Defend abortion rights in Scotland and globally

Abortion rights are under attack across parts of the world including here in Scotland, *writes Mike Picken*. [Photo Edinburgh abortion protest US Consulate 14 May 2022, photo: Gillian Mackay]

The recent leak of the imminent decision of the US Supreme Court to overturn the 50 year Roe v Wade decision that made abortion a right across the USA has provoked anger and outrage across the States, with a coordinated series of rallies and demos on 14 May 2022 (reports here). Across Europe we have had a series of steps forward in recent decades but more recently Poland has joined Malta in outlawing abortion.

A solidarity rally against repeal of Roe v Wade was held at the US Consulate in Edinburgh last weekend by pro choice groups and attracted publicity and support (though unfortunately clashed with three other major protest events on other issues in Glasgow).

The attacks on abortion rights by the right wing in the USA have also encouraged anti-abortion activists in Scotland to scale up their intimidation of women attending clinics, with recent reports from the Back Off Scotland campaign of up to 100 protesters appearing at venues around Glasgow for example. These protestors intimidate women attending the clinics, whether for abortions or other reproductive rights and health support.

ecosocialist.scot is pleased to see the start of a robust response, both by pro choice organisations in Scotland and by sections of the Scottish government and parliamentary representatives of Labour, SNP and Scottish Greens. At First Minister's Questions in the Scottish Parliament recently,

Scottish Labour backbench MSP Monica Lennon raised the attack on abortion rights and received strong support from First Minister, SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon, who also offered to chair personally a summit on defending abortion rights.

> *Speaking at First Minister's Questions, Ms Sturgeon insisted that "women have the right to access abortion without fear or intimidation", adding that demonstrating outside healthcare facilities was "deeply wrong".*
>
> *She added: "I strongly support the introduction of buffer zones and the government is actively considering how this parliament can legislate in a way that is effective and also capable of withstanding legal challenge.*
>
> …
>
> *Turning to calls for her to chair a summit on the issues, Ms Sturgeon said: "I am very happy to convene and indeed, I will personally chair a roundtable summit to discuss buffer zones and indeed any other matters that need to be addressed to ensure safe and timely access to abortion services in Scotland within the current law."*
>
> *Ms Lennon said she would "warmly welcome the First Minister's agreement to convene an urgent summit that more than a dozen women's organisations have called for".*
>
> *https://www.heraldscotland.com/politics/20134691.nicola-sturgeon-chair-abortion-clinic-buffer-zones-summit-deeply-wrong-protests/*

Scottish Greens defend

abortion rights



Green MSP and ecosocialist Maggie Chapman defends abortion rights on Twitter

This week, Scottish Green MSP Gillian Mackay launched a Bill in Parliament to create a 'buffer zone' around healthcare facilities offering abortion services. Mackay has made clear that unlike measures introduced by the Tories in the UK parliament against protest, her bill was not supressing civil rights for legitimate protest but was aimed at giving women freedom to exercise their right of choice without fear of intimidation. Other Scottish Green Party MSPs gave their full public support (see picture) and the Party wrote individually to all its members and supporters asking them to campaign in defence of abortion rights.

The consultation phase of the Bill introduced by Gillian Mackay has now opened and we urge readers to indicate their support for defence of abortion rights.

https://www.bufferzones.scot/

Campaign needed

The Scottish Government have yet to indicate their formal support for the Bill, though it is welcome that Nicola Sturgeon has indicated her personal position.

Nevertheless pressure needs to be brought across Scotland both widely and within the SNP for the Scottish Government to take defence of abortion rights seriously.

Similarly, although Labour MSP Monica Lennon has campaigned strongly and rightly on this, the full weight of the front bench of Scottish Labour needs to be deployed to back abortion rights. This is particularly important given the seemingly increased presence among Scottish Labour's ranks of members of the Orange Order, with the former "world leader" being selected and elected as a Scottish Labour council candidate recently to serve in an council administration where Labour appear to be doing a backroom deal with Tories. The Orange Order are an important political force in Scotland and are just as virulently anti-abortion as the Catholic church worldwide.

Trade Unions defend abortion

Trade unions are a key part of the campaign to defend abortion rights as well: working class women will always be the first

to be affected by any weakening of state abortion health services and don't have the resources to seek private treatment. Time after time has shown that restricting or obstructing access to free state abortion services simply results in a rise in backstreet abortions, with all the misery, suffering and death that causes working class women.

The statement by the Unison national women's and international committee chairs is an important first step in this regard.

> *With over a million women in our union, we believe passionately in defending the right to choose. Access to abortion is a trade union issue.*
>
> *Abortion is also a class issue. Rich women can always access abortion, whatever the legal status where they live. It is working class women who always suffer.*
>
> *Abortion rights are high in the priorities for our [Unison] national women's committee.*
>
> *As the UK's largest organisation representing women, UNISON ran a webinar about defending abortion rights as part of our programme of events around International Women's Day earlier this year.*
>
> *It's brilliant to see bold local leadership on access to abortion from Ealing, Manchester and Richmond Councils. They are to be congratulated for putting buffer zones in place to protect women from the protestors handing out leaflets and harassing vulnerable women.*
>
> *UNISON wants to see a change in the law to see buffer zones to protect women in all such places.*
>
> *Anne McVicker, chair of national women's committee, and Liz Wheatley, chair of the international committee, Unison*
>
> *https://www.unison.org.uk/news/2022/05/legal-abortion-under-attack-why-this-is-a-trade-union-*

matter/

The Fourth International has been part of the worldwide movement for women's rights and defending abortion globally for many decades as an integral part of the struggle for Women's Liberation. As Fourth International supporters in Scotland, ecosocialist.scot gives our full support to campaigns to defend abortion rights both here and across the world.

Mike Picken, 21 May 2022

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8 March of struggle for women's lives and for equality in the production of life!

Each year, **International Women's Da**y is an important moment in giving visibility to feminist struggles against patriarchal capitalism, in its attempt to engender new ways to oppress and exploit us. With the health crisis provoked by the pandemic of COVID-19, added to the economic crisis and the attacks of conservative governments against women's rights, international mobilization on 8 March gains even more importance and urgency

The pandemic has unleashed a crisis in various dimensions of human life, and, when measures of physical isolation have been brought in to protect health, has shown that the jobs necessary for survival are the really essential ones. Many

women were confined to the domestic space of the home and were deprived of jobs that, although precarious, brought them monetary income.

The burden of care work done for the family increased considerably, and came hand in hand with an increase in cases of violence and feminicide, as a way of imposing the burden of this on women. The pandemic crisis has therefore shown that social reproduction work is at the centre of the alternatives for managing such crises and finding solutions, but it also poses the risk of deepening and crystallizing women's role in carrying it out.

As a counterpoint to this, women around the world have been forging and strengthening networks of solidarity and reciprocity, creating forms of protection and denunciation against this type of violence, and also building forms of resistance against hunger, poverty and worsening loss of rights during the pandemic. The cultivation, production and distribution of food, and the exchange of food and health protection materials, the replacement of face-to-face meetings with virtual ones, the creation of self-protection mechanisms, among other initiatives, were carried out in local areas under the leadership of women.

In addition, the active struggles that women have continued during the pandemic have achieved important victories, such as the legalization of abortion this year in Colombia and previously in Argentina and in some Mexican states and women as essential workers (health workers, teachers, etc.) who have not hesitated to engage in strikes to defend their working conditions.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has hit women particularly hard. Women and their children are the overwhelming majority of the more than a million who have already fled the country as refugees. At the same time, younger women in particular are taking an active part in the armed and unarmed defence of

their country. Women are also playing a key role in mobilising diaspora communities elsewhere and are prominent in the anti-war movement in Russia.

On this 8 March, we must rescue the alternatives created during these years of deprivation, highlighting the role that the women's strike has played in giving visibility to social reproduction work in this context.

We will occupy the streets, the internet networks and all the areas where our struggles can take space. We want to live, without machismo, without violence, with recognition of our work and with equality!

Long live International Women's Day!

Motion adopted by the International Committee of the Fourth International.

5 March 2022

Reproduced from Fourth International website: https://fourth.international/en/510/427

Glasgow City Council unions vote for strike action over equal pay

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

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

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

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

GMB Scotland Organiser Sean Baillie told the Glasgow Times:

> *"Our members need equal pay justice and an end to the discriminatory pay and grading system that remains in place.*
>
> *"That's the clear message this ballot result sends to the council officials who should be negotiating properly with our claimant groups and to every councillor seeking election in May.*

"The council's liabilities are growing every working hour of every working day and the cost will likely run into the hundreds of million yet again, so the situation is critical for our members, the services they deliver, and the city's finances.

"That's why we need an urgent negotiation process to be conducted in good faith between the council and the claimant groups, if strike action is to be avoided." Sean Baillie GMB Scotland Organiser

https://www.glasgowtimes.co.uk/news/19964224.equal-pay-strikes-hit-glasgow-end-month-unions-back-action/



GMB members demanding equal pay

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

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

In the run-up to the local Council elections on 5 May, resolving this dispute is major challenge for the SNP Council leadership and also raises the question of whether the SNP-led

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

3 March 2022

UNISON Glasgow media release:

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

The trade unions will also continue to receive regular updates from the claimants joint legal team on the current negotiations with the council lawyers. The council should now listen.”

To Unison Glasgow members:

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

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

Women Defend Rojava (Event on 10 March 2022)

Over the past decade, the women fighters of the Kurdish-led forces in Northeast Syria have inspired our admiration and our hope for a better world, *says the Women Defend Rojava UK campaign*. Against all odds, these courageous women took up arms and defeated the Islamic State caliphate, while simultaneously fighting for a radical re-imagining of women's liberation rooted in the Middle East and the Kurdistan Freedom Movement.

To mark International Women's Day, we are joined by the Commander of the YPJ Women's Defence Forces, Arzi Hesen, to discuss the challenges and victories of the women's movement in Northeast Syria and how revolutionary understandings of self defence have shaped one of the most inspirational and successful social movements of our times.

A Woman's Place is Rojava

The frontline of feminist anti-fascism in Northeast Syria in Conversation with YPJ Commander Arzi Hesen

Thursday 10 March, 6pm UK Time/18.00 UTC

Register for the event here: https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZYkcOmurjopHNFaO2DkhzoIutuXCFnh0XhX

Dundee celebrates life of Mary Brooksbank

On Saturday 18 December, Dundee sees events to commemorate the birthday of Mary Brooksbank.

Among speakers taking part are Dundee community activist Siobhan Tolland, Labour MSP Mercedes Villalba, Scottish Green MSP Maggie Chapman and Republican Socialist activist Mary McGregor. There will be a social event afterwards featuring the brilliant Madderam Band.

Mary Brooksbank is the best known Dundee woman trade union and socialist activist of the twentieth century and the event takes place on what would have been her 124th Birthday.

Mary Brooksbank was born in Aberdeen and came to Dundee as a child. She began working in the jute mills, for which Dundee is famous, at an early age and organised women workers into unions – leading strikes and agitating over pay and conditions. She was inspired by attending classes of Glasgow socialist John Maclean through the Scottish Labour College movement to join the Communist Party, but was expelled in 1933 for opposing Stalin. She supported Maclean's aim of an Independent Scottish Workers Republic and continued to be politically active for decades.

But as well as being a political activist, Mary was also renowned as a musician and songwriter. She played violin, sang and wrote the famous "Jute Mill Song" and other songs – her work was recorded by Ewan MacColl. So it is fitting that the tribute to this inspirational woman's life will include a musical performance by Madderam, finalists in the Up and Coming Artist category at the 2021 MG ALBA Scots Trad Music Awards earlier this month. (Do check out their album *Ebb and Flow* on Bandcamp.)

The event starts at 1.30pm at the Weaver Statue in Lochee High Street, Dundee with speeches and music, and moves on at 2.30pm to the Ancrum Arms Logie Street for the social and band. Participants are asked to follow full Covid guidelines and ensure that they are tested and vaccinated before they attend.

Further details:

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/events/1312705905866570

Eventbrite: https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/mary-brooksbank-commemoration-social-tickets-225538901927

This event is organised by Republican Socialists, which you can find out how to join here: https://join.republicansocialists.scot/ or contact them here: secretary@republicansocialists.scot