

whae's like us?

anything to learn from places like Scotland?



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Comment

In her email sending us her article on the state of politics in Iceland, Birgitta Jónsdóttir signs off 'love and rage'. This is a greeting from a country which took to the streets banging pots and pans to demand that the neoliberal government which had crashed the country while enriching its bankers was removed. It is a country where the replacement government were stopped from meekly submitting to the will of Britain, the IMF and the other usual neoliberal bully boys when one in four members of the voting public signed a petition calling for a debt repayment plan to be put to a referendum. The Icelanders then said a resounding 'no'.

They have every reason to be angry – every man, woman and child in Iceland is being asked to pay £10,000 to British and Dutch investors because a private bank went bust. It is to be assumed that the investors in question did not seek or get a no-risk promise from government when they were taking advantage of great deals from these banks so the expectation that the public purse pay back the private debts seems to be the definition of 'moral hazard'. It is worth dwelling on how the media in Britain would react if the situation was reversed. Imagine that every family in Britain was forced to stump up £40,000 and that every penny would be given to the French and all because a British company behaved badly. We can safely assume that the Daily Mail would not be publishing an apology to the French people nor would it urge us to swallow our medicine. And because our media would kick off, the Government would be cornered and – we assume – the whole thing would be stopped.

There are two responses that have to be made to that assumption. The first is that it exposes the myth that a country can chose just to say 'no' to things. Even the mighty US has to play by the rules of international financiers (most of the time) because for 30 years the financiers have reconfigured the global economy to ensure that individual nations cannot disrupt the Big Game. That is why they invented the World Trade Organisation and the International Monetary Fund and that's why we have a Global Agreement on Trade in Services and every other piece of obscure-but-crucial policy drift removing power from nation states. Domestically, the power has also been sucked upwards in a range of alarming ways. Surely we have now gone long

past the point where anyone actually believes that the 'terror legislation' is there solely to deal with terrorists? Hundreds of thousands of people are being stopped and search with no reasonable cause for suspicion other than a policemen doesn't like the look of them (or has been told that a group of people are inherently 'dangerous' – again, simply on say-so, whim or opinion). Just as countries have been stopped from disrupting the dodgy dealings of financiers, so the public has been stopped from disrupting the work of Government in bolstering and glorifying these dodgy dealings. If you try to protest against these behaviours then it is normal procedure for policemen hiding their identity to beat you, detain you and even play loud music while you sleep peacefully to cause sleep deprivation. How is this last action legitimate policing? Surely it is a clear breach of the peace?

So countries don't get to do what they want. But the second response is that far from saying a Great British No to Foreigners Taking Our Money, this has already happened. Tracing where the trillion-quid bail-out went is no easy matter but you can rule our (a) homeowners (b) savers (c) UK-based businesses (d) back to the public purse, which leaves a fairly clear picture of where our money went – to pay off debts our banks owed overseas. There are only two differences between us and Iceland. One is scale – proportionate to their size they were being asked to hand over too much. The other is spine – people in the UK generally simply don't demonstrate the rage needed to change politics. Where or where are the mass demonstrations, the civil disruptions, any sign of our unwillingness to accept this? Our media are a big problem in that while they pay lip-service to being angry at bankers, they have spent a year trying to redirect our anger elsewhere (especially the public sector). But we're a problem too. The class war may indeed be over – certainly, we're very happy to act like serfs again, expecting and accepting corruption and quite happy to Know Our Place. The British are a supine people and the more isolated from the rest of the world we make ourselves, the more supine we become.

It is really past time for us to reach for our pots and pans and to take to the street. It is also long past time for us to realise that it works. For that to change, we have to stop seeing the world as it is presented to us through our newspapers, commentators and broadcasters ('world outraged at Megrahi release' being a particularly dubious definition of 'world'). It is time for us

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to get to know our neighbours so that we might escape our isolation and reach out to others like us. Even where we know what is happening elsewhere, it is only the things that the very people marginalising the world view of the British consider to be relevant that we hear. Such as a titillating crime or political gossip, or very often propaganda (how much we learn about Iran these days...). If you believe what you read the world is full of violent people trying to harm us and pathetic people wanting to leach off us. What there isn't is people like us – ordinary people who have to work for a living and didn't make it big through financial speculation. If we don't know whae like us, how can we know what we could be?

For these reasons we have decided that in every issue of the Scottish Left Review in 2010 we will publish at least one article about the state of left politics in a place which looks at least a bit like Scotland - small countries or big 'regions' looking to develop greater autonomy. In this issue we start off with Iceland (the topicality of events there and the similarities with the collapse of the financial institutions in Edinburgh is compelling) and Holland. We hope to look at Cateonia, Ireland, some of the Nordic countries and others - and we would welcome your ideas of where else we should look.



Fighting for trade-union freedom
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SCOTLAND HAS TAKEN THE LEAD IN TRANSFERRING FREIGHT TO RAIL

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very strong tradition of 'first past the post' voting. Proportional voting systems were broadly unknown in Britain until Scotland adopted an Additional Member system. The outcome - not immediately understood by a lot of the political establishment - was that this would be a parliament in which it was unlikely that there would be a single party with an overall majority. The response to this unknown territory, at least for the first eight years, was to form an administration which as closely as possible mimicked first past the post government. The Labour Party had dominated Scotland for most of the previous 40 years and was the biggest party elected in 1999, but it required a coalition with the Liberal Democrats to govern. This coalition was created on the basis of a very detailed 'partnership agreement' which was negotiated before the coalition was agreed. The basic aim was to create a coalition administration which - as closely as possible - behaved as if it was a single party. As little as possible was left outside the ambit of the agreement and the two parties then adhered to 'collective responsibility', almost always acting in a unified way in public and seeking to keep all negotiations and disagreements 'in private'.

This arrangement was kept with a high degree of discipline, even when put under strong pressure from outside forces. Above all, the Labour Government in Westminster had an enormous majority and under Tony Blair it not only shifted very significantly to the right but simply did not tolerate any dissent from within the Labour movement in Britain. This caused problems for the Edinburgh Labour administration which remained a centre-left party but came under repeated pressure from London when it sought to take a more progressive line on policies - the

So since we are asking people to give a summary of the state of their nations, it seems only fair that we should do the same. If we were to give a concise summary of the state of radical and progressive politics in Scotland, what would we say?

Governance

By far the most significant development in Scottish politics over the last decade has been devolution. For three hundred years Scotland had no parliament and relied on policy which was made in London (though sometimes differently for Scotland than the rest of the UK). The election of Labour in 1997 finally resulted in the establishment of a Scottish Parliament which had very widespread support in Scotland. There was an overwhelming 'yes' to the devolution referendum and in 1999 elections to the new Parliament were held. The Scottish Parliament now had a range of powers which were defined in terms of what was **not** devolved - foreign policy, macroeconomic policy, welfare policy and taxation (other than the ability to raise up to three pence on the basic rate of tax) were kept in London with almost everything else being devolved. In Britain we have always had a thing for 'strong government' and we have a

fact that almost every Labour MSP opposed the war in Iraq but voted for a motion in favour under strict instruction is the most visible example. The main change in the structure of governance in Scotland over this period was the extension of proportional representation to the voting system in local government. This is also very significant for the overall power balance in Scotland - as well as dominating governmental politics in Scotland, Labour had overwhelming control of local authorities, in some cases having over 90 per cent of the seats with less than 50 per cent of the votes. This was the power base from which Scottish Labour effectively ran Scotland. In 2007 this changed with local government elections based on PR. The Labour dominance of local government came to an end overnight (although it remains the single biggest party in local government). The wider implications of this for the place of the parties is still working its way through and it will be a while before we discover what effect this has had on the ground for the parties campaigning in the Scottish Election which will be held in 2011.

During the period between 1999 and 2007, the constitutional debate in Scotland revolved mainly around whether the terms

of the devolution settlement were right or not. However, things changed in a number of ways in May 2007. We have perhaps forgot the shockwaves that hit Scotland when Labour lost that election and the Scottish National Party was elected. There are three major consequences which are relevant here. First of all, the UK's 500 year relationship with first past the post voting was tested for the first time. If the Labour/Lib Dem coalition behaved as if it was a single party of government, the SNP were forced to form a minority administration which was very clearly different. It was forced to do this by the refusal of any of the other main parties (all of whom strongly oppose independence for Scotland) to consider coalition. And, despite a number of set-backs in late 2009, it has worked much more effectively than an awful lot of commentators on Scottish politics thought possible. Then again, the second consequence was also seen as impossible by most of those commentators - the idea that Labour could ever 'lose' Scotland. Labour in Scotland had become an establishment every bit as strong as any other, and the loss of the election and the loss of the power of patronage which went along with it was not only a massive shock to that establishment, it was one the Labour Party seemed unable to internalise for at least two years. And finally, it put independence right at the heart of the political agenda again. While the three unionist parties have a blocking majority in the Parliament, nevertheless their joint work on what extra powers could be added to those of the Parliament is a response to independence. The evidence suggests that if held now a referendum on independence would be lost and the unionist parties are presenting this as proof that constitutional issues are only of minority interest. This is clearly contradicted by the fact that their actions are all now a response to the independence debate and while they might claim to lead the constitutional reform agenda, this is clearly illusory. There are now two basic political stances - a deal to add some powers to the Parliament which the unionist parties have agreed (but which is really quite pitiful in terms of the extra powers it gives) or independence. This is a very big shift in the nature of the debate.

State of left parties

This governance context is particularly important in the Scottish case because of the rapidity and implications of the change. It has had an important knock-on effect on the political parties operating in Scotland. Most obviously, because of the opportunities of the voting system, smaller parties have emerged. Only two have had any electoral impact, both on the left. Scotland elected one Green MSP in 1999 and seven in 2003 and one Scottish Socialist Party MSP in 1999 and five in 2003. The Greens have proven to be more centrist in policy than some European Green parties but have been solidly progressive on most social issues and radical on war and peace matters. The SSP had a bigger impact than the Greens in the first Parliament. The election of a large number of Socialists and Greens in 2003 caused some shockwaves across the Scottish political system and it resulted in a strategy of containment and cooption (in the case of the Greens) and outright hostility (in the case of the SSP) on whom much of the media turned viciously and on who the four big parties ganged up on. But it was the implosion of the SSP which was the biggest factor - personal internal policies saw one group oust the leader over a sex scandal and the party basically split in two, the SSP on one side and the former leader's Solidarity party on the other. The outcome was the loss of all their seats in 2007. But the Greens didn't do much better

- the pattern of voting meant that they were the main losers on the way votes for the main parties were distributed and only two Greens were elected in 2007. The Rainbow Parliament of 2003 has been lost.

On the other hand, this was the price of breaking the Labour rule in Scotland. The Labour Party had been the biggest party for the first eight years and had (unlike the UK party) been broadly socially progressive over that period, at least in terms of what it didn't do if less convincingly on what it did do. It did enough to continue to be considered a left party - just - and certainly didn't follow Blair's headlong drive to turn the Labour Party into a neoliberal centre-right party. But these are generous interpretations - Scottish Labour took a good deal of pride that over its eight years it did nothing too radical and didn't scare anyone. The running battle within Labour has all been about how much independence from the London party they have been able to demonstrate. The answer is, not that much and certainly not if it is noticeable. The Liberal Democrats are almost indistinguishable from Labour in Scotland, and not only because they were in coalition. If anything, the Lib Dems dragged Labour to the left on a number of policy areas. However, losing power in 2007 has had a damaging effect on the Lib Dems who have elected a populist leader who has dragged them incoherently to the right - even the right-wing Conservative Party (one of the main four parties) found itself arguing again infeasible calls for tax cuts from the Lib Dems. This party seems in terminal decline.

The more significant issue is the role of the SNP. The only major party in Scotland which is not part of a wider UK party, the debate about independence from itself hasn't been an issue. What has been confusing is the positioning. In 1999 it set out a position well to the left of Labour, calling for tax rises to pay for better services. Incorrectly believing that there was evidence this harmed their electoral performance and under a new leader, they appeared to position themselves marginally to the right of Labour (at least on core economic policy) in 2003. And did badly. In 2007 they played two cards - to the left of Labour but just and competence of leadership after a weak administration. They won by picking up a lot of the top-up votes, but this came at the expense of the smaller parties. In power they have been to the left on social policies, well to the left of international and war and peace issues but right in the middle of the right-wing consensus on economic policy. The biggest mistake the party has made is the closeness it developed to the very banks which a year later were going to bring the economy to the brink of disaster. The party would have been in a very strong position if it had not picked the wrong side in the economic debate during the 2007 election.

Policy

There have been four basic public policy positions in Scotland since devolution, shared in different ways by most of the parties. On economic policy, the neoliberal agenda has dominated all but the Socialist's stance (and to some extent the Greens, though they have not put forward a strong alternative strategy for economic development in Scotland). So far, so predictable - whether this will change is an open question, but it is hard to see things going back to the way they were given the massive collapse in the banks.

On social policy, Scotland has basically put up a 'social democrat' barrier to the worst of the neoliberal moves that were seen in England. Scottish Labour quietly resisted the creeping privatisation policies that affected health and education in England. There has also been a tendency towards universalism, with removal of charging for a number of public services like higher education and care costs for the elderly being both high profile and popular. The SNP Government is seeking to push this further with abolition of prescription charges and introduction of free school meals for every pupil, but the Labour Party is seeking to block this on rather petty party political grounds.

Then there has been a comparatively radical but comparatively consensual range of 'social good' policies. The cruel practice of hunting foxes was banned, policy discriminating against gays in the school system was scrapped, the right for people living in rural areas to buy the land they rent and other forms of land reform were introduced. There were also interventions on public health such as the ban on smoking in public places, restrictions on tanning salons and the (currently controversial) attempt to put a minimum price on alcohol to minimise the problems of excessive drinking.

But the really radical stuff has been mainly symbolic and almost all done by the SNP Government. It has little power over a lot of these areas or has used what powers it has to get across a point. So the Government won a vote opposing the Iraq war, has won a vote opposing the renewal of the UK's nuclear weapons (and wrote to the international community to tell them so), is using planning laws to prevent the building of more nuclear power stations (even though energy policy is reserved to London) and while technically an independent decision, clearly wanted to send messages about being fair and open-minded in the compassionate release of the man accused of the Lockerbie terrorist bombing. There was some element of this before the current administration - the previous administration did some positive things on encouraging immigration and on overseas development. But it has to be noted that the Scottish Parliament has reserved much of its radicalism for subjects on which it does not have formal powers.

Campaigning and civic

Meanwhile, there has been a strong, civic campaigning culture in the last ten years. There has been a very high-profile anti-war campaign in Scotland and there is no doubt that it has influenced policy - it is impossible to imagine the opposition to Trident or the vote on Iraq happening without the pressure from civic Scotland. There have been linked anti-racism campaigns and campaigns in support of asylum seekers. Again, all of these are tied up with a pretty strong pro-Palestinian campaign and with a fairly strong Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

There have also been strong campaigns on global poverty and Africa - Make Poverty History was very strong in Scotland given that it was themed around a G8 meeting that took place here. There has been a lot of crossover between the global poverty campaigning and the environmental campaigns, both high profile. There has also been a fair amount of campaigning on domestic poverty issues but, given the lesser support of the media for the less photo-friendly face of domestic poverty, it hasn't gained quite the same profile.

Finally, there has been an encouraging strand of campaigning on local issues, especially to do with service delivery. Saving

local hospitals, schools and swimming pools has radicalised a lot of local campaigners and a good number of these have moved on to be involved with campaigning on behalf of local asylum seekers (for example) and have certainly become more aware of the need to take on vested powers.

Economic collapse

Scotland, like almost everywhere else, has stood hypnotised by the economic collapse. The neoliberal consensus has been in shock - Scotland was excessively dominated by a small number of big financial players which are now shorthand names for the global collapse. To understand just how big the vacuum is in the Scottish establishment and its perception of the world you need to understand just how pervasive was the assumption that what was good for the banks was good for Scotland. The financial gurus of the banking sector were beyond reproach in 2007 and their word was gospel for the political classes. The construction industry and the retail industry were the other two legs of the speculative trinity which underpinned the economy for more than a decade. Like everywhere else, there is every reason to believe that retail-based-on-personal-borrowing is largely over, construction on a voracious whirlwind of short-term speculation is over and the financial speculation that created a sort of mini-Babylon is over. Unfortunately, all the mainstream political parties are so closely tied to the banks by now that they simply don't know what to do. The left parties are weak or dead and have not provided a strong counter vision. And everyone in the commentator class is reading a lot into the fact that massive UK-level bailouts were needed to save the Scottish banks, concluding that this proves an independent Scotland would not have survived. Right now, that's it - we remain, as a nation, utterly transfixed staring into the headlights of this car crash.

What next?

There are three things which are going to dominate the next few years of politics in Scotland and it is very hard to guess what exactly will happen. The first is the 2011 Scottish elections. There are strong signs that the Scottish establishment will not 'allow' the re-election of the 'outsider' SNP administration and the anti-government stances being taken are accelerating. Unfortunately, they do not seem to realise that voters do not see them as a safe pair of hands any more and the establishment assumption that a centrist Labour Party is what 'ordinary people' really want (and that everyone hates the SNP) is simply not borne out by polls. A lot of people assume the SNP has already lost because 'important people' have turned against them. The fact that strong majorities still say they are going to vote for them shows an increasing dislocation between people and power in Scotland. This also relates to post-recession policy and it is very unclear when the 'let's get back to how it used to be' policy will be jettisoned. Right now, everyone continues (unsustainably) to act like this is a blip. It can't last. Finally, there is Scotland's relationship to the rest of the UK. It seems likely that the UK will elect a Conservative government and that will be unpopular in Scotland. It is certain that the powers available to Scottish politicians will increase in the next five years. What isn't proving obvious to everyone yet is that, like it or not, the debate is now revolving round a centre of gravity which is independence for Scotland. This issue more than any other is shaping up to be how Scottish politics defines itself over the next few years. ■

PUBLIC WORKS:

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Scotland's public services!**



Private Finance Initiative

More expensive than
conventional borrowing

Controlled by Private Companies

Private Profit from Public Services

Inflexible and Secretive

Scottish Futures Trust

✓

✓

✓

✓

UNISON says -

don't tinker with PFI-Lite - Reform PFI now!

Review existing contracts, - buying them out where appropriate

No new contracts

Dispense grants on a true level-playing-field basis

Give prudential borrowing powers to health boards

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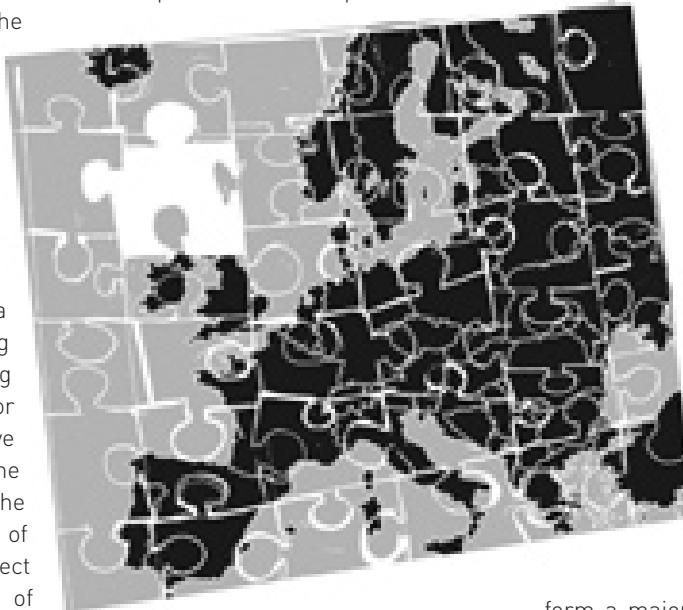
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heroin-economic detox

A small country with politicians mesmerised by dodgy financiers? Birgitta Jónsdóttir's explanation of events in Iceland should be read closely by Scots

Iceland founded Althing, the national parliament, in 930, making it one of the oldest parliamentary institutions in the world. Icelanders were free until 1262 but then we were submitted under the Norwegian Monarchy that lasted until 1400, after that we were ruled by Denmark and full independence wasn't our reality until 1944. In order to understand Icelandic politics one has to compare it to nations who have claimed freedom from colonists. In many ways Icelandic politics are still coloured by legislation and functions of the old Monarchy. Our constitution is basically a copy/paste of the Danish constitution and it had become redundant a long time ago. Iceland's population consists of only 320,000 people. This of course means we are a clan-based society and that has resulted in nepotism of a high degree in politics. The nation finally realised last year that a separation of the three branches of government is a mere illusion. Iceland is a state of political party leaders. It is subject to the dictatorship of a handful of political leaders.

The separation of the three branches of government is disregarded. Althing has no power whatsoever. It's merely a processing and handling institution for the executive power (the cabinet) and the appointment of judges is subject to the whims of those in power.



for maintaining the same social structure as before. The nation is having to face either spending all its GDP in paying interest on foreign debt (in many cases originating from private debt rolled over to taxpayers) or claiming debt moratorium.

The public and the power of change

A left government has never ruled in Iceland, not until the pots and pans revolution in January 2009 drove the meltdown government from power. The Social Democrats were a part of that government but after the elections in April 2009 the Left Green Movement and a new political movement created shortly before the elections from a coalition of grassroots movements originated from the demand for social reform called the Civic Movement were considered the true winners of the election. The left parties could for the first time in Icelandic history

The financial meltdown

As a result of the total financial meltdown, old demands of increased democratic reform has been rekindled with more fervour than ever before. The country had not seen a government without the Independence Party for 18 years straight. The Independence party gradually shifted into neoliberal policies and the Progressive Party gradually became so weak that any chance of voice or reason was thwarted by what some consider as bribes, when it came to, for example the privatisation of the national banks a few years ago. As a result of the three banks collapsing, each earmarked to different political party, the Social Democrats, the Independence Party and the Progressive party, a wave of anger erupted and resulted in a revolution a few months later. No other country was hit as dramatically as Iceland when the global financial crises hit the world in 2008. The staggering debt has left the country hovering at the edge of debt moratorium. Going from being classified as the 5th richest country in the world to a debt moratorium is leaving little room

form a majority government; and so they did. The name the government chose for itself was "Nordic welfare government". That sounded like music to the ears of many Icelanders who had dreamed of living at times when left values were the core values of society. However it might have been a grave mistake for the SDA and LGM to take on running an economic program through the iron fist of the IMF, which indeed bases its program on everything **but** left values. It might have been a grave mistake to clean up the mess after the heroin economics practiced in Iceland for the last decade or so by the neoliberals of the Independence Party.

Is left really left?

The Social Democratic Alliance was created in the run-up to the parliamentary elections of 1999 as an alliance of the four left-wing parties that had existed in Iceland up till then: the Social Democratic Party, the People's Alliance, the Women's Alliance and the National Movement. The parties then formally merged in May 2000. The merger was a deliberate attempt to unify the entire centre left of Icelandic politics into one party capable of countering the right-wing Independence Party. The initial attempt

failed however as a group of Althing representatives rejected the new party's platform - which was inspired by that of Tony Blair's New Labour Party - and broke away before the merger. They founded the Left-Green Movement, based on more traditional socialist values as well as environmental issues. Some MPs and Ministers from the Social Democratic Alliance have been heavily criticised for being more to the right than the neoliberals in the Independence Party. The Left Greens have been criticised for abandoning all its major pre-election promises, such as being opposed to the application for EU membership. However most of the Left Green MPs voted in favour of application last summer. The SDA said before elections that they were not willing to form a government with anyone unless they would support EU application. They also promised to help pave the way for more multinational heavy industry, mostly aluminium smelters for notorious corporations such as Rio Tinto. There has also been heavy criticism on this government for passing a budget that will erode many of the core values of the Icelandic welfare system, such as equality in health and education. The most banal poison pill this government decided to swallow was the Icesave bill, the way the left wing government handled this case of transferring private debt to the taxpayers of Iceland has been a total failure from day one. First of all they refused to accept assistance from foreign experts in handling contracts for nations in a similar situation as Iceland. They did nothing to bring attention to the fact that the IMF program was blocked by the UK and Dutch governments and other EU member states. The SD dream of being part of the EU family could be thwarted if they didn't do as they were told at the dramatic ECOFIN meeting in November 2008. The £3.4 billion payout agreed upon to roll over to taxpayers is against the will of 70 per cent of the nation. Just the interests of Icesave will suck up income tax from 80.000 taxpayers in Iceland every year for at least seven years. It will place Iceland in the same position as developing nations who spend all their GDP paying interest of foreign debt typically created by dictators. The reason for this being such a hot potato in Iceland is that the government has still not made enough effort in freezing the assets of the people responsible for this unbearable debt. The people responsible are still living in luxury while we now have three per cent of the nation relying on churches and independent welfare organisations to feed them. And it is only going to get a lot worse before it gets better. The Minister of Health Ogmundur Jonasson resigned recently because of the way his government handled the Icesave saga with, according to him, intolerable tendency to secrecy and emotional blackmail. The neoliberals are to blame for the mess in Iceland. All extremes in politics tend to have terrible results for the nations whom are naïve enough to elect that sort of power to govern their social structure. Perhaps is really time for those that claim to be left parties in Iceland to have a long hard look at what is really left of the left wing politics in their parties. The trend for confusion as to what is left wing policies within the Social Democratic Alliance is contributed largely by seeking inspiration from the British Labour Party during the era of Blair. It created a deep impact on left policies and politics in Iceland. The opinion of many people is that the Blair leftism has very little to do with left wing policies. Perhaps now is the time in Iceland to look beyond traditional political lines and seek some sort of consensus on what all parties need to work together towards in order to pull us out of the mess we are in.

Iceland politics in major political crises

One of the nosiest cries for change during the times of the

revolution in January 2009 were for social reform such as the possibility for the general public to call for national referendum. Another one was to be able to vote in a similar fashion as they vote in Ireland, a single transferable voting system. The nation also wants to have a general constitutional convention for the people not the politicians. All the parties promised pre-election to listen to these demands yet all of the bills proposed by the government are still collecting dust in committees. There is turmoil in all the political parties; power struggles have made their mark on all the parties. The Left Green Party in on the verge of losing some its key MPs if they carry on sacrificing their ideals and policy in order to hold on to power. There are two towers battling for idealistic power within the party and today it doesn't look like they will be able to keep it together for much longer. All this political turmoil is quite natural in a total meltdown and crises like the island is going through. There will be without doubt a few new government coalitions before the dust has settled. The financial meltdown was much more than just a financial shock for the island nation. It revealed in a shocking way deep rooted problems of nepotism and the weakness of parliament.

What next?

As I am writing this article historical events have been unfolding yet again on the island. The Icelandic President Olafur Ragnar Grimsson chose to listen to the 23 per cent of the nation who signed a petition calling on him to put the state guarantee for £3.4 billion to be paid to the British and Dutch governments to a national referendum. The bill was passed through the parliament with a narrow vote on December 30, 2009 after months of acrimonious debate, tainted with secrecy and dishonesty on the part of the government. Every day throughout the debate, new controversial information would emerge and documents would leak on a regular basis to local media or wikileaks. Finally the people of Iceland has a chance to have something to say about their fate. On January 5th 2010 the Icelandic president had the courage, backed up by his nation, to place the interest of the people before that of the banks.

On 1st of February the report from a Special Investigation Commission established by the Icelandic Parliament will be published. The Commission's mandate has been to seek the truth relating to the events leading to, and the causes of, the downfall of the Icelandic banks, and related events. The head of the committee said to the press last August that no other committee in our history would have to bring the nation as bad news as the committee he chairs. Speculation is that many political leaders and politicians from all parties will have to face the blues except the Left Greens and the Movement. This could mean that there would have to be general elections again this year. Many fear that the Independence Party will regain its strength on the political arena - they are already gaining following in polls. One thing is for sure - these are interesting times in Iceland, politically and socially. The nation seems to be awakening to its responsibility of co-creating the social structure it wants to live in. The nation has been forced to rethink its values and morals, consumerism is no longer the core value. However, values of self sustainability, family and compassion are emerging as the cornerstones in our society. ■

Birgitta Jónsdóttir is a party group chairman for the Movement, a member of the Icelandic parliament, activist and a poet

a coalition of losers

Tiny Kox argues that a fear of moving away from the neoliberal consensus left the Netherlands with a government that doesn't reflect the views of the Dutch

Although general elections in the Netherlands are scheduled for 2011, the chance that Dutch citizens will already have to cast their votes in the fall of 2010 is quickly increasing. The actual Government of Labour and Christian Democrats - the country's two biggest parties - supported by the smaller Christian Union, in office since 2007, will have to dismantle several major political cluster bombs if it wants to survive. Halfway through January Parliament will receive the result of an official independent inquiry of the role of the former Dutch Government in the US-UK-led Iraq war in 2003. Christian-Democratic Prime Minister Balkenende, who fiercely backed Bush and Blair in 2003, will now be in the centre of the debate on whether the Netherlands then violated international law.

Also in January, the Government will have to take a decision on whether or not to prolong Dutch military presence in Afghanistan. US President Obama and UK Prime Minister Brown are constantly pressing the Dutch Government to stay in Afghanistan, but the majority of both Parliament and public demand withdrawal of Dutch troops, before the end of the year. If the government can survive these two clear and present dangers, it will have to decide, before late Spring, how to deal with a possible draconic 35 billion euro budgetary cut in the Dutch welfare state, due to the financial and economical crisis that also is hitting Dutch society. In between

January and June, local elections in March could easily turn out to be a disaster for both Social and Christian Democrats and put both parties under unbearable pressure of its membership to end the strangling cooperation in Government. Meanwhile, outside Parliament, the trade unions will try to mobilise the working class to oppose the Government's proposal to raise the pension age from 65 to 67. If the unions prevail (public opinion is at their side but a parliamentary majority until now backs the Government), the Government will have to step down.



Looking to Dutch politics from abroad, transparency will probably not be the first thought in a person's mind. Dutch politics means an inevitable great number of bigger and smaller parties in Parliament, right, left, centre, some religious inspired, others secular based, elected via a

system of proportional representation. It also means a steady tradition of coalition governments ever since the introduction of general suffrage in 1919 - but also a tradition of governments that do not complete their full term in office. So, Dutch coalition Governments come, go and change - and in the meanwhile, often do not quite represent the wish of the voters. The actual Government was formed in January 2007 by two parties which both lost the elections - but nevertheless succeeded to leave the big winner of the elections outside a coalition, by asking the small somewhat fundamentalist Christian Union to join them in a narrow majority coalition, that nobody would have thought of before elections day.

The big winner of the November 2006 elections was, without any doubt, the Socialist Party, positioned clearly to the left of Labour

and the Greens. SP won over 16 per cent of the votes and 25 out of the 150 MPs in the Second Chamber of the States-General. Its attempts to enter Government for the first time in its history, however, failed due to the harsh resistance of the centre-right Christian Democrats to enter into a Government with two left parties, and the understandable fear of Labour to bring its main ideological competitor into a favourable position from which it could try to take over the number one position in the Dutch Left. Whereas Social and Christian Democrats ingeniously did succeed to form a coalition of losers in

January 2007, leaving the winner out in opposition, its coalition Government since then never succeeded to gain much public support, neither in the good times of 2007/2008 nor in the crisis years of 2008/2009.

While winning the 2006 elections, the failure to enter the new government in 2007, also did cost the SP some of its public support. Many people were disappointed that the expected shift to the left in government policy did not happen and most things stayed as they were. Being now the biggest opposition party of course strengthens SP's position but not to that extent that the party could already seriously influence Government's internal economical and social policy. Although rightwing liberals (also in opposition now) like to say the Government is afraid of us and that we participate in the Government's policy from the opposition seats in Parliament, reality shows that we are indeed able to block some neoliberal developments, for example in health care and education, and that we did get bonuses and top salaries on the political agenda - but nevertheless the political mainstream is still neoliberal style. The Government continues the privatisation of state owned energy companies and got a parliamentary majority for a raise of the pension age - which is

in effect a Big Robbery: people will not be able nor allowed to work longer (most elderly people nowadays have to stop working before 63), but they will have to wait two more years for getting the pension they were promised to get at 65. Meanwhile Governments continues to decrease both company taxes as well as taxes for the Rich. More successful until now are our attempts to press the Prime Minister to finally accept an official Iraq-inquiry and to press Labour to take a clear stance against prolonged Dutch military participation in the Afghanistan war. Both results could lead to a collapse of the Government in the near future.

Whether the SP will be able to mobilise in the coming months together with the trade unions and Dutch working class against the proposed raising of the pension age to 67 is not yet clear. The same goes for the struggle against the upcoming other severe cuts in the welfare state. Although SP's resistance to the Government's policy is backed by a big share of the public, that same public is not yet convinced that resistance will be effective anyhow, giving the continued support of Parliament for the governmental approach of the crisis. Part of the problem of getting a regime change in our country after the next elections is that the Netherlands have hardly any experience

with a left orientated Government. Most governments have been dominated by centre right Christian Democrats, in changing coalitions with Labour and Liberals. Only in the 1990s did the Netherlands get, for a period of eight years, a Lib-Lab-coalition headed by a Labour Prime Minister but clearly based on a neoliberal ideology. So, Dutch governments use to be centre-right. That is what we know. And although many people have a lot to complain about, quite a lot of them also tend to say when asked about the future Government: 'better the devil you know than the devil you do not know...'

Another part of the problem is the fear of Labour to get into an electoral alliance of the Left - and after elections end in the opposition together with SP and Greens, while the Christian Democrats enter into a new coalition with the right. On our next Congress on January 30 the SP leadership will propose to its members to continue the party's attempts to mobilise the people outside the Parliament against the Government's social,

economical and foreign policy, while also attempting to free Labour from its understandable but yet ineffective fears for a left electoral alliance as a realistic alternative to a next centre-right Government. We as SP cannot but combine these two elements of our political approach. Without a strong base in social struggle, the party would lack its main reason of existence; without allies in Parliament, SP participation in a coalition is not possible. But while organising social struggle, we necessarily provoke

SP: main opposition party of the Netherlands

The Dutch Socialist Party SP, founded in 1972, operated for over two decades as a socialist grass roots movement before entering the national Parliament in 1994. Since then its national popularity has grown quickly, due to its clear opposition to neo liberal policy of changing coalition governments of Christian, Social and Liberal Democrats. Since 2006, SP is the country's main opposition party and, with 47,000 members, the third party by membership, just behind Christian and Social Democrats. Although it can trace its origins in the Marxist-Leninist movement of the early 1970s, the Dutch Socialist Party exchanged long since this borrowed ideology for a home grown variety which prioritises practice over theory, and action in the here-and-now to dreams of a distant utopia. The party defines socialism in its party program as the ongoing movement for human dignity, equality and solidarity. The SP now has 25 MPs in the Lower House, 11 Senators in the Upper House, two MEPs in Brussels/Strasbourg, three MPs in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, and is represented in all 12 Provincial Parliaments and in about 100 city councils. In 2005, the SP led the successful Dutch campaign against the European Constitution. Although nearly all parties in Parliament supported the proposed Treaty, nearly two out of three citizens said no to it in a nation wide referendum. In 2009, the Government, scared for another defeat, refused its citizens a second referendum on the Lisbon Treaty (although Labour promised its voters in 2006 such a referendum). Parliament ratified it, while SP was voting against in Lower and Upper House, backed by a majority of the public.

While strongly opposing the neo liberal development of the European Union since the Maastricht Treaty, SP advocates European cooperation as such, as necessary and inevitable. Therefore SP representatives participate actively in the European Parliament as well as in the parliamentary assemblies of the Council of Europe and the OSCE. In the European Parliament and the Council of Europe the SP participates in the Group of the United European Left. More information: www.international.sp.nl

those Labour-forces which are hostile to us, and give them even more arguments to increase their resistance against an electoral alliance of the Left. Our hope to convince Labour nevertheless to look to left options, is related to the clear wish of a majority of Labour membership for some kind of cooperation of the Left.

And of course: the financial and economical crisis that has hit the world, shows how the neoliberal approach has failed to deliver what it promised to citizens. The mantra of more market and less government, combined with the processes of deregulation, liberalisation and privatisation, clearly have proven to be false and ineffective. Now neo liberalism is losing its credibility, it is up to us who

believe in socialist alternatives to convince the public about the possibility of such an alternative. In the next 18 months local, provincial and national elections will show whether or not we can meet this challenge. ■

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reinventing a faulty wheel

In an extensive piece of research, Margaret and Jim Cuthbert discover not only that many of the criticisms of PFI have turned out to be correct but that the mistakes are being repeated by the current Scottish Government

This paper reports on a study we have carried out analysing the bidding process for schools PFI projects in Scotland. This tells us a good deal about PFI, and about some important things which have gone wrong. Unfortunately, even though the current Scottish government is attempting to correct some of the worst features of PFI, we will see that it has failed to learn key lessons.

In Scotland, there have been 37 schools PFI projects to date: the first project, Falkirk, was advertised in 1998, and the last contract was signed in 2009. Overall, the 37 contracts involved around 245 new schools and 45 refurbishments and/or extensions. The capital value of these projects was £3.3 billion - although, of course the total that local authorities will pay over the lifetime of the projects in unitary charges, (covering not only the capital financing costs, but payment for the provision of services), will be much larger. For example, the total in unitary charges paid by local authorities in 2009-10 is estimated at £390 million: rising to £465 million in 2010-12 when all existing PFI schools projects are in operation.

Our study looked at the bidding process for each of these 37 projects. Our approach was to obtain the Final Business Cases of all schools PPP/PFI projects in Scotland. Some of these are available on individual local authority websites: most, however, were obtained through Freedom of Information requests. The information has been supplemented by minutes of Council meetings, and by contractor bulletins on PFI. General statistics are from Partnerships UK and from the Scottish Government. We examined this information on the bidding process to see what it told us about the degree of competition, or other potential problems. The first thing we looked at was project size. Sheer size is an important factor in PFI for two reasons: first of all, because the number of firms capable of bidding for very large projects is likely to be severely limited - so that very large contracts in themselves are likely to be associated with a restricted degree of competition. And of course, from a Scottish perspective, the larger the contract, the less likely that a Scottish firm will be able to handle it - so very large contracts are likely to be associated with the loss of Scottish market share.

What we found was that the projects did indeed tend to be large. Remember that there have been 37 contracts in all covering around 290 schools. The five largest contracts alone accounted for 107 of these schools. At the other end of the scale, only 14 of the projects were for less than five schools. In terms of capital value, there was one contract with a capital value of over £300 million, two in the range £200m to £300m, and twelve more over £100m. The largest individual contracts were Glasgow with 11 new schools, and 18 refurbished; Edinburgh with 15 new and two refurbished; North Lanarkshire with 24 new; South Ayrshire, 17 new; and South Lanarkshire, 17 new and three refurbishments. So, PFI schools contracts in Scotland are indeed large. Moreover, they are relatively large in UK terms. Figures from Partnerships

UK indicate that the three Scottish projects are the only ones in the UK with a capital value of over £200 million. And of the 10 UK schemes with a capital value of over £150 million, six were in Scotland. In fact, Scotland has not just large individual schools PFI projects but has a disproportionate large share of the overall market in schools PFI over the UK as a whole: Scotland, with just 8.5 per cent of the UK's population, has 40 per cent of the UK's PFI schools projects, as measured by capital value. We will return later to the significance of this.

The next question we looked at was: how competitive was the market for Scottish PFI schools projects? There are a number of ways of looking at this. One approach is to consider the number of firms, or groups of firms, engaged at key points in the PFI bidding process. One key milestone is the issue of an Invitation to Negotiate to a number of consortia. A later milestone is the final selection of a single preferred bidder from the resulting bids. The view taken by the Treasury and the Public Accounts Committee is that if there are two or fewer compliant bids at the final selection stage then this is potentially indicative of a failure of competition, and special care should be taken: indeed the Treasury lays down specific requirements which must be met before single bid projects are proceeded with. In fact, of the 37 Scottish schools PFI projects, two had only one viable bid at the final selection stage, twenty-eight had two bids, and only seven had three bids.

These figures in themselves are suggestive of a fairly restricted degree of competition in this market. Nor is it the case that the small number of bids at the final selection phase arises solely because bidders are dropping out at a late stage in the bid selection process. For ten out of the thirty seven projects, there were only two or less bids at the initial Invitation to Negotiate stage. This is good evidence of a limited degree of competition in the market from the early stages of the bidding process. The above bald figures in themselves give rather too generous a view of the degree of competition: it is clear from an examination of the detail of the relevant documentation that in a number of cases, Councils were counting bids which had very little chance of ever becoming realistic. For example, in one case, which went right through to the final selection stage, the consortium involved was clearly just a shadow company with no staff and no track record. Another way of looking at the degree of competition in the market is to consider the overall number of firms involved. The 79 bids at the final selection stage involved 22 construction firms, or groups of firms: (where firms habitually work in groups, we have counted the number of groups, rather than individual firms.) And the construction work for the 37 final contracts was handled by 20 firms (or groups). Again, this is indicative of a fairly restricted market.

Now let us look at some other aspects of PFI bidding: namely, how well do Scottish firms do in the process. On the one hand, it is clear from our data that a few Scottish firms have done

well with PFI schools contracts: for example, Robertson have been involved in consortia which have secured five PFI schools projects worth almost £300 million in capital value: and as well as being involved in the construction for all these projects, they have secured the facilities management contracts for four of them. Overall, however, the bulk of the firms involved in PFI schools projects have headquarters outside Scotland. Of the 24 firms involved in the construction work on the 37 contracts, (and here we are looking at individual firms, not groups), only six are headquartered in Scotland. As regards the service element of the PFI projects, only two Scottish headquartered companies gained facilities contracts, (covering nine projects in all). The data is therefore indeed consistent with the view that PFI is not good for Scottish firms. This is in line with what researchers at Glasgow Caledonian University found, in an earlier study of the Scottish Executive PFI database.

Another claim which is often made is that PFI introduces bias into the procurement process - away from refurbishment and towards new build. It is certainly the case that, in several of the projects we have studied, initial proposals by the Council which involved refurbishment of existing schools were modified to include a greater, or even total, new build element. This happened in at least twelve cases - and in two cases this resulted in the collapse of the original project design. On the other hand, there were no cases where the change was in the other direction. Of course, we do not know that this was necessarily a bad thing: what emerged finally may have been an altogether better and more cost effective solution. But the data is certainly consistent with a bias towards new build in PFI projects.

There are also concerns that the complexity of PFI leads to a long bidding process, in the process of which costs tend to escalate. There are plenty of examples in the data of both delays and cost escalation - with, in several cases, significant cost escalation occurring after the selection of the preferred bidder. Possibly the most pronounced example is Clackmannanshire schools, where the whole process from the outline business case to financial close took four and a quarter years: costs escalated from an initial estimate of capital value of £35.8 million to £72.7 million at financial close: more than £10 million of this escalation actually took place after the preferred bidder was selected. Another aspect of the length and complexity of the bidding process is that this in itself involves high cost, for both tendering firms and Councils. It has been estimated that the cost to each bidder associated with the tendering for a large schools PPP project can be upwards of £1.5 million. Ultimately, of course, the costs of successful, and unsuccessful, bids find their way into the eventual costs of delivering services.

The findings from our comprehensive study of all PFI schools projects in Scotland confirm many of the negative suspicions that have been held about PFI, and also point to previously unidentified aspects of the schools PFI process in Scotland. In particular, the facts that Scottish schools PFI projects tend to be large in themselves relative to the norm for the UK, and also that Scotland represents such a large share of all schools PFI projects in the UK, have serious implications. Local authority expenditure on PFI projects is contractually committed, and hence effectively ring-fenced: in addition, the costs are indexed to rise in relation to inflation. This means that PFI costs are inevitably going to pre-empt an increasing proportion of local authority budgets as we move into a period of stringent public expenditure cuts. Because of the scale of schools PFI

in Scotland, this squeeze is going to be much more severe in Scotland than in the rest of the UK. There is therefore unlikely to be any Westminster initiative to rescue English local authorities from their PFI squeeze, from which Scotland might have hoped to benefit through Barnett consequential. The likelihood is that Scotland will have to face on its own the consequences of the rash implementation of PFI North of the Border.

The present Scottish government dislikes PFI, quite rightly, and has attempted to move on. But in doing so, it has made the disastrous mistake of not taking on board key lessons to be learned from past experience with PFI. One of these key lessons is that many of the adverse features of PFI stem from the sheer size of the contracts. Sheer size itself restricts competition, freezes out Scottish firms, and complicates and lengthens the bid process. And yet, in putting forward its proposals for the arrangements to replace PFI, the Scottish government did not take adequate steps to reduce the size of projects. For example, in its consultation for its proposed PFI replacement, the Scottish Futures Trust, the Scottish government included the requirement that projects involved should be 'off the books' in terms of the previous requirements of government accounting. However, by the time the consultation document was issued, it was already known that changes in government accounting standards were going to bring almost all PFI projects on the books anyway - so the 'off the books' requirement in the consultation document was pointless. But it was precisely the requirements of the old 'off the books' test which led to complex, bundled, and almost inevitably large PFI contracts. In other words, the Scottish Government was quite needlessly ensuring that some of the worst features of the old PFI would be carried on under the Futures Trust.

But this is not all. In those cases where the Scottish government has completely abandoned PFI or its clones, and gone back to old fashioned procurement, it has still not appreciated the lesson of size. For example, the much heralded conventional procurement of the new Southern General Hospital has been let recently as a single contract with a capital value of over £550 million: no surprise that a contract of this size did not go to a Scottish company. And still on the same theme, the present Scottish government has enthusiastically embraced the principles of the McClelland report on central procurement by public bodies. This report advocated, with the best of value for money intentions, that procurement should be bundled and centralised. Again, unfortunately, this has led to large contracts, with their resulting consequences. As a result, the Scottish Chambers of Commerce issued a statement in September, complaining that their members were being squeezed out of billions of pounds worth of public procurement contracts.

But there are other lessons too which have not been learned. Another important point about PFI and public procurement generally is that there are social and macro economic implications which go far beyond the question of value for money on individual contracts. We have already seen some of these effects above, in relation to the adverse impact of PFI on Scottish firms. But there are much broader ramifications, for example in relation to employment, training, the pool of skills in the economy, research and development, business creation and business growth. In total, the way in which the £3.3 billion of schools capital was let under old fashioned PFI by the previous Labour/LibDem administration had an adverse impact on all of these aspects. There is no evidence that the present SNP

administration is taking any wider perspective in its approach to procurement - despite having plenty of opportunity to do so if it wished. For example, if it had been less interested in financial engineering and more interested in real engineering, it could have designed the Futures Trust to provide central expertise in project design, procurement and management, in order to assist public bodies to split down complex requirements into manageable individual contracts. This would have enabled Scottish firms to compete on a level playing field. And this would not be just Scottish construction companies, but companies involved in design, architecture, cleaning, catering, and other services.

Overall, the conclusion we draw is a depressing one. It is not just that we will have to suffer the consequences of old PFI in Scotland for years to come: but, as we attempt to move forward, the lessons that ought to have drawn from that experience have not been learnt. ■

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universality needs diversity

Tom Nairn argues that the political return of the Scottish nation is a perfectly comprehensible expression of trends embracing the whole globe

...The faces pass, the individuals, how there can be such difference we do not know but what we do know is that an absolute instinct loves it different, the world, the dialectic, the packed coaches whistling at daybreak through the patched countries.'

Edwin Morgan, 'Differences', 1994

More than a side effect?

'Globalisation' has increased consciousness of 'species-being': everyone is more permanently conscious of homo sapiens as something like a single 'tribe', 'nation' or societal entity. This is independent of religious faith in God-given unity or commonality - though inevitably intertwined with 'revivals' of faith, where consequences re-present themselves as causes, or true sources.

A more persuasive approach may be to keep in mind the dominant mode of sociality over the period that ended in the conjoined crises of 1989 and the 'GFC' of 2008-9: 'the world as we knew it', in which socialism competed with North Atlantic-based capitalism for future dominance. The latter won in the short term, but only with a pyrrhic victory that led directly to a different kind of defeat: the 'general crisis' of a system no longer held together by the constraints of competition.

These critical shifts amount to a deeper reorientation of development, on the level of nationality-politics. Both Eastern (socialist) and Western (capitalist) growth patterns rested upon 'nationalism' in the sense discerned and theorized by Ernest Gellner: 'ethno-development' as the sole immediately available mode of cohesion in market-formation and industrialisation

- nations as mobilizable nature, activated by language and mass culture, and idealised into the social-personal fusion of 'identity' in a modern sense. In the emergent world of Nations and Nationalism one (everyone) had to 'be' something - for example, 'French', and then as the process expanded, 'Algerian', 'Moroccan', etc. - in order to get anywhere, to become modern in one's own terms. Of course 'one's own terms' assumed a reality of its own, like the new condition of sea-going: a recognisable ship of the line, rather than a tow-barge or 'dependency'. But those terms were not 'for their own sake': identity was functional, not civilisation as such - a way into the game, uniforms rather than fashion clothing chosen for style or self-assertion alone.

Shifts and '-isms'

'Ages' in that sense have no general closing date: 'nationalism' in E.G.'s sense was approximately 1789-1989, but the 'approximate' doesn't mean that before the French Revolution nobody was industrialized or had national-style identification, while everybody 'moved on' from the latter when the Wall collapsed. Avalanches come and go; earth-shifts take longer, linger and occasionally re-erupt, preserved by customs, nostalgias and intelligentsias. As Gellner so often said, nationalism needed intéllos and working (or would-be working) classes; and the former grew influential enough to have a heavily invested stake in the '-ism' - which today continues to entail, some interest in '-ism'-preservation, resurrection, or at least pretence.

None the less, it remains 'approximately' true that the two centuries were the main-body age of nationalism, and ■ successor is in formation: what people are aiming at with terms like 'globalization'. Everyone, everywhere is of course not 'industrialised', commercialised, and so on: many have

hardly started, and a few have had a surfeit of 'modernity'. Intelligentsias and proletariats continue to sprout, albeit in different circumstances. Circumstantial shifts are processes, chains of unintended events rather than policies, think-tank plans, or sage-like forecasts. The most convincing panorama of such directional tide-turnings remains Albert O. Hirschman's **A Propensity to Self-Subversion** ([Harvard 1995], especially 'Mapping the Getting-Stuck Syndrome' [pp.51-68]). A sufficiently large number of 'side-effects' amounts to a non-side effect or change. 'Globalisation' is such an alteration: a shift from functional or original nationality-politics to some successor - a farther epochal setting that both bears forward much of its predecessor, and changes its content and significance.

Identifications

Populations still have to identify themselves within globality but it may be arguable this is no longer primarily a means to an end - i.e. the achievement of place and status within industrialisation. Nancy Fraser has argued that, despite all its absurdities and final crisis, Neo-liberalism had the unintended consequence of partial gender-levelling, a shift now permanent and undeniable (New Left Review, 'Feminism Coopted', March-April 2009). Can't analogous effects be discerned in the dimension of nationality and statehood? The '-ism' defined by Gellner was for long instrumental. Without it national market-places and enterprises were difficult to obtain, and liable to be prevented, or overwhelmed. A nation-state mechanism seemed the most available way for any distinctive population to remain, and develop. The alternative was subordination, 'assimilation', disappearance and the assumption of different identities: premature 'globalisation' as all-French, all-Spanish, all-American, all-Chinese.

Warfare was the natural climate of such contestation. But the era concluded in a 'cold war' compromise, in which around two hundred nationality-states survive, and even continue to proliferate as the established norm. Actual globality has imposed the persistence of diversity, within a (roughly) global market-place and economy, and hence altered the circumstances of societal evolution. 'Identity' has become more evidently a compromise between world-wide development and particular needs and traits: the inherited 'peculiarities' of populations, languages, cultures and interests. The latter need the former, in a sense different from what was once entailed by empire and colonisation - 'becoming' British, 'Spanish', 'Russian', etc. Imperialism used to carry 'modernity' in its baggage-train. But of course this baggage can't be left behind on what has become an older, de-railed train. It has to be re-housed in more appropriate ways, as a continuing precondition of species-being variety, and diversity.

The crucial shift here is that the converse is also true. Cultural diversity may require appropriate universal conditions; but 'universality' also needs the appropriate maintenance and increase of diversity. Nor can such differentiation be relegated to 'culture' alone, in the sense of aesthetic display, rituals, and re-presentation of communal traditions - leaving 'serious' economic and political matters on the global or 'international' plane. Plurality is not play: if there's an essence to human nature, it's probably here. It lies in the 'common ground' between kinship and species-being. That is, in the zone where biology is both side-stepped and continued: 'transcended' is the elusive term here, popular among clerics for obvious reasons

- but also, as Mauss and Durkheim first understood and stated plainly, the basis of sociology and human (i.e. societal) nature.

Societal Selection

Gellner worked out something of the selective machinery appropriate for 'primitive accumulation', in **Nations and Nationalism** (1983, see new 2009 edition with Introduction by John Breuilly). By contrast, 'globalization' indicates the limits of the mechanism of nationalism/imperialism. Natural selection made way for historical selection; and the latter is now mutating into 'globalization'. Transcendence is changing skins again, and misinterpretation is part of the process. A vital part of the mission of 'intellectuals' lies here. In pre-global times they both enabled nationalism and protested against it, via 'internationalism'; now that the latter is a mere fact, ambiguity has to alter focus. Part of this shift lies in detecting and helping to rid culture of pre-global phonies. For a significant period, the chief phony was the 'USSR': a deceitful instrument of Great-Russian power, as well as of an error-laden ideology. Mercifully ended in 1989, its disappearance has regrettably not been terminal. Other over-sized remnants of past ages remain, like India, China, Indonesia and the United States.

These should not be confused with Europe. The latter's 'union' has been deliberate, partial, and constitutionally configured to avoid big-lad presence: a confederation rather than a warlike power in the making. But though some of its constituents have themselves gone (or been forced) through divestiture of grandiosity, like Germany, Italy and Spain, another still longs for the impossible: the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The ruling class of this fossil heritage aspires to post-modernity plus a non-reformed early-modern constitution and an over-blown monarchy. A domestic anachronism dated from 1707 (the Treaty of Union between England and Scotland) is accompanied by global pretentiousness garbed in 'Commonwealth' robes, and Security Council status at the United Nations.

Although diluted to some extent by 'devolution', this state naturally remains devoted to over-sized posturing. Neither defeat nor occupation have compelled a retraction of essence. The current Premier Gordon Brown is in fact an apostle of reanimated 'Britishism', and he seems likely to be succeeded by a Conservatism stressing the same factors of Unity and continuing grandeur, albeit in the more contemporary tones made unavoidable by globalization. This is the broader framework for continuing 'devolution', and the rise of differentiated nationality-consciousness in the British-Irish archipelago. Globalizing conditions encourage a more politicized national awareness, but one in which 'identity' ceases to be primarily instrumental. It used often to be said that 'identity' was ideal play-time, counterposed against 'real' economics... or 'materialism'. But today finality is enforcing its own agenda: Societies must select themselves, no longer for the short haul of industrial-commercial presence, but for an indeterminate time to come - 'as far as the eye can see'. Identity has become 'for its own sake'...and that of the world.

Sovereignty and Selection

Far from retreating to an unattainable past, 'sovereignty' - or 'having the last word' - has therefore become the serious way of taking on an attainable, if damnably awkward, future. - a democratic-collective role of more and smaller states,

associated (or sometimes dissociated) in novel ways. The G8 has become the G20 (with some leadership from Australia), and the United Kingdom is already a less-united conglomerate, where Scotland, Wales and the different parts of Ireland are learning new parts, both in the E.U. and outside of it. Referenda in Wales and Scotland will soon re-establish popular rights, and help in turn to extricate the English majority from its addiction to the 'Unwritten Constitution' of the Crown and absolute Parliamentary authority. This is why the demise of the Treaty of Union could mean all-round liberation - outside the British-Irish Isles, as well as within them. All democratic nationalists have some stake in the outcome.

Anglo-Britain took the lead in formation of the earlier phase of development. Is it not conceivable that this multi-national entity might still play its role in the successor or globalizing phase? For example, by emphasis upon democracy, and through the cultivation of an appropriate 'civic' nationalism as foundation for such political union? Were the components of the 'U.K.' roughly equal or comparable in influence, this would be imaginable. An altered 'imagined community' could come in to being by forms of balance and compensation, aided by the common ground of European Union. But the trouble is, 'Britain' is simply not like that; nor will the imaginative efforts of enlightened circles make it so. It is overwhelmingly dominated by a single component, England: eighty-five per cent of the population, with territory and resources to match. Nor can any reconstructed union do much to change this. In addition, the disproportion is deformed by sheer concentration of people and resources in a single area of the national component: 'London and the Home Counties' in the conventional terminology is a cosmopolis within both nation and Union. Even democratized, a multinational state would remain overwhelmed by it.

Certainly, this might be cushioned or distanced by an English-national polity where the North and North-East played a greater part. But there is (putting it mildly) very little sign of any such shift. On the contrary, the absence of all-English political initiative tends to be taken for granted - as if England's electorate has grown so accustomed to Westminster-British enlargement that no other is imaginable. 'Empire' in that sense has hardened into an indurate ideology resistant to serious challenge from all other sources, including European enlargement and 'assimilation'. Hence what should be the principal energy for structural political reform, majority willpower and interest, is simply not there. Nor can it be conjured up by rhetoric and speculative ingenuity. What democracy encounters in this case is something like a form of quiet, dogged nationalism - underground, yet all the stronger for such reticence and low-level certitude, the conviction of not being 'like that'.

But Wales, Scotland and Ireland have naturally had to be 'like that'. In broader context, they are fairly typical European nationality-problems. This is what creates the unusual context of the proposed referenda in Scotland and Wales: movements for independence and sovereign rights, not against suppression of the typical 1789-1989 kind but for emergence from collapsing disregard and failing 'solutions' of indifference and marginalization. Accusations of 'regression' here encounter a quite basic problem: getting out of Ukania can't avoid going 'backward' in order to recuperate terrain lost earlier, and foster the foundations for a new start. The latter will of course be different from standard-issue de-colonization and nationalism. However, such differences do not disqualify nation-building and

awakening - they simply mean that new times call for new, and partially different answers - the responses of a 'globalizing' system, rather than those of former uneven development, domination, incorporation (and so on). It should also be pointed out that only the initiatives of new nationality arrangements and claims are likely to achieve this, from East Timor and West Papua to Catalonia and Wales. By definition, no text-books can be much help: the 'raw material' for twenty-second century guides and 'Politics 1' courses is itself in formation, including false starts, failed leaderships and dubious ideologies.

And Scotland's role in the process? I have emphasized the wider context in order to present a non-standard view: the political return of the Scottish nation is a perfectly comprehensible expression of trends and changes embracing the whole globe, not just the United Kingdom. Naturally, nationalists have always claimed to be 'joining the world'; it is our great fortune to be joining this world, not 'belatedly' but at a moment imposed by real if novel circumstances. We don't have to fight for it in the miserable old way, bursting out of prison with weapons; but we have to do so while the customs of a better time are still being forged, in more propitious circumstances where a greater equality of nationhoods is recognized, and indeed called for, by the pressures of a 'final solution' having nothing to do with race and genetic endowment. In Christopher Harvie's terms, Scotland has to be 'mended': fixed up and got back into mundane operation again (See *Mending Scotland: Essays in Economic Regionalism*, Argyll Publishing, 2004).

Not 'leading the way' (thank God) but getting out of the 'inverted commas' of the Union Treaty, and modestly contributing in its own right to a new mode of nationality, within a world of many colours, where democratic mansions are again on the increase. In former times, Scotland's odd fate was to become an 'inverted commas' country: the 'Scotland' of abnegation, a historical land that opted for absurdly unequal incorporation into the grander multi-national polity of Great Britain, which in turn expanded into an imperial order around the globe. Compensation for the loss was to some extent invented via what Tom Devine has labelled 'Highlandism', an exaggerated identity-version stressing non-political and kinship themes. The other compensatory tendency was what could be called the 'good boy' ideology: exemplary contribution to modernity's need for rational procedure and servitude. Folklore plus engineering were the inverted commas of Brit-Scotland: hallmarks of acceptance and wider-world propriety.

Escape from the latter into independence is a long-overdue normalization, a rejection not of 'the English' but of the wider British yoke so fatally important in the struggles of 1789-1989. Part of that fatality remains in English over-attachment to this order, a deep-laid exceptionalism reluctant to acknowledge that those who were for so long first are lapsing the ordinary ways of the (globalizing) world: an England as 'little' (or as big) as everywhere else, and no longer requiring anachronistic supports and traditions that hamper rather than enable adaptation to a successor age. ■

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not ready to forget

Daniel Gray examines the significance of the popular response to the publication of his well-received study of Scots volunteers in the Spanish Civil War

From the Glasgow Communist Party to the St Margaret's boarding school, for some reason they all wanted to hear about Scotland's role in the Spanish Civil War.

In all, twenty eight disparate groups invited me to speak in person on the subject in 2009 following the publication of my study of Scots volunteers in the Spanish Civil War called **Homage to Caledonia: Scotland and the Spanish Civil War**. Group sizes ranged from two to 400, ages nine to 99. Despite my own fascination with all things International Brigades, this popular level of interest staggered me.

It gave me hope, too; people were engaging, locking horns with ideas and embracing history, their history. Indeed, they were choosing to make this **their** history by their willing identification with it. At no time was the end of my speaking greeted with stony silence; questions and opinions were plentiful and varied, from 'could British intervention in Spain have prevented World War Two?' to 'would Rabbin Burns have gone?' and 'did the Brigaders smoke cigars while they were there?'

Whatever the political stripe or the demographic of those at these meetings, I encountered admiration for what those who served in Spain did. Perhaps part of that was born of today: to many, the idea of going to fight or nurse in a foreign war in the name of principles seems alien. There was captivation, too, at the Scotland of the 1930s, and a feeling that while no one would want to return to the poverty that ravaged the country back then, a dose of the convictions of those that peopled it would not go amiss.

People were moved to tears and tirades by some of the volunteers' letters home that I read out, indicating the importance of letting those who make history tell it. That method offers connection with people now in a way that lickspittling tomes and TV series of kings, queens and castles simply cannot. To that end, the point frequently arose that labour and working class history must be preserved by those who make it; no school syllabus is likely to focus on Peterloo (of the massacre in Manchester) above princes (of Charles, William and the like), or on republicanism over royalty, and there will never be a government-bankrolled May Day gathering.

Those sentiments in turn reminded me that progressive ideals and ideas are now outside parliament, Holyrood or Westminster; it is about harnessing them for progression, just as the 1936 Hunger Marchers took to the streets when shunned by those in the House of Commons.

Early in the year, STV commissioned two documentaries on the subject, screened in August as **The Scots Who Fought Franco**. The programmes used interviews recorded with Scots Brigaders in the 1990s, adding faces and voices to courageous and heartrending words. With filming, I was able to visit the conflict arenas that Scots Brigaders I had written about had fought, laughed and died in.

If I came across as emotional in the programmes, then that's because I was. STV did the nation a real and brave favour by not only commissioning but putting on *The Scots Who Fought Franco* during prime time watching. It doing so it brought the story to a whole new audience, even if some of that audience had been tuning in for *The Bill*.

At every juncture, I have learned more about the conflict, more about Scotland's role and more about Scotland now. I've heard inspiring stories of a generation of Grannies boycotting Spanish fruit 'fae the Republic' once Franco won. In Aberdeen, a dapper man in his eighties rose slowly to announce that he had been one of the anti-fascist boy scouts of the 1930s I had spoken of earlier in the evening.

I've encountered (and hopefully encouraged) a feeling that this history must not be seen as a static entity that ended in 1939, something to be closed shut in a book and put up on a dusty shelf.

Rather, it can be and must be a galvanising, continuous and inspiring thing. Just as Scots wholeheartedly banded together to oppose the British Union of Fascists in the 1930s, so must they do so to attack the British National Party in 2010. Brigaders that saw and continue to see the emergence of the BNP repeatedly rammied home this message. I heard one Brigader even go so far as to say 'never mind Spain, let's fight these bastards today'.

As they slowly and sadly die out, there is a feeling that the baton is being passed to a new generation. The very greatest tribute modern Scots can pay is to continue the fight against fascism. Scotland must take the unity of the 1930s and let it inspire a unity of purpose today. That is a heavy legacy, but one collective action can bear the weight of. ■

*A paperback version of **Homage to Caledonia: Scotland and the Spanish Civil War** is now available (price £9.99) in bookshops and on-line. Daniel Gray is its author.*

remember our economic rights

UN Human Rights Treaties can be used to establish public expenditure priorities, argues Carole Ewart

Can decisions rooted in a human rights framework improve our everyday lives or is progressive change best delivered by democratically elected politicians? It should not be a matter of 'either, or' as our politicians have seven, ratified United Nations (UN) Treaties to draw on when deciding on policy, on services and on funding. However there is little explicit evidence that these basic human rights standards and our international obligations to deliver them do inform key decisions on everyday issues in our communities especially at a time of public sector cuts. There is even less evidence that politicians and public sector staff are aware of the extent of their existing obligations and the range of the public's individual rights.

Just how many people are aware that the UK Government has undertaken to progressively realise, to the maximum extent of its available resources economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights? At a time of public sector cuts, budgets in the UK should be properly analysed and understood and spend determined on delivering specific rights such as 'the right of everyone to the enjoyment of just and favourable conditions of work' (Art 7) the right of everyone to social security, including social insurance (Art 9) the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions (Art 11 of the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights). Publicity to date has given the public a clear impression that human rights are confined to civil and political rights such as the voting rights of prisoners and the right to protest rather than human rights on issues which equally impact on and therefore belong to, all of us.

The seven UN Treaties are in addition to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) which has been incorporated into domestic law by the Human Rights Act 1998. Added protection exists for people in Scotland due to sections 29 and 57 of the Scotland Act 1998 which requires MSPs and government Ministers, apart from certain acts of the Lord Advocate, to comply with the ECHR. So if a UK Conservative Government is elected in 2010 and delivers its commitment to abolish the Human Rights Act, then Scotland will be better off as our Government still retains specific ECHR obligations which can be enforced in Scottish courts.

The ECHR is regarded as a more powerful human rights instrument as it can be enforced in domestic courts whereas the seven ratified UN treaties are a matter of international law. Practically the ECHR can make a difference as, for example, section 6 of the Human Rights Act requires the public sector to comply and that means people in care homes and in hospitals should not be subjected to degrading treatment.

However the ECHR has its critics who argue that it is a narrow document focusing on civil and political rights and that its

benefits are enjoyed by only a few. However it is a document that needs to be more proactively understood by elected politicians and by the public sector and used by the voluntary and charitable sectors to prevent human rights abuses. It is a 'living treaty' and has been interpreted to apply to a range of everyday issues such as in Spain where Mrs Lopez Ostra argued that the smell from a local factory interfered with her right to enjoy 'family life and her home'. The European Court of Human Rights agreed and ruled that the public authorities had failed to properly discharge their regulatory functions in respect of the private factory.

The lack of information and the cost of enforcing human rights domestically mean that just some people qualify for legal aid and that has led to an imbalance in who can exercise human rights. The now famous 'slopping out' case involving Mr Napier and Scottish Ministers makes a fascinating read due to the range and source of evidence heard during the proceedings in 2004. What remains a matter of some disappointment is that the implications for the health service and for environmental groups have been overlooked as we learnt so much about airborne infection in confined spaces and about the quality of air we each need to be healthy. So the UK's most expensive human rights case needs to be understood better so that all our lives are improved.

The seven UN Treaties chosen by our Government to be ratified give greater effect to the Universal Declaration of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms which celebrated its 60th anniversary in 2008. They explicitly cover the full range of human rights - economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights. Underpinning all rights are the human rights principles of fairness, respect, equality, dignity and autonomy. Human rights provide a complete framework for the culture of public sector organisations, attitudes of departments and individual staff members from the governors and leaders to the front line staff. Human rights detail specific rights and obligations so achieving some of the buzz words of 'empowerment' and often used phrases such as 'a responsive public service'. Yet human rights are often regarded as a threat rather than as an opportunity.

Ratification is a process whereby our Government declares to the UN that all our laws and policies comply. Clearly there is a gap between human rights theory and practice so there is a process of periodic hearings at the UN to monitor implementation and encourage progressive change. There is no shortage of basic rights and extensive guidance on

application from the UN. International experts have invested a lot of time and expertise drawing up information and practical tools from addressing poverty to enabling people to enjoy the right to highest attainable standard of physical and mental health under the UN Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The famous 'slopping out' case needs to be understood better so that all our lives are improved

Democracy is the only form of government recognised by the United Nations. UN hearings with the UK usually commence with a robust debate about why the rights are not domestically enforceable. The UK believes it is up to democratically elected politicians to decide how to spend scarce public resources and the UN should not interfere. However the UN asserts that as the UK has ratified seven treaties, as opposed to merely signing them, then it is stating that its laws and policies comply with the Treaties. So the UN is not seeking to interfere after decisions are made but to remind our Government that a system should exist whereby it pays attention to its existing commitments prior to any decision being made.

This approach not about undermining democracy but seeking to ensure Governments of all political persuasions agree to prioritise the delivery of basic human rights to deliver a society where there is equality of opportunity, where people of all ages can reach their potential and fairness rules decisions and services. A broader understanding of human rights and public sector obligations can achieve quite fundamental changes. Accessible housing is a good example. Scotland has too many people living in homes which limit their lives and increase their dependency: if a disabled person lives in a house which they cannot enter and exit without assistance due to stairs, cannot access the toilet because their wheelchair cannot be manoeuvred into a small bathroom and is unable to cook food because the kitchen surfaces are too high, then the combination of factors may

reach the threshold and amount to degrading treatment. The public sector response may be to provide a certain amount of direct care services but while this may suit the Council this may not be what the individual wants. Physical alternations to the home or moving someone to another home might fix the problem long term and respect the dignity and autonomy of the householder. The UN made recommendations to the UK about its obligations on accessible housing for disabled people as recently as May 2009 [Concluding Observations on UK by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights E/C.12/GBR/CO/5 12 June 2009]

It is time to focus on how we can better deliver the quality and range of services funded by a limited, and contracting, public purse. The fact that so little is known about the detail of each of our human rights means that in Scotland key decisions are being made without any knowledge of or reference to, human rights obligations. We the public are the poorer as human rights set out a framework which is transparent and ensures accountability. It acknowledges that there is not an unlimited supply of money but establishes a responsibility to resource these rights to the maximum extent possible within available resources. So if there is a decision to lay an expensive stone pavement rather than a cheap pavement at the same time as

cutting mental health services, then the priority of the spend should be invested in delivering key services to people who need them. That may be an uncomfortable situation as politicians are elected with their own set of priorities.

However there has been an exciting and important development with the Scottish Government's publication of an action plan 'Do the Right Thing' which takes forward the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommendations to improve children's rights in the UK. The action plan sets out a range of activity for elected politicians and public servants in 21 areas of work during the next four years'. (Scottish Government News Release 1st September 2009) We need this example to become a standard procedure in Scotland rather than an exceptional experience across the other six ratified treaties in respect of devolved matters.

UN monitoring of human rights can help our democracy to deliver for people in Scotland and the UK. However as long as human rights are marginalised and regarded as the preserve of the 'undeserving', who are often the most vulnerable, then human rights compliance will continue to be a low priority. At a time when many people are questioning the value base and principles of MPS of all parties, subscribing to human rights standards provides the equal base from which decisions on Government can be soundly made. Judging the priority of application, interpreting the meaning of basic

rights and trusting people with their human rights will be a challenge for all Governments. Maybe that is a question we can all be asking the candidates as they brave our doorsteps in the coming months?

Charities such as Human Rights Scotland closed due to lack of funds and interest in 2007 despite having published materials and delivering human rights training. Maybe human rights have arrived as the principles and standards resonate with the needs and interests of the general public. We will wait and see! ■

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chasing the economy

Jim Phillips shows how demands for control of the Scottish economy drove the devolution campaign. What now?

On 30 November 2009 the First Minister, Alec Salmond, revived questions about Scotland's constitution by outlining a variety of positions that might be tested in a future referendum, possibly before the next Holyrood election. Salmond related the apparent urgency of further constitutional changes to the current economic and financial crisis. With full fiscal and economic autonomy, he claimed, an independent Scotland would be better placed to minimise the dangers and maximise the possibilities of globalisation. There will be some who query whether 'independence' is philosophically, politically or economically feasible in a globalised capitalist environment, pointing, for example, to the government of a small north west European country that recently trumped planning regulations to evade localised objections and so accommodate the business ambitions of a powerful and super-wealthy, property-developing inward investor. Yet Salmond's point, strictly speaking, is about the particular position within the United Kingdom, and how, essentially, economic management from Westminster and Whitehall privileges the interests of southern England, with the effect of damaging the quite different interests of Scotland. This is the central yet often ignored element of the longer history of devolutionary and nationalist pressures in Scotland, at least since the 1950s. This history is important, illuminating the current debate about our common constitutional future, showing the key role of industrialists and trade unionists who - from distinct material and ideological positions - argued for enhanced administrative and then political devolution.

The business case for devolution was generally made in post-Second World War Scotland by the Scottish Council for Development and Industry (SCDI), a body incorporating some trade unionists and local authority representatives, but dominated by manufacturers from the 'traditional' sectors of shipbuilding and steel and the 'modernising' assemblers of consumer goods. One of the latter, John Toothill of Ferranti electronics, authored the famous eponymous report on the Scottish economy in 1961. The SCDI's main role was encouraging new business growth in Scotland, with a particular focus on inward investment. Toothill and the SCDI argued that economic growth in Scotland, including the development of new enterprises, was retarded in two ways by economic management from Westminster. First, the efforts to control inflation in the higher growth regions of southern and central England, involving periodic public spending cuts or increased indirect taxes or interest rates, choked off slower growth in Scotland. Second, regional policy, the range of measures geared to attracting a wider range of industries and firms to regions that were over-reliant - as Scotland certainly was - on a narrow range of mature, or 'declining' heavy industrial sectors, such as shipbuilding and steel, was allegedly failing. It focused on raising employment in particular localities rather than growth more broadly, with public investment therefore attracted to the declining sectors, chiefly in west central Scotland, rather than the potentially thriving and higher added value consumer goods sectors. Modernising businessmen like Toothill were unsuccessful in their attempts to transform regional policy and

transfer its administration from the Board of Trade in Whitehall to the Scottish Office in Edinburgh, but they won other battles, notably when the Macmillan government compelled Colvilles to establish a rolling strip mill at Ravenscraig. The steel maker knew this would be a heavy loser financially, but the government wanted to provide in effect a subsidised supply of steel to the consumer goods industries, including car manufacturing, with the Midlands motor assembly firm Rootes directed to Linwood under regional policy terms, opening in 1963.

The Linwood plant was part of a wider programme of economic restructuring encouraged by UK government policy in the 1960s. There were losers in this process, which elicited a variety of political responses from those involved, including workers in declining industries. In coal mining the number of pits was radically reduced and the number of working miners roughly halved in the 1960s as the UK government cultivated alternative energy sources, notably oil and nuclear power. Those miners remaining had to travel greater distances to work. In central Fife, for instance, the old 'Little Moscow' village collieries all closed, and miners were compelled to travel east to the 'cosmopolitan' pits of Frances and Seafield, on either side of Kirkcaldy, or west to mines servicing the vast South of Scotland Electricity Board power station at Longannet. These miners were led by a new generation of activists and officials, less willing to tolerate the compromises of the nationalised industry than older men with direct experience of the conflict-riven pre-war privately owned industry. The new generation resented the closures, which accelerated under a Labour government, and the decline of miners' earnings relative to other manual workers which the older union officials had tolerated in the 1950s and early 1960s. The result was an upsurge of militancy in the coalfields, with Scottish miners engaged in big unofficial strikes in 1969 and 1970, and making a full contribution to union victories over Edward Heath's Conservative government in the national strikes of 1972 and 1974. This militancy, chiefly articulated by Communist Party members including Michael McGahey, President of the Scottish Area of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUMSA), was shaped, however, by devolutionary as well as class politics. McGahey was an early and consistent proponent of Home Rule, and NUMSA officials from the later 1960s through to the great but doomed strike of 1984-5 consistently linked the tensions in their industry, notably managerial incursions on union rights and closure of pits on 'economic' grounds, to the remote administration of policy from Westminster and Whitehall.

Class and devolutionary - or even nationalist - politics were also blended in industrial affairs in Clyde shipbuilding, most notably with the 1971-2 Upper Clyde Shipbuilders' work-in. The work-in leaders, notably Jimmy Reid, Sammy Barr and James Airlie, were comrades of McGahey and other NUMSA figures in the Communist Party. They blamed the collapse into liquidation of the UCS combine in 1971 on the 'faceless men' in Whitehall who decided to end operating subsidies, and Reid in particular was successful in subverting established discourses in industrial politics by characterising the Conservative government as the

irresponsible wrecking force in the dispute. The workers by comparison, Reid sternly observed, were behaving responsibly, getting on with the important job of building ships and so supporting communities and the broader regional economy of west central Scotland. The impact of the work-in was strengthened by the deteriorating economic picture in Scotland in the winter of 1971-2, with Heath's economic management - geared to eliminating 'lame ducks' - leading to a sharp escalation of unemployment. This worried Tory figures and business leaders as well as trade unionists in Scotland. On 14 February 1972, as both the work-in and the national miners' strike reached their climax, an extraordinary public meeting was held in Edinburgh's Usher Hall. This was the Scottish Assembly on Unemployment, convened by the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC), and attended by a very broad range of economic and political actors, including representatives of all major political parties, local authorities, trade unions and business organisations. Speakers included McGahey and other key union figures, but also the chairman of the Conservative Party, Sir William McEwan Younger, and Teddy Taylor, Tory MP for Cathcart in Glasgow, who both raised the linkage between rising unemployment and the distant and therefore ineffective administration of economic policy and regional development.

Younger was also pressing Heath's government early in 1972 to support Oceanspan, a grand scheme for economic and industrial regeneration in Scotland prepared for the SCDI by Bill Lithgow and Lord Clydesmuir, scions, respectively, of great shipbuilding and steel-making dynasties. This required major capital investment in deep water ports on the west and east coasts, to transform central Scotland into a 'land bridge', with raw materials and other goods flowing between the Atlantic and European worlds, in the context of EEC membership. This was bold and imaginative, not to say potentially expensive, and directly challenged Whitehall and Westminster control of public policy, with enhanced investment and transport planning powers envisaged for the Scottish Office. Treasury and other Whitehall

objections duly prevented the plans from securing government support, and it is tempting to see this episode as a terminal point in the history of indigenous Scottish capital. Political leadership - or at least political eminence - within Scotland certainly appeared to be passing from business to labour. Trade union density and electoral support for the Labour party was increasing across the 1970s, despite the progress made by the SNP, notably in the 1973 Govan by-election and the 1974 General Elections. The Heath government, humiliated twice by the miners, also conceded defeat on the Clyde, reversing the decision on subsidies to keep most of the UCS workers in employment in a reshaped industry that now included a venture with the US oil rig manufacturer, Marathon, at Clydebank.

North Sea Oil is, of course, a familiar part of the established devolution-cum-nationalist narrative, the riches boosting immeasurably the apparent possibility of independence and therefore support for the SNP but jealously protected by the UK government. There is a strong flavour of conspiracy within this narrative. In 2005 the SNP seized upon a memorandum on the political economy of the North Sea written by Gavin McCrone for the Scottish Office's Economic Planning Department in February 1974, just before the General Election that unseated Heath's Conservative government. The SNP's then industrial spokesperson, Kenny MacAskill, claimed that the UK government buried McCrone's paper because it demonstrated that 'booming oil revenues' from the North Sea had made Scottish independence 'not only theoretically possible but economically desirable'. This was a partially accurate characterisation of McCrone's analysis, but ignored his warning that an oil-fuelled 'Pound Scots' would greatly appreciate in value relative to sterling, pricing Scottish manufactured goods out of foreign markets and encouraging a marked growth in consumer goods imports. Oil was undoubtedly mismanaged by the UK governments, especially during the 1980s, when a version of the McCrone scenario developed, but there is no obvious evidence to suggest that an independent Scotland governed by the SNP could have produced a substantially different outcome, with manufacturing on the slide.

An important lesson and a key paradox emerge from this short history of devolution's essentially economic and industrial origins. The lesson - shown most vividly with the complexities and contradictions identified by McCrone in his analysis of the political economy of North Sea Oil - is that independence, or indeed any form of constitutional change, will not in itself produce radically improved economic and social conditions in Scotland. The paradox relates to the fact that devolution was intended by its advocates in the 1960s and 1970s to enhance democratic control of economic and industrial developments in Scotland, boosting employment and working class living standards. But in practice Scotland's constitutional powers have been increasing since 1999 just as the capacity of democratic governments to command and control the tide of human affairs has receded in the face of globalised capitalist power. The Scottish Parliament of the future would be 'a Workers' Parliament', James Jack of the STUC told the 1972 Assembly on Unemployment. Who would be bold enough to venture this now? ■

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not falling for it this time

It's time to shake off forty years of establishment manipulation says Andy Anderson

I was born in Glasgow just before the outbreak of the Second World War. My father was a coal miner and a socialist and I grew up in a socialist environment, later when I became a miner myself I graduating into a Marxist. For most of us socialists, who grew up in this time period the idea of nationalism was anathema to us. It reminded us of the horror of the Nazi regime; of savagery, brutality and murder on a state basis, something that our families had fought against and something we wanted no connection with whatsoever. So many Scots, like me, were dead-set against Scottish nationalism because of the concept of "nationalism"; we prided ourselves in being "internationalists" and above all that. However we worked for, and in some cases, like my own, we served in the military for an imperialist State, and sometimes failed to see the contradiction. We were content to play our part in a democratic country which we felt we could influence, in spite of the fact that it was an aggressive, nuclear-armed colonial empire which held millions in bondage.

I remember reading a short booklet about Nguyen Van Troi, a young electrician in South Vietnam, who was persecuted tortured and executed by the South Vietnam puppet regime in the mid 1960s. While he was being interrogated the CIA "advisors" asked the South Vietnamese interrogators to question him about being a Marxist and internationalist yet being involved with a Vietnamese nationalist organisation. They put it to him that there was a contradiction in his position and to explain it. He told them clearly that he was a Marxist and an internationalist. He explained that Vietnam could not play its proper role in the international community until it threw off the yoke of the imperialists who dominated it. He supported the nationalist movement which he believed would be able to throw off the imperialist yoke and allow the Vietnamese people to have a national state and an internationalist presence. That explanation taught me something about my own position in Britain. We on the left were being led along by a Labour party which seemed to offer real choice when it offered in reality no such thing. I am looking at the 1974 Labour Party Manifesto "Let us work together". In the foreword to this document Harold Wilson promises to solve the economic crises which he said the UK was in, to stop house prices rising, stop the Common Market from forcing up prices and taking more control of Britain's affairs, and to solve the miner's dispute with fairness. He was elected you will recall.

In the mid 1970's the British establishment was in a panic about the strength of the British economy, the weakness of the pound, the balance of payments, and British "standing" in the world based on the old imperialist view of "Great Britain".

For most in the British Government, Civil Service and the media, imbued as they were with imperialist ideas, Britain was facing a real crisis. The British economy was just not keeping pace with other advanced economies, and indeed some backward economies such as China's were catching up. They could see that Britain was going to lose its place as a "world power" because it would soon not be able to afford the high profile. At this crucial time developments were taking place in Scotland

which very much caught their attention and two developments in particular. Oil was being discovered in great quantity in the North Sea in Scottish territorial waters, and the SNP were gaining in political strength. The civil servants wanted to make a careful examination of the former, and to assess the implications of that on the latter. The senior economist at the Scottish Office at that time Mr Gavin McCrone did a study of the implications of the new oil industry to the economy of the UK and of Scotland as an independent country. That study was completed in 1974 and forwarded to the Cabinet Office in London in April 1975.

The contents of this important **McCrone Report** were of such significance, and so devastating to the Westminster Establishment that they made this report, and all correspondence relating to it 'Top Secret' and kept it out of sight of the Scottish people for over 30 years. That however is only the start of what they did. They followed that up with a widespread, sustained and well funded campaign in the public arena to deceive and mislead the Scottish people about these economic matters.

In that obscene anti-democratic campaign the Unionist political parties, particularly the parties of Government, played a full and dishonourable role and are continuing to do so to this day. This campaign which, because of documents released under FoI, we can now expose was based on the economic foundations of the McCrone report, but it extended into other areas in an attempt to undermine the SNP such as inserting 'agents provocateur' into the SNP and attempts to associate the SNP with violence. Another of the tactics employed by the British secret services was to try to create internal divisions in Scotland. That good old imperialist trick employed by Edward the First against the Scots. The Gaelic programme, "Dìomhair" (Secrets), shown recently on Alba TV for which George Rosie did the research, exposes much of this and is well worth watching. (It is sub-titled for those who do not have the Gaelic)

In this paper I want to concentrate on the economic issue, for it was this that caused the Westminster Establishment to start the campaign against the SNP and indeed it is in this field that they have been extraordinarily successful. We are told, and I have no reason to doubt it, that the majority of Scots would vote against independence for their country if given the chance to-morrow. Now that is very strange, so why is that?

The answer is obvious. Over thirty years of distortions, half-truths and outright lies about the Scottish economy from London controlled Governments, Civil Servants and Media have had an effect. A large part, possibly a majority of the Scottish people believe that Scotland would have great difficulty surviving as an independent economy, and in an economic downturn such as now this insecurity increases. Yet not only is this idea entirely false, it is in fact the opposite of the truth. If independent, Scotland to-day would be much stronger economically as all unbiased opinion shows, and the people who have been persistently spreading that falsehood have been well aware of that for two decades. Indeed the Westminster establishment have been so successful at making this distortion stick that it is now emerging

that there is pressure coming from English voters for the Scots to have independence because they quite reasonably do not feel that they should continue to keep subsidising the Scots. The Unionist political leaders know that this is untrue so they are caught on the horns of their own dilemma.

The McCrone report and the correspondence between civil servants relating to it, show quite clearly that they had no hesitation or misunderstanding about the findings of this economic study. They knew that McCrone was correct to say that the Scottish economy, with the expected oil production level would, if independent, be one of the strongest economies in the world. Indeed Scotland's 'problem' which they discussed would be how to deal with its economic riches. They even took the view that the SNP assessment of Scotland's oil wealth was far too low, and history proved them right on that. The UK however, if Scotland had gone independent in the 1970s, would have been in real trouble, and the pound as a world trading currency would have collapsed.

It was not a question of the UK saving Scotland economically; on the contrary it was very much understood by them to be the other way round - the UK could not afford to lose Scotland.

It is clear in the correspondence between top civil servants that they had accepted the McCrone report as being valid, it is equally clear that they were united in keeping this information from the Scottish people, and indeed assisting in feeding them the very opposite information - the lie that Scotland could not make it as an independent economy. One very revealing set of communications in 1976 is between Brian Willott, then Assistant Secretary at the Dept of Industry, and Gavin McCrone where they are faced with the "problem" that North Sea oil revenues could strengthen the pounds exchange rate to such an extent that it would cripple UK exports while sucking in imports. The answer they felt was to spend the new oil money on UK infrastructure projects. Here are Willott's suggestions:

- (a) The road net-work between Tilbury Dock and the English Midlands
- (b) Dealing with trade-union "restrictive practices"
- (c) Building a London outer ring road
- (d) Supporting the proposed Channel Tunnel

McCrone pointed out that the Scots would be less than pleased if they saw the new oil money from Scottish oil being spend entirely in the south of England. We now know from history that this is exactly what they did do with much of the oil money while some of it went into the military spending black hole. Thatcher dealt with the trade-union issue by abandoning Keynesian economic policies and embracing a monetarist position. Using the oil-backed strong pound she allowed a depression to drive up unemployment while her Government refused to help what they called "Lame Duck" industries and forced their closure.

This gave them an ideal position from which to attack the trade-union movement. She drove the UK unemployment rate up to 3 million using the strength of oil revenues to keep the pound steady. Of course this made Thatcher very unpopular for a time all over Britain, but the Falklands war helped restore her political popularity in England, although it never did recover in Scotland. Scotland, having a higher proportion of heavy industry than the UK average, suffered very badly by this attack. What is clear though all this period, irrespective of party allegiance, all unionist politicians joined the big lie in talking down Scotland's prospects as an independent country, as did the whole UK establishment, some of course were ignorant and knew no better while trying to be seen as sophisticated but the leadership knew very well what the true position was.

At the recent Glasgow by-election while Labour claimed a great victory, two out of three voters did not bother to vote while this is an area of social deprivation among the worse in Europe. Are our people so subdued and depressed by the propaganda that they have given up trying? The Unionists are trying to divert us from dealing effectively with this issue by claiming that it is not important 'we have no time for relooking at constitutional matters while the economic situation is so poor'. The truth however is that unless and until we deal with this

matter, we will be unable to deal properly with our economic or political problems. If we as Scots are prepared to confront the Imperial nonsense of Britain retaining nuclear arms, of Britain being second fiddle to the USA in armed conflicts world wide, and Britain playing "super-power" in the UN Security Council, then we need to take this on at its lifeline, its Scottish economic base.

What McCrone identified in 1974 is still valid to-day. The UK economy is in dire trouble without Scotland's assets. If therefore we can move the debate around to the real issues this will be of benefit to the people everywhere in Britain, and it will kill off British imperialism. The Thatcher attack on the trade-unions was planned by civil servants before she was even elected leader of the Tory party and was financed by Scottish oil. Britain's nuclear weapons, her overseas military adventures, and her super power posturing has all being financed by Scotland's link to the UK. It is crystal clear, if we as socialists want to put an end to this, we have to expose the lies and the case for Scottish Independence in the interests of all people in Britain. ■

George (Andy) Anderson is an ex-coal miner, ex-piper with the Cameron Highlanders, Board member of the Community Trust and author of "The Skye Bridge Story"

Reviews

The State in Capitalist Society by Ralph Miliband (republished by www.merlinpress.co.uk £16.95)

Ralph Miliband was a major figure in the marxist revival which became known as the New Left in the 1960s. A founder of *New Left Review* and the *Socialist Register*, the *State in Capitalist Society* (1969) remains a key work of modern marxist analysis. Long out of print Merlin has done a service in reprinting this, along with his works *Parliamentary Socialism* (1961) and *Marxism and Politics* (1977), to mark its 40th anniversary. It is strange to review a book you first read as a young activist reading and engaging in marxist debate 37 years ago, three to four years after it was published. During those few years, largely through discussions in *New Left Review* and papers such as *Black Dwarf*, many of its ideas had become mainstream within the far left. In consequence, I read it, agreed with it and carried on with other debates, rarely feeling the need to return to the book. With the wisdom of hindsight and a rereading, I and indeed much of the left would have benefited from periodically referring to this book in strategy discussions in past decades.

The *State in Capitalist Society* examines major topics of marxist theory: Is there a ruling class? Who are the ruling class in modern capitalist society? How does the state operate within capitalism? What is the class basis of state employees? Does the state elite always work in the ruling class's interest? What is the role of democratic parties, institutions and government within the state? Why do 'oppressed' classes accept the rule of their 'masters' as legitimate? In short how does the ruling class rule? Finally, Ralph examines the trend towards authoritarianism and curtailment of democracy and asks what it means to "overthrow" the ruling class and what are the obstacles to this.

This book was the first in English to systematically look at these themes from a class-based perspective. Marx only tangentially addressed the role of the state in the *Communist Manifesto* and his aphorism "a committee for managing the affairs of the whole bourgeoisie" was picked up but little developed by Lenin. Gramsci did develop the theory, particularly of tensions and conflicts within the state (antinomies) and Miliband makes due reference to this. The book's structure is partially dictated by the need to combat the then-accepted bourgeois promoted concepts of the state - impartial between classes, functionalist. He examines the role of nationalised industries - questioning the widely held view that the creation of the welfare state and large scale nationalisation had weakened markets or capitalism. These and many other views prevalent in the 1960s, are demolished by Miliband, yet are resurgent now.

Leo Panitch, in the 1960s a student of Miliband at LSE and now a contributor to *New Left Review* (amongst others), provides an up to date reassessment of the themes of the book and their current relevance. He points to the issues of banking bail out, Obama's saving of the car industry and the accusation of Republicans that this is 'Socialist Economics' and how these mirror similar debates dissected by Miliband. The main reason he claims for reading the book is to understand fully Miliband's observation that "reform always and necessarily falls short of the promise it was proclaimed to hold: ... what always lay behind this were the fears, reinforced by capitalist pressures, of aggravating a crisis of capital accumulation".

For myself, I found the latter chapters on The Process of Legitimation (analysing non-state institutions such as political parties, trade unions, the church, lobbyists, universities and how ruling class ideology is 'reproduced' within the working classes) and Reform and Repression (how industrialisation creates opportunities for a humane social order and how such aims are frustrated and disoriented), came across with fresh insights as the left faces another period of reinventing itself. Two observations remain powerful; "the failures of social democracy implicates not only those responsible for it, but all the forces of the left" and "a serious revolutionary party, in the circumstances of advanced capitalism, has to be the kind of 'hegemonic' party of which Gramsci spoke ... but the creation of such a party is only possible in conditions of free discussion and internal democracy, of flexible and responsive structures".

I recommend the book for all on the left seeking clarity on our tasks and the enormous antagonistic forces we face. I hope, with little conviction, that Ralph's sons David and Ed, possibly vying for leadership of the Labour Party, have recently reread the book and like their father seek a socialist solution for humanity by transcending capitalism. ■

Gordon Morgan

Hamish Henderson: A Biography, Volume Two. Poetry Becomes People (1952- 2002) by Timothy Neat, Polygon, Edinburgh, £25

Hamish Henderson died at the age of 82 in 2002 having done much from which the citizens of Scotland and many other countries still benefit. His life was as cluttered and wonder-strewn as his tape teeming study in George Square. At the start of this elegant, compelling and inspiring culmination of an outstanding biography, Timothy Neat warns us that things are going to 'slow down'. It could scarcely be otherwise! By 1952, when its subject was 35, Hamish Henderson had been, as a Perthshire only child, born out of wedlock, one of the scholarship boy stars of Dulwich College, a brilliant student of Leavis, a dazzling linguist, played an heroic part in, and been the beloved bard of, the desert campaign, won the prestigious Somerset Maugham Award for the masterly and moving *Elegies* written about El Alamein, accepted the surrender of, and began the cultural revival in, Italy, shortened the war through his polyglot skills as an interrogator, led a partisan army of communists, translated into English for the first time the letters of Gramsci, helped found the People's Festival that was to become the Edinburgh Fringe, got the Folk Revival going on both sides of the Atlantic, opened up non sectarian adult education in the North of Ireland, begun the song collecting that was to make him the most important Scottish folklorist, certainly since, Hogg, probably since Burns, and got involved on the margins of militant post box bombing Nationalism. Thus ended the first volume. And that is a drastic, frugally foreshortened summary of a life not yet at its distinguished mid-point.

'Big Hamish' is, self confessedly, Neat's hero as well as his subject, though (mostly) the hagiographical impulse is restrained as discipline offsets discipleship. Fault is found and flaws confronted in this palpable labour of love. It is not only nations that need foundation myths. Henderson could be fey and as an innocent a gilder of lilies was as much romancer, as Romantic, especially about his mysterious, 'aristocratic' paternity. That

riddle, Neat definitively (and mundanely) solves. Trying to pin down a giant, in figure and in fact, this filidh of figment and facet is like attempting to tack mist to a notice board. Yet Tim Neat, not merely Henderson's chronicler but his (multi award winning) long time collaborator on books, documentaries and a feature film, catches his likeness ('Like'-ness) with a true visual artist's exactness. "This man was a singer, 'a lad o' pairts, but perhaps above all a teacher- a man of Franciscan simplicity, Socratic wisdom and Druidic authority....". All who admired the warrior wizard of Neat's opening instalment will be farther enthralled.

The period covered in the second volume sees Henderson become a husband and father, having found himself a professional home too, installed in the newly established School of Scottish Studies, his 'hut' to stravaig out from, for the rest of his life. Work is begun, with Maurice Fleming, on the treasure trove of tradition borne by the Travelling People, a project that was to change Henderson's life and theirs. Campaigns - to be fought with all the righteous ferocity and gallantry of the Desert Campaign - intensify, for a Scottish socialist republic, for folk culture, for Christian compassion, for gay rights, for life and love. And against apartheid, nuclear weapons, imperialist oppression and Calvinist joylessness and repressive and regressive stricture. A Stalin-despising fellow traveller and then a disillusioned convert to the short-lived Scottish Labour Party, Henderson led, and was prominent in, no political party. Until, and mostly after, the broadcast of Keith Alexander's fine film about the Elegies, the BBC kept him off the airwaves. He was the subject both of scurrilous rumour and the attentions of the Security Services. Few will doubt Neat's account of the gossip-mongering and malice. More readers will wonder if the stymyings and surveillance don't owe something at least to paranoia and conspiracy theory. That said, knowing even a little about the all too real proactive paranoia of the MI's, 5 and 6 alike, anything was, and perhaps remains, possible.

Among those who sought out Hamish and whom he influenced, again this is a miniscule sampling, were Pasolini, Margaret Bennett and her son Martyn, Mark Cousins, Tilda Swinton, John McGrath, Gordon Brown (in better days), Billy Kay, Kirsty Wark, Eck Finlay, Ted Cowan and Jean Redpath. "A person who is not genuine cannot recognise someone who is genuine", he believed. Several of his detractors failed that existential test. Hamish Henderson was genuine and then some. After an Episcopalian funeral attended by nearly two thousand, when Hamish's ashes were scattered on the mountain above the fairy pass of his native Glenshee, it was George Gunn, Angus Calder and Tim Neat who waved an over-size Saltire and toasted him in Jura from charity shop golden goblets. Somehow, the people always know: when he turned down the OBE, the citizens of Scotland voted him BBC 'Scot of the Year' in 1984. He remains the only person to have had our devolved legislature devote a whole festive day of commemoration to him. Finally, he had his day. Is having it still, his devotees insist.

"Love", As Hamish confided to his journal, "forgives every flaw and error". In truth, love was his mission and his metier. Ewan MacColl and others emerge here as being calculatingly and ruthlessly deficient in that regard. Henderson **was** taken a lend of and abused. To an extent however, this genuinely great man was the author of his own misfortunes. He drank too much too often, romanticising the otherwise, collegial and gemudtich Sandy Bell's, after visits to the similarly convivial McDaid's in Dublin, as, office, court, ceilidh house, bower and divan. It was

those things surely, but maybe too much so. Bars do, after all, sometimes, make prisons. Encountered there, toothless, shabby, ill scrubbed, negligently groomed, surrounded by hangers on as well as dear friends, Henderson, though invariably charming and well mannered, did not 'look the part' of the eminent scholar and prospective political leader that he most assuredly was. You 'got' him, or you didn't. Many of us entrancedly did. Over in the New Town, MacCaig and MacDiarmid didn't. Timothy Neat is correct positively to revise the sense in which MacDiarmid and Henderson, allies in the beginning, were indispensable poles, the two complementary 'phrenia' of the (now less credited) 'Caledonian Antisyseggy'- lowland, highland, atheist, Christian, high culture, folk culture, canonically great poet, song writer, creator, collector and so on.

Still, antipathy there was and MacCaig would use Henderson's affectionately guiltless and gently inclusive Hellenism as an excuse to assert "That man's a homo", when Henderson did pay a companionably bibulous visit to Rose Street. In exemplary fairness, Neat points out that in the famous debate staged at Edinburgh University and recorded by BBC Radio on the relative merits of literary and oral artistry, the two Macs out-argued and out-jibed their antagonist. Those of us who did respond to the aura and the attainments, the vision and the humanity, the sheer darling depth, look back on that setback, knowing that in losing the battle, Henderson was, once again, winning the war. As we should remember, Henderson 'discovered' the peerless ballad singer Lizzie Higgins (and probably coached her to slow down her delivery, a tour de force of intuitive 'direction') but he also loved and translated Holderlin and Heine, Montale and Rabelais, his actual polyglot scrupulosity contrasting with MacDiarmid's untutored linguistic kiddology and brassnecked plagiarism. What MacDiarmid did have though, and Henderson saluted from the start, was indisputable lyric genius on a scale to transfix and transform his native land.

Scotland is becoming what he beheld. To update a sixties saying, 'It's a Frank Sinatra world, we just live in it'. Contemporary 'Alba' is, in sober truth, a 'Hamish Henderson world'. And we gratefully live in it. With Traditional Music long prominent on the syllabus of the RSAMD, the airwaves crowded with folk, roots and world music, with Celtic Connections and indeed celtic connections flourishing, with a Parliament reconstituted, the Polaris base gone, and the country nationally confident and internationally minded, the high hopes of and for Hamish may be said to have been achieved magnificently enough to satisfy Scotland. This is a marvellous book about a wonderful man. 'The Freedom Come A' Ye' is a national anthem for an independent, socialist republic. The 'John MacLean March' is a masterpiece in the bardic 'praise poem' tribal tradition. 'The Banks O' Sicily' and 'The D Day Dodgers, were paid, within months of their composition, the ultimate compliment for a folk song composer, of being thought, 'anonymous'. On his, 'carrying stream' the idea and ideals of Scotland flow. As he inveterately maintained, Politics follows culture: here truly, was the artist as leader. Hamish Henderson helped beguile a new Scotland into existence, proving in doing so that dreaming is the hardest work of all. Hamish Henderson, in those magisterial Elegies, could detect "No gods and precious few heroes". His own life of faith, witness and solidarity suggests the young captain, tested in the desert spoke, eloquently, but too soon. A hero has been honoured here. One, of whom the world, and Scotland, will long have need.

Donny O'Rourke

web review

Henry McCubbin

“Princes and priests soon saw an enemy in the press. Type was in their opinion the most serious form that lead could take.... The rich classes - otherwise the conspiring classes - shut out as far as they could all knowledge of their doings, alleging that their object was to prevent the dissemination of ‘heresy and immorality’”.

George Jacob Holyoake

Back in the mid seventies I was working for BBC television in Glasgow when a group called the Glasgow University Media Group (GUMG) published a book titled **Bad News** covering research they had been conducting into bias in the media. It caused such a stir amongst the journalists that I worked with that it prompted me to buy a copy. The problem with the journalists was that they could not accept that the reports they turned in could in any way carry bias.

This year 2009 I have just come across a book written by members of Media Lens, a group of academics and activists who encourage readers to challenge received view of the world presented by major newspapers and broadcasters. **Newspeak in the 21st Century** by David Edwards and David Cromwell exposes the arrogance and servility to power of leading journalists and editors. This recalls George Orwell’s proposed preface to **Animal Farm** “The sinister fact about literary censorship ... is that it is largely voluntary. Unpopular ideas can be silenced, and inconvenient facts kept dark, without the need for any official ban”. In the 35 intervening years since **Bad News** technology has changed the ways in which news is delivered increasing the breadth of methods delivery from TV radio and print medium to a whole host of electronic delivery systems which multi-millionaire media moguls have tried, with some success, to monopolise.

However the availability of computing power and the ability of this capacity to be used for the analysis of news corporations’ outputs has meant that much more sophisticated methods and more robust findings can be added to the early pioneer’s headline counts and measurements of column inches.

The archiving of transcripts of reports and comments on newsworthy issues has permitted the use of sophisticated search programmes which improve research accuracy and speed. The use of email to beard the offending journalists on their Blackberrys has added a new level of added scrutiny to the system. Further, and as this book amply illustrates, it is possible to direct readers to the authors’ sources on the internet.

An issue analysed in “Newspeak” is the Israeli operation “Cast Lead” in December 2008 in which they killed 1,400 Palestinians in that Ghetto they call the Gaza Strip. To set the context Edwards and Cromwell refer to a GUMG web page. www.gla.ac.uk/centres/mediagroup/media/israel_excerpt2.pdf. I shall not précis it except in to say that it warns us that the viewers’ basic knowledge of an issue should not be taken for granted.

Of great concern to the authors is the position of the BBC in this conflict with the questions as to whether it is taking sides or has it lost its spine on tricky issues. The contribution by Tim Llewellyn the BBC’s former Middle East correspondent voices his knowledgeable apprehensions on this count at

www.medialens.org/alerts/04/040115_Ducking_Palestine_1.HTM.

The distortion of language is taken to issue in Media Lens’ own archived report which forensically dissects the meanings ascribed to “arrested” or “kidnapped” which ironically includes a report by the BBC’s reporter Alan Johnstone who himself had time to ponder the semantic niceties of this conundrum when he himself was arrested/kidnapped.

www.medialens.org/alerts/06/060630_kidnapped_by_israel.php.

In order to show that there is clear supporting evidence by official bodies for an alternative perspective you can reference UNHCR report in to the whole mess at

www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?docid=47baaa262.

How this was taken up by the BBC is to be found at

news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7281711.stm.

Comment on operation Cast Lead from Seumas Milne provides support for a different perspective and is to be found in full at

www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/dec/30/israel-and-the-palestinians-middle-east.

Excerpts from BBC Middle East Editor Jeremy Bowen’s diary of the conflict between Hamas and Israel are to found at

news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7822048.stm. Bowen found himself in hot water after heavy pressure on BBC Trust by Zionist groups to which the BBC Trust caved in.

And finally to restore faith in the human race the below article by Noam Chomsky provides a necessary antidote to our pusillanimous guardians at our State Broadcasters. Always remembering that lesser reporters than Bowen will all have taken the message broadcast by the Trust’s deliberations and that is that its own staff cannot trust the BBC’s spineless trust to support them.

www.zcommunications.org/znet/viewArticle/20316. ■

Kick Up The Tabloids

SNOW! EH, THAT'S IT

As 2010 started with the worst winter the UK has experienced since the last time we had a right-wing Tory government, Britain entered the year snowbound and with the prospect of the coming year bringing us a right-wing Tory government.

By the time you read this, of course, the snow may have stopped. In which case, the TV news may have no other option than to start broadcasting news on the news. For the past week, I have watched increasingly hysterical reports on the disastrous whiteout conditions. As inane ITN reporter after inane ITN reporter has shouted with ever-rising horror in their voice: "This village is quite literally cut off from the rest of the world. Essential services can't get through, even emergency vehicles are unable to brave these sub-Arctic conditions. This is, quite literally, a community where non-one can get in or out". To me the most obvious question is how the hell did the TV camera crew get in there in the first place?

The ITN lunchtime news is in serious danger of becoming a parody of itself during the "Great weather crisis". Believe it or not, one day this week, they devoted a full five minutes to the earthquake in Haiti which looked like it could claim up to 100,000 lives. This item was followed up by 20 minutes on two inches of snow in Dorset, which had resulted in the a calamitous series of events including the closure of a primary school, and the non-delivery of milk to a tea shop.

Perhaps if they get a heavy snowfall in Afghanistan, we might even get some news about what's going on over there. After all, they did do a report on the Iraq inquiry, mainly because it was snowing outside. Also, it could have been a repeat from seven years ago, as Alastair Campbell appeared to be telling exactly the same lies as he did in 2003.

And then, worse still, we have had the salt shortage. Say what you like about the old Soviet Union. There may have been severe violations of human rights, and dissidents may have been packed off to the gulags on a regular basis. But when Stalin was sending people off to Siberia, the country never ran out of salt, no matter how severe the winter.

Eventually, emergency supplies of salt were imported from Africa. Presumably, the people of Africa will soon be staging large outdoor rock concerts to help raise money to send salt to Britain. African comedians may well start wearing red plastic noses and coming over here to send crisis reports to the people back home: "This is Fraser, he lives in the village of Bruntsfield, and every day he has to walk two miles to Waitrose

in Morningside to buy salt. But when he has walked all that way in the snow, he finds that there is no salt there. Please help people like Alastair by giving now to Salt Aid. Just £3.49 will buy him a week's supply of Malden crushed sea salt flakes."

The fact that we are now buying salt from Africa represents progress. Let's face it, 200 years ago if we needed salt and the Africans had salt, we'd just have gone there and nicked it off them. Or worse still, forced a whole lot of Africans to come over here to clean up our snow.

One right-wing tabloid has suggested we should force prisoners to take to the streets to clean up the snow. I don't know about anyone else, but I would find it less than re-assuring to look out of my window and see Peter Tobin standing in the street holding a shovel. I think the only really surprising thing about the snow is that Gordon Brown has not apologised for it yet. One of my hobbies for the coming year is to see how often Brown says "sorry" between now and May.

And finally, 2010 started with the devastating news that alcohol abuse costing every single person in Scotland £ 900 per year. I find that statistic shocking. My alcohol abuse costs me a bloody site more than nine-hundred quid a year. So there's obviously quite a few lightweights out there letting the side down! ■



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