

# Sturgeon quits – where next for Scotland?

Nicola Sturgeon's resignation as First Minister of the Scottish Government and leader of the Scottish National Party (SNP) has dominated the news across Britain and even internationally, *writes Mike Picken*.

In one sense, the standing down of a political leader in what can be regarded as a small 'regional'/devolved government should hardly create many ripples. The fact that it was regarded as so significant speaks volumes about the current state of British politics. It overshadowed completely the fact that on the same day as Sturgeon resigned the main Scottish teachers' union, the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) representing over 80% of school teachers, voted unanimously to reject a 6% pay offer and reaffirmed two days of strike action on 28 February/1 March that will close every Scottish state school and have a huge effect across the country.

## Media glee

The mainstream British press and media, almost entirely unionist and conservative, greeted the resignation statement with uncontained glee – '*Huge boost to unionism*' shouted the Times; '*Sturgeon brought down by trans row*' and '*without her the SNP is nothing*' screamed the Daily Telegraph, 'house journal' of Britain's Conservative Party membership, in what must rank as one of the most inaccurate front pages in its history. '*Independence dream fades*' trumpeted the 'i' newspaper. The tabloid press charge was led by the Daily

Mail with '*Sturgeon ... dreams in tatters*' while Andrew Neil exclaimed '*Her Legacy of Failure*', all in block capitals of course. This is the paper that supported the fascist blackshirts. Even the supposedly liberal Guardian displayed its unionist credentials in talking about the SNP being '*thrown ... into turmoil*'.

Across the globe, Donald Trump led the global reactionary charge describing Sturgeon as a '*crazed leftist*' and '*failed woke extremist*'. Though in an indication of his grip on reality he also seemed more exercised at the £15M loss made by his Scottish golf courses, blaming Sturgeon personally for their failure.

Compared to the chaos of the recent resignations of UK Prime Ministers Theresa May, Boris Johnson, and the 49-day catastrophic reign of Liz Truss, Nicola Sturgeon's press conference in Edinburgh was a calm and controlled affair. She explained that after over eight years at the helm of the devolved Scottish government and nearly 30 years in front line politics in Scotland, she had simply had enough and wanted a bit of a rest on the backbenches of the Scottish Parliament. But she also clearly stated she was not giving up on politics and '*would be around*' for some time to come. Unlike the Conservative shambolic Prime Ministerial resignations last year, she took questions from the media and answered them confidently, even receiving plaudits from seasoned political journalists like the Independent's Paul Waugh, taking a brief step back from the overwhelmingly hostile environment of the British press.

Sturgeon's resignation received a rather more respectful response in Europe's capitals, with the Irish Taoiseach and the leader of Sinn Féin applauding her stance against the UK's Tory Brexit.

Tory Prime Minister Rishi Sunak struck a more restrained mood, perhaps befitting his constitutional role and attempt to

steady the Tory 'ship of state', than the more gleeful Scottish Tory opposition leader, Douglas Ross. Both Labour leader Keir Starmer and his Scottish subordinate, Anas Sarwar, praised Sturgeon's public service.

But behind the scenes they will all be rubbing their hands with glee at the prospect of moving British politics firmly to the right, now that what is seen as the progressive and left wing Sturgeon is 'out of the way'.

The press and political commentators immediately started a frenzy at the prospects for a Starmer landslide at the next UK general elections. The irony that it came on the twentieth anniversary of the largest demonstration in British history against his mentor Tony Blair's support for the US war in Iraq, appeared lost on Keir Starmer. He began the day pronouncing that like Blair he too would ignore the wishes of Labour members in refusing to allow former leader Jeremy Corbyn to stand as a Labour candidate in the north London constituency he has represented for forty years.

For Labour's increasingly right wing leadership it was seen as a successful day – 'Corbyn Out, Sturgeon Out' – in what they now see as Starmer's passage to becoming next British Prime Minister.

But what is the reality of both Sturgeon's period in office and the prospects for what will follow her resignation?

## **Socially progressive**

Nicola Sturgeon is undoubtedly a consummate political performer, perhaps the most talented mainstream politician in the British Isles, compared to the buffoons that have headed Tory UK governments at Westminster. In only eight years as

Scottish First Minister, Sturgeon saw five of them go through the doors of 10 Downing Street. She also saw out three UK Labour leaders and five leaders of the Liberal Democrats (a one time governing party at both Westminster and Holyrood).

Her calm and measured response to the Covid pandemic through her daily broadcasts on TV had a major reassuring effect on Scottish people, particularly compared to the chaotic disarray of the UK Westminster government, as she became the most popular political leader across the UK state ... by a long way.

But Sturgeon is also highly socially progressive. An outspoken supporter of feminism, she had defended abortion rights absolutely unequivocally since entering politics and in the words of left wing writer Owen Jones *"she'll go down as a hero to LGBTQ people"* for her defence of LGBTQ rights.

The Tory and unionist press overwhelmingly claim that public opinion is against her stance in the recent 'row' on trans rights and even claim that this has caused her demise. Sturgeon is depicted in the Tory press as the 'architect' of the recent Gender Reform Recognition (Scotland) Bill that passed the Scottish Parliament last December and was struck down by the Tory Government at Westminster last month in their right wing 'culture war' against trans people. But the GRR Bill was passed by an overwhelming two thirds majority in the Scottish Parliament and as well as most in Sturgeon's SNP, three other Parties voted strongly for it – Scottish Labour, Scottish Greens and the Liberal Democrats. The latter also joined the SNP and other opposition parties at Westminster, but not UK Labour, in opposing the unprecedented striking down of the progressive legislation.

As with previous progressive social legislation in the UK – ending capital punishment, decriminalising homosexuality, gay marriage – lawmakers can lead public opinion, and reforms that elicited reactionary vocal opposition at the time become mainstream soon after, even if they do have to be constantly

defended. The support for de-medicalisation and self-ID in the GRR Bill is overwhelmingly supported by medical and health professionals across Scotland and the British state. It is also backed by those campaigning for women's rights and supporting victims of sexual abuse, by the LGBTQ community, and, significantly, by the vast majority of young people in Scotland. It even has support from the United Nations, World Health Organisation and an increasing numbers of states – most recently the Spanish state and Finland have legislated for similar processes.

The recent conviction of rapist Isla Bryson and her imprisonment briefly in an isolation wing of a Scottish women's prison has become a 'cause célèbre' amongst reactionary opponents of trans rights, keen to put the labels 'trans' and 'rapists' in the same sentence. We've seen this before when it was almost impossible to read a newspaper article without the word 'paedophile' being included with the word 'gay'. But in fact Sturgeon intervened immediately in the Bryson case, an independent action by the Scottish Prison Service, to say that she agreed 100% with the Scottish Rape Crisis organisation, a supporter of the GRR Bill, that a rapist should not be accommodated in a women's prison.

The brutal murder of trans teenager Brianna Ghey in a Cheshire park and the announcement by the police in the last few days that they are now investigating it as a potential 'hate crime' has sent shock waves through the LGBTQ and young community as the anti-trans rhetoric has been dialled up by Westminster Tory politicians presenting an 'anti-woke' agenda to the declining Tory party faithful. The turnout by young people at massive vigils across the British state



Over 1,000 people join vigil for murdered trans girl Brianna Ghey in Glasgow's George Square on day after Nicola Sturgeon's resignation

presents a counter trend and to most of the young people in Scotland Nicola Sturgeon is identified, in Owen Jones' words, as a heroine rather than a villain.

While the recent abuse that Nicola Sturgeon has received over her support for trans rights has created a vile political atmosphere, it is wide of the mark to suggest that it is the main reason for her resignation.

## **Independence at crossroads**

While the trans rights issue has dominated recent media attacks on Sturgeon, the underlying concern of the British ruling class remains the prospect of Scottish independence and the potential break up of the UK state.

Sturgeon was first elected to what was then the new Scottish Parliament in 1999. The SNP has defined itself as 'within the mainstream of European social democracy' for decades and

narrowly became the ruling party at the Scottish Parliament in Holyrood in 2007 holding government leadership throughout the 16 years since, with Nicola Sturgeon being a permanent feature: firstly as Deputy First Minister and Health Secretary, then taking over as First Minister from Alex Salmond in 2014.

In 2011, the SNP won a freak majority at Holyrood under an electoral system that was deliberately designed by the Labour Party to prevent such a thing occurring. The SNP manifesto contained a commitment to a referendum on independence and sensing an easy victory then Tory UK Prime Minister David Cameron agreed to the Scottish Parliament legislating for such a referendum. Support for independence began at just 25% in opinion polls, but by the time of the referendum in 2014, shocked Westminster politicians saw polls indicating a majority. A huge rearguard last minute right wing action and a promise of 'jam tomorrow' in the form of a 'Vow' by the Westminster parties led to a 45/55 defeat of independence in the referendum, but with the highest turnout in any Scottish or UK election and the enfranchisement of both 16/17 year olds and all EU citizens living in Scotland. A key part of the argument for staying in the UK was that an independent Scotland would be outside the European Union and unable to join due to a veto by states opposed to secessionist movements, particularly the Spanish state.

But a major part of the shift to independence was among Scottish working class communities who turned out in large numbers to vote, alarmed at the austerity policies being pursued by the Tory/LibDem coalition at Westminster that Scotland hadn't voted for (Scotland voted overwhelming Labour for most of the twentieth century). The Labour Party's alliance with the Tories in a joint 'Better Together' campaign against independence created a huge swing away from the party among its traditional working class base.

The joy of the right wing parties at the defeat of

independence was short-lived, however, as the SNP under the new leadership of Sturgeon surged at the 2015 UK general election winning nearly 50% of the vote and 56 out of the 59 Scottish seats – with the Labour Party losing 40 of its 41 seats, a cataclysmic result for Labour after generations of domination of Scottish politics.

In 2016, the Westminster Tories again gambled on a referendum, this time over UK membership of the EU. But while the shock result at a UK level was 52/48 in favour of leaving the EU, Scotland voted overwhelmingly 62/38 to remain in the EU (the north of Ireland also voted 56/44 to remain). The Tory party rapidly became taken over by the extreme right wing politics of the UK Independence Party (UKIP). Although Nicola Sturgeon proposed a compromise of the UK state leaving the EU but remaining in the single market (the so-called 'Norway' option), this was rejected by the rightward moving Tories, intoxicated with the 'Brexit' process and encouraged by the elevation of Donald Trump to US president.

Sturgeon, the SNP and the wider independence movement began agitating against Brexit and for a further referendum on independence on the grounds that if the UK state left the EU the circumstances in 2014 had changed significantly. Sensing the possibility that a second Scottish independence referendum ('indyref2') could result in victory for independence, the Westminster parties, including the Labour Party then led by Jeremy Corbyn, closed ranks to deny that such a referendum would take place.

There are many reasons why the UK state fears the disruption that would be caused by Scottish independence to its continuity as one of the leading imperialist powers. But central to the debate is the issue of nuclear weapons. The UK state holds a seat on the UN Security Council by virtue of its ownership of a nuclear arsenal. These weapons are now exclusively located in Scotland, in the Trident missile system within submarines stationed just along the Clyde river at



Faslane, just 40 miles from the centre of Scotland's biggest city of Glasgow. There is nowhere else in the rest of the UK state where such weapons could be located, at least in the short term. The SNP has always been a pro-independence party and moderately social democratic, but has also opposed nuclear weapons and is committed to an independent Scotland removing nuclear weapons. Even though the SNP reversed its position to one of supporting membership of NATO in 2013 under previous leader Alex Salmond, and there are some in the party who would be willing to compromise over a 'Guantanamo-style' leasing of the Faslane base to the rump UK state, the majority of the party including Nicola Sturgeon remain committed to removing nuclear weapons.

Sturgeon has repeatedly said that as well as joining the SNP as a 16 year old teenager opposed to the Tory attacks on the working class community she was brought up in, equally she also joined the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) to oppose nuclear weapons at the same time.

For this prime reason, acceptance of Scottish independence is totally unacceptable to the British ruling class – and therefore it is unremittingly hostile to both the SNP and to Sturgeon.

Since the 2016 EU referendum, the British ruling class has therefore used everything at its disposal to prevent Scottish independence by blocking a referendum. Despite this and in the face of the increasing economic calamity for Scottish workers represented by the Brexit process, the SNP together with Scottish Green Party put forward in their manifesto for the 2021 Scottish Parliament elections the demand for a second independence referendum in the early part of the five year parliamentary session. The SNP and the more left wing Scottish Green Party won a clear parliamentary majority and following a governmental agreement between the two parties that saw two Green ministers enter government for the first time anywhere in Britain, Sturgeon and the SNP/SGP proceeded

to prepare a Bill for an independence referendum regardless of whether the increasingly dysfunctional Westminster government approved.

But the legal basis for a referendum was not established and there was much caution in SNP circles including from Nicola Sturgeon that a constitutional referendum was the only option. The Scottish government legal officer therefore asked the UK Supreme Court for a ruling, that took place last autumn. The legal basis for referendums is actually quite well established in the UK state even though it is a relatively recent phenomenon (since 1973) and there were some legal hopes of a positive ruling. However the conservative judges in the UK Supreme Court took a particularly narrow legal view of the statute establishing the Scottish Parliament and the wider framework for referendums, and ruled unanimously (and unsurprisingly) against any unilateral action by the Scottish Parliament.

Given the stubborn and anti-democratic refusal of the UK Tories to approve a referendum, Nicola Sturgeon set out the case for 'Plan B' – using the next UK general election in Scotland as a 'proxy' referendum.

This is filled with problems and has created a huge debate within both the normally disciplined SNP and in the wider independence movement. A special conference of the SNP was due to take place on 19<sup>th</sup> March – reportedly it is being thrown into uncertainty by Sturgeon's resignation, though Sturgeon herself actually gave the ability to take a decision on tactics unfettered by the impact on leadership as one of the reasons for the timing of her resignation.

While Sturgeon is seen in the UK media as unremitting in her opposition to Brexit and support for independence, the effect of her constitutionalist tactics has been to stall the independence movement within Scotland, which as recently as 2018 had been able to mobilise 100,000 on the streets and

polls in 2021 showed a significant move towards a sustained if small majority. The lack of a sustained substantial majority for independence and the lack of a tactic to achieve independence from the SNP has had an effect on the movement. While still strong and while creating a clear electoral divide that has given the SNP between 40 and 50% of the vote in elections, it is not yet strong enough to achieve success. The dangers of a Quebec-style second lost referendum are significant.

Some in the independence movement have become frustrated and this led to a split in the SNP in 2021 when former SNP leader Alex Salmond set up a rival party, Alba, ostensibly to 'game' the Holyrood electoral system and win an overwhelming pro-independence majority. But since the unsuccessful prosecution of Salmond on sexual assault charges alleged to have been committed while he was First Minister, he has become a highly divisive figure. Even though found not guilty, his behaviour towards women was judged, even by himself, to be 'inappropriate' and this has had a significant effect on his popularity. The Alba party also became a repository for those engaging in conspiracy theorists who believed that Sturgeon conducted a vendetta against Salmond, while those who defend Sturgeon point out that she simply stood up for women's rights in the workplace and had no part in the legal case. The Alba Party flopped electorally and has increasingly become a repository for reactionary politics – it strongly opposed the GRR Bill for example, and has joined the chorus of those accusing Sturgeon of being a 'destroyer of women's rights'.

So, the independence movement now faces a watershed. Despite the hopes of the Westminster Tories, Labour and the media, the movement is not going away even despite Sturgeon's departure from centre stage. Young people including many of those who voted at 16 in the 2014 referendum are overwhelmingly supportive of independence, with polls showing 75%+ support and that reflects in electoral support for the SNP and

Scottish Green Party. In fact among those of working age and those who have been through tertiary education, there is a clear majority in Scotland for independence. Polls show that those in the lowest paid jobs (working class) are more strongly in favour of independence than those in highly paid work (middle class) and again this maintains a strong SNP electoral support. But there is a large section of retired older and generally less educated people who are strongly against independence and these factors lead to the current 50/50 balance impasse.

The demographic changes however are in favour of a substantial majority for independence as a long term goal, despite all the short term routes being largely closed by Westminster.

The key question for the independence movement is how to 'reboot' the movement as a long term struggle and avoid the short termism of being side-tracked by the machinations of constitutional politics at Westminster and Holyrood. In order to build a permanent majority in Scottish society, the movement needs to focus on an alternative vision of life in an independent Scotland. This means ditching the 'business-as-usual' approach to Scottish independence that simply sees it as a continuation of the current SNP regime with more levers and recognition on the international stage.

Independence poses a paradigm shift, with the opportunity to develop working class interests and a different form of society that is more socially progressive and supports those affected by the ravages of capitalism. While there are aspirations for a single united movement, an 'Independence Convention' is put forward by Alex Salmond, there is a real problem with the toxic nature of those in the movement who have a socially conservative or reactionary position on issues such as trans rights that probably makes coexistence difficult if not impossible. This has been shown by the demise and disappearance of the 'NOW Scotland' movement and the decline in attendance for marches by 'All Under One Banner'.

A key issue is the climate and ecological crisis. Most activists recognise that independence would give the opportunity to tackle Scotland's economic over-dependence on fossil fuel extraction and give a more rapid transition to renewables. Friends of the Earth Scotland supports Scottish independence. The hosting of COP26 in 2021 in Glasgow gave the climate crisis a major focus. While most of the issues are controlled by the UK government at Westminster, the Scottish government and parliament does have an important role to play. In general the SNP, which championed oil extraction in the 1970s, has been slow to respond to the climate emergency seeing the jobs tied up in fossil industries as a priority. The Scottish government does lack the legal and fiscal resources to effect a really significant 'just transition', even if it wanted to, but it can be a much more effective vehicle for making the case. Instead its initiatives tend to be marginal. But that doesn't mean the battle should not be continued and there are active groups in Scotland protesting the UK government's massive expansion of oil and gas fields, such as the Cambo and Rosebank fields, and continued dependence on fossil fuel industries. Groups include Climate Camp Scotland direct action group and Extinction Rebellion Scotland. Such campaigns cannot wait for Scottish independence or the SNP to get their policies right and must be taken up vigorously now. So far the involvement of the Scottish Greens in the government has been disappointing in its outcomes, free bus travel for young people up to 21 is a step forward but we are still a long way from a full free public transport system to tackle poverty and the climate crisis. The need is for the climate justice movement to head up mass protest at the UK government, while the need for independence and a strategy for ecological change needs developing and fighting for.

The opportunity is therefore presented to those groups such as the Radical Independence Campaign, Socialists for Independence and the Scottish Socialist Party to put aside tactical

differences and seek to build a wing of the movement that supports strikes, defends abortion and trans rights, fights government cuts, challenges climate change and looks instead to putting the case for a better Scotland for the many. In doing so they could win support from those who might see Labour as the solution to 13 years of Tory rule at Westminster. In the longer term there needs to be a left wing party able to challenge both the SNP and Labour on the electoral terrain.

## **SNP elects a new leader**

The SNP leadership election is the first contested election for nearly 20 years. However in 2004, the last time the party had to ballot its members, its membership was only 6,000 and it had won just 27 seats at Holyrood and 5 seats at Westminster, a very narrow pool. Now it has around 100,000 members, and has won 64 seats at Holyrood and 48 at Westminster.

Sturgeon has dominated the party in recent years such that there is no obvious successor so it seems likely there will be quite a few candidates coming forward.

A real and genuine fear is that the party could lurch to the right on social policy. The Finance Secretary Kate Forbes is seen as a challenger – despite being articulate, educated and a Gaellic speaker from the Highlands, she is fiscally conservative and an active member of the 'Wee Frees', the tiny conservative Free Church of Scotland that bans gay marriage among its congregation. She is on maternity leave currently and so was not required to vote on the GRR Bill, which she had voiced opposition to. It would be a real problem for Scottish LGBTQ politics if she were to get elected, as would a proxy

candidacy for her from Ash Regan, the only SNP minister who resigned over the GRR Bill.

Much more likely is a duller male candidate. John Swinney, the current Deputy, has been leader in the past but would not be a particularly impressive candidate. More likely is the equally dull but considered 'safe pair of hands' or even 'continuity Sturgeon' figure of Angus Robertson, former leader of the party at Westminster and current Constitution and Culture Secretary. However other candidates could emerge and there will be significant jockeying for position in the days ahead, though the candidate will have to be an MSP due to the role of First Minister, so that rules out any of the Westminster figures.

The SNP constitution states the election takes 133 days but that is almost certainly likely to be shortened.

## **Labour Prospects**

In the recent period of impasse over independence, attention across Scotland has focussed more on the cost-of-living crisis afflicting working people across the UK state. Soaring energy bills are causing massive instability and wages are not keeping pace with rapidly rising inflation on basic foodstuffs leading to the current wave of strikes – of which the most prominent current examples in Scotland are school teachers, civil servants, postal and rail workers and university staff. The SNP administration at Holyrood has attempted to buy off some sections of the public sector workforce from striking, for example in the National Health Service (NHS) and on the ScotRail train franchise it now runs, by offering slightly higher pay offers than those employed through the Westminster government. A temporary rent freeze has given some respite on

costs, but this has recently been rolled back. The Scottish Government has a cash-limited budget allocated by Westminster, no borrowing powers and only limited tax raising powers of its own. That cash is running on empty and seems to have reached an impasse with the current claim for 10% pay rises by Scottish teachers. The school strikes on 28 February/1 March are now hugely important as a test of the union resistance and the administration in Holyrood.

The Scottish government budget from 1 April faces many significant demands, with the priority for health services in the wake of the covid pandemic being unavoidable. This has led to huge pressures on other aspects of the budget particularly those for local councils. The SNP minority administration at the largest council in Glasgow faces a staggering £100 million pounds of cuts to jobs and services. The council budget crisis is also causing tensions between the SNP and their Scottish Green Party allies with councillors expressing worries about the impact of the cuts.

For the Scottish Labour Party the current strike wave and the likelihood of council cuts has seemed like a lifeline to rebuild support among working class voters. In a totally opposite way to Starmer's UK Labour Party at Westminster, the Scottish Labour Party has urged its elected members to support strike pickets and protests called by unions.

However across Scotland, 30 out of the 32 councils have no single party in a majority. The UK Labour Party instruction is that there should be no coalition with the SNP as this would be seen to endanger the chances of Labour winning support among English voters at the next UK general election. In fact polls indicate that most voters in England, including Labour voters, are actually pretty relaxed about the question of Scottish independence seeing it as a question largely for Scottish people. The Labour Party in Wales has a governmental agreement with the pro-independence Plaid Cymru and has permitted a governmental commission on the constitution to



consider independence, with no apparent adverse effect on electoral support for Labour.

The refusal to make any agreement with the SNP, despite them holding nearly twice as many council seats as Labour, means that in council areas where Labour is stronger, typically in second place, they have made agreements to take control with the Tories and other unionists, including in one council a fringe ultra right wing party. This tactic seems certain to backfire as some Labour councillors are forced into making cuts, while screaming that it's all the 'bad SNP's fault'.

A fundamental change has taken place since 2014 in Labour support in Scotland. While the press is hyping up the prospects for Labour in the aftermath of Sturgeon's resignation, the reality on the ground is somewhat different. Even with a much duller leader like Angus Robertson, the SNP will still be a formidable electoral force. A small decline in support for both the SNP and independence is likely, but the SNP is miles ahead of Labour and Tory support, particularly among young people and workers. Labour's desperate support for the union, with Starmer routinely appearing with not one but two union flags behind him, does not endear them to Scottish voters any longer.

Many of Labour's proposals in their General Election manifesto will seem a pale imitation of already existing SNP policies at Holyrood – Starmer is even prepared to drop Corbyn's opposition to student tuition fees, a policy that was long swept away by the SNP. Every time Starmer goes on TV promising to end a few Tory policies in England, Scots voters will think little of it. Starmer's tepid policies on energy and support for continuing domination by profiteering oil and gas corporations will impress no-one. The tactics of Scottish Labour depend entirely on a collapsing Tory vote that has nowhere else to go but into Labour. But there seems little chance of them eating into the mammoth SNP vote that they need to restore their fortunes. Labour has sunk to the low

watermark of one seat and could well win a half dozen more (though every seat they gain from the SNP, the SNP are likely to gain one from Tories). The return of right wing Labour has-beens like Douglas Alexander and Jim Murphy, the architects of 'Better Together' and the loss of 40 seats in 2015, is unsurprising as they sniff the prospect of seats in a Labour government at Westminster.

## Conclusion

The resignation of Sturgeon represents a sea change in Scottish politics. She is an adept politician in every way – highly principled in some respects, but deeply tied to constitutionalism, fiscal conservatism and constrained in other respects. But the predictions that her departure means the end of the battle for independence or for socially progressive politics is wide of the mark. There is a small danger of a lurch to the right, but more likely is a continuation of SNP dominance but failure to break the impasse. Labour's electoral prospects will probably rise at the margins, they could scarcely get lower. But the radical wing of the independence movement needs to grasp the mettle – focus on working class economic interests, progressive politics, and an alternative vision of Scotland to neo-liberal capitalism.

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## EVENT – ECUADOR: Behind the

# **indigenous mass uprisings and ecosocialist struggles**

*ecosocialist.scot is holding an educational and discussion meeting in Glasgow and online on Wednesday 22 February 2023 7pm-9pm (19.00-21.00 GMT). The leaflet for the meeting is available in PDF form [here](#) and reproduced below. You don't need to book to attend the meeting in person, just turn up! But if you wish to join us online please use the [Eventbrite link below](#) to get the Zoom link. As this is an educational discussion you may find it useful to consult the [reading list on the link below](#).*

## **ECUADOR: Behind the indigenous mass uprisings and ecosocialist struggles**

Come and discuss with a feminist and ecosocialist activist from Ecuador (In-person Glasgow, online via Zoom)

**Wednesday 22 February 2023. 7pm-9pm  
(19.00-21.00 GMT)**

**icafe (upstairs meeting room), Ingram  
Street, Glasgow G1 1EX  
(5 minutes walk from Glasgow Queen  
Street/Central stations [Google Maps  
Link](#))**



The Indigenous-led uprising in Ecuador in October 2019, and the similar national strike mobilisation in June 2022, have been two of the most dramatic, and successful, in a wave of big struggles and protest movements that swept the world in recent years – from Hong Kong, Iraq and

Lebanon, to Chile, Colombia and now Peru and Iran. Thousands of indigenous people went onto the streets of Ecuador to demand reforms in agricultural payment, to tackle the cost-of-living and poverty, to defend indigenous communities and to protect the natural environment from destruction, exploitation and profit-driven extractivism. The indigenous movement marched on the national capital, winning support from workers' organisations, from students and from the womens' movement.

They forced concessions from a neo-liberal government and vowed to continue the struggle.

In some parts of Latin America the semi-insurrections have gone alongside, and partly encouraged, the return of progressive governments in much of the region including recently in Colombia and even Brazil. But the struggles have often gone far beyond the limits of reform-minded governments and posed even bigger questions about the global order. In Ecuador, especially, they have shown something that is also vitally important now to activists in Scotland and other parts of Europe: how an immediate struggle to defend communities against rising prices and an attack on their basic living standards, can both develop a dynamic that is clearly anti-capitalist, and connect with the national and international environmental struggles to defend our planet, our Pachamama.

Maria Isabel Altamirano is a sociologist, community organiser and ecosocialist who has been active for a number of years in Ecuador in the feminist movement and working in Indigenous

communities in both the Highlands and the Amazon region. She was in the midst of the uprisings, both in 2019 and last June. She is now in Glasgow and will give a short introduction on what happened and its context, and then open up a discussion on what we can learn from the struggle.

This meeting will be held in Glasgow in person but also available can be joined online, with full participation and discussion including questions. (Please note the meeting will be in English but the speaker will speak in Spanish with translation – we are unable to provide simultaneous translation during the discussion).

Online:        book        through        eventbrite        link  
<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/545187278827>

If you wish to prepare with some reading, please consult our reading list at [ecosocialist.scot](https://www.ecosocialist.scot/?page_id=1699) (link)  
[https://www.ecosocialist.scot/?page\\_id=1699](https://www.ecosocialist.scot/?page_id=1699)

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## **Earthquake hits Kurdish regions in Turkiye/Syria**

The earthquake that hit parts of the Turkish and Syrian states on Monday is a tragic disaster for millions of people in the region, *writes Mike Picken*. Tens of thousands are already known to have died and the scale of human disaster is unfolding every hour.

Many of the worst affected populations are in towns, cities and villages with large Kurdish populations. Aid is being mobilised by states and governments around the world, but there is a big issue about the Turkish state government and

the officially recognised Syrian state governments being used to coordinate emergency support.

The Turkish government of President Erdogan has sought to repress its Kurdish population for decades and with an election originally scheduled for May has increasingly been attempting political attacks and bans on Kurdish-supporting parties and taking military action in Kurdish areas, including invading and attacking Kurdish communities within the neighbouring states of Iraq and Syria prior to the earthquake. The declaration of a state of emergency gives the Turkish state massive military powers in the affected regions (the Turkish state has the second largest army in NATO after the USA).

The Syrian dictatorship of Assad, backed by the Russian state, has waged a brutal war for a decade with the help of Russian forces against all opposition to the despotic regime, including the Kurdish liberated zone of [Rojava](#) that stands as a beacon of hope.

The Turkish state also has an appalling record of mismanagement of funds for emergencies and is now apparently blocking independent aid entering Turkey. The progressive Turkish party, the pro-Kurdish HDP under threat of being banned, has issued a briefing to Members of the European Parliament that we are publishing below that warns of the role of the Turkish government and the steps European powers need to take to ensure aid goes to those who need it.

Kurdish fighters were the key element of the resistance to Daesh/ISIS in the region in recent years, but the progressive Kurdish movement is under attack by governments around the world who accept the Turkish and Syrian states' repressive behaviours.

# Aid must be independent of the Turkish and Syrian states

The Kurdish community in the region cannot rely on the Turkish or Syrian states to come to their aid in this disaster. It is therefore urging that solidarity and aid pass through appropriate NGO bodies, particularly Heyva Sor (the Kurdish 'Red Crescent/Moon' humanitarian group). Getting funds to Heyva Sor, which is repressed by the Turkish state, is difficult. We don't yet know whether the Disasters Emergency Committee of 14 UK charities is prepared to work with independent Kurdish organisations or whether it will accept the veto of the Turkish state.

So, we are therefore calling for fundraising efforts in Scotland and the rest of Britain to support the efforts of the London-based registered charity the Refugee and Workers Cultural Association which has launched an appeal for fundraising via gofundme as the quickest way of getting monies to support Kurdish and other communities on the ground. It is also possible to donate from the UK directly to Heyva Sor via its German account. Links for both these appeals are below.

The main organisations in Britain coordinating solidarity and aid in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake are [Scottish Solidarity with Kurdistan](#) and the [Kurdistan Solidarity Network](#) covering England and Wales. We urge readers to support these two organisations. You can also follow developments on the independent news channel [MedyaNews](#). We also publish below the statement of the **Workers Party of Turkey** on the disaster (Workers Party of Turkey is a left wing extra-parliamentary party [supported by members of the Fourth International in Turkey](#)).

# **Supporting victims of devastating Earthquake**

*FERHAT AKGUL is organising this fundraiser on behalf of REFUGEE WORKERS' CULTURAL ASSOCIATION.*

*At Gik-Der we are dismayed and heartbroken to hear of the terrible earthquakes that have affected various cities in Turkey, in which thousands of people have tragically lost their lives. Many of our members and wider community in the UK are from areas where the devastation has been worst, and we note with a solemn heart that relatives and those dear to us are among those who have been killed. As we come to terms with this grief and loss, we are equally outraged at the government's failure to act with any degree of care and decisiveness in preparation for such events, despite continued warnings from the community. Natural disasters like this are not simply acts of God – the devastation and destruction, the loss of life and limb, are unforgivable failures of a state which places no value on lives.*

*The first and most important foundation for any such struggle is solidarity, and for this reason, we are immediately starting a campaign to fundraise for relief for those effected by this tragedy.*

*Funds will be sent directly to organisations working on the ground to support the victims.*

*Update by FERHAT AKGUL, Organiser*

*Donations are reaching out to those effected. Teams we work with our working tirelessly day and night supporting the victims of the earthquake, even clearing snowy roads to reach the aid to those in need.*

*GOFUNDME Appeal by Refugee and Workers Cultural Association*  
<https://gofund.me/f9db8b43>



# ***HDP Briefing to Members of the European Parliament***

*Instead of monopolising aid, which given the Erdoğan government's track record of financial mismanagement will simply generate more chaos and bureaucracy, we recommend the following seven-point plan to Brussels:*

*The European Parliament and the EEAS should, through resolutions, delegations and diplomatic notes, call on the Turkish government to allow all civil society and political actors to participate in humanitarian relief efforts without facing politically-motivated obstruction;*

*The member states of the European Council should establish and facilitate a joint crisis and recovery group to coordinate relief and rescue operations. The group should include Turkish state and civil society actors such as HD, TTB, KESK, DISK and Egitim-Sen, as well as international institutions.*

*Grants made to the Turkish state in the context of the crisis should be subject to constant scrutiny to prevent nepotism, embezzlement, and misuse of aid funds.*

*It should be made easier for aid organised by European charitable initiatives or smaller aid organisations to cross Turkey's borders.*

*On 8 February, President Erdoğan declared a three-month state of emergency in ten provinces affected by the earthquake. The government is seeking parliamentary approval for this unprecedented measure. This is unnecessary and will most likely serve to further weaken the opposition in the country, which already faces liquidation in the form of ongoing legal*

efforts to ban the HDP. The EU and international organisations, should strongly emphasise that it is not necessary to declare a state of emergency and concomitant rule of law, while pointing out that this difficult transition can be managed through alternative legislative mechanisms.

In addition to the political and humanitarian crisis resulting from ten years of war, Syria has suffered major damage in the recent earthquake. Due to Damascus' obstruction of aid to opposition-held areas, the main routes for aid to enter Syria are via neighboring states. Therefore, it is recommended that all border crossings to Syria be opened so that humanitarian aid can also reach Syria via neighboring states, reaching all regions of Syria including those out of Syrian Government control.

The consequences of this earthquake are long-reaching in nature. Millions of people are affected, not only because of the earthquake, but more generally because Turkish society is in a severe economic crisis. Therefore, longer-term support is needed to help people rebuild their communities and homes. Planning longer-term reconstruction assistance for Turkey should be an crucial issue for the EU and international institutions not only in the present crisis, but also in the months and years ahead.

If you have any further questions about the situation after the earthquake in Turkey or Syria, please do not hesitate to contact the crisis coordination office of the HDP

## **Earthquake Appeal – Kurdistan Solidarity Network (England/Wales)**

Thousands in Turkey and Syria are still trapped from the earthquake and are sending messages to loved ones from under

the rubble. The region affected is largely Kurdish. Please donate to Heyva Sor (the Kurdish Red Crescent). They are the main Kurdish charity on the ground carrying out rescue operations right now.

“Today, 6 February, an earthquake of magnitude 7.8 occurred in the Pazarcik district of Maraş city in Northern Kurdistan. After that, there was a second earthquake with a magnitude of 6.4 in Nurdagi district of Dilok and a third earthquake with a magnitude of 6.5 in Islahiye district of Dilok.

These strong earthquakes mainly affected the cities of Amed, Malatya, Urfa, Semsur, Dilok and many other areas in northern Kurdistan, the cities of Adana, Hatay, Kilis, Osmaniye and Kayseri in Turkey, and the areas of Cizre, Euphrates and Shehba in northern and eastern Syria. The earthquake also affected the surrounding countries. As a result of the earthquake, hundreds of citizens have lost their lives and thousands are injured. Thousands of people are still under the rubble. Many houses and buildings have been destroyed, with winter conditions making rescue operations difficult.” – Heyva Sor

More from Heyva Sor and a link to a Direct Paypal donation, or the bank transfer details to their European branch in Germany:

<https://www.heyvasor.com/en/banga-alikariya-lezgin-ji-bo-mexduren-erdheje/>

The Direct Paypal donate button link:

[https://www.paypal.com/donate/?hosted\\_button\\_id=ST5BWWFB7FPGS](https://www.paypal.com/donate/?hosted_button_id=ST5BWWFB7FPGS)

As of today, Monday 7th, the day after the earthquakes the death toll has reached 6,000 with the search for survivors ongoing. With at least 8,000 people rescued from debris in Turkey with 380,000 taking refuge in shelters.

Please donate what you can to the ongoing rescue efforts, and share this appeal as wide as you can.

Thank you.

Published by Kurdistan Solidarity Network 7 February 2023  
<https://kurdistan solidarity.net/2023/02/07/earthquake-appeal/>

***“Our country does not deserve this cruelty – we stand in solidarity with our people with all our strength”***

*Statement by the Workers Party of Turkey*

*Upon receiving the news of the earthquake that shook our country this morning, we in the Workers’ Party of Turkey took immediate action, and rapidly established a Disaster Coordination Center. Since then, we reached out to many compatriots in the earthquake zone and coordinated humanitarian aid coming from citizens in other provinces.*

*So far, the TIP Disaster Coordination Center has received more than 1500 calls for help. The number of calls reveal the severity of the situation we are facing.*

*– > In many neighborhoods of the Hatay province, especially in Defne and Samandağ, as well as in provinces Kahramanmaraş, Gaziantep and Adıyaman, people have been left to their fate in the harsh winter conditions.*

*– > In these areas, many buildings, old and new, subcontracted via state tenders under the AKP government - public institutions such as hospitals, dormitories, hotels,*

*AFAD and municipality buildings- collapsed. The pro-government construction companies, and the ministries and directorates which awarded these tenders to them are responsible for the death of the young, the children, and the patients. We demand the prosecution of those who caused the death and suffering of thousands of citizens.*

*– > Against all the protests of Hatay residents, experts, and environmental activists, Hatay Airport was built on the Amik Plain, and is now unusable. With the cities' highways and viaducts damaged, it is now impossible to reach Hatay, and tens of thousands of people cannot receive aid.*

*– > Institutions such as the Turkish Armed Forces and AFAD are tasked with search and rescue and providing food during emergencies. However, under the AKP rule, they have been systematically disempowered, their staff and personnel reduced, and thus they have been rendered useless in search and rescue operations. Besides, many specialized, volunteer search and rescue groups were not allowed to get involved because they couldn't get the necessary certification issued by the pro-AKP bureaucracy.*

*– > In the aftermath of the massive earthquake of 17 August 1999 in northwestern Turkey almost 25 years ago, the "earthquake taxes" collected nationwide were not spent on preparing for earthquakes and ensuring the safety of the citizens, but on roads and bridges that the AKP has built in order to generate political gains and enrich pro-government contractors.*

*– > Our country was hit by two very severe earthquakes during the coldest days of winter. Effective search and rescue in the earthquake region, especially in Hatay, Kahramanmaraş and Adıyaman, is virtually impossible. Besides, there is a lack of food and water supply. Our citizens are trying to rescue their relatives from the rubble by digging with their hands, while those who survived struggle in the freezing cold.*

*– > Our country has been facing a great challenge for hours since the two devastating earthquakes. But the state, the government institutions, specialized experts, means for transportation and sustenance are nowhere to be seen.*

*The people of our country do not deserve to be abandoned to such despair, nor do they deserve the remorselessness of the government.*

*We will never forget and never forgive those who abandoned our people to this fate.*

*We have mobilized with all our power to stand with our fellow citizens who have been left to fend for themselves in these harsh winter conditions.*

*Our people will heal their wounds through solidarity.*

*Our fellow citizens will never be alone and helpless.*

*7 February 2023*

*Published by International Viewpoint:*  
<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article7979>

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## **Statement by ecology movements in Turkey- demands for immediate action**

*Immediately after the February 6 earthquake, one of the biggest in the history of Turkey, a broad meeting of Ecology*

**Organizations in Turkey published this statement:**

***Our urgent demands from the government, which holds all the resources of the state in its hands, and our call for solidarity.***

*After the 7.7 magnitude earthquakes centered in Pazarcık, Kahramanmaraş, at midnight on February 6, followed by the 7.6 magnitude earthquakes centered in Elbistan at noon on the same day, more than ten thousand buildings collapsed and tens of thousands of people were trapped under the rubble. In reality, it is the government, which is trying to turn this disaster into an opportunity for its own survival and has declared a state of emergency in the region to this end. Organization of civil initiatives and rank and file solidarity networks are vital to making emergency interventions in the areas of destruction and rebuilding life. It is imperative that the disaster is not magnified by obstructing the aid and solidarity of civil initiatives under the pretext of the State of Emergency!*

*The state, unable to fulfill its basic duty of organization and coordination, has left the people of Turkey today with the obligation and responsibility to organize themselves.*

*Our most urgent need today is to weave a solidarity that crosses borders in order to keep alive our people who have lost their living spaces and cannot meet their basic needs in the entire geography affected by the earthquake, especially in search and rescue operations.*

*First of all, we would like to observe that an earthquake is a natural phenomenon, that it has been going on for millions of years and that earthquakes occur for nature to realize itself and for the earth to complete itself:*

*The main responsible for the losses of life is this corporatist government, which has left life to freeze under the rubble, and which no longer functions as a social state.*

Natural phenomena cannot be characterized as disasters, catastrophes or fate to cover up the massacres caused by the capitalist system based on the greed for profit. Humanity has lived in peace with nature for thousands of years, and has built its social life in harmony with nature, taking into account natural phenomena. Houses were built in harmony with the behavior of nature. Now, the governments that nourish the concrete-oriented urban policies imposed by capitalist modernism with multi-storey buildings, thus paving the way for capital to increase its earnings, bear the main responsibility for these losses.

In the last two hundred years, policies that increase the exploitation of nature and labor have been followed. As a result of these policies, we are facing an ecocide caused by the brutal face of capitalism, which causes destruction and collapse by destroying human and non-human life. The region where the earthquake occurred is a region where many ecological crimes have been committed, such as the construction of hydroelectric dams, thermal power plants, nuclear power plants and airports on fault lines and, as a result, lives have been endangered. The only way to defend life against this destruction is not in spite of nature, but in a reciprocal relationship with nature, in peace with nature, and in solidarity with nature.

We know that there are many things we need to do to build the life we dream of, but today we are faced with an urgent, vital situation that requires us to act without waiting. As you read this, there are still lives under the rubble waiting to be rescued if they are not frozen. While they are fighting for their lives, the construction and mining companies who caused the collapses continue to count their money.

This is our warning to the government, which controls all the resources of the state, about what needs to be done urgently and our public call for solidarity:



## WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE URGENTLY:

1. Mining and construction activities, especially in the region and neighboring regions, should be stopped immediately, and construction machinery and equipment belonging to public and private companies should be sent to earthquake zones for search and rescue operations together with technical personnel.
2. Civilian and military infrastructure and personnel, and private sector airline infrastructure and search and rescue and relief teams should be rapidly deployed to earthquake areas that cannot be reached by road.
3. Buildings such as second residences, hotels, places of worship, including those in neighboring regions, especially reliable buildings in the region, should be put into service free of charge or by using public resources to be used in solving the shelter problem.
4. In order to provide vital needs such as clean drinking water, food, clothing and hygiene products, the mechanisms created by civil society for solidarity should be fully and completely coordinated with public services.
5. Rescue teams should be formed to include living beings other than humans. The work of civilian teams taking initiative in this regard should be facilitated and supported.
6. Since the earthquake occurred in a region with a high concentration of migrants, search and rescue and basic needs should be carried out with full inclusiveness, free from discrimination.

## ECOLOGICAL DEMANDS:

1. Information should be provided on the causes of the natural gas explosions and the fire at Iskenderun Port, which

materials were burned, and the chemical and nuclear materials, if any, involved in the fire.

2. An inventory of hazardous, flammable and explosive materials in the industrial facilities in the region should be made; preventive measures should be taken without delay for possible disasters as a result of aftershocks or new earthquakes.

3. More than ten thousand buildings are thought to have collapsed. Work on asbestos, radon and other harmful gases emitted from these buildings should begin as soon as possible to ensure the safety of the people in the region, especially search and rescue teams.

4. Damage assessments should begin on the dams, which control water and are an extension of the commodification work, and necessary measures should be taken to prevent a secondary disaster.

5. It must be determined whether the chemicals in the mines are mixed with water aquifers; necessary measures must be taken.

6. The problems of non-human creatures living in cities and their peripheries, whose habitats we have usurped, regarding nutrition, access to clean and healthy water and shelter must be solved as soon as possible.

7. Damage to electricity and natural gas transmission lines in the earthquake zone, explosions in natural gas lines, security dams in the region, thermal power plants in Maraş and Adana poses great risks.

8. Large energy investments, security policies and fossil fuels that put life at risk must be abandoned.

Our condolences to everyone who is suffering. We are very saddened by our losses, but our sadness does not prevent us

*from ignoring the cause of the destruction, the slowness of the search and rescue efforts, and the measures that need to be taken to prevent possible further disasters. The state of emergency cannot hide this situation, nor will we allow it to.*

*In solidarity.*

*Climate Justice Coalition*

*Assembly for Unity of Ecology*

*Republished from International Standpoint 10 February 2023*  
<https://www.internationaliststandpoint.org/statement-by-ecology-movements-in-turkey-demands-for-immediate-action/>

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## **Earthquake in Turkey: the state versus the people**

What do you do when you are thousands of miles from your family, writes [Sarah Glynn](#) on [Bella Caledonia](#), and their phone stops ringing and you don't know if they are lacking a signal or buried under rubble? This is the situation facing very many diaspora families with roots in the extensive region devastated by Monday morning's earthquake. Ugur Cagritekin, from Edinburgh's Kurdish community, told me that around a dozen of his close friends had already flown back to Turkey to try and find their relatives. Many members of his sister in law's family are beneath the ruins.

Those remaining in Scotland, and in other parts of the Kurdish and Turkish diaspora, are working frantically to try and organise aid deliveries to the worst affected regions. Besides

damaged roads and severe winter weather, this task is made much more difficult by the Turkish authorities who insist that all aid must be delivered through AFAD, the government's Disaster and Emergency Management Authority. AFAD has been shown to be woefully inadequate for the task it faces, and there are also well-founded concerns over its priorities. Government bodies are known to favour government supporters, and there is no confidence that AFAD will distribute aid where it is most needed. Rather than allow the evolution of local support networks, this top-down approach is designed to make people dependent on, and grateful to, President Erdoğan and his ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). A record of government corruption makes many wary that aid distribution will be co-opted to boost the image of the government.

Hatice (not her real name), another Edinburgh resident, told me that she has been working with contacts in Turkey to try and organise the delivery of essential equipment that can help some of the hundreds of thousands of people who have had to leave their homes and are struggling to survive in the bitter cold. They are looking for vehicles that can travel through the snow, and for routes where they can avoid having their supplies confiscated by AFAD. Hatice, in common with a very high proportion of Edinburgh's Kurds, hails from Elbistan. Their hometown, which was very close to the epicentre of the second earthquake that followed eight hours after the first one, has suffered severe damage. Buildings that had cracked with the first quake were brought down completely by the second. Hatice's mother-in-law is lost in her collapsed home, as are many of her cousins and friends.

Monday's earthquakes have devastated ten Turkish provinces that are home to around thirteen million people: well over twice the population of Scotland. They have also caused massive destruction in Syria, especially in government-controlled areas and areas controlled by Turkey (including occupied Afrîn). Autonomous North and East Syria is less badly

affected, and their Syrian Democratic forces have offered to provide help to all other parts of Syria – however I only have space to look at Turkey here. The scale of the disaster is terrifying. Thousands are already confirmed dead, but with so many more trapped in the destroyed buildings, and the vast majority of these buildings yet to see any rescue equipment, the number is expected to rise into the tens of thousands. Some fear the final figure may be over 100,000.

Three days after the initial earthquake, which caught people asleep in their beds, many places, and especially smaller towns and villages, have yet to see any sign of official help. Local people are trying to remove the rubble that is burying their families and neighbours with their bare hands, but without the equipment to cut and lift concrete this is often impossible. Chances of survival in the sub-zero temperatures are eking away with every passing minute.

Even for those who have escaped the initial destruction, conditions are extremely difficult. The risks from the many aftershocks, as well as dangerous structural damage, makes it unsafe for people to stay in their homes, but AFAD has done very little to supply them with the basic shelter, warmth, and sustenance that they need to survive. Many places are without water and electricity. Checking that surviving buildings are safe for people to return to will be a massive task in itself.

Social media is full of desperate pleas for help, and anger at the absence of the authorities that should be providing it. The response from the government has been to clamp down on people sharing news of what is happening. In an angry television message on Tuesday, President Erdoğan announced a State of Emergency in the affected provinces. The main effect of this, like the national emergency following the 2016 coup attempt, will be to allow much greater government control and suppression of criticism. Erdoğan told viewers that he is keeping a note of all the 'lies and distortions' and will open his notebook 'when the time comes'. Already, twitter has been

restricted – although it was being used to provide vital information for search and rescue. Journalists have been detained while reporting from the rubble in Diyarbakir, and investigations are being opened against TV commentators and social media users.

The one organisation that has the equipment, skills, and competence to make a serious impact on the rescue efforts, the Turkish army, remains in readiness to invade Syria, but only a relatively small force has been deputed to help the rescue operation.

Prospects are grim and hopes are fading for the tens of thousands still buried.

## **A natural disaster in a political context**

Before looking at the huge mobilisation by local people in Turkey, and at what people in Scotland can do to help, I want to examine the political context that has massively amplified the horror of this natural disaster. Of course, the focus must be on humanity, but we do need to understand the politics that makes humanity so difficult to achieve, and the political forces that are seeking to exploit the situation for their own, very inhumane, ends.

This natural disaster has taken place in the context of a lethal cocktail of ruthless neoliberal crony capitalism, political corruption, anti-Kurdish racism (which has left infrastructure underdeveloped and attacked political and civic organisation), and an increasingly dictatorial authoritarian regime that will not work with others and will not broach criticism.

Across the affected region, blocks of flats have collapsed like houses of cards. Much of Turkey's recent economic

development was based on a building boom, with contracts awarded to government supporters. Turkey is crossed by major geological fault lines, but in the rush for profits, there was no room for such niceties as observing earthquake design regulations. As a friend who works in disaster planning put it to me, you can have a lot of good regulations and codes, but 'the snag is in the governance' and politicians feel that enforcing regulations is not a vote-winning priority and that nothing will happen on their watch.

The neglect of earthquake preparedness has come from the top. After the 1999 Istanbul earthquake, the government of the time brought in what was commonly known as the 'Earthquake Tax', which was supposed to pay for disaster preparation. This is estimated to have brought in £3.8 billion pounds, but there is no evidence that this has been spent on making anything safer.

It was not as if the government had lacked warnings. The Chairman of the Chamber of Geological Engineers has stated that they had not only expected an earthquake of this kind but had also submitted a report to the president and government on what should be done in preparation, which had received no response. He described the policies of uncontrolled development as 'rent and plunder'.

Despite the palpable and massive failure of the government's disaster response, Erdoğan shows no sense of responsibility, let alone contrition. On Wednesday, when he finally visited Maraş, at the centre of the first earthquake, he told a survivor, 'The damage is done. These things are part of destiny's plan.'

We have seen plenty of evidence of this disregard of safety planning before – notably in the lack of vital planes to fight 2021's forest fires, when, too, Erdoğan seemed more concerned to stamp out negative publicity than extinguish the flames; and also in the mining disasters at Soma in 2014 and Bartın last October, when warnings of dangerous conditions were not

heeded, and Erdoğan also provoked anger by putting the blame on 'destiny'.

The abject inadequacy of both preparedness and response has not spared any of the cities hit, whatever their ethnic makeup or political leanings, but it is also significant that the predominantly Kurdish southeast of Turkey, where much of the damage occurred, has been purposefully left behind in infrastructural development by successive governments. And, in the places where the population voted for the pro-Kurdish leftist Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), they have had their elected mayors removed – and often imprisoned – and civic structures that the mayors supported closed down.

When people most need to work together and combine resources, Erdoğan is terrified of allowing any involvement from other political parties in case it earns them support. Again, this is not a new phenomenon. The central government confiscated aid for Covid victims collected by the Peoples' Republican Party (CHP) mayors of Istanbul and Ankara. An openly HDP delivery of aid to the earthquake areas was seized by the government.

Faced with a disaster of this scale and a response organisation that is clearly unable to cope, most people would have expected the government to turn to the military – the second biggest army in NATO: all the more so as Erdoğan is looking for a popular victory, and what could be more universally popular than an effective response to a major disaster? That he has opted for only a very limited deployment may also be a consequence of his fear of being upstaged. Despite major purges, many in the army do not endorse his turn against Turkish secularism.

The dreadful failures in the government response can also be seen as a product of the arrogance of dictatorship, where one man cannot oversee everything, but others are afraid to criticise: the emperor's new clothes syndrome.



Erdoğan's desperation to hold onto power at all costs makes him prioritise perception over reality. The Turkish government has increasingly resorted to stifling freedom of speech, and last year's Disinformation Law has been widely condemned as a vehicle for censorship and the criminalisation of journalism. Although making political predictions for Turkey has become even more difficult, many must be worrying that if he sees his support falling, Erdoğan might use the emergency situation to postpone the forthcoming election.

The scale of the Turkish Governments failures and of their impacts is staggering, but in trying to understand what could have gone so wrong, I found myself thinking of the Grenfell fire. Turkey's disaster may be a thousand times bigger, but there are many similarities in the underlying forces and in the attempt to manage perceptions rather than face responsibility.

Inevitably, the lack of effective response – and in many places any response at all – has produced a swell of anger, especially among those who have waited in vain for help to rescue family members trapped beneath the debris. On Wednesday in Adiyaman, where no help had arrived more than two days after the earthquake, the Minister of Transport, and the local governor fled in their cars rather than face the angry crowd. The AKP mayor of Kirikhan has damned his party's government in front of the collapsed building that buried his children. There is a new axiom being shared round Turkey: It is not earthquakes that kill people, it is states that kill people.

## **Solidarity from the grassroots**

In contrast to the state's failures, organisations across Turkey have sprung into action, from political parties to community groups. Cars and trucks are bringing aid supplies from all over the country, organised by local groups or even private individuals.

The big municipalities run by the main opposition Republican People's Party have been coordinating large collections and deliveries of basic aid, with the CHP leader announcing that they will not accept bureaucratic obstacles even if they 'have to be arrested for finding bread and blankets'. And the HDP, which has fewer financial resources and has been deprived of municipal power, is also managing to get deliveries through despite government obstruction. (The scale of the relief effort is going to make government control increasingly difficult to implement.) 93 trucks of supplies organised by the HDP had reached the earthquake area by Wednesday morning, and Ugur Cagritekin told me that they had received news that five trucks had reached Elbistan where supplies were being delivered to people in need through the coordination of the HDP and the local Alevi centre. They want to take aid to villages as well as the town centre. Some people in the villages have moved from their homes into the relative safety of their more lightly constructed stables, where they can also benefit from the warmth of the animals, but there has been no help from outside.

The HDP's strength lies in its ability to mobilise and organise its large network of supporters and sympathisers and like-minded community organisations. As soon as they heard about the earthquake, the party dropped all other plans, set up a central coordination centre, and dispatched leading members to the affected area. Local election centres were transformed into coordination centres, while the youth organisation concentrated on rescue work. They put out calls for solidarity and for people with shelter and food to share with those without, and they helped create a framework to allow people's natural solidarity to find direction.

I spoke with a volunteer at Rosa Women's Association in Diyarbakir as she took a break from preparing soup and tea for 200 people taking shelter from the dangers of damaged buildings. She told me that their city (the unofficial capital

of Turkish Kurdistan) benefitted from being left wing and thus easy to organise. Even in relatively accessible Diyarbakir, where the devastation is patchy, official relief efforts are seriously inadequate; however, although the HDP mayor and council have been removed (and the mayor imprisoned), HDP organisation remains extremely strong.

Their earthquake relief coordination is the HDP's philosophy of grassroots organisation and control put into action. When Ertuğrul Kürkçü, the HDP's honorary president, writes about 'transforming earthquake solidarity into a social movement', he is not talking about an abstract idea but a political practice.

Kurdish communities outside Turkey have wanted to send essential supplies too, but there are reports of deliveries being turned back for lack of documentation, or being taken over by AFAD at the border. The consensus, across the Kurdish diaspora, is to call for financial donations to the Kurdish Red Crescent, Hevya Sor, which operates throughout the affected areas – and of course helps everyone regardless of background. Hevya Sor have the contacts on the ground that enable them to get the aid through to where it is needed, independent of government meddling. So far, this fundraising has been focused on Kurdish communities, but the many other people who want to help and are uncertain who to trust, should be reassured that this is an organisation supported by those with most reason to be concerned.

To donate in from the UK please send to Hevya Sor's German bank account or donate via Paypal:

Account details:

IBAN: DE49 3705 0299 0004 0104 81

BIC/SWIFT: COKSDE33XXX

<https://www.heyvasor.com>

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# **Call for a global counter-summit of social movements to the IMF-World Bank Annual Meetings**

The Annual Meetings of the World Bank Group (WBG) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) will be held from 9 to 15 October 2023 in Marrakech, Morocco. The IMF is taking centre stage as the multi-faceted crisis that has affected the world since 2020 deepens. It has signed credit agreements with around 100 governments over the past three years. In each of these agreements the IMF demands the continuation of neoliberal policies. At the same time a new debt crisis is developing. It is high time to react.

Established in 1944, the IMF and the World Bank meet mainly in Washington and every three years they meet in a member country other than the United States. Since 1947, the General Meetings of these two institutions have been held only once in Africa, in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1973. The choice of Morocco is no accident. This country is considered by Washington and its allies as a good pupil because its government systematically

applies the neo-liberal credo of the two institutions and because it supports the inhumane policy of the European Union in terms of migration and asylum.

The international CADTM network (Committee for the Abolition of Illegitimate Debts) will mobilize to actively contribute to making other voices from around the world heard at these WBG and IMF Assemblies, which bring together finance ministers and central bank governors from 189 member countries, as well as representatives from the private sector, academia and NGOs. We propose the organization of a world counter-summit of social movements against these assemblies.

In order to promote unity of action, the CADTM proposes that a common call to this counter-summit be drafted. It is addressed to all movements wishing to join forces in defence of humanity.

Hereafter the CADTM makes known its position with regard to these two anti-democratic institutions and their policies that run counter to the exercise of human rights.

Both institutions continue to promote neo-liberalism and capitalism, which have caused social, economic and ecological devastation on a global scale.

The people of the South, who gained political independence in the late 1950s and early 1960s, have been burdened with the repayment of colonial debts and the odious debts of the despotic regimes supported by the two institutions. The latter prevented the industrialization and endogenous development of these countries in favour of the promotion of export with the active support of the local ruling classes and large foreign companies according to the demands of the global market. The World Bank has financed white elephants with huge loans, large, expensive and unnecessary projects that do not benefit the local population. These factors led to the debt crisis that broke out in 1980. This was used by the IMF and the WB to

impose structural adjustment programmes (reduced spending on health and education, privatizations, etc.) and the opening up of the countries of the South to the free movement of capital and goods in a context of capitalist globalization, financialization, free trade and the increasing internationalization of production chains, which reduce the sovereignty of states. The two institutions have thus contributed to the impoverishment of small producers, particularly the small peasantry, the impoverishment of the working class, the casualization of jobs, especially for women and young people, and the private indebtedness of working-class households, particularly through microcredit.

As regards the environment, the World Bank continues to develop a productivist and extractivist policy that is disastrous for people and harmful to nature. Contrary to its promises, it continues to massively finance fossil fuels, which have a disastrous effect on pollution and climate change. The World Bank also finances the construction of large dams that cause enormous environmental damage. It favours the development of agribusiness against peasant agriculture, it supports the massive use of pesticides, herbicides, chemical fertilizers responsible for a dramatic loss of biodiversity and soil impoverishment. The World Bank promotes the privatization and commercialization of land for the benefit of large landowners.

The World Bank and the IMF have also contributed to the rescue of the big private banks in the major industrialized countries following the global crisis of capitalism in 2007-2008 through massive public indebtedness accompanied by austerity policies and the destruction of social gains. They have used public debt to generalize the privatization of water, land, forests, mines, fishing grounds and public services, such as education and health.

The decay of the latter has been highlighted by the Covid pandemic. Since the beginning of the health crisis, the IMF

and the WB, together with other institutions of big capital and multinationals (G20, Paris Club, etc.), have multiplied initiatives to avoid radical solutions of cancellation through deferment of payment by excluding private creditors, the main holders of the external public debt of the countries of the South. The new payment deadlines coincide with the context created by the invasion of Ukraine and the soaring prices of basic foodstuffs, livestock feed, fertilizers and energy that are hitting hardest the poorest countries already badly affected by heavy flooding and intense drought.

According to the IMF, about 60% of low-income developing countries are already in debt distress or at high risk of debt distress.

Debt suspensions are on the rise. Since 2020, 9 countries have defaulted: Argentina, Ecuador, Lebanon, Suriname, Zambia, Belize, Sri Lanka, Russia and Ghana. Several other countries are close to defaulting, such as El Salvador, Peru, Tunisia, Egypt, Kenya, Ethiopia, Malawi, Pakistan, and Turkey.

IMF and WB lending to low-income countries increased dramatically in 2020 and is expected to remain at a high level for several years. The conditionalities are increasingly binding on the populations.

Both institutions act for the benefit of a handful of big powers and their transnational corporations that reinforce an international capitalist system that is destructive to humanity and the environment. It is urgent to initiate broad mobilizations for sovereign repudiations of the debt and to build a new democratic international architecture that favours a redistribution of wealth and supports the efforts of peoples to achieve socially just development that respects nature.

The organization that would replace the World Bank should be largely regionalized (banks in the South could be linked to it), and its function would be to provide loans at very low or zero interest rates, and grants that could only be given on

condition that they are used in strict compliance with social and environmental standards and, more generally, with basic human rights. Unlike the current World Bank, the new bank that the world needs would not represent the interests of creditors and impose market-righteous behaviour on debtors, but would have as its primary mission the defence of the interests of the peoples who receive the loans and grants.

The new IMF, for its part, should regain part of its original mandate to guarantee the stability of currencies, fight speculation, control capital movements, and act to prohibit tax havens and tax fraud. To achieve this objective, it should contribute, in collaboration with national authorities and regional monetary funds (which must be created), to the collection of various international taxes.

The international CADTM network calls on networks, organizations, social and civil society movements in the South and the North to hold a global counter-summit to the IMF-WB Annual Meetings to be held in Marrakech from 9 to 15 October this year. An international follow-up committee will be set up to begin collective preparations for this very important global activist meeting, which could lead to other initiatives for a new international coordination of social movements.

Let's make the voice of social movements heard in Marrakech next October. We want to demonstrate the power of organized peoples, defend popular sovereignty and promote social and environmental justice.

**END THE WORLD BANK AND THE INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND!**

ATTAC CADTM Morocco, a member of the shared international secretariat of the CADTM network, will work with its allies in Morocco on organizational and logistical matters.

Source CADTM.

The official links to follow the news on the IMF-WB Annual



Meetings:

<https://www.imf.org/en/News/Seminars/Campaigns/2023/Marrakech2023>

<https://openmorocco2023.com/>

*This appeal was originally published by the CADTM network (Committee for the Abolition of Illegitimate Debts):*

<https://www.cadtm.org/Call-for-a-global-counter-summit-of-social-movements-to-the-IMF-WB-Annual>

*Photo: March against the IMF in Buenos Aires, on the occasion of the 25th of May 2018, Gastón Cuello, CC,*

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Marcha\\_contra\\_el\\_FMI\\_50.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Marcha_contra_el_FMI_50.jpg)

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# **Cymru/Wales – “Strike: Our collective future depends on this movement”**

*[Robat Idris](#) writes on the [Undod website](#) about the importance of the current strike movement for Welsh/Cymraeg struggles and relates it to the history of the nation’s struggle.*

## **Strike: Our collective future depends on this movement**

### **Introduction**

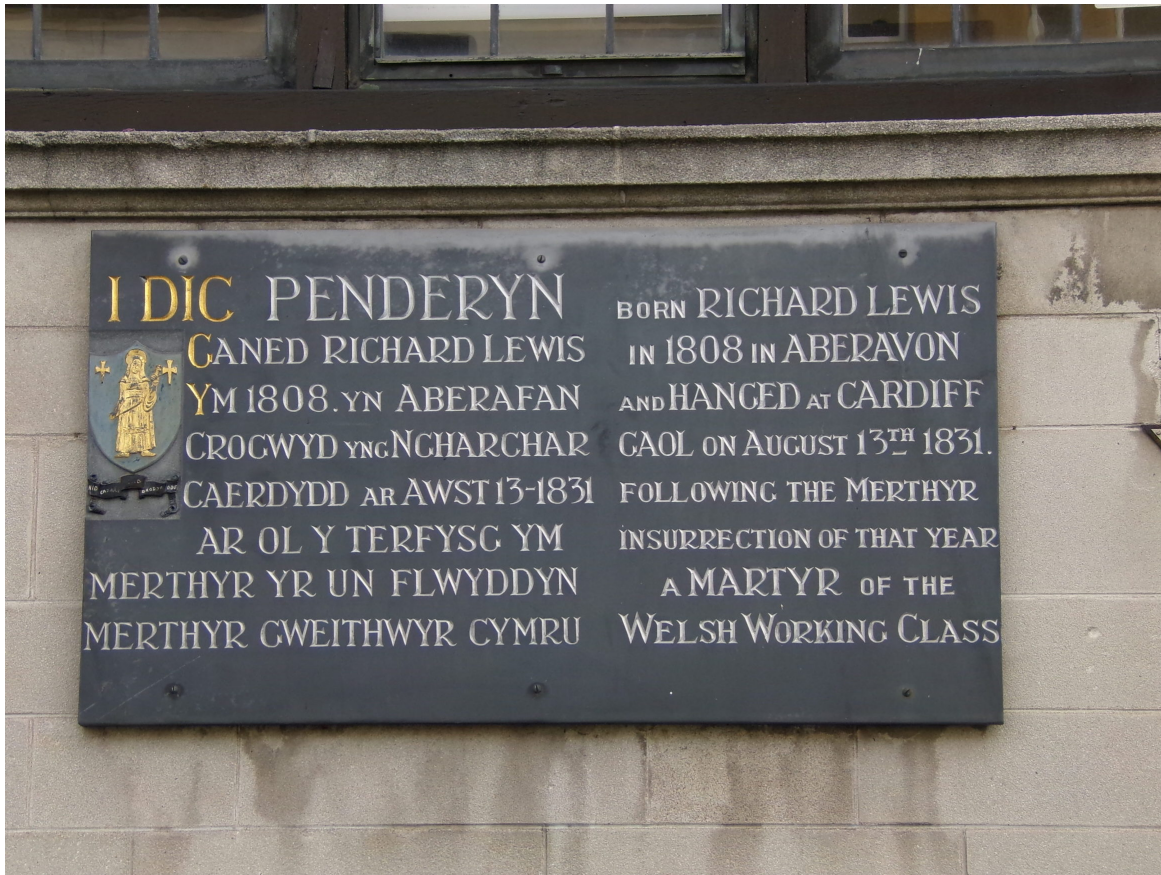
*“Public sector workers are not on strike because they want to break the system. They’re on strike because the system is broken.” – Mick Lynch, RMT leader, Aberdare, 21-01-2023*

Sometimes, saying nothing and doing nothing tells a lot about who you are. It shows which side you're on. It shows if you understand what a crisis is or whether you don't. We live in such a time at the moment. That is why we must support those workers who are on strike. Because in the end, our collective future depends on what the outcome of this fateful battle will be. Do we want our people to live without the threats of poverty, cold, hunger and unemployment or undignified work being hanging over them constantly? Do we want to continue to suffer under the tyranny of capitalism owned by the few? Do we want to surrender our basic rights to strike and protest?

The current strikes are much more significant than just seeking more pay for specific workers. They are all fighting to benefit the wider society, and protect the services the public treasure. They are a cry that echoes from the hospitals and the schools and the railways and the mail vans and the colleges that proclaim quite clearly: "Enough is enough". The strikers know very well that one in three children live in poverty in Wales, that the use of food banks is on the rise, and that fuel poverty is rampant. All this following over a decade of austerity, with more to come. The strikers know that wages do not keep up with inflation, especially in the public sector – this was not the case when such inflation was seen in the 80s of the 20th century.

Do we want to lose even the partial freedom we have? Such are the implications of Tory anti-strike legislation. Or do we want to act according to the heroic traditions of workers of the past?

## **Historical background**



Dic Penderyn plaque, Merthyr Tudful

Cymru saw the Red Flag raised for the first time in Merthyr in 1831, followed by the unjust execution of Dic Penderyn – and up to 24 people were killed during the fighting as well. “Cheese and bread” and “Down with the King” were some of the slogans of the rebellion.

In 1839 Cymru saw the Chartists fighting for rights, when around 20 people were killed by the authorities in Newport.

Cymru saw the longest strike ever, and one of the bitterest, when Bethesda quarrymen rose up against the brutal working conditions of the owner Lord Penrhyn, whose estate had profited enormously from slavery in Jamaica. The strikers would display posters in the windows of their houses with the words “*Nid oes bradwr yn y tŷ hwn*” (“There is no traitor in this house”). The strike lasted from 1900 until 1903, and many had to move to the Valleys to work in the coal industry.

The coalfield, of course, has been the cradle of the workers’

strength, and where there was a continuous dispute between the coal masters and the peasants who lost their health and sometimes their lives in the mines. In 1910 Churchill sent the army to Tonypandy to quell the efforts of the miners to stand against the masters. Churchill's name is still hated in the area. Closer to our time, came the great miners' strike in 1984, which gave Thatcher the opportunity to defeat her main enemies – namely the miners – and change the political course of the United Kingdom in the direction of individualism, privatisation, and a squeeze on rights. A post-industrial desert was created in the South Valleys. Thatcher's heirs are the current Westminster government, and what we see these days is a continuation of her ideological war.



Tonypandy

## Today's strikers

Who are in an industrial dispute today? Ambulance Workers, Nurses, Midwives, Physiotherapists, Royal Mail, Teachers, Railways, Civil Servants, Academics, Buses. It is possible that others such as fire workers and junior doctors will also strike.

Striking is not something to undertake thoughtlessly. People

have reached the end of their tether. Perhaps it is the wages that have not risen much for ten years, and therefore more and more people who work full time have fallen into the pit of poverty as inflation is rampant, which on the surface has triggered them to strike. But there is much more to it than this. Time and time again over the last few years, we heard about unbearable working conditions with targets being elevated above service. In different occupations, workers have suffered from mental and physical illness, until people are completely exhausted and have to leave their work. This is true for many occupations other than those who are on strike.

The fight against the employers is not just about protecting wages. All of these strikes are battling against fundamental changes to workers' rights, such as holidays and sick leave, and the much devalued terms offered to new staff.

At the same time we see that corporate profits and payments to corporate chiefs and directors of companies rise and rise to incredible levels.

## **National Health Service**

Hooray! These workers were heroes during Covid! Deserving of being clapped in the street! But clapping doesn't buy a loaf or keep the house warm. It does not hide the mismanagement of the NHS which is tottering on the brink of failure. And it certainly hasn't done anything at all to convince us that the Government's aim in Westminster is not to privatise the NHS.

So the Government is trying to blame the failures of the NHS on the heroic and dedicated workers who are doing their best to look after us. The Government wants to pass anti-strike legislation in order to maintain a "minimum level of service". Of course they don't reach the lowest level of service when there is no strike – the service was on its knees a long time ago. So the the nurses and the ambulance workers are scapegoats. The Government's tough new law could mean that

nurses are sacked. We cannot accept that – especially bearing in mind the scandals about friends of the Government getting contracts worth millions at the time of Covid, and providing equipment of an unacceptable standard, and without anyone being called to account. Do we want the Health Service to be privatised? In the context of Cymru, our Government says that it is grateful to the Health Service workers, but that it cannot pay the workers more without more financial support from the Westminster government. You decide if that is a sufficient reason. Incidentally, this is at the core of the contradiction which characterises Welsh Labour – on the one hand, it believes in the Union with England; but on the other hand it complains when there is not enough money or sufficient attention being given to Cymru. And undeniably, the Health Service is Labour's main article of faith, yet it cannot protect it effectively.

## **Royal Mail**

The service is 500 years old. Since its privatisation years ago, it has been under siege. "Competition" is one of the holy words of capitalism – and so the competition of the free market means that a multitude of companies deliver parcels to us. It appears that the van drivers of these companies suffer from poor working conditions, with targets that are almost impossible to achieve. No doubt this enables a cheaper service, but at what cost? Not only in human terms (attacking the working conditions and wages of Royal Mail workers, and taking advantage of workers from the other companies), but also the environmental cost – where one vehicle used to bring goods to us, now there can be several in day.

## **Teachers and Assistants**

These are workers who had a very difficult time during Covid, carrying responsibilities that were almost impossible at times. Combine this with an increase in their workload, lack

of support and resources, discipline problems, an oppressive system of inspection, the fear of losing your job when a complaint is made about you, and it's no wonder things have come to an end. We know that many leave the profession for these reasons. Do we really want a society where our children are taught by teachers who have fought, are looking forward to retirement or aspire to leave teaching for a different career?

## **Railways**

Mick Lynch, the leader of the RMT, has become prominent in this troubled time. He led his union, and to all intents and purposes the labour movement in the absence of leadership from Starmer, the leader of the post-socialist Labour Party (although there are many good socialists amongst its ranks) who condemned one of his own shadow cabinet for daring to go on a picket line. Mick Lynch is certainly particularly effective in standing up for his own employees, and also in explaining the wider picture. Don't be surprised if we see relentless attacks on him by the Government and the media. It is worth reading an article about his visit to Aberdare in [Voice Wales](#), and watching a video of his speech there. The Government has clearly shown which side they are on, by ensuring that the companies that run the railways have not lost a single penny since the dispute began – and it has cost the country more than if the dispute would had been settled. This is an ideological battle. As in the case of other workers, the protection of service users and their safety is one of the main reasons for striking. Do we want an inferior rail service with the increased risk of accidents?

## **Academics**

The world of colleges changed beyond all comprehension in a generation. Where there used to be students, today there are “customers” who want “value for money” for their fees. Learning institutions were turned into profit making factories



by expanding the numbers of students beyond the ability of the job market to employ them in their respective fields. Lecturers and researchers were changed into machines to try to please administrators, and work contracts were downgraded to being insecure and short-term, as well as changing pensions for the worse. We have even heard of some lecturers sleeping on library floors. Do we want to continue to disrespect learning?

## **Oppression by Westminster**

Squeezing the right to strike and intimidating the workers is the purpose of the Act which is currently going through the parliamentary process. The official name is the "Minimum Service Level Bill", but unofficially it is known as the "Anti-Strike Bill". According to the Government, they want to ensure a basic level of service in the public sector, by forcing people to work even if the union has won a vote to strike. If people strike in violation of the law, then they can face losing their job. This is a completely unreasonable threat, and shows a complete lack of understanding of things as they are. Because this is the truth – there is no basic level of service in the Health Service when there is no strike of this kind in the world. The troubles of the ambulance service, shortage of nursing staff and doctors, waiting lists, and lack of care in society all testify that the Government is guilty. And in Wales, our Government is dependent on Westminster for resources. This is a cynical attempt to portray the true heroes and essential workers of our society as selfish and unscrupulous people. The truth is that because the Health Service is on its knees the strikers are acting to protect it, as well as for their own benefit. We can say exactly the same thing about the other public sector workers on strike. This law will be a blunt instrument in the hands of the rich. The intention is to keep the worker in his place, that is, to be obedient, quiet, and not complaining. The publicity machine will try to divide the strikers, try to turn



the public against the strikers, and pave the way for even more privatization and relaxing of safety rules as well as returning the worker to insecurity, poverty and illness. Couple this act with the "Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act" or the Policing Act as it is called, and there is a real attempt to attack our most basic democratic rights. It is not impossible to imagine circumstances where both laws would be implemented at the same time. Is a General Strike the only way to get this obdurate Government to listen?



## Support

We can show our support in many ways.

- Join a Union in your workplace.
- Go on a picket line.
- Ask people like your postman or nurse, or anyone else who is on strike how you can help.
- Take part in a local protest.
- Join a large protest if one is organised.

The 1984-85 miners' strike. Write to your Member of Parliament and Member of Parliament for Wales (maybe that's asking too much!).

- Support the strikers on February 1st when several unions work together to strike on the same day.
- Continue to support throughout the strike period.

## Conclusion

Fundamental questions about the nature of work, sharing the reward for our labour, and the relationship between employer and employee are driving these strikes. Grimly ruthless capitalism is steamrollers it all, and an ideological agenda that is driven by a Government in the hands of a small group of right-wing extremists.

So the question must be asked – is a General Strike the way to force the Westminster Government to listen? The feasibility of such mass action will depend on the ability and willingness of all unions to work together. It would certainly be a big step to take. But what is the alternative? Watching the employers and the government divide the labour movement. The strikers surrendering little by little, union by union, so that individual disputes are separated from the others, weakening the strength of the whole enterprise? If that happens, it's not just the strikers who will lose out, but every section of society apart from the rich.

There are so many lessons to be learned by comparing the situation here now with the history of the growth of fascism in the past, that it is truly a scary time. That is why we cannot be silent, and not say or do anything.

The country is tired. The people are exhausted. Poverty and austerity are rampant. Let us begin, here and now, to restore dignity, to raise spirits, to fight for justice and to defeat the forces of greed and oppression.

If a General Strike is called then I would like to think that Undod members will support in whatever way is practical for each individual. Members of an organisation campaigning for a radical future for our country cannot avoid taking sides. This crisis is so serious that we cannot expect to win without fighting to the extreme. Justice is on the side of the workers!

***“Trech Gwlad nac Arglwydd!”***

(rough translation: “The people overcome the state!”).

*Originally published by Undod on 30 January 2023:*  
<https://undod.cymru/en/2023/01/30/streic/>

*For more information about Undod and to support their struggle for a better Wales, visit: <https://undod.cymru/en/>*

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# Scottish and Irish solidarity against the UK state

*Republican Socialist Platform (RSP) members from Edinburgh, Glasgow and Dundee this year joined the annual Bloody Sunday march in Derry. Below we reproduce the text of a leaflet they distributed from the RSP website.*

The anniversary of Bloody Sunday in Derry reminds us of the depths to which the British ruling class will sink to preserve their UK state. One major difference between 1972 and 2023, though, is that they now face a far wider challenge.

By 1998, in the face of various national democratic challenges with Irish republicans at the fore, the British ruling class had to fall-back on 'devolution all round' in their attempt to hold the UK together.

Today, the unionist/loyalist bloc created by the Good Friday Agreement has lost its majority in the bi-sectarian Stormont Assembly; Scottish unionists are a minority at Holyrood and Westminster; and in Wales, support for independence is growing rapidly.

What has not changed is the British ruling class's contempt

for democratic change, including the right of national self-determination. To get around their shrinking support, they turn to the most reactionary political forces and the anti-democratic Crown Powers of the UK state.

Brexit has paved the way for Westminster's assault on trade union, consumer and environmental rights and draconian new laws attacking migrants and asylum seekers. To appease reactionary unionists, the Tories are undermining their own NI Protocol.

In December 2022, the UK Supreme Court overruled plans for a new Scottish independence referendum, despite this receiving majority support in the 2021 Holyrood election. The very next month, the Tories blocked Scotland's progressive Gender Recognition Reform Bill, passed by a cross-party super-majority of MSPs.

It is clear is that British ruling class not only have no intention of conceding greater self-determination, they are now attempting to roll-back even the limited democratic concessions of 1998. The British Labour Party will do nothing to stop them.

The British monarchy plays a crucial role in fronting the UK state's Crown Powers. We are witnessing a media offensive, led by the BBC, to reinforce the UK state around Charlie and his dysfunctional family. The planned coronation in May is the centrepiece of this anti-democratic offensive.

The Republican Socialist Platform, as part of the Radical Independence Campaign in Scotland, is working with Our Republic and others to hold a major republican demonstration on Edinburgh's Calton Hill on May 6th, the same day as the coronation.

There is already a formidable campaign in Wales against the humiliating investiture of a new Prince of Wales. We encourage and want to support more protests across these islands against

the coronation in May.

RSP members are here in Derry and Belfast to seek support in developing an alliance, based on internationalism from below, to break up the deeply reactionary UK state.

*Originally published on the RSP website 30 January 2023:*  
<https://republicansocialists.scot/2023/01/scottish-and-irish-solidarity-against-the-uk-state/>

*To join the Republican Socialist Platform, go to this link.*  
<https://join.republicansocialists.scot/>