GREENPRINT

News from the Scottish Green Party
Naidheachdan o Phàrtaidh Uaine na h-Alba

SCOTTISH GREENS

Spring (An t-Earrach) 2012

Power in the hands of the people

By Richard Doherty

That Scotland would benefit from seeing more Greens elected is evident when comparing and contrasting the proposals put forward by Scottish Green MSPs and councillors with this year's final budgets.

Despite being urged by Green MSPs to reconsider the implications of their budget for workers, the Scottish Government refused to budge on its real terms pay cut for the public sector, copying the Westminster coalition. Prospective students will also find access to education more difficult as the extra £10m announced for colleges must be seen against a massive £34m cut, meaning they are still losing £24m.

Alison Johnstone MSP said: "Ministers are harming the chances of young people and particularly women, many trying to juggle childcare, the cost of which is amongst the highest in Europe. We won't break the cycle of poverty and disadvantage by limiting education opportunities."

In addition, only 1% of the £28bn budget is aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions, despite Scotland's responsibility to compensate for a failure to meet last year's emissions reduction targets.

Patrick Harvie MSP said: "The SNP continue to make the wrong choices with precious resources. It's shocking they're only committing 1% of the budget to measures to reduce emissions, while they plough ahead with road schemes that will add to the problem. Properly funding measures that reduce emissions would put our economy on a truly sustainable footing, creating long-term jobs."

Scottish Greens have called for the establishment of a publicly owned Scottish renewables company. Mr Harvie said: "Scotland's renewable energy market is already worth several billion pounds to the economy – just imagine what opportunities there would be if more of that value could be directed for public good."

For the benefit of generations now and to come, rather than punishing workers unfairly for financial crises, reducing access to college, threatening our climate change ambitions and handing profits of our resources over to multinationals, a new approach is desperately needed locally as well as nationally.

Continues on page 4

Photo by Christian Kliesch

Editor's Letter

Welcome to 2013, and many happy returns to the Green Party of England & Wales on their 40th anniversary!

With so many Scottish Greens in Nottingham at the end of February to visit the GPEW Spring conference, we'll be sure to feature your reflections on the event and its associated celebrations in our next edition.

As so often is the case while gathering content for Greenprint, real-world events have unfolded at such a pace that it is impossible to include everything we'd like to. Everybody seems finally to have shaken off the lethargy and been busy setting the political agenda for the year ahead, although it would be better if certain people never bothered.

Also during production of this edition, Westminster voted in favour of equal marriage – a truly historic event that still wasn't enough to forgive David Cameron's otherwise diabolical tenure as prime minister, in which his Con-Dem government have been found to be in breach of anti-slavery legislation. Though the lack of surprise, sanction or renewed determination to protest was telling.

With the Scottish parliament shortly to hold their own vote on equal marriage, the next edition of Greenprint will be sure to feature your comment, analysis and hopefully celebration. Until then, do enjoy the comment and analysis our members have in store for you here.

Richard Doherty

Don't need this in the post? Drop us a line and next time we'll send it to you by email instead.

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Contents

Mun cuairt na dùthcha | Around the nation

P3 **Natalie Bennett in Scotland**
Gary Dunion on the GPEW leader's visit to Scotland

P4 **Scotland's 2013 budget season**
Continued look at what we are bringing to the table

P5 **Campaigning for a Living Wage**
Andrew McGowan MSYP on the campaign for fair pay

P6 **Cedar Court resists the rent hikes**
John Yorkshire meets Glasgow residents making a stand

Uainich Thall thairis | Greens Abroad

P7 **Merkel's Red-Green nightmare**
Lynne Hunter explores Green triumph in Lower Saxony

Am Fòram | The Forum

P8 **Scrap Trident**
Veronika Tudhope and David Mackenzie highlight 2014 as the best opportunity for Scotland to finally stand free from nuclear weapons

Beachd | Viewpoint

P10 **When welfare cuts bite**
Gavin Corbett takes a look at Scotland's welfare options

P11 **One Billion Rising**
Richard Doherty takes a look at the campaign to end a pandemic

P12 **Crunch time for big biomass in Scotland**
Oliver Munnion examines the short-term biomass plans

P13 **Greens call for an end to Ecocide**
Fabio Villani and Richard Doherty outline the campaign

P14 **The labour behind the label**
Jane Metcalfe on the fatal flaws in global production

Pleidhe airson Cofaidh | Coffee Break

P15 Book Review: Radical by Maajid Nawaz

In Greenprint 2 (Members' Supplement):

- Further insight into Natalie Bennett's recent visit to Scotland, including her views on gender and sustainability
- In anticipation of the Heldon & Laich by-election
- Information for this year's Scottish Green Party conference to be held in Inverness
- Reports from recent anti-fascist demonstrations in Dundee and Glasgow

Natalie Bennett in Scotland

By Gary Dunion

Green Party of England & Wales leader Natalie Bennett visited Scotland in January, speaking to SGP party members and others in an open meeting in Edinburgh, hosted by Patrick Harvie MSP.

Natalie opened by setting out her policy priorities: the re-nationalisation of the railways, the Living Wage, and a sustainable, socially just energy policy. She added that on top of these priorities, another matter close to her heart is fighting against the privatisation of the NHS.

She pointed out that this agenda is radical by the standards of the British political establishment and media, but resonates closely with very many regular people. To take rail re-nationalisation as an example: the Green Party is the only major party proposing a policy supported by 70% of the electorate.

The Greens' aim, she said, should be to replace the Westminster consensus of permanent privatisation, unemployment and cuts with a "positive Green picture" characterised by strong local economies based on the restoration of manufacturing and food production.

On the topic of growth, Natalie rejected the idea of focusing on either the expansion or contraction of the discredited GDP measure: "we all agree that GDP is nonsense, so I'm not interested in arguing what the GDP growth figure is."

She reiterated GPEW's "three yeses" position on the EU – yes to a referendum, yes to reform of the EU (to strengthen social and environmental co-operation and weaken the corporate hold over EU policy), and yes to continued UK membership.

Moving on to election strategy, Natalie announced that the Party would identify 10 'Advance Seats' around England and Wales to target long-term as Westminster prospects, on top of the already well-developed Brighton Pavilion and Norwich South constituencies. The aim will be to ensure that every Green member has a seat near them where they can contribute. 2010's three target seats were clustered within 100 miles of London, meaning that the energy and expertise of members in the north and west often went unused.

Natalie said she placed a high priority on building stronger connections with the Green movement, which she described as "everything from Occupy and UK Uncut to the RSPB and the National Trust." Some campaign groups, she said, have begun to see that lobbying alone can bring only limited success while there is no strong advocate within politics for their position, and have indicated interest in working more closely with the Green Party. She has moved to develop the Party's relationships with trade unions, including meeting with TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady.

"The Greens' aim should be to replace the Westminster consensus of permanent privatisation."

Asked whether the targeting of Lib Dem voters was particularly key for Greens, Natalie said that there were simply not enough of them to make them the main target, and that many were former Labour supporters anyway: "clearly the biggest group of people that we can get votes from are Labour voters."

With her eye firmly on the next electoral challenge – the 2014 Euro election, Natalie pointed out that a

1.6% swing to the Greens in 2009 would have elected an extra four MEPs, and set this as the party's target for 2014, saying "I think we can deliver six MEPs and of course with Scotland we go up to seven."

Scotland's 2013 Budget Season

By Richard Doherty

Continued from front page

In Glasgow, Green councillors put forward a budget to halt cuts of £2.4m to education provision for children with additional needs, protecting the number of Additional Support for Learning teaching staff, as well as the Additional Support for Learning summer and term time programme. Other proposals included protecting voluntary and community groups from Labour's £4m cuts in grants and contracts, to provide vital services for the most disadvantaged across the city. Additionally, Greens supported income generation from new technologies, and secured funding to repair potholes, pavements and cycle routes.

Cllr Martha Wardrop said: "We are developing new initiatives to reduce the costs of energy within buildings and across our city streets using LED technologies. This will generate new training and job opportunities and assist in reducing the energy bill."

As well as proposing funds to improve access to information and better participation in council decisions, the Edinburgh Greens identified almost £14m in the city's coffers – made up of additional income from council tax on empty and second homes – that can only be used for housing. They suggested a substantial investment of £10m in a Warmer Homes programme targeted on the lowest income households. Such a programme would support over 160 new jobs and new apprenticeships.

Cllr Gavin Corbett said: "Scotland's capital should lead the country in investing in jobs, training and protecting the most vulnerable from welfare cuts."

In Midlothian, the SNP-led administration made the bulk of their proposals two months before others expected it. Cllr Ian Baxter said: "At the start of the process I approached both [SNP and Labour] groups seeking a meeting to discuss their proposals. Disappointingly, Labour did not even respond. In contrast, the SNP discussed their proposals in detail with me and I raised a number of concerns. Some of the more contentious proposals were dropped.

"There are other issues I have either influenced or will be watching closely over the next year, when I will be in a better position to put forward my own proposals rather than reacting to others'."

"Scotland's capital should lead the country in investing in jobs, training and protecting the most vulnerable from welfare cuts."

In both 2011 and 2012, the financial straitjacket imposed on all local authorities by the Scottish Government saw Aberdeenshire make over £20m of cuts, only to underspend by the same amount each financial year. Cllr Martin Ford identified the main reason for underspend being difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff. The budget amendment put forward by the Democratic Independent and Green Group (DIGG) made provision for improving workers' terms and conditions in order to address this.

Rather than putting the £19.5m budget surplus to swell the Council's already considerable reserves, DIGG proposed investing much of it in renewable energy – projected to give the Council over £2m new annual income, as well as using some to reverse unnecessary cuts in education, and fund refurbishments and improvements to libraries and museums. DIGG also proposed new spending on Pupil Support Assistants, Community Learning and Development, and major new investment for public transport. Fundamentally, the DIGG budget proposed that Council could afford a higher level of on-going revenue spending, part-funded from renewable energy generation.

Cllr Ford said: "The record of under-spending was partly a consequence of unduly pessimistic assumptions – leading to unnecessary cuts. Sadly, the DIGG are in opposition in Aberdeenshire. Our amendment was, inevitably, heavily defeated. To actually get things done, at any level, there's no substitute for being in government."

Photo by Andy Miah

Campaigning for a Living Wage

By Andrew McGowan MSYP

With every Scottish Green MSP and Councillor supporting the Scottish Youth Parliament's One Fair Wage campaign for a Scottish Living Wage, leading campaigner Andrew McGowan MSYP outlines the cause for Greenprint.

In June 2012, Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament chose to fight for a better wage for young workers by selecting our 'One Fair Wage' campaign. This was one of the top issues raised by young Scots in our Picture The Change manifesto consultation which received over 42,000 responses. With 78% agreeing that there should be an equal minimum wage for all, it is clear that this is an issue that greatly concerns young people in Scotland.

The scandal of in-work poverty is completely unacceptable in modern Scotland. It's abhorrent that our society is ok with investment bankers receiving multi-million pound bonuses, whilst 16-year-olds are expected to work for less than £4 an hour.

That's one of the reasons the Scottish Youth Parliament chose last June to join the campaign for a Scottish Living Wage. Young people believe passionately there should be no age discrimination in terms of wages, and that everyone deserves at least enough money for a decent standard of living.

Sadly this is just not the case at the moment. Thousands of 16-17 year olds across Scotland receive little more than £3.68 per hour simply because of their age, fellow colleagues aged over 21 can expect a wage of £6.19 per hour. However it is not just the disparity of these levels of pay, it is that the minimum wage does not reflect the true cost of living. The Scottish Living Wage currently stands at £7.45 per hour and we believe that does take into account the expenditure necessary to have a minimum standard of living. Or to put it another way, at the moment two-thirds of children in poverty in Scotland come from working households – that's not acceptable.

So far our campaign has been successful in allowing MSYPs to engage with employers and decision makers on the issue of an equal living wage. Last year we welcomed the news that all 32 local authorities in Scotland, along with the Scottish Government have made a commitment to pay their workers at least £7.50 per hour.

However, more needs to be done. There are still tens of thousands of low-paid workers in the private sector. Just because these people don't work for the public sector doesn't mean the Scottish Government doesn't have an obligation to protect these workers from the problems of in-work poverty.

That's why SYP is calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to implement a Scottish Living Wage Recognition Scheme. We believe this scheme would provide an incentive to encourage good employers to adopt a Living Wage, provide a robust test to ensure employers really do pay these rates, and allow consumers to differentiate between employers who pay a fair wage and those who do not.

It has been over 40 years since the implementation of the Equal Pay Act which rightfully sought an end to pay being linked to gender. Now, in 2013, Scotland's young people should not settle for anything less than equal pay to the rest of their colleagues.

Andrew McGowan MSYP is a trustee of the Scottish Youth Parliament, and is the Lead Petitioner for the Scottish Living Wage Recognition Scheme.

Cedar Court resists the rent hikes

By John Yorkshire

Tenants in the Glasgow suburb of Maryhill are currently organising a campaign of resistance to rent hikes being imposed upon them by Queens Cross Housing Association.

Queens Cross is one of the largest providers of social housing in Glasgow with around 4,500 properties across the north west of the city. The housing association have come in for stark criticism however, after announcing a 4.6% rent hike for tenants staying in the Cedar Court high flats, following a 4.5% rise in rents last year. This massive increase over two years is especially hard on many tenants who are already being hit by increases in fuel bills, the bedroom tax and a public sector pay freeze.

Residents also complain that much vaunted improvements to the fabric of the flats and the surrounding area have failed to materialise. Residents I spoke to complained of damp flats, highly inefficient and expensive heating systems and lifts prone to breaking down.

Mark Rooney, a resident in Cedar Court for ten years complained bitterly that Queens Cross had repeatedly failed to deliver on promised improvements since taking over ownership of the blocks from Glasgow Housing Association. Mark, who is registered blind and in receipt of disability benefit, says he faces having to decide between heating his flat and spending money on food.

Alice Coy, a neighbour of Mark's who works as a nurse, explained to me how these pressures combined with a perceived lack of consultation from the housing association spurred the residents to begin a campaign against the rent rises. Alice described how she and other tenants had gone door to door across the entire estate to organise resistance to the rent hikes. After a couple of weeks of hard work, a group of local activists have organised a petition of 600 signatures which they presented to the Queens Cross management during a

demonstration outside their offices in early February. They have also manufactured banners condemning the rent hikes which, wind allowing, are displayed from the balconies of all three high rise blocks. Activists have also translated material into Chinese and Polish in order to get their message across to tenants from these communities.

The campaigners are dedicated to fighting the rent hikes and improving their area, but they also hope that the spirit of solidarity and unity of purpose that they have shared during the campaign will lead to improvements in other areas of life for people in the area. As Alice put it: "We're gaining a better feeling of community. We feel like we know each other better and we can look after each other and help each other out with other things."

In the short time the campaign has been running they have done a great job of raising awareness and garnering support, both within the estate and across the rest of the city.

Anybody wishing to get involved should contact Alice Coy via the campaign's web page at cedarsaysno.wordpress.com

Going Green in Lower Saxony

By Lynne Hunter

Lower Saxony's nail-biting election of 20 January was a landmark result for Germany's Bündnis 90/die Grünen (Greens). Lynne Hunter outlines the implications it may have for Germany as a whole.

After polling so low (<1%) as to be ineligible for election cost refunds, the suggested ban on Germany's far right NPD may be unnecessary. The Pirate Party's initial success appears now to have ended, while far left Die Linke were unsuccessful in clearing the 5% hurdle necessary to enter parliament, continuing a slow decline in Germany's western regions.

Perhaps more significant, however, are the similarities between Lower Saxony and the German government: a strong and popular leader (Angela Merkel/David McAllister) in an unpopular coalition [their CDU (Conservatives) and the FDP (Liberals)] with a slight lead in the polls, but not enough to make up 50% of the vote.

The CDU's David McAllister, fearing his Lower Saxony coalition partners would not enter parliament, hinted at understanding if people used their second vote for the FDP, a view he later reneged. Too late. The 'vote-loan' (Leihstimme) phenomenon kicked in, bringing about a CDU loss of 6.5 percentage points and the FDP's best ever Lower Saxony result of 9.9% - still not enough to remain in power.

The Bündnis 90/die Grünen campaign on issues such as more renewable energy and an end to tuition fees and intensive farming paid off with a jump of 5.7 to 13.7% of the vote, meaning a coalition of SPD (Socialists) and Greens won by a single seat.

There are further implications for Germany's Bundesrat, the second chamber comprising regional governments, which now have an SPD, Die Linke and Green majority who could reject and propose legislation with the general election in mind, creating major obstacles for Merkel.

"The Green campaign on renewable energy and an end to tuition fees paid off."

Keen to avoid McAllister's mistakes, Merkel is likely to distance her campaign from the FDP and move somewhat to the left, as the CDU remaining in power will probably require a highly improbable coalition with the Greens or an increasingly unlikely coalition with the red SPD.

Jürgen Trittin, one of the Greens' two top candidates for the general election, pointed out that Lower Saxony's result is the twelfth election loss in a row for Merkel, and 50 million Germans now live in Red-Green or Green-Red governed regions. Trittin said: "We now have the task of convincing the remaining 30 million Germans of the advantages of this model. Nine months is a good length of time, much can be done".

Why Scotland's referendum matters for world peace

By Veronika Tudhope

Can a wee place like Scotland affect world disarmament? Yes! Can you help make it happen? Yes! How do you have to vote? Yes!

It's not just the Scottish Greens who voted to support the 'yes' campaign, so did the Scottish CND at their AGM a few weeks later. In SCND, as in the SGP, there are differing views on the issues surrounding the referendum and the vision for Scotland's future. Rather like the Greens the one thing we are agreed on is that we do not want nuclear weapons stationed in Scotland.

At the moment all Great Britain's Nuclear Bombs, over 200 of them, are situated at the Faslane/Coulport naval base, about 30 miles from Glasgow city centre. If Scotland were to vote for independence this might all change.

It is unlikely that rUK (remainder of the UK) would wish to store its nuclear arsenal in another country – they would wish to have it within their own borders. As 66% of the Scottish population are against hosting trident on Scottish soil a future Scottish government would be called upon to act on this wish. A good start has already been made in that both the SGP and the SNP have passed resolutions stating that the constitution of an independent Scotland would include a statement on being nuclear-free.

So where would Trident go? A deep harbour is needed for Trident submarines, neither too close to a population centre nor too remote from land transport, and a lot of land. During the 1960s, a number of places were identified as possible to sit the nuclear submarine base, mostly in Scotland. In the intervening 50 years all English and Welsh sites have changed and are now even less suitable than they were then. In other words there is simply nowhere for Trident to go.

So it is Friday afternoon in autumn 2014. We have woken up with a terrible hangover in an independent Scotland. We know this means Scotland, and the rest of Britain, will be nuclear-free, but how long will it take to dismantle trident and make it harmless?

Research done by John Ainslie of SCND says the removal of the keys and triggers takes 24-48 hours, so if the submarines are in port we could be a non-nuclear weapons state before we go back to work on Monday. If any of the submarines are out at sea and we need to wait for them to come in, it might be the end of the week. By the end of two years all the parts of the trident nuclear weapons will have been dismantled and made safe. Another part of the world will have become nuclear-free and the world will be a safer place for all of us. All because enough of us put a cross bedside 'yes'.

Scotland is already in a unique position as a country where the majority of the people and the parliament are against the nuclear weapons within its borders but unable to evict them. As a result of the proposed referendum we are in an important position too. We are being given the chance to make a decision that brings about British nuclear disarmament and makes progress towards world peace and human security.

To mark our pivotal position in relation to international progress towards world peace, two conferences are taking place in Scotland this Spring, with two meetings in Edinburgh in April, including a trip to Faslane:

PNND (Parliamentarians for Nuclear Disarmament)
www.pnnd.org/about.html

Abolition 2000
www.abolition2000.org

Join the 'Scrap Trident: let Scotland lead the way to a nuclear free world' weekend of protest and action from 13 – 15 April: scraptrident.org

SCRAP TRIDENT

Let Scotland lead the way to a nuclear-free world

By David Mackenzie

For those of us who have been on the case for some time it is cheering to see so many Trident-related stories and opinions in the conventional media. There have been times when being down at Faslane causing a stushie was practically the only way to get any media attention at all.

But the fact that Britain's WMDs are rarely out of the news these days is no reason for us to think that the job is done. There are three reasons why we still need acts of protest and peaceful civil resistance.

Reason One is very much about 2014 and the potential for Scottish independence to deliver the big prize – the removal of Trident from Scotland, with the knock-on disabling of the UK's nuclear weapon system for lack of a suitable location, plus the hope that the nuclear disarmament of Britain will kick-start the stalled engine of global abolition. Scottish political leaders who want Trident scrapped will be under huge and varied pressure to wobble from their principles. They will need courage. They will need the encouragement and backing of people who will make popular Scottish rejection of these hideous weapons visible. We can begin to give them that at the Scrap Trident weekend in April.

Reason Two is about the substance of the argument. The case against Trident needs to be focussed clearly on the fundamental issue – the inescapable wrongness of actively deploying a weapon designed for mass murder. Strategic absurdity and obscene cost in a time of austerity are important arguments and indeed, the cost argument has an obvious moral dimension, but at a time when clarity, strength and determination are required the question has to be honed down to this sharp point of principle. People en masse on the streets of Glasgow and the Faslane base make the core of the objection clear.

Reason Three is about people. We cannot afford to leave it to the politicians, the establishment, the decision makers. This is true even at a time in Scotland when so many of our elected representatives take their stand with us. We all have to take responsibility. And we can have realistic hope that the Scrap Trident weekend will not be simply a one-off demonstration of our rejection of Trident but may be a significant first step in helping to give our country the only identity that really counts – an identity based not on fear and hatred but on community and humanity.

When welfare cuts bite

By Cllr Gavin Corbett

From listening to the public's concerns, it is clear that welfare reform requires both short-term and long-term responses.

2013 is the year of welfare cuts. I know, we said that of 2012 and will certainly say it of 2014 and 2015. The UK Government's assault on the welfare system is long and sustained and its effects are cumulative.

Faced with such an assault what do Greens do? First of all, I believe it is important to deal with the here and now and, within the limits of our powers, to take the rough edges off benefit cuts. Some of the options for doing that are less palatable than others but there is no "do-nothing" option. Here in Edinburgh, Green councillors have been looking at a "welfare reform mitigation package": for example, enhancing advice services, while our proposals on energy efficiency can seek to reduce energy bills for people in rented homes to offset housing benefit cuts.

One of the most irrational changes is the so-called "bedroom tax" where working-age people in socially-rented homes will see their housing benefit reduced if they are deemed to be under-occupying property. So a single person or a couple without children living in a two bedroom property will see their housing benefit cut by 14% and are expected to make up the difference from other meagre income. It will cause immerse hardship and will do little to address mismatch in household type to house size as that issue is far more one for older households and owner-occupiers – and I am not suggesting extending penalties to them!

So I have raised a number of possibilities to mitigate this impact: looking at the council part-topping up rents with the money that it will lose in arrears anyway; rethinking our provision of 1-bedroom homes; how we allocate tenancies; and what we do about joint or shared tenancies. None of these ends the bedroom tax but they can make it less worse.

So it is not enough to propose mitigation. That is always a rear-guard action. Over the horizon the prospect of independence challenges us to consider what kind of welfare system we might want. How do we build the social solidarity of universal benefits in the way Scandinavians often do? How do we better value older people and, at the same time, give proper focus to the corrosive problem of unemployment among young people? Those are system-redesign questions.

And we need to consider our own shibboleths as well. Citizen's Income has been the cornerstone of our welfare proposals for all of the 23 years I have been a party member. But we usually keep it on the top policy shelf, great for articulating visions of a green society but slightly clunkier once we get into detail of how much Citizen's Income would be and what it would cost. Either we need to engage with the detail or be prepared to consider new ideas.

Plenty to chew upon there!

Gavin Corbett is Green Councillor for Edinburgh's Fountainbridge / Craiglockhart ward.

One Billion Rising

By Richard Doherty

This Valentine's Day marked the beginning of the year-long One Billion Rising (OBR) campaign, in recognition of the fact that one in three women in the world – one billion in total – face violence in their lifetime.

The organisers describe OBR as a call to "express outrage, and to strike, dance and RISE to support an end to violence against women once and for all".

As I write this, I'm listening to the House of Commons' Violence Against Women debate, set against the back-drop of allegations that global hero figure Oscar Pistorius murdered his girlfriend, Reeva Steenkamp, following what police described as previous "allegations that were domestic in nature".

Sarah Green of the End Violence Against Women Coalition said the debate in the Commons was only taking place "because of the global focus on these issues brought about by OBR - and because leading women MPs from across the parties want this issue on the wider political agenda." Despite the post-Iraq generation often seeming reluctant to believe in the power of protest, the fact remains that if you really do believe in something, you have to get out on the streets and show it.

Yet, there are those who suggest OBR doesn't go far enough to address the problems in society that lead to such levels of abuse. Natalie Gyte, Head of Communications at Women's Resource Centre, said: "The primary problem with One Billion Rising is its refusal to name the root cause of women's inequality; its outright refusal to point the finger at a patriarchal system which cultivates masculinity and which uses the control and subjugation of women's bodies as an outlet for that machoism."

Whether Gyte is correct in suggesting that "a campaign with unprecedented media fire-power has failed to achieve anything other than to create a façade which will have no effect whatsoever upon the global pandemic which is gender-based violence", only time will tell, but she is correct that the campaign to end violence against women, has to be viewed as bigger than OBR in and of itself.

ONE BILLION RISING
STRIKE | DANCE | RISE!

A warning of the danger perceived to be inherent to campaigns viewed through the media lens individually, rather than seen in a broader context, can be seen in disillusion towards football's long-running Kick It Out campaign against racism. After years of high-visibility campaigning there is still abuse from spectators and players, and no meaningful sanctions to be seen. This season, high-profile black footballers in England distanced themselves from Kick It Out, citing complacency and a lack of meaningful influence.

The response from critics was to ask what influence such a protest would actually achieve. That's not easy to answer, but it doesn't address the point that the aims of the campaign to tackle a culture are perceived, by some of those victimised by that culture, to have become secondary to the campaign itself.

As Gyte alluded to, it may be that where idolised campaigns focus on consequences that problems in our culture cause, whether violence against women, racism, homophobia or anything else, they are treating a symptom of a much bigger disease, rather than the disease itself, which is our societies' systems being structured so as to perpetuate myths of gender, racial and sexual norms. Similarly, we allow hero-worship (particularly of men) to create a public persona so popular that nobody is willing or able to expose an abusive character, before it's far too late.

OBR may lay the foundations to tackle the pandemic of violence against women, either through breaking down barriers of ignorance or the meeting of minds the campaign generates. But my own hope is also that we, as societies, aren't so reliant on any campaign to solve our social ills for us, that we don't also look inwardly at what day-to-day actions of our own will help bring about a systemic change for the better.

Crunch time for big biomass

By Oliver Munnion

Photo by Jim Champion

The next couple of months will make or break industry hopes for new large-scale biomass projects in Scotland.

A recent government announcement on new subsidies for large biomass power stations is likely to be followed soon by decisions over Forth Energy's applications for two large biomass power stations in Grangemouth and Rosyth. Forth Energy's third such application, for Dundee, is expected to go back to consultation.

The new Scottish government proposals for Renewable Obligation Certificates (ROCs) for biomass will directly support destructive, low-efficiency, large-scale biomass – the opposite of what the policy was supposed to achieve.

But what are ROCs? Instead of direct subsidies a "green certificate" system is used, whereby different renewable generators get different numbers of ROCs depending on the type of energy system and whether or how the Scottish government has decided to reward it. Since they can be traded between energy companies this allows producers who are not eligible for them to buy them from those that are. The costs are passed on to the consumer – so higher energy bills for non-renewable generation and lower bills for renewable generation. How renewables are defined and whether the money actually goes to energy that is sustainable and low carbon is the crucial question.

The proposed changes to the system are: a cap on electricity-only biomass plants; continued "high ROCs" for so-called "good quality Combined Heat and Power (CHP)" plants; and more subsidies for energy companies burning coal or oil to convert whole units to biomass, rather than just co-firing.

While a cap on electricity-only biomass plants may sound positive, a loophole in CHP legislation means any power station achieving as little as 35% efficiency and producing a tokenistic amount of heat, even if it's only used to dry the power station's own woodchips, will be eligible for subsidies. This is a loophole so big that virtually every energy company can get their biomass power station to attract subsidies.

The final change, where coal power station conversions and co-firing get even more ROCs, is particularly bad news. This is because current conversions and co-firing account for more biomass consumption in the UK than all the dedicated biomass power stations put together. It's no surprise that energy companies are rushing to get in on it. Forth Energy has three applications for 100MWe biomass power stations. The new ROCs would make the company eligible for some £220 million a year in subsidies, or a whopping £5.5bn over the 25 year life span of the plants.

Other than increased energy bills, biomass power stations are as polluting as coal power stations (emitting more of some pollutants and less of others). Forth Energy claims "the majority of the fuel will be imported from sustainable sources overseas." However, imported biomass is far from sustainable. It is associated with corrupt certification, deforestation and clearcutting of highly biodiverse forests. Consequent landgrabbing dispossesses communities and causes violent conflict.

Finally, government policy and energy companies don't include power station emissions in their carbon calculations for biomass plants – the idea being that new trees planted to replace the ones used in power stations absorb the CO_2 released. But it doesn't take much to realise that it's a lot faster to burn a tree than to grow one. This means that until the tree is fully mature you've got a carbon debt being stored just where we don't want it – in the atmosphere. And, because you have to burn more weight in wood to generate an equivalent amount of coal, there are 50% more emissions with biomass than coal over the first 40 years.

You can join Friends of the Earth Scotland's e-campaign for Fergus Ewing to stop Forth Energy's biomass plans at act.foe-scotland.org.uk/lobby/21

Sign up to email alerts on biomass and biofuel developments at biofuelwatch.org.uk or by emailing biofuelwatch@ymail.com

This is an abridged version of an article originally published at brightgreenscotland.org

Greens call for an end to Ecocide

By Fabio Villani and Richard Doherty

The Scottish Green Party at its conference in October called for an international law of Ecocide – a crime against nature, humanity and future generations – to be established and recognised as an International Crime Against Peace.

Ecocide, in the definition proposed by international barrister Polly Higgins, is: "The extensive damage to, destruction of or loss of ecosystem(s) of a given territory, whether by human agency or by other causes, to such an extent that peaceful enjoyment by the inhabitants of that territory has been or will be severely diminished."

Four International Crimes Against Peace are already recognised within the Rome Statute: Crimes Against Humanity, War Crimes, Genocide, and Crimes of Aggression. A law on Ecocide would build on and extend one of the crimes already defined as a war crime in the Statute: "Intentionally launching an attack in the knowledge that such attack will cause incidental loss of life or injury...or widespread, long-term and severe damage to the natural environment..."

Whereas Polly Higgins campaigns for Ecocide to be added to the Rome Statue, and therefore be implemented as an international law, the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) campaign End Ecocide in Europe aims at a law with Europe-wide reach. This will still extend internationally however, as EU-registered companies or individuals will be liable for their activities outside the EU. End Ecocide in Europe supports the international Eradicating Ecocide campaign therefore by offering to set a precedent closer to home that can strongly influence international law.

The ECI offers EU citizens a chance to propose legislation or suggest amendments that the European Commission has the power to propose change in, the environment being one of them. If one million signatures are gathered from a minimum of seven countries within one year, the European Commission is duty-bound to review the proposal and give organisers the chance to speak publicly in the European Parliament. The European Commission then publish a formal response, explaining their stance and action they intend to take.

Existing EU legislation (Environmental Liability Directive and Environmental Crimes Directive) is softer than the proposed Ecocide Directive in many ways. As well as applying also to EU citizens and companies operating outside of the EU, the Ecocide Directive allows warrants for arrest which can result in imprisonment, and whereas Environmental Crimes Directive applies to air, soil, water, animals, plants, waste, dangerous substances, and habitats within protected sites, Ecocide Directive applies to ecosystems in a wider sense.

"It is time for Ecocide, the 'missing fifth crime' to be recognised."

Polly Higgins' proposal that Ecocide should be globally recognised as a Crime Against Peace is not new – Ecocide was originally to be included in the Rome Statute. It is time for this, the 'missing fifth crime', to be recognised, and used to prevent major harm to the environment and to those who depend on it. The Scottish Green Party agreed unanimously to support the campaign, and we look forward to living in a world free of Ecocide.

Photo by Sasia Kimel

You can sign up to the movement seeking to establish Ecocide law on an EU-wide scale at endecocide.eu
For more info, see eradicatingecocide.com

Fabio Villani is convenor of the Highland & Islands Green Party

The labour behind the label

By Jane Metcalfe

Dickensian as the word 'sweatshop' sounds, it's still an accurate description of most garment factory conditions.

Campaign group Labour Behind the Label explored typical workplaces in textile industry hotspots, finding overheated, cramped warehouses where several thousand workers produce 10,000 garments per day. Rights considered usual in the UK – maternity leave, trade unions, safe equipment – are minimal or non-existent. Even basic human needs, like lunch or toilet breaks go unmet.

Many factories are not merely uncomfortable, but dangerous. In 2010, a fire at a Gap-owned Bangladeshi factory killed 29 workers simply through blocked fire exits. As for minimum wage figures, a 2008 BBC investigation showed the reality, when one British 'exchange worker' discovered her twelve-hour-day's wages at a New Delhi factory didn't stretch to one can of deodorant. And these conditions aren't limited to overseas. A 2010 investigation found similar in a Leicester textile factory, which largely employed needy immigrants and paid them half the UK legal minimum wage.

The initial supply chain stages pose additional problems. GMO 'Bt cotton' was touted by seed companies like Monsanto as a valuable crop to help grow India's economy. The reality for farmers was spiralling debt from initial investment, expensive pesticides and fertilizers still needed for these allegedly pest-resistant crops, and the necessity of annually re-stocking sterile seeds. Between 1995 and 2011, 300,000 cotton farmers killed themselves to escape debt. Monsanto denies their responsibility (the state of Maharashtra disagrees; in August 2012 it banned the company's products). But whether the cause is ultimately US cotton subsidies, climate-change-related drought or GMO seeds, it's clear the cheap cotton supply provides no cushion against natural ups and downs of business.

Even the Organic label is not a smug middle-class luxury, but a response to an urgent human rights problem. Aside from clear environmental consequences (cotton accounts for 16% of the world's pesticide use), the Environmental Justice Foundation reports up to 77 million agricultural workers worldwide suffer from acute, often fatal, pesticide poisoning. In Pakistan and Egypt, it is often child labourers suffering this for the cotton that makes school uniforms for the West.

What to do? Clearly, the conventional tightly-squeezed garment supply chain perpetuates social and environmental abuses. You could support ethical clothing businesses, buy second-hand, or even sew your own. LabourBehindTheLabel.org provides an annual rating, enabling you to reward with your custom those companies currently improving. Either way, informing those you chose not to shop with precisely why is a good idea. Also, Sponsume.com offers a crowd-funding platform for many projects.

There's much to be done, and much that can be done.

Photo by Craftivist Collective

Coffee Break

Radical: my journey from Islamist extremism to a democratic awakening

Maajid Nawaz (WH Allen, 2012)

I was privileged to meet Maajid at the Edinburgh International Book Festival 2012 when he read work from 'Freedom From Torture Survivors'. He introduced himself as a former Amnesty Prisoner of Conscience and someone with first-hand knowledge of torture.

This book is his story, the story of a British-born son of Pakistani parents. Growing up in Essex, he charts his experience of the racism that was so accepted in the 1980s. A pivotal incident in his political development was the day when the other/white children decided that he was not allowed to play football with them because "this game's not for Pakis". This intolerance was baffling and life-changing.

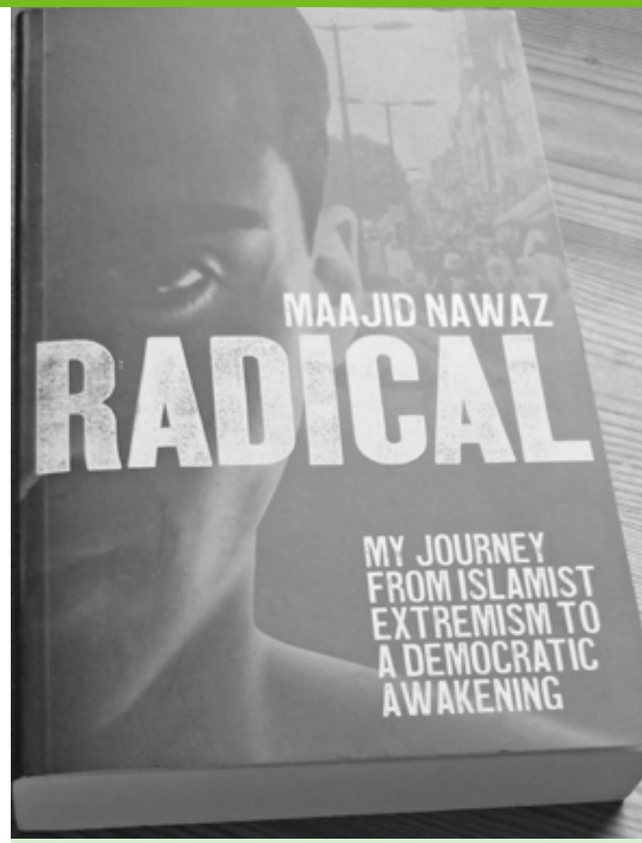
We move through his adolescence and it is easy to see how he became involved in the Islamist group, Hizb-ut-Tahrir. An excellent recruiter and public speaker, he rose quickly within the organisation, working in Europe and in Pakistan. He was imprisoned in Egypt in the aftermath of the Twin Towers attacks, with his experiences and the group of people he met there leading to a growing awareness of the folly of extremism.

That Amnesty International adopted him and his fellow convicts as prisoners of conscience, when he had been working to overthrow the British State, played a key part in his change of heart. He saw then that his values about justice were shared by many non-Muslims and that Islamist extremism could only create further injustice in its rigid imposition of codes of behaviour, religion and dress.

Maajid emerged from prison convinced the world must be persuaded against any tolerance of extremist politics and set up the Quilliam Foundation to do that. Courted by world leaders, he holds onto his neutrality and his right to challenge injustice wherever it appears.

This book is a great read and an education in terms of politics and race. Maajid offers us an insight into the dangerous impact of injustice by telling his unique and riveting story.

Reviewed by Moira Dunworth



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POST is a collaborative journalism project established by Dominic Hinde and Lee Bunce. Whilst both are active Greens it is not party political, being intended as a discussion forum for developing a sustainable society, both in terms of environment and welfare.

POST consists of a website, an e-magazine featuring longer in-depth articles, and side projects such as seminars and short films. Any suggestions for articles ranging from culture to technology and politics can be submitted to editors@postmag.org

postmag.org

Voice for Arran is the work of Alison Prince, offering a perspective of, and the outlook from Arran, and is always pursuing the green angle. You can register to receive a new email update on the first of every month.

voiceforarran.com

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Declaration
I accept and will further the aims of the Scottish Green Party, and am not a member of any other political party except a Green Party abroad.

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