

# scottish left review

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We are calling this issue **Agenda 15**. It is an agenda for the Scottish Parliament elections and the four years afterwards. Everything in here can be done within the powers of the Scottish Parliament and its agencies. Everything can be started now. And it will deliver substantial change over four years to 2015. It is a clear message that there ARE alternatives and that we do NOT have to accept what we are given. We want you to read this and to talk about it. We want to leave no arguments against acting now. We want to find creative solutions to our problems. We do it in the spirit of our founder Jimmy Reid.

## Contents

Agenda 15.....	2
Three wise men? .....	24
Dave Watson	
A steady flow of venality.....	25
Tommy Kane and Kyle Mitchell	
Taking back our trains.....	27
Kevin Lindsay	
Edwin Morgan.....	30
Jimmy Reid.....	33

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(Editor)	Kirsty Rimmer	

Back Cover Cartoon: Frank Boyle - [www.boylecartoon.co.uk](http://www.boylecartoon.co.uk)

Articles for publication: [editorial@scottishleftreview.org](mailto:editorial@scottishleftreview.org)

Letters and comments: [feedback@scottishleftreview.org](mailto:feedback@scottishleftreview.org)

Website: [www.scottishleftreview.org](http://www.scottishleftreview.org) Tel/Fax 0141 424 0042

Scottish Left Review, 741 Shields Road, Pollokshields, Glasgow G41 4PL

### Jimmy Reid

It is of course with great sadness that all involved with the Scottish Left Review learned of the death of Jimmy Reid. The SLR was originally the brainchild of Jimmy who pulled together like-minded people in 1999 with a vision of creating a publication which offered a space for real thinking and analysis by the left. So we consider the Scottish Left Review to be one of Jimmy's lasting legacies and we hope also to be able to keep his brand of fiery, creative, intellectual but accessible political thinking alive. This issue was already planned as a major contribution to future political thinking in Scotland. We hope that it represents a tribute to the man. A fuller tribute to Jimmy can be found from page 33.

We also mourn the passing of **Edwin Morgan** who in the past has been a friend of the magazine. A great poet and a great Scottish thinker, he will be sorely missed. Our regular feature on the political scene in small countries akin to Scotland would this issue have looked at Greece. We have decided to hold that article over until the next issue and instead republish the edited version of Edwin's wonderful presentation to a Scottish Left Review discussion event at the Edinburgh Festival in 2002

## AGENDA 15

We are calling this issue Agenda 15. It is an agenda for the Scottish Parliament elections and the four years afterwards. Everything in here can be done within the powers of the Scottish Parliament and its agencies. Everything can be started now. And it will deliver substantial change over four years to 2015. It is a clear message that there ARE alternatives and that we do NOT have to accept what we are given. We want you to read this and to talk about it. We want to leave no arguments against acting now. We want to find creative solutions to our problems. We do it in the spirit of our founder Jimmy Reid.

There are simply so many reasons we felt we had to produce this issue of the Scottish Left Review. We have watched over the last year as newspapers have been filled with the outpourings of 'think tanks' and interest groups, all of which intone with their usual self-assuredness a prescription for our ills not measurably different from the prescription that caused our ills in the first place. We are deep in the middle of a crisis of neoliberal manufacture but we are forced to listen to neoliberal solutions. We are part of a global economy brought to its knees by policies which placed the importance of profit for the powerful above all else. It (completely predictably) led to a trail of destruction. But still we're encouraged to keep going.

So firstly we have been motivated by the arrogance of an elite which the more it gets things wrong, the more it tells us that

they got it right and in fact it was us humble citizens who got it wrong with our stubborn support for luxuries such as protection at work, a health service or (in Scotland) a publicly-owned water service and a policy providing care for our elderly. In particular, we are heartily sick of the CBI informing us that the privatisation of Scottish Water is the only rational solution to every problem (and will presumably be held up as a model for peace in the Middle East before too long). We're not stupid; we know there are real benefits. But only for your members.

But it is not all that has motivated us. For more than a year now the Scottish Left Review has commissioned a whole series of articles to throw a light on what is happening. We looked at how to intervene at the outset of the crisis to do what could be done to prevent it happening again. We published an entire issue analysing the way that the blame for the crisis was being deflected towards those not responsible. We invited people to think about what opportunities there are in the political system for change. We looked at how other countries of a similar scale to Scotland are approaching the problem. Then, in the last issue, we asked people to consider how those on the left who have simply not delivered during this crisis can redeem themselves in time for the Scottish election. There has been much good writing, much good thinking and some enlightening perspectives. But it hasn't amounted – collectively – to a proper alternative. There is a sense that other countries have responded with a decisiveness we haven't. There is a sense of complacency from some parts of the political spectrum which ought to be taking concerted action but in fact is content not

to. Overall, there is a sense that the left does not know how to grasp this situation and reshape politics to fit the new realities.

And so we here, collectively as the Scottish Left Review Editorial Board (and with the invaluable help of a number of others) put forward a discussion paper which proposes the basis of an alternative. This is not a 'manifesto' nor an instruction list. It is an attempt to propose a different approach with the aim of achieving two things; stimulating others to contribute and showing that there are alternatives.

In producing it we started from a particular place. Firstly, we recognise that the nature and the shape of the problem stretches very far beyond Scotland. This is a global problem caused by global institutions. Scotland is a small country and we cannot change the world alone. But this has not been taken as a reason to do nothing. Nevertheless, in slightly different circumstances we would have looked at some of this quite differently. Specifically, if Scotland was a fully independent country we would have had much to say about Scotland's relationship to the international institutions which have shaped and driven this mess. But Scotland is not permitted a direct relationship to these institutions so we have not addressed this directly.

Secondly, we recognise that the whole 'debate' across the west is stubbornly sticking to the assumption that we are living through a temporary 'interruption to service'. The rhetoric suggests that we just need to weather this passing storm and things can return to the heady days of the 1990s and 2000s. That this period saw housing crashes, dot com crashes, oil price panics and an unstoppable spread of insecurity and inequality is ignored. That it was built on principles that a schoolchild would have had reason to question (look away now folks – trust us that nothing can go wrong with our financial speculation, nothing can go wrong with your house price, we can just keep building crap for profit and you don't ever have to worry about your credit card bills because growth will sort everything) is passed over. That perpetual growth on a planet of constant size is obviously a contradiction is ducked. In one of the Carry On movies the declining British regime in India is represented by an effete dinner party being held by upper class British colonialists in a house under heavy artillery attack. As the tea cups splinter at the same time as the Earl Gray is being poured into them, one of the dinner guests comments that they're all mad. We are sitting in a house that is falling down discussing redecorating just as soon as the next piece of collapsing masonry passes our heads. We are not about to regain a past that didn't work even when it was working. We are the mad ones if we believe it. The SLR recognises this and would be first to point out that we can't return to the dysfunctional political economy we had, even if for some odd reason we should want to. We need an international rethinking of what we want from our collective resources and our shared relationships. But it will not happen in the next few months and so we are left to deal with what we have. We put this forward in the knowledge that it is not a route (on its own) to the fundamental change that we need globally. But we hope that it will at least point us in the right direction, and we hope it will not be seen as a temporary solution but the start of a transition.

Thirdly, we are acutely aware that there are simply things Scotland is incapable of doing because it does not have access to the powers or the decision-making. The UK's power to set fiscal policies barely sees over its own nose. It looks out from Whitehall and sees all the way to, oh, Canary Wharf. The UK does

not shape its big policies to benefit the tagged-on bits of the UK. Those include all of Scotland, all of Wales, all of Northern Ireland and most of England. The question of independence has traditionally been a divisive one for the left. It is our perception that this is declining – those genuinely on the left have, through a sequence of wars and reprehensible policy decisions, largely come to realise that the UK is not going to become a force for good any time in the foreseeable future. Certainly, Calman is not any kind of answer and repatriation of all fiscal powers is seen by many as a minimum (though this won't stop us being dragged into all those despicable wars). Even if there is to be an independence referendum immediately after a Scottish Election (and even that seems a stretch at the moment) we will have to live with what we have for a while yet. We have very little corporate ownership in Scotland which does not help and which is also something about which we can do little. And then we are stuck with the civil service we have. This is an issue which is simply not discussed enough. There are always exceptions, but the civil service we have is simply not very good. In at least three clear occasions in producing this people have pointed out that we actually have good strategies on paper but that the civil service thinks that getting a good strategy on paper is the successful outcome. There is no imagination, no willingness to stray from the safety of numbers (and the numbers are wrong) and absolutely no incentive to do anything apart from show docility to Whitehall which after all is the fairy godmother from whom comes all promotion. Quango chairs, politicians, civic leaders and many more deserve criticism, but the volume of attack that ends up directed at them for actions which are the responsibility of civil servants is unjust. Sir Muir Russell ran the civil service badly and made a monumental mess of building a parliament. There is little evidence he did anything useful or that he did it well. But he still got his pay-off and sailed off into other high-paid public employment. Politicians lose their jobs, civil servants lose politicians their jobs. But there is no debate about this and in any case Scotland can't do anything about it. So here we mainly try to propose ways to avoid the dead hand of Whitehall-lite which is inflicted on us.

But while these are limitations, we intentionally begin from the view that these must not be reasons to do nothing. There are things we can do now, even if they are insufficient to address problems completely. So everything to follow is within powers available in Scotland and where they are insufficient we propose the best work-arounds we can. They stack up, they are feasible, and they will work. They consider the broad range of issues and they are not driven by vested interest.

Which leads to two final scene-setting points. The first is about a word which crops up a number of times – corruption. There are three relevant definitions of corruption:

- dishonestly using your position or power to your own advantage, especially for money
- morally bad
- spoilt information which cannot be used because it has become changed in wrong ways

The neoliberal project has been all about corruption – corrupt information which leads to incorrect understanding ('it's not about oil – there are weapons of mass destruction'). Corrupt practices which abuse power to the profit of those with the power (privatisation). And corruption in the principles of good government (don't offend those with power, don't worry about

those with none and don't consider this to be a matter of ethics). The Scottish version has left a deep infection of three kinds of corruption. Venal corruption in which people get themselves into positions where they can use power for personal gain (the PFI-consultant nexus, the movement of people from industry to the civil service). Subversive corruption in which the intention of something is undermined and ultimately lost either because it is inconvenient or to revert to the status quo is safer (the emasculation of the Curriculum for Excellence, the almost wilful efforts not to take the Climate Change legislation seriously). And structural corruption where processes have been designed with the explicit intention of the system as a whole resulting in benefit for a few (procurement policies, planning decisions). All systems of power and all bureaucracies bring corruption, but neoliberalism is based at heart around the very concept of 'dishonestly using a position of power to your own advantage'. It isn't good enough and we need to clean up the whole system if any alternative agenda is to have a chance of succeeding.

And our final point: what do we do about our pseudo-medieval system of patronage? It is yet another way in which power and control are exerted by those with wealth. The key word is 'credible'. Again, let's have a quick look at the word:

- capable of being believed; believable
- worthy of belief or confidence; trustworthy

This word is bandied around government more than almost any other. Everything is measured against a slide-rule of 'credibility'. Eminent academics with international reputations are routinely branded 'not credible'. In Scotland a striking example was Allyson Pollock's work on PFI. There is no question at all that this body of work met the first definition – it was well researched and documented and was most certainly capable of being believed. But she was regularly vilified as 'not being seen as credible'. What they really meant was credible according to the second definition – trustworthy. That she was not, if 'trustworthy' means 'we know she will say what we want her to say'. In the upside-down world of government, credibility has come to mean either obedience or convenience. Anyone reading this who has worked close to government will recognise this immediately. The CBI produces policies scribbled on the back of a Wall Street Journal crossword and is 'credible'; the STUC has a team of researchers put together detailed, verifiable data and it is ignored. The first is convenient, the latter not. Or pick any two academics (you can do this for yourself), one who will obediently say what officials want them to say and one who won't. Who is credible?

This point is of the utmost concern for us. We have taken care to make sure that everything in this report is sensible, achievable and based on sound thinking. Those who have gone before us with neoliberal solutions have certainly done no more to generate a 'reason to believe' what they say and in an awful lot of cases haven't really bothered to try on the basis that their patrons in the media and in government will grant them 'credibility' with a wave of their magic wands. So inefficient PFI fiascos are 'credible', selling off Scottish Water on the basis that it is bad for the public but presumably good for whoever buys it is 'credible', collateralised debt obligations are 'credible', unlimited tuition fees for university students with no idea how they'll pay for them are 'credible', Calman is 'credible', the Labour Party's pretendy alcohol report is 'credible' (well, OK, no-one actually thinks it is at all, but nothing wrong with a bit of slapstick). Meanwhile if you dare to make a statement without

an accompanying PR budget of substantial size or friends who do, you're not.

**This we accept with enthusiasm. If 'credibility' is something which typifies these crackpot ideas then it is not an adjective we will lose any sleep over begging for. We put forward the following on the basis that it makes sense, can work and is much, much better than the alternatives. We do not seek the patronage of those we wish to reform. We are therefore happy to be considered the incredibles.**

**And so, to those other incredibles out there (and that, after all, is not only those reading this but most of the population), let us know what you think. You don't have to agree with all of this. You don't have to believe all of it. You just need to be sick and tired of being lectured by those who have through a corrupt system benefitted sumptuously at your expense. Credibles – you had your chance and you made an almighty mess of it. Incredibles, the future is yours – if there is to be a future worth having.**

## Principles

Who exactly isn't progressive these days? It's not just the politicians who have decided that it sounds good (or perhaps more to the point that it sounds bad not to be progressive) – it is now a 'safe' mantra used by just about everyone who wants to influence power in much the same way that the buzzterm 'social inclusion' was jumped on in 1997 when Blair took power. Everyone who uses it take progressive to mean 'fair' and 'egalitarian' but they deliberately pick a word that virtually no-one can properly define. Progressive is relevant both in its meaning as an opposite of 'reactionary' and also by association with its technical use as a phrase to describe taxation which is spread fairly according to ability to pay. But the former use is about as well defined as the vacuous use of 'modernisation' and the latter is just not an accurate description of what is happening. It is yet another pointless neoliberal ruse to disguise neoliberalism. But because we've had 20 years of depoliticising politics the phrase passes as meaningful. It co-opts the idea of social equity and rebrands it as something meaningless, harmless. And this happens with ease because the depoliticisation of politics has been worryingly effective. It has allowed many people to advocate right-of-centre policies while wrapping themselves up in left-of-centre jargon. Indeed, it is how Blair defeated the Labour movement.

Why is it so easy simply to subvert and subjugate such an enormous political movement as the labour movement (lower-case)? Because in a sort of postmodern fantasy world surface is all that matters and nothing is rooted to a core value. It is the myth of the third way – take two opposing ideologies, kill one, steal its language, apply that language to the other and carry on regardless. And so now there are people who advocate scrapping child benefit because it is a goldmine for benefit cheats who just keep having children (if you don't read the Mail or the Express you should have a look sometime, just for humour value) and

there are others who want it scrapped because it is a 'middle class perk' and the money could be targeted to the 'poor' in a more 'progressive way'. Two ideologies, two goals, same result – the poor get stigmatised and marginalised and the rest of us have yet another strand of policy that ties society together dismantled in a head-long rush to the US-ification of Britain. This has become so embedded that at times you can almost sense that those posing as the left and calling universalism a middle class luxury almost believe it. But not about the NHS though. Too risky.

Charlatans posing as the left have sullied, stained, corrupted and buried the values which underpinned a global movement. And often they have done it simultaneously to talking about 'values'. So let's call them principles so they are a bit more specific and a bit less malleable in the hands of politicians working on behalf of global financial interests. The following is both a suggested starting point for the sorts of principles which should be adhered to if policy is to claim to be 'fair', 'progressive', 'left-of-centre' or anything else close. It should have equal use as both a guide to ensuring that policies are worth pursuing, but also to reveal the nature of those who subvert the left movement for their own uses.

- **New understanding.** The need to drive an alternative vision of Scotland and the world has become imperative because of the overwhelming power of the neoliberal consensus which has been created over the last 30 years. This consensus is and has been shown to be wrong, ill informed and intentionally manipulative. It must be dismantled. Much of what must be done requires direct confrontation of neoliberal ideology. Fighting and accepting the need to fight that ideology and questioning it carefully when it arises will be continually necessary. The catchphrases of the 1990s must be rewritten as a dying religion and neither a science nor a truth. The markets do not know best.
- **Universalism.** The assault on the concept of universalism must be halted. It is neither a 'waste of money' nor a 'subsidy to the middle classes' – it is a fundamental means of ensuring 'shared interest', provides cohesion and prevents fragmentation. If the wealthy are being 'subsidised' then this is easily corrected by generating more resource from them through tax. The wealthy may choose to 'opt out' of free school meals, free care for the elderly or universal education, but that does not mean they can opt out of the society they live in which should be providing these to everyone.
- **Convergence.** Society and community are not being broken down by 'lack of freedom' but by too much freedom for some to win at the expense of others. Income inequality is indivisibly linked with everything from social breakdown, ill health and crime to environmental damage, waste and global conflict. In the last 30 years income inequality in Scotland has spiralled out of control. Bringing convergence in the distribution of both wealth and life experience is the only remedy for this.
- **Freedom of expression, freedom of knowledge.** The 'freedom of expression' is a very important and laudable principle and one which must be protected. However, it should neither be allowed to be distorted beyond its meaning nor should it be placed preeminently above the right to freedom of knowledge. Freedom of expression is not synonymous with the right to own the means of mass communication and the right to access information rather than be sold only propaganda and inaccuracy is also essential to a fair society. And the right to expression does not mean only the right to purchase the means of expression – the voices of the non-super-rich deserve to be heard too. People must be able to understand their society and make decisions about it – the right to profitable media ownership is not more important than this.
- **Real security.** The basic ability to rely on real life security should guide all policy. A basic level of 'existence' should be something which people can rely on and it should be explicit what that means. So, for example the minimum wage, the NHS, comprehensive schooling and the police force should ensure that people get a living wage, health care, a full education and proper protection from crime. But the 'package' of security available in Scotland falls short of what we would deem acceptable as a minimum quality of life (in the eyes of all except for those who wish 'punishment' to be an inherent part of 'security'). We need to state what we mean by real security and we should seek to ensure it is being met.
- **Accountable evidence.** Parliament must be put in a position to be held fully to account for its actions. This cannot happen unless it has a duty to provide people with the means to assess the real impact of what it does. Like the accountable officer in a company, Parliament should provide sufficient clear information to enable people to identify if it is achieving what it said it is.
- **'Recentring' and pluralism.** The public sphere has been designed to benefit the elite first and foremost and has given far too much privileged access to that elite. This has moved the 'centre of power' far to far away from the majority and towards the minority. Policy and policy development should reflect the views and interests of spectrum of opinion and not just the elite (business leaders should no longer form the vast majority of those tasked to advise on policy etc). Policy should 'recentre' power, making it equally accessible by those at the 'below average' end of the spectrum and not only to those at the top end of the spectrum.
- **Improvement.** It is a small but important point – we should aim to ensure that whatever is built or created is better than what went before. That does not mean 'better for some' (as in 'your new hospital will be briefly better than your old one until it starts falling apart but saved money which helped us reduce top-rate income tax'), but adding to an overall improvement of the world around us. This should be the antidote to 'short termism' and should be closely linked to the idea of handing on to the next generation a Scotland better than the one we inherited.
- **Real diversity.** Difference should be encouraged, but this should be for a reason. The concept of 'choice' has been perverted to mean 'suitable for commercial bullying'. Being able to choose between three items with the same terrible environmental performance but in slightly different colours is not a fundamental choice. Our threat is not from the 'nanny state' but from the 'conman conglomerates' whose right to influence us through marketing is virtually unlimited. Rather than letting others sell 'variation' we should be seeking to encourage difference, at least as something which is available.
- **Aesthetics matter.** There has been no real element of understanding the importance of aesthetics in



**“My perception of the progression to socialism in Britain is of a process towards a fuller democracy where government of the people, by the people, for the people applies in the economic as in the political sphere.”**

**Jimmy Reid 1984**

**In memory of Jimmy Reid.  
Let us carry on his work**

**HARRY DONALDSON**

**REGIONAL SECRETARY**

**JIM LENNOX**

**REGIONAL PRESIDENT**

Fountain House, 1/3 Woodside Crescent, Charing Cross, Glasgow G3 7UJ

E:mail contact: [Scotland@gmb.org.uk](mailto:Scotland@gmb.org.uk)

polycymaking. Creating a positive impact on our senses and commercial interests are often at odds, with our senses losing. This benefits the commercial interests over the lives of real people who must live among what is created.

- **Universal human rights.** There have been enormous steps forward in the recognition of human rights, but they are under attack. The internationally-accepted standards of human rights must be protected. Then there should also be more emphasis on universality – the ridiculous concept that some people have acted in some way which reduces or removes their rights or that some groups must cede their rights in favour of the rights of another group is the opposite of what the the concept is supposed to mean.
- **Morality.** The left has been scared of the concept of morality, identifying it with social conservatism or regressive religious beliefs. This is a mistake; morality matters and it is enshrined in the principles outlined above. And one more – the concept of ‘First Do No Harm’ should be at the heart of policy just as much as at the heart of medicine.

There are other principles which it could be argued should be included here, but these form a strong starting point. And, importantly, they offer an important forensic tool to pick apart what we are told is ‘progressive’ to see if it is the right kind of progress. Does it improve real security? Does it protect universalism? Is it created on the basis of the best evidence or the evidence that had the most money behind it? We need to define principles and we need to be guided by them. The current ideological free-for-all is simply an invitation for power to subvert principle.

# Money, work, wealth, equality

Alasdair Gray wrote:

“Economics: Old Greek word for the art of keeping a home weatherproof and supplied with what the householders need. For at least three centuries this word was used by British rulers and their advisers to mean political housekeeping – the art of keeping their bankers, brokers and rich supporters well supplied with money, often by impoverishing other householders. They used the Greek instead of the English word because it mystified folk who had not been taught at wealthy schools. The rhetoric of plutocratic bosses needed economics as the sermons of religious ones needed The Will of God.”

In deciding the themes under which to arrange this issue, it would have been obvious to start with ‘the economy’ since that is by universal agreement the primary political objective of our era, the one from which all the others follow. But economics has become the most corrupted of disciplines; pumped up with its own importance and with each massive mistake or miscalculation quick to reposition itself to show that in fact these were somehow not mistakes at all. The Alasdair Gray quote above captures perfectly the problem with starting with

the idea of economics. So rather than talk about ‘the economy’ we will break down the idea into four component parts:

Money, or the impact and effect of monetising and marketising all aspects of life and making every exchange a financial transaction. Work, or the process of creating and doing things for pay and the experience of creating and doing them. Wealth, or the way that the outcomes of work and money are distributed. Equality, or the impact on social relations and society more generally of money (and power), work and wealth. As they interrelate continually, they will not be considered individually. Rather, the immediate task facing politicians in Scotland will be looked at in terms of these four themes.

## Aims

In the immediate future obvious priority must be to ensure adequate wealth is available to people and that the ways this wealth is generated are sustainable in the medium term. As the Scottish Parliament has only very limited tax and benefit powers, the most important way in which wealth is secured is through providing jobs. But these must be sustainable jobs, they must offer a chance of short-term security (ability to live on the income from the job), of long-term security (the jobs have a chance of still being there in the future) and of long-term sustainability (they do not destroy the ability of future generations to have the same quality of life). We start from the assumption that generic ‘economic growth’ is often an extremely ineffective ways of creating jobs in the immediate term (so-called ‘jobless growth’, in fact better understood as ‘profiteering’), and that the concept of ‘wealth creation’ being a function of private enterprise is blatantly incorrect. This last point is particularly important. Even in neoclassical economic theories, wealth creation is a function of resources and work and the source of the resources and the work is secondary or irrelevant. In any economy upwards of 70 per cent of that economy is domestic trade – people buying and selling things locally. The high streets of Scotland do not register or record whether the people spending money in the shops were paid by a private company or the public sector, they only record that sales are made or not made. Losing tens of thousands of public sector jobs will create enormous knock-on effects to the domestic economy as spending in the high street falls and more and more jobs are lost as a result. Profits in the private sector (especially the big players) have nothing like the same multiplier effect on small businesses and local economies since much of this profit does not end up in the pockets of Scots. In the immediate term the most important action government can take to secure economic stability is to avoid large-scale unemployment, which means avoiding large-scale public sector job losses.

This does not mean that there is not a crucial role for private sector job creation (and protection), but this must not be seen as at the exclusion of or in priority over public sector jobs. The use of public funding for economic development must be targeted at the creation and protection of good jobs and not at ‘economic growth’ (which may be jobless). It was in large part because public policy was so mesmerised by the growth potential of the financial services sector that we have ended up in the position we find ourselves. Much of this growth was paper growth – the purchase of foreign banks which increased share value but which did little to make people in Scotland any wealthier (other than the shareholder and board-member class). In addition, there has been minimal attention paid to the

quality and nature of the Scottish economy being 'developed'. The current dogma is that government intervention on behalf of private enterprise is unarguable and in the public interest but that the public interest should have no say in the nature or purpose of the intervention (the market knows best). This is wrong. Supporting parts of the private sector is very clearly in the public interest, but firstly not all parts of the private sector deserve public support (some parts tend to act in ways inimical to the public interest) and secondly the public interest surely has a right to take a view on 'virtuous growth' and the long-term sustainable nature of activity. All blanket moves to help business (such as across-the-board tax cuts) should be resisted as there is little evidence they work. Strategies must be careful and targeted at specific goals.

There are European laws about subsidising private activity, but in Britain we find it convenient to interpret them too narrowly. It is perfectly possible to use public policy and public procurement to support and develop domestic industries deemed worth supporting. The problem is that the industries and economic activity we may wish to support does not necessarily equate to the activity with the biggest paper returns in terms of growth. It is no coincidence that the last ten years' obsession with 'big business' has resulted in low rates of business start-ups – hardly surprising when the vast majority of public spending is inaccessible by small businesses and the explicit 'economic development' spending is geared towards large-scale activity only (the current Scottish Enterprise mantra is 'five million in five years' – i.e. it is interested only in start-ups which will grow to be giant in very short order). The fact that ten companies employing ten people are usually more economically valuable than one company employing 100 people has been rejected by Scottish Enterprise (arbitrarily it would appear); Scottish Enterprise and indeed the civil service and politicians are all far too close to big financial interests to make good decisions on growth.

We must dump the 'economic growth' policy now for a 'sustainable, quality job growth' strategy and we should be seeking to diversify the Scottish economy. This also means much more attention to the sorts of enterprise which are simply not taken seriously by 'economic development professionals', such as cooperative, mutuals and social enterprises. Other countries have large-scale cooperative movements (indeed, there are many more in Britain than people realise) and they are good ways of creating quality jobs and solid economic activity, but since they are designed explicitly not to deliver large shareholder returns they are not supported. And domestically not enough focus has fallen on the fact that – in general – the financial services companies which were mutuals performed better during the crisis than those which were private. Planning and other decisions should also be integrated into this strategy. Time and time again we hear that a new supermarket is going to 'create' thousands of jobs. This is never challenged. How are these jobs being created? Are people within shopping distance of the new supermarket really buying 1,000 jobs-worth of extra groceries? Or are we simply displacing better jobs elsewhere? And if we are so wedded to 'free markets' why do we spend so much time propping up business sectors which do not create genuine benefit? Where economic activity has no public interest, there should be no public support. A root-and-branch redesign of economic (or rather job) strategies should be put in place immediately.

This is then a 'wealth' strategy refocussed from shareholder-driven wealth to jobs-driven wealth. But it must then be

balanced with the need to use other means to ensure the equitable spread of wealth in a country with only limited powers of redistribution. One of the most important ways this can be done is to use the resources and policies of social provision to even out access to the proceeds of wealth – policy-led rather than fiscal redistribution. This means that we should use policy in such a way that it spreads the proceeds of wealth as fairly as possible. Contrary to much current commentary, this does not mean greater 'targeting', which is a solution to a different problem (how to keep taxes low). The most effective forms of redistribution of wealth in Scotland are the health service, education and the services delivered by local authorities. It is precisely because these are universal in their nature that they redistribute wealth effectively. Setting thresholds for eligibility simply creates arbitrary barriers to redistribution and in time they are forced lower and lower, distributing less and less. It may sound great to say that resource should be targeted at the poorest but where it happens we see the least benefit – healthcare is equally distributed and is efficient and effective because of it; housing is not and is a mess. We should do more to create effective wealth distribution, and we should be clear that this is also an 'economic' policy, since people on lower incomes are much more likely to spend money in local economies and are therefore more 'virtuous' in the cycle of local economic development.

The process of wage convergence must begin immediately and policies should be put in place to close the gap in income differentials as quickly as possible. Wealth is a more effective means of creating growth the more it is spread (concentrations of wealth lead to activities which are harmful to growth, such as siphoning it away into off-shore bank accounts). Income convergence will promote growth by ensuring a greater national 'spending power'. This can be done by using a national 'convergence curve'. We should be explicit that in coming years we aim to take major steps towards equalising what we pay public sector workers. There is so much literature on the economic and social benefits of lower levels of wage inequality that its merit is surely beyond argument, particularly in a period where there has to be wage restraint because of decreasing budgets. In the next section we will look at the social benefits of convergence, but in terms of wealth we need only look to the Nordic countries which have both had stronger and more stable economies and weathered the recession better on the basis of much lower income disparity. A 'convergence curve' would set a specific five-year trajectory for changes in pay levels at different pay bands. Those on the lowest bands should see modest growth, those on intermediate bands might see pay freezes while those on the highest bands will bear a greater share of the cuts. If this is sustained over five years we can both contain and control the public sector pay bill and at the same time reform it to make it fairer, more efficient and more effective in sharing national wealth.

Since many of the agencies involved in economic development repeatedly resist any shift in the current model of 'development' and since there is little real evidence of their impact, they should be closed down if they cannot be reformed (and reform means proper involvement of trade unions, consumer groups and public interest representatives).

It is possible to implement pay convergence immediately in the public sector but not in the private sector. However, this does not mean that nothing can be done. In fact it is possible to use public spending to influence the activities of private sector companies. For example, companies bidding for public contracts might be

required to demonstrate that they pay a living wage and that there is a maximum 'wage ratio' in the organisation – the best-paid employees should receive not more than a defined multiple of the worst-paid. If we can embed this culture in both the public sector and large parts of the private sector we would have taken a major step towards tackling the inequality in society which does so much harm and has grown so rapidly in recent years.

In the medium term, we need to look more closely at the meaning and purpose of work to ensure that the concept of work does not always inherently put the interests of the employer ahead of the interests of the employee. The assumption that profit is more important than quality of life must be challenged, meaning everything from workplace democracy to altered work/life balances. This would be an extremely popular policy to pursue. Most people now report that they are unhappy with their work/life balance and Britain has some of the worst conditions and longest working hours in Europe (but with lower levels of productivity, contradicting the assumption that changing this would harm the economy). There has been no major debate about the nature and experience of work and the employees' experience of it in a generation – public policy has left this crucial question of the quality of people's lives entirely to unelected businesses. There should be an immediate national inquiry to identify what people want from employment and then ways to encourage better employment practices should be identified. Along with this, the assumption that the only way to spread wealth is through an employer/employee relationship must be tested and ways of providing for security through means other than this relationship must be supported where they are shown to work (the types of cooperative, mutual and social enterprise work discussed above).

In the medium term we must also do more to explore the purpose of wealth. The current relationship between money, work and wealth is tautological: to create wealth there must be consumption, to enable consumption people must secure money, to secure money people must work, to provide opportunities for work we must create wealth. And this tautology contains in it an imperative that each link in the chain must be bigger than the last link – the imperative of growth. But this imperative is inherently time-limited (there are real-world limits on the scope for growth, natural resources being the most obvious), so we need to begin to find alternatives. Scotland can pioneer new approaches to the economy which would end the obsession with 'GDP growth'. Combining all of the above – jobs-led economic strategies, no 'share value growth' assumption in public policy, pay convergence, redefining the experience of work, diversifying the economy and economic models, accepting a role for 'public values' in public support for economic growth and so on – Scotland could develop a new economic model which is sustainable domestically and internationally and delivers an economy more in the public interest.

If 'economic growth' does not directly and demonstrably achieve the above, it should be a zero-priority issue.

## Policies

- The immediate economic priority must be to secure as many jobs as possible, and this means avoiding swinging cuts in public sector employment – and 'private-led' growth theories must be challenged.
- Economic development strategies must be changed to

emphasis quality sustainable job growth and not economic growth in its own right. And this growth should be in the public interest if it is to receive public support. Blanket 'incentivisation' should not be pursued.

- An explicit programme of economic diversification should be developed, putting less emphasis on fast-growth, more emphasis on quality, less reliance on a small number of high-profile sectors, and a wider range of economic ownership models should be encouraged.
- Explore all policy options for the potential to redistribute wealth equitably through practices such as universal provision or the use of public procurement as a policy tool to redistribute.
- Create a national strategy for jobs which will provide a road-map for how to move the experience of work in the right direction over coming years. This strategy must be based on national interest not vested self interest – the public sector should work hard to support any private enterprise which is likely to create positive work and have positive social impact. There should be no commitment to support private enterprise which does not.
- If public agencies are pursuing strategies aimed at different objectives than these, reconstitute them or close them down.
- An immediate policy of 'pay convergence' must be put in place in the public sector. This should use a curve to move people progressively into a narrower spectrum of pay. In the immediate years ahead this should be used firstly to protect jobs and convergence may mean overall wage bills declining, but weighted so loss of salary is borne by those able to bear it.
- The Scottish Parliament cannot put in place employment policies to promote pay convergence in the private sector, but it can use public expenditure to encourage it. Government contracts should be given only to companies which meet pay policies such as 'living wage' and 'income ratios'.
- A commission should be established to generate debate and identify what Scots themselves want from their work, in terms of pay, hours and engagement/involvement in decision-making. This should provide a landmark piece of work to guide future policy in this area.
- The kinds of investment that have gone into promoting private profit generation should now be put into the development of other economic models such as cooperatives, mutuals, community-owned companies and other shared equity approaches.
- More work should be put into 'low growth' strategies – ways of providing security and wealth that do not require unsustainable growth. This does not mean abandoning all current 'economic development' activity, but rather means balancing it with new types of activity which aim to achieve a different kind of development of the economy.

# Real Security

The role of government and the nature of public services have both been redefined in the last 20 years. Before that, there had been the direct, Thatcherite assault on 'big government' and



## **Financial Crisis and Risk Management A Dilemma for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Services?**

The Fire Brigades Union views the approaching spending cuts as nothing short of a full scale ideological onslaught on the fundamental principle of public service. History should teach us that with an economy at less than full capacity a reduction in government spending will lead to increased unemployment and all the social injustice that this brings with it. The FBU believes that government spending should be used to increase employment and the best way of doing so is through the development of quality public services.

We are realistic enough to know that the UK Government will cut spending and that we will have to pick up the pieces. Our concern is that the major part of the fire service budget is made up of staff costs and the easiest way to make cuts is by losing jobs. The goal for all in the Scottish fire & rescue services must now be to reduce the amount of money spent in providing the service without reducing the amount or level of service that the public expects.

For the past five years Fire and Rescue Services have been allocation their emergency resources based on the risks identified in their communities, this was done using Incident Risk Management Planning (IRMP.)

Regardless of the financial crisis these risks have not gone away and for that reason the entire focus of the service must be on providing firefighters, fire engines and fires stations where and when they are needed, to mobilise, control and manage incidents safely and to try and reduce the number and severity of incidents. With that focus and knowledge of the risks that our communities face we must concentrate in providing the service that people rely on.

The FBU is absolutely focused. We are not afraid of change, we will discuss, negotiate and we will work in partnership. But we must look at our structures, governance and how we operate because we cannot accept front-line cuts in the delivery of a vital emergency service.

**The Fire brigades Union, 4th floor, 52 St Enoch Square, Glasgow, G1 4AA**

**TEL: 0141-221-2309 E-mail: [officescotland@fbu.org.uk](mailto:officescotland@fbu.org.uk)**

**Website: [www.fbuscotland.org](http://www.fbuscotland.org)**

the open hostility to public provision. But this was at odds with the attitude of the public towards public services. Britain has for 60 years had a deeply-embedded positive attitude to universal public service and people do not want to see this rolled back and replaced with a 'each on their own' scramble to provide basic security. (In fact, there is an equally embedded love of public service among the business classes as well – it's only what they expect to be provided that differs, which is why we do not hear the CBI asking for big tax cuts funded by leaving private businesses to pay for their own individual transport infrastructure or to defend themselves against crime at their own expense.) People do not want to be left on their own to provide the basic elements of security – healthcare, education, transport and infrastructure, refuse collection and sanitation, law enforcement, assurance that food in the shops is not poisonous and so on. Beyond that, they also favour public services which they like, trust or prefer to private alternatives – the BBC being an excellent example (despite the current Murdoch-and-Mail led campaign to demonise the Corporation). Even services which are not routinely used by the majority have support – it would be politically impossible in Britain to offer no form of welfare system for the unemployed. We may not use it, but either because of a sense of 'fair play' or because we recognise that we never know when our own situations might change, we accept it. For these reasons the Thatcherite approach failed and people did not turn to a US-style 'small government, look after yourself' attitude.

Which is why the New Labour project sought to redefine public services in a more subtle way. Yes, people want the kind of social provision offered by the post-war settlement, but it is not 'ideological'. In fact, they just want the security with the same sort of self-interested attitude of the US system but they recognise that sometimes it is simply cheaper and more cost-effective to provide it 'in bulk'. Thus we were told that what matters to voters are 'health and education', the sort of self-interested individualism that Thatcher failed to provoke but in a 'bulk provision' context. Thus what really matters to people are only the things provided by the state that they can't buy themselves or can only buy at much greater cost. This reduces the purpose of the state (in relation to social services) to little more than that of 'efficient procurement agency'. The old language is gone. It is no longer about 'social security' (the concept of ensuring that people in a society have a right to basic levels of assurance of wellbeing) or 'welfare' (the need to ensure that no-one is left to 'fare badly'). These concepts are communal, about collective action for the collective good. But the Blairite version they become only 'public services', like financial services or businesses services but with a different provider and the state is not an entity with a duty to ensure the welfare of all but a provider of services to individuals (well, actually, usually 'hard working families').

This shift has been effective in dismantling much of the underpinning philosophy of the post-war settlement. It has made privatisation more palatable ('we only sell off things which don't really matter in the way health and education do') and has provided cover for the marketisation of the public realm ('people don't care who provides the service so long as it is free at the point of delivery'). The pretence that 'public service' has no role in ensuring the fabric of society but rather just to ensure that each family unit gets access to a doctor and a teacher has been much more effective in undermining the welfare state than was Thatcher.

But it hasn't worked, and people still want to have a sense that they are secure. There are many reasons for this, and we should

not underestimate the desire of people to be part of a community and a society (we don't have 'God' like the Americans do). But one of the most important is that in fact most people in Britain live on the edges of security. Which is to say that those who know for certain that their circumstances could not change in such a way as to leave them with no security are in a small minority. Even well-paid professionals who are 'home owners' are very likely to be heavily mortgaged – if they are unable to work through illness not many of them would be able to survive unaided. We have committed ourselves so deeply to a debt-driven culture that not many of us are more than a month or two of lost income away from real difficulties and very few indeed have the kind of security that would mean they could lose all earned income and continue to exist in anything like the standard of life they current have for any significant period of time. This is why security is such an important issue for people, and why it is important to put it at the heart of the purpose of government. Unsurprisingly, the right-wingers realised the emotive nature of the word and tried to play on it by believing that 'security' actually has something to do with foreign wars and faceless terrorists, so let us simply use the expression 'Real Security'.

Finally, when we think about 'Real Security' we must think about the fabric of society as a whole and the causes of insecurity. Another trick of the Blair era was the redefinition of poverty as 'exclusion' – somehow not really about unemployment or exploitation in the low wage economy. And there are multiple misunderstandings of the effects of 'poverty', such as the debate about the so-called 'Glasgow Effect' in health where absolute levels of 'cash poverty' do not explain differences in health experience. The poverty comes not only from the 'low wage' part but also from the 'exploitation' part. Falling below subsistence (the minimum required to survive) is not the definition of poverty but the definition of starvation. Poverty is always relative and the literature on this is enormous. What we should properly mean by poverty is a relationship between a person and society which includes 'lack of wealth' but also includes 'lack of power'. The Glasgow Effect in health is simply a measure of the gap between what could be described as an 'income-induced health deficit' (which some have taken to be synonymous with poverty) and an 'inequality-induced health deficit' (which is about lack of wealth but also demoralisation, lack of power, alienation, awareness of being at the 'bottom of the ladder' and so on). In fact, this latter definition is the real definition of poverty. In health we should be pushing to achieve the opposite – what we might call 'health equality'. But this is a function of ensuring that there is Real Security, which in turn must involve making people feel like they have a stake in society and some power and control over their lives. Dissecting this one power relationship between people and society into multiple pieces has been a great way to ignore it. Real Security means making sure people have a functional relationship with their society, their community and the 'common wealth'. The relationship just now is too often dysfunctional and everything from poor health to crime is the result.

The first and most important purpose of government is to ensure Real Security for its citizens.

## Aims

Let's begin with security from crime. This use of 'security' (as with its use in 'national security') seeks to define security in a negative way (what will not happen to you) than in a positive

way. It is of course important to recognise the significance of the crime agenda and the impact it has on many lives, but at the same time it is important to reject its ideological and political use to create division, suspicion and fragmentation, and to reject the hyping and exaggeration of the effects of crime on most people (the statistics on 'fear of crime' versus 'experience of crime' are telling). But since there is already a very persuasive road-map for dealing with this issue in the McLeish report what is required is simply support for proper implementation.

An early aim should be to create a clearer understanding of what is meant by Real Security. The neoliberals tried to create a framework for public services which involved 'charters of rights'. This was meant to offer a contractual relationship between people and power. Instead, a framework for Real Security should be created by providing a statement of what that would mean. The Scottish Parliament should establish a clear statement of the minimum expectations of a decent existence for a citizen of Scotland. This statement should be able to make clear a line denoting the point of quality of life below which no-one will be allowed to fall, and this statement should consider a holistic range of factors. Once that statement is produced it should be possible to assess the extent to which the state is successfully able to maintain all of the population above that threshold. Not every element of this security will be provided by the devolved administration but this does not mean that the Scottish Government cannot make an assessment of the 'worst-case' scenario. And such a statement does not only apply to those at the very bottom of the economic ladder but should also explain security in terms of education, healthcare, policing and access to things like libraries, leisure facilities and so on – security for everyone. Then there should be a regular way to assess how effectively those minimum standards are being reached, not in a contractual manner (the aim is not to encourage a litigious attitude to public services) but in a way which enables people to understand how effectively different layers of government and indeed different government agencies are meeting those commitments. This in turn should make people feel more involved in society and more empowered to ask question about where society has failed them, also contributing to Real Security.

The issue of healthcare has become strangely totemic in British politics. The Tories have become so afraid of being seen to be 'anti NHS' that we have ended up in a position where the aggregate spend on the NHS has become the primary way of showing commitment to the UK welfare system, and thus no-one is able to contemplate any form of cut to the NHS. This is a mistake, since the growth in NHS spending in recent years has lead to a sharp expansion in a number of areas of NHS spending which have been only partially about healthcare. The Blair years saw more and more money going into health but also saw costs rising and rising. This was the perfect 'third way' solution – appear to put money into the public realm but do it in such a way that the maximum amount possible 'leaks out' into the pockets of the private sector. There is a risk that the current obsession with protecting the total budgets of the NHS will disguise ways in which the NHS requires reform. The marketising of the NHS has wasted enormous amounts of money on the usual array of consultants, middle managers and insidious relationships to private businesses. The relationship between the NHS and the pharmaceutical companies is unhealthy and the amount spent on drugs suggests a monopoly (one supplier able to drive up prices) where in fact it is a monopsony (one purchaser which ought to be able to drive down prices). This relationship needs

to be reversed and the inefficient opting-out and profitising of public services should be ended. The enormous cost of PFI and similar contractual deals should also be examined to see if there are ways to reduce the amount of private profit which is being drained from the NHS. The high salaries which have also been awarded to some in the health services must also be addressed.

And as discussed above, we need to think of health a social issue as well as a clinical one. Naturally, a large chunk of the health service deals with the impacts of illness, but in reality there is also a large part of the health service which is really dealing with the impact of poverty and inequality. The link between inequality and ill health is so well documented and the costs to society so great that it needs addressed more directly. As above, we need to pursue policies that promote 'health equality' and this aim needs to be treated as a cross-cutting issue and should be embedded in all public policy in the same way sustainable development is (at least in theory). The effect on health of all social policies and economic conditions should be assessed (if a company offers to create a thousand jobs but does so in conditions which will leave many with no option but to work damaging, unsocial hours which will harm health and home life, that must be considered before decisions are made in support of the job creation (and if necessary conditions put in place). And this approach should be active – rather than waiting and integrating health issues in decisions which need to be made the Scottish Parliament should be quicker to place sanctions on those who promote actions which knowingly cause ill health in pursuit of profit. Currently there is a presumption in favour of the right of those seeking profit to do almost anything to make people behave in ways that are harmful-but-profitable. There should be no such presumption. People (if they choose) have a right to consume alcohol, fatty and salty foods and pursue lifestyles with low levels of exercise and high levels of debt. But that does not mean that powerful commercial interests should simply be allowed to promote the sorts of choices which result in ill health, debt and low self esteem. After all, we recognise that the relationship between a powerful multinational with an enormous marketing budget and an individual is not equal when it comes to regulating alcohol and nicotine. There is no reason this should not be extended to other harmful-but-profitable products and marketing strategies by using planning decisions, access to publicly-provided services, legislation or any other means. And there should be more real empowerment of the non-business-leader community in policy-making to give people that feeling of having a stake in society (ways to do this are discussed in the next section).

The range of services provided by local authorities is enormous, but many of them are simply invisible to the elites in society (politicians, civil servants, newspaper editors, think tanks, none of whom have to visit their council offices very often to get help with housing issues or debt advice etc). The Council Tax is a flawed means of raising funding for local services, but freezing it rather than reforming it is a mistake. Local authorities simply need to be able to raise more income and should be able to do it in a progressive way. Scrapping the council tax in favour of a properly progressive local income tax would have two effects; firstly, it would enable redistribution of wealth within local authority areas and secondly it would contribute to safeguarding essential service provision without it being a drain on the overall Scottish Parliament budget. Economists produced detailed proposals for this for the SSP a number of years ago so there is no practical argument preventing implementation.

Provision of housing is a difficult problem to resolve in times of limited budgets due to the high capital cost of new build. There are a number of avenues which should be explored. One would be to identify the best practices in building to make future public sector housebuilding as efficient and effective as possible. Better-designed housing with higher performance, low cost of build and a positive aesthetic impact are much easier to achieve with modern technologies and approaches and we should aim to stop simply 'building like we always have'. More flexible means of funding and owning housing should also be explored as a priority, including shared equity schemes and social enterprise funding – the idea that a house is primarily an equity asset is harmful but providing people no equity in their house is only sustainable if there is a plentiful supply of attractive, affordable rented accommodation for people with proper security. Until that is available, mixed approaches to ownership should be used as a 'bridge' between the major divide in Scotland between owners and non-owners. In the short term, ways of encouraging or indeed coercing those with vacant properties (especially unsold new-build) to make them available as low-cost rental should be pursued. In the long term, economic segregation though housing must be tackled. The divide between ownership and non-ownership has created a 'geography of poverty' which is corrosive to society. The planning laws must be used urgently to redress this by placing a requirement on all new developments to be 'mixed ownership' housing. Planning should be reformed to ensure these changes and should no longer be seen as a tool for economic development. The encouragement of property speculation has caused a very large proportion of the current economic problems and needs to be changed to prioritise the needs of communities. And this should be enforced across Scotland where the local-level corruption in the planning decisions have left a barely-regulated free-for-all situation in which developers hold too much power. A national register of housing developers with an enforceable charter of practice should be considered.

The problems of transport policy are well known; we need to get more people using public transport and fewer people using private transport. But these problems are often expensive to address because of infrastructure costs and the coming years are not ones where large-scale investment will be possible. To increase the use of public transport we need to get people into the habit of using public transport. A low-cost means of doing this would be to put in place a 'utilisation strategy'; where busses and trains are running but are largely empty (particularly at off-peak times) ways must be found of getting those empty seats used through discounting or concessionary travel schemes. Meanwhile, a national policy of pedestrianisation should be developed alongside strategies to encourage cycling to remove both the need and the number of cars in town and city centres.

Energy has become seen as an 'environmental' issue, where in fact the immediate impact is social. Fuel poverty is recognised but not well understood. A proper national strategy of identifying ways to reduce energy usage (particularly in the poorest communities) needs to be developed using the extensive expertise in universities and the capacity for implementing changes must be created, whether through a government agency, local authorities or a social enterprise approach. This should also be seen as an important way to create jobs, and immediate discussions with energy suppliers should take place to get them to help to fund this programme. Planning and other decisions may require to make this a condition.

Finally, food security is not taken to be a major issue in Scotland. This misses four important potential benefits. Firstly, it could help to encourage better land use and create more jobs. Secondly, it could help to reduce the energy consumed in food transport. Thirdly, it would encourage more use of locally-produced food and less use of unhealthy processed food. Fourthly, it could help to create more affordable healthy food options which would increase Real Security. A food strategy would refocus agriculture policy in Scotland towards domestic consumption but would also take action to encourage urban and semi-urban land use for food production – allotments, cooperatives, local markets etc.

## Policies

- Implement the findings of the Report of the Scottish Prisons Commission 2008 (the McLeish Report) on crime and punishment
- Publish a statement of the minimum acceptable standard of life that a citizen should expect (base security) and assess whether collectively all layers of government are meeting this.
- Do not assume blanket protection of NHS budgets but put in place a programme of 'deprofitising' and 'demonetising' to substantially reduce leakage from the NHS through profiteering by suppliers of goods and services – and pursue salary convergence.
- Make 'health equality' a compulsory cross-cutting policy agenda and embed impact on health assessment in other policy decisions.
- Create a system of sanctions to discourage private interests from influencing and coercing people into negative health choices.
- Protect local authority services and reduce the pressure on the Scottish budget by removing the Council Tax freeze and urgently replacing it with a progressive local income and wealth tax to ensure equity.
- Hold an architecture prize to create designs for future social housing which is cheap to build, efficient in performance and has a positive aesthetic impact.
- Diversify models of home ownership and increase 'shared equity' schemes to bridge the social segregation of 'owners' and 'non-owners' and to reduce the use of housing as 'equity', and to open up alternative models of funding social new-build such as social enterprise models.
- Establish a developers' charter to require a more responsible national approach to the provision of housing.
- Reform planning both to remove corruption, enforce the charter and prioritise social rather than commercial factors.
- Implement a transport infrastructure utilisation strategy to encourage more use of off-peak public transport. Pursue a national pedestrianisation strategy for towns and cities.
- Establish a programme of energy saving action and create the capacity to implement by putting pressure on energy suppliers to fund it.
- Develop a Scottish National Food Security Strategy to create jobs, improve health, help the environment and reduce food poverty.

# Freedom of knowledge

Freedom of expression should be considered one of the great universal rights of humankind – the right to say what we think without censorship. And it is a right that must be protected. But all rights sometimes create conflicts with other rights and we must recognise when a right is being abused. No-one thinks that distributing child pornography should be protected as ‘freedom of expression’ and few people would argue with defamation law designed to prevent the spread of malicious lies about an individual. That is because these actions both contravene other rights. The right to freedom of expression is not – must not be – absolute because other rights matter too. We should be much clearer on the other side of the equation – the freedom of knowledge. People have a right to be able to access other people’s views, to have a chance to gaining accurate and balanced information, to be equipped to make effective, informed decisions and arrive at informed opinions. Without this right, there is little chance of democracy functioning.

That is why it is completely ignored. The idea of the ‘freedom of expression’ has been perverted to mean ‘the right to buy the means of expression for personal use’. Newspapers strike a pretend pose of righteousness as they control, censor and distort information for political purposes. They have a cosy deal with others with the same political purpose. The Daily Mail is owned by the rich, it reports news in such a way that demonises any act which might challenge the dominance of the rich, it presents inaccurate information to make people believe that the decisions which benefit the rich actually benefit them, and they allow other rich people free access to their pages to push their own agendas while excluding everyone else. Outside of newspapers, you also have freedom of expression, but only if you can find a way to express it. This is never a problem if you have money – you either pay for space to express your view (pay for advertising or for a PR company to place your stories) or you set up some fake organisation to push your own interests as if they were neutral or someone else’s (the ‘Taxpayers Alliance’). Freedom of expression has been turned into an ideology every bit as repressive as medieval theology, and every bit as self-assured.

And the impact on democracy and society is terrifying. Five years ago no-one thought ‘asylum seekers’ were a national problem until newspapers started a campaign. The perfectly reasonable and fair inheritance tax (affecting only the prosperous) has been turned into an attack on ‘ordinary people’. The European Union has been converted into a sort of comedy pantomime villain, primarily on the basis of lies. Meanwhile, much of the corruption and misdeeds among the rich are off-limits. We are intentionally denied the information we need to function as citizens.

And the problems of lack of ‘freedom of knowledge’ do not lie only with the media. The education system has been designed in such a way as to make us believe its primary purpose is to train us for work and certainly not to equip us as citizens. We are simply not given the necessary core skills to let us make informed judgements. And the problem of lack of access to

accurate knowledge is not one which applies only to the general public. In fact, the people who make policies and spending decisions are equally bereft of adequate information. Civil servants and politicians are provided with one-sided information (often they are complicit in that). Policy is influenced primarily by those with the power, time and resource to be influential. The privileged access given to the business lobby in decision-making is nothing short of scandalous. When a commission or an inquiry is set up, you can virtually guarantee that the person leading it will have been a member of the CBI or will look very much like they should be (the occasional former very-senior manager in the public sector or leading quango appointee sneaks through but the majority are businessmen). One of the most obvious examples in recent years was the commission to investigate cultural life in Scotland which was loaded with businessmen and one – one – token artist. Three ‘wise men’ have just pronounced on what services the rest of us are to lose in budget cuts – two senior figures from the Scottish ‘business community’ and one former local government chief executive. The idea that anyone representing the interests of the public, workers, civic Scotland, the arts – in fact anything – would be included is so far outside normal practice that no-one even seems to have complained. When was the last time a trade unionist was appointed to influence government thinking? And is it therefore any surprise that government thinks the way it does?

It is not enough that information exists – it must be available, people must know it is available and they must be equipped to use and assess that information. We live in a governmental system which promotes secrecy and keeps decisions-making and influence in the hands of the elite. This state of affairs must be challenged.

## Aims

We have to go right back to source if we want to provide people with freedom of knowledge; it must begin in schools. As with everything else in the neoliberal years, school education and the curriculum have been subordinated to financial interests. The business of education is now seen as simply getting the process right for equipping people with ‘work skills’ (this is the standard neoliberal agenda – act as if the goal is self-evident and indisputable and if there is to be debate make sure it is only about process). Of course children should leave school able to make a positive contribution in life, through work or further study, but that is surely not the end of the contribution we want them to make. What about preparing them properly to make cultural and artistic contributions? Social and civic contributions? Political and public contributions? In fact, given that most employers only want people who can read, write, count and speak clearly (or who have had specialist training at college, university or elsewhere), surely these other contributions are the ones on which we should be focussing? In fact, is it possible to imagine people being prepared to make civic, social, political or cultural contributions and not be capable of being effective employees? Unless, of course, docility is one of the attributes employers secretly want.

We must therefore park for a while the work on how we teach and spend more time on what we teach. This argument is decades old. It used to be called ‘civics’, but in fact is about more than that. Yes we need to teach people about civic issues of how to engage with society and how to think about what we want from society. But we need to give them access

to the world of human intellectual achievement – of history, art, politics, international affairs, philosophy, psychology. We need to teach people how to understand other people, how to understand the way societies work, the ways to think about and debate morality. We need to give them a platform from where no knowledge is out of reach if they choose to pursue it. That so many people feel this way about education and think that something should be done and yet that nothing is ever done is a national waste. In fact, the new Curriculum for Excellence offers much for this agenda – in theory at least. Its stated aims are laudable and if the content of courses achieve those aims it would be a significant step forward. But there is not much to give us confidence that civil servants are capable of turning these aspirations into reality and reason to fear that in a very short timescale the on-the-ground delivery will revert back to the narrow, unimaginative, employer-focussed exam-mill system it is supposed to replace. There is consistent reasons to believe that education management from the civil service down has so absorbed a process-focussed, box-ticking approach that vision and big-picture thinking withers. We need real national leadership in education if it is to be converted from a training-for-work programme into a stimulating, enriching programme for citizens. This is such a crucial issue for all of society that it is difficult to see a sustainable solution to other problems such as crime and health if we don't get this right. The inequality, alienation and low self esteem issues that infect society are embedded (if not created) at school. The interests of employers simply do not come close to the importance of this wider agenda.

The same problem with rampant utilitarianism infects our universities. Universities have allowed themselves to believe that their main purpose in life is to act as pseudo-economic development agencies. Of course universities are about preparing people for work and always have been since they were training institutions for medics, lawyers and clergymen. And of course there are important economic benefits from research. But the purchaser-provider model which has come to dominate university policy is a corrosive mess. More and more emphasis has been put on funding teaching and research which has 'economic utility' and this has been at the expense of everything else. In fact, universities were taken out of the education portfolio at the outset of devolution and placed instead in the enterprise portfolio. And now the Scottish Funding Council has announced its intention to fund parts of university activity on a case-by-case basis assessed against immediate economic returns. Since universities are at the heart of understanding and changing societies (and in very diverse ways from architecture to zoology), reducing them to a sort of intellectual stock market in which you invest in whatever gives the highest short-term return is fundamentally to undermine Scotland's ability to change itself. We need to free academics from this sort of utilitarian micromanagement and fund them to think for the sake of thinking. If people think this is a utopian ideal, a sobering thought: it is not widely disputed that under the current funding and assessment regime there is simply no way a scientist would have been allowed to discover the existence of DNA (taking as it did years of messing around with expensive equipment before generating the big breakthrough, 'messing around' which would no longer be tolerated).

But even if someone is equipped with the attributes to make good decisions, they still need good information to make them. The media in Scotland is possibly not as overwhelmingly propaganda-driven as the London media, but that isn't to say

much. The Scotsman has not recovered from its experiment with far-right neoliberalism and has been hollowed-out into a publication arbitrarily put together with insufficient resources. The Herald remains a serious newspaper (though even here there are worrying signals) but it is woefully under-resourced to be Scotland's sole source of high-quality news. The Daily Record is a case-study in lowest common denominator and anti-intellectual rubbish which has a political agenda so blatantly skewed as to be of serious harm to Scotland's wellbeing. And of the rest there is little worth saying – fake Scottish versions of London newspapers, Sunday versions of the dailies or 'regional' newspapers which don't appear to have the ambition of covering the big national issues in real depth. That the Sunday Herald remains Scotland's best newspaper despite its drop in quality and substance is telling. The commercial radio stations are just for music, sport and a bit of talk. BBC Scotland (both TV and radio) is woefully under-resourced and treated like a pro/anti independence football in terms of autonomy. And STV is worse. Scotland simply isn't served by effective media.

In the short term there is a limited amount that the Scottish Parliament can do, but it should seek to do what it can. The potential for alternative media has never been higher but while means of transmission (mainly the internet) have proved revolutionary, content is still key and content requires investment. The Scottish Parliament should provide funding for alternative media where it can be shown to provide a public service. The level of investment would not be large and the impact potentially high (when alternative media uncovers news, mainstream media is quick to follow, meaning that alternative media is not only about those who already seek out alternative information sources). This would easily be found from within marketing and advertising budgets. There is also scope to establish a Scottish Media Commissioner. The current system of self-regulation is feasible only because the only way people know anything about it is in the pages of the 'self' which is being 'regulated'. A Scottish Media Commissioner should be given a 'public interest accuracy' remit; no-one is questioning the right of newspapers to publish opinion but they should be obliged to ensure that information they present as news is accurate and balanced. The problem with media regulation has always been with sanctions – newspapers tend only to respond to financial sanction and this is difficult. However, there are a number of sanctions available to the Scottish Parliament, not least the ability to remove advertising, a major source of income for Scottish newspapers.

But perhaps the most ambitious option for providing access to knowledge in a Scottish context would be the establishment of a dedicated Scottish television channel. A Scottish Broadcasting Corporation has been mooted from time to time since digital technologies made the prospect feasible. Now is the time to take these ideas a stage further towards a worked-out proposal. A poorly-funded 'SBC' would potentially do more harm than good (people will not watch television which is not put together with professional standards) but the sums of money required to create a professional-quality service are no longer prohibitive. In fact, in terms of the economic benefit a domestic TV industry would bring an 'SBC' might be in the credit rather than the debit column. And it is not just the production of news, documentary and features which would have the positive impact – as explored below it could act as an incredibly valuable 'patron' for the arts in Scotland. The Scottish Parliament should begin immediately to develop a full feasibility plan for an 'SBC' - and it should

not be led by commercial interests and least of all by another businessman.

Finally, we need to address the ability of people to gain and provide accurate information from and to policy-makers. First of all, there should be a major revision of the Freedom of Information legislation. This legislation should be strengthened and expanded with a universal assumption of transparency. By far the biggest reform should be of the corrupt 'commercial confidentiality' clause which was put in place to prevent proper scrutiny of some of the most important aspects of government. It should be a straightforward requirement that if a business wishes to get taxpayers' money then it should expect taxpayers to know what is being done with it. This applies to everyone else (the salaries of public employees, the way agencies spend public money, the personal lives of people who claim benefits) so why are corporations exempt? While there is a case for a very tightly controlled period of commercial confidentiality (during bidding processes) there is absolutely no case for secrecy as soon as contracts are signed. That this might 'scare off' companies bidding for contracts is laughable. That it might reveal the corruption and inefficiency in the way the public sector procures is all too believable.

And then there should be a way to control the extent to which policy-makers are influenced most by those with the most money. A code of conduct should be published for both policy-makers and for those who wish to lobby or influence policy-makers. The former should be absolutely transparent about who has been influencing them – there should be a register of those who wish to influence decisions-makers and any meeting between either an elected or paid official and anyone who is seeking to influence (or might reasonably be expected to seek to influence) a decision should be automatically published. This should apply to organisations or to individuals (although individuals would not need to register). Meanwhile, any collective entity acting for or representing government or local government should abide by a code of conduct which would require it to demonstrate reasonable balance in its work. Thus if a commission or an inquiry is set up there would be a requirement to demonstrate that reasonable steps have been taken to make sure its membership in some way reflects the range of stakeholders and interests. And where any government-related entity is involved in deliberations it should when appointing advisors or taking or hearing of evidence, be required to demonstrate that it has taken evidence from a balanced range of people and interests (the days of parliamentary committees concluding inquiries having spoken to a couple of business leaders but no representative of employees for example must be ended). And for those seeking to influence there should be a clear code of conduct for what is reasonable behaviour. For example, there should be an assessment made of the money spent on influencing any given decision. Where evidence is provided it should be sourced and if crucial negative evidence exists access should be given to that as well (for example, if a supermarket wishes to claim that it will 'create' 500 jobs it should be required to make an assessment of the jobs which would be lost elsewhere as a result). And the sources of funding and constitution of a lobbying or influencing group should be transparent – for example the Scotch Whisky Association should be obliged to make clear that the majority of its funding is received from companies whose biggest commercial interests are not in whisky but in other cheaper alcohols.

## Policies

- The Curriculum for Excellence should be developed in a way which puts preparing pupils to be active, empowered citizens ahead of the interests of employers, and structures for ensuring the delivery of these aims on the ground should be reformed.
- The attempt to fund universities for short-term return must be abandoned in favour of a commitment to fund them for broader purposes and for longer-term outcomes.
- A proportion of the Scottish Government's advertising and marketing budget should be used to establish a fund to encourage alternative media.
- A feasibility study for the establishment of a Scottish Broadcasting Corporation should be begun immediately, with a social and cultural remit, not just a commercial one.
- A Scottish Media Commissioner should be created to monitor the public interest implications of newspaper news reporting, with the ability to apply sanctions where appropriate.
- The Freedom of Information Act should be extended and strengthened. In particular, the commercial confidentiality exemption should be removed.
- Three codes of practice should be established to govern the interface between policy-makers and those seeking to influence them – one for individual policy-makers (elected or professional), one for governmental entities (including committees and inquiries) and one for lobby groups.

# Looking after Scotland

The concept that one generation does no more than look after the world for the next generation is one which is so widely recognised and used that it has almost become an unhelpful cliché. But the concept is correct, and it applies to the world (and Scotland) not only as a physical entity but as an idea. Policy and politics should pay much more attention to what legacy we are leaving behind. Scotland is both a place and an 'idea' which we should have a duty to protect. There have of course been giant steps forward in recent years in the recognition of the need to protect the environment and biodiversity in Scotland. Indeed, in many areas (notable climate change) Scotland has policies and targets of which we can be rightly proud – so long as we follow through on the rhetoric.

But Scotland as a physical entity is not only 'wilderness, water and wind'. Our wildlife and its habitat matter deeply, the quality of our waterways and coastline is paramount and the quality of air and the volume of greenhouse gasses produced are potentially existential in nature. But the built environment in which we live also matters deeply and in this field there is reason to argue that we have gone backwards, not forwards. The implication of the built environment on health and mental health is widely recognised among professionals and academics but simply hasn't percolated through to national politics. There are reasons for this, and all of them are bad. The first and most alarming is that urban and rural planning

has been converted from being a policy designed to protect and enhance the integrity of our villages, towns and cities into being a policy of 'economic development' – or more accurately a vehicle for commercial property investment. And the level of corruption that this has brought goes widely unrecognised. Development after development in Scotland simply could not answer the 'is this something you'd be proud to leave the next generation' question but instead pass the 'well, there's money in this today so let's grab it' test. From poorly constructed high-density housing estates at the edge of our towns to the meritless and characterless 'signature' corporate buildings we are leaving behind a built environment which in a very few years will compare badly even with the much-maligned sixties building policies. We do not get multiple opportunities to get this right and we should be taking it more seriously.

And it is not just about new-build, it is about everything from landscaping to general maintenance. Scotland seems to have abandoned its love of colour and creativity which imbue places like Kirkcudbright, Oban or the Fife villages with so much charm. You would think that off-white, grey or beige were there only masonry paints available in Scotland. Housing estates which we now describe as 'grim' need not be. And if we consider proper plans for the use of urban space with more pedestrianisation, more communal spaces and more greenery we can create surroundings which contribute to positive attitudes and wellbeing. This is important because 'aesthetics' are about how all the senses are affected and not only how things look. We should pay more attention to how the spaces we create affect all aspects of how we feel, how we respond, how we interact and in what ways they impact on our wellbeing.

So we need to think about the physical state of the Scotland we leave as a legacy, but also the state of 'Scotland the idea' that we leave behind. This matters deeply and influences how we see the world and the ways in which we act, and yet it is neglected by many (though not, interestingly, the neoliberals who from the time of Thatcher's 'home-owning democracy' have sought to make us see ourselves as consumers and individualists). There are many strands to Scotland as an idea, some more obvious and easier to address, others more complex and subtle. One part of the idea which is strong but needs further strengthening and support is how Scotland projects itself through the arts. Scotland has been remarkably successful in a number of areas – literature, music and the visual arts in particular – but we have come to take this for granted and we shouldn't. Often when the world sees Scotland this is the prism through which it sees us and we need to support it more fully. We need to invest in arts and we need to stop being apologetic. The hostile language of 'subsidy' comes from the usual sources but for some reason this is not a phrase applied to repairing potholes in the road or the other acts we take to secure the fabric of society. But the hostile language often comes from the 'left' as well, the more cravenly populist parts of which complain about 'elitism' when we fund our national companies. Scotland should consider itself as a hub of artistic activity, a centre of writing, publishing, music-making, filmmaking, design and so on.

And the experience of the arts by the Scottish public is also important. The private sector has created an appetite for any social activity with pile-it-high, sell-it-cheap-with-high-margins credentials. Even coffee shops and bars have been corporatised. People have been steered away from anything on a smaller scale or which does not deliver quick private profit. This should

be balanced by giving people much easier access to a much wider range of arts. And it is not only access to arts which is important in helping people's enjoyment and self-development. We need to see sports as an important participative activity and not a luxury. We do not need to have an agenda for elite sports – although there are very strong arguments for pursuing great sporting achievement – but we must have an agenda for community sports. This is another area in which our only hope is to ensure that local authorities do not see budgets squeezed so much that these activities are abandoned.

Also easily achievable, we should take our international reputation more seriously than we do. We simply seem unable to take a long view about how we wish others to see us. Instead, we revert unfailingly to a pantomime version of Scotland (all scenery, golf, whisky and history) in the hope that our American progeny will gift us some of their riches. And yet we neglect so much of the rest of the world – unless we're after business links or there is an emerging market for whisky. Why do we do this? There is so much more we can do with the 'idea' of Scotland around the world. The myopic domestic media is transfixed by how 'America' views the release of Al Megrahi but is utterly disinterested in how the rest of the world sees it (often very positively). We sell ourselves, but we sell ourselves short. Scotland is the home of the European Enlightenment and has a genuine case for being seen as the birthplace of much of modern humanist thought. In the 21st century that could mean a role in conflict resolution, radical social thinking (we have the universities to do it), international creative arts (again, we've got the festivals and the practitioners), international law and human rights and as a centre of research and development in medicine and science.

But we should also ask more difficult questions about the idea of Scotland. What are we? What is our morality? And what would we wish it to be? It is much more difficult to delve into this issue (the risk of slipping into state propaganda is always high and we have to be honest that we may not always like what we find) but that does not mean that it should not be done. We are a post-religious society, a post-industrial society, a post-imperial society and we may not be far away from being a post-consumerist society either. What does that leave us as a guiding morality? We need to be open about exploring and discussing this.

## Aims

Our aims for the environment and a sustainable future have been very widely discussed and debated in recent years. Broadly, we do not need to go back to first principles to identify what we should do. Indeed, we have in many cases already been quite explicit about what we should do and the Scottish Parliament has set out an agenda which is comparatively ambitious. It is not identifying what we should do that is the failing but rather establishing why we are not consistently doing it. There is an attitude among Scotland's elites that these aren't real policies and strategies but rather totems designed to make us feel good but inevitably ones on which we will fail. This is unacceptable. It needs to be made clear (and not least to those legislators who put in place strategies and targets) that these are real, meaningful and binding. We need to find ways to make sure that annual failure to meet aspirations is not simply confined to a story tucked deep inside our newspapers once a year. We need to create a means of oversight to monitor progress and to raise red flags when progress is insufficient. The current monitoring

is insufficiently rigorous. But even more importantly we need to be told clearly the reasons that progress is not being made and we need to be told what could have been done. An annual report on progress should be produced independently and that report should make clear what wasn't done that should have been and what was done that shouldn't. Only then will we be able to understand what we have to do differently.

We have a national strategy for our built environment and there is much in it which is good. We need a vision for the immediate surroundings in which we live and how they should enhance our health, our wellbeing and our everyday lives. To do this we first of all need to get serious about the strategies we have. Then we should look to see where we can be ambitious in improving them further. We need to use this strategy to recapture planning issues from commercial developers (what town planning should be aiming to achieve along with major reform of the planning system), integrate social issues (how do people wish to live their lives in the 21st century, how these affect our health and mental health) and aesthetic issues (what the Scotland we leave behind should look and feel like). Such an enhanced strategy could be produced and monitored by Architecture and Design Scotland but only if it is reformed, strengthened and given independence from political and commercial interests. If reformed in this way it would be capable of having public trust. We need a body which is trusted continuously to advise on implementation of strategy and monitor whether the individual agencies, organisations and companies which deliver our built environment are achieving what they should.

The issue of arts funding is straightforward – we need to be unashamed in investing in the arts. The Creative Scotland paradigm of shifting to a sort of 'loans culture' which sees straight financial return for monies spent must be binned immediately. Instead we simply need to put more money into the arts and creativity. Given the proportionately tiny sums involved there should simply be no reason not to do this – the sorts of money spent on even modest business-focussed vanity projects would be sufficient to maintain hundreds of artists, musicians and writers and we would receive many times the benefit as a nation. Making sure that local authority budgets are not so seriously squeezed that they see arts funding as an unaffordable luxury will also be important.

This direct funding of the arts should also be embedded in long term public policy. The argument that the arts can survive on the patronage of the private sector and the rich is not only a poor misreading of history (where it is argued that this produced some of the greatest periods of creativity in history), it is also a massive overestimation of the inherent qualities of our current private corporations and the taste and civic duty of many of our rich. Rather, we need to identify 21st century patrons of the arts for Scotland. One of the most promising opportunities would be to ensure that in the feasibility study for establishing a Scottish Broadcasting Corporation a role as 'commissioning patron of the arts' is central. This would be particularly beneficial to film and television artists but also to visual arts, music, writing and many other fields.

Participating in the arts should also be an aim for every Scottish citizen. Again, this includes the important role of local authorities but it also means taking a more imaginative look at the current levels of utilisation. When there are arts venues and performances where there are empty seats we

should think about ways of filling them, especially with people who would otherwise be unlikely to attend. As with transport it should be possible to develop an arts utilisation strategy to give better access to under-sold arts events (and especially those publicly subsidised). Also, giving much greater access to the arts to schools would have generational benefits. No Scottish schoolchild should leave school without a substantial exposure to live arts; world cinema, music and opera, theatre, comedy, rock music and galleries and visual arts. The marginal costs of achieving this need not be high (adding extra daytime performances of a production need not be prohibitively expensive) and the long-term benefits to all involved would be substantial.

The point about the importance of local authorities in maintaining community and local arts is of the utmost importance and must not be lost. But if anything it is an even more pressing priority if we are to protect community and participative sport. There is no realistic way to embed at least the capacity to participate in sporting and fitness activity in Scotland without doing it through local authorities. In the medium term we should see greater subsidy of local authority sporting provision – too often now prices are set a level lower than but comparable with private provision (such as private health clubs). This is too expensive to achieve proper access to sport for many people.

We should be more consciously aware of how Scotland is presented internationally and we should be much less narrow in our thinking about the purposes of international promotion (it's not just about trade and tourism). We should set up a distinctive Scottish version of the British Council with the aim of creating an understanding and appreciation of modern Scotland beyond our own borders and for its own sake (though there would be many spin-off benefits). This could easily be achieved by diverting relatively small amounts of money from existing marketing and promotional budgets which are almost entirely focussed on business and tourism. The international development funding Scotland spends could also be rolled into this fund and the organisation given an international development role.

Finally, we should be explicit about the need continually to encourage debate and discussion about attitudes and morality in Scotland. It will not be helpful if politicians seek to tell people how to think or behave, but it is undoubtedly helpful if they can encourage space and opportunities for debate. The revision of the school curriculum is one opportunity for this. Proper funding for public sector broadcasting via the Scottish Broadcasting Corporation is another. But direct funding for events such as international conferences, open lectures and debates would also be an option. Thinking in this area should begin now.

## Policies

- Existing policies on sustainable development and the environment must be properly enacted. To ensure this an independent annual report on whether they have been is produced and where they haven't the reason for this should be reported.
- A national policy of improving the built environment and landscaping should be put in place and Architecture and Design Scotland should be given the strength and independence to advise on and implement that policy.
- Funding for the arts should be increased, even during the period of budget cuts.

- In producing a feasibility study of a Scottish Broadcasting Corporation, the remit should contain a clear purpose of acting as a 'patron of the arts' in Scotland, channeling funding towards a range of artistic disciplines.
- An 'arts utilisation strategy' should be put in place to maximise the take-up of places at publicly-subsidised arts events. In particular, free access for schools to performances should be implemented and an entitlement of access to cultural activities given to pupils.
- A Scottish version of the British Council (a Scotland International organisation) should be created by redirecting funding from some existing international promotional activity. The organisation should be free to fund or subsidise any initiatives which promotes a positive idea of Scotland overseas.
- The Scottish Parliament should be explicit in its role to encourage debate about ethical values in Scotland. It should make the effort to create focal points for this debate (such as funding public service broadcasting, more emphasis in the school curriculum and events such as international conferences, lectures and debates).

# Ways to provide

The above sets out a major agenda, but ways of finding resource to fund it is important. However, budgets and resources are about more than fundraising for initiatives; the way we raise resource tells us every bit as much about the society we are creating as the way we spend it. There has been no shortage of voices proposing neoliberal solutions to the budget problems we face in Britain, but these are all basically echoes of the same failing ideology of small government, privatisation, anti-progressiveness, anti-universalism and cravenness to business (especially big international business) that caused the current problems. These would be laughably predictable if they didn't pose such a serious risk to so many people (and especially to those most vulnerable). Sell-off, hand control to private businesses, contract the state, allow the private sector to write its own policies etc.; if these were the policy responses designed for an age of relentless growth, how come they are still the responses to a crisis caused by themselves? The poison is killing us, take more poison.

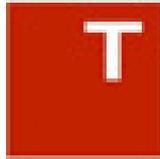
But these predictable knee-jerk responses have gained so much traction precisely because alternatives have not been forthcoming. So far the response to the 'crisis' in public finances (in many ways this is proving to be a very convenient crisis for a lot of people) from the left has been a negative – what it opposes – rather than a positive – what it would do. The slogan from the left has been 'fight the cuts'. But this is insufficient. There must be a fundamental position taken on what we do and not just on what we don't do.

However, this will prove nothing like as difficult as many imagine. There is a genuinely workable package of measures which could be enacted in Scotland now which would create a very real alternative to the slash-and-burn approach of the big financial centres and others they can bully.

## Aims

The first things we should do to address declining public budgets is to cut from them all 'leakage'. The Blair years saw the public budgets grow, but contrary to neoliberal dogma the 'public sector' has not grown at anything like the same rate. In fact, very large proportions of the rise in public spending have leaked straight out of the public realm and into the private. We spent more as a collective society but more and more of it went straight into the pockets of those in least need. There are two high-profile examples of this, and both tell us much about how to get better value for society from its own resources. The first is PFI/PPP, the practice of allowing private businesses to leach money out of public services to extremely dubious benefit to anyone but themselves. The second is the surprise emergence of a bonus culture inside the civil service, which appears to have emerged from nowhere (or rather straight from the heads of the very people receiving the bonuses).

The first of these examples makes the case for the first and most important step in controlling public sector budgets – make sure that they are being used for public good. The profit motive must be taken out of public expenditure and there should be an immediate audit to identify exactly where we should be closing leakage. There are some very obvious examples. Firstly, capital expenditure has become one bad joke with project after project coming in over budget and underspecified, with more and more of that expenditure boosting the profits of private companies (and precious little evidence of risk transfer). Secondly, all service provision which is added as a sweetener to these deals must be ended and the profit taken out of activities such as cleaning hospitals – especially as the neoliberal suggestion that private provision will be more efficient is not borne out by much poorer standards at greater cost. Procurement is a mess and the must-vaunted McLelland report offers little more than short-sighted dogma – here the leakage is not only from the public purse but straight out of Scotland as contracts are virtually designed in such a way to make them impossible to win for domestic business. But there is also the more specific question of what we are procuring and on what terms. Since 1970 the proportion of GDP which goes straight from the public purse and into the pockets of big pharmaceutical companies has almost tripled. Some is due to medical advance but much is simply the power of Big Pharma to secure unmerited patent protection, unchallenged prices and to market relentlessly to everyone from Government to individual GPs. Then there is the travesty of the 'consultancy culture'. This has a double impact on public finances. Firstly, the giant consultancy companies take inordinate fees for their services (and seldom deliver outcomes which it would be possible to describe as value for money) and then they produce outcomes which invariably lead to even more leaching of profit. So either a big accountancy firm is paid large sums of money to then tell government to give another private sector company large sums of money or technical services are expensively outsourced to a company which then advises on spending even bigger sums of money to yet another big company. All the while the ability to achieve oversight of this giant corrupt system declines and we must continually take the word of the person with their hand in our pocket that it's all in our best interests. The scope for cutting private profit from public service is substantial and the potential savings substantial.



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With the challenges ahead on the civil justice front the Scottish elections in May could not come too soon.

The SNP Government have a clear agenda to marginalise workers' rights by forcing health and safety and personal injury cases out of the Supreme Civil Court, the Court of Session, in favour of big business. They have provided for only those who can pay to use the courts.

Without change our system shall continue to be under attack from the Civil Courts Review of Lord Gill in support of such an SNP agenda.

We must campaign to set the justice agenda to ensure that health and safety is given the highest standing in both our civil and criminal courts by:

- Fighting for real Corporate Homicide Legislation
- Calling for changes to anachronistic rules in relation to Fatal Accident Inquiries, demanding that our most senior judges deal with FAIs and that they have real and necessary powers to ensure and demand that lessons are learned from deaths at work
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And the benefits are more than financial. We should use the capacity in our universities to provide advice without the conflict of interests inherent in the web of private sector providers; we would get better advice at least cost and take the pressure off university budgets by giving them an expanded source of income. We would probably see more economic benefit in Scotland, not less – much of this wasted money goes to companies with very few employees in Scotland and often only minimal activity here (a few salesman, a couple of consultants, supported my millions of pounds of public money). Larger numbers of domestic companies would benefit. And overall, reducing financial corruption from government is a liberating experience – the views and positions of politicians are distorted far too much by the influence of this network of money-leachers.

The second of the examples of profiteering in the public sector raised above is the bonus culture. This must also be addressed as part of the wider policy of pay convergence. Above, pay convergence was put forward as an economic and social policy. Here it is reframed as a fiscal policy. The overall public payroll may have to be reduced as budgets tighten, but if they do it should be done in a manner that is both equitable and provides the best value for money. First of all, it is time to call the bluff of the anonymous public sector leaders who claim that soaring remuneration packages are the price we must pay for, eh, them. All payments in the previous year should be consolidated into a single salary (where did this idea that we must pay people extra for doing their jobs adequately appear from?). These salaries will then be very substantial. So there should be no affordability problem in significant year-on-year pay restraint on this group – annual cuts of ten per cent would presumably be reasonable. By putting the squeeze on pay where it can be best afforded the pay of those who can afford it least can be protected. If these senior managers – most of whom have trodden along an entire career in a protected sector – can really find more lucrative options elsewhere then we should wish them luck. It is very clear indeed that the old argument that there would be no-one who would do the job properly at a lower salary is nonsense. It is possible to control payroll and protect jobs if we take back from those who have taken most in recent years.

Then we should be more brutal about what deserves to be cut. Scotland gets much more benefit as a nation from free care for the elderly than it does from Scottish Enterprise – which we can tell by the fact that Scottish Enterprise has had its budget cut almost every year since devolution and no-one has noticed. There are still a few strands of Scottish Enterprise activity which we should maintain, but the organisation itself has passed its useful life long ago and is a hive of self-serving inefficiency and conflicts of interest. The same is true of its hived-off progeny Skills Development Scotland – there are some of its functions we would wish to retain but not the organisation. A national tourism agency is of course essential to a country with so much vested in tourism, but it is probably time to admit that VisitScotland is not it. It spends very large sums of money but far too much of it is unaccountable and ineffective. Of a different order of importance to these, we have a clearly-failing prison system in Scotland. The reason for reform is driven by social need (the impacts of failure are mainly social) but there are potentially large savings to be made as a result. Again, the McLeish report was compelling on this.

Local authorities are the poor relations to the current funding 'debate'. While health and education are held up as essentials

that must be protected there is almost an unspoken acceptance that local government must take the hit. This is significant – the services provided by councils are often pretty invisible (you go to work, you come back and your bins are empty) or are weighted towards people on low or no incomes. So we have been manoeuvred into a position where we feel we have to protect the services with a high visibility to the middle classes but not the services which are an essential lifeline to the poor. This isn't sustainable. But there is a positive way to look at the problem. The Council Tax is partially progressive but not enough to rebalance levels of wealth – and the Council Tax freeze (as with all tax cuts and freezes) overall benefits you more the more money you have. The freeze must be scrapped. But Scotland should also take this opportunity to challenge the unprogressive approach being taken to budgets in Britain. We do not have to wait until we are gifted more powers to take steps on a fairer tax system, we simply have to replace the Council Tax with a steeply-ramped local income tax and use that both to protect essential local services but to do so in a way that rebalances the unfair national tax system. This local income tax should certainly raise significantly more money than the Council Tax but it should do it by putting the bulk of the burden on those who can best afford to pay. There will be arguments over whether it should be set locally and the implications for the budgets of local authorities with different social class profiles, but these issues can either be easily addressed or are ones we will need to live with during a period in which the Scottish Parliament does not have the powers necessary to deal with budget cuts in a fair and effective manner.

Finally for the immediate future, serious thought should be given to the use (or otherwise) of the Scottish Parliament's tax raising powers. The income tax powers are limited to basic rate tax and are not extensive. However, before any decisions to cut public spending are taken there should be a very careful evaluation of whether the economic and social impact of lost jobs and lost services is really less than the economic and social impact of a one pence rise in income tax. The neoliberal consensus suggests that taking small amounts of money out of people's pockets during a period of economic recovery is ill advised, but that removing all income from large numbers of people completely and leaving them at the mercy of the benefits system makes perfect sense. Except that it doesn't. A haemorrhaging of jobs is a much bigger threat to society and the economy and if the options are hold down tax or watch unemployment soar, we should raise taxes in Scotland.

As a small adjunct on local government funding; the deprofiting agenda applies here. Most visibly, there should be an immediate end to the worryingly unaccountable practice of hiving out core council responsibilities to the less-than-transparent 'arms length executive organisations' (aleos) which were briefly the fashion. If a local authority has a service it wants to or has to deliver the presumption should be that it is carried out by the local authority itself. The pseudo-private sector obsession with clever-clever process changes (almost always leading to lack of transparency, inefficiency, corruption – or all three) must end in favour of the effective discharge of duties.

All of this has demonstrated quite clearly that Scotland has insufficient powers to deal with major social policy issues properly. The Calman proposals are unconvincing but we are led to believe that they are the only option on the table. Scotland must not accept this. People may have a range of views about

full political independence, but granting Scotland access to the full range of economic powers must now be the minimum option. In the end, the arguments for full independence seem strong to anyone who has been observing closely what being part of the British State really involves. But the status quo or status-quo-plus (Calman) are not enough. If we are not to have a straight independence referendum then at least we must agitate for a real empowering of Scotland.

These are all actions which will help meet budget cuts and protect jobs and services that can be enacted now. However we should also take steps which will mean that in the longer term the sorts of pressures being felt now do not recur – or at least are more manageable. The first and simplest step is to drill into public sector employees (and this refers almost exclusively to very senior employees) that they are not in fact thrusting private sector businessmen and that the childish fripperies and self-serving attitudes of that class do not belong in the public sector. The witless adoption of practices of ‘team building exercises’, ‘away days’ and unnecessary incentivisation schemes should end. We have already tackled the issue of the unacceptable bonus culture and recourse to endless consultants. It is important that Scotland does not become myopic and stop learning from other parts of the world, but the endless revelations about ‘fact-finding missions’ taking place at public expense raise real questions about quality control. There are multiple examples of this approach – pretending that the stuff senior figures read in the business magazines on their flights back up from London are the ‘done thing’ and can be simply transplanted into the public sector must stop.

Then there should be a much clearer fiscal attitude to preventative policy actions. Specifically, we know that a range of major drains of the public budget can be reduced if we act now to prevent future problems. We have already looked at a number of health-related actions which could prevent significant costs on the NHS. We have also looked at the scope for reducing the costs of crime. In encouraging a debate about what we want and need from work, we should consider the impact on things such as care costs if people are more able to provide care to family members as a result of a different work/life balance. But there are other things which should be explored. One major example is the current approach to drug abuse, which is not only costly but clearly failing. Serious consideration should be given to policies such as the medicalisation of heroin addiction for the long term financial (never mind social) benefits it would achieve. The practice of a ‘paymaster’ relationship between the finance department and the rest of government means only annual answers to annual questions. We should start to act to reduce the long-term costs to society of social failures.

Finally, there are steps that can and should be taken to diversify social provision in the same way as economic activity. David Cameron and his ‘big society’ idea are a fraud being used to mask an assault on the welfare state, but there are real options for changing the relationship between people and society. There are lots of examples of initiatives which deliver real benefit to communities which are organised and delivered by communities. We should look at a medium-term national strategy for ‘provisioning’. This is the process of trying to identify what can be provided by people themselves (with proper support) and what needs to be provided by the state or through the market. The balance is clearly wrong, and everything from greater provision of allotments so people can grow their own food to local trading

schemes, shared equity housing developments and credit unions are all ways of helping people to provide collectively. But it cannot just ‘happen’ because we will it. It requires ensuring people have time, that they have the ideas and examples, and that there is training and support and where necessary funding. A national strategy of provisioning could help to take the strain away from expecting local authorities (usually) to solve all local problems. But we need to accept that this is not going to offer a quick fix – or indeed an easy fix.

This is a balance of proposals every bit as balanced and compelling as that produced by the right-wing think tanks. There is no reason to claim that there is no alternative to cuts. There are alternatives.

## Policies

- An immediate audit of all government expenditure should take place to identify where public expenditure is ‘leaking’ into private profit and this expenditure should be reformed urgently.
- A ‘pay convergence curve’ should be used to manage pay costs in such a manner that reductions should be borne most by those most able to pay. Bonus and other non-salary remuneration practices should be ended.
- Funding cuts to public agencies and NDPBs should be targeted first at failing or non-essential activity. Underperforming organisations like Scottish Enterprise, Skills Development Scotland and VisitScotland should be reformed. Less should be spent on a failing prisons policy.
- The freeze on Council Tax should be ended and immediate reforms begun to bring in a local income tax. This tax should be heavily ramped to spread the cost of dealing with budget cuts to those most able to pay.
- The practice of outsourcing local authority services to ‘aleos’ should be ended.
- Before any action is taken which would lead to large-scale losses of public sector jobs, an analysis should be made of whether job losses or a penny rise in income tax will have the lesser negative social and economic impact. There should be a national culture change among senior public sector employees to stamp out costly pseudo-private sector practices with no direct benefit.
- A longer-term approach to public budgets should see more emphasis put on sustained programmes which will reduce cost burdens in the long term – such as tackling health inequality, income inequality, crime, drug abuse and care provision.
- More time should be devoted to developing ‘provisioning’ strategies designed to help communities deliver more of their own social services themselves on mutual and collective principles, but properly supported through training, education and funding. ■

*With thanks to Doug Bain, Malcolm Fraser, Leigh French, Gerry McCartney, Mike Danson and Jim and Margaret Cuthbert*

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# three wise men?

## Dave Watson looks at the report of the Independent Budget Review and in the predictable recycling of the same-old neoliberal agenda finds few signs of wisdom

Five months in the preparation we now have the Report of the Independent Budget Review Panel (IBR). Commissioned by the Scottish Government, at the behest of the Tories, the Panel was asked to look at the implications of forecast spending reductions and make recommendations about the options for delivering public services within this constrained financial environment. The Panel consisted of Crawford Beveridge, Neil McIntosh and Robert Wilson, often described as the 'Three Wise Men'. But how wise have they been?

The best you can say about this report is that it gives a clear, if stark, description of what they describe as "the most challenging public spending environment since the Second World War". Whilst precise figures won't be known until the UK spending review is published on 20 October, they forecast a 12.5 per cent cut in Scottish budgets over four years, that's £3.7bn in real terms. These cuts will be front-loaded with £1.7bn coming in the first year. Capital budgets fare even worse, with a 40 per cent cut of the same period. They don't anticipate a recovery in public finances until 2015-16 and no return to 2009 spending levels until 2025. In fact this analysis understates the real impact on local services. UNISON Scotland's analysis of planned local budgets shows that councils and health boards are planning much greater cuts than the Scottish budget would indicate. This is because real inflation is likely to far exceed the notional Treasury allowance for inflation (the GDP deflator). We also face increased demands on services due to the recession and demographic change, plus reductions in income in addition to the Council Tax freeze. Most public bodies are also looking to strengthen their balances in anticipation of worse to come.

Perhaps not surprisingly from such establishment figures, the IBR does not question the necessity for these cuts, beyond a brief reference to the evidence submitted by UNISON Scotland and the STUC. They simply add to the myth that that cuts in public spending are both essential and inevitable. The costs of the bank bailout were higher in the UK than any other G21 nation. It is therefore no surprise that the deficit is projected to be the largest of any G21 nation. This public debt is really corporate private debt and it is the price of the massive bail out Britain's banks, not excessive public spending. The financial crisis has also increased unemployment which raises the demand on social spending and reduces tax revenues, adding to the pressures on public spending. The rising deficit is a response to the crisis; it is not in itself a crisis. Investors continue to fund UK debt. Recent gilt auctions have been oversubscribed and the cost of servicing the debt is currently very low. Cutting public spending now will prolong and deepen the recession. It is purely an ideological, not economic response, to call for cuts in public spending.

Even when it is appropriate to start reducing the deficit, spending cuts will not be the only ways to cut debt. We could introduce a fairer tax system and cut out real waste including PPP schemes, management consultants and Trident. Significant sums could be raised without affecting the incomes of the majority if we made sure the financial sector and the super-rich paid a fairer share. For example:

- £4.7bn could be raised every year by introducing a 50 per cent tax rate on incomes over £100,000;
- £5bn could be raised every year with an Empty Property Tax on vacant dwellings which exacerbate housing shortages and harm neighbourhoods;
- £10bn could be raised every year by reforming tax havens and residence rules to reduce tax avoidance by corporations and non-domiciled residents;
- £14.9bn could be raised every year by using minimum tax rates to stop reliefs being used to disproportionately subsidise incomes over £100,000;
- £20-30bn could be raised every year by introducing a Major Financial Transactions Tax (or Robin Hood Tax) on UK financial institutions.

Sadly none of this is discussed in the IBR report, with the positive exception that the Council Tax freeze is no longer viable. Instead the recommendations are a predictable rehash of the business agenda and the same neo-liberal economics that got us into the financial crisis.

They start with a reasonable concern over the cuts in capital spending. Their solution is the privatisation of Scottish Water, dressed up under the guise of a public interest company. This is a purely ideological recommendation as there is no explanation as to how this would help the budget. It makes no sense to sell off Scottish Water at a fraction of its asset value, only to send the cash to London. Meanwhile, the water charge payer will have to pick up the purchase cost through higher charges and cuts in service. Paris is the latest city to bring its water service back under democratic control. Interestingly, it was privatised under the guise of a public interest company and just two years later production was in the hands of multi-national companies. Back under public control charges have been frozen and profits are flowing back into the public purse.

Next the report looks at the impact of protecting NHS expenditure. If the Scottish Government was to pass on the 'real increase' in NHS spending apparently planned in England, then all other departmental budget cuts would increase from 12.5 per cent to 20 per cent. This is often misleadingly described as ring-fencing health spending. Few staff in NHS Scotland will recognise this alleged protection, with health boards planning over £200m of cuts and the loss of 4000 jobs. Health spending is much wider than just the NHS and like many other public services there is an interdependency of provision. In health, most obviously with social care and housing.

The report recognises that most public bodies have achieved challenging efficiency targets in recent years. However, they argue that these savings should no longer be recycled but instead treated as a contribution towards the cuts. Then comes another rehash of the business agenda with a call for outsourcing and shared services. Not a scrap of evidence is offered in the report as to how this would save money. Privatisation has already led to millions of pounds that could have been spent

in the public sector being wasted. Increasingly across the UK and worldwide public services are being brought back in house. APSE has recently published a guide to bringing services back in house. This report shows the benefits of include; improved performance and governance, cost efficiency, flexibility and added value and service integration.

Better co-operation between public services is of course desirable and is already one of the strengths of the Scottish public service model. However, despite the hype, mostly from management consultants and commercial providers, shared services have not provided the answer to more cost effective services. The previous Scottish Government report into shared services showed an investment ratio of 2:1 i.e. an initial investment of £60m is needed to save £30m. The UK National Audit Office report indicates that so far projects have taken five years to break even and so will make little contribution to the current crisis. Improved cooperation between public service is essential, but this does not require setting up vast call centres or bringing in the private sector.

The IBR devotes a whole chapter of their report to workforce issues given that pay represents 59 per cent of the Scottish budget. The report does at least give a more balanced picture of the myth that public sector wages are racing ahead of the private sector. None the less they recommend that it is public sector workers that should pay the price for bailing out the bankers. There are a number of options set out in the report from a blanket pay freeze (with or without incremental progression), to some underpinning for the lowest paid. They call for a consistent approach, whilst recognising that this is difficult given the different pay bargaining structures. As we have seen with the recent local government pay debacle, organisations like CoSLA are simply adding to the problem, rather than being part of a coordinated response. On pensions the report is particularly unbalanced, claiming that changes are essential. There is little recognition of the substantial work done in recent years on Scottish public sector pension schemes to address affordability.

Finally the report engages in an extensive dialogue on the issue of universal services. They question free care for the elderly, phasing out prescription charges, concessionary travel and others. The report recommends looking again at eligibility, means testing and user charges - public services should be focussed on "those with the greatest need". Here is the biggest ideological challenge in the report. The Panel essentially

supports the UK Con-Dem coalition attack on the welfare state. Using spending cuts as an excuse to reduce public services to a safety net for the poor and disadvantaged on the USA model.

The collective provision of public services is central to the political debate over the coming years. Universalism is less costly to administer, avoids stigmatisation and encourages a higher participation amongst those who need them. But most importantly, they create a more cohesive and more equal society with greater support for redistribution. This is best evidenced in Scandinavian countries that have redistributive tax systems based on universal rather than means-tested benefits. We know from studies including Wilkinson and Pickett that more equal societies do better on almost every measure.

The report pays little attention to the overall economic impact of the cuts. Taking billions of pounds out of public services, means taking billions of pounds out of the economy. As well as mass job losses the Panel are also recommending years of pay restraint. Seventy pence in every pound spent on public services finds its way back into the local economy. The state recoups 92 per cent of the cost of employing a public sector worker through increased tax revenues and reduced benefits payments. If implemented this programme of mass redundancies and real terms wage cuts will be a real blow to local economies across Scotland. It is estimated that between 70,000 and 90,000 jobs could go in the public sector across Scotland. The recruitment freeze is already condemning a generation of young people, many of whom have trained for years, to unemployment. By the Treasury's own model this scale of job loss in the public sector will result in almost 100,000 workers in the private sector losing their job.

So have the Three Wise Men shown wisdom with their recommendations? The American writer and peace activist Norman Cousins once said "Wisdom consists of the anticipation of consequences". The IBR report pays scant attention to the disastrous consequences of this neo-liberal economic prescription for Scotland. The task for the left is to expose the myth that there is no alternative to this prescription. ■

***Dave Watson is the Head of Policy at UNISON Scotland.***

***For more on the IBR report and the alternative economic strategy visit the Public Works pages of the UNISON Scotland website [www.unison-scotland.org.uk/publicworks/index.html](http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/publicworks/index.html)***

# a steady flow of venality

**An orchestrated campaign to privatise Scottish Water is underway, and as Tommy Kane and Kyle Mitchell show only those running it stand to benefit**

Plans to privatise Scottish Water (SW) and remove it from public control have, yet again, intensified. This time, however, the purveyors of privatisation make their case in the backdrop of uncertain economic and social recovery from what has been widely reported as the worst economic crisis since the 1930s. In this political and economic climate, we are told a scaling back of public expenditures and subsequent retrenchment of public services is inevitable. This message is peddled by the

same supposed experts, many of whom were responsible for establishing, legislatively and legally, the necessary political and economic conditions for the policies that were directly responsible for and/or created the conditions that led to the collapse of the financial market. Yet now, we are told that the same macroeconomic policies that in part created the collapse of the global economy are to be applied to a whole host of public goods and services, including Water and Wastewater

Services (WWS) in Scotland. Esteemed academic David Harvey refers to this dogmatic thinking as “the irrational rationality of an irrational system”. To be sure, the current crisis is being strategically manipulated to reconfigure WWS in Scotland.

The proposed reconfiguration of SW would purportedly save the Scottish Government between £140-150 million per annum. This cut would amount to 15 per cent of SW’s annual budget; the remaining 85 per cent is made up by user charges. All else being equal, surely this would imply a rise in user charges to make-up SW’s total annual budget. In this context of financial crisis and the need to reduce the deficit, the cacophony of calls for some form of privatisation of WWS in Scotland has gathered momentum in a way that chimes with market ideologues who have pushed this idea for years. Now, it is no longer just business, neo-liberal think tanks, media elements, the Tories and their chums the Lib-Dems that are creating the momentum for change. Their ideas and arguments now resonate amongst agencies and organisations linked to and formed by government, most notably, the stakeholders and regulators from the WWS industry. There is no longer any pretence: the views of government agencies mirror the likes of the Scottish Confederation of Business Industry (CBI) who have argued for years the need to wrest public control from WWS in Scotland.

At a Holyrood Water Conference in 2009, Alan Sutherland, Chief Executive of the Water Industry Commission for Scotland (WICS), Richard Ackroyd, Chief Executive of SW and Pamela Taylor from Water UK, pre-empted the current debate propounding the need for change on the basis that government cuts to SW funding may need to take place. Despite the fact the Scottish Government has never suggested a cut in funding to SW, Sutherland raised this prospect for change, moreover, that alternative means of financing should be sought, namely, either commercial loans or by way of the Scottish Futures Trust (SFT). In July 2010 the calls for the transformation of SW ownership were accelerated by the SNP-created SFT (chaired by Merchant Banker Sir Angus Gossart) and the Independent Budget Review (IBR) (chaired by Crawford Beverage, an industrialist and board member of the venture capitalist firm Scottish Equity Partners) – an initiative by the Scottish Parliament to consider options for public spending budgets. In a carefully-choreographed process, the SFT and IBR, alongside the Centre for Public Policy and the Regions (CPPR), recommended SW become a Public Benefit Company otherwise known as a Company Limited by Guarantee (CLG). In an apparent attempt to manipulate public opinion they contend this is not privatisation and would ensure SW remained in public hands.

The WICS has perhaps been most influential of all. Their role is solely concerned with setting the budgets and charges in Scotland. Yet, in 2006/2007 the WICS privately commissioned London-based consultants LECG and ING Barings to consider different options of ownership for SW. Known as ‘Project Checkers’ and never publicly released, this report recommended a CLG, an almost identical recommendation made by the SFT and IBR. Included within the £209,000 cost of the LECG report (paid for from public money) was a staggering £17,606.00 for external advice from Neil Summerton (obtained through FOI), a non-executive director at English companies Veolia South East and Veolia Central, both of which are owned and controlled by Veolia, the biggest transnational water corporation in the world. It’s plain to see that the objectivity of this influential report, from the outset, was compromised. The intentions and self-interest of Veolia are clear in shaping change in the water industry in

Scotland. Their Chief Financial Officer, Thomas Piquemal, recently remarked to Veolia investors, “The only growth we are interested in is growth in profits [...] we have tremendous potential to improve our profitability”.

The LECG report, produced prior to the recent pressure on public spending, demonstrates the seamless path between business, regulators, government bodies and government itself. Moreover, a preliminary LECG report obtained through FOI, illustrates the ideological and political rationale for privatisation. Further, the role of a public regulator in setting policy agenda is highlighted through the WICS commissioning such a report. The report’s only stated concern of recommending full scale privatisation was whether Scottish politicians, trade unions and the public would accept such a radical measure. Moreover, the report contradicts SFT and IBR’s assertion that as a CLG SW would remain in public hands, noting that a CLG is, in fact, a form of privatisation. Characteristics of the proposed CLG validate this concern as this type of company would be free of public control and involvement, be fully funded by private markets and user charges, and have directors’ pay increase beyond what are already exorbitant levels (obtained through FOI). Furthermore, the LECG notes that this form of privatisation could change over time, pointing to a “possibility that a group of members by determined action might be able, with the support or allowance of the remaining members, to influence the company in unforeseen or even irrational ways...” This “cannot be ruled out completely...” the LECG contend, “that is the price of creating an independent body” (obtained through FOI). Notably, however, should this happen it would be without public recourse. It’s no wonder LECG’s concern is with public perception.

To give context to the debate, it is important to acknowledge that even though SW is still tenuously accountable to the Scottish Parliament, this public entity has been essentially corporatised – operating as a private company with only a semblance of public accountability. Indeed, a key feature of this corporatisation is the entrenched private sector involvement manifested in the outsourcing of SW’s operations through Scottish Water Solutions and the PFI contracts employed to design, build, operate and finance 21 Wastewater Treatment Works (WWTW), which came into being in the late 1990s. Alarming, however, many of these PFI contracts have had difficulty meeting odour and discharge compliance at various sites around Scotland, pointing to the many risks of privately operated WWS. In spite of the PFI companies’ responsibility for much of the finance, design, building and operating of these plants a bulk of the funding for failures at plants have come from public funds. Private companies’ aversion to, and poor track record of, reinvesting capital for construction, improvement and extension of goods and services, indicative of PFIs here in Scotland, points to the siphoning of public monies to bolster private operations and profits. Thus, while privatisation transforms the public interest ethos into a for-profit motive – with the company legally obliged in this regard to their shareholders, as evidenced in Scotland’s WWS PFI contracts – the public ultimately remains responsible for risk in terms of large capital investments thereby effectively subsidising private profit.

Economists suggest that the sale of Scottish will relieve the public purse, forever feigning that it is more a matter of value for money than it is politics and ideology. Even if this were the case (which it is not as it is ultimately the people of Scotland who pay for their WWS through either general taxation or user charges),

then one concerned about public interest would be compelled to question the proposed sale of a public utility with a total asset base worth £36 - £42 billion (as outlined by SW), for £2.75 - £3.5 billion (as suggested by SFT). To be sure, this economic rationale represents a particular world view with an ardent belief that private companies operating in robust markets with minimal government interference are more efficient than public entities. Once the profit motive becomes society's *raison d'être* and all productive capacities are geared towards this ethos, so the argument goes, only then will life be more efficient and, as an ancillary benefit, more equal. This is a neoliberal worldview that has intensified reform in all aspects of life: social, political and environmental, including all facets of daily life associated with these spheres.

The economic rationale for privatisation paints a partial picture; there is little, if any, analysis of the social and political impacts. From a social point of view, the history of water privatisation has shown that workers' rights, including pensions and pay amongst others, are detrimentally impacted. Disconnections are a normal - a mere collateral occurrence consistent with the tendency for private water providers to cherry-pick lucrative operations. This would call into question service provision in the Highlands and Islands if privatisation was pursued. From a political point of view, control of socially necessary goods and services in a privatised model is ceded from democratically elected and accountable officials and subsequently transferred to city of London investors and private equity firms. The loss of democratic control of our most precious and essential resource, water, is unconscionable and dangerous.

The purveyors of water privatisation are intimately involved and closely following the SW debate, anxiously waiting for changes to the ownership of WWS in Scotland. Certainly, as a mature and relatively well developed system, Scotland's WWS industry is the archetypal market sought by transnational water corporations and investors alike. Where throughout Europe the broader ideology is agreeable, the political and economic climate is stable and conducive to business' interests (i.e. legislation permits, risks low and/or amortised [public subsidy] and profits guaranteed) water corporations have openly acknowledged their plans to expand. At the 2008 World Water Week in Stockholm an investor proclaimed, "Water systems in Europe are ripe for privatisation, it's the policies that's not ready [sic]." With the economic criteria met here in Scotland, the purveyors are left only to test the political will, thus the importance of this debate.

Moments of crisis, to which capitalism is prone, and the policies employed to mitigate their worst effects (those generally skewed in favour of private capital over the public interest) create new spheres of investment thereby reconfiguring class relations. This is where we find ourselves in Scotland, locked into a debate over the ownership and control of one of our most precious and essential resources. Harvey adds, "Whether we can get out of this crisis in a different way depends very much upon the balance of class forces". To this end, organisation and cooperation is essential. The most fundamental of public services must remain under public ownership and control. ■

*Tommy Kane, University of Strathclyde and Kyle Mitchell, University of Strathclyde*

# taking back our trains

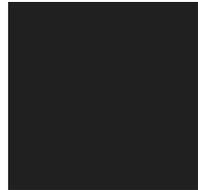
**Kevin Lindsay shows that both the social and economic case for the full renationalisation of the rail network stack up**

David Cameron's often-mentioned desire to strengthen his party's relationship with Scotland will not have been helped by money-saving proposals to axe a number of direct rail links between London and Scotland. Plans to cut services on the state controlled East Coast Main line will result in direct services between Glasgow Central and Kings Cross station in London being reduced from thirteen a day to just two. These latest cuts which have been strongly opposed by ASLEF follow money-saving proposals to axe the direct rail link between London and Aberdeen. The DfT has so far been one of the biggest losers in the savage round of cuts that followed the General election, facing reductions of £683 m, or 4.6 per cent of its total. Further announcements of cuts to specific projects are anticipated following the Comprehensive Spending Review in October.

Scotland is additionally facing the prospect of losing more than direct cross-border services. Infrastructure plans to upgrade lines and replace slow diesel trains with faster electric models were put on hold in February following a report by former Audit Commission Chairman Sir Andrew Foster who claimed that halting electrification at Edinburgh, requiring passengers who want to travel further north to change to slower local services, would save tens of millions of pounds. His report stated that 'some significant long-distance destinations (Aberdeen and Inverness) are served by lines which are not, and may never be, electrified

and therefore require diesel propulsion'. Such routes would best be served by 'high quality connecting trains rather than through services'. Foster's proposal would certainly save on capital costs but is likely to prove something of a false economy. Not just for the cities losing a direct rail-link to London but for the whole of Scotland. History has proved that any government that disinvests in transport infrastructure will inflict long-term damage on its economy. A Con-Dem transport policy for Scotland is likely to harm not only passengers, but the entire country. A survey published in August which looked into the impact of economic activity found, to no one's great surprise, that investing in rail produces a better return than investing in any other sector for which the government is a major provider. In fact £2.20 of wealth is generated for every £1 spent, which compares particularly favourably with investment in the banking and finance sectors. At a time of economic uncertainty the most obvious course of action is to invest where medium and long-term profits can best be achieved. Any cutbacks to rail services, in Scotland as well as in the rest of the UK can be seen as a betrayal of Conservative and Liberal Democrat election manifesto commitments to fully support business while ensuring that public transport continues to provide for those who most need it.

The Scottish government has so far taken a different approach to Westminster in giving the go-ahead to the electrification



# PUBLIC WORKS:

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of the 200 miles of track between (and immediately around) Edinburgh and Glasgow at a cost of £1 billion. The funding of the scheme through Network Rail, which uses the rail track as collateral and is able to obtain low rates of interest because loans are underwritten by the UK Government, means that any savings to be made from cancellation of the scheme would have been relatively small. At the same time the DfT in England has postponed two schemes funded by the same mechanism: the electrification of the Great Western Main Line between London and Wales, which it described last year as of vital national strategic importance to both England and Wales, and the line between Liverpool and Manchester, which would enable electric trains to operate between Manchester and the West Coast Main Line services to Glasgow and Edinburgh. In Scotland, the decision to go ahead coincides with economic forecasts of slow or negative economic growth resulting in higher than anticipated high job losses. All of which requires much deeper cuts elsewhere to compensate, such as the cancellation by the SNP government in Scotland of the Glasgow Airport Rail link which would have created 1300 jobs at a time when they are desperately needed and significantly enhanced existing infrastructure in time for the city to host the Commonwealth Games. The cancellation of GARL was a short-sighted decision which leaves Scotland without rail links to any of its major airports and will undoubtedly lead to an increase in road traffic, meaning increased congestion and carbon emissions.

In fact the Fraser of Allander Institute at Strathclyde University warned in August that the risk of a second recession in Scotland had been considerably increased by the fiscal consolidation package in the Con-Dem coalition's post-election emergency Budget. The warning was based on the impact of a 14 per cent real terms reduction in the Scottish budget by 2014/15, equivalent to the loss of between £4bn and £4.5bn a year, calculations based on the continuance of the Barnett formula. If that were to be changed to adopt the proposals of the Calman Commission, with the Scottish budget based on tax receipts from north of the border, there would be an even bigger cut (an additional £500m in Scotland's annual budget) with all that implies for major investments in infrastructure. The cancellation of major infrastructure projects south of the border and the delay of similar projects in Scotland belies Conservative attempts to 'decontaminate' the party by pursuing a green transport agenda. Promising to scrap the third runway at Heathrow and a second at Stanstead alongside a major overhaul of Air Passenger Duty is meaningless without the provision of an alternative cleaner, greener, electrified rail network. Since regaining power earlier promises to begin work 'immediately to create a high speed rail network that connects London, Heathrow, Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds and eventually Scotland and Wales' have not been repeated. Only time will tell whether this silence can be blamed on a lack of money or on growing resistance from Conservative-voting greenbelt residents. Either way the Conservatives are suddenly looking a

lot less green than previously, and those on the left should now be mounting a concerted challenge to Tory pretensions to 'be the greenest government in history'.

The Conservative election manifesto included several promises specific to our railways. Included among them was a commitment to 'grant longer, more flexible franchises to incentivise private sector investment in improvements like longer trains and better stations'. What the vast majority of the rail-using public would prefer to see is trains and tracks reunited and running on time under a fully nationalised railway, both south of the border and here in Scotland, something that Scottish Labour seemed to be considering when they said in a manifesto that 'the case for running the Scottish franchise on a not-for-profit basis needs to be fully examined as part of the preparation for the next franchise.' Scotland would be the ideal place to try out a return to a socialist, publicly owned railway, operated for and by the people because the railway network in Scotland is largely self-contained, with more than 90 per cent of services run by one company, First Scotrail. The only exceptions are the cross-border long-distance trains operated by Virgin and East Coast Mainline. First Scotrail's franchise, which received subsidies of £1.7bn over seven years, making it one of the most heavily subsidised franchises on the entire network, was extended until 2014 by Scottish Transport minister Stewart Stevenson without consulting MSPs, transport authorities, passenger groups or trade unions, despite an assurance given to a Scottish TUC delegation only a few weeks earlier that future decisions would be made only after 'consultation and dialogue'. Aslef has contended that this decision was deliberately timed to pre-empt Audit Scotland's enquiry into whether taxpayers were actually receiving value for money. Certainly Scotrail's shareholders were.

Why not introduce a fully integrated, publicly owned operation instead? The benefits of combining track with train in a single body that exists to serve its users, rather than its shareholders are manifold and likely to provide much better value for money to a traveling public fed up with delays and fare hikes. Profits would be reinvested, allowing fares to remain stable and the need for subsidies would no longer exist. It is an operating model that has support, not just from rail unions, but from a confused and exasperated public who have seen for themselves the expensive chaos resulting from the fragmentation of the railways that followed privatisation. Despite a doubling in the revenue from ticket sales since privatisation Britain's rail network receives an annual subsidy of more than three times what it cost to run British Rail, and in Scotland's case you can not even claim the intended 'benefit' of competition. In England delays in awarding two rail franchises earlier this summer presented taxpayers with a bill of £24m, for which they received absolutely nothing in return. Further delays in re-negotiating the East Coast franchise will likely cost many more millions. At a time when Train Operating Companies' profits continue to rise despite a recession-led drop in passenger numbers the left must amplify its demand for an end to this maddening, incomprehensible and covert system of administering the great carve-up of our railways. Having spent almost £40bn partly nationalising the banks you would think that taking our railways back into public ownership at almost zero cost would be considered a bargain the government would want to snap up. Of course there is little chance of this government doing so, but it is certainly something a newly invigorated Labour opposition

should plan early for, that is if the leadership can overcome new Labour's aversion to the 'n' word.

Renationalising our fragmented railway would not only be cheap to do, but has never looked more possible. Franchise operators, who owe the government millions of pounds for the right to operate trains, can not reasonably expect to continue running on an overdraft. Sooner or later we are likely to see more Train Operators default on government contracts. Rather than re-negotiate we should cancel existing obligations and instead ask for our trains back. If we do not then fares are likely to soar above inflation from next January. Transport Secretary Phil Hammond has already hinted strongly that exponential fare increases might be one way to help balance the books saying 'This is not a normal year. The scale of the financial crisis means that we have to make some tough decisions in the spending review which concludes this autumn. I am therefore not in a position to determine next year's fare increase'. All very different than before the election when the Liberal Democrats under the leadership of deputy prime minister Nick Clegg pledged to change the formula for pricing rail fares so that they would be pegged to RPI minus one per cent.

A clean, green railway that operates seven days a week and does not charge more than it costs to travel by car might be the only way to preserve our network, our environment and the trust of passengers. It is an objective that only a fully nationalised network can deliver. ■

*Kevin Lindsay is Scottish Organisaer of ASLEF*

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# Edwin Morgan

## As a tribute, here we reprint a presentation Edwin Morgan gave to a Scottish Left Review event at the Edinburgh Festival in 2002, entitled 'Scottish Fiction'

I'll begin by taking up some of the topics which the Scottish Left Review asked its three speakers to consider. I think 'consider' is the word, since in many cases there is no clear yes or no, right or wrong.

The first question was a big one, but we might as well plunge in and see what we make of it. 'What does the state of the arts and Scottish culture more generally tell us about Scotland just now?' Speaking about it from a literary point of view, I see it as a large and succulent egg which has not been quite cracked open. It seems to be generally agreed that there has been a revival of Scottish writing. If this is the case, it has come in two waves, one in the 1960s and one in the 1980s. The earlier revival was not chiefly concerned with things Scottish, the later one was very much concerned with things Scottish.

In the Sixties, there was an atmosphere, an excitement, a sense of liberation, of potentialities, of boundaries being crossed, which came from a great variety of things outside Scotland - the music of Bob Dylan and the Beatles, a new explosion of poetry and prose in America with Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, a new generation of poets in Russia with Yevtushenko and Voznesensky, the beginnings of space exploration, the international growth of the idea of a counter-culture. All this was reflected in Scotland, to the surprise of not a few observers. When a literary magazine called **Sidewalk** appeared in Edinburgh, there were complaints about its American title, to say nothing of its contents, and I remember a newspaper headline which said EDINBURGH SURRENDERS TO THE BEATS! This was the time when Tom Leonard published his poems in Glasgow dialect, to make his point that, as he said, 'all living language is sacred', and also to deliver strong political signals about social class and social authority. It was the time of The Edinburgh Writers Festival where the very public row between Hugh MacDiarmid and Alexander Trocchi made wonderful journalistic copy but was also genuinely significant as a turning-point in Scottish culture. Trocchi's novel *Cain's Book*, which later became very influential in Scotland, was largely concerned with the drug scene in America, but with flashbacks to the hero's childhood in Glasgow, and it reminded people that the New York waterfront could well be regarded as material for a Scottish writer to deal with - it didn't have to be Sunset Song country. Trocchi became a pivotal figure in Sixties culture with his Sigma Portfolios, which were cyclostyled sheets including articles by R.D. Laing and Kenneth White as well as by Trocchi himself and many internationally known writers. The main point about it is that Scottish writers were at home in an international context. And this applied also to things like concrete poetry, which was an international movement that turned out to be strong in Scotland but not in England. When Ian Hamilton Finlay and I began to publish our concrete poetry, eyebrows were raised; could this be poetry? could this be Scottish?! I was ready to answer Yes to both charges. It was a new time.

Between that time and the 1980s there was, of course the 1979 referendum and its failure to deliver a Scottish assembly. This political event, which caused a sort of numbness in

Scottish politics, had the opposite effect on Scottish writing, a galvanizing effect that was unexpected but powerful. As Cairns Craig has written, 'The political activism of the 1970s, made redundant by the referendum, became the cultural activism of the 1980s.' This was the decade of Alasdair Gray's **Lanark**, James Kelman's **The Busconductor Hines**, Iain Banks's **The Bridge**, Liz Lochhead's **Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off**, Janice Galloway's **The Trick is to Keep Breathing**, Tom Leonard's **Intimate Voices**.

These were not the books of a defeated country! There has always been argument about whether cultural change should precede, accompany, or follow political change. In this case, the outburst of good writing in the 1980s (which spilled over into the 1990s) clearly presaged the 1997 referendum with its overwhelming endorsement of a Scottish Parliament. Looking back now, I can see how my own book **Sonnets from Scotland** (1984), which began as a sort of defiant non-acceptance of the failed referendum, fits into an evolving pattern of Scottish culture as wide-ranging, risk-taking, internationally aware. Although it was in a sense a history of Scotland, an alternative history, I gave it a science-fiction setting, with mysterious visitors to the earth commenting on events and experiences in an oblique way, as in the poem called 'The Coin':

We brushed the dirt off, held it to the light.  
The obverse showed us Scotland, and the head  
of a red deer; the antler-glint had fled  
but the fine cut could still be felt. All right:  
we turned it over, read easily One Pound,  
but then the shock of Latin, like a gloss,  
Respublica Scotorum, sent across  
such ages as we guessed but never found  
at the worn edge where once the date had been  
and where as many fingers had gripped hard  
as hopes their silent race had lost or gained.  
The marshy scurf crept up to our machine,  
sucked at our boots. Yet nothing seemed ill-starred.  
And least of all the realm the coin contained.

As a rider to that, I might add Tom Leonard's little poem, written about the same time:

Scotland has become an independent socialist republic.  
At last.  
Eh?  
You pinch yourself.  
Jesus Christ. You've slept in again!

As you move through the 1990s, however, there are signs that things are not going to be so clear-cut. When Irvine Welsh's **Trainspotting** came out in 1993, it broke various boundaries and set up various challenges. It was another modern urban novel,

but its language was Edinburgh/Leith instead of the Glaswegian people had become used to in works of this kind; it lifted the lid off the wildness of urban life without moralizing; and although it was obviously very Scottish it was also anti-Scottish. As the hero Renton says, watching some violent, mindless, swaggering guys in a pub:

Ah hate cunts like that... Fuckin failures in a country ay failures. It's nae good blamin it oan the English fir colonising us. Ah don't hate the English. They're just wankers. We are colonised by wankers. We can't even pick: a decent, vibrant, healthy culture to be colonised by... What does that make us? The lowest of the fuckin low, the scum of the earth... Ah don't hate the English. They just git oan wi the shite thuv goat. Ah hate the Scots.

This language, with its mixture of the colloquial and the educated, seems devised to open up questions about Scotland in the reader's mind. It's an aspect of the book's particular kind of realism, the realism that made it the success it was. You may say, wasn't there realism before, in Kelman for instance? It's instructive to compare these two writers. A decade has passed between **The Busconductor Hines** and **Trainspotting**, and they inhabit different spaces, different worlds. Here is the busconductor telling his young son how to make mince and tatties. It begins like this:

Item: 1 pot. Item: 3/4 lb mince. Item: 2 onion, medium sized then a 1/2 lb carrots, a tin of peas and also a no - not at all, don't use a frying pan to brown the mince; what you do is fry it lightly in the same pot you're doing the actual cooking in. Saves a utensil for the cleaning up carry on. So: stick mince into pot with drop cooking oil, lard or whatever the fuck - margarine maybe. Have onions peeled and chopped. Break up mince with wooden spoon. Put pot on at slow heat that it doesn't sizzle too much. While breaking up mince all the time in order that it may not become too fucking lumpy. Toss in onions. The pepper and salt to have been sprinkled while doing the breaking up. Next: have your water boiled. Pour a 1/2 pint measure in which you've already dumped gravy cube viz crumbled into the smallest bits possible. Stir. When mince brownish add mixture. Stir. Place lid on pot. Having already brought to boil. Then get simmering i.e. once boiling you turn gas so's it just bubbles and no more.

And here is the hero of **Trainspotting**, listing what you need to come off heroin;

Ten tins ay Heinz tomato soup, eight tins ay mushroom soup (all to be consumed cold), one large tub ay vanilla ice-cream (which will melt and be drunk), two boatils ay Milk of Magnesia, one boatil ay paracetamol, one packet ay Rinstead mouth pastilles, one boatil ay multivits, five litres ay mineral water, twelve Lucozade isotonic drinks and some magazines: soft porn, Viz, Scottish Football Today, The Punter, etc. The most important item hus already been procured from a visit tae the parental home; ma Ma's bottle ay valium, removed from her bathroom cabinet.

Between mince and cold turkey there's quite a gap. Drugs are not a problem in Kelman's world. In Welsh's world no one would waste time making mince and potatoes. Both books reflected aspects of Scottish life, but when Renton and his pals appeared, they made us look back on the busconductor with different eyes, not necessarily more critical, but different. And it may be that

one of the legacies of **Trainspotting**, even though it has been much imitated, has been to establish or encourage difference rather than schools of writing. The sense that a referendum, this time likely to be a positive one, was in the offing may have induced a certain feeling for creative freedom instead of the linearity of striving towards that particular change. At any rate, in the last decade it has become much harder to see the wood for the trees and in fact there may not be a wood. Take a handful of recent notable books: Toni Davidson's **Scar Culture**, Jackie Kay's **Trumpet**, Alan Warner's **Morvern Caller**, James Kelman's **Translated Accounts**, Ali Smith's **Hotel World**. Have they anything in common? **Scar Culture** is a powerful, complex story of child abuse and psychotherapy. **Trumpet** is the touching story of a black jazzman who is found after his death to be a woman. **Morvern Caller** has a rural setting (Oban, plus a visit to the Mediterranean rave scene); it's written in the first person of a very cool young woman, amoral, unsettled, ready for anything. **Hotel World** interlinks in an oblique but moving way the lives of five women who have a connection with a big hotel. **Translated Accounts** shows a new aspect of Kelman: non-Glaswegian, written in a fractured, jargon-ridden English, set in an unnamed police state. The variety of approach in these five books is an argument in favour of diversity, a new phase in which Scottish writers have decided to boldly go wherever they feel impelled to explore. Categories are thin on the ground. Risks are taken. But this mixed, scene is not all that different from the Scottish scene in general.

A further question was suggested to us: "How do we persuade politicians of the importance of the arts in a time when micro-management is seen as the priority?" When the Scottish Parliament was established, it got a mixed reception from Scottish writers. Iain Banks said "I think it's a good idea. I'm all for devolution. I voted for the SNP at the last election... despite their absurd resistance to devolution." Tom Leonard said he wasn't even interested; it was just a different kind of sweetie being handed over to Scotland by Westminster. Alasdair Gray was somewhat between these two extremes. In his book **Why Scots Should Rule Scotland**, which came out in 1997, just before there was a referendum, he wrote (answering his publisher's comment that Tony Blair had committed his party to a Scottish assembly): "Perhaps. It is likely to be what Billy Connolly call a pretendy parliament... It will only be a step nearer democracy if Scots refuse to let it rest at that." And what was perhaps a surprise reaction from Irvine Welsh, whom many people think of as a sort of bizarre anarchist-cum-entrepreneur: "British identity is in terminal decline. Full independence is the future for Scotland. The worst-case scenario is that the parliament will be crap. You always get an oligarchy that creams it off for themselves. There is such a moribund' infrastructure of deadbeats and con men in the Labour party that has dominated politics in central Scotland for so long. I'd be absolutely astonished if these people didn't manage to push their noses in the trough and dominate. Hopefully not." I think all these comments suggest a very guarded welcome for the new Parliament. Welcome, but watch it! seems to be the mood.

It's quite natural for writers and artists to be wary of governments and governmental bodies. Writers and artists want recognition, but they also want independence. That's the crux. The Irish poet Yeats served for six years as a senator in the first Irish Free State parliament, but became increasingly disillusioned by its politics. One thing he did do was introduce a new Irish coinage - surely the most beautiful coins in Europe. That was alright;

but really Yeats's value lies in his poems and plays. How far a government can be proactive for the arts is always an arguable point. I think a Minister for the Arts would help. At the moment we have a Minister who includes the arts with a portfolio bulging with other things, and that's not good. The arts, and especially the literary arts, explore and expose and express the soul of a country (the Scottish Executive seems to be either unwilling or unable to make any kind of strong commitment to Scottish literature, perhaps in the mistaken belief that this would play into the hands of political nationalists). Take a small example. After I was appointed Glasgow's Poet Laureate by the City Council, a number of people began to ask why there wasn't a Poet Laureate for Scotland, especially since it now had its own Parliament. There was an English Poet Laureate - Andrew Motion - so why not a Scottish one? The answer is of course that Andrew Motion's post is a UK post, and it doesn't matter that no Scottish, Irish or Welsh poet has ever been crowned, that's just the way the cookie crumbles. Well, a proposal was, I believe, put to the Scottish Executive, but received a dusty answer. There are no plans for a Poet Laureate in Scotland. It may seem trivial, but symbolism is never unimportant. The Scottish Executive is still thinking in UK terms and cannot get its head round the fact that there really has been a change, and it must be recognised.

Do governments simply distrust writers? IRVINE WELSH FOR FIRST MINISTER! How would that go? Even if they distrust, they should listen to them. As Burns said, "A chield's amang ye takin notes, / And faith he'll prent it." And what he (or she) says about Scotland may not look like very good electioneering material. Here's Liz Lochhead, in the guise of a crow:

LACORBIE:Country:Scotland. Whitlikeisit?  
 It's a peatbog, it's a daurk forest.  
 It's a cauldron o' lye, a saltpan or a coal mine.  
 If you're gey lucky it's a bricht bere meadow or a park o' kye.  
 Or mibbe... it's a field o' stanes.  
 It's a tenement or a merchant's ha'.  
 It's a hure hoose or a humble cot. Princes Street or Paddy's Merkit.  
 It's a fistfu' o' fish or a pickle o' oatmeal.  
 It's a queen's banquet o' roast meats and junketts.  
 It depends. It depends ... Ah dinna ken whit like your Scotland is.  
 Here's mines.  
 National flower: the thistle.  
 National pastime: nostalgia.  
 National weather: smirr, haar, drizzle, snow.  
 National bird: the crow, the corbie, le corbeau, moi!  
 How me? Eh? Eh? Eh? Voice like a choked laugh.  
 Ragbag o'a burd in ma black duds, a' angles and elbows and broken oter feathers, black beady een in ma executioner's hood.  
 No braw, but Ah think Ah ha'e a sort of black glamour.

'No braw, but a sort of black glamour' - Is that subject to management, or micro-management? Probably not! It needs a bit of lateral thinking. The crow has a lef twing all right, but it gives a raucous warning that if you want the lordly eagle or the rare osprey or the famous grouse as your national bird, you're barking up the wrong tree. It's the common crow, watchful, dangerous, interactive. Talk to it. ■



# Scottish Executive Council

National Union of Journalists Scottish Executive Council mourns the passing of two progressive Scottish writers. We call on all the politicians of this county to support the NUJ campaign to raise standards in the educational field of language, literature and journalism at all levels.

## IN MEMORY OF JOURNALIST JIMMY REID and POET EDWIN MORGAN

Paul Holleran, Scottish Organiser. James Doherty (Chair, Scottish Executive Council)  
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# Jimmy Reid

“The golden age will then revive; each man shall be a brother,  
In harmony we all shall live and till the earth together,  
In virtue trained, enlightened youth shall move each fellow creature  
And time shall surely prove the truth that man is good by nature”.

That was the very apt Burns poem with which Jimmy Reid concluded his 1972 Rectorial Address at Glasgow University, his “A rat race is for rats” speech. I knew Jimmy for over 40 years. We first worked together in the late 60s. At that time in shipyards and factories, there would be five or six big trade unions and at least half a dozen smaller unions. An almost “caste” system operated separating workers by the job they did - white collar, blue collar, tradesmen, semi-skilled and labourers. Workers and their trade unions were divided, rarely combining, often in competition and could be easily picked off by employers. Jimmy and others saw the need for industrial unions that covered whole industries or services. After much effort and persuasion we were successful in getting engineers, foundry, construction and technical workers to form the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers. While the AUEW was not as successful as hoped, because of the self-interest of some at the top, it was the genesis of UNITE, now our largest trade union covering most of manufacturing industry. There have been similar mergers in other industries and services, creating single, stronger, more effective organisations to protect and advance the interests of workers and their families. This campaign exemplified Jimmy’s skills as a strategic thinker, able to analyse and articulate situations and then eloquently and passionately to argue for that position. He eschewed differences and narrow self-interests, always stressing the need for unity and solidarity.

He had profound vision and imagination and was a charismatic orator. He said what he believed to be the truth, often at great personal cost when others would have kept silent. During the 1984 Miners’ Strike, while supporting the cause against pit closures, he openly questioned its timing, tactics and validity. Many agreed with him, others didn’t, but it was a debate that was needed. On trade unions’ relationships with political parties; he advocated caution when it was unfashionable to do so. In 1995 he said: “In the 1970s trade union leaders did get too involved in quasi-governmental institutions. At the time I argued that if trade union leaders wanted to play a part in governing the country they should resign their union posts and stand for Parliament. The danger of such involvement is not that unions dominate government, but that government dominates the unions. Free trade unions, like the judiciary, have to be independent of government, all governments, any government”.

Jimmy’s last main project where he combined his political, trade union and journalist skills was in the establishment of the Scottish Left Review magazine in 1999. Since the mid-1990s he had warned about the direction of the Labour Party which had been hijacked by the New Labour faction. Jimmy called them non-Labour. Jimmy was equally critical of all the other main parties’ support for neo-liberal economic policies. As he

warned, these policies have led to a major recession where ordinary families will pay a heavy price for the greed of bankers and speculators and the failure of politicians to regulate them. Through disillusionment with this political direction Jimmy conceived the idea of a not-for-profit publication which would provide an inclusive, non-party forum for all the left in Scotland. He saw the potential of the internet for mass communication and interaction at a low cost to put forward the radical alternative policies and views. Jimmy, using his address book, convened a number of meetings and the Scottish Left Review was set up, primarily as a free, online magazine with printed copies available. His involvement and contacts were instrumental in keeping the magazine going in our early years. Ten years on, thanks to our readers, trade unions and individuals, the Review is going from strength to strength and providing that radical Scottish thinking which Jimmy envisaged and always practiced himself.

Jimmy got a lot of criticism from many in the Labour movement for becoming a nationalist. The truth is he was always a nationalist; home rule had been the policy of the Communist Party and off course Labour. In his last article for Scottish Left Review in November 2007, he wrote: “An old Welsh miner told me that a man who cannot love all that’s good in the culture of his own nation is incapable of respect for all that’s good in the cultures of other nations. In other words a healthy nationalism spawns a healthy internationalism. This truth seems to evade many on the British Left who tend to equate nationalism with chauvinism and to pose nationalists against internationalists. This is nonsense. “Inter” means between and “nationalist” a sense of your own national identity. Internationalism can therefore only exist as a kind of solidarity or a coming togetherness of peoples from different nations. If there were no nationalist there could be no internationalist”.

Our last conversation was about the political situation and the coalition government, or as he called them, the CON-DEMs. I was particularly despondent, Jimmy was more upbeat and reminded me that adversary could act as a stimulus to motivate workers to organise and fight back. It is a good memory of a fine man.

***Bob Thomson is a member of the Editorial Committee of the Review and a past chairman and treasurer of the Scottish Labour Party.***

‘Men are like rivers: the water is one and the same in all of them but every river is narrow in some places, flows swifter in others; here it is broad, there still, or clear, or cold, or muddy, or warm. It is the same with men. Every man bears within him the germs of every quality, and now manifests one, now another ... while still remaining the same man’. Tolstoy (The Awakening)

For our family Dad remained the same man. He never changed or altered. His essence was a good nature. He was good natured to the core. And he was eternally optimistic, generous, tolerant

and convivial (not always about politics), but about the capacity for human beings to be good essentially. And he saw it in all of us. There's an old phrase coined by a cynic about socialists: 'I love humanity, it's people I hate'. Not for Dad. He loved humanity, but he loved people even more. Dad was unusual in that the political was never personal for him. Dad and I argued a lot about issues. But although we argued we never ever fell out. That's why the 1980s were so difficult for him and our family. The personal attacks levelled against him during that decade bewildered him – even more so because many of those who did so told him in private he was right. But he persevered – 'Standing strong against opposing winds' – the key to a great leader. That was Dad.

Publicly he could be coruscating about one particular group – leaders who misled. But I didn't hear him say a bad word about anyone in private. Dad never gossiped; it didn't interest him, but more than that, he didn't like it – whether about family, friends or political friends or foes. So he wasn't clubbable. He resisted membership of any club or society that took itself seriously or met on a regular basis. He was non-sectarian and tolerant or in the modern jargon, multi-cultural, diverse.

Dad sang and danced a lot at home. Every morning, you could hear him. The kids used to follow him around the house, marching behind whilst he trumpeted his favourite tunes. Superficially and domestically, dad typified the West of Scotland working class male. He was that, but much, much more. He didn't like all – male Burns suppers and other male bonding events. His support of his daughters and granddaughters has had a huge influence on who we are as women.

As Dad, I cannot imagine life without him. It is going to be very hard. His love for us all was demonstrable. Kisses and cuddles were constant. And we talked – oh how we talked! Despite ours and his foibles, mistakes and failures, he did that un-Scottish thing: he saw the good in all of us. The water of that river may be muddy at times, but for us, he remained the same man. His values, along with his kindness, love of family, humour and decency will be passed down the generations of Reids to come.

*Eileen Reid, Jimmy's daughter*

I don't know how good an engineer Jimmy was but as a user of journalism's modern technology he was hopeless. Words were his means of income for 25 years after he reinvented himself as a commentator but processing them from a computer screen to The Herald often led to calamity. Very often the job of seeing the Reid column safely delivered to the editorial department was best left to colleagues or his family. Jimmy flirted with the tabloids for a while. At different times he wrote columns for the Scottish edition of the Sun – Neil Kinnock had argued for a Labour voice in a generally hostile media environment – and the Daily Record. But Jimmy was never comfortable with the Murdochs and Maxwells. He regarded Murdoch's power as an anti-democratic injustice and he was scandalised by Labour's fear of the Sun. His Record column, cleverly titled JR (the villain in the Dallas soap was popular at the time) had a big following but there were tales of heavy editorial direction, which dismayed him. And he was always one to resist the tabloids' fondness for columnists' comment on trivia. He was too big a thinker for that and, besides, he did not like being told what to think and he did not like Robert Maxwell nor Maxwell's notorious contempt for his own employees.

So his best journalistic efforts were poured into television where broadcasters, eternally searching for new talent, found themselves a natural performer, and into his Herald columns throughout the 1990s. Such was his lack of self-regard that he once phoned me in a panic asking where he could buy a copy of his own book, Power without Principles, which was an anthology of his Herald columns. He did not possess one himself and had forgotten the name of the publisher! In television he embraced the camera as if it was a close friend. A viewer could almost feel Jimmy's arm around him in the living room proffering a drink as he enthused over his latest subject. The Baftas and other awards were the inevitable result but however able Jimmy was on the telly his métier was the written word. "I consider myself dead jammy, hoachie, and any other word you can think of that means inordinately lucky. I make a living out of what I most want to do," he wrote.

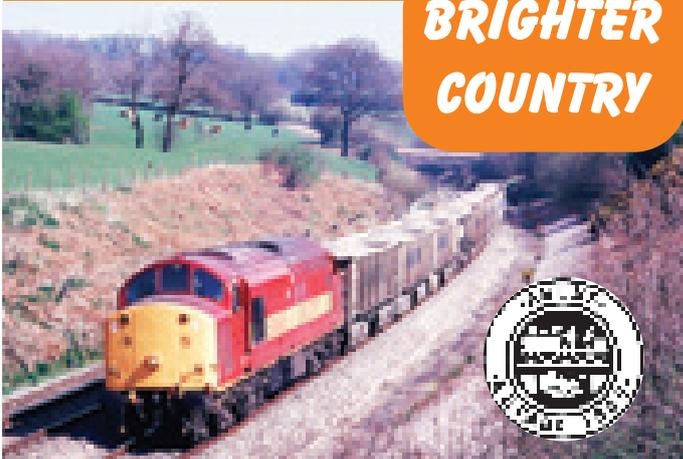
Whether as television critic or as columnist he poured out opinion with characteristic warmth and passion and when he talked politics – which was most of the time – with profound knowledge. How New Labour quaked when he thundered his denunciations and, later, began gravitating towards the SNP and independence. He had the greatest of journalistic talents, the ability to explain complicated issues in clear and unambiguous terms – and make his copy entertaining. In a Reid column you could always expect a good joke and heartfelt argument as he took up arms for protecting society's most vulnerable. "I'm a warrior," he said, "a warrior who trades in words." And Jimmy's words – his beautiful way with language – proved that the pen can indeed be mightier than the sword.

*Murray Ritchie is former Scottish Political Editor of The Herald*

## SCOTLAND HAS TAKEN THE LEAD IN TRANSFERRING FREIGHT TO RAIL

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I loved Jimmy Reid. He was a big fabulous convivial man who thoroughly enjoyed life and thrived on social interaction. He once said "We are social animals. We need one another" and he really lived that conviction. Beyond that he was a man of principle, always guided by his fundamental belief in socialism. His book, "Power without Principles" provided a welcome antidote to "New Labour's sickness"; a philosophy that sadly so many Labour politicians have been keen to associate with over the past decade and, interestingly, the current leadership candidates are now vying to disassociate from. Jimmy's essays unpicked the myth and reduced complex matters to the scrutiny of plain common sense, providing a beacon for anyone who sought to represent labour and promote socialism. This was a refreshing remedy for the spin and weasel words of the snake oil salesmen, dominating the political stage.

Jimmy epitomised for me the essence of real labour. He was working class, self educated and had a passion for fairness and equality. No doubt he would now be questioning why the 6th richest country in the world, whose economy continues to grow, is cutting services and provisions for the poorest in society instead of taxing the rich. I had the pleasure to visit Jimmy and Joan on Rothesay on a few occasions over the years. I particularly recall one occasion when Joan took me, my son and my niece to the beach whilst my husband Vann spent several hours drinking malt whisky, smoking Cuban cigars and soaking up the pleasure of Jimmy's company in the fabulous garden with a view of the bay. I'm told that the conversation mainly consisted of jazz, cricket and socialism – fantastic! Jimmy stayed with us a few times at our home in Coatbridge, with one of the most memorable involving a political meeting in my dining room to discuss the future direction of the Scottish Left. Clearly, we didn't sort that one out.

With Jimmy's passing, I have lost a personal friend, mentor and political inspiration. I believe that his various political party affiliations over the years were incidental to his fundamental belief in socialism. In "Power without Principles" he said "Let the parties rise above party, politicians above party politics. Let Scots unite across the divides, and governments, and even this lot, will surely pay heed". Sadly we still seem unable to do that, whichever party is in power. Jimmy Reid will be sorely missed and he leaves a massive gap in Scottish political and cultural life. Scotland has lost a much-loved, respected and renowned son whose common sense approach to arguing the case for socialism in a land of plenty was inimitable. He was also a well-read, self educated man who loved words and literature almost as much as jazz, malt whisky and Cuban cigars. I hope he would approve if I finish with a quote from Hamlet: "He was a man, take him for all in all, I shall not look upon his like again."

***Elaine Smith is MSP for Coatbridge and Chryston and Convener of the Labour Campaign for Socialism***

Jimmy Reid and Jimmy Airlie were two of those I looked up to and respected when I first attended the AEU National Committee in 1978, a notable year in which the left and right were tied 26-26. Of course I knew of both Jimmys by repute but I have to say they exceeded even their massive reputations they were an inspiration to me and many others ... I know this piece is about Jimmy Reid but I find it difficult to see one without the

other such as they were in my eyes. However I can relate one true story of when I last met Jimmy Reid, perhaps four or five years ago... I had come up to Scotland for a presentation evening for big Davie Cooper and in the room was Jimmy holding court as usual. On spying me Jimmy turned and in his characteristic way, arms outstretched. He said."Derek .... You haven't spoken to me in years!!". I shot back a reply "Sorry Jimmy I didn't like to interrupt"! For a few seconds Jimmy was for once lost for words until he convulsed into laughter. Like so many I will miss him his words and the confidence with which he spoke them.

***Derek Simpson is Joint General Secretary of Unite the Union***

Jimmy Reid; what do I write? All the adjectives have been used up by the wonderful tributes and contributions that have come from far and wide. Inspirational, Informative, and an exceptional talent for explaining issues - no matter how complex - in a simple way . The only person who could have found more adjectives, and articulated his contribution, would have been Jimmy himself. However not about himself but about all the injustices he observed and wanted to eliminate. I first came into contact with Jimmy Reid and of course the other Jimmy (Airlie) as a young shop steward during the UCS work-in. I was a steward working with the Marine Engineering Company Kincaids, installing main engine and marine equipment in the ships in one of the threatened Yards, Connells at Scotstoun. I found the whole experience of listening to Jimmy extremely enlightening, something which held me in good stead for a 17 week strike which I was involved in later in 1972. I am sure that both Jimmys would have agreed UCS was a collective effort given all the work that was carried out by the other stewards none of whom are household names. Their efforts ensured the success of the campaign. However without the Leadership provided by the two Jimmys, but in particular Reid's outstanding eloquence with the wider public, UCS would not have been so successful so much so that at a time when the Trade Union movement found it difficult to convince employers to take union contributions off members wages. In factories up and down the country Employers agreed to deduct the UCS fighting fund off the payroll, 25p per week. Everyone paid. So not only did Jimmy's oratory inspire the workers in the yards under threat it captured the hearts, and the minds of fellow workers, communities, and employers.

The unfortunate and tragic thing is that both times that Jimmy stood for election, once for a senior Full Time position in his Union the AEU and his attempt to be elected to Parliament as the Labour Candidate in Dundee, the electorate rejected him. This was in spite of the great contribution he made to both his union and the Labour movement. Maybe some of the people who conspired in those defeats whether in the Union, media, or in other political parties (playing the anti Red card) should reflect on a quote from one of the other great trade union, socialist and national Leaders of the last century, James Connolly: "Apostles of freedom are ever idolised when dead, but crucified when alive". Jimmy's loss to the labour movement and Scottish society are immense but in comparison to the loss that Joan and Jimmy's Family are suffering is minuscule. ■

***John Quigley is Former Unite Scottish Secretary and shop steward Kincaids marine engineering company Port Glasgow***



# 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**

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