

Redemption

It was a pitiful six months,
and no one should feel proud -

But there is still time...



Contents

Comment	2
Still waiting	6
John McAllion and Gordon Morgan	
Redemption Song	8
Vince Mills	
It's how you play the cards.....	10
Kevin Williamson	

Out of the comfort zone	12
Peter McColl	
Nowhere to go?	14
Gordon McKay	
Splits that weaken	16
Isobel Lindsay	
Are bills of rights wrong?	19
Carole Ewart	

Comment

Many of you will find this a dispiriting issue. Many of you will be unsurprised by this because you will be finding this a dispiriting time to be a socialist, social democrat, progressive or however you choose to style yourself. And that's because there is every reason to be dispirited.

Let us begin by explaining what was the idea behind this issue. Whatever way you look at it, 2010 has been a bad year for the left. Firstly there was more than enough evidence by the end of last year that not only had the bad guys gotten away with ruining the global economy, they had quickly converted their own crimes into an indictment against those who are blameless. So just as the out-and-out corruption of the Blair/Brown years finally resulted in collapse – banks are only a part of it, the capturing of government and its functions by profiteers who stripped the nation of any asset or value they could get their hands on was virtually complete – at this precise point the collapse was rebranded as proof of failure of the public sector. The final and petrifying evidence of this is the shift in attitude to pensions. It is not public sector pensions which are pulling us under but economic corruption. It is not that cash has been shifted from the private sector to the public sector. It is not that the public sector undermined the pensions in the private sector. It is much more simple – as the ideology of 'there is no such thing as too much profit' became a globally-acceptable motto, so the private sector simply abandoned any pretence to any form of responsibility to its employees. But as the corporate giants threw their employees out of the luxury yachts and left them to sink slowly to allow a bit more space on board for more hoarded wealth, the right-wing media started pointing at the public sector workers in their little row boats, shouting 'why aren't they left to drown too?'

Then there was the 'election'. We got to vote for which Chancellor was going to raise VAT (that most regressive of taxes) and which Prime Minister was going to devastate the rest of the public realm. There wasn't an option on the table that didn't involve slash and burn, only the option of who was going to do it. It is galling now to hear Labour people to pose as 'horrified bystanders', the knife they were set to wield hidden

sheepishly behind their backs. The Lib Dems just lied to us all and the SNP didn't seem to have anything to say. And as the London Metropolitan 'social democrat' set speculated for those three or four days about how some sort of Nirvana could be manufactured out of this poisonous sludge, the rest of us waited for the inevitable resumption of the 'destroy at all costs' strategy.

And then there has been the post-election period. It has become clear that the neoliberal doctrine that destroyed the country had a Plan B. If it couldn't simply buy the world up in its version of Fantasy Monopoly (Never Pass Go, Never Pay Your Debts) then it would rip up the game for the rest of us. The Project wanted three things. First it wanted all the rules designed to stop it behaving like a savage beast removed (the 'burden of regulation'). Secondly it wanted to convert the public realm from a way of providing for the people (the welfare state model) into a way of providing for the private sector (PFI, consultancy, uncontrolled capital overspend, a bonus culture for policy-makers to corrupt them into the ways of the businessman). Thirdly, it wanted to prevent the possibility of the public realm ever influencing life in our country again. Down with the BBC, let Fox News provide. End state education, let shadowy 'consortia' teach our children. Strip back all means of redistributing wealth, only flat taxes can be considered. What is so disturbing is the ease with which it has achieved all three – each against all available logic, evidence or experience. We let them act like savage beasts and they did. We let them rob and corrupt the public realm and they did. This all caused the economy to collapse and the fabric of our society to fray. So they used this as a reason to end the ability of the public realm to interfere. A child behaving in this way would be rapidly moved into the care sector. And adult behaving like this would be in an institution for the criminally insane.

OK, so far so predictably depressing. But this is where the usual disappointment of being interested in social justice tips over into something more fundamentally awful. Commentators have invented a new history for Britain. In fact, everything that just happened didn't happen. Labour didn't do 95 per cent of the damage. Secretly, they knew the public sector was out of

Continental drifting.....	22
Henry McCubbin	
Reviews	24
Web Review	26
Kick Up The Tabloids.....	27

All illustrations: Nadia Lucchesi
nadia_l@hotmail.com

Editorial Committee

Moira Craig	Peter McColl	Kirsty Rimmer
Gregor Gall	Henry McCubbin	(Deputy Editor)
Isobel Lindsay	David Miller	Jimmy Reid
John McAllion	Gordon Morgan	Tommy Sheppard
Robin McAlpine (Editor)	Tom Nairn	Bob Thomson
		Leanne Wood

Articles for publication: editorial@scottishleftreview.org
 Letters and comments: feedback@scottishleftreview.org
 Website: www.scottishleftreview.org Tel 0141 424 0042
 Scottish Left Review, 741 Shields Road, Pollokshields, Glasgow G41 4PL

Printed by: PrintIt Xpress Ltd, 34 High St., Linlithgow, EH49 7AE

control. Well, banks are just banks after all and it turns out that the collapse wasn't as bad as people were pretending it was. Now we have to wake up and over our breakfast we must be lectured by 'commentators' on why our social provision is a luxury we have no right to expect since it is self evident that there is a more needy cause – the International Monetary Fund, the 'markets', the banks. It has spread so awfully that even many of the few remaining sources of sanity have lost their mind. Are you kidding us? We should have voted Labour after all? We should see the last ten years as a golden age for the public? A pension of £10,000 a year for a life's work is virtually a crime against the wider public? There is no mainstream left; the country is largely delusional or extremist.

Now there are those of you who will respond to this by pointing out that there really hasn't been much of a mainstream for a rather long time now. This is a fair point, although there were places where the truth about the banking crisis was at least being aired openly. But what else is there? The trade union movement is simply nowhere. At its politicised edge it is considering a campaign to 'fight the cuts'. Perhaps it is an injustice and an underestimation, but this doesn't really sound like a strategy for change. A million Catalan's just took to the street, the French, the Greeks and others have done the same. We seem to hope that five column inches on page 12 about a couple of thousand activists is an adequate response. It will be ignored. Actually, possibly worse, it will be steamrollered out of existence. Civic Scotland offers us not much that is better, at least right now. And there is no media, no message, no story, no challenge to the 'orthodoxy'.

Meanwhile, there is 'always the Scottish Parliament', the 2010 version of what the trade unions and local authorities were in the 1980s, some sort of protection. But it is probably about time

to wake up to the reality of this. We have a Labour 'movement' in Scotland which deserve a rapid death. There can never have been a point in time when the Labour Party in Scotland was quite as dreadfully, pathetically pitiful. It has a leader that everyone knows is there on the basis of the ability to take instructions. Its loudest voice appears to have been given to a young careerist by the name of Richard Baker who has decided that self-righteous

We have a Labour 'movement' in Scotland which deserve a rapid death. There can never have been a point in time when the Labour Party in Scotland was quite as dreadfully, pathetically pitiful.

drivel about 'knife crime' and 'soft on crime' is how it is going to win in Scotland. It has a 'health' policy which would oppose Aspirin if the SNP supported it. This party has become a juvenile, reactionary, third-rate, witless and talentless sack of nonentities with no vision, no principles and nothing to say worth listening to. There are those who think that a decent leader would be all they need to ensure a win in the 2011 election. The fact that there is not a single candidate in the entire Parliamentary Party is

telling. That the main choice of the 'commentators' was until recently Jim Murphy MP shows just how dislocated from reality the whole scene has become – when he was put head-to-head with someone other than the Daily Record and actual people (not the Daily Record version of 'actual people') were asked to rate him, only five per cent thought he was any good. And that's their best hope? There are still good people in Labour, but they've largely given up.

Then there is the irony of the Liberal Democrats. In Scotland they have been a disgrace more-or-less since the 2007 election. The refusal to even consider forming any form of government without Labour was misjudged, but seeking to justify that over the succeeding years by faking outrage at, well, anything was pitiful. That Liberal Democrats would oppose the release on medical grounds of Al Megrahi was hard to fathom. That they would stand with Labour and the Tories against, well, absolutely everyone else in the country and oppose minimum pricing for

alcohol is beyond discussing. The Lib Dems deserved to be routed for their behaviour in opposition. The irony is that they will very possibly be routed because of the one thing they didn't have any control over – the Westminster coalition – feels like a sort of surrealist justice.

Then there are the three parties which are supposed to carry the flame for radical politics. It is easy to dispose of two of them in considering the state of Scotland, simply on the basis that they have chosen to dispose of themselves. The SSP and Solidarity haven't split the left, they have destroyed the left. Personality has got in the way of everything. Lawyers ('there is still a court case pending...') seem to be the fig-leaf to cover up their shame. It will be hard for many to forgive them, much as they will want to. But they have written themselves out of electoral politics for the next five years so let us move on.

Then there are the Greens. OK, there are only two of them and there is a limit to what they can do. And certainly they have not been actively bad like the others – they have been on the right side on crime, alcohol pricing, Al Megrahi and other issues. But they have been so safe and so predictable on so many things.

The Green Movement has to get past the practice of pointing their fingers at people who fly places (whether its civil servants going to too many meetings or punters going their holidays). It is not enough to be the voice saying 'be nicer to the planet'. It simply isn't working. The Greens haven't taken enough chances, they haven't put any real issues on the agenda, and when they have had a chance to win concessions (notably the Budget Bill) they have postured and then held out for the sort of concession which is easily forgotten (insulating lofts). When you are an army you can trudge on relentlessly; when you are a guerrilla movement you need to be smarter and braver. OK, the Greens have a split constituency and not all its voters are radicals. But that can't be enough to justify the level of small-issue-point-scoring at the expense of big-issue-chance-taking. You don't change the world by keeping your head down.

Which leaves only the party of Government. Let's be clear here; from a radical perspective there is an enormous amount over which it is necessary to criticise the SNP. But it can be captured in a sentence; they should never have gotten so close to the banks. The SNP was a split personality party for much of the last five years. On many social issues they were

not bad. In particular, the SNP resisted the reductive New Labour pantomime cat call that universalism was 'anti poor'. Why is universal provision a 'subsidy to the middle class' but tax cuts is 'prudent and fair'? On this above most other things the SNP has at least tried to hold to one of the defining principles of progressive politics. No, it has not always been successful and it may pay a price for not living up to some of the commitments (perhaps especially on student support and free school meals). But the principle is there. And in a few areas the SNP has been courageous. Minimum alcohol pricing isn't an issue which many would have predicted to be a risky business because it was difficult to imagine that there would be political opposition. But the more radical stance on crime and punishment should be singled out as the sort of policy which had risk embedded in it from the beginning that other big parties would have ducked completely. The SNP knew that short sentences don't work, just like all the other parties know it, just like everyone knows it. But the Daily Record, the Daily Mail and the Tories were always going to be hostile and so the Labour Party was always likely to follow (but who knew how rabidly they'd adopt the Michael Howard position). And heaven knows that the Al Megrahi business was the sort of difficult issue that the McConnell administration would have buried with more care than it would nuclear waste. And here are another set of issues on which the SNP deserves some plaudits – Trident, nuclear power, expansionary war, a whole host of issues on which it could have said and done nothing but chose not to.

So much for the credit. On the debit side is a lazy, tartan version of the same-old

SCOTLAND HAS TAKEN THE LEAD IN TRANSFERRING FREIGHT TO RAIL

ASLEF WILL DEFEND THE INDUSTRY AND ITS JOBS THROUGH THE RECESSION

CLEANER TRANSPORT FOR A BRIGHTER COUNTRY



Keith Norman
General Secretary

Alan Donnelly
President

Kevin Lindsay
Scottish Officer

ASLEF the train drivers union - www.aslef.org.uk

neoliberal economics everyone else fell for. Scotliberalism worked on the basis that if we can just keep our behemoth banks in safe profiteering territory, everything else will sort itself out. Happy bankers, happy business pages, happy CBI, happy happy. Economic strategy really doesn't stretch much beyond 'a nice story which the banks will like', even now. And that is why the glimmer of hope that has come from the SNP isn't enough. It is not enough to allow the dismantling of economic justice and try to patch it up with social justice. One goes hand-in-hand with the other. The SNP simply has not recovered from the banking crash – the bankers were cushioned by a publicly-funded airbag, the politicians went straight through the window. And that is where they remain – bloodied, bruised and disorientated on the roadside watching as the traffic ploughs on regardless but with no way to get back on board. Unless the SNP can swallow the fact that it got it wrong and stop making speeches defending a strategy which is now so completely devalued as to be worthless it will have no big story and no way to change anything fundamentally in Scotland. It's not about independence, more powers or the status quo – or at least it is about more than all of these things. It is about deciding what kind of Scotland we want to live in. A fair, just, non-prejudiced vision of our society is what we need, but it can't ride on the back of the same-old deregulation-and-low-tax nonsense that got us here. No, the Scottish financial sector isn't just fine thanks and no, even if it was that is not enough.

That was the starting-point for this issue. It started from the assumption that everyone (at least the Scottish Left Review's 'everyone') would accept that whatever sect, tribe or group you are a part of, none of us did anything to cover ourselves in glory before, during or after the election just gone. So, we thought, let's ask the question 'what do we all need to do to redeem ourselves?'. It is with the greatest respect to all our writers that a picture emerges from the totality. And it is a grim picture. Broadly, either people don't know what we need to do, don't believe we can do it or don't even think that we need to do anything at all. Are we to accept that having Labour in opposition means that the trade unions have no further soul searching to do? Are we to accept a 'well, now it's all out against the Tories so that mean Labour' rallying call? Is nothing else possible, no matter the crimes committed by the Labour Party against the Labour Movement? In the Scottish context is a 'Dutch Auction' between Labour and the SNP so unthinkable that it's not even worth trying? Seriously, is there no merit in considering at least roughing Labour up a bit between now and next may to see if it can't adopt some sort of policy position which is more in tune with the real interests of working men and women? Are the Scottish trade unions to be nothing more than paymasters for an anti-knife-crime-and-blame-the-Tories agenda? Is the People's Charter really too radical to be a condition of support?

Perhaps we are too hard on Labour, but perhaps we are not hard enough. Why is it really so easy to believe that no-one in Scottish Labour thinks anything is going wrong? Why is it so

easy to imagine the satisfaction in Labour ranks at the election result in Scotland as the only true indicator of their justified existence in Scotland ('because it belongs to us after all')? Is it wrong to suspect that Jim Devine would have got back in as if nothing had happened had he been allowed to stand? Is this party really now completely post-ideological – believing in nothing apart from victory? A compelling case is made.

What happened to civic Scotland? Where did it go? Why is it so hard to remember when civic Scotland was not only visible but had a leadership role in the country? Why is it so difficult to believe that it will have again? And perhaps above all, will civic Scotland have the strength of will to see beyond the small,

fragmented part of the overall picture which represents each organisation's self interest? Will it simply allow the cuts story to shape all action as an all-against-all defence of what we have in the face of 'inevitability'?

Many Greens know that their safety-first approach will lead nowhere, but will they win over the True Believers ('I got into this to save the trees, not help the poor') and the Ramblers Tendency ('I fancied joining a party and after all I do like the countryside')? And if they do, can they get themselves into a position to influence anyone? And if they manage that, will they have the focus to pull it off?

We know there will be no socialist politicians elected in Scotland before 2015. Is that it? Do we just walk away? And do we think there might be even a slim chance that anything good can come out of the SSP/Solidarity farce?

We couldn't even find a left-leaning Lib Dem willing to write an article. Is that it?

And what does that leave us? The SNP we have or nothing? The SNP we have may have demonstrated some principle but it is increasingly finding it comfortable to be inside the 'if we don't slash and burn we'll be in trouble...' camp. If the SNP decides that to be taken 'seriously' by the 'mainstream' it must start behaving like the 'mainstream' then we might find that the story of 'not if but how we dismantle the public sector' gains another recruit.

The Scottish Left Review was established in 2000 in a spirit of hope and optimism. We are a few months past our ten anniversary. We hoped to tell a story of redemption but we commissioned our cover artwork too early. This is a tale of denial and despair, not of hope and redemption.

Issue 59 is a low point. In Issue 60 we'll stop asking the established groupings what has to be done. For the left, the only hope before 2011 sets the order for the next four years is to create a vision worth the name and to start stuffing it down some throats. ■

The Scottish Left Review was established in 2000 in a spirit of hope and optimism. We are a few months past our ten anniversary. We hoped to tell a story of redemption but we commissioned our cover artwork too early. This is a tale of denial and despair, not of hope and redemption.

still waiting

John McAllion of the SSP and Gordon Morgan of Solidarity debate the path to bringing a fragmented Scottish left together - and hope for a 'movement of movements'

JM: Gramsci's refrain about pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will has never been more relevant following the abysmal performance of Scotland's Left parties in this year's general election. Comparison with previous general election performances shows the Left vote in Scotland collapsing by more than 90 per cent since the 2001 election. In 2010 we were able to field less than a third of the candidates that we did in 2001. The average vote registered for Left parties per constituency collapsed by two-thirds over the same period. By any standard these are brutal results for all of Scotland's Left parties. While more than a million Scottish workers voted for a war-mongering, pro-business Labour Party that trampled all over their civil rights, less than 9,000 of our fellow workers supported the parties of Scotland's principled socialist Left. These results more than justify pessimism of the intellect. Are there any grounds for optimism of the will?

GM: Optimism of the will can be maintained even in front of a firing squad. However, there are some intellectual grounds for optimism. The economic crisis has severely dented economic orthodoxy; unions across Europe are largely intact and no longer completely dominated by pro business bureaucrats; the peoples of Spain, France and Greece are resisting the attacks; far left forces in several countries have made advances; left governments are still in power in Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia (we might argue over others); China shows neo-liberal capitalism is not the sole economic model; America's military might is not all powerful. Overall, however, the left, particularly in Britain, is weaker than it was and lacks intellectual cohesion, a coherent strategy and particularly a political structure. How did we get here? What lessons should we learn? How do we move forward?

JM: I agree that capitalism is in serious trouble. So why are we, the arch critics of capitalism, not doing better? Partly, it is because of our near invisibility inside the political system. Unlike 1999-2007, we neither hold nor seriously challenge for political office. The mass media ignores unelected socialists. Socialists are invisible to most workers. It is a Catch 22 situation. To be elected you need to be noticed. To get noticed you need to be elected. This will change. The "political system" is itself beginning to fail. When it finally does, the relevance of parliamentary politics will recede as the importance of extra-parliamentary struggle will grow. Politics will move back on to the streets. The Left must then ensure that it has the analysis, the language and the necessary unity to lead that struggle and to expose the bankruptcy of the New Labour opposition. So the present varieties of Left analyses and organisations will need to cohere into a credible and effective political force. There is no alternative.

GM: Unfortunately there always is an alternative for capitalism. However grave their crisis they can adapt the state, normally

through 'strong state' initiatives, undermining civil liberties, targeting immigrants and minorities such as Islam. These trends intensified under Labour and helped contribute to social divisions. Ultimately even more authoritarian forms can be adopted if they create the preconditions through mass unemployment and smashing the unions. This is the battleground and you are correct in saying the left has no alternative but to fight on this ground and attempt to unite the working class around a common analysis, language and unity, in Gramsci's term seek hegemony over the class. We are though far from this stage at present and seem to disagree over analysis, language and particularly unity. Our strongest weapons at present are the trade unions and a willingness to fight for defence of services and community facilities. Even here, however, there have been differences over tactics and occasional ultra-left posturing. We must not underestimate how difficult it is going to be to challenge 'cuts' unless we challenge the fundamental view that somehow they are 'a necessary evil'. I believe that a necessary separation of strategic and tactical discussions is required. The People's Charter is a useful framework for a strategic discussion on a defensive programme and our analysis of the economic crisis. As left Labour, most trade unions, all left parties and groups agree on this, it may be that a civilised discussion can take place which could lead to widely-backed campaigns. Tactical discussions, however, require a degree of tolerance and a willingness to compromise; discussions on left unity involving organisations even more so. It is at this level that we face our greatest difficulty in Scotland. I cannot see an early resolution despite many of us seeing its necessity. However, we should explore possibilities.

JM: I meant that there is no alternative for the Left other than working together to unite the working class in exactly the way you mean through an agreed analysis of what is wrong and, to borrow a phrase, of what is to be done. Capitalism may be down but, as you make clear, it is not yet out. I also recognise how far away the Scottish Left is from forging that kind of unity. There was a ray of hope during the last election when locally agreed truces between some of the Left parties allowed them not to oppose each other in particular constituencies. With the regional list system operating in the coming Scottish election, even that small glimmer of light is likely to be extinguished. Before then, however, we need the Scottish Left working together in a broad-based campaign against the cuts. I agree that this will require compromise. The People's Charter is open to attack from a Scottish Left perspective. It seeks to reform rather than abolish the British state. Its purpose is to petition Westminster rather than to sweep it away. Its major supporters still fantasise about recapturing New Labour for the Left. However, it remains by far the most radical set of political demands currently backed by some

of Scotland's major trade unions. With the ConDem coalition now in office, we can expect the big British unions to fund and to organise mass resistance to government cuts. These big unions are likely to back one or other of the New Labour leadership candidates. They are extremely unlikely to endorse Charter policies that are anathema to New Labour. They will therefore throw their weight behind a more moderate set of demands that David Miliband and friends can live with. When that happens, the People's Charter will be the Left alternative in the coming struggle against the cuts. When that happens the Scottish Left will need to decide whether it stands outside of this coming struggle or whether it becomes an integral and important part of that struggle. We already support Charter demands such as the banks and insurance companies being brought into public ownership and the troops being brought home from Afghanistan. We already oppose New Labour, its moderate union backers and their pro-business policies. Why should our distinctive voice and policies not be heard by those who in the coming period will rally behind the People's Charter?

GM: Clearly I hope the Scottish Left will indeed be an integral part of the struggle; indeed any organisations abstaining from joining in would by definition be sectarian and irrelevant. I also agree we have a distinctive voice and policies which should be developed and deepened in the key areas of defensive struggle - no unemployment, no benefit cuts, defend public services and pensions. It is here I hope cooperation is possible, developing the broad campaign around the charters demands into an action programme which draws broad forces to challenge the economic assumptions and policies of capitalist governments. I hope as well as unions, forces from Labour, SNP, Greens and others will be drawn to these campaigns. However, this returns us to the fact that unless there is a credible organisation to their left, the leaders of pro-capitalist parties can put a left face on as necessary without electoral loss and not be effectively exposed as reactionary. In the forthcoming Scottish



elections, it would still be possible to reach a similar truce as in the General Election in some if not all regions but it is disheartening that when approaches were made on this, the SSP leadership immediately announced on their website they would stand in all regions. Similarly, but of less significance, the SLP refused approaches during the general election and look set to continue in that vein. We must not give up. A broad party encompassing all seeking an alternative to capitalism, a "movement of the movements", is a historical necessity, but damned difficult to achieve in Scotland at present. The forces and the practices that led to the split in the SSP, which I opposed as politically unjustified, need to be analysed in order to prevent a recurrence. A first step is for dialogue to begin between individuals and organisations and it is frankly unacceptable that this is being obstructed.

JM: We are agreed on how the Left should respond to the ConDem attack on the public sector. All socialists, regardless of their current party affiliation, should be active in the broad-based resistance to the cuts. In the longer term, we are also agreed about the "movement of the movements" that you rightly describe as an historical necessity. The original foundation of the SSP was supposed to create just such a movement. The subsequent split in the party has seriously damaged but has not destroyed that idea.

We are not alone in discussing the split and how it might be repaired. Similar unofficial discussions are happening across Scotland. Unfortunately, official dialogue between the parties is for now stymied by the continuation of legal proceedings and the advice of lawyers.

At some point those proceedings will end, the lawyers will depart and the open debate and analysis you call for will take place at every level. When that happens lessons will be learned, mistakes will be identified and the "movement of movements" will begin to be put together again. Until then, wherever possible, socialists across the party divide should look to cooperate wherever and

whenever they can. The alternative is to carry on treating those who broadly agree with us as sworn enemies. That way lies madness and continuing political irrelevance. The SSP/Solidarity split is only one of the fissures that weaken the broad Scottish Left. There are socialists working inside Labour, the SNP, the Scottish Greens, CPB etc. Many others are active in their unions and in different campaigns while not belonging to any political party. The longer-term aim must be to find ways of working together with all of them towards common socialist objectives. While socialists in the SSP and Solidarity cannot even work with each other, few of them are likely to want to listen to what we have to say. It is time to talk. ■

John McAllion is an SSP activist, Gordon Morgan a Solidarity activist

redemption song

Vince Mills sees no easy route to change in a Scottish Labour Party with a complacent leadership

Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery; None but ourselves can free our mind (Redemption Song, Bob Marley)

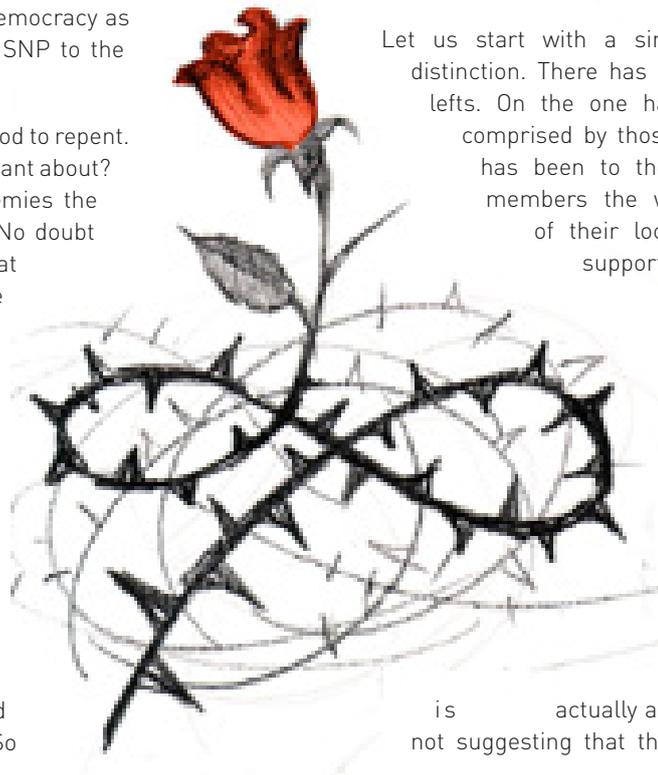
The editor was interested in exploring the notion of redemption in this issue. For many in the Scottish Labour Party, the suggestion that they have sinned and that they require to be saved will be meaningless, especially those in and around the leadership at Scottish and UK level. Even the Left of the Party does not appear to have a united position or clear vision about the Labour Party's (or indeed its own) direction, although it is in their ranks that you will find the voices of contemporary John the Baptists pointing out the domestic failures to attack inequality and the international catastrophe of imperial interventions, not to mention sustained support for financial capital and its freedom to wreak havoc on the economy. The dominant ideological group in Scottish Labour stretches from unreconstructed Blairites (see for example John McTernan's recent defence of competition in the Scottish NHS in the Scotsman) to the moderate Social Democrats of the Compass group, with followers of Gordon Brown ideologically closer to the former. Brown after all, was the brains behind the New Labour project. Make of that what you want given its abject failure in addressing the fault lines of inequality in British and Scottish society. Although limited in its impact, the analysis offered by Compass is that more social democracy, translated as social as opposed to private provision, is electorally attractive as well as in tune with the always vague, Labour values. Here is Compass's Willie Sullivan commenting on the SNP's rise before its reversal at Gleroths: "The SNP's rise was not primarily a cry for 'freedom' by the Scottish electorate. It was a vote of disillusionment and disappointment with Labour and a vote for social democracy as Salmond managed to position the SNP to the left of Scottish Labour."

This mainstream section is in no mood to repent. After all, what have they to be repentant about? They have just given their archenemies the Tories the drubbing of their lives. No doubt the Compass left would argue that this is because we never gave political space to full-blown Blairite neo-liberalism while the Blairites would argue that had we done so we would only have strengthened our electoral hold. While the Tories took 40 per cent of the vote in England and 26 per cent in Wales they only managed 17 per cent in Scotland (winning them only one seat). It was only in Northern Ireland they failed to register at all and it would be fair to say that Northern Ireland hardly poses a fair comparison. So

Scottish Labour, simply by being Scottish Labour it seems, was most effective in routing the Tories in the UK. This paid off handsomely in seats. Labour have 41 as opposed to the Liberals 11 and the SNP's six. And that last figure also helps explain the Scottish Labour mainstream's confidence that they are in no need of salvation. The SNP, as Willie Sullivan noted, posturing left during the election, had precisely the same problem as the independence-supporting SSP and TUSC, coupled with a less than competent performance in office in the Scottish Parliament. Their Free School Meals, Scottish Futures Trust, Local Income Tax, and Smaller Class Sizes policies had variously been scaled down, back-burnered or simply ditched. But more than anything, the threat that a vote for the SNP (or anything to their left) might help the Tories, not only meant they made no gains, seats like Glasgow East went back to Labour. Their failure to get a referendum bill through, before the end of parliament is only the last and arguably least problematic in a line of failures.

In light of this, Scottish Labour can look forward to the elections in May with some confidence. They have to some extent already set out their stall. They will defend front line services against the Con Dem cuts and continue with populist anti-crime policies on knife crime, for example. But there is no soul searching. There is no evidence that they feel the need to explore whether and how they can transform British and Scottish society. It may well transpire that such complacency will damage Labour profoundly in the longer run. I will consider that later, but first let us look at the Labour Left where we might expect energy and ideas for Labour's redemption to be flowing. You might expect it. But you will not find it.

Let us start with a simple but hopefully revelatory distinction. There has always been two Labour Party lefts. On the one hand there is the Left that is comprised by those whose primary commitment has been to the Labour Party and who are members the way some folk are members of their local church. Nevertheless they support left wing polices and left wing candidates and without them the Labour Left would have no ballast at all. They would not for a moment consider leaving the Labour Party and more to the point they would not assess whether Labour is the best instrument for the kind of society they seek. Their political purpose is defined by their membership of Labour. The other Labour left is actually a Left that is inside Labour. I am not suggesting that they are entryists, though some



may have begun life in the Labour Party that way. Individually or collectively they joined Labour because they thought it the most likely route to a socialist transformation of our society, or at the very least, the best way to move Scottish and British society in that direction. At every juncture and in recent history, at least since Kinnock began the reclamation of the Party for the right (although you might just as easily have started with the ILP's 1932 defection) this section of the Labour left has questioned the nature and purpose of the Labour Party and whether strategically they ought to be part of it. Since the 1990s their ranks have been depleted by the New Labour Party's lurch to economic liberalisation and imperial conquest. And their options outside the Party simultaneously reduced by the abject failure of every attempt to build a left electoral alternative to Labour. This second group is predominantly Marxist in orientation and it leans heavily on the classic Leninist analysis that the British Labour Party is in some ways unique, primarily because it provides a platform for affiliated unions as well as individual socialists and therefore as long as Communists and socialists can argue freely within it against its leadership and their policies, the Labour Party is the pivotal place for a revolutionaries to be. Or as Lenin put it: "While remaining in the ranks of the Labour Party the British Socialist Party enjoys sufficient liberty to write that such and such leaders of the Labour Party are traitors, champions of the interests of the bourgeoisie and their agents in the Labour movement; this is absolutely true. When communists enjoy such a liberty, then, taking into account the experience of revolution in all countries ... it is their duty to affiliate to the Labour Party."

Although the Communist Party has never been allowed to affiliate to the Labour Party the central argument that the Labour Party provides a vantage point to make the case for socialism and to at least nudge society to the left has remained a canon for the Socialist Left in the Labour Party. Usually both of these Labour Lefts rub along well together. They have tended to support the same candidates, campaigns and left organisations. Now, however, the prolonged crisis of socialism in and outside of the Labour Party is taking its toll. The differences are probably more visible in England where the left is bigger. Essentially those who believe that the Labour Party has to remain the central focus of activity are arguing that the Left's energies should be directed at democratising the party and winning more left candidates and more influence on the central decision-making bodies of the Party like the National Policy Forum (NPF) and National Executive Committee. For example, they would argue that the Left should use the review of Labour Party structure due to begin in October of this year to argue for the restoration of motions, restate the sovereignty of Conference on policy and the right to amend NPF documents. They would also want the party structures of the Labour Party to reflect a strong trade union influence and they would want a commitment from the Labour Party leadership to defend Union political funds if they are subjected to attack by the Con-Dem alliance. Not surprisingly they would also want the 12.5 per cent threshold required for MPs to be eligible to stand as candidates for the Labour Leadership to be reduced to 5 per cent as well as giving Constituency Labour Parties and trade unions a role in the initial nomination process. So far, so unremarkable you might think, and no doubt anyone on the Left in the Labour Party will support such an agenda. The question is, given that the party has shifted right, even if such an agenda was achievable (it will be countered by a position championed in a Fabian

booklet by Horton and Katwala that we should instead adopt an Obamesque networking model) would such democratisation lead to the adoption of a left programme? It is somewhat ironic that Labour's most left wing leader in recent times, Michael Foot, was elected by MPs only, in a much less democratic system than Labour has now.

For the Marxist orientated Left the problem is less to do with Party structures than the success the right has had in displacing left social democratic and socialist ideas with a 'common sense' view of the need for a smaller state, a reduced public sector, the importance of markets and the need for choice through competition. The strength in depth of this view can be seen in the absence of any serious strategy emerging to fight the cuts. There has been no talk of refusing to make these cuts by Scottish Labour Party public representatives at any level, for example by refusing to set budgets, or mass resignation, both tactics seriously explored and sometimes implemented by Labour Councils in Scotland in the 1980s fight against Thatcherism. Consequently the assumption that the Left in the Labour Party need only rehearse the old arguments that make the party democratic and you will make it socialist, misunderstands the changes that have been wrought in the Labour Party at the Left's expense. Some of us have therefore reached the conclusion that at the very least the Left needs to spend as much time campaigning in the communities of resistance that will spring up in defence of jobs and services as we do in inner party machinations. Indeed the emergence of a new movement born in the battles against cuts may wish to fashion quite a different relationship to the traditional voice of Labour in Scotland. This will not be a lonely struggle. The STUC is committed to mounting a united struggle against the cuts culminating in a massive event in October.

If there is a widespread national anger at the injustices of the cuts, then the current Scottish Labour Party position as articulated by Iain Gray will not do. He promises to protect frontline services in our schools, hospitals and police. Does that mean it's tough luck for Social Workers, Lecturers and Civil Servants? And given that it is accepted that ring fencing of some services is a sure fire way of intensifying cuts elsewhere, how will councils, for example, be able to provide the infrastructure necessary to keep frontline services running?

We have been here before. In 1987 there was a massive swing to Labour from the Tories and Alliance in Scotland. However in 1988 a Scottish Labour Party Special Conference, held in March in Glasgow, refused to back non-payment of the Poll Tax, in effect ending Labour resistance to it. (It wasn't long till Brian Wilson, initially in support of non payment, was telling folk to pay up). In November 1988, Labour lost a by-election in Govan, a very safe Labour seat, to the SNP's Jim Sillars who was championing Scotland against the Tories in general and the Poll Tax in particular. It may be that Labour in Scotland can redeem itself by seriously building for a nationwide campaign of resistance against the assault on the public sector, but with a small and divided left and a complacent leadership which itself bridges moderate social democracy to hard line neo-liberalism, the people of Scotland are best advised to fashion their own defences. ■

Vince Mills is the Convener of the Campaign of Socialism Scotland

it's how you play the cards

Kevin Williamson argues that the SNP holds some aces – if it can play them properly

As the electoral dust settled over the new look ConDem Nation almost every political commentator agreed upon one thing: Alex Salmond and the SNP had been dealt the best possible hand given the circumstances. The UK's coalition government – with just one Tory MP and 11 LibDems out of a possible 59 – have no democratic mandate north of the border. Throw into the mix a much-trumpeted budget deficit “crisis” – and a ConDem austerity programme consisting of the most savage public sector and benefits cuts in living memory – and the ingredients are there for a potentially bruising constitutional battle between Scotland and London. Taking into account the Independence Referendum Bill - due to go before the Scottish Parliament sometime between now and May 2011 – you'd be forgiven for thinking that Alex Salmond and the SNP simply have to play the cards they've been dealt, at the right time, in the right order.

The most obvious winning strategy for the SNP is not exactly rocket science. Oppose both the savagery and democratic legitimacy of the ConDem cuts; explain they are an ideological choice rather than an economic necessity; and rally a Scottish public around the only viable alternative on offer: Scottish independence via a democratic referendum. But thus far it hasn't happened. The independence card hasn't been played. And, perhaps, more tellingly, neither the First Minister nor any of his closest colleagues have questioned the validity of London's neoliberal agenda nor its democratic legitimacy in Scotland. This is baffling and alarm bells are ringing. Many independence supporters are wondering what on earth is holding back the leadership of the SNP? Why the hesitancy at a time when clarity, boldness, and even good old fashioned Scottish radicalism are called for to defend Scottish interests? The independence movement is currently stuck in a frustrating Beckett-esque anti-drama of Waiting For Alex. Conservatism and cautiousness within the SNP leadership could lead us to another possibility which is slowly rearing its ugly head. The SNP could surrender power back to a New Labour-led coalition in May 2011. Not only would this remove independence, a referendum, and even fiscal autonomy from the legislative political agenda for at least the next four years but it may also mean that Alex Salmond – perhaps the most effective and articulate voice of independence – could very soon be staring into a personal political abyss. Where would defeat in 2011 leave the SNP, the morale of its activists, and the wider independence movement? None of these outcomes is pre-determined. As any student of poker will tell you, it's not always the best hand that wins the pot, it's how you play the cards.

Scottish independence is a long game. The Holyrood Parliament, the current SNP administration, the referendum bill, and the ongoing discussions on fiscal autonomy prove we've come along way since the “five and forty” were “bought and sold for English gold”, as Robert Burns so eloquently put it. Scottish politics - like the hopes, loyalties, fears and aspirations of its people - are in a state of deep flux and great intellectual fluidity. Opinion polls cannot be trusted to give us the bigger picture.

North of the border they're politically loaded. For example, with a straight face The Times newspaper (on 18 Feb 2010) ran a headline: 'TORIES COULD OVERTAKE SNP AT GENERAL ELECTION.' The article began: “Tory optimism that they are on course to win more seats in Scotland than the SNP in this year's General Election was strengthened yesterday by a new opinion poll which showed them neck-and-neck with the Nationalists.” Quite. It must be embarrassing for an army of professional political pundits – I won't name names but we know who you are – to be reminded that near the start of the UK election campaign they bought into the idea of a “LibDem surge” signifying “a fundamental switch from two party politics”. Aye, right. This was even more bizarre when you consider it was based on nothing more substantial than an overnight reaction to a telly programme!

More astute observers are drawing the conclusion that the purpose of opinion polls - with their carefully-constructed wordings – are primarily used to try and influence public opinion rather than reflect it. For the purposes of political extrapolations I'll steer clear of fly-by-night opinion polls on Scottish independence and the prospects for the SNP in May 2011 and try to get to the underlying realities.

Even in the world of manipulative opinion polls there are four remarkable constants which consistently emerge and which underpin the Scottish political landscape. None of these will ever be emphasised in the pages of The Scotsman so perhaps it is worth reiterating them before considering the immediate prospects for the SNP:

1. The vast majority of people in Scotland increasingly consider themselves Scottish first rather than British. This is a major sea-change in thinking.
2. The vast majority of people in Scotland support the basic democratic principle of a referendum on Scottish independence. This has never wavered, not even during turbulent periods of banking collapse and recession.
3. The vast majority of people support the transfer of more powers from London to Holyrood. Champions of the status quo are a silent diminishing minority.
4. There is an unflinching solid bedrock of support for Scottish independence that rarely dips below 25-30 per cent of the population. This in itself is the most remarkable aspect of Scottish politics and which bears down heavily on everything else.

These are not only undisputed facts but the starting positions in the 2011 election campaign, as well as any referendum campaign. How these are configured into the SNP's calculations will play a large part in determining the possible outcomes.

Even the most curmudgeonly of opponents would have to admit that the SNP's minority Government has been competent and professional in office. Given the depth of the cesspool recently

uncovered at Westminster, it is to their credit that the Scottish government and the SNP have not got themselves embroiled in the sort of sleaze and scandal which have brought shame to the two main unionist parties and helped bring down the last two UK governments. Scottish ministers have, in general, been open about their plans, made themselves accessible, and have put their hands up when things haven't worked out. This isn't in question. What is in question is whether competent management of a devolved parliament progresses the cause of independence. To return to May 2007. Alex Salmond and the SNP were playing a blinder while their unionist (and leftist) opponents were at sixes and sevens. Whether it was standing firm against the British war in Iraq, or against a new generation of London-imposed nuclear weapons and nuclear power stations, the SNP stuck to their guns. In addition, A&E services facing closure were going to be saved. The sell-off of public housing would be brought to a halt. PFI to pay for new schools would be ended. Student top up fees and prescription charges would be abolished. More police on the beat. A freeze on council tax. This was all good populist stuff and absolutely necessary if the soft neoliberal belly of New Labour was to be successfully challenged in its traditional heartlands.

Yet despite this progressive manifesto of ambitious pledges, and the feel-good factor it helped generate, the SNP was elected by the very slimmest of majorities. It was the last List seat called in the Highlands which tipped the SNP over the winning line. Therein lies the problem. How can the SNP, now scrutinised and judged as a party of government rather than opposition, inspire the same sort of positive engagement from the Scottish electorate that only just got them elected in 2007? In the months following May 2007 everything the SNP did struck a chord, support grew steadily, and an overall SNP majority in 2011 was considered a very real possibility. But this is no longer the case. The feelgood factor of 2007 has evaporated as the clouds of recession make their presence felt. What remains is widespread respect for significant progressive legislation and governmental competence in adversity. But is this enough? The all-important first-time SNP voters who felt inspired by the SNP's message in 2007, and sought fundamental constitutional change, have been drifting off from the periphery with that familiar weary sense of disappointment and disillusionment. "Promises are being broken." "Scotland is no closer to independence." "No one is taking a stand on Scotland's behalf against the ConDems cuts." Over the next few months Scottish Labour will opportunistically try to blame the cuts on the SNP. With the SNP government on the back foot, having to defend its backtracking on a number of key manifesto pledges such as classroom sizes, its going to be a tough uphill election battle ahead.

However, the SNP does have one ace in its hand if it chooses to play it. A constitutional crisis is slowly, angrily, haphazardly, but inexorably developing as the brutal reality of ConDem cuts begin to sink in. David Cameron has gone on record stating that "Britain is broken". This could come back to haunt him north of the Tweed. The ConDems are selling us ten years of austerity and hardship. Perhaps even longer. Jobs will be decimated. Essential services axed. Benefits slashed. The ConDem Nation are preparing for a long term offensive against not just the poorest in our society plus those who work in or need public services, but against the very principles of an inclusive social democracy. In this potentially explosive situation Alex Salmond and the SNP have one last potentially game-winning card they

can play. They need to drive home to the Scottish people at every opportunity that it is Decision Time:

Do you want to be crucified for the next decade as part of a bankrupt broken Britain? Or are you prepared to embrace a new beginning as citizens in a prosperous independent Scotland?

The Independence Referendum Bill is perfectly positioned for the SNP to make its move. The beauty of this is that the SNP has nothing to lose and everything to gain. While the Referendum Bill may well be lost in parliament – this time round – it's more important to go on the offensive. Challenge the democratic deficit. Challenge the union itself. Who dares wins. But there is another possibility. Alex Salmond and the SNP may fumble the ball between now and May 2011. They could accept the flawed logic of the London neoliberals. Instead of countering The Big Economic Lie, through galvanising support for independence, they may instead concentrate on talking up "the coming pain" thereby sending out a predominantly negative message. John Swinney has already begun down this road. This could be disastrous.

There are also worries over a long-term strategic switch to emphasise – in campaigning terms - fiscal autonomy over full blown independence. Fiscal autonomy is absolutely necessary for Scots to develop Scottish solutions to specifically Scottish problems. A recent GERS Report spells out that the Scottish economy was in surplus in 2008/09 by £1.3bn while the British budget was in deficit to the tune of £48.9bn. The economic arguments against fiscal autonomy hold little water. But to accept the logic that full fiscal autonomy is a necessary stepping stone to full independence is an argument fraught with danger. Catalonia and the Basque Country for example have had fiscal autonomy for over twenty years but it is questionable whether this has been a "stepping stone" to independence. SNP members should pay particular heed to the way that the Spanish state has used fiscal autonomy to incorporate the main Basque and Catalan nationalist parties - the PNV and CiU - into being toothless agents of an anti-independence federalist agenda. The SNP could do worse than pause to reflect upon the many differences between fiscal autonomy and full independence. These differences may well be the easiest part of independence to sell to a restless nation desperate for substantive change. For it is these currently 'reserved' issues which would give us control over our own constitutional arrangements, as well as democratic control over energy policy, civil rights, nuclear weapons, nuclear power, military spending, foreign wars and sovereign territory. These are areas where the UK government tends to be out of sync with the Scottish electorate. To prioritise campaigning for fiscal autonomy could be a serious error of judgement.

The natives are getting restless. Bankrupt Britain is going down the tubes. It may well be that Alex Salmond and the SNP government are boxing clever, taking a good look at the lay of the land, before making their next move. Let's hope so. The stakes are high. ■

Kevin Williamson is a writer, publisher, and activist and a member of the Council of the Scottish Independence Convention

out the comfort zone

Greens find it too easy to resort to opposition to policies which are harmful to the environment, argues Peter McColl. If they are going to make a breakthrough they are going to have to sell a more radical agenda.

In the 2009 Rectorial election at Edinburgh University New Labour grandee George Foulkes was on his way to defeat by Iain Macwhirter. Foulkes couldn't escape the consequences of voting for tuition and top up fees, ID cards and the war in Iraq while an MP. He was unable to make his local campaign issues (like refurbishing theatres) play. He was heading for an inevitable defeat. So he turned to his trump card - crime on campus. The move by the Labour party to capturing law and order as an issue for the party was seen by Blairites like Foulkes as fundamental to their electoral success. It was so effective that it became the issue to which the Labour party returned time after time. There were more Criminal Justice Acts in the 13 years of Labour government than ever before.

Foulkes' campaign resulted in a remarkable failure. Students thought the notion of crime on campus was daft. There are three key lessons for Greens in this. The first is that campaigning in your comfort zone (in the case of Foulkes, this was crime) almost inevitably results in failure. The second is that some issues just don't resonate with the electorate - students didn't see crime as an issue. The final lesson is that even if the issue resonates with the electorate you might well not win votes because voters suspect your motives.

In Scotland Labour repeatedly legislated on anti-social behaviour and argued for tougher sentences. The defining issues for Labour in Scotland after its 2007 defeat have been justice issues. Early release, mandatory sentences for knife crime and the Megrahi issue have all been bread and butter for the party. It looks like the key issue for Labour in the 2011 election will be crime and justice. This has become New Labour's comfort zone. It's somewhere that they feel comfortable. They have the moral high ground, they can attack other parties, and they know from focus groups and polling that it is popular. We all remember the Conservatives running the 2001 election campaign on Europe. William Hague had a countdown to the election in which he would proclaim that the electorate had "12 days to save the Pound" or whatever. This was popular, whether or not it was right. Most people agreed that

Britain shouldn't enter the Euro. But it was in the comfort zone.

The reason that staying in the comfort zone is so problematic for political parties is that any one issue is not enough to win a vote. People agreed with the Conservatives on Europe. But they wanted a competent government. So they voted for Labour. The Euro simply wasn't important enough as an issue. Almost any voter makes their decision based on a complex set of information. Some of it is about historical voting behaviour. Some is about policy, other voters choose candidates that they trust in parties that they don't. Every political party has its comfort zone. It is sometimes about particular issues. Sometimes it's about appealing to a particular type of person. Often it's both. We all know what the comfort zones are for parties. For Conservatives it's Europe. For New Labour it is crime and for the Liberal Democrats it is proportional representation. These are issues where parties are almost always in agreement with the majority - or at least a section of the electorate substantially larger than their vote. They are issues that play well in focus groups and in polls. Many people will list them as their real concerns.

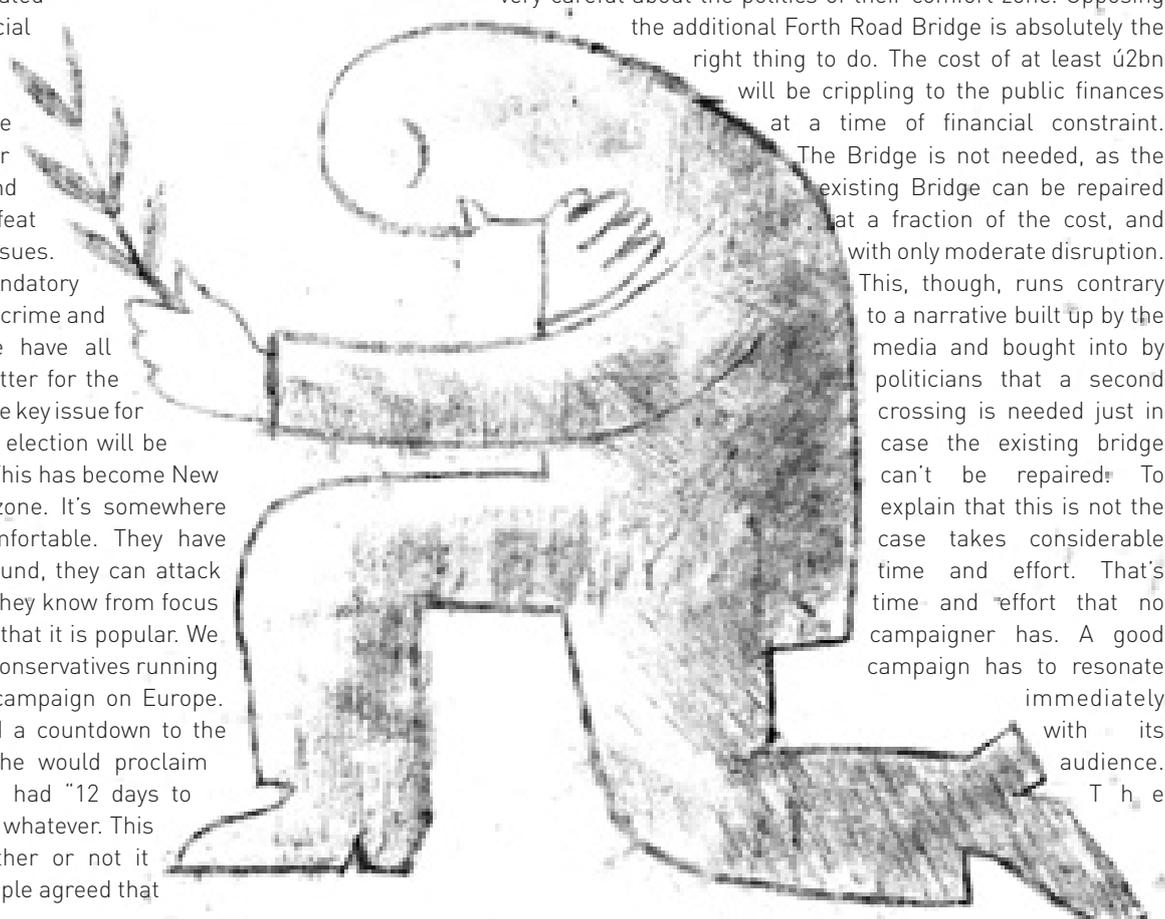
This is a difficult area for Greens. As a radical party the number of voters needed to make a significant breakthrough is relatively small. With just 10 per cent of the vote Greens could be very significant players in Scottish politics. But Greens need to be very careful about the politics of their comfort zone. Opposing

the additional Forth Road Bridge is absolutely the right thing to do. The cost of at least £2bn will be crippling to the public finances at a time of financial constraint.

The Bridge is not needed, as the existing Bridge can be repaired at a fraction of the cost, and with only moderate disruption.

This, though, runs contrary to a narrative built up by the media and bought into by politicians that a second crossing is needed just in case the existing bridge can't be repaired. To explain that this is not the case takes considerable time and effort. That's time and effort that no campaigner has. A good campaign has to resonate immediately with its audience.

with its audience. The



campaign against the additional Forth Road Bridge is just too complex to be communicated easily. That's not to say that Green Councillors and MSPs shouldn't highlight the massive opportunities to spend the money that would have been used on the additional crossing. And here's the crux of good campaigning. The issue is, really, what we should spend the money on, not why we shouldn't spend it on a bridge.

There's another reason why Greens need to widen their appeal. The appeal of environmental issues is simply not enough to ensure that Greens are able to win enough elections. Green politics goes way beyond the environment. It has a foundational critique of the consumerist, market driven society and economy we live in. It is this that will return more Green members to Councils, the Scottish Parliament and other bodies. These representatives, with their very presence and by their actions will put the environment up the agenda. They will also fight for a fairer, more equal, more just Scotland.

The development of the SNP provides an interesting blueprint for Greens in this area. After the first significant breakthrough in the 1960s Winnie Ewing's by-election victory in Hamilton the SNP focused on Scottish identity as the way to achieve an independent Scotland. The party was about ceilidhs and the Gaelic language, and that appealed to substantially greater numbers of people than voted SNP. This was enough to elect 11 MPs in the mid-1970s. It was not enough, however to resist the squeeze election of 1979, where the SNP were wiped out. A group including Alex Salmond and Roseanna Cunningham tried to widen the party's appeal beyond cultural Scottishness. While the SNP sought to expel these people (and in many cases succeeded), it was Alex Salmond that finally led the SNP to power in 2007. This was done by focusing on a wider politics than that of ceilidhs and language- promising to cancel graduate debt and bridge tolls and to keep hospitals open and end PFI/PPP financing of public projects. These policies very effectively positioned the SNP as a party that had the interests of Scotland's people at heart, rather than an interest in independence at heart.

The third element of a political strategy that Greens must embrace is an effective recognition of the value of identity politics. This means Greens must find way to link the issues with which they are associated with Green issues that have a broader appeal. This means that instead of talking about recycling Greens should promote the jobs that can be created by recycling projects. Instead of opposing Bridge projects, Greens should support investment in Green infrastructure, like the reopening of branch rail lines. It can be clear where the money will come from, but it also associates Greens with a positive and popular measure - and one that delivers social and environmental benefits too.

It is very important in developing a successful political party to persuade voters that you have their interests at heart. Understanding the 'Nixon to China' concept is important here. Richard Nixon was able to go to Communist China and re-establish links with the country because he was a conservative. Had he been a liberal Democrat his actions would have been seen as undermining American foreign policy interests. As it was, his actions were tolerated as he was clearly acting in the interest of American international trade. Only certain politicians will be trusted to take certain actions. This is important because voters attribute motivations to politicians and political parties. A proposal by Conservatives to bar recruitment of

health professionals in developing countries is likely to be seen as racist, but Liberal Democrats could convince the electorate that they were doing it to protect health services in poorer countries. People evaluate the motivation behind the actions of politicians and parties to understand what they stand for.

The 2010 election provided an excellent example of how voters distrust politicians' motives, even if they agree with their policies. Almost no one disagrees with having a better society, with more social connection. So when the Conservatives suggested that 'Big Society' was the answer to Britain's problems you would assume this was popular... Well, it wasn't. People believed that it meant stopping the state from paying for vital services. This was because people couldn't understand sufficiently what it would mean

other than ending state funding. And the Conservatives have a track record of removing state funding from vital services.

Greens have a durable and popular set of values. We believe in equality, human rights, quality of life, global justice, prevention not cure and environmental justice. To only talk about environmental issues is to do these values a disservice. It narrows the number of people who will vote Green. And most of all it makes it more difficult to take action in these areas. Surely it is much better to make a broad appeal on the basis of all Green values.

Caroline Lucas and Adrian Ramsay, the Green candidates who did best in the 2010 election, both fought campaigns based on these broad sets of values. Lucas was elected on a platform of defending public services, while Ramsay doubled his vote in a campaign focused on opposition to student tuition fees, hospital closures and for a living wage. There is no reason why Scottish Greens shouldn't prioritise these campaigns. It is much more likely to yield success than yet more campaigning against roads and bridges and for more recycling. Those are things that Greens can deliver once elected, much more than things on which Greens should seek election. ■

Peter McColl is a member of the Scottish Green Party, and a community activist in Portobello. He worked for Green MSP Mark Ballard from 2003-07.

nowhere to go?

Gordon McKay argues that trade unions have no option but to stick with Labour

When I was first approached to write this article the remit given to me was to answer the question of whether the link between the trade unions and the Labour Party could survive in its current form. On June 22 the Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne announced a 25 per cent spending cut across all Government departments, with the exceptions of Health and International Aid and an increase to 20 per cent in one of the most regressive taxes in operation, namely Value Added Tax. Finally he ushered in a two-year pay freeze for all public sector workers earning over £21,000 per annum. At this point I felt it necessary to ask the Editorial Board of the Review if they wanted to ask me a different question, as I thought it might be difficult to spin out the word "Yes" with an exclamation mark attached, for two thousand words.

It is six years since two trade union disaffiliations from the Labour Party brought into question the sustainability of the Trade Union/Labour Party link, particularly under the policies and direction being followed by Tony Blair. The first to go was the Rail Maritime and Transport union. Technically it was the Labour Party who disaffiliated the RMT from membership rather than the RMT actually leaving the Party after the RMT continued to allow a number of Scottish branches to affiliate to the Scottish Socialist Party in breach of Labour Party rules. The Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, one of the RMT's predecessor unions had been one of the original founding organisations of the Labour Party and the RMT's decision therefore had symbolic as well as immediate significance. Four months after the break between Labour and the RMT another union broke from Labour. This time it was the Fire Brigades Union. The precursor to the decision was a very bitter and ultimately unsuccessful strike by the FBU in 2002 over pay and conditions. The New Labour Government took an extremely hard line over this dispute, which Tony Blair saw as a test of strength against a powerful public sector union. It was not only the Government's determination to face down the FBU that so alienated the fire-fighters however, it was the viciousness of the language used by Ministers. John Prescott, the responsible UK Minister, said he was prepared to examine making strikes illegal in the fire service. In Scotland the Deputy Justice Minister called striking firefighters "bastards". The next big test came later that year with a number of trade union political fund ballots, which although not specifically about affiliation to the Labour Party would be seen as a good indicator of the wishes of union members with specific relation to political campaigning. All of the ballots provided substantial yes votes, with figures between 73 per cent and 88 per cent. In 2005 UNISON members voted 85 per cent in favour of maintaining its political fund.

There would be one more threat of a major trade union disaffiliating from Labour, this time over a specific issue. In 2008 the Labour Government announced that it supported the proposals put forward by the Hooper Commission, which called for the part-privatisation of Royal Mail. The Communication Workers Union had already said if this went through they would ballot their members on continuation of links with the Labour Party. While the break from the Party by the RMT and

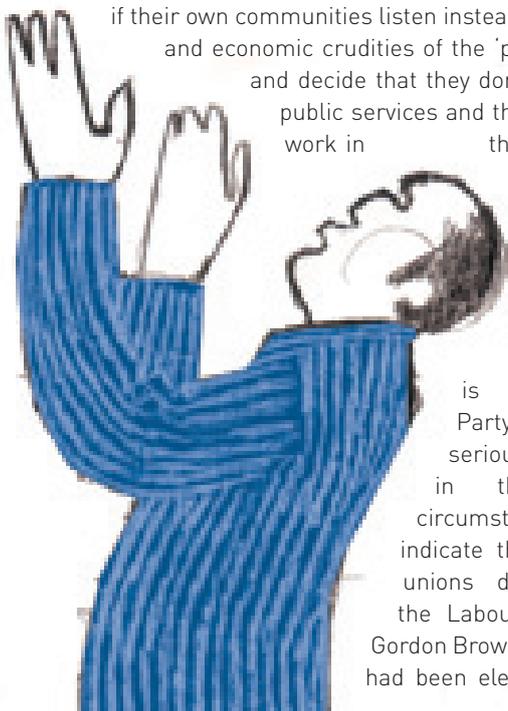
FBU was serious enough for historical reasons, the CWU were different. The CWU had donated over five million pounds to the Party between 2001 and 2008 and through a large membership provided substantial financial and political support. There were also serious concerns that if the CWU split that great pressure would fall on a number of other major unions to support the CWU on the subject of privatisation, and it was thought that it would prove very difficult for a number of unions to hold the line of continued affiliation. This Mexican stand off never resulted in a shooting war as the part-privatisation plans were formally shelved after the number of Labour MPs signing a Commons Motion opposing the plans reached one hundred and fifty, with Gordon Brown knowing that attempting to press ahead would have meant him relying on support from the Conservative Party. A story did the political rounds in 1981 that during the Labour Party Deputy Leadership Denis Healey lost the votes of a number of right wing Labour MPs because rather than responding to their concerns about the future direction of the Party he told them that they "had nowhere else to go" reducing Healey's victory over Tony Benn to a wafer thin margin of less than one per cent. Shortly after failing to vote for Healey a number of those MPs deserted Labour and joined the newly constituted Social Democratic Party, the forming of which at least in part condemned Labour to a generation in parliamentary opposition. The story goes that Healey then received postcards from a number of his ex-colleagues telling him that they "had now found somewhere else to go". Their new home was temporary however as the SDP failed to make the necessary electoral breakthrough in 1983 and Labour gradually reinforced itself as the only credible alternative to an increasingly right-wing Thatcherite Government.

So, today do the trade unions have somewhere else to go? An annual cry from the trade union non-Labour Party left is for the formation of a new Workers Party. The current manifestation of this was seen in the General Election under the guise of the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (TUSC). With the parliamentary expenses scandals and the collapse of the banking system, and with all of the main political parties campaigning on promises of public expenditure cuts there was a belief that if there was ever going to be an opportunity for a breakthrough from a party to the left of Labour then 2010 would be the year. Furthermore, the language of Alistair Darling in saying that Labour's cuts would be deeper and tougher than that of Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s made very clear to the electorate that the choice was not one of Tory cuts versus Labour investment. With this background the election results for the TUSC was nothing short of calamitous. Standing 41 candidates across the United Kingdom they polled a paltry twelve thousand votes, six thousand less than the Christian Party. Only three of their candidates polled more than a two per cent share of the vote in the constituencies. In Glasgow South West Tommy Sheridan polled 931 votes, a far cry from the 6016 he won in the Scottish Parliament election of 2003 in Glasgow Pollok.

Possibly the most ironic result of the General Election for those who have called for a break by the trade unions from the

Labour Party is that Labour's defeat killed off any hope they had of such a break. A Tory/Liberal Democrat coalition intent on slashing public services at the same time as attacking jobs, pay and pensions guarantees that the trade unions will rally around the Labour Party. As the Labour Party at a UK level is not going to have to implement any policy decisions for at least five years there is going to be very little for the Party and the trade unions to have fundamental disagreements about. In those areas where there is not genuine agreement there will be enough leeway for the clouding of differences if so wished. It is said at times that opposition can lead to disunity and disarray, but on occasions it can also have the opposite result, as not being in power also means that there are no difficult decisions to take. With five years of Cameron and Clegg ahead of them the trade unions are to a large extent going to have to rely on themselves to stave off the worst excesses of a Tory-dominated coalition which sees the economic crisis as the perfect cover for implementing the slash and burn economic policies that they would have put in place anyway. The trade unions should not look to the coalition junior partners to offer them any protection. The Orange Book aficionados like Clegg and Alexander believe in what they are doing, and others like Vince Cable who just for a moment may have baulked slightly over presiding over such savage cuts quickly realised that this was going to be his one and only opportunity of being a Government Minister, both due to his age and to a realisation that the Liberal Democrats would pay a heavy price in 2015, and that the best thing to do therefore was to keep his mouth shut and swing the axe. As well as being self-reliant, the trade unions should grasp the opportunity that they have been given to build coalitions with the communities that they work and live in. There is a clear symbiotic benefit from this in that it is local communities who are going to see their quality of life suffer if council and health and education services are cut back. There will also be an economic impact on communities if jobs in the public sector are cut back and as wage freezes are implemented in the public sector one can start preparing, as night follows day, for reductions in wages in the private sector. The trade unions hopes of staving off these proposals increase if they are able to take their local communities with them. Protecting services as well as jobs,

pay and pensions are going to be much more difficult if their own communities listen instead to the social and economic crudities of the 'popular' press and decide that they don't care about public services and the people who work in them.



The other group who the trade unions need to work with is the Labour Party. There is no serious argument in the present circumstances to indicate that the trade unions do not need the Labour Party. If a Gordon Brown Government had been elected and had

started to cut public expenditure and privatise services then there may have been a different debate to have been had, but that is now for the historical theorists who write their 'what if' books. The only risk in the short to medium term for the trade union/Labour Party link is not a divergence in views; rather it is apathy. We are unfortunately about to see played out in front of us the evidence to justify the claim that a poor Labour Government is a hundred times better than a good Tory one, but it is not going to be enough for the Labour Party to sit back and wait for the Tories to fail. Trade unionists are going to have to see the benefits of casting their votes positively for Labour. They will need to see Labour out in their communities speaking up for services, they will need to see the Labour Party going around doors to remind people that they are not there just for elections but they have an actual interest in people's lives and want to improve them, and when needed they will need to see them on the picket line defending jobs and services. If the Labour Party does not actively engage with and represent working people the vacuum will be filled by someone else either from the political left or the far right to the cost and shame of us all. All of this however is not a blank cheque from the trade unions to the Labour Party. With the triumvirate of founding fathers, Blair, Brown and Mandelson now all gone, New Labour has been laid to rest, although some of the current Labour leadership candidates would argue for repackaging rather than burial. The question that presents to the trade unions is whether they wish to see a second generation of true believers come through or whether they want to take back the Labour Party. Reclaiming the Labour Party however is not about simply writing cheques. We have seen that this may work while in opposition and years from power, but as soon as the sniff of Government approaches there will always be enough people to dust off the cheque books and invite Labour leaders to come into their parlour. The trade unions have to take the opportunities that present themselves to encourage their members back into the Party, to do the humdrum things like affiliate to local constituency parties, to take up their delegations and to put forward trade unionists for Labour Party selection at elections, whether it be local authority, devolved parliament, European parliament or UK parliament. The trade unions also need to work together, instead of allowing the machine to pick them off individually by offering small carrots occasionally to show that they have a special relationship and that they really need to separate themselves from the extremists in whatever other union has annoyed the leadership that particular day.

In a newspaper interview in 1999 Tony Blair repeated the Denis Healey jibe about having nowhere else to go, except that Blair didn't address his remarks to right wing Labour MPs. Blair said it to the whole of Labour's core vote when he commented that "the choice is between the Labour Government you have and a Conservative Government". Blair was telling traditional Labour voters that New Labour was not going to change, and in the words of Andrew Rawnsley "they could like it or lump it". Unfortunately for trade union members at the last General Election the majority decided that they didn't like it. The trade union movement has the opportunity to reconnect the Labour Party with those people who want a reason to vote Labour. It must grasp that opportunity so that in the years to come the trade unions do not want or are forced to find somewhere else to go. ■

Gordon McKay works as a psychiatric nurse, is a member of the NEC of UNISON and Chair of UNISON Labour Link Committee

splits that weaken

There is a very real possibility that any campaign against the cuts in Scotland will be undermined by a divided civic sector. New leadership is needed, argues Isobel Lindsay

‘Divide and Rule’ is a well-worn phrase for good reason. It is such a standard component in the tool-box of the powerful. There was little sign of civic Scotland promoting a united front during the General Election campaign and there are no strong grounds for confidence that it will happen now. It is possible but it needs leadership. The pressure to protect sectional interests has understandably been great and will get much greater, and the risk is that the emphasis will be on union versus union, local government versus Scottish Government, public sector versus voluntary sector. This is, of course, what the Con-Lib Government wants and it is also what the previous Labour Government wanted. If we can’t develop a coherent, broadly-based response based on values to which the public will respond, the Westminster Government will drive through drastic cuts while the resistance is pulled in different directions.

There are good examples of building co-operative civic campaigns. The campaign for a Scottish parliament in the 1980s and 1990s was one. Make Poverty History was another as was the opposition to the Iraq war. In Scotland there has been the anti-Trident campaign developed by Scotland’s For Peace and SCND. The main Scottish churches, certainly at leadership level, put considerable effort into promoting this as did the STUC and most of the unions. Campaigns may not achieve success but there is unlikely to be success without campaigns. We have not seen an effective campaign on the issues that have arisen out of the banking crisis and the economic outcomes. Individually people are angry and feel that there has been a complete distortion of natural justice but this has not been channelled into public protest because nobody has led it. Part of this was because there was a Labour Government in power and some of the unions which might have initiated protest were compromised by their party involvement. The SNP was also compromised because, while more radical than Labour on many issues, it was equally complicit in supporting uncritically an out-of-control financial sector. Nor did we have Left think-tanks to promote a radical analysis of what was happening and alternative policies. Civic Scotland did not have a clear idea of what to do and did not have the leadership to develop a strong campaign against the dramatic failures of neo-liberalism.

Now that there is a Tory-Liberal government and major public expenditure cuts are imminent (which would also have happened with the previous government), we will get some organised

public protest. However will there be a clear alternative strategy and will there be any real unity beneath the slogans and the banners? When groups are pitted against each other in job and resource cuts, can there be an effective overarching national campaign? In the context of organisations that have loyalties to either Labour or SNP in the run-up to Holyrood elections, will civic Scotland demand that there is a united front against Westminster decisions? If any of this is to happen, there needs to be a lot of preparation with the potential divisive issues identified and addressed. Among the divisive issues that need examined are voluntary versus public sector, resource competition within public services and among user groups. If we let these fester, then we will get united demonstrations on the streets and bitter rows in the workplaces and communities.

One of the most sensitive areas of potential conflict is voluntary sector versus public sector and the roots of this tension go back to the Thatcher period. The idea of Compulsory Competitive Tendering was introduced by the Conservatives into public services to open up opportunities primarily for the commercial sector and to fragment the labour force, thus weakening its bargaining power. It was continued with minor alterations by Labour. Engagement with the ‘contracts culture’ was controversial in voluntary organisations at its inception but on balance it was felt that there was little option and some larger organisations saw opportunities for growth.

Will there be a clear alternative strategy and will there be any real unity beneath the slogans and the banners? When groups are pitted against each other in job and resource cuts, can there be an effective overarching national campaign?

The voluntary sector covers a very diverse range of organisations and objectives and plays a crucial role in representing many of the least privileged and in innovative policy and project work. Most of the sector is radical and egalitarian in its ethos (if we forget the scandal of private schools having charitable status) but is in most cases very financially insecure. The concern is to prevent the sector being used as a stalking horse for the objectives of others while protecting the important work done and trying to develop a new division of labour. The English situation has been much more problematic than that in Scotland

and this is set to increase. There was a clear strategy south of the border, driven by the Labour Government, to use the voluntary sector and pseudo-charitable organisations in the forms of trusts as a bridgehead to break public sector control. Typical of this was the Future Services Network launched in 2006 bringing together the CBI, the National Consumer Council and the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations. The Prime Minister’s Office briefed about a ‘coalition of the

willing' planning to take over more public service provision with the probation service, employment services and health as areas where the voluntary sector and business could work together. This was in addition to the aim of transferring ownership and control of schools to trusts, initially 'not for profit' but with private business encouraged to form partnerships. Foundation hospitals were part of this market agenda ultimately to contract out the public sector for the benefit of the private sector with pseudo-charitable sector organisations used as a bridgehead. The enthusiasm for this approach from groups like the Institute of Economic Affairs and the Adam Smith Institute which hardly have a natural affinity with voluntary sector egalitarian values, tells us what we need to know. Genuine voluntary organisations will be discarded when convenient. They may be left with the more difficult, less profitable parts of a service that no-one else wants to take on, helping to manage residual social problems arising from poverty and inequality at cut-price. The Tory-Liberals will accelerate this in England. Scotland has not gone down this route to anything like the extent in England and it still has the protection of the Scottish Parliament but public expenditure cuts will produce tensions.

The starting point in developing a co-operative approach to voluntary/public sector relations should be a shared understanding of the wider economic-political context. With markets that are close to saturation point in many aspects of personal consumption in the richer countries (without a redistribution of wealth to the bottom 20 per cent), the one big area of potential growth in which corporate power has been restricted is that of public service provision. We have seen the drive, promoted by the IMF and the World Bank, to take over aspects of this provision in poorer countries but the real prize would be the European public services. The opening up of these services to private capital was the Thatcher contribution, continued with enthusiasm by New Labour. Lobby groups like the US-based Coalition of Service Industries have been pushing the case to allow service corporations greater rights to enter the markets of other countries. UK corporations like Serco are actively seeking business. Recent privatisation like Air Traffic Control, Prisons, Search and Rescue and the massive PFI programme has kept up the momentum but the drive is to open the doors wider in health, education and welfare. These services are long-term in their implications, have major social costs if they go wrong, have a high ethical dimension and are not simple commodities that can be easily traded. We need to get rid of market approaches and instead to develop other reforms in the public sector together with a valued role for the voluntary sector. The aim should be flexible team working, multi-tasking, clear and simple lines of accountability and continuity of personnel, with the voluntary sector given a respected role. Long before CCT or Best Value had been heard of, there was a substantial voluntary sector presence in elderly, child, disabled and homeless care and in recreation. Greater understanding of the

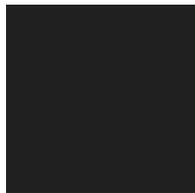
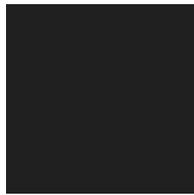
complexities of social problems and the desirability of testing different approaches - such as in treatment of offenders, rough sleeping, ethnic integration, children with behavioural problems - will bring in voluntary sector vision and expertise because it is needed. Much of the community-based voluntary work gives good value for low cost. We need to get unions, local authorities and voluntary sector umbrella organisations working together and not fighting it out with mutual recrimination.

Splitting is already underway – teachers promoting their case, police pushing theirs, nurses theirs. Who and what will bring them together for more than a token demonstration? The 'who' probably needs a specific new body to campaign against public service cuts which is broader than the unions.

Failing to minimise the tensions between different public service workers and users will undermine any campaign against cuts. Splitting is already underway – teachers promoting their case, police pushing theirs, nurses theirs. Who and what will bring them together for more than a token demonstration? The 'who' probably needs a specific new body to campaign against public service cuts which is broader than the unions, bringing in other civic groups, representing users and the voluntary sector with the aim of developing both a critique of Westminster policy and a programme of action. That programme is needed. Even if we

can build up an effective campaign of resistance, the best we can expect in the short run is to modify the extreme expenditure cuts the Coalition is proposing. If we don't work out the values that should guide decisions on expenditure priorities, then the decisions will be reached on the basis of political expediency, on the basis of who can exert most pressure or simply on the basis of incoherent drift. Can we reach agreement on priorities? The crude reference to front-line services does not offer much guidance – it is election-speak. But we can start to look at principles. If we decide that the important thing for social reasons as well as to maintain services is to keep jobs, then accepting a sharing of costs with a pay-freeze plus a reduction for the top earners should be accepted. But only accepted if it comes with maintaining jobs. If we want to sustain much of the community work carried out by voluntary sector groups, then we need to end the council tax freeze even if it is a flawed tax. Do we need to revive the 'penny for Scotland' option and use the Scottish Parliament's tax power? These are the questions that need to be discussed with the difficult aim of reaching a civic consensus in Scotland that could be presented to the public as fair and which would be difficult for the parties to ignore even in the rancorous run-up to the 2011 election. It will need the unions to accept decisions which some of their members won't like but if it comes with less unemployment and fewer service cuts, there is a big social gain. It will need the wider public to pay a bit more in tax when other costs are also rising but there will be social gains. The only way this will work is if we are clear about the principles underlying decisions, can reach a broad agreement on them and promote them to the public. For all of this, we need real civic leadership. Who will provide it? ■

Isobel Lindsay was formerly Vice Convener of SCVO and Convener of the Scottish Civic Forum



PUBLIC WORKS:

Public services are part of the solution, not part of the problem

Join UNISON in the campaign to defend Scotland's public services

UNISON Scotland
UNISON House
14 West Campbell Street
Glasgow G2 6RX

0845 355 0845
www.unison-scotland.org.uk

cross currents in culture

variant

number 37 spring 2010 free



Culture in its broader social political context

issue 37 is out now
variant.org.uk

are bills of rights wrong?

Carole Ewart discusses the establishment of a human rights consortium in Scotland - and what that means in the context of a UK government hostile to the Human Rights Act

Who stands up for human rights in Scotland? The answer used to be simple but now a surprising mix of people argue that rights are a privilege which, in a period of economic downturn, cannot be afforded or that the threat of terrorism is so great that our civil and political rights must be limited. Such onslaughts have created a climate whereby we have to justify human rights rather than assert them. Civil society has reacted by establishing a Human Rights Consortium Scotland (HRCS) to share information, open doors to expertise, generate debate and encourage a more rights respecting society. Knowledge is power and there is a colossal mountain to climb. Meeting in the STUC and serviced by the Glasgow Disability Alliance, a range of organisations have declared formal support including Engender, the Campaign for Freedom of Information in Scotland, Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights, SAMH, SCVO and Glasgow Anti-Racist Alliance.

The HRSC is modelled on the Northern Ireland Human Rights Consortium, a campaigning organisation focusing on the need for a strong and inclusive Bill of Rights. Importantly The Good Friday Agreement uses the words 'right' or 'rights' 61 times which prompted Mary Robinson, the then UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, to point out that "equality and human rights have now moved from the margins into the mainstream of Northern Ireland life". This was acknowledged by the then-Secretary of State, Peter Mandelson, that Northern Ireland is now "the sort of rights-based society that other countries will look to as a model of excellence". Translating that vision into practice across Scotland presents an interesting set of challenges for those politicians and public servants who make daily decisions on million pound budgets and critical frontline services.

Wherever you live, there is always someone telling you that you cannot enjoy or be trusted with certain rights. Scotland has only had the enforceable right to access information since 2005, nearly forty years after America where in 1966 the Freedom of Information (Fol) Bill became law. However President Johnson refused to hold any kind of public signing ceremony to limit publicity for this new right. Draft language from Johnson's statement arguing that "democracy works best when the people know what their government is doing" was changed with a handwritten scrawl (author unknown) to say "Democracy works best when the people have all the info that the security of the nation will permit". However we only found out about this distrust of the public in 2006 following an Fol request. Fol has a track record in enabling ordinary people to hold the public sector to account for decisions on spend, on services and about the procedures in place or otherwise for making major decisions fairly. Fol is a human right as well as being a powerful tool to secure human rights.

Defining human rights is actually quite simple because the UK Government over decades has ratified seven UN treaties

covering most of the rights you could ever imagine including 'an adequate standard of living' and 'safe and healthy working conditions'. The UK is obliged to work progressively, to the maximum extent of its available resources, to deliver these rights even in a period of economic downturn which means rigorous prioritisation of spend. Case law at the European Court of Human Rights has also extended our rights to include for example environmental rights. Knowing about the rights we are already supposed to hold provides an interesting context for the HRCS to consider the case for and against a Bill of Rights which is prompted by the UK Government's 'Coalition Agreement' to:

"... establish a Commission to investigate the creation of a British Bill of Rights that incorporates and builds on all our obligations under the European Convention of Human Rights, ensures that these rights continue to be enshrined in British law, and protects and extends British liberties. We will seek to promote a better understanding of the true scope of these obligations and liberties."

Interestingly Lord Jim Wallace, who has been appointed by the UK Government as the Advocate General for Scotland, recently spoke at a meeting in Edinburgh and emphasised that this commitment is "not a retreat from European Convention" and said "it will be crucial that the Scottish dimension is properly considered". Those who read the Conservative's General Election Manifesto will be aware of the commitment to abolish the Human Rights Act.

Debating a Bill of Rights is not however a new subject. In March 2009 the UK Government launched a Green Paper on a Bill of Rights for Britain and stated:

"Some argue that economic, social and cultural rights should be guaranteed as 'human rights', carrying the same status in domestic law as the civil and political rights in the European Convention. While many specific welfare entitlements are legally enforceable, the Government believes that such policy matters should generally be developed by democratically accountable elected representatives, rather than by the courts."

Politicians are correct that if we become individual rights holders rather than subjects, who are vulnerable to policy changes and economic downturns, there is a shift in power to the people. Can democrats seriously argue that is a bad thing? Where there is disagreement is who adjudicates in disputes about rights. Many are reluctant to leave the judges and courts to decide on key human rights matters but frankly the track record of some politicians is not that great either. The focus needs to be on agreeing rules for decisions in the first place and setting out an independent review process when disputes arise.

Whether domestic enforcement of our human rights arises from the rights in the current Human Rights Act 1998 or/and

any future Bill of Rights, we need to start taking preventative action and avoid costly disputes. To focus on the final arbiters distracts from the key people and systems making decisions about our human rights and that is the 10,000 public bodies that deliver services on a daily basis. Each one has a legal duty to comply with S6 of the Human Rights Act 1998 which requires compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights. Unfortunately there is not a lot of evidence that human rights considerations are influencing the decision-making process and civil society is feeling the effect of disempowered people who cannot assert their human rights on key services such as providing home care to frail and elderly people.

Perhaps that is why civil society has an increasing amount to say on human rights domestically and internationally. For example due to representations made by the SAMH the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights addressed the issue of funding and stated that the UK should “take immediate steps to address, as a matter of priority, the regressive measures taken in funding mental health services” So the Committee was condemning the cuts as the human rights of the service users remain and no alternative service provision has been made. Glasgow Disability Alliance points out that the UK has now ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which includes Article 19 the ‘right to independent living’. Independent living is about having the right support and assistance to enable you to make choices that you want such as being able to live in your barrier free home without carers. Delivery of this right remains a dream for too many people in Scotland today.

Yet however loud and informed the voices, they are ignored. There are signs of change not because of a principled acceptance of human rights arguments but because the economic downturn is forcing scrutiny of democratic processes hitherto ignored. For example Audit Scotland has confirmed that a much more robust decision making framework is needed in Scotland:

“Councils have some way to go in developing medium to long-term financial strategies which are based on good information about service costs and value for money and which provide a framework to compare the financial effects of different policy options.”

The Scottish Parliament’s Finance Committee Report on the Budget Phase was influenced by considerations of how to ensure the most vulnerable are protected in a period of economic downturn. In the section on “Human rights and equal opportunities” the Committee states:

“It is helpful in this section to set out some of the other factors that may also shape or constrain the Scottish Government’s capacity to take action. For example, the Glasgow Women’s Voluntary Sector Network said that the Scottish Government had positive duties to promote human rights, which creates obligations to provide support services. Using the specific example of support services for women facing violence, the network argued that public authorities seemed to view

such support services “as a selective aspiration thus failing to understand that spending to protect human rights is a fundamental duty”.

The Scottish Parliament has established the Scottish Human Rights Commission. Whilst it is absolutely prohibited from taking cases and is even banned from giving advice or assistance to people thinking of taking a case, it is enabling a major international conference on ‘human rights and business’ in October 2010 and is undertaking key work such as developing

a human rights based approach (HRBA) model for public services to use in the decision making. The case of *Cadder v. HM Advocate* serves to remind us that human rights cannot always be protected by the Courts in Scotland so the enforcement system needs to be broad based and robust. Following a hearing at the UK Supreme Court in May, although a decision is not expected until October, the Lord Advocate issued new guidance, apparently admitting defeat, by bringing Scot’s law into line with the European Court of Human Rights decision in *Salduz v. Turkey* which permits suspect’s access to a solicitor as soon as they are detained. The High Court of Justiciary ruled last year that the Scots system was fair and the European Court decision did

not require any improvements. Thankfully we have an appeal process which reviews decisions by our top judges in Scotland.

The capacity of the system to right wrongs has always vexed human rights activists in Scotland. Clearly taking a case, all the way through the system, can get problems fixed it is just that so many vulnerable people do not have the resources to pursue cases so their human rights are unequally protected. Human rights should be equally enjoyed by us all - as employees, as service users, as individuals, as family members and as part of a community.

In addition to asking who stands up for human rights we need to rally behind what stands up for human rights. That means debating whether the Human Rights Act, and the relevant provisions of the Scotland Act, need to be properly enforced rather than developing any new Bill of Rights. The debate will hopefully be as dynamic as the outcome. A key factor is the enforcement mechanism which empowers the individual, challenges staff attitudes and organisational cultures that resist the implementation of human rights standards, equally and fairly. We cannot underestimate that for Scotland to become a rights-respecting society will require almost a revolution in established ways of working. ■

Carole Ewart is a public policy and human rights consultant.

To support the Human Rights Scotland Consortium contact Shirley Coull at Glasgow Disability Alliance shirleycoull@gdaonline.co.uk For further information on the NI Human Rights Consortium go to: www3.billofrightsn.org



Scottish Executive Council

Fighting for public service broadcasting

Standing up for press freedom

Raising standards of journalism

*Fighting to retain quality Scottish
newspapers*

Campaigning for better employment law

Paul Holleran
Scottish Organiser
James Doherty
(Chair, Scottish Executive Council)



National Union of Journalists, 114 Union Street, Glasgow G1 3QQ
Tel.: 0141 248 6648/7748 Email: NUJScotland@nuj.org.uk

continent drifting

Henry McCubbin looks at the implications for Europe of the Greek crisis - and what it means for a vision of a progressive European Union

The organisation Transform Europe recently held a meeting in the Garcia Lorca Centre Brussels on the topic "The case of Greece, the response of the EU and alternative solutions." Transform is a network of mainly European organisations in the field of political education and critical scientific analysis. This collaboration of independent non-profit organisations, institutes, foundations and people means to utilise their work to contribute to a peaceful statehood and to a transformation of the present world. The debate on the Greek crisis in the UK press has very much been that the problem the Greeks are having is very much theirs and at a political level Alistair Darling's visit to Brussels for the Ecofin emergency meeting was to make sure that we gave minimal support to aid Greece out of its crisis. The left in Europe however has a different view of this crisis and it is one which sees the outcome of the attempts to rescue the Greek economy affecting us all. Sigfrido Ram' rez, of the Transform Working Group Brussels in his report on the meeting at the Garcia Lorca Centre, introduced us to Liem Hoang Ngoc MEP. Liem is not only an academic - Senior Lecturer in Economics at Paris-Sorbonne - but also an activist and founder of ATTAC.

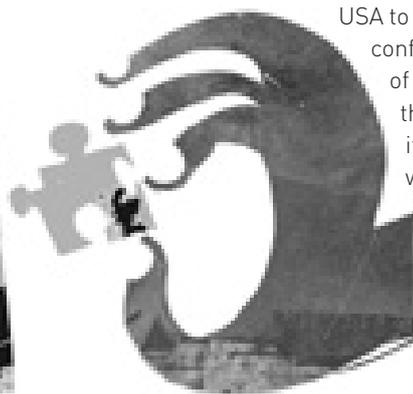
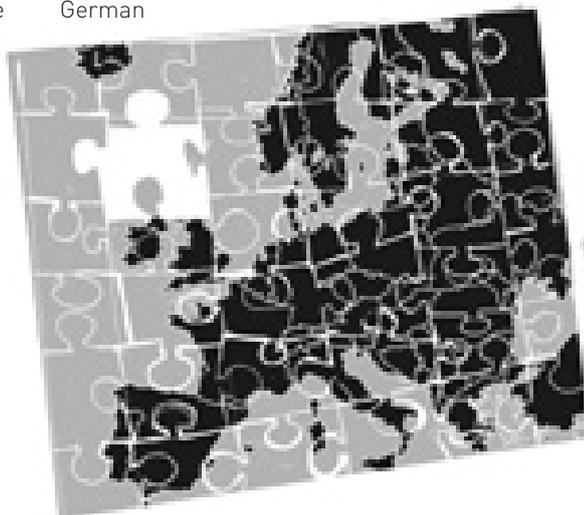
Liem started by presenting the communication of the European Commission on the crisis which concluded that once the financial crisis stopped, economic growth will spontaneously arise after some structural reforms of the European Welfare State. In a few words, for Neoliberalism the crisis is over. This analysis is extremely worrying, because the speculative attacks on public debts show that there is an underestimation of the current risks linked to the fragility of public debt like in the past for the debts of the private sector. Moreover, Germany is maintaining its policy of wage deflation, which is extremely damaging for the recovery of the whole of the European Union as there is not enough demand in the most important European economy which may take the slack of the fall in the domestic demand of Southern European countries. This accentuates the economic divergence of the economies of the Euro-zone creating economic unbalances, particularly the commercial balance, whose effects are still underestimated. However, the consequences are the same for the Southern European countries suffering the most from these asymmetric shocks, namely being constrained to follow the German

policy of wage deflation. In this case, the perspectives are dim because this will imply the killing of incipient growth recovery stimulated by the liquidity provided by governments. In his view, if Greece, Portugal and Spain defaulted, this will mark the end of the European project as conceived by Jacques Delors for whom the single currency was a means for further integration, preceding the creation of federal instruments at the European level. Such a crisis of state finances will mark the transformation of the European Union in a de facto Free Trade Area.

For this reason, Liem pointed out that the economic crisis is bringing European integration to a crossroad: either it marks a return towards a resurgence of economic nationalism with the return to national currencies, or it succeeds in taking a federalist turn with new European instruments. He singled out three particular instruments that may be used for this turn: an increase of the European budget with macroeconomic ambitions; the issuing of Eurobonds; and last, but not least, the authorisation to the European Central Bank to finance the debt of member states. The problem is not legal but political, more particularly that neither Germany nor Britain are in favour of more federalist solutions. The likely solution will be a reaffirmation of the stability pact rules with the consequences of killing the recovery and bringing down public finances given that member states will not be in position to increase taxation or receive more fiscal receipts to reduce their deficit. He concluded by calling the attention of the meaning of this neo-liberal turn for any future Left government in a European country which could experience again what the Greek Socialist government is currently suffering. It is precisely for this reason that the Left needs to attempt from now a modification of the political balance of power in the European Union.

Nicolaos Chountis is the Member of the European Parliament (MEP) representing Syriza (party of the Greek left) and from 2005 to 2009 he was the Secretary of the central political committee of Synaspismos. Departing from this economic analysis and its political consequences for the left, Nicos Chountis followed with a strong criticism of the European Commission, whose action is not being that of building the rescue of Greece on the basis of solidarity. In his view, it is wrong to consider that the financial crisis is just an imported external shock from the

USA to Europe, but the depth of the crisis confirms that the institutionalisation of neo-liberalism in Europe with the Maastricht Treaty and all its democratic deficits was the work of irresponsible politicians who supported the Stability Pact which appears now as a structural error. Indeed, the fiscal crisis is not just a particular case of Greece or of the PIGS but also a trend in all European countries including Germany.



For Chountis it was also irresponsible to rescue a financial sector which had overcome its structural role by going into other sectors and that now that it has been rescued by public moneys it does not have any problem in attacking the public hand which saved them from bankruptcy. Transform's guest passed onto the solutions suggested by Liem agreeing that the UE budget is now too low to serve as economic stabiliser but it is much more important to underline for the public the absurdity that private banks are 'printing' money by borrowing from the ECB at one per cent and then lending to the Greek government at five per cent. Furthermore, the Left should insist that the European Council controls the participation of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which is the central institution which support the dollar and the international economic policies of the USA. Otherwise this implies that the European Union has opened a very dangerous door for the future resolution of similar problems as there is no European Treaty which envisages the participation of this non-European institution. If this has been done it is because politically, it participates from the same neo-liberal logic of the stability pact which is not based on European solidarity but on fearing and shaming Southern European countries which are constrained to knock in the IMF's door. In a few words, for Chountis, the Left must take note of what this call to the IMF means for the role of the European Union in the future economic architecture of international economic relations after the crisis.

In a paper delivered by Haris Golemis of the Nicos Poulantzas Institute his conclusions sum up a perpetual problem of the left when he tries to offer alternatives under the heading "Radical left alternatives: Easy to conceive, difficult to apply". According to Golemis the radical left in Europe can feel completely vindicated for its criticism of the neoliberal construct established by the various European Treaties since Maastricht. "The neoliberal European project is staggering and nobody can guarantee its future. However, ex-post vindication is not an achievement per se, although it can be a useful weapon in the ideological and political struggle with both the right and the centre-left political forces, which are responsible for the state of the Union. The problem is that the left has neither managed to prevent this disastrous neoliberal process of integration nor change it after it started. Effectiveness is even more urgent today, since the situation in Europe is extremely difficult for the working people in all countries.

I am in a position to know that in Greece Synaspismos has a coherent programme for a progressive exit from the crisis, which includes specific proposals for the Euro-zone and the EU in general, and I am sure that the same is more or less true for most European left parties. What we don't know is the way the radical left can gain the ideological and political hegemony in our countries in order to change the balance of political and social forces, without which no social transformation is possible at national and European levels. In the face of the ongoing crisis and the problems in Greece, the countries of the South of Europe, the Euro-zone and the EU in general, the European radical left should:

Seize the opportunity to speak about the irrationality, instability and injustice of financialised capitalism, i.e. the capitalism of our times. It is an outrage that humanity is dependent on the mood and plans of a handful of hedge funds and big banks. Markets should not be allowed to rule our lives.

Denounce the neoliberal architecture of the European project as reflected in the Lisbon Treaty and at the same time propagate the need for the 'refoundation of Europe' along new lines that must be based on the popular will. If this does not happen, the 'actually-existing EU' will, sooner or later, meet a fate similar to that of 'actually-existing socialism'.

Try to build broad political and social alliances on the national, Southern European and EU levels.

Explain the impasse of the policies dictated by the Stability Pact and effected through the national Stability Programmes and remind the people of the infamous history of the IMF which, after having disciplined some new EU entrants (Latvia, Hungary, Rumania) is now being invited to save a member of the Eurogroup.

Propose credible but not necessarily detailed programmes for the exit from the crisis, including radical measures (i.e. debt adjustment, socialisation of part or all of the banking system, etc.), which should be carefully designed in terms of their effectiveness and consequences.

Avoid falling into the trap of defending national interests, by supporting 'social contracts'. Despite what mainstream parties claim in order to receive cross-class support, there are no win-win solutions, especially during a major crisis.

Don't hesitate to support possible government measures that can increase the tax base without hurting the wage earners who usually bear the heaviest tax burden in the countries of the European South. Populism does not pay in terms of a long-term radical left strategy.

Reject hostile or friendly proposals for the exit of a country from the euro-zone or the EU. Recently, some left intellectuals and extreme left groups in Greece, but also a number of distinguished members of Synaspismos and Syriza, are flirting with the idea of a so-called 'progressive' exit from the Euro-zone. My view is that, with the present balance of forces, an exit of Greece or another country of the European South from the Euro-zone cannot be but ineffective and is 'conservative', even dangerous. It would mean a return to a depreciated national currency which will increase public and private debt denominated in euro, reduce real wages and pensions and lead to a huge flight of capital that will increase fiscal and foreign exchange difficulties, making inevitable the recourse to the IMF. Furthermore, it will enhance the divisions between the working class of the country in question and the working classes of the other EU countries to the benefit of the populist and extreme right.

The situation in Greece, the South of Europe and EU is really worrying and unstable. One cannot say if the crisis will destroy the dilapidated neoliberal project of Europe's dominant classes and mainstream political forces or will be a catalyst for a so called neoliberal 'political governance' of a Union with or without some or all of the PIGS. In these historic circumstances, the European radical left should try to regain its transformative outlook which is constitutive of its identity. Our comparative advantage in this arduous task is internationalist solidarity, cooperation and common action. Let's try to concretise this aim ■

Henry McCubbin is a former MEP

reviews

Broonland

Christopher Harvie (Verso 2010), ISBN-13: 978-1844674398, 224 pp., £8.99

Fiddled statistics on employment and public debt, catastrophic distance-learning projects, ditto for computerisation schemes, raids on pensions funds, selling off gold cheap, mud-wrestling with Tony Blair, yet bankrolling his delusions. Taxes that are baffling but real, tax credits that are baffling but illusory. Programmes cutting public sector jobs; programmes promising more public sector jobs. Transport, higher education, public culture: all kept anorexic. This is before we get to the motor itself, the property-and-retail - VAT fraud carousel which sucks in imports, piles up trade deficits, then attempts to correct these by 'inward investment', a euphemism for foreign takeovers, and less seductively, international hot money. Welcome to Broonland.

From these musings in the Guardian's Comment is Free blog Chris Harvie has expanded Broonland from blog to book. It is more a sort of biography less the obsequious interviews of the official sort and the confectionary of quotes from the unofficial sort. Written before the great leader's exit from Number 10 it almost charts Gordon Brown's trajectory back to earth but I would defy any satirist to have the imagination to dream up the head in hands contrition over "that bigoted woman." I have read two types of book from Chris Harvie, the heavy analytical academic and the humorous commentary; Broonland is at times an uneasy compromise between the two. But with his subject moving from a self-confident Calvinist and ambitious young politician to senior croupier at Blair's Downing street casino and the lack of quotable and attributable comments on Brown the character has to be squeezed out of dry facts and statistics sometimes created by Gordon Brown and at other times created by the activities of his finally-to-be-worshiped free markets which eventually surrounded and ambushed him.

For those who may think that Harvie is being harsh on Brown; I came across a copy of his speech, typed in caps as is his wont, to the Scottish Labour Conference 12 March 1995 in Inverness. As the applause greeted him a banner was unfurled from the balcony calling for the retention of Clause 4 prompting Jack McConnell to creep up and down the aisles posing the question "Who did that?" to likely culprits. Meanwhile, Brown, oblivious to this diversion delivered this speech specially tailored for his Scottish audience;

"AND WHAT OF ANOTHER GREAT PUBLIC SERVICE AT RISK OF PRIVATISATION? WHEN THEY'RE PLANNING TO SELL OFF OUR STATIONS, OUR RAIL TRACK, OUR TRAINS, OUR BRIDGES, EVEN THE FORTH RAILWAY BRIDGE. WHEN 600 MILLION POUNDS HAS BEEN SPENT IN CITY FEES TO DONORS TO THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY. WITH JOHN MCGREGOR THE FORMER TRANSPORT MINISTER WHO PRIVATISED RAIL, NOW STANDING AS A DIRECTOR OF A COMPANY - ADVISING ON THE SELL OFF OF BRITISH RAIL.

LET US BE CLEAR ABOUT THE MOTIVATION OF ALL THOSE INVOLVED - IN THIS THE SECOND GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY. THE ONLY NETWORK THEYRE INTERESTED IN PROTECTING

IS IN THE OLD BOYS NETWORK. THE ONLY TRACK THEY WANT TO BE TRAVELLING ON IS THE INSIDE TRACK. THE ONLY CONNECTIONS THEY'RE INTERESTED IN MAKING ARE CITY CONNECTIONS. AND THE ONLY TRAIN THAT REALLY CONCERNS THEM IS ...THE GRAVY TRAIN

NOT SERVICE THEY'RE INTERESTED IN...BUT SELF SERVICE. THAT'S THE TORY PARTY. NO LONGER A PARTY OF THE WHOLE NATION - NOW EXPOSED SIMPLY AS A RUN-DOWN BRANCH OF NETWORK SOUTH EAST.

LET US BE CLEAR. IT IS NOT OUR TRAINS THAT SHOULD BE DRIVEN OFF THE TRACKS - IT IS RAIL PRIVATISATION ITSELF AND WE'RE GONG TO KEEP THE RAILWAYS IN PUBLIC HANDS JUST AS WE STOPPED THE VAT RISE. IT'S TIME TO CALL A HALT TO THE PRIVATISATION HAND OUTS

IT'S TIME TO BLOW THE WHISTLE ON THE BOARDROOM EXCESSES OF THE GREAT AND THE GREEDY. IT'S TIME TO CALL AN END TO THE SHARE OPTION MILLIONS, THE INSIDER DEALERS, THE DUBIOUS TAX EXILES. THESE PEOPLE NEVER NEEDED TO WAIT FOR THE SATURDAY NATIONAL LOTTERY DRAW. EVERY DAY OF THE WEEK THEY'VE BEEN AWARDING THEMSELVES ALL THE BIGGEST PRIZES ON OFFER. IT'S NOT A NATIONAL LOTTERY.

IT'S A NATIONAL DISGRACE. AND WE'LL STOP IT.

BECAUSE IT IS WRONG THAT ONE HUNDRED AND TEN MILLION POUNDS OF PRIVATISATION SHARE OPTIONS ARE GIVEN TAX PRIVILEGE WHILE MIDDLE AND LOW INCOME FAMILIES ARE TAXED MORE TO RECEIVE LESS. WE WILL END THE TAX PRIVILEGE AND USE THE MONEY TO HELP THE MANY, NOT THE FEW. BECAUSE IT IS WRONG THAT TELEPHONE NUMBER SALARIES ARE PAID TO EXECUTIVES. WHEN BT ADDED ONES TO THEIR TELEPHONE NUMBERS THEY DIDN'T TELL US THEY'D ALSO ADDED NOUGHTS TO THEIR SALARIES.

WE WILL GIVE THE PRIVATISATION REGULATORS POWER TO CUT PRICES FOR MILLIONS OF CONSUMERS WHERE THERE IS ABUSE AND SO REDISTRIBUTE RESOURCES FROM THESE POWERFUL INTERESTS TO ORDINARY PEOPLE IN THIS COUNTRY. BECAUSE IT IS WRONG THAT UNBRIDLED SPECULATION IS THREATENING THE LIVELIHOODS OF THOUSANDS OF MEN AND WOMEN...

WRONG THAT A BANK CAN VIRTUALLY BECOME A BETTING SHOP. WRONG THAT SOME BANKERS ARE MORE OBSESSED ABOUT THEIR BONUSES THAN THE JOBS AND SAVINGS OF THOSE AFFECTED BY THEIR BANKRUPTCY

Chris Harvie's Broonland relates the actual onward route march of Gordon Brown from Inverness, through the bonfire of the pledges in 1996 and his irresistible rise to the top of the Labour Party. A Labour Party which was reduced to fighting the recent election that lead to Brown's dñouement with the old policy free slogan "If you vote SNP you'll let the Tories in - Only Labour can beat the Tories!"

Chris Harvie will not miss the irony of the English voters sending him homewards to think again this time with further empirical evidence to ponder that if Scotland votes Labour to keep the

Tories out and England votes Tory you get a Tory government. Will the old slogan work the next time and put the frighteners on the Scottish electorate as before or will the electorate just get fed up in that Labour just does not deliver. Adding to the electoral evidence on Labour's inability to deliver is "Broonland" which lays bare the collapse of the faux ideology that the left can manage capitalism to produce fair outcomes. I'm afraid that vulgar wealth at one end of the axis and grinding poverty at the other is both the prerequisite of a capitalist society and the outcome of its theory being put into practise.

Henry McCubbin

Alone in Berlin

Hans Fallada (Penguin Classics 2010), ISBN-13: 978-0141189383, 608 pages, £9.99

German Literature is not well-known in Scotland, or anywhere in the English-speaking world, and it may seem strange that a novel first published in Berlin in 1946 should now appear in English and, even stranger, make record sales in both the US and Britain. Hans Fallada was the pen name of Rudolf Ditzen, son of a German High Court judge, who came from a privileged upper-middle class background. From an early age he was a rebel, a tearaway, and had literary aspirations. Unlike the giants of 20th-century literature Mann and Remarque, he thought that he could come to an agreement with the new forces that swept to power in Berlin in 1933. Mann, Remarque and most of the contemporary giants of German literature escaped into emigration in Switzerland or the USA. Fallada decided to stay and try to come to terms with those in power in Berlin. He continued to write in the period of the Third Reich from 1933 to 1945. Some of his work was published. He wrote one of his greatest novels "Wolf Amongst Wolves" in this period and that novel led to allegations of collaborating with the Ministry of Propaganda and the other literary and cultural bosses of the Reich. Dr Goebbels himself was an admirer of Fallada who judged his literary efforts with praise ("Schreiben kann der Kerl!" - The man can WRITE!)

During the hard days of World War and in the chaos after the establishment of the new Republic in 1918, Fallada added to his problems by beginning to use morphine. This had been widely used as a painkiller in the War and use spread amongst the civilian population after 1918. He listened to a friend who said that by using morphine (i.e. Heroin) he could learn to live without alcohol. In fact he developed a dual addiction which was to plague him for the rest of his life. Readers who wish to pursue this theme could look at his writings on being a drug addict in the Berlin of the 1920s. This is truly astonishing stuff that could describe the life of a heroin-user in more modern times.

In the novel "Alone in Berlin" we meet the characters who live in an apartment block in a working-class area of the "Reichshauptstadt" Berlin. The story describes all the families living in one entry in a street in Wedding, a working class district ('close' in Scots parlance), and focuses on a carpenter and his

wife. These are the Quangels, modelled on the real life couple whose story was documented in the police files handed over to Fallada in 1946 by a functionary in the KPD, Johannes R Becher. Angered by the loss of their only son on the Eastern front, the Quangels begin to write subversive cards, and drop them where people will find them. "HITLER YOU ARE A MURDERER AND WILL PAY FOR YOUR CRIMES" and similar highly subversive texts were penned on these little 3" by 4" cards. When Eisler, another carpenter, planted his bomb in the Burgerbraukeller or when the plotters of the 20 July attempted to blow up the Supreme Leader, there was at least a chance that they would achieve their aims - the physical elimination of Hitler. What did the Quangels hope to achieve? What was the point of writing their subversive cards and distributing them quietly and at night? In the novel, as in the real life story, most of the cards were immediately handed over to the authorities. The average German in 1942 knew what it would mean to be found in possession of anti-Nazi propaganda like this.

The attraction of Fallada as a writer is that he had that rare gift. He could actually have his fictional characters speak the way that real people speak. As with successful writers in any culture, he was an observer and a listener. He had been an enthusiastic drinker since adolescence and hung around in bars, cafes and other places where he could overhear what people had to say. Some of this is lost in the rather wooden translation of Michael Hoffman, but as far as I know this is the first published translation of the book into English.

After 1945 the English-speaking world did not want to hear about Germans or about Germany. It was bad enough that Fallada had lived and worked in the Reich during the Nazi period. He had also lived in the East, in what was soon to become the GDR. Many western commentators in Germany and in the US were hostile to Fallada and painted him as both an active collaborator with the Reich and later as a stooge of the 'The Cultural League for the Democratic Renewal of Germany' (i.e. the leadership of the Stalinist KPD under the 'Albrecht Group'). His book in fact would not have been published a few years later in the GDR because it does not reflect the 'organized struggle' of the progressive forces against the fascist regime. Our heroes are not in the KPD, and work in isolation. Like that other small group the Baum-group, they are not hooked into the party network, following the instructions of the CP leadership from Moscow Centre.

Since the changes of 1989 and the takeover of the GDR, there has been an increased interest in Modern German History, and the Literature which reflects this period. Those with an interest could do worse than pick up a copy of Alone in Berlin and remember please, reflect on those real people on whom this novel is based. Elise and Otto Hampel paid the price for their 'antifa' activity. They were executed in Ploetzensee Prison by guillotine on 8 April 1943. For those interested in Fallada I recommend a visit to the house in Carwitz which is now a Museum and the focus for the Hans Fallada days every July. See www.fallada.de/ (In German). ■

Hamish Kirk

web review

Henry McCubbin

Our theme this edition is a comment on the outcome of the General Election - but what do the parties think of their own positions in this regard? Their own web sites give us an insight to their self opinions. Firstly the Lib Dems in Scotland appear to be very pleased at making the world a safe place for bankers again just when the invisible hands had become visible thus making it easier to clamp handcuffs round their wrists. Their Scottish site can be viewed at www.scotlibdems.org.uk.

Scottish Labour (to be found at www.scottishlabour.org.uk/home) is running a consultation campaign for new ideas and asking for contributions. Being able to track how surfers' suggestions are dealt with and whether they finally find their way in to policy would be a fine idea. They used to have a system whereby these matters were discussed in public at conference and delegates voted on them. It goes back to Mandelson wanting supporters and not members. He has certainly lost plenty of the latter.

Pleased to note that the SNP has asked me, as visitor to their site, if I'm for or against nuclear weapons. Against of course, but a nice touch - perhaps the Lib Dems should ask us if we

are in favour of their capitulation to the Tories? However the SNP appear to be having a problem with its web forums. I wonder why? Keep watching www.snp.org/issues/manifestos/holyrood and you may, or there again you might not, find out.

The Scottish Greens site has had the courage to engage in a lively ideological argument regards the aftermath of the General Election particularly in relation to the emergency budget. It is to be found at www.scottishgreens.org.uk/news. Then there's the socialist parties - www.scottishsocialistparty.org and www.solidarityscotland.org. The issues covered are the same but the layout differs. The SSP has loads of reading and Solidarity has the best pictures. What a team they would make. If only someone would start a Relate organisation for political factions.

And so to the Unions. Will the blowing-away of the fetid odours of New Labour put the carters back in charge of the old warhorse? The STUC web site is more operation now than it has been. With greater blog activities from the activists or the reforming of the Scottish shop stewards in to a political force it might provide a few sparks to light the fire. Now there's a thought. Look to ifitwisnaefortheunion.blogspot.com. ■



Vol 6 No 3
•
OUT AUG 2010

info and orders
tel 01369 820229

www.scottishreviewofbooks.org

Kick Up The Tabloids

ELECTION PROBE AS VOTE FOR LIB DEMS TURNS OUT NOT TO BE WASTED AS PROMISED

I've been touring Scotland's distilleries this June, researching my Edinburgh Fringe show about whisky. It's been a tough job, but it has given me an insight into the cosmopolitan nature of modern Scotland. The people of Edinburgh are of course used to American tourists. However, I watched the England v USA World Cup game in a pub in Clydebank. It was only when the USA equalised that I realised everyone in the pub was American. Over the next week, I watched the next England World Cup games in pub in various parts of the country, and hadn't realised there were so many Algerians in Campbeltown, or Slovenians in Oban. I saw the knock-out game against Germany in Port Askaig in Islay and everyone in the pub was German. Actually, that's not a joke, everyone in that pub apart from me actually was German.

There has been some criticism of Scots not supporting England but with David Cameron so proudly flying the St Georges Cross, why the hell should we? George Osborne's first budget has given us all a taste of the "new politics" being trumpeted by our new "progressive coalition" government. A rise in VAT to 20 per cent. In other words, a tax on the poor. And this is new, how? It's new because it's now supported by Nick Clegg and Vince Cable, who were opposed to the idea as recently as two months ago. I think I'm starting to get the hang of this "new politics". However, we cannot argue that we aren't living in a significant period in history. 2010 will go down in history as being the first time ever that the "Don't Knows" have won a general election. And of course, what the "new politics" means to Scotland is we are now landed with a government that none of us voted for. Not so much "new" as "eighties retro". Complete with "on your bike" rhetoric from the powers-that-be. There are many of us with long memories who fondly think back to the good old days when voting Lib Dem was merely "a wasted vote". Not any more, sadly.

The greatest irony is that the Lib Dems wield more power now than at any stage in the last hundred years after an election in which their share of the vote actually fell. Indeed, big question to emerge after the polls closed was what happened to the so-called "Lib Dem bounce"? Their vote appeared to collapse spectacularly from opinion polls which had earlier suggested they could have the largest share of the vote, but come election day they were down to 25 per cent and lost seats. The answer, of course, is that their vote did not collapse. It was never there in the first place. The reason for this is that people lie to opinion pollsters. People who are too ashamed to say to a stranger

that they're voting Conservative, but who in the privacy of the ballot box will do just that. Voting Tory is like domestic abuse. Nobody is ever going to admit to doing it, but statistics prove it does happen quite a lot.

Even for a party noted for its silly ideas, forming a pact with the Tories must go down as one of the Beard and Sandals Brigade's daftest. I suspect that the cracks will appear sooner rather than later. Indeed, it emerged that there was some disquiet about the coalition from various influential grandees in the party. In particular, both Charles Kennedy and Menzies Campbell were reported to have spoken against it. It shows the extent to which Clegg, Cable and company have lost the plot that the only voices of reason are those of an OAP and a guy with a drink problem. Some people will be willing to give the new Tory-Conservative coalition time to prove themselves. They have made some liberal-sounding noises about ID cards, and pretty much all of us will be in favour of the pledge to scrap them. Identity cards would never have been enforceable in Scotland and in large parts of the country would have been totally unnecessary. Anyone who lives north of Perth does not need an ID card. Everyone knows everyone else. After all, how could they be enforced by your average West Highland village bobby.

"Come on, John Angus, show me your identification card"

"Come on, now, Lachie, you've known me for years."

"Aye, but you could be a terrorist."

"You ken fine well I drove the school bus."

"Exactly, what to stop you loading that thing full of explosives and driving onto the Cal-Mac ferry? Think of the mayhem you could in a major centre of population like Stornoway." ■

Vladimir McTavish is performing "Whisky: An Idiot's Guide" at The Stand Comedy Club at this year's Edinburgh Fringe, at the Stand Comedy Club, from 6th to 29th Ausy (except Mon 16th & Mon 23rd) at 6.50 pm

Further information on www.vladimirmctavish.com

The Scottish Left Review is Scotland's leading journal of radical politics. For ten years we have provided an inclusive, non-party forum for all the left in Scotland. It is non-profit publication which relies on subscriptions and donations. To subscribe go to:

www.scottishleftreview.org

Or complete the subscription form and return to Scottish Left Review, 741 Shields Road, Pollokshields, Glasgow G41 4PL

Name

Address

E-mail:

Amount:

Date:

Subscriptions: Individuals: £15 waged/£12 Unwaged. Organisations: £15 local/£30 national. Cheques should be crossed and made payable to: Left Review Scotland Ltd.

Stop the Scottish government using YOUR money to undermine rail safety

The recent Loch Awe derailment underlined once more the essential role of safety-trained guards. But First Scotrail wants to do away with guards on the Airdrie-Bathgate line, and has plans to impose even more driver-only operation. The Scottish government has colluded with the company, and is even considering using public money to bankroll the company's attempt to break RMT's strike action

No public money for First Scotrail's strike-breaking army

Ask YOUR MSP to sign motion S3M-06444

Keep the GUARD - Keep the train SAFE

Campaign postcards available from info@rmt.org.uk

www.rmt.org.uk

