

Move the bits, not the electrons – Duncan Chapel

On the first Thursday in September, several hundred people gathered outside Holyrood carrying banners against AI data centres. They had come from around fifteen local campaigns, Larbert to the Borders, Fife to Inverclyde, and their message to John Swinney was blunt: stop approving these things until there is a strategy, and until then, listen to the communities already saying no. Larbert alone has drawn 7,000 objections. Auchtertool's proposed Cato development, at 600 megawatts reportedly the second-largest data centre on earth, would sit inside a Fife village smaller than the campus itself. In the Borders, the Duke of Roxburghe has been offered a private briefing with every Scottish Borders councillor to make the case for his own £2 billion scheme on the Roxburghe Estate, a meeting leaked emails describe the council's own chief executive arranging and encouraging planning committee members to attend, against a petition that has by now passed 22,000 signatures. Edinburgh's council has already thrown one scheme out, at the former RBS headquarters, for failing to show its green credentials. The Scottish Greens tried to force a moratorium at First Minister's Questions before summer recess. The SNP's own National Council backed one too. The government has said no to all of it so far.

Every one of those campaigns is right to fight the site in front of it. Police Scotland has already warned it may need what it calls "robust security" if the Larbert scheme goes ahead over local objection, which is itself a measure of how far this has travelled from an ordinary planning dispute. The Larbert site would put 200 diesel backup generators within 50 metres of a 56-bed hospice for the terminally ill and within 400 metres of Forth Valley Royal, an 860-bed hospital. Action to Protect Rural Scotland, the charity that has done most to

knit these fifteen-odd local groups into something resembling a national campaign, now publishes an interactive map of every hyperscale proposal in the country, precisely so that a resident in Cockenzie or Dunbar or Bishopbriggs can see they are not fighting alone. What none of them can do alone is answer the question underneath all twenty-four proposals now in the planning system, which together would draw over 150 per cent of Scotland's peak demand: why is this landing in the Central Belt and the Borders at all, when Scotland spends hundreds of millions of pounds a year paying wind farms further north to switch off?

The Duke's own developers, to their credit, say the quiet part out loud. Their pitch for the Roxburghe scheme argues the site can help prevent some fifty million pounds a year of wasted wind energy, because it sits near turbines the grid regularly switches off. That is the correct diagnosis wearing the wrong politics. The waste is real. The fifty million pounds it could capture should not become one aristocrat's private return on a family estate that already runs to fifty thousand acres, a castle, a golf course and a hotel.

Start with the waste, because the waste is the argument. Generators in Scotland's congested transmission zones, principally the B4 and B6 boundaries in NESO's own terminology, are routinely told to reduce output, and the system pays for both sides of that decision: for the generation turned down, and for the gas fired up elsewhere to replace it. NESO recorded £1.7 billion in thermal constraint costs for 2024/25, up 64 per cent on the year before. Widen it to every category of constraint and the total climbs to £1.9 billion, 71 per cent of Great Britain's whole balancing bill. Gas dominates the replacement side: £959 million in gas offer costs in winter 2024/25 alone, much of it covering exactly the shortfall Scottish constraints create. This is not a technical footnote. It is public money spent unmaking electricity that has already been produced, on a scale NESO expects to keep

climbing toward £8 billion a year by 2030.

The obvious answer is more pylons, and National Grid is building them, slowly, at a pace that would make a Bolshevik weep. But that's not quite right either. Electricity is expensive and contested to move over long distances. Data is not. So don't move the electrons south to the compute. Move the compute north to the electrons.

Britain has done something like this before, once, in Manchester. The National Computing Centre opened on Oxford Road in 1966, one of the visible products of Wilson's 'white heat' of scientific revolution, built to put scarce computing time within reach of industry when computers themselves were the bottleneck. By the 1980s that scarcity had gone, so the state let the Centre wither into a membership body and then sold its commercial arm into what is now NCC Group, a cybersecurity firm on the FTSE 250. The lesson is not the technology. It is that the state built serious public computing infrastructure once, and handed it to the market the moment the scarcity that justified it moved somewhere else.

Scarcity has moved on again, from silicon to electricity, and the shape of the answer is a national compute utility: not a single site but a grid of publicly owned compute campuses, sited where curtailed renewable power already sits. That is not official policy. It is an idea some policy people are starting to float, quietly, in the places where the mismatch between generation and demand is worst, and it is worth noticing that the people floating it are not, on the whole, socialists.

Which is where the moratorium campaign meets its harder question. Every one of the twenty-four sites now working through Scottish planning, Cato in Fife, Rufus in East Ayrshire, Aurelius in North Lanarkshire's new AI Growth Zone, the schemes at Larbert, Hermiston and the Gyle, sits in or near the Central Belt because that is where the fibre, the

grid connections and the skills base already are. None of it is sited to relieve a single constraint. A properly sited national grid of compute campuses would look nothing like this map. It would sit north of the Central Belt, on the curtailed capacity these very same communities' wind farms are already producing and being paid to switch off, and it would be owned publicly, not by ILI Group or whoever comes after them.

That is a harder demand than a moratorium, because a moratorium only has to say no. A compute utility has to say what compute is for, who owns it, and where the profit that a hyperscaler or a duke currently extracts from a stranded grid connection would go instead. Public ownership of the racks means nothing if the models running on them are still licensed from the same handful of firms that own the training data and the chips. Nationalising the plug socket while leaving the extraction in place is exactly what happened to Oxford Road once its own scarcity ran out, and it is not obvious that a government which would not take Thames Water into public ownership when the case was overwhelming will treat compute any differently, or that a council chief executive arranging private briefings for a duke will treat the next landowner's scheme with any more scrutiny than the last.

There is a version of this that ends with a call for the moratorium campaign to become a nationalisation campaign, computing sited for the grid and not the shareholder, and that ending would not be wrong. The harder truth is that fifteen local groups fighting fifteen separate planning applications are not yet the same thing as a movement with a positive answer to what should replace the map they are rightly rejecting, and turning one into the other is the work still to be done.

Duncan Chapel is a member of Anti-Capitalist Resistance and the editor of RedMole.org

Map of Proposed Data Centres reproduced from the Action for

the Protection of Rural Scotland website is available [here](#)

Scottish Parliament elections: a balance between continuity and change

The independence-supporting Scottish National Party (SNP) [3] became the largest party for the fifth consecutive time since the Parliament was re-established in 1999, though it fell short of a majority. The SNP have been the largest party for 19 years and now move into their third decade of continuous leadership of the Scottish government – a remarkable outcome given the volatility of UK politics.

Despite the SNP falling back a little, the Parliament now has the largest majority supporting independence in the devolution era. This is despite the process of devolution and the electoral system being deliberately intended by the once-dominant British Labour Party to prevent independence.

While the right wing anti-immigrant party Reform UK has emerged as a significant force in Scotland for the first time, their gains in seats were entirely at the expense of the discredited rightward-moving Conservative & Unionist party [4], with the combined Reform UK and Conservative seat numbers being less than those held by the Conservatives alone in the last Parliament. Reform failed to win a constituency seat and had to rely on the regional list “top up” seats in the “two votes” electoral system.

The election was a disaster for the Labour Party [5] which had high hopes two years ago of emerging as the largest party, but

they lost seats and fell to their lowest representation in the devolution era.

The big gainers were the left-wing Scottish Green Party [6], who nearly doubled their seats despite being ignominiously bundled out of a joint governmental agreement with the SNP in the last parliament. The Scottish Greens won two constituency seats from the SNP for the first time in the largest cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh and won representation from all regions of Scotland. The small centre-right anti-independence Liberal Democrat party also grew but is still the smallest party in the parliament.

The SNP will continue to take the role of First Minister and nominate Government ministers as a minority, negotiating with other parties to get their legislation through. One policy of the newly re-elected government will be to demand another independence referendum from the UK Parliament at Westminster. This is very unlikely to be granted by the Starmer UK government majority, leading to a continuing “democratic deficit”. However the SNP will be strongly encouraged by the victory of Plaid Cymru [7] in Cymru/Wales to take control of government there and role of First Minister. The SNP are also working with Sinn Fein in the north of Ireland, once taboo due to Sinn Fein’s past and unionist sentiment in Scotland, but now becoming normal.

All three First Ministers and leading parties in the devolved legislatures of the UK state now support the break up and creation of separate states. The “Celtic Alliance” of the three First Ministers and parties, as it is increasingly called, will put significant pressure on the unionist forces in England. [8]

Similarities and differentiation across Britain

The separate elections took place across Britain on 7 May have provoked a crisis in the UK government of Prime Minister Keir

Starmmer that could see him ousted from power after only 22 months within days rather than weeks.

It is important to understand that although synchronous, the elections were to different bodies in different parts of the state in England, Scotland and Cymru/Wales, and even under totally different electoral systems and electorates. Unlike the Westminster Parliament, both Scotland and Cymru/Wales use systems for their national-devolved legislatures that are more proportional and give votes to 16/17 year olds. The electorate in Scotland includes all nationalities, the only part of the UK state where all immigrants are enfranchised.

But the common features across the UK state were a massive collapse in votes for the Labour Party compared to the UK general election in 2024, a continuing rise in support for the right wing Reform party of Nigel Farage, emerging from the Brexit Party, and a rising challenge to the Labour Party by parties setting out policies to the left of Labour or posing a radical challenge to the UK state union.

However these challenges to Labour were differentiated across different parts of the UK state – in England from the Green Party of England & Wales (GPEW) winning 5 councils and hundreds of councillors, in Scotland from the Scottish National Party (SNP) and the left wing Scottish Green Party (SGP) in Parliament, and, most dramatically, in Cymru/Wales from the left social democratic/nationalist Plaid Cymru that replaced a century of Labour domination and their 27 year uninterrupted leadership in the devolved legislature, Senedd Cymru.

There were no elections in the part of the north of Ireland occupied by the UK state, where Sinn Fein, the former political wing of the IRA, have emerged as the largest party in elections in recent year, reinforcing the fractures within the UK state on national lines. Elections will however take place for the Northern Ireland Assembly and local councils

there under a more proportional system (Single Transferable Vote – STV) in May 2027 and for all the local councils in Scotland and Cymru/Wales, as well as for some councils in England. Scotland also uses the STV election system for council elections, while Cymru/Wales and England still use the less representative 'first past the post' system for local councils.

A further fracturing and crisis of the political system into multi-party, multi-national politics in the 2027 elections and the multiple by-elections anticipated is likely to put pressure on the UK government, whoever is at the helm by then.

The results

Scottish Parliament Election results in seats (previous results in brackets from 2021)

Party Seats Vote Share Constituency / List (figures in brackets 2021 election)

SNP 58 seats (64), 38% (47%) / 27% (40%)

Labour 17 seats (22), 19% (22%) / 16% (18%)

Reform UK 17 seats (-), 16% (-) / 17% (-)

Scottish Greens 15 seats (8), 2% (1%) / 14% (8%)

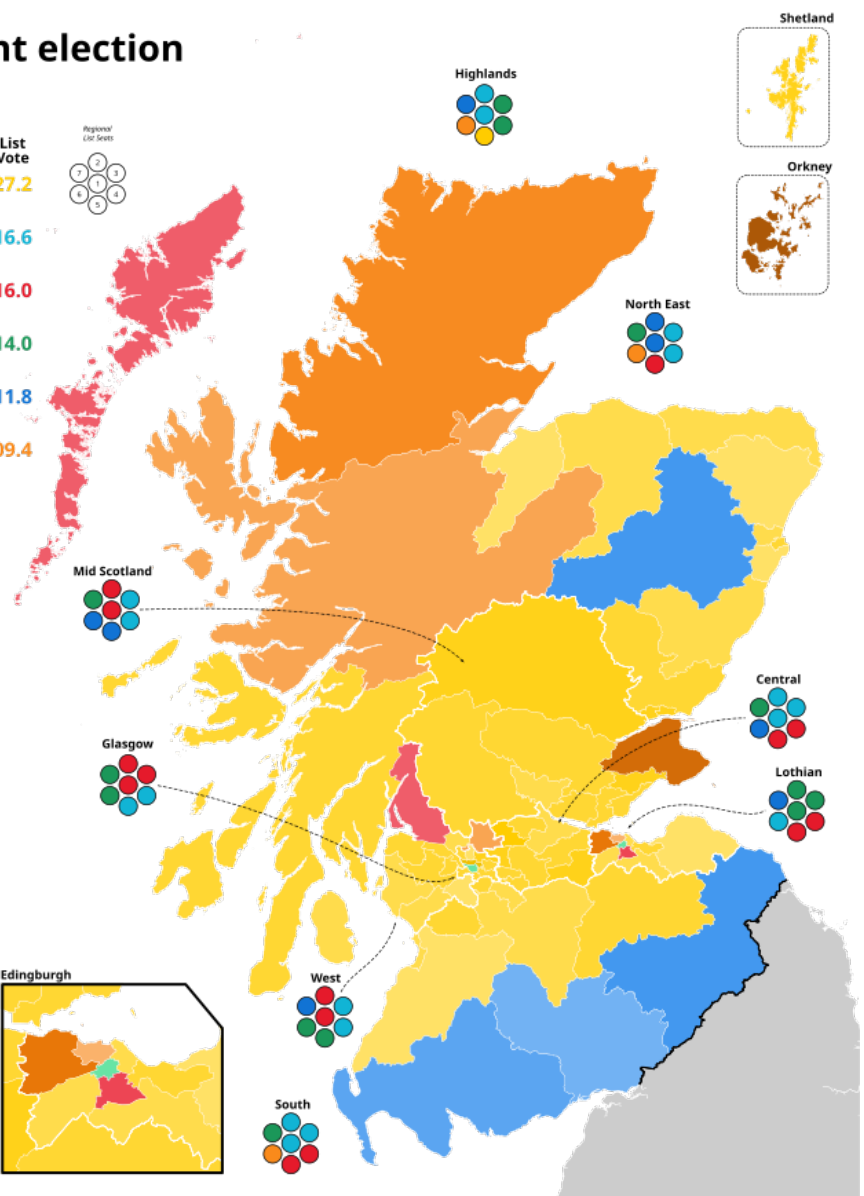
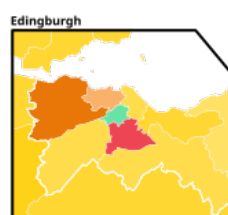
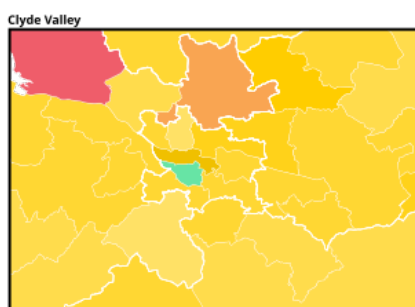
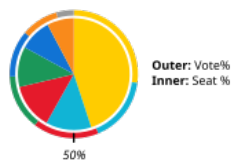
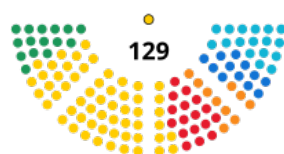
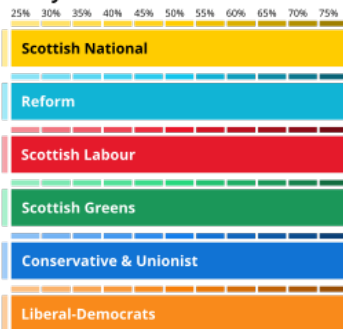
Conservative 12 seats (31), 12% (22%) / 12% (24%)

Liberal Democrat 10 seats (4), 11% (7%) / 9% (5%)

2026 Scottish Parliament election

129 MSPs | 65 for Majority | 7 May 2026

Party Results



Unlike the UK Parliament, the Scottish Parliament is elected under an Additional Member System that resembles that used in Germany, where voters have two votes: one for a traditional 'first past the post' constituency candidate and one for a party list top-up regional election that brings a stronger element of proportionality than the winner-takes-all Westminster system.

The SNP won the lion's share of the constituencies taking 57 out of 73 seats, largely due to a significantly divided opposition. The SNP constituency vote however declined by 9.5 percentage points to 38.2% from the last election in 2021. Due to its domination of the constituencies, in the regional party list elections the SNP only took 1 list seat, with many SNP

voters switching to other parties, particularly the Scottish Greens. But the net effect was to give the SNP a clear large lead over other parties, but short of a majority. The SNP have led a minority government on 3 of the last 4 occasions since 2007, only winning a narrow and supposedly impossible majority in a somewhat 'freak' election result in 2011 that has yet to be replicated.

While Reform UK took 17 list seats and entered the parliament for the first time as joint largest party, this was entirely at the expense of the collapsing Tory vote. The Tories were originally a more liberal party in the Scottish Parliament, even supporting SNP budgets and advocating increased spending commitments while presenting a pro-LGBTQI image, but the process of Brexit transformed the situation and the Tories in Scotland followed their party at Westminster in moving rapidly rightwards and embracing anti-immigrant sentiment. However the Tories lost much support to the more media-savvy, more right wing populism of Nigel Farage's Reform UK, particularly given the relentless promotion of Farage and scare-mongering against immigrants in the London-based media that Scottish unionism looks to.

The entry of the 17 members of Reform UK of a populist far right anti-migrant party into the national parliament will have a significant effect on Scottish politics. Reform UK have promoted far-right street protests against asylum seekers. Reform UK are opposed to efforts to stop climate change through development of sustainable energy. They will aim to move politics to the right. Yet, most Scots realise migration is needed to tackle an aging population and populate jobs in the economy and public services. North Sea oil and gas is nearly exhausted and due to its large land mass, Scotland is well placed to expand wind, wave and hydro sources of cleaner energy. The SNP have declared they will attempt to isolate Reform UK MSPs. Overall the combined right wing anti-immigrant parties have less seats than the previous parliament and there

is a big 10 percentage points difference in electoral performance of Reform UK in Scotland than England.

The Scottish Greens were criticised from their left for standing in only six constituencies and concentrating on the list vote. The Scottish Greens are a decentralised party however, and decisions about where to stand were made in local branches. Against all the odds, the Scottish Greens took two constituencies/direct mandates, defeating two SNP ministers, and topped the list poll in five constituency areas in Glasgow and Edinburgh. Across the Glasgow region as a whole the Greens exceeded 20%, beating Labour and coming a narrow second to the SNP in what was previously regarded as Labour heartland (Labour ran Glasgow council for over 40 years from the 1970s and won all 7 Westminster seats in 2024).

The left of the left

Outside of the Greens, Labour and SNP, the left challenge completely floundered. The Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) contested the list vote in all eight regions in its own name for the first time since 2011, but its vote was minuscule (only 0.37%). The SSP was a significant force in the early days of the parliament, winning 6 seats in 2003 election and over 10% in Glasgow region. The SSP included most of the left groups to the left of Labour/SNP, but split badly over the leadership of its maverick biggest personality Tommy Sheridan, and has diminished to a small group of highly committed activists with a lost direction. Sheridan tried to reinvent his career by standing for a motley cobbled-together 'independence' coalition arising from the ruins of the former Alba Party formed by former SNP leader Alex Salmond. Alba had turned to transphobia and the right, and has since collapsed. The Sheridan coalition also won less than 1% of the vote wherever it stood, as did the few candidacies by the George Galloway's Workers Party and the remnants of the Militant Tendency/CWI and the Communist Party.

Despite an enthusiastic response and big conferences, the new party launched by former Labour MPs Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana has totally collapsed in Scotland and did not stand or support any candidates. Named 'Your Party Scotland', the 300 strong conference in Dundee in February decided to form a separate but linked Scottish Party, to support Scottish independence and to contest the elections. A sizeable contingent including three councillors from the Scottish Green Party in Glasgow had joined Your Party Scotland, alongside a wide range of other left wingers who reflected the consensus by the vast majority of the radical left to support independence. But these moves to a new Scottish party were blocked by the England based clique around Corbyn supporters, despite claims to respect 'autonomy of nations'. This finally collapsed in April when it became clear candidates would not be permitted to stand and that a unitary party with the Scottish members constituting a 'branch office', reflecting UK Labour practice, was inevitable. All the leading members of Your Party Scotland resigned, declaring it a failure, and are now engaged in a process around developing a new initiative.

The challenge ahead

In many respects the election campaign was dull. Despite their claims of being progressive, the SNP promised an element of continuity with little in the way of new thinking around tired and struggling public services. Their one radical policy – price controls over basic goods – was treated as undeliverable by the media. UK Labour threw massive spending on advertising, focussed on a presidential style campaign for their leader, Anas Sarwar, much of it funded by commercial interests and Labour supporters in England. Yet Labour failed due to the massive disillusionment among those who had voted Labour in 2024 to rid the UK government of the 14 year reign of Tories. While independence is a major cleavage in Scottish population, it's mainly the Tories who raise it, unsuccessfully for them, as an electoral issue. Similarly with Brexit. The climate and

ecological crisis was not a major feature – the main issue was the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and the failure of the UK government to tackle it.

The general feeling of voters was summed up in the old Scots language word “scunnered”, meaning discontented and bored. Turnout was down ten points on the previous election to 53% – it had previously been higher than UK Westminster elections, though the electorate for Scottish Parliament elections is significantly larger due to the more inclusive electorate. The Greens tried to develop alternatives, for example by promoting an immediate policy of free bus fares to tackle both climate and poverty and having previously championed (and won) free bus travel for those under 22. But both the SNP and Greens present cautious social democratic incrementalism rather than radical change. It is Reform who are presented as the disruptors and their support mainly comes from a minority of disillusioned working class former Tory and Labour voters looking for scapegoats in the crisis.

Despite winning its largest ever Scottish Parliament majority, the movement for independence remains stalled. The Westminster UK parliament veto over a second independence referendum, established by the UK Supreme Court in 2023, remains in place. The focus on the day-to-day cost of living pressures makes it unlikely a successful mass movement for rupture will re-emerge in the short term, though the constitutional divide remains a significant cleavage, demonstrations regularly occur and polls put support for independence at 50-55%, rising to 60% if Reform UK came to power at the next Westminster election. The broader coalition against the union state is given a boost by the victory of Plaid Cymru and the liaison with Sinn Féin, though all three parties adopt constitutional gradualism and compromise with capital, relying on changing generations rather than mass mobilisation and rupture.

The SNP did put forward a radical policy in their manifesto – price controls over basic goods by the end of the year in the

face of rapidly rising inflation due to war and trade. The Scottish Greens may pressure the SNP to make that policy more meaningful for a working class bearing the brunt of an economic crisis. The trade unions, increasingly disentangled from their Labour Party heritage, may support mobilisations and increase defensive actions including strikes. However, the powers of the Scottish Parliament to impose widespread price controls may be limited by the UK government using a post-Brexit Tory law over the UK internal market and their powers over fuel pricing and taxes. A confrontation over the right of the Scottish Parliament to take such measures is possible.

Whatever happens in the crisis of Labour at Westminster and the threat of a Reform victory in the UK government, there are some positives in Scotland in building a fightback.

Mike Picken, 14 May 2026

[1] Graphic: Par Talleyrand6 – File:2026 Scottish Parliament Election Map.svg, CC BY 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=191646626>

[2] The Scottish Parliament covers a population of over 5 million and has very significant legal and constitutional role and a large annual budget of around £60 billion sterling and including some taxation measure, control over many public services like health, education, transport, aspects of social security benefits, local government, police, courts and prisons.

Importantly the UK government retains control over oil and gas industries in the North Sea and the energy infrastructure, though the Scottish government are able to use devolved planning powers to oppose fracking and the construction of new nuclear power stations, and to promote renewable options particularly wind farms. The Scottish government has deviated significantly from some UK state policies, for example

abolishing university tuition fee and health prescription charges, adopting more progressive income tax measures, not breaking hospitals and schools into semi-independent “trusts”, and expanding social security benefits targeted at the poorest.

[3] The Scottish National Party, normally abbreviated to SNP, was formed in the 1930s combining a conservative layer with radical middle class support for Scottish identity. In the late 1960s and early 1970s it emerged as a significant electoral force and declared it was in the “mainstream of European social democracy” though without the formal links to the trade union bureaucracy enjoyed by Labour and most social democratic parties. It first became the largest party in the Scottish Parliament in 2007 and in 2011 won a “freak” majority of seats that resulted in the independence referendum of 2014. While losing the referendum, the SNP emerged as the strongest electoral force with a mass membership five times that of Labour, but it fell back in the UK general election of 2024 and was widely presumed to be on its way to being replaced by Labour as largest party.

[4] The Conservative party in Scotland organises under the formal title of “Scottish Conservative & Unionist Party” but is also widely known as “Tory” or “the Tories”. It was originally a separate party but merged with the Conservatives in England & Wales in the 1960s. The “Unionist” label in its title originally referred to opposition to Home Rule in Ireland and many of the party’s supporters had strong links with the unionist/loyalist block in the north of Ireland, including the sectarian protestant-supremacist Orange Order dedicated to preserving Protestantism within the UK state. The party has not won an election in Scotland since 1955, but became the second party in the Scottish Parliament in 2016. In recent years it has collapsed and many of its activists and voters have defected to the newly established and more rightwing Reform UK of Nigel Farage. However, both parties

support Brexit, the UK leaving the EU, which is very unpopular in Scotland where support for EU membership runs at over 75%.

[5] The Scottish Labour Party was established by Keir Hardie in the 1880s, predating the Britain-wide Labour Party and supported “Home Rule” within the UK state – most domestic policies being controlled by national parliaments with only defence and foreign policy being coordinated at UK level. However it has now become a fully fledged unionist party and its opposition to independence and alignment with Tories in a “Better Together” campaign in 2014, led to a mass exodus of voters and members to the SNP. Its central strategy to head off independence moves from the UK state in the 1990s was to create significant “devolution” though keeping many powers at the level of the UK state. While it has some elements of a notional “autonomy” within the British Labour Party, under its current leadership of Anas Sarwar it had aligned itself with the leadership of Keir Starmer in London winning 37 out of 57 Westminster seats in the UK general election in 2024 mostly from the SNP. Following its electoral collapse in 2026 and plummeting support for Starmer across the UK, there are some marginal voices calling for it to become an independent party.

[6] The Scottish Green Party [SGP] was formed in 1990 and is entirely independent from the Green Party of England & Wales/Plaid Werydd and the Irish Green Party which operate elsewhere in the UK state. It sits on the left of Green Parties internationally and long supported Scottish independence. It has formally adopted “ecosocialism” as its ideology and increasingly uses that term to describe its politics. It is opposed to membership of the NATO alliance but supports Scottish membership of the EU when it becomes independent. It has supported the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign in Scotland and endorses Ukraine’s right to defend itself against Russia’s aggression rejecting pacifist pressures. It is strongly anti-monarchy. It entered into a governmental agreement with the SNP in the Scottish Parliament in 2022,

taking two ministerial roles in the government, but its support for trans rights and opposition to an abandonment of climate targets by the SNP generated tension between the SNP and SGP and it was unceremoniously bundled out of the government by the SNP. For many Green activists the SGP was too uncritical of the SNP, and a new leadership was elected in 2025 that takes a slightly more critical tone. Other parties argue the SGP is just a satellite of the SNP. The SGP broke off relations with the Green Party in England over disputes about trans rights and recognition of devolution, but following the election of Zack Polanski as leader in England and his advocacy of Scottish and Cymru/Wales independence, there has been a convergence and closer working.

[7] Plaid Cymru “Party of Wales” was established in the 1920s and was heavily involved in the revival of Cymraeg/Welsh Language in the 1960s, though remained only a minor or fringe party confined to Cymraeg speaking areas until recently. It has long had informal relations with SNP though it does also define itself as a party of “decentralised socialism” rather than nationalism per se.

[8] This Alliance includes the North of Ireland in which no elections were held this year. Stormont, the devolved Assembly, will be re-elected next year.

From the Ground Up: The Leith Model and the Future of Your Party Organising

How Edinburgh activists are building a new kind of left politics through community roots, worker solidarity, and

ecosocialist campaigning

Duncan Chapel, January 2026

Something is stirring in Leith. While much of the post-Corbyn left remains trapped in cycles of faction fights and social media outrage, a small group of Your Party activists in Edinburgh's historic port district have been quietly developing an approach to organising that deserves wider attention.

They call it the Leith Model. It's not a grand theory. It's a practical template for building political presence through three interconnected commitments: worker solidarity, community defence, and anti-fascist mobilisation. And it's already generating results that other branches across Scotland might learn from.

The Core Commitments

When Your Party Leith held its founding meeting in late 2025, around twelve committed members agreed on three core areas of action. The list is instructive for what it includes and what it refuses to defer.

Worker solidarity came first. This wasn't abstract commitment to "the working class" but concrete presence on picket lines. When workers at Rockstar Games Edinburgh began organising with the IWGB Game Workers union, facing what the union describes as "Amazon-style" union busting, Leith activists were there. The dispute, which saw 31 workers summarily dismissed in October 2025 just one week after the union reached the statutory recognition threshold, has become a defining struggle for creative industry unionisation in Scotland. Your Party members have maintained visible solidarity throughout: attending protests outside the Holyrood Road headquarters, joining the march to the Scottish Parliament, and connecting the dispute to wider questions about precarious work in the digital economy.

Community defence meant partnership, not substitution. Leith already has Living Rent, the tenants' union that has won real victories on rent controls and retrofit debt. Rather than competing or duplicating, Your Party activists joined existing campaigns. When Marionville fire station faced closure, they worked alongside Living Rent to oppose it. The principle is clear: we're not here to replace the brilliant work being done by community groups; we're here to amplify it.

Standing against racism required physical presence. When fascists terrorised refugees at a hotel in Falkirk, Leith members travelled to stand on the counter-demonstration. One organiser describes the surreal experience of dancing to Spice Girls while bottles and flares flew. "That was really restorative for me," he told a recent branch meeting. Anti-fascism isn't a position statement; it's showing up.

Mutual Aid as Foundation

Alongside these three commitments, practical solidarity has anchored the branch's community presence. The "Keep Leith Warm" initiative before Christmas 2025 brought together food, clothing, and toys for residents facing hardship. Activists leafleted the Kirkgate, inviting people directly: come along, you're hungry, we'll feed you; you need clothes, they're yours.

One organiser, a former Labour member of nineteen years, reflected: "Never had I done something like that, where I was going out and saying, hey, come along next week." The contrast with Labour's hollowed-out electoralism could not be sharper. Mothers left with arms full of toys. Relationships were built that no canvassing database can capture.

The methodological insight matters. As the Leith Model document puts it: "Digital tools support communication, but face-to-face organising remains the core of community mobilisation." WhatsApp groups and social media pages are

useful for outreach. But lasting momentum came when organisers prioritised street stalls, leafleting, and open meetings.

The Freeport Campaign: Ecosocialism in Practice

The most strategically significant development is the emerging campaign against the Forth Green Freeport. This is where ecosocialist politics meets concrete local struggle.

The Freeport, designated in June 2024, stretches across the Forth estuary: Leith, Burntisland, Rosyth, Grangemouth, Edinburgh Airport. It promises 34,500 jobs and billions in investment. It delivers tax breaks for corporations, regulatory “flexibilities” that weaken planning oversight, and a “green” label that environmental groups call straightforward greenwashing.

Living Rent has already identified the housing angle: thousands of projected jobs without housing means rent increases for existing residents. They’re pushing the Council to direct Visitor Levy revenue toward social housing rather than unaffordable “mid-market rent” schemes.

Your Party Leith is developing a broader campaign: researching potential impacts on communities and labour standards, building a coalition to resist, preparing a conference motion, planning public demonstrations with affected communities. The Freeport connects deregulation, weakened worker protections, and false climate solutions in a single site of struggle. It’s exactly the kind of material issue that can ground anti-capitalist politics in everyday concerns.

The STUC has a representative on the Freeport Governance Board but warns that without enforceable collective bargaining guarantees, the model risks “a race to the bottom” in labour standards. At Grangemouth, the Petroineos refinery closed in April 2025 with 400 job losses. The promised “low carbon manufacturing hub” won’t arrive until 2040. That’s fifteen

years of managed decline dressed as green transition.

An ecosocialist response demands more than opposition. It requires an alternative vision: public ownership of the Forth estuary's infrastructure, a genuine just transition for fossil fuel workers, democratic control over economic development. Your Party organisers in Leith are beginning to articulate exactly this.

Replication Across Edinburgh

The Leith Model is already spreading. At a recent Edinburgh branch meeting, constituency groups reported back on their emerging plans.

Edinburgh South identified local health campaigns linking lung conditions to air pollution, connecting individual illness to environmental crisis. They mapped their territory honestly: working-class areas in Oxbgangs and Liberton/Gilmerton separated by more affluent Morningside. They're planning stalls at the library, the square, the Aldi: places where people actually gather.

Edinburgh Central drew on members' experience of Labour canvassing to articulate what they want to avoid: "instrumental and extractive" data harvesting without genuine conversation. They noted that young people have nowhere free to exist, nowhere to hang out without paying. A party that can provide space, literally, builds roots.

Edinburgh Western focused on visibility: mapping festivals and farmers markets, preparing leaflets for community noticeboards, "free advertising" that establishes presence. They're thinking about how to respond to Reform talking points with positive class politics rather than defensive counter-messaging.

Each constituency is adapting the model to local conditions while maintaining the core commitments. The methodological

suggestion from Leith is worth repeating: ask people “what are your key challenges?” rather than “what do you want to change?” The first elicits concrete grievances organisers can act on. The second produces abstract wish-lists.

What Makes This Different?

The Belgian political theorist Anton Jäger has diagnosed our era as one of “hyperpolitics”: extreme politicisation without political consequences. Politics is everywhere; everyone has opinions; social media buzzes with moral urgency. And nothing changes. The old infrastructure of parties, unions, and civic solidarity has been hollowed out.

The Leith Model offers a modest counter-example. It doesn’t promise revolution. It builds relationships. It shows up on picket lines. It feeds people. It connects struggles that might otherwise remain siloed: the Rockstar workers fighting for union recognition, the tenants organising against rent increases, the communities facing a Freeport that promises jobs but delivers deregulation.

The test will come. Local and national elections will reveal whether community organising translates into electoral presence. The full Rockstar tribunal, likely not until 2027 or 2028, will determine whether the union’s legal claims succeed. The Freeport campaign is only beginning.

But something is being built. Not a social media movement that surges and dissipates. Not an electoral machine that extracts data and disappears between campaigns. A presence. Roots.

How to Get Involved

For Your Party members in Edinburgh, constituency groups are forming now. WhatsApp groups and email lists are being established. The invitation is open.

For activists elsewhere in Scotland, the Leith Model offers a template worth adapting. Map your area: who's already doing good work? Where do people gather? What are the material grievances that could anchor political organising? Partner with existing campaigns rather than duplicating them. Show up on picket lines. Feed people.

The document circulated at the Edinburgh meeting concludes: "This approach offers a tangible blueprint for branch organisation across the four other Westminster constituencies of Edinburgh as well as at ward level."

It could offer a blueprint well beyond Edinburgh. The question is whether we're willing to build it.

Postscript: A Necessary Correction

Since drafting this piece, a comrade with direct knowledge of the Leith branch's activities has offered a sobering corrective. The account deserves honest acknowledgment.

The Rockstar solidarity was a single appearance at an IWGB picket line, uncoordinated with the union, which resulted in organisers asking Your Party to put their banner away. Self-promotion had displaced actual solidarity. The Living Rent "partnership" at Marionville amounted to one petition stall; LR had explicitly asked the branch not to wade in, given their non-partisan stance. We proceeded regardless. And the Freeport campaign remains a discussion group without democratic mandate from the wider branch membership.

The gap between aspiration and execution is the gap between a model and a movement. The Leith document describes an orientation: towards workplace struggle, community defence, anti-fascism, ecosocialist campaigning rooted in material conditions. That orientation remains correct. But turning up uninvited with your banner is not worker solidarity. Ignoring an organisation's request to stay out is not partnership. A WhatsApp group is not a campaign.

The harder lesson: the united front method requires discipline, not enthusiasm. You strengthen existing organisations by actually coordinating with them, by subordinating your party profile to the struggle's needs, by doing the unglamorous work that builds trust over months and years. The impulse to plant flags, to claim credit, to turn every action into recruitment: this is the infantile disorder of a movement still learning to walk.

None of this invalidates the strategic insight. A left party that connects electoral ambitions to community roots, that builds from workplace and neighbourhood struggles rather than parachuting in at election time, that takes ecosocialist campaigning seriously as a material practice: this remains what Your Party Scotland needs. But the Leith Model is, at present, more manifesto than method. The work of translating intention into organisation has barely begun.

DC, 24th January 2026

Duncan Chapel is a member of Your Party in Edinburgh and is the creator of [Red Mole Substack](#). Duncan wishes to thank Richard Parker for his permission to reuse his write-up of the Leith approach

How Can Socialists Run Cities – will Mamdani show us the

way?

Zohran Mamdani's election to Mayor of New York has been a badly-needed boost to the confidence of the left in the U.S. and beyond. It has also reignited debate about the strategic choices facing socialists elected to local government, and eventually to national governments too. A special, end-of-year issue of *Jacobin*, the U.S. left magazine, was devoted to lessons of municipal socialism, from Red Vienna and Milwaukee's 'sewer socialists' in the first half of the 20th century, to Communist-run cities in Italy or France after the defeat of fascism and Ken Livingstone's Greater London Council in the 1980s, facing off, quite literally across the River Thames, against what was then the far-right, Margaret Thatcher, in government.

These are debates that we, too, need to take seriously, as we seek to build Your Party Scotland as a real, socialist alternative, here in Glasgow and across the country.

One of the most suggestive contributions to the discussion draws on experiences of participatory democracy in Latin America and elsewhere, to argue that as mayor, 'Zohran Needs to Create Popular Assemblies' (*Jacobin* 12.22.2025. <https://jacobin.com/2025/12/mamdani-popular-assemblies-democratic-socialism>) to build a bottom-up political culture that empowers working people. In this article, Gabriel Hetland, who has done a lot of work with social movements in Venezuela and Bolivia, and Bhaskar Sunkara, the editor of *Jacobin*, point to the positives of governing with such assemblies. In the short term, it enables the social base to keep mobilising, which is vital to sustain a progressive administration that will inevitably be hemmed in by hostile elites and procedural roadblocks, hindering its attempts to implement even its core, immediate, 'affordability' policies. In the process of these fights over housing and transport, childcare and the cost of

groceries, it also begins to create new structures of power, increasing “the capacity of workers to collectively shape the decisions that shape their lives”, and “to lay the basis for a society beyond capitalism”.

Even without the aid of a crystal ball, it is not hard to see how a socialist administration in Glasgow City Council, or even in Holyrood, would confront many of the same obstacles, and need similar solutions, as it sought to seize back the cost-of-living agenda hijacked by Reform in Scotland, or even confront a far-right, Reform government in Westminster.

As Hetland and Sunkara make clear, the key point of assemblies or other forms of mass, participatory democracy, is to change the relationship between the governed and their government, shifting power back to the former. The forms this can take vary greatly. Even within Latin America, the early participatory budgets (PBs) in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in the 1990s and early 2000s – cited here as one of the most successful examples – were very different from the communal councils and communes developed in Venezuela, or the more sporadic assemblies used in Bolivia, a few years later. Although not part of a wider revolutionary process, the scope of the powers in Porto Alegre was in fact much greater.

It would be foolish, from so far away, to pretend to offer much of an opinion on exactly what might work best in New York City. As these authors point out, it is more important to identify the underlying principles. It is these that will determine whether a given form of assembly democracy can effectively change the relations of power, and whether it really can, or even wants to, open up possible paths to a different kind of society.

The problem is that the principles they do identify are quite slight and could lead in a rather different direction. This is not semantic quibbling: the gap between ‘affecting decisions’ and exercising sovereign power is the gap between supplicants

and rulers, between consultation theatre and the embryo of workers' self-government. They are significantly weaker than the four core principles adopted by the founders of Porto Alegre's participatory budgeting. For example, Hetland and Sunkara talk about ordinary people having "real and meaningful opportunities to affect the decisions that shape their lives", and counterpose this to the "participation without influence" that breeds cynicism about many exercises in participation that are merely consultative. This distinction is important, because many later versions of participatory budgeting were indeed consultations without real power. But the original Porto Alegre version was stronger still. Its second and third core principles were that (2) the PB should have *sovereign decision-making power*, and (3) that it should discuss *the whole budget*, not just a sliver of it. This sounds like a lot more than just 'affecting' decisions.

The first of the Porto Alegre core principles was that (1) the PB should be based on *direct, universal participation*. The basic building block was mass, local assemblies, where *all* citizens could take part – there were no delegates at this level of the process, and certainly no algorithms performing random selection or sortition – and where they could debate and decide on the main priorities. An elected PB Council would then work out the nuts and bolts. This partly overlaps with Hetland and Sunkara's second principle, where they talk about creating spaces "to foster meaningful deliberation". As they rightly observe, this "is how non-elites learn to govern themselves", bringing working-class communities together across the divides of race, gender and language that often separate them. This is the essence of collective action, and it upends the isolation and atomisation that underpins most of our capitalist societies.

The fourth Porto Alegre principle was that (4) the PB process should be *self-regulating*. Its shape and procedures, its rules, would not be decided by anyone else or laid down in

legislation by some other body. The assemblies and their elected council would work out the rules and keep changing them along the way as needed. There is at least a potential contradiction between this fundamental autonomy and the third principle our authors suggest for the new Mamdani administration. They talk about the need for a “deliberate design” to avoid the participatory space reproducing inequalities of confidence and political experience, or becoming dominated by existing activists.

These are issues that have drawn attention within our own process of launching Your Party. Certainly, most would agree on the importance of taking steps to make political spaces – in this case the assemblies of participatory democracy – as accessible as possible, in relation to physical accessibility, child care, procedures, language, tone and so on. The problem is that these needs have also been used to justify a ‘deliberate design’ drawn up somewhere else according to criteria decided by no-one quite knows who. And this in turn raises suspicions of algorithms shaping representative samples, sortition and digital plebiscites. Such instruments, whose roots lie more in marketing and management studies, tend to reproduce the prevailing isolation of individuals, rather than foster the kinds of collective action that alone can begin to reverse the relations of power.

It is worth remembering that most of the core group that ‘invented’ the Porto Alegre experience saw themselves as revolutionary socialists. They were members of the *Democracia Socialista* current in the Workers Party (PT), which was then the Brazilian section of the Fourth International. When they suddenly found themselves at the head of the city hall administration in a medium-sized state capital, they asked themselves how they could use this to move towards a revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist state. And the first experience they turned to for possible inspiration was the Paris Commune.

Their conception of the participatory budget, and more broadly of direct, assembly-based democracy, was developed with this in mind. As a co-thinker of theirs in France, Catherine Samary, later put it, participatory democracy can be revolutionary if it permanently challenges the existing structures of the bourgeois state. If it ceases to challenge them, if it merely complements or 'extends' the processes of existing representative democracy, it becomes merely reformist and can easily be co-opted as a block to radical change and in effect a prop for the status quo.

Anyone who has endured a local council's 'community engagement' session already knows where this leads: sticky notes on flip charts, facilitators with lanyards, and outcomes decided months ago by officers now nodding gravely at your contributions. That is why, not long after the successes of the early, radical participatory budget in Porto Alegre, the World Bank was soon promoting a watered-down, consultative version as a pillar of 'good governance' in the Global South. Although the situation in New York today may be very different, similar dilemmas, and dangers, are likely face any attempts by the new mayor to open up popular assemblies and spaces for participatory democracy. We should pay close attention because, with a bit of luck, we might later have to deal with parallel problems here in Glasgow.

Iain Bruce is a member of Your Party in Glasgow North and the author of ['The Porto Alegre Alternative: direct democracy in action'](#)

Corbyn's New Party Risks Labour's Fatal Mistake – Why “Your Party” Needs Independent Wings, Not Branch Offices

Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana's newly announced “Your Party” is already raising concerns among Scottish left activists who warn the venture could collapse before it starts if it continues ignoring the national question. The harsh reality? Scotland's left has watched this movie before – and it always ends in failure.

[Bella Caledonia](#) sums it up: “Limited consideration of Scotland has taken place in this attempt to get a left of Labour electoral challenge up and running,” observes Democratic Left Scotland, while Richie Venton of the Scottish Socialist Party warns that “any new party that seeks to operate in Scotland must respect the right of the Scottish people to self-determination and must not be a mere branch office of a London-centric project.

This isn't just Scottish sensitivity – it's strategic necessity. The historical record is unforgiving: centralized left parties that ignore national questions don't just fail in Scotland, they fragment entirely. Spain's catastrophic left retreat in the 1990s offers a perfect case study of what happens when socialists dismiss plurinational realities.

The Spanish Warning: How Centralism Destroyed the Left

The Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) once dominated the left. The left magazine [Viento Sur](#) describes its failures. By the 1990s, it had become a “neoliberal force with progressive

trappings,” transforming into what critics called a “party-cartel” that monopolized politics through state financing while abandoning its working-class identity. But PSOE’s fatal error wasn’t just embracing neoliberalism – it was promoting a divisive “theory of two national communities” that alienated Catalonia, the Basque Country, and Galicia.

In the Basque Country, PSOE manufactured a false division between communities, casting Basques as “bourgeois and racist” nationalists opposed to “working-class, socialist, and universalist” speakers of Castilian Spanish. This strategy poisoned dialogue and drove communities apart. This wasn’t just bad politics – it was organizational suicide.

Izquierda Unida (IU), formed as a left alternative to PSOE, repeated the same mistakes. Despite its anti-capitalist rhetoric, IU struggled with a chronic inability to accept the plurinational reality of the Spanish state. Strong centralist currents within IU viewed national demands as “sectarian” or “right-wing,” fatally undermining the party’s ability to build genuine grassroots support in the Basque Country, Catalonia and Galicia.

The results were devastating. In Galicia, the rise of the [Bloque Nacionalista Galego](#) (BNG) captured the “vote of discontent” while IU’s components struggled to reach even 3% of the vote. The lesson couldn’t be clearer: Spain’s alternative left faces a binary choice: **either** genuinely champion the distinct national identities and self-determination rights of its regions, **or** accept political marginalization and eventual collapse.

Scotland’s Clear Message: Autonomy Works, Branch Offices Don’t

Scottish left parties have learned this lesson the hard way. The most successful examples – the Scottish Socialist Party and Scottish Greens – operate as genuinely independent entities, not subordinate branches of UK-wide organizations.

The Scottish Greens emerged in 1990 when the former UK Green Party deliberately separated into two independent parties. Today, they're completely separate and unique with their own leaders, membership, and policies. Their strong support for Scottish independence isn't incidental – it's integral to their identity and success.

Similarly, the [Scottish Socialist Party](#) formed in 1998 from the Scottish Socialist Alliance, explicitly as a distinct Scottish entity. The SSP unequivocally supports independence, framing it through “internationalist rather than nationalist concerns” and advocating for a “Scottish socialist republic.”

Contrast this with parties that maintained centralized structures. The Respect Party, “established in London” with no distinct Scottish presence, made virtually no impact north of the border and even lost supporters in England who opposed its organising north of the border. The pattern is clear: Scottish voters reject “branch office” politics.

Ross Greer, the Scottish Green MSP, put it bluntly: “The idea of a new London-based party trying to establish a ‘branch office’ in Scotland without a clear understanding of our distinct political context is deeply concerning.”

Why “Your Party” Risks Disaster

Troubling early indicators suggest “Your Party” risks repeating these historical errors. Scottish commentators describe the initial launch as “badly bungled and incoherent,” with conflicting reports about organizational structure and minimal Scottish input.

Helena from ‘No Justice’ [captures](#) the frustration: Rolling out “Jeremy Corbyn as a ‘left-leader’ and harking back (uncritically) to how wonderful he was” isn't “serious politics.” The party risks being dismissed as nostalgic English leftism that ignores Scottish political realities.

Most critically, “Your Party” has yet to clarify its position on Scottish self-determination—a silence that Scottish activists are already interpreting as indifference.. This isn’t a minor oversight – it’s a deal-breaker for many. As Ross Greer notes, “Scotland needs a strong, independent voice on the left, not another Westminster-controlled outfit.”

The electoral arithmetic is brutal. Connor Beaton warns that attempting to contest Holyrood elections without broad engagement could “end up like RISE in 2016, winning a derisory share of the vote which then contributes to the whole project’s collapse.”

The Platform for Socialism and Independence

The good news is that Scottish socialists are already organizing to prevent this disaster. The recently launched Platform for Socialism and Independence brings together Aberdeen Marxist Caucus, the Republican Socialist Platform, Scottish Socialist Youth, and Socialists for Independence. It represents exactly the kind of proactive intervention needed. Rather than waiting for “Your Party” to impose a structure from London, these groups are engaging strategically while maintaining core principles around independence and Scottish autonomy.

The Path Forward: Embrace Plurinationalism

Jamie Driscoll, involved in “Your Party’s” formation, seems to understand the stakes, emphasizing “significant autonomy in the nations and regions” and rejecting a “top-down London-run party.” But good intentions aren’t enough – organizational structure matters.

Based on successful precedents, “Your Party” needs to:

- **Unequivocally support Scottish self-determination**– not as a tactical position, but as a foundational principle. The Spanish experience shows that half-measures create

“artificial barriers of incommunication.”

- **Foster genuine autonomy**– Scottish and Welsh wings must have their own leadership, decision-making structures, and tailored political programmes. The Scottish Greens’ model of formal separation or the SSP’s autonomous development offer proven templates.
- **Build grassroots power first**– Instead of immediate Holyrood campaigns, focus on local organizing and council elections in 2027. This allows time to develop genuine Scottish leadership and avoid the “excessive politicismo” that doomed Spain’s IU.
- **Engage existing Scottish movements**– Work with independence campaigns, climate justice groups, Palestine solidarity, and other progressive forces rather than competing with them.

Learning from Failure in the Spanish State

The Spanish left’s 1990s retreat wasn’t inevitable – it resulted from strategic choices that prioritized institutional power over grassroots organizing and centralized control over plurinational democracy. These same pressures exist today.

“Your Party” can succeed, but only if it learns from these failures. The choice is stark: embrace genuine autonomy for Scotland and Wales, or watch another promising left initiative fragment on the rocks of unresolved national questions.

The Scottish left has been clear about what it needs. The question is whether Corbyn and Sultana are listening – or whether they’re destined to repeat the mistakes that have buried left parties across Europe.

As Richie Venton warns: “We’ve seen countless attempts to build left-wing unity in Scotland only to see them fail because of a lack of understanding of the Scottish political landscape and the need for a genuinely independent Scottish socialist movement.”

This is “Your Party’s” moment of truth. The early warning signs are flashing red, but the fatal mistakes haven’t been locked in yet. Corbyn and Sultana can still demonstrate they understand what every successful Scottish left party has learned: revolutionary democracy means unequivocally supporting self-determination. The choice is stark—act now to embrace genuine Scottish autonomy, or watch another promising left initiative fragment on familiar rocks.

Reposted from [Red Mole Substack](#)

Kurdistan: Scottish activist interviewed on Turkey’s local elections

From a polling station in the Şirnak mountains – an interview with Hazel, an election observer from Scotland for the 31 March local elections in Turkey.

Sarah Glynn talks to one of two Scottish women who came to observe the elections at the invitation of the DEM Party [Peoples’ Equality and Democracy Party – see note 1]. Hazel describes the militarisation of the region and the psychological pressure on voters. She witnessed the mass voting by soldiers brought in from outside the region, and saw the anger and worry in Şirnak (Şirnex) after their election was stolen by imported votes. And she emphasises the power of Kurdish resistance.

Hazel was observing the election at the invitation of the DEM Party, and was sent to village polling stations in the Şirnak (Şirnex) mountains. She describes a heavily militarised

region, and militarised police and armoured vehicles outside the polling stations. Despite having become accustomed to the constant military presence, voters described feelings of intimidation and psychological pressure on account of the people outside the polling stations, who included families of AKP members.

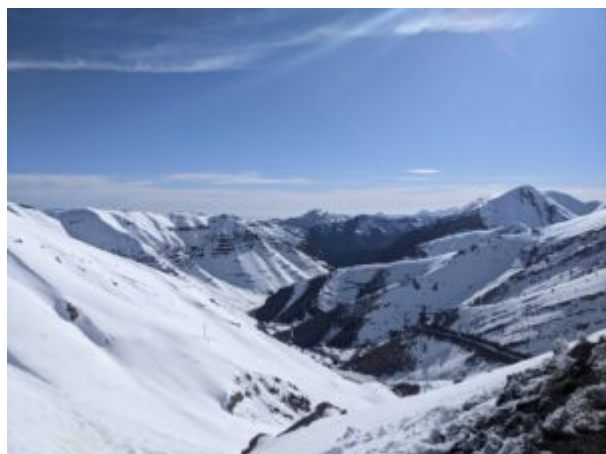
Hazel saw a military helicopter that they were informed had brought soldiers to vote, and witnessed a long line of soldiers in civilian dress waiting to cast their ballots. But the observers were restricted in where they could go, and in inspecting voter lists.

She contrasted the victory celebrations in Diyarbakir (Amed) with the anger and worry in Şirnak – at the stolen election due to the votes of thousands of soldiers brought from outside, and at the prospect of the coming years of AKP control. And she described the immediate post-election repression and arrests in Şirnak.

Hazel attended protest statements in Amed, following the government's refusal to recognise the elected mayor of Van, and observed the importance of the presence of the Saturday Mothers.

She finished by trying to convey the sense of powerful resistance that she could feel in the Kurdish region and that she was reluctant to leave behind.

Below is the full transcript of the interview:



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So, Hazel, obviously a lot has happened since the actual election itself, but you were there to observe the election, so I think we should start with that. And I wondered, for the benefit of people who've not been to a Turkish election, if you could just describe – well, describe where you went, where you were – but also what the polling station is like, who's allowed in, what sort of privacy you get for voting, what sort

of security there is to protect the ballots themselves, and whether there's pressure on the voters from people outside.

Yeah, so I've also been to the general election last year, which was a little bit different to this year's municipal elections, and I think it's also a little bit regional. So, all over Kurdistan region, also Turkey, it's generally in schools that people go to vote, and there are certain laws pertaining to the schools. So, for example, police shouldn't have weapons with them if they're actually inside the polling booth, like the room that people are voting in. And last year, there was a proper booth inside the polling stations that did afford people a bit more privacy, but I didn't personally see that at this one, but we were in quite a remote village in Şîrnak province, and it was called Beytüşşebap in Turkish, or Ilkê in Kurdish. And yeah, there wasn't actually really any privacy, to be honest, in the rooms, but people will make their vote, and there's a sort of desk that people from each party – so DEM Party, AK Party, CHP – they all also sit in the room as well, and they're kind of responsible for overseeing the process. So, there's a bit of a collective management of the day, and there's quite a lot of people from each political party there as well, and also outside the schools, and I'm sure we'll get into this more later. It does depend on the region, so what we saw in Ilkê or Beytüşşebap is, there's the Jandarma outside the schools, which is like militarised police, and there's also plainclothes police, and also uniformed, but there's the militarised and armored vehicles outside.

So, did you get a sense that there was pressure on voters?

So, this is what we asked people, actually, who were there, and they did tell us that they did feel quite a bit of pressure, and I think that also, one thing to keep in mind is that, actually, there's a normalisation of the militarisation of the region, because there's checkpoints, there's military checkpoints when you move inside or outside of the cities in

Kurdistan region. You can see the Jandarma (Gendarmerie), or the military – there's military bases all over the place, inside cities, etc. So, I think that there is a desensitisation, actually, as well; but of course, it does also create the psychological pressure, and for example, there was big families from the AK Party outside in the school grounds that we saw ourselves, and it was like an extended family. And people were also telling us this is also a type of psychological pressure, and they also felt intimidated. And it was also reported that – not where we were, but at another location – that some of the police did have weapons with them inside the schools, as well.

And anyway, they're allowed weapons just outside the schools.

Yes, they're allowed weapons outside of the schools, including the military vehicles themselves, which were literally parked right outside the gates, literally right opposite the entrance to the schools, multiple ones, actually. And also, one thing that we saw too is a military helicopter actually landing directly next to the school, which we were told was bringing soldiers in from Şirnak, like central, the actual city. And then, you know, we were in quite a remote area up the mountains, and we went to the first school, and then we went to two others, and then we were told, oh, go back to the first school, because now a lot of soldiers have just come. And you know, in the region, it's occupied militarily, so there are soldiers around, but people know who are the local soldiers. You know, there's not thousands and thousands of soldiers in each place, usually. And when we went back to the first school, there was this long line of soldiers in plain clothes who were waiting to vote, and it was a very, very tense atmosphere, and we basically were quite abruptly asked to leave.

They wouldn't actually let us be present inside the polling station on that occasion. And yeah, we saw the helicopter, because it wasn't there when we first arrived, and then when

we went to the schools, and then it had arrived, and then it left when we were there.

And were people able to see the voters' lists there? Were all these soldiers' names on the voters' lists?

So, one of our friends who was with us – one of our colleagues who was with us, who was also doing the observations, she has a press card, she's a journalist, she was allowed to look, but we were not allowed, and we were barred from looking at the lists. But there is many, many areas that people have had more access to the lists, and Şirnak is one of them, Şirnak Central, that has shown hundreds and hundreds of male names who – and no women at some addresses at all – but just hundreds and hundreds of male names, which aren't normal military bases. And what we were told is that this is basically soldiers coming from outside, who have been sent here by the state, and they are using other people's addresses to be able – because you know it's municipal, so you have to have like a specific local registered address to be able to vote in that district. And yeah, there's been like a lot of this military people coming and voting.

Over 6,000 in Şirnak, I think.

I know at the general election there was a lot of concern about guarding the ballot boxes, and then there were also problems about changes made when the votes were transferred onto the final system. Were either of those issues this time around, or not?

Yeah, so this was definitely a thing last time. There was really clear evidence, for example, of votes getting transferred from DEM Party to MHP last time – well it was Yeşil Sol (Green Left) Party last year, but to MHP – and then they even ended up being transferred back in the appeals process at points, but I haven't heard of that myself this time. But also, it's one of those things that, you know, I

think it's really hard sometimes to catch the ways that manipulation happens. And there's been really widespread observation amongst the independent observers about this practice with the soldiers, and this is something that – it's in specific areas, it doesn't happen in every single area, obviously – but it's, yeah, it's very difficult to appeal this process. And it didn't really seem like the ballot box issue was something that was really focused on this year, but they were already aware of the extra people signing up in the municipalities this time, so that has been the main focus this year.

I heard calls for guarding the ballot boxes, but I didn't hear of any actual concerns, I think.

I haven't heard of any myself.

And what immediately afterwards, as the results started coming in – I mean, before things started happening in Van – what was the general view of the elections from the DEM Party, because I think you were with people in the party after the elections as well.

Yeah, so I mean, I was in two different places – in Şirnak at first, and then I went back to Amed. And it was really different in both places, because, you know, in Şirnak, people were really hurting, because AK Party, for the central area, was elected again. And people were pretty furious, and also worried. People are really worried about their future, and they're very angry, because they feel it's a very, very undemocratic process. And straight afterwards, on the same day as the elections, there was an attack on the party office by the police, and they arrested at least a dozen people, I think two dozen people – so two of the responsables in DEM Party, and then also quite a few youth as well. And when we were leaving the next day, we heard that the DEM Party members had been released, but a lot of the local young people were still being detained. And this is just like a kind of – I think that

that's very symbolic, actually, because straight away, there's repression. And I mean – you just mentioned Van already, but even when there is a secure vote for the DEM Party, it doesn't mean that repression doesn't come. But when people don't have control of their own municipality, and that really affects, you know, funding, that affects education, that affects all of these different things. It affects also, you know, state propaganda. It affects state control, it affects state access to the border – for example, going south and east, and Şirnak is a really strategic location for the state's war policies. All of these things are affected in people's everyday lives. And somebody – not a DEM Party member, but just like a local person – was saying to me – he was saying, I'm really worried about my child's future. She's only three years old, but again, and again, and again, this keeps happening. I don't know what I can do. And then for DEM Party, people were really exhausted, but they were just busy the entire time. They were saying, we're going to appeal this, we're not going to stand for this, you know, they have cheated the system. And there was this feeling of loss.

But there wasn't much, I've seen in Western media. There's been a lot of dialogue around – oh, CHP, they've done so well; oh, this is such a win for democracy, because AKP have done really badly in this election. But people don't talk about the Kurdistan region, and don't see that AK Party can't even – they can't even keep hold of their own seats in the West. But still, they try and coup them, basically, from the Kurdish regions, for their war policies, and for political reasons.

But when I went back to Amed – so I didn't see it myself, because we're in Şirnak, but I did see a lot of videos that showed there was a big celebration. People were really happy, but there was this focus on the other regions, it wasn't cut off. I think the first day, people were dancing in the streets, big, big celebrations, but by the time we got back, people were just really focused on Şirnak, and then also the

other regions where AKP had sent soldiers, or just where they'd also just done well, you know. And then, also what happened in Van after. So, yesterday, all day, there was just announcements, protests. The people in DEM Party were incredibly busy, I have to say, from morning until evening, just full-on organising: visiting the family of the martyr, the shaheed [the DEM Party election official who was killed in a polling station dispute]; organising announcements, where police also repressed people, and two people were arrested from that – nothing like what we've seen in the further east regions, where people have been really being attacked viciously by the police, and, you know, there's a bigger answer, I think, there – but still, people were then focused on that...

It's not clear what's going to happen now. I was asking people. I was saying, do you think that... will come again, is this going to be the policy of the state this time, because it happened so much last municipal election. And people's answer was just, we just don't know. We just don't know what's going to happen. It's just very unclear.

Which is frightening in itself, of course, the not knowing. So, I don't know when you had to leave that area. Were you able to see any of the protests about what was happening in Van?

In Amed. Yeah.

Reactions to the removal of the mayor, of the elected mayor in Van – were you able to see any of the reactions to that?

Yeah, in Amed, I went to a couple of the announcements and protests, and the thing is, like, even just an announcement, which is what it actually was – or announcement is maybe not quite the right translation, but a kind of, like a statement against what happened – like, even these things, when they're made publicly, are very, very, criminalised by the police. So,

maybe in Western Europe you could make a statement saying, oh, the state did this, and it wasn't good, blah, blah. But, in Bakur [North Kurdistan/southeast Turkey] you're surrounded by armed police, armoured vehicles. Lots of people already have criminal cases or have spent a significant time in prison, and these are the kind of things that can certainly get people arrested again and sent to prison. So, there's quite high stakes, even with just standing up and denouncing ...

And there was one protest outside one of the legal centres, and that was made by DEM Party members, and two of the MPs, so one person was Abbas Şahin, and then also Pınar as well. They're both MPs in Amed region. And then also, directly after that, there was another announcement in a park in Amed, and that was by the Democracy Platform, which is particularly, like a labour platform.

And there were people from other parties or from...



Vigil for forced disappearances

Yeah, I mean, in general, the people who attended, it wasn't only DEM Party members who were there. It's just people in the community, basically, people who agree with the fact that what happened in Van was extremely undemocratic and unfair, and it didn't reflect the will of the people. And the second event, I'm not sure, I would need to find out exactly which groups it was present, actually, and yeah, but there was, like, a kind of mix of

people from, like, various groups, and also non-affiliated people as well. Not everyone was specifically a member of a specific organisation who was present. There was, oh, and the Saturday Mothers as well, the mothers of the martyrs, and also of the missing people who had disappeared in the 90s. So, when everyone was going to this court in the first announcement, the first denunciation, some people tried to enter. And they weren't allowed, of course, they weren't allowed to go in, but there was this big crowd of people, maybe a couple hundred people, and the mothers who, you know, they were walking as a group, and they have the white veils on their head, they're very, very distinctive. And they're really, really, really strong embodiments of the principles of the struggle there, and what people sacrificed, and what people continue to do as well, despite such a deep

and painful struggle. They tried to get in, and when they first came, everyone started clapping and applauding, and people were chanting. It was really, really beautiful to see how people reacted to their presence as part of that struggle, and part of the wider statement. And they were also at the second denunciation as well, which was in the park. They didn't speak at it, but there was – yeah, like I said, it was kind of a mix of people present, and – just one second, I'm just gonna check something... I had a thing where I wrote down the chants that people were making, but I'm just struggling to find it...

You were looking for the chants that were said at these demonstrations, so do give us some examples.

Yeah, so, well, one chant that people were chanting is, long live the resistance of Van, so, “Biji Berxwedana Wanê”, and also, “Resistance is Life”, and also, “Kurdistan will become a grave for fascism”, and, yeah, I thought it was just a very – like, every time somebody would make a speech, the young people in the crowd would start leading the chants. Yeah, that was all.

So, is there anything else you want to add before I let you go

and catch your plane?

It's really hard to – I thought there is something that I want to add, but it's really hard to put into words. And I feel really, like I really wish that I wasn't leaving now, because the different layers of society that say, and one of the other chants, the translation in English is, "we will win by resisting". I think that that is just such a present spirit and energy, and that is something that is really beautiful and inspiring; and yeah, I'm sure that people really will resist. And if it really is the case that the mayor has, again, been reappointed, I think that that really just shows like that chant, that we will win by resisting, is completely true. And whatever happens now, because I think that the democratic process is completely – it's not respected in Kurdistan region especially. And I think that we need to stop invisibilising the politics there, when we talk about Turkey as a whole, and the democratic process in Turkey as a whole, and, you know, not see CHP as this kind of – oh great, everything's answered now, blah, blah, blah. I think that, yeah, the struggle is really alive, and we also need to find ways to support it, that's all.

Thank you, and bring that spirit of struggle back to Scotland with you. Thanks very much.

Thank you for having me.

Sarah Glynn is an activist from Scottish Solidarity with Kurdistan who writes for Medya News.

For a full report of the local election results and the successful resistance movement to the annulment and subsequent reinstatement of the successful DEM

candidate in the municipality of Van, see Sarah Glynn's article 'Resistance Works!'

<https://medyanews.net/resistance-works-a-weekly-news-review/>

Interview originally published by Medya News: <https://medyanews.net/from-a-polling-station-in-the-sirnak-mountains-an-interview-with-hazel-an-election-observer-from-scotland/>

*Note by Ecosocialist.scot: [1] **DEM Party – Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party** is a pro-Kurdish political party in the Turkish state. It is the legal successor of the Green Left Party (Yesil Sol) and with the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) handing over its work to this party in 2023, it has become the latest iteration of Kurdish interests in Turkey. It won 10 provinces and 2.6 million votes (5.7%), the fourth highest vote in the elections of 31 March.*

Photo: DEM Party Election Rally, Medya News

The UK's suicidal Rosebank decision – Scotland needs a stronger response

Rishi Sunak's scandalous decision to go ahead with the exploitation of the Rosebank oil and gas field, alongside Keir Starmer's cringe-worthy non-response – 'yes, we're opposed but

no, we won't do anything about it' – has left the Scottish government and the SNP with an open goal. Unfortunately, Humza Yousaf and his Net Zero and Just Transition minister, Mairi McAllan, are being so careful not to blast the ball over the bar, they seem reluctant to kick it at all.

The desire seems to be there, sort of. After weeks of edging himself off the fence on the issue, the First Minister did say this was the wrong decision. Mairi McAllan said the same. The Scottish government's Energy Secretary, Neil Gray, said, rather tamely, that the SNP administration was "disappointed" while pointing out, correctly, that Rosebank would not contribute to 'energy security', as most of the oil produced would be sold abroad. In fact, Equinor, the Norwegian state oil company that has been given the go-ahead to exploit Rosebank, was more forceful in its dismissal of the bogus argument about energy security used by the Tory government in London and the oil lobby in Scotland. It said if the UK wanted any of the oil it plans to extract from Rosebank, it would have to buy it on the open world market.

The sound of opposition from SNP ministers is a lot weaker than that coming from Caroline Lucas, still the only Green MP in Westminster, who called it "morally obscene" and "a climate crime", or from the Scottish Green Party, the SNP's partner in the Scottish government, whose spokesman, Mark Ruskell, called it an "utter catastrophe" that showed "total contempt for our environment and future generations".

The day after the announcement, Mairi McAllan told the BBC's Good Morning Scotland that the Scottish government had had "long-standing concerns" about Rosebank and had been "calling for a very strict climate compatibility test, an evidence-led test, to be applied". When quizzed on what evidence was needed, she said there were a series of things that needed to be evaluated: firstly, whether it was in line with both Scotland and the UK's climate commitments, including to the Paris Agreement and its goal of keeping global warming within

1.5 degrees Celsius; but also to things like energy security and the rights of workers in the northeast of Scotland.

We may agree these are vital concerns (although what exactly was meant by energy security could be controversial). However, insisting on them now seems pointless, unless it is just a rhetorical device to avoid saying clearly that no oil or gas should be extracted from Rosebank, or any other new field in the North Sea or elsewhere. We already know because we have been told, endlessly, by the scientists of the UN's IPCC, by the International Energy Agency, and by Antonio Guterres himself, not to mention the climate justice movement across the world and thousands of representatives and experts from the Global South, that staying within the 1.5 limit is simply incompatible with any new oil or coal extraction, and that we also have to phase out, rapidly, the wells and mines that are currently operating.

Most recently and conclusively, we have also been told by the very oil company responsible (as we mentioned before) that Rosebank and any other new North Sea fossil fuel production will contribute more or less zero to any kind of energy security. And although there are many, justified fears among workers in the northeast, oil workers themselves have told researchers that they want to be involved in a just transition away from fossil fuels. Some of them have begun to push for that themselves and to design what it might look like, through the important Our Power campaign.

The SNP government's problem is that it feels unable, or unwilling, to confront the oil lobbies or its right wing. It's unclear if the suspension of the right-wing, anti-Green, anti-woke MSP, Fergus Ewing, might signal a small shift in this respect. But the roots of such reluctance run deeper. They flow from the party's history and its character – as a nationalist party caught between its genuine, social democratic desire to build a fairer, more decent country, that seeks to combat poverty and exclusion at home and deal

decently with migrants, the Global South and the planet, and its refusal to challenge or even query the iron laws of the market economy. The latter is cemented by its yearning to become a junior outpost of the supposedly progressive, European capitalist class.

This has been accentuated since the bruising leadership campaign at the beginning of the year, when Kate Forbes' explicitly right-wing, business-first, climate-light campaign came within a whisper of beating Humza Yousaf as bearer of the legacy of former First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon.

The police investigation into the party's accounts a few weeks later, with the formal questioning of Sturgeon's husband and then herself, drove the process further. Whatever the reality, if any, behind the case, it was certainly used to try to discredit the SNP as a whole and to push the new Yousaf administration to the right.

Ironically, the central target of that campaign, Nicola Sturgeon herself, has come out more strongly against the Rosebank go-ahead than her proteges. She tweeted her agreement with Caroline Lucas calling the approval an act of environmental vandalism, and saying risks slowing the green transition that oil and gas workers need to happen at pace.

The fact is that a sizeable majority of people in Scotland want their government to take urgent action to combat climate change. And despite its constrained powers under devolution, there is a lot it can do too. Taking a clear, unequivocal stand against Rosebank and any other new fossil fuel projects in the North Sea would be a start. It would be one way of marking a clear difference with the pusillanimous position of Starmer's Labour leadership and might even help win the crucial Rutherglen election.

More strategically, that stance against any new oil and gas needs to be clearly stated in the Scottish government's long-

overdue response to the public consultation on its seriously inadequate Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan, and built into its new Climate Change Plan, due to be published in November.

It should look at how it can use its existing powers – in areas like planning, transport, and health – to wage a guerrilla campaign against the implementation of new fossil fuel extraction.

And it could put in serious doubt the long-term viability of investments like those of Equinor, if it promised that any government of an independent Scotland would make a priority of nationalising and closing down Rosebank and any other new fields, without compensation.

Such bold action may seem unlikely, unless there is some serious pressure pushing in this direction.

We could all take courage from the historic success of the *Yes to Yasuni* campaign in Ecuador, led by environmentalists and the powerful Indigenous movement, which persuaded nearly 60% of the population to vote in August in favour of mandating their government to leave the oil in the soil beneath the mega-diverse Amazonian rainforest.

Iain Bruce

28 September, 2023

Photo: Steve Eason

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 Bensaid 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'état 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 Vukovic, 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 disaster. 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'état 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.

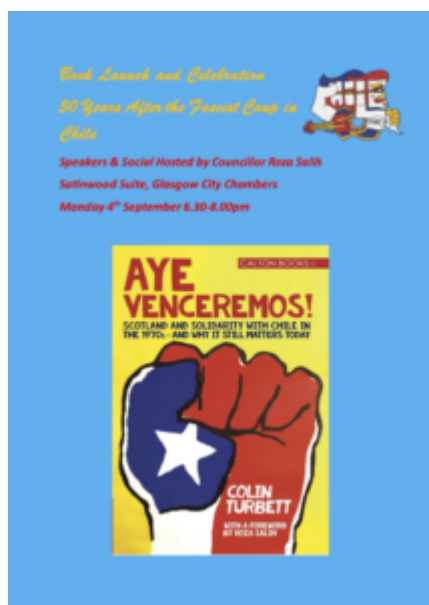
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<https://anticapitalistresistance.org/remembering-september-11-1973-the-us-backed-pinochet-coup-in-chile/>

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/ay-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!***

Solidarity with Nicaraguan people – Scotland's role

In Scotland, soon after the 1979 Sandinista [FSLN] revolutionary triumph over the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua, a united front solidarity campaign was established called **Scottish Medical Aid for Nicaragua** (SMAN), *writes Norman Lockhart*.

The campaign included trade unions, Labour Party and other campaigns, including church organisations influenced by liberation theology.

It played a similar role to the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign based in London and was based on the experience of Medical Aid for Palestine.

It also incorporated the El Salvador solidarity campaign (ELSSOC) which had been more prominent in Scotland.

It not only sent NHS doctors and nurses to work mostly in the southern region and concentrated in sending Scottish delegations there, including trade unionists and MPs, but also built health centres and other facilities for people neglected by the Somoza dictatorship.

A high point of the solidarity was the visit by the then revolutionary Sandinista president Daniel Ortega to the Glasgow Mayday 1989 celebrations at a time when right wing US President Ronald Reagan and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher dominated the world of imperialist politics.

The revolution was never to be considered perfect – it was even once described as the Labour Party but with guns!

One of the important lessons of both the Nicaraguan FSLN and the FMLN in El Salvador had been recognising the common

grounds for uniting in struggle.

In the context of the popular struggles world wide and particularly in Latin America again today, it should be a priority to defend democratic and human rights against what can be referred to as the [Orteguista dictatorship regime](#).

Ortega and his partner the current vice president Murillo have become another brutal dictatorship [that has imprisoned several hundred political prisoners](#) including his once fellow Sandinista combatants.

For example, one of them who has been detained in solitary confinement for over a year, [Dora Maria Tellez](#), led a military wing of the Sandinista army in overthrowing the Somoza dictatorship and was also the minister for health during the Sandinista government.

This process became more obvious about four years ago when police, aided by para military thugs, shot down workers, peasants and students demonstrating in defence of the environment and for better state pensions.

While the Sandinista revolution heralded many obvious benefits for the population of Nicaragua in health and education as well as land reforms and farming cooperatives, it also set a worldwide example to those forces struggling for social justice and human rights.

Most notably the recognition of the need for the indigenous and minority black groups on the Atlantic coast for self determination.

This was very significant in undermining the base of the 'contras', the terrorist opposition financed, trained and armed by the USA.

Part of the consolidation of the revolutionary process and the best way for a legitimate international profile was the first

democratic presidential election that confirmed the Sandinista popular liberation victory.

In contrast, a clear expression of the revolution's many faults was the so called 'piñata' when after losing the next election many financial rewards and privileges (state property, land and businesses) were given to faithful FSLN party servants or bureaucrats.

The dictatorship of Ortega has even refused permission for [revolutionaries from other latin american states](#) to visit Nicaragua to find out first hand what conditions for working class people are like. And even the Organisation of Latin American States OEA has condemned Ortega's undemocratic regime repeatedly over the last four years but this year it was unanimous and without abstentions.

There is still a network of Scots previously sympathisers of the Sandinista revolution who support the people's continuing struggle.

Norman Lockhart, October 2022

Image from <https://correspondenciadeprensa.com/>

“Socialism: Endorsed by James Connolly” tee shirt and other new items at Calton Books, Glasgow

In his tour of TV studios this week, RMT General Secretary Mick Lynch was asked on ITV's Peston show who his political

hero was and immediately answered “James Connolly”.

The presenter looked quizzical and Lynch had to explain that Connolly was an “Irish, Socialist, Republican ... trade unionist ... hero of the Irish Revolution”.

“Who’s your political hero?”

“James Connolly, an Irish socialist republican”

<https://t.co/JAUkY9G5Nd>

– Ronan Burtenshaw (@ronanburtenshaw) [June 22, 2022](#)

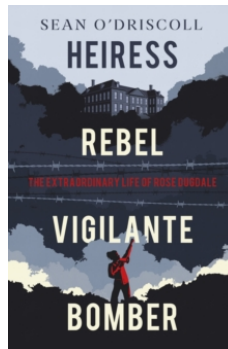
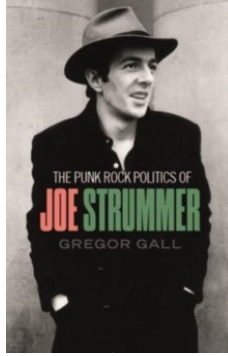
Although of Irish descent and describing himself as an “Irishman”, Connolly was also a Scot, born in Edinburgh, he spoke with a Scottish accent throughout his life. After serving in the British Army and deserting, he became a socialist and the secretary of the Scottish Socialist Federation, standing for local elections. He moved to Dublin for work at the age of 27. In Ireland he founded the Irish Socialist Republican Party. After several years working in America he returned to Ireland and helped found the Irish Labour Party before opposing the First World War and taking part in the Easter Rising against British rule over Ireland in 1916. He was executed by the British State for his part in the Rising.

ecosocialist.scot thought it was therefore highly appropriate that this week, Calton Books in Glasgow launched a new tee shirt: “Socialism – endorsed by James Connolly”. It looks like we are going to have more RMT picket lines over the summer before their battle is won, so what could be a better picket apparel than this Socialism – Connolly tee shirt?

We encourage all our readers to get down to Calton Books in Glasgow’s east end – the **‘best wee radical bookshop in the world’** – and get themselves kitted out for a summer of protest, alongside many of their other new items.



SOME OF THE NEW ITEMS AVAILABLE FROM CALTON BOOKS



Calton Books quality postcards now available including We Still Hate Thatcher!

As always many thanks for supporting the 'best wee radical bookshop in the world'!

[Visit the Shop](#)



Women's Climate Strike: Vigil and Rally March 7-8 in front of Scottish Parliament Edinburgh

Women's Climate Strike: Vigil and Rally

7pm on March 7th to 7pm on March 8th

In front of the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh

International Women's Day (IWD) is an international awareness day, celebrated annually on March 8 to commemorate the cultural, political, and socioeconomic achievements of women. It is also a focal point in the women's rights movement, bringing attention to issues such as gender equality, reproductive rights, and violence and abuse against women.

Women's Climate Strike call all from around Scotland to gather with women & FINT (female, intersex, non-binary, trans) outside the Scottish Parliament at Holyrood, for a 'drop-in' 24-hour vigil and rally for Climate & Nature.

Come and stand for the whole vigil or for couple of minutes (whatever you can manage); in solidarity with women and girls

already being impacted disproportionately by climate chaos around the world.

Women are carrying the weight of the inaction and yet still we wait for meaningful action to be taken to avert the rapidly unfolding climate and environmental crisis.

We will wait no longer. We want a seat at the table and we want climate justice now!

The 24-hour 'drop in' vigil will take place from 7pm on 7th March to 7pm on the 8th March. We can come together, act as one, and have immense power during this International Women's Day!!

[Facebook Event for the vigil](#)

In Edinburgh: there are these preparation activities:

Saturday, 26th and Sunday, 27th February: 11:00am to 1.00pm

Handing out flyers

Middle Meadow Walk, Edinburgh (in front of Sainsbury's)

Saturday, 5th March: 1-5 pm

Art / banner / placard making

Out of the Blue Drill Hall, 36 Dalmeny St. (off Leith Walk)

[Facebook Event](#)

If you want to be involved on March 7th or 8th, there are ways to support: as a Police Liaison, Legal Observer, or with the Wellbeing team.

If you are interested in taking part in these roles: reply to this or email selin.tekin.au@gmail.com.

All information reproduced from an appeal by [XR Scotland](#)

Scotland's renewables sell-off – right direction, wrong road!

Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon was over the moon when she reacted to the outcome of last week's sale of rights to develop wind farms off the coasts of Scotland, *writes Iain Bruce for ecosocialist.scot*.

The [ScotWind](#) auction of licenses to 17 projects covering 7,000 km² of seabed could lead to the generation of another 24.8GW of clean energy in the next ten years or so. That's two-and-a-half times the amount the Scottish government had expected, and two-and-a-half times the offshore wind capacity that Scotland currently has operating or soon to come online. It would effectively double the entire installed wind energy capacity of the UK, including offshore and onshore – providing, in theory, enough electricity to power more than half, possibly three quarters, of all the homes in Britain. Obviously, this could be a significant step towards decarbonising the energy supply this decade, which is essential to keep global warming increases below the critical level of 1.5 degrees Celsius.

On the main BBC Scotland news that night, Sturgeon said the nearly £700 million due to her government in option fees was just the start. As the projects were implemented, she expected £1 billion in supply chain investment for every 1GW of power generated. She called it “truly historic” in terms of the scale of the opportunity. An industry representative was even more fulsome. For Scotland this was a moment akin to the beginning of North Sea Oil in the 1970s. Two days later, the

First Minister tweeted a screenshot of a Zoom meeting she'd just held with executives from the multinational energy companies that had won the rights. They include BP, SSE and Shell, from the UK and the Netherlands, Iberdrola, the Spanish parent company of Scottish Power, as well as Vattenfall of Sweden, Falcke Renewables of Italy, Baywa of Germany and Deme of Belgium. Nicola Sturgeon said they'd told her how they would help to put Scotland at the forefront of offshore wind power globally.

ScotWind auction slammed

The ScotWind auction was immediately slammed by some on the left of the pro-independence movement. Their criticism centred on the fact that the licences had gone to foreign companies with little guarantee that future benefits, or jobs, would come to Scotland. Robin McAlpine, the former director of Common Weal, pointed out that the amount those companies paid for their licences was a pittance compared with what they can expect to make from selling the electricity they generate – they could pay it off with a couple of days' wind, he claimed. He also calculated that, per Gigawatt, it was barely a third of what the Scottish government had said it hoped to bring in.

These are serious arguments, and in the week since the auction results were announced they have gained traction in some expected, and unexpected quarters. [Conter](#) used a simplified version to denounce an alleged irrevocable turn to the right by the Scottish Green Party – a misplaced and somewhat sectarian criticism towards the base of the Scottish Green Party in our view. Anas Sarwar, the leader of the Scottish Labour Party, attacked the Scottish government at First Minister's questions in the Holyrood Parliament for selling out Scottish jobs and selling off Scottish assets *"to foreign multinationals with woeful human rights records"* (sic). He echoed the Common Weal argument that the Scottish National Party (SNP) administration's failure to deliver on its promise

to set up a state-owned energy company had led to this new “*privatisation*”. Neil Mackay went over the top in The Herald and accused the SNP of “Thatcherism-lite”. Common Weal has now developed its case in more detail in a 14 page report just published, entitled “[ScotWind: Privatising Scotland's Future Again](#)”. The left-wing Labour MSP, Mercedes Villalba, retweeted the report approvingly, demanding “*socialist ambition*” and a “*people's government*” that would “*advance democratic worker ownership of the economy*”.

Sovereignty

The counter argument, not only from the SNP but from some on the radical left of the pro-independence movement, points to the ever-present issue of sovereignty.

It questions some of the basic premises of the Common Weal argument, in particular the possibility of a devolved Scottish government, given the current limitations on its legal and fiscal powers, establishing a public energy company capable of taking on an electricity generation project of the kind and scale of ScotWind. It points out that these limitations are precisely one of the strongest arguments for independence. The reasoning runs something like this:

After the 2014 Independence Referendum, one concession from the government in Westminster was to transfer to Holyrood complete control over Crown Estate Scotland, the body that granted the ScotWind licences. That means the Scottish government is now, effectively, the landlord of the seabed up to 200 miles off Scotland's very large foreshore. As landlord, it can charge for the licences to exploit the resources, as it just has done, and when production begins it will be able to charge rent.

This is also the means by which onshore wind farms have already been bringing in a tidy sum for some of Scotland's big private landowners. Although such deals are shrouded in

secrecy, as far back as 2012 the Earl of Moray was reckoned to be making £2 million a year from the 49-turbine farm on his Doune estate in Perthshire, and the Duke of Roxeburghe just a bit less from a slightly smaller development in Lammermuir Hills. On a similar basis, the Scottish government might be able to charge as much as £400 million a year in rent, according to some calculations, as and when all the ScotWind projects start to generate electricity, although the Common Weal report estimates this income at between £50 and 90 million a year. In either case, it is still a pittance compared with what the companies stand to make.

Reserved power

However, the argument continues, energy policy itself, including taxation, regulation and ownership, remains a legal power reserved for the UK government. That means firstly that the tax paid by the corporations on their profits from wind power will go into the coffers of the Westminster government, not Holyrood. Nor would Holyrood benefit from the substantial fees for connection paid to the national grid.

Secondly, it remains very unclear what levers the Scottish government could use to ensure the companies keep their promises – for example to create supply chain jobs in Scotland – or even to control where the energy goes. There is currently nothing like the capacity to bring ashore and distribute an extra 25GW of clean energy, and apparently no plan to install the connections required, so it is likely that the companies will choose immediately to re-export a large part of the wind energy to Europe.

Thirdly, and perhaps most decisively, under the existing constitutional settlement, the Scottish government cannot nationalise all or part of the industry in order to ensure its aims are met. The National Energy Company mooted by the Scottish government in 2017 was an electricity **distribution**

company. The idea seems to have fallen victim to the pandemic and the more recent crisis in the UK's gas retail sector that has led to the collapse of over 20 energy distribution companies. There appears to be some doubt about whether the Scottish government with its current powers could set up an electricity generating company, but even if it could, it seems certain that the fiscal limits on Holyrood's ability to borrow would mean it could never raise anything approaching the amount of investment required to develop offshore projects on the scale of the ScotWind ones.

Alternative – towards radical independence

Whichever side of this argument you come down on, the issues of revenue and control, ownership and sovereignty, must be an important part of the alternative we need to develop as Scotland moves towards independence. The experience of other small, resource-rich countries, combining measures of nationalisation, raising royalties and rewriting the service contracts on offer to multinationals, may have useful lessons here, both positive and negative. And the efforts of Bolivia or Venezuela in the first decade of this century, to assert sovereignty over their natural resources **and** redirect revenue towards social spending, may have a lot more to teach us in this respect than Norway.

But these aspects are not enough. On their own they risk leaving us with a narrow nationalist, technocratic response, which will certainly be insufficient to address the gravity of the global climate crisis we face, and the depth of the changes we need in the ways we live. They have to be integrated into a wider, deeper, more ambitious and more urgent vision of the transition ahead, one that is inspired by the principles of climate justice that were expressed so impressively on the streets of Glasgow in November. If there

is one thing that we should have learned from the breadth and diversity of the protests during COP26, it is that such climate justice is inseparable from social justice, in all its dimensions. That means bringing together the rights of workers and working-class communities in the global north, including those who are affected by the dismantling of fossil industries, with the rights of those in the global south who are most affected by climate change, especially women, Indigenous communities and the migrants who will be forced to move on an ever vaster scale (including to Scotland), and with the rights of nature itself (something a future Scottish state should write into its constitution, following the example first set by Ecuador back in 2008).

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GMB trade union members, including striking bin workers, turned out for the Fridays For the Future demonstration in Glasgow on 5 Nov

Building a Vision

That vision needs to build out from three main pillars.

Firstly, we need **a transition that is just** – in the full sense of the word. Of course everyone, including the Scottish government, *talks* about a just transition. But it is not enough just to mention, or hope, that wind farms and other renewables will create thousands of jobs for those whose jobs must go in oil and gas. We need a planned transition which includes both, and many other kinds of job too, where the workers and the communities involved are not just consulted, but play a leading, decision-making role, so that they can choose and exert control over their own futures. We need not just some “green jobs” but a complete refocus and massive change to develop what has been called “green, purple and red jobs”.

Secondly, we need a profoundly different grasp of **what we are transitioning from and to**, and a much more creative vision of how to do it. We must not think of renewable energy simply replacing fossil fuel energy, so that electric cars can replace petrol ones while everything else goes on more or less as is. We need to reduce sharply the amount of energy we use, and that means radical changes to the ways we travel, where we live and where we work, how we heat our homes or obtain our food, and indeed profound changes to what we value for a good life, over and above the consumption of more and more stuff – stuff that too often has been hauled backwards and forwards across the globe before it gets to us. This means we also need a wider rethink of how we produce our energy. Obviously, nobody wants just to switch off the lights, so we may still need some large-scale clean energy generation projects like ScotWind. And the complexities of technology, supply chains and finance may leave us with no choice but to do some

business with big energy companies, for a limited period and on strictly regulated conditions. But all this needs to be put alongside, and subordinated to, a new emphasis on the local generation and consumption of clean energy – local energy that is publicly owned and controlled by the community.

all this needs to be put alongside, and subordinated to, a new emphasis on the local generation and consumption of clean energy – local energy that is publicly owned and controlled by the community.

Thirdly, we need to make absolutely sure that **whatever we do to achieve this transition is not trashing the environment, living conditions or rights of other communities in other parts of the world, especially in the Global South**. Exactly how much balsa wood went into the wood resin sandwiched between fibre glass in those wind turbine blades? Which tropical forest was that balsa wood dragged out of? How much say did the people living there have, and how much benefit or destruction did it bring them? The same goes for the lithium in the batteries that will store all that clean energy. We can only ensure positive answers to these questions if we build on the close relations and solidarity with movements and communities in the South that flourished on the streets of Glasgow last November.

The transition to zero carbon has to be a shared and collaborative project across the world – part of a Radical Global Green New Deal – not a privilege for the North at the expense of the South.

The transition to zero carbon has to be a shared and collaborative project across the world – part of a Radical Global Green New Deal – not a privilege for the North at the expense of the South.

The Urgency of Independence

Here in Scotland, these three pillars are yet more arguments for the urgency of independence. They obviously cannot be achieved within the confines of the current devolution settlement. But this is also where the real weakness of the current Scottish government approach becomes clear. It is a weakness that runs much deeper than an alleged dispute over whether or not it could have set up a publicly owned generation company to take advantage of the ScotWind licences – important though that issue is.

The SNP-led administration likes to broadcast its green commitments, not totally without justification. Scotland's legally-enshrined target of zero carbon by 2045 is not nearly soon enough, but in Europe it is equalled only by Germany and Sweden. Scotland was the first and only country of the Global North to respond to the demands of governments in the South and make a symbolic pledge during COP26 – albeit a paltry £2 million – to a fund to pay for the loss and damage already suffered by those countries as a result of climate change. The latest ScotWind auction shows the government is taking seriously the need for big and rapid increases in renewable energy. Given the gravity of the climate crisis, these have to be good things, even if they are by a long way insufficient.

False Narrative of 'Net Zero'

The problem is that all of this is underpinned, and ultimately undermined, by the fact that Scottish government policy remains wedded, apparently unquestioningly, to the false narrative of *net zero* by 2045, with all its accompanying false solutions of negative emissions technologies and offsets, including carbon capture and storage (CCS), hydrogen, Bio Energy with CCS (BECCS) and nature based solutions to be used as offsets. This is the same narrative that the UK government as COP26 President worked hard to impose in Glasgow in

November; the same narrative that many fossil fuel companies are using to justify their continuing extraction of oil and gas through to the mid century and beyond; the same narrative that other core sectors of international capital, especially in finance, are using to back up their green capitalist revolution; and the same narrative that was called “The Big Con” by Friends of the Earth.

It is also the same narrative that was massively rejected by protesters on the massive demonstration in Glasgow on 6 November and throughout the COP.



Global Climate Justice campaigners march in Glasgow Nov 2021 (Photo: M Picken)

For core sections of the SNP leadership, this is a weakness that is embedded in their fundamental social democratic vision of society and economy, in their basic belief that, with a bit of a tweak and a bit more regulation, the free market can solve the greatest existential threat that humanity has ever faced. Well, it cannot! Many of the 100,000+ members of the SNP surely know that. So does the membership of their governmental partners in the Scottish Green Party. Even many Labour members and supporters know the free market does not work. That is why one of the greatest challenges now for climate activists in Scotland is to work with those people and with others, in the Indy movement, in the trade unions, on the

left, to *shift this narrative*, to dismantle the myth of net zero and encourage the movement onto a much more inspiring path – that of climate justice, which also means social justice and national justice.

26 January 2022

Iain Bruce is a member of ecosocialist.scot living in Glasgow

The Island and the River

COP26 brought all the world and its political issues to the Clyde for a few weeks in November. Catching a quiet moment away from the demos and kettles, Paul Inglis [of ecosocialist.scot] spoke to Paul Figueroa, a prominent member of the Puerto Rican Independence Party visiting Scotland during the conference. Ranging across the history of the island and its politics, particularly the issues of climate change and imperialism, this interview presents the cause of Puerto Rican independence to a Scottish audience.

Puerto Rico is not usually an island that occurs to the Scottish political imagination. Our international awareness, at least within the independence movement, is mostly centred on places like Catalunya and Wales, with an occasional (but rather reserved) glance at the Basques now and then. We draw lesson and inspiration, if at all, from a fairly small pool of contemporary national movements, and barely look beyond Europe in the process. Apart from fairly predictable Euro-centrism, this narrowness of outlook speaks to the fact that our most ready analogues are afforded by countries in similar social and economic situations.

Not just the enthusiasts of the left but most indymarchers

would point out that Scotland has little in common with the historical experience of colonised nations like Egypt or Angola, never mind ongoing anticolonial struggles like those in Puerto Rico or the Mapuche lands. Scotland is simply not a colonised country (though of course one could speak of a form of internal colonialism practiced by both Scots and English against the Gaels) and only in the wildest dreams/tweets of certain sectors of the indy movement do the problems imposed on us by Westminster bear even slight resemblance to anything visited upon the Kurds by the Turkish government.



As such, it is either by an unconscious or a tactful choice that we generally keep our eyes on European matters. This certainly avoids falling into ridiculous and insulting direct comparisons between ourselves and peoples who are currently experiencing brutal, life-or-death struggles for freedom, but I also believe it can accidentally result in a different, and distinctly limiting, kind of euro-centrism, one that assumes offhand that little of the previous or current history of national liberation in Africa, Asia and Latin America can teach us anything.

So keen are we to not seem appropriative or offensive that we can risk ignoring great and helpful lessons. Just think about the challenges that the national question sets before Scottish socialists on a daily basis: What sort of classes (or fractions of classes) take part in the national movement? Where do the goals of the working class and the nationalist bourgeoisie/middle class diverge? How does imperialism

constrict and hinder self-determination? How does the socialist movement orientate itself amidst all this? We should realise that these exact questions have troubled national movements past and present all over the globe, and that the ways in which they attempted to give answers yield a vast storehouse of reference material for us to consult. As long as we do not pretend that we can simply harvest direct or ready-made lessons, there is a lot that we can gain by looking beyond Europe, and we should not be afraid to do so.

It was for this reason that I was excited to sit down and speak to Paul Figueroa, a member of the Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP), amid all the rush and activity of COP26. Paul, who stood as the PIP's candidate for council in San Juan during the 2020 elections, had come here during the conference on the invitation of Scotland's Radical Independence Campaign to speak at a meeting of the COP26 protest coalition's "Peoples' Summit", and to make international links and connections. Naturally then, it was the perfect opportunity to find out what the fight for Puerto Rican freedom can teach us here in Scotland.

My first question dealt with the topic that was on everyone's lips during those November weeks: Climate change. I asked Paul a question with two parts: What does climate change, and what would climate justice mean for Puerto Rico? Climate change is a bleak prospect in general, obviously, but for an island nation it is especially pressing. Paul said that "if austerity and privatisation don't kill off the Puerto Rican people, climate change will," pointing to the fact that for every one centimetre rise of the sea, the island loses a yard of coast. Not only this, but there is the impending threat of consistent drought and the danger that an increase in landslides means for a mostly mountainous country like Puerto Rico.

The problem with getting climate justice, Paul explained, is

that the kinds of steps Puerto Rico must take to help tackle climate change are essentially blocked off by the economic interests of the United States of America. In the last year, the entirety of the island's energy grid was privatised, falling into the hands of an American company, Luma Energy, which has stated that it has no interest in pursuing green energy. Indeed, American interests have even pushed the Puerto Rican government to enact what Paul termed a "tax on the sun"- that is, a tax on anyone going off the fossil fuel-based grid to use solar power. As a Caribbean country, the green alternative for Puerto Rico is naturally solar energy, but Luma is standing in the way of this in favour of fossil fuels. Just as the grid is controlled by an American company, so too is the supply of coal and gas, most of which comes from the firm Applied Energy Systems. This leaves Puerto Rico dependent on the USA for energy when a safer, cleaner alternative is right at hand. And the fruits of this toxic, dirty dependency are dearly bought. Paul was stark on this point: "For island nations, climate change is a matter of life and death." To underline this, he gave the example of the town of Peñuelas, where the coal ash from the power plants is dumped. It has the highest rate of cancer and birth defects in Puerto Rico.

All of this for the profit margins of the Yankee coal industry, and the stuffed pockets of West Virginian members of congress. And they too, like Luma Energy, lobby the Puerto Rican government to keep their vested interests secure. In contrast to this, climate justice would mean an opportunity for Puerto Rico, and Puerto Ricans, to make their own climate policy, not lobbyists from Wall Street or Washington. This is a freedom that has long been denied the Puerto Rican people, held down as they are by the United States' political and economic imperatives. Considering a situation like that, Paul was not enthusiastic about COP26's significance for the island. Discussing Puerto Rico's lack of representation on international bodies like the United Nations, CARICOM (Caribbean Community), CELAC (Community of Caribbean and

Latin American States) and the OAS (Organisation of American States), Paul argued that the island therefore lacks a seat at the table for global discussions and decisions which will be crucial for its future. Frustrated by “the posturing of the larger countries and leaders like Biden and Johnson”, Paul felt that “they need to decide if they lead, follow or get out of the way” and let the countries with the most at stake have the deciding say.



Unavoidably, this talk of freedom to make choices, and the obstacles to that freedom, led into a discussion of the colonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico. How did this state of affairs, where the USA, and American businesses, can do what they like with Puerto Rico, come to be? In order to get an idea of why, I next asked for some historical background. Of course, the history of any land is a rich and varied ocean, and the story of Puerto Rico is no exception. Therefore, Paul aimed at giving me a quick gloss, one that covered the key points.

He started at the beginning of Puerto Rico's time as a colony, with the Spanish invasion of Borinquen, as the island is known in the indigenous Taino language, in 1493. From there stemmed three hundred years of indigenous and enslaved African rebellions, centuries of continuing struggle against imperial

Spanish rule. One of the most important uprisings of this Spanish colonial period was el Grito de Lares (the Cry of Lares) in 1868. This was an insurrection, beginning in the town of Lares, which aimed at independence and a Puerto Rican republic- The first such national rebellion in the island's history. And while it may have been defeated, Lares was the birth of the Puerto Rican national consciousness, identity and flag. Thirty years later, the Spanish-American War saw Puerto Rico, as well as Cuba and the Philippines, wrenched from the grip of Spain by a new colonial overlord, the United States of America,

Any hopes that Puerto Ricans might have had for a better future without Spanish control were quickly dashed, as the American takeover precipitated a dramatic, costly change in the island's fortunes. Immediately following their victory, the United States devalued the currency by 40%, stopped Puerto Rico from controlling its own trade with other countries, and began breaking up the networks of small farmers that underpinned Puerto Rico's economy in favour of large scale, industrial sugar farming run by a handful of absentee American businesses. The result was a strengthening of the sort of export-crop monoculture that has thus far played such a limiting, exploitative and destructive role in the history and ecology of the Caribbean. While the United States profited from its new colony, Puerto Rico came to be known during the Twentieth Century as "the Poorhouse of the Caribbean."

Not just economic damage, but cultural oppression came with the Americans. Most blatantly, there was the attempt to make the Spanish language illegal, to anglicise the country. In a particularly crass move, the island's name was even officially changed to the more Anglo-sounding "Porto Rico" from 1899 to 1932. Students of Russian history might here be reminded of the old empire's attempts at forcibly "Russifying" its national minorities, or perhaps the long campaign against Gaelic by first the Scottish and then the British state has

sprung to your mind. The Americans also attempted to clamp down on Puerto Rican holidays and foist their experiment with booze prohibition onto the island too.

These simultaneous cultural and economic troubles, and their joint link to the effects of American imperialism, meant that the independence movement and the workers' movement became easily and naturally connected. Paul gave the example of how, from the 1930's to the 1950's, there were more than two hundred workers' strikes, and almost all of them were led by the nationalist party. In 1950, the nationalists would take the fight for independence even further, renouncing pacifism and launching a war for independence that, like el Grito de Lares almost a century prior, was defeated. The years following this setback marked the most intense period of persecution for independence supporters, with the Americans bringing in a gag law which made the Puerto Rican national anthem illegal and banned meetings or discussion of both independence and socialism. This, coupled with the "Carpeteo", the constant FBI and police spying on independence supporters, spurred the emergence of clandestine militant groups on the lines of the Guevarist guerrilla strategy popular across Latin America in that era.

These days did not yield a favourable environment for the PIP. Unlike the nationalist party and the guerrilla groups, the PIP does not uphold armed struggle as a strategy or tactic. But with the repressive Carpeteo making open organising for independence and socialism difficult, the PIP quickly went from being the main opposition party to a minority party, holding just two percent of the vote right up to the present day. As for the armed conflict, it would continue into the early 2000's, with the 2005 assassination of guerrilla leader Filiberto Ojeda Rios by the FBI marking something of a turning point for the independence movement- People who wouldn't necessarily have agreed with Ojeda Rios' methods or politics were incensed by his murder, and took to the streets

protesting against U.S. intervention in Puerto Rican politics.

Paul saw this as one of the chief causes of a renewed interest in Puerto Rican independence since the millennium. Another lies in the concurrent dispute taking place over the island of Vieques, one which had a similar galvanising consequence for the movement. Vieques is an island of the Puerto Rican archipelago which the U.S. military used as a testing ground for above-ground and underwater bombs from 1941 onwards. After an American bomb accidentally killed David Sanes, a Vieques citizen, the PIP launched a campaign against bomb testing which saw activists sailing from the main island to Vieques on fishing boats to camp out on the beaches and occupy U.S. military property. Even with arrests and repression, the sustained militancy of the campaign led to a success, with the U.S. military withdrawing from Vieques in 2003. In a speech celebrating this victory, the president of the PIP, Rubén Berríos Martínez, said: "Yesterday Lares, today Vieques, tomorrow Puerto Rico!"

This recent history brought us up neatly to the matter of my next question, which turned on contemporary events and their significance for the Puerto Rican independence movement. Paul emphasised the importance of the Puerto Rican economic crisis, which has been ongoing since 2006. To prop up the economy, the island's government has taken on a great deal of debt since the crisis- fifty billion dollars from 2006 to 2016, which dwarfs the twenty billion dollars of debt accumulated between 1952 and 2006. By 2016, the former governor Alejandro García Padilla had declared the debt unpayable, calling on the U.S. government to address the debt crisis.

At the level of normal peoples' lives, the figures Paul had for me were grim ones- From the beginning of the crisis in 2006, around a quarter of Puerto Rico's population has migrated away to the United States. There is a poverty rate of sixty percent, and the island is one of the top five countries of the world for income inequality. In a typical austerity

response by the government, huge swathes of Puerto Rican society have been privatised- Healthcare, the highways, public transport, energy and sections of the education system. In particular, the marketisation of education can be seen in how university tuition fees have more than quadrupled since 2006.

The youth of Puerto Rico, the first-time voters of today, Paul continued, “are people who have never had a memory of Puerto Rico in prosperity, of Puerto Rico not in a time of crisis. They see no opportunity or future in their own country.” A result of this is that the fear people have traditionally had that independence and socialism would cause massive poverty has tended to fall away. After all, Paul pointed out, Puerto Rican people “are living those conditions right now under a U.S. flag.”

This growing discontent manifested in 2019 with the “Ricky Renuncia” protests against governor Ricardo Rosselló over the government’s response to Hurricane Maria and his overall apathy to the problems of the people. From that movement, Paul traces a new openness to Puerto Rican independence and new youth participation in the electoral process, this from a youth that tends to be overwhelmingly pro-independence. An illustration of this is the PIP’s recent electoral fortunes, with an increase from two percent of the vote in 2016 to almost fifteen percent in 2020 during a five-way race. Paul was understandably very, very hopeful about these new developments among the youth.

Of course, the problems of austerity have continued to make life tough, especially because they are imposed from outside with little Puerto Rican say in the matter. There is the continuing issue of the Control Board, an unelected body of seven people chosen by the U.S. president and salaried with Puerto Rican tax money who are in charge of overseeing Puerto Rican finances and repayment of the debt. The board have proven voracious, bringing in a forty year long hike on sales tax and a forty year tax on electricity to make up for the

period when energy was nationalised. PROMESA, the law that inaugurated the board, states that the Control Board will exist until Puerto Rico has had five consecutive years of balanced budget. However, the Board recently marked its fifth anniversary without a single year of balanced budget. Paul pointed out that like any austerity program, the point is not to save the economy but simply to perpetuate the problem, to asset strip and transfer whatever wealth isn't nailed down into rich pockets. In contrast to this, the PIP's position is that the Board should be abolished, PROMESA repealed, and Puerto Rico's debt should be forgiven. As ever, an essential part of any meaningful self determination is economic sovereignty.

Bringing things to a close, I asked Paul what importance the solidarity of other independence movements, like ours in Scotland, has for the Puerto Rican struggle. "No country exists in a vacuum," Paul began. Discussing world politics today, he was struck by the way in which independence movements are on the rise across a variety of nations, like Scotland, Wales and Catalunya. He was also very impressed by Barbados' recent steps towards becoming a republic. He explained that local actions and developments like the ones already mentioned have repercussions on a global scale, so that what might seem on first glance to be isolated fights for self determination end up taking on a significance that leaps borders and crosses oceans to inspire and teach others. It is well to remember, even if we never learn of them, that we in Scotland have sympathisers and admirers all across the world, and our struggles, and, I hope, our victories, will cheer and excite the passions of a great multitude of fellow fighters.

Secondly, solidarity matters to Paul because part of the essential groundwork for Puerto Rican independence is establishing relationships with other countries and movements. After all, Paul argued, "independence is not to separate us from the United States but to unite us with the rest of the

world.” And this unity is to be a different kind of unity from the one-sided, opportunistic unity Puerto Rico has thus far experienced with the United States. The PIP looks for relationships of reciprocity, solidarity, camaraderie and respect with other countries- International co-operation, not exploitation. That wish, to be an active and progressive player in the wider world, not just one part in a stifling union with an imperialist power, is something I’m sure Scottish readers will readily sympathise with. It is a fine sentiment, and Paul summed it up wonderfully by once more quoting Rubén: “One day we’ll be able to hug our brethren from across the world and say to them: Comrades, we have arrived late to freedom, but because of that we love it even more.” May the day arrive swiftly!

If you want to keep up with Paul Figueroa and the PIP, you can follow them on social media:

Paul’s Twitter: [@paul_delpip](https://twitter.com/paul_delpip)

Paul’s Facebook Page: [@paulfigueroapip](https://www.facebook.com/paulfigueroapip)

The PIP’s Twitter accounts: [@PIPTwitteando](https://twitter.com/PIPTwitteando) [@PIPSanJuan](https://twitter.com/PIPSanJuan)

The PIP’s websites: independencia.net and juandalmau.com

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Ukrainian history holds lessons for Scottish socialists

Paul Inglis of ecosocialist.scot writes on Marko Bocjun's recent book [*The Workers' Movement and the National Question in Ukraine, 1897-1918*](#)

The *Historical Materialism* book series has been the source of a number of useful works for my political thinking over the years. Previous volumes I've encountered, like Alan Sennett's book on Revolutionary Marxism in the Spanish revolution and Ralf Hoffrogge's book on Richard Müller and the German workers' councils, have served as both examples of erudite scholarship and as powerful influences on the way I think about socialist politics, strategy and tactics. One of the latest entries in the series, Marko Bojcun's *The Workers' Movement and the National Question in Ukraine, 1897-1918*, looks set to hold a similar place in my estimation going forward.

This book presents a fascinating account of a lesser-known movement for leftists today, telling the fraught story of the Ukrainian working class movement, its political parties and organisations, and how they faced up to the national question amid the revolutionary tumult of the year 1917. Reading the book, it is like hearing about something of a lost world – tendencies and movements shrouded by the success of the Bolsheviks in the conflicts that followed the collapse of the Russian Empire. Furthermore, it is simply solid, detailed writing on the national question, and like any good writing on the national question, it has a relevance that leaps beyond

its own subject matter and which sheds light on other national struggles and movements, past and present.

As someone who has hitched my political commitments as a socialist to the opportunities and risks presented by the cause of Scottish independence, I am always interested to learn more about national movements from all over the world: how they organised, how they fought, what kind of compromises they made, and especially where they failed. In short, lessons of history! I think it is a shame that for a lot of the left and the national movement more broadly here in Scotland, there is a tendency to act like the only comparable situations for us are Catalunya, the Basque Country and Quebec, presumably because these are contemporary movements in Western nations.

As long as we don't pretend there are any directly, exactly comparable situations, we can take valuable lessons from national movements both here and across the Global South, and from across history – specifically lessons pertaining to questions of approach and attitude. How does the working class get involved with national movements? How do we bring the class on board? What attitude should we take towards the moderate or liberal political parties and groups? How do we manage to get socialists from the larger nation, in our case England, to consider our national movement seriously and enlist their support? These are questions that face us today as they faced the Ukrainian socialists.

Bojcun's book contains much on the specific historical difficulties of Ukrainian socialism and nationalism and the lessons gathered therein, but I wanted to focus this short article on some of the questions and thoughts about Marxism that I had running through my mind as I read the work, particularly the discussions in the third chapter on *Social Democracy and the National Question*.

It is very useful that this book not only gives a historical narrative of Ukrainian socialism, but also addresses

theoretical concerns, problematising classical Marxist thinking on the national question – Marx, Engels, Kautsky, Lenin and Luxemburg – and subjecting them to analysis and criticism in the light of contemporary nationalist movements in Eastern Europe. I was excited to see this as I have in recent years, especially as I have become more interested in the national question, come to believe that there is an unfortunate weakness in the Marxist “canon” where the national question is concerned, one that plagues it to this day. Where thinkers like Marx or Engels can be thrilling and enlightening on a wealth of matters, they can be flippant, arbitrary and cruel when speaking about the fate of “smaller” nations.

Take, for example, the remarks from Marx’s early work, quoted by the author, on how Scots, Gaels and Basques are “historically unprepared for nationhood”, national leftovers that “will become and will remain until their final extermination or denationalisation fanatical partisans of counterrevolution, since their entire existence is in general a protest against the great historical revolution”. The thoughts of Engels on the South Slavs, which I first encountered in Mark Leier’s excellent biography of Mikhail Bakunin, are a similarly crass diatribe.

In this conception, the smaller nations of the world were simply written off as barriers to the centralising tendency of capitalism towards more unified, larger states and, apparently, a more effective and efficient development of the productive forces conducive to building socialism.

What use is any of this to socialists in these smaller nations? Leaving aside the more complex tapestry of uneven economic development that resulted from the spread of global, imperialist capitalism and which calls into question the effective base for socialism that such great power “assimilation” has given us, the brutal reality of how stateless people have been forcibly integrated into larger nations through repression should give us all pause when we

read of “denationalisation” and the like. No culture disappears from the scene of history cleanly, and no language simply dies out gently.

Now, to their credit, Marx and Engels of course came to a more sophisticated position on small nations in their later years, particularly regarding Irish freedom, but the “great power assimilationist” tendency in Marxism still runs through the thought of Kautsky, Lenin and Luxemburg, as the author shows. I quite enjoyed the exploration of the ambiguities of Lenin’s writing on the right of nations to self determination, and the criticisms of the Ukrainian socialist Lev Yurkevych on this matter – how Lenin sort-of wants to have his cake and eat it by both supporting the right to national self determination but also discouraging it, lauding the advantages of big states and bourgeois development. Another area of Yurkevych’s criticism looked at Lenin’s assertion that the achievement of democratic multinational states would see strivings for complete freedom of secession weaken.

This, considered in light of the modern day, feels like wishful thinking. The national question is alive and well in multinational democracies like the United Kingdom and Spain, and even if it is countered that this fact is only because of democratic deficits in these big states, it should be kept in mind that the centralising tendency of states like the United Kingdom and Spain has precluded the kind of genuine national autonomy that would render secession irrelevant. One need only think of the “fruits” yielded by Spanish democracy to the Basques in the 1980s, and how they can be measured in murdered, tortured and unlawfully detained independence activists.

What I feel all of this criticism poses, and what I would hope all of you bear in mind as you read this work, and other works like it, is: how do we overcome this weakness in Marxist theory, and how do we do better in the future? How do we conceive a radical alternative to the current state of affairs

that genuinely grants self-determination and security to national cultures, no matter how small? This is especially pertinent for us Scots, because we absolutely must make sure that, whatever Scotland emerges from the next period, the Gaelic language and culture is preserved and supported, and that the Gaels have whatever autonomy they feel is appropriate. To do otherwise would be to continue the historical record of the British state.

Watch a recording of the full event with Marko Bojcun below



Paul Inglis is a member of the RSP and Socialist Resistance, based in Glasgow. This article is adapted from Paul's spoken contribution at a joint RSP/SR meeting in September 2021 to discuss Bojcun's book.

[Ukraine, Marxism and the National Question: A Conversation With Marko Bojcun – YouTube](#)

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