Remembering September 11, 1973: The US-backed Pinochet Coup in Chile

This September marks the 50th anniversary of the US backed coup by Pinochet in Chile. It was one of the heaviest and bloodiest defeats ever suffered by the left and progressive movement in Latin America. There are a number of events being organised in Britain, including in Scotland (full details also below), this year to remember and discuss the Chilean process and coup and links are provided below. (The introductory note is compiled by Dave Kellaway of Anti*Capitalist Resistance in England & Wales.)

The following article is an edited extract of a chapter in a book, Recorded Fragments, by Daniel Bensaid that Resistance Books has translated into English (published in 2020). The book is a transcript of a series of radio interviews Daniel did with the radio station Paris Plurielle in 2008. He discusses the politics behind a series of key dates in 20th Century history. Daniel Bensaïd was born in Toulouse in 1946. He became a leader of the 1968 student movement and subsequently of one of France's main far left organizations (Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire) and of the Fourth International. He is the author of ***Marx for our Times,*** *Verso: 2010,* ***Strategies of Resistance****, Resistance Books: 2014 and* ***An Impatient Life****, Verso: 2015. He died in Paris in 2010.*

On 11 September 1973, the Chilean military put a bloody end to the three year reformist experience of the Salvador Allende governments. Augusto Pinochet leader of the armed forces initiated a new cycle of bloody repression and brutal economic liberalism that had started in Bolivia with the 1971 Banzer

coup. He was soon followed by other dictatorships in South America such as the one led by General Videla in Argentina in 1976.

The United States, which intervenes throughout South America, has no intention of allowing the people in its backyard to raise their heads against its interests.

Perhaps we should begin by recalling that the 11 September coup, in 1973, and not that of 2001 Twin Towers terrorist attack, was first and foremost an emotional shock. We were transfixed by the news that arrived on the radio from the headquarters of the Presidential Palace, La Moneda, and then by the announcements that gradually came in about the success of the coup d'état. At first we hoped it would not succeed, since another coup d'etat had failed in June three months before, but then we got the news of Allende's death.

How can such an emotional shock be explained, this had not been our reaction during the bigger bloodbath in 1965 when the Indonesian Communist Party was crushed or more recently with the repression of the Sudanese Communist Party? I believe it is because there was a very strong identification in Europe and Latin America with what was happening in Chile. There was a feeling that this was indeed a new scenario and a possibility, practically a laboratory experiment, which was valid for both Europe and Latin America, in different ways.

So, why was it so important for Europe?

Because we had the impression, partly false I would say today, that we finally had a country that was a reflection of our own reality. Unlike other Latin American countries, there was a strong communist party, there was a socialist party represented or led by Salvador Allende, there was an extreme left of the same generation as ours. Small groups existed like the MAPU(Unitary Popular Action Movement, a Christian current) and MIR, the Movement of the Revolutionary Left, born

in 1964-65 under the impulse of the Cuban Revolution. There was an identification with the latter organization, with its militants, with its leaders who were practically of our generation, who had a fairly comparable background. The MIR was formed from two sources: on the one hand inspired by Che Guevara and the Cuban Revolution; on the other hand there was a Trotskyist influence, it must be said, through a great historian of Latin America, Luis Vitale. He was one of the founding fathers of the MIR, even if he was removed from it, or left shortly afterwards. All this in a country where, in the end, Stalinism had never been dominant, including on the left, nor did it have the role that the communist party had in Argentina, for example.

There was a specific factor in Chile, which is one of the difficulties in understanding the situation. The Chilean Socialist Party, even though it called itself socialist, had little to do with European social democracy. It was a party that had been built in the 1930s as a reaction, in opposition to the Stalinisation of the Communist International. So it was a party more to the left of the CP than to the right, so there was a strong sense given to the idea that Chile could give the example of a scenario where the left came to power through elections. This would then be the beginning of a social process of radicalization leading to, or, let's say, transitioning towards a radical social revolution at a time when, it should also be remembered, the prestige of the Cuban Revolution in Latin America was, if not intact, then at least still very important.

I believe there are still lessons for us about what happened in Chile.

Today, I would be more cautious about this reflection of European realities. I think that, seen from a distance, there was a tendency to underestimate the social relations and the reserves of reaction and conservatism that existed in Chilean society. We saw this a lot in the army because, as was said

and repeated at the time, the army had been trained by German instructors on the Prussian army model, which was already not very encouraging. But what's more, as I've seen since then, it's a country where the Catholic tradition, the conservative Catholic current, is important.

And besides, this was just a starting point. Allende was elected in September-October 1970, in a presidential election, but only with a relative majority of about 37%. For his nomination to be ratified by the Assembly conditions were set. These conditions included two key aspects: no interference with the army and respect for private property. These were the two limits set from the outset by the dominant classes, by the institutions , for accepting Allende's investiture.

Nevertheless, it is true that the electoral victory raised people's hopes and sparked a strengthening of the social movements, which culminated in a major electoral victory in the municipal elections of January 1971. I believe that Popular Unity, the left-wing coalition on which Allende was relying at that time, had on this occasion (and only then) an absolute majority in an election.

This obviously gave greater legitimacy to developing the process. So we had an electoral victory, a radicalization, but also a polarization that was initially internal to Chile, which gradually translated into a mobilization of the right, including action on the streets. The landmark date was the lorry drivers' strike in October 1972. But it should not be thought that it was employee led: it was the employers who organised it. Chile's long geographical configuration meant that road transport was strategic. So there was this truckers' strike, therefore, supported by what were called ***cacerolazos (people banging empty pans)*** , i.e. protest movements, particularly by middle-class consumers in Santiago. Santiago makes up more than half of the country in terms of population. It constituted a first attempt at destabilization in the autumn of 1972.

At that point, there was finally a debate on the way forward for the Chilean process, which opened up two possibilities in response to the destabilization of the right. The latter was also strongly supported by the United States. We know today with the disclosures of the Condor plan how much and for how long the United States had been involved in the preparation of the coup d'état, through the multinationals but also through American military advisers. So in early 1973, after the warning of the lorry drivers' strike, there were several options. Either a radicalization of the process, with increased incursions into the private property sector, with radical redistribution measures, wage increases, and so on. All of which were debated. Or on the contrary, and this was the thesis that prevailed, put forward by Vukovik, Minister of Economy and Finance, a member of the Communist Party. The government had to reassure the bourgeoisie and the ruling classes by definitively delimiting the area of public property or social property, and by giving additional guarantees to the military.

The second episode of destabilization was much more dramatic, no longer a corporate strike like that of the lorry drivers, but in June 1973 we saw a first attempt, a dry run for a coup d'état, the so-called ***tancazo***, in which the army, in fact a tank regiment, took to the streets but was neutralized.

I believe that this was the crucial moment. For example, it was the moment when the MIR, which was a small organisation of a few thousand very dynamic militants – we must not overestimate its size, but for Chile it was significant – proposed joining the government, but under certain conditions. After the failure of the first coup d'état, the question arose of forming a government whose centre of gravity would shift to the left, which would take measures to punish or disarm the conspiring military. But what was done was exactly the opposite.

That is to say, between the period of June 1973 and the actual

coup d’état of September 11, 1973, there was repression against the movement of soldiers in the barracks, searches to disarm the militants who had accumulated arms in anticipation of resistance to a coup d’état, and then, above all, additional pledges given to the army with the appointment of generals to ministerial posts, including Augusto Pinochet, the future dictator.

So there was a momentum shift, and Miguel Enriquez, the secretary general of the MIR who was assassinated in October 1974, a year later, wrote a text, in this intermediate period between the dry run and the coup d’état, which was called “**When were we the strongest**? ». I think he was extremely lucid: until August 1973 there were demonstrations by 700,000 demonstrators in Santiago, supporting Allende and responding to the coup d’état. That was indeed the moment when a counteroffensive by the popular movement was possible . On the contrary, the response was a shift to the right of the government alliances and additional pledges given to the military and ruling classes, which in reality meant in the end encouraging the coup d’état.

That is how we were surprised. You referred to the reformism of Salvador Allende but, in the end, compared to our reformists, he was still a giant of the class struggle. If we look at the archive documents today, he still has to be respected.

In the movement of solidarity with Chile, which was very important in the years that followed, 1973, 1974 and 1975, I would say that we were, somewhat sectarian about Allende, who was made into someone responsible for the disastor. That does not change the political problem. It implies respect for the individual, but there is still a conundrum: during the first hours of the coup d’état, he still had national radio, it was still possible to call for a general strike, whereas a call was made in the end for static resistance in the workplaces, and so on. Perhaps it was not possible. Even an organisation

like the MIR, which was supposed to be prepared militarily, was caught off guard by the coup. We see this today in Carmen Castillo's book, ***An October Day in Santiago*** or in his film, ***Santa Fe Street***, 2007. They were caught off guard, perhaps in my opinion because they did not imagine such a brutal and massive coup d'état. They imagined the possibility of a coup d'état, but one that would be, in a way, half-baked that would usher in a new period of virtual civil war, with hotbeds of armed resistance in the countryside. Hence the importance they had given – and this is related to the other aspect of the question – to working among the peasants of the Mapuche minority, particularly in the south of the country.

But the coup d'etat was a real sledgehammer blow. They hadn't really prepared, or even probably envisaged, a scenario of bringing together:

a) the organs of popular power that did exist,

b) the so-called "industrial belt committees (cordones)" that were more or less developed forms of self-organization, mainly in the suburbs of Santiago ;

c) the "communal commandos" in the countryside ;

d) work in the army, and finally

e) in Valparaíso even an embryo of a popular assembly, a kind of local soviet.

Whatever else can be said, all that existed and suggests what could have been possible – but that would have required the will and the strategy. It was another way to respond to the coup d'état, whether in June or September, with a general strike, the disarmament of the army, something akin to an insurrection. It was always risky, but you have to weigh it up against the price of the coup d'état in terms first of all of human lives, of the disappeared, of the tortured. Above all, you have to consider the price in terms of peoples' living

conditions, when we see what Chile is today, after more than thirty years of Pinochet's dictatorship. It has been a laboratory for liberal policies. It was an historic defeat. If you look at two neighbouring countries, Chile and Argentina, the social movement in Argentina has quickly recovered its fighting spirit after the years of dictatorship, despite the 30,000 people who disappeared. In Chile, the defeat is clearly of a different scope and duration.

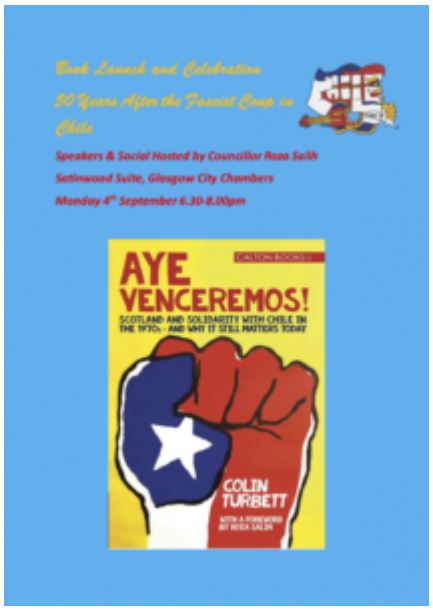
I believe that the coup d'état in Chile was the epilogue of the revolutionary ferment that followed the Cuban Revolution for 10-15 years in Latin America. And as you pointed out in the introduction, the dates clearly tell the story: three months before the coup d'état in Chile, I think it was June 1973, there was the coup d'état in Uruguay. In 1971 there was the coup d'état in Bolivia. While the dictatorship had fallen in Argentina, it returned in 1976. But let's say that symbolically, the killing of Allende, the disappearance of Enriquez and practically the entire leadership of the MIR, closed the cycle initiated by the Cuban Revolution, the OLAS(Latin American Solidarity Organization, meeting in Havana in 1967) conferences, and Che's expedition to Bolivia in 1966.

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Forthcoming events in Scotland

Book Launch – "Aye Venceremos – Scotland and Solidarity with Chile in the 1970s – and why it still matters today.

Monday 4 September @ 18:30 [Satinwood Suite, Glasgow City Council, Central Chambers, George Square, Glasgow, G2 1DU]



The new book celebrates acts of Chile solidarity in Scotland in the 1970s, including the action by Rolls Royce workers in East Kilbride. It also describes the welcome given to refugees at the time. All this is set against events in Chile before and after the Coup, with eye-witness accounts from some who ended up as political exiles in Scotland. The event is being hosted by City of Glasgow Councillor Roza Salih – herself a Kurdish refugee from Iraq, and a well known campaigner since her school days, for refugee and human rights.

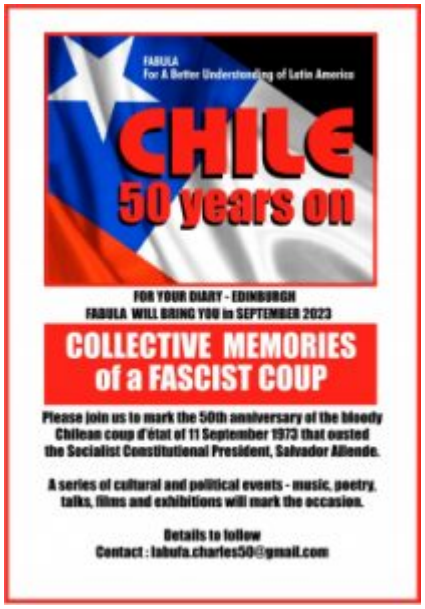
The event will include contributions from Chileans in Scotland, trade unionists and campaigners, as well as the book's author, Colin Turbett.

For a free ticket via Eventbrite see here > https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/aye-venceremos-book-launch-anniversary-celebration-glasgow-4th-sept-tickets-674133751197

SCOTLAND – COLLECTIVE MEMORIES OF A FASCIST COUP

Monday 4 September – Thursday 21 September

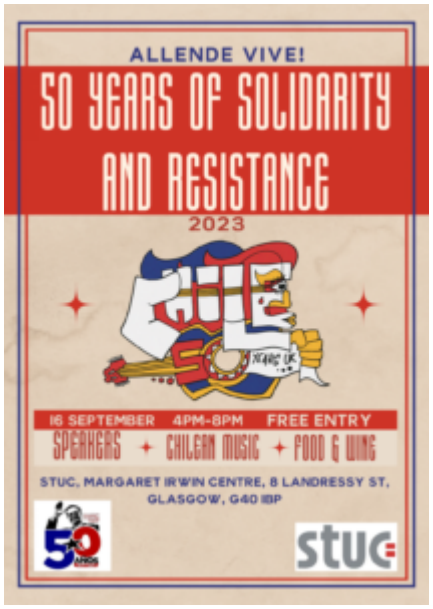
A series of cultural and political events -music, poetry, talks, films and exhibitions to mark the 50th anniversary of the bloody coup d'état of 11 September 1973.



Programme still in development for September 2023 with participation of FABULA (For A Better Understanding of Latin America) Full details here: https://chile50years.uk/event/scotland-collective-memories-of-a-fascist-coup/

For further information email labufa.charles50@gmail.com

Public event hosted by the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC)
Saturday 16 September @ 16:00



STUC, 8 Landressy Street, Bridgeton, GLASGOW, G40 1BP

All welcome! Speakers, music, food and wine available

Please register for the event here >> so that the organisers can best cater for the food and wine!

Trans Liberation and Feminism

Oppression is not a direct result of physiological features but the social role assigned in general to those who have those features, and while the gender binary oppresses us all, it particularly oppresses those for whom it is a daily prison and for whom their/our daily transgression leads to physical

and mental violence in the family, in the workplace and on the streets. That's among the many arguments in this document on support for Trans Liberation recently agreed by the Socialist Resistance Editorial Board (and endorsed by ecosocialist.scot). It was originally published here

Back to basics

Our understanding of the term gender is that it is separate from the term sex, the latter refers to physiological features, the former to a socially constructed role. To quote Simone de Beauvoir: 'one is not born but rather becomes a woman'. This has always been the general position of Marxist feminists – oppression is not a direct result of physiological features but the social role assigned in general to those who have those features.

There is obviously a whole lot of nuance available in understanding HOW the fact that MOST people with the physiological features identified with female give birth and nurture children impacted the social role of people with those same physiological (or perceived to be) features. The Fourth international 1979 resolution on women's liberation does not pretend to lay out a complete picture. However it is clear that our analysis and strategic orientation is not that of what we call radical feminists, i.e. that men are the root cause of women's oppression and thus the enemy.

We think neither sex nor gender are determinant in how people perceive themselves, it is possible for people to reject one or both of them and many people do to greater or lesser extent. Women's oppression does not derive from our sex or biology rather from the societies in which we live that require us to have a primary role in social reproduction which plays an important role both in paid and unpaid labour in 'socially necessary labour time', the labour time that is required to keep production going for profit in capitalist

economies.

Social reproduction is the reproduction of the labour power of the working class to serve its role in the capitalist economic system. A part of the production of socially necessary labour is done outside of the labour market in the home where it is not directly covered by wages. It is not physical reproduction only but also basic education, nursing, caring, cooking and cleaning of the family home and care, not only for children but others in our households that need support and assistance. Moreover, when women enter into the capitalist labour market, they often wind up trapped in employment which is based on traditional women's labour which is then viewed as unskilled and of little value and therefore worse paid that traditionally 'male' jobs.

Marxist feminists do not usually use the term 'the patriarchy' and indeed argue against its use explaining that the term gives rise to a conception that there are two systems: patriarchy and 'class society' (or 'capitalism', depending on which Marxists from which tradition you are discussing this with). There are a number of works on the question of 'dual systems' theory and indeed Lise Vogel's seminal work provides one way forward, and is the root of the development of social reproduction theory, which is explicitly Marxist, and called 'Towards a unitary theory'.

This is not counterposed in any way to also adopting an intersectional approach also within a Marxist framework in which different forms of oppression coexist, reinforce and sometimes contradict each other, and in which we have a political responsibility to stand with the oppressed, working with those differences and turning them from weakness into strength.

A general agreement with this analytical approach is important because it affects how we act politically. If women's oppression derives from social constructs we can organise to

change them, but if they are derived from biology then our options are much more limited.

As we understand it, those who call themselves ‘gender critical’ reject these positions and link the definition of woman **directly** to the physiological features. Note that we have not used the term ‘Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists’ (TERF) in this document, though it is used by some trans people to describe those that organise against them. The term is confusing because there are radical feminists who are trans inclusive and other feminists who would define themselves as socialist feminists who organise on the basis of ‘sex-based rights’ and are therefore trans (and intersex) exclusive. It is not helpful to use a term that people see as an insult when attempting rational discussion with those who may be influenced by these ideas.

The ‘gender critical’ people also demand specific rights for those born with (or assigned as born with, if the ‘gender critical’ people even envisage that possibility that things are assigned rather than simply wired in) the physiological features judged as women’s – what they call ‘sex based rights’. Such a road is dangerous – for what it would imply for other physical differences e.g. for disabled people or intersex people as well as trans people – and also completely unnecessary as we can’t think of a circumstance where we would argue that rights should be granted on such a physiological basis. Furthermore, there is a hidden political trajectory in the argument of these groups, that for trans people to gain rights means taking them away from cis (non trans) women – this is like arguing for crumbs not the whole bloody bakery.

Binaries and determinism

Acceptance of the gender binary – by which we mean that throughout the natural and human world there are only ever two sexes and two genders – and that the sex assigned to everyone

at birth is always in line with their physiology which is assumed in itself to be always uncomplicated – would also politically limit our options. There are many reputable articles which show that there is much evidence to the contrary in the biological sciences for example: https://www.nature.com/news/sex-redefined-1.16943 https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/voices/stop-using-phony-science-to-justify-transphobia/

As comrades have pointed, out there are parallels between some of the discussion in this frame and that about race and biology. It's surely inconvertible on the left that biological determinism has long been used to justify imperialism and racism. Notions of 'women's brains' seem to us to have terrifying parallels with the deeply reactionary notions of 'negroid brains' and so on. The need to think outside the binary is not only based on an understanding of biological sciences but also on the complexities of different human societies. See for example: http://www.gendertrust.org.uk/gender-concepts-around-the-world/.

Feminism in its many forms has always questioned gender stereotypes, whether they are about the socialisation of children into pink and blue, into different types of playthings, of recreational activities or into training and work, or notions of which competences should be more valued etc.

The gender binary oppresses us all, but particularly oppresses those for whom it is a daily prison and for whom their/our daily transgression leads to physical and mental violence in the family, in the workplace and on the streets. It also leads to exclusion from services or their provision only on the basis of conformity to rules which negate individual selfhood.

A partial history

Gender identities outside the binary have always existed. Gender identities don't necessarily have a relationship to sexuality. But the construction of sexual identities in a more fixed way under capitalism have also had an impact on trans identities. Michelle O'Brien explains it like this in *Abolish The Family: The Working-Class Family and Gender Liberation in Capitalist Development*: 'In the prostitution and sexual subcultures of the industrializing city, people seized on new forms of gender transgression. A lexicon of cross-dressing emerged, as alongside cis sex workers other new transfeminine gender deviants walked the streets of London, Amsterdam and Paris: Mollies, Mary-Anns, he-she ladies, queens. They sold sex to the bourgeoisie on the streets, ran from police, fought in riots, held regular drag balls, and worked in one of the estimated two thousand brothels specializing in male-assigned sex workers scattered across London'. Similar points have been made, perhaps in less detail, by many others.

There is a complex relationship between early theories of gay and lesbian identities and trans identities in some early theories eg those of Ulrichs a very influential German writer and activist in the 1860s who described gay men as being of a third sex – 'Uranian' (derived from Plato's ancient discussion of that possible third category of being). Ulrichs' theories influenced Magnus Hirschfield who in 1897 founded the groundbreaking Scientific-Humanitarian Committee which campaigned for the decriminalisation of homosexuality (and won only partial support from the German Socialist Party before the Nazis took control).

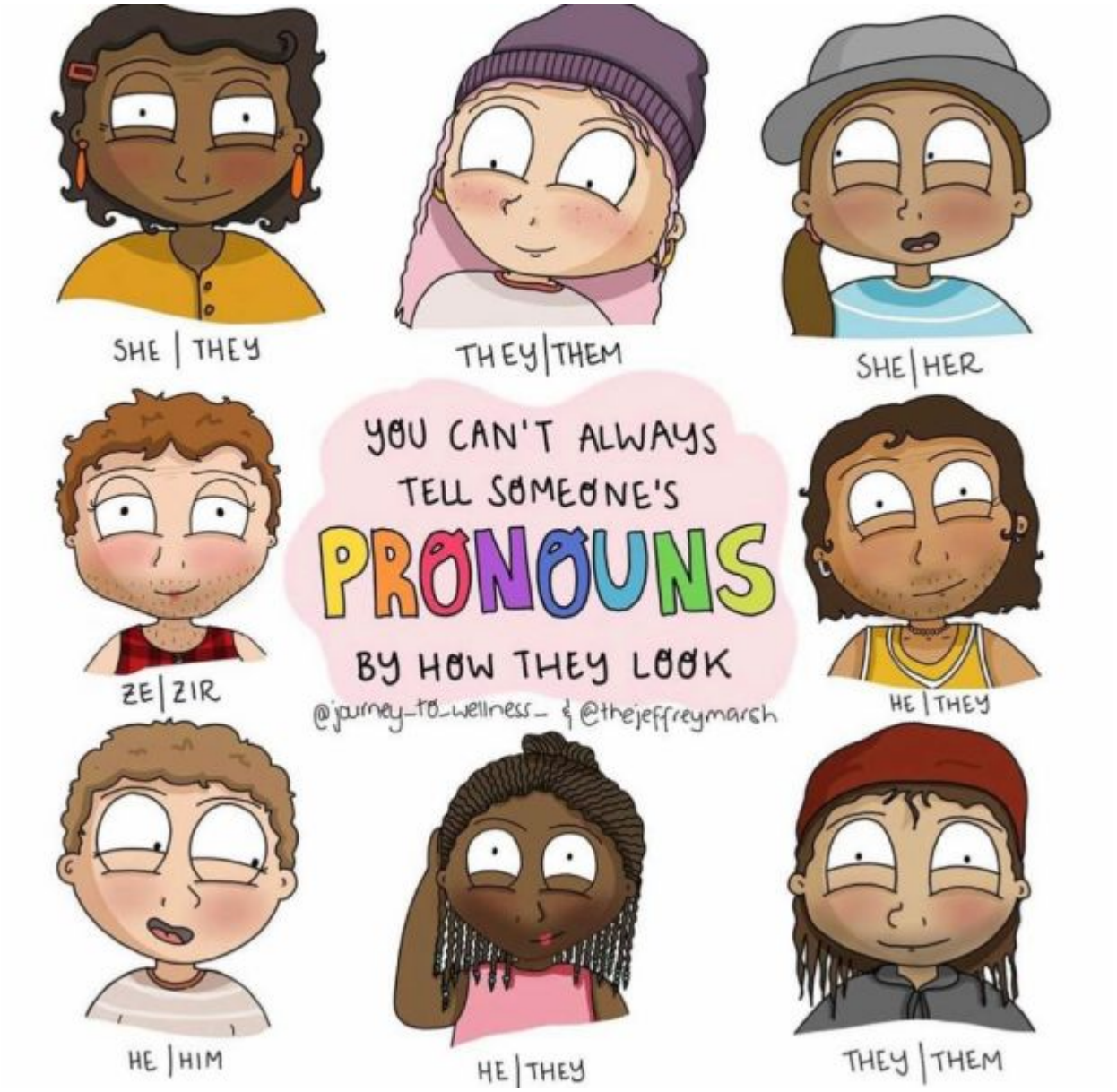
These ideas had international impact, for example on English utopian socialist Edward Carpenter (1844 – 1929), who himself was a collaborator with the early socialist William Morris. And while these theories focused more on gay men, Radclyffe Hall's (1929) novel *The Well of Loneliness* also poses things

in a similar framework.

The earliest recorded example of gender reassignment surgery is 1917. This kind of surgery became more frequent in the 1970s – with Jan Morris as a prominent example – but was hugely expensive and still pathologised. The Greek model, especially amongst men, i.e. the idea that young men were always passive and effeminate, was playing out in parts of the commercial gay scene as late as the 1970s in Britain.

O'Brien talks of the particular position of trans women of colour: 'Among queers in major US cities from the late 1950s on, trans women of color were the most starkly visible, leaving them the most vulnerable to street harassment and violence. They served as the consistent foil representing deviant queerness for police, mainstreaming gays, and gender radicals alike. Trans women of color were almost entirely excluded from formal wage labor, instead surviving through streetbased sex work and crime. These trans women of color likely numbered in the low hundreds in many American major cities, but acted as the central figures in a broader underworld of thousands of motley lumpenproletarian queers, including other non-passing gender deviants, homeless queer people, queer drug addicts, sex workers, and gay criminals'. While her account is based on the US it has much in common with developments in Britain and other advanced capitalist countries.

It is important to point out that while there have often, perhaps always, been a trans presence in the LGBTIQ movement, this has been differently described, and there are significant complexities about the relationship between concepts of gender and issues of sexuality. Both trans and other voices from the LGBT movement have pointed out that many of the tropes directed against the LGBT movement as a whole are now directed primarily against trans people particularly in terms of the denial of the rights of young people.



Assessing trans oppression

Let us begin here by taking seriously key trans stats around mental health for trans people. Although this data is couched in terms of the mental health outcomes actually it contains information about how the actions of others are responsible for very negative impacts on trans lives.

- More than four in five (83 per cent) trans young people have experienced name-calling or verbal abuse, three in five (60 per cent) have experienced threats and intimidation and more than a third (35 per cent) of trans young people have experienced physical assault.

(Youth Chances 2014, sample size – 956)

- More than one in four (27 per cent) trans young people have attempted suicide and nine in 10 (89 per cent) have thought about it. 72 per cent have self-harmed at least once. (Youth Chances 2014, sample size – 956)
- Two in five (41 per cent) trans people have been attacked or threatened with violence in the last five years. (FRA LGBT Survey 2012, sample size – 813)
- In the last year alone, two thirds (65 per cent) of trans people have been discriminated against or harassed because of being perceived as trans. Over a third (35 per cent) avoid expressing their gender through physical appearance for fear of being assaulted, threatened or harassed. (FRA LGBT Survey 2012, sample size – 813)
- Almost three in four (70 per cent) trans people avoid certain places and situations for fear of being assaulted, threatened or harassed. (Trans Mental Health Survey 2012, sample size – 889)
- More than half (55 per cent) of trans people have experienced negative comments or behaviour at work because of being trans. (FRA LGBT Survey 2012, sample size – 813)
- One in four trans people report having been discriminated against at work. (FRA LGBT Survey 2012, sample size – 813)
- More than two in five (44 per cent) trans people have never disclosed to anyone at work that they are trans. (FRA LGBT Survey 2012, sample size – 813)
- Almost half (48 per cent) of trans people in Britain have attempted suicide at least once and 84 per cent have thought about it. More than half (55 per cent) have been diagnosed with depression at some point. (Trans Mental Health Survey 2012, sample size – 889)
- More than half (54 per cent) of trans people reported that they have been told by their GP that they don’t know enough about trans-related care to provide it. (Trans Mental Health Survey 2012, sample size – 889)

We have less information on more precisely what leads to these figures: of how much is violence or coercion to gender conformity within the family, how much discrimination and isolation at work, how much lack of support from health professions, and how much harassment and violence on the streets. UK police statistics show that in 2018 hate crimes against trans people went up 81%.

In her chapter 'Trans Work: Employment Trajectories, Labour Discipline and Gender Freedom' in the 2021 book Transgender Marxism, Michelle O'Brien talks in detail about the way that the rigid gendering of most work settings impacts on the limits the places accessible to trans people within the labour market. She notes that: 'The most systematic report on trans Americans available comes from a 2011 survey by the National Center for Transgender Equality, including 6500 respondents… The data on employment was dire: 28% of African-American trans respondents report being unemployed, and 12% of white trans people, compared to 7% of the general population; 15% of all trans respondents were living in extreme poverty, with incomes below $10,000 a year, four times the rate for the general population… 44% of African-American trans women reported experiences in sex work, and 28% of Latinx trans people'. (p.50)

The recent context in Britain

The debate in Britain, particularly the debate on the left, has been sharper for longer than anywhere else. The conflicts probably became sharper here because there was a push from trans organisations and individuals to reform the Gender Recognition Act. When the Act was passed in 2004 it was a step forward from what existed before though it was less radical than what was being debated and in some cases passed elsewhere. (see: https://ilga.org/trans-legal-mapping-report)

Under the GRA, people have to prove to a doctor that they were

living full time as ‘the other’ gender for years before they could access a gender recognition certificate (GRC) – and without a GRC all sorts of protections under the act are not there. The act was absolutely based on a (lack of) understanding that there was a single trans path determined by a medical and psychological model very similar to the debates around the 1967 sexual offences act for gay men.

In fact not all trans people want gender reassignment surgery. New terms were being created and increasingly used eg the notion of ‘genderqueer’ in the 1990s and, increasingly now, ‘nonbinary’. According to official statistics, the proportion of the UK population who define as non-binary when given a choice between male, female and another option is 0.4%, which is 1 in 250 people (Titman, 2014). Around a quarter to a third of trans people identify in some way outside the gender binary: – see: *https://www.allabouttrans.org.uk/about/resources/*

Trans organisations and inclusive LGBTIQ organisations were growing in this period and many more trans people were arguing that the path of the GRA was humiliating, demeaning and determined by the gender binary.

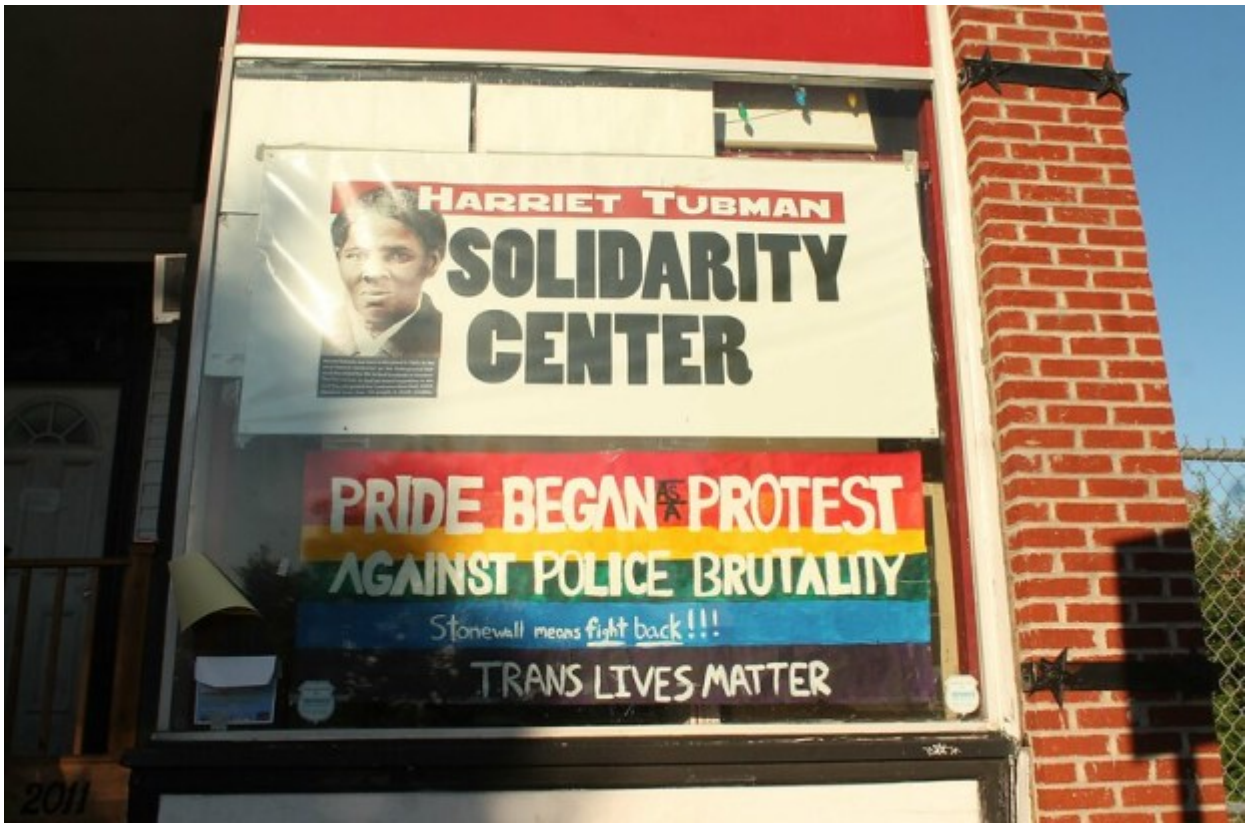
By the 2000s, there were far more vocal trans people speaking about the humiliating way that, for example, access to hormones was dependent on their convincing a doctor that they subscribed to traditional i.e. reactionary views of men and women’s roles (even when they did not really subscribe to them at all, but had to pretend they did). There was also increasing knowledge of some of the work cited above in the scientific world that shows that a gender binary not only not universal but rare. There was also increasing work about the extent to which trans identities are embedded in many different cultures in the global south in Africa and Asia in particular.

Of course, there are trans people who do hold a stereotypical

view of the gender binary and of male and female roles (as there are cis people who do) – but the voices of those who don't were becoming louder and arguing that the GRA should be amended to support self id – i.e. the right of trans people to define their gender identity in the same way that people define their sexuality.

As Jules Gleeson points out here, the proposed reform of the GRA still offers virtually nothing to the even less highlighted position of intersex people. But discussions about changes in the law that would improve the lives of many trans people were used, consciously or not, by forces who wanted to prevent this happening.

Their ability to gain exposure for their reactionary views was enhanced by the weakness of socialist feminist thinking and organising in Britain at the time. It's instructive for example to contrast the powerful response of Irish feminists to an attempt to export such backward notions there. It was also and continues to be enhanced by a heavy bias in their favour in key media outlets – most notably the Guardian and Radio 4s Woman's Hour. And of course the Morning Star has played a particularly pernicious role in stoking up hatred towards trans.



Gaslighting

This was the context in which Womans Place UK was set up in September 2017 as they themselves put it: 'to ensure women's voices would be heard in the consultation on proposals to change the Gender Recognition Act i.e. from the beginning denying that trans women are women. They organise/d around 5 demands – which again are premised on that exclusionary principle. While their focus is debating with women, they also have a not insignificant and loyal following amongst men on the left.

The LGB alliance came later but takes a similar approach though its focus is to argue for a movement based only on sexuality- denying the actual history of queer movements.

They both focus on trans women in public speech – trans men are generally ignored, although can sometimes be subject to particularly vile abuse as 'traitors'. They claim to support trans rights and take great exception to being told that any of their demands, writings or speeches are transphobic – but in practice they don't support any of the demands trans people

make – of which self id is clearly the pivotal one.

Much of their rhetoric focuses on body parts in an almost scatological way – particularly impactful in a culture which is generally uncomfortable with bodies.

Parts of their rhetoric instrumentalise women who have experienced violence including sexual violence. Not only do they assume that all of us are cis but that all of us agree with them.

Their focus on toilets is particularly extraordinary. Many people's privacy and indeed health is far more impacted by the lack of accessible and free public toilets than by anyone you might meet there. There is nothing to stop someone who wanted to physically and/or sexually attack women – including trans women – from entering a toilet block to do that – especially when they are badly lit and rarely staffed. The attacks on the rights of young trans people are deeply reminiscent of attacks on LGB people from previous eras.

The misuse of the term 'no platform' has become a favourite trope for these groups who make a huge amount of noise, get a massive amount of media exposure to claim they have been silenced! We need to keep in mind that there is a legitimate, nay necessary debate about when an actual tactic of no platform should be use ie to physically prevent an event taking place by the mass mobilisation of the labour movement. Such should in my view be reserved for fascists – though it does have important analogies with effective picketing. This is an important discussion not least because the National Union of Students has taken a much broader position on when to take a No platform position. But that is different from politically choosing who to invite as speakers to trade union, LP or campaign meetings etc.

In general these organisations and their primary advocates use bad faith arguments which are based on bad/non-existent

science and denial of diversity of contemporary and historical human culture

More recently this has also been an increasingly polarising topic of conversation including within Plaid Cymru, the SNP, around the formation of Alba and within the Scottish Greens.

Our position

The practice of the Fourth International is trans inclusive (most evidently and over a long period of time through our youth camp), that is, **trans women are welcomed in our women's spaces**, and our most recent resolution on the women's movement is clearly trans inclusive.

This does not at all mean that we retreat from our position that the autonomous women's movement is a necessary strategic subject in the class struggle. That would mean for example that we are not in favour of erasing the mention of women, for example, from discussion of pre-natal care but of being inclusive.

The founding conference of ACR (Anti Capitalist Resistance [1]) overwhelmingly agreed a constitution which talks about 'trans people currently experiencing the sharp end of a backlash against their right to existand to unconditionally self-define their genders' and explicitly mentions transphobia as one of the things that the organisation opposes. This was strongly supported by the then 'Women's caucus' which subsequently agreed unanimously to rebadge itself as a 'Women's and non-binary caucus'.

There are moves to set up an LGBT caucus within the ACR which will include at least one comrade who identifies as nonbinary. We support these developments. Our activity in ACR is in line with a trans-inclusive position, and we will argue for that as we build that organisation.

Notes

[1] Anti Capitalist Resistance is a new revolutionary marxist organisation in England and Wales within which supporters of Socialist Resistance, British Section of the Fourth International, are active.

Reading list

Left resources

https://www.vice.com/en/article/9k7mzv/intersex-experience-gender-recognition-act-reforms Jules Gleeson

https://newsocialist.org.uk/whats-debate/ Jules Gleeson

https://www.anticapitalistresistance.org/post/notes-on-british-transphobia Rowan Fortune

https://redfightback.org/read/transphobia_in_the_left

To Abolish The Family: The Working-Class Family and Gender Liberation in Capitalist Development. *Endnotes* 5.. *Michelle O'Brien*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8pIj9KTxKsg Transgender Marxism book launch as part of Red May

https://www.plutobooks.com/9780745341668/transgender-marxism/
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https://www.socialistparty.org.uk/keyword/LGBT_Pride/Trans/30302/19-02-2020/labour-party-and-trans-rights

https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/49506/The+fight+for+trans+rights

https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/49414/Socialist+Workers+Party+conference+debates+where+next+for+the+left

https://www.historicalmaterialism.org/articles/intersectionality-and-marxism

Far right and trans people

https://qz.com/807743/conservatives-have-created-a-fake-ideology-to-combat-the-global-movement-for-lgbti-rights/

https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2017/10/23/christian-right-tips-fight-transgender-rights-separate-t-lgb

https://www.thedailybeast.com/southern-baptist-convention-trans-people-dont-exist

Wider resources

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https://www.nyctransoralhistory.org/

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TERF

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https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2021/03/26/puberty-blockers-keira-bell-high-court-parent-consent-tavistock-portman-nhs-good-law-project/?fbclid=IwAR1OMCHWl2S826GufEm01yJIB4bO5S2IpTb6n-oYLidKVAaysSnxMxYyz0s
https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2021/03/27/adventures-in-time-and-gender-lgbt-trans-history-krishna-istha/?fbclid=IwAR1eWhVum49-isCjIaUA8CmTmD245cZ6hzJM0F4DSVQmyk1bcK4igTznQfU

https://www.stonewall.org.uk/truth-about-trans

https://www.glaad.org/transgender/allies and https://www.glaad.org/transgender/transfaq

https://transequality.org/issues/resources/frequently-asked-questions-about-transgender-people

https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jul/09/transgender-people-equal-rights-self-identification-gender-recognition-act

https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/the-latest-form-of-transphobia-saying-lesbians-are-going-extinct/2021/03/18/072a95fc-8786-11eb-82bc-e58213caa38e_story.html https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2019/01/15/a-lost-piece-of-trans-history/

DISUNITED KINGDOM – the elections on 6 May

by Terry Conway 31 May 2021

On 6 May 2021 there were elections of some sort everywhere in England, in Scotland and in Wales. The picture in England was one in which Johnson's Tories using a model of right-populist Keynesianism and appeals to English nationalism and anti-migrant racism, have done well and Starmer's Labour had disastrous results. The Green Party of England and Wales also improved their showing – gaining 80 extra seats in local government.

There were parts of England where Labour did better – notably in Greater Manchester where Mayor Andy Burnham had showed rather more spine in challenging the Tories than Labour leader Keir Starmer, but also in parts of the south east. Indeed, Labour did relatively well at the level of Mayors – winning 11

out of the 13 contests – including Sadiq Khan's seat in London, but this is nothing like enough to compensate for the loss of a bye-election in Hartlepool and dire results at local council level.

But it is the extraordinary differences between Scotland, Wales and England that are the key story of this election and that the left in England ignores at its peril.

Pro-independence majority at Holyrood

Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon and the SNP (Scottish National Party) are right to point out that it is a huge victory to be returned as the largest party after 14 years in office, to be forming the fourth government in succession This is particularly the case if you realise that the particular form of proportional representation voting in use for Holyrood elections was precisely introduced to prevent any party getting an absolute majority. They would have needed 65 seats to take an absolute majority and came one short with 64 – but that is one more than in 2016.

They did so with a much higher turnout than anywhere else in Britain, 64 per cent overall with some constituencies topping 70 per cent and queues reported in some places. One polling station was unable to close until 11.30pm because of the numbers already queuing before the 10pm deadline.

Another first for Scotland was that for the first time there – or anywhere else in Britain – all foreign nationals and anyone serving a prison sentence of less than 12 months to vote. [1] And 16-17 year olds – allowed to vote in Wales for the first time at this election – have been allowed to vote in Scottish elections since 2015. England looks increasingly isolated with its limited franchise.

Despite the split in the independence electoral camp as a result of the founding of Alba by former first Minister Alec

Salmond, and the fact that the Unionist media used this as an opportunity to lay into both Nicola Sturgeon personally and her party, the SNP vote has held up and it remains the main electoral expression of the independence movement.

While Salmond attempted to present Alba as to the left of the SNP, even on the question of independence; they do not have the key to unlock the standoff between Westminster and Holyrood. Only a mass movement on the schemes (housing estates) and the streets which dwarfs what the Radical Independence campaign impressively managed in the second referendum, based on a radical vision of what an independent Scotland would stand for, could force Johnson to change his mind.

This needs to be combined with a major growth in support in England and Wales for the democratic right of the Scottish people to decide. Salmond and Alba are no more likely to build such a pluralist movement than Sturgeon and the SNP. In the meantime, Alba has a reactionary stance on social issues with prominent members playing a role in an anti trans backlash and trivialising misogyny in terms of Salmond's behaviour.

The Scottish Greens, who stood in more constituencies than previously and saw their share of the vote rise, have also elected eight MSPs, an improvement on their previous best showing in 2003 where they elected 7. Indeed, they could easily have elected 10 MSPs – coming only a few hundred votes short of doing so.

Support for independence was clearer in their manifesto than before and with COP26 coming to Glasgow in November the environment has been climbing the Scottish political agenda. So it was not surprising that that section of the pro-independence electorate who did not buy the rather hollow appeal to give both their votes to the SNP were more likely to back the Greens. [2] Their strong showing should be welcomed and it is to be expected they will exact a radical price from

the SNP – particularly, but not necessarily exclusively on environmental questions.

The Scottish Greens are an interesting formation – with political positions similar to or to the left of the GPEW (Green Party of England and Wales) – but with no real branch structure or existence outside elections. Patrick Harvie has been the party's dominant figure for a long time – becoming an MSP in 2003 and taking over from Robin Harper in 2008 as co-convenor (the post became co-leader in 2019). Though he has nominally shared the leadership during these years the fact that 5 women have shared that role with him means that his profile has been much greater. Whether a bigger parliamentary group, including previous co-convenor and socialist Maggie Chapman, who was also active in the Radical Independence Campaign, remains to be seen.

While there is not the scope in this piece to deal with the radical left in Scotland in detail, its certainly worth noting that this was the first Holyrood elections were there were no pro-independence candidates to the left of the Greens. The Scottish Socialist Party decided not to stand any candidates – and indeed looking at their website, they hardly acknowledge an election was taking place. Sheridan's Solidarity has effectively disappeared.

The current that played a major role in the Radical Independence Campaign during the previous referendum campaign, the International Socialist group Scotland, formally dissolved in 2015 with its members going into other projects such as Rise and Conter. Unfortunately some of them were also heavily involved in attempts to undemocratically wind up RIC precisely at the point when the left needed to really focus on what urgent tasks would be posed for it following the inevitable fact of a new electoral mandate for a new referendum. [3] After all it was precisely in the last referendum campaign that the failure of the SNP to put forward a radical vision for Scotland became apparent to the greatest

numbers. The Republican Socialist Platform has made some important steps forward in this regard but cannot hope to entirely fill the gap

Unionist discipline

There was disciplined tactical voting in the Unionist camp. In seat after seat significant numbers of voters backed whichever Unionist party was seen as the strongest challenger to the SNP, whether that be Tory, Labour or Lib Dem, though this was less true of Labour voters. While this did not take seats from the governing party, it did prevent the SNP taking a number of key target seats – Dumbarton was held by Labour as was Edinburgh Southern while the Tories held Eastwood.

In Dumbarton, the seat with the smallest majority in the country, Labour's Jackie Baillie saw an increase of 6.1 per cent in her votes with the Tory vote falling by 6.3 per cent and the Lib Dems by 1.6. In Edinburgh Southern Labour's vote increased 10.4 per cent, the Tory vote fell 14.5 per cent and the SNP vote rose only 4.4 per cent. In Eastwood the Tory vote went up by 6.2 per cent to hold the seat while the SNP challenging increased only by 5.6, while Labour's vote plummeted by 14.8 in a seat where they had no hope of even being second. It is probably worth marking the fact that a higher proportion of Tory supporters switched to Labour where this was tactically advisable – the strength of their unionism was hugely apparent.

The new leader of Scottish Labour, Anas Sarwar, presided over a 1.6 fall in his party's vote, the worst since devolution, but claims it is on 'a journey back'. Tell that to the whole of the Glasgow Kelvin Executive committee who resigned their positions after candidate Hollie Cameron was removed for disagreeing with the leadership over the right to a referendum. [4] The support even for the right to a referendum has always been weak in Scottish Labour, which has a long tradition of tribalism and of dismissing the SNP as Tartan

Tories – somewhat ironically when the majority of their leadership is happy to block with the Conservative and Unionist Party to try to defeat a push for independence.

While promises of further devolution may have purchase in Wales and in the English cities, it is unclear that they would fly in Scotland. Sarwar is much closer to Starmer than to Drakeford and has inherited a Scottish Labour Party which has lost a huge proportion of its working-class base in particular to the SNP. No road back without some very sharp turns – turns which Sarwar is certainly not contemplating.

The Welsh dragon roars

Welsh Labour's Mark Drakeford will be very pleased with the surprisingly good results in the Sennedd elections where Labour took 30 seats, Tories 16, Plaid 13 and Lib Dems 1.

Making a comparison with the previous national elections in Wales is complex because then UKIP took 7 seats and this time they (nor the new formation Abolish the Welsh Assembly with similar reactionary roots) had any significant impact. This, together with the two tier electoral system means that calculating swings is a nightmare.

Labour's showing was much better than opinion polls predicted early on. Drakeford has definitely benefited from managing the pandemic relatively well – he has not made nearly as many U-turns as Johnson, though that does not explain the shift during the campaign. [5] Labour will work with other parties on a case by case basis; the widely predicted Labour-Plaid coalition is not a runner. And while the Tories in Wales are much less pleased than those in England, they should not be completely written off.

The big political story in Wales however is increasing support for independence . [6] Before 2018, the proportion of Welsh voters in favour of independence ranged between 10% and 20%.

However, this figure has increased in recent years. Recent polling indicates that between one quarter and one third of Welsh voters who express a view say they would vote Yes in a Welsh independence referendum. Yes Cymru has grown significantly – and those numbers are probably much higher amongst younger people.

But unlike in Scotland, where for the mass of people the SNP is clearly the electoral voice of the independence movement, the same is not true in the same way for Plaid in Wales. While the differences are indisputable the reasons need more exploration.

There are certainly different takes. This piece "This was a bad election for Plaid Cymru – but they seem to be winning without winning elections" seems a profoundly complacent piece after such a lacklustre campaign by Plaid, whereas this [Voice Wales article which suggests former Plaid leader Leanne Wood, who lost her seat in the Rhonda, might have been a victim of current leader Adam Price failure to champion independence enough in a lacklustre campaign. [7]

Plaid's website remarkably has no reaction to the results – only a statement at the eve of poll as to why people should vote for Plaid. I can only find Price's comment on his own individual election result – but clearly they will not be happy not only at the loss of Leanne Wood's seat but with their national showing. [8]

Indeed independence was the issue that everyone other than the far right were trying to downplay despite its increasing popularity. The Welsh Labour manifesto has nothing to say about it but Drakeford made a speech to Welsh Labour's spring conference in late February in which he said: "Now, for all that to be achieved we need a more powerful devolution settlement. One in which we secure both home rule for Wales but in a successful United Kingdom. Internationalist, not nationalist. Outward facing, not inward looking." [9]

The fact that since the election Mick Antoniw has been appointed to a new post of Minster for the Constitution shows that this was not just a stance to undermine Plaid at the election but a longer term route that Welsh Labour under Drakeford is committed to going down. Antoniw was one of the those involved in the publication of an extensive report on Radical Federalism published this January – so in appointing him Drakeford is certainly given some weight to his views. [10]

While sections of the Welsh Labour bureaucracy can be as tribalist as is the case for the overwhelming majority of Scottish Labour, there is also more support – and more organised support for independence inside Welsh Labour than there ever was in their sister party in Scotland. Labour for an independent Wales is a visible and serious organisation which makes this key statement: Labour for an Independent Wales sees independence as a tool with which to organise a socialist state, on an equal footing with every other state around the world – an ambition that is unattainable in the United Kingdom as it is.

It is not clear how these views around home rule and independence are reflected within the Labour left in Wales. Welsh Labour Grassroots, the sister organisation of Momentum in Wales, these days has a very out of date website and no list of its current office holders, but it was good to see prominent Welsh Labour Grassroots member s making a public tribute to Leanne Wood. This sentiment was also expressed widely by supporters of Labour for an Independent Wales recognising that she was probably the most left wing members of the Sennedd

All of this means that for socialists in England the question of deepening our understanding of the national questions in both Scotland and Wales, and in particular fighting for labour movement support for the right to self determination, needs to be pushed much higher up our political agenda.

Republished from International Viewpoint

Leonard resigns, as Starmer abandons Scotland's voters

This article was originally published on the Socialist Resistance website.

Richard Leonard has bowed to the inevitable and resigned as Scottish Labour Party leader, just 16 weeks before the most critical Scottish Parliament elections since devolution on 6 May.

The choreographed move coordinated by the office of the UK Labour leader, Keir Starmer, continuing his purge of the Party of any apparent remnants of supporters of Jeremy Corbyn came on 14 January. *Mike Picken* reports from Scotland.

Purge of Corbyn associates

Leonard's departure comes after three years of desultory performance at the helm of Scottish Labour. He was narrowly elected in 2017 as an associate of left wing former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn. Following Keir Starmer's consolidation as new leader of the Labour Party in April 2020 and the subsequent ongoing purge of Corbyn associates, Leonard was hanging by a thread.

Since his election, Leonard faced repeated opposition from within the 23-strong Labour group of Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs). He fought off one major public attempt to remove him in September 2020, when several MSPs worked through the press to undermine his position. But, having tabled a motion of no confidence, they judged they did not yet have

enough support on the Scottish Executive Committee (SEC) and withdrew their motion before the vote. This followed the disqualification of the right-wing controlled Labour Students' organisation representatives across the whole of Labour due to financial misconduct, which unexpectedly reduced the votes of those supporting "no confidence" on the SEC at the time.

Starmer demands "Get Brexit Done!"

Starmer in London and Leonard's opponents in Scotland were looking for another opportunity and the apparent public split in December 2020 over the respective votes on Brexit legislation in the UK Parliament in London and Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh made this more urgent.

Starmer, one of the most argumentatively anti-Brexit of Labour MPs under Jeremy Corbyn, is now apparently becoming the strongest Brexit supporter in the Labour Party as leader.

As the Johnson government's trade negotiations with the EU faltered during the autumn, over the UK's intransigent opposition to any remaining vestiges of the EU within the rest of the British state (outside the occupied six counties in the north of Ireland which to all intents and purposes remain part of the EU), Starmer forced Labour to adopt the previous 2019 pro-Brexit line of Johnson and N Farage and even shamefully adopted "Get Brexit Done!" as an official campaign slogan.

He tried to force Labour MPs in the Westminster Parliament to vote for Johnson's miserable eleventh hour Brexit trade deal. Although nearly 40 Labour MPs defied Starmer's whip, the sole surviving Labour MP in Scotland, Ian Murray, previously an outspoken opponent of Brexit and of Leonard, trooped meekly into the Westminster lobbies with the Tories to give Johnson a massive "hard Brexit" majority.

The Scottish National Party (SNP), which since 2015 has had the vast majority of Westminster MPs from Scotland and is the

third largest party in the House of Commons, called instead for continuing opposition to the Brexit deal and an extension of the ‘transition period’ to avoid massive economic dislocation in the middle of the pandemic.

Scots MPs formed the main contingent of those voting against Johnson’s squalid deal at Westminster, reflecting the 62% vote for Remain. Opposition to Brexit is now about 75% according to recent polls in Scotland.

Starmer sees Labour taking a hard line in favour of Brexit as a way to ‘win back’ the dozens of former Labour seats in northern England lost by Labour in 2019, the so-called ‘red wall’ that were allegedly lost because of Brexit. In fact many of these seats were lost because of neglect over decades by the Labour Party and the reality is that in taking such a hard line pro-Brexit position, lining up with the Tories, Starmer is definitely consigning Scottish Labour to electoral oblivion in May.

The Scottish Parliament and Government, led by the SNP since 2007, attempted to intervene in the Brexit negotiations particularly over fishing and free movement but was kept out by Johnson Because Brexit significantly affects devolved matters, the Scottish Parliament and the devolved legislatures in Wales and the north of Ireland were asked by the UK government to give a ‘legislative consent’ to the Westminster bill. Not only did the Scottish parliament overwhelmingly refuse this , so too did the Welsh Senedd, where Labour are the leading party, and the Northern Ireland Assembly in the occupied six counties. This left the Brexit deal as an England-only affair imposed on the population of rest of the British state.

Scottish and Welsh Labour parties had to oppose the Brexit legislation in the devolved parliaments to avoid losing face, while Starmer was pressing Westminster Labour strongly to support it to ‘win back the red wall’. A press release issued

by Leonard about why Scottish Labour was voting a differently to UK Labour attracted huge controversy making Labour look stupid, and gave Starmer the excuse he was looking for to move openly to ditch him.

Secret meeting organises coup

According to *The Times* and confirmed by a wide range of sources, Starmertold Leonard he had "no confidence" in him. On the evening of Wednesday January 13, Starmer hosted a secret online meeting to which Leonard was not invited, though private millionaire Labour donors and Ian Murray were. A deal brokered by trades unions apparently saw Leonard resign the next day with immediate effect, but guaranteed him a place at the top of one of Scottish Labour's regional lists for the Holyrood elections in May – in apparent contradiction of the Scottish Labour policy of putting women at the head of all lists. This guarantees Leonard one of Scottish Labour's dwindling number of seats in the Scottish Parliament and an MSP's salary of £65k for the next four years.

While Leonard went along with the pretence that this was a personal decision taken over Xmas in his vacuous resignation statement, (link) the shoddy 'deal' produced outrage from Leonard-supporting left wing MSP Neil Findlay who attacked Leonard's opponents as "flinching cowards and sneering traitors" (link) (a reference to the words of the "Red Flag", the longstanding anthem of the Labour Party ritually sung at Labour's conferences but completely ignored by Labour leaders other than Corbyn).

Findlay held explosive interviews including on BBC Scotland's TV News programme The Nine and radio programme Good Morning Scotland attacking Leonard's opponents of Leonard for their manoeuvres. Findlay is an outspoken Corbyn supporter but is standing down from the Scottish Parliament, and the organisation he leads within Scottish Labour, the neo-Stalinist Campaign for Socialism, has been increasingly

ineffectual.

While Richard Leonard has been identified by the mainstream press as a Corbyn supporter and this constituted a major reason for his purge, the reality is actually more complex. Leonard is a fairly committed left social democrat supporting action on workers' rights and environmental issues, genuinely liked by people who work with him, including opponents. But his decades working in the trade union bureaucracy have led to a politically cautious approach, seeking to work through "backroom deals" and attempted careful presentation. This is the very opposite of what was Corbyn and his many supporters in the party represented. In the right wing atmosphere of the Scottish Labour Party, Leonard failed to win support for his equivocal role.

Scottish Labour was the only part of the Labour Party where in 2016 full members failed to vote for Jeremy Corbyn. Leonard only won by a few hundred votes against his opponent a year later, right wing businessman Anas Sarwar. By the time of the election of a deputy leader in 2020, it was clear that the majority of Scottish Labour Party members had moved to the right and the devoted Blair-supporting MSP, Jackie Baillie, easily won nearly 60% of the membership vote against the challenge by left wing Glasgow councillor Matt Kerr. Leonard's base of support was less within the Corbyn supporting minority within the party membership and relied on the financial weight of the affiliated trade unions after decades working as a paid official. And a majority of trade unions in Scotland are not affiliated to Labour.

Leonard also committed a number of major gaffes in his lacklustre appearances in the Scottish Parliament against the more visibly competent First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon of the SNP, running a high profile Covid presence. In interventions over measures to lockdown hospitality during the Covid crisis, he accused the SNP of behaving like temperance leaders by restricting alcohol sales and put forward a bizarre claim of

the SNP treating the industry like “Sodom and Gomorrah”. Voters were unable to tell whether he was for or against tighter measures to suppress Covid.

Sturgeon easily ran rings round him, even though on many occasions she said they shared a similar outlook and that she wanted to work with him. In the febrile tribal politics adopted by Scottish Labour, Leonard repeatedly called on the SNP government to undertake things they had already demonstrably done, while his fiscal demands for more expenditure were easily rebuffed by the SNP saying that due to the UK government’s treatment of the Scottish government, only independence could achieve what he was demanding. While Labour swung between being for and against Brexit, leaving Scottish voters breathless, they failed to hit home against the SNP’s unconditional support for EU policies especially when it came to the SNP using state-aid policies as an excuse for not intervening to defend Scottish workers.

Under Leonard, the Scottish Labour manifesto for the 2019 general election dropped the Scottish party conference’s opposition to renewal of the Scottish-based Trident nuclear weapons system, to adopt the UK party policy of spending up to 200 billion pounds upgrading Britain’s nuclear weapons of mass destruction. For a long period Scottish public opinion has been strongly against the Trident system and nuclear weapons, but Scottish Labour now backs it.

By the time of Leonard’s removal on 14 January, it was clear that the unions could not support him any longer and thus they brokered a backroom deal for him to vacate the leadership while staying in the Parliament.

Dismal electoral performance of Scottish Labour

As well as Brexit and the wish to purge Corbyn supporters, the ostensible reason for Starmer seeking to ditch Leonard was the

dismal electoral performance of Scottish Labour. But the collapse of support for Scottish Labour started well before Leonard became leader.

Labour was the dominant party in Scotland over many decades, regularly sending up to 50 MPs to the Westminster parliament. Labour introduced devolution and the recreation of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 (after an earlier attempt in 1979 was defeated by a small "anti devolution" minority of Labour MPs blocking with the Tories to sabotage the democratic process). Labour saw devolution of the highly centralised British state as the opportunity to "see off" the electoral challenge of the independence-supporting SNP. But Labour's own record in government was badly tainted by the Iraq war in 2003 and the pro-austerity policies of the Blair/Brown days – in Scotland this was reflected by major privatisation of public services.

Labour were ousted from the Scottish government (then called "Executive") in 2007, when the SNP overtook them in the more proportional elections for the Parliament. But Labour managed to take the majority of seats in Scotland at Westminster in 2010 because of the undemocratic first-past-the-post electoral system where Scots voted tactically for Labour to keep the Tories out. They assumed voters would just return to them.

By the 2011 Holyrood elections, the SNP were able to use the more proportional system to win an unexpected majority and to press their demands for a referendum on Scottish independence. Then Tory Prime Minister David Cameron eagerly agreed to a referendum in 2012 at a time when independence was showing around 25% in the polls. Labour entered into an alliance with the Tories under the slogan "Better Together" to defend the unionism of the British state. But Scottish voters, particularly working class Labour voters, increasingly saw independence as an alternative to austerity policies of London that had been imposed on Scotland undemocratically. Support for independence soared to 45% in the referendum of

2014.

Although defeated in the referendum, a mass independence movement was mobilised and in 2015 voters wiped out both the Tories and Labour, returning 56 out of 59 SNP MPs to Westminster. Labour learnt no lessons from this and continued to espouse the Unionist cause, despite the Brexit referendum in 2016 when Scotland voted overwhelmingly to remain in the EU, opposing the xenophobic campaign against free movement by the Tory and UKIP Brexiteers.

Labour slumped to third place in the Holyrood elections of 2016 and while the SNP went from a majority to a minority government, their vote share actually increased. Labour won back a few Westminster seats in Scotland in the general election of 2017 when Corbyn's left wing programme massively increased Labour's appeal (though only an increase of a few tens of thousands of votes in Scotland, compared to over a million in England), but they lost all these gains in 2019 on the back of an ambiguous policy on Brexit and continuing growth in support for independence. A few Corbyn supporters like John McDonnell held out the possibility of Labour accepting self-determination for Scotland, upholding the right of the Scottish Parliament to determine whether and when to hold a referendum. But this received a hostile reception from the leadership of Scottish Labour and some on the left across the pro-union Labour Party. Scottish Labour also lost control of all its councils in 2017, including the city of Glasgow which it had controlled for over forty years.

Majority for Independence

Throughout the last year opinion polls have repeatedly shown a majority for independence in Scotland – the latest two polls put support at 57-58%. The SNP are showing over 50% support for first-past-the-post seats, giving them the strong likelihood of a majority government in May, committed to a second independence referendum in the near future. Together

with the pro-independence Scottish Green Party picking up regional list seats, the next Scottish Parliament looks set to have a clear pro-independence majority – that will be ignored by Boris Johnson's government at Westminster, backed by Labour leader Starmer.

Starmer made a major speech in January setting out his opposition to a second independence referendum in favour of a campaign for a more radical devolution or federalism policy aiming to prop up the failed British state. Scottish voters have heard all this before – in "the vow" made by Labour and Tory leaders claiming to boost the role of Scottish governance within the UK as a desperate attempt to stop independence voting in 2014. The "vow" was symbolised in the figurehead of 'yesterday's man', former Labour prime minister Gordon Brown, who has now been appointed by Starmer to head up a Labour devolution campaign that has no discernible policies and cannot be delivered without support in England.

The imposition of hard Brexit on Scotland has been the hugely unpopular result of the 'vow' – rejection of Scotland's vote on the EU and ignoring any views of the Scottish government or parliament. Boris Johnson has made clear his views that devolution was a "disaster" and that he intends to continue to ignore Scottish opinion.

Scottish Labour's newly appointed constitutional policy spokesperson, Anas Sarwar, caused consternation within the party when he said Labour would be against any independence referendum being held in "the next five years" – a made-up on-the-hoof policy never adopted by Scottish Labour and standing against the views of the Scottish Trade Union Conference (STUC) and Labour's largest Scottish affiliate Unison, both of which back an independence referendum being solely up to the Scottish Parliament.

Fishing crisis

Hard Brexit has in recent days provoked a huge crisis in the fishing industries – one of Scotland's largest economic areas – as tonnes of Scottish fishing products sit rotting in lorries unable to get to their traditional EU markets. Tory cabinet member Jacob Rees-Mogg's response that "at least the fish are British and happier", together with the revelation that the Tory fishing minister had not even read the Brexit deal before voting with it because she was "too busy with nativity", has poured fuel on the flames of Scottish opinion as thousands of jobs are threatened by Tory Brexit.

But it is Labour's commitment to working with the Tories and supporting their hated policies that will continue to further its electoral collapse in Scotland – voting for Brexit, supporting nuclear weapons, undemocratically refusing an independence referendum, and unconditional support for the union. Starmer appeared with a union flag behind him on a recent TV broadcast to emphasise this commitment.

As many in Scotland are pointing out – it's the Labour message that's the problem not the messenger!

The contest for Leonard's replacement is unlikely to produce any sparks, as the likes of Anas Sarwar and Jackie Baillie are the frontrunners to compete for the mantle of "Starmer's Champion in Scotland" – or "running the junior branch office" as many in the independence movement put it.

MSP Monica Lennon has been touted as a possible runner due to her recent high profile successful campaign to make Scotland the first country in the world to distribute free sanitary products for women and girls. However, Lennon is among only a few who support separating the Scottish Labour Party from the UK party and had defended the right of the Scottish Parliament to determine an independence referendum. She is therefore unlikely to attract significant support and the Starmer

leadership will seek to ensure she fails.

Unless Labour makes a dramatic change of policy on both independence and Brexit, the Scottish party seems set to confine itself further to the margins of politics, whoever emerges as the eleventh leader in twenty years.

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