

# Wales since the election

Wales is the one country within the United Kingdom where there has been a Labour administration over recent years. To many people's surprise, including their own, Labour not only won the Senedd election in May but gained a seat overall. Geoff Ryan looks at some of what has been going on since then.

The Labour administration has had to deal with a number of issues, in particular climate change and the environment, housing; free school meals; the continuing Corona virus pandemic and of course the relationship between Wales and the United Kingdom have been high on their agenda

## Climate Change and the Environment

One of the first acts of the new government was to introduce a new Ministry for Climate Change which has responsibility for transport, housing, planning, regeneration, energy and environment. The main function of the Ministry is to *'ensure that all Welsh Government policy on new infrastructure projects, energy schemes, and planning decisions can meet environmental targets and be justified in the context of Wales' current and future climate challenges'*. Julie James, the Minister and Lee Waters, her deputy, are generally thought to be on the left of the party and close allies of First Minister Mark Drakeford.<sup>[\[3\]](#)</sup>

One of the first acts of the new ministry was to put a complete halt to all new road building. This was opposed by the Tories, many of whom still dream of getting the go-ahead for the M4 relief road near Newport despite Senedd majority against. At least one Labour MP, Mark Tami who represents Alyn and Deeside, has complained about the fact that the 'red route' linking the A55 to the A494 and A550 as been put on ice. And Cardiff Council is using £300,000 of its 'clean air fund' to make Castle Street wider for traffic while reducing

the pavements – hardly an environmentally friendly step.<sup>[\[4\]](#)</sup>

Of course there are a few instances when new roads may have to be built. In fact the government quickly reversed its freezing of the Llandeilo bypass in Carmarthenshire, a road that has been planned for years and has become more necessary because of the number of HGVs passing through which have started to have a serious impact on the structural safety of some buildings as well as posing a threat to pedestrians in this small, picturesque town which attracts significant numbers of tourists.

The ban on road building has been followed up with proposals to introduce 20 mph speed limits in all built up areas, including villages. There are also proposals to ban all parking on pavements. While these proposals have been largely welcomed there has also been opposition. While the 20 mph limit is anathema to the Top Gear brigade who think they have a right to drive as fast as they see fit, the proposals on parking have often been criticised by local residents because many towns do not have wide enough roads to allow for parking close to one's house.

But, in fact, there is a link between issues of speed and parking on pavements. For example, where I live, on a busy main road, some drivers frequently exceed the 30 mph limit. Because the road is narrow, despite being a main route, car owners often park partly on the pavement to avoid their car being damaged by the boy racers. Slowing down the traffic would mean there would not be the necessity to park on the pavements.

And of course there are far too many cars on the road. The problem in many areas is the lack of reliable public transport, especially in the evenings. Where I live it is impossible to go to Ammanford (about 8 miles away), never mind Swansea (15-16 miles) after about 18.30 other than by taxi or car. Given the enormous cost and scarcity of taxis, it is not

surprising that many people rely on their own private transport. This problem is currently being taken up by the Labour Party in the Amman Valley with the intention of building a broad based campaign for regular and cheap public transport, preferably using electric vehicles.

The Welsh government is trying to develop an approach that recognises the linked nature of many issues. In my village, for example, there are proposals for a housing estate off my road and a hotel, holiday accommodation and a diving school further down the road at a former coal mine. While these projects may be beneficial for the village, they have potentially negative aspects such as considerably increasing the amount of traffic as well as creating problems for the already overburdened local school if significant numbers of children move to the new estate. Consequently plans for the estate and the diving school complex are on hold until all these issues can be resolved satisfactorily. No doubt this has been repeated throughout Wales.

Labour has also promised a national forest for Wales, stretching the length and breadth of the country. The aim is to plant 86 million trees in 9 years. This is very much a personal project for Mark Drakeford but is generally popular. Tory MP for Aberconwy Robin Millar has criticised the scheme for taking away farm land, mainly because he doesn't understand, or pretends to not understand, the difference between reforestation (which is what is proposed) and afforestation i.e. the establishment of a forest where there has not previously been tree cover.

Swansea council has announced free buses for 4 days per week while it looks likely that the Swansea Bay metro may go ahead, with plans to link up much of west and south west Wales by public transport. Both these initiatives show there is considerable enthusiasm for environmental friendly projects. There are also plans to use 'Homes As Power Stations' in Neath

Port Talbot and spreading to much of South West Wales.<sup>[\[5\]](#)</sup>

And, somewhat unusually for Welsh Labour, on 30 June the government supported the Plaid Cymru motion calling on the Senedd to declare a nature emergency as well as calling for legally binding biodiversity targets. This makes the Senedd one of the first Parliaments on the world to declare such an emergency. The holding of COP 26 in Glasgow later this year didn't appear to have much impact on the Welsh Tories, 13 of whom voted against the motion.

## Housing

Wales has a serious housing problem. According to Nation.Cymru (29 July 2021) 25,701 homes worth £4 billion pounds sit vacant across Wales.; partly because of second homes and holiday homes that are occupied for only a small part of the year. Though Janet Finch-Saunders, Tory spokesperson on housing, tried to dismiss the impact of second homes: perhaps she is influenced by the 7 residential and 4 retail properties she owns, as well as the trusteeship of a further 2 residential properties in Llandudno.

In addition, Wales has some of the oldest and least efficient housing in Western Europe, which impacts on climate change. According to Sophie Howe, Future Generations Commissioners for Wales a £15 billion retrofit plan would create 26,500 jobs by 2030 and would reduce fuel poverty. She recognises that there is a link between the climate emergency and fuel poverty.<sup>[\[6\]](#)</sup>

On Saturday 10 July, hundreds of protesters turned out at the Tryweryn dam to call for action from the Labour government to stop local people being priced out of the housing market by second home owners and to protect the Welsh language. Tryweryn is a potent symbol of Welsh resistance since the artificial lake there was created by the drowning of the Welsh speaking village of Capel Celyn against the wishes of the overwhelming

majority of the population. The rally was addressed by, among others, Mabon ap Gwynfor the Plaid Cymru MS for the Dwyfor-Meirionnydd constituency in which Trewern is to be found and Cian Ireland, former Labour candidate for the seat and a member of Labour For An Independent Wales.

Welsh language campaign Cymdeithas yr Iaith was involved in the protest, not least because one of the effects of second homes is to weaken the position of the Welsh language as villages are taken over by relatively wealthy incomers from England. To get some idea of the scale of second homes it was revealed in the week before the protest that almost half of all houses sold in the constituency in the previous 12 months were second homes.

And Norton Finance is encouraging investment in buy-to-let properties in Wales' national parks, particularly the Brecon Beacons, while the Telegraph encouraged its readers to invest in the 'staycation boom' by snapping up a holiday home in Wales. Property clearly outranks the preservation of Welsh culture and language for them.

The Welsh government has published a plan for dealing with the second home crisis but this has been called 'weak' by Plaid Cymru and Cymdeithas yr Iaith. Mark Drakeford has also said he will explore the possibility of a 'tourist tax'. This, not surprisingly, attracted the hostility of the Tories. Yet the idea is not totally farfetched: certainly it's not unusual to pay a local tax, collected as part of a hotel bill, in a number of other European countries.

## Wales and the UK

After the election Mark Drakeford published *Reforming Our Union* <sup>[7]</sup> (a follow up to a previous version originally published a few years ago and also *We The People* <sup>[8]</sup> largely identified with Mick Antoniw, a left wing member of the

government and now Counsel General and Minister for the Constitution. Drakeford and Antoniow are both in favour of maintaining the UK though, as Mark Drakeford recognises in his foreword, this is becoming increasingly harder to argue. But they certainly want significant changes, though stopping short of independence.

In fact, the Tories have made it harder and harder for Drakeford to hold back demands for independence and indeed at times they behave as if they want to break up the UK. The ridiculous attempt to prevent journalists referring to the 4 nations and insisting there is only one *British* nation ( at a time when England, Scotland and Wales all had their own teams playing in the Euros), the demand that the union flag (aka the butcher's apron) be flown higher than the Saltire or Red Dragon on all government buildings, the demand that children in Welsh and Scottish schools sing the dire *We Are Britain* anthem on 'One Britain, One Nation Day' (totally ignored in Welsh schools, schools in Scotland were already on holiday) has now been upstaged by the plan to install a 100 foot union flag on the UK Government's tax office in Cardiff. Tory MP Darren Millar welcomed this display of imperial rule and demanded the Welsh government took action against Yes Cymru for a proliferation of stickers.

All of this comes against a backdrop of increasing hostility to Wales and the Welsh language among sections of English people. Most recently Carol Decker, singer with T'Pau, who was born in Shrewsbury and lives on the English-Welsh border, claimed that a supermarket in a photo she was shown couldn't be in the UK because some of the signs were in a 'foreign' language. They were: Welsh, a language Ms Decker must have come across many times given where she grew up and continues to live.

*Guardian* writer Rhiannon Lucy Coslett was recently abused online after she wrote an article *Wales eerily beautiful slate quarries are getting the recognition they deserve* after the

North Wales slate quarries were awarded World Heritage Status. The editor of the *Spectator* joked about the Welsh language after Labour deputy leader Angela Rayner accidentally typed nonsense in a tweet. TV newsreader Huw Edwards was told to take off his mask by a fellow passenger on the London underground because they objected to the red dragon flag of Wales on said mask. English newspapers complained about the 'bias' of Gaby Logan and her team when reporting on Wales' matches in the Euros (unlike the totally neutral English media!) And the list goes on.

Perhaps worst of all in its attitude to the Welsh language was an article written by a Belfast based sociologist Dr. James Dingley for the Unionist supporting *The News Letter* in which he compared the Welsh language movement to the Nazis.<sup>[9]</sup>

Even the relatively mild proposal from the Welsh government that public servants should be able to speak a few Welsh phrases (not at a level where they could compete at an Eisteddfod, just a few simple phrases to answer the telephone, greet someone) was met with considerable hostility from the Tories for whom Wales is essentially an English colony. I can't speak Welsh but I think I could meet the requirements set out by the government.

## A Crisis in Yes Cymru

Unfortunately this is all taking place against a serious crisis in [Yes Cymru](#), the campaign for Welsh independence<sup>[10]</sup>.

Exactly what has been happening is unclear. One of the complaints is the lack of minutes. There have been a number of resignations from the recently elected Central Committee and Sion Jobbins, one of the founders of the organisation, has stepped down as National Secretary. Some members of the CC have been suspended. Allegations of harassment and bullying have been made. Most of the allegations and complaints about

different issues are very vague, don't give names etc so it is difficult to work out exactly what is going on.

However, it is quite likely there has been an orchestrated campaign by right-wing currents against the largely left-wing leadership elected at the last AGM. The right didn't put much effort into the election and are now attempting to oust the left. Apart from the allegations of bullying etc the opponents of the left are insisting that Yes.Cymru must be an organisation solely committed to achieving independence. I don't think there are any currents inside Yes.Cymru which disagree with this; the real problem for them is that the left (Labour For An Independent Wales, Undod) have gained places in the leadership which sections of the membership seem to believe makes it impossible for Yes.Cymru to remain a broad based campaign.

But seriously, anyone who believes that *members* of the thoroughly unionist Conservative and Unionist Party (the clue's in the name) or the equally pro-unionist Liberal Democrats are going to join and work with Yes.Cymru to break-up the union to which they are thoroughly committed is living in a fantasy land. It may be possible to attract a few Tory or Lib Dem voters but there is zero chance of winning the parties to support for Welsh independence. Realistically only Plaid Cymru and sections of the Labour Party, along with the Greens and far-left, are going to seriously champion independence for Wales.

There may be another AGM later this year and the remaining members of the current CC will remain in place until then though many members are unhappy with even that proposal and want an EGM as soon as possible and the current CC to step down. And the remaining members of the Central Committee are not helping themselves by a failure to recognise there may be some justification for the complaints, dismissing the views of local branches far too readily.



The destruction of Yes Cymru would be a major defeat for all those committed to independence. Both sides need to row back immediately from a potentially damaging split.

## Free School Meals

While the Labour government's record on the environment has much to commend it they have completely failed on the issue of free school meals. This was a major issue before, during and since the Senedd elections. Wales had, and continues to have, the worst provision of free school meals of any of the nations of the UK. The Bevan Foundation, the Child Poverty Action Group Wales have both been active in calling for an extension of the provision, as has Labour MP Beth Winter. But much of the lead has been taken by People's Assembly Wales (PAW), in conjunction with the others. There finally appears to be some movement by the government with letters being exchanged between Vicky Howells MS, Chair of the Senedd Labour Group and Len Arthur of PAW and Pasty Thomas-Turner of Unite Community Wales.<sup>[11]</sup> This is at least a step forward since previously the Labour Group has tended to ignore criticism of its policy on providing free school meals and has voted down resolutions in the Senedd from Plaid to expand the provision with the entire Labour Group, including the supposed left-wingers, voting as one.

## Coronavirus

From Saturday August 7, most restrictions in Wales have come to an end, several days earlier than in England despite Boris Johnson's boastful 'Freedom Day'. For virtually the first time Keir Starmer has spoken out in support of the Labour government in Wales. He has usually been silent or supported Johnson and ignored Mark Drakeford.

While there have been some anti-restrictions, anti-vax protests in Wales they have generally been on a much smaller

scale that in England, though the most recent saw a few hundred people outside Drakeford's home.

This is very much an aberration. The Welsh Labour government has generally been credited with running a more efficient (and more humane) Covid campaign than their English counterparts. Wales, despite a slow start, has now vaccinated more people than any UK nation and, indeed, has one of the best records in the world.

Despite the trolls, particularly on WalesOnline, and the protests outside his house, Drakeford has a much higher satisfaction level than Johnson. Of course this is partially because he is the First Minister in Wales and therefore attracts support from people in Wales whereas Johnson is identified much more with the UK or, especially, England. But it is also because at least some of the praise for the Welsh government's handling of the crisis is justified.

Nevertheless we should not ignore some unpleasant facts. WalesOnline may be seen as a cheerleader for the Welsh government, especially by Unionist and anti-Labour trolls who constantly spread vitriol in the comments section, but it has posed some difficult questions for the Welsh government. The refusal of the Welsh government to agree to a Wales specific enquiry into the handling of the pandemic is particularly problematic – but was reiterated on August 6 by the new Health Minister Eluned Morgan.<sup>[\[12\]](#)</sup>

On its refusal to hold an enquiry into its handling of the Covid pandemic and its unwillingness to increase the numbers entitled to free school meals the Welsh government certainly should be held to account. Unfortunately we don't appear to have an equivalent figure to Marcus Rashford so that puts the onus on the left in Wales to work together to support the government when they deserve our support and to fight them whenever necessary. Left Unity in Wales has recently issued a letter in which they appeal for the Welsh left to create an

ecosocialist, radical independence current. This would certainly be a step forward and one Anti\*Capitalist Resistance welcomes.

Source: [AntiCapitalist Resistance](#)

---

[1] Mark Drakeford formed a Labour led administration in Wales in 2018 when he took over as First Minister from [Carwyn Jones](#).

[2] The unicameral chamber that runs devolved matters in Wales has been the Senedd (Parliament) since May 2020 See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Senedd> for more details of the history and of devolved powers

[3] For a good analysis of the setting up of the Ministry and Labour's actions in the first few week after the election see [this](#) article by Sean Thompson on Red Green Labour.

[4] By far the most disruptive and stupid of Welsh MPs is Chris Bryant who defended the suspension of Dawn Butler and complained that the new Peruvian government wasn't centrist enough and got involved in a spat with an academic who knows a lot more about Peru than Bryant. He has been accused of having a hostile attitude to the Welsh language, while encouraging young people to learn a second language. Presumably Bryant would prefer those young people to learn Castillian, which he speaks fluently, to Welsh. The sooner the working class of the Rhondda can replace him the better.

[5] <https://www.southwalesguardian.co.uk/news/19474735.thousands-homes-south-west-wales-become-power-stations/?ref=rss&IYA-mail=6d6eabaf-a701-4b57-aa60-ee39a5436952>

[6] <https://nation.cymru/news/15bn-plan-to-retrofit-existing-homes-in-wales-could-eradicate-fuel-poverty-says-future->

[generations-commissioner/](#)

[7] <https://gov.wales/reforming-our-union-shared-governance-in-the-uk-2nd-edition>

[8] <https://labourlist.org/2021/01/constitutional-reform-is-key-labour-needs-an-agenda-for-a-radical-federal-uk/>

[9] <https://nation.cymru/opinion/knowning-a-few-welsh-words-really-isnt-too-much-to-ask-for-a-job-with-the-government/>; <https://nation.cymru/news/huw-edwards-told-to-take-off-covid-mask-because-it-had-a-welsh-dragon-on-it/>; <https://nation.cymru/news/belfast-based-academic-compared-welsh-language-movement-to-nazis/>

[10] See my earlier article [here; https://anticapitalistresistance.org/why-is-welsh-independence-suddenly-being-taken-seriously/](https://anticapitalistresistance.org/why-is-welsh-independence-suddenly-being-taken-seriously/)

[11] <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1rlsYpJPa1WKH9XIBez0RqZH79p3HeJ29LLNYbCZJV-o/edit?usp=sharing>; <https://pawalescymru.blogspot.com/2021/06/our-post-senedd-election-free-school.html>;

[12] [https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/politics/welsh-government-coronavirus-covid-](https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/politics/welsh-government-coronavirus-covid-19/)

[mistakes-21107573?utm\\_source=wales\\_online\\_newsletter&utm\\_campaign=politics\\_newsletter2&utm\\_medium=email](https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/eluned-morgan-interview-health-minister-21241975?utm_source=wales_online_newsletter&utm_campaign=politics_newsletter2&utm_medium=email); [https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/eluned-morgan-interview-health-minister-21241975?utm\\_source=wales\\_online\\_newsletter&utm\\_campaign=politics\\_newsletter2&utm\\_medium=email](https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/eluned-morgan-interview-health-minister-21241975?utm_source=wales_online_newsletter&utm_campaign=politics_newsletter2&utm_medium=email)

---

Geoff Ryan is a member of Undod, YesCymru, Labour For An Independent Wales, and Carmarthen East & Dynefwr Labour Party.

---

# What sort of Circular Economy?

**Sean Thompson discusses the idea of the circular economy...**

*Thompson's Iron Law of Wizard Wheezes* states that: 'When a social or economic innovation is advocated as a patent cure-all by proponents from both the right and the left, examine the small print very closely and with great caution.'

Examples of such silver bullets include the multiple versions of electoral reform; the numerous varieties of Universal Basic Income, promoted as the Citizens Income by the Green Party and as negative income tax by Milton Friedman, and Land Value Tax, whose supporters range from Milton Friedman (again) to John McDonnell. A currently very popular example is the idea of the 'circular economy'.

Over the last few years, the concept of the circular economy has come to be seen as a key solution in the fight to fix the dysfunctional 'take-make-waste' linear model that characterises the capitalist mode of production. For example,

in 2017 the Dutch government published a programme entitled 'A Circular Economy in the Netherlands by 2050'. The government website explains that:

*'For a long time, our economy has been 'linear'. This means that raw materials are used to make a product, and after its use any waste (e.g. packaging) is thrown away... To ensure that in the future there are enough raw materials for food, shelter, heating and other necessities, our economy must become circular. That means preventing waste by making products and materials more efficiently and reusing them. If new raw materials are needed, they must be obtained sustainably so that the natural and human environment is not damaged...In a circular economy, manufacturers design products to be reusable. For example, electrical devices are designed in such a way that they are easier to repair. Products and raw materials are also reused as much as possible. For example, by recycling plastic into pellets for making new plastic products. In a circular economy we treat our surroundings responsibly.'*

In its 2019 report, *Completing the Picture: How the Circular Economy Tackles Climate Change*, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation points out that:

*'To date, efforts to tackle the crisis have focused on a transition to renewable energy, complemented by energy efficiency. Though crucial and wholly consistent with a circular economy, these measures can only address 55% of emissions. The remaining 45% comes from producing the cars, clothes, food, and other products we use every day. These cannot be overlooked. The circular economy can contribute to completing the picture of emissions reduction by transforming the way we make and use products.'*

This all sounds very reasonable and sensible, and according to the GreenBiz 2020 *State of Green Business* report, 'the idea of a circular economy is growing up fast' moving quickly 'into

*the boardrooms of Fortune 500 companies and the halls of parliament around the world.'*

In the words of Accenture (formerly Anderson Consulting) it is '[the transformative model for competitiveness and sustainable prosperity](#)'. It's easy to see why this version of the circular economy – circular economy lite, as it were – is so attractive to large corporations, particularly those involved in extractive industries and already feeling the early effects of the gathering environmental crisis; it promises the prospect of squaring the circle, of business (almost) as usual.

But this model sees the development of a circular economy as essentially as a technical/organisational process – the prevention of waste in the environment through commodity life extension, improved maintenance and repair, and reuse of products and materials. There is no assessment of what is currently produced, or who for or by, and no awkward questions about who benefits from the current mode of production and who pays the price. At best, this model can result in Coca Cola undertaking a recycling campaign to recover some of the millions of its single use bottles thrown away every year, while continuing to contribute to the growing water shortages in many poor countries and to the obesity epidemic in rich ones. At worst it is simply used as greenwash.

Thus, it becomes possible for Aramco, the Saudi state oil and petro-chemical giant that is the fifth largest company in the world (and has the largest daily oil production of all oil producing companies), with a capital valuation of over \$2 trillion in 2019, to say, with a straight corporate face:

'We believe the circular carbon economy is the best framework for achieving the greatest impact in reducing global emissions, while ensuring consistent economic growth. We have undertaken a number of initiatives that move toward this framework by deploying technology solutions that provide more

reliable access to affordable energy, [reduce CO2 emissions](#), [enhance fuel efficiency](#), conserve water, and create next-generation [materials](#) that make consumer products greener.'

So the largest producer of fossil fuels on the planet can – no, it does – claim that it is a leader in the development of sustainable green growth!

One element of the circular economy concept is 'the sharing economy'. But without any integral element of social justice or equity – the 'just transition' that the trade union and environmental movements call for – those that control the sharing economy can be just as exploitative as less fashionable capitalists. For example, Uber offers a great example of how privately owned cars – which, on average, are parked 95% of the time – can be shared to maximise resource efficiency while reducing CO2 emissions, air pollution and congestion. However, Uber has become synonymous with the worst and most ruthless excesses of the gig economy, forcing their drivers from Dublin to Delhi into crippling debt, paying less than the minimum wage and forcing other cab drivers out of business. Airbnb, which capitalises on unused space in peoples' homes, claims they produce roughly 30% less waste, use 50% less water and emit 90% less CO2 than hotels – but the company has been responsible for pushing up rents in cities around the world and allowing tourists to avoid local taxes, while undermining the cohesion of local communities from Prague to Peru. Music streaming may well have led to a huge reduction in the production of CDs, but Skype and Apple Music have used their effective duopoly to force down the incomes of musicians and undermine small independent recording companies.

The latest manifestation of the sharing economy as greenwash is the growing clothing rental sector, which according to [GlobalData](#) is going to be worth £2.3bn by 2029. Renting clothes has been promoted as the sustainable and frugal alternative to fast fashion, popularised the likes of Gwyneth



Paltrow and [Carrie Symonds](#), who rented her wedding dress and her outfits for the [G7 conference](#). Even Ralph Lauren has announced a rental range. However, a report published in the Finnish scientific journal [Environmental Research Letters](#) assessed the environmental impact of five different ways of owning and disposing of clothing, including renting, resale and recycling and found that renting clothes had the highest climate impact of all. It also found, surprise surprise, that the most sustainable way to consume fashion is to buy fewer items and to wear them for as long as possible.

None of this is to deny that reducing the waste of resources and energy by extending the life of products, ensuring that they can be properly maintained and repaired, and that their components can be recycled and/or reused, is not an important part of a strategy to combat the climate and environmental crises and build a genuinely sustainable society. However, many of even the most thoughtful of the advocates of a circular economy in the green movement don't challenge the myth that 'growth' is a sign (or even THE sign) of a thriving society. They believe that circular models/practices can ensure we have continuous growth without excessive resource use, thus avoiding damaging environmental impacts, including rising emissions. In other words, a win-win for green capitalism.

The Ellen MacArthur Foundation's report says that 'A circular economy aims to decouple economic growth from the consumption of finite resources and build economic, natural, and social capital.' But that is the economic and biophysical equivalent of discovering the secret of perpetual motion. In their Earth Logic Fashion Action Research Plan, academics Kate Fletcher and Mathilda Tham sum up the limitations of the current model:

'The circular economy has gained traction and substantial interest perhaps because it aligns with existing commercial practices, suggesting that business-(almost)-as-usual is possible. Indeed, circularity is treated as a lifeline by

industry reliant on a model of over-production and over-consumption of goods, an effective endorsement of contemporary economic and political practices. While the circular economy brings the promise of useful contributions to a more resource efficient industry...it has serious limitations...The circular economy is optimised to grow the circulation of materials, irrespective of whether this goal supports total systems improvement and the ecological reality of genuine biophysical limits.'

The fundamental problem with the circular economy concept and its big brother, sustainable development is that, no matter what the desirability of many of the policies advocated in their names, they are essentially concerned with maintaining a system that requires continual economic growth, or as Kate Raworth puts it 'an economy that needs to grow, whether or not it makes us thrive'. In her book Doughnut Economics she provides a neat conceptual framework of how the world's economy needs to operate within the confines of both environmental and social limits. Raworth's doughnut is the 'ecologically safe and socially just space' between an inner ring representing essential human requirements and an outer ring demarcating the Earth's environmental limits – 'an economy that makes us thrive, whether or not it grows.'

Dealing effectively with the twin climate and ecological crises we face and achieving real sustainability requires us to look not just at the carbon footprint of the sum total of goods and services we produce and consume but the whole material footprint. Every stage of the life cycle of every product entails environmental costs, from the extraction and depletion of raw materials, through the manufacturing process, to its use and eventual disposal. These costs express themselves not only in carbon emissions but also in other forms of pollution, biodiversity loss and habitat damage, including to sources of clean water.

For millions of years the Earth has maintained a dynamic

equilibrium: a natural and stable flow of carbon between the atmosphere, ocean, and terrestrial ecosystems. Until recently, humans played a simple and relatively harmless role within this cycle, but the development of industrial capitalism, first powered by coal and then by oil, has rapidly started to destroy that balance through the dysfunctional 'take-make-waste' linear model of production and consumption that has been central to the exponential expansion of capitalism over the past two hundred years.

By mimicking the natural processes of the Earth, we can – and must – achieve our own balance, closing the loop, not only by reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions through energy efficiency and use of renewables, but also by designing out 'waste' as such by ensuring that virtually everything we create remains useful to us for as long as possible, in one way or another, and performs functionally with zero impact on the natural world.

For example, Kevlar is the strongest manufactured fibre yet produced, but, when dry, spiders' silk is stronger. In order to manufacture Kevlar, petroleum has to be boiled in sulphuric acid at 750C and the mixture must then be put under high pressure in order to rearrange the molecules. The toxic waste produced by this process is, of course, huge. Spiders manage to produce a stronger fibre at ambient temperature and pressure with raw materials of dead flies and water. Learning from the spiders, and from the other countless examples of resource efficient design in nature will be a major challenge for designers, engineers and chemists if we are to achieve a truly circular economy, but human creativity and imagination are resources that we do have in unlimited quantities, as long as that creativity is not chained to the demands of an economic system where success is measured by the bottom line in a balance sheet.

We do need to create a circular economy, but a reimagined one that is fundamentally concerned with meeting the needs and aspirations of the whole of humanity within the physical

limits that allow life to exist on Earth, instead of one which is optimised for economic growth and the interests of exploitative capital rather than social and ecological well-being.

22 July 2021

Article republished from Red-Green Labour:  
<https://redgreenlabour.org/2021/07/22/what-sort-of-circular-economy/>

---

## Build the climate movement – welcome to ecosocialist.scot!

With less than 100 days to go to the United Nations Climate Conference [COP26 in Glasgow](#), action is being stepped up across Scotland to demand governments respond effectively to the challenge of climate change.



Greenpeace's Rainbow Warrior in Edinburgh July 2021

Inspired by Greta Thurnberg's school strike for climate movement, Fridays for the Future school students held [a](#)

[protest in Glasgow](#) on the final day of the Scottish school year in June. July saw [an occupation of the UK Government building in Edinburgh](#) by activists from [Extinction Rebellion](#) and [Friends of the Earth Scotland](#) to [oppose the UK government's](#) proposed licencing of [a new Scottish oilfield, Cambo, off the shores of Shetland](#). Greenpeace organised for the iconic Rainbow Warrior ship [to protest against the existing oil and gas facilities](#) in North East Scotland, with the demand for [a Just Transition](#) for workers at the centre of the action. [Climate Camp Scotlan](#)d activists gathered at the Mossmorran plant in Fife to demand the closure of one of Scotland's largest contributors to carbon emissions and pollution by the Scottish government and it's toothless Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA).

Across all these campaigns, it is significant that young people in particular are at the centre of the actions, and that they are demanding workers rights, a just transition, and organising with local communities to put demands on government.



Fridays for the Future activists protest in Glasgow in June 2021

Further action will follow in August and September as we near COP26. A Scottish '[Climate Fringe Week](#)' takes place 18-26 September with protest meetings and events across the country, culminating in [a protest action on the theme of 'Peace and](#)

[Climate'](#) on Sunday 26 September, the International Day of action against Nuclear Weapons, at the Faslane military base near Glasgow – home of the UK's hated nuclear weapons' system Trident. Young activists in Fridays for the Future are also discussing a global massive school strike on Friday 17 September *[NB we understand this will now be 24 September – note added 5 Aug]*.

[In November, when the COP26 delegates arrive in Glasgow from the governments of the world](#), they will face a massive protest march in Glasgow on **Saturday 6 November**, with synchronised marches in London and elsewhere in Britain and across the world. Friday 5 November will be not just a school strike but an encouragement for a global day of industrial action around climate, though realistically this is not likely to be a widespread general strike. A "Peoples Summit" on the climate crisis will take place from 7-9 November, both in Glasgow and online to enable participation globally.

The [COP26 Coalition](#) is uniting environmental and political campaigns around the UK and globally in a broad-based movement to support the need for action at the COP26 in Glasgow, and will be organising many events

## Severe Weather

The target of all these protests before and at the COP is the need for governmental action in the face of the increasingly severe weather events across the globe during 2021 – we have seen [floods killing 100s in Europe](#), heat waves in north America, floods in China, fires in Australia and elsewhere, as the world faces rising temperatures and the consequences of a human-made climate crisis.

For decades, governments and establishment politicians have tried to claim that this is not happening or can be managed within existing policies. Now even the UK's [Meteorological Office has produced damning evidence](#) of the real impact of

climate change in Britain. But politicians are still trying to peddle the illusion of 'Net Zero' – they advocate carrying on with producing carbon and putting off dealing with the problem to tomorrow, with the false promise of technologies that don't exist yet or that can never be delivered.

Global capitalism is anxious to maintain its profits and exploitation even if it risks destroying the entire planet. False solutions of 'offsetting' and proclaiming future Carbon Capture & Storage technologies are being used to promote the '[Big Con](#)' of Net Zero, in reality putting necessary action off until 'tomorrow' while continuing with excessive carbon emissions today. The solutions for 'Real Zero' are clear and have been known for decades: leave fossil fuels in the ground and switch rapidly and entirely to renewable energy to limit global temperature rises, stop producing waste and pollution by transforming production and usage of goods, create a just transition for workers, support the global south from the riches of the north, transform the global economy to one with environmental responsibility to nature at its core.

## Two Governments Failing

In Scotland, we have two governments apparently giving somewhat different messages. But both the SNP Scottish government and the Tory UK government are failing to live up to the challenges of the climate crisis.

The Tory UK government, host of the COP26, wants to pretend that it is a 'global leader' in tackling climate change. The reality is very different, with the Tories backing fully their big business interests, for example expanding oil and gas extraction and even contemplating opening new coal and oil fields rather than shutting down the existing ones with full protection for workers jobs.



Peterhead XR activists highlight 'greenwashing' by Scottish and UK governments

Despite their greenwashing, the SNP have long been backers of 'Scotland's Oil' and their conferences are bedecked with big business sponsorship from aviation and oil interests. The Scottish government have published their own contribution to the Paris Agreement in the form of a ['Indicative NDC'](#) [1]. But despite the constitutional limitations of the current devolution arrangements, this still falls way short of the mark with a widespread failure to tackle adequately the areas of a just transition for oil and gas workers, roadbuilding, delivery of free public transport based on renewable energy, retrofitting homes, [closing down polluters like the Mossmorran plant](#), reduction of the aviation industry, agriculture and many other areas.

The [Scottish Green Party](#) and [some in Labour](#) have rightly spoken out against [the inadequacies of the SNP](#), but there is also a danger of the Scottish Greens going the way of their German counterparts and in their haste to join government, risking compromising on their principles and the needs of the situation. The Labour Party under its new Starmer leadership seems to want to just follow Tory policies in the face of the crisis and not build on the Green New Deal promised by the previous Corbyn leadership.





The SNP under Alex Salmond, now of Alba Party, campaigned for an oil-based economy for Scotland

Faced with the dislocation caused by a global pandemic, it is clear that the world and humankind need to 'build back' in a totally different way – one that respects nature and puts people and planet first. This means a direct challenge to capitalism and its institutions. But the alternative we need is not some reversion to the failed 20th century 'communism' or 'socialism' of the Stalinist or social democratic type. Nor do we just stand around talking about how we cannot do anything permanently until 'the revolution comes'.

## Ecosocialism

What is needed is '**ecosocialism**' – bringing new thinking to the radical movement, both about the future and about the here and now ... we need to have a vision for the future of a planet freed from capitalist exploitation and misery through 'system change not climate change', while at the same time building mass movements that can demand action from governments and win united support across the globe especially from young people who have most at stake. It's a massive task but one that holds the future of the planet in its grasp.



Ecosocialism is a global movement

## Why ecosocialist.scot?

[ecosocialist.scot](http://ecosocialist.scot) is an initiative of an existing group of revolutionary ecosocialists and supporters of the [Fourth International](#), who feel the need to put a distinctive view forward in the current crises in Scotland.

We will attempt to bring a modest contribution to filling the need for ecosocialist ideas with articles, often with a specific Scottish focus, about the global climate crisis, what ecosocialism means, and the battle against the exploitation of workers and championing the liberation of the oppressed. We will also put forward ideas about ways forward for both the environmental and workers movements in Scotland, and for the democratic right of the Scottish people for self-determination and independence. We support both the existing COP26 Coalition and the building of an anti-capitalist wing of the environmental movement to challenge governments across the world and put forward radical alternatives.

As Scotland moves centre stage with the COP26, we hope that readers of [ecosocialist.scot](http://ecosocialist.scot), in Scotland and around the world, will follow us, contribute ideas and join us in building a better ... and ecosocialist ... future! We look forward to meeting you in Glasgow in November 2021.

## NOTES

[1] 'Indicative NDC' – Nationally Determined Contribution is the technical term used by the United Nations in the Paris Agreement to set out a member state's actions in reducing carbon emissions. Scotland is not a member state of the UN and hence not a 'Party' to COP. So, the Scottish government's Draft NDC is entirely indicative and voluntary. The UK government would prefer the Scottish government to have nothing to do with the COP, as it sees it as a 'sub-national' entity subordinate to the overall UK government. With an electoral mandate to seek independence from the UK state, albeit contested by the UK government, the Scottish government is seeking instead to assert its role as a 'member-state-government-in-waiting' at COP. Because the UK government has control over certain key aspects of carbon emissions, such as the regulation of the important offshore oil and gas industries, the Scottish government's Indicative NDC at COP26 will always be weak. But on top of that the SNP-led Scottish government is politically weak and timid on setting out the drastic measures necessary to challenge climate change. An independent Scotland would open the opportunity for more radical action on the climate crisis that the SNP are unwilling to commit to for fear of losing support from big business and for inward capitalist investment.