

Red Clydeside, described aptly by Maggie Craig as 'those heady decades at the beginning of the twentieth century when passionate people and passionate politics swept like a whirlwind through Glasgow' is arguably the most significant yet controversial subject in Scottish labour and social history.¹ Yet, it is because of this controversy that questions still linger regarding the significance of Red Clydeside in the overall narrative of British and more specifically, Scottish history. The title of this paper, 'Does Red Clydeside Really Matter Any More?' has been generously borrowed from Terry Brotherstone's interesting article in *Militant Workers: Labour and Class Conflict on the Clyde 1900-1950*.² Following a decade in which the legacy of the Red Clydesiders had been systematically attacked by revisionist historians agitated by contemporary attempts to link the events on the Clyde with those occurring in Russia in 1917, Brotherstone emphasised the new and developing common sense approach to the Red Clydeside debate. It was argued that 'A new consensus seems to be emerging... which acknowledges the significance of the events associated with Red Clydeside, but seeks to dissociate them from what is now perceived as the 'myth' or 'legend' that they involved a revolutionary challenge to the British state'. However, as a consequence of the ever changing nature of Red Clydeside historiography it is now time for a re-assessment of the significance of Red Clydeside which incorporates new research into the rise of left-wing politics in Scotland more generally. In order to do this, this essay will draw upon and expand on some of the arguments made by Brotherstone regarding the significance of the Red Clydeside period. Furthermore, it will be argued that future research should seek to move away from the hegemony of Red Clydeside and adopt a regionalist approach in order for a better understanding of radical left wing politics in Scotland to emerge. At this point however, it is important to highlight the historiographical context which this argument is situated.

Terry Brotherstone's article uses a definition of Red Clydeside adopted from the work of Ian Donnachie and George Hewitt. Donnachie and Hewitt define Red Clydeside as the 'eight years of intense labour conflict in the Glasgow area, coinciding with World War I and its aftermath.'³ In assessing the significance of the period known as Red Clydeside, this paper will examine in detail what will be described as the 'reality' of Red Clydeside, the Glasgow rent strikes of 1915-16. However, in coming to a conclusion on the importance of Red Clydeside it will be necessary to briefly

¹ M. Craig, *When the Clyde Ran Red*, (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing Company, 2011), p.11.

² T. Brotherstone, *Does Red Clydeside Really Matter Any More?*, p.57, IN *Militant Workers: Labour and Class Conflict on the Clyde, 1900-1950*, (ed.) R. Duncan and A. Mcivor, (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd, 1992).

³ The main events of this approach to Red Clydeside are the strikes 1915-16 particularly over increases in rents and the dilution of labour, 'Bloody Friday' or 'The Battle of George Square' and latterly the General Election of 1922 where electoral breakthroughs for Labour were plentiful. SEE: T. Brotherstone, *Does Red Clydeside Really Matter Any More?*, p.53.

discuss the Red Clyde period as a whole. Methodologically speaking, the source material presented will emanate from both secondary historical writing and from contemporary newspaper reports.

Even though in previous essay work the historiographical narrative of Red Clydeside has been discussed, its central importance in the argument of this paper means that it necessary to reiterate the various stages of the Red Clyde debate. Contemporary accounts of the Red Clyde period by people such as Willie Gallacher have focussed on the raising of the Red Flag on George Square in January 1919, stressing the event's links with the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 in Russia. Gallacher explicitly stated that revolution was possible on Clydeside but that it never materialised due to the inability of working class leaders to foresee the Clyde's revolutionary potential that day.⁴ It was such accounts by contemporaries that such as these that led to the 'liberal revisionist' assault in the 1980s upon the Red Clydeside legacy. Revisionist scholars such as Mclean, Harvie and Hutchinson were arguably correct to dispel the links between Red Clydeside and the Russian Revolution.⁵ More specifically, Chris Harvie states that Red Clydeside was 'more legend than reality.'⁶ However, comments such as the one highlighted here are arguably unhelpful to the current historiographical debate. There is a reality behind Red Clydeside, a reality with major significance which has become lost as a result of some historians' fascination with debate regarding the relationship between the events of 1917 in Russia and those which occurred on Clydeside shortly after. Similarly, it has been argued by scholars such as McKinlay and Morris that previous historians' attempts to assess the significance of Red Clydeside in relation to its revolutionary potential has had the effect of obscuring 'the debate over the nature of Glasgow's working-class political history for far too long.'⁷ On the other hand, there is some merit in the argument that assessing the revolutionary potential of events on the Clyde has been an important part of a long process in which a sensible consensus has emerged on the significance of the Red Clydeside years. Such a consensus is best exemplified through the work of scholars like Brotherstone, McKinlay and Morris. These historians have sought to disassociate the events on the Clyde from questions of revolution but at the same time promote the significance of much that was achieved on the Clyde from 1914 to 1922. McKinlay and Morris are particularly convincing when they propose that there was a 'real Red Clyde' and it was the

⁴ W. Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde*, (London, 1936), p.234.

⁵ I. McLean, *The legend of Red Clydeside*, (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd, 1983), C. Harvie, *No Gods and Precious Few Heroes: Scotland 1914-1980*, (London, 1981) & C. Harvie, *No Gods and Precious Few Heroes: Scotland 1914-1980*, Review by I.G.C. Hutchinson, *Scottish Historical Review*, 62, No. 173, (April, 1983), p.102-103.

⁶ G. Gall, *The Political Economy of Scotland: Red Scotland? Radical Scotland?*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), p.126.

⁷ *The ILP on Clydeside, 1893-1932: from foundation to disintegration*, (ed.) A. McKinlay & R. J. Morris, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), p. 5.

Independent Labour Party (ILP) and the politics of this party that were responsible for it.⁸ Central to their argument is an understanding of the importance of the 'networking activities of the ILP activists'.⁹ Brotherstone sums up this argument well by stating that 'The various organisations and activities which contributed to Red Clydeside, in other words, would have remained uncoordinated and no greater than the sum of their parts, had it not been for the networking link-persons of the ILP.'¹⁰ Interestingly, accepting this approach has allowed for a rational debate about the significance of Red Clydeside to emerge. In 1992, Brotherstone set out to bring together in one place the multiple arguments that have emerged from the 'new consensus' on Red Clydeside. In doing so, Brotherstone made many interesting assertions purporting the significance of Red Clydeside, and it will be the aim of this paper to examine one particular assertion made about the Glasgow rent strikes of 1915-16.

Aside from 'Bloody Friday', the other key events in the Red Clydeside narrative were the rent strikes of 1915. Following the outbreak of the First World War, large numbers of workers descended on Glasgow in order to work in 'the munitions and allied war industry trades.'¹¹ Public discontent arose in 1915 from the decision by a number of house owners in the Glasgow area to raise rents.¹² *The Scotsman* in November 1915 reported that 'where the grievance existed the people held the view tenaciously that the minority who happen to own houses were taking advantage of the war to exploit the country for their own benefit.'¹³ Councillor Izert of Glasgow City Council further commented that 'he wished the soldiers could see and know that while they were defending the trenches abroad, the women folk were defending the trenches at home.'¹⁴ This disdain at the actions of landlords reached its peak in November 1915 when a demonstration by munitions and shipyard workers marched towards the Sherriff Court over the summoning of eighteen tenants to court by householders requesting the 'arrestment of their wages' for the non-paying of rents. Estimates vary on the number of people on the march: the *Forward* estimated around 4,000 but other accounts have argued as many as 15,000 were present.¹⁵ One of the more interesting aspects of the Glasgow

⁸ T. Brotherstone, 'Does Red Clydeside Really Matter Any More?', p.60.

⁹ T. Brotherstone, 'Does Red Clydeside Really Matter Any More?', p.5.

¹⁰ T. Brotherstone, 'Does Red Clydeside Really Matter Any More?', p.60.

¹¹ 'Radical Glasgow', Available at http://www2.gcu.ac.uk/radicalglasgow/chapters/rent_strikes.html, (29/03/15).

¹² By 1915 the housing market in Glasgow could not cope with the demand for property. However, some landlords saw this as an opportune moment to raise rents. This led to substantial rises in the cost of living for many munitions workers in this period. For tenants who could not afford to pay the rents, landlords often attempted to serve eviction orders to their tenants. SEE: 'Clydeside rent strikes 1915-16', Available at <http://gdl.cdlr.strath.ac.uk/redclyde/redclyeve05.htm>, (29/03/15).

¹³ *The Scotsman*, 26 November 1915.

¹⁴ *The Scotsman*, 18 October 1915.

¹⁵ I. McLean, 'The Legend of Red Clydeside', p.25.

rent strikes was the way in which the issue of increased rents affected both the working and middle classes. The left-wing newspaper, *Forward*, reported in January 1915 that 'The great expressions of disgust at the landlord's action in raising rent is not from the Cowcaddens or the slum areas, but from the districts where up till now people thought the housing problem only affected the poorer classes.'¹⁶ The ability of the housing issue to mobilise both the working and the middle classes was arguably one of the key factors behind the success of the rent strikes. As a result, it is estimated that around 20,000 residents of the main munitions areas of Glasgow took part in a non-payment of rent campaign.¹⁷ The unrest on Clydeside sparked panic in the Government who were deeply concerned with any potential disruption to the war effort. Consequentially, the War Restrictions Act was passed in 1915. The effect of this act was to restrict the rent on small-dwelling houses in certain areas to their August 1914 level.¹⁸

It is important to interject here that the rent strikes of 1915-16 should not be viewed solely as a reaction to increases of rent in 1915. Housing was an issue in Glasgow which pre-dated the Red Clydeside period adopted in this essay. As argued by Joseph Melling, 'The crisis proceeded not merely from the emergency of war itself, but from the same market conditions which were causing such concern before 1914.'¹⁹ In addition, Jim Smith notes the main problems with housing in Glasgow as being a result of the disorganised nature of the housing market. This meant that large numbers of homes stood empty, unaffordable to the majority of Glasgow's working class.²⁰ Activists from the labour movement and the ILP specifically put the issue of working class housing at the top of their political agenda. One of the most notable campaigns was the £8 cottages scheme promoted by ILP member John Wheatley.²¹ Wheatley, supported by the Labour Party Housing Committee, argued that cottage style houses should be built for working class families at a rate of £8 per annum. As Smyth notes 'Such plans were not original but Wheatley's major contribution lay in publicising his scheme and galvanising public opinion in support.'²² This was made possible arguably by Wheatley's

¹⁶ *Forward*, 23 January 1915.

¹⁷ It is also important to note that the rent strikers were given considerable support, unsurprisingly perhaps, from the munitions workers but also from people who worked in Glasgow's shipyards. SEE: *Clydeside rent strikes 1915-16*, Available at <http://gdl.cdlr.strath.ac.uk/redclyde/redclyeve05.htm>, (29/03/15).

¹⁸ W. Wilson, 'The historical context of rent control in the private rented sector', (22 October 2013), Available at <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/briefing-papers/SN06747/the-historical-context-of-rent-control-in-the-private-rented-sector>, (29/03/15).

¹⁹ 'Housing, Social Policy and the State', (ed.) J. Melling, (London: Croom Helm Ltd, 1980), p.139.

²⁰ J.J. Smyth, 'Labour in Glasgow 1896-1936: Socialism, Suffrage, Sectarianism', (Tuckwell Press, 2000), p.69.

²¹ 'Roots of Red Clydeside 1910-1914? Labour Unrest and Industrial Relations in West Scotland', (eds.) W. Kenefick & A. McIvor, (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1996), p.236.

²² J.J. Smyth, 'Labour in Glasgow 1896-1936', p.69.

association with the ILP and their growing influence on the ground in Glasgow even before 1914.²³ Therefore, it is clear that the rent strikes were not a direct consequence of events during the First World War which acted as an accelerant to an issue which was being discussed even before 1914.

Revisionist historian Iain McLean argues that 'We cannot be certain what influence the rent strikers in general... had on the action taken by the Government; we cannot now reconstruct what may have happened in the Cabinet between 17th and 23rd November.'²⁴ While this is true it would not be unsupportable to argue that the rent strikers played an important role in the Government's decision to introduce rent controls in 1915. It is possible using McLean's own evidence to argue that the Glasgow rent strikers were at the very least firmly in the thoughts of the Government when they made the decision to introduce rent controls. In Lloyd George's correspondence he states that 'The complaints I have had about rents have almost invariably come from the Glasgow area.'²⁵

Furthermore, the MP for Lanarkshire William Pringle spoke to *The Times* newspaper stating that the government's decision to not act on rents sooner meant that the situation had gotten out of hand, exemplified by the events in Glasgow in 1915 whereby 'the legal proceedings in the Sheriff Court were affected to some extent by an experience of mob law'.²⁶ Therefore it can be argued that although McLean is right to state that we cannot be certain of the extent of influence the rent strikes had on the Government's decision to create the Rent Restrictions Act, it is clear that key politicians such as Lloyd George were more than aware of the events on the Clyde at the time of the introduction of rent controls. This seems to be a rather trivial argument by McLean because as most historians are aware it is almost impossible for any historian to make an argument which they can be completely certain of. However, it is vital that arguments such as this one by McLean do not discourage historians from analysing the available data and making supportable claims from this evidence.

Brotherstone's key claim is that changes brought to the private housing market were the 'central specific achievement' of the Red Clydeside as envisaged by McKinlay and Morris.²⁷ Once the Government had intervened in working-class rents, it would be difficult in a post-war situation to hand the ascendancy back to the private landlord. However, the Rent Restrictions Act was only intended to be a temporary measure. In fact, the Secretary of State for Scotland in responding to

²³ A key resource for understanding the role and influence of the ILP before 1914 is '*Roots of Red Clydeside 1910-1914?*', (eds.) W. Kenefick & A. McIvor, & '*The ILP on Clydeside*', (ed.) A. McKinlay & R. J. Morris, especially Chapters 1-3.

²⁴ I. McLean, '*The Legend of Red Clydeside*', p.26.

²⁵ Lloyd George to Chamberlain, 8 July 1915. Lloyd George Papers. D/16/7/2 IN I. McLean, '*The Legend of Red Clydeside*', p.23.

²⁶ *The Scotsman*, 26 November 1915.

²⁷ T. Brotherstone, '*Does Red Clydeside Really Matter Any More?*', p.64.

protests at the bill from house owners stated that 'I don't suppose that either Mr Long or Mr Birrell or I myself would have dreamt of introducing a Bill of this sort in time of peace, but the national necessity must be the paramount consideration.'²⁸ Statements such as this one by the Secretary of State for Scotland were made in a bid to appease landlords who believed the act to be 'the most unjust and unrighteousness measure, and broke all moral laws and moral obligations.'²⁹ The rent strikes in Glasgow along with the Rent Restrictions Act of 1915 put the government in a difficult situation by the time the war ended. Between 1917 and 1919 the Government was locked in conversations about its housing and rent policies. Joseph Melling notes that the Minister for Health Christopher Addison's 'Advisory Housing Panel' acknowledged the tricky situation the government faced. In a *Memorandum by the Advisory Housing Panel* it was noted that 'unless prompt and effective steps are taken to remedy the shortage of houses, rents in many places will rise... and grave discontent will thereby be caused, and on the other... its continued existence would be a hindrance to the ordinary remedy, namely building by private enterprise.'³⁰ The outcome of discussions was the Addison Act 1919. This act was a major development in housing provision because it not only encouraged further rent control but also made providing adequate housing a 'national responsibility' with local authorities being granted state subsidies to build 500,000 homes in three years.³¹ Subsequent acts of parliament including the 1924 Financial Provisions Housing Act orchestrated by Clydeside John Wheatley as the Minister for Health and the 1930 Housing Act continued the precedent of granting subsidies to local authorities for building public housing.³² Conversely, critics could point to the fact that from around 1923 the government started to 'introduce the gradual decontrol of rents'.³³ However, the move away from centralised control of rents by the UK Government should not tarnish the achievements of Glasgow's rent strikes in 1915-16. As Mike Savage notes, 'The major Rent Strike and demands for state housing did not represent a fully fledged demand for widespread state intervention.' The significance of the Red Clyde rent strikes should not be assessed on the extent to which rent controls continued to exist in post war Britain but rather on their more general effect on the private housing market. Therefore, when

²⁸ *The Scotsman*, 1 December, 1915.

²⁹ *The Scotsman*, 1 December, 1915.

³⁰ Ministry of Reconstruction, *Memorandum by the Advisory Housing Panel on the Emergency Problem*, Cd. 9087, para 2. IN '*Housing, Social Policy and the State*', (ed.) J. Melling, p.152.

³¹ '*Council Housing*', Available at: <http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/towncountry/towns/overview/councilhousing/>, (30/03/15). Also, The Allison Act largely failed to meet its targets for home building. The Scottish Office had estimated that in Glasgow alone, around 57,000 new homes were required to be built but by 1921 only 4,500 new homes had been erected in Glasgow. SEE: '*Housing, Social Policy and the State*', (ed.) J. Melling, p.152.

³² J. Melling, '*Clydeside rent struggles and Labour politics, 1900-1939*', IN '*Scottish Housing in the Twentieth Century*', (ed.) R. Rodger, (London: Leicester University Press, 1989), p.5.

³³ '*Housing, Social Policy and the State*', (ed.) J. Melling, p.154.

looking at the Red Clydeside purported by the 'new consensus', the argument by Brotherstone that the rent strikes and their consequential effect on the private housing market was the 'central specific achievement of this Red Clydeside' appears to be convincing.

It is almost impossible to address the Glasgow rent strikes without at least briefly mentioning the role of women in initiating the political agitation. The Glasgow rent strikes are arguably unique for the role in which women played as leaders of the industrial unrest. For example, Mary Laird along with the ILP played an important role in creating the Glasgow Women's Housing Association in 1914. Laird spoke out at ILP party conferences about 'the problems of inadequate and over-crowded dwellings.'³⁴ Other important female leaders of the rent strikes include the ILP's Helen Crawford and the Govan-based Mary Barbour. Michael Byers in 2002 argued that the first signs of active political resistance to political rents arose in the Govan area with the non-payment of rents, primarily housewives, as well as the formation of the South Govan Women's Housing Association led by Barbour herself. There was often contact between the Government and the housewives of Glasgow. For instance, *The Scotsman* reports in 1915 of a direct telegram sent to a Mrs Ferguson, Secretary of the Partick Rent Strike Committee who had gone on strike over the issue of rent increases, from Lloyd George himself.³⁵ It is certainly significant to see that women were at the forefront of political agitation in Glasgow as it could easily be assumed that women would lack involvement in politics because of working class attitudes towards them. However, it is important not to overestimate this importance. It is argued by Morris that to understand 'the apparent paradox of the dominant role played by women in the rent strikes', it is crucial to highlight the relationship between the men and the women of the skilled working class on the Clyde. According to Morris, women played a significant leadership role in the rent strikes because 'their traditional role allotted them responsible for managing household spending.'³⁶ This differed completely from the attitudes towards women in the workplace.³⁷ Not only that, the Munitions Act of 1915 had replaced the ability of male munitions workers to strike with compulsory arbitration.³⁸ So, although the rent strikes are significant in that women played a critical role in the leadership of the political agitation during the Red Clydeside period it is important to stress that this did not represent any shift in the position of working class

³⁴ 'Housing, Social Policy and the State', (ed.) J. Melling, p.145&146.

³⁵ In the newspaper article the reporter notes that the ranks of the strikers were filled by a contingent of women from Govan. It would not be unreasonable to assume that the reporter was referring to Mary Barbour and the South Govan Women's Housing Association. SEE: *The Scotsman*, 18 October 1915.

³⁶ It should be noted that women were more likely to assume this role because a lot of men were away fighting on the front line in WW1.

³⁷ 'The ILP on Clydeside', (ed.) A. McKinlay & R. J. Morris, p.12.

³⁸ 'Munitions of War (Amendment Bill)', Hansard Papers [Online], 11 January 1916, vol. 20 cc852-68, Available at http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1916/jan/11/munitions-of-war-amendment-bill#S5LV0020PO_19160111_HOL_18, (30/03/2015)

women in the eyes of their husbands. Having said that, it is possible to argue that the experience of Clydeside women during the rent strikes may have politicised the women of Glasgow, contributing somewhat to a rise in the popularity of the ILP during the war. According to Morris, the ILP went from 3,000 members in 117 branches in 1917 to 9,000 members in 192 branches across the whole of Scotland.³⁹ Also, after 1918 some of the women on Clydeside would be eligible to vote in General Elections and certainly would have contributed to the electoral success of the labour movement in Glasgow. In the 1918 General Election, Glasgow returned one Labour or ILP candidate but four years later this rose to ten M.P.s constituting more than Sheffield, Manchester and Leeds combined.⁴⁰ These results can also be explained by returning to the point made by McKinlay and Morris relating to the success of the ILP's 'networking' in instigating the rise of local community politics prior to and during the Red Clydeside period.

Although labour historians' fascination with the question of revolution has both obscured historical debate and diminished the significance of the 'reality' of the events on the Red Clyde, the fact that reference has continued to be made to Red Clydeside decades later is arguably another way to illustrate the significance of the period to Scotland.⁴¹ Post-1945 reference to Red Clydeside has become synonymous with local political protest which can be best exemplified through the anti-poll tax campaign in the 1980s and 1990s. Tomy Sheridan, speaking at an anti-poll tax campaign proclaimed that 'We are building a new Red Clydeside in Scotland that will not pay the poll tax'.⁴² It is even argued in political science circles by Gregor Gall that the idea of 'Red Clydeside' has become a part of the Scottish national identity.⁴³ It is testament to the importance of the events on the Clyde that debate relating to Red Clydeside is still considered relevant in a modern Scotland. Finally, through a discussion of the significance of the Glasgow rent strikes in 1915-16 and the subsequent reference to Red Clydeside post-1945, this essay has demonstrated that Red Clydeside does really still matter. Yet the question remains in terms of historical research, where does the Red Clydeside debate go from here?

As noted earlier, it has been argued in some quarters that historians' focus on the revolutionary potential of Red Clydeside has adversely affected 'the debate over the nature of Glasgow's working-

³⁹ *The ILP on Clydeside*, (ed.) A. McKinlay & R. J. Morris, p.5.

⁴⁰ I. McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, p.159.

⁴¹ Brotherstone also states that the significance of Red Clydeside can be viewed in the work of historians conducting large histories of the British and society in the twentieth century. For example, A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945*, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1965) & A. Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1991).

⁴² *'Into Top Gear'*, Available at <http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/polltax/p2frame.htm?ch36.htm>, (01/04/15)

⁴³ G. Gall, *The Political Economy of Scotland: Red Scotland? Radical Scotland?*, see Chapter 6.

class political history for far too long.⁴⁴ However, this essay will now take the opportunity to assert that Scottish labour historians' obsession with Red Clydeside has in fact obscured the debate regarding the 'working class political history' of Scotland more generally. Although Red Clydeside is a significant episode in Scottish working class history, it is now important that scholars more closely analyse the idea of a 'Red Scotland'.⁴⁵ John Kemp makes an important point when he states that 'knowing what happened in Glasgow does not tell us what happened in Scotland, nor even in urban Scotland.'⁴⁶ Therefore, it will be the intention here to make the case for further research into left-wing politics outside of the West of Scotland. The history of left-wing politics in Dundee make for an interesting case study. According to Kemp, by the end of 1922 Dundee 'was far more left wing than any other city, a deeper, and more vivid, red than even Clydeside.' Dundee was one of the first cities in Britain to elect a Labour MP, which they did in 1906.⁴⁷ In 1922 moreover, only one third of the registered electorate in Glasgow voted for a Labour or Communist candidate, compared to nearly half of the Dundee electorate voting for such candidates.⁴⁸ It is crucial that when assessing the extent to which a particular city was 'Red' or not, historians compare the strength of left-wing politics in relation to population size. Returning to the rent strikes of 1915-16, it should be noted that these occurred all over Scotland and were particularly well supported in Dundee. In fact it is interesting to note that unlike Glasgow, Dundee saw a major confrontation between tenants and landlords over increases of rents occurring in 1912.⁴⁹ The strike ended according to Dr Ann Petrie because house owners soon began contacting their tenants agreeing to lower rent repayments.⁵⁰ The confrontation soon came to an end as increasing numbers of tenants constructed rent agreements with their landlords. Furthermore, at the same time as the rent struggle was gaining momentum in the West of Scotland, agitation was brewing again in Dundee following a decision by landlords to increase rent from May 1915. This time the Dundee rent strikers were more united than they had been in 1912. It is significant to note that the first demonstration held by the strikers attracted over 2,000 people with overflow rooms having to be provided to meet demand.⁵¹ An act of

⁴⁴ *'The ILP on Clydeside'*, (ed.) A. McKinlay & R. J. Morris, p.5.

⁴⁵ SEE: W. Kenefick, *'Red Scotland! The Rise and Fall of the Radical Left in Scotland c1870 to 1932'*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

⁴⁶ J. Kemp, *'Red Tayside? Political change in early twentieth-century Dundee'*, IN *'Victorian Dundee, Image and Realities'*, (eds.) L. Miskell, C. A. Whatley & B. Harris, (Tuckwell Press, 2000), p.152.

⁴⁷ The two seats won in Scotland in 1906 were in Dundee and Glasgow (Hutchestown and Blackfriars). Kemp sees little connection between the two because the victory in Glasgow is attributed to a switch in the Irish vote rather than a wider change in political mood. Alexander Wilkie's victory in Dundee received no such help from the Irish community in the city. SEE: J. Kemp, *'Red Tayside?'*, p.152

⁴⁸ J. Kemp, *'Red Tayside?'*, p.151.

⁴⁹ A. Petrie, *'The 1915 Rent Strikes: An East Coast Perspective'*, (Dundee: Abertay Historical Society, 2008), p.46-49.

⁵⁰ A. Petrie, *'The 1915 Rent Strikes'*, p.48.

⁵¹ A. Petrie, *'The 1915 Rent Strikes'*, p.53.

similar significance was a meeting between the Scottish deputation of five house owner associations and the Secretary of Scotland in order to discuss the Rent Restriction Act. Included in this meeting were four associations from the West of Scotland along with the Dundee Houseowners Association led by a Mr J.G. Sibbald.⁵² Moving away from Dundee, it is argued by Neil Rafeek and William Kenefick that there was a strong presence of radical left politics amongst the mining communities of Fife.⁵³ This was a presence which Kenefick argues formed before the war and later went on to become strongholds for the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) in Scotland. It is perhaps surprising to see that by the 1930s communists in Fife made up 13% of the total party membership in Scotland.⁵⁴ However, the history of the radical left in Fife is an area of Scottish labour historiography which deserved more attention from scholars.⁵⁵ It should be noted that the purpose of this section was not to try and challenge the significance of Red Clydeside but rather to highlight that there is certainly a case to be put forward for more research to be conducted into the history of radical left wing politics beyond the West of Scotland.

To conclude, it has been argued throughout this paper that despite some historians' fixation with dispelling the links between the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the events on the Clyde from 1914 to 1922, that there is an important reality behind Red Clydeside which must not be lost amongst the controversy surrounding the revolutionary potential of such events from 1914-1922. In attempting to demonstrate the significance of Red Clydeside, this essay focussed upon the Glasgow rent strikes of 1915-16, echoing Terry Brotherstone's claim that the changes brought to the private housing market through the Rent Restrictions Act of 1915, the 1919 Addison Act and latterly the 1924 Financial Provisions Housing Act along with the Housing Act of 1930, was the 'central specific achievement' of the Red Clydeside that emerged from the 'new consensus' in the 1990s. Such acts marked a change in the Government's approach to working class housing whereby rent controls and, latterly, subsidies were given to local authorities in order to build sufficient affordable housing for the masses. The Glasgow rent strikes were asserted to also be significant because of the influential leadership role played by many women in the political agitation. The rent strikes were instrumental in the politicisation of many Glasgow housewives, which it was argued along with the 'networking' ability of the ILP explains the surge in support for Independent Labour after 1917. Furthermore,

⁵² *The Scotsman*, 1 December, 1915.

⁵³ W. Kenefick, *'Red Scotland!'* & N. C. Rafeek, *'Communist Women in Scotland: Red Clydeside from the Russian Revolution to the end of the Soviet Union'*, (London: I.B. Tauris and Co Ltd, 2008).

⁵⁴ W. Kenefick, *'Red Scotland!'*, p.163.

⁵⁵ There is also research into the presence of the radical left in Aberdeen, although research into this area is still in its infancy. SEE: W. Kenefick, *'Aberdeen was more Red than Glasgow'*, IN *'Scotland and the Slavs: Cultures in Contact 1500-2000'*, (ed.) M. Cornwall and M. Frame, (Newtonville, MA: Sankt-Petersburg, 2000) & C.W.M. Phipps, *'Aberdeen Trades Council and Politics 1900-1939: The Development of a Local Labour Party in Aberdeen'*, unpublished Master of Letters dissertation, University of Aberdeen, 1980.

brief reference was made to the Red Clydeside period as a whole, proposing that the way in which reference to the events on the Clyde still exists in post-1945 political discourse is a further demonstration of why Red Clydeside really does matter. The second key argument emanating from this essay asserted that Scottish labour historians' continued focus on Red Clydeside has inhibited the growth of regional studies into the existence of radical left wing politics beyond the West of Scotland. Focussing largely on studies of Dundee conducted by John Kemp coupled with Ann Petrie and Kenefick and Rafeek's analysis of the influence of the CPGB in the mining communities of Fife, it was clear that there is a strong basis for more research to be conducted into this area of labour history. With more research into the left wing politics beyond the West of Scotland, scholars will be able to take a more thorough comparative regional approach allowing for a more rounded understand of the importance of those fascinating eight years on Clydeside.

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