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WORKERS DEMANDING BETTER

THE STUC'S MANIFESTO FOR THE 2026
SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS



The STUC represents more than 560,000 trade union members. We know that power concedes nothing without a demand - it never has and it never will. Our manifesto, Workers Demanding Better, sets out our demands. We demand better for our movement – we demand better for Scotland’s working class. This is our plan – the plan of Scotland’s trade union movement - to deliver dignity in work, reinvigorate our economy and rebuild our public services.





Fund Decent Public Services

Scotland's public services are at breaking point. The NHS has struggled to recover from the pandemic, with more than a third of A&E patients now waiting more than 4 hours to be seen¹ and an undervalued social care sector contributing to 720,000 unnecessary days in hospital due to delayed discharge.² Teacher numbers have fallen since 2021, support staff numbers fell between 2023 and 2024 and violence in schools is rising.³ Dissatisfaction with council services is at a record high,⁴ following years of cuts and the loss of tens of thousands of local government workers. The civil service is being targeted for cuts at a time when the multiple challenges facing Government have never been greater. Total public sector employment has fallen from 24% to 22% of total employment since 2010,⁵ while an ageing population is putting unprecedented strain on demand.⁶ The next Scottish Government should:

1. Raise more tax

Politicians need to be honest that taxes will have to rise. The Scottish Government's forecast funding gap of £4.7 billion by 2029-30⁷ cannot be closed through private sector led economic growth. To prevent cuts to public services and meet crucial priorities around child poverty, climate change and economic growth, the Scottish Government must increase tax revenue. They have the power to do so through property, land, wealth and other taxes, such as a private jet tax, an online sales tax, and a levy on alcohol retailers.

2. Replace the council tax

The council tax is a relic of the past. It's unfair, inadequate and outdated. It is based on property values from 1991. Reform isn't only necessary, it is popular.⁸ STUC research shows that a proportional property tax of 0.7% could fairly raise £783 million more for local authorities, whilst also giving low-income households in high-value properties a rebate.⁹ While a Scottish mansion tax is an improvement on the status quo, until the Government scraps the council tax and implements a full revaluation, this is simply tinkering around the edges of the current unfair system.

3. Kick out the profiteers

Scotland loses £2 to £3 billion a year in corporate wealth extraction from the outsourced spend of the Scottish public sector.¹⁰ This is money that is lost from already reduced public sector budgets and the pay packets and pensions of vital public sector workers. The negative multiplier effect means that the real loss to local economies is much greater, while the disproportionate impact on women, who are far more likely to be outsourced, amounts to discrimination. Addressing this issue, not cutting 11,000 public sector workers,¹¹ is the real way to achieve public sector reform. The first step must be an audit of outsourced services across the public sector, and a plan to bring them back under public control.



Deliver High Quality Jobs

Households up and down the country are still being hammered by the living standards crisis. In-work poverty is increasingly common: 6 in 10 people in poverty live in a household where someone works.¹² Real earnings are stagnant and more than 1 in 10 workers are in insecure work.¹³ Further and higher education, so crucial for delivering good jobs, is underfunded. We need Scottish economic development policy to go beyond support for the living wage to a focus on delivering high-quality jobs. The next Scottish Government should:

4. Expand collective bargaining

Collective bargaining boost wages, reduces inequality and helps deliver Fair Work. But hundreds of thousands of workers in low-paid, undervalued and insecure sectors, such as our social care workers¹⁴ and workers within the creative industries,¹⁵ are not covered by collective bargaining agreements. Change can happen quickly - adult social care is ready for a national negotiating body, while the multi-year public funding provided to Creative Scotland provides a mechanism for negotiation with employers in receipt of public funding to agree minimum terms and conditions for creative industries workers.

5. Ensure public money drives economic growth

Public funding should drive good jobs and higher productivity, not subsidies with no proven impact. Too much Scottish Government economic development funding still goes to ineffective business support. The Small Business Bonus Scheme (SBBS), for example, has grown from £93 million in 2008 to £239 million in 2024,¹⁶ despite a Fraser of Allander Institute evaluation finding no evidence that it improves business outcomes.¹⁷ A low pay levy and/or a fair work bonus could ensure public money is targeted towards businesses that create secure, productive jobs and deliver Fair Work, boosting pay in low-paid retail and hospitality, rather than providing across-the-board tax breaks with little return for workers or the economy.

6. Let workers lead

Workers know their workplace best. From the short-term furlough scheme fought and won by the workers at Alexander Dennis,¹⁸ to union plans to make education staff central at every stage of AI adoption in education,¹⁹ workers have plans and ideas to transform their workplaces, companies, and industries. Yet too often workers' plans and pleas are ignored. The Scottish Government and public bodies must change this approach – including by making changes to the remit of public sector agencies, such as Scottish Enterprise, so they can support trade union-led efforts to future-proof workplaces.



Develop a Proper Industrial Strategy

Scotland has lost 130,000 manufacturing jobs since the advent of the Scottish Parliament and the loss of jobs at Grangemouth, Mossmorran and Aberdeen further erode Scotland's industrial base.²⁰ The much-promised clean energy jobs revolution has failed to materialise and despite the nationalisation of Scotrail, public transport continues to decline. The next Scottish Government should:

7. Rebuild manufacturing

Manufacturing is the country's productivity engine, responsible for half of international exports and half of business research and development spending.²¹ To boost productivity and growth, we need a real industrial strategy based on public investment in Scotland's key manufacturing sites; stricter conditions on enterprise funding to ensure companies create good quality jobs here in Scotland; smarter use of public funds and procurement; investment in education, skills, and workplace-learning; public ownership of key parts of our industrial base, such as energy and ports; and support for collective bargaining in new industrial sectors, sites, and companies. Such a strategy should also connect our manufacturing base with policy priorities around climate change and fuel poverty. A publicly-led green retrofit and housebuilding programme could support the domestic energy efficiency, heating and construction supply chains, tackle climate change, lower household energy bills and reduce fuel poverty.

8. Harness Scotland's Energy

Despite political promises, Scotland's wind revolution has not created significant numbers of jobs, benefited communities, or lowered household bills. Just one job is currently created per million of turnover in offshore wind,²² while the sector is resistant to trade union engagement and workers' rights.²³ Policy change is needed to facilitate tripartite negotiations with trade unions and wind industry representatives; set Fair Work and Just Transition conditions within projects; and build greater public ownership to rebalance ownership away from multinational companies. Future Economy Scotland analysis shows that taking a 20% equity stake in offshore wind projects could be affordable within existing budgets and would ensure future generations benefit from our renewable resource.²⁴



Develop a Proper Industrial Strategy

9. Deliver better public transport

The number and frequency of private bus services have continued to decline in recent years, despite increases in public subsidy.²⁵ In contrast to private operators that have extracted significant dividends, the only surviving publicly owned bus operator in Scotland, Lothian Buses, has reinvested the surpluses they have made into improved vehicles, enhanced pay and conditions, and greater in-house capacity. We need this approach to become the norm – with Scottish Government supporting Councils to establish municipal bus companies. At the same time, we need to invest in our railways and ferries – including a long-term plan for investing in and upgrading the CalMac ferry fleet using Scottish yards, and funding new rolling rail stock using Green Bonds to prevent profits being sucked out of the system by ROSCOs, with savings reinvested in lower fares and better services.²⁶



For further information contact:

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