

For a Fairer Scotland

With the current debate and forthcoming referendum on Scotland's constitutional future it was felt worthwhile to gather together and refresh UNISON's statement on our vision for Scotland. The current process is only likely to deliver concrete benefits for working people if we ensure that *our* concerns and priorities are placed at the heart of the debate. This document is intended to help UNISON members and branches participate in this debate.

UNISON's approach to constitutional questions is one that is driven by the interests of our members, by the sort of Scotland we want to, and deserve to, live in. This means that for us precise constitutional arrangements are the end not the starting point of the debate. We must first define the sort of Scotland we wish to see and then try and then examine the likelihood of differing constitutional arrangements on offer to deliver on that vision.

Our role is not to promote or condemn the politics of national identity, Scottish or British. We should not accept at face value any of the claims from any of the side of the constitutional debate. Our role is to examine the assertions made by all sides of the debate on the constitution, to get them to spell out what their proposals mean for working people.

We also start from the reality of the Scotland we live in today. As the Christie Commission put it; "This country is a paradoxical tapestry of rich resources, inventive humanity, gross inequalities, and persistent levels of poor health and deprivation". Our objective is tackling those inequalities, poor health and deprivation. Doing so is *social* change and unless it is explained how this is to be achieved, arguments for or against *constitutional* change mean very little.

UNISON principles

UNISON principles are based around a long held set of key values and propositions:

- Democratically accountable public services that engender a strong sense of community.
- Creating sustainable economic growth together with social justice
- A political process that recognises that social dialogue and consensus is the most effective way of improving Scotland.
- Ending poverty, particularly for children, older persons and those in work.
- Reducing health inequalities and increasing healthy life expectancy
- Building social cohesion through a more equal society in which each citizen is afforded equal respect, security and chances in life, regardless of background.
- A greener Scotland that recognises that our future wellbeing is dependent on changing our relationship with the environment.
- A voice for peace and justice in the world without nuclear weapons

These principles overlap and reinforce each other. They all stem from a common concern that the Scotland we live in should be fairer and more equal because the evidence shows that more equal societies do better on every count. This document seeks to provide a starting point for building upon these principles.

Public Services: Community & Democracy

Quality public services are a marker of a decent society. Without them neither individuals nor society as a whole can achieve their full potential. But public services in turn have to have certain characteristics in order to deliver effectively. Services must be democratic; designed and delivered with the meaningful involvement of users and staff. This ethos rather than the narrow commercial concerns of the market - will provide the services the public need. We believe that the private profit motive has no place in running public services. The Scottish public service ethos has a proud history, is valued by the general public and should be maintained and strengthened.

Public Services are an important driver of a fairer society both through service delivery but also as a model employer.

Public service organisations should work in partnership with each other to create the joined up working necessary to address the complex problems facing Scottish society. However we also need to address the fragmentation of services, disrupted by privatisation as well as the growth of un-elected public bodies. Democratic accountability must be among the criteria used when considering any reorganisation of services.

Money spent on services is not a cost, but an investment in a better society, now and in the future. A workforce that cares, cures and educates is not a drain on Scottish society - it is an achievement of Scottish society.

Economic Growth & Social Justice

We will not create sustainable growth by relying on the volatile whims of market forces focussed as they are on short term returns with no reference to wider social need. Instead we require an active economic and industrial policy which aims at creating full employment.

It is important not only that work is available for all who can - but this work must pay enough to ensure a decent standard of living. This will require the development of a strategy that provides not just a minimum wage but a living wage for those working to provide vital services.

To build a fairer and more sustainable society we need fair taxation and a crackdown on tax avoidance. The wealthiest in our society need to pay their fair share. Higher income tax for the super rich makes society fairer by both providing resources to pay for services and by reducing the wealth inequalities that cause so much harm to our society. Taxes are good value for money. Public delivery means economies of scale and stopping shareholders taking profits out of the pot. Investment in public services helps create demand in the economy - and maintain communities.

The consequence of inequality is that 900,000 Scots, including 250,000 children live in poverty. And with half the population earning less than £21,000 per year most families are only a couple of pay slips away from poverty. Social justice should be about creating a Scotland, that is based on the principles of equality and solidarity, that understands and values human rights, and that recognises the dignity of every human being.

Scotland also needs something different to the consumption-orientated and distribution indifferent measure we currently use to assess our national prosperity, Gross Domestic Product. UNISON supports Oxfam's Humankind Index that is built on asking what people need to live well in their communities in a deliberative and participatory manner that moves beyond individual wants to what their communities require.

Democracy, Dialogue & Consensus

Democratic structures create public bodies which are open and transparent in their dealings with the public. Government at all levels must explain and accept responsibility for its actions. However, weak mechanisms and the rise of the quango state have devalued many of our democratic structures.

Local authorities are a key part of Scotland's democracy, and like the Scottish Government, require more control over their own finances.

Public bodies should as far as possible be directly elected. Direct elections will not be practicable for every quango or public body. Such organisations should become an amalgam of elected representatives, appointed laypersons and professionals with a statutory duty to engage with service users and the public. Others could be incorporated into existing democratic structures.

Healthier Scotland

We want to see a healthier Scotland where health inequalities are reducing and the NHS is adequately resourced. Since devolution the gap in healthy life expectancy between the 20 per cent most deprived and the 20 per cent least deprived areas has increased from 8 to 13.5 years.

An improved and strengthened NHS which remains publicly-owned, democratically-controlled and not subject to privatised interests must be at the heart of any vision for a healthier Scotland. The ethos of delivering healthcare must be one of co-operation rather than competition, neither is it an environment suited to the application of the imperatives of the marketplace.

Health inequalities do not exist separate from other inequalities. The evidence which has been found to link social inequality with poor health not only explains health inequalities, but it explains why so many attempts to deal with health inequalities fail – including policies such as targeted health projects, area regeneration, and many health promotion initiatives. And it helps us to understand why even an institution like the NHS, founded on a principle of equal, free access to healthcare, has not been able to redress the health inequalities which exist. Creating a healthier Scotland is therefore not simply a matter of a strong NHS, vital though that is.

Work & Decency

While full employment should be an aim of economic and industrial policy, the jobs people do should be, in the words of William Morris, "Useful work not useless toil". Workers can only ensure dignity and respect in the workplace through collective action to determine their terms and conditions. A trade union is the prime mechanism through which the disparity of power between worker and employer can be addressed. Unions must be able to take collective action either in defence of, or to advance members interests. It is important that workers should be free to support others in need. At the very least we need employment legislation which match the conventions of the International Labour Organisation.

Equality & Respect

Recent wide ranging international studies have shown that societies which are more equal do better across a range of social indicators - physical and mental health, crime, social mobility and many others. This means that the relationship between tax receipts and income equality is highly significant. Countries with higher state involvement generally have lower levels of income

inequality, suggesting that government intervention remains important in ensuring wealth is fairly distributed.

Universalism in the provision of public services is an important driver of a more equal and cohesive society. Universalism is less costly to administer, avoids stigmatisation and encourages a higher participation amongst those who need them. But most importantly, they create a more cohesive and more equal society with greater support for redistribution.

A more equal society welcomes diversity as strengthening our society, leaving no place for discrimination.

A Greener Scotland

Climate change is one of the biggest challenges we face in Scotland and globally. Tackling climate change is an opportunity not a cost. Energy efficiency, active travel and green workplaces can all contribute to more efficient as well as more environmentally friendly public services. The public sector has to lead by example – and the private sector must be prepared to put social necessity ahead of profit.

While moving to a low-carbon economy offers the potential for thousands of new jobs in areas such as renewables and energy efficiency, we must plan for the necessary economic restructuring to ensure the benefits and costs are shared fairly across society. There must be retraining, help with re-location and other support for those whose jobs change or go.

Peace & Justice

Trade unionism is rooted in the concept of solidarity - that we are not merely strivers after our individual betterment but together seek a more just existence. In UNISON we have taken that responsibility seriously with support not simply for other workers in Scotland, but in support through many years for those struggling against injustice in many parts of the world – South Africa, Palestine, Venezuela and many other places. At home we have been resolute in our opposition to nuclear weapons. There should be no place in Scotland for nuclear weapons because there should be no place *anywhere* for nuclear weapons. Public spending should be shifted toward social need and away from preparing for war.

UNISON's Role in the Debate.

We must aim not only to determine whatever option will deliver most for UNISON members, but also to change the nature of the discussion. We must strive to make this debate not a clash over flags and patriotisms, but about the reality of people's lives; at work, at home and the community they live in. Our principles outline a better, fairer Scotland. It is the task of others to show how their proposals match up to those principles. But it is our job to make sure that they need to.



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