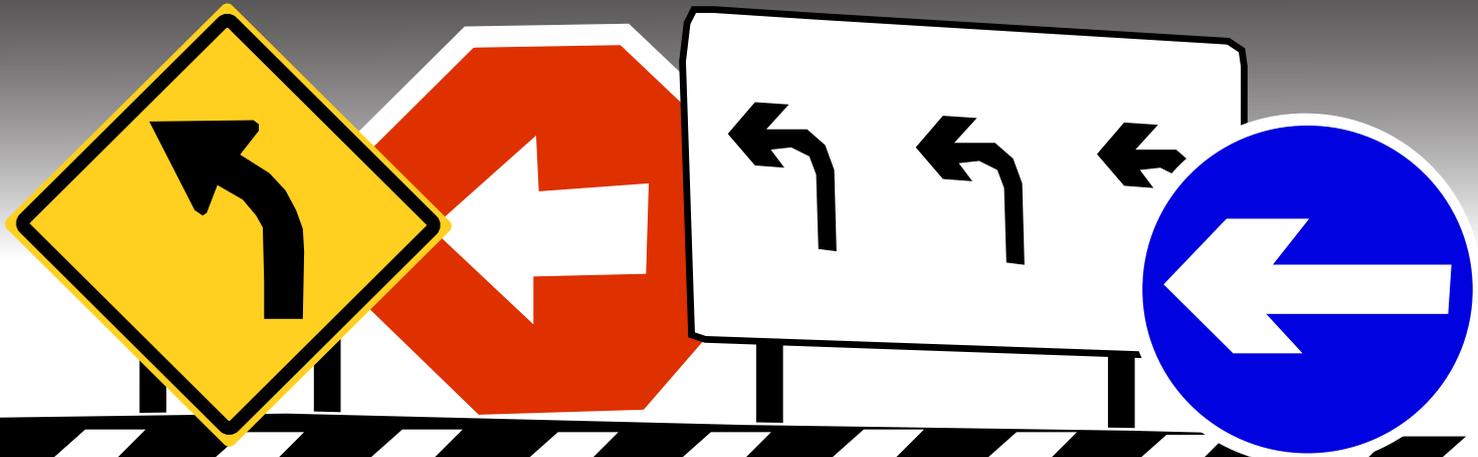


Scottish **Left** Review

Issue 63 March/April 2011 £2.00



**SO MUCH
LEFT AND
NOWHERE TO GO**

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Cover and illustrations: Nadia Lucchesi

nadia.shemail@gmail.com

Back Cover Cartoon: Frank Boyle

www.boylecartoon.co.uk

Articles for publication: editorial@scottishleftreview.org

Letters and comments: feedback@scottishleftreview.org

Website: www.scottishleftreview.org Tel 0141 424 0042

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

Editorial Committee

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Comment

In these times of change, the Scottish Left Review is changing as well.

One way or another, this feels like a period of change. Perhaps big change. There are perceptible shifts all over the place. The sort of rhetoric about the abuse of power of big business that would have been dismissed as fringe 'class war' a couple of years ago is now the language of the Daily Mail (at least intermittently). The all-consuming greed of the bankers is simply taken as a given. Issues like corporations avoiding tax make it into news bulletins. There is widespread unease at the level of influence exerted by Murdoch. The impact of our economic situation is starting to unsettle the unshakable consensus of recent decades – perhaps the market doesn't know best and perhaps the rich don't really deserve it.

In Scotland there are a few signs that the approaching election might actually be one in which the parties prioritise things that are popular with people and not moves which are popular with business and therefore with mainstream newspapers. In this issue of Scottish Left Review, both potential First Ministers do not appear to blink before ruling out any moves to change the status of Scottish Water. This sets them in direct conflict with the CBI, the higher echelons of the civil service and the business-linked think tanks. In the face of the Settled Will of the Scottish Establishment (and its couple-of-hundred votes) there is to be no charging for universities. Prescription charges are to go – and this in the period where 'cuts are unchallengeable'.

You do not need to go far to hear the pathetic cries of the elites in Scotland – 'this is all cheap bloody populism' they spit through gnashing teeth. What they mean is 'when did populism start meaning popular for someone other than us?'. It is a troubling time because change and populism is the order of the day, at least in the Middle East. How do you condemn decisions made here which have the support of the many while lauding the decisions being made elsewhere which have the support of the many? Well, you just do.

This is nothing to get too carried away with yet. What we are hearing here is a change of tone and it is very welcome. But what we need is to start to see change. In the upcoming election there is already a battle to claim the ground of 'decreasing inequality' as the ownership of one party or another.

Good. But it is only real when we start to see real action taken.

And of course, not all the change is good. In England we are seeing one of the most aggressively radical programmes of political change ever seen in this country. The Tories are simply ripping up the British social model and replacing it with the US system of survival of the richest. The Big Society is a cover for allowing multinational corporations to take over public services. It will change Britain forever. We are about to see one ideologue in ownership of half of our media and commercial product placement (one of the most insidious forms of commercial manipulation) simply slipped onto our screens almost unnoticed. The UK we thought we knew looks like it will soon be gone. Scotland will be pretty well protected whatever party is elected, but that in itself will change everything.

But there is one thing which this issue suggests is simply not changing fast enough – the Scottish left. Perhaps it is enough that the mainstream is swinging our way, but perhaps not. After all, the mainstream has a knack of swinging back to where it wants to be whenever we take our eyes off it for a second. If we can take some degree of pleasure of watching as the slogans of the anti-capitalist left of the last decade become the conversation-points of people bumping into each other in the supermarket, we cannot trust that this is enough. Scotland has just seen something that Scotland hasn't really seen before – the full might of the corporate lobby descend. The ruthlessness with which the big supermarkets sent their arm-twisters up to Scotland when it looked for a second that the Parliament might get uppity about cheap alcohol or massive profits is educational. As is the outcome. Nothing stands still. There are no vacuums. The old order will not go down without an almighty fight.

So who is fighting back? Can we just hope 'popular opinion' will do the job? Almost certainly not. We aren't going to get to a better place by looking on and waiting. For all the positioning of the big two parties, it will take a time for old habits to die. We do not – and almost certainly will not – have a parliament of radicals. 'Fighting the cuts' simply hasn't provided the lead. And as we can see from the writers in this issue, we don't have a properly-organised alternative.

It is against this background that Scottish Left Review has been looking at what it has achieved in the last 11 years and thinking about what it has to do next. We have started with a redesign. After more than a decade it was certainly time to look at the magazine and hopefully these changes have made it feel easier to read, cleaner and hopefully more contemporary. We have also undertaken a major redesign of our website which will make it much easier to use. We have been getting a very encouraging increase in people reading the magazine online and the words we print certainly seem to

be reaching more and more people. So we want to make them as easy to access as we possibly can. This is all a work in progress and we would be very happy indeed to get your thoughts as we refresh what we do.

But that isn't going to be the end. The Scottish Left Review – as envisioned by our founder Jimmy Reid – wasn't meant to be only a magazine. It was meant to be a force of change. We all take that intention very seriously and we are working hard on plans to expand what we do; to try and do more than simply reflect change. We will let you know more soon. ■



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All Is Not Lost

When I was first asked to write this article I can't say I wept with joy. It's not because the subject doesn't engage my thoughts (it does) but because there's a bad smell wafting out from a section of the Scottish left. Thankfully some other poor soul has been handed the poisoned chalice of making sense of the complex legal and political issues raised by the two Sheridan court cases. I wish them luck. You'll be damned if you take one side and damned if you take the other. And doubly damned if you sit on the fence.

As someone who was involved in the foundation of the SSP, and someone who, until 2004, was actively involved in formulating and promoting its drugs policy, it depresses me to see friends and former comrades constantly at war with each other, barely able to sit down in the same room without emanating visceral hostility. I still keep it touch with many on both sides of the SSP divide. I hear and read what is being said about "the other lot"; in private, in public, or on social media. And one thing is clear: as it stands there is more hope of Lionel Messi signing for Hibs in the next few years than any re-unification of the SSP and Solidarity.

The short term prospects for peace and reconciliation are bleak. Some of those involved fully intend to take undying hostility towards their enemies to the grave with them. Nor does Sheridan's imprisonment mark any sort of closure. Two more legal appeals means the saga could become The Never Ending Story.

The forthcoming Holyrood election highlights the scale of the problem. The SSP and Solidarity camps intend to stand against each other in the regional List votes, despite neither having a snowball's chance in hell of getting anyone elected. Nor is there any evidence to suggest that either party will improve on the derisory votes achieved in previous elections. Some observers may think, wishing the

socialist left could get its act together, why bother? SSP leader Colin Fox went on record recently as saying there are no significant policy differences between the two parties. If so the obvious question arises: Colin, why are you standing against someone with the same views as yourself?

This is a bit like asking Cold War dinosaurs of old why they didn't support unilateral nuclear disarmament. Both

would simply shrug and reply: "We can't or the other lot would win". The Cold War is over but the damage – in the form of nuclear arsenals – are still with us. A them-and-us siege mentality is difficult to get out of. It creates walls by default.

All is not lost though. Pockets of activists around both the SSP and Solidarity – who see the futility of a prolonged and bitter war of attrition – have made contact with others in the opposite camp, and beyond. Lines of communication and dialogue have opened up. The online journal *Democratic Green Socialist*, set up by a group of Solidarity members, is one such ray of hope. Hopefully these non-partisan spaces will spread and grow.

It is not within the remit of this article to go into all the dots and commas of the fractious SSP split. But one crucial aspect of the SSP's history is often overlooked. By late 2004, before the original News of the World article it was becoming increasingly obvious to anyone involved in the SSP that a damaging split was opening up on the question of Scottish independence. Truth is, if a wound hadn't opened up around Tommy Sheridan, or Scottish independence for that matter, then something else would have torn the party apart. It was built on shaky foundations.

The rise and fall of the SSP was not a unique phenomena. If we look southwards a similar left unity project was attempted under the banner of Respect. It also fell apart in an acrimonious split, ostensibly around the

personality of George Galloway. But scrape away the veneer of personality politics and the main underlying obstacle to any such left unity project soon becomes apparent. It was the Militant Tendency – in its re-jigged guise of Scottish Militant Labour – who were in the driving seat when the SSP was formed. In England it was the SWP who had their hands firmly on the rudder. To their credit both organisations were trying to think their way out of a political cul-de-sac and attempted to build bridges towards other lefts. But Scottish Militant Labour and the SWP had something else in common: both were unashamedly Trotskyite organisations. For decades the leading lights of both organisations had immersed themselves in Trotskyite methodology and inevitably they brought this ideology, along with their old practices, into both projects. It was like bringing a ticking time-bomb into a marketplace of ideas.

The SSP and Respect went through similar development curves. The Trotskyite methodology ensured that each project would be launched in a fanfare of excitement and enthusiasm at grandiose gatherings of interested parties. The top table of speakers, the interim office bearers, and the obligatory steering committees, would, of course, materialise through prior 'caucuses' and 'working groups'. SML and SWP activists pulled enough strings to ensure their choice of candidates were safely ensconced in most leading positions. The seeds of self-interest were thus sown into the original fabric of both the SSP and Respect.

Trotskyism encourages personality politics and builds cults around certain individuals. A leadership fetish nurtures celebrity Pied Pipers in order to engineer some initial electoral successes. And build up party membership. Then, as sure as night follows day, a split occurs, seemingly from nowhere, with the celebrity politician(s) often at the centre of it. Before long minor political differences are amplified into spurious 'principles' and the initial project lies in ruins, leaving all those who invested hope and hard work depressed and back to square one. For non-Trotskyites this is a unique and terrible experience to have to go through. They can't believe how such-and-such

Kevin Williamson observes the wreckage of the SSP/Solidarity project and argues that while it may be an unedifying sight, it does not mean there is no hope for the Scottish left

could behave like that. For seasoned observers it's depressingly familiar.

If any sort of Scottish left unity project is to be forged it cannot be driven forward by those who utilise this destructive methodology. The SSP was one Trotskyite balls up too many. Its time for all on the Scottish left to raise our voices and say enough is enough.

The Scottish Greens, on the other hand, far from being in disarray, are looking forward to the 2011 election with great confidence. And little wonder. They have retained a core presence in the Scottish Parliament for the last twelve years; they effectively influence policy where they can; take part in direct action campaigns; push a radical pro-ecology, anti-war and anti-corporate agenda; support Scottish independence; promote non-hierarchical forms of organisation, as well as non-patriarchal modes of communication; and stand consistently against the prevailing neoliberal orthodoxies. The Scottish Greens could justifiably consider themselves to be the main standard bearers of the left, yet it is a consistently appealing feature of the

Greens that making such grandiose claims to centrality isn't in their political DNA.

If the radical left is serious about mounting an effective struggle against the neoliberal consensus it would make sense that any re-organisation of the Scottish left involved the Scottish Greens from day one. If there was strategic joined-up thinking on the Scottish left the SNP and Greens would be given a clean run at the unionists on 5 May.

Defining the boundaries of the left remains problematic for some. The SNP government is one of the most left-leaning governments in Europe with a broadly social democratic agenda. The SNP membership consists of many individuals who consider themselves socialists or leftists. The same could be said for the Labour Party. Challenging neo-liberalism means mapping out new spaces for constructive dialogue and actions, spaces where old tribal loyalties aren't deemed important enough to create unnecessary obstacles.

Perhaps the largest component of the Scottish left (this writer included) operates outside the structures of

traditional political parties. This includes many thousands of trade unionists, community activists, co-operative members, social businesses, human rights lawyers, civil libertarians, peaceniks, and single issue campaigners, as well as Scotland's formidable wealth of talent among its creative thinkers and independent media.

It is against this backdrop that the writer Pat Kane has captured the zeitgeist more than most and mapped out an emerging network of energised and imaginative Scottish thinkers and radicals. *'Thoughtland'* is an imagined space where individuals are engaged in constructive non-programmatic dialogue, developing radical ideas and lines of cultural and political advance. Although not entirely disconnected from political parties closer inspection notes that *'Thoughtland'* is not hampered by the restrictive pressures of groupthink and the need to defend a party line.

Although still relatively small this fascinating network is crystallising outside the mainstream media and political parties. This emerging space may grow to include cultural projects, social forums, community projects, music festivals, as well as social media, online publications, etc.

It is important to identify this development in order to juxtapose it to the traditional structures and institutions of power. Similarly if the concept of a Scottish left is to have any meaning it may need to be considered as an emerging fuzzy entity rather than ring-fenced in advance by rigid absolutism or fixed ideology. On the big questions – such as Scottish independence, neoliberal orthodoxy, social democracy, a centralised state, decentralisation of power – alliances may need to be forged with those of differing viewpoints if the status quo is to be effectively challenged.

These are all areas where strategic thinking and constructive dialogue may have a far greater pay-off in the medium-long term than isolationist posturing which demands that all boxes be ticked in advance. ■



Kevin Williamson is Co-Editor of *Bella Caledonia*.

Anatomy of Division

Gordon Morgan attempts to take a non-sectarian and dispassionate look at the various attempts – and failures – to find a way to avoid left parties standing against each other and asks what next?

Although they complain, both Labour and the SNP are fully committed to wielding the axe to public services. They are meekly implementing ConDem instituted austerity both in Holyrood and in Councils across Scotland. Unions such as the PCS have clearly made the case that no cuts are required. The so called fiscal crisis has been manufactured from thin air by those who caused the banking collapse. Tax the Rich, Make the Bankers Pay, Fight All Cuts - these slogans will increasingly resonate and gather support.

The Irish Elections show what can happen. The United Left Alliance gained five TDs, out of a total of 166. In Dublin they took three seats, the outgoing governing party Fianna Fail took one Dublin seat, previously it had 20. This should be the battleground at the Holyrood elections. A Scottish Left Alliance, if it existed, could gain several seats in May, possibly more than the six gained in 2003. In each region only around five per cent of the vote is required for a seat.

However, yet again voters will be faced with several parties with little differences in policies. Because of divisions, there is little chance in most regions of reaching the five per cent threshold to return an MSP committed to fighting the cuts.

This was not inevitable. Numerous attempts have been made since 2007 to construct a Scottish left slate. Depressingly, they mostly failed due to parties putting their own interests before class interests. The following is a personal but I hope accurate and informative account of these discussions.

In late 2006, there was a split in the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) which led to the majority of its members leaving. Most including the organised groupings the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the CWI (now Socialist Party Scotland) went on to form Solidarity. The background to the split, which I opposed, is another tale; however, at that time the SSP had six MSPs. It was impossible so soon after the split to then have an electoral pact for the 2007 elections. At the 2007 elections Solidarity, the SSP and the Socialist Labour Party (SLP) appeared as separate parties in ballot papers in all eight

regions. No MSPs were elected by any of the three parties. In Glasgow Solidarity got 4.1 per cent, the SSP 1.2 per cent and the SLP 1.3 per cent. Had there been some form of electoral pact an MSP would have been won in Glasgow.

In March 2008, informal discussions took place between Solidarity and members of the Green Party with a view to having a Red/Green slate for the Euro elections. This indirectly led to the Democratic Green Socialist formation. The Green members were also discussing with the SSP. Solidarity responded in April 2008 "at this moment in time, given the current state of affairs surrounding the court case, Solidarity could not enter into any formal coalition with the SSP".

The unleashing of the economic crisis, forced a rethink of this position. In December 2008 Solidarity passed a motion from Tommy Sheridan which sought "to try and bring the left forces closer together to seek at least electoral

agreements that would see the left vote maximised not diluted in the face of the free market main stream".

In February 2009, an initiative from the RMT union led to the setting up of a No To the EU campaign to stand candidates in the European elections across the UK on an anti-privatisation/racism/war programme. Solidarity agreed to participate, along with the Communist Party of Britain (CPB) and other groups. Disappointingly, discussions between Bob Crow and Arthur Scargill came to nought and the SLP stood alone.

It was agreed that Scotland would select its own candidates and the SSP was asked to participate in the process. A motion supporting joining No to EU was discussed at the SSP conference at the end of March, but defeated. They decided to stand themselves. At the European elections in Scotland in June 2009, the SLP got two per cent and both the SSP and No to EU got 0.9 per

cent. More significantly for the left at the time, the BNP took two Euro seats. This intensified discussions within Solidarity and other sections of the left on the need for left unity.

In May 2009, the prospect of a Glasgow North East constituency by election was raised and the RMT wrote letters to Solidarity, the SSP and others seeking to discuss holding a joint hustings to agree a left candidate. In mid June the SSP planned a Glasgow meeting to decide if they would stand themselves. I leafleted their meeting to

"respectfully ask that SSP members delay a final decision on the issue, at least in the short term, until some form of left unity discussion can take place". The SSP ignored this and decided on their own candidate. In July 2009 the SSP stated "The Scottish Socialist Party was founded on the principle of left unity in Scotland. We continue to have that as our goal. In 2006 a split from the SSP fractured that unity. Once all of the legal obstacles have been cleared from our path we intend to initiate a full, open and democratic discussion around left unity in Scotland and the role that the SSP can play in achieving it".

Faced with this rejection and the lack of other significant independent forces, in October Solidarity selected its own candidate for the by election. At the election in November, the BNP came 4th with 4.9 per cent, Solidarity got 3.9 per cent, the SSP 0.7 per cent and the SLP 0.2 per cent. The Solidarity conference in November 2009 stated "With a general election only six months away we and the other left forces have to devise a method to prevent competing in the same seats for the same votes. Whether through electoral agreements or temporary alliances we owe it to the class we aim to represent to get our act together and offer a more united and therefore viable and potentially powerful electoral alternative".

In January 2010 the Trade Union

and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) was established to fight at the general election. Although not officially backed by any national union, senior RMT and PCS officials personally backed it. Bob Crow wrote to all groups in Scotland

Against everybody's wishes, Solidarity, the SSP and probably the SLP will be on most regional list ballots in the Holyrood election

to participate in TUSC. As well as the SLP, the CPB refused to participate (they effectively were backing Labour). Colin Fox was spoken to during the first TUSC Scottish meeting and asked, if the SSP were not joining TUSC, what constituencies they did plan to stand in? A similar question was put to the SLP. TUSC, with Solidarity's backing, decided not to stand against either the SLP or the SSP. In the event in May there were only two constituencies in Scotland where more than one of TUSC/Solidarity, the SSP or the SLP stood. In eight constituencies only TUSC/Solidarity stood and in a further nine only the SSP stood.

In August 2010, Motherwell and Wishaw RMT called for trade unions, community groups, socialist organisations and parties to agree a common slate at the Scottish parliament elections. Both Solidarity and the SSP as well as representatives of the FBU, RMT and anti cuts bodies attended the initial two meetings of this body. A steering committee was set with representatives from each group. In November Respect also agreed to participate as it was considering standing in Scotland.

At the steering committee meeting on 27th November, the SSP announced that it had already decided to stand themselves, indeed had chosen their candidates in all eight regions. They then withdrew from the meeting. Over the next weeks it became clear that no new trade union or other forces were now backing the initiative and that Solidarity and Respect were the only parties involved. Under electoral law joint party lists are not permitted for the Scottish Elections, so discussions centred on the name. Respect only wished to stand in

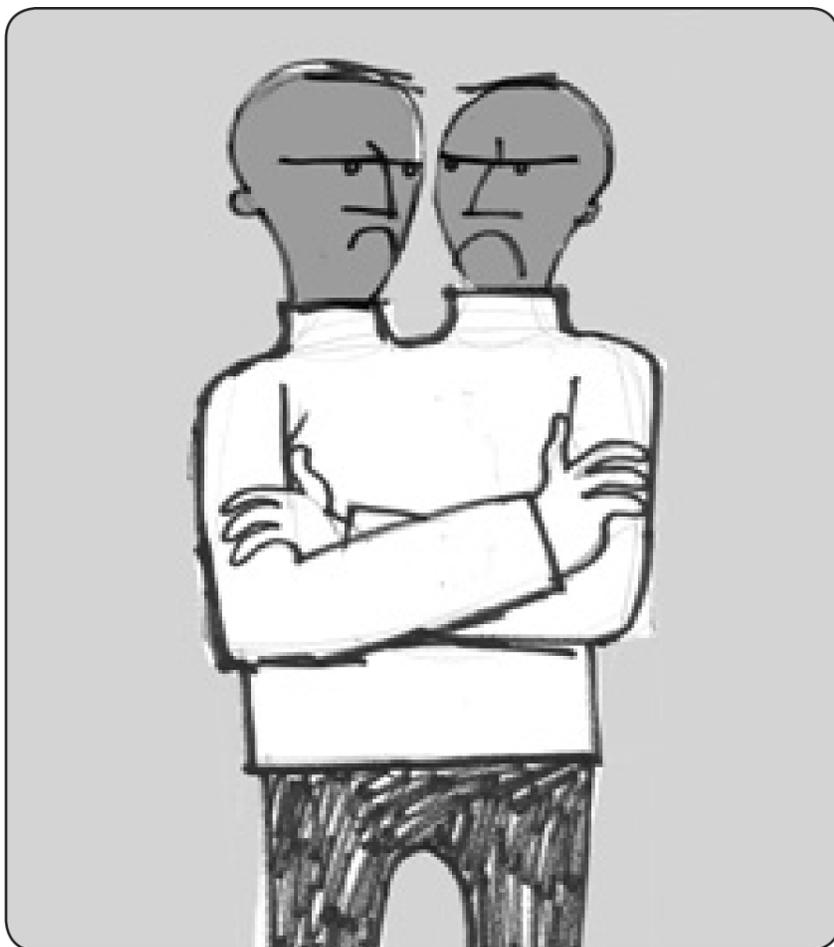
Glasgow. In the other seven regions of Scotland, Solidarity was the only party participating in the RMT-initiated steering committee.

Respect confirmed it would stand on a platform of clear opposition to all cuts and clarified some other key policies. On this basis Solidarity's conference at 19th February 2011 agreed to not stand in Glasgow and, subject to further discussions (successfully concluded on 1 March), to support Galloway and Respect as part of a coalition against all cuts. Solidarity will stand itself in the other 7 regions. Unfortunately this means that against everybody's wishes, Solidarity, the SSP and probably the SLP will in 2011 as in 2007 be on most regional list ballots in the Holyrood election.

There is an objective need for a united front to oppose the cuts, individually, as part of a campaign and within the electoral arena. To paraphrase Lenin this firm programmatic position requires extreme organisational flexibility on behalf of communists to become a reality. The electoral united front has largely failed for these Holyrood elections. United campaigns against all cuts can hopefully go on. Next year's council elections give another opportunity to achieve an electoral front or alliance against the cuts which will be ongoing. They will be conducted under an almost identical election system to Ireland. The Irish United Left was only established in August 2010 and won seats in February 2011. It is an Electoral alliance between the Socialist Party, the People before Profit Alliance and the workers and Unemployed Action Group and other groups all of which retain their own identity. All three above groups now have members of the Irish parliament having achieved first preference votes in Dublin of between 13 and 19 per cent - similar to the vote for the SSP in Glasgow in 2003.

With a year to go to the council elections, what obstacle other than entrenched left sectarianism can prevent the Scottish left agreeing a slate to contest and hopefully win many council seats across Scotland and thus more effectively oppose the cuts? ■

Gordon Morgan is the Treasurer of Solidarity.



Influence Now, Unite Later

Robin McAlpine argues that now is not the time for the left to put all its efforts into the long-term process of unification when there is an immediate need to professionalise and start making its presence felt properly

We all know it is a mess, we all wish it wasn't, we all know it will probably be a mess for a while yet. So goes left politics in Scotland. As a non-partisan magazine the SLR has had to look on as the legal battles raged, not really able to engage properly with the issue of what the organised left has offered the left-sympathising voter. Frustration at the ease with which the right (and its pseudonyms 'the establishment' and 'the political mainstream') was able to mock an entire political movement as barely capable of existing. Anger at how simple it has been to paint the left as infantile. So just when it may be possible to talk

Make no mistake – the CBI does not stand for election, nor does the Daily Mail or the Taxpayers Alliance or SERCO or BAE

about a future for a unified left party in Scotland it may seem perverse that I am going to argue that it isn't the priority.

I want to argue this not so much as a committed leftie but as someone who has spent his life working in the field of professional political influence. The aim here is not to look at the whats, the wheres, the whos or even the whys, but only the hows. I want to argue that there are two basic strands of what the left-sympathiser should want to see happening – influence and representation. But I also want to argue that these are not entirely the same thing, which is just as well given the realistic options. So it seems to me that there have to be two paths taken; one seeking to engage now with the big issues in Scotland, a path on which we can find immediate victories big and small, and one seeking to take us to a stronger place in the future, but one that remains strewn with obstacles. If the left wants influence and representation to be built from the debris, what does it have to do?

Let us begin with path two – the one that leads to representation. Representation here is taken to mean that when the public is asked to choose a political future for Scotland and when it puts politicians in a parliament to represent that political future, among

them will be voices of the left from parties committed to deep-rooted reform. There will almost certainly be a stronger Green presence in the next parliament and that represents the expression of an desire to see what might be called a renegotiation of the relationship between power and the social and physical environment. The Greens have been a central element of the left since devolution and on subjects such as

human rights and peace (as well as the environment) the contribution has been important. But they do not really represent the desire for a renegotiation of the relationships of social class. This also is an crucial element of the left

agenda and it has been missing. So let us make a simple assumption here – a left block needs the Greens but it also needs an avowedly socialist party.

What does this mean? Well, first and foremost it means that those on the left directly involved in representative party politics must get their act together in one way or another. It almost certainly means the need to find a new generation (here meaning nothing to do with age). But it also means a serious look at how political parties make breakthroughs. Sometimes political parties can make breakthroughs on the basis of the support for an important emerging agenda (the Green movement) or on the basis of dominant-issue approaches (national, age or gender issues for example). But in the vast majority of cases breakthrough parties require a figurehead. This is an analysis that can be found in the work of 19th century social philosopher Max Weber who argued that dynasties, monarchies and bureaucracies have ways of sustaining their power but that to 'break in' you almost always need "charismatic leadership" (his terminology). It is simply reality that when people hear a new idea they look to the person speaking and if they don't see someone they want to believe, they tend not to believe. I hold no brief for

Tommy Sheridan but objectively and in purely technical terms, he is the only contender for Alex Salmond's crown as the outstanding Scottish politician of this generation. He was able to take issues and articulate them to people in a way that made people both notice and want to believe. These are the attributes of successful charismatic leadership. They do not confer 'righteousness', but they do confer success.

So this is one important issue for left realignment. It is not enough to bury the hatchet and it certainly isn't enough to patch up the damage with an elaborate balancing act designed to make sure no-one comes out with 'too much profile'. That is a great way to save a bitterly divided golf club or amateur dramatics society. It is not the way to get elected. The path to representation will require some kind of accommodation between the desire to be represented and the distrust of the cult of personality. Right now it seems that 'left realignment' is like a delicate operation with 'do no harm' as the watchword. At some point it needs to get itself noticed. Anyone who believes this will happen simply through the act of existing hasn't been watching UKIP.

But that is representation. It is not influence. It is a difficult fact for the left to face but for four years more than one in ten of all elected politicians in the Scottish Parliament were part of a loose left group (if we include some of the independents) but the real evidence of influence is minimal. Scotland may have a proportional electoral system but that does not mean influence is distributed proportionately any more than it means a seat is the same as power. Even at its peak the left in Scotland was no more influential than the Lib Dems during the New Labour years. If path two is one seeking to reach representation, we need to think about path one as well.

Let this be put bluntly – it is a very long time since we had an influential politician in Britain. A very good case can be made that since Thatcher and Regan, every politician in the UK and the US has been influenced to a very much greater degree than influential. Ask yourself who is the real influence in the UK just now. Is it Cameron,

looking day by day more like a child dressed up in his daddy's clothes with the vague hint that he knows he is out of his depth? Is it George Osborne, a sidekick apparently petrified he might get caught out on something? Is it Andrew Lansley, apparently dragging the two of them around behind plans for an incredibly neoliberal health reform neither really seems to have understood? Or is it the corporate lobbyists who spent the last decade writing the policy for Lansley while he was packed off onto some yacht or other to wait it out over martinis while the adults got on with it?

Make no mistake – the CBI does not stand for election, nor does the Daily Mail or the Taxpayers Alliance or SERCO or BAE or any of the other corporations running the show. In the US the secretive Koch brothers who spend inconceivable sums of money twisting politics to their own ends did indeed try to run for office once many years ago. After the drubbing they realised it is really just vanity. Big Tobacco, the NRA, the anti-abortion lobby, the Israel Lobby, Fox News – no-one who matters ever runs candidates. Ever. They buy candidates, they twist their arms, they buy the media that reports on candidates, they even fund black opps against ideological opponents.

And they always win. To see it the other way round is to imagine that in the relationship between Jeremy Hunt and Rupert Murdoch, Rupert Murdoch was the supplicant.

This is the primary point I want to make. Representation is important; representation without influence is simply tokenism. The primary difference between influence and invisibility is money and professionalism. And while the money very much helps, it is not really the most important part. If you look at the campaign donations in the UK and even to some extent in the US they are quite large sums, but not really in the big picture. The lobbying budget of business in the UK is absolutely tiny in comparison with their advertising budget. It does not take much money to influence a politician if you deploy it with care and expertise. Simply look at Scotland, where the Reform think tank has had an influence well out of step with its resources.

This is what the left in the UK has not been good at – what might be called 'professionalising', or deploying the techniques of professional influence to a different end. You only have to watch Newsnight Scotland to get an idea about this. If you want to speak to the business lobby in Scotland you can take your pick.

If you want to speak to someone on the other side, who do you phone? Or look at the political agenda. If you want to privatise our national water asset you can pick and choose between apparently credible proponents (so long as you don't probe their case to hard). If you don't, you are not a long way away from apparently being on your own. What has happened over recent times is that the skills and techniques for wielding political influence have become more and more effective just exactly as they have often become harder and harder to see. This is how influence is really brought to bear.

So this is my second main argument – the left has to professionalise. This does not mean compromise or 'sell out', it simply means 'do the job properly'. It means that things don't happen without the left speaking in people's ears. It means the media doesn't run stories without opposing voices. It means that ideas and analysis are packaged in a sharp and effective way. We are seeing the beginning of this. The UK Uncut movement is incredibly media savvy, has short, pithy, memorable messages supported by effective and solid research and knows how to strike where it will have the biggest impact. It is sad but true that in the field of political debate (though obviously not industrial relations) the big corporations have become more worried about a handful of clever activists and the messages they are getting across than they are about the mass trade union movement. And UK Uncut has no money.

For this reason, we are currently exploring the possibility of establishing a left wing think tank and lobby group. If we can build a little support we can exactly exert the kind of influence in Scotland that the right has. If anything, the left is in a stronger position in Scotland than the right given that the political consensus is far to the left of the dominant business lobby and its endless drive for the marketisation and privatisation of everything. The left must work to be seen. But that will take four years. Until then, it must work to be felt. That can begin immediately. ■

Robin McAlpine is the Editor of the Scottish Left Review



In Whose Interest?

The prosecution and trial of Tommy and Gail Sheridan set many legal precedents and, as Jim Monaghan describes, leaves many unanswered questions.

The decision to prosecute Tommy and Gail Sheridan was the first time in living memory in Scotland that a charge of perjury had followed from a civil case. Other Scottish precedents followed, television crews were allowed to film in the courtroom after the verdict, twitter was allowed to be used in court prior to sentencing. Overall more than 50,000 police hours were spent on the investigation, at a cost stated in court of £1.2 million. Prosecution and legal costs give a total cost to the taxpayer of well over £4 million, excluding the ongoing cost of imprisoning Tommy. This at a time of cuts in public services and Lothian and Borders police having the worst conviction rate in Scotland for the more serious crime of attempted rape.

Regardless of the outcome of Tommy Sheridan's appeal, the case and its surrounding media coverage, raises serious unanswered questions about the process by which the investigation was conducted by the police, prioritisation of police time, monitoring of police, how 'public interest' in prosecution is determined and the relationship between the judiciary and police and the media, particularly the News of the World. These unanswered questions are outlined below.

1) Why was the Perjury investigation instigated, and was the remit to look impartially at all participants in the original Libel Trial?

As previously reported (SLR 45) 0.01 per cent of cases in Scottish

courts end in a perjury case despite the fact as BBC Scotland solicitor Alistair Bonnington said "lies are told every day and in every case in courts across Scotland". In court it was stated the Lothian and Borders Police initial police investigation was kicked off by Barbara Scott's 'notes' of an SSP meeting and they were investigating "whether perjury had been committed" in the libel proof. At the original libel trial, witnesses had stated the notes had been destroyed and Scott herself never mentioned their continued existence. Indeed the SSP executive lawyers in written testimony to Lady Smith's commission stated that the notes had been destroyed. At the perjury trial Scott claimed she had them in her possession during the original trial. Clearly there was evidence to the police that witnesses opposed to Tommy Sheridan had lied in court. Yet in the perjury trial, all of the witnesses against Tommy who were asked, confirmed that they hadn't been cautioned by the police. Several of these witnesses changed their statements between the libel and perjury trial. This would suggest that the investigation was carried out

only into evidence from supporters of Tommy Sheridan, five of whom were subsequently charged along with the Sheridans. Had the investigation been impartially carried out, all those questioned would have been suspects and would have had to been warned (cautioned) about the possibility of perjury charges when questioned.

2) Who took the decision to commit resources of 50,000 man hours of police time, and £1.2 million of the

police budget?

Police investigations at a case by case level is the prerogative of the police. However, policing priorities are set by the Scottish Government and the police budget is approved and monitored by the Lothian and Borders Police Board. Can individual inspectors run up such expenditure on their own? We know that expenditure was being monitored as FOI requests to Lothian and Borders Police were responded to promptly. At what level was this expenditure approved? Who decided and monitored the use of police officers? Was the Chief constable in the loop and were reports made to the police board? Frankly if no one is

Numerous News of the World reports relating to the Sheridan case appear in retrospect to rely on evidence found in police investigations but not made public at the time

police budget?

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ensuring police resources are used in line with policy they should be.

3) Did the procurator's office and/or Elish Angilioni, either as Solicitor General or Lord Advocate receive feedback from the police investigation prior to charges being made in December 2007?

There is no suggestion of impropriety here; however, Elish Angilioni was Solicitor General till 4 October 2006, and then Lord Advocate till now. Till April 2007 she was a member of the (Labour/Lib Dem) Cabinet in the Scottish Government. Early reports stated that the Procurator's office had asked the police to investigate possible perjury on 2 October 2006 at which time she was head of the procurator's office. At what level was the decision to make that request taken, if indeed it was? Was there any (even informal) reference to the case in the cabinet?

4) What was the public interest served by the decision to proceed with the prosecution and what role (if any) did financial considerations play in this decision?

On 12 February 2009 a spokesman for the Crown Office rejected suggestions that Lothian and Borders police had put them under "incredible pressure" to proceed with prosecution and maintained that an Independent Crown Counsel considered the police report and "subsequently took the decision to prosecute". Rumours persist that the initial recommendation of the Crown council was not to prosecute, as evidence was weak and it was not clearly in the public interest. This view was allegedly challenged by Elish Angilioni who asked him to reconsider. More recently senior counsel have been heard to state that the deciding factor in the decision was the fear that not to proceed would open up the police to a damages suit for wrongful arrest from the seven charged and that this could be costlier than a perjury trial, win or lose. Clearly the Crown can maintain that a successful prosecution, albeit with most charges thrown out and on an eight to six jury verdict on those remaining, proves the public interest. However, the additional costs to the taxpayer incurred from that time amount to well over £1 million, courts were tied

up and probably other cases dropped. It is in the interest of the public to know whether decisions to prosecute are made based on financial considerations and if not what was the 'public interest' reason?

5) How did police videos which were not shown in court end up in the hands of the BBC? Will prosecutions result? Why did the BBC broadcast them?

Videos of Tommy and Gail Sheridan being interrogated by police were shown within hours of the verdict by the BBC in a programme The Rise and Lies of Tommy Sheridan. These videos had to have been given to the BBC before the verdict, meaning that evidence was compromised while the trial was still live. Following questions, it has been stated the videos were not officially handed over by the police, the Procurator Fiscal's office or the Crown Office. Is there now going to be an investigation into how evidence was stolen? Tommy and Gail Sheridan have threatened legal action unless this happens. Given that the BBC reporter must know they did not come from legitimate sources, what justification was there for broadcasting them? Was an agent paid? Kenneth Roy has written further on this matter (www.scottishreview.net/KRoy66.shtml).

6) Why did the bugging of an MSP's car not merit a thorough police investigation?

In March 2007, a "viable listening device" was found in Tommy Sheridan's car by security police at the Scottish Parliament, who referred the matter to Lothian and Borders Police. Virtually no resources were devoted to the matter by the police and, eventually, they dropped the case. There was obvious speculation of News International involvement and the News of the World issued a denial of involvement. Despite this, during the perjury trial, News of the World witnesses confirmed that they hadn't been questioned by the police.

7) Has there been an external police review into the conduct and performance of Lothian and Borders police based on their trial evidence?

During the perjury trial it was established that: at least nine police officers met at Ibrox football ground rather than Govan police station prior to

raiding the Sheridan's house; during an eight hour detention and police interview, rosary beads were removed from Gail and she was accused of having learned interview techniques from the PIRA; Gail was charged with theft despite no complaint having been received relating to the property concerned. A police officer exchanged numerous emails full of sexual innuendo with a crown witness, he also met with that witness and a journalist, without a second police officer as a witness. His superiors said in evidence, when questioned about his relationship with this witness, that they "wouldn't have done it". Is sectarianism and sexual exchanges with witnesses acceptable in the police?

8) In how many cases has the Crown relied on paid witnesses?

Ian Hamilton QC believes the Crown's use of video evidence in court that the News of the World had paid £200,000 for is "malpractice". A similar reliance on paid witnesses is "one of the things that make many people believe the (Megrahi) conviction is unsafe." For full article see www.firmmagazine.com/news/2216/Exclusive%3A_Crown_use_of_paid_witnesses_in_Sheridan_case_is_%22malpractice%22_says_QC_.html.

9) Will Lothian and Borders Police Board determine if there are any links between Lothian and Borders Police and the News of the World?

Numerous News of the World reports relating to the Sheridan case appear in retrospect to rely on evidence found in police investigations but not made public at the time. Tommy Sheridan was one of many targets for phone tapping by the News of the World. As part of the furore over phone tapping, the Metropolitan Police Authority requested from their commissioner details of all contacts between them and News International. The Guardian reported many contacts including at the most senior level. The Lothian and Borders Police Board, by asking a similar question, can lay to rest perceptions of overt collusion between the police and the News of the World, if not informal collusion at more junior level. ■

Jim Monaghan is a member of the Labour Party and is writing a book on the Sheridans' trial



CWU SCOTLAND
STOP THE SALE OF ROYAL MAIL



CWU
The communications union

CWU Scottish Regional Committee welcomes all delegates and visitors to STUC Congress 2011 in Ayr.



NOT FOR SALE

CWU Scotland campaigning against the ConDems proposed 'Postal Services Bill' to make sure we 'Keep the Post Public' and to prevent the mass closure of Post Offices across Scotland that these proposals will inevitably lead to if the the proposed Bill is brought into legislation

**John Brown Regional Secretary Scotland
Pauline Rourke Regional Political Chair Scotland
Willie Lawson Regional Political Secretary Scotland**

GMB@WORK

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GMB@WORK

GROWTH, ACCOUNTABILITY AND DEMOCRACY IN GMB

Total GMB membership has grown by 15% in real terms over the previous five years following the adoption of the GMB@Work national organising strategy in 2005.

GMB emerged from a deep financial crisis and the threat of merger in 2004/5 with a new leadership but fewer officers and resources than at any other time. Yet by spending less and asking more of GMB Workplace Organisers GMB has turned around decades of membership and financial decline.

GMB developed a single set of 38 policies and organising approaches simply based on a common understanding of what works and what doesn't. These have been adopted and implemented in all GMB Regions and GMB Sections. But the GMB@Work strategy has five fundamental organising principles which we promote to all GMB Officials and GMB Workplace Organisers.

GMB's growth rate and the GMB@Work strategy have begun to fundamentally change the union. Four out of five members are now service workers, almost half are women, officials no longer sit on the CEC, sections have been reduced from eight to three and we have returned to an annual GMB Congress—all to focus on the core truth: that a growing GMB delivers for GMB members while a shrinking GMB lets members down.

GMB@WORK STRATEGY

- 1.** The workplace is the building block of GMB. It is at work, rather than in the community or in the media, that working people are most able to build the collective solidarity they need to tackle the injustice and inequality they face head on.
- 2.** Each GMB workplace is organised as if a ballot for industrial action was due. GMB need GMB members to be match fit and ready, but we also need our organisation in each workplace to be democratic, transparent and accountable every day.
- 3.** The employers have different interests than GMB members. It is GMB members' employers who are the cause of most of GMB members' problems at work and the Union's job is to stand up for and promote members' interests, not to bury them in partnership agreements.
- 4.** It is the process of industrial relations that builds a union. People don't join unions out of gratitude for what was done in the past but out of fear and anger for the present and hope for the future.
- 5.** People are strongest when they organise themselves. GMB members are encouraged to find their own solutions to the problems they face. GMB members in each workplace must have the power and authority they need to make decisions and officers must stop doing for members what they can do for themselves. Workplace democracy and organising must co-exist.

There is an alternative...

PCS sends greetings to delegates attending the 114th Annual Congress of the STUC

PCS wishes Joy Dunn, STUC President, a successful congress

Janice Godrich National President
Mark Serwotka General Secretary
Lynn Henderson Scottish Secretary



Pic: Karen Robinson

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Questions of Leadership

The Scottish Left Review wrote to the two candidates to be First Minister after the Scottish Election. We put six questions to them and asked them either to answer each individually or give us a statement. This is what we received.

SNP leader Alex Salmond

1. What is your vision for Scottish society now that neoliberal economic policies have failed?

It is a vision of a fair, independent Scotland, free to use its own vast natural resources to benefit all of its people, and of a Scotland playing its full part on the international stage as a force for good in the wider world, adaptable to the currents of globalisation, while remaining true to our core values.

2. Will you continue to block the transfer of functions from the NHS to private commercial organisations and will you apply the same principle to local government and other areas of public service?

We believe in a publicly-owned Scottish health service, and public services run for the public good. We have absolutely no plans to copy the NHS privatisation as pursued by the previous Labour administration in Westminster and the current Tory-led coalition.

3. Will you keep Scottish Water in public ownership as at present?

Yes, and more – we plan to evolve our water resources into a major plank of our environmental, economic and humanitarian policies. The question is not how our water utility can benefit shareholders, but how can our water benefit the people.

4. Will you keep open the option of using the tax-raising powers of the Scottish Parliament (including reform of local taxes) to protect jobs and services in Scotland?

We want the Scottish Parliament to be responsible for all taxes raised in Scotland, which would allow us to ensure taxation is fair and progressive. It was deeply regrettable that the Unionist parties stood in the way of our proposed large retail levy, which would have been paid by only the very largest business rate premises – some two per cent of the total – and would have raised £30m to help public services.

5. Will you ask university students or graduates to pay directly for their

education?

No, we believe in the right to free education, and restored that touchstone principle abolishing the Graduate Endowment.

6. Will you support a programme to reduce the pay inequality in the public sector and where possible bring pressure on the private sector to do the same?

Yes, and we are already acting on this by, for example, implementing a £7.15 an hour Living Wage in the public sector where we have responsibility. Since the Equal Pay Act of 1970, gender differences in pay levels have been illegal, yet a huge amount of work is still required to ensure that the same wage is paid for the same job. ■

The question is not how our water utility can benefit shareholders, but how can our water benefit the people.

Labour Leader Iain Gray

When I was a teacher in the early 80s I went to work in Mozambique and returned two years later to find the young people from my school in Gracemount had turned into the Lost Generation of the Thatcher era.

Few had hope for the future and many were condemned to long term unemployment.

We cannot let that happen again under this Tory led government. That's why jobs and apprenticeships are the focus of Labour's campaign for the elections in May.

As part of it we will reinstate the Future Jobs Fund that was scrapped by the Tory-led government and create 10,000 places for unemployed youngsters along with an apprenticeship guarantee for all those who qualify.

Shortly after I became leader of Labour in Scottish parliament in autumn 2008 the financial crash turned upside down the neoliberal consensus of the last 30 years and it was clearer than ever that government had to play an active role in determining the purpose of our economy.

We have the levers in the Scottish parliament to take a more active role and one of my criticisms of the SNP has been their failure to use them.

When the credit crunch occurred Scottish Labour came up with a 15 point plan for government action while the SNP froze.

It should be noted that Alex Salmond was leading proponent of light touch regulation and criticised the UK Labour government for being too heavy handed and interfering.

We all know there should have been tighter regulation. We all know that government has the lead role in protecting and providing frontline services.

But the Tory led government does not think times have changed and their attitude to the banking sector is the

traditional one you'd expect from a cabinet of millionaires.

At the same time the nationalists have tried to depoliticise politics in Scotland, believing a series of populist gimmicks and manoeuvres was enough as they indulged in their constitutional obsession.

When Labour left office in 2007 Scotland's unemployment rate was the lowest in the UK. Now after four years under the nationalist it is the highest. This is a dreadful legacy.

Meanwhile the scale of the cuts we face are too fast and too deep. This presents significant challenges for the next Scottish government and the test for whoever it is will be how to maintain values of fairness, equality and social justice.

However Labour will stay true to our values and protect the NHS and the transfer of functions to commercial organisations and will keep Scottish Water in public ownership. I have made clear there will be no price tag on education for students, either up front or back ended.

Labour is also committed to a Living wage right across all of the public sector and will campaign to roll it out across the private sector, unlike the SNP's limp efforts to follow suit.

I have also committed myself and ministers in a Labour government to taking a five per cent pay cut.

As for tax raising powers, it

was grossly irresponsible of the SNP to relinquish the SVR against the will of the Scottish people. We would bring these powers back and they would be available if a Scottish government wished to use them.

If elected a Labour government at Holyrood will focus on what really matters to ordinary working people and not be distracted by separation from the rest of the UK. ■

Labour will stay true to our values and protect the NHS and the transfer of functions to commercial organisations and will keep Scottish Water in public ownership

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The Keir Hardie Society

Lanarkshire-born Keir Hardie is best remembered as the founder of the Labour Party, its first leader and the Party's first Member of Parliament.

Self educated and his politics forged by the injustice that beset him and those around him from an early age James Keir Hardie dedicated his whole life to the cause of Labour.

A trade union agitator and organiser in Lanarkshire then Ayrshire, he became a political figure of national then international prominence. A great supporter of women's rights especially the right to vote, of peace not war and internationalism not nationalism; he toured the world preaching

his gospel of socialism.

Keir Hardie was an ethical socialist who argued not just for "bread for the hungry" but for "rest for the weary" and "hope for the oppressed" too. He understood the importance of vision in politics so he set out the kind of socialist society he wanted to build: even though he knew that he was unlikely to see it realised in his lifetime. And he established Labour as an independent working class party based on the trade unions as the vehicle for achieving it. He remains for the most part uncelebrated and his work largely undiscovered that's why we have launched a Society to "keep alive the ideas and promote the life and work of Keir

Hardie": the Keir Hardie Society. To commemorate him is not to look wistfully backwards but to remind ourselves of the necessity of unflinching principles, vision and determination in looking forward.

Membership is £10 (£4 unwaged) payable to the "Keir Hardie Society" c/o Richard Leonard, GMB Scotland, 1/3 Woodside Crescent, Glasgow G3 7UJ

For further details about the Society contact richard.leonard@gmb.org.uk Or Hugh Gaffney on hugh.gaffney@yahoo.co.uk

Answers for a Better Way

On the eve of the STUC Congress Dave Moxham looks at the questions we set the two potential First Ministers, suggests what their answers should be and puts forward other ideas they should be backing

At the time of writing STUC is preparing for what I believe will prove to have been the biggest trade union led demonstration for a generation, with hundreds of thousands of workers, students and people from all walks of life coming together to march for an alternative. STUC's own *There is a Better Way* campaign will be the major issue at our Congress with motions looking to develop our response around job creation, defence of public services, fair taxation and fair pay. Congress will also consider its options in relation to further mobilisation of Scotland's communities and the appropriate co-ordination industrially to the threats we face.

In circumstances where the key fiscal levers lie with Westminster and the central policy is austerity backed by welfare cuts and attacks on trade unions it would be tempting, but wrong, to focus all our energies south of the border. The role adopted by government in campaigning for "The Better Way" is vital. Whether at Scottish Government or local government, STUC expects that leadership will be shown through continually arguing and mobilising for policy alternatives and through implementing policies locally and nationally which are consistent with this approach.

All parties contesting the Scottish election must retain perspective on the roots and causes of the current economic crisis. The failure of neo-liberal globalisation and international regulation are manifest and can be laid

at no single government's door; however neither the previous Labour Government at Westminster nor the current Scottish Government can be absolved of blame.

In the election and despite the manifestly embarrassing position they find themselves in, Liberals in Scotland will be forced to heap opprobrium on the former Labour Government and hope against hope that their current Coalition position will be forgiven - or accepted as inevitable. This is unlikely to happen. For their part, the Tories will require considerable Chutzpah to defend austerity madness but their options are few and it can be expected that attacks launched on the public sector and universality down south will take up much of their time in Scotland during April. From the relative safety of opposition, the Greens are advocating a number of sustainable and progressive policies which will merit serious consideration, irrespective of the party's electoral success.

Which leaves us with the SNP and Labour. It is one of the more pleasing aspects of Scottish politics - and some would argue its voting system - that how 'the left' votes still matters to the outcome of Scottish elections. Thus the question posed of party leaders by Scottish Left Review - and a few others which STUC would add - represent an important political battleground.

Will you continue to block the transfer of functions from the NHS to private commercial organisations and will you apply the same principle to local government and other areas of public

service?

STUC will argue that within a framework of mixed provision, directly delivered, directly accountable, public services must remain the primary delivery mechanism and privatisation opposed. Within this framework the voluntary sector can and must play a limited yet vibrant and innovative role.

The next part of Government will be influenced to some extent by the findings of the Christie Commission. STUC hopes that that Commission will establish some important principles about models of public service delivery. Too many in the political class have fallen into the trap of confusing challenges to increasing productivity in *personal services* generally, with the idea that *public services*, specifically, are inefficient. Thus, whilst privatisation has generally been disdained at Scottish government level, local authorities have been liberated to pursue a hotchpotch of delivery models with varying levels of private sector involved. Procurement regulations make it difficult to pursue a genuinely mixed provision of delivery between public and voluntary sectors without opening up the market to private sector dominance. But whilst public services must remain the primary delivery mechanism, the voluntary sector can and must play a vibrant and innovative role based on contracting which guarantees and sustains equal pay and other conditions of employment for third sector workers.

Will you keep Scottish Water in public ownership as at present?

All parties should commit to public

ownership, explicitly oppose back door privatisation through mutualisation, PFI or contracting out of services. The new Government should then investigate how it goes about enhancing and democratising the current publicly owned model.

Will you keep open the option of using the tax-raising powers of the Scottish Parliament (including reform of local taxes) to protect jobs and services in Scotland?

The Council

Tax Freeze was never a good idea and become increasingly unsustainable as the Scottish Government starved itself of finance (now around £500 million a year) and resorted increasingly to use of 'smoke and

mirrors' mechanisms to mask the impact on local government and previously ring-fenced funded voluntary organisations. Part of this revenue self-denial was the implementation of the Small Business Bonus Scheme, which the Scottish Government did not even attempt to justify in terms of specific impact with even the Federation of Small Businesses unable to point to positive impacts. It was the turn of Labour to disappoint when the Supermarket Tax was thrown out at the unsubstantiated whim of big business.

All available taxes must be considered and it is to be hoped that the Scotland Act will enable borrowing powers to be introduced as early as possible. A more progressive Council Tax Banding is a must, and potential wider tax reform including business and local taxation must be considered given new fiscal powers proposed in the Scotland Bill. Above all the tax debate needs to be approached consistently by the parties of the centre left. Advocating higher public spending (and one presumes taxation) at Westminster while reducing the Scottish tax base is not acceptable.

Will you ask university students or graduates to pay directly for their education?

The expert group, set up by the

Scottish Government and Universities Scotland outlined the gap in funding between the English and Scottish higher education sectors. Even given the group's assumption that the tuition fees introduced in England will provide additional funding for the university sector (a fact disputed by Oxford University which has already stated that it needs £8000 per year tuition fees just to break even) the expert group has

estimated that the gap in funding for higher education in Scotland is only between £91 million and £263 million per year. These figures suggest that higher education can be sustained in Scotland without having to resort

to a graduate contribution that plunges young people into debt and discourages the poorest from applying.

Will you support a programme to reduce the pay inequality in the public sector and where possible bring pressure on the private sector to do the same?

Both the Scottish Government and Scottish Labour have made meaningful commitments in respect of the Living Wage. Labour in particular is proposing that the Living Wage should apply at local government level and has made general commitments to pursuing the Living Wage through procurement and through establishing a Living Wage Unit to increase pressure in the private sector. The commitment from both parties runs counter to the cacophony emanating from business organisations and the Tories down south in favour of reduced wage regulation and attacks on trade union rights. Establishing greater wage equality in Scotland is a prize which goes just as much to the economic recovery of local communities as it does to fairness. It therefore requires a narrative - ideally one which is shared by the major political parties - which connects fair pay with sustainable economic growth and is thus robust in the face of the inevitable attacks from business and the right.

What is your vision for Scottish society

now that neoliberal economic policies have failed?

Achieving sustainable growth built upon a more equal society requires action to rebalance the Scottish economy and invest in jobs. Notwithstanding the need for major change at UK, European and international level. Over and above the areas identified by SLR we need policies in Scotland on:

Jobs - Create Scottish Government funded jobs programmes targeted at young people with a particular focus on skills development and Green jobs. Commit to a policy of no compulsory redundancies for public service workers and to pro-active policies to protect skills and jobs. Commit to meaningful ongoing funding for Scottish union learning.

Manufacturing - work with STUC and other stakeholders to develop a modern industrial strategy for Scotland; make manufacturing output and employment growth an explicit aim of economic strategy.

School Education - commit to the necessary resources and teaching staff numbers to deliver on the Curriculum for Excellence and reduce class sizes.

Health - commit to public delivery, early intervention and an NHS funded and delivered occupational health service.

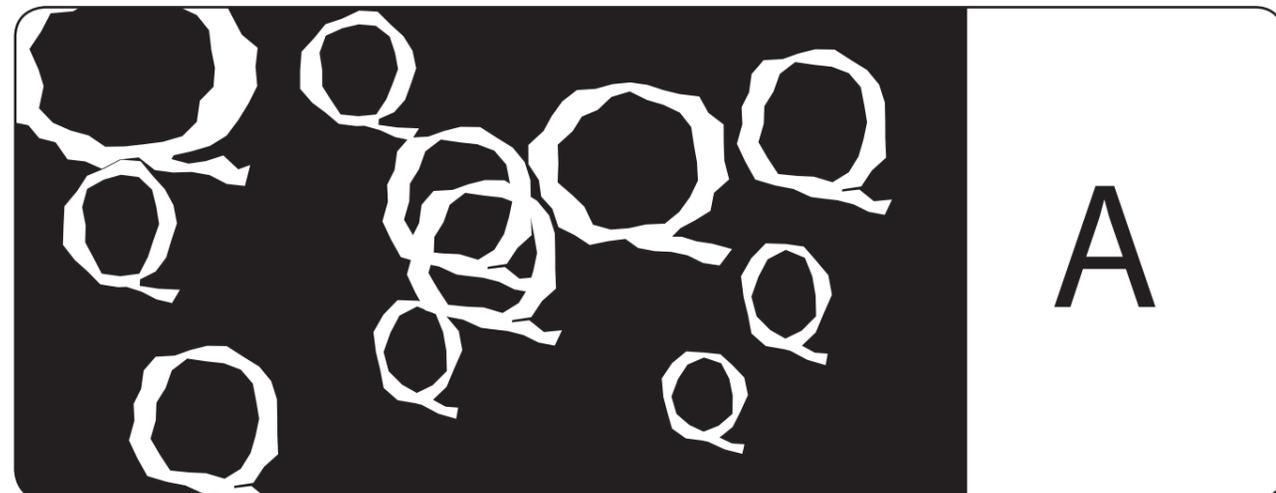
Access to Justice - recognise the role that personal injury claims play in maintaining and improving health and safety and therefore ensure that the importance of a case is not judged by its value so that trade unions can continue to use the Court of Session to raise claims on their members' behalf and to ensure that Access to Justice is not denied by oppressive and excessive court dues.

Childcare - commit to a step-change in support for childcare.

Housing - explore all available options to facilitate an increase in investment in voluntary sector and direct housing stock.

Ferries - public ownership; retention of the Clyde and Hebrides bundle; no to single route tenders - pledge to revisit costly, inefficient tendering of lifeline services. ■

Dave Moxham is Deputy General Secretary at the STUC



Committee of Self-Justification

In 2010, the Westminster coalition government introduced the Scotland Bill – a bill proposing new powers for the Scottish Parliament, set firmly in the context of the Union. The Bill incorporated most of the recommendations of the Calman Committee set up by Wendy Alexander. The major proposals in the Bill are those concerning fiscal accountability – in particular, the introduction of

income tax powers. Although this is a Westminster Bill, under the terms of the Sewel convention its principles must be approved by the Scottish Parliament. This makes it crucial that the Bill is subject to detailed, independent scrutiny in Scotland. To provide this scrutiny the Scottish Parliament set up a Scotland Bill committee. The committee has now reported, with the majority endorsing the income tax proposals.

In this paper we directly challenge the findings of the committee on the income tax proposals. *Scottish Left Review* readers may recall that in an article last November we argued that there were serious technical flaws in the Calman income tax proposals. In this paper we will show that the committee did not adequately address these points. Secondly, we will show how our latest work in fact strengthens our original concerns. Overall, the committee has not adequately addressed the effect which the operation of the proposed tax system will have in distorting the incentive to raise taxes – in a way which will almost certainly lead to higher taxes in Scotland than would otherwise be the case.

First, however, we give some background on the procedures of the Scotland Bill Committee. The Committee had Wendy Alexander, the person who had instituted the Calman commission, as its Chair: and as its advisors, it appointed the former Secretary to the Calman commission and a member of its expert group. Without any reflection on the individuals concerned, it is difficult to see how this is compatible with the committee being seen to carry out an independent scrutiny of the Calman proposals. We accordingly declined to appear in front of the Committee. We submitted the Committee our already published papers on Calman, but made it clear that we would not give further evidence, or report on our ongoing work.

In our original paper we demonstrated two technical flaws in the Scotland Bill. Given Scotland's poor economic performance relative to the UK and EU competitors, it is likely that Scottish governments will be interested in stimulating the economy. We hypothesised that to do so a Scottish government might use a combination of some of the considerable powers it already has, in conjunction with a reduction in the Scottish rate of income tax: and that it is possible that this could result in an increase in economic activity and an actual increase in total income tax revenues in Scotland. However, the tax revenues coming to the Scottish government would almost certainly fall in these circumstances, because under

Jim and Margaret Cuthbert examine the report of the Scotland Bill Committee and conclude that conflicts of interest and inadequate scrutiny means that the Committee has failed Scotland

Calman, the Scottish government would get a decreasing share of the total income tax take. Conversely, an increase in the Scottish rate of tax, even if it deflated the Scottish economy, and lowered overall tax revenues, would nevertheless almost certainly increase the tax coming to the Scottish government. So a Scottish government which was short of revenue would be under considerable pressure to raise tax rates. And a Scottish government operating under Calman would indeed be under severe financial pressure: not just because of the current prospects for public expenditure, but also because of the second Calman flaw, which means that, through the effects of fiscal drag, the Scottish government would receive a decreasing proportion of the overall income tax revenue raised in Scotland.

The evidence given to the committee dealing with our specific arguments came mainly from Iain McLean, and Anton Muscatelli: the first was a member, and the second the Chair, of the Calman expert group. Iain McLean argued in his evidence, and at greater length in a Scotsman article of 11 January, that we were mistaken as regards both of the flaws that we had pointed out. We will now examine Iain McLean's arguments in detail – and show how he, in fact, got it wrong. But first, since McLean developed his criticism of our first argument in terms of something known as the Laffer curve, we explain what this is.

The Laffer curve describes the notional relationship between tax revenues raised and the tax rate. The way the thinking goes is as follows. Suppose a government set a zero rate for income tax: then clearly it would raise no revenue. If, however, it set an income tax rate of 100 pence in the pound, then the population would not find it worthwhile to work, so again the government would

raise virtually no revenue. So as the tax rate is increased, from the lower to the upper of these two extremes, and with everything else assumed unchanged, the total of tax revenues raised must first of all rise, until reaching a maximum at a particular tax rate, before declining from then on. This notional relationship, something like an inverted 'U', between tax rate and tax revenue is the Laffer curve – usually ascribed to the Chicago economist Arthur Laffer.

Iain McLean chose to criticise our original argument in terms of the Laffer curve, even though we did not postulate our original argument in terms of it. What he said was that, for our first claimed flaw to hold, then the country would have to be positioned beyond the highest point of the Laffer curve: that is, in the area where an increase in tax rate led to a decrease in overall revenues. But, McLean

argued, available evidence indicates that the UK is placed well on the left hand side of the income tax Laffer curve, in the position where increases in tax rate yield increases in overall revenue. So, while our first claimed Calman flaw was indeed a technical possibility, it did not arise in practice.

Even in terms of the material available in our published papers, Iain McLean's argument is wrong. What we argue is that a Scottish government might be able to stimulate the economy, and increase total income tax revenues collected in Scotland, by a combination of an income tax cut and a package of other measures, like action on utility prices and business rates. It is perfectly feasible to envisage such a combined package being successful, even if the 'pure' Laffer curve at that point was upward sloping. But if tax revenues increased as a result of such a package, the Scottish government itself would almost certainly receive less revenue –

since it would, under the Calman rules, be receiving a decreased share of the increased tax take. So McLean was wrong to claim that our first flaw only operated to the right of the peak of the Laffer curve.

Work we have done subsequently provides more insight into the effect which the Calman proposals will have on a government's incentive to raise tax. And since McLean has introduced the concept of the Laffer curve it is convenient to illustrate this point by using it. What we want to do is compare the position of a Scottish government operating under the Calman rules, when it sets the Scottish rate of income tax at X pence in the pound, with the position of an independent Scottish government, which we assume is facing exactly the same Laffer curve, and which starts off with an equivalent tax rate: that is, $10+X$ for the basic rate, and so on. (So that, as far as the Scottish taxpayer is concerned, the same overall rate of tax is being levied under the 'Calman' and 'independence' scenarios).

Now consider the question: how much extra revenue will the Scottish government operating under Calman get, if it increases the Scottish rate of tax by one pence, compared with the amount the independent Scottish government would get if it raised its tax by one pence? Our latest work demonstrates that, no matter where we are on the Laffer curve, then under all feasible scenarios the Scottish government operating under Calman would get more revenue from a one pence increase in the tax rate than an independent Scottish government would from a one pence increase in its tax rate. Moreover, the evidence suggests that the difference between the amounts of revenue raised is, in most circumstances, likely to be material. The relevant algebra is set out at www.cuthbert1.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk.

The crucially important implication is that no matter where we are on the hypothetical Laffer curve, the implementation of the Calman proposals significantly distorts the incentive to change the tax rate, compared with an independent Scottish government facing the same Laffer curve (or, for that matter, compared with a UK government

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facing a Laffer curve of a similar shape). It will always be more worthwhile for a government operating under Calman to increase its rate of tax: and conversely, a Scottish government operating under Calman would always suffer a greater penalty, if it lowered its rate of tax. This consistent and significant shift in the incentive to raise tax is likely to have an entirely predictable outcome in practice: namely, a Scottish government operating under Calman is likely to set a higher rate of tax than an independent or UK government facing the same shape of Laffer curve. And if we assume that the independent (or UK) government achieves a close to optimum tax rate, the implication is that the government operating under Calman is likely to set a tax rate which is too high – and which is therefore deflationary for the Scottish economy.

Now consider our second point,

which relates to the effects of fiscal drag. What Iain McLean said was that fiscal drag would not be a problem, because a rational government would always re-index tax allowances and rates from time to time to keep up with inflation. Anton Muscatelli went further, and claimed that governments will ultimately adjust tax to GDP and government spending to GDP ratios to be relatively constant in the long-run. But even if the UK government did indeed ensure that the overall ratio of income tax to GDP was constant in the long term, this could still be perfectly consistent with a higher proportion of the overall tax take coming from the higher rate tax bands. And if this were to happen, then the tax take for a Scottish government operating under Calman would indeed decline relative to GDP – since under Calman the Scottish government receives a lower proportion of higher rate band tax revenues.

What this means is that McLean and Muscatelli's arguments do not, in fact, answer our concerns about the effect of fiscal drag. Moreover, empirical evidence is now available, (which was not available when we wrote our earlier papers), which actually confirms our concerns. Surprisingly, this evidence comes from the Secretary of State for Scotland and sponsor of the Scotland Bill, Michael Moore: he produced for the Scotland Bill committee estimates of what the yield of a 10 pence Scottish rate of tax would be, for each of the years 1999/2000 to 2007/08. Unfortunately the figures were not in a very helpful form – since what he gave the committee was the estimated yield for a 10 pence Scottish rate of tax, expressed as a percentage of total income tax receipts for the UK as a whole. Perhaps he did this because, expressed in this way, the figures are relatively stable: as a

percentage of UK income tax receipts, the Scottish 10 pence yield starts at 2.8 per cent in 1999/2000, rises to 3 per cent by 2003/04, and then declines to 2.8 per cent again by 2007/08 – that is, back to where it started at the beginning of the period.

If, however, the figures are re-calculated on a different basis to express the yield of a Scottish 10 pence rate as a percentage of Scottish income tax receipts, then a very different picture emerges. The relevant figures are given in the following table:

Yield of a Scottish 10 pence rate as a percentage of Scottish income tax receipts	
1999/00	40.0
2000/01	40.1
2001/02	41.7
2002/03	41.7
2003/04	41.0
2004/05	40.05
2005/06	38.1
2006/07	37.8
2007/08	37.8

It is necessary to take into account any major changes in tax rates or bands which occurred during this period: (that is, apart from normal marginal adjustments to tax bands). In fact, there were two major changes: taking effect in 2000/01, there was a one pence reduction in the previous 23 pence basic rate of tax to 22 pence: and taking effect in 2001/02, there was a 23.7 per cent increase in the upper threshold for the 10 pence lowest rate of tax. Both of these changes would have had the effect of increasing the yield of a Scottish 10 pence rate as a percentage of Scottish tax receipts.

It is likely that these major changes account for the initial increases in the 10 pence yield as a percentage of Scottish receipts in the above table. But thereafter, the percentages fall consistently year by year – and end up well below the initial percentage. This is entirely consistent with the anticipated effects of fiscal drag on the yield of a Scottish 10 pence rate: and is strong evidence in support of the view that fiscal drag would put

the finances of a Scottish government operating under Calman under consistent pressure. Overall, therefore, the arguments put forward against our position by McLean and Muscatelli do not stack up: and the further work we have undertaken, and Michael Moore's figures on 10 pence tax receipts, in fact strengthen our

original concerns. The consistent effect which the Calman arrangements have in increasing the incentive to raise tax, over effectively the whole range of the Laffer curve, is likely to mean that a Scottish government operating under Calman will be forced to set tax rates too high.

This should not be regarded as a surprising, or outlandish, conclusion. What we are talking about here, where a 'federal' government shares the same tax base with a constituent state, gives rise to the potential for what is known in the literature as 'vertical tax competition'. There is no overall consensus on what the effects of such vertical tax competition will be: but there is certainly a strong strand in the literature which takes the view that the likely outcome will be that taxes will be set at an inefficiently high level. This is illustrated by the following excerpt from a recent paper by Chernick and Tennant, from the journal *Publius*, (an academic journal concerned with the theory of federalism):

"The more harmonized revenue systems are—i.e. the more the national and provincial/state level share the same tax bases—the greater the potential for competition between levels of government, and the greater the potential for overall rates of taxation to be inefficiently high."

This clearly indicates that the sorts of effect we have identified are regarded as constituting a very active danger, and not something to be brushed away (as some members of the expert group did) as highly unlikely to happen. In terms of this quotation, the Calman arrangements could almost have been designed to maximise the danger – since what we have under Calman are tax bases which,

by design, are totally aligned.

Further, a factor which will tend to inhibit states from raising taxes in a usual federal/state system will not apply under the Calman implementation. Where there are multiple states in a federation, each with the ability to set its own tax rate, these states will tend to be inhibited from raising taxes by the

prospect of other states lowering their tax rates in response. This game theoretic inhibition does not apply in the Calman context, because the only subsidiary state with the ability to change its tax rate will be Scotland. This last point suggests that the Scotland Bill committee should have been much more cautious than they were about accepting the Canadian example as a guide.

The upshot is that the Scotland Bill committee report contains an altogether inadequate discussion of the nature of the distorted incentives which the Calman proposals introduce for the tax setting government: and gravely underestimates the danger of the Scottish tax rate being set at too high a level. Unfortunately, such a flawed outcome was almost inevitable, given the procedural inadequacies which were built into the arrangements for the Committee – with those with major responsibility for the Calman process being, to a large extent, judge and jury in their own case. The consequences will be borne by the Scottish people as regards the damage which will result to the economy: and in political terms, largely by the Labour Party. Unless, of course, the Scottish Parliament surprises us all, refuses to vote on purely party lines, and does not simply rubber stamp the existing flawed tax proposals before they are passed back to Westminster. ■

Jim and Margaret Cuthbert are independent economists and statisticians. They are not affiliated to any political party. To view their papers on economics and statistics go to www.cuthbert1.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk

Those with major responsibility for the Calman process being have been, to a large extent, judge and jury in their own case



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Are We Targets?

“A lot of what we do today was done covertly 25 years ago by the CIA.”

That was the view of Allen Weinstein one of the founders of the US Government-funded National Endowment for Democracy (NED), an organisation that appears to have slipped under the media’s radar, but whose influence is global and much more far reaching than most might think.

In early June of 1982, as British and Argentinean forces entered the final stages of the conflict in the Falkland Islands, the US President Ronald Reagan gave an historic speech in the Palace of Westminster that was to lead to the establishment of the NED.

The NED promotes ultra-right wing US policy objectives by identifying, funding and supporting ‘kindred spirits’. A number of large subgroups also benefit from multi-million dollar NED funding. These include the International Republican Institute and the United States Agency for International Development amongst others.

Like any new brand, when it was first established it had a snappy marketing title, but unlike most regulated products it does almost precisely the opposite of what it says on the tin.

At its core a new approach, a new philosophy that refocused what the US means by ‘democracy’. For those countries the NED were to target (which was basically the rest of the world) that meant that whoever you voted for, the policies would be broadly the same and your country’s economy would remain ‘in-step’ with that of the United States... or else.

Washington expanded – through the work of the NED and the sub-organisations it directly funds – the ‘special relationship’ alliances with those nations who demonstrated complete subservience to US foreign policy objectives.

Interference and manipulation in the affairs of foreign nations is nothing new for the US. Since 1945 successive Washington regimes have attempted to overthrow 50 foreign governments, most of them democracies. The Central Intelligence Agency was responsible for most of that effort, which included

both conventional black ops (military training and equipment supply, and propaganda and ‘educational’ support) until a growing number of scandals in the US exposed the brutal and wide-scale criminal activity of that ‘secret’ agency. That in turn led to the establishment of the United States Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, commonly known as the Church Committee named after its Chairman, Senator Frank Church. It was highly critical of the CIA’s operations and expressed concern about the lack of democratic accountability and oversight.

The establishment of the NED allowed Washington to place at arms length its covert funding and propaganda efforts abroad, effectively privatising a major element of US foreign policy activity. The vast majority of its funding still came directly from Congress, money that had previously gone directly to the CIA. The establishment of the NED though effectively ignored the Church Committee’s recommendations by deeming the NED a ‘non-Governmental organisation’, and thus out of sight and crucially out of reach of the democratic oversight the senate committee had pressed for.

One example where the NED has been particularly active was in the promotion and establishment of anti-left-leaning trade union movements. These ‘employer friendly’ trade unions purported to ‘build union-management co-operation’. At first glance such an aspiration appears innocuous until you realise the undermining effect millions of US tax dollars had on legitimate pro-worker trade union groups who are often the target of these ‘employer friendly’ movements.

One of the most defining cases came with the promotion of Lech Walensa’s Solidarity movement in Poland which triggered the collapse of Eastern European communism and ultimately the Soviet Union itself. Speaking in May 2009 Carl Gershman, President of the NED said of the rise of Solidarity:

“It was the most consequential aspect of the third wave of democratisation, the global expansion of democracy that transformed not just

the communist world but Latin America, Asia, and Africa as well.”

Gershman went on to describe how the model used in Poland was rolled out and overseen by the NED in a process he called “incremental democratic enlargement”. He added:

“In the NED we call this cross-border work, and it had its origins, at least in our own thinking and programs, in a conference that was sponsored by the Polish-Czech-Slovak Solidarity Foundation in Wroclaw in early November of 1989.”

In 1999 Walensa received the NED’s “Democracy Service Medal” in recognition of his role in the fall of communism, and consequentially the promotion of US foreign policy objectives and the opening up of Eastern Europe to US business interests.

It was not just Eastern European countries who ‘benefitted’ from the NED’s support and direction. At the same time the organisation was very active in Portugal and Spain. In France it helped establish a ‘trade union-like’ organisation of professors and students whose aim was to counter the perceived ultra left-wing professors groups that were taking root around this period.

The NED funded and published a number of books, pamphlets and posters which it distributed extensively amongst the student population. These promoted the NED’s core ideology and philosophy; that all working people are best served by a system of free enterprise, class co-operation and minimal Government interference. It’s the language most associated with the US neo-conservative far right today.

One of the major recipients of NED funding was the right-leaning American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organisations (AFL CIO). In 1986 the Executive body of the AFL CIO approved a grant of \$1.5m to ‘defend democracy in France’.

Even by NED standards this was a huge embarrassment for US diplomats. Washington quickly moved to distance themselves from the move for fear of a French diplomatic backlash.

Barbara Conry, a foreign policy analyst with the US-based libertarian think tank the Cato Institute wrote:

Mark Hirst examines the role of the US Government-funded National Endowment for Democracy which has taken over the CIA’s ‘propaganda’ dirty work and may be seeking to influence Scottish politics

“The grant was astonishing for several reasons. First of all, French democracy in the 1980s did not appear to be so fragile that it required financial assistance from American taxpayers to sustain itself. The government of François Mitterrand was duly elected within a democratic system nearly as old as America’s. The AFL-CIO, however, determined that France’s socialist government was permitting a dangerous rise of communist influence.”

According to the late Irving Brown, Paris-based director of international relations for the AFL-CIO at the time of the incident: “France... is threatened by the Communist apparatus... It is a clear and present danger if the present is thought of as 10 years from now.”

Closer to home the NED played a pivotal role in creating the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) which was modelled directly on its American counterpart and influenced by them to this day. In 1992 The WFD was formally established by the Conservative Government and remains funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Department and the Department for International Development.

Like the NED the WFD promotes an aggressive imperialist agenda which seeks to promote free-market, unregulated capitalist ‘democracy’ throughout Eastern Europe and sub-Saharan Africa that is entirely subservient to ‘Western’ (i.e. US) economic, military and geo-political interests. Some commentators have described with unchallengeable justification that these two related organisations are at the vanguard of modern ‘democratic

imperialism’. They aim to convert ‘emerging democracies’ and ‘rogue regimes’ into lucrative, compliant outposts geared towards boosting Western commercial interests.

The WFD’s patrons include the UK Prime Minister David Cameron, Nick Clegg MP, Ed Miliband MP and the First Minister of Scotland, Alex Salmond MSP.

Gallagher tried to scare potential US financial and political backers away from the new Scottish Government by focusing on the SNP’s links to Muslim communities in Glasgow. Just a month before the article appeared Gallagher had secured a fellowship with the NED in Washington.

But the WFD, like its NED mentor has not just confined itself to wooing the political class in pursuit of its wider free-market philosophy.

Supposedly independent academics have also proved useful, especially in pressing home the propaganda war against those who are deemed hostile to US foreign policy objectives.

One prominent voice, much utilised by the more right wing tabloid press, has been Tom Gallagher of Bradford

University’s ‘Department of Peace Studies’. Gallagher was one of the first recipients of WFD funding in 1992 which he used to establish a pro-Western news agency in Romania.

His early work in the 1990s was initially well received but in recent years Gallagher’s increasingly shrill contributions about the Scottish political landscape have, rather ironically, made him the subject of much ridicule among more respected political ‘talking heads’.

In fact Gallagher was virtually unknown as a political commentator until the SNP took power in 2007. From that point on however he suddenly began appearing regularly in the media, making a series of wild and wholly misleading statements about the SNP. In one

Washington Times article published to coincide with the SNP’s first visit to the US Tartan Day celebrations Gallagher tried to scare potential US financial and political backers away from the new Scottish Government by focusing on the SNP’s links to Muslim communities in Glasgow. Just a month before the article appeared Gallagher had secured a fellowship with the NED in Washington.

Later he implied in another article that the new SNP Government may try and forge an alliance with Iran to collectively fight ‘British imperialism’. This led to the First Minister labelling Gallagher “the Nutty Professor”.

Other commentators, like the respected Gerry Hassan, noted that Gallagher’s critiques of the SNP, which culminated in a bizarre, and poorly researched book by the Bradford University academic entitled *The Illusion of Freedom*, were “offensive and inaccurate”. The book was published, perhaps coincidentally, the same month as Abdelbaset al Megrahi was being returned to Libya by the Scottish Justice Secretary and at the height of US hysteria against the SNP Government.

Gallagher’s rhetoric must have pleased his new NED paymasters and certain elements of the right wing press in Scotland, but his modus operandi were drawn straight from the NED’s manual on how to subvert democratic, left leaning foreign Governments.

Gallagher’s role sought both to groom US opinion in Washington, but also aimed to influence the political debate in Scotland.

A suspicion remains about what other activities the NED has been involved with throughout the UK and Europe and there is surely a need to closely monitor their activities if we are to maintain any credibility at all in our limited and clearly vulnerable democratic system.

The NED is not about to go away any time soon and its focus and reach are set to manipulate international and domestic affairs for the foreseeable future. ■

Mark Hirst is a freelance journalist, Consultant for Aurora Media and Communications and political adviser at the Scottish Parliament.

The Emergence of One Wales

Leanne Wood examines the campaign for a Yes vote in the Welsh referendum and the eventual result and sees old divisions beginning to recede

Yes campaigners are still buoyant after a strong showing in the recent referendum on law-making powers in Wales. More than 63 per cent of people voted to endorse the next step of devolved power to Wales from London. Given the result to establish the National Assembly for Wales in 1997 was so close (the Yes campaign won by just over 6,000 votes), this result shows that over the twelve years of devolution, many more people have been won around. The 'Yes' vote won a majority in 21 out of the 22 local authority areas, only missing out in the Conservative stronghold of Monmouthshire by some 350 votes. The result stands in contrast to the

The result stands in contrast to the result in 1997, which split the country along class and geographical lines

result in 1997, which split the country along class and geographical lines.

In 2006, Wales had a new Government of Wales Act which introduced law-making powers for Wales for the first time, but not without major restrictions. Westminster had to be asked for the power to make laws before those laws could be made. The Act contained provision to move on to skip this step, but only after a Yes vote in a referendum, which could only be triggered by a two-thirds majority in the Assembly plus the agreement of the Secretary of State for Wales.

Possibly because he had included so many hoops, Peter Hain - the then Secretary of State for Wales - confidently stated that his 2006 Act had settled the devolution question for a generation. Hain was forced to eat his words only a year later when in 2007 his party in the Assembly signed a coalition deal with Plaid Cymru agreeing to support a referendum and to support a yes campaign within the term of the Assembly. It was one of the deal-breaker commitments.

The 2006 act has been in operation for less than four years. During this time the Assembly has not been able to make primary Acts. Welsh-Assembly made laws are termed 'measures'. The 2006 Act

restricts the policy fields to the 20 that were in the original devolution settlement (the 1998 Government of Wales Act). Unlike the Scottish devolution settlement, in Wales everything is reserved to the UK Parliament, with the exception of these 20 policy fields. It is within these 20 fields that the Assembly is able to make 'measures' after asking permission. The request for powers or competence is successful if Westminster grants a 'Legislative Competence Order' (LCO) to the Assembly.

The 2007 'One Wales' Plaid/Labour coalition deal included a commitment to legislate to increase the availability of affordable and social housing

and to restrict the tenants 'right to buy' their council house. It took three and a half years before the LCO was agreed. The powers requested to legislate on the Welsh language were watered down. The request for powers to stop the physical punishment of children was refused outright. Twenty five measures have been made within this Assembly term, but they have taken a long time, many have had their spirit weakened by outside interference reducing the scope of the powers.

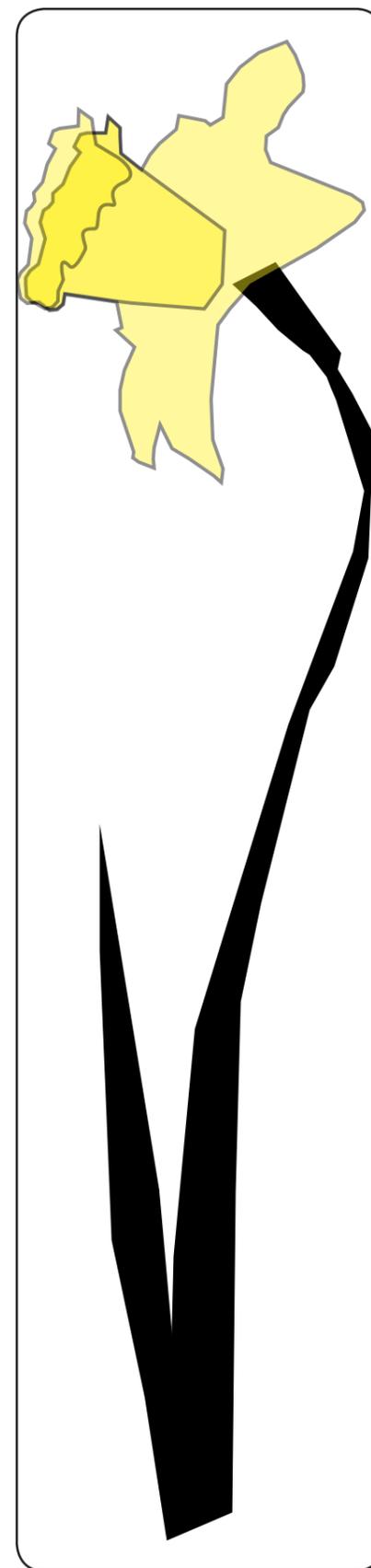
The referendum question asked if people were prepared to support devolving legislative competence en bloc for the 20 devolved fields. It was a technical question about the detail of a constitutional process and was not at the forefront of the minds of most people in Wales. The recession is biting and many people, especially public sector workers who make up a large proportion of the Welsh workforce, are feeling insecure about the future. Given this wider political context, the turnout was never going to be high. But when 'True Wales' (sic), the group that had been set up in 2008 to campaign for a no vote, decided not to apply to the Electoral Commission for official designation, the yes campaign automatically lost the opportunity to become officially

designated. Under the rules governing referendums, official designation can only be given to both sides. Official designation would have secured numerous TV and radio broadcasts, and the free delivery of a leaflet to every home. 'True Wales' severely restricted both sides' ability to explain exactly what the vote was about. A common response on the streets and on the doorstep was lack of understanding. A low turn-out was assured.

The situation was not helped by constant attempts from the No campaign to obfuscate the issue. They used every TV and radio debate between the two sides to throw in red herrings, decrying the lack of progress on the economy, education and health services in international comparisons, saying Wales's position had worsened since devolution. They attacked politicians for their expenses claims. Their entire campaign strategy revolved around an inflatable pig, which was meant to symbolise the 'snouts-in-the-trough' politicians who were only interested in 'grabbing more power for themselves.'

Although the No campaign was chiefly considered to be a joke, its arguments did gain some traction. On encountering No voters on the streets, certain common characteristics quickly became apparent. Many no voters were angry. They were mainly men, working class and nearing retirement age. Their anger was about waste, money, tax, cost, bureaucracy. They may well have had good reason to be angry. Perhaps they were insecure in their job and fully aware they wouldn't get another one if they lost it? The anger and aggression exhibited by these no voters was something I have only previously come across when discussing war with hawk-types. We ignore this anger at our peril.

The Yes campaign had the backing of all four political parties represented in the Assembly as well as the Greens, the Communist Party and the vast majority of the rest of the left in Wales. Celyn, the Scottish Left Review's sister magazine, carried a front page announcing that 'Socialists Say Yes'. The No side was backed by UKIP, the BNP and, bizarrely, the CPGW. The party backers alone clarified the question for many people.



The Yes campaign Chair was the affable, valley-boy-done-good, Chief Executive of the Welsh Rugby Union, Roger Lewis. Our campaign was no doubt given a boost with two Welsh wins in the two Six Nations games prior to the poll and our star winger, Shane Williams, featured on the front page of a million leaflets which were hand-delivered by thousands of volunteers. Showing great gratitude for the recent decision by the Welsh government to subsidise the tuition fee increase and keep the Education Maintenance Allowance, Welsh students mobilised to register their peers and ensure they were fully informed. Their work paid off with a good percentage of yes votes in on-campus ballot boxes. The public sector trade unions published leaflets and pamphlets which they sent to all their members advocating a yes vote. The Archbishop of Wales was on the national Yes campaign organising committee and the Catholic Bishops and the Muslim Council of Wales all called for a yes vote. A constant stream of Welsh celebrities popped up to endorse the yes campaign but it was also a youthful, grassroots, popular campaign whose workers were committed enough to go out leafleting in some of the cruellest weather Wales has to offer.

The No campaign consisted of a few disillusioned Labour and Independent councillors from the Gwent valleys near the border with England and the odd UKIP activist. If anything, the campaign exposed the decades-long rift that has existed within the Welsh Labour Party on the national question. It was this rift that gave birth to the Hain-designed dogs-breakfast of a law-making system in the first place. The No campaigners 'happy-slave' attitudes were exposed with lines like 'Wales doesn't have people with talent or ability to do things for ourselves - all the best brains have got out'. What is interesting is that these people, who the late, great Raymond Williams would have described as 'anti-Welsh Welsh people' have been reduced to a small rump in a small corner of the Welsh valleys together with a few Super-Brit-Tory-types scattered around in the 'usual suspect' areas like Monmouthshire and Pembrokeshire - the county known as 'little England beyond Wales'. Our campaign strength paid off when even in Pembrokeshire there was a

majority for a yes vote.

The referendum result in 1997 enacted significant political change to the landscape of Wales, even though it was granted with the tiniest of majorities. In the case of the 2011 referendum, the result is much more convincing, but the change will be minuscule in comparison. The significance is the unity shown by the result. Devolution has been endorsed by every part of Wales. We are now one Wales.

In May, the parties will present the people of Wales with their manifestos explaining what they propose to do with the changed powers. The remarkable unity shown by the four main political parties will come to an end and the usual sectarian slanging matches will return. In his speech at the declaration and accepting the result on behalf of the Yes campaign, Roger Lewis paid tribute to the party unity and discipline and appealed for that unity to continue for the sake of the future of Wales.

If the No campaign was right about anything, it was that for most people constitutional details are not top of the agenda during a recession. Given that, a turnout of 35.4 per cent is very respectable - and certainly compares well with Westminster by-elections, county council or European election results.

The 'Yes for Wales' campaign has shown that great things can be achieved by combining forces and maintaining unity until a specific political objective is achieved. The result was delivered by a very large, diverse group of people who were motivated and united by the feeling that they were doing something good for the future of the people in the country in which they live. Imagine what could be achieved if that motivation and unity of purpose could be kept up. With Wales having more control over the levers which drive our under-performing economy, we could have the tools to address the very real fears and insecurities of the 'Mr Angry' No-voter. And if the confidence of people in Wales in our ability to do things the Welsh way continues to grow, then the next Welsh referendum result could be even better. ■

Leanne Wood is a Plaid Cymru Member of the Welsh Assembly

Reviews

And The Land Lay Still

James Robertson (Hamish Hamilton, £18.99)

So much of our music, art and literature, though magnificent, is miniature. The wonderful wee works of a wonderful wee country. Not in this case: here is a seminal work of almost American amplitude and range. If it is not quite *the* great Scottish novel, at least it wants to be, is, valiantly and undeludedly, a contender. So, while this may not be the book Scotland has been waiting for it is *a* book of which the stateless nation has long been in need. And poet, publisher and polemicist James Robertson is just the man to have written it. Never parochially, always far seeing, as a novelist and editor, Robertson has worried away at a fair few gnawable bones of Caledonian contention, thereby extending and deepening the tradition he has been exploring. His have been typically, indeed archetypically Scottish investigations, often featuring Calvinist divines obsessed with and falling victim to those demonic doublenesses loved and hated by Hogg, Stevenson and nearly any writer from hereabouts one cares to name. We may no longer believe in the Caledonian Antisyzygy, but it continues to believe in us. Among the binary oppositions brilliantly parsed and polarised in this state of the nation *summa* are Armalite versus ballot box, straight and gay, lowland and highland, Catholic and Protestant and, above all, Unionist and Nationalist. It is to Robertson's credit that ambiguity and ambivalence haunt and problematise these defining dichotomies, a crisply focused dialectic, 'either or', blurring into a hazily human 'but also'.

The evocation and anatomisation of private, social and political life in this country from 1950 until this very minute more or less, rings imaginatively and historically true. A gifted poet and bearer of politico-cultural tidings, ill and good and a beady-attentive zoomer-in on the zeitgeist, this bardic chronicler eschews crude agit-prop for persuasive engagement. In telling it like it was, he steers the reader towards a notion of how it might one day be. Across nearly 700 pages, facts are cheils that winna ding.

They are eloquently marshalled; and the documentarian lets them speak. Behind his beautifully crafted, scrupulously researched and compellingly convincing novel are several journalistic first drafts of history as well as some history proper. All of these sources the author gratefully and graciously acknowledges.

And The Land Lay Still has the big-boned proportions and epic sweep of a nineteenth century French or Russian novel, nipping nimbly from salon to battlefield or barricade. A book to bust blocks it is confident in historic scale yet minutely observing (and observant) in conveying the plausible particularity of lives that are rivetingly idiosyncratic *but also* representative. The fostering and finessing of such dual purposeness of character is any fiction writer's most exacting challenge. That feat is managed across a vast cast of principals, supporting actors, players of cameo roles and mere spear carriers in the busy pageant of this novelistic 'spectacular'.

If I revert to the terminology of film it is because this truly magnum opus expectantly awaits the eliding genius of a benignly ruthless screen writer to do a 'Crow Road' or 'Our Friends In The North' on it. *And The Land Lay Still*, does not, even for a second, stop moving. Taking its title from one of Edwin Morgan's superlative 'Sonnets From Scotland', reproduced in full before the story gets underway, the novel is perfectly paced. James Robertson knows when to break into a sprint as he measures out his marathon. Mordant wit, satirical set pieces, eye-catching and ear-caressing descriptive writing (which no reader will wish to skip), 'snappy' dialogue, expertly tautened dramatic tension, political analysis and historical synthesis are on masterly display, often within a few sentences of each other. Robertson can even make psephology if not sexy then at least suspenseful!

This technical expertise and psychological insight, when applied to a plot (about plots and plotters) spanning a half century and more and implicating a roll call of characters of almost Powellian proportions, yields much readerly reward. Serenely homosexual, Michael, not so well known photographer son of strenuously straight and very well known

photographer Angus, the closest we come to a central character or protagonist, is a memorably unremarkable figure, all the more transfixing for that very ordinariness, quite a coup to pull off. Jean, queen of the ceilidh scene as latterday salon is an Edinburgh fixture out of Eric Linklater (or Stuart MacGregor) by way of Maupassant, Tolstoy or Henry James. The song writer, folk club founder, novelist and carousing doctor, MacGregor is just one of the many real people who pepper the narrative, lending an air of veracity to what we are told about their fictional counterparts. Thus MacDiarmid (and his begetting doppelganger Grieve or vice versa) is as hologrammically palpable as if we were at a Barrie or Conan Doyle séance so that it's not just *his* hair that stands on end. Willie MacRae is permitted here to perturb from even further beyond the grave. The passage in which Robertson's stream of consciousness torrentially advances and then cancels the various conspiracy theories and official naysayings surrounding the Nationalist lawyer's mysterious demise, is a tour de force of comic agglomeration - contradictory doubleness once (or twice!) again.

In the circumstances, events and places linking the respective periods, and people shaped by and giving shape to them, from post-war to post-Yes Yes vote in the referendum, there is an unforced inevitability that avoids melodrama or soap operatic unfeasibility. A pebble passed on and palmed on page one will prove satisfyingly portentous at novel's end. Revealing light will be cast on the temporary disappearance of one of two army veteran friends in a small mining town at the time of the Korean War. Unsurprisingly, 1979, that convulsive year of bitter memory, that scuppered and scunnered Scotland whilst visiting Thatcher upon us, looms large and pivotal. For those of us proposing a parliament and opposing the poll tax, James Robertson's superb synopsis of what happened will bring back memories and refresh our grasp of detail from that transfixing period drama. Readers who are younger, or from furth of Scotland will derive knowledge and aesthetic satisfaction from the putting

on novelistic record of the doings of Messers Cook, Forsyth and Sillars in those divisive days of constitutional yore. If the melder of all this immensely detailed 'faction' or 'infotainment' can occasionally be glimpsed putting up the hood of his anorak, a grateful nation will forgive him.

For this is historical *fiction* and the story in the history is told through, between and across genres. *And The Land Lay Still* is a family saga, an oedipal psychodrama, a story of artistic formation and a coming of age narrative, a *bildungsroman* in the fullest sense, a testament to coming out, a 'buddy' or 'bromance' narrative, pit disaster ballad in prose, a love story, a national foundation myth, a spy story and a mystery novel. That is a very generically rich and thick Scotch broth, most things to many people. It is these things excellently however. There is no hint of post modern hodge-podge in the book's six substantial sections, each preceded by an incantatory, highly poetic interpolation of heady lyrical lushness, each distinct, yet linked, those connections being gradually established and elaborated as characters develop and plots thicken. For me, the espionage component was the most satisfying

element of the intricately interleaved narrative. Secret service assets going rogue and or native. Agents provocateurs infiltrating revolutionary cells and fomenting illegal activity. Suspicious suicides. Treachery amongst friends. Not much fiction in any of that, a trawl through the newspapers of the recent past would quickly suggest. Robertson's undercover operatives, maverick military men intelligence officers gone to seed and ground are wonderfully believable. The story of the repatriation of the Stone of Scone is given a terrific new twist in a Scotland as tense and riven as the 'Ulster' of the 'Troubles'.

In important ways James Robertson's history really is *his* story. He is not as far as I know gay, nor was he, I am pretty certain, a republican 'terrorist'. But, born in 1958, he did live through this extraordinary epoch, helping make, by his cultural activism and literary engagement, the history he writes. He has succeeded me as President of Scotland's most Scottish book festival, that held in Ullapool, where, in instalments separated by two years, he read mesmerically from his outstanding then-work in progress. One scene centred on a gay pick up gone wrong between Sandy Bell's and Greyfriars' Kirkyard.

Another described two furtive agents of the crown settling down to subvert civil society over tea and digestives in a sordid rat trap bedsit more redolent of cowp than coup. Each is virtuosically intact in the novel as published. *And The Land Lay Still* has already carried off the Saltire Book Of The Year Award, been read on Radio Four and gone through a number of printings. It is Alex Salmond's favourite contemporary novel (make of that what you will). A political primer, a page turner of a thriller, a meditation on Scottishness, indeed a search of the renescent nation's soul, this is an ambitious book that works on many levels, instructing and memorialising as it enthral. The other week on Andrew Neill's late night television show Michael Portillo and a Labour MP whose name I have gratefully forgotten were agreeing that, "these devolved assemblies are often out of their depth". If I even half thought they would quarter read this timely and indispensable master work I'd post them each a copy. A book that entertains Scotland as it explains Scotland; and a work of significance far beyond these shores. ■

■ Donny O'Rourke

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web review

Henry McCubbin

One thing is for sure with regards to electoral systems – no one has yet discovered a perfect mathematical solution capable of satisfying all of the factions presenting themselves at elections. I got involved in the early nineties in preparing a response to Raymond Plant's report on behalf of the Labour Party on electoral reform. Plant also contributed greatly to Roy Jenkins' deliberations on the question of voting reform. It is worth remembering Plant's views on the issues as the presented themselves to those interested in reform or indeed blocking it:

"We then attempt to establish a set of criteria against which we believe any defensible electoral system should be judged. There are many such criteria and no single system can score equally highly against them all. Hence, there cannot be an ideal system. What is necessary is to come to a view about which system or systems do best against what are taken to be the most important criteria. This has to be a political rather than a technical judgement.

The criteria considered are broadly speaking of two sorts:

1. Procedural criteria, which are essentially about fairness and which do not look to the outcomes and consequences of elections. What matters is that the system is "fair". If it is, then outcomes must also be accepted as legitimate.

2. Outcome criteria, which look much more to the consequences of electoral systems and their impact on such things as the environment within which public policy is developed, their impact on economic management, on the possibility of political parties achieving their ideological goals and so forth."

The different outcomes argued by the Liberal Democrats in criteria two above, namely that there would have been no poll tax and no educational reforms of the sort the Conservatives introduced have of course been put to the test in our recent Tory-led coalition and have been so tested to destruction. For more click on www.parliament.uk/documents/commons/lib/research/rp98/rp98-112.pdf.

Electoral reform is nothing new in our self-styled 'Mother of Parliaments'. For the history of our various attempts at electoral reform go to aceproject.org/

[regions-en/countries-and-territories/GB/case-studies/united-kingdom-electoral-system-experimentation-in-cradle-of-fptp-1997](#).

The classical First Past the Post (FPTP), single-member district, electoral system that is so strongly associated with Great Britain did not in fact come into widespread use for Westminster elections until 1884-1885 – a full 50 years after the First Reform Act of 1832, which marked the beginnings of representative democracy in the UK.

One thing I can inform you with regards to electoral reform if you want the best outcome for the Labour Party, vote in the opposite direction of the Party's leadership. Jack Straw was in charge of the reform of the European Electoral reform in the UK1999 The British Labour Party went from 62 MEPS under the old FPTP system to 29 MEPs under regional lists. And in Scotland the prospective candidate with largest popular vote at selection conferences was placed at the bottom of the regional list by Mandelson's Star Chamber. There is more to democracy than posting a ballot paper at an election. ■



Fire Brigades Union Scotland

It is not often that those involved in any operation, business or organisation will be given an opportunity to reflect on their previous experiences and be able to shape its future from a fresh perspective. That chance is presenting itself to those within the fire and rescue services in Scotland. With the announcement in January that the Scottish Government "believes that there are compelling arguments for having one service" and the subsequent consultation paper, the topic of the future of the service is very much a live issue. Part of the challenge facing those considering the way ahead is the scale and scope of the subject.

The Fire Brigades Union believe this is a real opportunity, perhaps a once in a lifetime opportunity, to improve on many aspects of the service; in how it sees itself, how it conducts its business and how it interacts with both its own members and with the wider public. This is not meant as a criticism of previous generations but instead a realisation that the environment in which the service operates, changes, therefore the service must adapt and evolve. It is our opinion that if anything, it is this realisation that is overdue. If the consultation contributions generate discussion around this topic then collectively we can enhance the service, making it stronger, better and more effective, whilst at the same time becoming more responsive and socially responsible.

One key element keeps surfacing, that being local democratic accountability. The current arrangements are based on 2 services reporting directly to unitary authorities and 6 reporting through Joint Fire & Rescue Boards. One service (Strathclyde) is almost 50% of the service with the other 50% being made up of 7 other Authorities. We believe that the current arrangements can be improved upon.

It is our view that local needs, especially in relation to protection and prevention, can be best reflected and influenced by those elected by, and those most local to our communities. In this case the local authority ward, relating directly to the local fire station. We see local authority councillors playing a significant part in the challenge to make our communities safer.

In the run up to a general election we are keen to avoid the service becoming a political football. With the SNP, Labour and the Conservatives all speaking in favour of restructure, and all suggesting that a single service would be the best choice we are confident that across parties we can build consensus on the way forward.

Within the reform of the fire and rescue service there is scope to shape the way we approach the development of the service we provide. We can reduce the duplication and focus more resources on to the frontline, we can make the strategic, policy and procedural decisions once whilst at the same time driving forward the work of making our communities safer by using local resources, local knowledge and an understanding that this service works best when delivered from the heart of our communities.

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GADAFFI SANE – ‘IN COMPARISON TO BLAIR’

Events in North Africa are moving so quickly at the moment that all of this may seem like some quaint historic document by the time you read it. At the time of writing, Gaddafi is still holding on to power. Watching the last gasps of Gaddafi's regime is a bit like watching videos of the Rolling Stones on their last world tour. The guy really is a bit like Keith Richards but with slightly less grasp on reality. But with guns and fighter jets. And while the World will be safer without him, it will be a lot less colourful. I reckon what led many people being duped into thinking Gaddafi might be sane was the fact that most recent photos showed him posing with Tony Blair. Let's face it, most people are going to look fairly normal when they're sat next to that grinning, God-bothering nut-job.

David Cameron was quick to condemn the Libyan leader for using his vast armoury on his own people. We should maybe have a word about that before we sold him all those arms in the first place.

Many of the recent uprisings in North Africa have been organised on Facebook and Twitter. In Tunisia in particular, young people used social networking to organise and spread information. Bit different from the UK, where the major use of Twitter is to find out if Stephen Fry is having a cup of tea and a Hobnob.

Likewise, compare the reactions of those in power to peaceful protest. In Egypt, the people took to the streets in protest and Mubarak resigns. In Britain, people take to the streets in protest, Cameron says he's staying for at least another four years, and tries to make it look like it's all Nick Clegg's fault.

And while the West rightly

condemns regimes where the head of state is an unelected dynasty, handed down from father to son, it is still in Britain's interests to do business with these states. And when dealing with regimes where power is handed down from father to son regardless of talent, who better at doing that business than Prince Andrew? He can be contacted on payment of a five-hundred grand fee to his ex-wife.

Sarah Ferguson, we are told, has been invited to neither of the two royal weddings in 2011. On that subject, I read that Kate Middleton is now the Western World's top fashion icon ahead of Lady Gaga. But not as much fun. It would be highly entertaining if Kate turned up at Westminster Abbey dressed from head to toe in raw meat. The Duke of Edinburgh would probably shoot her.

There has been much speculation about how, as a commoner, Kate will adapt to life in the Royal Family. Her father used to be aircraft cabin crew, which means he's probably a gay man in the closet. So joining the Royal family should make her feel quite right at home.

Violent unrest this spring was not solely confined to North Africa. To Scotland's shame, the fifth Celtic v Rangers game this season saw possibly the most disgusting outbreak of sanctimonious drivel from press, police and politicians in Scotland. You expect it from the Daily Record, but politicians should know better. According to Annabel Goldie, the Old Firm game is a major cause of domestic violence. Hardly likely to stand up in a court of law:

"Your honour, I admit I did slap the wife about on the night of Wednesday 2 March, but in mitigation it was all a result of the fracas in the dug-out between Neil Lennon and Ally McCoist"

This is similar to the complete bollocks that David Cameron came up with, where he blamed multiculturalism for racist attacks. I may be naïve, but I had always assumed that racism was to blame for racist attacks.

This year to date there have been five Old Firm games, and major trouble at one of them. For politicians to blame all of Scotland's social ills on the behaviour of certain players in one game of football is a most ludicrous example of shifting the blame. This season there will be seven Rangers v Celtic games. If in any given period between August and May there were to be only seven days on which incidents of drunkenness, sectarian violence and domestic abuse occurred in the West of Scotland this would be trumpeted as progress.

As for the incidents that happened on the pitch, it really only was a matter of time before the timebomb that is El Haji Diouf was going to detonate. In his first month in Scottish football, the Senegalese player had appeared uncharacteristically well-behaved, obviously making a conscious effort not to lose the plot. It was a bit like watching an alcoholic trying to stay on the wagon. He was bound to crack, eventually. Part of the entertainment was in the anticipation of it happening.

Diouf is a bit like the Gaddafi of Scottish football. Violent, volatile, dangerous, deeply unpleasant and mentally unsound. But life would be so much duller without him. ■

Vladimir McTavish is appearing at The Griffin, 266 Bath Street, Glasgow on Saturday 9th April at 8 pm, as part of the Magners Glasgow International Comedy Festival.

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