

R O S E

RADICAL OPTIONS FOR SCOTLAND AND EUROPE

Issue 1: Winter & Spring 2024

For Public Ownership and Democratic Control

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EDITORIAL:

Bringing the Scottish Left Together

Kate Ramsden welcomes readers to the first issue of the ROSE magazine.

ROSE was formed in August 2016 to bring together those in the trade union and Labour movement who want to campaign for a post-Brexit settlement that protects and enhances workers' rights both at work and politically in terms of the freedom of Scottish governments to advance democratic control and public ownership.

Its core principles are, first, the enhancement of workers' rights in Scotland and, secondly, internationalism and solidarity with all those across Europe struggling against austerity and privatisation.

Our magazine aims to bring together articles from a range of different authors and activists that we hope will be topical, interesting and educational for those on the left in Scotland, of all political allegiances or none, that can mobilise around these aims.

In this issue we have focussed on public services, the Scottish economy and at a time when Israel's assault on Gaza is occupying minds and our media, our international section takes a look at the conflict, its roots and how Europe and the UK have responded, alongside articles on Ireland and the CND Festival for Survival.

We are circulating ROSE magazine to as many activists and thinkers on the left for whom we have contact details. We would be very happy for you to pass it on to anyone else you think would enjoy it. We would also be interested to hear your views on other topics, relevant to our aims and objectives, that you'd like covered in future issues, or if you would like to write on a relevant topic.

For our next issue we plan to focus on the pros and cons of Brexit from a left perspective, so if you would like to contribute, please get in touch. Please also let us know if you would like us to add comrades to our mailing list,

We very much hope that the magazine will generate debate and discussion, and will be helpful in mobilising and supporting campaigning by the left in Scotland, whether trade unionists or political activists and whatever your position on independence. **First and foremost we need a more equal, socially just Scotland and that is something that all of us on the left can rally around.**

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LAND JUSTICE: The Need For Transformational Change

Mercedes Villalba, MSP, outlines the need for her proposed Bill, to tackle the high concentration of land ownership in the hands of so few to ensure that Scotland's land serves the needs of the many.

As Andy Wightman noted in the 2013 preface to his book *The Poor Had No Lawyers*: “Land relations in Scotland continue to be neglected in mainstream public policy and elite interests in land ownership, land use, finance and property development continue to exert significant influence on the political establishment.”

That remains the case despite the approach of the 25th Anniversary of the return of the Scottish Parliament to Holyrood. In the year Andy wrote that preface, in a briefing to the House of Commons Scottish Affairs Committee, it was reported that just 432 landowners own 50% of all Scotland's privately owned land. Although there is no more current figure available, there is no indication that there has been a significant shift in this pattern of ownership. Increasing transparency on this is urgent, if we are to understand and address concerns over patterns of land ownership. What efforts there have been have focussed on strengthening alternative forms of ownership without tackling the concentration of ownership itself.

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, for example, gave rights to rural communities to register an interest in land which they were then entitled to have the right to purchase (under certain conditions) if that land came onto the market. The Act also granted special rights to crofters to seek to acquire their land even when the landowner did not wish to sell.

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 and the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016, further empowered communities with rights to buy land if it could be shown that they were acting in the public interest in doing so. In addition, communities were given rights to have publicly owned assets transferred to community ownership in asset transfer arrangements. The fundamental problem remains, however, that the continuing concentration of ownership constitutes a barrier to communities exercising their rights.

The Land Reform Review Group has noted that the scale or pattern of land ownership, and the decision of landowners, can inhibit communities from gaining rights to land for initiatives ranging from housing development to renewable energy installations.

“Increasing demand for land from wealthy individuals is leading to rising prices, entrenching the current patterns of ownership.”

Increasing demand for land from wealthy individuals is also leading to rising prices, entrenching the current patterns of ownership. Scotland's Rural College and two major estate agencies – Savills and Strutt & Parker - analysed land sales in Scotland involving Highland sporting estates and commercial forests and farms, finding that prices were rising steeply, with sporting estates prices jumping by 87% in 2021 compared with 2020.

This rise in prices, along with an increase in sales, led to a significant increase in spending which was up by 119% in the same period. Many communities simply find themselves unable to participate in the market. Communities are also finding it difficult to exercise their rights as land sales are increasingly carried out privately, denying them participation in the process as a result.

Nearly two-thirds of land sales in 2021 were carried out privately, without the land going on the open market, with a third of the total going to overseas buyers. There is a growing recognition inside and outside of government that future legislative change must now be focused on tackling Scotland's patterns of land ownership.

In 2017, the Scottish Government published its Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement which recognised the need for greater diversity of ownership. The Scottish Land Commission's work has also illustrated Scotland's unusual and highly concentrated land ownership patterns, reinforcing the need for diversification.

Researchers and other interested stakeholders have also increasingly highlighted how the lack of diversity in Scotland's land ownership is a social justice issue with the current use of land having a detrimental effect on jobs, housing and the environment and climate.

In July 2022, the Scottish Government launched its consultation on the new Land Reform Bill – *Land Reform in a Net Zero Nation*. While I recognise that the proposals brought forward by the Scottish Government are a positive step forward in addressing Scotland's concentrated patterns of land ownership, I do not believe they go nearly far enough in delivering the transformational change needed to ensure that Scotland's land works in the interests of the many. Their proposals do not include a limit on land ownership, meaning that wealthy individuals could continue to accumulate ever-greater concentrations of land. Nor do they include specific considerations for the public interest test and very limited scope for public interest examinations of existing landholdings.

That is why I consulted on a proposed Bill that will legislate for the introduction of a presumed limit on land ownership, the strengthening of regulation of Scotland's land market and the creation of a public interest test for land sales and transfers. My aim is to tackle the high concentration of land ownership in the hands of so few to ensure that Scotland's land serves the needs of the many. Over 500 people responded in the 14 week consultation period that ended in September, with over two thirds fully supporting my proposals. I hope to have published the responses in full soon.

PROFIT EXTRACTION MAKES SCOTLAND POORER

Dr Craig Dalzell is the Head of Policy & Research at the “think and do tank” Common Weal. Here he explains why the level of profit extraction from Scotland is far too high for a country of our size and why it must be reversed.

Scotland is one of the most foreign-owned countries in the developed world and the consequence of this is the loss of more than £10 billion pounds every year mostly as a result of shareholder dividends and other forms of profit extraction. This is the conclusion of my latest policy paper for Common Weal titled Profit Extraction: How foreign ownership drains Scotland’s wealth and is based on recently updated data from the Scottish Government.

Another measure, Gross National Income, takes a slightly different track by including data on how value is moved in and out of a country. If a company operating solely in Scotland creates £100 of value, then it will increase GDP and GNI by £100. If that company had a subsidiary in another country and it took £10 from that office’s profits and brought them back to the HQ in Scotland then Scottish GDP would increase by £100 (the value created in Scotland) plus another £10 (the value of the profits imported).

“Scotland is one of the most foreign-owned countries in the developed world and the consequence of this is the loss of more than £10 billion pounds every year mostly as a result of shareholder dividends and other forms of profit extraction.”

Those who watch economics news and statistics will be familiar with Gross Domestic Product – GDP – as a measure of the economy (even if only to the level held by many politicians who believe that the sole measure of “success” is if GDP went up). This number is inadequate in many ways, not least because it fails to measure the economic “value” of many things like maintaining a home or unpaid care, but it also doesn’t fully capture how the economy of a country interacts with the rest of the world. In essence, GDP measures the value of economic production within a country but doesn’t care who creates that value or where it goes.

The reverse would be true if a foreign company took profits from its Scottish outpost and shipped them back to HQ.

The latest figures from the Scottish Government – published in June 2023 but only presenting data up till 2021 – showed that while £26.4 billion was imported into Scotland in 2021 – largely through investments and wages paid to workers in Scotland from HQs outwith Scotland – we also saw £36.5 billion drawn out of Scotland (largely through profits and repayments of investment loans). In short, £10.1 billion was extracted from Scotland in 2021. For every £20 pounds of economic value created in Scotland in that year, £1.12 was net exported outwith Scotland.

The Scottish Government data covers the entire Devolution period from 1999 till 2021. Scotland saw a profit extraction deficit in every one of those years and a total extraction of £277 billion. More than a quarter of a trillion pounds has been extracted from Scotland since the start of devolution.

Why is this happening?

Part of it is a consequence of Scotland's integration into the UK – which itself runs an economic model based almost entirely on wealth extraction into the core of London and the South East of England – but this has been a decreasingly important factor as the balance of profit extraction has been shifting from extraction to the rest of the UK to extraction outwith the UK to the rest of the world.

The largest part of the problem is the lack of public ownership in critical assets like energy. Despite now-broken promises from the Scottish Government and despite a consensus of agreement across all of the left-of-centre political parties in Scotland, we currently do not have a national public energy company. The result of this is that our energy infrastructure is largely owned by foreign multi-national companies (for example, Scottish Power is owned by Spain's Iberdrola whose major shareholders include the sovereign wealth funds of Norway and Qatar as well as American hedge funds like Blackrock) or they are owned by foreign public energy companies like Norway's Equinor or Denmark's Ørsted. A substantial chunk of your energy bills are ultimately exported from Scotland to either line some shareholder's pockets or to actively subsidise the public services of the countries who kept their energy in public hands.

This is made worse by the Scottish Government's current attitude towards economic development in Scotland which is far too focused on "Inwards Investment", that is they celebrate companies based outwith Scotland coming in with investment cash to either build or, more likely, to buy up existing assets. That Inwards Investment always, by definition, demands future Profit Extraction so increasing the former now can only ever make the problem of the latter worse. We no longer celebrate companies being founded in Scotland, we instead celebrate when they are bought out. We should instead be using vehicles like the Scottish National Investment Bank to build our domestic economy not for 'supercharged growth' but for resilience and sustainability (words that are anathema to shareholders who only demand ever higher dividends).

The level of profit extraction from Scotland is far too high for a country of our size and economic development (most countries with our GDP/capita are net importers of profits). This should be politically, socially and economically unacceptable and its reversal should be considered a core part of strategic economic planning going forward.

“We no longer celebrate companies being founded in Scotland, we instead celebrate when they are bought out.”

THE COMING CUTS TO PUBLIC SPENDING

In the run up to the Scottish budget, Professor John Foster, of the ROSE organising committee, looks at the challenges ahead for public services as further cuts to funding loom.

One of the most important measures of a society's future economic potential is the educational achievement of its children. On this front the report just issued this December by the OECD group of economically advanced nations, the PISA report, is deeply worrying. Between 2018 and 2022 Scotland's performance significantly worsened both in comparison to the UK average and also to most other OECD nations – all of which suffered more or less equally from Covid.

Scotland's biggest fall was in mathematics from 6 percent above the OECD average to 5 percent below. It is now also below England. Less dramatic falls were recorded in reading and science. The causes advanced were the decline in teacher numbers, falls in parental support and, for over 10 percent of children, food poverty.

This may seem a strange opening to our overall topic: an assessment of the wider social consequences of Scotland's continuing and deepening budget crisis. In fact, it is not. The knowledge potential of the next generation of workers is one of the best, probably the best, indicator of future productivity. It is particularly so today in light of production processes that will be, or should be, increasingly based on sophisticated technologies in both services and manufacturing.

Already, and the evidence is there, the cuts impinging on our children are having a serious impact.

So what of the future in terms of public spending over the next five years?

We know, from the UK Autumn Statement and the Office for Budget Responsibility report, that Scotland's budget for public services, however it is manipulated, is going to get progressively worse. The question is how much worse and where the cuts will fall.

“The future looks bleak – probably bleaker than for over a century.”

According to the OBR the British level cuts to 2028-29 will be the biggest for a century and they will come on top of, and entrench, the 'austerity' cuts imposed by Osborne post-2010 and the massive loss of growth potential resulting from Covid. The OBR forecasts a reduction in resource spending by 2028-29 by government of 0.6 percent of GDP (equivalent to roughly 1.7 percent in real terms) and about 1.5 percent real terms for capital expenditure.

For ‘unprotected’ departments the cuts will be considerably higher. The estimate of the OBR is a reduction of 2.3 percent real terms spending from 2025-26 for departments covered by UK budgets for housing and communities, Levelling Up, Justice and Home Office.

What leeway does the Scottish government have? Some. But only some. It can increase income tax for the better off. It can, within quite narrow limits, borrow more – but against the future. And it can, through COSLA and local government, increase Council Tax to sustain locally delivered services.

Amazingly, the first response by the Scottish First Minister to the British budget statement was to announce the reverse: a freeze in Scottish Council Tax. He did so, apparently for electoral purposes, despite a previous commitment to local authorities to consult in advance. Council Tax currently supplies roughly a third of the resources for local council services.

The Deputy First Minister, Shona Robison, who will deliver the Scottish Budget statement on 19 December, has so far only made limited comments. She has acknowledged that there will be less to tackle poverty – so ‘better targeting’ (civil service jargon for ignoring all but the most serious). She has also expressed the view that the ‘third sector’ will have to take over some existing services (though apparently with no new resources and, so far, no planning). For anything more we will have to wait for the budget statement.

There are of course some possibilities for redistribution within existing legislation.

The Scottish Trades Union Congress has just released a report indicating the potential for immediate (April 2024) money-raising through higher council tax on more valuable properties and using existing powers to increase income tax on higher income bands. Longer-term, with further Scottish legislation, STUC highlights the scope for a range of Scottish wealth taxes (financial wealth, property wealth and pension wealth). Such taxes could indeed make up a proportion, but only a proportion, of the overall loss of tax income forecast up to 2028.

However, current actions and pronouncements by the Scottish government indicate very little appetite for any income and wealth redistribution of this type.

“So the question of who controls our wealth, and how it is used to develop our collective well-being, is as important as it was a century ago.”

The future therefore looks bleak – probably bleaker than for over a century. Already emergency services have been forced to cut back. Police are limiting responses; fire and emergency reducing cover. Cuts to the multiple services essential for the creation of a new generation of workers are already, as we have seen, reducing its productive potential. The only big increase over the last decade has been in the number of drug deaths.

All this is now due to get much worse – despite Britain, and Scotland, being wealthy countries and also, in terms of income and wealth distribution, some of the most unequal. According to the government’s own statistical agency, ONS, income inequality increased by 1.3 percent in just one year between 2021-22. In terms of wealth the top 1 percent have doubled their share since 1984. ONS figures also reveal that of the shares in the London Stock Exchange only ten percent are now held by UK residents and 3.4 percent by British banks. The rest is owned externally.

So the question of who controls our wealth, and how it is used to develop our collective well-being, is as important as it was a century ago.

So don’t hold your breath for Shona Robison. The magnitude of the present challenge means we have to think about how poverty, inequality and the private ownership of productive assets (mostly now external) can be challenged as it was in founding days of the labour movement by united action and solidarity based both in trade unions and communities.

FALL OF THE HOUSE OF VERITY

Stephen Low takes a pithy and incisive look at the Verity House agreement to determine if it does what it says on the tin.

It would be a mistake to think of the Verity House agreement as being a joke. Jokes after all, aim at providing amusement. Whereas the idea that the Verity House Agreement (VHA) means the Scottish government is taking local government seriously is merely laughable.

Named after the COSLA building in which it was signed and announced with some fanfare at the end of June this “new Partnership Agreement” has copious references to “partnership” and “working jointly” and “shared priorities” (11 mentions!). The document is a hymn of praise to working in harmony, a bubble bath of soft soap and warm words. That it needs to be stated that some sort of partnership is necessary between local and national government is a statement in and of itself.



(First Minister Humza Yousaf and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) President, Shona Morrison, sign the agreement)

The Scottish Government's track record of municipal assault and battery is impressive; a decade long council tax freeze, disproportionately high cuts to council budgets and ring-fenced funding pots are merely the headlines.

As well as this there has been a steady leaching of authority and responsibility from councils. The Joint Working Act 2014 further entrenched the marketisation of social services, giving a contract seeking third sector a seat on Integrated Joint Boards alongside public bodies. There has been a consistent and growing trend of the Scottish Government seeking the delivery of services (both statutory and non-statutory) by the third sector rather than local government. (The political convenience of this is obvious. Charity CEO's have no electoral mandate, their staff are outside national collective bargaining agreements and the sector lacks even the limited accountability provided by Freedom of Information).

Responsibilities over policing and the fire service have been removed. In the previous parliament John Swinney published, but did not progress, a Bill that would have in effect removed councils from education.

The COSLA leadership, whether through an excess of naivety, or being made an offer they couldn't refuse, signed off on the VHA. And why not? It is unquestionably a good idea that local and national Government should "show respect for each other's democratic mandate". Many, and not just councillors, will have been encouraged by a commitment to "work jointly to ensure better strategic alignment on workforce, including fair work". There are promises of a "local by default, national by agreement" approach. This is accompanied by a sort of, mebbes we'll try, aim of bringing the Charter of European Local Self Government into Scots law. Ringfencing is to be relaxed with "a presumption in favour of local flexibility". On a more technical note a review is promised over how local govt receives the cash it gets from central government through the year. It all seems a sizeable step forward, but important to bear in mind "it does not create legal obligations"

Having stated that a "positive working relationship should be based on mutual respect and trust" and to "consult and collaborate as early as possible in all policy areas" who could have expected that the only memorable line in Humza Yousaf's conference speech would be when he announced a council tax freeze?

"You don't have to be Nostradamus to work out what the direction of travel is likely to be there."

In June 2022 Scotgov started putting through the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill. Proposals include removing legal responsibility for social care and all of social work (including children's services) from councils.

The Bill is now in tatters, but as the saying goes 'when people tell you who they are - believe them'.

Not the COSLA leadership anyway. There was zero consultation or collaboration. Indeed, such is the respect for and trust shown that the council leadership in the hall found out only when the speech was delivered. Worth remembering that the COSLA leadership and the First Minister are all part of the same political party ...

Let's leave aside that anyone arguing for a council tax freeze is showing about the same level of social responsibility as a pyromaniac going round torching municipal facilities. Having first cancelled the fire insurance. The process, if we can even call it that, couldn't have heaped more ordure on the VHA if Humza had delivered his speech atop a muck spreader.

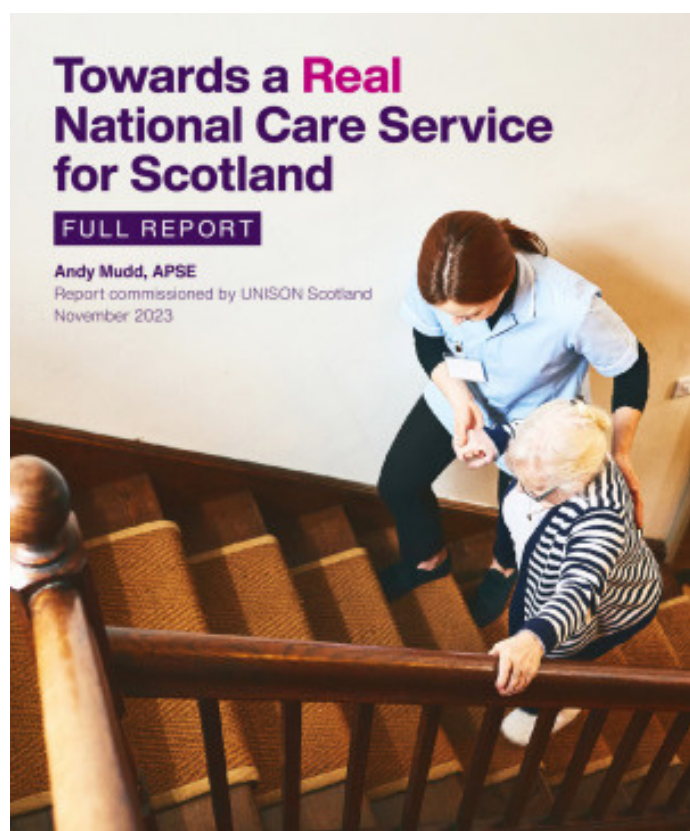
Any lingering doubts this is the case must surely have been quashed by the SNP /Green budget which "fully funded" the Council Tax Freeze in , as UNISON put it, "much the same way that the Titanic was unsinkable".

This centralising and anti-democratic manoeuvre shows just how much partnership the VHA really involves. Which isn't to say that the Scottish Government will ignore it completely – there are provisions about advancing the local governance review and public sector reform. You don't have to be Nostradamus to work out what the direction of travel is likely to be there.

If Scotland's local government leaders thought the Verity House Agreement was a much needed reset of relations between tiers they were wrong. The question now is, what are they prepared to do about it?

Towards a REAL National Care service

Susan Galloway, UNISON Policy Officer, and Kate Ramsden, UNISON activist on why a new National Care Service must get rid of the profit motive and bring care services back under public control



The National Care Service (Scotland) Bill has been a massive disappointment for many reasons, but in no small part because it entirely fails to take profit out of social care.

Any expectations that care workers would continue to be valued post-pandemic for their essential work caring for vulnerable citizens, have been dashed.

The current adult care system in Scotland is in crisis and not fit for purpose. Care staff are demoralised and difficult to recruit and retain; services are patchy, with many care recipients forced to top up fees to secure residential care or left with minimal care at home. But the SNP's National Care Service bill fails dismally to tackle the root cause.

The Feeley Review, on which the bill is based, called for improved pay, conditions and status for care workers. It said that to be on a par with the NHS, social care must be provided on a needs-led basis. Access to free at the point of delivery health care is a universal right, whereas access to social care is rationed through variable eligibility criteria.

Feeley also highlighted concerns about “leakage” from the care system and agreed with those who questioned the role of for-profit providers in publicly funded social care.

However, he rejected the obvious answer to this which is to expand direct public provision, preferring instead ‘a more actively managed market’. He dismissed public provision as unaffordable based on limited, somewhat anecdotal, evidence. As a consequence, the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill, if enacted as is, will allow the profit motive to flourish and to continue to dominate social care.

It’s no wonder that it has been embraced so enthusiastically by many private care providers, who have roundly condemned the proposed changes in the bill on the back of the Verity House agreement.

“The Bill, if enacted as is, will allow the profit motive to flourish and to continue to dominate social care.”

UNISON Scotland’s report, “Towards a REAL National Care Service” is the latest to demonstrate the folly of paying the private sector to provide social care, financially, in pay and conditions for workers and often, in the quality of the services.

Commissioned from APSE, the Association for Public Service Excellence, it draws on their work with local authorities across the UK and aims to begin a proper national conversation about a strategy for achieving a real National Care Service.

The report makes clear that the Scottish Government’s version of a National Care Service does not address the root problems of the social care crisis. It shows how the existing model of care is responsible for low pay, poor conditions, and the degradation of care work. It shows that direct public delivery is both affordable and necessary.

Over the last forty years there has been a shift away from public sector provision, as social care has been opened up as an opportunity for private companies to profit in a market. Residential care is now almost entirely provided by external companies and the private sector is the biggest provider of care at home. A handful of big multinationals occupy a disproportionately dominant market position. Many of these are ultimately owned by private equity companies whose main interest is driving returns to their investors.

The companies involved in residential care often have opaque and complex structures, created to extract a high percentage of cash earnings from front end care businesses. This inevitably impacts on care staff and undermines quality of provision. The home care business is subject to similar drains on income. Holding companies strip income from operators, creating strong imperatives to minimise operating costs, mainly staff costs.

UNISON's report calls for a National Care Service which incorporates a renewal of public sector provision and moves away from a market that increasingly works at the expense of the Scottish public and economy. Allowing a market model to continue, will mean care workers will remain underpaid and retain pressure on companies at the delivery level to follow a lowest-cost model.

Local authorities, NHS Boards or Integrated Joint Boards/Care Boards must be able to plan for the expansion of publicly owned provision. The report offers several options for achieving this.

It points to examples of English local authorities that have bought out going concern providers on the open market, or taken over failing providers. The development of brand-new provision would be another route to public provision.

Bringing care staff into the employment of councils or the NHS would improve rates of pay and working conditions and give access to decent pensions.

Research by APSE and others also illustrate that municipal insourcing is both sustainable and can deliver substantial benefits in terms of service resilience, improving workforce terms and conditions and achieving services more accountable to citizens. Social care contracts are often for short-term blocks of provision based on framework agreements. When they end, contracts can be brought in house. In this way, 'remunicipalisation', can be achieved on an incremental basis as part of a strategy to rebalance provision in favour of public delivery.

Without a core of public provision, a national care service will just be a nationally commissioned service that does not fundamentally change the failing market system. If Scotland is to achieve the radical change promised, it must include 'publicly provided' as an essential element of a National Care Service.

“With only one in ten care workers unionised, the promise of an effective voice for care staff is essential.”

Winning sectoral bargaining and better pay and conditions within the current fragmented privatised system will be a massive gain. With only one in ten care workers unionised, the promise of an effective voice for care staff is essential. But UNISON's report shows that a public model of social care is the best route towards not only this but universal comprehensive care provision on the same basis as the NHS.

You can view UNISON's report online by visiting: [national-care-service-scotland-report.pdf \(unison-scotland.org\)](https://www.unison-scotland.org/national-care-service-scotland-report.pdf)

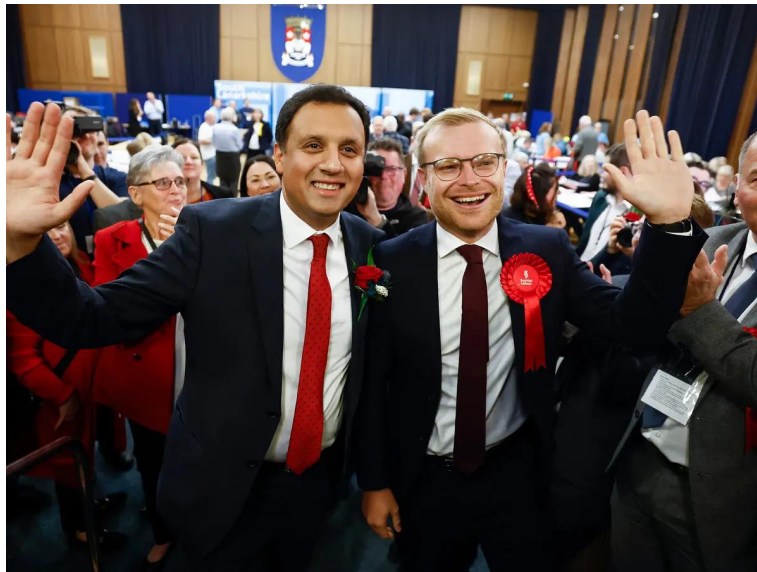
SOCIAL JUSTICE BY STEALTH IS THE HOPE

A Scottish Labour Party activist can only hope that once Labour has won the next election, policies that help the poorest will then emerge by stealth.

October 2023 saw the Labour Party and Scottish Labour buoyed up from the by-election win in Rutherglen and Hamilton West. And the overwhelming mood music is that the UK is heading for a Labour government at the next election.

There is plenty of evidence that the current trajectory for the country needs to change.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation reports that “over one million people still live in poverty in Scotland, with nearly half of those (490,000) living in very deep poverty” and comments that “the UK Government’s record on poverty is bad and has made things worse, [and that] the Scottish Government’s is better but could go much further.”



(Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar (left) and Michael Shanks)

Looking more broadly, the latest data from the Office for National Statistics illuminate further gloom:

- inflation rate for food and non-alcoholic beverages is 13.6% around two-thirds of adults are spending less on non-essentials because of the rising cost of living
- around 4 in 10 adults are finding it difficult to afford their rent or mortgage payments.

With this backdrop, it’s little wonder that 20% more UK adults in 2023, compared to the previous year, rated their life satisfaction as low.

Compassionate people and charities, such as the Trussel Trust would like to hear how the next Labour government will end the need for foodbanks. The Labour Party has yet to offer any hope on this front.

With people feeling low, perhaps a little political hope would help cope with stressful events.

“20% more UK adults in 2023, compared to the previous year, rated their life satisfaction as low.”

Hope can foster two different types of coping styles with different effects: problem-focused coping, motivating individuals to act on behalf of the possibility of a better future, and, emotion-focused coping, helping individuals to reduce negative feelings from the stress.

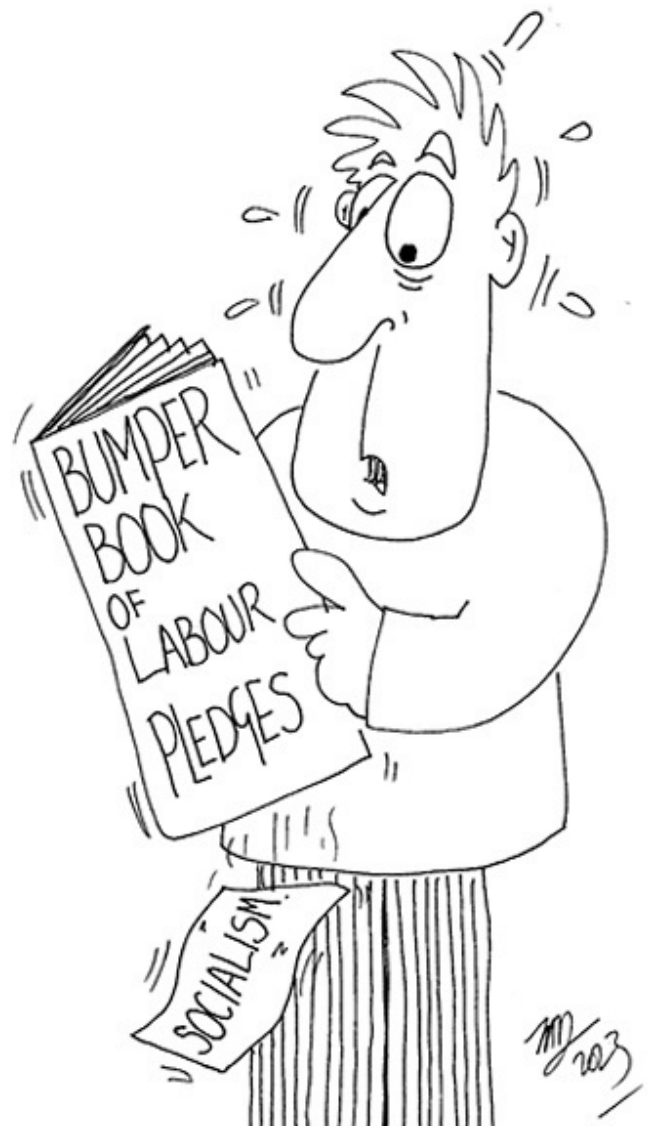
Perhaps, the lack of plans on how the Labour Party will improve lives for those in most need is more signalling than future plans, as many pundits note that the Labour leader is driven by whatever is required to win the election.

Or maybe, the reason for not talking about those in distress is because their target swing voters are more affluent, as polling notes and researchers found that those with the least are more attuned to others' distress, relative to their more affluent counterparts, even when other factors such as gender, ethnicity, and spiritual beliefs were controlled for.

Gordon Brown is reported to have once asked a group of party staffers why they had joined the Labour Party. “To help the bottom 25 per cent,” replied one. “Yes,” said Gordon Brown, “but we mustn’t say that or we will never win.”

So, perhaps, this tactic is being deployed by the current Labour leader and once elected social policy by stealth will be implemented.

Policy by stealth is not the Labour Party policy making process but it does seem to be where the party is, which suggests that things can only get better, on the qt.



ACTING ON THE CRISIS IN GAZA

Vince Mills, member of the ROSE editorial group, reminds us of the roots of the current Gaza crisis; how the support for Israel of western governments and the Labour leadership has allowed the carnage to continue and how the left should respond.



(Activists gather in Aberdeen to demand a ceasefire in Gaza)

When I was young, I am sure that like many of my generation, I believed that such was the horror inflicted on European Jews that they were morally entitled to find a safe “homeland” and better still that that homeland should be Palestine from where they had been exiled so many centuries before. Even if I didn’t quite believe the formulation of a “land without a people for a people without a land”, any fears that I might have had that the people living in Palestine would resent their new neighbours, were allayed given that, we were told, the egalitarian Jewish settlements being constructed would share the economic benefits they would bring, with everyone.

If there is any comfort to be taken in my naïve acceptance of these myths, it is that they were widely shared in the global north, and of course, in Israel itself, up until the work of the Israeli “new historians” in the 1980s and 1990s.

They exposed the savage truth about the foundation of the modern state of Israel. On 29 November 1947 the UN recommended the adoption of the partition of Palestine. It gave the indigenous Palestinians only 42% of the territory, while the Jewish state was to have 56% with 2% (Jerusalem and Bethlehem) shared. The Arab league rejected it, and war broke out.

What the “new historians” demonstrated irrefutably is that the expansion of the Israeli state after 1948 was at the expense of the indigenous Palestinian people. Together with more recent historians like the Palestinian Nur Masalha, quoted below, they have exploded the myth that the Palestinians somehow chose to abandon their homes:

“The politico-strategic tenets of the plan provided for the enlargement of the Jewish state beyond the partition boundaries. According to Sefer Toldot Ha-Haganah, the official history of the Haganah (the early Israeli army) villages inside the Jewish state that resisted “should be destroyed...and their inhabitants expelled beyond the borders of the Jewish state.”

-- Nur Masalha

It was a strategy that was largely effective. Nur Masalha again:

“By 1 June 1948, approximately 370,000 Palestinians had fled from their homes; this number were double by the end of the war. The reasons for this mass exodus were categorized by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Intelligence Branch as follows: Haganah/IDF operations (‘at least 55 percent’); operations by IZL and Lehi (15 percent); the whispering campaign psychological warfare, evacuation ordered by IDF, and general fear (14 percent). Meir Pa'il, Israeli historian of the Haganah and the 1948 war, estimates that, of the total refugee exodus, ‘one third fled out of fear, one third were forcibly evacuated by the Israelis... [and] one third were encouraged by the Israelis to flee.’”

The expulsion was not the end of the calamity visited on the Palestinian people. As Masalha has detailed in his work, evacuated Palestinian villages were often bulldozed, and rebuilt on by Jewish settlers, and the ‘new’ villages given Hebrew names. The landscapes were changed through forestation with even indigenous plants ripped out and replaced with European species, some of them environmentally damaging, to disguise their Palestinian history.

This collapse of Palestinian society was aptly named The Nakba (catastrophe) by the Palestinians, but both it and the aftermath were carefully hidden from view from both the post 1948 generations of young Israelis and supporters of Israel mainly, but not exclusively, throughout the global North.

The Nakba was not an event: it is a process. Since 1948 there has been a constant erosion of Palestinian ownership and control of their historic lands. Palestinian territory, the Gaza Strip and West Bank, including East Jerusalem have been occupied by Israel since 1967. This occupation has been deemed illegal by the United Nations. In 2023 alone, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 948 Palestinian-owned structures have been demolished or seized by Israeli government authorities leading to the displacement of over 1,676 Palestinians. Meanwhile in Israel, there is what can only be described as an apartheid legal and political system: comprehensive rights for Jewish Israeli settlers and military rule and control for Palestinians.

This is the perspective from which we need to view the current crisis in Gaza. Using the atrocious revenge attack by Hamas as a pretext, Israel has continued to intensify its geographical expansion by mass murder and displacement of the Palestinian people in plain sight of the international community.

The supine support given to the colonial settler project of Israel by the United States, has only been outdone by the likes of the British Prime minister, Rishi Sunak and even worse by the leader of the British Labour Party, Keir Starmer, who only after Sunak's concession to United States criticism that perhaps Israel had gone too far in its bombardment, is now calling for a 'sustainable' ceasefire.

“And anyone looking to the EU for a more progressive stance will hear the same Western echolalia”

Starmer's previous opposition was on the grounds that it would not give Israel sufficient time to complete its bloody retribution and therefore allow the survival of Hamas, whose support grows out of the very bloodlust Israel has displayed and is displaying. And anyone looking to the EU for a more progressive stance will hear the same Western echolalia, the need for a two-state solution someday, somehow but right now - no criticism of Israel and no call for an immediate ceasefire.

The Scottish Left must increase its efforts to win an immediate ceasefire, but more, it must campaign for an end to the military occupation of the West Bank, an end to discrimination against Palestinians in Israel and an end to the siege of Gaza. That is not an end point: it is a beginning.

(Activists gather in Glasgow to demand a ceasefire in Gaza)



THREATS TO IRISH NEUTRALITY MUST BE RESISTED

Dr Eamonn Carroll writes from Dublin about the importance of Ireland's proud tradition of peaceful co-operation and the threats such a policy faces.

Neutrality is central to many Irish people's pride in their country and its place in the world. Irish neutrality during the Second World War, referred to in Ireland at the time as the Emergency, was a key moment in Irish nation building. The newly independent state followed a genuinely independent foreign policy, despite pressure (all the way up to open threats of invasion) from the United Kingdom and, to a lesser extent, the US. Since then, Ireland has played a key role in UN peacekeeping missions all over the world and in resolving international conflicts at the negotiating table.

Yet, despite this excellent record, and huge public support, Ireland's neutrality has never felt more threatened. The threat lies at two distinct levels. First, there has been a decades long chipping away at what neutrality means by successive governments. The official speak for this is that Ireland's policy is one of "military" neutrality, a qualifier invented to allow Irish governments to do things incompatible with neutrality by shrinking the definition of neutrality to "non-membership of military alliances or common or mutual defence arrangements". It is this weasel wording which was (and is) used to justify Shannon airport being opened to refuelling by American troops on their way to wage illegal wars in Iraq and elsewhere in the middle east, despite huge public protests against the war and no real support for the policy. Outside the halls of power, that is.



(Activists protest threats to Irish neutrality)

Since 2003, an estimated 3.5 million US personnel have flown through Shannon, bringing with them an unknown amount of weapons and possibly victims of extraordinary rendition to boot.

On top of this insidious undermining of Irish neutrality, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has seen a full court press by figures in government and the national paper of record, the Irish Times. Ironically, the Irish public are now being told that what is needed is an "open conversation" about our policy of neutrality, as if neutrality is a dirty family secret we're upholding but not discussing (and the Irish state is no stranger to those). An open conversation, of course, was never needed about Shannon Airport's role in one of the great crimes of the 21st century.

What's more, it is blatantly obvious that what is wanted by the establishment is not a conversation but a shift in policy to bring Ireland more in line with other EU states, with the push being strongest in the immediate aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in early 2022.

The push took the form of endless questioning of how Ireland could remain neutral in the face of such a crime under international law, as well as faintly ludicrous scaremongering about Ireland's "inability to defend itself". Of particular concern in these pieces was our supposed inability to defend our skies and our seas, with particular scaremongering about Russian vessels (mostly commercial) entering Ireland's exclusive economic zone. Needless to say, the Russians have not yet invaded. This has not stopped European and US arms companies attempting to capitalise on the situation by lobbying the government to buy their extortionately priced wares. Clearly billion dollar boondoggles like warships and fighter jets to stave off non-existent threats should be a priority for a country which can't provide housing to its people, run a functioning health system or even provide school places for significant numbers of children with special educational needs. Again, the open conversation does not extend to the financial costs of joining the arms race.

“Now more than ever independent neutral voices are needed.”

There is an illuminating comparison to be drawn between the conflict in Ukraine and the conflict in Israel and Gaza. As I write, it is being reported that Israel is to “expand ground operations” in Gaza, after weeks of indiscriminate shelling and thousands of civilian deaths. The European partners we would be sacrificing our neutrality to fall in line behind have been nothing short of a disgrace in their response, second only to the US in giving Israel diplomatic cover for its actions as well as material assistance to carry them out.

The Irish government has been much better in its response than any other EU government, even if their calls for international law to be respected has had no impact. Again, there is no call for an open conversation on the matter, instead vocal voices for more support for Palestine are accused of being ignorant of a complex situation.

And beyond Israel and Gaza, the open conversation is not supposed to include areas like the deployment of EU forces in Africa, a neoimperial policy championed by France which is mostly concerned with maintaining French influence in its former colonies and preventing refugees reaching the EU. It is highly unlikely that this adventurism is something the Irish public wants to be part of, and for that matter it is not clear the citizens of EU states currently involved in it want to be part of it either.

The question is what drives this concerted elite project to undermine Ireland's neutrality. There is no Irish arms industry to speak of, and our history of neutrality means that we aren't tied into any military-industrial complex which would benefit financially from increased military spending.

It appears to be driven by Irish elite's buying into the EU's project to become a serious geopolitical bloc, capable of projecting its power and furthering its interests using the traditional methods of great powers. There is also a more pathetic element of Irish politicians wanting to be taken seriously by their fellow EU members and by the US.

As one of only four EU member states not in NATO (along with Austria, Cyprus and Malta) Ireland is an outlier. In the face of ratcheting geopolitical tensions most of the West has chosen to double down on splitting the world into rival armed camps. Now more than ever independent neutral voices are needed to advocate for peaceful cooperation, and Ireland must continue its proud tradition of doing so.

CND FESTIVAL FOR SURVIVAL: Striving for a better future

Lynn Jamieson, Chair of CND describes the success of the Festival for Survival and why climate change and the environment is key to the work of CND and important for all our futures.

When the primary focus of the Scottish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament is in our name, you might ask why we hosted an event that is equally concerned by the environmental catastrophes of climate change and loss of biodiversity, The Festival for Survival, held in Glasgow on 4th November?

The answer is because we see these as linked. Moreover, we believe that recognizing this is important for all our futures, not least because peace and environmental movements need to amplify each other's strengths for the challenges we face.

The links are multiple, both material and ideational. The material links include the largely uncounted enormous carbon footprint of the military, the ecocide as well as genocide committed in war, and the significant environmental harms of the nuclear industries – fallout of testing, toxicity of mining, radioactive waste. The ideational links include the legacy of colonial exploitative thinking written on both nuclear and climate issues.

The latter is expressed in the stated willingness of the UK government to press the nuclear destruct button when the expected result is that this will make life unlivable for half the planet.

Something like a colonial exploitative mentality is also expressed in willingness to open another oil field 'because somebody else is already doing it and we'll surely do it better.' Scientific evidence clearly shows that fossil fuel consumption in the rich 'developed' world has driven the climate change that is already life threatening in some poorer parts of the world. Both pressing the nuclear button and opening a massive new oil field are suicidal in the long run and to the immediate detriment of others; but presented as-if 'in our interest'.

It is not 'human nature' to lack any care for others and have such distorted notions of self-interest. Rather it takes particular social conditions to foster such a mentality. Fortunately, this is not the only or typical way of thinking.

We also have a civic society and government in Scotland that is typically more comfortable with working for social and environmental justice.

However, this can never be taken for granted. Striving for a better future needs active support from us as citizens. The Festival for Survival was for citizens interested in pushing for a Scotland in which our political representatives are working to decarbonise our economy, plan a just transition from fossil-fuel, the nuclear and weapons industries, and, as most MSPs now do, pledge support for the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) as the only real route away from the nuclear threat.

The approach of Ireland to diplomacy, international relations and 'foreign affairs' is a possible model for a future Scotland. Ireland is not only a signatory to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) but played an important part in bringing it about.

Although not party-political and with members across parties, since an AGM resolution in 2013, Scottish CND has had a position in support of Scottish Independence as the shortest route to nuclear disarmament in the UK. We celebrate the history of opposition to nuclear weapons in the Labour Party in Scotland but this opposition is not supported by the UK leader. Parties in Scotland campaigning for independence are committed to the disarmament and removal of the UK's nuclear-weapon system from Scotland. The nuclear-weapon system would then be unable to operate because there is no alternative site to the combination of the port at Faslane and sea-accessible armament depot at Coulport. (John Ainslie *Trident: Nowhere to Go* first written 2012, updates 2013 & 2014.)

“The Festival for Survival was an antidote to the paralysis of gloom and doom.”

We argue that the first act of an independent Scotland must be to sign the TPNW. This would ensure international and UN backing for the new Scottish state which would be legally bound to demand the disarming and removal of the UK's nuclear weapon system from Scotland. An independent Scotland would then achieve the disarmament of a nuclear armed state, a significant step towards world nuclear disarmament.

The Festival for Survival put a sharp focus on action in response to the threats of war, nuclear war and the environmental catastrophe of climate change and loss of biodiversity. The many themed workshops included sessions on the current situations in the Middle East and in Ukraine. Despite the hellish world events, the Festival for Survival was an antidote to the paralysis of gloom and doom.

Proceedings kicked off with the music of Karine Polwart. The lyrics of her song 'I can think of better things' were in response to the UK government's decision to spend 40 billion pounds on a new nuclear weapon system. The music was paired with a recitation of Makar Kathleen Jamie's, 'What the Clyde said after COP26' and the poem's warning against failing the young folk who were chanting on her banks.

Festival highlights included words from Melissa Parke, a former Australian government minister and newly-appointed chief executive of ICAN (International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons). As head of this Nobel Peace Prize winning organisation, Melissa was well placed to reflect on the current international context and on the way that citizens can make a difference. Other international guests included Timmon M. Wallis, author of 'Disarming the nuclear argument' and Linda Pentz-Gunter, founder of 'Beyond Nuclear' which supports efforts to phase out nuclear power in favour of safer energy choices.

Centre stage were organisations working across peace and environmental issues including Scotland's leading environmental campaigning organisation, Friends of the Earth Scotland, and the relatively newcomer think tank Commonweal.

David Hayman, Scottish film, television and stage actor and director, rounded off proceedings, leaving participants reverberating with the knowledge that people in Scotland truly have a chance to make a difference.

“Both pressing the nuclear button and opening a massive new oil field are suicidal in the long run”



(Scottish CND's Festival For Survival in Glasgow, November 2023)
Kat Knak-Watt, Scottish CND

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“What comes to pass does so not so much because a few people want it to happen, as because the mass of citizens abdicate their responsibility and let things be.”

Antonio Gramsci