

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

On 11 September 1973, the Chilean military put a bloody end to the three year reformist experience of the Salvador Allende governments. Augusto Pinochet leader of the armed forces initiated a new cycle of bloody repression and brutal economic liberalism that had started in Bolivia with the 1971 Banzer coup. He was soon followed by other dictatorships in South America such as the one led by General Videla in Argentina in 1976.

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

Perhaps we should begin by recalling that the 11 September coup, in 1973, and not that of 2001 Twin Towers terrorist attack, was first and foremost an emotional shock. We were transfixed by the news that arrived on the radio from the headquarters of the Presidential Palace, La Moneda, and then by the announcements that gradually came in about the success of the coup d'état. At first we hoped it would not succeed, since another coup d'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 Vukovik, Minister of Economy and Finance, a member of the Communist Party. The government had to reassure the bourgeoisie and the ruling

classes by definitively delimiting the area of public property or social property, and by giving additional guarantees to the military.

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

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

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

So there was a momentum shift, and Miguel Enriquez, the secretary general of the MIR who was assassinated in October 1974, a year later, wrote a text, in this intermediate period between the dry run and the coup d'état, which was called **"When were we the strongest?"** ». I think he was extremely lucid: until August 1973 there were demonstrations by 700,000 demonstrators in Santiago, supporting Allende and responding to the coup d'état. That was indeed the moment when a

counteroffensive by the popular movement was possible . On the contrary, the response was a shift to the right of the government alliances and additional pledges given to the military and ruling classes, which in reality meant in the end encouraging the coup d'état.

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

In the movement of solidarity with Chile, which was very important in the years that followed, 1973, 1974 and 1975, I would say that we were, somewhat sectarian about Allende, who was made into someone responsible for the 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

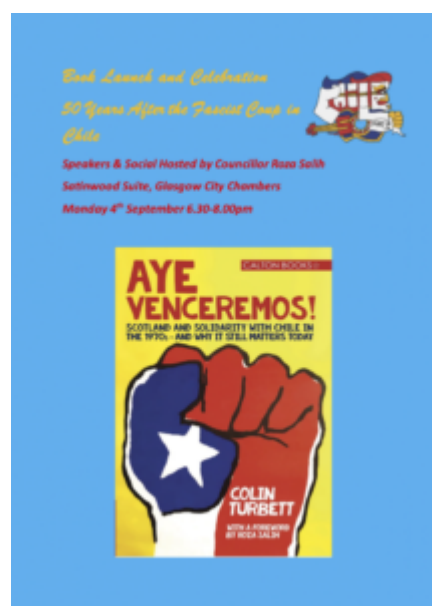
symbolically, the killing of Allende, the disappearance of Enriquez and practically the entire leadership of the MIR, closed the cycle initiated by the Cuban Revolution, the OLAS (Latin American Solidarity Organization, meeting in Havana in 1967) conferences, and Che's expedition to Bolivia in 1966.

Republished from Anti*Capitalist Resistance, 29 August 2023:
<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/aye-venceremos-book-launch-anniversary-celebration-glasgow-4th-sept-tickets-674133751197>

SCOTLAND – COLLECTIVE MEMORIES OF A FASCIST COUP

Monday 4 September – Thursday 21 September

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



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

For further information email labufa.charles50@gmail.com

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



[STUC, 8 Landressy Street, Bridgeton, GLASGOW, G40 1BP](#)

All welcome! Speakers, music, food and wine available

Please [register for the event here >>](#) so that the organisers can best cater for the food and wine!

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?”

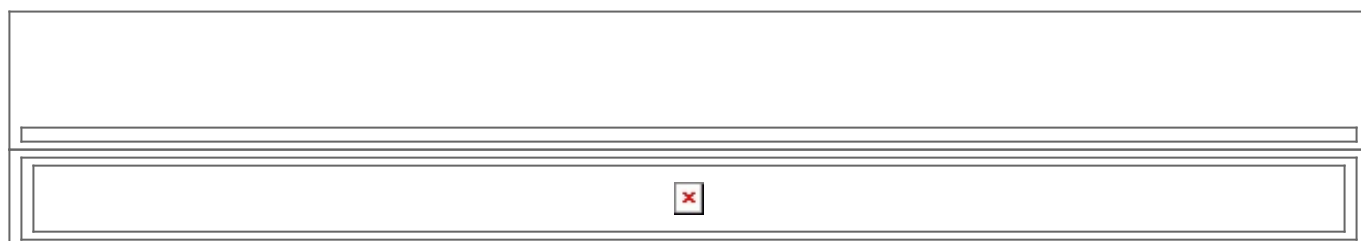
“James Connolly, an Irish socialist republican”
pic.twitter.com/JAUkY9G5Nd









– 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!	
<i>As always many thanks for supporting the 'best wee radical bookshop in the world'!</i>		
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 Lamermuir 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 2021 (Photo: M Picken)

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.

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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.

Bojczun'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](#)

Reproduced from the blog of the Republican Socialist Platform
<https://republicansocialists.scot/2021/11/ukrainian-history-holds-lessons-for-scottish-socialists/>

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

Glasgow COP26: Independence bloc on the 6 Nov March for Climate Justice

The Independence bloc on [Glasgow's March for Climate Justice on Saturday 6 November](#) will be marching for Climate Justice and for a Scottish Independence that takes effective action on climate, ends Scotland's role in fossil fuels and a new Scotland in solidarity with the Global South.

The slogan of the bloc is

It's Scotland's Oil – Keep It In The Soil

and the immediate demand will be for the Cambo oil field off the coast of Shetland to be stopped.

The slogan combines the [demand](#) popularised by the Scottish National Party in the 1970s with the [demands of the climate movement and the COP26 Coalition](#) calling the march for no new extraction of fossil fuels and a phasing out of existing extractions with a [just transition](#) for workers.

The bloc has been convened by the [Radical Independence Campaign](#) and will assemble at the Lord Roberts Statue in

Kelvingrove Park from 11.30am. Lord Roberts was a British imperialist military figure who was integral to the suppression of India, Afghanistan, South Africa and Ireland during the British Empire. Campaigners will also call for recognition of Britain and Scotland's role in the imperialist domination of so many countries, a domination that has underdeveloped them economically. Financial reparations and the cancellation of debts are essential if these countries are to survive.

The bloc has been built by a [Crowdfunder](#) that can still be donated to.

Other Blocs on the march

The Independence bloc is one of around twenty on the demonstration. Full details of all the blocs and their assembly points are here:

You can find an overview of all the [blocs and lead contacts here](#).

Facebook event page here: <https://tinyurl.com/cud3j5be>

List of blocs:

Indigenous bloc

Anti-Racist / Migrant Justice bloc (FB event – <https://tinyurl.com/857k7bmd>)

Youth bloc

Trade Unions bloc (FB event – <https://tinyurl.com/jcbx5pup>)

Communities bloc (FB event – <https://tinyurl.com/jvj5hvk8>)

Extinction Rebellion bloc (FB event – <https://tinyurl.com/kf8mk8wv>)

Faith and belief bloc

Independence bloc (FB event – <https://tinyurl.com/4jp2u5dr>)

Climate Justice bloc (FB event – <https://tinyurl.com/487htbxs>)

Health bloc

Farmers and Land Workers bloc (FB event – <https://tinyurl.com/ddh78hc>)

Biodiversity & Nature bloc

Housing bloc

Cycling Bloc & Sustainable Transport bloc (FB event – <https://tinyurl.com/fbvxzjz4>)

See here for site maps of [Kelvingrove Park](#) and [Glasgow Green](#), and the [full Action Plan here](#).

There will also be a Southside feeder march which will assemble at 12noon at Queen's Park and join the main demo at George Square. Please see FB event: <https://tinyurl.com/2au7djzjz>



Radical Independence Campaign on the march for

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

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

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

@fff_scotland

[_#COP26](#) [#UprootTheSystem](#)[#UprootTheCOP](#)

Glasgow COP 26: INSIDE OUTSIDE – daily reports from

the COP26 Coalition

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

You can access the programme daily on You Tube at the COP26 Coalition channel: [COP26 Coalition – YouTube](#)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

within months.

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

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

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

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

Increasing public support

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

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

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

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

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

Johnson – a dangerous liability

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

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

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

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

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

This is only true if you exclude the embedded emissions that

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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