

# WORKERS MADE GLASGOW



In the industrial heartland of the Central Belt, sprawled on both banks of the river Clyde, lies the city of Glasgow: starting from here, her limbs have reached every place on the map. With the relentless power of ships, trawlers and locomotives, this small rural settlement flourished into the largest seaport of Scotland and the tenth largest on the island. After reflecting the hues of Scottish Enlightenment into the rest of the world during the XVIII century, the turn of the century made Glasgow the 'second city of the empire'. Through an intensive process of industrialisation, heavy industry became the fundamental form of sustenance, interwoven with every aspect of worker life and identity. This process of industrialisation, and the deindustrialisation which followed in the second half of the century, marked the fate of this 'dear green place'. The city of *the bird that never flew, the tree that never grew, the bell that never rang, the fish that never swam* will soon be welcoming the 26<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties (COP).

## *The Glesga Powerhouse*

By the early XX century, the industrial revolution swept over Scotland. During these times, the Glaswegian population grew tenfold, following the surge of industry and welcoming many immigrants, particularly from Ireland (in fact, in 1851 20% of the population was of Irish birth), who helped fill the ranks of labour force in shipyards, factories and mines. Deindustrialisation was delayed by the Second World War, as the need to provide armies was fruitfully supporting the Scottish heavy industries. By the 1950s, the UK had consciously chosen to keep using steam locomotives rather than transitioning to electric and diesel, as in the rest of Europe, to maintain its railways. The economic predominance of the Clydeside was starting to decline, as it had remained unaltered in the face of worldwide changing technologies. Deindustrialisation

was thus bringing forth a decline in production and profit, but also in employment, as the economy was becoming increasingly service and market-based. The distant administration of Thatcher's government promoted an immorally unmanaged deindustrialisation, which was acutely felt by Scotland's economy in particular as this was far more dependent on nationalised industrial jobs than the rest of the Kingdom. To this day, Glasgow still bears the scars of an industrial power which was never renovated in light of a changing economy. Its industrial past remains the architect of its present, as the city was relatively small but crucial in driving major economic trends. The capitalist paradigm of production has thus had profound impacts on the local environment and public health (giving birth to the well-known phenomenon of the 'Glasgow effect', for instance), yet also created the space for a deep sense of collectiveness and solidarity.

### *Freedom Come All Ye!*

This had a great impact on the thick layer of the working class which inhabited the banks of the river Clyde. As well as feeding into the rising economic machinery, workers were fervently active between 1910-1930 in a phenomenon which has been called the 'Red Clydeside': one of the most radical political movements in Scottish history. After protesting against the participation in the First World War, the long radical tradition of the land was exacerbated and brought back to its zenith by the Industrial Revolution and the struggle for workers' rights. The deep poverty that inevitably follows from the unearthing of great economic wealth, was touching the political consciousness of Glaswegian inhabitants. As unions were betraying people's trust, as the political class was distancing itself from its commitments, people were slowly moving away from the liberal government of the time and embracing socialist ideals. The success of industrialisation along the Clydeside led to declining working conditions and precariousness, intensifying the undying struggles of women and men who were leading protests and strike across the Central Belt, from Clydebank to Greenock, Paisley and Dumbarton. In 1915, the rent strikes were also led by women such as Mary Barbour and Helen Crawford, supported by the labour party (the first was in fact born in Scotland), by trade unions and by the suffragette movement.

The political and industrial identity of this city bears unmeasurable consequences on its shape today, as 'the tears that made the Clyde' incessantly flow across Glasgow with all their hope and impetus, ploughing the field for fresh seeds of change in the coming weeks.

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