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Breaking up the British State, Scotland, Independence and Socialism (2021, Bookmarks)

Chapter 6

Racism and anti-Racism in Scotland

Henry Maitles and Charlotte Ahmed

Introduction

With their much vaunted ‘civic nationalism’ and ‘welcoming of refugees’, successive Scottish governments and even some on the Scottish left would have us believe Scotland, in comparison to England, is relatively free of structural and institutional racism. The friends and family of Surjit Singh Chokar, Imran Khan, Sheku Bayoh, Mercy Baguma, the detainees in Dungavel detention centre and countless other victims of racial assault and racial injustice over the last thirty years prove otherwise.

Karl Marx insisted, “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas; that is the class which is the ruling material force in society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force”.¹ This of course includes racist ideas. Propagated from the top down, they are always; challenged by anti racists. The myth that Scotland has been less racist than Britain generally, is linked to notions of a progressive nationalism discussed elsewhere in the book; but like the rest of Britain, racism in modern Scotland is bound up with slavery and Empire.

It’s not just about the past; the racist institutions of the British state remain intact in Scotland. True, there have been positive statements for example, welcoming and inviting greater numbers of refugees. But too often the government and some of its supporters simply throws up it hands, saying Scotland does not have the power to take action; that it’s London’s fault. Westminster is truly culpable but that’s a poor excuse. The SNP have been governing Scotland since 2007, having won three Scottish Parliament elections and three Westminster elections in a row. Yet it continues to tolerate the

¹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (manuscript first published 1846) CJ Arthur (ed) (New York, International Publishers, 1970) p.64 Publishing: London, p120.

detention of asylum seekers imprisoned at Dungavel, denied their human rights, while condemning racist Tory policies. Increasingly Police Scotland operates without proper scrutiny and accountability for its actions – and in the case of Sheku Bayoh, with impunity. The present government devoted much of its energy into keeping Scotland in the anti-immigrant, fortress Europe, contradicting its own anti-racist, pro-immigrant aspirations.

Yet there is a tradition of resistance to racism in Scotland, reaching back to the early industrial revolution and the rise of the working class. This confusion of ideas can be explained through what the Italian revolutionary Gramsci called ‘contradictory consciousness’². So, workers who are continually taught to believe ‘too much’ immigration is bad can also see that the non-white person working and living alongside them is a co-worker and someone to be protected from racism. Even in the grimmest of situations, this can be true. Himmler, writing in Nazi Germany in 1938- five years after Hitler came to power -complained that the problem with Germans was “each one has his decent Jew”³ and didn’t want him/her subjected to violence.

There’s a myth that Scotland has always welcomed refugees and migrants yet, as this chapter will show, often people arriving here faced, and continue to face, resentment and aggression. So for example, Jewish children of the kindertransport remember their experiences positively, yet there was clear opposition to immigration of adults; for example, Glasgow University and the medical establishment’s opposition to foreign (Jewish) doctors being allowed entry.⁴

We need to challenge the myths and look to build on the real tradition of anti-racist activism as an essential part of the movement for independence. Collective action and the role of socialists and socialist ideas can be decisive in shaping events.

² ‘One might almost say that he has two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness): one which is implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with all his fellow workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed’

Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London, 1971) p641

³ Heinrich Himmler Posen Speech 4 October, 1943 [Reference?]

⁴ University of Glasgow Senate minutes, Vol 19, 23 June 1938, p104; A. Sherman, *Island Refuge: GB and Refugees from the Third Reich*, (London, 1973), p48.

Scotland and Slavery

Scotland's role in slavery and Empire, previously buried under a mountain of lies and evasions, has belatedly and gradually been uncovered. Angus Calder's pioneering *Revolutionary Empire*, first published in 1981, was a good, early start, challenging the orthodox, Anglo-centric account of Empire and dispelling the amnesia over the role Scots played in colonialism and slavery:

"The Pakistani who sells me my paper most mornings is part of the same process of history as myself, and salient in it is the disturbing figure of John Johnstone, arch-profiteer from the Rape of Bengal after the battle of Plassey: even the habitual warmth, in portraiture, of Henry Raeburn could not soften the sharp features of that cynically rapacious fellow -Scot".⁵

Rapacious Scots played a key role in the British Empire, greater comparative to their size, than their English counterparts. Glasgow's merchants in particular benefitted; their profits laid the basis for Clydeside's rapid industrialization and Glasgow's claim to be the Second City of the Empire. Neal Ascherson, in reviewing Tom Devine's recent work, refers to Scotland's paradoxical Victorian apogee of industrial triumph and mass emigration:

"Devine asks the big question: where did it all go? Why has contemporary Scotland benefited so little from those billions of intercontinental profit? And why do the Scots – once, per capita, so much more involved in the empire than the English – now affect amnesia about it, sharing none of England's imperial nostalgia? Could it be true that the immense profits from slave-worked sugar and tobacco plantations made Scotland's industrial take-off possible?"⁶

In *Scotland's Empire*, Devine was cautious about this ugly problem but fresh research hardened his views. Ascherson writes that capital inflows from "the slave-based economies were of fundamental importance in the first textile-

⁵ Angus Calder, *Revolutionary Empire*, (London, 1998 edition) p.x.

⁶ Neal Ascherson, *LRB*, Vol 33, Number 19, 6 October, 2011

dominated phase of Scottish industrialisation”⁷. As for the slave trade itself, it’s true that Glasgow did not send slave ships to Africa and the Caribbean as Bristol or Liverpool did. But Scots abroad were managing and financing the trade in disproportionate numbers.

The Scots seldom competed directly with the English, establishing, “distinct and almost exclusively Scottish fiefdoms: the fur trade, the tobacco trade, the jute industry, the opium business in China, the ‘hedge-banking’ outfits in Australia, the executive levels of the East India Company”.⁸

By the late 19th century, Clydeside had near- world domination in shipbuilding, locomotive production and heavy engineering. Colonial enterprise was a pattern of near monopolies from Scotland’s regions and Ascherson shows the scale of it:

“The Hudson’s Bay Company was staffed by Orcadians; its Canadian rival, the North West Company, was run by Highlanders; the sugar plantations of Jamaica were packed with younger sons of Argyllshire lairds; the great trading houses of South-East Asia were mostly family businesses from Aberdeen and north-east Scotland; the outflow of foreign investment was cornered by Edinburgh solicitors. The myth that the Scots were closer to indigenous peoples than the English has been well punctured. They were indeed closer – by the length of a slave-driver’s lash. ...The same myth suggested Gaelic emigrants had a special rapport with traditional societies. In fact, Highlanders behaved with sometimes genocidal savagery - the Gaelic vigilantes who carried out the Warrigal Creek massacre of Australian aboriginals in 1843”.⁹

Since the murder of George Floyd the Black Lives Matter rebellion has forced millions to reconsider the 400 year history of racism, slavery and imperialism. Here in Scotland it has accelerated the unearthing of the ugly role that many Scots played in it.

⁷ Ascherson, Ibid.

⁸ Ascherson, Ibid.

⁹ Ascherson, Ibid.

The Legacy of Slavery in Scotland

Glasgow's Victorian and Edwardian splendour derived from the proceeds of slavery. Tobago Street, Jamaica Street, Otago Street, India Street, the Virginia Mansions, the Kingston docks and countless other streets and buildings are named after the outposts of slavery. Glasgow's Museum of Modern Art was the home of the Oswald family, who were enriched through slavery. Oswald Street is named after them. Headstones in the graveyards of Jamaica or Antigua bear a succession of Scots names like Campbell, Mackinnon, Baird, Duncan and Malcolm. How and when did this happen?

After the Darien Disaster, Scotland's failed colonial venture into Central America in the 1690's, key sections of the Scottish ruling class concluded their commercial interests lay in union with England. Darien was final proof they lacked the economic muscle to compete with their stronger southern neighbor. So a section of the nobility and the land-owning and merchant bourgeoisie favoured union and a stable Protestant, Hanoverian succession. With few opportunities at home upper and middle class, Scots travelled the world seeking their fortune - emigrants and mercenaries par excellence. Later thousands of their poorer compatriots were forced abroad by their landlords and masters.

After the Act of Union the Scottish merchant class, free to trade with the colonies, lost no time in establishing its own lucrative share of the slave trade. Before the American War of Independence its main focus was the tobacco trade in the plantations of Virginia and the Carolinas.

By 1796, Scots owned 30 per cent of the sugar plantations in Jamaica, including the slaves. Scots traders specialized in tobacco, sugar, cotton and rum, commodities reliant entirely on slavery. Although the slave ships did not operate through Scottish ports, the products of the trade did. "In one year, 1758, Scottish tobacco imports from the American colonies exceeded those of London and the English ports of Bristol, Liverpool and Whitehaven combined".¹⁰

As profits rolled into Glasgow service industries grew up to support the the trade. Dundee specialised in the manufacture of cheap linen, sacking and packaging fabrics from jute. The linen was used to make clothes for slaves.. Profits were reinvested in a variety of manufacturing enterprises in and around

¹⁰ Devine, p227.

Glasgow, as well as the dredging and deepening of the Clyde to allow more and bigger trading ships to reach the city. The single biggest industry benefitting from the slave trade was linen manufacture. It employed at least 230,000 men, women and children in the 1780's, a huge proportion of the population.¹¹

The American Revolution saw the focus of Scotland's trans-Atlantic trade shift to the Caribbean and the sugar plantations. More profits were made from importing sugar, refining it and exporting it to Europe. The fashion for sweet tea, fuelled a rapid increase in demand for both commodities. Tate and Lyall became a huge employer in Greenock and Glasgow became famous for its genteel tearooms

By 1815, 65 per cent of all goods exported from Scotland went to the West Indies.¹² Scots dominated the sugar plantations in Antigua, St Vincent and Jamaica. Rape and sexual exploitation was rife on the Scots -run plantations, evidenced by the proliferation of Scots names in the plantation records and the Caribbean graveyards. Scots participated in the establishment, maintenance and brutal coercion of the slave trade. Their plantations were ruthlessly efficient, reducing food rations and clothing to save money. Death rates among slaves were higher than those of the tobacco and cotton plantations.¹³ Many died within three years of arrival. The lack of family facilities and the unrelenting, back-breaking labour required contributed to the soaring death rates.

But there were slave rebellions and a mounting fear of revolt among the slaveholders. By 1750, 85% of the population of British West Indies were African slaves. Between 1655 and 1813 there were 16 slave rebellions in Jamaica. 50,000 slaves took part in the Baptist revolt there in 1831. The rebellion lasted 11 days and was brutally suppressed with hundreds executed. But it proved a turning point. Historian Hilary Beckles describes a 'Two-Hundred Years War'¹⁴ between slaves and slave-owners in the British Caribbean, culminating in the great Jamaican revolt of 1831 - the death knell of slavery throughout the British Empire.

¹¹ Durie Alistair, *The Scottish Linen Industry in the Eighteenth Century* (Edinburgh, 1979, pp158-60.

¹² Devine Tom, 'Scotland and Transatlantic Slavery' in Devine(ed.) (2015 p11.

¹³ Devine Tom, *Scotland's Empire* (2003) p 224

¹⁴ Beckles, Hilary 'The 200 Years' War: slave resistance in the British West Indies, an overview of the historiography', *Jamaican Historical Review*, 13 (1982), 1-10

Scots also participated directly in the brutal task of procuring and transporting slaves. The previously mentioned Richard Oswald owned the slave fort on Bunce Island off the coast of Sierra Leone. Tens of thousands of African slaves passed through it on their way to plantations in America and the Caribbean, some owned by Oswald.

In 1833 slavery was abolished in Britain, but only after slave rebellions and decades of campaigning. Scotland's slavers were generously compensated by the state and their profits financed the rapid agricultural and industrial revolutions that transformed the country.

However, there were also many Scottish anti-slavery proponents. In *The Wealth of Nations* published in 1776, Adam Smith argued slavery was both morally repugnant and ultimately inefficient:

“From the experience of all ages and nations, I believe, that the work done by free men comes cheaper in the end than the work performed by slaves. Whatever work he does, beyond what is sufficient to purchase his own maintenance, can be squeezed out of him by violence only, and not by any interest of his own”.¹⁵

Of course, Smith was extolling free enterprise but his attack on slavery, combined with the powerful influence of the French Revolution and the zeal of Christian reformers, had given a fillip to the growing abolitionist movement in Britain, particularly in Scotland. Although there were few slaves in Scotland and accounts of the brutality of plantation life were suppressed, the issue of slavery became a political issue.

The Abolition Act was finally passed in 1833. Several Scots were prominent in the leadership of the movement. Zachary Macauley from Inverary and William Dickson from Moffat witnessed slavery in the plantations and were passionate abolitionists. The Glasgow Anti-Slavery Society was formed in 1822 and became one of the most active in Britain. Women played a prominent role in the abolitionist movement that spread throughout Scotland. Many leading

¹⁵ Smith Adam *Wealth of Nations*, (London, 1937), p366.

figures in the Church -but not all- took a principled position on slavery as “inconsistent with the spirit and principles of the Christian faith”.¹⁶

Yet many Scots who witnessed slavery in the colonies subscribed to the ideas of ‘scientific’ racism, thoroughly un-scientific theorisation invented to justify the rise of capitalism, slavery and the subjugation of the colonies.

Its proponents tried to counter the growing influence of enlightenment ideas in the eighteenth century. Even David Hume, prominent in the Scottish Enlightenment wrote: “I am apt to suspect the negroes to be naturally inferior to the whites”.¹⁷ Hume was not unique in this among people who were opposed to slavery.

The written thoughts of a Scots woman who travelled from Edinburgh to Antigua in 1774 are illuminating. Janet Schaw felt uncomfortable with the inhumane treatment of slaves she witnessed when first arriving in Antigua. In time, however, she reconciles this with the belief that the African slaves do not feel pain and demonstrate indifference to their suffering in a way that Europeans would not.¹⁸ Even as increasing numbers of Scots were beginning to campaign against slavery, the Scots actively participating in the trade and the plantations developed no such scruples. The developing revolutionary ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity did not extend to all. But ordinary Scots played an active part in the movement against slavery. In 1788 and 1792 petitions were sent to Parliament protesting against it. In 1792, a third of all the petitions were from Scottish groups.

In Scotland’s central belt, where thousands of jobs were dependent on exports of cotton goods, pro-slavery voices were well represented in civic society, usually by businessmen. Newspapers like the *Glasgow Courier* and the *Edinburgh Review* carried articles defending slavery and published accounts of travellers who claimed slaves were very happy on the plantation.¹⁹

¹⁶ Iain Whyte, ‘The Upas Tree’ in Devine (ed) (2015) p189.

¹⁷ David Hume *Essays, Moral and Political* (1741–42)

¹⁸ E.W. Andrews (ed.) Janet Schaw, *Journal of a Lady of quality, being the Narrative of a journey from Scotland to the West Indies, North Carolina and Portugal in the years 1774-1776* (Newhaven: Yale University Press (1939) p127

¹⁹ *Glasgow Courier* 18 April, 15, 17, 22 June 1826

In 1792, in the wake of the French Revolution and the mass circulation of Tom Paine's popular pamphlet, *The Rights of Man*, there was mass rioting in Edinburgh, triggered by King George III's birthday celebrations. It spread throughout Scotland in protest at the corrupt establishment at Westminster and its venal placemen in Edinburgh, notably Dundas, Prime Minister William Pitt's key man in Scotland. Known disparagingly as 'Henry the Ninth, King of the Scots', Dundas held direct control over all political appointments, including colonial appointments. He became President of the East India Company, and acquired a notoriety for using his considerable patronage to bribe politicians. In this way Dundas was responsible for delaying the Abolition of Slavery in the UK. Further, wealthy Scots held a huge financial stake in slavery. Compensation paid to former slave owners ran to billions in today's money, a sum rivalled only by the bailout of the banks after the 2008 crash and the subsidies to big business during the coronavirus of 2020.

Indeed, recent research²⁰ has shown that significant land ownership in Scotland derived from slave transportation, ownership and investment in the plantations and compensation paid to slave-owners when slavery was abolished. This research shows that some 1.2 million acres (33.5% of the West Highlands and Islands) was bought with this slave money. Further, that traditional land-owners (what we might call clan chiefs) had married into slavery derived wealth. The research suggests that these two groups were responsible for some of the largest clearances of people from their land.

With British slavery formally ending in 1833, the attention of the abolition movement turned on America and its slave-owning southern states — enterprises, from which many in Britain still profited. The extent of the abolition movement in Ireland, England and Scotland is shown by accounts of a speaking tour undertaken by the great African-American abolitionist Frederick Douglass

²⁰ Iain MacKinnon and Andrew Mackillop *Plantation slavery and landownership in the west Highlands and Islands – legacies and lessons* (Community Land Scotland), November 2020

in 1845. He wrote that “Scotland is a blaze of anti-slavery agitation – the Free Church and Slavery are the all-engrossing topics”.²¹

The Free Church split from the Church of Scotland in the Great Disruption of 1843, over state interference in Church affairs but it needed money for its new enterprise and found many donors in the Presbyterian churches of the slave states in America. This incensed abolitionists who launched a campaign against the Free Church, using the slogan ‘Send Back the Money’. Douglass toured Scotland speaking to large, raucous gatherings in bigger centres like Greenock and Paisley but also in smaller towns like Arbroath, Ayr and Montrose. They included songs, poems and the constant refrain of ‘Send back the Money’!²² Douglass, and other American abolitionists, were welcomed everywhere and he considered settling in Edinburgh at one point.

The campaign featured petitions, public meetings, posters, pamphlets and street graffiti. i (‘Send Back the Money’ was painted in red on the sides of the Free Churches.), newspaper articles and debates. Ultimately the issue was resolved by the victory of the northern states in the American Civil War, a war in which many Scots fought, on both sides. It is estimated that about 50,000 people of Scottish origin fought in the Union Armies, many American citizens. There were no Scots regiments like the famous Irish Brigade. However two divisions largely of Scots volunteers, the 79th New York State militia and the 65th Illinois Infantry both fought at the key battle of Gettysburg in 1863, a resounding Union victory. It is difficult to find accurate estimates of the numbers of Scots who fought for the South. Most would have been second or third generation immigrants.

The Civil War had a big impact here. The Union organized a blockade of Southern ports to stop the export of commodities like cotton and the import of munitions and food. Confederate agents in Britain organized the purchase of blockade-running ships, finding willing suppliers among Clydeside’s shipbuilding magnates, who first supplied second-hand paddle steamers then started building

²¹ Frederick Douglass Letter to William Lloyd Garrison 16 April 1846
<https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/douglass/support11.html>

²² Henry C Wright (1846) *The Free Church of Scotland and American Slavery, Speeches from Music Hall in Edinburgh, Scotland*, <http://frederickdouglassinbritain.com/journey/scotland>

state of the art ironclad ships for the Confederacy. There were 27 shipyards on the Clyde at the time.

The effective blockade of the Confederacy devastated the British cotton industry. Particularly affected were Lancashire and Renfrewshire. Mills closed and thousands were laid off experiencing real hardship. These had been centres of Chartism, the first working-class political movement. The shipping, finance and mill bosses sided with the Southern slave states. In Manchester, meetings and marches were held to support the Union. In 1862, a huge meeting of cotton workers took place in Manchester Free Trade Hall and voted to support an embargo on goods from the Confederacy, including cotton.

It seems there was no corresponding class action in Scotland. The large crowds attending Abolitionist meetings, mainly working-class people, did so largely as conscientious objectors, influenced by religious and moral ideas. In terms of class-consciousness, Manchester was ahead of Glasgow at this point.

As the profits from slavery diminished, the profits from the Empire in the East began to flow in.²³ Huge fortunes were made²⁴ No wonder the Indian sub-continent was called 'the Jewel in the Crown'. Scots were involved in every aspect of this. Devine writes that:

"The Scots became prominent in the East India Company long before their position was further enhanced during the long reign of Henry Dundas as President of its Board in 1784. Many were from landed backgrounds and Scottish administrators, merchants and army officers returned home with the accumulated profits of their Asian enterprise. They sometimes used these fortunes to invest in estate improvement and road building".²⁵

On the Isle of Lewis there is a monument to James Matheson, then the second biggest landowner in Britain. A Liberal MP representing the electors of Ross and Cromarty, he became Governor of the Bank of England and Chairman of the P&O shipping giant. He also bought the Isle of Lewis for £500,000. The inscription on his monument says he was 'a child of God, a consistent

²³ George McGilvary, The Scottish Connection with India 1725–1833, *Etudes Ecosaises* 14 (2010) p13

²⁴ Tom Devine *Scotland's Empire* (2003) (London: Penguin Books) Ch 11

²⁵ Tom Devine, *The Scottish Nation 1700-2000*, (London, 2000), p 60.

Christian'.²⁶ It does not tell us that as that his mass eviction of tenants led to 'the Crofter Wars' that continued into the 1880's; nor that he accrued his massive wealth smuggling opium into China.

Illegal though it was, opium generated huge revenues for the British in India where it was grown and substantial income for the London government. Britain simply waived the rules and 12 million Chinese became opium addicts. When the Chinese tried to stamp out the illegal trade, Matheson persuaded the British to launch a war of reprisal. Thousands were slaughtered and ports were bombarded in what became known as gunboat diplomacy. As a skeptical British naval officer put it, 'the Chinese must submit to be poisoned with opium or be massacred for defending their own laws in their own land',²⁷ Finally the British army stormed Beijing forcing the Chinese to submit and concede Hong Kong as part of the spoils. Matheson became co-founder of the Jardine-Matheson Bank that came to dominate Hong Kong.

Poverty and land clearances instigated by the likes of Matheson fuelled Scottish recruitment into the army and navy. There was a conscious effort to create Highland regiments and make them the backbone of the imperial army.²⁸ They acted as the shock troops of Empire from the Siege of Quebec to the slaughter of Kandahar. In 1857, the Great Indian Rebellion that took place in Mysore was crushed by mainly Scottish regiments. The brutal repression that followed imposed direct rule from Britain as opposed to the regime of the East India Company. The poverty inflicted on the Indian population increased and famines recurred frequently. Millions were starved to death throughout the remaining decades of British rule in India.²⁹

Given this history, it was inspiring when a Bangra band and a Salsa band joined the huge All Under One Banner marches for independence in recent years. In Scotland, as elsewhere, the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement has inspired a flurry of popular agitation to decolonize education, change street names and topple the statues commemorating the 'Great Men' who prospered from slavery

²⁶ John Newsinger, *Declassified History: James Matheson*, in *Socialist Review* No. 460, September 2000, p36

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid p 296

²⁹ Chris Harman *A People's History of the World* (1999) London: Bookmarks p358

and defended it. One of the most prominent was the aforementioned Sir Henry Dundas, whose imposing statue dominates St Andrews Square in Edinburgh's New Town and whose streets are named after him in Glasgow and many other Scottish towns. The ongoing campaigns to highlight the racism of those connected with slavery or racist ideas forced the decision to rename the Hume Tower at Edinburgh University. It further led to debate as to whether there should be re-namings or plaques explaining the context of the times.

We need more of this to challenge racism and reflect the new Scotland. Not everyone in the Independence movement might agree but as the Russian revolutionary, Lenin argued '...every nation possesses a bourgeois culture (and most nations a reactionary and clerical culture as well) in the form, not merely of 'elements' but of the dominant culture.'³⁰

Scotland is no exception. Its dominant culture incorporates elements of racism from its slavery and imperialist past. It means, unfortunately, islamophobia in the wake of the Iraq war and the anti-immigrant, hostile-environment rhetoric from Westminster finds an echo here; but not without challenge. Amid the celebrations of the 2014 Commonwealth Games, itself a relic of imperialism, there were lectures, exhibitions and discussions exposing the real legacy of Empire in Scotland. An impressive antidote to the brazen attempt to whitewash Empire was South African opera singer Pumeza Matshikiza giving a wonderful rendition of Hamish Henderson's great song 'Freedom come all ye?' Her performance was viewed by one billion worldwide. Henderson's song refers to Nyanga, one of the oldest black townships in Cape Town, where Pumeza grew up. Describing the event afterwards, she said: "The song is not one I was even aware of until I was given it to rehearse but it is so beautiful. I love what the song stands for – freedom for all regardless of race, social standing or nationality."³¹

Irish immigration into Scotland

Scotland was never an imperial dependency like Ireland. While its ruling class benefited from union with England, Ireland's economy was driven backwards. Scots were at the forefront of British imperialism, not least in

³⁰ Vladimir Lenin <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1913/crnq/2.htm#v20pp72-023>

³¹ *Daily Record*, 27 July, 2014

Ireland. It can be argued Ulster was a Scottish colony during the seventeenth century. In 1603 James I recruited Scots Presbyterian settlers to establish loyal 'plantations' in Ulster to crush its Catholic population and use it as a Protestant bridgehead for the subjugation of the whole island. At the start of the 19th century Ireland's population was eight million. During the 1840's it fell by three million, - two million dying of starvation; one million emigrating. Not only did Scottish troops help police this genocide but Scottish capital played a big role in developing Ireland's one area of industrial development – Belfast and its hinterland.

The Great Hunger (An Gorta Mor) between 1845 and 1849 led to a rapid increase in Irish immigration to Scotland. At the same time, thousands migrated from the Highlands and Islands following the Clearances and the potato famine that ravaged through the North and West of Scotland in 1846. The wealth from the slave trade was now being used to drive industrial development in Scotland. Throughout the nineteenth century, thousands of Irish people were driven into the industrial revolution that was gathering pace in lowland Scotland. Along with the victims of the Scottish clearances, much of the unskilled heavy labour that transformed Glasgow from a small trading port into a key centre of heavy industry came from this source. They built the roads, canals and railways and laboured in the mines, mills and factories that made Clydeside such a powerhouse of capital accumulation.

With Manchester in mind, Engels claimed the industrial revolution would have been a more gradual affair but for the human raw material provided by Irish immigration.³² This was equally valid for Scotland; by 1851, 7.2 percent of its population was Irish compared to 2.9 percent in England and Wales. In Glasgow, the Irish immigrant population had grown to 19 percent and would increase as the city tripled in size between 1851 and 1911. Poverty was shared between Scots and Irish, but not equally. "The Irish constituted the most abject part of the population, prepared to tolerate a lower standard of life than all but

³² Engels, Friedrich *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Stanford University Press, 1968 (originally published 1845).

the very poorest of the workforce".³³ While this is true, it would be more appropriate to use the word 'forced' rather than 'prepared'.

Since the Reformation Scotland had been overwhelmingly Calvinist with some Catholic communities in the Highlands and Islands. The newly arrived Catholic Irish were regarded with hostility and suspicion. Between 1847 and 1880, there was a rise in sectarianism and a growth of the Orange Order in the West of Scotland.

Divide and rule meant systematic discrimination against Irish Catholics at work. Often it was 'No Irish Need Apply', except when Irish labour was deliberately hired to break strikes or drive down wages. This in turn saw sections of a rapidly growing working class develop an antagonism to Irish workers. Karl Marx, then resident in London, pointed out that this hostility served only the ruling class: "This antagonism is the secret of the impotence of the English working class... It is the secret by which the capitalist class maintains its power. And the latter knows this".³⁴ Marx's insight applied to Scotland just as much as England.

But working class solidarity was hard fought for in the factories, mines and shipyards over the next decades. Influenced by socialists like John MacLean, James Connolly, Helen Crawford, Mary Barbour, Agnes Dollan and Harry McShane, the working class in Scotland, as elsewhere, united to fight intransigent bosses. Throughout the Great Unrest of 1910 to 1914, strikes over wages and conditions united workers across the sectarian divide. For example, there was the Belfast Dock strike of 1907 and huge support for the Dublin lockout of 1913. Led by Jim Larkin and James Connolly, these strikes inspired a wave of solidarity in Britain, nowhere more so than in Glasgow. In the immediate post-war period Clydeside became a key centre of solidarity with the Irish struggle for independence.³⁵

³³ Tom Gallagher: *Glasgow The Uneasy Peace; Religious Tension in Modern Scotland* (Manchester, 1987) p12.

³⁴ Karl Marx (1870) *Letter to Meyer* [source]
https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1870/letters/70_04_09.htm

³⁵ Dave Sherry Ireland and Scotland in the First World War from the Dublin Rising to Red Clydeside, *Irish Marxist Review* Vol.4 No 14 (2015) pp50-53.

Sectarianism did not disappear after the high tide of Red Clydeside and WWI but it was diminished. The bigotry of sectarian unionism continued to express itself in the Church of Scotland, in some trade unions and in Protestant organisations like the Scottish Protestant League, discussed below.

Today, it emerges from the shadows, often in association with racism, fascism and British nationalism. The rivalry between Celtic and Rangers is still a flash point. Neil Lennon, Northern Irish born manager of Celtic, was sent bullets and an explosive device by loyalist criminals from Ayrshire. There is considerable debate about the influence of sectarianism in Scotland today. A report commissioned by the Scottish government makes interesting reading. It concluded that perceptions of sectarianism's prevalence being widespread were not backed by empirical evidence on issues like housing, employment and educational outcomes.³⁶ But there is no room for complacency -- not surprisingly, age, gender and class influence the extent to which people experience sectarianism today. Figures show 529 religiously aggravated charges reported in 2018-19, a fall of 18 percent on 2017/18, the majority targeting Catholics. There were 2,880 racially aggravated crimes recorded in the same year, also a fall.³⁷ By contrast, as Tom Devine points out in an article in the *Herald* newspaper, that same year, 59,000 domestic abuse cases were reported to the police.³⁸

The SNP government response was to enact a bad law that criminalised a section of society,- young football fans. The ridiculous 'Offensive Behaviour at Football' Act of 2012 was repealed in 2018. Yet the police continue to identify 'football risk groups' and act with impunity,- an approach that apportions blame 'evenly to both sides' when the evidence shows this is not the case. Until 2020, hundreds of Orange Order marches took place, disrupting services and bringing violence and intimidation in their wake. During the Referendum campaign of 2014, groups associated with the Orange Order attacked independence

³⁶ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/examination-evidence-sectarianism-scotland-2015-update/>

³⁷ <https://www.copfs.gov.uk/images/Hate%20Crime%20in%20Scotland%202018-19%20PDF.pdf>

³⁸ Why sectarianism in Scotland is on its death bed *Herald* 1st April 2018

protesters. Loyalist groups rioted when a peaceful, local Republican band marched in Govan in 2019.

During lockdown in 2020, in response to the Black Lives Matter movement, Loyalist and fascist groups gathered in Glasgow's George Square to 'protect the Cenotaph', even though it was never under threat. They used it as a pretext to attack young anti-racists gathered there to protest against the detention of asylum seekers. At the subsequent Stand Up To Racism demonstration in George Square, about 1500 anti-racists gathered safely and peacefully to support Black Lives Matter. The police decided to kettle hundreds of them, claiming they were a 'football risk group'.³⁹ So the police powers were used against peaceful anti-racists, not against violent fascists.

The legacy of anti-imperialism in relation to Ireland, Britain's oldest colony, is still present in Scottish political life. But in the mass movement for independence, sectarianism can be isolated further by a campaign that puts internationalism, anti-racism and pro-immigration at its heart. So during the recently successful campaigns against the Scottish Defence League and attempts to spread the influence of the racist Football Lads Alliance into Scotland, Stand up to Racism supporters leafleting all of the Scottish football grounds were heartened by the positive response of the great majority of fans – especially at Tynecastle and Ibrox – stadia that the far right have previously targeted.

We cannot rely on laws to protect us from bigotry and racism. History has shown racism and sectarianism can be challenged and defeated when socialists and the working class act and lead the way. A great example was the widespread support given to the Anti-Apartheid Movement, particularly in Glasgow throughout the Thatcher years. Support for the ANC and the township struggles in South Africa came from trade unions and civic Scotland. In 1981 Glasgow City Council granted the then jailed Nelson Mandela the Freedom of Glasgow, even as Thatcher labeled him a terrorist. Other cities followed suit. In 1993 he visited Glasgow as a free man, even before he became President of South Africa. It is a

³⁹ <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/18531091.protesters-kettled-converging-george-square-despite-police-warnings/>

treasured memory for all those who took part in that campaign and for anti-racists everywhere.⁴⁰

Yet another positive example was the Chile Solidarity Campaign in the 1970's after Pinochet's military junta toppled Chile's elected popular front government and murdered trade unionists and socialists. Engineering workers in East Kilbride and workers at Rosyth naval dockyard bravely and successfully blocked aircraft engines and submarines parts bound for Pinochet's dictatorship – bringing hope and solidarity to the opponents of the brutal regime in a great act of working class internationalism. At the same time Chilean refugee families fleeing the dictatorship were welcomed to Scotland.

'Russian' Immigration 1880-1920: immigration controls or fair wages?

Historically Scotland has been built on immigration, benefitting from the contribution and diversity the newcomers have brought. That remains the case today. Yet the trade union leaders attitude to Jewish immigration at the end of the 19th century and the first two decades of the Twentieth is perhaps summed up by Ben Tillet's infamous welcome: "We know you are our brothers, but we wish you had not come".⁴¹ Parts of the trade union movement reflected the widespread anti-immigrant mood of the period from 1880 to 1920. Millions of Jews had to uproot themselves and their families from the 'Pale' (the Jewish settlement area in Eastern Europe) and move west, fleeing Tsarist persecution in the Russian Empire, like the 1903 Kishinev outrage and the many other anti-semitic pogroms in hundreds of towns and cities following the defeat of the 1905 Russian Revolution. In 1898 a Tsarist official had promised Russia's Jewish problem would be solved by one third emigrating, one third converting and one third killed.

Initially the British trade union leadership's reaction to the bosses' attempt to use migrant labour to undercut wages was to blame the exploited migrant worker rather than the bosses. Breaking from that backward approach

⁴⁰ 'Annie Brown, Nelson Mandela's daughter thanks city of Glasgow for supporting her father while he was still in jail', *Daily Record*, 21 July 2018, <https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/uk-world-news/nelson-mandelas-daughter-thanks-city-12955024>

⁴¹ Ben Tillet, quoted in John Garrard *The English and Immigration* (Oxford, 1971) p157.

depended upon effective trade union organisation becoming established, especially amongst the immigrant workforce.

Iron, steel and mining unions in the West of Scotland, complained their wages and conditions were being undercut in areas where first Irish and then Lithuanian Catholic immigrants were employed. The Ayrshire, Lanarkshire and Fife coalfields saw initial hostility towards the new migrants from the local newspapers and criticism from some of the leaders of the local Miners Unions. The Lanarkshire union officials even promised support for strikes protesting at a Lithuanian presence in the coalfields. There had been major discussions on these issues at Glasgow Trades Council and it had written to the TUC, which responded pathetically by complaining “there was no law prohibiting the importation of foreign labour”.⁴²

Clearly, trade unions wanted immigration controls to protect, as they saw it, Scottish workers. At the 1892 TUC Congress, import restrictions and immigration controls were linked. The resolution asked for Government contracts to be purchased in Britain rather than abroad and demanded a ban on “foreign labour during strikes, lockouts or any trade disturbance”.⁴³

Some leading socialists and union leaders, such as Keir Hardie and Ben Tillett were not immune. Hardie, had been against Irish immigration in the middle of the 19th Century. He told the 1899 House of Commons Select Committee on Immigration and Emigration, that there was a strong dislike between Scots and foreigners. In response to a question about whether Scots trade unionists wanted a total immigration ban, he replied: “Yes they would...Strong diseases (immigration of destitute aliens) require strong remedies...to prohibit their importation”.⁴⁴ When an overtly racist MP on the Committee questioned him, Hardie conceded, “every foreigner throws one British workman out of employment”.⁴⁵ When another MP pointed out that the emigration figure for Scotland that year was 1500 greater than immigration, he claimed “It would be much better for Scotland if those 1,500 were compelled to

⁴² Glasgow Trades Council, *Yearly Report*, 1887-8. Mitchell Library, Glasgow

⁴³ TUC Annual Report, 1892, p53 British Library

⁴⁴ House of Commons Select Committee on Emigration and Immigration (HCSCEI) 1889, vol.10, lines 1410-18 British Library

⁴⁵ HCSCEI British Library

remain and the foreigners be kept out.”⁴⁶

As another example, Hyndman, leader of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), characterized Eleanor Marx as having “inherited in her nose and mouth the Jewish type from Marx himself”. Satnam Virdee comments that in England the dominant socialist imagery of the time put the Jews in a double-bind that represented them simultaneously as capitalist parasites and sweated labour.⁴⁷ Sadly this applied to Scottish society too.

There was a sharp divide on the ‘Jewish question’ between socialist internationalists like Eleanor Marx and James Connolly and reformists like Ben Tillett and Keir Hardie throughout the course of the ‘new unionism’. In May and June 1891, Ben Tillett and Tom Mann sent letters to the *London Evening News* demanding immigration controls against Jews. Keir Hardie's paper, *Labour Leader*, printed this astonishing, anti- Semitic statement: “Wherever there is trouble in Europe, wherever rumours of war circulate and men’s minds are distraught with fear and change and calamity, you may be sure that a hook-nosed Rothschild is at his games somewhere near the region of the disturbances”.⁴⁸

Hardie was contradictory, arguing at the time to restrict foreigners but to let in those who fled from religious or political persecution. That would have applied to the great majority! Encouragingly there was widespread dislike of Tsarist policies and sympathy for persecuted Jews. So for many trade unionists, the key issue became one of challenging the exploiters rather than their Jewish victims. Gradually Hardie softened his position explaining, “where a foreigner was employed, it ought to be at the recognised trade union rate of wages for that employment”.⁴⁹ By 1905, he had stopped blaming migrants as the cause of society's ills. At a rally in Glasgow that year he argued a clearer mainstream social-democratic position; “the whole explanation of the distress is due to unemployment” and his solutions were “higher wages and reduced hours”.⁵⁰

Unionisation of immigrant workers made a significant impact on the trade union movement. It led Glasgow Trades Council and other union bodies to

⁴⁶ HCSCEI, lines 1490-1.

⁴⁷ Satnam Virdee (2017) *Socialist antisemitism and its discontents in England, 1884-98*, *Patterns of Prejudice* Volume 51, 3-4, pp 356-373

⁴⁸ *Ibid*

⁴⁹ HCSCEI, line 1550.

⁵⁰ *Glasgow Herald*, 10 February 1905, p8.

change their tune from anti-immigration to fair wages campaigns. The change can be attributed to the solidarity and militancy of unionised migrant workers. In 1889 Glasgow Trades Council wrote to the Town Council in 1889 calling for an improved minimum wage as the solution.⁵¹

Clearly the push for wage clauses was more progressive than the call for immigration controls, yet at the end of the day the level of union organisation and the involvement of socialists, both generally and among the new migrants would largely determine if there would fight for general pay increases instead of calling for immigration controls.

It was crucial – as it is today - that there was socialist opposition to immigration controls. For example, when unions called on the government to control the immigration of ‘alien workers’, Eleanor Marx – a “bred-in-the-bone internationalist”⁵² – boldly stood against them. At a mass protest meeting called by Jewish trade unions in East London in 1985, she issued a leaflet arguing: “Jews! The English anti-Semites have come to the point where the English workers’ organisation calls on the government to close England’s doors to the poor alien, that is, in the main, to the Jew. You must no longer keep silent”.⁵³

Many members of the SDF left wing in Scotland agreed with her and saw little sense in remaining in such an organisation, leaving the SDF *en bloc* to launch the Socialist Labour Party.⁵⁴ Its most influential figure in Scotland then was James Connolly, who played a vital role in its formative days, travelling across Scotland, addressing dozens of meetings on behalf of the organization. Connolly was both clear and forthright about the dangers of immigration controls and anti-Semitism to both Jews and the labour movement.⁵⁵ Although John Maclean remained in the BSP he broke politically from the Hyndman leadership’s increasingly nationalist outlook. John Maclean always opposed racism and had worked hard to build links with the Irish and Lithuanian mining communities. The hugely successful 1915 Glasgow Rent Strike had brought Maclean to a wider audience but it’s victory marked his last day as a schoolteacher, when the Govan School Board sacked him

⁵¹ Glasgow Trades Council, *Yearly Report*, 1889-90, p12.

⁵² Yvonne Kapp (1979), *Eleanor Marx: The Crowded Years, 1884–1898* (London: Virago 1979)

⁵³ *Ibid*, p525

⁵⁴ Hyndman’s SDF would later become the British Socialist Party (BSP)

⁵⁵ James Connolly (1903) *The Socialist Labour Party of America and the London SDF*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/connolly/1903/06/slpsdf.htm>

for his anti-war activities. Months earlier he had been charged for a seditious speech at an anti-war street meeting. Because his case was heard the day after the rent victory, the authorities were keen not to make him a martyr. The Sheriff passed a mild sentence for what was a treasonable offence of sedition: a £5 fine or 5 days jail. Maclean refused to pay on principle and spent five days in prison. A number of pits in Lanarkshire struck in protest, particularly in the Irish & Lithuanian communities. Years earlier a branch of the Marxist Lithuanian Social Democratic Party was founded in the mining community of Bellshill, an area of Lithuanian settlement, where Maclean had built a following. His links with the Lithuanian community grew and he campaigned in their defence when Lithuanian families were threatened with starvation and deportation at the end of the war.

1919 – Race riots in Glasgow

At the end of January 1919, just as the British state was planning to deploy troops and tanks to Glasgow, fearing the looming 40 hour strike would threaten revolution, out of the blue racism within the working class movement came to the fore.. The events of 1919 are detailed in Chapter 4, including this, ugly, and less well known, race riot the week before the strike began. It was the first of a series of race riots in a number of British ports during 1919. It was triggered by Manny Shinwell, Scottish full-time official of the National Seafarers Union, Chair of Glasgow Trades Council and a local Independent Labour Party (ILP) Councillor. Later Shinwell would move further to the right, becoming a Labour cabinet minister and then a member of the House of Lords.

On 23 January, just days before the strike started, he addressed a meeting of seafarers warning of mass unemployment, if action were not taken to restrict foreign sailors on British ships. He called for British jobs for British workers, even although most of the black sailors were union members. Shortly afterwards near the depot where the Shinwell had spoken, African and Asian seafarers were viciously attacked by a mob, both in the street and in their lodging house.⁵⁶ Some were injured and wounded but in a classic example of institutional racism, the thirty victims were arrested and tried in court. Incredibly only one white sailor

⁵⁶ For a full discussion on this, see Jacqueline Jenkinson (2008) Black Sailors on Red Clydeside: Rioting, Reactionary Trade Unionism and Conflicting Notions of 'Britishness' Following the First World War. *Twentieth Century British History*, Volume 19, 1, 2008, pp 29–60

was charged and that was for police assault. As Henry Bell points out: “Whether Shinwell incited the riot cannot be said with certainty but the aim was quite clearly to stir up racial tensions within the workforce and the riot that followed made bosses reticent to hire non-white crews on Glasgow ships and led to the widespread deportation of black sailors”.⁵⁷

Then as now some union leaders blamed foreign workers for lowering wages and stealing jobs. Shinwell’s actions show that even in the high points of class struggle it is vital to combat racism, particularly when it comes from union leaders. At the same time on Clydeside there was a strong socialist current vigorously opposed to racism. Leading activists like Arthur MacManus from the SLP, John Maclean , Willie Gallacher and Harry McShane from the BSP and Helen Crawford from the ILP argued it was a dangerous diversion for workers.

In an article entitled ‘Race ,Riots and Revolution’, published in, *The Socialist*, the SLP attacked the leaders of the Seafarers's union for scapegoating black and Asian workers and condemned Shinwell for deflecting the anger away from the real enemy. . The Clyde Workers Committee made its opposition to racism absolutely clear. While Central Scotland was on strike for a cut in working hours, there was a mass strike in Mumbai docks. The CWC’s daily Strike Bulletin proudly proclaimed: “A victory here in Scotland will help our comrades in India, who are with us heart and soul”.⁵⁸

Sadly support for immigration controls persists in the higher echelons of the trade unions still. In 2019, Len McCluskey, leader of UNITE, intervened in the British General Election arguing against freedom of movement. His argument, similar to that expressed by Mannie Shinwell a century ago, opens the door to racist ideas. Socialists have consistently opposed this kind of dangerous ambivalence since the late 19th century onwards.

Combating racism and fascism in the 1930s

⁵⁷ Henry Bell, *John Maclean, Hero of Red Clydeside*, (London, 2018), p230.

⁵⁸ John Leopold, *The Forty Hours Strike*, essay published in *We Shall Be All*, edited by Laurie Flynn, (London, 1978), p44.

The Crash of 1929, the ensuing world crisis and the rise of Fascism posed huge questions for the labour movement and in particular the Jewish community throughout the 1930's. The immediate problem in Britain was the rise of the British Union of Fascists (BUF), which, from 1932 onwards, modeled itself on German Nazism and Italian fascism.

When Sir Oswald Mosley launched the BUF there was fierce opposition throughout Britain. In Edinburgh in June 1934, there were fights between Blackshirts and anti-fascists and in Glasgow the fascists were "trapped" in their headquarters in the city centre by a hostile crowd of some 2,000 following a BUF public meeting. The BUF continued to hold meetings in Glasgow and Edinburgh, many of which involved physical opposition from the left and the trade unions.⁵⁹ Monty Berkley, a Communist Party (CP) member in the 1930s, remembers:

"William Joyce (later ridiculed as Lord Haw-Haw for his radio broadcasts from Nazi Berlin,) came to speak at Queens Park Recreation Ground and we held a counter demonstration...The Labour League of Youth, the Young Communist League and other youth organisations, all agreed to disrupt the meeting. I had the privilege of taking one of the platform legs and throwing the platform up in the air. We were chased by the police but got away'.⁶⁰

Morris Smith, secretary of the Glasgow Workers Circle – a group of left wing and left Zionist Jews- recalls that the BUF met regularly at Queens Park gates in Govanhill but ".never got a chance as they were howled down. They never got a turnout and I don't think they recruited anyone. The line then was we had to stop them appearing on the streets".⁶¹

It is important not to overstate the impact of the BUF in Scotland. Its membership remained low. At the high point of BUF national membership in 1935, estimated at 50,000 there were approximately 50 members in Glasgow and 80 in Edinburgh.⁶² The BUF newspaper *The Fascist Week*, claimed in 1935

⁵⁹*Glasgow Herald*, 20 September 1937, p13; 15 October 1937, p13; 16 October 1937, p9.

⁶⁰Monty Berkley, interviewed by author (hereafter Berkley).

⁶¹Morris Smith, interviewed by author (hereafter Smith).

⁶²G C Webber, 'Patterns of Membership and Support for the BUF', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 19, 4 (1984), p606.

that there were active organisations throughout Scotland from Dumfries to Wick.⁶³ Despite this exaggeration it is true there was some activity outside Glasgow and Edinburgh.

Motherwell was a big coalmining and steel centre, fifteen miles east of Glasgow. Despite having elected the first ever Communist to parliament in 1922, by 1934 the town had an active BUF branch and it was bizarrely granted leasehold of the tennis courts at Calder Park in Motherwell⁶⁴! Its Scottish organiser claimed the branch was making great strides and Lady Mosley visited it in 1934 and spoke at the tennis courts. In nearby Wishaw, there was also BUF activity.⁶⁵ But there was also strong local opposition. In October 1934, the Motherwell Communist Party, “out in full force and in matters of numbers... easily superior to the Fascists”, stopped the meeting, forced the BUF speaker from the stage and held a meeting of their own. The police did not intervene as “the audience, swelling in number... wanted to listen to the Communist for the rest of the evening”.⁶⁶

There was a sustained attempt to build the BUF in Aberdeen from 1936 until 1939⁶⁷ Its meetings were heckled and broken up by opponents. In 1937 a BUF rally in Aberdeen had to be abandoned and its members protected by the police as a crowd of about 8,000 chanted, “Down with Fascist murderers...Mosley shall not pass...One, two, three, four, five, we want Mosley dead or alive”.⁶⁸ There were arrests but the bail was collected from the huge crowd who “were almost fighting for copies of a leaflet issued by the CP”. Similar events occurred in 1937⁶⁹ and throughout 1938.⁷⁰

Following a BUF rally in Dumfries, a town with little left influence, Finlay Hart, a Communist Party full time organiser, recalls that in the area “...we held a meeting to set up an anti-fascist committee and then a branch of the Party and the following year we had a member elected to the town council”. Hart maintains

⁶³Liz Kibblewhite and Andy Rigby, *Fascism in Aberdeen* (Aberdeen, 1978), p23.

⁶⁴*Motherwell Times*, 4 May 1934.

⁶⁵*Wishaw Press*, 17 March 1933; 14 April 1933; 31 August 1934.

⁶⁶*Motherwell Times*, 5 October 1934.

⁶⁷Kibblewhite and Rigby, p23.

⁶⁸*Glasgow Herald*, 26 July 1937, p11; *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 26 July 1937.

⁶⁹*Glasgow Herald*, 4 October 1937, pp10-11; *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 24 July 1937; *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 7 October 1937.

⁷⁰*Glasgow Herald*, 12 September, 12; *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 6 July 1938.

labour movement activity helped ensure people were not attracted to the BUF. He was certain the BUF did not grow "...because of the strength of the labour movement. For the unemployed there was the National Unemployed Workers Movement".⁷¹

It is assumed, from the strong British unionist stance of present day fascist groups, that there is an affinity between fascism and Orangeism born out of a mutual hatred of Irish republicanism. In Scotland, in the 1930's there were two significant Protestant, staunchly unionist, organisations-the Scottish Protestant League (SPL) in Glasgow and Protestant Action (PA) in Edinburgh.⁷² Until very late in the 1930s both were vehemently anti BUF. While it was on the rise across Britain, the extreme Protestant organisations in Scotland opposed it and by the time they'd moved closer to fascism, the BUF was in decline.

There was widespread Scottish trade union support for the anti-fascist struggle in Spain during the 1930's. There was also a large number of Scots volunteers in the International Brigades and this is still celebrated. Although the Republicans failed to stop Franco, the role of the International Brigades helped to inspire the successful struggle against Mosley's Blackshirts in the 1930's.

Antisemitism today

There is less anti-Semitism today, compared to Islamophobia and anti-Roma racism in Scotland, but it still exists and is once again on the rise on the far right. Yet the issue has been confused by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) dangerous examples of antisemitism, which equates criticism of the Israeli state and its Zionist origins as racist and its oppression of the Palestinian people as tantamount to antisemitism. The Tories, the media and the BBC cynically exploited the IHRA definition to attack Jeremy Corbyn, the wider left and pro-Palestinian activists as antisemites. Here Keir Starmer and the new right-wing leadership of the Labour Party have, as in most things, fallen into step behind Johnson and the Tories. Disappointingly, the SNP

⁷¹Finlay Hart, interviewed by author, 1988.

⁷²For more on the issues of the formation and development of both the Scottish Protestant League and Protestant Action and their relationship to Catholics and Irish immigration, see Tom Gallagher, *The Uneasy Peace* (Manchester, 1987); Henry Maitles, 'Blackshirts Across the Border': The BUF in Scotland, *The Scottish Historical Review*, Vol LXXII, no 213, pp92-99.

leadership and the Scottish Government have done so too. Many of their supporters and some of their elected members are unhappy because they disagree with the IHRA definition. As we go to press, the EHRC have published their report, actually highlighting that there are serious cases of anti-Semitism in Labour, but actually surprisingly few. Corbyn has been suspended for pointing this out and, even when reinstated, had the Whip withdrawn in Parliament so that he cannot sit as a Labour Party MP. There is a full scale attack on the left in the Labour Party underway, with hundreds of members suspended for supporting Corbyn and gagging orders imposed on local labour party branches. In Scotland, as we write, the Corbyn supporting Richard Leonard has been forced out as leader of Scottish Labour and an election to replace him is under way.

This attack on the wider left has serious consequences. The absurd charge of antisemitism has been used to attack Palestine solidarity and support for the non-violent Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign. Labour and SNP adoption of the IHRA 'working definition' of anti-Semitism has given unwarranted legitimacy to a wider suppression of free expression and right to protest over Palestine and Western Imperialism in the Middle East. The narrative of this 'new anti-Semitism' is aimed at the left, the Muslim community and the social movements, including Black Lives Matter and the anti-war movement.

Equating criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism implicit in the IHRA definition has also given the far right and the fascist movements a free pass. Antisemitism is used by Trump and the far right leaders in Hungary, Poland and elsewhere to attack Jewish financiers as 'globalists' who undermine national economies for personal gain – one of Hitler's main arguments as outlined in *Mein Kampf*.

We have to be absolutely clear: antisemitism is a reactionary ideology. Socialists must reject the conflation of criticism of Israel, anti-Zionism or support for BDS with antisemitism.

Asian Immigration

There has been an Asian presence in Scotland for centuries. However, large-scale immigration from Asia to Scotland did not start until after the Second World War. The numbers settling in Scotland were much less than in England .

Some settled to work in the jute mills of Dundee, others in the newly expanding public services, notably public transport and the NHS. Students entered Scottish universities and colleges. At first Asian immigrants were employed largely in retailing and catering, rather than in industry⁷³ The Asian experience in Scotland is not as well documented as it should be. For the same reasons that Scotland's role in slavery was largely hidden, the belated acknowledgement that racism has been a big problem is long overdue.⁷⁴

Most Asians settling in Scotland arrived from Pakistan and some from Bangladesh: most settled in Glasgow. Many were housed in sub-standard, tenements on Glasgow's southside, like successive waves of immigrants before them. The stark inequalities of the pre-war slums continued after many skilled workers' families moved out to the post-war new towns around Glasgow. Councils were ill-equipped to provide for the needs of new citizens, who spoke a different language and practiced a different religion. Their daily privations were real but went unrecorded.

As Black Lives Matters shows, tragedy can spark reappraisal and ignite activism. In 1998, 16-year old Imran Khan was stabbed to death in a school on the south side of Glasgow. Racial tension had been developing there for a while but the authorities were reluctant to accept that this was the case. That same year, Surjit Singh Chhokar, a young waiter was murdered in the street in Overtown near Wishaw.

These racist murders shocked many in Scotland. Anti-racists, socialists and trade unionists organised solidarity for the bereaved families and made sure that the cases did not disappear from public view. Incredibly it took 18 years of campaigning to deliver justice for the family.⁷⁵ But constant campaigning made sure that fascists groups like the BNP did not make an electoral breakthrough in Scotland as they attempted to exploit racial divisions.

⁷³ Scotland's Census 2011 <https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/labour-market>

⁷⁴ 'Everyday Racism in Scotland; A case study of East Pollokshields', *Scottish Affairs* 49 (Autumn 2004); Peter Hopkins (ed) *Scotland's Muslims: Society, Politics and Identity*. (Edinburgh, 2017).

⁷⁵ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-glasgow-west-3734970>

The Macpherson report, published in 1999 in the wake of Stephen Lawrence's murder, exposed widespread institutional racism in society and in the police. Evidence proves this was and is the case in Scotland too.⁷⁶ The lack of action over the deaths of Imran Khan and Surjit Singh Chokar merited immediate action. The Sheku Bayoh case and the mishandling of other recent racist attacks and incidents show that apart from the rhetoric nothing has really changed since the McPherson report was published over twenty years ago. A report in November 2020, carried by former Scottish Lord Advocate Dame Elish Angiolini⁷⁷ showed that there was a persistent problem with racism, sexism and homophobia in police culture. The *Herald* report was headlined 'Racism and sexism rife in macho police culture'. She has argued that a review into police practice needs to be urgently undertaken.

The political representation of Asian Scots has increased but only marginally Islamophobia has recently been highlighted and a cross party report has been commissioned by the Scottish Parliament. Reports are all very well; the urgent question is what is to be done? Most Scottish Muslims have suffered racism on such a scale that it makes them feel scared, bullied, frightened and excluded, a sobering account of daily life for Muslims today. The Asian experience fits into the long pattern of immigration to Scotland – racism and fightback.

'New' Immigration

We are witnessing a huge migration of people across the globe - fleeing war, famine, climate devastation, and persecution. Over the last 20 years, migrants from the new EU member states, from Turkey and refugees from outside Europe have arrived in Scotland. In each of those years, bar one, there has been a net inflow.⁷⁸ Polish delis, Turkish barbers, African supermarkets, Chinese restaurants, Syrian patisseries and other enterprises have thankfully become part of the streetscape, even as more traditional businesses have closed.

⁷⁶ E Kelly, 'Racism, Police and Courts in Scotland', *Scottish Affairs* no.30, (2000) pp141-159

⁷⁷ Herald, 12 November 2020, p1 and p 7

⁷⁸ <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/migration/migration-statistics>

Schools have also been transformed with pupils from many countries being taught along-side Scottish children, with at least 20 languages being spoken in some schools. The 2011 census⁷⁹ showed 16 percent of people in Scotland do not give ethnic origin as 'Scottish'. The largest non-Scottish group identify as 'other British', the second largest 'Polish', although there has been a considerable return to Poland following Brexit and a recent upturn in the Polish economy.

For a time the UK's policy was to encourage dispersal of migrants and refugees, housing people in different parts of the country, away from London. Not all regions of the UK accepted this policy but Scotland did. In common with previous immigration, the new migrants have tended to settle in particular areas where previous immigrants have stayed. In Glasgow, for example, this has been primarily in Govanhill, where Irish, Jewish and Asian immigrants had previously settled and then moved on as their economic circumstances improved. This has led to overcrowding and poor conditions – primarily caused by landlordism and the lack of repair and investment in new, affordable public housing. It has also led to sporadic campaigns demanding 'a clean up of the area', which have peddled or encouraged racism, blaming the victims of overcrowding and unfairly targeting recently arrived migrants.

Refugees were mainly housed in hard-to-let high-rise council flats in deprived areas of the city. The approach of the Scottish Labour government at the time was generally positive and welcoming. The campaign, 'One Scotland, Many Cultures' was refreshingly so. Scotland needs immigrants. It has an ageing population plagued with chronic ill-health. Encouraging immigration was one way for the new Scottish parliament to assert its independence from Westminster and serve the needs of the Scottish economy and public services.

A case study of the Roma community in Govanhill shows this well. Historically one of the most discriminated groups in Europe alongside the Jews, they were targeted by the Nazis for extermination in the 1940s. They currently suffer abuse and racism in most European countries, suffering violent attacks and discrimination, notably in Hungary, but also in Germany, France and Italy. As

⁷⁹<https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/documents/censusresults/release2a/StatsBulletin2A.pdf>

Harda argues, “Disproportionately affected by poverty and discriminated against in employment, education, health care, administrative and other services, they face considerable obstacles to a full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms”.⁸⁰

The study found discrimination in every aspect of life --- employment, housing, benefits, health services (through language issues) and educational achievement. As well as institutional racism, Roma also suffer racism at personal and community levels. The Govanhill Law Centre found that some local housing office staff routinely refer to Roma people as “gypos, scum, beggars, suicide bombers, thieves and paedos”. A whistleblower highlighted a culture of hostility – “almost as if there is a competition to see who can make the most outrageous statement for a cheap and nasty laugh”.⁸¹ One young campaigner, giving evidence to the Scottish Government, talked of discrimination against Travelling People in Scotland becoming the last form of “acceptable racism”.⁸²

In 2019 and again in 2020, vandals destroyed a Roma Holocaust memorial in Glasgow dedicated to those murdered during World War II. The Romani Rose Tree Memorial was planted in Queen's Park on Roma Genocide Memorial Day August 2, 2019 by young people from the Govanhill community. But the plaque has been ripped from its podium in a senseless act of vandalism. Local residents reported it had been “violently destroyed” in November 2019 and again in June 2020.⁸³

However wherever there has been racism there has been antiracist activity. Among many positive responses has been International Roma Day in Govanhill and the Govanhill International Carnival. Both have Roma at the centre, with a strong anti-racist theme. Both events are popular, having become established in the locality, attracting support from mainstream politicians and the trade unions. They provide talks, films, walking tours and workshops. Local

⁸⁰ Stefan Iulian Harda, 2006, *Policies on Roma's social Inclusion in Europe: Towards succeeding in social intervention – ROMAin: a quantitative analysis of 85 projects*, (2006)

[www.anr.ro/docs/programme/Roma percent 20in/Romain final supervised analysis.pdf](http://www.anr.ro/docs/programme/Roma%20in/Romain_final_supervised_analysis.pdf)

⁸¹ *Scotsman*, 8 November 2012.

⁸² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-42193431> 2017

⁸³ 2019 <https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/vandals-violently-destroy-roma-holocaust-20831125>

socialists and community activists in the area worked together to engage the wider community and develop these activities.

The acceptance of migrants and refugees by Glasgow City Council was laudable in principle but in practice there has been a lack of resources, a lack of political will at the top and a failure to engage with local people . Here we highlight some examples of racism and how anti-racists responded.

First, the racist murder of Firsat Dag in August 2001 just two weeks after he had arrived in Glasgow. Alongside other asylum seekers Firsat had been housed in the badly deprived Sighthill area of the city. The genuine hardship and deprivation of this working class community had been ignored for years. Housing conditions were appalling with repairs non-existent No one had spoken to the residents of the tower blocks, where many refugees were suddenly housed. It was predictable that tensions could develop and they did.

Firsat's murder sent shockwaves through Scotland. The migrant community demonstrated in fury, all the tensions and frustrations boiling over in a spontaneous expression of solidarity. Some local residents also demonstrated, feeling that the refugees were getting preferential treatment while locals were abandoned. It was a flash-point that could have been exploited by fascists and racists, allowing them to establish a local presence based on hatred and division. Community activists and local anti-racists acted to ensure that the racism was nipped in the bud and there was a concerted campaign to both condemn the scapegotting and demand increased investment in the area. A key point was when asylum-seekers and local residents marched together on the City Chambers to demand improved conditions. Billy Singh, a community activist in Sighthill, said: "If anything good can come out of somebody's death, then Firsat Dag did not die in vain. His murder has galvanised the community, both local people and refugees, into one voice fighting for the same social improvements".⁸⁴ A local festival was organised to showcase local talent, culture and food. The local schools reported that the new arrivals had brought a new positivity after

⁸⁴ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/sighthill-killing-leads-to-big-fall-in-racist-attacks-172440.html>

years of decline⁸⁵. A tragedy that could have seen the resurgence of racism was turned into something much more inspiring.

The intervention of socialists was crucial in arguing for unity. This was particularly important as the media peddled lies about refugees getting £5000 cheques and claiming Firsat Dag was a 'bogus' refugee, not a genuine asylum seeker.⁸⁶ Campaigners demonstrated outside the *Daily Record* in protest at its coverage. The police reported that one year later, racist incidents were down 56 percent in the area. Sighthill was crucial in demonstrating that racism could be fought and that solidarity between new and existing communities was vital.

This would be tested many times in many towns and cities in Scotland over the next few years as refugees from the Iraq and Afghan wars came to Scotland. The Stop the War Coalition (STW) activity organised across Scotland, uniting different communities on an unprecedented scale. The huge Scottish demonstration held in Glasgow against the Iraq war in 2003 coincided with the two million march in London and the hundreds of other mass demonstrations across the world. It was one of the biggest political demonstrations ever to take place in Scotland. Thousands of young Muslims took part in political activity for the first time.

Another effective anti-racist campaign was inspired by the action of 'the Glasgow Girls' - young Drumchapel school students who made national headlines in 2005. Their successful fight against the detention and deportation of their friend Agnesa Murselaj, led to them campaigning vigorously across Glasgow, organising pickets to stop the arrest of their friend's family and forcing a meeting with First Minister Jack McConnell, that eventually overturned the deportation. It was a model of how to deal with deportations and Home Office dawn raids. As Roza Saleh, one of the Glasgow Girls put it: "We definitely raised awareness of the dawn raids. Locals didn't know that children were being detained and deported. People got really angry about it, saying 'these are our weans' and that gave us a boost knowing, we had that support from our community".⁸⁷

⁸⁵ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/1507511.stm> August 2001

⁸⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2001/aug/12/race.immigration> August 2001

⁸⁷ <https://www.glasgowlive.co.uk/news/glasgow-news/glasgow-girls-15-years-on-11715795>

A third example was the campaign to halt the eviction of asylum seekers, in 2018. Serco, the multi-national awarded the contract to deliver housing to asylum seekers in Glasgow, first announced it was issuing eviction notices to tenants who had been denied the right to remain in the UK. Following legal challenges, that initially Serco won, there were protests at Serco's Glasgow HQ and at each and every attempt they made to change the locks. Robina Qureshi from Positive Action in Housing (PAIH) proved that people were being intimidated into leaving their homes and that Serco were changing peoples' locks to force them out. She warned that if unchallenged Serco would leave 300 people destitute. "Are people going to be dragged out and their belongings dumped in the street?... Anecdotal evidence tells us that vulnerable, frightened people, both men and women, will be man handled onto the street".⁸⁸

Large protests, organised by Stand Up to Racism, Living Rent, PAIH and the trade union movement forced Serco to back off. It then lost the contract, but it was a temporary victory. The problem remains and local activists have had to respond to further attacks on asylum seekers. In June 2020 during lockdown, there was a stabbing incident at a Glasgow hotel, where asylum seekers were being temporarily accommodated. Police then responded by shooting dead the assailant. Police Scotland seems to have wrongly assumed a terrorist attack, flooding the area with armed officers. It emerged that Mears, the company that has taken over the Serco contract, removed all asylum seekers from their homes into city centre hotels, ostensibly to help with the Covid lockdown. Yet they carried out no risk assessments, withdrew the daily allowance and failed to provide sufficient food; little wonder that in these circumstances an asylum seeker became distressed but it is unacceptable that he was shot and killed.

Far-right elements tried to exploit the tragedy by calling for asylum seekers to be deported; then launching a violent attack on a small group protesting in support of them. However, the most important response was a socially distanced, 1,500 strong rally organised in George Square by Stand Up to Racism alongside refugee support groups and the trade unions. It challenged the false narrative, highlighting the inadequacy of the hostel arrangements, as well

⁸⁸ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-glasgow-west-48608323>

as making clear that refugees were welcome in Glasgow and that the Scottish government should act rather than hide behind the excuse of Home Office culpability.

A fourth example was that the Coronavirus crisis has led to a number of racist posts and media attention on Govanhill immigrant communities supposedly refusing to socially isolate.⁸⁹ The blame goes to the tenants suffering from overcrowding rather than the slum landlords. Local residents have pushed back, highlighting that some of the photos showing congregating groups are out of date and pointing out language problems.

Institutional racism exists throughout Scotland. Although the SNP government has been consistently anti-racist and pro-immigration in words, it continually fails to increase black and minority ethnic (BAME) involvement in government and in key institutions like Education. The detention centre at Dungavel still incarcerates people who have committed no crime. The family of Sheku Bayou still waits for justice, years after his death in police custody. The campaign led by his family is widely supported throughout the trade unions and by politicians and campaigning bodies like SUTR and BLM. There is no immunity from racism for asylum seekers or the Roma, but wherever it happens, local communities, trade unions and left political organisations can push it back.

Conclusion

It has only been possible in this chapter to deal with some episodes of racism and antiracism. One key point is to note that Scotland is no more immune from racism – institutional and personal – than anywhere else. Racism is not only confined to episodes of economic recession, but can often flow from a misguided sense of scarce resources in a deprived area going to immigrants. We need a dual approach to defeat racism. First we need to organise all those who want to challenge it wherever it exists; but ultimately we need to end the system that breeds racism.

When confronting the racists, socialists need to adopt the tactic that has always come to the fore, as we have shown in this chapter – the united front. It is

⁸⁹ *Sun*, 27 March 2020.

not an easy choice but the involvement of trade unions, centre left and far left political parties and community activists can be a powerful force for combatting racism. It is not about pretending that there are no political differences but rather – like trade unions – it is a decision to pool resources and draw in new people on the issue of confronting racism. We must have an understanding that, whilst this is not the place to go deeply into the rise of Nazism in Germany in the 1930s, there is accepted wisdom that the inability of the two great socialist parties of Weimar Germany -- the KPD and SPD -- to work together was a major factor in the Nazi path to power. We must not forget that even as late as November 1932, the KPD and the SPD achieved more votes and more seats in the election than the Nazis. Even at that late stage, if they could have put their differences to one side in the fight against the Nazis, history might have been different. There are numerous recent examples of the united front tactic working effectively to combat racism and fascism, most notably in Greece where the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party has been eviscerated by a broad campaign resulting in the jailing of the entire leadership of that party.

Many of Scotland's newly arrived citizens found that they too wanted to get involved in a fight for independence in Scotland. The Tories in power in Westminster, years of austerity and endless wars abroad made people open to the idea that something better was possible through the achievement of independence for Scotland. People from countries blighted by years of war and domination by imperialist powers found common cause with the Yes campaign. This included people from Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq, Eritrea, Turkey, Syria, Poland, Romania and Catalonia.

The group All Under One Banner has organised a series of huge demonstrations, including the biggest ever political demonstration in Scotland in Edinburgh in 2019. These marches always include migrants who support independence, and groups, like Asians for Independence, that sprang up in the run up to 2014 referendum. A task for Now Scotland and AUOB and other campaigning groups is to ensure that the campaign for Indy Ref 2 is taken into migrant communities and incorporates activists from these communities.

There is a growing realisation that the campaign can shape a new Scotland that includes anti-racism as a principle and extends a welcome to all people who want to live and work in Scotland. A stark contrast to the UK government's 'hostile environment' policy. Indeed the AUOB demos across Scotland have involved anti-racist groups and prominent anti-racist speakers and anti-racist placards have been taken up by many on the marches. Potentially, this movement can unite an unprecedented coalition of activists with anti-racism one of its core principles. This is not automatic. And it requires a sharp argument with activists as to the pro-business, pro Fortress EU stance of the SNP. Further we need to challenge the SNP argument that migration is solely an economic necessity rather than a cornerstone in the building of a more equal, fairer society

We also need to highlight that the successes of anti-racism, refugee support, BLM and a surge in the polls towards independence also unifies some far right pro-union, anti-immigrant, racist groups. In the anti-racist movement we need to ensure that we do not abandon opponents of independence to the far right. Whether in favour of the union or opposed to it, there is a place in the anti-racist campaigns for all who want to fight racism. We need to continue and deepen SUTR in every community and workplace. The lessons from Trump's America and the events around his loss of the election are that racist ideas can quickly become a rallying point and need to be challenged everywhere. The post-covid recession will result in the potential for scapegoats. We must not let them divide us.

It is the task of socialists to insist that racism and the slavery and imperialist legacy are relentlessly exposed and fought. This is not an optional extra to be left to professionals and politicians but a task for the whole working class. Within the reformist and syndicalist traditions of the Scottish working class, this is not automatic, it has to be fought for. Lenin said that socialists ..."should not be the trade union secretary, but the tribune of the people, who is

able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects".⁹⁰

This is a key task for us now and we have a fantastic opportunity to push for real change in Scotland. The Black Lives Matter movement will not be satisfied with platitudes and vague assurances. There is clear evidence that the high incidence of Covid in BAME communities is a result of structural racism in Britain and needs to be tackled. We want statues down, plaques put up, more black and ethnic representation in our institutions, an end to police racism, an end to detention of asylum seekers, a decolonization of the curriculum and a museum of slavery in Glasgow. And that is just for starters. But even that radicalism will not be enough to eradicate racism – a racism that has its roots in the capitalist system and has been deepened by the experiences of slavery and imperialism. Independence in a capitalist form is thus not enough. Only socialism can do this. As Angela Davis put it: "Racism can't be separated from capitalism".⁹¹

⁹⁰ Vladimir Lenin, *What is to be done?* CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014 (originally published 1917).

⁹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhh3CMkngkY> (June 14, 2020).