

ROSE

RADICAL OPTIONS FOR SCOTLAND AND EUROPE

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JOHN FOSTER CHALLENGES FOR THE LEFT

YANA PETTICREW PRECARIETY BREEDS

BRIAN LEISHMAN..... KEY ROLE FOR LABOUR LEFT

MERCEDES VILLALBA..... ON TAXING WEALTH

And Much More on 'The Crisis of the Left' Inside.

For Public Ownership and Democratic Control

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EDITORIAL:

Bringing the Scottish Left Together

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

The theme of this issue of ROSE magazine is “The Crisis of the Left.” It has been surprisingly difficult to put together in part because, unfortunately, the crisis spans so many different aspects of today’s political reality.

Somehow the left has got to a stage where it is having difficulty mounting a coherent response to the challenges that face us. And just at the time when the far right is on the rise and a co-ordinated left is most needed.

Fifteen years of austerity has brought all the ills that the trade union movement predicted at the time. We warned that cutting public services and jobs, far from improving the economy would further damage it. We warned that the way to grow the economy was to invest in public services and the workers who deliver them because we are the people who pay our taxes and who spend in local shops and businesses. We warned that for every public service job lost at least one would also go in the private sector. And we’ve been proved right. But as time has gone on, we have seen that, rather than an unintended consequence, this was the plan all along.

Because as a country we are just as rich as we have ever been. It’s just that the wealth has been amassed by the richest at the expense of all the rest of us. We have seen massively growing inequality as a result but rather than bring us together, the left response has lacked any coherence.

Sections, such as the Labour Party, have moved to the right, and would have become (to the naked eye) indistinguishable from the Tories, had the Tories not also shifted rightwards.

“As a country we are just as rich as we have ever been. It’s just that the wealth has been amassed by the richest at the expense of all the rest of us.

The underlying reasons for this are many but in part it has been a response to the rise of Reform as a political entity – supported through exposure if not actual cash, by a right wing, billionaire owned media. This has complicated the political landscape. Add to that the rise of identity politics at the expense of a class analysis. Equalities versus equality. This issue looks to provide an analysis of the problems for the left and how we can reclaim class politics.

In the first of two long essays, Professor John Foster sets out how things have changed on the left since the 60s and 70s when there was a class based mass movement. Brian Leishman MP brings us up to date with an analysis of the failings of the current Labour Government, and how the left in Labour still has had a key role to mitigate moves to the right. Matt Kerr gives a personal take on the rise of Your Party, and the challenges which face the new kids on the left bloc, some inevitable, some self-inflicted.

Articles from Richard Leonard and Mercedes Villalba set out strategies to address the decline of the UK and Scotland’s economic fortunes, while Vince Mills contributes two articles, one looking at the implications for the forthcoming Scottish elections of the current crisis of the left, the other looking to Europe, where the EU is not immune to the crisis and is arguably even more vulnerable. Finally, we cannot consider the crisis of the left without looking at the vexed issue of women’s rights and trans people’s rights.

This has become a highly divisive issue on the left as was obvious in the difficulties that beset the founding conference of Your Party. Our second long essay, written by a collective of Scottish left feminists, argues that it is women's rights that have been eroded in the move away from a class analysis to identity politics.

Alongside this, Kiri Tunks notes that trade unions clearly recognise how violence against women has spiralled in the UK, with a myriad of excellent policies, but asks what they are doing in practice to address the issue. And of course, this epidemic of violence against women and girls is now being weaponised by the far right. Yana Petticrew provides an analysis of this phenomenon and calls for a left response that engages with the real issues for our class. Indeed, it has never been more important for the left to unite behind a class analysis of the current issues facing our citizens and our communities. It is clear that the right is doing its best to divide and rule and is, to some extent, succeeding.

CHALLENGES FOR A WEAKENED LEFT

*In this long essay, **Professor John Foster** provides a historical context within which he sets out an analysis of the challenges the left faces currently and calls for unity in how they must be addressed.*

The Left in Scotland is significantly weaker than it was a generation ago: not necessarily more divided but generally failing to project a coherent message that enjoys any degree of wider mass support. Only on Palestine and, to a considerably lesser extent, against war preparations, has it mobilised a degree of wider backing.

But the Left in Scotland remains split over independence and on neither side of this divide has the Left managed to secure significant support for clear alternatives to the strongly neo-liberal policies advanced by both SNP and Labour.

We cannot allow the toxic messaging of the far right and its neoliberal agenda to make more sense to people than our class based narrative. We hope that this issue of ROSE magazine will contribute positively to tackling the challenges we face. Thanks again to all our contributors for their support and their insightful analyses. Please consider writing for us consistent with our vision, "For public ownership and democratic control."

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More dangerously, it has failed to do so in face of the rise of a populist right that seeks to draw support mainly from traditional areas of working class political strength.

Within just four months we could see Reform emerge as the second largest group in the Scottish parliament and, worse, claiming to speak on behalf of these communities against a lame coalition of failed parties. This is the challenge. Go back a generation, to the 1970s and 80s, the situation was different.

A class-based mass movement did exist. Organised labour, trade union district committees and shop stewards committees linked directly with local trades union councils and tenants organisations. It was a movement that had very recently seen major victories both industrially and in terms of the needs of local communities.

And without being sectarian it is important to note that a key part of this cohesion was ideological, the development of common Left perspective. Every day packets of Morning Stars would be delivered to virtually every factory and pit branch in Scotland.

Every weekend the same happened in working class communities - delivered to activists in tenants associations, local campaigners on social provision and peace, Labour, Communists and Left-wingers in the SNP. When the National Front made an attempt to establish community bases in Scotland, this community cohesion meant it secured little or no support.

However, as we all know, a far more powerful enemy was at work, one that does not need description but whose strategic ruthlessness, and economic fecklessness, is too often forgotten. The re-invented Tory leadership from 1976 was willing to take major politico-economic risks to destroy what it perceived as a growing, potentially lethal working class challenge.

It handed over the publicly-owned industrial infrastructure to private companies whose rapacious restructuring would make Lady Mone a model of economic competence.

It listed the industries where the Left was dominant and destroyed them. It privatised, or attempted to privatise, all social provision that it saw as sustaining working class cohesion, above all council housing. It wilfully destroyed Benn's attempt to secure a Norwegian style future for oil and gas as the basis for renewed and publicly-owned industrial growth, particularly for chemicals. Instead, it handed it to the US and then, a decade later, also gifted the City of London to New York bankers - with consequences seen in 2008-09.

However, the Tories did largely succeed in achieving its key objective: destroying the economic basis of working class political cohesion – although in Scotland, and some other places the game was tougher.

From the late 1980s the Tories had to embark on much more detailed interventions in local working class communities using technocratic 'regeneration' projects that outlawed politics, initiatives that continued under New Labour. Even tenants' associations had to be registered and made 'democratically' accountable to the corporate landlords who now controlled housing.

Such intervention was, of course, nothing new for our rulers. In the 1920s and 30s equally radical de-investment and rationalisation was visited upon those industries, regions and communities that had previously mobilised a near lethal challenge in the years immediately after the first world war. In that case many of the political prime movers were from Scotland, industrial dynasties that controlled Britain's heavy industry and much of its industrial infrastructure and held dominant positions in Conservative administrations. Dependent on empire markets, fearful of US demands for free trade and supporters of Chamberlain's policy of fascist appeasement, it all ended very badly for them in 1940.

“A far more powerful enemy was at work.... whose strategic ruthlessness, and economic fecklessness, is too often forgotten.”

Subsequently the dramatic shift in the world balance of class forces and the resulting concession of full employment saw a politically-mobilised working class once more re-emerging.

That, however, is history. What about now?

Currently, we also have a politico-economic crisis that looks likely to end badly. Britain is acting as a spoiler for the US in Europe. War is again invoked. Right-wing populism is growing in strength.

The crisis of the Left remains unresolved.

Any viable response would seem to involve three things. First, to win an understanding of the gravity of current economic and political crisis within what remains of the organised working class movement. Second, re-engage that movement with local communities – doing so intelligently in terms of the new forms that communities now take (in many areas they aren't 'communities' in the old sense). Third, but simultaneously, to expose the truth about Britain's economy.

RMT leader Eddie Dempsey recently gave an inspired description of Britain and its economy: 'a group of banks with a country attached'. If Eddie wanted to refine his description he might have said US banks and noted that they were, in technical terms, 'non-banks', that is the much less closely regulated investment vehicles used by the very rich. It is these institutions that do effectively control Britain's productive resources.

Looking at the top twenty 'British' companies quoted on the London stock exchange, starting with AstraZeneca, ending with the Compass Group and including Britain's three big retail banks, US investment companies and non-banks hold a majority of dominant shareholdings in all but one (and that has French, Swiss and Emirati owners). Elsewhere, the names of the US Investment companies constantly recur: BlackRock, Vanguard Group, Capital Corporation. As investors they tend to be short-termist because their clients seek maximum payback quickly.

In large part it is this extractive ownership which explains why Britain now has the lowest level of productivity growth of all advanced nations. In fact virtually none. Elsewhere in Europe ownership is different.

In France, Germany and Italy the dominant companies are still owned by family dynasties or by clusters of regional investors. Even here, though, investment and growth is at a historic low. The profits go elsewhere.

So does Britain still have a coherent 'ruling class'? If capital ownership means anything, this is increasingly questionable.



Eddie Dempsey, RMT General Secretary

Policy subservience to the United States has become almost embarrassing. Our present government waits patiently for signals from the White House – acting, as any reading of Commons Defence Committee minutes reveal, assiduously as the US cat's paw in the far east and still more dangerously in Europe and the Middle East. Britain gratefully receives Trump's offer of US data centres that will destroy what's left of our water infrastructure. When Trump whistles, our three big pharmaceutical companies shift their new research to the US (though 'British' in name only in terms of ownership) - and our government gives £1 billion to buy F35 nuclear bombers we can't use and can't afford.

“It is this extractive ownership which explains why Britain now has the lowest level of productivity growth of all advanced nations.”

This reality is one that has to be taken back into the trade union movement, particularly to those unions, among the biggest, that continue to push for detailed alignment with US on war planning. It is also a reality that has to be taken into our communities to challenge the divisive messaging of Reform – equally serving imperialism but in potentially even more dangerous forms.

So, to return to the issues posed at the beginning, how is the Left to do this, under what banner nationally, politically?

Whatever the ultimate outcomes, in terms of challenging state power it would seem difficult to argue that this should not cover all of Britain, even if acknowledging national and regional traditions of working class struggle. Equally in terms of the fragmented Left. The first battle must be elsewhere: for the heart and soul of the trade union movement, building from existing bulwarks of Left influence, but, in doing so, also transforming that strength by engagement in communities and against the populist right. Today virtually all unions are, in one form or another, engaged in organising those delivering the 'social wage', even including the biggest that somehow see themselves as aligned to military production.

The next two or three years are scheduled to see still further cuts in the provision of welfare and housing.

So, by whom, and how, will the resistance be led? If organised labour does not take it, Reform certainly will.

Hence, the task of the Left must be, as far as possible unitedly, to explain the real nature of Britain's politico-economic crisis for what it is, a capitalist crisis in Marxist terms - and to call for some form of public and social ownership that necessarily includes a challenge to capitalist state power.

And this task of explanation can only be successful if it goes hand in hand with a new level of organisation that spans communities and unions.

KEY ROLE FOR LEFT IN LABOUR

Brian Leishman MP highlights the many failings of Starmer's leadership but also finds some reasons to be cheerful as left-wing backbenchers have made their presence felt.

So, we are now 17 months on from the General Election where 411 Labour Party members were sent to Westminster to deliver the change that was campaigned on.

It would be easy, but also fair, to say that many people consider it to have been a disappointing first period in office for the Labour Government. Poor political messaging and not "selling their vision" to the country has been a regular admission from party leadership and the team that surround them.

However, there is more to it than that. Rock bottom approval ratings are not the result of merely sub-standard communication or a leadership team that has been criticised in the media for its dour personality and lack of charisma.

No. The real reason for the anger people feel – and that is reflected in polls – is because of repeated unpopular and bad political decision making. The most despised being the initial decision to withdraw the winter fuel payment. With the following U-turn months later setting the tone for this government – making a decision and then having to row back because of the initial misjudgement.

However, the reason for the shift in government positions has not just been down to a disgruntled electorate. As socialists, we must be optimists and there are reasons to be cheerful, none more so than in the performance of MPs from the left of the Parliamentary Labour Party.

It is undoubtedly true that left wing Labour MPs, while not huge in number, still have influence on the leadership and can make the political weather. This fact should not be overlooked or underestimated. Another detested policy was the planned reduction of the Welfare bill. The government's proposed changes would have seen £7 billion worth of cuts. Cuts which would have negatively impacted some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in the country.

Incredibly, these proposals were championed by various MPs with some of the deepest poverty in the country within their constituencies. This was not only the antithesis of what a Labour Government should do, but also, when it comes to future election chances, it was an act of likely political suicide.

“Left wing Labour MPs... still have influence on the leadership and can make the political weather.”

It was the left of the parliamentary party which organised disability charities to come into Westminster and to brief MPs on what the proposals would lead to.

It was socialist MPs who spoke at rallies, who took to the media and explained the devastation these cuts would bring.

I was present in the Chamber on the afternoon the government's plans unravelled and descended into the chaos of making policy “on the hoof” from the despatch box.

Concessions were made, policies withdrawn and the front bench were left with their plans in tatters but most importantly, people were saved from being consigned to a life in forever poverty.



(Brian Leishman is the Labour MP for Alloa and Grangemouth.)

After working to stave off these cuts, the resulting suspensions to Chris Hinchliff, Rachael Maskell, Neil Duncan-Jordan and myself for the organisation of other MPs to vote against the proposals showed the fragility of the party leadership to dissent from within.

The accusation from “a Number 10 insider” of our “persistent knobheadery” highlighted the issue that internal debate on policy is not encouraged and it let outsiders know the authoritarian nature of politics in the Parliamentary Labour Party. For the benefit of the party, this culture must change. Our suspensions also brought into question the role of the backbench MP.

It seems obvious to me at least, that us humble backbenchers should not be there to parrot the arranged lines. Or to nod along without questioning what direction the leadership are taking the party and the country in. Instead, a backbench MP should act as the conscience of their party. To keep Ministers and leadership on the right course and to help them govern in the spirit and values of the party.

The recent Budget decision to bring an end to the cruel Two Child Cap is another example of the left of the Labour Party showing its teeth. Concerted pressure from backbench MPs by way of questions in the House, bringing the issue to the fore in parliamentary debates, on television, in the papers and on social media. That accumulation of pressure is what moved the leadership towards action.

At the time of winning the General Election 17 months ago, the mere mention of a Wealth Tax would have been met with scorn and derision. Painted as some sort of fringe idea that would never take hold. Now, because of left wing MPs in Parliament working with campaigners outside of Westminster and making the case for the redistribution of wealth across society for the benefit of the many, it is considered a mainstream idea while gaining traction and popularity with voters.

The country needs a functioning and fighting group of socialist MPs because real positive change can and will only ever be brought about by the Left. There are many fights to come – the floated idea of introducing mandatory digital ID and the wider issue of losing personal freedoms. These range from the right to protest to facial ID being used by police to the proscription of Palestine Action while a genocide continues to be committed by Netanyahu's regime.

And of course, the fight to change Labour's current electoral strategy – of moving to the right and trying to appease disaffected Tory voters and a working class so disillusioned that it is being seduced by the divisive politics of Reform UK. This lurch to the right is doomed to fail.

With the Green Party selecting a new leader who is talking the language of transformative policies of redistribution and nationalisation that was the hallmark of Labour under Corbyn, and a new organisation in Your Party entering the left of British politics, then there are other alternative vehicles available for people who believe in a fairer and more equal Britain.

The strategy that progressive voters have nowhere else to go is no longer an option. The same failure awaits the Labour leadership if we also think that come the next General Election, the electorate will throw their collective weight behind the party just to stop a Nigel Farage Reform UK government.

So, what should happen next? If the current leadership cannot turn around the opinion polls, then it is inevitable that the conversation comes round to a different type of change. Therefore, it is essential the left of the Labour Party is ready. It must continue to present the case for a radical political and economic transformation of the country and to have people in place ready to stand as candidates should that opportunity present itself. It is up to the Labour left to lead the way and bring about the real change people need and voted for in 2024.

THE WORLD IS YOURS – OR IS IT?

***Matt Kerr**, ROSE member and political journalist takes a personal and whimsical look at the rise and missteps of the Left's newest political party.*

Getting to grips with what Your Party means in recent weeks is a task not unlike trying to nail a jelly to a wall.

The name of course grew arms and legs after Zarah Sultana, at some point early in this weird, wonderful and winding process, launched it. She then promptly stated that it would not bear that name, leaving the rest of us to discover the whole thing had been quite a spectacular piece of freelancing on her part.

Sultana is someone for whom I have had almost boundless admiration since she took her seat in the parliament. She has guts. In spades. And in a world where the desiccated counting machine has a habit of ruling the roost, she has repeatedly injected a dose of humanity into proceedings, whilst managing to face down what seems like an endless barrage of misogynistic, Islamophobic, and racist abuse along the way.

She may have plummeted in my esteem through this troubled process, rushing headlong into unnecessary battles and nods to liberal edgelordism, but she undoubtedly still stands head and shoulders above most of parliament.

Jeremy Corbyn was more of a known quantity for me, and I suspect most. His radicalism undimmed after decades fighting the good fight at home, abroad, and in the Labour Party he once led. His flaws in this process are the same as ever they were, a more cautious, studied approach to the problem of building a new party that risked losing momentum, an inherent aversion to the conventional idea of being the leader, and a tendency to expect the best in other human beings without always preparing for the worst.

Given the party has elected not to elect a leader or pair of co-leaders as such, it may seem peculiar that I have begun this glance at Your Party on the respected leaders of the two tribes that seemed to grow through the process, but where else could it begin?

A proto-party drew 800,000 expressions of interest and more than 50,000 members is an impressive feat. It did not do so on the basis of policy or on the basis of its constitution. After all, until its Liverpool conference it didn't have the latter and the former remains largely a blank canvas.

If the push factor was a sheer disgust at the state of the Labour Party, the draw was the hope of a class-based alternative. There are already plenty of those though. For thousands to place that bet without a policy platform to speak of is not only an expression of the mass yearning for some hope to drag us from the void, but - in its embryonic stages - it is surely undeniable it was a bet placed on Corbyn and Sultana.

Man and woman, youth and experience, united in socialism. I get it.

It is perhaps the worst kept secret around these parts that I flirted with the idea of making the move myself. Just as Ian Murray was once keen to tell anyone who would listen that he was "sitting in the departure lounge" of Labour under Corbyn's leadership - even going so far as to rehearse his speech at the launch of that Tinge Party - I, like thousands of others, have been sitting in that same lounge for some time.

Openly invited to leave by what presently passes for a Labour leader, we sit in the airport pub at 7am, reminiscing on the past victories of the Labour left, stubbornly knocking back the pints, and dodging security whilst hoping we'll be too drunk to get on the plane.

It remains a crowded place, even after a quarter of a million souls have left.

Enough of personal grief though, what impact will this all have? The numbers drawn to the project must be seen as a positive for any socialist of any flavour. It's a demonstration of what lies latent in our towns and cities; thousands willing to put a hand's turn into building on the collective instincts of the brain. All that endless possibility also brings with it the possibilities of endless nightmares, but that's life in a movement.



Classics of the genre will naturally centre on issues of gender, on the EU, the urge to vote on everything and decide nothing, and here in Scotland, the national question.

I hope that class gets a real look in. Not performative, not careerist, not excluding. Let it underpin all discussion. Let Your Party offer a platform of working people rather than a stage for us to be lectured from, and it might just make it. For the time being, the rest of us will have to wrestle with a decision familiar to so many in the Labour Party over the last century; to get involved and shape the debate, or get the popcorn in?

Whatever happens, I do wish Your Party success. If a force can be built in this land that can pull the political debate onto the ground of basic decency, turn the competition for cruelty into the one for human welfare, bring some hope and a touch of class back to the heart of politics, it can only be a good for us all.

“Let Your Party offer a platform of working people rather than a stage for us to be lectured from.”

Will it choose that path, or stumble into the identitarian grave dug by the right for the left to die in? We'll see.

As Zhou Enlai might have said, it's too early to tell.

TAXING WEALTH - A FAILURE OF REEVES' BUDGET

Mercedes Villalba, MSP on why a wealth tax is both workable and necessary if the country genuinely wants to tackle massively growing inequality.

The argument that a Wealth Tax doesn't work, based on the so called Laffer Curve, relies on a number of faulty assumptions.

The biggest is probably the belief that the ruling class create wealth through their ingenuity and risk-taking. The reality is that all wealth originates from human labour. In face of that reality, the argument then that wealth creation ceases when the wealthy leave, is nonsensical. If the real wealth producers – the working class - ceased production, we'd have no power, no services, no food, and we really would have a crisis. It is interesting to note that during Covid the Tory government was willing to spend state money big to make sure the real wealth creators stayed put.

The second assumption is that existing wealth itself is mobile and when the rich go, they can take their wealth with them. This may be true of fine art, precious gems, other luxury items and the king of capital; cash, that is why we have currency controls and export restrictions. But a lot of wealth is in immobile assets like land, property and in the case of some products, like whisky, determined by the very land and water and yes, human labour that a rich individual or company cannot simply pack up in the luggage on the next flight to California.



The third major assumption is the Laffer Curve itself. This is supposed to represent the relationship between tax rates and tax revenue, the idea being that there is an optimum rate of tax which raises the maximum revenue. After that, the story goes, revenue starts to decrease as taxpayers are deterred from remaining in the tax system. It may sound convincing, but it is unfounded.

The reality of so-called trickle-down economics, that tax cuts raise more revenue by encouraging investment and thus benefit society, has no evidential base. Tax cuts have not reduced inequality. UK taxes, for example, are considerably lower than in most other western European countries, and yet we face significant and persistent income and wealth inequalities. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation reports that in the UK the top 10% own 57% of the wealth, while 2 in every 10 adults and 3 in every 10 children, are in poverty.

You might ask the question then, why is there so much resistance to taxing wealth among even leading politicians in the Labour Party, like Rachel Reeves, who claims to abhor poverty? The argument goes that if we make the country less profitable for wealthy individuals, even through a modest wealth tax, they will leave, and we will lose private investment in our economy.

Tax Justice UK and Patriotic Millionaires UK vehemently disagree. They argue that taxing the wealthy is necessary, so at least some millionaires will stay.

The central question is though, what do the rest of us lose from any potential risk of flight?

Waiting for wealth to trickle down has not worked; inequality has remained high and the rich have got richer. We will continue to create wealth as long as we have a fit and able population to do the work. The departing rich can't take our natural resources, built heritage and skilled workforce with them.

Indeed, the greatest risk to wealth is workforce shortages caused by a public health service on its knees, an undervalued public education system and a cost-of-living crisis deterring new parents. Ironically, the greatest risk to wealth is continuing to let it go untaxed. We need a system that tackles inequality and says if your private interest has benefitted from our public services, health, education, and our labour you will contribute a proportion of that benefit back into the system that has made you rich.

In the November 2025 budget the UK Labour Government had an opportunity to tax wealth. It did not take it. As Labour member of the House of Lords, Prem Sikka noted the wealthy were hardly touched. There were some minor tweaks on dividend and the introduction of the "mansion tax" but no wealth tax. There was no attempt to align the taxation of dividends and capital gains tax with the rates of taxation of wages for workers and there was no financial transactions tax. Instead by freezing personal tax thresholds an additional 780,000 workers will be drawn into paying the basic rate tax and 920,000 more at the higher rate. Last year Reeves ruled out the measure, saying it would "hurt working people".

If Anas Sarwar wants red water between Scottish Labour and the SNP, then he should support the STUC call for taxing wealth. If he does not, there will be little to differentiate Labour from the SNP at the ballot box.

“All wealth originates from human labour.”

THE NEED FOR DEMOCRATIC OWNERSHIP OF THE SCOTTISH ECONOMY

Richard Leonard, MSP and former leader of Scottish Labour sets out action to reverse the trend that sees private ownership of companies, particularly in manufacturing, move out of Scotland.

“The economic structure of Britain is the domain of private adventure. The prime motivator in industry and finance is the property owner and/or his hirelings. It is he who employs and dismisses. It is he whose wishes direct industrial enterprise and the use of credit. The mass of the people are the creatures of his private plans, they are never privy to them, but are the victims of their consequences. Parliament, therefore, legislates in a framework formed for it by the decisions of individuals who consult no one and nothing but their private interests. Parliament is therefore always after the fact, conditioned by what the City or some great captain of industry decides.” – Aneurin Bevan, 1944.

Bevan’s words ring as true today as they did eight decades ago. In Scotland the additional factor is that much of that private ownership is now based overseas, with power over our economy wielded in faraway board rooms. Astonishingly this is a trend courted, incentivised and boasted of, by the Scottish National Party whose leading economic tool remains an addiction to foreign direct investment. Scotland has been turned into a branch plant economy as a matter of official government policy.

The result is that by 2023 employment in private companies employing 250 or more employees in Scotland was; 37 per cent Scottish owned with 34 per cent owned abroad and 29 per cent owned in the rest of the UK. In the manufacturing sector the equivalent numbers were 31 per cent Scottish, 17 per cent rest of UK and 52 per cent owned abroad. But this is not inevitable. There is an alternative. And not just alternatives within the system, but alternatives to the system.

An alternative based on land reform, industrial reform, democratic reform.

Democratic socialism in place of neo-liberal capitalism. Direct democracy and representative democracy in our economy as well as in our political system.

We start from the conditions which we find ourselves in, including the concrete opportunities there are for extending democracy.

To avoid Parliament being “always after the fact”, that must include the introduction of planning agreements with those who own and control the commanding heights of the Scottish economy. Agreements covering investment, jobs, workforce planning, research and development. Socialising the process of economic management and planning.

“Democratic socialism in place of neo-liberal capitalism.”

We must secure extended trade union rights, not simply to strike a new equilibrium of employment rights in the workplace, important though that is, but to strike a new equilibrium of democratic rights in the workplace, in industrial sectors and in the wider economy. An extension of common ownership, including the municipalisation of all social care, the building of council houses, public ownership of bus and ferry travel and the socialisation of the just transition process notably in energy.

A decisive shareholding by the state, including in successful and growing businesses, as part of a strategic approach, in place of an ad hoc, case-by-case extemporisation.

There ought to be a statutory right for workers to convert the enterprise they work in to co-operative worker ownership if it is put up for sale, facing closure, or takeover.

Public procurement rules could be easily reformed to reserve contracts to these democratic forms of business ownership. We also need to realise the power which we already have in our occupational pension funds, (the Strathclyde Local Government Pension Fund alone is valued at £31.3 billion), but all too often fail to utilise, to intervene in local economies, and to community wealth building.

We will never renew and transform our economy while it remains colonised by private interests. Only through democratic accountability, control and ownership, can we build an economic future which centres on people, communities and social need.

“We will never renew and transform our economy while it remains colonised by private interests.”

Democratic socialist planning is about shifting decision-making from private to public hands. Instead of relying on the perverse logic of the market it is about ensuring that social need is met, waste is avoided and inequality reduced.

It requires clear and strong political leadership, and a confident movement from below, to overcome the inevitable resistance.

We must be prepared to learn from historical and international experience, understand which ideas and actions will cross pollenate and which will not. But be willing to take risks in order to change horizons.

THE CRISIS OF THE EUROPEAN LEFT

Vince Mills, ROSE member analyses the crisis of the left in Europe and highlights why the “yearning for membership” of the EU which persists in some quarters of the UK left is misguided.

One of the many peculiarities of the current period is the persistence of some on the British “left” and significantly more in the centre of British politics to look to the EU as a solution to the profound crisis we are living through. The SNP, for example, is arguing that achieving independence is inseparable from membership of the EU because membership of the EU is necessary for economic stability and growth.

This is a position echoed time and again by Britain’s liberal left for example [Rafael Behr](#) arguing in the Guardian in October that “... leaving the EU has been a disaster. But refusing to admit it has cost Labour precious time and credibility.”

This yearning for membership persists despite the confusion, retreat and fragmentation of the European left in the face of an almost universal rise in right wing populism.

That is a direct consequence of the economic failure of the EU, torn as it is, between the need to satisfy the demands of the ruling classes of individual nation states while providing an institutional framework that allows increasing deregulation and common rules on debt and deficit, designed to control public expenditure. I am not only referring to the social democratic tradition, whose European decline has been steep, but what we might call the radical Left.

As "The Future of European Competitiveness" of September 2024, by former European Central Bank President Mario Draghi points out, Europe's economy has been in decline for decades, with stagnant productivity, falling investment and loss of market share.

Add to that the shock of NATO's proxy war with Russia over Ukraine and the impact that has had on cheap Russian energy supplies, especially to Germany, and you begin to understand why in Ray Dalio's Great Power index of 2024, looking at estimated GDP growth over the next 10 years, European countries perform so badly: Poland 2.9%, Sweden 2.3%, Ireland 1.9%, Hungary 1.9%, Czech Republic, 1.9%, UK 1.3% Netherlands 1.2%, Portugal 1.1%, Belgium 0.9%, France 0.9%, Norway 0.8%, Spain 0.3%, Switzerland 0.2%, Greece 0.0%, Germany - 0.5% (yes minus), Italy -0.5%.

The "centre" right in Europe wants to address this economic sclerosis with even more neoliberal policies, more deregulation, and greater EU convergence. Draghi did also want 800 billion euros spent annually for the following 10 years to support private and public investments but the German ruling class, which believes it is being asked to underwrite the economic weakness of others member states, did not see this in its national interest. The crisis is so profound that President Macron speaking at the Berlin Global Dialogue last October said: "The EU could die, we are on a verge of a very important moment... Our former model is over – we are over-regulating and under-investing. In the two to three years to come, if we follow our classical agenda we will be out of the market."

“This yearning for membership persists despite the confusion, retreat and fragmentation of the European left...”



(Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and French politician and leader of the far-right political party National Rally)

As we know, the far right has exploited this failure. Across the EU, parties like Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany) in Germany, Vox in Spain and Rassemblement National (National Rally) in France, have all gained ground. In Italy, Meloni's Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy) party with neo-fascist roots, is even in government. By contrast the left, and in particular the radical left, has had a much more difficult time and last year, to make matters worse, the European Left Party (EL) founded in 2004 which acts as a bloc for radical left parties in the EU parliament split, with the creation of the European Left Alliance (ELA).

The ELA comprises La France Insoumise, (France Unbowed) Podemos (We Can), the Portuguese Left Bloc, the Finnish Left Alliance, the Swedish Left Party, and the Danish Green-Left Alliance. The formation of this new European party, unsurprisingly, drew fire from members of Germany's Left Party (Die Linke), firmly embedded in EL: "The splitting of the European Left into two competing parties (plus numerous configurations in between) massively weakens it." The EL remains the much larger grouping with forty affiliates including Die Linke, the Spanish United Left and a range of communist parties.

The split is a consequence of the block on working class advance inherent in the EU project and how the left should deal with it.



(Election literature of the the French left alliance, which brings together La France Insoumise (LFI), the Socialist Party (PS), the Greens and the French Communist Party)

As national populations in the EU reacted to the consequences of the 2008 crisis, in particular austerity and loss of national autonomy, they demanded “less Europe” and many wanted a more critical, even “disobedient” political response to the demands of the EU. The ELA was in its origins part of an attempt to offer that more intense resistance to EU diktats. However, according to a report referring to the performance of ELA from Transform! (a foundation that supports EL): “Even the ‘disobedient Euroscepticism’ of its (ELA’s) earlier incarnations appears to have been sidelined... in favour of pretty much the same kind of constructive criticism of the EU also practiced by the EL... the creation of the ELA only adds to a wider chronic problem on the radical Left: a level of organizational fragmentation that is not really justified by the level of political differences between various groups and initiatives.”

For Transform!, then, the emergence of ELA is close to inexplicable. The “earlier incarnations” refer, principally, to the group “Now, the People!” which contained several of the parties that later formed ELA.

“Now, the People!” was formed in 2018 in response to the austerity measures being implemented by the radical left wing party SYRIZA in government in Greece, after SYRIZA capitulated to the Troika as a consequence of the Greek government debt crisis of 2015. “Now, the People!” wanted to pursue a more combative stance.

It remains a fundamental blind spot for some on the left in Europe that the EU and its structures and its treaties lock member states into positions that are designed to thwart democratic resistance to the requirements of European capitalist interests. As the philosopher Jürgen Habermas said, referring to the Greek voters’ rejection of the terms of the international bailout that imposed severe austerity in 2015: “Against the treaties there is no democracy”.

Despite that Vladimir Bortun, an Oxford University academic, can still argue that SYRIZA might have had a better chance to avoid capitulation if there had been Europe-wide campaign of mass mobilization and disobedience. The truth is that such a campaign would only have been effective if the objective for the participating national left parties, had been escaping the clutches of the EU, an institution whose sole purpose was and is the advance of the interests of the Western European capitalist class. Until that is understood and addressed, the European radical left will struggle in its attempts to generate effective left resistance and build another kind of socialist Europe.

“The European radical left will struggle in its attempts to generate effective left resistance and build another kind of socialist Europe.”

THE CRISIS OF THE LEFT AND THE EROSION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS

In our second long essay a collective of Scottish left feminists takes an incisive look at how essential rights for women, fought for and won 50 years ago, are being rolled back by the very trade unions that fought so hard for them.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of two landmark pieces of legislation for women's rights in the UK: the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (SDA) and the Equal Pay Act, which came into force the same year. They mark the high tide of an era in which a strong grassroots ('second wave') feminist movement, embracing women trade unionists and their struggles, forced "women's issues" onto the agenda of the trade union movement and made women's rights a legislative priority for Labour in office.

Before this, employers could lawfully refuse to hire women, sack them when they got pregnant, force their resignation if they got married, pay them less than men, and cut their wages when they returned to work after having children - if they were able to, as there was little or no formal childcare provision in early 1970s Britain. Women couldn't obtain credit in their own name or have a medical procedure without the written consent of their husbands.

Sex-based apartheid was commonplace; women were socially excluded, barred from entering pubs, and from membership of clubs, societies and student unions. Second class citizens, women and girls were degraded and ridiculed in mainstream popular culture.

Sexual violence was treated as a laughing matter and there were no services for survivors, until feminists created them.

While this same societal culture permeated the labour movement and the Left, the kick-back mounted by feminists from the 1960s to the 1980s began to initiate some change.

In 1975 there was no doubt about the meaning of sex in the Sex Discrimination Act (SDA).

It was blindingly obvious that women were a group whose labour power was devalued and who suffered common indignities, disadvantages, injustices and male violence because of their biological sex. Treated as 'lesser' than men in every way, it was obvious they had shared needs and interests as a group. The sex-based provisions in the SDA were a response to those needs.

In addition, in the 1970s many on the Left, including socialist and Marxist feminists, understood that sex inequality, like that of race, is rooted in class society, and driven by the mechanisms of our capitalist economic system and the ideas that support it.



Sex Discrimination Act 1975

1975 CHAPTER 65

The Supreme Court ruling in April this year merely confirmed what was then universally accepted – an everyday understanding of sex, as something real, binary and unchangeable. The Court clarified that this definition has been the law since the SDA was passed and was not changed in the Equality Act 2010; despite that universal understanding being latterly assigned the label 'gender critical', a term designed by activists to 'reframe' and marginalise a majority view as something exceptional.

That universal understanding was unquestioned when the Scottish Parliament was set up. In the early years of devolution for example, the Labour-Lib Dem administration pledged to end the indignity of mixed sex hospital wards.

“It was blindingly obvious that women were a group whose labour power was devalued.”

The unacceptable delay in doing so was criticised by the SNP’s Shadow Health Minister, none other than Nicola Sturgeon. However today this position is actively opposed not only by the present SNP Government, but by most of the Left and the trade union movement. Why? Because in the intervening years they have adopted the belief that sex is an identity and consequently that the term ‘woman’ should be inclusive of men.

This puts the Left and the trade unions directly in opposition to the rights of women, at work and in society. The Supreme Court ruling, which is a model of clarity, explains in detail why a definition of sex based on identity undermines women’s rights. The Sandie Peggie v NHS Fife employment tribunal provides a real life example of the problems caused.

The Left/trade union belief that sex is an identity was comprehensively lost in the Supreme Court case For Women Scotland v The Scottish Government. The Court tested the Government’s preferred definitions of sex, woman and man (shared by most of the Left) against the Equality Act’s sex-based equality provisions and found these definitions made the Act “incoherent”. “illogical” and unworkable. It found that defining sex as identity cuts right across the human rights of women as a group, and specifically the rights of lesbian women and trans men, though unsurprisingly that part of the Ruling has been completely ignored.

Today not only the SNP Government but the health unions and the STUC positively favour male staff being able to share a changing room with female nurses in NHS hospitals based on identity claims, the situation at the heart of the Sandie Peggie tribunal and that of the Darlington nurses. More than this, the Left denies there is any conflict of interest here, and claims any suggestion that there is, is a “divisive construct”.

The months since the Supreme Court ruling have seen a concerted campaign of open defiance of the law and foot-dragging, by organisations opposed to it. While many sports bodies and private sector organisations acted quickly to correct their policies, the EHRC has had to reinforce that organisations must comply immediately or risk legal action by the regulator. Pre-action notices have been served on the Scottish Government for its delaying tactics.

Despite the majority of its members being women, the trade union movement, at least publicly, remains entrenched in its opposition to women’s Equality Act rights. This year’s STUC and TUC Congresses resolved to oppose the ruling that sex means biological sex and to campaign against it. As did the STUC Women’s Conference in October. Roz Foyer, the STUC’s General Secretary described the ruling as “deeply troubling”.

Many trade unions are doubling down and defying the ruling, or claiming, incorrectly, that they cannot comply until the EHRC statutory guidance is available. UNISON for example (membership 78% female) instructed its branches, six months after the ruling, that any member who identifies as a woman is eligible for election as a delegate to its National Women’s Conference in 2026. There is now a disconnect between the trade unions’ position and that of the Labour Party, and more recently differences between UK and Scottish Labour. Scottish Labour leaders publicly regret having supported the Gender Recognition Reform Act and have demanded the Scottish Government implement the Supreme Court ruling immediately and in full.

While the UK Labour Health Minister met with the Darlington nurses and instructed NHS trusts in England to implement the law, its new Women and Equalities Minister has requested a regulatory impact assessment before the updated EHRC code of practice is laid before Parliament. Meanwhile Your Party, at its founding conference, adopted gender ideology as a core principle, with Zarah Sultana warning in advance that ‘gender critical’ applicants are not welcome (amounting to unlawful discrimination). This is already Green Party policy north and south of the border.

There is a lot at stake here for the Left and trade union movement. Not just their credibility but also potential legal risks. The fact that women are being forced as a very last resort to take legal action against their own trade unions, to get them to comply with the law on women’s rights, indicates the state of crisis the movement is in. Sandie Peggie intends legal action against her union, the RCN, for failing her. Cases are also being taken against PCS for breaches of the Equality Act by women members who have already exhausted internal processes and been frustrated.

The even greater danger is that this opens the door for the Right to pose as defenders of women’s rights and give it ammunition with which to attack trade unions, and all in a context in which Far Right support is growing amongst working people. These are the dangers created when class organisations including parties claiming to represent working class interests abandon material reality for the dead end of identity ideology. An ideology associated with the establishment the Far Right are kicking against.

TRADE UNIONS MUST STEP UP TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Kiri Tunks of the Filia Trade Union Women’s Network on why the trade union movement needs to put its money where its mouth is when it comes to dealing with rising violence against women.

It is clear from a casual search that unions in Britain understand that violence against women is endemic. Many union websites provide easily accessible guidance, toolkits and model policies. For example, there is Unison’s Sexual Harassment is a Workplace Issue and Usdaw’s Sexual Harassment – Call It Out; or Unite’s Domestic Violence and Abuse Advice and Guidance and the NEU’s Domestic Abuse and Violence Workplace Toolkit.

After years of campaigning by unions and other organisations, employers now have a legal duty to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace. The Worker Protection Act was implemented in 2024 and the Employment Rights Bill promises to strengthen these obligations further. Both these developments build on the global work of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), specifically Convention 190, the first international treaty recognising “the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment.”

Despite these provisions, there is little evidence that employers are taking their new obligations seriously. In 2024 the United Nations declared that violence against women and girls in Britain is a national threat. This year shows no sign of improvement so whatever efforts are being made must be redoubled – and confronted within our own movement as well as in the workplace. The TUC general council statement on tackling sexual harassment in the trade union movement is clear that it is women who are overwhelmingly affected by harassment and abuse.

It outlines actions that all TUC affiliates should be taking to implement “meaningful and lasting culture change” and ensure such change is “ongoing and sustainable.”

“There is little evidence that employers are taking their new obligations seriously.”

The TUC statement calls for standalone anti-sexual harassment policies, codes of conduct and reporting routes, transparent and fair processes for handling reports, good remedies and preventative actions.

It is good to see the trade union movement recognising the issue and taking steps to challenge these behaviours and the structures and culture that enable them. But unless the TUC calls result in action nothing will change.

The trade union movement is not alone in this struggle. As the recent FiLiA report, [Making Policy Work for Women](#), makes clear, attempts to tackle violence and abuse against women are failing:

- One in four women are subject to domestic abuse in their lifetimes and one woman is killed by a man every three days. Women are 27 times more likely than men to experience online harassment and abuse. An estimated 121,000 women experience rape in England and Wales each year.
- Sexual harassment and violence in schools – one in six children are estimated to have been subjected to sexual abuse, with girls being three times more likely to experience it than boys. Almost a third of young women don't feel safe at school.
- 71 per cent of women have experienced some form of sexual harassment in a public space with only 4 per cent of them reporting the incidents to an official body.
- Women from black and minoritised groups and disabled women are more likely to experience violence and face greater levels of disbelief and victim blaming.



The FiLiA report identifies some key failures including the failure to turn policy into reality; inconsistent data collection; the slow progress in addressing the harms of violent pornography; police-perpetrated violence within a culture of sexism, misogyny, racism, ableism and homophobia; inadequate funding for specialist women's services over many years.

Violence against women is systemic, widely tolerated and enabled.

The labour movement must be at the forefront of changing this so that home, work and public places are safe for women and girls.

We must make sure the actions outlined by the TUC are implemented. Trade unionists have been key in challenging injustice and oppression. It is time we did the same to end violence against women and girls.

For more information about the FiLiA Trade Union Network visit www.filia.org.uk.

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“The labour movement must be at the forefront of changing this so that home, work and public places are safe for women and girls.”

PRECARITY BREEDS

Yana Petticrew takes a critical look at the Left's response to the rise of the Far Right and calls for a strategy that engages with the real issues for the working class.

It is starting to become apparent that Scotland's Left have become sclerotic in their approach towards the encroaching Far-Right. School disco songs and cheeky placards are not cutting it anymore, and in the arena of deteriorating attention spans coupled with extremely heightened emotions, we are losing at every single step. Reason has been lost to rhetoric and theory has overtaken praxis by a storm, leaving swathes of the Left unable to speak like a normal human being. Workplaces remain unorganised, flat closes remain isolated and divided, and we remain still. While we politick with one another in half-empty halls and flock to Buchanan steps for our mandated hour of protest, the working class of Scotland are faced with rapidly deteriorating material conditions and they certainly have questions about it – the Far-Right are answering with glee.

“Scotland's Left have become sclerotic in their approach towards the encroaching Far-Right.”

Described as a vigilante group, 'Scot's Active' have been walking the streets of Glasgow at night in a supposed effort to protect women and girls from sexual assault, as well as suicide prevention.

Their social media content often includes videos of mostly men dressed in black patrolling the city centre and surrounding areas that they conclude are hotspots for sexual violence and suicide. Self-identified as a Public Service on their Facebook page, a post from 14th December 2025 describing the group's work includes...

'...we walk round and in any "hotels" holding illegal men that have been spotted and reported creeping women out trying to pickpocket people or trying to commit sexual crimes on people... The reason we do this is that we have all seen far too much horrible things happening in our city centre and in the recent months it's been getting a lot worse and with the influx of illegal men entering our country being treated like royalty while [committing] these crimes... We need the people of Glasgow to stand together and take action against anyone who thinks it's acceptable to do anything of these horrible acts to our women and young people.'

They have reported interventions in sexual assaults and suicides, as well as the surveillance of people that they deem suspicious that they report to the police.

Videos often include clips of torches roaming over delivery couriers' bikes and bags, making clear that while Scotland remains reliant on a service characterised by cheap and exploitative labour, its workers are to be treated with suspicion due to a highly racialised perception of courier work.



(Vue cinema workers' strike)

It is somewhat doubtful that Scot's Active activists would be concerned with how the gig economy dictates poverty wages in exchange for long, physically gruelling shifts; how casualised and precarious service jobs are leading to rapidly increased in-work poverty, predominantly affecting women; and how employers in these sectors are becoming extremely vicious in their attempts to suppress unionisation. They instead use migrants as a scapegoat for worsening conditions, promoting racist ideology under the guise of protecting women and girls.

Many remain on the frayed edges of our social fabric feeling that social order has entirely collapsed, and in many ways it has. Youth unemployment records broken, wait times at GPs spiralling, industries collapsing, and safe affordable housing a luxury. Available work for young people is often precarious and low-paid, and universities consistently cut places for Scottish students as they profiteer from international students. As one commenter on Scot's Active points out, 'the police canny do their job.'

The argument the Left must be making is that these material conditions are not worsened by those fleeing from imperialist violence in the Global South, but by the likes of our employers and our politicians. At every single level we are faced with austerity as it seeps into the wounds left by the founding of neoliberalism and private equity, with working class people left to rot atop the mound of destroyed public services, secure employment, and safe housing. It is therefore the material and moral duty of the Left to not only mobilise on suitable evenings and weekends, but to deeply organise in their workplaces and communities.

We must undertake the relentless, difficult, and thankless work of supporting our fellow workers and neighbours with issues they face most sharply, whether those are working conditions and employment rights, rent increases and evictions, the inability to access affordable childcare, or to eat healthy nutritious food. It is daily work that must inform our every interaction with another and every action we take, understanding that it probably won't be hand-to-hand combat in the streets that defeats the Far-Right, but instead numerous series of hard conversations littered with misunderstandings. And if we are to hope for any kind of future, it is imperative that the Left understands that the future of the movement is here now.

As of January 2025, there are 85 hospitality workers on strike with Unite Hospitality at the Village Hotel in Govan and at VUE Cinema St Enoch with the average age of strikers being 19 and 22 respectively, and approximately half of them are the young women the Far-Right claim to care for. A demand carried across both disputes is for transport home to be subsidised by the employer after late-night shifts. They have organised themselves to take the first hotel strike since 1979 and the first cinema strike in Scotland because they refuse the notion that their safety hinges solely on spending two hours' wages on a taxi or walking home alone in the dark. Rather than rely on racist vigilante groups, they are holding their employers to account on their safety in a show of awe-inspiring collective strength that demonstrates the power held in a workplace and how communities can reach across social differences to fight back on an issue that affects them all. The Left could certainly learn from these young workers on their discipline, their base-building, and their determination in clawing back their own future from those that stole it.

“We must undertake the relentless, difficult, and thankless work of supporting our fellow workers and neighbours with issues they face most sharply.”

CALL FOR LEFT UNITY IN MAY ELECTIONS

Vince Mills, joint-secretary of ROSE, issues a call for left-wing unity ahead of this year's Scottish Parliament election.

With less than 6 months to go, the smart money is on the SNP retaining its dominant position in the Scottish Parliament, with Green votes guaranteeing their majority. This is despite endless failures by the governing SNP in everything from health to the efficient running of ferry services. We know they are likely to hang on to power because poll after poll keeps telling us that. The polls also tell us that support for the SNP has fallen precipitously since the last election. So, is there hope that there could be a left challenge?

An Ipsos Poll on 10th December 2025 for Holyrood constituency voting intention was as follows: SNP: 35% (+1 point compared with Ipsos' previous poll taken 12-18 June) Reform UK: 18% (+4 points); Labour: 16% (-7); Conservatives: 11% (+1); Liberal Democrats: 9% (no change); Scottish Green Party: 9% (no change); Other: 2% (+1)

For the Holyrood regional list voting intentions: SNP: 28% (+2 points); Labour: 18% (-4); Scottish Green Party: 17% (+2); Reform UK: 17% (+1); Conservatives: 12% (+2); Liberal Democrats: 7% (-1); Alba Party: 1% (-1); Other: 1% (-2). Ballot Box Scotland's prediction of seats which was published a week before the Ipsos poll but pretty well in line with it, gave us this: SNP 63 seats; Scottish Labour 18; Reform UK 18; Conservatives 10; Liberal Democrats 10; Scottish Green Party 10.

Any left challenge depends on what you mean by "left". The Scottish Labour Party has chosen to focus less on its alternative to the SNP and more on the SNP's failings. After all, it worked for Starmer in 2024, didn't it? Just keep saying the political equivalent of "Liz Truss" and support for the SNP will simply collapse.

That of course is the problem. It did work for Keir Starmer and in government in Westminster, Labour is offering a preview of what Scottish Labour might be like in control of Holyrood - hardly a challenge to the establishment - European not just British capitalism, that is offering austerity, xenophobia, war, and in Gaza and the West Bank tacit support for the brutal subjugation of the Palestinian people as part of an attempt to create a greater Israel, from the River to the Sea.

“Any left challenge depends on what you mean by ‘left’.”

There are of course those in the Scottish Labour Party who really would like to offer an alternative, but ironically, their voices are only likely to be heard after the May elections. So candidates like Katy Clarke, Monica Lennon and Carol Mochan deserve all the support that can be offered by Labour's progressive members and supporters, to make sure that they will be in the Scottish Parliament to make the case for a left Scottish Labour Party.

So, if not Labour who? Well, how about the Scottish Greens or the recently arrived Your Party? Firstly, Your Party has not yet decided formally whether it will contest the Scottish Parliament elections in May, a Scottish Your Party conference in February will decide that but co-founder Zarah Sultanah said recently: "The party are ready and it's Scottish members who are going to be leading that." Consequently, there is a widespread belief that Your Party will field candidates. The question is, where will their votes come from?

According to the psephologist, Professor John Curtice, the answer is likely to be Green party voters, a position given credence by the defection of three Green councillors to Your Party in October. If that is indeed what happens then the “left” voice in the Scottish Parliament (outside the small number of Scottish Labour and even smaller number of SNP dissidents) is likely to become more diverse rather than larger.

This is all the more worrying given the rise of the ultra-right in the shape of Reform UK and its boot boys protesting outside the hotels housing asylum seekers. Any notion that its increased presence will bolster the position of the SNP by acting as a kind of UK bogey man, even worse than the Tories, is contradicted by the very nature of protests and the votes it is receiving from Scottish working-class voters. The hotel protestors are waving saltires after all, and if Scotland became independent tomorrow, they would still be here demanding Scotland as opposed to the UK, expel asylum seekers and immigrants. Reform UK won its first local by-election in December 2025 in working class Whitburn and Blackburn with 32% of the vote.

This issue of ROSE magazine has been about the crisis of the left. Whatever else the Scottish left does in the run up to the May elections, it needs to come together on a strategy for defeating the ultra-right.

Opinion polling now suggests that immigration is the third most significant issue for Scots. It is third, because the ultra-right has managed to “mainstream” their notion that immigrants are the source of the increasing attacks on their standard of living and the social decay that austerity and poverty bring. At the very least, the left should seek to have a common set of basic demands.

First attack the material base of poverty through increased corporate and wealthy individual taxation to fund better services and infrastructure. Secondly demand social ownership to drive up employment in well paid rewarding employment. Thirdly expose the lie that immigrants, shut up in shoddy hotel accommodation, are the source of social and economic misery. We know where that comes from: the endless pursuit of greed and power embedded in capitalism. It is time we ended it.

“At the very least, the left should seek to have a common set of basic demands.”



(Trade unionists gather to demand better outside the Scottish Parliament, credit: Colin Mearns)

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**"TO BE TRULY RADICAL IS TO
MAKE HOPE POSSIBLE
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CONVINCING."**

RAYMOND WILLIAMS