

This article builds on a talk at [Eco-cultures: Glasgow's Festival of Environmental Research, Policy and Practice](#). It was in a round table session entitled **Routes for collaborative research and activism in Scottish policy-making**. The speakers were Patrick Harvey, Green MSP; Luke Devlin, Centre for Human Ecology; Penny Cole Assemblies for Democracy and anti-fracking activist; Helen Greene, Researcher in Geology, University of Glasgow.

1. Assemblies for Democracy, forming all over the UK, bring together diverse groups and individuals, from community groups, democracy campaigns, and members of political parties too, to discuss and plan what kind of society we want, and to research and develop a concept of real democracy and how to achieve it.
2. Assemblies are part of a growing movement across the globe that recognises that it is not enough to be green, to be left, and even, as Syriza learned – to be elected.
3. What kind of movement can ensure a future where public policy, law and constitution serve the interests of people and planet, instead of the interests of a tiny, increasingly bizarre, élite? (Algy Cluff and Jim Ratcliffe take note¹).
4. At the next Assemblies for Democracy Scotland in Edinburgh on November 7th we are going to talk about what a People's Plan for our Energy Future would look like – community-led, democratic, no fracking.
5. And a week later, Assemblies for Democracy London, are bringing people together to talk about a People's Constitution for Real Democracy.
6. At these events people are modelling the future and supporting each other to have confidence and flex their democratic muscles. They are forums for taking responsibility for social transformation.
7. This non-hierarchical form of organisation is being tried and tested in pockets all over the planet. It is the true opposition to the status quo and as it gains momentum, it will enable us to make a revolutionary transition beyond institutionalised destruction.
8. We are bringing together knowledge, experience, passion and desire to act together for fundamental change. The aim as I understand it, is to create the active form that expresses the underlying necessity for global change.
9. Assemblies need to include policymakers, academics, researchers, ecologists, engineers, artists, poets and philosophers. And they will be happy there, because they will be able to enjoy their work without the dead hands of state bureaucracy and big business on their shoulders.
10. As assemblies develop, they will gain more resources and have the ability to launch projects and develop alternative research.

¹ Cluff Industries, owned by Algy Cluff, has a licence to carry out Underground Coalbed Gasification under the River Forth; Jim Ratcliffe is owner of INEOS which has licences for fracking and coal-bed methane capture in Scotland's central belt.

11. The key problem for environmental public policy is the refusal of governments to act on evidence-based research and well-founded proposals that could actually tackle the ecological and climate crisis.
12. That is because they exist to support transnational capitalism through the exercise of state power. The consensus that the interests of the corporations are paramount is what will permit governments meeting in Paris to sign a legally-binding treaty that will lead to the destruction of millions of eco-systems, species and people.
13. The days when reformist governments developed research-based environmental policies for example the Clean Air Act, are long gone.
14. Now, where governments act on public health issues it is in terms of using marketing techniques – they call it “social marketing” – to manipulate and change people’s behaviours.
15. This anti-science has entirely failed to address, for example, serious public health issues such as obesity. Whereas actions that would work, such as regulating the amount of sugar permitted in supermarket foods, are rejected because the corporations won’t allow it.
16. In terms of the environment, the needs of business dominate. This can be seen in the failure to adequately fund public bodies such as the flood protection and environmental protection agencies.
17. In Scotland, the Scottish National Party gave an undertaking to anti-fracking campaigners that a new planning framework would include a “buffer zone” between fracking wells and settlements. What happened in reality was that it has been left to the fracking industry itself to decide what buffer zone is acceptable.
18. In this situation, academics, researchers and scientists battle to protect their independence.
19. If states globally can ignore a consensus of all the world’s leading climate scientists, how much easier for individual states to ignore ordinary people’s needs, wishes and passionately held beliefs, whether expressed through protest, activism, community-based localism or autonomous organising.
20. This is the fundamental challenge we face in tackling the eco-crisis and in Scotland at the moment, the most crucial environmental campaign is to prevent the development of unconventional gas extraction and support the development of renewables.
21. We live in a society where the many different organs of the state conspire to tell us that we have willingly delegated OUR power to the government, which will serve our interests. Whereas in reality the state as a whole exercises “power over” the people. This is the myth of our hollowed-out democracy, and it is within this mythology that public policy is forced to exist.
22. The state does not only rule by waving a big stick. It tries in every way to reinforce the neo-liberal consensus that says our interests and the

interests of capitalism are identical. If we do not accept this we are naïve, foolish, or even extremist and dangerous, and unworkable. It is making life pretty unbearable for many researchers and academics.

23. But we should take heart from the growing opposition to hegemony. People come together in different ways to support each other to resist. Scientists, researchers and thinkers continue to strive to be independent, to be heard and to have a positive influence on the future.
24. It is true the state has a talent for undermining autonomous action for example by allowing NGOs or alternative parties or trade unions, to feel they have a seat at the top table. And as those of us involved in community-based campaigning or education know only too well, through decisions about what receives funding.
25. But this is a contradictory system, riven by its own internal contradictions for example those that brought about the economic crash of 2008. The system's inability to overcome its crisis can be seen as growth slows and deflationary pressures and stagnation continue.
26. There is also a further, and definitive weakness, which is that the system contains us, its opposition. Globally socialised relations of production and communication have unified people in an entirely new way.
27. In its attempt at complete enclosure capitalism has to enclose within itself beings whose interests are diametrically opposed to it.
28. These massive internal tensions must bring about a fundamental transformation. The form of this transition will depend on the extent to which we are able create a new legal and political framework that enshrines the needs of the eco-system and our roles as stewards, and dependents, of the eco-system.
29. Failing that, the transition could be from capitalism some kind of extreme corporatocracy, of the kind explored in the current apocalyptic literature.
30. Only human beings have the power to halt the climate catastrophe, or the destruction of rain forest, species loss or the terminal depletion of resources.
31. Therefore is a real urgency about developing the counter power to the corporate state.
32. We have to find a way to form a new set of human social relations, including economy, which serve the rights of people and the eco-system. And these have to be embodied in new constitutional and legal forms that transfer legitimacy from private property and the exploitation of labour as the organising principles, to co-operation and guardianship of nature.
33. A number of countries are already working on this experimentally, with the help of environmentalists and economists.
34. In its submission to COP21, the Bolivian government has recommended a society based on "living well", achieved by bringing the rights of Mother Earth into a legal framework.

35. Their submission states: *“The capitalist system seeks profit without limits, strengthens the divorce between human beings and nature; establishing a logic of domination of men against nature and among human beings, transforming water, earth, the environment, the human genome, ancestral cultures, biodiversity, justice and ethics into goods. In this regard, the economic system of capitalism privatizes the common good, commodifies life, exploits human beings, plunders natural resources and destroys the material and spiritual wealth of the people.*
36. *“Thus, Bolivia presents its intended contribution consistent with its vision of holistic development, according to the provisions of the State Constitution, Law No. 071 of The Rights of Mother Earth and Law N° 300 of Mother Earth and Integral Development to Live Well, guided by the 2025 Patriotic Bicentennial Agenda and its 13 pillars, as well as national plans for medium and long-term.”*
37. In Ecuador the government has established a cross-governmental project, involving all the economic and business ministries, and with support from economists, to develop a practical plan for achieving a mature Peer-to-Peer Economy. The aim is to “fundamentally re-imagine Ecuador”, based on the principles of open networks, peer production and a commons of knowledge, and then to enshrine these principles in laws.
38. In these two projects, scientists and those involved in developing public policy have been given the chance to put their skills at the service of people and planet.
39. On Sunday 11th October, more than 2,000 of us held hands across the Forth Road Bridge demanding a total ban on the development of unconventional gas in Scotland.
40. At the SNP conference the following weekend political chicanery of a kind which they can only have learned from the Labour Party, made sure there was no resolution on a total ban on the agenda. But ordinary members in the hall were absolutely clear that is what they want.
41. The Scottish government says it is going to take an evidence-based approach to the extraction of unconventional gas. However, its first expert panel² was dominated by academics funded and working almost exclusively with the fossil fuel industry.
42. What evidence will they accept? Whose interests will they serve? Where does the power lie? What are the real alternatives to unconventional gas? These are the questions we need to decide in democratic assemblies, and we need to have the constitutional right, the legal framework and the control of resources to implement the conclusions we reach collectively.

Penny Cole
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