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 Oxgangs 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'