



A watched **kettle** always boils
Resistance is not futile....

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comment

In recent years we have seen the British State at work abroad and we think we are familiar with how it operates when it establishes itself in foreign lands (although few of us can really appreciate what the horror of this work looks like abroad). But there is an emerging trend which shows us how the British State operates when it feels it is being challenged at home. It is chilling to see but in its overreaction we can find signs of hope – this is how our State behaves when it feels threatened. It hasn't felt threatened from within for an awfully long time.

The groundwork for this was a Blair legacy – as we know, in his view anyone who had any doubts about rampant neoliberal policies not only had “no arguments” but where they had arguments they were simply “wrong” (his well-known verdict on the G8 protesters). For a decade up to this point Britain was largely in a morphine-like daze. The 1990s were years in which neoliberal capitalism created for itself a series of new ideologies which were designed to secure the victories it had won and to create a staging-post for the victories to come. Prime among those ideologies was that we were ‘all winners’; the borrow-and-spend years made people feel like they were active, in-control consumers when in fact they were trapping themselves. The housing-price-rise-con made people feel rich by doing nothing. The new opiates saturated popular culture – pub society (and the lifestyle marketing of alcohol and eating out), gambling (the National Lottery and the deregulation of betting), footballism (the reinvention of English football as an almost self-contained lifestyle option), the rise of the celebrity (gazing at the lives of ‘ordinary’ but ‘rich’ people). We were tricked into thinking that this was our golden age and we had nothing to worry about other than how to spend our money. None of this was measurably true and it was going to come apart. It started about 1992 with the end of one economic crisis and was fuelled by the start of the ascent of never-ending house price rises. In the mid-1990s the domestic economy was doing fairly well (if you didn't work in manufacturing or the part of the service sector typified by cleaners) and the reinvention of England began in earnest (it is hard now to remember that the St George Cross was not the football flag-of-choice of the English football fan and English league football was a distant

fourth behind Italy, France and Germany). Then Blair arrived and this nascent feel-good effect was kicked into overdrive. We had Britpop and people were asking if London was the ‘most buzzing’ city outside the US (even our national fantasies were subjugated to America). We got Cool Britannia, licensing law reform, gambling deregulation, advertising deregulation and Mandelson and Blair's emphatic love affair with the rich. This last percolated down rapidly – soon we all loved ‘the rich’ (but mainly the nouveau riche as typified by our entire national loss of taste) and wanted to be like them. There was the millennium and a million marketing ploys flourished. By the mid decade the reading choice of Britain was celebrity gossip magazines and our money was only to buy endless clothes, shoes, alcohol and other signs of ‘success’. We believed we were only one small step away from the ‘rich’, that they were like us really. By then we had almost made this ‘true’ with the arrival of the talent show and reality TV ‘stars’. Britain was not so much depoliticised as lobotomised.

But the Fifteen Years of Intoxication were starting to wear off by the middle of the decade. Some will point to the Millennium Dome fiasco as the moment we realised we might not be untouchable and that Hubris might be flowing through the heart of London. Others would point to the ‘tulip fever’ of the Dot Com Crash in which people invested billions in companies with no products or no profits simply as an act of faith. The Iraq War was another important moment – it was hard to feel good about our spend-spend-spend lives when such a blatant injustice was about to be perpetrated. The G8 and Make Poverty History put conscience back in our lives and the Decline and Fall of the Emperor Blair unpicked much of our self-certainty as a nation just as Leeds United's bankruptcy started to question the impervious nature of the Premiership. The generation behind the winners in the house price game found themselves priced out of property and this hurt the nation's self-image. And as the debt mounted, cracks in the spend-spend-spend years appeared.

But in the end this is not what woke us from our slumber. In fact, as unfashionable as it might be to say it, it was Marx Wot

Web Review22

Kick Up The Tabloids23

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

Did It. The simple prediction that in capitalism one class will use the means of production to enrich itself and subjugate the rest was proved to be an unavoidable truth once more. All that changed was it was the means of financial production which was the weapon used by the few against the many. The unavoidable dynamic of capitalism meant this was simply bound to happen. All of the fantasy economics and fantasy lifestyle marketing in the world don't change the laws of gravity. It was always coming down. The question is, what is now left of the British citizenry?

In many regards the answer to this question is a positive one. There is real anger at the banks and at the rich and this is only just beginning. It is only now that the jobs are being lost, the prices in the shops are rocketing and wages are slipping further behind. Now is when the public seem to be starting to feel that it was not designer RayBans that were pulled over their eyes but the wool. Even two or three years ago it would be impossible to find Daily Mail readers ready to focus their ire on business leaders; now it is fairly normal. Barely a year ago a middle-class student would be infinitely more likely to be found shopping in Jack Willis than poking the wife of the Heir to the Throne with a stick. There isn't a political party in the country capable of keeping pace with the public mood – they threw out Labour to be immediately disillusioned with Lib Dems and decidedly lukewarm on the Tories. No party is coming close to capturing the mood.

And this is where we begin with this issue of Scottish Left Review, because perhaps for the first time in a decade it is not the citizens who have to answer the question of radicals 'why aren't you speaking out' but the institutions expected to represent them. There are two well-discussed examples. It was not the NUS which brought fear to the heart of the political establishment but the spontaneous anger of young

citizens acting collectively but alone. And it was not really the established NGOs which caused tremors in the Financial Times by putting tax-dodging front and centre in the public imagination but a somewhat disorganised bunch of individual citizens coming together as UK Uncut. Many are waiting for the union response, and not just to the attack on jobs and wages but to the big political questions. What no-one is really waiting for is a political lead from politicians.

This is what scares the British State. Blair left us a State ready to do virtually anything to combat what it saw as a threat and to justify it rigorously and self-righteously. But until now it was never 'you', it was 'foreigners', 'terrorists' and 'anarchists'. The irony, of course, is that it was none of these groups who brought chaos to the heart of government but the aforementioned middle-class students. That's what really scares the British State – uprising. Troublemakers will be dealt with sternly but what happens if the wider population shows any signs of unrest? The answer is that you step up what is now being called 'political policing'. The repeated use of 'kettling' (a sort of extra-judicial detention) and the revelation of the routine use of undercover police officers straying beyond spying into agent provocateur territory is what the state does to its people when its people seem to be making their own minds up.

So this is where we begin this issue. There is anger and there is a desire for change. Right now individuals are acting outside the institutions and in many cases this is because the institutions have been co-opted by the State. The State does not like this; an NUS full of aspiring future mainstream politicians the State likes. Their own children shouting abuse at banks they do not. So, if we are to resist, what are the institutions going to do about it? ■

how do we resist?

Trade unions may not yet be the public face of resistance to the cuts in Britain, but it is not too late. By building on the start made by students and anti-tax avoidance campaigns, Mark Serwotka argues that the unions can seriously challenge the cuts agenda

We are facing an unprecedented assault on public services from a government of millionaires that measures its success by how much of the welfare state it can destroy. A movement against these cuts seems to be rising – students and tax justice protesters are leading the way. But many people on those demonstrations are asking: where are the unions? Are they too weak? Have they become irrelevant?

Public sector workers currently face job losses, pay freezes, pension cuts and, in many cases, privatisation; and all of us are facing huge cuts in our local services, and our rights to housing, welfare, education, and healthcare being either diminished or removed all together. This is the greatest attack on the public sector and the welfare state since Thatcher, and some would argue (rightly in my view) that the proposals even go beyond that onslaught. Of course, the trade union movement looks very different compared with the early 1980s. Trade union membership is barely over half what it was thirty years ago and the anti-union laws act to constrain trade union action.

This is a reality, but some seem all too ready to use this fact to downplay the potential for any form of resistance – as if action can never win.

The reality, told from another perspective, is that the UK has higher trade union density and membership than France – yet no one suggests that the French are incapable of resisting bad governments or that they should moderate their opposition. Some will inevitably suggest that there is something distinctly un-British about the street mobilisations and direct action that characterise French resistance. However, both the student protests in November and December have challenged that idea – as have the tax justice protests that have targeted Vodafone and Topshop, organised by UK Uncut. Large street mobilisations and direct action are being organised by a new generation of activists, who have been politicised and radicalised by the gross injustice of these cuts.

Young people, including a growing number of working class youth, have destroyed the myth that they are an apathetic and consumerist generation. They clearly see their prospects are being destroyed by this coalition government. The abolition of Education Maintenance Allowance (£30 per week payments to the poorest students to attend college) which has successfully increased participation in further education is a disgrace. For those that still persist through college and wish to continue on to university they now face a lifetime of debt from £9,000 annual

tuition fees. With youth unemployment at 20 per cent, young people face some unappealing choices.

PCS has fully supported the students' protests and we marched with them, spoke at their meetings and occupations, and raised our concerns about the unprecedented levels of police violence they have faced. It would be easy for our movement to stand

aside from their struggle, to recoil at the direct action and passion of their demonstrations, and to keep to our own industrial issues. But the reality is that we, that is the working class, are all in this together. Trade union members live in households and communities with young people, with those on welfare, with pensioners, with people suffering in both the public and private sectors. We need unity. A call for unity may seem obvious, and you would be hard pressed to find a trade union leader or activist opposed to calls for unity against the cuts. It becomes controversial when put into practice, when concrete proposals are made beyond the rhetoric.

At the TUC last September, I stunned some media interviewers into silence when I said not a single penny needed to be cut and not a single job should be lost. "Surely", they spluttered, "you must accept the need for some cuts?". I don't. That's because the cuts are not economically necessary, they are a political choice. Different choices could be made. And neither do millions of others accept cuts, because we understand that if you want to build unity, you can't accept that someone else's job is expendable or that someone else's rights should be taken away. Unity requires solidarity – whether that's for students, pensioners, welfare recipients, or for public or private sector workers. This is a position that we have to fight for within the labour movement. While there appeared to be unity in the Congress hall, since then I have been accused at a TUC meeting of being a "fundamentalist" for opposing all cuts. There is a difference of opinion within the labour movement.

It appears this pick'n'mix approach to cuts opposition is in deference to the parliamentary Labour Party, but this is to let the tail wag the dog. While PCS is not affiliated to any political party, it seems ridiculous that the founders, funders and foot soldiers of a political party should be cowed by a leadership making policy in the bubble of Westminster. We've already seen the Labour Party offer support for Iain Duncan Smith's attacks on welfare, and Ed Miliband's splinter-inducing fence-sitting on student fees and protests. The problem with this pick'n'mix approach is that it means the labour movement picking between deserving and undeserving cuts. Woolworths' pick'n'mix meant

the liquorice and boiled sweets left on the stands, this pick'n'mix strategy would leave students and those on welfare hung out to dry. It is a strategy as bankrupt as Woolworths.

People have been subject to a tidal wave of propaganda blaming excessive spending on public services and welfare for causing our economic problems. This is entirely false. Public services and welfare spending did not cause the economic crisis that began in 2008, and the massive cuts proposed are only likely to extend the crisis by increasing unemployment. Even if people accept this is the case – and it would be hard to argue against it – then they are still faced by the argument that there is now no alternative to cuts. That is the political consensus at Westminster. Of course they argue about whether the cuts should be £40bn or £80bn, whether over four years or five years, but never about whether cuts are needed. We need to break free from this consensus, not become entrapped by it. It wasn't just rhetoric when I argued at the TUC that not a single penny needed to be cut and not a single job should be lost. PCS backed that up with the economic case, publishing a 12-page pamphlet **There is an Alternative: the case against cuts in public spending**, which set out why it was unnecessary to cut a single penny or job from public services.

People know that they did not cause this crisis; our duty is to build confidence that they should not pay for it. The students know that they should not have their EMA cuts or tuition fees trebled. We need the same level of confidence against injustice in the rest of the movement. Our national debt is far from crippling: less than that of all the other major economies. It is over £800 billion, but to put that eye-watering figure in perspective UK personal wealth is a staggering £9,000 billion (nearly half of which is held by the

richest 10 per cent). Why as a nation are we panicking when we have the equivalent of a £1 debt with £11 sitting in our back pocket?

The question is not 'can we afford public services and welfare anymore?' but 'can we afford the richest to go on getting ever richer?'. Thanks to the innovative protests of UK Uncut, this latter question

PCS has fully supported the students' protests

being brought into the public eye. People are rightly aggrieved that while they work hard and pay their taxes, many wealthy individuals and wealthy companies do not. Our research estimates that there is an annual tax gap of £120 billion from tax evaded, avoided and uncollected. The protests at Topshop and Vodafone have been a response to the injustice of these two high profile cases. The fact that the tax justice campaign has moved from the page into the streets (and into the shops) is a reflection of the confidence of activists that there is an alternative, the cuts are unfair, and must be resisted.

This confidence and mood of resistance is essential if we are to see mass and co-ordinated industrial action against the cuts. It would be naive to ignore or downplay the legal barriers that confront unions in achieving mass co-ordinated action, but I would argue the political obstacles are actually more formidable. In 2005, PCS and fifteen other trade unions successfully co-ordinated strike ballots over cuts in public sector pensions. Despite the anti-union laws the determination and solidarity existed – even against a Labour government in the run-up to the general election – to work together to defend members against an unjustified attack on pension rights. In 2011 it seems that public sector pension cuts might again be the issue around which trade unions unite in co-ordinated action. Both the NUT and UCU have already indicated that they will ballot for strike action in the Spring. The TUC General Council has agreed to convene a meeting of interested unions on coordinating industrial action, and the new leader of the UK's largest union says "this is the moment when we have to prove ourselves"

We will need to build a mood of militancy, and that is not easy, but we have to deal with the situation we are in, just as previous generations have – from the Tolpuddle martyrs onwards. Trade union militancy was not buried by Thatcher – it can and will rise again. In my own union and sector the last six years have seen the only national strikes in civil service history. As Bob Crow recently said of his own union, "our brand is that we're out there, punching away" and who could allege that the RMT has been paralysed by the anti-union laws? Inconvenienced certainly, but not left impotent. We should not forget that it was only two years ago that the movement was praising the occupations at Vestas, Visteon and Linemar – invoking the spirit of the Clydeside and Jimmy Reid. Only eighteen months ago there were the wildcat strikes at the Lindsey oil refinery and other sites.

If there was ever a moment for the unions, to paraphrase Shelley, to shake their chains and rise like lions, it is now. It is time for this generation of trade union leaders, members and other activists to make their mark on history. Yes, there are obstacles, but what previous generation made history without overcoming obstacles? ■

Mark Serwotka is General Secretary of the Public and Commercial Services Union



resisting the assault on care

Martin Sime argues that the voluntary sector can play a major role in resisting cuts which affect the most vulnerable, but that the left must take a more thoughtful look at the issues faced at the margins of the state

Will voluntary organisations be in the vanguard of those resisting the cuts? And what, exactly will they be fighting for? There is surely fertile ground here for anti-cuts campaigners to recruit people and organisations that work to support some of our most vulnerable and marginalised citizens. Many think that the voluntary sector ought to have a natural affinity with the trade union and labour movement and a mutual antipathy to rapacious bankers and duplicitous politicians. The voluntary sector has been uniquely affected by the recession and imminent cuts in public expenditure will have a profound impact on their work. Their meagre resources are diminishing at precisely the same moment as demand is growing. Across the world there are queues outside homeless shelters; record numbers are seeking help from the Citizens Advice network and many services are stretched beyond their limit. This perfect storm is made complete by falls in donated and earned income including government contracts, whilst facing the same escalating costs as everyone else.

If such an army could be won to the cause of resistance they would bring a formidable scale and reach which compliments the more formally organised battalions of the labour movement. The voluntary sector includes the millions who volunteer on a regular basis as well as a paid workforce which is now not far off the size of the NHS. The purpose of this article is to explore this proposition and to place the contemporary voluntary sector in a political and socio-economic context. My focus is Scotland, but the domestic themes here have a wider resonance – the salience of non-profits, NGOs and wider civil society has risen around the world in the last 20 years and their role in campaigning and civil resistance is much debated.

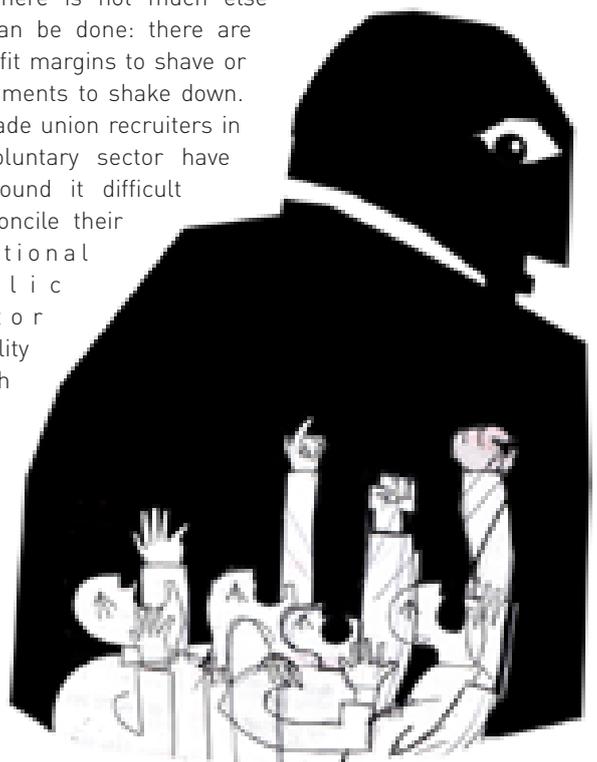
Of course we are grappling with diversity and pluralism here. In Scotland alone there are some 50,000 voluntary organisations, each with their own management committee and volunteers. Three new charities are registered every working day and the combined annual income of the sector is estimated at £4.5 billion. The vast majority are small and volunteer-led but there is now a cohort of service-providing groups, some of whom have substantial operations mostly in the field of care services under contract to local government. The challenges faced by this service providing model have been well rehearsed. Can you bite the hand that feeds, or will the traditional campaigning role be forced to take a back seat? As far back as 1993, a report to the Home Office (The Centris Report), suggested splitting the sector into two: tax breaks (and muzzles) for the service providers and no state funding at all for advocacy groups. A recent visitor from Sweden characterised their social welfare groups as having moved from “voice to service” and “from watchdog to lapdog”.

The recent fashion for social enterprise has also had an impact. A creeping managerialism and talk of business plans and contracting strategies have replaced the values and ethos focus

of traditional charities. Of course a degree of professionalism is necessary in order to run any operation of scale, but the notion of being agents of change has morphed into the sector being suppliers to government. The growing third sector workforce, too have noticed the change. Competitive tendering run by local government has simply eroded pay and conditions for what is now an army of care workers. It’s become a race to the bottom with zero hours contracts, no pension, minimum wages and frequent TUPE transfers to other providers. The sector has become what many feared – the cheap (and dispensable) alternative to public sector delivery. The irony here is that this has been done by local government, which now boasts an army of “commissioning officers” with thick rule books and a detailed knowledge of European procurement procedures. Yes, these are the same Councils who promote a “living wage”, final salary pensions and no compulsory redundancy policies for their own staff. Despite the rhetoric, there is no parity of esteem here. No matter how necessary the service, the work of many voluntary organisations has a second class status imposed by municipal authority.

Trade unions have been quick to recognise the voluntary sector as a fertile recruiting ground but this too has proved problematic. Labour disputes and poor employment practices are now all too familiar in the voluntary sector, but the rights of workers have been difficult to assert within a culture of well-meaning benevolence that characterises the volunteer Boards which lead many organisations. Also, if the money isn’t there then there is not much else that can be done: there are no profit margins to shave or governments to shake down. But trade union recruiters in the voluntary sector have also found it difficult to reconcile their traditional public sector mentality with the

The Big Society is now widely understood to be a fig leaf for cuts



interests of their newly recruited voluntary sector members. Manifestos which oppose contracting-out look hostile to voluntary sector interests. No-redundancy agreements with Government simply export job losses to voluntary organisations. A two tier workforce is now emerging between those directly and indirectly employed by the state.

In truth there has always been ambivalence about the role of voluntary organisations in public life. The left promoted not-for-profit delivery as an alternative to privatisation, for example in the housing association movement, whilst the right saw voluntary sector service delivery as a way of breaking up the power of a monolithic state. Patronised on both sides but for diametrically opposing purposes, voluntary organisations have exploited successive governments of all persuasions to promote their interests, fund their particular causes and create the most positive operating and fiscal environment for the sector of any developed country. However, politicians who see the sector as a potential instrument through which to achieve their objectives are almost always disappointed. (The Big Society is now widely understood to be a fig leaf for cuts.) Such ambitions often flounder on an inability to orchestrate diverse and often competing interests or to curb the remarkably steady inflow of new causes and movements. It seems that society, that much derided concept that Thatcher claimed did not exist, is alive and kicking in the environment movement, the work of groups like Positive Action in Housing and, of course in the many disability and single interest groups where self help and mutualism are the founding principles for collective action.

In any case the old battles to protect the public sector (perhaps because they will protect the vulnerable) have surely had their day. A big challenge is coming to all of these producer interests and to top down delivery on an industrial scale, including the voluntary sector and the state itself. Health and care is where it will be most sharply felt. Public expenditure cuts may have sharpened the debate about the sustainability of public services, but it was already widely known that the NHS could not be sustained in the longer term without radical surgery. The challenge of demography, and in particular the growing population of older people, could not be addressed with the current array of services, no matter how much Barnett-driven funding became available. On current projections for example, every school leaver would be needed to work in the care industry by 2030. What's more, there has been a growing appreciation that the current service model is outmoded. Statutory delivery, whether internal or through a third party, is fundamentally at odds with the policy objective of personal control and empowerment. Simply put, a new paradigm where people make choices about their own needs, in the context of their own families, networks and support systems offers a much better prospect than the current top down approach. In theory at least, this promotes the state to the role of enabler

rather than provider and puts the citizen at the heart of what will be a revolution in the care industry.

If such an army could be won to the cause of resistance they would bring a formidable scale and reach which compliments the more formally organised battalions of the labour movement. The voluntary sector includes the millions who volunteer on a regular basis as well as a paid workforce which is now not far off the size of the NHS

Gone are the big contracts where the words "person-centred" meant the opposite; gone are the armies of underpaid workers shuffling from one big provider to the next. In their place, people will make their own decisions to meet their own circumstances and I do not doubt that many will be informal, irregular and based around their immediate circle of neighbours and those nearest and dearest to them. Early experiments suggest, encouragingly, that their choices will be less institutional and thus less expensive. Hospital beds will be closed because people really do prefer to live their last few months at home, with the right support. It seems that

fewer people will choose residential or nursing home care too – the days of institutional solutions look numbered. We may yet end up with a state-enabled bigger society.

It would be a big mistake for the left to resist this change in defence of some combination of public sector/public service workforce interest. More-of-the-same won't work because it doesn't work for those who matter most, the people who depend on support to live as much of an ordinary life as their circumstances allow. Resistance to cuts can't become resistance to a change which is better aligned to current expectations and circumstances. Of course many people will want to mobilise to resist the reactionary policies of the Coalition Government and those who work in voluntary organisations will be well represented. But the epicentre of such an uprising ought to be the people at the sharp end of the £18bn cuts to welfare rather than the providers of services to them. Voluntary organisations can be useful conduits in such circumstances since they have unparalleled reach and are largely trusted in a way that public and private institutions are not. But they can be no more than that.

There is at least a theoretical narrative that connects the Scottish traditions of self help and mutual aid to the current conjuncture. People helping themselves and each other is how our mining villages survived in the 1920s and how our most remote rural and island areas are rebuilding and renewing their communities today. The left need a reappraisal of the role of the state in 21st century life as well as a deeper understanding of the varied roles and interests of voluntary organisations and the people who work and volunteer for them. ■

Martin Sime is Chief Executive of the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations but is writing in a personal capacity

the war that is coming

The managerialisation of local government means it is fanciful to imagine it will resist the cuts like it did in the 1980s. But Vince Mills argues that this does not mean the battle is over.

There is, according to military pundits, always a danger that we fight the wrong war, in the sense that we prepare for the next war on the strategy and tactics we used in the last one; the initial tactics of the first world war, for example, allowed for cavalry charges, not tank attacks. We are now in the throes of debating how we resist the cuts. To continue the military analogy there are three main theatres of struggle: UK issues determined by the Westminster government, like housing benefits; the NHS - the responsibility here lies primarily with the Scottish Government; and finally there are local services like education, social work, refuse collection and so on that are delivered by and partly funded at local level.

It is on local government that I want to focus. There is no doubt about the significance of this sector. The third quarter of 2009 showed that the total full-time equivalent employment in Local Government in Scotland (excluding Police, Fire and related services) was 221,600. This figure comprises: 56,000 teachers; 36,400 other education staff; 43,600 social work staff and 85,500 other staff. These make up 54.2 per cent of devolved public sector employment as opposed to the next largest employer, the NHS with 162,191 full time equivalents, 32.2 per cent of the 503,700 people employed in Scottish devolved public bodies. The big battalions of the Scottish public sector unions have their bases here in local government, in particular Unison which represents most non-teaching staff; teachers are mainly represented by the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS).

In so far as there has been a discussion around how we resist effectively at the local level, it has taken the form of an almost nostalgic call for the kind of strategies that emerged during the anti cuts fights of the Thatcher era. Where are the pamphlets calling on councilors to set illegal budgets, or to resign en masse? Where are the angry left councils leading the way? Where are the angry unions demanding resistance? In response to that last question, you could at least point to the decision by the Unison Scotland's Council for a day of action and their support for councils setting needs budget - at least some way to a strategy for involving local elected representatives in the process. But in assessing union responses you would need to factor in the call from EIS for unelected boards to take responsibility for education; this seems to be aimed at ring fencing education spending rather than either enhancing democracy or supporting a general mobilisation against the cuts.

By now you will have guessed where I am going with this argument. We seem to be working on a set of suppositions that are no longer sustainable. In relation to the response of unions and community groups I think the anger is latent. Here Alex Salmond and the SNP government have played a blinder. The offer of £70m to councils to freeze Council Tax for the fourth successive year in exchange for a 2.6 per cent cut in their grant,

totaling £540m as opposed to 6.4 per cent, if they refuse, has punctured the mood for immediate resistance in the wider community. However, as far as councils are concerned, the problem is much deeper and closely connected to the fate of the Labour Party. Firstly it has to be acknowledged that Labour no longer has a monopoly of power in Scottish local government. The introduction of STV mean that the number of councils it controlled fell from 15 prior to the election in 2007 to three currently. But it is not only Labour's lack of council control that matters in relation to its capacity to fight cuts; it is the abandonment of social democracy, both the 'social' and the 'democracy' as the, admittedly elastic, ideology that held the Labour Party together. By that I mean,

although there was always considerable room for maneuver, there was, historically a desire to use local government both to extend the public domain and to make local services a matter for democratic discussion not market transaction.

According to Knox's and MacKinlay's **The Re-Making of Scottish Labour in the 1930s**, "Since its formation Labour had viewed the state in an ambiguous way at both local and national level. Municipal socialism was a dominant part of Labour's strategy for social change and any 'municipalisation was socialism' as far as it was concerned." The residual commitment to this position, however weakened by disappointments, failures and political timidity in the post war period was the political basis of the resistance to Thatcher's cuts in the 1980s. It is not only that this ideological commitment has by and large been expunged from Labour's thinking but Labour in power under Blair and Brown became the instrument of transforming local government into an agent of neo-liberal proselytising at local level, with a mission to change citizens to 'customers' and democratic accountability to the parlance of customer service. Labour's 1999 white paper, **Modernising Government** sought to bring about three changes in government in general, but it is not difficult to see their particular relevance for local government. The paper argued that there should be a more participatory role for the public to tackle what it described as paternalism; that

This does not mean that the game is up and there is nothing we can do at local level. We can and should still call on Labour and SNP councillors to support creating Needs Based budgets, for example, even although we know we will not win majorities for that position.

there should be a move to executive-led councils as opposed to the traditional committee structure. This has affected all councils in England but in Scotland councils had a choice and only some, like Glasgow, chose 'cabinet style' government. The third change was an end to tax and spend.

Despite the differences between the systems in England and Scotland and despite the different political leaderships in post devolution Scotland, the tentacles of Modernising Government have reached out to throttle local democracy. Of course like much of New Labour rhetoric what appears to be an appeal to prudence and respect for local taxation, the injunction to end tax and spend is an essential part of reducing the autonomy of local government (not that there was any real evidence of excess according to local government expert Arthur Midwinter). You may recall that the first act of defiance by Labour-led councils in the eighties was to raise rates to defend services. The intention of a more strategic, business-like (in the literal sense of that term) approach to running local government through cabinet as opposed to full council and committee, is premised on the assumption that the committee system is associated with the sclerotic bureaucracy necessary to ensure accountability of officers and councillors to their electorates. It is the issue of accountability more than any other that we have experienced a quiet top-down revolution in local government. Under the guise of being more responsive to Council Tax payers and giving a more participative role to the wider community, including, of course the business community, democratic accountability has been hedged in. Councils have moved from being service providers to being 'enablers' often abandoning service provision in favour of outsourcing to private or third sector bodies.

Councillors have been helped on their way to this position by a series of legislative changes designed to transform local authorities into what Elaine Kamarck, former advisor to Bill Clinton, calls a 'performance managed bureaucracy'. According to Kamarck this is characterised by public sector organisations where budget rules, personnel rules and procurement rules etc are traded off for flexibility - hence the end to decent conditions for local government workers; where they use outcome or output performance measures - not manifesto commitments; where performance measures act as market proxies and customer service is used to model organisational behaviour - the citizen becomes customer. In relation to the last two points, The Best Value framework introduced as part of The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 was designed to achieve exactly these and this has been further embedded through the introduction of the Public Sector Improvement Framework (PSIF) based on the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) quality model whose roots can be found in the US Baldrige award. This award was named after Malcolm Baldrige, who served as United States Secretary of Commerce during the Reagan administration, from 1981 until 1987. In other words it is suffused the values and practices of corporate capital. The Best Value framework has been subsumed in the PSIF. The consequence of these changes can be seen in a report based on studies of local authorities in New Zealand and Scotland, sponsored by the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland (www.icas.org.uk/site/cms/download/res_bureaucracy_summary.pdf):

"The major result, in terms of managerial and organisational changes, was that of a move away from old-style bureaucratic management to a more responsive style of management. This

was a development common to local authorities included in this study, whether rural or urban, and whether located in Scotland or New Zealand...

- a shift from service providers to being enablers, by outsourcing/contracting services;
- a move away from a set of values which were internal, and driven by professional interests within local authorities, rather than the needs of the citizen as 'customer';
- a rejection of short termism and a desire to take a more strategic perspective on the activities of the local authority; and
- the promotion of a corporate philosophy and perspective rather than narrow, sectional interests."

If that were not enough to ensure council compliance with the underlying drive to a fully marketised future, since 2007 councillors not only receive a salary but are required to engage with a Continuous Professional Development framework. The development programme launched in September 2010 sets out areas of development typical for an aspiring middle manager in the private sector for example 'Promoting Change and Improvement', 'Working Collaboratively', 'Effective Leadership'. These concepts do not come in an ideologically neutral form. They will be 'taught' within the ideological boundaries set by Best Value. In short, the notion that as in the eighties we can look to Labour (or SNP councillors for that matter) to lead or even play an important part in the struggle against cuts is fanciful; both are enmeshed in the language and thinking of New Public Management (for which read market dominance) that permeates local government.

This does not mean that the game is up and there is nothing we can do at local level. We can and should still call on Labour and SNP councillors to support creating Needs Based budgets, for example, even although we know we will not win majorities for that position. Some at least will join the few Greens and other independent socialists already willing to stage serious resistance to the cuts and they will be welcome additions to our campaign. Secondly we should use the space that the SNP's budget dodge has given us to continue to do two things. First we must campaign to heighten awareness of the implications of cuts at local level and argue for practicable alternatives. Here I think the Peoples Charter can play a role. We should aim for thousands of signatures to be delivered to the Petitions Committee of the new parliament of 2011 and we should ask every candidate for the Scottish General election to sign up and publicise those who do and those who do not. And we should begin a serious discussion about local democracy in Scotland from a left perspective. We cannot ignore the fact that we now have a Scottish Government that provides around 80 per cent of funding for local government and we need to determine how we best achieve delivery of essential services under real democratic control. In short we need to develop a credible alternative vision that will motivate the building of a new socialist movement for a new Scotland based on the war that we will need to fight rather than the one we may have wished for. ■

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beyond usual boundaries

Stephen Smellie argues that trade unions must run a political campaign and not just seek to protect member interests, which means reaching out beyond the unions. But he warns that this may not be as easy as it seems.

All across Scotland Councils, Health Boards, non-departmental public bodies and community and voluntary sector organisations are making cuts to jobs and their workers terms and conditions. In every one of these organisations there are trade unionists trying to resist the worst-case scenarios.

Negotiating to avoid compulsory redundancies and cuts in pay has now become a target that, in some cases, unions are pessimistic about achieving. In Aberdeen City unions were told pay cuts or compulsories – what do you want to agree to?

Those who consider industrial action find themselves attacked as unrealistic, lucky-to-have-a-job-and gold-plated-pension bureaucrats who need to get real. Sometimes that is the membership reaction, never mind the employers and press. So there is a difficulty. Assuming we want to resist the cuts and attacks on jobs, how do we overcome these difficulties? Public sector trade union leaders, at local and national level, have spent so long negotiating for small improvements within a context of increasing budgets. Now the tide has turned and budgets are being slashed it presents a whole different context for trade unions. As a colleague in UNISON put it; "If we fight to save this library and its jobs, we might win, but they'll just go and shut another one".

Cuts in budgets from Westminster mean cuts in jobs, says the consensus. So how do we resist and what is it we are hoping to achieve? Part of the answer is to recognise that cuts to jobs will mean cuts to services for the public. However instead of trying to invoke the threat to services as simply an argument for protecting jobs and hoping service users will support our jobs we need to focus on the services themselves. We need to think about campaigns to save services first and think how our fight to save jobs can support the campaign to save the services. In other words try to get it the right way round. Services, and then jobs.

If campaigns are successful in saving schools, day centres, libraries, etc. then the jobs of the trade unionists will be better protected. Trade unions don't need to lead these campaigns but they need to support them. Trade unions have resources, funding, staff, contacts in the media and political circles. We need to put these towards building an anti-cuts movement. That

means supporting campaigns regardless of the party affiliations of the people involved – not demanding a veto over tactics with the threat to withdraw financial, practical and moral support. (It is helpful that there was not a rush to condemn the students over a few incidents, unlike in the past when violence was the excuse for some politicians running a mile from supporting Poll Tax campaigners or striking miners.) Branches and Regional and National Committees of unions should encourage

any community or group which opposes any cut in public services. A thousand little campaigns against local cuts adds up to tens of thousands of campaigners against public sector cuts. An army of anti-cuts campaigners.

Trade union leaders will also need to be relaxed about the possibility of 'illegal' industrial action. If workers in a council walk out over the threat of compulsory redundancies without taking a month to go through the legal procedures so be it. Wherever and whenever workers or students or service users decide to protest it should be supported. We need to think out how to support quickly and we need to take initiatives and even risks to do so. The point is to build and encourage resistance, not control it.

Some people have referred to the example of the mass campaign that defeated the Poll Tax. These include some who played no part in

the campaign other than refusing to pay and some who actively opposed the central tactic of non-payment. They remember the mass demonstrations and riot in Trafalgar Square but they forget about the hundreds of thousands of leaflets stuck through letter boxes, the thousands of public meetings held in community centres and village halls and the hundreds of anti-Poll Tax Unions set up across the country that built the movement from the bottom up. The building of an anti-cuts movement rooted in the communities is an essential part of the answer.

Of course for the unions, this is a new world. Most unions are used to running their own specific campaigns to defend or promote the interests of their members. They often do not even work with other unions never mind community and service user groups. The Scottish Parliament's existence has encouraged this insularity with trade union lobbyists being able to have direct access to Civil Servants, MSPs of all parties and Ministers. With such direct access, with generally a supportive

As anyone who has tried to establish a local anti-cuts group or hold a public meeting will know, the community is not well organised. The tenants movement is a shadow of its former self. Community Councils tend to be moribund. Older and disabled peoples, parents and youth groups are few in number and the 'activists' among them are often overwhelmed with running their own groups



more. The organisations that frequently seek to represent the 'voluntary' sector, 'service users' and 'consumers,' with one or two notable exceptions, are professionally led and compromised by their ties to the 'third contracting-to-provide-services-on-behalf-of-the-state sector' and more likely to be implementing cuts in their own services and workforces than forging 'ant-cuts' alliances with service users, never mind trade unions.

The STUC is fond of talking up the role of 'Civic Scotland'. The reality is that Civic Scotland is a shadowy creature not much in evidence on the streets. If trade unions are to build alliances across a broad spectrum then they will need to assist in building not only an alliance but the organisations to be allies with. The STUC is organising a conference in Lanarkshire in January on Social Justice and Equality and efforts have been made to ensure that as well as trade unionists, representatives from faith groups, student associations and other community groups are in attendance and helping to shape the agenda and outcomes of the conference.

response expected, there was seldom a need to build an alliance of supporters to persuade politicians. Now, building those alliances has become essential. This means reaching out beyond the trade union perimeter.

UNISON made a start by organising a 'Strategy Conference' in September where they invited voluntary, community and service user groups. It was a good conference and encouraged UNISON members in their efforts to resist but there were only a small number from out-with the unions and leftist groups in attendance. Community the Union in Lanarkshire wrote to 300 community groups and invited them to attend a meeting. The meeting went well but it was a trade union activist audience with few if any community representatives turning up. The October STUC demo in Edinburgh was positive but again it was a largely trade union affair with only small representation from out-with the union movement.

As anyone who has tried to establish a local anti-cuts group or hold a public meeting will know, the community is not well organised. The tenants movement is a shadow of its former self. Community Councils tend to be moribund. Older and disabled peoples, parents and youth groups are few in number and the 'activists' among them are often overwhelmed with running their own group's affairs that they are unable to take on much

Local Trade Union Councils, where these exist, have a key role to play in reaching out to their communities and building links, offering support and building confidence that the trade union movement is not just about preserving its own interests, jobs, terms and conditions and pensions. We are about a fair and more equal society that provides services not only to those who need them but to the community as a whole to enhance all of our lives. This, ultimately, is what we want to achieve and it is therefore appropriate that the STUC has not launched a 'defend public sector jobs' or even 'public sector services' campaign but a political campaign 'There is a better way'. From small campaigns to save a local day centre to the large demonstration that will hopefully fill the streets of London in March, the ideas and activists will come to campaign for and deliver that 'better way'. ■

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the scotland bill is broken

If the Scottish Parliament uses its tax powers successfully, it loses money. If it doesn't use its tax powers successfully, it loses money. Given that Jim and Margaret Cuthbert already pointed out this serious flaw, why is it still there?

The Scotland Bill, which is intended to implement many of the proposals stemming from the Calman Commission, was published by the Westminster government on St Andrews Day. In many ways, the central plank of the Bill is the proposal relating to the Scottish rate of income tax. In this paper, we will show how these income tax proposals suffer from grave technical flaws: how this threatens serious damage to the Scottish economy: and why, in political terms, the Bill constitutes a minefield for Labour in particular. We should start by making our own position clear. In principle, we very much support meaningful new powers for the Scottish Parliament: and we support the objective of increasing accountability. But as regards tax powers, it is essential that they are well formulated and not technically flawed: otherwise they could constitute a trap for the wellbeing of the Scottish economy.

The original Calman proposals were published in June 2009. In July 2009, we published an open letter to the Calman Commission pointing out that its proposals on income tax were technically flawed. There were, in fact, two main flaws. It is worth describing these at this point in the paper, because the same problems are still there in the income tax proposals in the Scotland Bill. Under the Calman proposals, the Scottish Parliament would be responsible for setting a Scottish rate of income tax every tax year. More specifically, all of the rates of income tax levied on the non-savings income of Scottish taxpayers would be reduced by 10 pence: and the new Scottish rate of income tax would be levied on top of this reduced level. Correspondingly, the block grant from the UK Government would be reduced to reflect the loss to the UK exchequer from the reduction in the UK tax rate charged to Scottish taxpayers. So if the Scottish government were to set its tax rate at ten pence, it would, at least initially, get back by way of income tax the same amount as had been deducted from its block grant. Now consider what happens if the Scottish government reduced the Scottish rate of income tax to below 10 pence: the most obvious reason being as part of an overall package of measures designed to make Scotland a more competitive place to do business and to stimulate the Scottish economy. Suppose total income tax receipts collected in Scotland, (from the combined UK and Scottish tax rates), rose as a result of this stimulus package. Would the income tax receipts coming to the Scottish government rise too? In fact, because the Scottish government would be getting a decreasing share of the increased total income tax take, the receipts coming to the Scottish government could well fall.

A hypothetical example makes it clearer how this could happen. Suppose that the Scottish government reduced its tax rate by

one pence, from an initial starting value of 10 pence: then the Scottish government would in future receive 9/19 of the basic rate income tax collected in Scotland. Suppose also that, as a result of an overall stimulus package to the economy (of which the tax cut would be an important part) total basic rate income tax receipts in Scotland rose from 100 to 103. Before the change, the Scottish government would have received 10/20 of the 100 total basic rate receipts: that is, it would have received 50 from the basic rate. After the change, it receives 9/19 of the increased total of 103, which amounts to 48.8. So the effect of the successful stimulus package is that the Scottish government in fact receives 1.2 less than it did before. The other side of this coin, of course, is that the Whitehall exchequer would be better off, to the tune of 4.2. So while overall basic tax receipts have gone up by three per cent, what the Scottish government gets goes down by 2.4 per cent, and what the UK exchequer gets goes up by 8.4 per cent.

We analysed the conditions under which this effect would happen in detail in our open letter. It turns out that, if the effect of a one pence reduction in the

Scottish rate of income tax is to increase overall basic rate revenues in Scotland, but by less than five per cent, then the revenues coming to the Scottish government from the basic tax rate would always fall. The corresponding percentages for the intermediate and highest rate bands are 7.5 per cent and eight per cent respectively. Since a one pence reduction in the Scottish rate of tax is very unlikely to stimulate overall tax revenues by more than these percentages, the implication is that a Scottish government operating under the Calman tax proposals would be unable to use its tax powers to stimulate the economy, without suffering a drop in its own revenues, and a consequent drop in the services it could supply. And while the Scottish government's revenues would suffer, the beneficiary of a successful stimulus package would actually be the Whitehall exchequer, which would receive increasing income tax revenues from Scotland. This perverse package of effects was the first technical flaw we identified with the Calman proposals.

The second technical problem we identified with Calman relates to the differing proportions of tax revenues coming to the Scottish Government from the different income tax bands: at a 10p Scottish tax rate, the Scottish government would receive 50 per cent of basic rate tax revenues, 25 per cent of middle rate revenues, and 20 per cent of highest rate revenues. However, the phenomenon known as fiscal drag means that the proportion of tax revenues generated by the higher rate tax bands tends to increase through time. But since the Scottish Government receives a lower proportion of the revenues generated by the

higher rate bands, this would lead to a decreasing trend in the average proportion of income tax revenues going to the Scottish government. The mathematics underlying these effects are given in a paper we published in the Fraser of Allander Economic Commentary in February 2010.

What the first technical flaw means is that a Scottish government would be unable to increase its revenues by decreasing the Scottish rate of income tax: its only option, if it has to increase revenue, is to increase the Scottish tax rate. What the second flaw means is that, under most foreseeable circumstances, a Scottish government operating under the Calman proposals would face increasing financial pressure as fiscal drag decreased the share of Scottish income tax revenues which it received. Taken together, this means that the Scottish government would find itself under almost irresistible pressure to progressively increase the Scottish rate of tax: hence condemning the Scottish economy to increasing lack of competitiveness and ongoing decline. This led us to the conclusion that the implementation of the original Calman income tax proposals would be a disaster for Scotland and her economy. In November 2009, the then Westminster government published a White Paper, containing its response to the Calman proposals. It endorsed the Calman proposals on income tax, virtually unchanged, and without addressing any of the technical flaws which we, and other commentators, had identified. In fact, the White Paper actually made things worse. The White Paper transitional arrangements, which would last for an unspecified time, had the effect of aggravating the first of the above technical problems. While the transitional arrangements lasted, a decrease in the Scottish rate of tax would always decrease the revenues going to the Scottish government, no matter how much the economy was stimulated: and an increase in the Scottish rate would always yield more revenue for the Scottish government, no matter how much the Scottish economy declined. Again, the maths of this is given in our Fraser of Allander article.

So, finally, we come to the Scotland Bill. Has this addressed the technical flaws? No. What is proposed as regards the Scottish income tax is in all essentials the same as in the last government's White Paper: this includes the flawed transitional arrangements, (now suggested to last for three fiscal years). The current proposals are therefore subject to all of the technical problems discussed above: if implemented, the proposals will impose a chronic squeeze on the Scottish budget – and as the Scottish Government is forced to raise the Scottish rate of tax to counter this, will have a disastrous effect on the Scottish economy. There is, it is true, a promise in the Command paper published at the same time as the Scotland Bill that "The UK Government will continue reviewing the system to ensure that the relative levels of public expenditure going forward remain consistent with what the Commission described". There is no comfort in this: if anything, it gives the Westminster government the ability to impose, by default, whatever squeeze on public expenditure in Scotland that it chooses. When the Scotland Bill was published, some commentators suggested that, in the event, future Scottish governments would be unlikely to make active use of the income tax powers: and that, just as no use has been made of the existing tax varying powers, so future governments would probably continue to set a neutral, 10 pence, Scottish rate. What these commentators failed to grasp was that, because of the fiscal drag squeeze which will result under the new arrangements, long term continuance of a 10 pence rate is not really an option.

One of the key objectives of the Calman Commission was to improve the financial accountability of the Scottish Parliament. But Calman also identified, as one of the main weaknesses of the current block grant arrangements, the lack of effective economic management tools for the Scottish government. The great paradox of Calman is that the income tax changes which the Commission finally recommended, far from improving the Scottish government's powers of economic management, would virtually force the Scottish government into a series of progressive tax rises which would damage the Scottish economy. And it is a strange form of accountability that forces the organisation in question down one particular, adverse, course – and then tries to make it accountable for the results.

But in addition to the potentially disastrous economic affects, there are also huge political implications: and, as we will argue, these are primarily for the Labour Party.

Let us look at the other parties first. The Conservatives have little enough to lose in Scotland anyway when the adverse effects of the Calman tax proposals become clear: and, in fact, the curb on Scottish public expenditure which will result will play quite well with certain elements of Conservative traditional support, both in Scotland and beyond. The LibDems anyway are sleepwalking to disaster. The Nationalists, on the other hand, have a consistent and defensible stance on the Calman tax proposals. They have understood that there are basic technical flaws in Calman, and have argued that the proposals should not be implemented without radical change. They will not be able to stop Calman on their own: but they will be able to account for themselves with the electorate when things go wrong.

What about Labour? First of all, they are in the position where they can stop these tax proposals if they want. As is made clear in the Command Paper, under the Sewell convention it will be for the Scottish Parliament to indicate their approval for the measures contained within the Scotland Bill. So if Labour were to oppose, then their votes, together with the SNP's, could block this. But for Labour to do this it would mean publicly acknowledging that that part of the Calman proposals relating to income tax was flawed. It would also mean Labour breaking the consensus between the three Unionist parties, and making common cause with the SNP on this issue in what, in effect, would be a challenge to Westminster. On the other hand, if Labour assists in pushing the tax proposals through, then as the damaging consequences of Calman become clear, Labour is likely to reap the whirlwind of Scottish electoral disapproval. It is not too much to say that the Calman income tax proposals could become Labour's very own Poll Tax in Scotland.

So Labour has a difficult choice to make. In our Fraser of Allander article, when we were commenting on the Labour Government's White Paper on Calman, we made the point that a cynic might think that the failure of that White Paper to address the technical flaws in Calman might well suggest that Labour were never serious about implementing these tax proposals anyway. That same cynic, looking at the Scotland Bill, might well suggest that David Cameron's coalition has spotted this, and sees electoral advantage in calling Labour's bluff. ■

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road to ruin

David McVey has discovered that the M74 extension is running even further over budget than has been reported and that the promised public transport improvements have been negligible. Here he asks why is no-one else asking these questions?

The M74 Northern Extension, said, mile-for-mile, to be Europe's most expensive urban motorway, is fast approaching completion. However, its history is complex and controversial. In 2002, the BBC called it 'the £250m missing link' but by 2006, the estimated cost of the road had risen to £500m. In February 2008, an over-excited Robbie Dinwoodie, writing in **The Herald**, hailed the beginning of work on the ground and commented that "At £650m, the project is up by around £100m on the last estimate but, crucially, the government has been able to build in a cap on the deal which means the cost cannot escalate from now until completion in 2011". However, Dinwoodie's sunny optimism was misplaced; in March 2010 Transport Scotland informed me that the latest estimate of the cost was £692m.

Any public project where building costs soar alarmingly, whether it's the Scottish Parliament building or the Edinburgh trams, the new Hampden or the new Wembley, tends to get a serious kicking in the papers and from those politicians not in power, but both the press and the political classes have unyieldingly supported the M74 Extension throughout its troubled development. Public criticism hasn't been muted so much as completely absent.

The M74 Northern Extension actually has its roots in 1960s planning, when cars and motorways were seen to be the future in the context of the post-Beeching marginalisation of the rail system. Much of the land along the course of the extension had lain derelict and abandoned for decades waiting for the announcement that work would actually start. The project was delayed again when the New Labour government was elected in 1997 on a platform of supporting public transport over road building. That commitment, of course, didn't last long and the six-mile, six-lane motorway was scheduled to begin construction, through a swathe of Glasgow's Southside, in 2002. However, so many and powerful were the objections to the development, particularly from local community groups, that a public enquiry was called, delaying the beginning of works once more.

The enquiry was convened and listened to evidence between December 2003 and March 2004. Those local communities whose areas the road was due to slice through, backed by environmental and sustainable transport groups, put the case

against the development. Big business, local councils, motorists' groups and an uncharacteristically harmonious alliance of the four main Scottish political parties pressed for the project to go ahead. The inquiry report was completed in July 2004 but was suppressed by the then Scottish Executive; we now know that its officials had, during this period, advised that, despite official denials, the new road **would** breach a number of environmental guidelines. Only a Freedom of Information request finally prompted the release of the report in March 2005.

The results were – or, at least, should have been – devastating for the roads lobby; the reporter found no evidence that the road would bring the jobs bonanza or the economic prosperity that its promoters promised. Congestion would at best be redistributed, not alleviated, and there would be no benefit to the 59% of Glasgow households with no access to a car; rather, social exclusion would be increased. The report recommended that the building of the road 'should not be authorised'. However, the then Scottish Transport Minister, Nicol Stephen (who since then has been ennobled and now sits in the House of Lords), announced that the Project would go ahead. In other words, the public enquiry report, the evidence it had considered and

the concerns of the local community were to be ignored and construction would proceed. Many opponents of the project suggested that the entire appeals process had been a sham and I'm certainly not arguing.

A legal challenge, supported by community and environmental groups, was subsequently mounted but this collapsed in disarray in January 2006 for reasons that are still unclear. All the same, it wasn't until February 2008 that the order was finally given to begin construction. A new SNP Government had replaced the Liberal/Labour coalition and it was new Transport Minister Stewart Stevenson who made the announcement, demonstrating that the new boss really was the same as the old boss.

Our main political parties usually strongly dislike being seen to agree in public, even though these days there is little difference between their ideologies and agendas; but they were never more united than in welcoming the new six-lane motorway which was about to slice through Glasgow. Analysis and democracy through political debate were suspended and a

In other words, the very minor changes introduced were never intended to be costly or significant, and were simply a tiny carrot to dangle in front of those opposed to, inconvenienced by or otherwise affected by the new road. After the roads lobby had got its way, the complementary public transport provisions were largely forgotten

dubious unanimity dominated the airwaves. The then Glasgow Council Leader Stephen Purcell (remember him?) announced "This is tremendous news for jobs, for commuters, and for the 2014 Commonwealth Games!". In fact, the Commonwealth Games had not been a consideration at any stage of the development of the project. In any case, as was the case with all of the scheme's supporters, Purcell's comments flew in the face of all the available evidence, economic, social and environmental, as presented at the public enquiry. There were also messages of approval from the CBI and the far-right, near-deranged motorists' lobby group the Association of British Drivers (ABD); supposedly 'Labour' and 'Liberal' figures seemed happy to be seen in such company. In **The Herald** article I quoted earlier, Robbie Dinwoodie finally parted from reality completely in claiming "...only the environmental lobby and its political arm, the Greens [voiced] serious dissent". So much for the views of the local community and the findings of the public enquiry.

This is all now history, of course; the road is currently taking shape and it will blight Glasgow and its environment for generations. Early in its gestation, promoters of the road tried to address the social exclusion factor by citing a plan to introduce a number of public transport improvements that would run complementary to the development of the M74 Extension. I became curious about what had happened to these measures. There is no mention of them on Transport Scotland's M74 Completion project website. I contacted the project's Community Liaison Team; surely, if anyone would know about public transport improvements designed to serve the communities affected by the new road, they would? In fact, puzzlingly, they told me they had no information about them. I wrote direct to Transport Scotland and, with some difficulty, finally obtained some replies.

Allan Roberts of Transport Scotland listed a number of public transport improvements that had already been put in place, including "...Streamline, an enhanced bus service operating along Quality Bus Corridors in the Greater Glasgow area". There was also "...the Smarter Choices Smarter Places – East End Accessibility initiative [which] comprises a package of localised measures including infrastructure improvements, an intensive sustainable transport marketing campaign and practical support for people wishing to adopt sustainable travel methods". Other than this, Mr Roberts had to fall back on lauding "...the benefits of the M74 Completion in terms of freeing up road space for public transport, cyclists and pedestrians...".

You might reasonably suggest, along with me, that this doesn't sound much in comparison to Europe's costliest urban road. So I obtained, again with difficulty, a further response from Mr Roberts asking for the comparative cost of the public transport improvements and the M74 Extension project. It was in this communication that I was told of the latest, £692m, cost of the road. However Mr Roberts also wrote, concerning the public transport element "...we do not have details on the level of expenditure on these interventions". In other words, the very minor changes introduced were never intended to be

costly or significant, and were simply a tiny carrot to dangle in front of those opposed to, inconvenienced by or otherwise affected by the new road. After the roads lobby had got its way, the complementary public transport provisions were largely forgotten – even by the Community Liaison Team, the ones you'd most expect to know about them.

Some have said that Scotland is in the vanguard of rail development in the UK; I'd suggest that, on the contrary, we're seeing a new golden age of the car dawning.

It is true that Scotland has seen some recent major rail developments; the Airdrie-Bathgate scheme, opened to the public in December 2010, is the latest of these. However, the next major project, the Borders Railway is limited, flawed, and must still be regarded as likely never to occur. The Scottish Government has accepted the need to reduce the nation's carbon emissions by 80 per cent before 2050. Quite how this will happen with the M74 Northern Extension, the new M80 Haggs to Stepps alignment, the Kirkintilloch Link Road (opened in December 2010 and largely built on old rail formations), the Aberdeen Western

Peripheral Route, a new Forth Crossing and Glasgow's East End Regeneration Route all attracting and increasing road use is anyone's guess. Some have said that Scotland is in the vanguard of rail development in the UK; I'd suggest that, on the contrary, we're seeing a new golden age of the car dawning.

There is no evidence that the M74 Extension will bring prosperity to anywhere – any more than, elsewhere in Glasgow, the M77 has energised Pollok or the M8 has turned Easterhouse into a garden suburb. No doubt, in due course, statistics will show that a whole new range of economic activity has developed alongside the course of the road, bringing a number of new jobs to the area; but bear in mind that much of the course of the road has been derelict, awaiting the beginning of construction work once local opposition, public enquiries and other minor inconveniences have been set aside. It's easy to improve on nothing. What we'll never know is what an alternative, more modestly funded programme of urban renewal, public works and public transport spending would have brought to this part of Glasgow's Southside.

The M74 Northern Extension will be an environmental blight. It will do little if anything to help most people economically. But the most worrying aspect of the whole sorry affair is the uncritical unanimity of the press, the main political parties and of big business in ignoring the evidence and distracting attention from the escalating cost of the project. It's really as if they do value ten minutes shaved off their drive to Glasgow Airport above everything else. And I suspect they do. Most of all, the very existence of the M74 Extension represents a troubling defeat for democracy and open government. ■

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city of no children

The horror of the effects of depleted uranium deserve to be heard in Scotland, argues Bill Wilson

It was recently reported that doctors had advised women in Fallujah not to give birth. There are many medical reasons for infertility which might shatter the dreams of a young woman. It is not difficult to imagine how heartbreaking it must be for a woman who is advised that she can never bear children. But for the young women of an entire city – tens of thousands of them – to be advised not to give birth, how can one imagine such collective pain? But perhaps it does not matter – one life is a tragedy, a million a statistic? Certainly this episode attracted limited press attention. Media Lens highlighted an interesting contrast with the attention directed at the lady who chucked a cat into a bin – one cat confined for a few hours was a tragedy.

This year the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health published a study, "Cancer, Infant Mortality and Birth Sex-Ratio in Fallujah, Iraq 2005–2009" by Chris Busby, Malak Hamdan and Entesar Ariabi. The report concludes "results confirm the reported increases in cancer and infant mortality which are alarmingly high. The remarkable reduction in the sex ratio in the cohort born one year after the fighting in [Falluja] 2004 identifies that year as the time of the environmental contamination." It was this increase in the incidence of child cancer and deformities which resulted in women being advised not to give birth. Fallujah is not the only city witnessing skyrocketing rates of child cancer. "The rapidly soaring child cancer rate in the southern Iraqi province of Basra has prompted the officials in the country to open the country's first specialist cancer hospital for children in the province's capital. [...] Since 1993, Basra province has witnessed a sharp rise in the incidence of childhood cancer. 'Leukemia (a type of blood cancer) among children under 15 has increased by about four times,' said Dr. Janan Hasan of the hospital inaugurated on Thursday in the southern port city of Basra."

In response to such reports, I lodged a motion in the Scottish Parliament highlighting the issue. This was of limited interest to my fellow parliamentarians (fewer than 20 supported it), and of no interest to the Scottish media, but it did attract the attention of a number of dedicated individuals campaigning on the issues raised by the Iraq war, including the issue very relevant to the increase in childhood cancers and birth deformities: depleted uranium (DU). I have subsequently come to appreciate their bravery and determination in the face of what would seem to be attack, denial and disinformation by a ruthless, dishonest and uncaring establishment. The Non-Aligned Movement in the UN believes at least 400,000 kg of DU shells have been fired. Precisely how many and even where is uncertain. Whether we will ever know is also uncertain. The United Nations First Committee recently voted, by an overwhelming margin, for state

users of depleted uranium weapons to release data on where the weapons have been used to governments of the states affected by their use. However, four nations opposed the motion: the UK, the USA, Israel and France. Three of these nations have used DU weapons; France produces them. The resolution then went forward to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) for a second vote. The result was identical. However, as such votes are non-binding, it is likely that the four nations opposed to the resolution will simply ignore it.

Alongside refusing to divulge precise details on where DU weapons were deployed, the four also voted against previous resolutions accepting that DU has the potential to damage human health (2007) and calling for more research in affected states (2008). Meanwhile the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) claims that not only is the risk low, but that simple

countermeasures can deal with contaminated sites. Even the latter point, with which I strongly disagree, does raise the question: if the counter-measures are so simple, why is nobody taking them in Iraq? Nicholas Wood has suggested spraying oil on and around destroyed tanks (a temporary measure to stop the dust blowing about and to discourage children from playing on them) and deploying barbed wire to barricade contaminated areas. In Iraq no such measures have been taken, nor has there been any significant clean-up, though the BBC did report a UK commitment to doing so in 2003. It should be noted that the UK's failure to do so may constitute a war crime. Nicholas believes that these things are not being done because to do so would be an effective admission that DU might be harmful, and that is not something the UK or the US government/military are keen to admit (more on that later). Meanwhile, children continue to play in contaminated tanks.

It is not just in Iraq that little or no action is being taken. The International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons reported: "In Kosovo, where most of the contaminated sites are located, and over 70 per cent of the DU was fired, there has been no programme of monitoring since UNEP's study in 2001". The report further notes that decontamination is difficult work and it is impossible to fully remove all the contamination. It is also very costly. The Cape Arza site in Montenegro cost DM 400,000 (almost US\$280,000) and took about 5,000 working person days to decontaminate 480 rounds, which in total took around twelve seconds to fire. The estimated cost of clearing up a test firing site in Indiana is \$7.8bn. The report also notes that the health consequences remain unclear with a lack of research data, though it is known that internalised DU is a carcinogen. It is also known that as a DU shell hits a tank it effectively vaporises, resulting in rather a lot of carcinogenic dust. Radioactive materials do not remain radioactive forever,

It is good to know that if we don't bother to clean up the mess then 150 million generations or so down the line the descendants of today's Iraqis, Afghans, etc. will only have to cope with half the radiation that people have to face today

SCOTLAND HAS TAKEN THE LEAD IN TRANSFERRING FREIGHT TO RAIL

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however. DU dust has a half-life of only 4.5 billion years. It is good to know that if we don't bother to clean up the mess then 150 million generations or so down the line the descendants of today's Iraqis, Afghans, etc. will only have to cope with half the radiation that people have to face today! The sun will still have half a billion years to burn.

The use of radioactive weapons in Iraq as far back as 1991 was exposed by Professor Siegwart-Horst Gunther, who found, on the highway between Baghdad and Amman, projectiles the size and shape of a cigar (fired from aeroplanes). Professor Gunther took a bullet back to Germany for testing. The bullet exhibited a radioactivity giving an effective dose of 11 to 12 microsieverts per hour and was considered highly dangerous. It was seized by German police, wearing protective clothing, and transported to a safe place. (In Germany, radiology personnel should not be exposed to more than 50 millisieverts per year.) It might also be noted that US authorities closed a DU penetrator ammunition factory on the edge of Albany in upstate New York because airborne contamination levels exceeded 150 microcurie per month, contaminating populated areas up to 26 miles away. This was the equivalent of only one or two 30 mm cannon shells per month releasing their radioactivity to the environment.

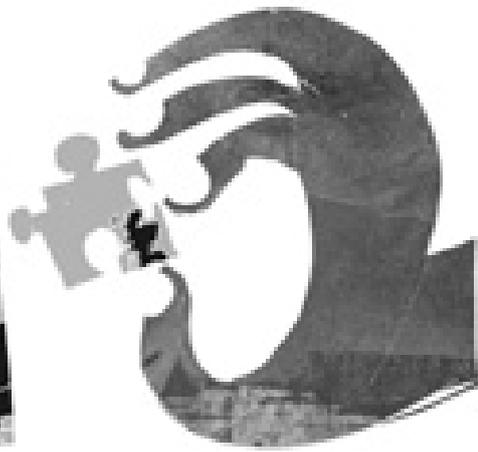
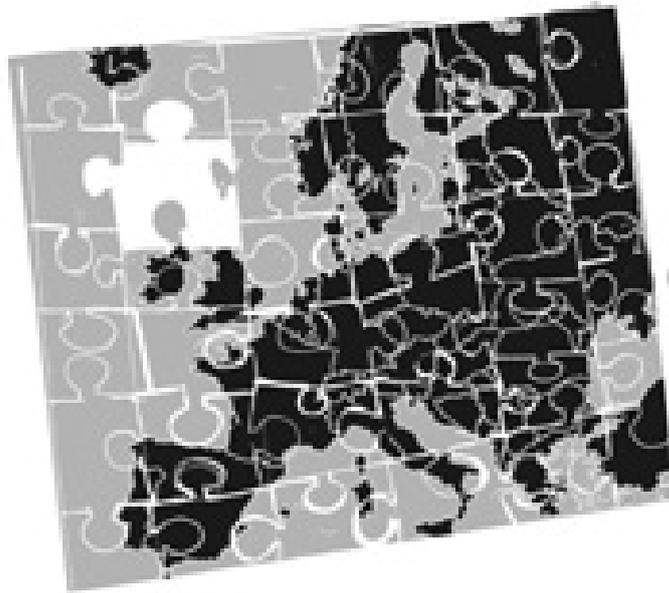
The fact that definitive evidence that the shells fired by allied force are responsible for the huge increase in cancers, stillbirths and birth deformities is limited is not surprising, as the nations that fire the shells refuse to provide accurate information on where they have been fired, making accurate statistical analysis all but impossible. However, there is abundant circumstantial evidence, as two minutes on the Internet will show (for example search for "Doug Rokke" on YouTube). Whilst it may appear a cynical view, sadly I have come to the conclusion that the UK Government and MoD are deliberately making such analyses impossible. Indeed, the level to which supporters of DU weapons will go to deny effects are quite considerable. A classical example is a communication I recently received from Roger Helbig, considered by some to be a Pentagon 'attack dog'. In a lengthy email which accused various anti-DU groups of lying, Mr Helbig also included the following quite stupendous line: "There is no such thing as a uranium weapon. That is term that they [the International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons] made up to make depleted uranium kinetic energy penetrators look like weapons of mass destruction instead of tank-killing bullets." Yes you did read that correctly: there is no such thing as a uranium weapon, only a "depleted uranium kinetic energy penetrator"!

Recently I asked the Scottish Minister for Public Health and Sport, Shona Robinson, if the Scottish Government held statistics relating to the incidence of cancer, stillbirth and birth deformities in Scottish armed forces personnel and their families. She obligingly wrote to the MoD to follow up my question. I received her reply a few days ago. In summary:

1. The MoD does not believe that there is credible evidence that DU induces cancer and birth defects
2. The MoD asserts that there is no evidence that DU has been responsible for incidences of ill-health in UK forces or in civilian populations
3. The MoD does not believe that a statistical study would be appropriate as this issue has been addressed under the auspices of the Independent Depleted Uranium Oversight Board (DUOB).

The first and third claims are clearly disputed, while the second statement is a simple lie. At a coroner's inquest (10th September 2009) into the death of Mr Stuart Dyson a unanimous jury ruled that his death from colon cancer was caused by the DU he was exposed to in the Gulf War of 1990/91. In the USA, Leuren Moret, a geoscientist and geologist has said: "Of 251 Gulf War I veterans in Mississippi, in 67 percent of them, their babies born after the war were deemed to have severe birth defects. They had brains missing, arms and legs missing, organs missing. They were born without eyes. They had horrible blood diseases. It's horrific." Perhaps the warning given to the women of Fallujah should have been extended to service personnel? ■

Bill Wilson is MSP for the West of Scotland



the other end of europe

Continuing our post-financial crash series on small countries around the world, Hamish Kirk looks at the recent history of Bulgaria

When Romania and Bulgaria were accepted as the newest (and last?) states to be accepted into the EU what did we at the other end of Europe know about them? Even amongst those who follow current affairs, Bulgaria was a far-away country of which they knew nothing. Stories about sinister doings with poisoned umbrellas, attempts to murder the Pope, and a vague idea of a place for cheap package holidays in the sun might emerge from those who could differentiate between Bulgaria and Bavaria. This is strange because for at least a decade in British politics, Bulgaria was centre stage.

The 'Bulgarian Atrocities' of the 1870s dominated public political discourse. As the Ottomans attempted to hold onto Bulgaria during an armed uprising against their rule, news reached the European press, including The Times, of massacres committed by irregular forces against the Bulgarian population. Gladstone, MP for a Scottish Constituency, tapped into this outrage and railed at every opportunity against the continuing Ottoman occupation of Bulgaria and the rest of the Balkans. The 'Eastern Question' acted as a litmus test for political opinion in 19th Century Britain. Tories were pro-Ottoman. Liberals and other radicals were vociferously on the side of the insurgents in the Balkans. The Uprising against Ottoman rule ended in massacre, but did result in The Russian Tsar declaring war on Ottoman Turkey. The Imperial Russian forces, with help from Romania, crossed the Danube and military defeat after a long winter campaign led to a peace treaty in which the government in Istanbul agreed to a free Bulgaria. Liberation of Bulgaria was paid for in the blood of Russian soldiers. Bulgarians did not forget that and pro-Russian sympathies are not hard to account for.

Despite the machinations of Disraeli, Bulgaria did achieve a limited independence within the Ottoman Empire in 1878. And with that, it would seem Bulgaria disappeared from the political agenda in Europe and from the consciousness of the radicals and socialists of the continent and the world. During the period of economic growth after independence, Bulgaria began to industrialise and parts of the country, for example Sofia and Gabrovo, saw the growth of an urban proletariat. The Socialist movement saw rapid growth, with close ties between the

Bulgarian movement and those in Germany, Austro-Hungary and Russia. 1891 was the year when the first Social Democratic Party in the Balkans was founded by Dimitar Blagoev. The Bulgarian Social Democratic Workers' Party split in 1903 with a Narrow Wing and a Broad Wing, mirroring splits in other parties in Europe. Parallel with the growth in the Socialist Party we can see a growth in trade unions representing labour and also a growth in the cooperative movement, especially in the field of agriculture and of handicrafts.

During this period of development and change in Bulgaria, one important factor was that the dominant feature of agricultural life in most areas of Bulgaria was the peasantry. As in other areas of Europe, there were no agricultural clearances in Bulgaria. Individual peasant farmers continued to farm the land with small, mixed farms accounting for much agricultural production. Imagine an economy which is dominated by crofters; that was then and continued to be, a feature of Bulgarian life. There was not an urban proletariat totally separated from the land. Most town dwellers maintained family and personal contacts with those producing food as smallholders. This was a tendency that has continued until today and is a crucial factor in explaining developments in Modern Bulgaria. It accounts for major differences between Bulgaria and the Soviet Union.

After partial independence in 1878, Bulgaria did not develop into the 'Switzerland of the Balkans' that some patriots had hoped to see. There was a minor war with Serbia in 1885 and then the disastrous Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913. Bulgaria lost territory as a result of these, including the fertile Dobrudja which produces huge quantities of wheat. In an attempt to regain lost territory in Dobrudja, Macedonia and Thrace, Bulgaria sided with the Central Powers and in 1915 became a belligerent fighting with Germany, Austria and Turkey against Imperial Russia, France and Britain. Ferdinand, a German prince of the House of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, certainly played a role in allying Bulgaria with the Central Powers. The disastrous defeat of Bulgaria and the imposition of the Peace Treaty of Neuilly cost him his throne. Attempts to establish a republic were unsuccessful. A left-wing government under Alexander Stamboliski was overthrown by

a military coup in 1923, and the organised left, including the organised peasantry and the socialist groupings were the victims of death squads and arbitrary executions. Stamboliski himself, a prominent anti-war activist, adversary of King Ferdinand and signatory of the Peace of Neuilly (the Bulgarian 'Versailles Treaty') was tortured, mutilated and murdered by his Macedonian captors. Writers like the Symbolist Geo Milev disappeared. Thousands of others shared their fate. Political activists, those who had opposed the War, and trade unionists were particular targets for the Death Squads. Police and Army played their part in helping crush the Left.

Those who are nostalgic about pre-war 'Bourgeois Bulgaria' would do well to remember that this regime had more in common with some vile South American military dictatorship than with the liberal democracies of Western and Northern Europe. After 1923 a series of undemocratic and authoritarian governments ran Bulgaria. Influences from Austria and Germany were always strong and after 1933 it was clear to most observers that Bulgaria would be with the new powers in Berlin in any conflict. The political repression and political executions committed from 1923 on go a long way to explain the ferocity of the Peoples Court in the period after 1944. As the World divided itself into two camps in the late 1930s and 1940s, Bulgaria was clearly with the Axis Powers. Berlin had engineered a settlement between Romania and Bulgaria whereby the Southern Dobrudja including the towns of Dobrich, Silistra, Balchik and Tutrakan were returned to Bulgaria after 27 years of Romanian administration. After the occupation of Greece, Western Thrace was given back to Bulgaria which had controlled this area briefly after the Balkan Wars. This area had a substantial ethnically Bulgarian population, and furthermore gave Bulgaria direct access to the Mediterranean without the need to go from the Black Sea through the Bosphorus. King Boris, unlike his father King Ferdinand who had been forced to abdicate in 1918 could learn something from history. As a result after he declared war on Great Britain and the USA, he did not declare war on the USSR. He realised that there was a huge sympathy for Russia amongst the people, partly as a result of the role played in establishing Bulgarian independence. The organised left in Bulgaria had gone underground and after the German attack on the USSR, armed struggle against the 'monarcho-fascist' government in Sofia was decreed.

The partisan struggles in Bulgaria were determined and no one should doubt the enthusiasm and courage of those involved. It never reached the levels of the partisan war in Yugoslavia under Tito. Students of British Social History may have come across the name of E P Thompson who wrote **The Making of The English Working Class**. Not so well known is his brother, Frank Thompson, who as a liaison between London and the Bulgarian partisans was arrested, tried and executed. A village to the North of Sofia is named after him. The war took its inevitable course and as the Red Army crossed the Danube into Bulgaria in September 1944, partisan units took over the administration in Sofia. A Popular Front-style government under the leadership of Georgi Dimitrov took over. Revenge for the repression of the previous two decades was swift. Large numbers of politicians and administrators were executed. These included Prince Kyril, regent and brother of King Boris who had died in mysterious circumstances in 1943 after a visit to Berlin. A referendum in 1946 abolished the monarchy and the infant King Simeon left. First port of call for the ex-royals was Egypt where King Farouk offered asylum. After Farouk lost his job, General Franco gave

the family a pied-a-terre in Madrid.

Bulgaria had not suffered the devastation that other European countries had seen during the Second World War, but the 1940s and 1950s were hard times economically. Bulgaria was fully integrated in Comecon and assigned the role of agricultural producer with some heavy industry. Prosperity did come in the 1960s and later, although in terms of measured GDP she was always down at the bottom of the list. Let us not forget though the role of the peasant farmer. Small farmers in Bulgaria, even during collectivisation continued to produce food. In the economic collapse coming after the fall of the USSR and the end of Comecon, this was to prove a blessing to many families. Large enterprises in many cases after 1989 simply stopped paying wages, or paid only part wages many months in arrears. Because large sectors of the population still lived like crofters, they could survive this catastrophe. Of course Bulgaria during the period of the People's Republic was no Workers' Paradise, but there were certain gains. Full employment, a health system that provided basic health care for all, decent housing for people in the towns were some of the gains. One sign of prosperity was that from the 1960s it became increasingly common for a family to have an apartment in town as well as a house in the village. How many proletarians in Britain had two houses?

The changes after 1989 came to Bulgaria slowly. There were no dramatic scenes as were witnessed with the end of the Ceausescu's in Romania. Blood was not spilt and the transition was peaceful. Nonetheless the 'Changes', as the euphemism goes, did bring about real changes for many. A few became rich. Many were pauperised. Times were not good for pensioners, the chronically sick, large families and the Roma. The age of full employment ended in the early 1990s. From a system where everyone had a job (indeed where everyone was **required** to work), we now have a system where there is mass unemployment. Whole sectors of industry have disappeared – the most recent being the Steel Plant at Kremikovtzi. Accession to the European Union in 2007 was not universally popular, although some analysts saw this as providing Bulgaria with alternative markets for its produce. Many within the political class had a clear interest in administering the grants and other aid that were expected from the EU and true to predictions of some commentators there have been many cases of corruption involving agricultural development funds from Brussels.

A dramatic illustration of the hard times can be seen by looking at the case of emigration – emigration from Bulgaria is a new historical phenomenon. Unlike Poland or Scotland, Greece or Italy, this country has no tradition of sending its sons and daughters into exile. Look no farther to see that the Triumphalism we witnessed amongst the ideologues of the Cold War in 1989 rings very hollow to many. A sad anecdote will illustrate the reality of the New Bulgaria for many. This story was reported recently on Bulgarian TV and in Novinite (the Sofia News Agency). A couple from a village in the North east of Bulgaria were unemployed. They listened to advice from a man who promised them work in a factory in Prague. They parted with their money for his fee and for the bus fare to the Czech republic. There was no job. Stranded in a foreign country with no money they came back the only way they could. They walked the 1100 km from Prague to Russe. ■

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reviews

Beyond The Last Dragon: Life Of Edwin Morgan, James McGonigal, Sandstone Press, £24 99

Edwin Morgan, who died in August at the age of ninety, quickened the cultural life of Scotland more than any poet since MacDiarmid. This was, to some extent, a matter of longevity. 'Laureateship' played its part also: Morgan was in turn the first ever Makar of his native Glasgow and then of the nation he sought to define. His accessibly varied poems, in their vivid reach and range, presented and represented the open, cosmopolitan, modern country he wanted to live in and thus had to help create. Appalled by the rigged referendum of 1979 which in closing the door to home rule, opened the gates to Thatcher, Morgan insisted on Scotland's imaginative viability, as a place being transformed by artists whose cultural exertions would in time produce a politics worthy of their talent and tenacity. The poems continued to say, 'YES'. Indeed his, I'd contend, was the most affirmative major poetry written in the English-speaking world during the last half century. Essentially solitary, the independently progressive Morgan was chary of most 'isms'. Coming into contact with this poet of the left therefore, ideological labels lose their adhesiveness.

The political beliefs that emerge from this meticulous and masterly biography (and from conversations I was lucky enough to have with the poet over many years) were strong and unwavering. A socialist republic was what Morgan hoped Scotland would become. Sectarian dogma did not attract him. MacDiarmid's rejoining of the Communist Party in nineteen fifty six to trumpet support for the Soviet quelling of the Hungarian uprising, disgusted the younger writer. Morgan had visited the USSR the year before and seen the article he had written subsequently for 'Soviet Weekly' crudely edited to remove any ideologically disobliging criticisms. University colleagues at Glasgow who did not know the lecturer in English well (and even some who did), believed him in those days to be 'extremely left wing'. Much later he would visit Albania, professing himself impressed by the people's thraven refusal to join any 'bloc' whether American, Chinese, or American.

Morgan's detestation of Stalin never occluded his admiration for the original revolutionary impulse in Russia whose language he studied at university and whose doomed, ardent, agit prop bard, Mayakovsky, he brought over into a superbly supple and sensuous Scots. From the Futurists this determinedly up-to-the-minute poet drew lifelong inspiration. Born into a 'well to do', and well to the right, mercantile family Edwin Morgan maintained a certain prosperous punctilio about money until the end. On the other hand, 'winning and dining' never particularly appealed and his claim that a boiled egg, a slice of buttered toast and

a 'freshly poured cup of tea' would delight him was the (very) simple truth.

Forced by the Wall Street Crash and the Great Depression to 'down-size' from Pollokshields to Rutherglen, the Morgans did not change their outlook with their alteration in circumstances. Their only child would reject along with their Calvinist Conservatism and Freemasonry, Morgan senior's unapologetic bigotry. "I would never knowingly employ a Catholic" he told his son over breakfast. This prejudice, typical enough in its day, seems to have had at least something of a hold over Morgan until he met the love of his life, John Scott, who came from a large, easy going and warmly accepting Catholic family. Service as a Royal Army Medical Corps private in the Desert Campaign in North Africa broadened the basis of Morgan's social – and erotic – contacts and although he wrote almost no poetry in situ, the War and the anti-fascist ideals it was waged for affected everything that came after. And the war poems did eventually and marvellously get written. Literary success did not come easily or quickly. Morgan was translating 'Beowulf at thirty, 'for lack of love'.

For those who believe that talent is work, Edwin Morgan's indefatigable feats of formal self fashioning will bolster such a conviction. James McGonigal traces brilliantly the making of the master whose ground breaking, name making, first substantial collection was not to appear until 1968 when its author was pushing fifty. Ah but so suited to and suitable for, the sixties with these jazzy, unjaded poems that watched housing schemes going up and totems coming down, love lyrics of ineffable poignancy addressed to that Shakespearianly ambiguous 'you', concrete poems, experimental poems, poems that zinged with the zeigeist, poems so futurist(ic) they were science fictional, poems that pulsed with the energy of pop culture and of the

United States and of Glasgow, yes Glasgow, a very 'happening' locus and focus for all manner of exhilarations as Morgan dizzily embraced this 'Second Life'; and was embraced in turn as he began to become the public figure, the exciter of dazzled interest, the inspirational visitor of schools, my own included. This was the poetry, and the poet, a renewed nation had been waiting for.

A self-consciously public intellectual along precisely 'organic' Gramscian lines, Edwin Morgan was not. Yet by talking Scotland up, steadying its aestheto/ political nerve in time of Tory traumatised need,

he anticipated, indeed precipitated our present constitutional arrangements. In this respect his prescient co- editorship of Scottish International was crucial. Ever the nationalist as rationalist and internationalist, Morgan, the polyglot translator from several European languages, intuitively jaloused that

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non-chauvinist, geopolitically congruent communities based on common values, common languages, common traditions common weal and common sense should be understated in every sense. A large and lauded library full of poems, plays, translations, critical essays and correspondence is his legacy. Of the bards gathered in Sandy Moffat's seminal 'Poets' Pub', Morgan the eyes-averted homosexual peering into the middle distanced future, was the longest lived. One can almost watch him determinedly foreseeing a Scotland whose preeminent poets would be gay, black, female or all of the above (cf Jackie Kay a regular visitor of Morgan in his nursing home) and not Protestant, male and complacently heterosexual. Unlike Hamish Henderson, whose busier, bigger and perhaps 'braver' war, the sometime 'conchie', ambulance orderly and inventory clerk respected, Morgan accepted the offer of an OBE. In which of us does any father fail a little to live on? He taught, inspired, influenced, corresponded with or actively mentored many of the poetic generation I am a part of. Richard Price comes out of James McGonigals account with especial distinction as a loving and loyal successor poet, writing unfailingly each week to his fellow avant-gardist in that cancer perturbed care home decade and more, when like a word tintured wonder drug, the writing and reading of poetry seemed to keep Scotland's national poet alive.

Rarely can it be said of any writer, all the books have been written, the work is done, the oeuvre completed. Finis. In that respect, Edwin Morgan is nearly unique. He lived and wrote exactly as long as he should have, losing not a single line to self indulgence, temperamental imbalance or sloth. That work ethic was a patrimony he didn't reject. Morgan, in Welsh, means 'sea bright'. That he was. His fetish from the animal world would have been the 'whittrick' or weasel, the title of an early opus. His wits were quick. To protect his privacy (and proclivities), there were secrets and social compartments. Edwin Morgan came out at

the age of seventy during Glasgow's year as Capital of Culture. Some fairly explicit poems soon followed. He could be whimsical. The proceeds of a literary prize went on a day trip by Concorde to visit Santa Claus in Finish Lapland; and the author of 'From Glasgow To Saturn' was one hundred and second in line to be a civilian passenger on the space shuttle! The dragon of this book's title is death. The author begins his outstanding account with an analysis of several dreams that troubled the poet as he neared that deferred demise. This is no mere device. It gets the book off to a beguilingly symbolic start and is expertly followed up. As Edwin Morgan's undergraduate pupil, PhD student, surrogate son of sorts, literary executor and confidant-cum-carer, James McGonigal could have resorted to hagiography and myth mongering. Instead, swiftly but scrupulously, he has written a beautifully measured biography, unstinting in its praise for a great poet of international importance, yet candid throughout about flaws and failings, of which, in truth, there were few. A professor poet himself and like his subject therefore a doctus poeta, Jim McGonigal has shown in this weighty but wonderfully unwearying book, that reverence can be revealing. I salute him and his elegantly written, assiduously researched, judiciously balanced, utterly enthralling life. A large life, room has nonetheless been left for other approaches. For example, a study of Morgan as a gay poet would complement McGonigal's magisterial survey. In the meantime we have this comprehensive, insightful and almost filially tender amalgam of literary criticism, memoir and biography. Edwin Morgan was a great advert for the species and this is a splendid book about a splendid man. ■

Donny O'Rourke, who was taught by the poet, made a film for Scottish Television to mark Edwin Morgan's birthday in 1990. The anthology he then edited, 'Dream State: The New Scottish Poets', took as a theme and manifesto Morgan's vision of the post '79 nation. Donny O'Rourke is mentioned variously in the biography under review. That interest is here declared.

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web review

Henry McCubbin

Educate ANIMATE Organise

Well it's "bliadhna mhath ur" to all our readers. Now we have a real Tory government, the type of rule that Blair really wanted, it must be time for us to support and study the actions of comrades world wide to crack the Tory-Liberal Orange Book ideologues within the next twelve months. The title above is inspired from RSA animations which have provided short ten minute animations to aid understanding of Marxist critiques of the god-awful mess financial capital has got us into. But more on this later.

Clear the Hogmanay headaches with a glance at this study on what the gamblers are punting your pensions on now. Having dabbled in this field under Thatcher's umbrella they are spreading their crazy ideas worldwide. "Systemic Danger? The Effects of the Financial Crisis on Private Pensions", is a study by Richard Detje about the risks of private pension schemes and available at www.transform-network.net/uploads/media/Detje_FinancialCrisis.pdf.

For further unrelenting punishment the following is available from a European left conference: Strategic Perspectives of the European Left, "Why the Crisis Seems to Favour the Right Rather than the Left in Europe". The recent economic crisis, among other things, has shown the serious crisis of European Social Democracy, as well as the inability of 'our' Left (with some

interesting exceptions) to increase its influence in society. This can be seen not only from the fact that the agenda for facing the crisis is set by the conservative political forces in Europe, but also by the election results for the European Parliament. Thus the question arises with urgency how the Left in Europe can develop the capacity of becoming an effective counter hegemonic force. The debate, which started out with a general assessment of the political geography, was followed by a number of thematic focuses and case studies on different countries such as the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Spain and Sweden. Videos, papers and PowerPoint presentations can be found at: www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/rls_uploads/pdfs/Standpunkte/policy_paper/Policy-Paper_4-2010.pdf

David Harvey has recently published "The Enigma of Capital and the Crisis of Capitalism". But it is not the book I am directing you to in the website but to the animation of a lecture Harvey delivered with regards to the main theme of his book. As you can see from the address it is on youtube so you can direct colleagues to it where other Marxist delights can be found. Just the job for students awakening from their slumbers. All together now "Educate, Agitate, Kick the Tories Out." Ah, Echoes from the past; don't think the young Millibands did loud street demos. Ed has certainly denied the students support thrice. www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOP2V_np2c0. ■

Stop the Scottish government using YOUR money to undermine rail safety

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

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

Ask YOUR MSP to sign motion S3M-06444

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Kick Up The Tabloids

SERIAL KILLER SHOVEL FREAK-OUT

As 2010 started with the worst winter the UK has experienced since the last time we had a right-wing Tory government, Britain entered the year snowbound and with the prospect of the coming year bringing us a right-wing Tory government. By the time you read this, of course, the snow may have stopped. In which case, the TV news may have no other option than to start broadcasting news on the news.

For the past week, I have watched increasingly hysterical reports on the disastrous whiteout conditions. As inane ITN reporter after inane ITN reporter has shouted with ever-rising horror in their voice:

"This village is quite literally cut off from the rest of the world. Essential services can't get through, even emergency vehicles are unable to brave these sub-Arctic conditions. This is, quite literally, a community where non-one can get in or out".

To me the most obvious question is how the hell did the TV camera crew get in there in the first place ?

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

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

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

Eventually, emergency supplies of salt were imported from Africa. Presumably, the people of Africa will soon be staging large outdoor rock concerts to help raise money to send salt to Britain. African comedians may well start wearing red plastic noses and coming over here to send crisis reports to the people back home: "This is Fraser, he lives in the village of Bruntsfield, and every day he has to walk two miles to Waitrose in Morningside to buy salt. But when he has walked all that way in the snow, he finds that there is no salt there. Please help people like Alastair by giving now to Salt Aid. Just £ 3.49 will buy him a week's supply of Malden crushed sea salt flakes."

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

One right-wing tabloid has suggested we should force prisoners to take to the streets to clean up the snow. I don't know about anyone else, but I would find it less than re-assuring to look out of my window and see Peter Tobin standing in the street holding a shovel.

I think the only really surprising thing about the snow is that Gordon Brown has not apologised for it yet. One of my hobbies for the coming year is to see how often Brown says "sorry" between now and May.

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

agenda 15

The Scottish Left Review recently published Agenda 15. It is an agenda for the Scottish Parliament elections and the four years afterwards. Everything in it 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 it 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.

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.

And so the Scottish Left Review Editorial Board puts 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.

The crackpot ideas of the resurgent right apparently have 'credibility' while the left is apparently 'discredited'. If so, 'credibility' 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.

Read Agenda 15 in Issue 60
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