

SCOTTISH LABOUR RESPONSE TO JUST & GREEN RECOVERY SCOTLAND ELECTION LETTER

28 April 2021

Dear Just, Green Recovery Coalition.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to your supporters on the topic of a just, green recovery. As we come out of this pandemic, we must focus on solutions which will deliver a fairer recovery and a stronger Scotland. Scottish Labour will focus on what unites us, not what divides us.

I believe we must tackle the climate and nature emergencies while reducing the inequalities that Covid-19 has exposed and exacerbated. The transition to net zero is an opportunity to create thousands of jobs and address the immediate economic crisis caused by Covid-19. The past year has been tough for us all but it is important to recognise that the impact has not been felt equally across society. Women, children and young people, disabled people, LGBTI people, diverse minority communities, key workers, unpaid carers, private renters, and those on lower incomes have all been particularly affected. We have a plan for a recovery that recognises this inequality and works for everyone.

We have a mission to make every community in Scotland a place where people can safely grow up, settle and work, with access to public services and free from poverty and hunger. Expanding public ownership of public services is a key part of this mission. Scottish Labour championed both public ownership of our railways and buses, and a National Care Service throughout the last parliament. The privatisation of public services has failed our economy, with investment only serving private corporations' interests rather than the people of Scotland. Scottish Labour will halt this economic model by promoting common ownership nationally and locally. We will establish a Workers Ownership Fund with the aim of doubling the number of cooperatives and supporting alternative business models, including social enterprises. We also have a plan to invest in our health and education services to reduce inequality. Our Health Recovery Plan lays out steps to address the backlog created by COVID-19, get cancer treatment back on track, improve mental health care and support, deliver a national care service and value the workforce that has done so much for us during the pandemic. As part of this, we are committed to increasing care workers' pay to £15 an hour. Our Education Recovery Plan would give every young person the support they need to succeed after a year of disrupted learning, including a personal comeback plan, mental health assessment, a tutoring programme, and access to free school meals and extracurricular activities over the summer holidays.

Every family in Scotland should have access to a safe, warm and affordable home. With Scottish Labour, housing will be a national priority. To reflect its importance, we will create a National Housing Agency to help coordinate the sector. We would build at least 120,000 social homes and improve our current housing stock with a plan to upgrade all homes to at least an energy efficiency rating of C or higher by 2030 and, where possible, zero carbon by 2045. Our National Housing Agency would be primarily responsible for the acquisition of finance, land and housing, dealing with derelict and vacant land, and act as the prime mover in coordinating and driving the delivery of housing. Its mission will be producing well designed, mixed tenure, neighbourhoods and communities. Scottish Labour's vision for publicly-led development would put communities first and prioritise public health, green space and energy efficiency.

We want to make full use of the Scottish Parliament's powers to tackle poverty and inequality, redistribute power and wealth, and plan the economy for the future wellbeing of the people and the

planet. Scottish Labour will have a strong focus on job creation and a bold industrial strategy, and will engage positively with businesses and trade unions to create the sustainable economic recovery we need. Our jobs recovery will learn from the lessons of the past by rejecting austerity. Support from government provides an opportunity to shape a fairer economy. Recovery deals for each sector should include a range of financial and other support to business. In return, they should sign up to enforceable Good Work obligations, including working towards commitments on pay, conditions, equal opportunities, carbon reduction, skills and collective bargaining. Further to this, our Better Business Pledge would require all businesses that benefit from public procurement to commit to using no zero-hours contracts or similar insecure work practices, paying the Scottish Living Wage and producing a clear carbon reduction plan.

The pandemic has highlighted the need to strengthen worker safety in Scotland. Protecting the health and safety of workers also protects public health and the economy. Local authorities will be funded to ensure statutory safety inspections are undertaken. We support establishing a Scottish NHS-based occupational health service, roving safety representatives, a toxic use reduction strategy, and strengthening electrical and building regulations, including protection of title for electricians. We will work with employers to ensure psychologically healthy workplaces that support workers to thrive mentally and physically, and promote pilot schemes to reduce the length of the working week.

Long-term unemployment is damaging for individuals and wider society so Scotland cannot afford to have a recovery that leaves anyone behind. At the same time there is much work to do to restart our public services, restore our communities and tackle the climate emergency. However, COVID-19 and further exposed the disadvantage that exists in our economy and jobs market. Our Jobs Recovery Plan seeks to ensure that no one who wants to work is without a job and widen access to skills and training. As part of this, our Jobs for Recovery guarantee will provide a public sector role of at least six months, paid at the Scottish Living Wage, for every young person, disabled person and person who is long-term unemployed. Our new Scottish Skills Benefit will offer everyone who is unemployed, along with those currently on furlough, a £500 grant for retraining while retaining their benefits or furlough payments. Individuals who are unemployed would also be eligible for a further £750 in income support to reflect time spent in training or study. We would also establish core training funds to subsidise the cost of entering, training or completing continued professional development, in particular targeting key professions where there are shortages such as nursing, health, care and engineering.

The social security system we would build would secure the wellbeing and human rights of everyone and seek to guarantee a Minimum Income Standard that no one would fall below. We would lay out a bold and transformative mission to work across departments to make this happen. This would include ensuring good and fair unionised jobs, decent pay and conditions, and affordable housing costs, with a social security system there when you need it. We would recognise the additional costs that groups such as lone parents and disabled people face. We would work closely with communities in the development of the Minimum Income Standard, especially those most at risk of economic inequality.

Devolving powers to local government is a key part of Scottish Labour's vision for devolution. Scottish Labour also supports measures to revitalise local democracy and promote greater community empowerment. If Scotland is to truly be seen as a democratic leader, we need to implement innovative ways of working which embrace citizens and decision-makers as equals. We will place importance on capturing the opinions of those who have been marginalised in the past and develop methods of amplifying and embracing these voices in policy and financial planning.

Those who have been described as 'hard to reach' are too often 'easy to ignore'. This includes a Right to Space to ensure communities have places to meet and funding to build the capacity to participate as active citizens. We believe giving more power to communities will help create a more preventative approach that tackles problems at source rather than merely managing them once they've happened. We sought to amend the Planning Bill to give individuals and environmental organisations the right to challenge decisions that will severely impact the environment. At a UK level, Labour have voted against the Policing Bill.

Scottish Labour would deliver a statutory Just Transition Commission to focus on how the transition to net zero would benefit those who are unemployed, underemployed or who are at risk of unemployment as a result of the current economic crisis and the transition. Our bold industrial strategy would lay out how domestic manufacturing capacity must evolve to ensure that the growth in domestic renewable energy production leads to new jobs in Scotland. Alongside this, we would establish the Scottish Energy Development Agency to coordinate the growth in renewable energy production including in skills and training. It would work closely with the Scottish National Investment Bank to invest in the development of the domestic supply chain.

Government must take the lead and make it possible for communities across Scotland to tackle the climate emergency. We would: invest in councils to create urban and rural safe active travel routes, green spaces and food growing places; invest in interest-free government loans to help more low and middle income households to buy electric cars over the next two years and accelerate the roll-out of electric charging points with an initial focus on areas with the least access; increase active travel spending to 10% of the overall transport budget, giving priority to encouraging and enabling people to get out of their cars, onto bikes, and walk more; and introduce free bus travel to under 25s and invest in the manufacture and widespread introduction of accessible low-emission buses.

Climate change is one of the biggest challenges we face as a country. The next Scottish Government needs to demonstrate that we are not just a world leader in climate change ambition but that we can also lead in climate change action. This means supporting faster and deeper emission reductions to limit global heating and recognising our responsibilities as a developed nation, with increased support for communities impacted by the climate crisis in the global south. We support the development of a Wellbeing and Sustainable Development (Scotland) Bill during the next parliament, which should look at our contribution to global climate change and how to address this. We will also ensure that the International Development Programme spending is climate proofed, including an increase in the Climate Justice Fund.

Defeating Covid-19 will require international cooperation and Scottish Labour is committed to the global efforts to guarantee that everyone has equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines and treatments. We will not be safe until we are all protected.

Much more on our proposals for a just, green manifesto can be found in our manifesto: <https://scottishlabour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Scottish-Labours-National-Recovery-Plan.pdf>. It demonstrates that a vote for Scottish Labour at this election is a vote to get a parliament focused on solutions, not divisions - a stronger recovery for a fairer Scotland.

Kind regards,

Anas Sarwar
Leader of the Scottish Labour Party