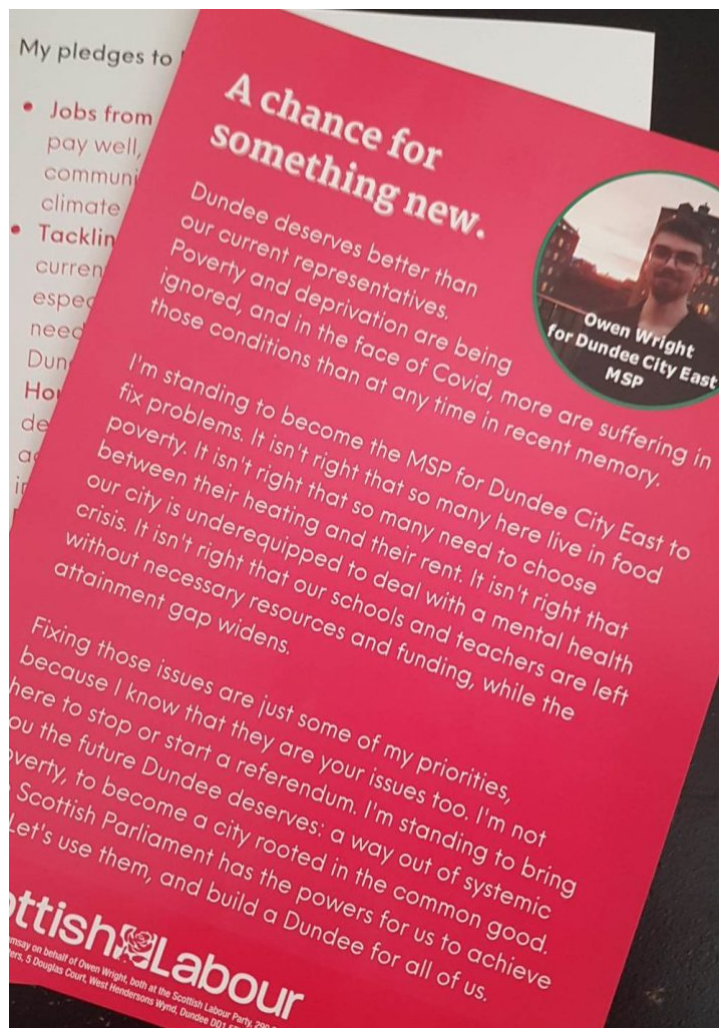


Stارmer's Labour is not a force for Good

Owen Wright, former Labour candidate for the Scottish Parliament, writes for Heckle [online journal of the Republican Socialist Platform, Scotland]

Sir Keir Starmer's Labour party is not a party worth fighting for. Any Labour victory under his leadership risks entrenching many aspects of Conservative rule which he purports to oppose, and should be treated with fear and concern by all those left of the political centre. Labour now has no understanding of the UK's deep underlying problems and this is reflected in the Starmer leadership's deceptive political practices and increasing propensity to indulge in far-right rhetoric and dog-whistles.



Pictured: A leaflet promoting Owen Wright's candidacy in Dundee City East.

Though I am not originally from the UK, I consider myself to come from something like a 'Labour household'. I moved from France to Scotland to study in Dundee after finishing secondary school and, after a very brief stint in the Scottish Greens, joined Labour in autumn 2017, drawn by its platform and policies which appealed to my values of progressivism, international and social conscience.

Having gained campaigning experience through my students' association – at a time when the Brexit saga, the 2019 election and later the beginning of the Covid pandemic was unfolding – I decided to put myself forward as a Labour candidate and subsequently ran in my home constituency of Dundee East in the 2021 Scottish Parliament elections.

I'm still incredibly proud and grateful to my former Dundee CLP comrades for that opportunity. After the election, I continued to hold positions in my CLP, attended Labour's UK conference twice and acted as an agent for a successful candidate in the 2022 local elections.

Nonetheless, in November 2022, I decided to leave the Labour party. A number of things led to the 'breaking of the camel's back', which, in no particular order, I now want to set out for the record.

Transphobia

Having lived and worked with transgender people, the Labour party's failure to defend one of the most marginalised groups in British society today sickens me. Recently, Labour [said it "welcomed"](#) proposals from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) to strip trans people of some of their current rights under the 2010 Equality Act. This was just days after the party tried to distance itself from trans issues

generally, citing the toxicity of the “debate” and its unattractiveness to the general public, which alone is cowardly – but even worse, in the same intervention, Starmer gave legitimacy to one of the spurious position that the rights of women and trans women are inherently in conflict.

This argument is regularly peddled by the most ardent of transphobes, from those in far-right circles to those appropriating the language of feminism, in order to drive a moral panic regarding trans women being in women’s spaces. This panic is based on the notion that trans women are just men pretending to be trans to take advantage of women. Similar arguments have been spread regarding trans children’s identity and presentation in schools, as well as LGBTQ+ education. Several Labour MPs have made those kinds of transphobic arguments, sometimes managing to pull the Labour leadership to their side.



Pictured : A placard from a trans rights demonstration in Dundee in

2023.

There is reason enough to believe that Starmer is a transphobe himself. He is on record [trampling on Gillick competency](#),

effectively arguing that trans children should not be allowed to access treatment for gender dysphoria without their guardian's permission; children with transphobic parents or guardians should be trapped in suffering. He has advocated for schools to out trans children to their parents, again endangering those children unfortunate enough to have parents who do not accept them. These positions make little sense unless Starmer himself harbours an irrational fear of trans people or trans-ness. Labour's position under his leadership is nothing short of cowardice and stupidity at best, or open bigotry at worst.

The ghost of UKIP

Speaking of open bigotry, let's cast our minds back a few years to the days of the coalition government and the rise of Nigel Farage's UKIP, which was ultimately responsible for Brexit.

Like other fascists, UKIP liked to play a game of hide-and-seek – saying a highly controversial, often racialised statement about migrants, refugees or foreigners, and then hiding behind the language of 'legitimate concerns' and the thin veil of plausible deniability. The Brexit disaster is what we got from letting this fester. This was because politicians were incapable of steering the conversation away from migration and towards other issues underpinning the same 'concerns'.

I make no apology for saying that I do not think migration is a fully controllable variable in politics. Migration is a natural human phenomenon, often in response to developments in people's environments, those ranging from war, famine and drought, disease, etc. Even an economic downturn in a region of the world today can be a perfectly natural cause for someone to migrate. Migration is a fact of human life; to try and stop or control it on any kind of permanent basis seems to

me a fruitless task. I'm surprised the UK's political class hasn't given up on "fortress Britain" after meeting failure after failure over decades.

The likes of Farage and the far-right elements of the Conservative Party seem to me to be playing nothing but a massive con to drive up their popularity. Their goal was never to control migration but to whip up an angry population in the throes of deep, painful austerity to back them and their main political projects: Brexit, then followed by a steep and purposeful decline in our living standards. Labour's shameful surrender to that anti-migrant politics in 2015 only legitimised UKIP and likely cost Labour the election. The 2019 election firmly cemented the victory for the Conservative-Brexit camp.

During the height of the Covid pandemic, when migration was not in the spotlight of national politics, national sentiment on migration softened; polls began to show people in Britain seeing immigration as a boon, particularly as labour shortages took the media spotlight. In this time, Labour made absolutely no attempt to solidify those views, which could have blunted the resurgence last year of Conservative scapegoating tactics around migration and refugees. Instead, the Labour party is now again embracing UKIP language of 'concerns' with migration. In a BBC interview about NHS staff shortages, Starmer – referring not only to the NHS but the whole country – said "there are too many migrant workers".

Describing migrant workers as too numerous implies they are a problem, rather than people who benefit our society and should be welcome here. In the context of the NHS, where there are over 55,000 frontline nursing vacancies UK-wide, and over 130,000 overall vacancies in NHS England trusts, Starmer's simultaneous pledge to train 50,000 nurses and doctors while saying there are "too many" migrant workers in all sectors is also plainly incoherent.

The ghost of UKIP sits well in the Labour party and, with Starmer at the helm, it will haunt and poison our politics for the decade to come. The fact is Starmer's Labour is again ceding arguments to the far-right, based on 'concerns' elaborated to the far-right's benefit, not that of working people. As an immigrant who advocates for the rights of migrants, refugees and their right to a decent life like the rest of the country, I can't stay in or support a Labour party which blindly adopts such far-right rhetoric.

Keir Starmer
ANOTHER FUTURE IS POSSIBLE

MY PLEDGES TO YOU

My promise to you is that I will maintain our radical values and work tirelessly to get Labour in to power – so that we can advance the interests of the people our Party was created to serve.
Based on the moral case for socialism, here is where I stand.

1. Economic justice	Increase income tax for the top 5% of earners, reverse the Tories' cuts in corporation tax and clamp down on tax avoidance, particularly of large corporations. No stepping back from our core principles.
2. Social justice	Abolish Universal Credit and end the Tories' cruel sanctions regime. Set a national goal for wellbeing to make health as important as GDP; invest in services that help shift to a preventative approach. Stand up for universal services and defend our NHS. Support the abolition of tuition fees and invest in lifelong learning.
3. Climate justice	Put the Green New Deal at the heart of everything we do. There is no issue more important to our future than the climate emergency. A Clean Air Act to tackle pollution locally. Demand international action on climate rights.
4. Promote peace and human rights	No more illegal wars. Introduce a Prevention of Military Intervention Act and put human rights at the heart of foreign policy. Review all UK arms sales and make us a force for international peace and justice.
5. Common ownership	Public services should be in public hands, not making profits for shareholders. Support common ownership of rail, mail, energy and water; end outsourcing out NHS, local government and justice system.
6. Defend migrants' rights	Full voting rights for EU nationals. Defend free movement as we leave the EU. An immigration system based on compassion and dignity. End indefinite detention and call for the closure of centres such as Yarl's Wood.
7. Strengthen workers' rights and trade unions	Work shoulder to shoulder with trade unions to stand up for working people, tackle insecure work and low pay. Repeal the Trade Union Act. Oppose Tory attacks on the right to take industrial action and the weakening of workplace rights.
8. Radical devolution of power, wealth and opportunity	Push power, wealth and opportunity away from Whitehall. A federal system to devolve powers – including through regional investment banks and control over regional industrial strategy. Abolish the House of Lords – replace it with an elected chamber of regions and nations.
9. Equality	Pull down obstacles that limit opportunities and talent. We are the party of the Equal Pay Act, Sure Start, BAME representation and the abolition of Section 28 – we must build on that for a new decade.
10. Effective opposition to the Tories	Forensic, effective opposition to the Tories in Parliament – linked up to our mass membership and a professional election operation. Never lost sight of the votes 'lent' to the Tories in 2019. Unite our party, promote pluralism and improve our culture. Robust action to eradicate the scourge of antisemitism. Maintain our collective link with the unions.

Promoted by Jenny Chapman on behalf of Keir Starmer, both at Acre House, 11-15 William Road, London, NW1 3ER



Pictured: Keir Starmer's 10 pledges in the 2020 Labour leadership contest.

Starmer is a persistent liar

Without reviewing them line-by-line, as many others have already done, we should be clear that Starmer has broken nearly all measurable pledges made during his campaign to become leader of the opposition.

Starmer sought to present himself to Labour members as 'Corbynism but acceptable' – giving the impression that he would take most of the radical, transformative policies of the previous leadership but sell them to the electorate more effectively than Jeremy Corbyn could. He has since trashed this impression and shown that it was something he invented for convenience during the campaign.

Both Starmer and his supporters argue that many of these radical policies are no longer feasible as the economic situation has changed due to the Covid crisis, but the timeline for this excuse doesn't add up. By the end of the leadership contest in April 2020, the economic consequences of Covid were becoming clear domestically and internationally. Was Starmer economically clueless, bandying those promises without knowing if he'd be able to keep them, or did he lie to members? Neither possibility produces confidence.

This habit of lying about policy extends beyond the leadership contest. GB Energy, for example, has been presented by Starmer as a publicly-owned company built to compete with the private sector to bring prices down. On further examination, this seems duplicitous; it will not actually compete with the private sector but instead collaborate with it. According to Rachel Reeves, the shadow chancellor, Labour will throw £8 billion into green energy projects, but private sector investment will be required on top of that to make it viable.

The investments made by GB Energy will not be majority public-owned; the private sector will *still* have a controlling stake on the most vital material portions of green energy generation. As a result, GB Energy will do nothing to bring down energy prices – those who keep them high today, for profit, will still be in overall control of our energy sector infrastructure and generation.

Labour's pledges on climate change suffer broadly from this sort of lying by omission as well. Starmer and Reeves' [pledge](#)

[to borrow £224 billion](#) to invest in tackling climate change is subject to borrowing guidelines which closely match the Conservatives' own borrowing guidelines. If the economy underperforms or if inflation remains high, the actual figure borrowed and invested will be reduced. This does not inspire confidence or trust in Labour's ability to tackle the greatest problem humankind has ever faced. There is also a total lack of an international dimension to Labour's climate plans, which is crucial to reducing emissions worldwide. *(Edit: As this article was being reviewed for publication, Labour – without even being in office – proved the above by [reducing the amount](#) they are pledging to borrow for the first two to three years in office, for the very reasons suggested above.)*

On the NHS crisis, Starmer's Labour suggests the private healthcare sector has a pool of doctors, nurses and specialists ready to go. This is a fantasy; that pool of recruits doesn't exist for the private sector for the same reason it doesn't for the NHS. That is no accident, it would seem, as Starmer and his shadow health secretary, Wes Streeting, have taken donations from wealthy private healthcare executives. This explains Starmer's sudden change of heart on his earlier principle that healthcare and profit should not mix.

All in all, it's very easy to simply observe reasons to not trust Sir Keir Starmer. He has lied about his person, his intentions, and continues to present policies in a duplicitous fashion. How is this man any better in terms of fostering trust in politics than someone like Boris Johnson, who did very much of the same? How could I, as a Labour member, be honest about my party's policies to people at the doorstep when not even the party leader seems to ever be? The answer, to me, is that I could not.

*Pictured
: Owen
Wright
(left)
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supporte
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Campaign
at a
Dundee
rally
marking
the*



anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine

The Labour left, Ukraine and Soviet-tinted nostalgia glasses

Another reason I left the Labour party was the 'Labour left' itself, which has proven itself thoroughly incapable of introspection or self-criticism, making blunder after blunder as a result.

The greatest example of this is its reaction to the Russian war on Ukraine, which has left me dumbfounded. While Putin, a near-dictator, made a blood-and-soil speech about Ukraine and its supposed non-existence on the eve of his invasion of the country, the Labour left still could not recognise that as fascism. Instead, many elements of the Labour party's left flank backed the Russian line that NATO is as responsible for this war as Russia. As much as I am not in favour of NATO overall, any such claims can only be qualified as bogus and attempted justification for the invasion.

While initially I thought this was a legitimate response to

genuine concern about escalation of the conflict – as I too spent weeks in anxiety about the possible launch and detonation of nuclear weapons – it became impossible, in the face of escalating Russian war crimes and genocidal acts, to view the repetition of Kremlin talking points as defensible. This became a factor in my eventual decision to leave the party.

With the exception of John McDonnell, who now supports arms for Ukraine and backs the [Ukraine Solidarity Campaign](#), the Labour left has yet to learn from these mistakes. To be relevant in the 21st century, the Labour left must clearly move itself away from Cold War-era geopolitical analysis.

Beyond this, however, the left of the Labour party has also yet to realise that the battle within the party has already been lost. The Starmer leadership is doing all it can to avoid having new left-wing MPs in its next, probably quite sizeable, parliamentary cohort. Moves to restore the electoral college for leadership elections may eventually ensure a left-wing upstart like Corbyn can't take part in a Labour leadership election again, let alone win. The right of the Labour party is on a crusade to eliminate or at least fully suppress the left of the party.

Recently, Labour has [actively prevented](#) the incumbent mayor for North of Tyne, left-winger Jamie Driscoll, from running for North East mayor without clear justification. The notion that the Labour leadership are seeking to purge the left of their party from political positions is exemplified here. The ways the left of the Labour party can resist such a move are in practice, non-existent.

Momentum's argument that left-wingers can stay, fight and win internally falls flat when recognising that the real systemic power of the Labour party doesn't lie with its membership but with the upper ranks of its parliamentary party. The size or prevalence of the left-wing membership doesn't matter, as it

can be – and regularly is – completely ignored by the parliamentary cohort and leadership.

The left in Britain needs to undergo a process of intense introspection and re-establishment outside of the Labour party or it could well cease to exist as a political force entirely. That Momentum and others on the left of the Labour party do not acknowledge this necessity shows how naïve they have become about their systemic position, leaving them perpetually aimless and incapable of achieving their overarching political goals, many of which I share.

Conclusion

It took agonising weeks of thought to lead me to the conclusion that the Labour party is no longer the force for good that I thought it was. The only people for whom it is now reliable are those who already have wealth and social and material power. Most of us – no matter the size of our payslip, whether we rely on foodbanks or not, or whether we consider ourselves ‘Labour at heart’ – are not these people. There is no shame in calling Labour out for their abandonment of us.

I hope that this state of affairs one day changes again. Hope is not something often repaid in our politics, however, so the only thing left for me, as well as no doubt many others, was action, and that action was to leave the Labour party. I recommend others who care about the truth and honesty in progressive politics do the same; it may be the only way to show our discontent. And perhaps, something new can be born out of it, with time.

Owen Wright is a former Labour member who ran as the party's candidate in Dundee City East in the 2021 Holyrood elections.

Article and pictures republished from **Heckle**:
<https://heckle.scot/2023/06/starmers-labour-is-not-a-force-for>

[-good/](#)



Online magazine of Republican Socialist Platform (Scotland)



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Hope is shipwrecked: Erdogan's regime wins again

After twenty years in power, *writes Uraz Aydin*, Recep Tayyip Erdogan won again in the second round of the presidential elections on 28 May 2023. Faced with his rival Kemal Kilicdaroglu, who won 47.84 per cent of the vote, Erdogan, whose bloc had also obtained a majority in parliament, was the winner with 52.16 per cent. Which means that the "Reis" should normally reign over an autocratic, fascistic and Islamist regime for another five years.

The reactionary bloc wins the majority in parliament

The bloc formed around Recep Tayyip Erdogan is probably one of the most reactionary coalitions in the country's political history. Already, since 2015, the AKP [*Erdogan's party*] had been in alliance with the far-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). For this election Erdogan included in his bloc the Islamist party Yeniden Refah, led by Fatih Erbakan, son of the historic leader of political Islam in Turkey, Necmettin Erbakan.

Another more Islamist wing of the far right, the Great Union Party (BBP) also forms part of Erdogan's camp. This bloc was also joined by HÜDA-PAR, the legal party of Hezbollah in Turkey, mainly established in the Kurdish region and which in the 1990s had been used as an armed force by the Turkish Gladio against the PKK [*Kurdish Workers Party*] and had committed numerous massacres. The regime will try to use this organization to break the hegemony of the Kurdish political movement, which has maintained itself despite a level of fierce repression since 2015.

During the legislative elections of 14 May, which were held at the same time as the first round of the presidential elections, the pro-Erdogan bloc obtained, with 49.4 per cent of the votes, 323 deputies (out of 600). Although his votes were down compared to the election of 2018 when he obtained 344 deputies, Erdogan still has the majority in parliament which allows him to adopt or prevent bills. The results obtained by the AKP were also down, but the MHP, which was estimated to have fallen to 6-7 per cent, almost regained its 2018 level, reaching 10 per cent. However it should be noted that the bloc came first in almost all the cities of the earthquake zone.

A defeat for the opposition

Opposite this bloc was the Alliance of the Nation, whose main party is the Republican People's Party (CHP), a centre-left party whose origins lie in the foundation of the Republic. The other "big party" in this bloc is Meral Akşener's Good Party (İYİP), which is a far-right split, representing a more secular nationalism than the MHP, but trying to reposition itself towards the centre-right .

Also part of this alliance are two parties whose leaders were previously leaders of the AKP, one led by Ahmet Davutoğlu, former Prime Minister, and the other by Ali Babacan, former Minister of Economy. Finally, the Saadet Partisi (SP), which comes from the historical current of Islamism from which the AKP emerged, also participates in this bloc, as well as another small right-wing party.

Politically, this opposition alliance defends a return to a parliamentary regime (abolished by Erdogan in 2017 following a referendum) and the recovery of the economy through a restored neoliberalism with certain "social" traits. With 35.4 per cent of the vote, the opposition bloc obtained 212 deputies, 23 more seats than in the previous election.

The parties of Babacan and Davutoğlu , as well as the SP, whose candidates were presented under the CHP lists, seem to have contributed 3 per cent to the results of the CHP. These right-wing parties thus obtain 40 seats, while they only brought in 22 more. The eligible places reserved for right-wing candidates in these lists had sparked debate among the rank and file of the CHP.

Nationalist turn of the opposition

after the first round

During the 14 May presidential election, despite all the opposition's predictions, Erdogan won 49.5 per cent of the vote, thus beating the leader of the Alliance of the Nation by 5 points, the latter only receiving 44.8 per cent. Given the importance of the President of the Republic in the autocratic system, Kılıçdaroğlu's victory was decisive for regime change. He led a campaign that was able to embrace large sectors of the population. The fact that he is an Alevi Kurd (a minority stream of Islam seen as a heresy by traditional Sunnism) had generated debate, with many believing that he could not unify the opposition. However, the leader of the CHP led a campaign proudly claiming his adhesion to Alevism and calling for a reconciliation of the population of Turkey in the face of the polarizing policies of Erdogan.

A third candidate, Sinan Ogan, an ultra-nationalist from the ranks of the MHP, won 5.2 per cent. He was the candidate of a small nationalist, anti-migrant and anti-Kurdish bloc, who refused to support Kılıçdaroğlu, in particular because the latter was also supported by the pro-Kurdish party HDP. He thus held a crucial position for the second round.

In order to be able to rally the electorate of Ogan , Kılıçdaroğlu, himself a candidate from a bloc made up of various centre-left, conservative, Islamist and far-right currents, thus operated a nationalist turn.

He argued that, in the context of a victory for Erdogan, 10 million new migrants would arrive in the country, that the cities would be under the control of refugees and the mafia, that young girls would no longer be able to walk around on their own, that violence against women was going to increase (because of the refugees) and that finally Erdogan was going to make concessions in the face of "terrorism" (therefore of the Kurdish movement). He was thus trying to ride the

(massive, among Turks and Kurds) anti-migrant wave by declaring that he was going to send them all back to their own country, but also to reverse Erdogan's main argument during his campaign, that the opposition supposedly supported the "terrorism" of the PKK.

Indeed, the fact that the HDP (pro-Kurdish left) supported Kilicdaroglu, himself Kurd and Alevi, and that it promised to release Selahattin Demirtaş (former HDP leader, imprisoned for seven years) had been Erdogan's main angle of attack against the opposition. After having maintained a more democratic discourse before the first round, Kilicdaroglu ended up criticizing Erdogan himself for having conducted negotiations with the Kurdish movement (in 2009-2014).

Eventually Ogan preferred to express his support for Erdogan, but the most prominent party in the bloc for which Ogan had been a candidate, the Victory Party, whose main political stance was anti-migrant nationalism, declared its support for Kilicdaroglu. On this, the latter signed a protocol with this party, where the anti-migrant position was reaffirmed but which also promised (within the framework of the laws) the continuation of the appointments of administrators in place of HDP mayors in the Kurdish region, who were accused of having links with the PKK (about fifty municipalities are concerned by this). While in the initial programme of the opposition it was a question of new elections for the town halls concerned... Although the HDP protested this decision, it continued to call to vote for Kilicdaroglu, but the percentage of participation in Kurdistan, which was already below Turkey's average in the first round, fell further in the second round. Despite everything, the opposition candidate emerged a winner in all the towns of the Kurdish region.

HDP, TIP and the "Work and Freedom"

Alliance

Another opposition alliance was the one called “Work and Freedom,” made up of the HDP (Democratic People’s Party, left-wing party from the Kurdish movement), the TIP (Workers’ Party of Turkey, in which our comrades of the [Fourth International](#) are active) as well as four other formations of the radical left. For the presidential elections this coalition supported Kılıçdaroğlu. For the presidential elections the HDP participated in the elections under the name of its “replacement party”, against the probability that it would be banned, the Green-Left Party (YSP).

The TIP did not present itself in the cities where the HDP had a large majority (Turkish Kurdistan) and in some where it risked losing deputies to the HDP and the CHP; it submitted slates in 52 out of 81 cities. The fact that the TIP wanted to run within the alliance but with independent slates in some cities is a question that has generated a lot of debate. For the HDP, the TIP should have included its candidates in the lists of the YSP; its opinion was that having two competing lists within the same alliance would divide the votes and lose potential elected representatives.

The TIP had another proposal. The party had been observing an influx of members for several months. It had quadrupled its membership since mid-January, going from 10,000 to 40,000 members in four months, in particular because of its mobilization in solidarity with the city of Hatay (Antioch), seriously affected by the earthquake. This participation, but above all the sympathy that was expressed towards the party and its elected representatives, who for five years had led a very combative policy, came from political and social sectors that were largely different from those who had previously voted for the HDP. An important part came from the left of the CHP, but also from an electorate which previously voted for the right but which (especially through the elected

representatives of the TIP) discovered a combative left, which does not mince its words vis-a-vis the ruling circles and gives a prominent place to workers' rights. It was clear that the TIP could not channel all of these votes to the HDP-YSP lists. So its proposal was that the alliance candidates present themselves in certain cities under the TIP lists (even if it meant putting HDP candidates at the top of the list) and thus having a plurality of candidacy tactics according to the demographic, ethnic and social specificities of the localities. This would have increased the results of the alliance at the national level, but also the number of elected representatives. In the end, the two parties failed to agree on this tactic, mismanaged the controversy (which had negative repercussions on the networks) and the TIP ended up presenting itself with its own lists in fifty cities. Among the TIP lists there were also candidates from two Trotskyist currents, the Workers' Democracy Party (IDP) and the International Workers' Solidarity Association (UID-DER).

The HDP-YSP obtained 8.8 per cent in the legislative elections, 3 per cent less than in the previous ones. It is still too early to make substantial analyses, but it seems that support for Kılıçdaroğlu for the presidential elections was understood as support for the CHP (in the legislative elections) and therefore votes went to this party. On the other hand, the 10 per cent barrier (to enter parliament) was an important source of motivation to vote for this party and allow its representation in parliament (and reduce that of the opposing bloc). The fact that this barrier is currently 7 per cent (a threshold that the HDP should easily exceed, according to estimates) must also have weighed, and part of the left-wing electorate who had previously voted for the HDP returned to vote for the CHP and partly for the TIP. Finally, we know that especially within the Kurdish people, certain more conservative and nationalist sectors are opposed to alliances with the Turkish far left; this must also have had an effect on the results.

The results of the YSP, which are considered a failure by the party, have triggered debates and in particular severe criticism from Selahattin Demirtaş, whose relationship with the leadership had been strained for several years. Having played an important role during the campaign from his cell (through the daily visits of his lawyers and his Twitter account directed from outside according to his instructions), Demirtaş has declared his retirement from “active politics”. The HDP is thus embarking on a process of internal debates which will culminate in its next congress.

In this nightmarish panorama a meagre (but significant) consolation is the result that the TIP obtained. For the first time since 1965, a socialist party defending the cause of the working class has managed to enter parliament with its own votes (and not by being elected under the list of another party). The TIP obtained 1.7 per cent with a million votes, only presenting itself in two-thirds of the territory, therefore probably above 2 per cent in total. It thus gained four deputies, three of whom were already in the previous parliament. The fourth, Can Atalay, who was elected as deputy for Hatay, is a renowned lawyer involved in all the struggles of the country and who has at present been in detention for a year and has been sentenced to 18 years in prison for having been one of the main spokespersons for the Gezi revolt in 2013. Can’s case is being appealed; legally he should be able to be freed to take his place in parliament, but the regime refuses for the moment to release him.

Rebuilding class consciousness

If the conditions for carrying out the campaigns were completely unequal (control of the media by Erdogan, etc.) and many cases of fraud were observed, we must recognize that the regime triumphed despite everything. Neither the economic crisis nor the earthquakes of February, and even less the attacks on democracy have led the conservative and popular

electorate to break with the regime. On the contrary, the discontent of the working classes was expressed within the reactionary bloc, but towards currents even more radical than the AKP.

The results of these elections show once again that to defeat the Erdogan regime the defence of democratic and secular values is not enough. If Erdogan's camp brings together different social classes, so does the opposing bloc. Once again we see that the right wing of the opposition, far from being a solution, further strengthens the regime and the dominant bourgeois, nationalist and Islamist ideology. It is necessary to build another polarization, in order to break the reactionary hegemony, but also that of the opposition bloc. A polarization that would allow the dissociation between the interests of the working class, the oppressed and those of the bosses, whether secular or Islamist. The fight against authoritarianism must be invested with a social, class content. And this goes through the reconstruction of the "subjective factor", of class consciousness, of the capacity for self-organization of the exploited, of women against patriarchal domination, of the unification of local and migrant workers, Turkish, Kurdish, Syrians and Afghans. This is the main challenge facing the radical left, from the HDP to the TIP and other currents of the revolutionary left. Certainly the situation is not easy. We recognize our defeat, but we refuse to bend and give up the fight. Being aware of the fact that freedom and equality will only be the work of the workers themselves, as we like to repeat here, we pour ourselves a tea and get back to work...

1 June 2023

Uraz Aydin is the editor of Yeniyol, the review of the Turkish section of the [Fourth International](#), and one of many academics dismissed for having signed a petition in favour of peace with the Kurdish people, in the context of the state of emergency decreed after the attempted coup in 2016.

‘Tsunami’ of industrial action to hit oil and gas operators as 1400 offshore workers set to strike – from Unite the Union

From [Unite the Union](#):

Dozens of platforms in UKCS set to be brought to a ‘standstill’ with BP, Shell and Total hit

Unite the union announced today (Monday 20 March) that major oil and gas operators in the UK Continental Shelf (UKCS) face a ‘tsunami’ of industrial unrest within weeks as around 1400 offshore workers across five companies demand a better deal on jobs, pay and conditions.

Unite, whose members will take action at companies enjoying record-busting profits, predicts that platforms and offshore installations will be brought to a ‘standstill’ due to the specialised roles its members undertake.

The action will hit major oil and gas operators including BP, CNRI, EnQuest, Harbour, Ithaca, Shell and Total.

Unite general secretary Sharon Graham said: “Oil and gas companies have been given free rein to enjoy massive windfall profits in the North Sea; drilling concessions are

effectively licences to print money.

“1400 offshore workers are now set to take strike action against these employers who are raking it but refusing to give them a fair share of the pie. This will create a tsunami of industrial unrest in the offshore sector.

“Unite will support these members every step of the way in their fight for better jobs, pay and conditions.”

The prospective action includes electrical, production and mechanical technicians in addition to deck crew, scaffolders crane operators, pipefitters, platers, and riggers working for Bilfinger UK Limited, Stork construction, Petrofac Facilities Management, the Wood Group UK Limited and Sparrows Offshore Services.

John Boland, Unite industrial officer, added: “Unite has received unprecedented support in favour of industrial action in the UK Continental Shelf. It is the biggest mandate we have received in a generation in the offshore sector. There is no doubt that this is directly linked to oil and gas companies reaping record profits while the workforce gets scraps from the table.

“Unite’s members are angry at the corporate greed being shown by offshore operators and contractors. Now these major global companies are set to face the consequences as dozens of offshore platforms will be brought to a standstill in a matter of weeks.”

Details of the disputes

Around 700 offshore workers at Bilfinger UK Limited are set to down tools after Unite members voted in favour of taking industrial action as part of a pay dispute. Bilfinger workers are demanding an increase above the base rate of pay set in the Energy Services Agreement (ESA) for 2022.

Meanwhile, 350 Stork construction workers are set to take strike action after Unite members also supported industrial action in a dispute over working rotas and rates of pay.

Unite members employed by Petrofac Facilities Management Limited on the FPF1 platform also voted in favour of strike action. Around 50 workers are involved in the dispute over holiday entitlements. Offshore workers can be asked to work at any time for no additional payment. The operator, Ithaca Energy, has a 'clawback' policy of 14 days, double the industry norm of 7 days.

Unite members employed by the Wood Group UK Limited on TAQA platforms similarly voted to take strike action. Around 80 members are involved in the dispute which is focused on a 10 per cent cut made to salaries in 2015 worth around £7,000 a year.

The mandates for industrial action follow the recent announcement by Unite that around 200 Sparrows Offshore Services workers will take strike action across more than 20 oil and gas platforms in disputes over pay. Strike action is set to hit various platforms from 29 March and until 7 June in a series of 24, 48 and 72-hour stoppages. This action will hit a number of major operators including BP, Shell, Apache and Harbour Energy.

A further two industrial action ballots are due this week at Petrofac BP involving around 80 workers (21 March), and at Worley Services UK Limited on Harbour Energy platforms involving around 50 workers (24 March) in disputes over pay. The pending ballot results could bring the final total to around 1500 offshore workers taking industrial action.

Unite [recently blasted](#) the UK Government's inaction on taxing oil firms as BP posted the biggest profits in its history as it doubled to £23 billion in 2022. BP's bonanza profits come after Shell reports earnings of £32 billion, bringing the

combined total profits of the top two energy companies in Britain to a record £55 billion.

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

Ballot results in full

- 1. Bilfinger – Yes to strike action – 97%*
- 2. Stork – Yes to strike action – 98%*
- 3. Petrofac Facilities Management Limited – Yes to strike action – 100%*
- 4. Wood Group UK Limited – Yes to strike action – 93%*

Republished

from:

<https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2023/march/tsunami-of-industrial-action-to-hit-oil-and-gas-operators-as-1400-offshore-workers-set-to-strike/>

The political economy of the cost of living crisis in the UK: What is to be done?

Özlem Onaran writes on the UK cost of living crisis.

Soaring prices of energy, food, other essentials and rent in 2022, caused by multiple supply chain disruptions after Brexit and the pandemic, followed by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, brought an intensive cost of living crisis, exacerbated by inequalities in class,

race, gender, as well as the care and ecological crises.

While the squeeze in wages is not new, the current scale of cost of living crisis is the deepest in a generation. The Bank of England expects inflation to come down to 3.9% by the fourth quarter of 2023, but the cost of living crisis will continue for many working class households.

Inflation (CPI) in January 2023 fell to 10.1% from its peak of 11.1% in October 2022. Core inflation (excluding food, energy, alcohol, and tobacco prices) declined to 5.8% as of January 2023. However, inflation coming gradually down does not mean prices are falling; they are merely increasing at a slower pace and they will remain high, deepening the cost of living crisis for the many, whose nominal wages have not been increasing at the same pace as inflation. Meanwhile, the inflation in the prices of food and housing and household services – including water and energy bills and rent – are still substantially higher at 16.8% and 26.7%, respectively. Consequently, the inflation experienced by the poorest 10% of households is 11.7% as opposed to 8.8% for the richest 10% ([Resolution Foundation, 2023](#)).

In the UK inflation as of January 2023 is higher than that in the US (6.4%) and the euro-zone (8.5%) and coming down at a slower pace. The UK is forecast to have a poorer performance than the rest of the G7 with a recession in 2023 and at the end of 2022 it is the only G7 economy which has still not returned back to pre-pandemic levels of economic activity.

Particular vulnerabilities due to years of austerity implemented by the 2010-15 Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government, historically low investment in both physical and social infrastructure, a highly financialized economy, high debt levels of households and small businesses and Brexit hurting both investment and international trade with the EU – the most important trade partner – caught the country unprepared to deal with the pandemic and the cost of

living crisis. Yet, fiscal and monetary policy responses are still centred around austerity and increasing interest rates to fight inflation, with repeated warnings against wage-price spirals by government ministers and the Bank of England governor alike.

A historical context of rising inequality

The squeeze in wages is not new. The cost of living crisis of 2022 comes on top of decades of fall in the share of wages in national income due to the deterioration in the bargaining power of workers as a result in changes in trade union legislation, labour market deregulation, structural change, neoliberal globalisation, and financialization, along with historically undervalued wages of key workers in the care sector and public services.

The wage share reached its peak in 1975 at 69.5%. The years of austerity after the Great Recession, followed by the pandemic and now the cost of living crisis brought it down to 63.7% by 2022 -about 6% lower than its peak ([AMECO](#)). Meanwhile, the rising top 1% share in income since 1980 grew from 6.8% to 12.7% as of 2021 (World Inequality Database): the fall in the wage share of the bottom 99% is even more dramatic.

Wealth inequality has also been increasing. During the pandemic, the wealth of UK billionaires grew by 22%, and the share of top 1% in net household wealth increased further to 21.3% in 2021 from 21.1 in 2019 ([World Inequality Database](#)).

The fall in union density and collective bargaining coverage are the most remarkable factors explaining the decline in the wage share and the rise in wealth inequality, and the effects of other factors such as globalisation has to be interpreted in that context. Union density fell from 52.2% at its peak in 1980 to 23.1% as of 2021. The fall in collective bargaining coverage is even more dramatical from 85.0% at its peak in 1975 to 26.0% as of 2021.

Since the Great Recession, real wage rates have been falling. The years of austerity in its aftermath deepened the squeeze in wages and the recovery since 2014 has been slow and incomplete, with real wages still lower than their 2007 level in 2019, and the cost of living crisis reversing any improvements since 2014. As of 2022 compared to 2007, real wages in construction and manufacturing are 9.9% and 3.7% lower, respectively; in the public sector wages are 5.4% lower in real terms compared to 2010. The only sector where real wages are still substantially higher in December 2022 compared to 2007 is finance and business services, with a real increase of 5.9%.

The effects of the crisis and real pay cuts are also gendered. Women are at the frontline of the cost of living crisis, doing still more than 60% of domestic unpaid care work , including budgeting, shopping, cooking, caring, providing for the children, elderly and the household, sewing and mending. These activities increase during cost of living crises to compensate for the loss in real income of households, and this is not due to their own choosing; it is not a hobby but a stressful daily survival struggle when women need to make difficult choices between eating and heating.

Women also constitute a larger proportion of the most vulnerable on the lower end of the wage scale and those with precarious contracts. They make up the majority of workers in the public sector, such as health, social care, education and childcare, who have suffered from pay freezes and dismal increases since 2010. This situation has changed little after the pandemic, despite their being clapped as key workers by policymakers.

Households headed by women and single mothers are more likely to struggle with debt and soaring utility bills. Women also carried the brunt of the rise in the increased care needs after the pandemic with the rise in long-term illness against the backdrop of overstretched healthcare and social care

services, due to years of cuts in the National Health Service and social care. The result was that many women had to leave paid work against their will.

Against the background of these facts, it is difficult to see evidence for the Bank of England governor's warnings of the risk of a wage-price spiral. The big difference to the 1970s is the fall in the bargaining power of labour, as indicated by the fall in trade union density and collective bargaining coverage as well as labour market deregulation that brought a rise in zero-hours contracts and dodgy self-employment.

It is yet to be seen whether the biggest strike wave of the past three decades will be able to stop the real cuts in wages. Nearly 2.5 million working days were lost to industrial action in 2022. Two million of these days of strikes were in the private sector – the highest in three decades. Taking the public and private sector strikes together, the record in 2022 is still much lower than the historical highs of late 1970s, but the severity of the cost of living crisis and the discontent among public sector workers led to 2023 starting with a historical escalation of public sector strikes in rail, education, and civil service.

Causes of the current waves of inflation

The first wave of inflation in 2021-22 was due to the increase in critical imported input costs due to the supply chain disruptions after the pandemic and later due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Brexit added further dimensions to the supply chain disruptions in the UK. Apart from these transitional aspects, longer term problems related to climate change disasters inflated food prices too. All these factors led to soaring prices of energy, fertilizer, animal feed, food, some industrial metals (nickel, copper), neon gas (input for semiconductors). The immediate effects were worsened by commodity price speculation.

Against these exceptional and transitional factors, mainstream economists still try to point at expansionary fiscal and monetary policies during the pandemic. To date there has been little evidence of a wage-price spiral in the UK and policymakers so far have paid very little attention to firms' price setting behaviour, which has driven a second wave of inflation due to increasing profit margins in the UK, as well as the US and the EU. Firms have not only passed on the rising costs of inputs to their output prices but have increased their mark-up rates.

In the UK, some companies increased their profit margins by up to about 60% points in the fourth quarter of 2021 or first quarter of 2022 compared to the 2017-19 average ([Jung and Hayes 2022](#)). Overall, about half of the companies could either preserve or increase their profit margins during 2021-2022's first quarter. This suggests they increase wages without causing higher inflation if profit margins decrease in some industries or firms.

There is a striking variation across firms in the UK with about half experiencing a decline in their profit margins. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are not able to pass high input or wage or borrowing costs to their customers who are themselves cutting back non-essential spending as their real incomes fall. Company insolvencies and the number of listed companies issuing profit warnings have been increasing since the third quarter of 2022.

The fiscal and monetary policy response in the UK

The monetary policy response by the Bank of England, following the conventional wisdom of mainstream central banking, failed to address the root causes of inflation, which was driven by increasing imported input costs and mark-ups rather than demand or a wage-price spiral. On the contrary, focusing

narrowly on the wage-inflation expectation spiral, in an interview in February 2022, its governor Andrew Bailey said that while it would be “painful” for workers to accept that prices would rise faster than their wages, some “moderation of wage rises” was needed to prevent inflation becoming entrenched. He continued to warn of apocalyptic prices and implied that workers must pay for the crisis by moderating their wage demands.

According to its own projections, the current actions of the Bank – relying on increasing interest rates to control inflation – is expected to lead to a recession of -0.5% in 2023 and -0.25% in 2024 and growth is expected to remain well below pre-pandemic rates.

The political economy of this could not be clearer, particularly after the long squeeze in wages since the Great Recession. Currently, the profit share of the employers and the wealth of the top 1% are increasing, while workers’ share in national income is being squeezed by the spike in the cost of food, utility bills and rent. The current policies of the Bank of England of increasing the interest rate does not tackle the rise in imported input costs or rise in mark-ups at the root of today’s inflation and pretends that it is demand-driven. A recession is seen as an unavoidable outcome to make sure that the bargaining power of labour remains muted and the wage-price spiral does not escalate. This ultimately means that workers will pay for this crisis in the form of real wage cuts.

In this spirit, the Bank puts a lot of emphasis in its monetary policy reports on the tightness of the labour market, low unemployment, high economic inactivity and worker shortages in justifying its rate-setting decisions after ten successive increases in the interest rate within 18 months until February 2023, bringing it to 4%. While the unemployment rate in the last quarter of 2022 at 3.7% is still lower than pre-pandemic levels, it has started to increase. Crucially,

total hours worked have decreased compared with the previous three-month period and remain below pre-pandemic levels.

The economic inactivity rate of 21.4% is still higher than before the pandemic, mainly due to health conditions, unpaid care responsibilities particularly among women, or unacceptable working conditions: the Great Resignation. But recently economic inactivity has started to decrease, putting pressure on unemployment.

This rather narrow mainstream analysis misses the broader range of policy tools beyond interest rates that could address the root cause of economic inactivity and labour shortages. The latter would require investing in the care economy – in both health and social care as well as childcare- and a radical reversal of the new migration policies in the post-Brexit UK. Some migrant workers from the EU returned home during the lockdowns and have never returned, which adds to labour shortages -an outcome partly related to the migration policies after Brexit.

In September 2022, the new Conservative government announced a new revised budget. The main changes included an increase in planned borrowing due to regressive tax cuts for high-income groups, informed by supply side and trickle-down economics.

Markets' reaction to the mini-budget was clear that this will not stimulate the economy, and a blind trust in simplistic low tax supply-side economics will not solve stagflation or long-standing problems in the UK.

This shift in fiscal policy stance coincided with the opposite stance in monetary policy, teaching a perfect lesson on the consequences of a lack of coordination between monetary and fiscal policy. The September 2022 "mini-budget" led to an increase in government borrowing, coinciding with an announcement of quantitative tightening (QT) by the Bank of England. The day before the mini-budget, the Bank committed to

actively selling off government debt by shrinking its quantitative easing gilt portfolio by £80bn over the next year, including, in contrast to other central banks, outright sales of bonds before they matured. This meant both the Bank and the government were selling huge quantities of government debt in the markets. The detrimental lack of coordination between fiscal and monetary policy institutions triggered a financial crisis in parts of the pensions sector, which no policymaker had foreseen.

Eventually, the Bank had to pause QT and buy large quantities of gilts to prevent a financial crisis in the pension funds. The new government's "mini-budget" was abandoned in three weeks, and a third party leader and Prime Minister was appointed by the Conservative Party.

The "mini-budget" is now replaced by a return to austerity policies by the Conservative government. Austerity, including real cuts to public sector wages of nurses, teachers, and civil servants, and a reduction in public debt/GDP are said to be essential to prevent inflation and to plug a "fiscal hole."

This second age of austerity, following the big wave of cuts by the 2010-15 Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government following the Great Recession, will not only be detrimental in a country with already weak social and physical infrastructure. It will be self-defeating on its own terms, as it will lead to further negative effects on national income, thereby leading to a fall in tax revenues, despite some increase in the tax rates. Even the ultimate impact on public debt sustainability is ambiguous.

The new Conservative government has drawn the wrong lessons from the collapse of the previous Conservative Prime Minister Truss's "mini budget". The Financial Times reports that even asset managers say that austerity isn't going to solve many of the UK's problems.

The resistance to increases in public sector pay in health, education, and the civil service after decades of below-inflation pay rises, along with the discourse that the best way to fight the cost of living crisis is to halve inflation, demonstrates the class bias in these policies. Nurses', teachers,' or civil servants' pay rises would not directly feed into a wage-price spiral, as they do not lead to a rise in the input costs of private companies.

In fact, insisting on further real pay cuts in the public sector is a political decision based on the government's class position on the distribution of income. One note about the hypocrisy of this position is also relevant here: public sector workers have suffered more than a decade-long real pay loss following the austerity wave during the 2010-15 Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition government. Most of them worked under very difficult and risky conditions during the pandemic and were praised as the "key workers" by policymakers and the public alike.

Increases in interest rates, cuts in public spending and the recession will deepen the crisis for indebted working class households as well as indebted firms at the bottom of the distribution of profit margins. The crisis for indebted households and firms is yet to unravel even when inflation starts to decline in the second half of 2023. The use of interest rates as the tool to fight a surge in inflation fuelled by imported input costs turns a transitional problem into permanent distributional scars for indebted households and companies.

The increase in interest rates has led to higher mortgage and other debt payments by households, who have already been struggling to make ends meet due to real wage cuts and rising food prices and utility bills. More than 750,000 households are at risk of defaulting on their mortgage payments in the next two years according to the Financial Conduct Authority, because their mortgage costs will be more than 30% of their

income. About 200,000 households had already fallen behind on their home loans by mid-2022.

The increase in the interest rates, fall in mortgages and slowdown in activity is feeding a fall in house prices. Mortgage approvals have fallen to their lowest level since January 2009. The Office of Budget Responsibility (2022) forecast that house prices will fall by 9% between January 2023 and the third quarter of 2024. While a correction in house prices might be welcome, this happening in a recessionary climate rather than due to a rise in housing investment, is expected to lead a further deterioration in business as well as consumer expectations and investment. There is also an increase in sales by buy-to-let landlords who cannot cover mortgage payments, which then intensifies the crisis in the rental market.

For companies, on top of supply chain pressures, rising input costs, high energy prices and rents, higher interest rates increase the pressure, particularly on already indebted companies. The total number of company insolvencies in 2022 reached 22,123, the highest since 2009 and a 57.4% increase compared to 2021. Companies in construction, retail and hospitality sectors have seen higher numbers of insolvencies. There are concerns that more companies will fail when the government's energy support package is scaled back in April 2023. Personal insolvencies also reached the highest numbers for three years in 2022.

What are the economic policy alternatives?

In the short-run, two sets of urgent measures are required:

i) First, we need policies to urgently reverse the squeeze on wages and low incomes. The policy tools to achieve this include increasing the minimum wage to £15 per hour in the UK; increasing public sector pay above inflation; tying benefits

to the increase in inflation; and rebuilding the trade unions' power for collective bargaining agreements to ensure adequate pay rise in the whole economy. Mindful of the risk that these measures may increase company insolvencies, in particular at the bottom of the distribution of SMEs, a reactivation of fiscal support for short-time work to avoid transitional shocks is essential.

ii) Second, the extreme nature of the cost of living crisis requires price controls, in particular on energy prices, rents and essential food items. The New Economics Foundation (2022) proposed a package for guaranteeing basic energy needs for households, while avoiding subsidising fossil fuel consumption above a certain threshold. In the international context, France acted early in November-December 2021, directly limiting electricity price increases to 4%, and froze domestic gas prices, with energy subsidies to businesses and households. It enjoyed the lowest inflation in the eurozone with 7.0% as of January 2023. The measures, which included discounts at the pump and cuts to electricity taxes, cost the government just over €34bn in 2022.

Another major component of essential spending for low-income households which increased substantially is rent. The Conservative Government in the UK limited the increase in the social (housing) rents to 7% in November 2022 for the next year, but a genuine policy of rent controls require controls in the private housing market too. Both in the context of energy prices and rents, these policies need to be accompanied by a ban on disconnections or compulsory instalment of pre-paid meters for utilities and a ban on evictions. The latter was implemented during the pandemic.

A third category where price controls could help is essential food items. France with a competitive supermarket sector had lower food inflation because of limits on the rise in profit margins in the retail sector. In the UK where competition has not sufficed to limit food price inflation, some coordination

to curb the rise in mark-up rates or subsidies could go a long way to avoiding the worst poverty effects of the cost of living crisis.

Overall, anti-trust scrutiny and windfall taxes targeting the increase in mark-up rates as well as banning speculation in commodity markets are other short-run policy tools to tackle the rise in inflation.

In the medium run (1-5 years during the first term of a new government), the multiple crises require a paradigm shift towards a needs-based approach to macroeconomic policy, addressing the deficits in the care and green economy and avoiding competition between urgent social and ecological requirements.

Addressing the cost of living and energy crises, as well as reversing the ecological crisis requires a massive and urgent mobilization of substantial amounts of public investment in the green economy, that is, renewable energy, public transport, housing, energy efficiency, sustainable organic plant-based agriculture, forestry, recycling, and repair.

The long-standing deficits in the care economy are no less urgent, and are now behind the labour shortages, and public provision of high quality universal free basic services in social care, health, childcare, and education is key to tackling both the care deficit and inequalities by creating decent care jobs while providing much-needed services. The scale and the urgency of the spending needs to address both deficits in the green and care economy; and the public good character of these services requires a large public spending programme, which cannot be substituted by private investment based on the profit motive. There has never been a better moment to make the case for creating permanent public sector jobs with decent wages to build a caring and sustainable society based on a green, purple, red new deal.

How to fund a green, purple, red new deal?

The social and ecological needs, and the urgency of an effective response to the multiple crises of inequalities, care and climate change requires the use of all tools of policy.

Public spending even without any increases in tax rates, is partially self-financing, thanks to the strong multiplier effects. However, an increase in economic activity and thereby tax revenues without a change in tax rates will finance only half of the public spending needed in the UK.

Public borrowing to fund the deficit can be justified given the effects on productivity and sustainability, or the expected damage to the ecology, society, and economy, if investment needs are not delivered on time.

Monetary policy should accommodate fiscal policy for public investment in the care and the green economy. The Bank of England's mandate should include a dual target of full/high employment and an inflation target high enough to be consistent with this. There is a major problem with the current mandate of the Bank targeting narrowly the inflation rate at a level as low as possible, which only helps the rentier who make profits by speculation and lending.

National and regional investment banks working in cooperation with the government and central bank are also crucial for funding largescale public infrastructure projects.

However, eventually the large scale of spending needs requires also an increase in the degree of progressivity of taxation of both income and wealth. A progressive scheme of wealth taxation, aiming especially at the top 1% of the wealthiest households, rather than a limited one-off windfall tax targeting only one sector or increasing tax rates merely on

dividends and capital gains, is particularly important after the Great Recession, QE and the pandemic which has increased wealth inequality.

Wealth is more unequally distributed than income in aggregate and in terms of gender gaps. Progressive taxation of wealth is essential to prevent excessive wealth concentration. Wealth taxation also helps to control wealth-demand-driven inflation. Progressive wealth taxes and the consequent decline in wealth inequality are good for private investment, taming speculation, financialisation, market concentration and barriers to entry.

A progressive scheme starting with a high threshold targeting the top 1% wealthiest households, has the advantage that only a small number of households would be valued and is easier to monitor.

The coordination of fiscal and monetary policies with labour market policies eases the funding pressures as higher wages lead to higher tax revenues. Strong, well-coordinated trade unions, equal pay legislation, increased job security, permanent contracts, higher minimum wages, and improved and equitable parental leave are good for an equality-led sustainable development. Labour market regulation for a shorter working week can also promote a rise in gender equality in paid and unpaid work and income, while facilitating a green transition and higher productivity.

At this crucial juncture of food, energy and ecological crises, international policy coordination is vital, especially for the emerging economies. Firstly, the effects of public spending are stronger and negative effects on the current account balance are moderated, if policies are implemented simultaneously in all the countries. Secondly, cancellation or restructuring of parts of the debt of low and middle income countries needs to be part of the international agenda. Thirdly, transfer of technology to support mass not-for-profit

global production of key public goods, from vaccines and medication to solar panels, turbines, or batteries for storing renewable energy, is the only way to tackle global crises such as the pandemic or climate change.

Finally, these multiple crisis open a space to rethink not just the role of fiscal policy but also of public ownership in the care and green economy and finance, with national coordination in combination with collective, municipal, and cooperative ownership and democratic participatory planned decision making.

Özlem Onaran *Is Professor of Economics, Co-Director of Institute of Political Economy, Governance, Finance and Accountability and Associate Head of the School of Accounting, Finance & Economics – Research and Knowledge Exchange at the University of Greenwich. This article is an edited version of [a working paper published by the University of Massachusetts Political Economy Research Institute](#).*

Image: Liz Truss and Kwasi Kwarteng, authors of the “mini-budget” in September 2023, c/o



Article originally published by Labour Hub, 7 March 2023
<https://labourhub.org.uk/2023/03/07/the-political-economy-of-the-cost-of-living-crisis-in-the-uk-what-is-to-be-done/> Also republished at [International Viewpoint](#) and [Anti Capitalist Resistance](#)

French Pensions: “Victory is possible against Macron, his reform and his 49.3!”

Statement by the [New Anticapitalist Party \(Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste NPA\)](#) of France on Macron’s pension reforms.

The use of the 49.3 by the government is a democratic scandal. [1] It shows the weakness of the government’s social base and of its authoritarian approach. Under the pressure of the movement, despite an agreement with the LR (Republicans: mainstream conservatives) leadership, their members of parliament did not dare vote for the reform. It reinforces the illegitimacy of the government and pushes the mainstream left and union leaderships with positions in the institutions to continue the mobilisation, notably the CFDT. [2] It shows the particularly undemocratic character of the institutions of the Fifth Republic, which allow a minority government to pass a reform. In a way, what has happened is good news for the movement.



The actions that took place throughout the country on Thursday night testify to the anger at the democratic scandal, the repression that has been unleashed, not only against the

demonstrations but also against specifically targeted union activists, such as those in the energy sector, and the hardening of the government's position. Macron and his reform have little support, and the first post-49.3 opinion poll indicates the massive rejection of his draconian action and the depth of the protest, which is not weakening. With the continuation of the mobilisation, it is likely that the government will step up the repression. This will require solidarity and a united response equal to the challenge.

However, nothing is won. The motions of censure will be rejected, and the balance of forces remains uncertain. The movement must take a step forward to win; we can no longer be satisfied with renewable, rolling strikes. The 23rd of March date set for the next national mobilisation announced by the inter-union coordination is too far away. [3] We have to use it to build strikes where there are none by building on the strength of the mobilised sectors. But we need to accelerate the pace so as not to demoralise people and not to leave the most advanced sections of the labour movement isolated.

For us, a victory depends on the combination of different factors:

- Strengthening the rolling strikes, in particular in the public services and state enterprises. In the private sector, it is necessary to broaden the mobilisation to slow down production and put pressure on the employers and their political representatives. Renewable strikes have greatly contributed to destabilising the government. We have to do everything to enlarge them; to make this struggle a daily mobilisation, the movement has to be in the news every day.

What we are aiming for is a general strike.

- Continuing the mass demonstrations which show the depth of the movement and its legitimacy. We call for mobilisations everywhere that directly target political power, as the Yellow Vest movement did. The movement must aim to blockade the country. We need a national demonstration in Paris to politically and massively challenge Macron's reforms and government.
- Responding to the ongoing democratic scandal The government and Macron must go, but we must prevent the far right from ambushing us and gaining the main benefit. It is a question of imposing a policy that starts with the needs of workers, youth, and pensioners and relies on their mobilisations to impose it. We need a government that is as faithful to the interests of workers as Macron's is to those of the employers. It is the responsibility of all the organisations of the trade union, political, and social movements on the left to discuss all these points. We will work to help set up such meetings as soon as possible.

Beyond that, and more than ever, a political alternative around a project of breaking with capitalist policies is necessary—a rupture for an ecosocialist society.

A victory is possible against Macron and his reforms. We must give ourselves all the means necessary to achieve it.

NPA Executive Committee

16 March 2023

Montreuil

FOOTNOTES

[1] Paragraph 3 of Article 49 of the French constitution allows the prime minister, “after deliberation by the Council of Ministers,” to force a bill through the Assemblée Nationale

with no vote. The only alternative to prevent the bill from passing is then to overthrow the government. When the prime minister triggers this procedure, MPs have the option of tabling a motion of no confidence within 24 hours. Le Monde.

[2] The CFDT is the largest French trade union confederation by number of members (875,000) but historically less radical than the CP-dominated CGT to which it comes second in voting results for representative bodies.

[3] The inter-union coordination is composed of eight trade-union confederations/federations (CGT, CFDT, FO, CFTC, CFE-CGC, UNSA, Solidaires and FSU) and four youth organisations l'Union nationale des étudiants de France (Unef), l'Union nationale lycéenne (UNL), le Syndicat général des lycéens (SGL), and the Fédération indépendante et démocratique lycéenne (FIDL).

Reprinted from International Viewpoint:
<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article8026>

Original article (in French):
<https://nouveauanticaliste.org/actualite/politique/un-e-victoire-est-possible-contre-macron-sa-reforme-et-son-493-0>

Main photo credit: Photothèque Rouge /Martin Noda/Hans Lucas

Our Power: Offshore workers demands for a just energy

transition

An important new report from [Friends of the Earth Scotland](#).

Over the past two years, we've come together with offshore workers to build demands for a just energy transition. These workers developed 10 demands covering training and skills, pay, job creation, investment and public ownership.

We surveyed over 1000 additional offshore workers and over 90% agreed with these demands. This plan is comprehensive in scope, transformative in scale and deliverable now.

Below you will find a series of resources setting out the demands and the paths we can take to turn them into reality.

We need a rapid transition away from oil and gas that protects workers, communities and the climate. But the government has no plan to phase out oil and gas production in the North Sea.

Oil and gas workers are ready to lead a just transition away from oil and gas, but they are caught in a trap of exploitation and fear created by oil and gas companies. Working conditions are plummeting, just as profits, prices and temperatures are soaring.

The UK and Scottish Governments must listen to workers to make this transition work for all of us. These demands lay out a comprehensive plan, which includes:

Removing barriers that make it harder for oil and gas workers to move into the renewable industry.

Ensuring safety, job security and fair pay across the energy industry.

Sharing the benefits of our energy system fairly, with public investment in energy companies and communities.

Workers have told us what they need for a just transition,

now we need to work with them to make it happen.

Hear from workers



Our Power: Offshore workers' demands for a just energy transition

The [‘Our Power’ report](#) is a blueprint for a just transition in the UK North Sea.

Reproduced from [Friends of the Earth Scotland](#) with thanks to [Red Green Labour](#).

Scottish Government Energy Strategy – what's wrong with it and what we need to change

The public consultation on the Scottish Government's [Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan](#) ends on **Tuesday 9 May 2023**, writes *Iain Bruce*.

That means responding to it will be one of the first big tasks for the new leader of the SNP and Scotland's new First Minister.

The deeply disappointing [consultation document](#) was published on 10 January after a year or more's delay. It fails to build on the recent positive steps taken by Nicola Sturgeon towards opposing any more oil and gas extraction from the North Sea – after she came out against Shell's proposed Cambo oilfield following the mass protests in Glasgow at COP26 in November 2021.

The [consultation document](#) reiterates, at great length, the SNP Government's obsession with false 'techno-fixes' to the climate crisis, in particular hydrogen and carbon capture and storage. It ignores the pressure from environmental organisations and some offshore oil workers and their unions, for a just transition to renewable energy that is led by the communities and workers most affected. And it is partly at odds with the positive steps taken by Sturgeon herself and the outgoing SNP administration, through their [initiatives on 'Loss and Damage'](#), to recognise that a just transition must be just for the global south too.

In the coming weeks we need to build maximum pressure on the government to change the most negative aspects of this draft strategy.

The interview below with Mary Church of [Friends of the Earth Scotland](#), for the [Rising Clyde Climate Justice show on Independence Live](#), gives a lot of [important context and background](#) for such a campaign.

However, it is also important, for the climate justice movement in Scotland and for the radical forces in the independence movement, to understand and challenge the deeper contradiction that underpins this energy strategy, as it does almost all the Scottish government's economic policy. This is its attempt to combine progressive, humane and necessary steps on a number of environmental and social issues, with an inability or refusal to question the underlying systemic factors which hinder such action, and makes it necessary in the first place – in other words its unwillingness to challenge the priorities of the free market.

Link to Video:

Also on Facebook:

[Rising Clyde Episode 10: Scotland's Energy Strategy- leading the way or sitting on the fence? | We talk to Mary Church of Friends of the Earth Scotland, about the Scottish government's new Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan – where it needs to... | By Independence Live | Facebook](#)

7 March, 2023 (YouTube link added 10 March 2023)

International Women's Day – “Women's Rights, Human Rights”

Editorial for International Women's Day from USA magazine [Against the Current](#), journal of [Solidarity US](#), “a socialist, feminist, anti-racist organization”

Women's Rights, Human Rights

Afghanistan, Iran, Poland, El Salvador and Nicaragua. Texas, Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi...

These are among the countries and states where ruling authorities take it upon themselves – in a variety of ways along a broad repressive spectrum – to curtail, suppress or outright nullify women's rights if not their basic personhood. The ways and means of these attacks of course vary widely.

They range from legal and official discrimination, to gendered violence perpetrated with impunity, to rape as a weapon as in Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the Ethiopian state's war in Tigray, and more. What's common to each and every case is that degrading women's rights – along with those of queer and non-binary people – is central to reactionary forces' assaults on all human rights.

As for the United States itself, where the battles over abortion and gender are inextricably part of the swirling unresolved political crisis and potential Constitutional meltdown, we'll also look briefly here at some too little-

covered facts of how U.S. policies impact the rights and lives of women outside this country's borders.

In Iran, the regime is in open warfare against the population. The response to the murder of Mahsa (Jina) Amini has become an uprising against the entire apparatus of the "Islamic Republic." Dictating what women choose to wear is basic to the drive for complete social control of what everyone, especially youth, are allowed to do or dream.

"Women. Life. Freedom!" is a women-led revolution that now engages the struggles of Iran's youth, Kurdish people and strategic sectors of the working class.

Will it triumph? Right now there's no way to know. What we can say, even though the murderous brutality of the Iranian theocracy and Revolutionary Guards knows no limits, is that Iran will not return to society's former half-voluntary compliance with the dictatorship.

In Afghanistan, the most vicious elements of the Taliban – who exercise decisive veto power over the regime – seek to nullify the very personhood of women. Deprived of access to university and even high school education, barred from employment in public service or by international aid organizations, they are left dependent or destitute. Among the results this winter are threatened deaths by starvation or freezing of hundreds of thousands of Afghans whom assistance can no longer reach.

This heartbreak and disaster are fairly well-covered in mainstream media. What's too easily forgotten, so all the more important to recall here, is that "liberation" of Afghan women served as a pretext for the U.S. and allied invasion following the 9/11 2001 attacks – after imperialist

interventions and rivalries from the 1980s on had already brought Afghanistan to the edge of catastrophe.

The delusion of liberating women – or anyone else – in Afghanistan from above and from outside played no small part in the development of the present tragedy.

In Ukraine, not only are rape as well as mass murders of civilians committed by Russian invading forces. Vladimir Putin himself calls Moscow's war a defence of "traditional values" against such perversions as queer rights and the mythical "dozens of genders" supposedly recognised in the West. Putin's ultra-reactionary ravings are the natural accompaniment to the denial of Ukraine's right to exist, with the genocidal implications of that doctrine. The invaders' rape and massacre perpetrated against the people of Ukraine feed back into the savage escalation of the already intense repression of LGBT people within Russia.

Closer to Home

If the examples of Iran, Afghanistan and Russian atrocities in Ukraine are the most immediately visible cases of the extinction of women's rights and the consequences, there are plenty of instances closer to our own situation. The point is not to identify the "worst" case – as such comparisons are essentially meaningless – but to examine some common features.

Take Poland, in the heart of Europe: Extreme restrictions on abortion access have been imposed by the right wing "Law and Justice" party in alliance with the Catholic church. These measures are accompanied – not coincidentally – by severe weakening of the power of the judiciary to limit anti-democratic legislative extremism. That's also occurred in Hungary's self-declared "illiberal democracy" and is now well underway in the Israeli state.

Two-thirds of Polish citizens support abortion rights – very similar to the percentage in the United States. Women-led protests have taken to the streets in large numbers in Warsaw and other cities and towns, but so far failed to overturn the government's measures.

The full toll in women's deaths and permanent injuries remains unknown. Since 2021 at least two women in publicised cases, Anieszka T. and Izabela Sajbor, died after abortion care was denied even though the fetuses were either unviable or already dead.

In Ireland, popular revulsion over the 2012 death of Savita Halappanavar, who was denied a medically essential abortion until it was too late, led to striking the anti-abortion provision from the country's Constitution.

In Israel, tens of thousands are taking to the streets weekly against the ultra-racist governing coalition's move to strip the powers of the Supreme Court. Women's and queer rights are relatively well-entrenched in Israel – for Jewish citizens – and less likely to be immediately on the chopping block.

The first casualties in this case are the already-vanishing shreds of court protection for Palestinians in the occupied territories, and the (limited) civil rights of Arab citizens including their parties' ability to run in Israeli elections (which the Supreme Court has reinstated by overruling bans imposed by parliamentary decrees). There are elements in the "religious Zionism" bloc, however, for whom gender and especially queer rights are blasphemy and ultimate targets for extinction under the "Jewish state."

Central America is a particularly gruesome arena in the women's health battleground. The new government of president Xiaomara Castro in Honduras promised to loosen the country's deadly abortion ban, but hasn't yet succeeded. The situations in Nicaragua and El Salvador are grim: When left wing

governments were in power (the Sandinistas in 1980s Nicaragua, the FMLN party elected in El Salvador in the '90s after the civil war), they failed to take anti-abortion laws off the books.

Nicaragua today is ruled by the right wing presidentialist dictatorship of Daniel Ortega (see [“Repression Continues to Grow in Nicaragua” by William I. Robinson, ATC 222](#)) and El Salvador by the reactionary government of Nayib Bukele. Women in El Salvador who suffer miscarriages are subject to prosecution and up to 30-year prison terms, provoking widespread outrage. Not coincidentally, under this repressive regime, water protectors are also being prosecuted (see page 2 of this issue).

The Not-“100% American” Scene

In our own partially democratic country called the United States of America, a woman's right to control her own body is constrained legally by the state she lives in, practically by her county of residence – where abortion care may be unavailable even if legal – and financially by her capacity to travel if she needs to gain access beyond state lines.

The long, instructive and often heroic struggle for abortion rights and expanded other essential rights and services – against racist sterilization abuse, for adequate paid parental leave and free quality childcare, for birth control and sex education – is discussed by [Dianne Feeley in this issue of Against the Current](#). Much of that feminist liberation agenda remains unfulfilled, of course, especially in the era of neoliberal “free market” dogma, falling real wages and stagnant living standards, and capital's assault on labour rights and unions.

Following the Supreme Court Dobbs ruling, the right wing aims to hurl women back to the age when unwanted pregnancy, or a pregnancy with complications, meant terror. Where they

control state governments, attempts to criminalise medical (pharmaceutical) abortion, out-of-state travel for abortion access, even contraception, are on their agenda – along with ever more vicious assaults on trans youth, banning books and education on Black history and U.S. racism, and other malicious mischief.

What often gets less attention than it deserves is the international impact of the United States' reproductive rights battleground. "A half-century-old U.S. law is stripping women of rights they are legally entitled to in their home countries," writes Anu Kumar ("Why is America Preventing Legal Abortions in Ethiopia?" *The New York Times*, 10/23/22)

The reason is a particularly vicious 1973 post-Roe backlash legislation known as the (Senator Jesse) Helms Amendment, appropriately carrying the name of its sponsor, one of the most racist as well as misogynist politicians in our recent history. It prohibits U.S. foreign aid funding for "abortions as a method of family planning."

Under a restrictive interpretation that goes beyond even the language of the amendment, Kumar explains, the law "instead incorrectly has been applied as an outright ban on all abortions." It has also been interpreted to mean that clinics receiving U.S. funding cannot even mention abortion. And even though only U.S. funding is directly affected, in many poor and rural regions "the complication of securing other funding that could be used for abortions is too difficult, which means the entire health facility simply does not offer abortions at all."

The heavy hand of these restrictions is felt all the more strongly because U.S. funding of family planning overseas amounts to 40-50% of the global total. In Ethiopia, Anu Kumar reports, her organization IPAS (Partners for Reproductive Justice) states that "the United States funded about 30

percent of total family planning foreign aid in Ethiopia from 2018 to 2020, but that funding is spread among more than 45 percent of health facilities in the country.”

Such is the case for example at the Shekebedo Health Centre in southwestern Ethiopia, a country where abortion is legal. The Centre’s partial funding by the U.S. Agency for International Development “has stopped the clinic from offering abortions to Ethiopian women.”

The global harm is enormous, says Kumar: “In countries that accept U.S. family planning aid and where abortion is legal under some circumstances, more than 19 million unsafe abortions occur annually – more than half of the global total” (emphasis added) – resulting in complications including deadly ones like sepsis that claim some 16,000 women’s and girls’ lives annually.

The alternation of U.S. presidential administrations, with Republicans applying more restrictive and Democrats more liberal directives, makes it even more difficult to implement coherent policies.

This is blood on the hands of the U.S. Congress, the grotesquely mislabelled “pro-life” movement, and the executive branch, including president Biden, who at least “could issue federal guidelines to clarify that Helms permits U.S. funds for abortion care in cases of rape, incest and life endangerment” and “ensure that clinics in countries where abortion is legal understand that U.S. rules allow them to offer abortion information and counselling.”

To see what difference a sane and decent policy could produce, consider the case of Benin, an African nation where the number of botched abortions declined after access to abortions was broadened (Elia Peltier, *The New York Times*, 11/13/22).

While most countries in Africa restrict or ban abortion –

South Africa, Mozambique, Cape Verde and Tunisia being among the exceptions – the tide there is slowly turning toward abortion rights, despite fears that the overturn of Roe in the United States may hold it back.

It's important to say here that the very real authoritarian menace globally and in the United States, with all the murderous attacks on women's lives, LGBTQ people and (especially in dozens of U.S. state legislatures) transgender young people, is only one side of the picture. Victories are being won, whether large (as in Ireland, Mexico, etc.) or more modest as in U.S. state ballot referenda.

Most important of all is that everywhere, the fight is on – women along with queer and trans people will not quietly accept oppressors' and cynical politicians' denial of their humanity, dignity, agency and rights. The movements are decisive: When the targets of oppression stand up for themselves, they attract allies and solidarity, and their struggles cannot be pushed back into isolation, silence and shame – as so many generations of women have suffered undergoing forced birth or deadly illegal abortions.

The lesson everywhere is that women's rights, gender and trans rights, queer rights are human rights. They rise or fall together. In a world of rising authoritarian rule and right wing menace, "Women. Life. Freedom!" means all of us.

Source: Editorial March-April 2023, ATC 223
<https://againstthecurrent.org/atc223/womens-rights-human-rights/>

International Women's Day inspirational reading: "Dangerous Liaisons: The marriages and divorces of Marxism and Feminism"

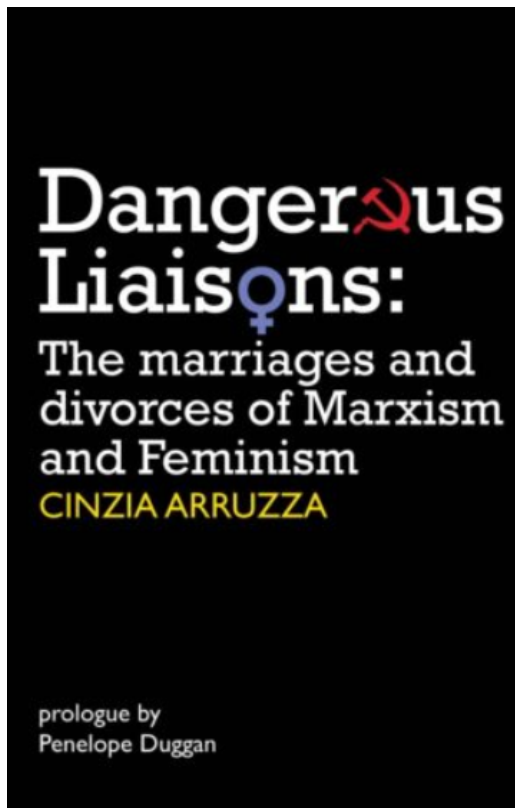
For International Women's Day 2023, our friends at [Resistance Books](#) are promoting a book to inspire you – **Cinzia Arruza's "Dangerous Liaisons: The Marriages and Divorces of Marxism and Feminism"**.

An accessible introduction to the relationship between the workers' movement and the women's movement. The first part is historical, the second is theoretical. Historical examples range from the mid-19th century to the 1970s and include events, debates, and key personalities from China, Russia, the USA, France, Italy, Spain, and Britain. It shows time and again, the controversial, often difficult relationship between feminism and Marxism.

The theoretical questions discussed include the origins of women's oppression, domestic labour, dual systems theory, performativity, and differentialism. Women's oppression is a structural element of the division of labour and one of the direct factors through which capitalism not only reinforces its ideological dominance but also organises the exploitation and reproduction of labour. The integration of patriarchal relations and capitalism has led to their radical transformation—in the family, in terms of women's place in production, in sexual relations, and with respect to sexual

identity.

[Purchase a copy here >>](#)



Marxism needs to probe complex processes: ongoing transformations and crises, a global context creating an increasingly feminised workforce, and changing relations between men and women. It is a mistake to submerge gender into class or to believe that freedom from exploitation automatically brings about women's liberation and the ending of sexual roles. It is equally wrong to think the class question can be removed and gender made the main enemy. The author believes passionately in the need to combine gender and class politics.

Dangerous Liaisons: The marriages and divorces of Marxism and

Feminism – Reviews

“Although Cinzia Arruzza calls her aim “modest,” her book is anything but. She provides a masterful survey of the vexed relations between feminism and socialism over the course of more than two centuries. The result is not only a lucid overview but also a penetrating intervention into current debates. Perfectly timed to enlighten new generations of activists and theorists, Arruzza’s book offers the best short introduction to a question that is as relevant as ever today: How, in the wake of a capitalist crisis of global dimensions, can struggles against male domination be made to synergize with struggles against neoliberalism?”

NANCY FRASER, PROF. NEW SCHOOL, NEW YORK

“Dangerous Liaisons offers an acute, critical and refreshingly open analysis of feminist theories and, best of all, links the development of theory to the historical and contemporary political issues facing women activists. A perfect book for students but also for anyone seeking to learn more about the ongoing dialogue between Marxism(s) and feminism(s). Arruzza’s presentation of complicated theoretical debates is fair, accessible, and lively; her wide-ranging historical account hits the highlights (and lows) of feminist engagements with the revolutionary left across Europe and in the US.”

JOHANNA BRENNER, PROF. EMERITUS, PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY

“a well written book and ideal for anyone interested in the political and theoretical history of the relationship between feminism and Marxism.”

MARX AND PHILOSOPHY REVIEW OF BOOKS

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 Fein 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 19th 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.

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

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

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://kurdistansolidarity.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>

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/>

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, hales 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:

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Republished from Bella Caledonia:
<https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2023/02/09/earthquake-in-turkey-the-state-versus-the-people/>

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