Trade unions oppose Glasgow's drastic cuts in museums services

Glasgow City Council Unison's branch has launched a campaign against the SNP leadership of the Council's proposed cuts in museum services. Rallies are being held at the Burrell Collection gallery and the Gallery of Modern Art in the city centre (Saturday 5th August 12 noon). The rally at the Burrell Collection was addressed by Unison workers in conservation and collections whose jobs are at risk and also by representatives of the Unite and GMB unions at the Council. Below we publish the leaflet issued by the Unison branch – please support the campaign.

Shredding Services quicker than a Banksy Auction!

Banksy's Cut and Run exhibition, Mary Quant at Kelvingrove and the Burrell Collection winning the prestigious award of Art Fund Museum of the Year. These are just some of the successes Glasgow Museums have delivered this summer.

So visitors and tourists to Glasgow's Museums will be shocked to know that the city's Museums and Collections department, run by Glasgow Life, will see nearly a third of jobs cut with 37 posts from a total of 128 to be lost this year to save £1.5M.

The jobs cull affects the behind the scenes staff across Glasgow Museums and the City Archives and Special Collections staff at the Mitchell Library. Posts to go include Curators, Conservators, Technicians, Outreach and Learning Assistants, Collections staff, and staff from Photography, Editorial and

Design.

The Museum Conservation department is being reduced by 40%. Curatorial staff and Collections Management are facing heavy cuts. Savaging cuts to the professional teams will result in a loss of skillls, knowledge, creativity and essential car of Glasgow's world-renowned museum collections. Public programmes, displays, exhibitions and online content will be vastly reduced as a result. Losing the technical and specialist staff who prepare objects and loans, manage and move the collections, design and build the displays and temporary exhibitions will result in diminished public experiences, empty exhibition spaces and stagnant galleries.

A move towards the privatisation of technical and specialist skills is expensive and diminishes both the public offer and public purse.

Cuts to Glasgow Life's Open Museum and Learning and Access provision will see a reduction in services to marginalized communities in Glasgow. Activities such as free facilitated weekend activities for families will be greatley reduced. Successful initiatives such as dementia and autism friendly programmes are much less likely to happen in the future. The cuts risk shifting a dynamic museum services towards spaces of elite privilege.

UNISON demands Glasgow Councillors stand up for Glasgow Life services, not pass on the funding attacks from the Scottish and UK governments.

We call on Glasgow City Councillors to reverse these devastating cuts to our Museums and Collections.

Our Museums and Collections are world renowned and internationally lauded. They need to be protected and cherished.

Want to vent a little?

We suggest you contact:
Councillor Susan Aitken (Leader of Glasgow City Council)
Susan.Aitken@glasgow.gov.uk

Councillor Annette Christie (Chair of Glasgow Life)
Annette.Christie@glasgow.gov.uk

Leaflet published by Unison, 84 Bell Street

Glasgow, G1 1LQ Tel: 0141 552 7069



Photos of protest rally at The Burrell Collection by M Picken for ecosocialist.scot





Socialists contest Glasgow Council By-election

The Scottish Socialist Party is standing George MacDougall in a Glasgow Council by-election, *writes Mike Picken*.

The by-election in the Linn Ward, on the south east edge of Glasgow, takes place on Thursday 17 November and is caused by the death of a Labour councillor, Malcolm Cunning, a former leader of the Labour group reelected only in May.

At the heart of the Linn ward is the vast Castlemilk area – a remote housing scheme/estate established in the post-war period. At a well attended SSP election meeting on 8 November in the heart of Castlemilk, socialist candidate George MacDougall explained that poverty is a massive challenge in Castlemilk, particularly due to its remoteness and lack of infrastructure with few shops or cultural facilities, no rail station and a poor and expensive bus service. Housing standards are varied but some older tenements are afflicted with inadequate insulation and damp. George has lived in the area and explained that it had a strong community ethos with a previous local group, Castlemilk Against Austerity, campaigning for improvements and standing independent candidates in the elections with some success. During its successful early period twenty years ago the SSP won around 13% of the vote in Castlemilk.

The SSP campaign is focussing on the need to unite working class communities against the Tory UK government and point out the inadequacy of the response of parties in the Scottish Parliament – SNP, Labour and Green. SSP Industrial Organiser, Richie Venton, told the public meeting that the SSP demands

were to “End Fuel Poverty” by cutting energy bills and calling for the nationalisation of the entire energy system. Venton explained that the SSP demanded a ‘Socialist Green New Deal’ that involved challenging the Tory government at Westminster and demanding the Scottish Parliament and Scottish councils campaign for a massive insulation programme with retrofitting of working class homes, combined with a move to clean green energy, an end to fossil fuel extraction and free public transport to end reliance on private cars and reduce pollution. While these demands are massively popular across Scotland, none of the parties in the Scottish Parliament are prepared to confront the Tory government at Westminster to get them implemented.

The SSP also called for massive solidarity with those workers currently struggling against the Tory wage cuts and cost-of-living crisis. A highlight of the public meeting was a speech by Gordon Martin, the RMT union Scottish Organiser. The RMT has been leading the battle across Britain to defend wages through strike action on the railways. Martin explained that although the strike action had been temporarily suspended following recent developments by the Rail Delivery Group employers, the RMT was still committed to a further ballot for strike action in the event of no reasonable inflation-matching offer on pay and conditions coming forward. Also addressing the meeting was Melanie Gale, an NHS nurse and workplace representative of the GMB union. She spoke about the struggle in the health service for decent pay and welcomed the likelihood of industrial action by the RCN and other unions (two small health unions in Scotland had already voted for strike action, while the RCN Scotland confirmed on 9 November they had also voted for strikes). Melanie demanded the SNP/Green government in Holyrood put their money where their mouth was and come forward with a pay offer that matches inflation.

The by-election takes place under the transferable vote system

used in Scottish councils, so there is no question of the SSP 'splitting' the left or pro independence vote. There are nine candidates in the by-election, including not just the five parties at Holyrood (Labour, SNP, Green, LibDem and Tory) but also the Alba Party, a largely reactionary splinter from the SNP, and the ultra conservative UKIP and Freedom Alliance parties.

This by-election marks a welcome return by the SSP to contesting elections and providing a voice for working class politics of solidarity, socialism and environmentalism. While it is unlikely to make a major breakthrough in terms of numbers of votes at this stage, as the SSP has not stood in an election in the area for 12 years, the SSP campaign focusses on key class issues of the day. To help the SSP election campaign use this form to contact them.



Gordon Martin, RMT Scotland organiser addresses SSP election meeting in Castlemilk, 8 November

Glasgow City Council unions vote for strike action over equal pay

Workers at Glasgow City Council have voted overwhelmingly for legal strike action over equal pay measures *writes Mike Picken*.

The trade union Unison's ballot ended on 1 March and the results were announced on 2 March (see below). Nearly 9,000 Unison members employed directly by the Council voted in a postal ballot, 96% in favour of strike action on a turnout of 52.5%.

Under the reactionary anti-trade union laws of the Conservative UK Government, postal ballots for strike action have to exceed a legal threshold of a 50% turnout. Given the difficulties of postal ballots sent to home addresses having to be returned through the post in an era of electronic communication in the workplace, this is an extremely difficult challenge and the fact that this threshold was exceeded and an overwhelming vote for a strike carried shows the huge strength of feeling among rank and file workers. Unfortunately the 50% threshold was not quite exceeded in the subsidiary employer "Glasgow Life", an 'Arms Length Management Organisation" (ALMO) notionally a charity, used by the Council to deliver cultural, leisure and recreation services such as sports centres, arts venues, museums, libraries and community centres across the City. Nevertheless the 91% vote for strike action on a 48% turnout indicates the strength of feeling in that part of the Council's services.

The GMB union also balloted its Glasgow City Council members affected by the dispute and achieved a 97.8% vote for strike action on a more than 50% turnout from its members in social

care, cleaning and catering services.

GMB Scotland Organiser Sean Baillie told the Glasgow Times:

> *"Our members need equal pay justice and an end to the discriminatory pay and grading system that remains in place.*
>
> *"That's the clear message this ballot result sends to the council officials who should be negotiating properly with our claimant groups and to every councillor seeking election in May.*
>
> *"The council's liabilities are growing every working hour of every working day and the cost will likely run into the hundreds of million yet again, so the situation is critical for our members, the services they deliver, and the city's finances.*
>
> *"That's why we need an urgent negotiation process to be conducted in good faith between the council and the claimant groups, if strike action is to be avoided." Sean Baillie GMB Scotland Organiser*
>
> *https://www.glasgowtimes.co.uk/news/19964224.equal-pay-strikes-hit-glasgow-end-month-unions-back-action/*



GMB members demanding equal pay

Unite, the third union involved in the equal pay dispute, is balloting members currently, with a closing date of 14 March.

The pressure is now on the SNP-led Council to come up with a

resolution by introducing new proposals for compensation and equal pay grading. The SNP leadership inherited the crisis in Glasgow City Council in 2017 when it took over from a Labour Council found guilty of pay discrimination against women workers over decades but promised to settle the issue and introduce both compensation and a new pay and grading system that they have failed to do.

In the run-up to the local Council elections on 5 May, resolving this dispute is major challenge for the SNP Council leadership and also raises the question of whether the SNP-led Scottish government and their Scottish Green partners have the wherewithal to come up with financial support for the cash-strapped Council that can enable resolution. If they fail in this, then strikes will almost certainly go ahead against the backdrop of the Council elections. Solidarity and support from workers and residents across Glasgow and beyond will be vital in the event of strikes to ensure a victory in this long-running battle for equal pay. A separate Scotland-wide pay award campaign for council workers from 1 April is also ongoing by the unions.

3 March 2022

UNISON Glasgow media release:

UNISON
the public service union

UNISON members in Glasgow City Council have voted overwhelmingly for strike action in the dispute over equal pay compensation payments.
96% of members voted for strike action, on a turnout of 52.5%.
Just under 9,000 workers were balloted.
Lyn Marie O'Hara, UNISON Branch Depute Chair, said:
"This is a huge vote for action and a clear message to the council to resolve the dispute.
The UNISON branch will now request authorisation for strike action from our NEC and be liaising with our sister trade unions on the next steps in the industrial dispute.
The trade unions will also continue to receive regular updates from the claimants joint legal team on the current negotiations with the council lawyers. The council should now listen."

To Unison Glasgow members:

UNISON Strike Ballot Results – Equal Pay Compensation Payments Dispute
UNISON members in Glasgow City Council have voted overwhelmingly for strike action in the dispute over equal pay compensation payments.
96% of members voted for strike action, on a turnout of 52.5%.
This is a huge vote for action and a clear message to the council to resolve the dispute. The UNISON branch will now request authorisation for strike action from our NEC and be liaising with our sister trade unions on the next steps in the industrial dispute. The trade unions will also continue to receive regular updates from the claimants joint legal team on the current negotiations with the council lawyers. The council should now listen.
The vote in Glasgow Life was also for strike action however the turnout in the ballot was just short of the 50% threshold required under the current UK anti-trade union laws. Nevertheless, this is still a very clear message from UNISON members in Glasgow Life on the need for equal pay justice. 91% of members in Glasgow Life voted for strike action, on a turnout of 48%.

Further communications will be issued in due course.
Well done to all who voted in the two strike ballots.
UNISON Glasgow Branch
https://www.facebook.com/UnisonGlasgowCity/

Glasgow COP26: Join Fridays for the Future march Friday 5 November 11.00 Kelvingrove Park, Glasgow

Fridays for the Future have called a school strike for Glasgow on Friday 5 November to protest against climate change. There will be a march from Kelvingrove Park (Prince of Wales Bridge) to Glasgow City Centre starting at 11.00. Speakers include Greta Thunberg.

Details here: https://climatestrike.scot/strike/

@fff_scotland

#COP26 #UprootTheSystem#UprootTheCOP

Glasgow COP 26: INSIDE OUTSIDE – daily reports from

the COP26 Coalition

INSIDE OUTSIDE brings you daily reports of developments at the Glasgow COP26. Brought to you by the COP26 Coalition and presented by Sabrina Fernandes and Iain Bruce, the programme will cover what is happening both inside the COP26 conference and outside in the streets and protests in Glasgow.

You can access the programme daily on You Tube at the COP26 Coalition channel: COP26 Coalition – YouTube

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Glasgow COP26: Zero Carbon by 2050 is far too late!!

If dire warnings resolved the environmental crisis we would be heading for victory *writes Alan Thornett*.

Boris Johnson tells us that we are heading for a new dark ages, which indeed we probably are. The UN Secretary-General has called it a "code red for humanity". A report from the IPCC (International Panel on Climate Change), just before the Glasgow COP concluded that changes to the Earth's climate are now "widespread, rapid, and intensifying".

Such warnings are important, of course, but the gap between such words and action is enormous. At the moment we are heading for a 2.7 degC increase by the end of the century – which would be catastrophic – and that is only if countries meet all of the pledges they made in Paris.

The problem in Glasgow is not just whether an agreement is reached, or even whether it will be implemented, it is that

the target that has been set by the elites – ‘a 50 per cent reduction in carbon emissions by 2030 and then ‘net’ zero by 2050’ – was entirely inadequate before the conference opened.

The 1.5degC limit was a last-minute breakthrough at the Paris COP in 2015, and was agreed only as an aspiration and not a policy. Two years later (in October 2018) it was officially adopted in a Special Report on Global Warming published by the IPCC. The Report concluded that the 1.5degC limit was entirely possible within the laws of chemistry and physics but would require unprecedented effort in all aspects of society to implement. The IPCC also warned that we have just 12 years to do something about it, since a 1.5degC increase could be reached as soon as 2030.

After this the climate movement then adopted the slogan net zero by 2030 – which was adopted by the 2019 LP conference, for example, with the ‘net’ part hotly disputed. The resolution was supported by the UNITE union. Extinction Rebellion (XR) adopted it with a date of 2025.

Zero carbon by 2030, however, has been replaced in Glasgow by a demand for a ‘50 per cent carbon reduction by 2030 and net zero by 2050’. The British government has adopted this position and according to Ed Miliband Labour has also, with 2040 instead of 2050.

We should reject the notion that that zero carbon by 2030 can’t be done – from whoever it comes. It would, of course, need a dramatically new approach and degree of political will commensurate with an existential threat. And it would have to be led by governments, who alone have the resources to do it. It means putting their economies on a war footing – a point made strongly (and bizarrely) by the heir to the British throne.

During the Second World War the British economy was taken over by the government and completely turned over to war production

within months.

The USA acted in the same way once it entered the war. The US War Museum puts it this way: “Meeting these (wartime) challenges would require massive government spending, conversion of existing industries to wartime production, construction of huge new factories, changes in consumption, and restrictions on many aspects of American life. Government, industry, and labour would need to cooperate. Contributions from all Americans, young and old, men and women, would be necessary to build up what President Roosevelt called the “Arsenal of Democracy.”

Leaving aside the jingoism, the scale of the ecological emergency also requires mobilisations of this kind which go way beyond anything that the free market can achieve – despite the profile it has been given in Glasgow.

It means forcing major structural changes at every level of society very quickly. It means a major transfer of wealth to the impoverished countries to facilitate their transition and lift them towards western levels of development. It also means major reductions in energy usage and wastage alongside renewable energy. It also means recognising that this decade – the 2020s – is crucial in all this. Once we go beyond this decade the problems escalate and the task becomes more difficult.

As Greta Thunberg insisted in the Guardian last month: “Science doesn’t lie. If we are to stay below the targets set in the 2015 Paris agreement – and thereby minimise the risks of setting off irreversible chain reactions beyond human control – we need immediate, drastic, annual emission reductions unlike anything the world has ever seen. And since we don’t have the technological solutions which alone will do anything close to that in the foreseeable future, it means we have to make fundamental changes to our society.”

Increasing public support

Last month a poll of 22,000 people, conducted by Demos, found that up to 94% public supported radical action to stop climate change including a carbon tax on industry, a levy on flying, a speed limit of 60mph on motorways, and a campaign to reduce meat eating by 10%. Last week another poll of 35,000 people, this time by GlobeScan, found that a big majority want their governments to take tough action against climate change.

Protest actions have also greatly increased. Not only those around the Greta Thunburg, the remarkable school strikes, and the Fridays for Futures movement, but around XR and Insulate Britain who have played a major role in the run-up to Glasgow.

Last week 49 members of Insulate Britain were arrested after the group blocked three major junctions in London as part of an ongoing campaign in defiance of injunctions banning them from protesting anywhere on England's strategic road network. The group, is calling on the government to commit to insulate all British homes by 2030 as a key step to tackling the climate crisis. Along with XR in particular they have played a major role in mobilising public opinion in the run-up to Glasgow.

Alongside this science is telling us that we have 10 years to hold the global temperature increase to a maximum of 1.5degC. After that a dangerous and irreversible feedback process could take un-challengeable control.

How all this will affect the outcome in Glasgow, however, remains to be seen over the next two weeks. Many world leaders, heading for summit, were already more concerned with how they can get away with pledging as little as possible and how many loopholes and excuses they can deploy to avoid serious action.

Johnson – a dangerous liability

Any gains that might come out of this conference will be in spite of Boris Johnson, who was deeply discredited on environmental issues well before he got there – even in capitalist terms.

He acts as if he is a lifelong environmentalist dedicated to the defence of the planet when most of the time he acts as a climate sceptic and runs a party that is stacked out with climate sceptics. Other than supporting electric cars – though in a totally under resourced way – his domestic record on environmental issues is appallingly

In the UK budget last week – you couldn't make it up – he actually reduces the tax on domestic air travel– a more direct snub to COP26 it is hard to imagine. He is also supporting the development of a major new oil field in the North Sea off Shetland [Cambo] with an estimated capacity of more than 1,000-bn barrels. He continues to defend the opening of a new deep coal mine in Cumbria – which he claims is nothing to do with him. (Britain is currently producing 570m barrels of oil and gas a year and has a further 4.4bn barrels of oil and gas reserves to be extracted from its continental shelf.)

His huge road building programmes, alongside airport expansions, are still on his government's agenda. He cut Britain's foreign aid budget from 0.7% to 0.5% of GDP in advance of this COP26. His government has refused to prevent the water companies dumping millions of tonnes of raw sewage a year into UK rivers making them amongst the most polluted in Europe.

His biggest lie, however, is his oft repeated claim that Britain has reduced its carbon emissions by 44 per cent since 1990.

This is only true if you exclude the embedded emissions that

Britain has exported to China and India and other developing countries as a result of massive de-industrialisation. The emissions from which now appear in the carbon budgets on those countries not the UK. Britain also excludes from its figure carbon emissions from to major emitters, aviation and shipping. These exclusions have a huge effect, amounting to around 50 per cent of Britain's carbon budget.

(Johnson also arrived at the G20 in Rome banging his little Englander drum after flouting the agreement he signed with the EU in terms of the access of goods into the north of Ireland and French fishing rights around the Channel Islands, in order to boost his support amongst UK Brexiteers.)

Conclusion

Despite it self-evident weakness, and its inability to reach conclusions and take actions commensurate to the problem the COP conferences are important in raising global awareness of the problems and as a focal point of struggle for real and decisive action. The climate movement is right to take these conference seriously and to place demands on them that would begin to have positive results. Those who argue that we (the movement) should have nothing to do with the process should think again.

Stopping climate change and environmental destruction, however, will not be resolved by COP conferences but will require the broadest possible coalition of forces ever built – and the struggle around the COP conferences is important in building such a movement.

Such a movement must include vast range of activists from those defending the forests and the fresh water resources to those that are resisting the damming of rivers that destroy the existing ecosystems. It must include the indigenous peoples who have been the backbone of so many of these struggles along with the young school strikers, and those

supporting them who have been so inspirational over the past two years. And it should include the activists of XR who have brought new energy into the movement over the same period of time.

It will also need to embrace the more radical Green Parties alongside the big NGOs such as Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, WWF, the RSPB, which have grown and radicalised in recent years alongside the newer groupings that have come on the scene such as Avaaz and 38 Degrees. These organisations have radicalised, particularly in the run up to Paris, and have an impressive mobilising ability. Such a movement has to look wider, to embrace the trade union movement, and also the indigenous peoples around the world along with major social movements, such as La Via Campesina and the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (MST).

The involvement of the trade unions is also crucial, though it remains difficult in such a defensive period. Progress has been made, however, via initiatives such as the campaign for a Million Green Jobs in Britain, which has the support of most major trade unions and the TUC, and the 'just transition' campaign (i.e. a socially just transition from fossil fuel to green jobs) which has the support of the ITUC at the international level, and addresses the issue of job protection in the course of the changeover to renewable energy. This opens the door for a deeper involvement of the trade unions in the ecological struggle.

The real test, however, will be whether it can embrace a much wider movement as the crisis develops drawing in the many millions who have not been climate activists but are driven to resist by the impact of the crisis on their lives and their chances of survival.

Glasgow communities march against closures and cuts

Hundreds of protesters marched through the streets of Glasgow city centre on Saturday 16 October to oppose the City Council plans to close community facilities.

The SNP-led City Council has put forward a programme of expenditure cuts in the face of the growing financial crisis of Scotland's 32 councils.



Central to the cuts programme in Glasgow is the closures of libraries, leisure and community facilities organised through *"Glasgow Life"* – a semi autonomous, undemocratic offshoot of the council (officially called an Arms Length External Organisation or "ALEO", a common feature of Scottish councils).

Council "nasty trick"



Rather than close facilities directly, the Council plans to squeeze funding forcing Glasgow Life to declare facilities are unviable and offer to hand them over instead to “community trusts” through a “Community Asset Transfer”. This means that instead of being run by the Council, using professional staff and having municipal-level economies of scale, small groups of volunteers will need to fundraise to support essential facilities like libraries and community centres. It’s a nasty trick that’s long been used by the Tories in England, aided and abetted by Labour councils like those in Birmingham and Waltham Forest. The elected politicians wash their hands of the services by handing control over which stay open or go to unelected officers, and rely on the “goodwill” and voluntary efforts of community groups to keep services going.

Trade unions and communities using the facilities currently under threat by the cuts by Glasgow Life have banded together to form the new **“Glasgow Against Closures”** protest movement.



The demonstration on Saturday marched from the City’s shopping area, under the watchful gaze of the statue of Labour politician Donald Dewar, to the People’s Palace in Glasgow Green to hear speakers protesting against the cuts. While there were

a lot of lefty paper sellers selling their wares to each other, the important element in the protest was the engagement from local community activists like the campaigns in Drumchapel, Ruchill, Maryhill and Whiteinch parts of the City, alongside support from union members especially members of Unite the union who were prominent on the march.

Municipal Financial Crisis

The municipal financial crisis has been exacerbated by the pandemic, but it has long been a problem that the Scottish devolved government is responsible for central funding of local government alongside the priorities of other directly funded central government services, the NHS in particular. As the demands on NHS Scotland grow and the 'national' services delivered by councils, like schools and social care, are under pressure with protected funding, the SNP Scottish government has slashed the block grant for other local services run by councils. Councils have very little source of revenue to run local services independent of their Scottish government block grant. The Council Tax is a thoroughly discredited and regressive 30 year old tax system introduced by the Tories, which both the SNP and Labour before them have criticised but failed to replace when in office. While Glasgow is the largest council and faces a particular crisis because of the cost of the equal pay settlement, all Scottish councils face the same challenges.

The SNP argue that the Scottish government, unlike the UK government for England, is forced to depend on a fixed budget with little ability to tax and raise revenue. The SNP answer to this is that rather than resist the austerity imposed on them by the Tories, we should wait for "Jam Tomorrow" in the shape of independence. The Tory UK government Spending Review on 27 October will unleash another wave of cuts in public services across the UK state with budgets in Scotland largely tied to how much is spent by the Tories in England through the

‘Barnett formula’. The reality is that Scotland is not going to achieve independence from the Tory UK government if it just means the ‘same old Tory austerity’ in new SNP clothes and a fightback to defend council services is an essential element of the battle for independence.

We urge everyone to support the union and community campaigns in their street protests and activities against the cuts today, as an essential part of the struggle for an independent and ecosocialist Scotland in future. Glasgow is the start but action needs to be built across Scotland. Five yearly ‘all-out’council elections are also due in May 2022 and there should be discussions now about a concerted united electoral challenge in local communities, to highlight the fight against the cuts and closures and build resistance across Scotland. While support from individual Labour Party members and supporters is very much welcome, we should beware the Scottish Labour Party leadership’s record of empty rhetoric against the SNP – savage cuts were also implemented during periods of Labour control of councils and the UK and Scottish governments and Labour’s support for the union saddles Scotland with Tory governments it has never voted for.



Drumchapel residents protest under the watchful eye of Donald Dewar

Get Involved

To get involved in Glasgow Against Closures, visit the Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/groups/glasgowagainstclosures/ follow the campaign on Twitter, **@glasgowclosures** (https://twitter.com/glasgowclosures) and get involved in local groups.

(All photographs and words by Mike Picken, ecosocialist.scot)



Unite Community West of Scotland puts the case against Closures

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Scottish workers vote to strike during COP26

Scottish trade union members in two unions – RMT members on ScotRail and the Caledonian Sleeper, and GMB members in Glasgow City Council – have voted overwhelmingly to strike during COP26 in November. Industrial action is also likely at the Stagecoach bus company by Unite the Union members. *Mike Picken* reports for *ecosocialist.scot* on what could be a

forthcoming ‘Scottish Winter of Discontent’.

Further strikes threatened on ScotRail network

84% of the 2,000 members of the RMT working on ScotRail voted to hold strike action across Scotland over a pay claim. The strikes could be held during the COP26 in Glasgow from 1-11 November when transport systems will already be under severe pressure.

The dispute has provoked the SNP government transport minister, Graeme Dey, into trying to challenge the RMT union and the legitimacy of the ballot vote. In an interview on BBC Radio Scotland, Dey claimed the dispute was ‘no longer valid’ as a new pay offer had been made. ScotRail had announced after the ballot had commenced that they would make a miserly two year 4.7% pay offer. This is likely to be well below inflation rates, given the current Tory cost-of-living crisis across Britain with soaring energy costs and road haulage distribution problems, caused in part by skilled labour shortages because of the Tory pursuit of Brexit at all costs. The Tories are desperately trying to apply sticking plaster to the damage done to the road haulage industriy by the exclusion of EU workers from the Labour force – it doesn’t seem to have occured to them to expand rail freight as an alternative to diesel lorries clogging up the roads. The below inflation pay offer from ScotRail was also coupled with major reductions in working conditions and standards. The RMT has responded by ridiculing the offer and demanding that the Scottish government get round the table with ScotRail and the RMT to put forward a reasonable offer.

> *RMT Scotland organiser Michael Hogg, a former miner, said it was a **“lousy, rotten offer”** of a 4.7% increase [over two*

> *years] which was not worthy of consideration because it required* ***"members to sell hard-earned terms and conditions in order to get a pay rise"***



RMT Organiser Michael Hogg

ScotRail has been in dispute with the RMT for many months over conductor and ticket examiner conditions and pay and the RMT have recently been holding strikes on Sundays which has shut much of the network down. Senior figures in the SNP government have already disgraced themselves by trying to claim that the dispute is being manipulated by the RMT leadership in London, despite the fact that the disputes are led by the Scottish leadership of the union and repeatedly supported by rank and file membership in legal ballots. In fact the RMT is one of the few unions in Britain that actually supports the core SNP policy of Scottish Independence and the union called for a vote 'Yes' in the 2014 referendum. The RMT was also disaffiliated by the Labour Party in 2004 after its Scottish section agreed to support and affiliate to the Scottish Socialist Party, a pro independence party standing against Scottish Labour.

A key issue in the framing of the Scottish government's anti-union response to the current dispute will be the attitude taken by the SNP's recent junior governmental partner, the Scottish Green Party. The Scottish Green Party currently support the SNP government in parliament and have two junior governmental ministers including part of the Transport brief.

The Scottish Green Party Trade Union Group immediately issued

a statement saying:

> *"Abellio and Serco have let the railways down. Their intransigence has cost Scotland most Sunday services and now travel during COP26. As lay members and trade unionists we support the RMT, a shining example of leverage, and urge the employers to make a genuine worthy offer."* *Scottish Green Party Trade Union Group*

This statement has been retweeted by ecosocialist Scottish Green MSP Maggie Chapman, who had also issued a statement after the SNP attacked the 'London-based' RMT with the single word "Solidarity!" in support of the RMT action.

Friends of the Earth Scotland, one of the main environment organisations backing the COP26 Coalition demonstrations and events in Glasgow during the COP also tweeted solidarity with the latest workers' actions, demonstrating the importance of solidarity between the union and environmental movements built in the recent period.

> *Solidarity with workers who are taking action to defend their jobs & conditions @GMBGlasgowCC @RMTunion @UniteScotland*
>
> *Responding to the climate crisis means we must create decent green jobs but we must also stand alongside those already doing these vital roles.*
> *#COP26*
>
> *— Friends of the Earth Scotland (@FoEScot) October 14, 2021*

ScotRail is the main rail service across Scotland and is currently run by a private company, Abellio. Under Britain's privatised and fragmented rail system, private train operators are awarded contracts, called 'franchises', under rules enacted by the Tory UK government – 13 years of UK Labour government 1997-2010 under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown failed

to change the privatised system however. The Scottish government, led by the SNP with an agreement with the Scottish Green Party, subsidises the costs of the franchise. The Scottish government has some legal powers over the franchise and after much prevarication over poor performance from Abellio finally called time on the franchise by announcing that the government would take over the running of the network from March 2022. This was a big climbdown by the SNP who claim to be social democratic and who repeatedly claimed in the face of demands from the left wing RMT that they did not have the power to nationalise the network. But this hollow claim was exposed when the Welsh Labour-led devolved government nationalised and took over part of the network in Wales last year. However since the announcement that the Scottish government would take over, Abellio announced big cuts to the network services from December leading to protests from all the rail unions and passenger campaign groups.

Caledonian Sleeper dispute

RMT members on the Caledonian Sleeper service have also voted overwhelmingly to strike over pay during COP26. The Caledonian Sleeper is a separate privatised rail franchise for an overnight service between Scotland and London and is currently operated by the SERCO group. SERCO is a private sector outsourcing company run by a Tory grandee with strong links with the UK Tory party and government. It is notorious for getting contracts underhand from the Tory government at Westminster, most notably for the lamentable 'Test and Trace' privatised testing system set up in response to the Covid pandemic and ridiculously given 'NHS' branding by the Tory UK government when it has nothing to do with the state-run NHS systems. RMT has previously held strikes and been in dispute with SERCO over their failure to create safe workplace conditions during the pandemic, ironic given the parent companies propensity to seek billions in contracts from the UK government for public health functions that should have been

undertaken by the state.

Glasgow bin and school workers vote to strike – Council heads for crisis

In addition to the likely RMT strikes, Glasgow City Council bin and school workers in the GMB trade union have also voted overwhelmingly to strike over a pay claim during the COP26.

The pay offer had been put forward by the umbrella body representing Scotland's 32 councils – COSLA, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities – and there are a number of ongoing strike ballots among various unions in council workforces across the country.

GMB members in Glasgow City Council represent 900 bin workers and 600 school support staff. They voted by a magnificent 96.9% to reject the pay offer and support strike action during the COP26. This could mean widespread school closures and bins unemptied across the city as it welcomes tens of thousands to the city.



GMB members protest outside Glasgow City Chambers (photo: GMB)

COSLA say their hands are tied by the lack of funding from the Scottish government, which has found money to pay NHS key workers more. The GMB rightly argue that their members were also key workers during the pandemic and deserve better pay.

There will be severe pressure on the minority SNP leadership of Glasgow City Council to demand more money is put on the table by COSLA. The seven Scottish Green Party councillors can take the lead in demanding support for council workers and unions. Scottish Labour are also likely to challenge, cynically, the SNP government to solve the crisis. But Scottish Labour have long been part of the problem. Glasgow City Council is Scotland's largest council by far and was under Labour control for over 40 years until 2017, overseeing cuts in services and discriminatory pay systems that eventually resulted in a massive equal pay payout after the Council was found guilty in the courts. The court decision and the subsequent payout costs in the equal pay case against the previous Labour council was a massive victory for women workers, who had been discriminated against by Labour for decades. But the one billion pound cost of the settlement is costing the council dearly, particularly in the faltering system of grant funding coming from the Scottish government and the failings of the 30 year old Council Tax system leading to cuts in services.

> *In Glasgow we have reached the legal threshold in our Industrial Action Ballot.*
>
> *96.9% voted in favour of Industrial Action in response to the latest pay offer from @COSLA*
>
> *Unless there is an improved offer on Monday we will be taking action in Glasgow during COP 26 pic.twitter.com/rEXapaGYHL*

— Glasgow GMB (@GMBGlasgowCC) October 14, 2021

Proposed cuts in Glasgow City Council services are threatening the closure of community centres and local libraries. They have been challenged by a new community and trade union campaign – 'Glasgow Against Closures' which has held marches and protests across the city, the next taking place on Saturday 16th October (12.30 Buchanan Galleries). Local council elections take place across Scotland in May 2022 and there is already talk about anti-cuts and socialist candidates challenging the SNP government and local administrations.

It's not good enough for the SNP government to blame UK government funding to Scotland. The SNP at local and national level need to get behind the council and other public workers, and offer solidarity in challenging the UK government to prioritise public services. However, the signs are that the UK Chancellor's public expenditure Budget and Spending Review statement on 27 October is set to unleash massive cuts. Analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies and others shows that given the costs of the privatised response to the pandemic, increased Defence, NHS and school spending, all other public services in all parts of the UK are likely to see budgets slashed as the millionaire Tory government unleashes another wave of austerity cuts. It will take a massive defence campaign across the labour movement and communities to resist these cuts in Scotland, and elsewhere in the UK.

The Scottish Socialist Party National Workplace Organiser has offered the solidarity of his party to the workers in dispute.



Scottish Socialist Party National Workplace Organiser Richie Venton gives solidarity to RMT and GMB members