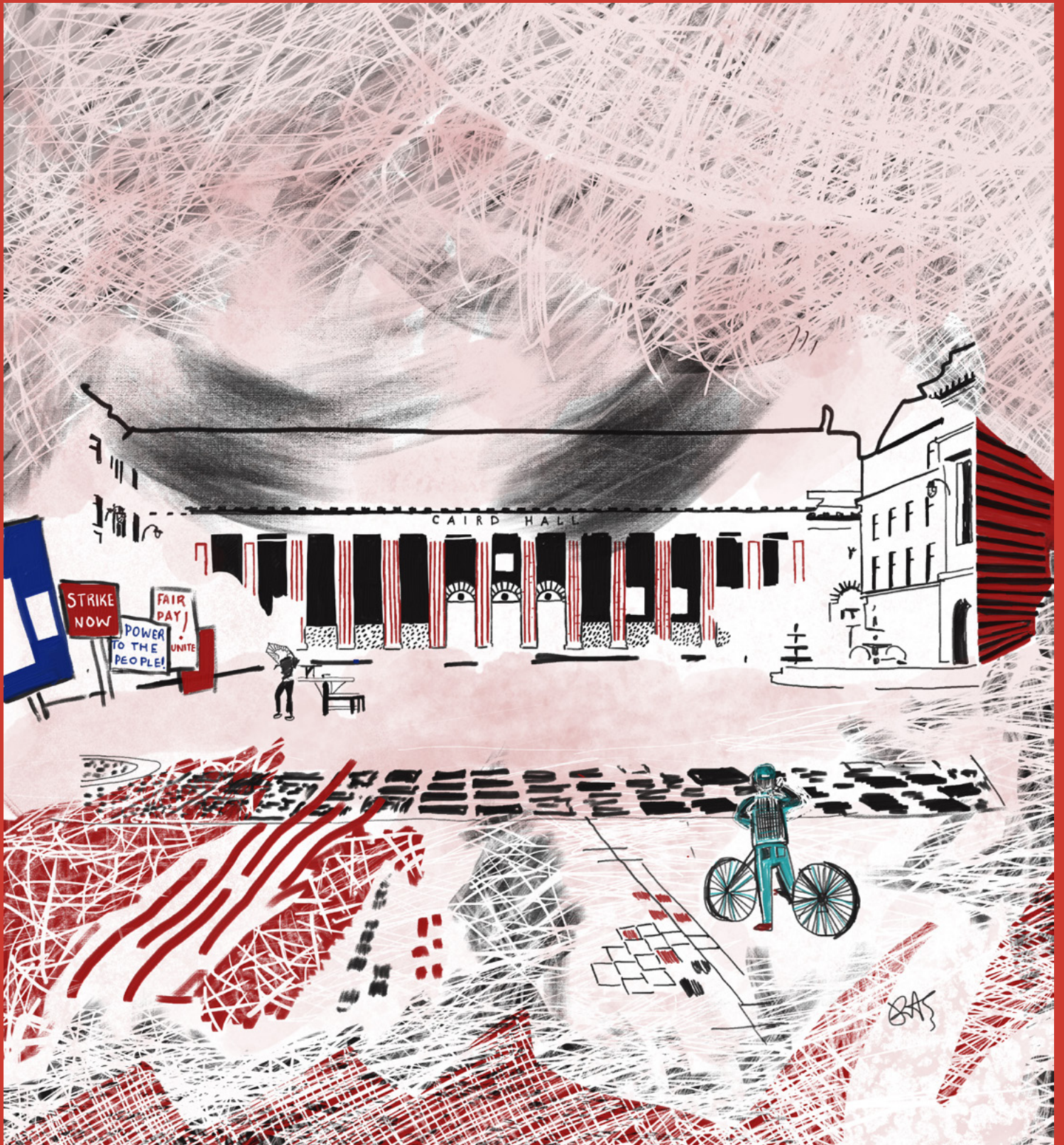


SCOTTISH LEFT REVIEW

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TEN SCENES FROM STRIKE SEASON • DUNDEE SOLIDARITY FROM JUTE TO JOURNALISM
WHO CAN BE A NEW SCOT? • CRATERS AND KINSHIP ON UKRAINIAN SOIL



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MUSIC, POWER AND LOVE: LESSONS FROM STRIKE SEASON

SCENES FROM THE EDUCATION PICKETS

'I didn't know that anyone had ever written a song about a picket line!' I laugh. Everyone I know outside of work knows every song ever written about pickets. But this morning, one of the probationer teachers at my school joined me outside the school gates, just before half seven to help me put up signs, and this is their first strike, their first picket and their first taste of Billy Bragg.

One of the reasons I love Glasgow, have chosen to live here and would never leave, is how steeped in socialist history it is. How easy it is to organise and how much solidarity you're frequently surrounded by. However, in the area I work in, which used to be called the safest Conservative seat in Scotland, it isn't always such a given that everyone you organise with will have the analysis of the production of value that you'd like. So to see how willing all my colleagues are to stand on freezing wet pickets chanting and waving placards and how strong the support from the community has been (the minister opening the church so we can have tea and use the toilets, parents bringing tray bakes and chocolates) has given me an experience of solidarity that is different to any I've had before. It's a solidarity entirely devoid of theoretical chat, and entirely shaped by the recognition of the social value of the work that teachers, posties, railway staff, nurses and workers create.

- Olivia Crook

In January of this year, a group of high school students set up the Edinburgh High School Students Union, to give a greater voice to young people. Since joining the EHSSU, I have begun to think about society and the issues that matter to me very differently. School teaches us to stick to studying for exams, and while this is very important, it is often challenging to focus only on short term goals like these while witnessing the current state of the world. As young people, the decisions that our leaders make now will directly impact the world we have a future in, but it is often a struggle for us to be listened to and taken seriously. That is one reason why just studying during this wave of strikes is incredibly difficult. Attending strikes, rallies and marches, especially as part of a union, is something incredibly empowering as it allows us to feel like we are making a difference in a world where young people are so underrepresented.

This is my first time protesting and being a part of any movement like this. Starting to be a part of strike organising has been really moving and motivating. It is an amazing opportunity that has enlightened me about the political state of the world and the effect that I can have on it. The recent teachers' strikes have had the most impact for me because, as someone who wants to go into the teaching field, it feels incredibly vital that teachers are fighting for something that will directly affect me in my future career. It feels wrong that I should grow up knowing that even if I gain all the qualifications I need, I still might not be paid enough to keep a roof over my head and food on the table. It is challenging to grow up seeing the impacts of the cost of living crisis affecting those who are already the worst off in society, and to have the threat of climate change always hanging over my head. However, I have been inspired by the recent increase in trade union activity and firmly believe it is time I use my voice. Many high school students have strong opinions on the issues we see, and being part of a union gives us the ability to raise our voices collectively, whether about local issues for individual schools or the bigger issues facing us all. Joining the EHSSU has shown me that anyone can take action on the issues that they care about, and I would love to see more young people begin to feel empowered because of it.

- Lara

'Fighting for the Future of Further Education' is the strapline of my union's current campaign. Members in the Further Education sector have had to take strike action, and action short of strike action, for seven out of the last eight years over pay and

terms and conditions. We have won the fights, but it has been exhausting for all concerned. Covid and home working amplified this. Rallying members over a video call and keeping them strong became much more difficult, more intangible than physical union meetings and picket lines. Recently, our strapline could be adapted to fit the fights of workers all over the country. Everywhere you look, people realise they are not valued. Our campaign is for positive change, fair pay, and a sustainable and high quality sector. Surely that is not too much to ask for any sector? The country is haemorrhaging healthcare staff, educators, and people working in industries which have not seen a fair pay rise in a long time. They can no longer afford to work in the industry they chose. Why should they stay? As strikes become more prolific, and our incomes are squeezed to the max, this has become a fight for all of our futures, and a long time coming.

Looking around me as we head towards another ballot, I see something different. This time, more young people than ever are joining us. With the pay of FTSE 100 chief executives rising an average of 23 percent in 2022, the inequalities in our society are ever greater, and young people see the importance of being an active member of their union. As I stood with one new young member on the picket line he described his experience of various jobs that he had had since he was 15. 'This is the first job I have had in my life where I have not risked my income, job security, physical health by joining and being a member of a trade union', he said. 'Going on strike last year', another told me, 'was the first time I have ever felt empowered at work'. Their optimism about winning was palpable. They need the future to change. They are rising up. It has become a fight for all of our futures, one we have to win.

- Paula Dixon

On the first day it felt like the whole world was on strike. Protests were happening across the UK against a draconian bill which, if passed, would revoke our right to take part in industrial action. We held a rally on North Street in St Andrews where we hit pots and pans and chanted louder than the bustling town. We heard rousing speeches from staff, students, and striking workers from Diageo in Leven, just a few miles east, who joined us in support. It simulated a general strike, gave us a quick dose of how it could feel.

On picket lines there is energy too, but it is a quieter transcendence of a different kind. Here we talk with our colleagues, the public, more students, and every day we have good conversations about why we are here. There is more support than ever before. Striking also brings out the creative parts of ourselves that chronic overwork

Paula Dickson, EIS Fela picket line



forces into retreat. Homemade cakes, bagpipes, hand-painted placards, a trombone, daft poems and the highland fling all make their appearances and keep us warm. Our kind students do their rounds every day, heaving coffee vats and every type of biscuit to pickets across town.

Between students and staff our struggle is one and the same. We suffer together the effects of the financialisation of the university sector; of institutions which deliver care in the form of learning, development, and accommodation. Like us, our students are organised. In 2019 they formed the Campaign for Affordable Student Housing (CASH) in response to the increasing scarcity of affordable university accommodation. We are supporting each other to build a university that is inclusive and fair.

Once the pickets are done we head to the Students' Association, which students always so kindly open for us to use. We take stock, make plans, unfreeze our red hands under hot taps. These are Baltic conditions. There is a joy to striking. It brings hope in hopeless times. But it also wears us down, emotionally and financially. We had only been hanging on by a thread before. We reflect honestly on our tactics. Universities are businesses and the means of production – or a good bit of them anyway – are not through there but in here: bionic, all silicon and brain. Now that so much of our work is done remotely, standing out in the cold can feel futile at times. On the other hand it feels more radical, an ever greater testament to our anger and drive. Out here we invoke a symbol of dissent which makes our action all the more powerful. We will come out every day until our demands are met, where we are visible, conversing, loud.

Throughout all of this our principal calls for reason and good faith. Sit tight, she urges, and hope that soon a resolution will come. Perhaps the odd stolen pension chunk will fall from the sky, hit the ground, crack open, and we will all call up to the heavens – thank you! Cross our fingers too and maybe a pay gap here or a zero-hours contract there will evaporate up into the clouds. But we do not ask for miracles. Our principal has powerful leverage she can use. She is the President of Universities UK, one of twenty-one vice-chancellors who sits on the board of that body with whom we are in dispute. We ask our principal to listen to students, listen to staff, and build a St Andrews for all.

- Amber Ward

ARE THESE THE GLIMMERS OF A RESURGENT STUDENT MOVEMENT?

Solidarity between students and staff is regenerating a united movement that can face current challenges, writes Coll McCail.

Thirteen years ago, thousands of students stormed Conservative Party headquarters. The ramifications of the Millbank occupation reached far beyond the student movement. It was a critical juncture in the fight against David Cameron's austerity agenda. Since then the organisational strength and militancy of yesterday's student movement has evaporated. In 2023, amidst unprecedented industrial action, the student movement is noticeably absent from the tide of increased political activity. In February, the University and Colleges Union took six days of strike action, suspended their remaining twelve days on account of 'significant progress' in negotiations, then scheduled a further five days in March. This followed UK-wide action from Unite and UNISON members in higher education earlier in the year. Academic, professional services and facilities workers have a common struggle. If the student movement can find the spirit and politics that inspired the thousands-strong demonstrations of the last decade, it can help them win.

Since 2013, the tentacles of marketisation have reached ever further into Scotland's universities. Higher education is, in many ways, predictably neoliberal. Poorly paid, casualised labour is more common than ever. The continued use of online learning post-Covid serves only to further alienate students from one another, their work and staff. University workforces, already compartmentalised, are further divided by the outsourcing of services. Students, treated more and more as customers or service users, are pitted against 'undeserving' staff who dare to demand better. The consequence is the growth of a pervasive apathy among students who may have sympathy for their staff, but will still cross their picket line. The process of commodification leaves students with such little stake in their university that they see the fight of staff as totally disconnected from their own. The destruction of community, of course, is imperative for neoliberalism's onward

march. It is for this very reason that there have been such determined attempts to formalise campus organising within university structures. This bid to control and sanitise potential resistance, coupled with punitive action against more organic dissent, breeds a sense that the university is immune to resistance.

However, with a resurgent labour movement behind them, students across Scotland are rallying in defence of their staff and education. At Glasgow Caledonian University, where there were previously no political networks on campus, there is now a strike solidarity group - a testament to rising consciousness among students. At Strathclyde University, collective pressure from students and staff has forced events taking place on strike days to move venue. Those which went ahead were disrupted by students. In December, Strathclyde students made so much noise outside one exam hall that the University was left with no choice but to automatically pass all students. In the same month, across the city at the University of Glasgow, a coalition of formerly disparate and ideologically distinct student organisations united with students from other universities to blockade lectures taking place on strike days. Staff were forced to cancel their classes. Most students who had arrived to attend class were more than happy to walk on, or to take leaflets and convince classmates not to cross the picket line. Then, in February, Glasgow University students set their sights on the university's management and bureaucracy by blockading the largest car park, provoking angry men in suits, queues of traffic, and threats of suspension and arrest. Elsewhere, a blockade of lecture halls during a break ground the university's operation to a halt. Alongside these more militant actions, students have run 'teach-outs' on Glasgow's radical history, committing to learn from past struggles.

Of course, this trend is not limited to Glasgow. It was only a few years ago that thirteen Stirling University students were barred from campus having occupied management buildings. This February, Edinburgh University students disrupted a planned postgraduate fair with a banner that read 'Don't Cross Any Picket', extending their struggle beyond campus. The student movement across Scotland may still be catching up with the labour movement, but it is gathering steam. While higher education has fallen prey to the worst of neoliberalism, student activists across Scotland are advancing the case for reorganising the economy. Students have once again begun to exploit the vulnerabilities of a market-driven higher education sector. Campaigns are exposing the pay disparity between vice-chancellors and casualised staff. Management's divide-and-conquer strategy has been countered by the construction of strong relationships between students and local union branches. Students have cut to the heart of capitalist contradiction, focusing on record university reserve funds as a means of decrying pitiful pay offers.

Paulo Freire wrote: 'To study is not to consume ideas but to create and recreate them.' Against a backdrop of climbing class consciousness, collectives of students are aspiring for a more radical, unmarketised pedagogy. More than that, in creating and recreating tactics and strategies as Freire entreats, that aspiration has come to inform struggles in support of staff and a transformed education. If higher education workers are to win then this work must continue, coordinate, and grow.

ERASURE YOGA FOR STRIKING WORKERS

An erasure poem from the transcript of 'Yoga for Golfers' by Yoga with Adriene - Allie Kerper.

The spine is collapsing.
We're gonna unravel time.

Tired, rickety,
we need to do this.

Everything under the wrists,
tension in belly.

Deep breath, drop the Earth
and look forward.

Exhale, claw into the base.
Up sweet spine, turn left,

find a rock.
Reach up in the air.

Take more time.
Needle the dinosaurs.

You want your mind
working for you.

Redundant hands
fold the mountain,

flow blood up towards the sky:
a little reminder.

We're here for five, four, three,
repeat the standing.

Knuckles drawn,
imagine beautiful work.

WE'VE OVERCOME THE MYTHICAL SEPARATION BETWEEN WORKERS AND PUBLIC

This season of strikes has brought the public into closer connection with the battles of our unions, writes **Roz Foyer**.

This year's STUC annual Congress follows a year in which industrial action was at its highest level for the past decade and takes place during a year in which that trend is most certainly continuing. In truth, this comparison understates the real significance of the current situation. Ten years ago, the large majority of industrial action centred on public sector unions undertaking a co-ordinated one-day action in defence of pensions. By contrast, over the past year we have seen industrial action across sectors including industries such as transport, Royal Mail, telecoms and energy alongside a whole range of public sector groups. In areas such as health and the fire service, strong ballot results for industrial action induced improved employer offers. In local government, strikes in key sectors combined with the threat of future wider action delivered a positive result. At the time of writing teacher unions are expecting an improved offer following two solid strike days. This represents by far the broadest, most organised industrial unrest in a generation.

The economic crisis is a combination of the effects of Brexit, bad policy choices during Covid, and disastrous fiscal interventions designed to bring on a recession. It has provoked widespread anger and the conditions for building collective action. Union membership and activity is growing with high ballot turnouts, busy pickets, mass rallies and demonstrations. We continue to receive high levels of public support. This is in part due to the recognition of the role of key workers during the pandemic followed by the shared suffering from the cost of living crisis. But it also seems likely that the sheer breadth of industrial action has meant that members of the public not directly involved in an industrial dispute feel a closer connection to the battles we are fighting. This is best seen in the abject failure of the Tories to capitalise on the mythical separation between 'workers' and the 'public'. Arguably, the trade union movement has emerged as the main opposition to government generally and the Tories specifically. Through the period of the pandemic, workplace organisation and the role of unions gained real agency. Now, specific wage disputes and our campaigning around issues such as energy costs are publicly recognised as the main counterpoint to the cost of living crisis. Right wing politicians and media outlets have tried and failed to 'take down our leaders' and attack us with outdated tropes which don't work anymore. The Tories in particular have woefully misjudged the public mood.

Of course, we have not yet been successful everywhere. Even when we have won, some degree of compromise has been necessary. Now is certainly not the time to take our foot off the pedal.

Even as some disputes are won, we must double down to ensure that no part of our movement that is in dispute is left behind. We must continue to organise and build outwards. Winning builds confidence and gives us the opportunity through education and organising to build durable workplace power. It also presents the opportunity to forge long term durable alliances with community and campaign organisations. All of the STUC's priority campaigns seek to achieve this goal, to combine collective workplace success with wider political and policy goals. Our Just Transition campaign includes calls for a public energy company, municipal ownership of buses and council retrofit programmes, all of which also attract significant support from community campaigners and environmentalists. Our National Care Service Campaign has successfully united user groups, local authorities and enlightened providers. Our Scotland Demands Better campaign is underpinned by. These have received widespread support not just from think tanks and academics, but from anti-poverty campaign groups.

These are policies and campaigns that can deliver short term wins but should also be seen as a part of a wider struggle to rebalance power and wealth in this country. Thus, this strategy is not separate from wider democratic issues. Tory attacks on trade union freedom present a massive challenge which as well as requiring continued resistance require a wider public campaign. We are seeing attacks on devolution at precisely the time that we need more power to be vested in the Scottish Parliament. UK Government voter suppression legislation presents a massive challenge to our class. So, the challenges are many. And true to form, the right wing continues to attempt to capitalise on the economic crisis to scapegoat minority groups. Nowhere is this truer than in its horrific treatment of migrants and refugees. However, there are reasons to be optimistic. Collective action is working, and the Tories continue to languish in the polls. Our task now is to continue to collectivise and organise, to increase our education programmes and to build outwards into our communities. With this strategy and the skills and commitment of our reps and activists, I have every confidence that we can win.

NOURISHED BY LOVE

Rona Proudfoot describes the Valentine's letters written for striking posties in Glasgow.

I have recently joined a union and found myself part of the growing group from all walks of life who are volunteering their time on picket lines in support of striking workers. Although I'm new to this, some of my companions have been fighting for years, for decades. Some work for unions and some are lifelong trade unionists, now retired. Some are embroiled in their own industrial disputes and some are supporting other striking workers. It's both heartening and heartbreaking to see a growing number of young people in this movement. What do their future working lives look like?

Others like myself are feeling their way as they go. We are all fuelled with a common desire for fair and living wages, job security and protecting workers' rights. I have watched all of these being steadily eroded over my own working lifetime with the introduction of zero-hour contracts, precarious working conditions, unpaid trial shifts, and stagnant wages, with many hospitality workers in particular seeing their gratuities cruelly and illegally taken from them. So here we are with many more thousands falling into debt and misery every day. It is not greed to need a living wage and enough hours to pay your bills. Dignity and kindness are the heart of every picket action or event that I have been involved with. Our recent action on the picket lines has been nourished with love and sustained by solidarity.

In the run-up to Valentine's Day, we learned that the final day of planned industrial action by Royal Mail workers and other members of the CUW had been legally challenged and blocked, leaving the striking members' morale very low. Born of an idea raised at a Strike Solidarity meeting, a group of us invited people from the local community to come and create love letters to our striking postal workers. On February 14th, at gate meetings, posties from the local distribution centres were presented with the cards and other gifts that folk were kind enough to offer. The appreciation was palpable. I had tears in my eyes as I told them that their community was still 100 percent behind their fight. Posties are striking not only to protect their jobs and wages. They are trying to save the Royal Mail service as we all know it. As I type, it has been reported that CWU members have delivered the biggest ever return in a major strike ballot, turning in an incredible 95.9 percent voting yes and with a very respectable overall 77.3 percent turnout. It has been a huge honour to support them, however small my involvement has been.

We need to unite for a workers' economy. Now is not the time to succumb to divisions and infighting when the common goal is the same: decent, liveable wages and stable work.

NO ROUTES LEFT: STRIKING FOR REVIVAL IN RURAL SCOTLAND

Local authority decisions in transport and education have increased the burden on underpaid workers, writes **Enas Magzoub**

More than half a million workers across the country have taken part in industrial action so far this year. Many are striking while facing the particular difficulties affecting rural Scotland. For instance, privately-owned and unregulated bus providers, subsidised by local governments, are demanding that Scottish workers pay higher fares for poor services. Now, in Inverclyde and Renfrewshire, funding allocation for bus routes has been cut by 13%. The 'lack of commercial and financial viability' of bus routes in rural areas is being touted as the reason for the cuts, which will result in further fare hikes. In areas underserved by the rail network, the cuts mean that now the infrastructure simply does not exist to allow people to get to work reliably. Where routes are cut, workers on the lowest incomes will have no options at all.

It is not just in transport that rural populations are being deprived. Highland Council has just approved a new budget which will affect the funding allocation given to schools to support children with additional support needs for learning. The local authority is re-assessing the formula it uses to distribute grants. One axis of this formula takes into account the rurality of the

schools. Additional support is typically more expensive in rural areas. Thus, the council proposes a shift towards the controversial practice of 'mainstreaming', wherein pupils with additional support needs are heavily pushed towards education in mainstream schools where possible, as opposed to being educated in separate classrooms. It seems that mainstreaming 'guidance' is intended to be used as a cost-cutting measure, at the expense of vulnerable children, and burdening already underpaid teachers with a higher workload.

Councils may try to shift the blame for reduced and unsatisfactory amenities onto workers, but Scotland's rural populations are neglected even during normal times. It is local governments that are failing to ensure adequate services and pay workers what they deserve. The lack of infrastructure in rural society is not the fault of striking workers. In truth, successful strikes would do much to revive the future facing Scotland's rural communities.

LETTER FROM AMERICA

Peter Frase, New York, February 2023

My last visit to Scotland coincided with May Day 2022, and it's always a pleasure for an American socialist to experience the workers' day in another country. Despite having its origins in the 19th Century US labor movement, May Day in the States has long had the status of a subcultural holiday, celebrated mainly by the small groups of the socialist and anarchist Left. (Our mainstream labor movement instead observes Labor Day in September, which tends to emphasize solidarity more in the form of backyard barbecues than political marches.)

Of course, Scotland is hardly an exception to the general decline of the labor movement in the rich countries, and so the marches were perhaps not on the scale one might have seen in earlier times. The Edinburgh march in particular, in contrast to the one in Glasgow, reminded me more of an American-style socialist family reunion than a show of strength by a confident labor movement. But in Scotland and the USA alike, there are signs of life. In both the UK and US, workers are striking in greater numbers than they have in many years. According to a new report from Cornell University's Worker Institute, there were 52 percent more work stoppages in the US last year than the year before, involving 60 percent more workers.

In the US, however, the overall picture of labor's health is more mixed than these numbers might suggest. In 2022, despite all the strikes and a wave of new organizing, the government Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that the number of US workers represented by labor unions grew by only 200,000. This failed to keep pace with the growing labor force, leading the unionized share of the workforce to fall to 11.3 percent, yet another all time low in the long decline of US labor since its 1950s heights. The situation in the private sector is particularly dire, with unionized workers now making up only a 6.8 percent share.

Nevertheless, the increase in strikes suggests a renewed militancy, and one that is coming from outside labor's traditional strongholds. In April 2022, the independent Amazon Labor Union won a shocking victory at an Amazon warehouse in New York, the first time one of the company's US warehouses had been successfully unionized, despite repeated efforts by more established unions. Service employees at places like Starbucks, and tech employees at major game companies, are among those who have begun to unionize for the first time.

The previous era of union strength may have been concentrated in manufacturing, but today most of the new organizing is concentrated in services, and most of the militancy has been happening in the public and non-profit sectors. According to the same Cornell report cited above, 80 percent of strikes in the United States in 2022 occurred in education and health care. The changing nature of the working class and its leading elements has brought forth sharp debate on

the Left, over just how to understand an upsurge in militancy from workers who may in many cases hold professional degrees. In a recent exchange on the website of Jacobin magazine, Matt Karp and Chris Maisano debated Karp's account of so-called 'class dealignment', in which the traditional association between the working class and the Democratic Party is supposedly breaking down as workers move to the right and the Democrats appeal increasingly to the affluent.

In response to Karp, Maisano argues that the dealignment thesis suffers from a narrow and somewhat mis-specified notion of class. If one concentrates on education as a marker of class (as is common among bourgeois social scientists), then it does appear that voters with less education have shifted in a conservative direction. But over the past few generations, a college education has gone from an elite credential to a mass one—in the 1960s, barely 40 percent of Americans graduated from high school, while today 63 percent have at least some post-secondary education, and 38 percent hold a four year university degree.

Given these facts, along with the long decline in manufacturing and other traditional 'blue collar' occupations, it is hardly surprising that labor militancy is coming from new kinds of workers, with different kinds of backgrounds.

All of this is not to say, however, that more traditional sectors of organized labor have been rendered irrelevant. Drivers and warehouse workers for UPS, organized with the venerable International Brotherhood of Teamsters, are preparing for the expiration of their contract and a potential strike this year, which would be easily the biggest the US has seen since the last UPS strike, when 185,000 workers across the country walked off the job for 15 days in 1997. A UPS strike today would involve 350,000 workers, more than the total number of workers who went on strike anywhere in the country in 2022.

What is happening at UPS can't be separated from the broader ferment among workers, however. It was only in 2021 that reformers within the Teamsters finally succeeded in electing a reform leadership, displacing the conservative and compromising regime that had persisted for decades under Jimmy Hoffa and his son James, with only a brief respite in the 1990s. If the current stirrings are to be more than a false dawn for labor, it will be through some combination of revitalizing the traditional labor base and expanding it to new areas, while tapping into the anger of a younger generation that has become more receptive to unions as they have become disillusioned with the ruthless exploitation of contemporary capitalism and its false promises of individual success through hard work.

LETTRE D'EUROPE

Paul Malgrati, Villars-sur-Ollon, March 2023

France is being stirred by the most significant general strike since the beginning of the twenty-first century. On 7th March, French syndicats claimed more than 3.5 million protesters nationwide, with between 30 percent and 50 percent of striking workers in the education, energy, civil service, and transport sectors. This was the biggest success for the unions since the beginning of the upswell. After five days of actions in January and February—which rallied at least 1 million protesters each—the French movement has now reached numbers unseen since 1995, when Jacques Chirac's government had to withdraw his conservative reform of French welfare.

Walking in Chirac's footsteps, Emmanuel Macron plans to push back the state pension age from 62 to 64. Needless to say, this measure is hugely unpopular, with 70 percent of French people opposing it according to polls. By contrast with the UK, where private (or professional) pension funds are mainstream, France's pension scheme remains chiefly state based. In the current system, workers who reach the required threshold of 42 working years will receive an allowance averaging their wage from the last 25 years. Macron now wants to increase this threshold to 44 years of work.

Unfortunately, parliamentary attempts to thwart Macron's minority government have failed. Divided between left-wing and far-right components, the opposition has been both incapable and unwilling to join forces. Certainly, the same cannot be said about moderate and radical trade unions who united for the first time in 13 years—an alliance which broadened the scope of current protests. Yet thus far, and despite the seriousness of the strike, the government remains inflexible. Such disdain is not new: it is consistent with Macron's relationship with French unions since he took power in 2017.

The next few weeks will be tense, and it is hoped that French strikers (especially in the energy sector) can hold long enough to bring the economy to a standstill. Should their action fail, however, Macron's aloof strategy might become increasingly risky. The memory of the 2018 Gilets Jaunes insurrection is still fresh and, should all legal routes fail, the possibility of violence might become real.

WRITE TO US

We want the magazine to be a place of discussion, debate, and dissent. If you have any reactions, reflections or perspectives on what you are reading, send a letter to the editor:
editor@scottishleftreview.scot

WRITE WITH US

We want to publish work by those who don't usually write, as well as those who do. This issue has writing both from people who have never had their words published, and from acclaimed and established authors. You do not need to be a writer to write.

If you join the network of writers and contributors, you will find yourself in company with writers who can offer mentoring, creative guidance, and editorial support. Let us know how you want to get involved in radical writing by emailing the editor: editor@scottishleftreview.scot

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And there is much more, including **Claire Peden** on the campaign that inspired this mural that freshly adorns a wall in the Calton in Glasgow. Subscribers to the magazine can look forward to finding an interview with the artist, **Mack Colours**, in the pages of the next edition, along with a range of radical essays and reviews.

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WHAT HOME CAN REALLY MEAN

Esmond Sage surveilles the situation of renter and tenant organising in the silver city and explores the radical hearth of Union Street.

Living Rent in Aberdeen has a new lease of life (if that expression can be used for a tenants' union). The tenants' movement isn't new here, of course. There's a history here that we're only just getting into as we live and make its latest chapter. I've been chatting to a knowledgeable local archivist who's told me about the city's squatters of the 1930s and 1970s. Living Rent alone has been organising here since its own beginnings about six years ago, but we have ebbed and flowed with the transience of life when our most active members leave the city. Tenants struggle against organisational transience everywhere of course, as they move often, but it seems particularly the case in Aberdeen, where the oil and gas economy sprints then exhausts itself, and everyone it leaves behind has to pick up their things and head elsewhere to catch up.

The very specific problem we have to address for tenants in Aberdeen then is not just how we grow our union in terms of numbers of members, but how we grow a radical tenants' culture in the city. As long as tenants are precarious, our movement needs a way of remembering and passing on which is more substantial than the second-hand nostalgia I feel going through photos of our predecessors a couple of years back. If the problem of membership numbers can be flippantly framed as a friendly rivalry with the Central Belt (who are well in the lead), then in the problem of culture, I fancy we have a special advantage over our comrades down south. One of my favourite things about Aberdeen is its existing radical culture. The Aberdeen Social Centre just off Union Street is a kind of hearth for numerous radical organisations in the city, including Living Rent. At the Saturday café sessions around the table you will hear thoughtful debates and roving conversations between trade unionists, socialists, anarchists, Trotskyists, members of the left-of-centre parliamentary parties, left utopians, environmentalists, fellow travellers and hangers on. If there is dogma in Aberdeen I haven't yet tripped over it. Groups forge relationships quickly and quite deeply too.

This eagerness between groups to feed and grow each other, this solidarity, is what will help a tenants' culture to grow. Solidarity doesn't stand for long if it's not international as well. At our last meeting I showed fellow members a newsletter published by the NSRA tenants' union in Chicago, where a friend of mine lives and organises. Another attendee pointed out we should go to the print workshop across the road who they were sure would be happy to help us produce our own, which could be spread around Aberdeen and indeed, sent back to the States.

So a tenants' culture is something which helps us recognise comrades who are distant, be that in space or time. What about those nearby? We suffer from rather bourgeois associations of home as a place of

retreat and withdrawal from the world, to 'recharge'. Our home may be adjacent to but is not seen as being mixed up with anybody else's. 'Mi casa es su casa' is the trite permission granted by a host, at best time-limited and at worst ironic. When the fallacy of domestic inertia becomes clearly apparent, such as when tenements need communal repairs, resolving the problem is invariably a headache. Throw in the rent relation, and most tenants will feel that their condition is a single vertical line between them and their landlord. We need culture to help us see our neighbours as well.

At the moment in Scotland there is a ban on rent hikes until the end of March and a limited ban on evictions until September. These measures amount to very little to stop landlords breaking the law. Several of our members in Aberdeen can attest to appalling experiences of landlords using nefarious getarounds and loopholes to push 'difficult' tenants out of their homes or raise rents. There is little else I can write at this moment, as many aren't ready to share their stories, fearing that, even anonymised, their landlords will be able to identify them and target them with further harassment. This fear, often of bark more than bite, is used by landlords to build imaginary cell walls around tenants, dividing them from each other and convincing them there's nothing they can do. This fear is what gets dispelled when you build a culture that can find its home in the city, and in so doing, show everyone what home can really mean.

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In 'Caird Hall in Red', Rosalind Sanderson uses mark-making to create an impression of dynamism and movement such as you might see at a protest. The red and black colour palette reflects the socialist theme. She wanted to give the impression of a protest scene that people have just started to arrive at, perhaps early in the morning.

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EDITORIAL: A RADICAL HEARTH

Lift your eyes from the enchanting orb of party politics and government and you will see an unsettled Scotland. It is a country of workers moved to strike against bosses struggling to hold down wages. A country where asylum seekers are detained in hotels while fascists chant outside their windows. A country where sexual health clinics are targeted by reactionary preachers and their disciples. But challenging the heartless can be heartening work.

In the words of Lorna Proudfoot, who writes about one of the countless picket lines drawn across workplaces this year: movements of solidarity are nourished by love. In this magazine, you will not find fantasies of a new progressive Scotland, but field reports from a movement that is managing to overcome what Roz Foyer calls 'the mythical separation between workers and the public'. There is Coll McCail's review of the resurging student movement and Lara's reflections as a school pupil on the lessons learned from watching teachers strike. There are words by Olivia Crook and by Paula Dickson describing soulful, songful pickets; and a poem by Alison Kerper and a perspective piece by Amber Ward that speak of the physical strain of standing united through Scotland's winter. And there are letters from Peter Frase and Paul Malgrati on working class resistance in the US and in France.

Beyond the strikes, later pages give space to the people who take the side of everyone who seeks to be at home in Scotland. Emma Ór describes a fascist counter-demo, and Pinar Aksu reports from migrant rights campaigns, with images that are cause for sorrow and for inspiration. Quân Nguyen explains his discomfort with Scotland's self-congratulatory efforts to welcome migrants. Iryna Zamuruieva reflects in Scottish terms on the devastation of war in her homeland. Henry Maitles writes of the fate of anti-fascists eighty years ago in a tribute to victims of the Warsaw Ghetto, and Sean Sheehan reviews a history of the British earls and bombs that reshaped the Middle East.

At this issue's heart sits a trio of histories exploring how the workers of Dundee have resisted the efforts of bosses to define, dominate, and debilitate them. STUC Congress this year takes place in the Caird Hall, the concert venue at the heart of the city. James Barrowman considers how the collective identity of Dundee's workers was forged every time they passed through the gates of the jute mills and factories. Later, it was in newspaper offices that the everyday radicalism remembered by Ellie McDonald was sustained, despite, or perhaps because of the dominance, described by Charlotte Lauder, of D. C. Thomson's printing presses spouting conservative doctrines across the North-East.

Rosalind Sanderson's beautiful cover captures the dynamism of this city's radical ground. Every city and community in Scotland has squares and corners where you find the Left.

Esmond Sage describes a hearth for radicals in Aberdeen that welcomed trade unionists during last year's Congress. Dundee is not short of socialist spots, some of them tended by STUC President Mike Arnott, whose fire and warmth are well known. During a previous Congress, Mike took a small delegation from Caird Hall to a bit of ground that will always be a kind of hearth for socialists. It is a stone that speaks of those who could say: 'all my life and all my strength were given to the finest cause in the world – the fight for the liberation of mankind'. The words seem solemn and grand, as they ought to be, for they are set in a memorial to Dundee members of the International Brigade killed in Spain fighting fascism.

James Connolly said of Ireland, what could be applied to any country, including Scotland, the country of his birth, that anyone bubbling with enthusiasm for 'Ireland' who can witness all the wrong and degradation wrought on the people by others in their nation without burning to end it, is 'a fraud and a liar in his heart, no matter how he loves that combination of chemical elements which he is pleased to call 'Ireland''. There has been much concern recently that Nicola Sturgeon's departure, and the appearance of a candidate who pays tribute to the oily wealth-creation fountain, and whose principles Vladimir McTavish reckons would be reactionary even in 1950s Dingwall, is damaging the social-minded self-image of progressive Scotland. Of course, the idea that Sturgeon presided over a society to be proud of is fiction familiar to the Left. Many people prefer to believe that things are better than they are, and would rather not to see the struggles of strangers. The Scottish Left is good at taking this dinnae-think-abootery to task. Yet, in the post-Sturgeon gap, any kind of wait-and-see approach risks fueling apathy. Sceptics say the fundamental problem Scotland faces is that none of us can be bothered. But as journalist and anarchist Dorothy Day said: 'No one has a right to sit down and feel hopeless. There is too much work to do.' Writing is part of that work, and it is work that every reader is invited to do. So, scribe a letter, review a book or gig, report on a protest or meeting, describe a pilgrimage, draft an essay with friends, and send them to the magazine. Share your energy to make this journal a living source of socialism. Think of us as a radical hearth of the Scottish Left.

LEAVING THE JUTE MILL

James Barrowman reviews a recent exhibition in Dundee, leading us back through the factory gates

The Cooper Gallery's show *Consider Labour* is the first major exhibition of work by the late filmmaker Harun Farocki in Scotland, and places Dundee within the international network of cities that have hosted the 'Labour in a Single Shot' workshop that Farocki developed with partner Antje Ehmann. Dundee is well-placed to undertake an exploration of work and industry; the exhibition is explicitly framed around 'the political activism of working class culture in Dundee' and giving 'this most radical of cities an emotive relationship with all others who labour.' The work on display includes Farocki's *Workers Leaving the Factory*, taking what is widely regarded as the first motion picture, *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory*, as the starting-point for a journey through cinema history focusing on the factory gates. The exhibition's workshops encourage the creation of new films inspired by this motif.

In an essay of the same title, Farocki insists that 'leaving the factory is not a literary theme', but it was an occasional subject for the poets of industrial Dundee. It receives moving treatment in William Thom's *Rhymes and Recollections of a Hand-Loom Weaver*. Thom recounts the moment he resolved to escape the factory walls in 1826, 'when banks were falling like meteors, but rather oftener' and 'the world seemed hurrying to ruin.' He penned a song which gained popularity among the workforce, even 'without the gates', and from then on he moved forward with one eye shut and the other 'immovably fixed on Parnassus', the fabled home of poetry and literature. The notion that he could write to bring joy to his fellow weavers beyond the confines of the workplace led Thom to a new conclusion: 'Why should his powers live and die in this black boundary? His song not be heard beyond the unpoetical brick walls of a factory? It was settled. He is off. The shuttle for a time may go rot.'

But leaving the jute mills was a complicated matter. The *Parliamentary Papers* of 1831-32 record the case of one mill girl who spent seven months in Dundee gaol for deserting her post, then was beaten on return while working to make up her employer's legal expenses. A generation later in 1863, Ellen Johnston was employed at Verdant Works, only to be discharged without explanation. She took her dismissal to court and won back a week's wages. Though leaving the factory had been involuntary for Johnston, she faced an uphill battle to enter back into the workforce. She describes how prior to dismissal she was 'envied' by her 'sister sex' for her weaving talents, while after the lawsuit they treated her with a 'perfect hatred'. Johnston was 'persecuted beyond description'. Lies were spread about her and she was

assaulted in the street, where the assailants ripped her clothes and spat at her. Letters were circulated among the foremen and tenters that warned against employing her, so that she 'wandered through Dundee a famished and persecuted factory exile.' Eventually Johnston secured a position at Chapelshade Factory, and as she developed her craft as a writer she became known in Dundee as 'the Factory Girl'. But she was unable to make her writing into a means to leave weaving behind. In *Gilfillan of Dundee*, Aileen Black describes the Reverend Gilfillan's 'prejudiced and lukewarm endorsement' of Johnston as a writer, and discusses how she he lacked the 'networks of influential friends' that had enabled Thom to remove from his black boundary.

Johnston's account of her victimisation is indicative of the divides within Dundee's labouring classes. In an article from the *People's Journal* in 1926, Reverend Henry Williamson describes the opposition between the factory girls in their 'be-ribboned hats' and the mill girls with 'shawls over their shoulders, all bare-headed and some even bare-footed.' It is said of the Scouringburn that the mill girls took one side of the street and the factory girls the other. This split is captured in *Employees Leaving Gilroy's Jute Works*, a motion picture shot in 1903 that echoed the Lumière's 1895 film. In one clip, one of the veiled mill girls spits at a factory girl in a hat. This sequence illustrates a point that Farocki made in his original analysis: 'The appearance of community does not last long. Immediately after the workers hurry past the gate, they disperse to become individual persons [...]. If after leaving the factory the workers don't remain together for a rally, their image as workers disintegrates.'

In the *Dundee Year Book* of 1884, the gates of Gilroy's jute works are described as the threshold of a 'miniature town' removed from the 'bustle and confusion of the street'. It was this position as a boundary between two worlds which made the factory gates an important site for protest. In these cases, they doubled as a proscenium arch, the frame surrounding a stage space separating the public from the players. In 1912, a march brought 400 strikers in masks and fancy dress to 'besiege' the Baxter Brothers gates with stones. Emma Wainwright's PhD thesis 'Gender, Space and Power', uses these examples to portray Dundee's factory gates as spaces where 'the messiness of domination and resistance' erupts and 'the distinction between actor and audience is blurred.'

The factory gates remained a site of workforce resistance up to the Timex strike in 1993, when locks were glued shut to delay buses full of scab labour. Today, the gateways to former mills

and factories remain thresholds to other worlds and miniature towns, be they in heritage attractions, the urban ruins of deindustrialisation, or the gentrified 'luxury' of boutique hotels and converted flats. These boundaries retain their power through their potential for performance, and as we leave the jute mill, we can reflect on and momentarily embody the workers that passed through the gates in centuries past. The expression, 'Leaving the Jute Mill', is used in a letter from Groucho Marx to his daughter, describing her release from institutional care for mental health difficulties. It is a useful phrase to adopt when considering labour in Dundee, as we strive to resist efforts to pit workers against each other, and depart from orthodoxies that depict the working class as a homogenous block.

Harun Farocki's 'Consider Labour' runs at the Cooper Gallery from 3rd February to 1st April.

D. C. THOMSON, LOGAN ROY, AND THE TYRANNY OF THE TARTAN MONSTER

Charlotte Lauder compares two malign media influences with their roots in Tayside.

In *Succession*, the transatlantic TV show that depicts the Machiavellian manoeuvrings of New York City media mogul Logan Roy and his power-hungry family, the city of Dundee holds a special significance. As the place of Roy's birth, it is central to the character's humble origin story and the place that inspired his life as an anti-hero media baron. In an episode filmed on location in 2018, Dundee is a moniker for the 'lad o' pairts' trope. In the classic Scottish literary narrative, the 'boy from round here' leaves for the bigger place and becomes successful. The episode also speaks to the transatlantic-emigrant experience of thousands of Scots who created successful settlements and capitalistic ventures overseas. This narrative is reinforced in a later episode, when Roy is described by his brother as 'an ex-Scot, ex-Canadian, ex-human being'.

There are obvious parallels between Roy, his fictionalised media conglomerate 'Waystar-Royco', and the real-life press dynasties that have dominated Western media since the 1950s. The most obvious are the legacy companies of Rupert Murdoch and Robert Maxwell. Like Roy, Murdoch and Maxwell emigrated to their chosen countries, developed global reputations as powerful pressmen with enormously influential media empires, and sustained notoriously complicated relationships with their children. Although *Succession's* choice to make Dundee the birthplace of its central character is bolstered by the casting of Dundee actor Brian Cox, the city's notoriety for media and journalism makes the links obvious between Logan Roy and Dundee's D. C. Thomson.

Family-owned and family-operated, D. C. Thomson has its own complicated history. Named after its founding director, David Couper Thomson, the company's roots are in the W. & D. C. Thomson Company, a shipping and woollen manufacturing business established in Dundee in the 1880s by Thomson's father. When the Thomsons became primary shareholders of the

JUTE, JAM AND JOURNALISM: WHEN D. C. THOMPSON DOMINATED DUNDEE

When **Ellie McDonald's** uncle organised a union at Dundee's media powerhouse, the bosses blacklisted the family. It never kept them down.

Dundee Newspaper Company, they inherited ownership of the *Dundee Courier*, *Northern Warder*, and *Weekly News*, thus beginning the family's publishing business. Since then, D. C. Thomson has been hell bent on press domination. In 1905 they hoovered up the John Leng Company, the original press empire of Dundee that supported Irish and Scottish Home Rule, the enfranchisement of women, and universal suffrage. (The John Leng parallel in *Succession* is Roy's anti-capitalist, anti-corporation, pro-environment brother Ewan Roy). In 2006 it bought Aberdeen Journals Limited, operators of the *Aberdeen Press and Journal* and *Evening Express*, for £132 million, and in 2018 was eyeing-up the soon-to-be defunct Johnston Press Limited (now JPI Media, owners of the largest number of newspaper titles in the UK).

D. C. Thomson has always courted controversy. As an organisation historically affiliated with the Scottish Conservative & Unionist Party in a notoriously radical, left-leaning city that has consistently returned Liberal and Labour candidates since 1832, D. C. Thomson was politically out of place. Winston Churchill, who was the Liberal MP for Dundee from 1908 to 1922, considered Thomson a secretive, overly paternalistic employer who exercised immense persuasive power over Dundee. Thomson's hiring and firing policies are also well-known. In 1952, it dismissed 74 printers for union membership, leading to a boycott of their newspapers by the Trades Union Congress in 1953. The company also demanded that its journalists sign an anti-union pledge, which led Lord Thomson of Monifieth, then sub-editor of Thomson's comic the Dandy, to quit Dundee for Glasgow where he became assistant editor of the socialist newspaper Forward. Other allegations of unjust workplace practices – no Irish, no Catholics, and no married women – are colloquially remembered in Dundee.

Culturally, D. C. Thomson has also been antagonistic. In the *Red Paper on Scotland* (1975), the late intellectual Tom Nairn identified Thomson's papers as part of the 'vast tartan monster', a soft nationalist Scottish media that coddled and codified modern Scottish cultural identity as mediocre, kitsch, and sentimental. D. C. Thomson's de-politicisation of the Scottish press – its 'couterisation' to use Bill Herbert's phrase – has taken many textual forms, not least in *The Broons* and *Oor Wullie*. Both comics were launched on the same day in March 1936 in the *Sunday Post*, Thomson's weekly newspaper that was established as a patriotic First World War paper consisting of positive war stories, football scores, and wartime fiction in October 1914. Nairn considered the *Sunday Post* a major obstacle to Scottish cultural

liberty: 'Scotland will be reborn when the last minister is strangled by the last copy of the *Sunday Post*', he said. Ironically, this prophetic clerical murder is actually a death by suicide, as Scottish ministers have dominated the news items, editorials, and articles of the *Sunday Post* since its inception, thereby living vicariously through its pages to preach another day. Lastly, there are Thomson's women's magazines of which there are too many to list here. The longest running is the *People's Friend*, established in 1869, followed by *My Weekly*, founded in 1910, both of which continue to portray women as hard-working housewives and homemakers via the magazine's economised romantic fiction, knitting patterns, and cleaning tips. I am no mathematician, but Thomson's formula for a 'tartan monster' might be as follows: aspirational working-class identity + women's literature ÷ Scots language x family orientation = a Scottish populist press. For Kenneth White the variables are 'common sense and sentimentality', 'social realism and airy-fairy', 'Gaelic piety and Lowland pawkiness', and 'porridge and the People's Friend'. Most insipid of all is Thomson's ability to distil this formula, integrate it across multiple titles, and dispatch it to Scottish readers and their sympathetic Scottish descendants around the world for nearly a century. If you didn't shout 'Logan Roy is D. C. Thomson!' whilst watching *Succession*, then why not?

Just as *Succession's* Logan Roy ruthlessly took the upper hand in last season's cliff-hanger, D.C. Thomson brutally laid off 300 employees to counter a £10m shortfall despite a £2m increase in its dividends to shareholders. While the mighty force of the 'tartan monster' continues to wreak havoc on the media landscape of Scotland, this latest episode in Thomson's employee relations has been regarded by journalists, cultural commentators, and the public as signalling a turning point in Scotland's press. Will the last *Sunday Post* prophesied by Nairn come sooner rather than later?

In Dundee in the 1930s, unemployment was as familiar as the smell of jute which permeated the city. Among endemic poverty and lack of opportunity, my granny held a far-sighted belief in being well-educated. Apart from the jute industry and Keiller's marmalade and jam factories, only the newspaper industry employed large numbers. Production of the newspapers and comics that covered much of the east coast was dominated by the offices and printing presses of D. C. Thomson.

The Thomsons saw themselves as benign father figures, with the staff encouraged to call their employers by names like Mr. Alistair, to foster a family atmosphere. They offered secure full-time employment to a carefully selected staff. Roman Catholics were not employed in any capacity and clerical staff from the junior ranks upwards were recruited only from the Academies. Most Dundonians read the *Courier* daily, digesting its Conservative stance and its portrayal of righteous indignation while the rise of Labour and Communist voters continued in Dundee.

Against this background my uncle was employed as a compositor with D. C. Thomson. Being raised to think for himself and with a belief in fairness he saw that trade unionism was the way forward. A few other men who worked alongside him agreed that they should gather support for a union. Management got wind of the troublemakers and they were immediately sacked and blacklisted. It was a swift and brutal response, especially as the families of the men were also blacklisted. My uncle went to Manchester to work at the Guardian and never came back to Dundee.

The company's animosity continued through the years, and we would amuse ourselves by applying for jobs with D.C. Thomson for which we were suitably qualified but never got a reply. One of the other blacklisted men had a son who took a degree in maths from Dundee University. After a fine academic career in Britain and abroad he was appointed to the Chair of Mathematics at Dundee. When the *Courier* reported on three appointments at Dundee University, two academics were given the usual long blurbs and Ian Adamson was given two lines.

One of my cousins became a manager in the Bank of Bermuda and some time in the 80s a staff member came to tell him that a chap from Dundee was in the office on business and would he like to meet him. My cousin shook hands with one of the Thomsons with barely concealed amusement. The surname was no longer a barrier.

SCOTTISH ANTI-FASCISM IN 2023: WHEN THE ‘PURE’ TRY TO SPEAK FOR THE POOR

Emma Òr attended the counter-demo to rally at a hotel in Erskine.

‘Refugees are welcome here’ and ‘Nazi scum off our streets’ were the chants outside the Muthu Glasgow River Hotel in Erskine on Sunday 5th February to drown out Patriotic Alternative’s (PA) anti-refugee rally. Members of PA, currently the largest far-right movement in the UK, gathered to capitalise on community frustrations and oppose the housing of 200 asylum seekers in the hotel. Attendees included several notorious fascist organisers: incredibly dangerous people who have been known to use online forums to recruit neo-Nazis posing with weapons, share bomb-making manuals, quote mass murderers and encourage members to ‘kill for the greater good’, by which they mean fascism. PA’s website describes the denigration of ‘indigenous British people’ using the kind of rhetoric which justifies genocide. Using a classic fascist strategy of ‘punching down’ by blaming society’s most marginalised for problems caused by the rich and powerful, PA aimed to exploit the housing crisis to turn different parts of the working class against each other, claiming that refugees living in poor conditions were depriving Scottish people of homes. Members of various leftist groups including SWP-aligned Stand up to Racism and Scottish Anti-Fascists mobilised in response to this disgraceful event, holding a banner which read ‘gays against Nazis’.

The Scottish far-right had been relatively subdued prior to PA’s recent rise to prominence. Up until 2020 fascist mobilisation in Scotland largely took the form of rowdy public rallies inspired by leader of English Defence League (EDL) Tommy Robinson. On multiple occasions, he attended the chaotic and loosely organised SDL rallies in Scotland which gained public attention but were resolutely seen off by anti-fascists time and again. With the SDL having collapsed in a morass of scandals and infighting, PA are building a support base using a more vitriolic racist politics, mobilising those radicalised online, in the community, and former members of the BNP and National Front. They are more organised, extreme and dangerous than many of their predecessor groups. The Scottish far-right is changing and poses a threat which must be taken seriously by the left.

It is not just the active members of PA, however, who are suffocating the freedom of migrants housed in the hotel, but the British state itself. Many of the anti-fascists who turned up to oppose the demo were at pains to point out that in order to stop fascism, we must begin to understand and tackle its root cause. Erskine is a small and economically challenged community on the outskirts of Glasgow. Services in the area have been decimated following decades of austerity. The government have taken advantage of the depressed local economy by using it to house refugees, knowing

that hotel prices in the area will be much lower than better off districts. Mears, the Home Office’s private provider of choice, profit from this contract by providing the cheapest available, and therefore substandard, accommodation in Erskine. Refugees in hotels across the country have reported damp, dirty and vermin-infested accommodation. Their living conditions are unsafe, inhumane and isolating. Since Mears is only accountable to the Home Office, however, and not the local authorities or communities in which they operate, they are continuing to accumulate wealth at the expense of the wellbeing of some of the most marginalised people in Scotland.

Following years of concerted effort by Westminster and the billionaire-controlled media to demonise those fleeing war and brutality, literally making a ‘hostile environment’ for them, it is, sadly, no surprise that some working class people would be open to the hate-filled rhetoric of groups like PA. Fascism, as always, is useful for the ruling class because it divides the working class and distracts people from directing resistance towards real enemies associated with capitalism and the state. The corporate media use anti-asylum seeker rhetoric. The word ‘invasion’ is chosen to describe migrants arriving by hugely dangerous small boat crossings (a phenomenon itself directly resulting from the state having closed legal entry routes). There is symmetry between far-right sentiment, government policy and media rhetoric. Opposing fascists on our streets and building anti-capitalist projects are simultaneous. We must explain tirelessly to friends, family, neighbours and co-workers that the reason for worsening material conditions is not poor, dispossessed people from abroad, but the system that guarantees wealth and power for a few and social exclusion, poverty and precarity for the many.

The majority of attendees at PA’s demo were white working class men, a cohort all too readily targeted for recruitment by fascists. Dispossessed members of the working class have more than enough legitimate reasons to be angry with the system. Nonetheless, they make a fatal, disastrous mistake in blaming those that are even worse off than them for their woes. The cost of living has shot up recently, making life harder and more precarious for almost everyone except the rich and powerful. The last time we faced such a crisis was the 2008 recession and then, as now, the government forced the costs onto the poorest in society whilst bailing out the banks.

PA’s banner read ‘house the homeless before migrants’. This is a false equivalence and an example of mistaken division. The reason there is a homelessness problem in Scotland is because

WHY HOTEL ACCOMMODATION?

Pinar Aksu reviews the reality that awaits people seeking asylum and refuge in Scotland.

the government prioritises other interests. During the Covid pandemic, for example, Scottish councils, given the mandate and funding, had the means to end the vast majority of homelessness. Instead of directing their anger towards the government, PA direct it towards asylum seekers who are demonised by the state and media establishment.

In a move that might anger many supporters of independence, PA were seen to be waving the saltire at the demo. They are attempting to co-opt the Scottish flag from an independence movement which is overwhelmingly based on an inclusive sense of civic nationalism and opposition to Westminster’s austerity. PA, by contrast, have appropriated the flag to promote ethnonationalism which is explicitly imperialist, colonialist and regressive. As opposed to seeing independence as a way to rid Scotland of the racist imperialism of Westminster, they want independence as a means to exclude anyone from Scotland who isn’t ‘pure’ white and Scottish.

The rise of fascism must, of course, be addressed by all who are part of the Scottish Left. Across the environmental movement, it is a growing concern. Not only are fascists already increasingly trying to use environmental issues as an excuse to militarise borders and control populations, but the disastrous planetary future we face offers the potential seeds for an escalation of this trend. The world saw the rise of the far-right in Europe in response to the migrant crisis emerging between 2015-2018. Scotland, like other countries, will receive far more migrants as a result of the rapidly escalating ecological collapse than it did as a result of the conflicts in places such as Syria and Libya. If allowed to grow, fascism leads inexorably to racist violence and genocide. As has long been noted, it doesn’t begin with death camps, but ends there – having begun in places like Erskine with mobs of Nazi thugs pretending to represent the needs of the poor. Fascism is an existential threat of the gravest kind to all that is good and progressive. All of us on the left must organise to resist it through a multi-pronged offensive rooted in anti-capitalist politics. Nae Pasaran!

At the start of the pandemic and lockdown, when everything seemed unsure, people seeking asylum and refuge were evicted from their homes across Glasgow and placed in hotel accommodation. They were only informed on the day of the move and were given thirty minutes or so to pack their belongings without being told where they would be going. Placing more than a hundred people in hotel detention was not right and should not be normalised. It was widely condemned.

In May 2020 we lost our friend Adnan Elbi in one of the hotels in Glasgow. As campaigners and organisations continued to raise concerns for these provisions, their voices were not listened to. Later, Badreddin Abadlla Adam, 28, who was moved into a hotel at the start of the lockdown, lost his life at the Park Inn hotel in June 2020, shot by a Police Scotland officer. 72 times he had contacted the Home Office, the housing and social care provider Mears, and the charity Migrant Help about his health. His voice was ignored.

At the moment, people are in hotel detention across the country. The process takes people’s dignity and freedom. There is neither justice nor accountability concerning the lost lives of those undergoing the inhumane and cruel practice of hotel detention in Glasgow. In November, the final report of Asylum Inquiry Scotland was published. Commissioned by Refugees for Justice and led by Baroness Helena Kennedy, the *Independent Commission of Inquiry into Asylum Provision in Scotland with particular reference to failings in the provision of care to New Scots during the Covid pandemic* report found that the tragic series of events surrounding Badreddin Abadlla Adam’s death were ‘avoidable’ and that a public inquiry is now essential.

Meanwhile, myths circulate. With ongoing cuts to services in local communities, it becomes easier to target the most marginalised rather than the government that has been underfunding and cutting services for many years. Against this narrative,



Flowers left outside hotel, Pinar Aksu, 2020

we need more conversation and understanding about the experiences of people who are being placed in 'hotel detention'. What are their rights? Why are hotels being used?

Hotels that are used to accommodate asylum seekers make profit from their contracts with the Home Office. While those who are in the asylum process receive £45 per week in the form of Asylum Support, people living in hotel accommodation receive £9. These hotels are often located where it is difficult to access essential services, and it is common for people to get moved between hotels, which makes it difficult for them to know the community, or for people in the community to know them. With living costs rising, the Home Office is forcing people to live in ever deeper poverty, while hotels profit.

Pinar Aksu works with the Maryhill Integration Network, which is part of the Lift the Ban coalition that is campaigning to change the regulations so that people can work after six months and be independent, rather than dependant on Home Office support. Maryhill Integration Network also runs a campaign on the right to education: 'Access to Education - Our Grades Not Visas'.

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WHAT WOULD IT TAKE FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT IN SCOTLAND'S HEALTH?

Submitted by the People's Health Movement (PHM) Scotland ahead of their People's Health Assembly on 10th June, this article was written by its Steering Committee: **Tony Robertson, Mark Langdon, Sue Laughlin, Eva Gallova, Neil Quinn, Giulia Loffreda and Toby Pepperrell.**

The combination of the climate emergency and a crushing cost of living crisis have often been described in recent months as a socio-ecological polycrisis. In this era, where is the alternative to the neoliberal playbook of austerity, trickle down economics, and the never-ending focus on economic growth as the medicine for all ills? The future of Scotland, independent or otherwise, is appallingly bleak if new policy ideas are not put forward, discussed, and enacted. Informed and critical democratic engagement is the only vaccine that can hope to address the pandemic of what the RAND Corporation call 'truth decay', that is already undermining the fundamental rights of the vulnerable and threatening the existence of future generations. In the realm of public health, groups like Medact, Global Justice Now and the People's Health Movement are doing brilliant work across civil society to improve the health and wellbeing of our society, while the Enough is Enough movement is continuing to rise up and address the cost of living crisis. Yet all can be guilty of focusing on simply trying to survive, rather than giving people alternatives and the ability to thrive. In Scotland, we are caught in a cycle of paying to fix what we continue to break. Public Health Scotland lament that there is 'continued low investment in primary prevention, which would address the upstream drivers of poor health, social and economic outcomes. Failing to invest in primary prevention now continues to increase the demands facing health and social care and wider public services over the coming decades.' What forces in Scotland can come together to energise a paradigm shift from the grassroots? Who will unanimously advocate systems change to support the health and wellbeing of people and planet as our core aims, rather than an outdated, misguided and unfair focus on economic growth and finances?

The People's Health Movement (PHM) Scotland wants to catalyse this paradigm shift by bringing people together for a People's Health Assembly (PHA) on 10th June 2023. The 2023 Assembly will recognise the failures of current and past approaches, but more importantly will highlight the breadth and depth of positive alternatives. The aim is to create a space for organisations and groups concerned about health to fashion a more effective response to Scotland's growing health crisis. In view of the impact of austerity and inflation on workers from a wide range of sectors, it is especially important that this includes participation from trades unions. Scotland has its own rich tapestry of activism interlacing the global, the national and the local, as well as networks of support for communities and individuals. Yet these efforts lack synergy, leading to a loss of

effectiveness. We will focus on the processes of social movement building and grassroots activism in shifting from surviving and coping (by some better than others) to systems change. When voices come together they can re-ignite solidarity in the face of detached politics.

As the leadership of the SNP and the Scottish Government shifts, the policy status quo that has wreaked havoc on our population's health will seemingly continue. Ineffective responses and worsening outcomes, such as falling life expectancy, can only be reimagined in a positive and united civil society. If another well-meaning event on health inequalities or climate fills you with dread or apathy, please think again. In order to create an event that will energise as many groups and individuals as possible, and one that has the best chance to achieve our objectives we are asking individuals, community groups and organisations, including trade unions, to input into our planning.

PHM Scotland is inviting members of the public to facilitate discussions in communities and organisations, online, through in-person meetings/events, or through any other means, to generate insightful contributions that can be put forward to help to shape the PHA. PHA ask that responses are made via a short survey found at the link below. If you would like more information on the PHA, you can join the mailing list via the website.

<https://forms.gle/wcme3xPidEpnxUAHA>.

If you would like more information on the PHA, and/or PHM Scotland, you can join the mailing list at

<https://peopleshealthmovementscotland.wordpress.com/subscribe>

Web: <https://peopleshealthmovementscotland.wordpress.com/>

Email: phmscotland@gmail.com

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MIGRATION EXPERIENCES, NEW SCOTS, AND THE LIMITS OF CIVIC NATIONALISM

Some wear the label ‘New Scots’ as a badge of honour;
for others it’s less appealing, writes **Quan Nguyen**.

Last summer, at the ‘Progress to Yes’ conference in Aberdeen, I visited a workshop where a panellist introduced himself earnestly as a New Scot. A young white man, an EU immigrant from a Nordic nation, so seriously embraced being a new citizen in Scotland that he made it part of his introductory pitch at a conference on independence. I was puzzled. Not because I’ve never heard the word before, but because I’m an immigrant as well and would never describe myself as a New Scot, never mind introducing myself like this to an audience. What was going on in that New Scottish head?

‘New Scots’ is an umbrella term describing people from anywhere outwith Scotland who, for whatever reason, are newly living in Scotland. This includes Irish people, Pakistani people, Polish immigrants, EU citizens and international students, as well as asylum seekers and refugees fleeing poverty, persecution and war. Very different backgrounds are mashed together, from Americans who enjoy discovering their ‘Scottish Heritage’ at Edinburgh Castle to Ukrainian refugees trapped on a cruise ship just a few miles away. ‘New Scot’ is meant to be an inclusive concept, emphasising one key point: that citizenship and nationality are a matter of choice, not birth, blood or land. It links centrally to Scotland’s civic nationalism: a nationalism that bases self-determination not on ethnicity, but on choosing and identifying with Scotland as a national project. Civic nationalism is inherently tied to a universalist political culture that invites everyone to identify with and support it, regardless of their birthplace, skin colour and blood heritage. For Scottish nationalists wanting to assert self-determination against a hostile British state, this is useful, as it provides a sharp contrast to the anti-immigration sentiments deeply embedded into the UK’s obsession with sovereignty that culminated in Brexit’s empty shelves, and its racist border regime that becomes more absurdly inhuman every year. So, no wonder that a progressive participant at a grassroots independence conference describes himself as a New Scot, thereby voicing his commitment to an inclusive Scotland and its political culture as well as his dissent to the British state at the same time.

So, why am I puzzled? My scepticism of self-describing as a New Scot is difficult to grasp. It is partly about what Tom Devine describes in *New Scots: Immigrant Communities in Scotland since 1945* as a narrative portraying Scotland as more welcoming to immigrants than it actually is. This ‘belief that Scotland has traditionally been a welcoming country to strangers is in conflict’, Devine says, ‘with some historical realities’ such as widespread anti-Irish sentiment until the 1970s and hostility towards Black

and Asian people since then. My scepticism also stems from a discomfort with the construction of a universal experience that all migrants are supposed to share. Like my New Scot acquaintance, I’m an EU immigrant who had to apply for settled status and slowly fell out of love with the UK. But our similarities probably end there, and the reason is not (only) that he is white and I am not, but something personal: I felt like an immigrant before I moved across borders.

My home country, Germany, had similar discussions that saw ‘Neue Deutsche’ (New Germans) being used both by migrants to self-describe, as well as in academic circles to analyse Germany’s migrant populations. Like in Scotland, ‘Neue Deutsche’ is linked to a universalist conception of citizenship defined not by blood or soil, and supports the construction of a civic form of nationalism (Verfassungspatriotismus, or Constitutional Patriotism, most famously defended by philosopher Jürgen Habermas). Unlike Scotland and its need for civic nationalism as a form of resistance against the UK, Germany’s constitutional patriotism rose from the ashes of the Holocaust, which poisoned German culture so deeply that any attempt at a continued German cultural tradition grounding national identification was morally unacceptable. Unlike ‘New Scots’, ‘Neue Deutsche’ is not a concept used by the German state or governing party, but used as a self-description to build solidarity between different migrant experiences that, crucially, includes people who were born in Germany but not to white, ethnically German parents. I might feel differently about ‘New Scots’ as a term if it captured the experience of Black, Asian or Arab people born and raised in Scotland, wrestling with their identity and their sense of belonging to a country that is clearly their home, but at the same time reminds them of every time they have been rejected from Scottishness because of their skin colour, accent, clothing, food or religious practice. This feeling of being torn apart, being othered as a minority within a nation while also belonging to that nation, is something ‘Neue Deutsche’ as a term describes, but ‘New Scot’ does not (yet) capture. But just like New Scots, Neue Deutsche expresses a political commitment to inclusion and progressiveness. As Özlem Topçu, Alice Bota and Khuê Pham, the Turkish, Polish and Vietnamese authors of *Wir Neuen Deutschen (We New Germans)* write:

People like us, with hybrid identities, embody a new Germany and a new attitude towards the nation. [...] They see Germany as a creative and lively nation, with a different perception of Migration. There are no parallel societies, only one society.

The word ‘Migration Background’ is removed from vocabulary, as children born to immigrants will just be called Germans. [...] We think that sounds like a pretty concrete Utopia. We will not be satisfied with less.

So, if we extend ‘New Scot’ in the same way and reclaim it for ourselves to articulate migrant experiences, our sense of belonging, and a new Scotland that we embody, does this lead us to a concrete Utopia? What are the possibilities of ‘New Scot’ not aiming at superficial inclusion but becoming a radical term that articulates the experience of immigrants and their descendants, their experiences of loss of their own culture, the denial of their old backgrounds, and the widening cultural, linguistic and spiritual gap between immigrants and their children that both generations have to process? Does ‘New Scot’ open up a conversation about this, and the different struggles migrants experience in their journey, in their learning, in their workplace? Or does ‘New Scot’, in its attempt to universalise the migration experience and signal inclusion into a progressive, welcoming Scotland, shut the doors on such topics that are difficult to articulate?

In my scepticism, I lean towards the latter: for now, the term ‘New Scot’ is firmly in the hands of academic researchers, Scottish Government strategists and SNP loyalists, and not in use by migrants and their descendants in Scotland. The term itself points towards an unhealthy drive to include all migrants under one banner, washing over differences in migration experiences when it comes to language, culture, gender and class. It should be obvious that an English immigrant who joins Scotland’s charity industry has a very different experience of migration than a hospitality worker from Poland, a Deliveroo driver from Tunisia, a nail polisher from Vietnam. But ‘New Scot’ encourages us to assume that all of them share something by the nature of their migration, being equally welcomed and included in an open and diverse Scotland, forgetting that different migrants from different backgrounds receive very different levels of welcome even in a comparably welcoming Scotland.

In the end, understanding the shortcomings of ‘New Scot’ is helpful to grasp the limited nature of the civic nationalism to which the concept is tied. Just as Scottish civic nationalism is obviously preferable to ethnic nationalism, ‘New Scot’ is not something to be condemned where it informs an inclusionary strategy that guides the work to welcome refugees done by government and charities like the Scottish Refugee Council. But just as ‘New Scot’ misses out on articulating crucial migrant experiences, civ-

ic nationalism in its universalist political culture cannot capture and articulate the vastly different cultural backgrounds of the Scottish nation, and drives us towards an artificial, abstract form of unity that has surprisingly little to say on the struggles both New and Old Scots face across the country.

Devine, T. M. (Ed.). (2018). *New Scots: Scotland's Immigrant Communities since 1945*. Edinburgh University Press.

Topçu, Ö., Bota, A., & Pham, K. (2012). *Wir neuen Deutschen. Wer wir sind, was wir wollen*, Rowohlt, Hamburg.

KINSHIP IN OUR DAMAGED LAND

Iryna Zamuruieva reflects on the devastation wrought upon her native land, and the roots in language and culture that can sustain a deep sense of resistance and resilience.

We've seen many images of the Russian war against Ukraine: there is pain and loss on scales that are difficult to comprehend. A year into the full-scale invasion, there is one image I think of often. It is a photograph of a field punctuated with glaring black craters left by the Russian shelling close to Izyum in the Kharkiv region. In it can also be seen the remains of burnt down tanks, iron debris sinking into the soil. This image for me encapsulates this war's violence against Ukrainian land. The war has made me think deeply about my own relationship to land, both in my homeland in Ukraine and my current homeland in Scotland, wondering what political commitments a relationship to the land should entail?

There is a pervasive perception of Ukraine as an agricultural country: the 'breadbasket of Europe'. This image can be traced back to the Renaissance when present-day Ukrainian lands were described as 'the most fertile in Europe and with a mild climate'.¹ Jump a few centuries forward and Ukraine has become the fourth largest exporter of wheat in the world, letting the market drive its land use. Besides being a 'breadbasket', Ukraine's land is also a frontier for the EU's search for alternatives to fossil-based fuel. The increasing volume of rapeseed produced in Ukraine, one of the primary biofuel crops, reflects the growth in demand for raw materials for biofuel in the EU. With 1.3 million hectares of land used for intensive and soil-exhausting rapeseed farming, the biofuel hunt, under the auspices of action to combat climate change in the West, perpetuates the degradation of Ukrainian land, leaving those who rely on it for subsistence in a position of even less power to influence how this land is managed and cared for. The shades of yellow that one sees from the train across Ukraine – corn, soybeans, sunflower and wheat – are also exported to the EU as raw materials for 'sustainable' biofuel. What is not immediately visible are the ripple effects of a profit- and export-driven orientation of land management, combined with the near absence or repression of any resistance efforts.² This dynamic impacts most severely those already marginalised and imagined as less-than-human – other species, other-than-white-male bodies. What also remains under the surface is the toxicity spilling itself decades into the future, with intensive farming requiring large amounts of fertilisers that deplete the soil and leave it unsuitable for growing food for years to come.

Looking at the scale of ongoing war damage to the land, there are effects that remain invisible. Currently about 40 percent of all Ukraine's territory is covered in mines and other unexploded ordnance.³ Lead, a key component of many Russian munitions, has a half-life of 700 years and will continue poisoning life for

generations to come.⁴ This will take decades if not centuries to clear and, as WWI experience shows, some land will never recover. Some of the largest agricultural businesses in Ukraine are establishing their own 'demining divisions', but the effects for smallholders are far more devastating. Whilst surely the most devastating and damaging consequences of the war are unfolding on Ukrainian land, lands elsewhere are impacted too. This war has disrupted the outsourcing of biofuel production and we see farmers across the UK (and EU) growing more of their own biofuel crops. In Scotland in particular, the Government has encouraged farmers to grow rapeseed – a knock on vegetal effect of Russian invasion. While this may be good for farmers in the short term, it goes against the visions of thriving landscapes and rural communities presented by those campaigning for food sovereignty in Scotland.⁵

The war in Ukraine has been widely written and talked about through the lens of national sovereignty. For centuries, Russia has been coercing Ukraine into its political, economic and cultural space. Russia's war against Ukraine is a colonial war. This dynamic is important to understand. But if we're to understand how to resist this violence in a meaningful way and in true solidarity with the people and place/land, it is essential that we pay attention to what war does to the land and our relationship to it, beyond an agricultural framing of 'productive land'. I am thinking of *adonis vernalis*, a plant common in my home region and known in English as pheasant's eye, spring pheasant's eye, yellow pheasant's eye and false hellebore. There is nothing terribly outstanding about *adonis vernalis*: it grows, it blossoms, it heals, it poisons, it is eaten, pollinated, it creeps northward with the steppes as the climate heats up and it is also going extinct as its habitat is wrecked, polluted, ploughed and shelled. Before the full-scale war started I was planning an expedition into my home-region's steppes and forest steppes to spend time with this plant, which became impossible with the escalation of the war.

In Ukrainian there's a way to describe your home-place as *kin-place*, *ridnyi krai*. It's similar, but different to the notion of mother-, father-, home-land, different to the 'native' land or 'ancestral' land. There's a sense of wider kin, *rid*, to it and there's much more than blood connections to kin. *Krai* can mean both land, edge and region. In Scotland people sometimes use Gaelic *dùthchas* to describe this complex connection between people and land. It is perhaps the Gaelic word closest to *ridnyi krai*. With the impossibility of going to my own kin-region, the impossibility of spending time in the steppes with *adonis vernalis*, this plant be-



Credit: A field is covered with craters left by the shelling close to Izyum, Kharkiv region, Ukraine, Tuesday, Sept. 13, 2022. Kostiantyn Liberov—AP

came a path to thinking about the steppe environments and habitats. This very plant also constitutes home for me. A nation-state seems less significant, important, and worthwhile to think with, not despite the war, but because of it. Instead, what seems significant is my kin region with all its web of life, whose life-supporting capacity is being destroyed by Russia as I write this.

In the image from Izyum there are glaring holes on the agricultural field. There are thousands of such images and thousands of such fields in Ukraine now. Ukraine has become the largest minefield in the world, and the damage that this will keep doing, even when this war is over, is difficult to grasp. Preserving meaningful kinship and land-based solidarities through this war, as well as working out socially and ecologically just approaches to the land's regeneration, depends on collectively remembering what we are defending, and telling the stories of our damaged land. It is about relating to the land in ways that run much deeper than national sovereignty or national sentiment. It is about sharing the history that people are making as they defend home in all its multispecies glory.

- 1 Asia Bazdyrieva, 'No Milk, No Love', e-flux journal
- 2 Natalia Mamonova, 'Resistance or adaptation? Ukrainian peasants' responses to large-scale land acquisitions'
- 3 'Shmyhal: "World's largest minefield" created in Ukraine as result of Russian invasion', *Kyiv Independent*
- 4 Ref: 'Soils of war: The toxic legacy for Ukraine's breadbasket', *Reuters*
- 5 Nourish Scotland: nourishscotland.org/resources/key-food-issues/food-sovereignty/; Landworkers' Alliance Scotland: landworkersalliance.org.uk/lwa-scotland

HUMANITY AND HOPE

Henry Maitles remembers the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.



This picture, showing Bundist survivors of the Holocaust on the May Day 1945 demo in the ruins of Warsaw, is both poignant and uplifting. The Bund was the largest grouping of Jewish socialists in the lands of the Russian Empire from 1900 until the Holocaust. It was targeted both physically and memorially by the Nazis and their collaborators. In the great emigration from Eastern Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the ideas of the Bund were evident from Govanhill in Glasgow to East London to New York. It is estimated that some 10 percent of the International Brigaders in Spain were Jewish, including 50 percent of the Abraham Lincoln US detachment.

Eighty years ago, in April-May 1943 one of the most inspiring moments of World War Two was taking place. The Warsaw Ghetto uprising had no hope of success, but had at its core a moral and ethical mission, and a lesson to us that humans can fight back against oppression, even if they have virtually no chance of success. As the Jewish Fighting Organisation (in Polish, Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa or ŻOB) announced to the world: 'All of us will probably perish in the fight... It is a fight for our human dignity and honour, as well as yours'.

In November 1940, the Nazi occupation in Poland moved to the ghetto stage of its persecution of Jews, and the Warsaw Ghetto

was created and walled in. At its height there were nearly 300,000 Jews, one-third of Warsaw's population, forced into 2.5 percent of its area. The massive overcrowding and drastic shortage of food (at one stage estimated at 180 calories per day), and lack of sanitation and medicines, meant that there was a large death rate from disease and malnutrition. Nonetheless, the Jews were not dying fast enough and Nazis began clearing the residents to Auschwitz and Treblinka from 1942 onwards; by early 1943, there were only some 60,000 left in the ghetto. A mixture of disbelief about the death camps and misleading information from the Warsaw Jewish Council, as well as the starvation that hung over the ghetto, meant that the promise of bread led to more Jews turning up at Warsaw railway station for transportation on some days than the Germans could deal with.

When the Nazis surrounded the ghetto in spring 1943 for the final round-up of the last 20,000 Jews who had refused transport for 'resettlement', ŻOB resisted by force. ŻOB was a mix of Zionist and socialist organisations (the largest being the Bund), with big differences in politics, their point of unity being that all Jews, regardless of their political outlook, faced ending up in the camps. The first victims of the uprising were the Jewish police and Judenrat (the Nazi appointed Jewish Council) who, ŻOB argued, collaborated with the Nazis to facilitate the round-ups of Jews for transportation. ŻOB was completely outnumbered and outgunned as they had only a few rifles and pistols (smuggled into the ghetto), a few grenades, and homemade bombs and Molotov cocktails. The German army, with thousands of troops, machine guns, tanks and some air support, was startled on that first day, and withdrew, with dozens of casualties and a damaged tank. It was the start of something of great meaning for all observers. In May 1943, Goebbels (the Nazi propaganda chief) fumed in his diary about Jews fighting back, and with captured German weapons. What makes it even more important was that Nazi theory held that Jews – men and women fighters – couldn't fight back like this, that they were incapable of any, let alone armed, resistance, because they were subhuman. Moreover, it tied down thousands of German troops, meaning that they could neither be deployed in the war nor used to hunt Jews. By the middle of May, the Nazis decided that they couldn't defeat the uprising without greater loss of life and decided to burn the ghetto to the ground. Some survivors fled through the sewers; most were captured and killed.

It is perhaps the last great moment of the Bund and the hold of revolutionary ideas in Central and Eastern European Jewish communities. The ghetto fighters left us a universal message of humanism and hope in the face of barbarism. The Manifesto to the Poles stands out as one of the greatest socialist appeals in the 20th Century:

'we, the slaves of the Ghetto convey heartfelt greetings to you... All of us will probably perish in the fight but we shall

never surrender... it is a fight for our freedom, as well as yours! We shall avenge the gory deeds of Auschwitz, Treblinka, Belzec and Majdanek'.

It was an inspiration understood by some of the leaders of the Polish resistance, one of whom commented that 'the blood of the ghetto fighters was not shed in vain... It gave birth to an intensified struggle against the fascist invader'. A message to remember as we confront racism and fascism wherever and whenever it raises its head. These words must always be transformed into action.

As racism and fascism and right wing populism continue their growth across the world, the task of the left is to build the largest possible united front of all ethnicities, trade unions and left and progressive political organisations against them.

IMPERIALISM BY STEALTH

Jonathan Parry, *Promised lands: The British and the Ottoman Middle East* (Princeton 2022). Reviewed by Sean Sheehan

Promised Lands begins with a bombardment in 1799 against a town in what is now Israel, an opening salvo in the history of British involvement in parts of the Ottoman Empire. The intention of the bombardment was not to attack the Ottomans – their empire was a useful bulwark against Russia and France – but to prevent Napoleon blocking Britain's access to India. The book ends with the coming of the Crimean War in 1853 and Britain's alliance with the Ottoman Empire against Russia.

Napoleon's invasion of Ottoman Egypt precipitated an enlargement of Britain's imperial centre of gravity, widening to include the eastern Mediterranean. Since the loss of the thirteen American colonies in 1789, India acquired a new importance and Britain adopted a geopolitical perspective grounded on securing its business routes through Egypt and the Red Sea, or through Syria, Mesopotamia and the Gulf. It was, the author states, a mission largely accomplished by the time of the Crimean War. This is the background, framing Jonathan Parry's study and what makes it a fascinating read is his granular attention to an imperialist-minded project that was generally carried out more by stealth than systematic violence. To a large extent this was dictated by the practical impossibility of directly governing the territories that mattered: the challenge and financial cost of confronting head-on the Ottoman Empire and other vested interests would have been unthinkable. Far better to try and manage the rulers and inhabitants by diplomacy, commercial and technological prowess and naval power in adjacent waters. Relationships were subject to mood changes on all sides and there were French and Russian influences at Constantinople complicating geopolitical equations. If the Ottomans felt their power was waning there would be a concomitant increase in reliance on Russia and there is a chapter, for instance, devoted to the crisis caused by the defeat in 1839 of the Sultan's army in Syria by Mehmet Ali, the Ottoman governor and de facto ruler of Egypt. In this and other crises there were British officials in the region with their own career aspirations and Parry has delved into their agendas by scouring Foreign Office archives for the records of original correspondence with British representatives overseas.

In a region inseparable from three of the world's major religions, Parry takes on the task of disentangling the consequent

affiliations that wove complicated patterns into the fabric of the Ottoman Middle East. British troops did their bit early on by spreading the rumour that if Napoleon reached Jerusalem he would bury a French soldier in Christ's tomb and plant the revolutionary tree of liberty where the cross of Cavalry had reputedly stood. Characteristic of the book's cellular dissection of competing interests is a chapter on the various Christian denominations in Syria and neighbouring lands and how British evangelising Protestant bodies interfered with them in the late 1830s and '40s.

The author provides a tremendously readable synthesis of scholarly studies of this sectarian and arcane field while also, throughout the book, illuminating his study with cultural and social asides that bear tangentially on the main story. By winning favour with the Ottomans at the time of the French invasion of Egypt, the Earl of Elgin received rights over the Parthenon which he then used to persuade local officials in Athens to dismantle the marble sculptures adorning it; a navigation company (which became P&O) cashed in on steam travel by gaining government support for a luxury service from Southampton to Alexandria partly in exchange for a subsidised mail service from Suez to India; when the pyramids came into view on the Nile boat to Cairo, the novelist Thackeray wrote how 'several of us tried to be impressed; but breakfast supervening, a rush was made at the coffee and cold pies'.

VLADIMIR MCTAVISH'S KICK UP THE TABLOIDS

'At least Liz the Lettuce waited until she had been elected party leader before she pressed the self-destruct button.'

I'm currently working in Australia, but even here we felt the shockwaves of Nicola Sturgeon's departure. As we enter the post-Sturgeon era of Scottish politics, many are still in the dark as to why the First Minister resigned so abruptly. The real reason behind her decision may never be known.

Some readers of this publication will no doubt have an inside track on Sturgeon's resignation. Was it because of the fallout from the Gender Recognition Reform Act? Was it because of the endless trolling from TERFs or because of internal disputes over the direction of the indolence movement? Or was it, after nine years in the job, nine years of daily vitriolic headlines in *The Daily Mail* and the *Scottish Daily Express* that she finally reached the conclusion 'fuck this shit, I've had enough'. If she did, who can blame her?

I'm probably showing my age here, but the thing that strikes me most about the leading contenders is that they are both very young. Humza Yousaf is the same age as my youngest daughter but he's a likeable bloke and, importantly, a fan of stand-up comedy. He was a regular front row member of the audience in a small gig in Dundee and was always very enthusiastic in his enjoyment of the show. So he obviously enjoys a laugh. Kate Forbes, on the other hand, might enjoy a bit of a laugh, but only 'a bit' of a laugh, provided that the laughter only occurs before eleven thirty on a Saturday night and after eight o'clock on a Monday morning.

While Humza may be young Forbes is even younger, but holds views that belong in a previous century. Some of her opinions even my granny would have considered out-of-date. My granny who was a regular church-goer and died in 1968, in case you're wondering. It is somewhat sobering, no pun intended, to think that the next leader of the SNP could be more socially reactionary than Ruth Davidson.

The idea of a member of the Free Kirk running the country is not worth contemplating. But it has to be contemplated now that Forbes has thrown her hat into the ring. It would not only be damaging to the SNP, but also to the entire independence movement. What would a Scotland run by Kate Forbes look like? I can tell you, it would look like Dingwall in 1958.

There would be no gay marriage, and probably no gay anything else for that matter. There would be no shops open on Sunday, no Sunday football and no Sunday newspapers. Pubs would shut at 10pm and not be open on Sunday. Hanging out washing on Sunday would be made illegal. There would be no Sunday television, not even *Songs Of Praise* as singing in church is a heathen activity. That is not to say we would not be allowed to do anything on Sundays. There would still be a myriad of options such as going to church, reading the bible, taking a walk and praying. And, in exceptional circumstances, going to the toilet, provided you did so without making any noise.

Kate Forbes is, of course, free to express her views, but those views look likely to scupper her political ambition. I'm guessing

that Forbes also disagrees with assisted suicide. Indeed, she appears to disagree with it so enthusiastically that she decided to kill off her own leadership campaign without any assistance from anyone else. Her statements on same-sex marriage on day one of her campaign made me think she had herself had decided 'fuck this shit, I've had enough' before the leadership contest even got under way. This is the second act of political hari-kari to have happened in the last six months, after the spectacular implosion of Liz Truss back in October. But at least Liz The Lettuce waited until she had been elected party leader before she pressed the self-destruct button.

There is little doubt that this is a bumpy stretch on the road to independence. However, the movement is bigger than any individual. And Unionists should not get too cocky about claiming the game is over. A hundred Rangers fans dancing a conga around George Square does not represent a sea change in public opinion.

Vladimir McTavish is appearing at Glasgow International Comedy Festival on Sunday 26th March



VLADIMIR MCTAVISH



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