilean secret police; some of the horrific actions of the Chilean military and its secret police agency in torturing and killing suspected dissidents of Pinochet's regime; and newsreel commentary about USA-Andes copper mines investors, whom in 1973 were believed to have supported Pinochet's coup against President Allende.

Connecting meaning and significance between 1973 to present day through recent interviews with a prominent Chilean journalist, British officials who represented the Chile Solidarity campaign at the time and a high-ranking Chilean air force general, the fine intelligence, open curiosity and unobtrusive style of the film truly shines. Light is consequently thrown upon certain Chilean viewpoints such as '[the Rolls Royce workers] did not see themselves as criminals ... nobody knows the truth', aired by one commentator; the Scottish boycotters being thought of as similar to radicalised Islamists expressed by another. In answering questions after a screening, Felipe stated that in his own view the General who made the latter

comment missed an opportunity for humanitarian reflection - instead he 'made a shovel and buried himself'.

As if by poetically dramatic juxtaposition, the heroic, magical image of Bob Fulton in ghostly form appears as the story unfolds, standing in the way of trucks destined for Chile to deliver war plane engines. This transcendental touch resonates with meaning beyond the facts and conversations distilled within the film. This ordinary hero and his former Rolls Royce colleagues alike are telling how they felt at the time and how they still feel today, despite circumstances being very different. Seeing the image of trucks simply driving through Bob in ghostly form resonates with the men's point that circumstances today are very different. The open question which the film points to here is clearly whether or how a similar action of solidarity between workers in Britain and abroad would be able to have the same direct impact today. With resounding and resonating proclamation, *Nae Pasaran* is the best documentary to come out of Scotland in recent years. Not to be missed on its release this September.

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.



Iain Ferguson,

Politics of the Mind: Marxism and Mental Distress

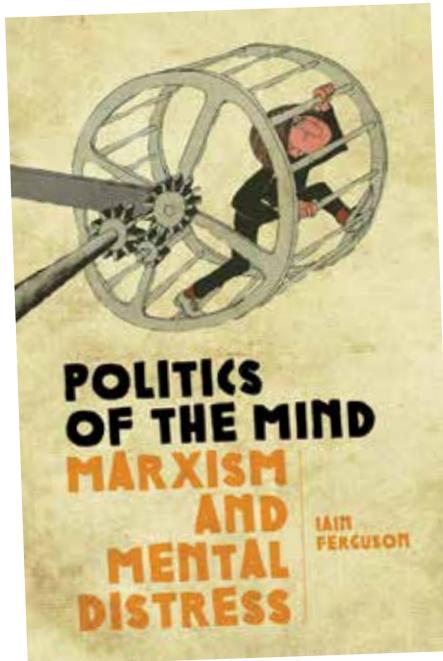
Bookmarks, 2017, £9.99,
9781910885659

Reviewed by Susan Clark

The book is a study of the causal link between capitalism and the high levels of mental illness and distress in society today. Indeed, this is the central argument of the book. The author provides worrying statistics. The World Health Organisation states that depression affects 350 m people around the world and further evidence shows that mental illness is inextricably linked to poverty, affecting in greater numbers the unemployed or low paid. Workers are put under considerable pressure to produce more. Stagnant wages, precarious work and rising living costs result in poverty, indebtedness and alienation. Combined with a lack of effective union resistance and collective action, this has resulted in an epidemic of work-related stress responsible for 45% of absences from work in 2015/16. It's interesting that while the number of working days lost to strike action has gone down, the number of days lost to stress-related illness has risen exponentially. Social care and welfare benefits have been savagely cut in the name of austerity. The unemployed are threatened with a brutal sanctions regime if they fail to find work. The disabled are forced to undergo work capability assessments that aren't fit for purpose and usually result in their benefits being stopped, inevitably leading to mental ill health.

Ferguson is, therefore, correct in his assertion that the crisis in mental health has become one of the key issues of the twenty first century and that it has two aspects: the extent of mental illness and the nature and availability of mental health services to deal with it. He addresses this by providing a detailed account of Marx's materialist perspective on mental health. Marx recognized that humans have basic material needs that must be met to maintain our physical and mental wellbeing and survival. Unlike other animals, we have a conscious ability to control our own labour which should provide us with a sense of freedom. However, the main drive

in a capitalist society is to increase production and accumulate wealth, not meet social need, and this leads to widespread alienation and mental distress. He knew that to understand those feelings we must look at the social and economic circumstances, reject biological determinism and instead look at how people react to their life experiences.



The author provides historical context by exploring and critiquing the dominant models used to assess and treat mental illness, beginning from religious explanations that 'madness' was a punishment meted out by the gods or due to demon possession, through to the dominant biomedical model that holds organic causes such as chemical imbalances responsible for mental illness. The solution is often seen as medication and Ferguson draws our attention to the link between the over-prescription of anti-depressants and the financial relationship between the psychiatry profession and pharmaceutical industry. Psychiatry has a gruesome history and the use of barbaric treatments such as ECT, insulin induced comas and lobotomies is explored. A detailed account and critique is also provided of Freud's radical ideas on sexual repression and the use of psychoanalysis.

The author points out that attitudes to mental health change during periods of social upheaval such as in the 1960s with the development of the anti-psychiatry movement. The most famous proponent of this was the controversial psychiatrist, RD Laing,

who rejected the determinism of the biomedical model and sought to understand the meaning behind mental distress by linking it directly to life experiences.

The use of asylums and institutionalization reduced over time as 'community care' became the buzzword in managing mental illness. The stigma attached to mental illness reduced and the author discusses the resultant growth of the mental health movement from the 1970s onwards. This involved service users, radical social work and professionals campaigning to give the mentally ill a voice by demanding better treatment and services.

In conclusion, living under capitalism is responsible for mental distress. Mental illness is not solely down to the individual, either through some physical cause or lack of moral fortitude; it has political and social causes. It is the result of the capitalist obsession with the accumulation of wealth at the expense of meeting the basic social and emotional needs of a society. The resultant inequality, oppression and alienation lead to feelings of powerlessness and, ultimately, mental distress. Rather than treating the individual to be able to live in an unliveable world, our response should be to fight to change society for the better through collective action.

As we see a renewed interest in socialist politics, the author has chosen the right time to produce a comprehensive study on the Marxist/socialist debates surrounding mental distress. Its sources include mental health service users, as well as leading names in psychiatry including Freud, Laing and Sedgewick. The book is detailed but the information and debates are presented in a clear and accessible way. You can tell that Ferguson is very passionate about the subject, showing great compassion and solidarity with those living with mental distress and those working to treat them.

Susan Clark is a Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) member in Glasgow and a third sector worker

Neil Findlay with Jeff Homes,

Socialism and Hope: a journey through turbulent times,

Luath, 2017, £12.99, 9781912147274

Reviewed by Finlay Smith

Neil Findlay's *Socialism and Hope* follows him on his path through Scottish politics between 2014 and 2016. These were, of course, turbulent times featuring 'indyref', the detonation of the Labour Party, a Scottish Labour leadership contest and a General Election. Difficult times indeed. Being a leading member of the Scottish Labour Party gives him a front row seat, so you get first hand insight into the peculiar world of politics and politicians.

The book for the most part is written in diary style with the exception of a brief introduction and an afterword. The introduction gives an outline of Findlay the man, and he seems a genuinely nice, honest, hardworking and funny chap. However, his endearing habit of referring to his parents as 'ma' and 'pa' means it takes a while to shake a vision of *The Broons* from your head. He was a late starter in politics having spent time as a bricklayer, cook, student and teacher before getting a leg up into his current profession by the marvellous, Tam Dalyell.

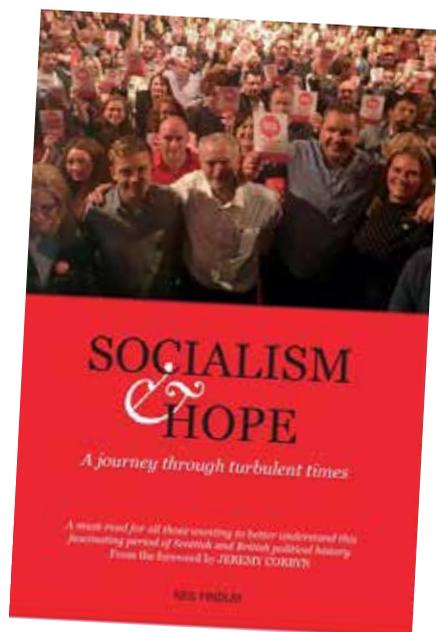
After that you're straight into the diary, which must rate as the second laziest way to write a book after the illustrated celebrity biography. The big picture is, of course, politics in Scotland, but there's no-one to paint the picture for you. You need a knowledge of the zeitgeist to have a hope to following the plot, but I assume anyone who chooses to read this book would be so prepared. So you're flying solo, but you may also choose to first set your watch to 1975 if you want to tune into Neil Findlay's personal politics.

You can gallop through the book very quickly, due in part to a lot of it being filler. A random example: '6th December: For the first time in ages I had a quiet day then went to my

brother John's 50th birthday party'. Well, my wife and I went out to dinner with my parents last night, but are you bothered?

You have to assume that anyone who sets out to keep a diary doesn't do so with the intention of having it published so they can be as vicious as they like when referring to others, and here Findlay doesn't hold back. Characters are described variously as 'bitter and spiteful', 'a sycophant', 'a cretin', 'a pompous git', and so it goes. I won't spoil the fun by naming names except to record that he really, really, really can't stick Jim Murphy.

The diary style does allow you to follow our hero as he develops as a politician. There's evident naivety early on when he shares his opinion that being an MEP must be the most boring job in the world and that most people haven't a clue what MEPs do. Breaking news, Neil - a whole lot of people don't know what MSPs do either. He is also (unintentionally) funny when he states: 'We are calling for radical federalism across the UK, retaining a redistributive system of taxation and the Barnett formula but with double devolution to regions and communities; if only Labour would say the same, I'm sure the referendum would be won quite easily'. There you go. Simple as that!



As the months go by Neil's interest grows in focus groups, opinion polls, TV debates, who's backing who for what and who said what about somebody else. This is particularly

evident during his bid for the Scottish Labour leadership. You can read this two ways. Is he going the way of the popular perception of politicians in that they're more interested in the mechanics of politics than doing the job, or is it just part and parcel of what committed politicians have to put up with? Personally I prefer the latter, although it is open to interpretation and an intriguing element of the book.

The 'hope' part of the book's title shines through in the section following Labour's disastrous showing in the 2015 General Election, where the surprise election of Corbyn as leader precedes the remarkable renaissance of the party. As a bonus you get a foreword from the leader himself. Overall, this is an intermittently entertaining book but it will only appeal to those with a sound grasp of recent Scottish politics, or someone with a keen interest in Jim Murphy bashing.

Finlay Smith is a manager in part of the aviation business, an ex-RAF officer and an atypical lifelong Labour fan.

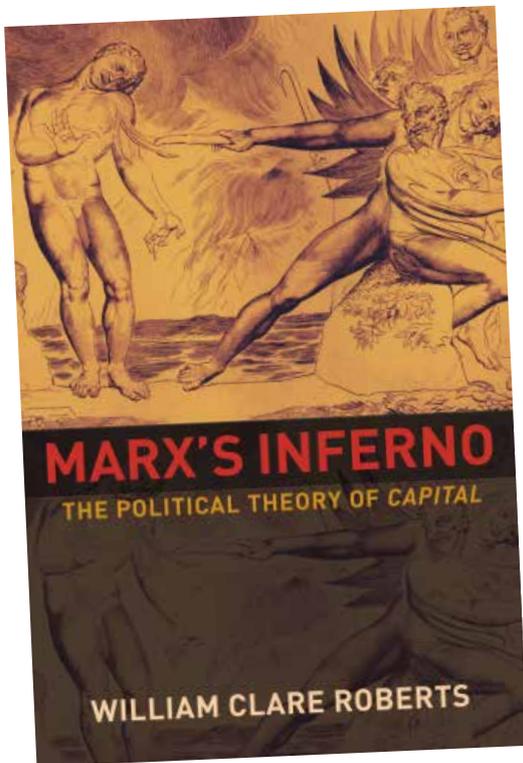
William Clare Roberts,

Marx's Inferno: The Political Theory of Capital,

Princeton University Press, 2018,
£19.95, 9780691172903

Reviewed by Sean Sheehan

Marx's Inferno is an interpretation of Volume One of Marx's *Capital* based on the idea that Dante's *Inferno*, the first part of the *Divine Comedy*, was appropriated by Marx as a literary framework. The argument is that he rewrites the *Inferno* as a descent into the social Hell of the capitalist mode of production. The argument is an intriguing and appealing one and the author William Clare Roberts marshals evidence to support his contention. It certainly carries an authentic poetic truth given that we are living witnesses to the social perdition currently being experienced by ordinary, hardworking people. Dante believed Hell's punishments



were proper remuneration for earthly sins; Tory theology considers austerity as a necessary measure to sustain the economic system without unduly hurting those who profit most from it.

The second main argument of *Marx's Inferno* is that *Capital* is a critical response to other versions of socialist radicalism in Britain and France during the 1860s and 1870s. This is where the book tends to get side lined with academic arguments about the work of William Thomson, Robert Owen and the anarchist, Joseph Proudhon. A virtue and value of *Marx's Inferno* for non-specialist readers is that page references are to the Penguin edition of *Capital Volume 1*. Reading *Capital* is a daunting task without the help of a commentary but, by following up references of Roberts to particular sections and paragraphs, a sign posted way in to reading Marx's *magnum opus* is provided.

Capital, as borne out by current events, is incapable of self-control. There is a discipline to the market but it is one that champions the rule of commodities – material and virtual ones – and a world where people have to sell their labour power to the owners of the means of production for a wage. By appropriating Dante's *Inferno*, the sins of individuals are

transformed into the system of capital that dominates people's lives. *Marx's Inferno* is a rewarding but not an easy read. At times, too much space is devoted to bickering with other commentators on Marx and the prose is generally dry and humourless. Along the way, though, there is plenty to get your theoretical teeth into; just be sure to also have a copy of *Capital Volume 1* as a companion volume.

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

Anna Groundwater,

Scotland Connected: a timeline for Scottish history in the wider world,

Luath, £9.99, 9781908373625

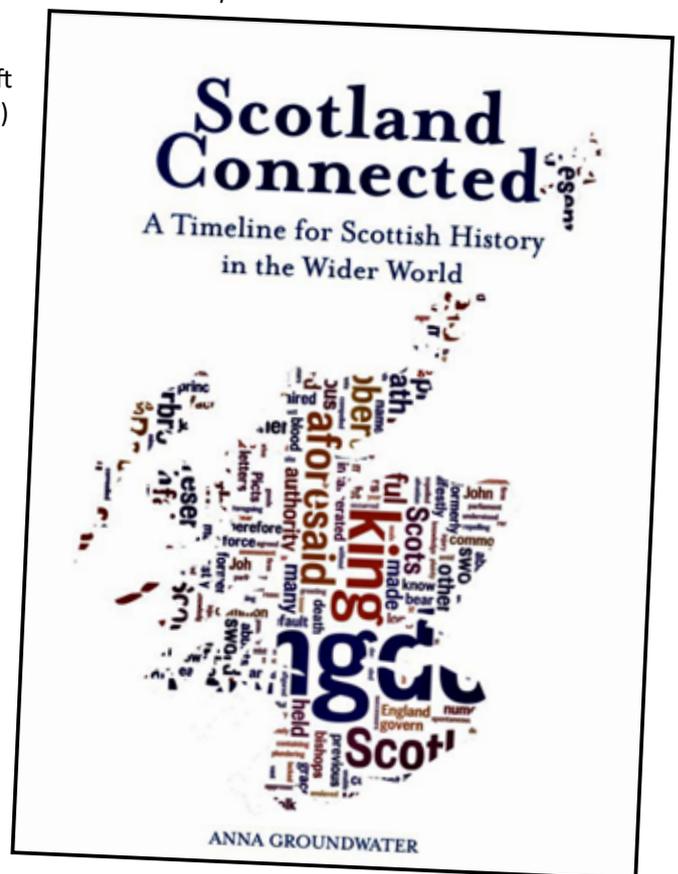
Reviewed by Donald McCormick

Anna Groundwater suggests that the reader should not sit down and read her book from end to end but to 'Dip in and dip out. It might be better to come to it in the spirit of enquiry, or exploration.' This is very sound advice. *Scotland Connected* quickly becomes addictive as one moves from the left hand column (Scotland) as the lead-in with an event in Scottish history that takes our interest, moves to the middle column (British Isles) to see what was happening in the near neighbourhood at the same time and then moves to the final column (The World) to have a look at the wider context.

As a random example from the book let us take the pre Union period 1695-1698: Poor harvests have had a negative impact on the Scottish economy, exacerbated by the

English parliament's Navigation Acts forbidding Scottish and Irish ships from trading with the American colonies. Obviously, things were not going well for us but a damn sight *better* than for Finland where, as column three points out, one third of the population were killed off by famine in these years.. Oh, and the Prussian army adopted the goose step. *Scotland Connected* is a timely work as there are forces which appear to be presenting the United Kingdom as the planet's best friend past and present – forever grateful for the Empire and, therefore, eager to give us the sweetest trade deals - while simultaneously presenting a singularly isolationist view towards nations which we have worked with for a century. Remember the pre Great War Times headline 'Fog in Channel. France cut off. Now, of course, all of Europe would be cut off. This is a great wee book for anyone interested in how our own wee country at the edge of Europe fitted in with the rest of the World. A useful and fascinating read so go and buy it now!

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



Kick up the Tabloids

It is seldom that this column opens with a message of congratulations to the Leader of the Scottish Conservative Party. Well done, Ruth Davidson. This is truly an historic occasion. It is the first time in the history of Scottish politics, that a party leader has become pregnant in order to get a few new photo opportunities. After being snapped by the press driving tanks and riding bucking broncos, Ruth is looking to be portrayed in a softer light. I imagine that, after three election campaigns where Davidson was presumably being rebuffed by young parents, she has concluded that the only way she can be photographed kissing a baby is to have one of her own.

The young Davidson-Wilson will be born into a markedly different world to that of the 1950s when I first entered this world. I am now sixty years old and have lived in Britain all of my life. However, my father was adopted and two of my grandparents were born outside the UK. It is only in the last few weeks that it has occurred to me that I may be living in this country illegally.

The scandal of the Windrush Generation is obscene on so many levels. What I find most disgusting is that this Government behaves as if people who were born here and have worked their entire adult life for the NHS have less right to stay in the UK, and less entitlement to hospital treatment than a recently-defected former Soviet agent.

As there has been so much over-exaggeration surrounding the Sergei Skripal affair, it is important to put the whole matter into some kind of perspective. It was not, as claimed by Theresa May, 'an attack on Britain'. It was an attack in Britain on a former Russian spy by person

or persons unknown. Furthermore, the assumption that it was 'almost certainly Russia' who carried out the attack ignores a number of facts.

Sergei Skripal was no human rights activist - he was an ex-spy, a trained killer. He had doubtless carried out numerous similar attacks on other people in countless countries across the globe in the course of his career. He had doubtless managed to piss off a number of different groups of people over the years. Indeed, when you work in espionage, it kind of goes with the territory. If you are a defector or a double-agent, the chances are that you have pissed-off twice as many people as your normal run-of-the-mill one-country spook.

The guy could have been attacked by the KGB, the Russian mafia, MI5, MI6, Mossad, the CIA, or various rogue elements previously employed by any of the above. He could even have got on the wrong side of a truly evil organisation such as Amazon.

Also, let's face it: if the Russian state was out to do the bloke in, I tend to think they would have made a bloody sight better fist of doing the job. They tend to kill you off in a much more clinical way than leaving a few traces of itching powder on your door handle. Even British intelligence is a good deal more efficient at making people disappear. I am sure most readers remember the UK agent who was found strangled, handcuffed, trussed-up and zipped into a sports bag, whose death was passed off as 'suicide'.

'Russia will face the full wrath of Britain' bellowed May. Like some latter-day Churchill, only without the excuse of being drunk, our PM

always looks absolutely petrified when making such announcements. Indeed, she has recently adopted the demeanour of someone being subjected to non-elective colonic irrigation.

Hearing they were facing the full wrath of our armed forces must have had the guys in the Kremlin quaking in their boots, although more probably shaking in their seats with laughter, as they waited for our one aircraft carrier to steam up the Baltic, only to wait another five years for its aircraft to be delivered.

Quite who will suffer from the range of sanctions announced against Russia is anyone's guess. With their tit-for-tat expulsion of British diplomats from Moscow, the only people likely to be affected are English people at the World Cup. Undoubtedly a few daft idiots will get drunk, lose their passports and get arrested for starting fights outside nightclubs. And, that's just the players.

May, of course, further announced that the UK Government and the Royal Family would not be going to the World Cup, which left everyone in Scotland totally unimpressed. After all, we decided last October that we won't be going to this year's World Cup.

Vladimir McTavish will be appearing at The Stand's New Town Theatre, George Street, Edinburgh at this year's Fringe with his solo show '25 Years Of Stand-Up' from Friday 3 to Sunday 26 August at 6.50pm each night (except Tuesday 14) www.thestand.co.uk

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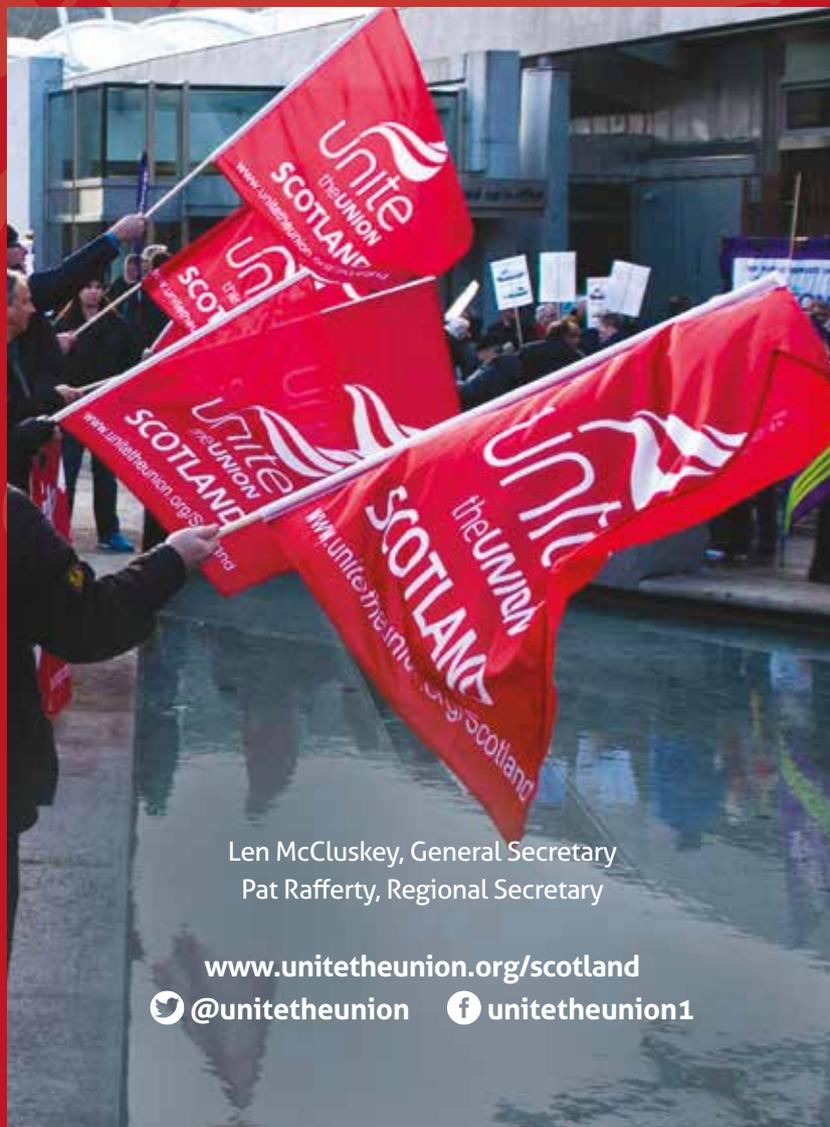
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