



This mess we're in...

Contents

Comment	2
Root of this evil	6
Neil Davidson	
Work isn't working	8
Isobel Lindsay	
Why we fight.....	10
Alan McKinnon	
No such thing as failure.....	12
John Barker	

Us swallowing their medicine	14
Robin McAlpine	
Fragments of truth	16
Mark Hirst	
Lessons for now.....	18
Bob Thomson	
Minimum isn't enough.....	20
Peter Kelly	
The English postman	22
Tom Nairn	

Comment

It would be understandable if the regular Scottish Left Review reader gave a slight sign of resignation at the thought of yet another 'what is to be done?' issue. It's not just that we've run a few articles on the theme of 'reforming the post-banking crash world'. It's not even that there have been enough column inches on the subject from which to build an airport rail link. It's that you may well feel that the totality of the suggestions you have heard and read in the last year may sound a little bit underwhelming. It's not that each of them doesn't sound like a perfectly good idea, it's just that somehow they don't really seem sufficient to do anything much more than ameliorate the worst of the problems. And so it is that many of us may feel like the Cat in the Hat, standing before the giant mess he has created: "This mess is too big and too deep and too tall. We can't clean it up! We can't clean it up at all!". So in this issue we are going to try to delve down below the top-level problems on which everyone now has an opinion and see if it is possible to draw out some of the deeper, fundamental problems of the way we live in the 21st century to see if, in fact, we can clean up our mess after all.

Let's start by considering for a minute the sorts of things that are being mooted as part of the 'tidying up' agenda. First, we have reform of the banking system. There are many strands to this debate ranging wildly in their radicalism. At one end of the scale we have two kinds of neo-liberal approach. One (at least an honest one) argues that crashes are part of the deal, creative destruction, and that we should have let banks fail and let the market repair itself. Now these people basically want government out as quickly as possible. The other strand is much more cynical - continue to support the free market unquestioningly and just pretend that the bail-out didn't really happen. Both of these stances one would expect from the 0.1 per cent of the world population which benefits from the mess. On the reform side, we have many shades. There is the tokenistic 'let's at least inflict a little punishment by taking away their bonuses' shade. There is the 'use political leverage to force bankers to be more responsible' approach (lend more to business, don't sell risky options to marginal customers), but without any real legislation or sanction. Moving to the more radical side there is a 'split the risky speculative side from the essential retail banking side to stop the gambling bringing down the bit we can't allow to fail'

stance (which is hard to argue with, other than that it appears to assume that the speculative bit is a necessary evil). There is also the active state intervention approach which suggests that the retail banking bit should in fact be nationalised and run as a secure public service. And then there are those who want to address some of the root causes of the whole thing by tackling the way speculative financial capitalism works in the first place (such as advocates of a Tobin Tax). What do we learn from all of this? Well, the majority of these proposals do not really appear to envisage a global financial system which is fundamentally different from the one we have. The more farsighted attitudes want to tame the global flow of capital, but these voices have been around for decades and very little of it is reaching mainstream debate. The rest could legitimately be described as taking existing patterns of behaviour and making them more stable and less liable to failure. That does not mean they are not good ideas, but it equally does not suggest a major change in direction.

Then there is the public sector/public service agenda. This is an enormous area which is populated by a dizzying array of interests and prejudices. Broadly, there are 'less' and 'more' approaches and they all claim to be about mitigating or restoring some larger problem. The hard-core 'less' people want smaller government and less spending to reduce public debt and, well after that the arguments are as usual (market best, public sector a drag, makes people lazy and so on...). They don't stack up, but they don't have to because all the big money is behind these ideas and as Mr Burns from the Simpsons put it, "What good is money if it can't inspire terror in your fellow man?". The soft-core 'less' people want exactly the same, but they pretend to be nicer. So now it's all about 'targeting those in most need'. There is no difference at all between these positions other than the pose struck - the man cutting off your hand may tell you it's for your own good or to hurt you, but you're still left without a hand. On the other side there are a million ways to spend more public money. As a very rough categorisation there are those on the 'producer' side who make the case for expansion and conditions (more of us, more pay for us), those on the 'delivery' side who believe there is a need for more/better/different and those on the 'big picture' side who favour universalism as a social good. From all of this we can see that both sides are basically after a continuity of one half of the Anglo-welfare model - either 'cradle to grave' or 'safety net' - but only for

Reviews	25
Web Review	26
Kick Up The Tabloids.....	27

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the really needy'. Either way, the Anglo model is not really in question, and rather surprisingly both sides tend somewhat towards the 'servicing poverty' model rather than seeking to end poverty. There is almost a sort of 'building things' debate, but not really. The housing and public infrastructure debate is not really a debate but a sales pitch by the construction sector. That is why we dwell on whether a given road or rail project is a 'job-creator' or an 'environment-harmer' while on all sides knowing in advance that somehow the budget is going to be at least ten times the original estimate. The next time you hear blasé claims on the economic benefit of infrastructure projects, go and read some of the empirical evidence on the subject - you'll quickly find that it doesn't stack up. And yet no-one in the 'debate' ever mentions this.

The war-and-peace options are even more straightforward - either lots more or lots less and the distinctions in either side matter little. Which is only to suggest that more 'nukes, fewer guns or more guns, fewer nukes' is a debate for those who want to kill people one way or the other. Equally, the pacifist-minded 'less' and the pragmatically-minded 'less' are both of the view that we should try to avoid killing (with one side more inclined to stay ready, 'just in case'). What this addresses, though, is the 'capacity to do harm' question. The 'what drives us to consider harm in the first place?' question is one which is not really at the heart of most of the war and peace debate. (This does a disservice to many who are squaring the questions of international law, global resource allocation and conflict resolution, but they are hard to find unless you look very carefully.)

Then there are the big global moral issues - poverty and the environment and so on. These are in some ways the most dispiriting because the genuinely strong force of public feeling has been met head-on by big corporations which no longer try to prevent action but rather to subvert it. So it is that we're still messing around with better light bulbs and forgetting that we didn't really make poverty history at all. On the big picture side there are those who hope technology will save us, those who say we need to live differently without providing a plan for how to get there and those who don't care.

On the media side there is simply no debate - but then again, since debate can by definition only take place in the media (they can talk about it in parliaments but you can only hear about it from a third party) that isn't that surprising. The despicable

assault on the BBC by its biggest rival (an outraged member of the Murdoch clan assuming the moral high ground while grubbing venally for any way to make even more money and monopolise even more of the public space - imagine!) is matched only with the cowardly appeasement of that position by Labour and Tory politicians.

Another two areas where there are debates but in name only are 'moral values' and 'democracy'. The first of these still boils down to an argument between the 1950s and the 1960s - deference and manners or liberation and tolerance. This is especially depressing because we're moving backwards not forwards. Careful use of 'moral backlash' (a 1980s American phenomenon where the conservatives tried to fight back against the gains made by liberals in the 1960s and 1970s) has got us acting as racists and misogynists again - tabloids love tits and hate gypsies. We were supposed to have got by this a while ago. Meanwhile, the debate on democracy is the very pinnacle of tinkering at the edges. A small group of academics worry about PR, local participative decision-making and so on. Frankly, none of them really imagine any real change in the world resulting from these changes - the aim seems more like greater legitimisation for the status quo. In the heart of this is education, but then who is arguing for education as anything other than a tool of economic development these days (social mobility being a function of economic development)? And stuck on the side is 'recreation' - but here there is less debate than in any other area. In fact, simply to suggest that you have an opinion on someone else's leisure pursuits is enough to get you shot these days - it is a complete and unbending axiom that leisure time is 'free market' and if that means bottom-scraping lowest common denominator and ever-deteriorating stupidity and shallowness then rejoice because the people have chosen. There is simply no room to suggest we encourage people to aspire to something better in their personal life - anyone other than corporations marketing products who tries to suggest a way to spend your free time is an elitist snob and must be told to shut up immediately.

Finally - and probably most depressing of all - there is the economy and inequality (these are the same thing after all). Here we have by far the biggest debate but perhaps the least variation. Simply put, for the very largest part there is no real conception of a system which is all that much different from the one we have. Mostly we are in the territory of 'nice growth'

versus 'any growth' and then an utterly fragmented discussion of how to get there. We have skills-driven growth, low-cost-driven growth, high-tech growth, environmentally-friendly growth, let-it-rip growth and a bundle of variations. Now, this is somewhat unfair since there are three areas where alternative thinking is emerging - no-growth, measurement and ownership. So for example, the radical movement in the US in particular has been coming up with new ideas on 'participative economics' in which control and ownership of industry is democratised and profit no longer put above all other concerns in determining corporate strategy. There is real merit in this thinking, but it is so far away from mainstream debate and the transition stage so sketchy that it is a long way from being a credible manifesto for change. There is a growing strand of thinking challenging the whole concept of growth and this also offers real hope, but it is going to have to find a better way to present itself. Afraid to point out that simply sharing existing resources more evenly would make almost all of us more prosperous without any need for growth for fear of being accused of communism, instead it comes across like a monastic order. We need to get the ideas and their delivery right before we challenge the 'universal consensus' on growth. And there is also real hope in the challenge to how we measure. As Will Self put it nicely, when the hell did we start measuring the state of our nation solely on the basis of how much pointless crap we buy in the high street? Why is an expensive house 'better for us all' than the same house but cheaper? When will people follow the money from the point after it is marked down as 'gross domestic product'? - because it doesn't generally go anywhere that makes the people happier or the country better. So all three of these strands of thinking offer hope, but not in the near future. And there is just no debate on tackling economic inequality anymore (although again there are hopeful signs of that changing). Simple ideas like living wage and laws on pay variation are totally alien to all but a tiny minority of people and

yet are fairly cautious in their nature. And the financial services sector (in one of its many crimes against the public) has made sure that no-one even understands what to debate when it comes to the complicated ways in which any trickling-down of wealth is prevented. For example, does anyone realise that if you earn enough and are in your fifties you can manipulate pension rules in such a way as to pay less tax than someone on minimum wage, only to release all the money a couple of years later tax free? Why are we incentivising the further enrichment in old age of the already very rich? And that's an easy bit to understand in comparison to what you can do once you get into the realms of off-shore banking. Even standard pay deals are iniquitous - even if a boss keeps getting the same three per cent pay rise of the workers, it stretches the real gap between their respective wages wider and wider every year.

In total, if we add up even the best of the ideas which have made it into even the fringes of the mainstream, we have an agenda which is far too close to a case for continuity. We know something is wrong but we are not really equipped to tackle it yet. Or at least that is how most people feel.

This attempt to try to cover the entire public debate in 2,500 words is somewhere between stupid and foolhardy and almost certainly insulting. But it at least gives us an overview of how we are thinking about how things are organised. If we are to put our finger on the fundamental issues of how we live now in an effort to think more hopefully about how we might live tomorrow, we need to be tough on the assumptions and approaches we are currently taking. After all, does any single one of us think that we are close to a solution for this awful mess we have created? If we do not break it down into its constituent parts then we will never be able to clean it up. The mess is too big, but the causes may not be. And so if we want to really tackle the mess we need



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to start thinking about its cause and spend a bit less time raking over the debris. This issue will therefore look at five underlying problems we face in the reform of society. We hope it can help people consider the day-to-day problems we now face.

Money and measuring. Money is not necessarily the root of all evil, but it can almost always be found **at** the root of all evil. We all tend to think we know what money is and what it is for, but in fact most people really only have a sketchy idea of what are the implications of how we manage money, how it is used and how we measure it. For example, the vast majority of us don't even know where the money is, who has it or what they do with it. It is telling that when we are asked how rich we are individually we always get it wrong and we always overestimate (this has been done lots of times but as an example, 40 per cent of the UK population report being in the top 15 per cent by income, which clearly can't be right). We hear the official tales of 'prosperity' and it is all about growth and GDP. But we don't understand GDP because if we did we might not like what it measures – the measure of prosperity we use includes all those massive theoretical gambles that the City of London was making as if they were real productive activity, or as if there was any conceivable mechanism for that money to trickle down in our direction. As Neil Davidson outlines in his article on this subject, we have simply encouraged massive disparity in wealth. We do not talk about the fact that the rich do not 'shop locally' and so this wealth disappears from the UK quite quickly, to the benefit of none of us. We pretend that because it is measured in 'money' then it is real wealth, and there aren't many on any side inclined to demur from this view. And yet we should know better; we have lost sight of Marx's observation that money is a relationship and that in fact it is more a measure of power than of prosperity. But all of our political system is set up in such a manner that this is disguised and the interests of power are disguised as the interests of what might be called 'money/prosperity'. If we keep swallowing this myth, it will be hard to achieve fundamental change.

How things get done. John Barker's article on the role of the big consultancy firms in both creaming-off profit from the taxpayer while at the same time distorting public policy in ideological ways leaves one scratching ones head. How is this allowed? How can such glaring inefficiencies and mistakes be permitted? But it stretches even further; the people of Britain know at the point that the cost of a big project is given that this is not what it is going to cost us. Can anyone think of a big public project that came in on cost? And generally we're not talking here about five per cent cost overruns – it is more likely to be cost overruns of 500 per cent. IT projects have been particularly visible, as have some of the construction projects, but there are a plethora of contracts that have got out of control. And we expect it, accept it and do it again. It is worth noting that this phenomenon is limited to public sector contracts, but that it is not only a public sector phenomenon. There was a news report about a group of engineers for the Lotus car company who wanted to prove the viability of really exciting electric sports cars. They did this on their own and managed to produce a car with a better performance than the petrol version for £250,000. As they themselves point out, had they done it inside the company that is the kind of money that they would have had to spend on consultants to agree a codename for the project. The cost of actually delivering would probably have been at least 100 times bigger. We expect this now. All the processes of 'getting things done' have been hijacked and booby-trapped by the consultancy

and contract service industry. We are leaking wealth right across our society and it is all falling into the hands of the same kleptocracy. The unbelievable thing is that we are all complicit and wasting money is Government policy, because so long as the waste keeps landing in the pockets of CBI members then all the Money Gods remain happy.

The way we think. We all think that we know what it is that we want, but do we know why we think it? There is an endless litany of self-reinforcing myths that suggest that we 'know what we want' and that, by extension, we are getting it. Freedom, choice, the empowered commuter, lifestyle shopping and so on all make us believe that this is what we want. And then we have an education system and media which drive the issue home lest we ever doubt the truth of what we want. But we're not happier or more fulfilled and we're not really better off so how come, if we're getting what we want, we don't seem to want it so much after we've got it? And why did we start hating and fearing people from different ethnic backgrounds again? In his article Robin McAlpine argues that it is because we have become oblivious to both the strength of the ideology in which we're engulfed and have lost sight of many of the means through which it is propagated.

The purpose of work. There is one overarching 'good thing' which we all celebrate – jobs and work. New jobs created? Hurray! The fact that we are cheering because we are all up to our ears in debt, barely four weeks away from defaulting on some payment or other, that we face endemic job insecurity and that we believe anything – poor pay, terrible hours, crushing boredom – beats falling behind in the race to having a 'model life'. So how is it that the more we work the less well off we get and the less happy we are, and how is it that all the promises of the future that were once put in front of us have been so completely subverted now they are in front of us? The answer, argues Isobel Lindsay in her article, is that work is now much more about control than about productivity. We work not because it is valuable but because it ties us into a bigger web of reliance, all of which reinforces the position of only the very most powerful. We work more and are less happy. And this is the triumph of technological modernity?

Why we fight. All discussion of national defence issues is accepted to be irrational from the outset. We are not supposed to make decisions about threats which exist (bluntly, a strong, rich nation like ours doesn't face any) but either to imagine threats where they are not or to think about threats which might possible appear in the future. These are both strange places to start a debate – would we be designing an NHS for diseases that don't exist or because of a plague that might one day happen? The answer is no, because the NHS is actually used for the purpose it is supposed to be used for – to provide a health service which is universal and national. The defence industry, as Alan McKinnon makes very clear in his article, is about imposing power on others in the interests of multinational corporations. That is why it is so important that we all accept the irrationality of the debate before we start. It's about 'our boys' and bravery and poppies and bombs on the street. Except it really isn't. Which is why we can talk endlessly about whether we have enough helicopters for our wars but never about whether we might have too many wars for our helicopters. The same neoliberal resource issue which drives economic policy also drives defence policy. ■

root of this evil

Neil Davidson argues that it's not money that got us into this mess - it was the myths we bought with it

Capitalism is a system of competitive accumulation based on wage labour. The transition to a monetary economy was not sufficient for its emergence, but it was necessary. Money became the general or universal equivalent, the special commodity which acted simultaneously as a measure of value, a medium of circulation and a means of payment. Yet, in the beginning, the bourgeoisie had an ambiguous attitude to money. It was necessary to enable accumulation to take place (which meant preventing any more than was absolutely necessary being diverted to labour); but as the Bible taught, the love of money was a sin, and virtue might be indicated by a conscious refusal to make possession of money an object of vulgar display.

But as capitalism ceased to be a revolutionary force, as the austere regimes required for primitive accumulation and primary industrialisation passed into history along with the cultural repression they engendered, money came into its own.

This was reflected in bourgeois theory, as well as the personal behaviour of individual members of the bourgeoisie. At the end of the 18th century, Scottish political economy saw value as being produced by the labour of workers; by the end of the 19th century, Austrian neoclassical economics saw value as being determined by the expenditure of the consumer: however much you were prepared to pay for a commodity was the measure of its value, as it remains to this day. The decline in bourgeois thought marked by shift from the rigorous objectivity of the labour theory of value to the vapid subjectivity of the theory of marginal utility was also indicative of a wider retreat from reality. Marx, who preserved and extended everything which was scientific in the work of the Scots, identified three types of capital: productive, commodity and money. When a bank lends money-capital to a productive capitalist for investment it is returned with interest - 'money breeding money', as he put it. But money-capital disguises the reality of capitalist relations of production by appearing to grow, as it were, magically, when in fact the interest is part of the surplus value extracted from the workers employed by the productive capitalist. Where the disguise is mistaken for reality the results have been disastrous; but there is another aspect of money which has also been problematic for capitalism and consequently for us. As Marx discovered during the 1850s, and Keynes rediscovered during the 1930s, capitalists do not spend all their money either on immediate consumption or on investment in production, they also save or hoard it: they exercise 'liquidity preference', in Keynes' jargon. A combination of these two aspects of money, the illusion of self-generating growth and the actuality of deferred spending and investment, lie behind the current crisis.

From the 1970s onwards, profit rates failed to consistently reach what capitalists considered acceptable levels. The result was a fall in the proportion of surplus value being invested

in production and a rise in the proportion being saved, to the point where the latter was greater than the former. Not for the first time in the history of the capitalist system (1870s, 1920s), the need to find profitable uses for surplus capital, where productive investment was insufficiently attractive, tended to draw industrial capitalists towards financial speculation. The Great Depression of the 1930s showed productive capital that accumulation could no longer depend on a largely unregulated

system; financial capital came to no such conclusion. The point at which productive capital reverted to the views of financial capital in the 1970s signalled the opening of the neoliberal era, but this did not mean that the former had become subordinated to the latter, rather that their interests had converged. In April 2009, for example, the German luxury car manufacturer Porsche announced that it had made pre-tax profits of 7.3 billion Euros in the six months to 31 January at a time of collapsing car

sales, an outcome due almost entirely to a windfall from share options which the company held in Volkswagen.

The new focus on finance had wider implications than the shifting focus of investment, which tend to be compressed into the term 'financialisation', which means more than the growth of the financial economy in relation to the productive economy. Above all it means an attempt by capital to transform every human transaction into an exchange of commodities, one of which is money. But among all the complexities of arbitrage, derivatives, hedge funds and the rest, there are two essential points about financialisation which need to be understood. One is that, financial speculation can increase the profits of some individual capitalists at the expense of others, but cannot create new value for the system as a whole. The other is that, in so far as profits were raised, one aspect of financialisation became more important than any other: the massive increase in consumer debt. Credit became crucially important in preventing the return to crisis after the post-1982 recovery had exhausted itself. The East Asian crisis of 1997 and the dotcom collapse of 2000/1 signalled an unprecedented expansion of credit. Why? Neoliberalism was based on a threefold strategy of allowing unemployment, disciplining labour and relocating production. These could never have been permanently effective in cowing resistance, but their effect was prolonged by the very nature of the neoliberal boom. Growth in the heartlands of the system was based on investment in services rather than manufacturing or other productive sectors of the economy; consequently, new jobs tended to be characterised by more insecure employment or underemployment, in occupations at the bottom of the pay scales: workers in personal service occupations, for example, earned on average £14,146 for the 2002/03 tax year. This suppression of real wage levels among the working class therefore encouraged - indeed, one might say, necessitated - a massive expansion in borrowing. At the same time debt also

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provided an alternative to struggle, in conditions where that was difficult or impossible.

Between 2000 and 2004 household debt in the USA increased by 39 per cent, but real disposable income did not, with workers relying on \$675 billion of new borrowing rather than on salaries and wages, which only increased by \$530 billion, to finance an overall \$1.3 trillion increase in spending. The British figures are similar. While New Labour has been in office in the UK, total debt held by individuals rose from £570.0 billion to £1,511.7 billion, an increase of 165.2 per cent. During the same period the ratio of personal debt to disposable income rose from 101.6 per cent to 173.1 per cent - an increase of 71.5 per cent which exceeds even the increase of 49.8 per cent registered during the preceding period of Conservative government. But whether or not the expansion of credit constitutes a problem for capitalism depends on the relationship between it and expansion of the value in production, which ultimately forms the basis of working-class incomes. When the supply of new credit and the production of new value are roughly aligned, growth of the former need not be a concern; but when, as between 2000 and 2005, the rise of after-tax income was slightly greater than a third of the rise in house prices, the disparity proved unsustainable.

Neoliberalism may not have resolved the problems of the rate of profit, but it provided one major service to the capitalist class and the bourgeoisie more generally: the neoliberal programme benefited individual members of the capitalist class by increasing their personal wealth, at the expense of the living standards of the poor and the working class. In 1965, during the last full decade of the post-war boom, the ratio of Chief Executive Officer income to that of an average worker in the US was 35:1; by 1980, the opening of the first full decade of the neoliberal era, it had risen to 80:1 and by 2005 to 450:1. To express the gap in another way; between 1968 and 2005 the salary of the highest paid CEO in the USA went from 127 average workers and 239 minimum waged workers to 7,443 average workers and 23,282 minimum waged workers. In Britain, even after ten years of Thatcherism, the average CEO of one of the FTSE top one hundred companies in 1988 earned 'only' 17 times the wage of an average worker; by 2008 it had risen to 75.5 times. Like the neoclassical economics of the Gilded Age before it, neoliberalism is an ideology. Both represented, not disinterested theory, but the articulation of particular class interests. Neoclassicism represented mainly the interests of a rentier subset of the bourgeoisie described by radicals and Marxists before the First World War as being characterised by extreme individualism and focussed on the means of consumption rather than the means of production. Neoliberalism in some respects reflects the way in which these attitudes have been generalised across the bourgeoisie as a whole. It is unsurprising, therefore, that no significant section of the international ruling class has abandoned its belief in the fundamentals of neoliberal capitalism: they have too much to lose. But neoliberalism is also an ideology in a second sense; not only one which presents the perspective of a particular class as universal, but also one which seeks to explain or justify the discrepancy between theory and reality, between the promise of improved standards of living for all and the delivery of inequalities in which benefits are reserved for the rulers of society.

What should the attitude of the left be to the current dominance of money-capital? Two attitudes seem to be not simply useless, but actively harmful. The first would be to identify the activities of financial capital as the source of exploitation and oppression,

rather than the system itself. Past experience suggests that, whether the opposition is supposedly between patriotic and cosmopolitan capital, competitive and monopoly capital, or - as in the current case - financial and industrial capital, the tendency is first to align, then to submerge the interests of labour beneath those of one ('progressive') section of the warring brotherhood. But however much they may fight among themselves, all sections of the capitalist class have benefited from the restraints which neoliberalism has imposed upon labour. And the 'manufacturing and exporting' wing of capital continues to do so, for one response to the crisis in Britain has certainly been cooperation between trade unions - or rather their bureaucracies - and employers; but this has been entirely to the advantage of the latter, involving workers accepting pay freezes, pay cuts, as in Honda, or in the most extreme case, periods of working for nothing, as in British Airways. The second would be to issue moralising homilies to working class people condemning them for acting as 'consumers' and unnecessarily adding to their possessions. The implication is that, although the irresponsibility of politicians and bankers may primarily be to blame for the current crisis, some of the responsibility must also lie with the individuals who took on the debt. In so far as better-off workers have spent borrowed money on commodities which are above the minimum needed to reproduce their labour, it is a response to their increased alienation under neoliberalism. But if the argument here is correct, the main reason for increased debt has been the need to maintain personal or familial income levels. There is a long and unedifying history of socialists, intoxicated on their own misunderstanding of Lenin and Gramsci, denouncing the workers for their 'economism'. Seeing the way working-class people in the US have had their anger diverted into opposing abortion, or defending gun-ownership, one can only hope that they discover their vulgar material interests sooner rather than later. More generally though, asking people in a situation of already dire poverty to do with less for the sake of the planet or in pursuit of some higher, non-materialist morality is simply insulting. Worse, it echoes ruling class calls for sacrifice, such as the assertion that 'we are all in this together' uttered more than once by the millionaire George Osborne at the recent Conservative Party Annual Conference.

In fact, the attitude of the left should have two aspects, which at first sight may appear paradoxical. On the one hand, support every struggle to increase wages for workers and transfer payments for those people not in work. Of course trade unions must fight in defence of services and for political aims; but organisations which are unable to defend their members' standard of living are unlikely to be able to fight successfully on any other front. On the other hand, we must oppose the commodification and marketisation of social life which makes access to money so necessary in the first place: free access to services provided from general taxation should be our demand over everything, from the NHS to libraries to public transport. The defence of Royal Mail combines both objectives: protecting the living standards of postal workers and preserving the post as a service rather than a business. The abolition of money will have to wait until we abolish the system that requires it; but we only have to imagine the response of the political class to these modest proposals to understand that reformist demands can have a radical charge, if people are prepared to fight for them. ■

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work isn't working

Isobel Lindsay looks at how 'work' is now as much a part of the neoliberal ideology of control as it is about producing things

From a contemporary perspective, it is strange to think that much of the debate in the 1950s and 60s on 'automation' and the future of work was about the opportunities and challenges of the huge increase in mass leisure and the end of scarcity that was about to come. How then did we get to where we are now in the UK with a high proportion of those in employment who are 'time poor', experiencing ever-increasing intensity of effort at work with long hours and later retirement? The outcome of forty years of economic development has been a vast expansion of things, the commodification of many services, greater inequality and high-pressure lives. For the minority who are unemployed, poverty, social rejection and low morale make it difficult to use time constructively.

The Anglo-Saxon model has been more extreme in these respects than most other developed countries. In the UK there are some pre-Thatcherite origins to this. Trade unions here in the post-war period prioritised wages over working hours. I can recall doing some research in an Italian-owned factory in Glasgow in the 1970s and finding that workers did not know that in the same factories in Italy, employees had much longer holidays. The shop stewards' convener did know but did not think it was an important issue. Matt McGinn's song - **Two Nights and a Sunday Double Time** - was not so far off the mark. Continental workers, then as now, had better holidays and hours and it was the Scandinavians who led the way in parental leave. Nor did the French and Germans and Swedes have to sacrifice earnings and other financial benefits for the sake of more leisure. It is difficult to know whether this failure to promote better working-time conditions in Britain arose because of lack of political and trade union vision or because this was simply a response to the priorities of employees. Since few UK workers were (or are) aware of their disadvantaged position, we do need to look at the reasons for the lack of aspirations. The closed shops in Germany for much of the weekend to enable people to have social time together would be a culture shock for the younger generation here who have been socialised into the assumption of seven day consumerism as the bedrock of our society.

The Thatcher period and the continuity of neo-liberalism through the New Labour years removed much of the choice from workers. Weakened unions and the fear of unemployment greatly strengthened managerial power to dictate the terms of work. There is extensive unpaid overtime because jobs depend on being seen to be keen. This applies at all levels and particularly at middle-management. In addition the past few decades of hyper-commercialism has driven people to maximise earnings as the over-riding priority. The housing market was used initially by Thatcher to tie people into high mortgage dependency and the Blair/Brown use of spiralling housing costs and high personal debt to fuel economic growth resulted in the pressure to make money taking precedence over everything else and the two-wage family becoming a necessity

for many households. For those who are graduates, student debt adds to that personal debt burden (a much bigger problem in England) and now many students have to work long hours in paid employment throughout the year at the expense of their studies.

Apart from mortgage payments, the constant multi-media promotion of ever-changing goods and services as essential to social status and personal fulfilment has increased people's money dependency. Contemporary capitalism cannot sustain itself without constantly speeding up the frequency of consumption while ironically undermining this by trying to reduce the costs of labour through increasing the intensity of work and keeping earnings for the majority low. Each company has to hope that others will increase the consumption capacity of the public. If it were not for public expenditure, cyclical crises would be more frequent. Yet the result of so much of this consumption is to make us run fast to stand still. More care services have to be commodified because people are short of time. More expensive pre-prepared food is bought because people are short of time. More recreation is bought because it seems easier for stressed workers. The peak financial pressures come at a point in the life-cycle when the need for personal time is greatest. Young families need time but they are under pressure to maximise earnings rather than leisure in order to buy and furnish homes, to pay for child-care, to pay for cars because of so much geographical centralisation, and for graduates to pay off student loans. Time poverty and the stress it produces have become a taken for granted aspect of modern life.

In his 1974 book, **Labour and Monopoly Capitalism**, Harry Braverman predicted that new technology and new managerial practices would sharply increase managerial control of the labour process, not only for manual workers but significantly also for white-collar workers. Thirty years later the extent of that centralised control has been one of the defining features of the modern workplace, depersonalising the work and leaving the employee as subject rather than agent. Most striking has been the extent to which this has spread to the traditional professions. New Labour has been characterised by its obsession with the



control of everyone except those at the top in business. The 'light touch' applied to the senior people in financial services contrasts with the constant micro-management of everyone in the public sector and support for the same ethos in the private sector. This control is imposed through excessively detailed job specifications, constant measurement, 'naming and shaming' with league tables. The same values that produced the call centre have been applied to the health service, to education, to policing, to postal services and throughout the private sector.

New technology has enabled management in public and private services to keep tight control

of what each worker is doing from portion

control in catering to hourly

sales figures in retail to patient

throughput in hospitals to

access to the content of

telephone calls and

emails. One of the

most consistent

complaints when

people talk about

their work is

about this micro-

management

with its lack

of personal

discretion,

its constant

reorganisations

to meet imposed

targets and to be

seen to be showing

initiative, and its

frequent rigid irrationality

that junior employees dare

not challenge. This creates

a stressful work environment with

no shortage of evidence that the outcome

frequently involves displacement of goals -

working time channelled into box-ticking rather than thinking

about how to achieve the real objectives of the organisation.

All the old research into assembly-line work identified lack of

any personal control over the job as the most disliked aspect.

That feeling has seeped into many other areas of employment.

At least the public sector should be able to move away from

these managerial approaches and engage with its employees in

genuine co-management.

Add all of this to the most basic change that has been prevalent

since the 1980s - job cuts to boost profits - and we have millions

of employees with increased workloads who feel they haven't

time to do their job thoroughly and also lack discretion and

control.

Our intellectual heritage has provided us with a rich source of

material on the significance of work in our lives. In the 19th

century Marx, Ruskin, Morris were outstandingly perceptive

in identifying the social and spiritual/psychological aspects

of work as well as the importance of fair economic rewards.

From the 1960s and 1970s there was a growing interest in Marx's concept of alienation, in industrial democracy and in job enrichment. The 1980s saw a new interest in understanding the role of informal labour or 'self-provisioning' and the past decade has seen 'happiness' and 'well-being' research and the relationship to work.

Unfortunately little of this has found its way into mainstream party political discourse. More accurately, none of it has. The outstanding late 20th century theorist on rethinking work was Andre Gorz who challenged the Left to question traditional patterns of employment. Why, he asked, are we not benefiting from new technology by sharing work and radically reducing working hours? Why not the 30 hour week or the six month working year? Why are we not spending more time on labour for our own use/own choice rather than on exchange value labour? This, after all, was Marx's vision for communism. This is certainly not a private enterprise vision. A strong state would be necessary to regulate hours, essential production and a guaranteed social wage. Strong local government would be necessary to provide some of the amenities to enable people to make best use of their increased free time. Recreation facilities, workshop and studio space, shared access to equipment would provide us with the opportunity to improve the quality of life for ourselves and the community. Many of the services that have become commodities to be purchased because we are time-poor could be provided from the skills of family and friends.

A serious initiative to develop a programme across all areas of employment to reduce working hours would address many of our current problems. Child-care, a major expense for young families and a bar to employment for many single parents, would be radically cheaper if all parents were working much shorter hours. A later retiral age would not be problematic if the working week or the working year was much shorter. Voluntary work would have a much wider range of participants. There could be more genuine care in the community. Gorz's assumption was that more free time and support for creative work and community involvement would reduce the demand for constantly accelerating consumption as the principal source of status and meaning, that more control over time would contribute to a more sustainable society.

Of course, far from rethinking the meaning of work and giving people more control over time, British Governments have been the worst in Europe in opposing reform in employment conditions and British business has been among the most regressive in demanding worse conditions than their continental competitors. The opt-out from the working time directive, shamefully demanded by Labour as well as Conservatives, has made it easy for employers to impose long working hours and unsocial hours. The trend towards centralisation of public and private services has imposed longer travel to work on employees. The financial services were encouraged to trap increasing numbers in high debt. Developing new objectives for work and time needs to be the start of a radical process of change that brings together the traditional aspirations of socialists and the social and environmental aspirations of Greens. Above all, it will resonate with the day to day experience of most workers. ■

Isobel Lindsay is a retired academic who specialised in industrial sociology



why we fight

Alan McKinnon shows that the UK and US 'defence' policy is in fact a 'projection of power' policy with the primary purpose of defending the commercial interests of transnational companies

The world of war is today dominated by a single superpower. In military terms the United States sits astride the world like a giant Colossus. As a country with only five per cent of the world's population it accounts for almost 50 per cent of global arms spending. Its 11 naval carrier fleets patrol every ocean and its 909 military bases are scattered strategically across every continent. No other country has reciprocal bases on US territory - it would be unthinkable and unconstitutional. It is 20 years since the end of the Cold War and the United States and its allies face no significant military threat today. Why then have we not had the hoped-for peace dividend? Why does the world's most powerful nation continue to increase its military budget, now over \$1.2 trillion a year in real terms? What threat is all this supposed to counter?

Britain's armed forces are different only in scale. For generations our defence posture has emphasised the projection of power to other parts of the world. And today our armed forces have the third highest military spending in the world (after the United States and China) and the second highest power projection capability behind the United States. The Royal Navy is the world's second largest navy and our large air force is in the process of procuring hundreds of the most advanced aircraft in the world. And then there is Trident, Britain's strategic nuclear 'deterrent' - the ultimate weapon for projecting power across the world. None of this is designed to match any threat to our nation. It is designed to meet the 'expeditionary' role of our armed forces in support of the policy of our senior ally, the United States.

This military overkill cannot be justified by 'defence' unless we extend its meaning to the 'defence of its interests' across the world. And this gets us closer to the real explanation for this military build up. US and UK companies comprise many of the biggest transnational companies. Twenty-nine of the top 100 global companies by turnover are US and seven are UK-based. And the top five global companies are all US or UK based. Both economies share many of the same strengths and weaknesses. Both have seen major erosion of their manufacturing base as compared with economies like Germany and Japan. Both have become increasingly dependent on banking, privatised utilities and financial services, hence their vulnerability in the recent banking collapse. But both retain dominance in certain key areas such as oil and gas and arms manufacturing. In the case of the UK we can add mining. Of the top 10 global companies, all but three are in oil and gas, with

British companies Royal Dutch Shell and BP coming first and fourth on the list. The world's three biggest mining companies - Anglo-American, Rio Tinto and BHP Billington - are UK-based.

Today Britain continues to export capital on a scale unmatched by any other country apart from the United States. By 2006 British capital assets overseas were worth the equivalent of 410 per cent of Britain's GDP. This is the highest of any major capitalist economy. Much of this investment is in the United States and Europe, but a significant amount continues to be invested in extractive industries in Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Latin America. An even greater amount of money from abroad (mainly US) is invested in British financial and industrial companies, many of them now under external ownership. It is this interlocking of capital between the UK and the much stronger US economy which helps to bind UK and US foreign policy together. Britain's oil and gas giants, its mining companies and its arms manufacturers have a powerful and ongoing relationship with government and an effective lobbying influence in the office of successive Prime Ministers.

All of these strands come together with the drive for 'energy security' by the US and UK governments. It is the desire to protect overseas investments and control the strategic materials such as oil, gas and minerals that drive the foreign and defence policy of both countries. Britain no longer has the global military reach to defend its overseas investments. Increasingly it depends on the United States for this. The unwritten agreement is that, in return, the British government supports US policy around the world. The same is true for Britain's biggest arms manufacturer, BAE Systems. It has grown rapidly in recent years to become the second biggest arms manufacturer in the world, mainly through the acquisition of other US companies. It now gets more business from the Pentagon than the MoD. UK support for America's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan certainly helps to oil the wheels of the UK arms business.

That becomes a greater imperative in a rapidly changing world where US power is being challenged by banking collapse and growing indebtedness at home, the rise of the economies of the east, a political challenge to its hegemony in Latin America, and unwinnable wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. With the steady

increase in demand for oil across the world, especially from the rapidly growing economy of China, the emergence of Russia as an oil and gas giant to rival Saudi Arabia, the creation of an Asian Energy Security Grid placing up to half the world's oil

In short, to understand the world of war, we need to understand the nature of modern imperialism, and how nation states act internationally to help maximise the profits of their biggest companies

and gas reserves outside US control in a network of pipelines linking Russia, Iran, China and the countries of Central Asia, that US strategy to control the arterial network of oil is now in crisis. The Gulf area still accounts for up to 70 per cent of known oil reserves where the costs of production are lowest. So it is no surprise that US policy continues to focus on Iran which has the world's second largest combined oil and gas reserves.

The US response has been largely military - the expansion of NATO and the encirclement of Russia and China in a ring of hostile bases and alliances. And continuing pressure to isolate and weaken Iran by a campaign of sanctions orchestrated through the IAEA and the United Nations with the threat of military action lurking in the background. The danger is that, even under the presidency of Obama, an economically weakened United States will tend to use the one massive advantage it has over its rivals - its global war machine.

Of course the battle to secure control over strategic materials does not explain everything that happens in the world today. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are not **purely** about oil. In the Middle East the US strategy is about changing the balance of forces against the Palestinians, establishing US client states in Iraq and Iran and leaving an expansionist Israel as the only surviving military power (although even that is ultimately connected with control over Middle East oil). The wars in central Africa (especially the Democratic Republic of Congo) are not **purely** about strategic minerals. But behind the rival guerrilla groups vying for control of these assets and the rival African neighbouring states who support them, stand the mining companies and their nation states.

And what is not directly connected to the battle for strategic resources is the wider agenda of free trade, open economies, deregulation and privatisation which the US and its allies are trying to impose on every country in the world through the IMF, the World Bank, the EU and NAFTA. Structural Adjustment Programmes imposed on countries as the price for 'forgiving' or rescheduling debt allow US and UK transnationals to prize open and penetrate the economies of the poorest countries with catastrophic consequences for the people.

In short, to understand the world of war, we need to understand the nature of modern imperialism, and how nation states act internationally to help maximise the profits of their biggest companies. Directly and indirectly these policies generate conflict and war on a daily basis. Moreover, the problem is compounded by arms manufacturing firms, generously supported by state funds, who sell lethal weapons around the world to allow wars to be fought. In 2007 the world's leading 100 defence manufacturers sold arms worth \$347 billion, an

increase of 45 per cent in the past 10 years. Britain's 'champion', BAE Systems, is currently under investigation for corrupt practices in several countries and has sold all kinds of weapons across the world, including to countries like Saudi Arabia and Israel who have a record of human rights abuses.

As we have seen, British defence policy is geared to fighting wars overseas in support of the United States. Our four nuclear submarines and their payload of 160 warheads, are really an extension of America's strategic 'deterrent' and could not be used independently. But there is an alternative. The overwhelming majority of countries, including some who have the technology and wealth to do differently, do not have nuclear weapons and do not seek them. They do not invest in power projection or the expensive platforms or transport systems which will allow them to fight wars thousands of miles from their own borders.

If our concern is really the defence of the nation's land and coastal waters we could make deep cuts in our 'defence' spending without compromising our security one iota. Indeed, withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan and Germany would dramatically reduce the threat of terrorism and reduce tensions in Europe. It would also save us a lot of money. So would cancelling the two new aircraft carriers, and the F-35 aircraft which are designed to fly from them, the Type 45 Destroyers and the Astute-class attack submarines. Our Trident submarine force is useless, dangerous and expensive and should be scrapped. None of these are required for real defence. Instead we could invest in coastal patrol vessels, early warning aircraft and relatively cheap sophisticated anti-tank, anti-ship and anti-aircraft radar guided missile launchers. Dispersal of these mobile but effective weapons would ensure that a heavy toll can be taken of any potential attacker. A fraction of the money saved could be used to tackle climate change by harnessing wind, wave and tidal energy and insulating millions of homes. We could radically cut the size of the navy, slim down the airforce and army and still have plenty of forces left over to help in any genuine humanitarian intervention led by the United Nations.

In today's multi-polar and 'asymmetrical' world the only threats are from terrorism and unstable states (none of whom could remotely pose a military threat to Britain or the United States). Real security comes from strengthening and democratising the United Nations and developing collective security arrangements in all parts of the world that involve all countries in the region. Aggressive and exclusive military alliances like NATO should be disbanded. Mediation and diplomacy should be used to settle international disputes. A global ban on nuclear weapons as proposed by Obama and the UN Security Council would be an excellent place to start. ■

Alan Mackinnon is Chair of Scottish CND

no such thing as failure

John Barker shows that the ideological ‘consultants’ who distort public policy are not only unaccountable, they appear to damage everything they touch

In an incident described by Gunther Wallraf when he had infiltrated the Springer newspaper empire and worked on the **Bild** newspaper, its best-selling tabloid, a lorry driver, Johann was set up to be the boss of 320 people. The upshot is that he has “to admit: A boss’s life is no bed of roses”. At first he smokes a cigar and has coffee made for him, no problems. But then he just can’t cope: three phones going, problems to be sorted, decisions to be made, it’s all too much. The story was published though in fact, none of it happened. For one thing there were only two phones in the designated office. The reporter who signed the article - Pichel - was not even at the scene on the day in question. The Springer photographer who drove out from Essen told Johann, when he asked who was going to write the report: ‘It’s already been written’. In fact the real-life Johann was given 10 minutes to demonstrate to **Bild** what a boss’s life is like. And this Johan says was after the office staff had gone home, and an attractive secretary from another branch was brought into pose on his lap.

It’s an old story, but what prompted this set-up is repeated over and over. Many of us have no desire to be professional managers, and are besides - often in tough circumstances - ‘managing’ everyday, but the story is a necessary justification for an elitist view of the world. It is a view of the world which capitalism and its protectorate depends on; people in general are simply not competent to make decisions, especially when the decisions themselves depend on mastery of specialised knowledges too complex for public scrutiny. Such a situation is that feared - and seen as a possibility - by the writers of the Scottish Enlightenment. It was one which would not encourage a critical public, and by doing so would be likely to act irrationally. Or rationally only in the interests of private profit. Interests necessarily with their own agendas. The **Bild** story has been repeated recently in the form of bonuses for bankers being in everyone’s interest, but it is also at the heart of the government’s increasing use of privately interested consultants with profit to themselves of primary importance. They make a special claim for specialised competence, while income from government contracts becomes a major source of total incomes for such consultants.

These consultants are ‘global players’ which make substantial profits for themselves and who always advise in the interests of capital in general. They can be roughly divided into the designer-consultants for government IT systems, and those whose brief is privatisation, outsourcing, and a general increases in the intensity of labour. Often there is a crossover, or alliances are made. Who then are these ‘global players’? Most well known is McKinsey, but also significant are the Big Four Accountancy ‘partnerships’, PriceWaterhouseCoopers(PWC); KPMG; Ernst & Young (which has joined forces with IT consultants CapGemini to form the kind of cross-over described above); and Deloitte Touche. The consulting arm of the former fifth such firm, the Enron-disgraced Arthur Anderson, did a Windscale-to-Sellafield name shift and is now Accentua. EDS with several IT system overspends and failures to its name has in similar fashion

become HP Enterprise Services; Fujitsu, IT systems ‘specialists’; Capita; Siemens Business Services. PA Consultancy has rather lost its shine after losing the memory stick containing the details of 84, 000 prisoners.

They have done especially well under New Labour with its perverse psyche of elitism combined with insecurity, while carrying a banner of Efficiency, or “effective delivery” as it’s now called.. Elitist because cowardly buffoons like Jack Straw believe that their own superiority entitles them to be where they are, but who, because their backgrounds are student union and/or media, are in awe of heavyweight managerialism which is, to say it again, highly profitable. In addition there is what C. Wright Mills called a revolving door of personnel between government and the heavweights of capital and those who service its working at the highest level. In his day, in the USA, they were from Wall Street law firms and banks. Here under New Labour, many of them are from global consultancy firms. The door swings also in reverse. Lord Warner for example, a health minister till December 2006 but who has advised PA Consulting and Deloitte, both in receipt of Department of Health consultancy contracts. Between these firms there is also a revolving door of government contracts. Thus when EDS along with Accenture was dumped from the Inland Revenue’s ‘Aspire’ rolling 10-year contract it was replaced by Cap Gemini-Ernst & Young, BT, and Fujitsu in 2003. This despite Fujitsu having been the main player in the magistrates courts’ Libra project at the same time, one described by the chairman of the Public Accounts Committee as “one of the worst IT projects I have ever seen. It may also be the shoddiest PFI project ever.” Fujitsu had ‘run rings’ around officials. In this case the cost had risen from an initial £146million to £390m.

This case is indicative of what has happened with so many such projects and invites a critique of such consultants on their own terms, that is of efficiency defined both in cost-benefit terms and in its own boasts of ‘effective delivery’. A National Audit Office Press release of 15 December 2006 declared “It is not possible to make an overall assessment of the benefits that have resulted from the money spent on consultants, partly because departments rarely collect information on what has been achieved”. No league tables here then. Now way of measuring ‘effective delivery’. In 2007 The Information Officer of the Department of Works and Pensions, Joe Harley, noted that seven in 10 government projects had failed. The Aspire project has not - as far as we know when repeatedly we don’t know - failed, but by 2009, had risen to £8.5 billion from the £3.5billion planned when the contract was awarded in 2003. CapGemini’s profits are expected to rise from £600m to £1.2bn, and the contract has done wonders for its share price. At the same time it has been unable to shake-off Accenture which had lost the contract in 2003. It had up to that point been developing a replacement National Insurance Recording System (NIRS2) but in 2006, three years afterwards, they were still at the Inland Revenue/HMRC, their system being so complicated, and when it was conceded that they was locked into into Accenture for

the foreseeable future. This explodes the myth, as Tony Collins of **ComputerWeekly** puts it, "That the government can replace any supplier in a competitive bid if it really wants to". A myth promoted by the only 'watchdogs' on offer, The Public Accounts Committee and National Audit Office which congratulated the Revenue for proving it was possible to remove an entrenched supplier, EDS being the example, without mention of Accenture who, because it was a PFI deal, also kept the intellectual property rights of the system. None of this has prevented Accenture from winning a contract in October this year to analyse the UK's readiness to adopt smart grid technology.

Profits have been made from most government departments; DEFRA, the Home Office, Education, Works and Pensions, and Defence But the present gold mine is the consultant-battered National Health Service. Once again it is in the IT sector that the most spectacular not-efficiencies have taken place. The NPfIT (The NHS's National Programme for IT) is a grisly saga of over-expenditure and failure which includes - as subplots - revolving door personnel and the undermining of another myth, that it is the consultants who take the risks of failure which, in a pre-emptive strike, its PR, says is putting consultants off from government contracts. In this instance it is once again Accenture which is involved. The costs of the project have risen from £2.3 billion to £12.4 billion with estimates that it may rise as far as £20bn. This cost should have been lessened by the contracts signed by the IT providers making them liable for large sums if they withdrew from the project. But when Accenture withdrew in September 2006 NPfIT's Director General Richard Granger, who had worked for Accenture when it was still Arthur Andersen and had previously been a partner at another big player, Deloitte Touche, charged them £63m instead of the £1 billion the contract permitted. Several others of the club also have profitable relations with the Department of Health.

- Capita: with a variety of contracts in the millions got a new one to develop 'NHS Choices' (worth £80m) - with some standard flim-flam "a focus on innovative engagement with citizens" - despite having been accused of serious shortcomings in its criminal records bureau contract, one worth £ 400m over ten years.
- CapGemini: £3.2 million in 2007-8 for management consultancy for the department, and for whom the notorious Lord Birt has been an adviser since 2006
- PA Consulting with Lord Warner on board: £4.9m from the department in 2007/8
- Deloitte with Lord Warner on board: £3m in the same period.
- Old friends EDS who lost the contract to provide the NHS with email; which threatened to sue, but then reached an amicable and secret arrangement with the government.
- KPMG: In 2003 it was investigated for its role in the proposal for a flagship sell-off of £400m worth of NHS property with a likely loss of £100m to the taxpayer. This when it had done auditing work for the two successful bidders. This crude conflict of interest has not stopped it taking £30m in fees from the Department of Health in the period

2004-9. Now it has won a contract to review NHS IT. On this contract, as the persistent Tony Collins of **Computer Weekly**, has discovered there is contradictory coyness on whether this contract went out to open tender. Everything is now helped by KPMG having recruited Mark Britnell, the very man who was the Department of Health's director general for commissioning and systems management. He has become a partner and its new head of Healthcare Europe. With a brazenness it knows it can get away with, KPMG's Alan Downey said: "We are not remotely interested in connections, the idea that you hire people to open doors is nonsense".

- McKinsey, it most of all. It has produced a variety of reports for New Labour on foundation trusts and how to introduce private companies to advise PCTs (Primary Care Trusts) to give contracts to diverse providers. It was they who were paid to do the original feasibility study for the NPfIT. Since then, from September 2005, Sir Michael Barber has become a partner. He had been Tony Blair's chief adviser on "delivery" - focusing on education and health from 2001 until this same September 2005. And now, in its primary role as Management consultants in the interests of capital, their recent report - leaked to the **Health Service Journal** in September of this year - proposes cutting the NHS budget by £20 billion and reducing the staff by 10 per cent, 137,000 jobs. This in addition to selling off yet more public space, that is hospital estates. Annual cuts though would be focused on reducing 'unnecessary' operations; cutting hospital after-care time; and most of all by increasing staff 'productivity'. This means fewer staff to do the same work, an increase in the intensity of labour. We know from the privatization of cleaning services the pincer movement that will follow. A reduced staff/patient ration will produce **Bild/Sun** type stories of patient neglect as if this had nothing to do with their equally strident cries for 'efficiency'.

If it were not for the leak, none of this would be known. But neither unions nor the public at large were in line to see the 100 page report on the grounds of 'confidentiality'. This is typical of the government-private profit consultants business. In 2005 the Office of Government Commerce released details of the 10 IT projects found to be most at risk, but kept their identities secret. Changes to payment by the Ministry of Defence to EDS in August 2006 were kept secret because the details were 'commercially sensitive'. The supposed system of checks are 'Gateway' reviews, but the Public Accounts Committee is still asking for them to be published. This lack of transparency has meant that even when the reviews are critical they have often not been taken seriously. When in June of this year 31 such reviews were published relating to the NPfIT, it revealed that many of the problems identified by previous reviews were not acted on. 'Effective delivery' then has proved to be a very expensive business, and the weakness of parliamentary democracy is revealed by the failures of the official watchdogs, the Public Accounts Committee and the National Audit Office. Transparency and accountability are preached to the rest of the world, but here confidentiality rules. It allows for that irrational wastefulness predicted and feared by the Scottish Enlightenment, one magnified by the primacy of private interest profitability. ■

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buying it

Neoliberalism is a giant marketing ploy, and we've almost all swallowed it. Robin McAlpine argues that we need to face up to our complicity if we want to change it.

It really is time for us all to stop believing that we know what's going on. We have convinced ourselves that we're now all 'media savvy', that we know the ways and means of newspaper manipulation and, since we do, we are therefore immune to their effect. We also think that we have the politicians' number, that we have become so used to their methods and techniques that we can see straight through them. We have all read an article about how supermarkets place products to maximise our purchases and so we think we understand the tricks of the trade to a degree that we aren't going to fall for them. We think that adverts don't really work on us. Sure, sometimes we see things in adverts that we really, really want and that's different, but they'll never sell us something we don't want because we're not that gullible.

And, over all, we have a good grip on 'things' - perhaps we don't understand all the details but we have a pretty good idea of what's really going on in the world. We're not idiots after all. And from within 'us' there is that extra-special gang, the 'super-informed'. Us. People who read quality newspapers, the occasional political journal and who watch Question Time. We really, really don't fall for this stuff and to suggest otherwise is patently absurd.

When will we wake up to the fact that this is part of the trap? Making us feel like we know better than to fall for this stuff is one of the important ways to make us fall for it. If you want someone to buy a sophisticated product you have to make them feel sophisticated. And since we're now dealing with an age in which so much of the media messages are about co-opting us for fairly

complex political positions [deference is very much out of fashion] then we need to feel like we're on the 'inside'. But we're not, none of us. The 'inside' is very small indeed and if you're reading this, are not in Government or very rich or (with a small number of exceptions) living in Scotland) then you're not. The sooner we wake up to this the better the position we will be in.

None of this is new. Marx took a strong interest in it - false consciousness, opium of the people. Gramsci expanded it, explored further its underpinning role. Others with less overt political agendas like Foucault and Derrida understood the same process as an analytical tool to help understand texts. And there are entire university courses dedicated to marketing and influencing. The literature is extensive and the subject very well understood. So why is it that we believe ourselves to be immune? Why is it that our default position is that we understand what we are doing and why we are doing it (or what we believe or feel and why we believe or feel it)? We know how easy it is to influence people through means such as subliminal programming and we know it happens all the time. We know that the advertising industry works because it demonstrably does, over and over again. We know that every political or military campaign waged by the power elites is accompanied by a carefully devised propaganda campaign which is put together by people who have dedicated their whole lives to manipulating people and are where they are because they have managed to do it. We know that we are broadly as helpless against the power of planned ideological influence as we are against a well-armed police force. So why don't we believe it?

There isn't space here to run over all the

SCOTLAND HAS TAKEN THE LEAD IN TRANSFERRING FREIGHT TO RAIL

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CLEANER TRANSPORT FOR A BRIGHTER COUNTRY



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material which would reinforce this argument and there are many sources. But let me give you a couple just to help explain why it is that we need to take this issue more seriously, both as a democratic state and as individual radicals inclined to challenge power structures. My personal favourite is the success the Bush administration had in converting a vast majority of people who knew something which was accurate and true into a clear majority of people who 'knew' precisely the opposite. Within 18 months, polling showed that from over 80 per cent of Americans knowing there was no Iraqi involvement in the September 11 attacks, 60 per cent ended up believing that there were. That is fairly remarkable, but when you realise that in those 18 months no-one from the Bush administration ever said that there actually was Iraqi involvement it becomes even more surprising. In fact, all that they did was to say the word 'Iraq' or 'Sadam' and 'terrorism' in the same sentence as and reference to '9/11'. For example 'we have to invade Iraq because it is a training ground for people who could launch another 9/11' or "'9/11 changed this nation and that is why we cannot sit by and allow Iraq to gain weapons of mass destruction'. This is classic subliminal manipulation, but it did not take place in a closed, dark cinema where people's attention is focussed on the message (the usual sort of set-up for subliminal manipulation). It was simply repeated over and over until the effect took place.

The risk that we face on the left is the patronising view that this is something to do with American's being 'dumb'. It is true that there are a set of incredibly strong ideological and linguistic constructions in the US which tend to make people susceptible to this kind of influence (there is usually a correlation between the number of flags you see in everyday life and the leeway individuals have to think their own thoughts). But it is patronising and bluntly blind to take this as an explanation. If those of us in 'free thinking' Europe are so emancipated from the power of influence and indoctrination, why is it that we have an entire continent of governments which have barely a policy difference between them? The default reaction of many in the political-intellectual 'class' is to assume that this is a result of 'others'. But this is where it is time for us to be very much harder on ourselves than we have so far been. I usually use a test to see how independent our thinking really is, and that is to assess the recreational and cultural consumption of an individual (and that usually means me). If I'm so well informed, why does my CD collection look quite as like the next person's? Why am I annoyed that they have seen all five seasons of the Wire as well? I'm typing this on a MacBook Pro which means I have paid three times as much for additional computing power and I am using a fraction of it. But it looks good. I have (I hope) largely managed to avoid falling into the big public policy narrative traps (or more accurately, I have tried hard to get back out of them) but that does not mean that I am not every bit as embedded in the structure of neoliberal capitalism as anyone else. The way I live, eat, travel consume, spend my recreation, talk, joke - all of these things are things I do from within a deeply-rooted ideology which is

the thread from which is woven the fabric of neoliberalism. My choices are not my choices, they are my selections from a series of choices which have been decided for me and I have chosen to accept them.

Let us be clear on the size and nature of the problem. There are a series of interlocking 'industries' which create and reinforce the social structures which have resulted in this terrible mess in which we find ourselves. We are entirely surrounded by advertising with virtually no escape. It all - every bit of it - has a political message and that is that it is good to consume. The main message is 'consume me', but it all assumes that increasing consumption is the goal. So does the media. In this we need to stop focussing only on the Sun and the Daily Mail. The function of celebrity gossip magazines is the same as Fox News - to normalise a set of assumptions and desires without which neoliberal capitalism is impossible. The education system goes further in that direction every day - this is written in a week



when there was very little contrary said to Peter Mandleson's assertion that businessmen should be writing university coursework because, after all, education is about preparing us for work, right? And do we really know why we are in Afghanistan? Setting aside immediately the suggestion that it is anything to do with Al Qaeda on the streets of London. I'm sure more of us could take a stab at the geopolitical implications of the Caucus region and the commercial imperative of oil and gas trade routes, but could we really sustain the detail of the argument under cross-examination? But are you confident that, in five minutes in the pub you could persuade someone who is open-minded that there is a direct link between the advert for soap powder you just saw and improvised explosive devices in a desert country miles away? It is the blatant conspiracy that no-one will really believe.

And there is no simple escape from all of this, but there are ways out if we work at them and are patient. All ideologies topple over eventually and while capitalism may not really be at risk in the near future, neoliberal capitalism certainly is. If we can be clearer about both the role of the messages around us and our own individual complicity then we may be able to chart a better direction. Why do we need advertising? How about a law ensuring the separation of education and private commercial interest (at least at primary and secondary school)? What is the reason that we accept monopoly ownership of print media - or private ownership at all? And when we accepted a separation between legislators and the judiciary, did we really mean that politicians would never ever be held to account for war crimes or corporate corruptions (such as signing overpriced PFI contracts)? All of these things would start to pull at the threads which hold the whole thing together.

But we need to start closer to home and challenge many of our own assumptions as well. Until we are honest about how we ourselves think, we will not be in a position to change how others think. ■

Robin McAlpine is Editor of the Scottish Left Review and author of No Idea - Control, Liberation and the Social Imagination

fragments of truth

Mark Hirst argues that Lockerbie lies are vital to maintain the integrity of Scottish legal system - and shows that lies are indeed being told

Earlier this year I met with the man convicted of the worst terrorist atrocity in British history. Now back in Libya to await a verdict from a 'higher court', terminally ill Abdelbaset al Megrahi steadfastly maintains his innocence in the murder of 270 people over Lockerbie in December 1988. Many professionals involved in the case including US intelligence officers, legal experts and police investigators also share his view, in spite of the concerted propaganda efforts by vested interests in the Crown Office, FBI and US Justice and State Departments. Yet for reasons still to be fully explained by Megrahi, his Defence or the Scottish Government, in August this year he dropped

his second appeal and a week later Scottish Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill released him on compassionate grounds.

That decision resulted in a hysterical reaction from representatives of some of the US relatives and

somewhat half-hearted condemnatory slogans from the Obama led US Government.

Megrahi was not required to drop his appeal in order to qualify for compassionate release. He subsequently claimed in a newspaper interview after his return to Libya that no pressure was placed on him to do so. So why did he? When I, along with MSP Christine Grahame, met with him his focus had been very much on the detail of the case and the new evidence that would be led during his second appeal. But he made it clear that his priorities had changed since discovering he was terminally ill last year. His over-riding objective was to return to Libya and to see his family before he died. He understood fully why some, mostly UK victim's relatives, were keen to see the appeal continue, but told us it would not take them any closer to the truth and who was ultimately responsible for the deaths of their relatives.

"At this stage, at any stage of the appeal they will not say 'you are not guilty', they will say this case is quashed and you are free to go" Megrahi told us during a visit to Greenock Prison in July, before adding, "So we will not reach the truth. This is an appeal, this is not a retrial." Megrahi literally was running out of time and was deeply concerned that he would, as he put it very directly, return to Libya in a wooden box in the hold of a cargo plane. I believe he was genuinely supportive of the need of relatives of victims to get to the 'truth', but those efforts were not going to bring him any closer to his family in Libya before he died. His faith in Scottish justice and the legal process he had been subjected to was understandably low. "If they have a brave judge who looks and says 'good or bad', 'yes or no', but I doubt that the chair of the judges, who chairs all the other judges in Scotland, will turn around and say that all the other judges [at

the trial and the first appeal] before got it wrong." Megrahi said, before adding, "They will want to show, to keep the integrity of the system, that they don't care if they have to keep an innocent man in prison to do that."

The integrity in the Scottish legal system, whether it deserves it or not, is right at the heart of this issue, because that is what is at stake if the complete truth behind this case emerges and that is why very prominent vested interests are even now working hard to close the case down. The latest spurious police investigation being just one example that will ensure no independent inquiry takes place any time soon. In a number of

statements and official correspondence from the Scottish Government the Justice Secretary made it clear that he had considered both applications (The Prisoner Transfer Agreement, the PTA, and separately the Compassionate Release Application) "in parallel" and that no decision on the Prisoner Transfer Application could be made whilst Megrahi's second appeal was ongoing. That phrase "in parallel" is significant and was overlooked by the popular media, because if determination of the outcome of Megrahi's compassionate release application took

into account his "parallel" Prisoner Transfer Application then it amounts to a serious error in law. Integrity could only be maintained by ensuring the conviction remained in place.

The message to Megrahi, whether made explicitly or not, appears to have persuaded him to drop his 18-year fight to clear his name. That view was confirmed when his defence counsel Maggie Scott QC addressed the High Court in August to confirm Megrahi was indeed dropping his appeal. Scott stated that her client believed that this action would "assist in the early determination of those applications". Applications, plural. The link was made explicitly. Ultimately Megrahi was led to believe by vested interests in our own legal establishment that his only chance of returning home was by dropping his second appeal and to leave his family name forever associated with the bombing of Pan Am 103. That outcome is a scandal that will haunt the Scottish legal system in particular, for decades to come.

So was there a conspiracy? Perhaps, but there certainly has been a cover-up which is very much ongoing. A cover-up of the weakness of the evidence, the weakness of the criminal investigation and a cover-up of the shameful conclusions reached by three Scottish judges at the trial. Lastly there has been a cover-up of the geopolitical strategic interests that the West, in particular the US, had in the Middle East at the time of the bombing, to ensure that the real perpetrators were not 'put in the frame'. It is clear from reading Richard Marquise's book on this case that investigators, including himself in his role as the senior FBI investigator, came under huge pressure from the Crown Office to secure an indictment within a very limited timescale. The evidence they had was very limited and almost entirely circumstantial in nature. It relied on statements from individuals who were actively seeking financial reward. It

relied on scientific identifications by FBI officers who were not academically qualified and whose professional reputations were later tarnished by revelations they had tampered with forensic reports in other criminal cases.

Investigators desperately needed to establish some kind of a narrative for this horrendous crime and link it to the suspects they had. Despite explicit instructions from the Lord Advocate not to rely on evidence from sources who were or had been offered financial inducements, intelligence obtained from a Libyan defector, Majid Giaka, by US intelligence flagged up the names of two Libyan suspects, Abdelbaset al-Megrahi and Lamin Khalifah Fhimah. At the subsequent trial it emerged Giaka had actively sought and secured significant US cash in return for his information and was later described by the judges as an utterly unreliable witness who lacked credibility. Recently it has also emerged that Tony Gauci, the Maltese shop keeper who it was claimed had identified Megrahi as the man who purchased the clothes which were packed with the bomb, received millions of dollars, again from the US Government, in return for his evidence.

Earlier this year Dutch filmmaker Gideon Levy completed an award-winning documentary, still to be shown in the UK, that proves that the then-Lord Advocate, Lord Fraser of Carmyle was unaware that the crucial fragment used to link Libya to the attack went to the United States FBI lab for examination. It now transpires it also went to West Germany, although despite recent Crown Office claims that movement was not explicitly made during the trial. Levy's film includes interviews with the chief prosecutor in the case, Lord Fraser, the FBI's Senior Investigating Officer Richard Marquise and Robert Baer who for 30 years worked in the Middle East Directorate of the CIA and was a senior US intelligence operative. What emerges during the course of Levy's film is the staggering revelation that this crucial evidence was not properly secured by Scottish police and should never have gone to the US. The importance of this piece of evidence cannot be understated. Marquise states that without the fragment, known as PT-35, there would have been no indictment, let alone conviction of Megrahi.

Lord Fraser, who brought the original indictments against Megrahi is then asked if he was aware that PT-35 had ever been to the US. "Not to my knowledge... I would not have permitted this as it was important evidence that could have been lost in transit, or tampered with or lost," He is then shown the interview with Marquise, who confirms the fragment did go to the US before the trial. Fraser responds; "Well this is all news to me". Later in the film Levy challenges Marquise to clarify whether PT-35 was taken to the US without the knowledge of the Lord Advocate. Standing next to him is retired Detective Chief Superintendent Stuart Henderson, the senior Scottish investigating officer in the case. Marquise initially seems confused over whether PT-35 was taken to Washington, contradicting his earlier on-camera interview, before Henderson interrupts and states categorically that the fragment was never in the US. "It was too important to be waved around", Henderson states. "It was never in the US, it was never out of Scottish control. They [The FBI] came to the UK to see it, but it was never in the US." After filming Marquise emailed Levy to "clarify" and confirm that PT-35 was indeed in the US and apologised for the earlier confusion. It is clear that if Marquise did not understand the significance of PT-35's foreign movements then Stuart Henderson clearly did.

What has not yet been made public, until now, is that Stuart Henderson states in his precognition statement that he gave to the Crown, ahead of Megrahi's second appeal, that the fragment, PT-35 definitely did go to the US. Henderson states that on the 22nd of June 1990 he travelled to the US with the fragment accompanied by Chief Inspector McLean, DI Williamson and Alan Feraday of RARDE, the forensic explosives laboratory in Kent. According to Henderson's statement to the Crown they met with Metropolitan Field Officers of the FBI and Thomas Thurman, the FBI official who, it is claimed later 'identified' the origin of the fragment. Thurman has a degree in political science and has no relevant formal qualifications in electronics or any other scientific field.

I have also seen one of the crucial productions that was to be led during Megrahi's second appeal which is the official log that accompanied PT-35 and is meant to record each movement of the evidence in order to protect the evidential chain. At each point it is signed for by the relevant police officer. This is an extremely important process and is meant to ensure the chain of evidence is not broken. There is no entry in this log recording that PT-35 ever went to the US, at any point. That has to cast serious doubts over its integrity in light of Henderson's precognition statement and the confirmation from the FBI's Dick Marquise that the fragment was in the US prior to the trial.

Ian Ferguson, the award winning investigative journalist and author "Cover-up of convenience: The hidden scandal of Lockerbie", concludes: "This could bring the Scottish judicial system and the FBI into fucking complete disrepute, and frankly they would not want this linen to be washed in public. "Few of us who have looked closely at this case could disagree with that. ■

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lessons for now

Bob Thomson looks at the legacy of the late Bill Spiers

Bill Spiers, former General Secretary of the STUC, died in September at the early age of 57. Many tributes from far and near have been paid to an outstanding personality and a fine human being. I knew Bill as a colleague and friend for some thirty years, working with him on the Scottish Executive of the Labour Party and on the General Council of the STUC. This article is not an obituary; there have been plenty of those. It is an examination of his beliefs and legacy and the lessons they teach us on how to deal with the issues confronting ordinary working people today.

Bill was a pragmatic socialist, never narrow or sectarian, suspicious of markets, pro home rule, an aggressive internationalist, a leading advocate for Palestine and against apartheid in South Africa. He was all these things and a key player during the Thatcher years, and had to deal with the continuation of the same neo-liberal economic policies of New Labour. With the bank-induced international recession, working people throughout the world are facing unemployment and cuts in wages, pensions and vital public services. At the same time there is no willingness by most of the main political parties to make any changes to the international financial structures and regulations, which have caused this turmoil. Here in Britain there is a strong likelihood of a Tory government, even more big business-friendly than New Labour.

Bill was a passionate believer in home rule for Scotland, a committed devolutionist. He believed the centralist model of the UK was a hangover from Britain's imperialist past. He argued for self-determination as a human right, codified in international law in which sovereignty was invested in the people. This was exemplified in the Claim of Rights for Scotland drawn up by the Scottish Constitutional Convention, in which he played an important role: "We, gathered as the Scottish Constitutional Convention, do hereby acknowledge the sovereign right of the Scottish people to determine the form of government best suited to their needs, and do hereby declare and pledge that in all our actions and deliberations their interests shall be paramount". Prior to the setting up of the Convention Bill had been active in Scottish Labour Action, a group within the Scottish Labour Party set up in the late 1980s to campaign for a devolved Assembly/Parliament. This included many now prominent Labour activists including Jack McConnell and Susan Deacon. It has to be remembered in the 1970s and 1980s that many in the Labour Party strongly opposed devolution, many usually silently still do and have used wrecking tactics and opposed the use of existing powers far less extended powers for the Scottish Parliament. This has often been for selfish reasons, wanting to be big fish in the bigger pond of London. This belief in the sovereignty of the people was not academic. In the late 1980s, the Tories introduced the highly regressive single flat rate poll tax using Scotland as a guinea pig. Nicholas Ridley, the Environment Minister, said, "why should a duke pay more than a dustman - only because they have been subject to socialist ideas for the last 50 years that people thinks that this is fair". Ridley was, surprise surprise, the son of a peer. The Tories had lost heavily

in Scotland at the 1987 General Election, and Bill argued that the people of Scotland had no moral obligation to pay this unfair tax. This call for non-payment from the Deputy General Secretary of the STUC and former Chairman of the Scottish Labour Parliament caused a stir amongst the establishment. Neil Kinnock called non-payers "toy town revolutionaries". However the poll tax eventually brought down Thatcher. Kinnock and his wife ended up in the House of Lords after both had lucrative careers in Europe - there is a moral here or perhaps a lack of them.

When the Tories, losing even more seats in Scotland, won the 1992 General Election, Bill was at the forefront of Scotland United, forming a broad front calling for direct action. During these Thatcher years the STUC along with civic society and the churches were at the vanguard of resisting its excesses and campaigning for change. This required forging broad alliances, being pluralist and non-sectarian. There were not just attributes to Bill but part of his beliefs. Devolution was not just for government. We were both past chairmen of the Scottish Labour Party. Together with others, including Jack McConnell, we argued that Labour Party structures and policies must also be devolved where appropriate. These changes while receiving lip service were never carried through.

It was as a committed internationalist that Bill was a true radical. From student days he had opposed the apartheid regime in South Africa and supported the boycott and other campaigns. At the STUC he organised financial, educational and organisational support for South African trade unions and delegations for COSATU and individual trade unions were regular visitors to annual congress. He took great satisfaction and pride at being invited to the annual Burns Suppers at South Africa House in London outside which he had often demonstrated in the past. Bill's support for a Palestinian homeland was long and consistent. He argued and campaigned for their cause when it was highly unpopular and the PLO were seen as a terrorist organisation and anyone supporting them vilified by the establishment and the media. He regularly took STUC delegations to the refugee camps in Gaza and met Yasser Arafat on a number of occasions. Ever the trade union conciliator, he ensured that delegations from both the Palestinian trade unions and HISTRADUT, the Israeli trade union federation, were invited to congress and facilitated discussions between them. With the election of a Labour government in 1997, the prospects for Palestine seemed better. I remember with pleasure dinner in a Lebanese restaurant in Brighton during the Labour Party Conference, attended by Yusuf Allan, who had been the PLO representative in Britain and a regular visitor at Congresses. He had just been appointed Palestinian Ambassador to Dublin and Bill took great delight and some mischief in calling him "Your Excellency". The other side of the coin was the smears and misrepresentation from the almost entirely pro-Israeli media. George Galloway told the story of a Labour MP contacting Bill to say that a Daily Telegraph journalist who had told him that Bill and George owned the Lee Jeans Factory in Greenock from

which they were financing the PLO campaign had interviewed him. Also they were both lovers with a love nest in St John's Wood, London - as George said, the Telegraph were going for broke on this story. The truth was that there had been a lengthy occupation of the factory by the mainly women workers and that George as vice-Chairman of the Scottish Labour Party and Bill as an STUC official were regular attendees in those capacities to support the workers. The love nest was a chemist shop being used to gather medical supplies for Palestine. Nearer home Bill supported a united Ireland. He regularly spoke at meetings for the Connolly Association, an Irish socialist campaign group and always made the point that the Irish Congress of Trade Unions covered the whole of Ireland.

In this recession banks are being bled out with our money and no corresponding control or regulation. Unemployment is climbing and will for at least the next couple of years, real wages reduced, public services cut and 2.3 million children living in poverty. People are starving in the third world and we are waging unwinnable wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. A general election next year offers little choice between the parties. What can we learn from Bill's legacy? Central to improving world peace and reducing the threat of terrorism is the establishment of a viable Palestinian State. Muslims not just in the Middle East but also throughout the world have rightly been incensed by the unfair treatment of the Palestinians and the favourable treatment of Israel by the USA and Britain. This despite Israel being in defiance of umpteen United Nations Resolutions for more than 40 years. This has motivated Muslims including some in Britain to join terrorist organisations. Had the Palestinian issue been resolved there is a strong likelihood that 9/11 and the invasions of Iraq, Afghanistan and the London bombings would not have taken place. Gordon Brown's assertion that we are in Afghanistan to prevent terrorism being exported to Britain is patently wrong. It is Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan, which is fuelling homegrown terrorism. Israel's continued settlement building on occupied land is a provocation against international law, the United Nations and world opinion. The Israeli tail is wagging the USA dog with Britain as the poodle. If our political parties are not prepared to act then a campaign should be mounted to boycott Israeli goods, businesses, sport, and educational and cultural links similar to the anti-apartheid campaign against South Africa. Of course we will get the same arguments that were put up against that campaign but it motivated World opinion and forced governments to take action.

On the domestic front left parties and groups including the left in the Labour Party must, if they have to have any credibility with ordinary voters, try and unite on a platform of common basic policies. I would suggest that the People's Charter is such a set of policy goals. This could set an agenda for action whichever party wins the election. It has six basic policies that most progressive parties, groups and individuals can support - A fair economy, more and better jobs, decent homes for all, protect and improve our public services, fairness and justice and build and secure a sustainable future for all (see www.thepeoplescharter.com). The STUC, if it is to retain its pre-eminent position in Scotland, must reaffirm its pluralist non-party position. In 2007 just before the Scottish Parliament elections the Congress passed a controversial motion with many abstentions calling on trade unionists to vote Labour. Likewise this year Congress narrowly voted against supporting the People's Charter even though its policies are those of all the affiliated unions - the reason was that

its modest programme might embarrass New Labour. These decisions were a mistake. Most trade unions are not affiliated to the Labour Party and such partisanship could threaten their involvement in Congress. Of course the STUC should support Labour when it calls for more apprenticeships or the SNP's social policies and opposition to PFI and privatisation but on an issue by issue basis.

The last time I was with Bill was at our local Labour Party meeting. Labour is in the last chance saloon. To regain its core vote it must reaffirm itself as a democratic socialist party (still in Clause 4) or face continuing decline. Here in Scotland it must shake off the shackles of Westminster and be truly devolved on home affairs. In Wales the Welsh Labour Party put 'clear red water' with London on issues such as PFI, privatisation and abolition of prescription charges and has become stronger as a result. In Scotland because the big guns Brown, Darling, Reid etc are based here any radical initiatives were stifled so as not to show up their reactionary policies in England. Most of the unique policy initiatives in the eight years of the Lab/Lib coalition such as social care and student fees came from the Liberals. One of Bill's great successes in the Scottish Constitutional Convention was getting trade unions, mostly controlled from London, to agree to a more proportional voting system for the proposed parliament - the additional members system. Without such a commitment the Convention would have collapsed in disarray. In its 1997 Manifesto Labour promised to consider electoral reform and "democratisation" (sic) of the House of Lords. Twelve years on and Gordon Brown has made some vague statements on the same issues. At the 2005 General Election Labour won a comfortable majority with 4 million votes less than they got in 1997, their lowest vote since 1929 - the Tories could do the same next year. Five years ago the Electoral Commission conducted a survey on including an abstention vote on the ballot paper for citizens dissatisfied with the choice before them but wishing to register their vote and not wanting to spoil the ballot paper with 'none of the above'. This initiative received wide scale support but was killed off by the main political parties not wanting the embarrassment of abstentions coming first. Electoral reform and ensuring citizens feel their vote counts and that they not the politicians are in control will I am sure become a major issue after the General Election. All on the Left must unite to ensure that this happens. Space does not allow more on Bill's commitment to peace and Scottish CND, his involvement in the Make Poverty History Campaign, his support for the arts and the 7:84 Theatre Company in particular.

Then rouse, ye sons of Labour!
Strike hard while yet ye may,
Break down these superstitions
That block the workers' way.
Raise high the crimson banner
That all the world may see,
And work for retribution
And the days that are to be



Bob Thomson was Associate Scottish Secretary of UNISON and member of the General Council of the STUC

minimum isn't enough

The Scottish Living Wage Campaign has been in existence for nearly two years and is now beginning to have a real impact. In this article Peter Kelly looks at what has been achieved and how the campaign can continue to grow even in recession.

Times are tough for those of us fighting poverty and inequality. This seems like a statement of the blindingly obvious given the facts: unemployment stands at almost 2.5 million in the UK, homelessness is starting to creep up again, four million households live in fuel poverty and that is expected to increase dramatically over the next two years, the numbers facing serious problems because of debt is at crisis levels, public spending looks set to be slashed over the coming years and, to top it all, the benefits system is about to go through another round of reforms that will make access to social protection even more of a privilege than a basic right. Tough times indeed, particularly if you are unfortunate enough to find yourself out of work and needing support over the next couple of years.

So in the midst of the longest recession since the 1950s, what are the prospects for the coalition of anti-poverty campaigners, trade unions and faith groups that are behind the Scottish Living Wage Campaign? It's arguable that the conditions for building such a campaign have never been worse, but recent evidence would suggest that real progress can be made despite the economic context. What is more, the living wage campaigns that have developed all across the UK have the potential to build solidarity within working class communities and to ensure that social justice is not left off the political agenda until the economy recovers. For many campaigners, the living wage is not simply about getting some much-needed extra cash into the pockets of low paid workers, it is also about injecting some justice into one

of the most unequal societies in Europe.

Campaigning against low pay is, of course, not a new phenomenon. 'A fair days wage for a fair days work' has been a rallying call of the international trade union movement for over 100 years. It is largely due to the work of the trade unions that the problem of low pay in the UK is not even worse than it is at the moment. But campaigners against poverty and inequality have long recognised that collective bargaining will not improve the wages of those who are not covered, and that very often these have been the lowest paid workers. The establishment of the Low Pay Unit in London in the mid 1970s and the creation of a network of Low Pay Units, including the Scottish Low Pay Unit, was an acknowledgement that a different approach was required. In many ways the Scottish Living Wage Campaign builds on the tradition that the Low Pay Units' represented, bringing together a wide range of organisations, including trade unions, to make the case for more protection of the lowest paid and to see this as a crucial element in addressing poverty and wider economic inequalities. But living wage campaigns in the UK have also drawn inspiration for the United States, where the approach has differed in crucial ways.

Living wage campaigns in the US have utilised the long experience there of community organising. There are many different styles and approaches to community organising in the US but something that unites them all is that they attempt to bring together diverse communities to work for progressive

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social change. This can include faith-based organisations, trade unionists, community organisations, and, of course, low paid workers themselves. Campaigns across the US have forced city councils to introduce living wage ordinances that have required any firm receiving public money from the state to offer rates above the existing federal or state minimum wage. By building broad-based coalitions these campaigns have not only tried to improve incomes, but have also challenged the way that power is distributed and used.

Whether in the UK or in the US, there is a recognition in all living wage campaigns that the legal minimum wage is not sufficient to lift all workers out of poverty. Despite the introduction of the national minimum wage in the UK, it is estimated at around 20 per cent of workers are low paid, and prior to the start of this recession around half of poor children lived in a households where there was an adult in work. This is not to deny the importance of minimum wage legislation; it has boosted the pay of millions of workers in the UK, and has protected many from outright exploitation. Living wage campaigners would also support increases in the minimum wage and moves to ensure that it was properly enforced. But the combination of tax credits and a low minimum wage has not been enough to secure an adequate income for thousands of workers across the UK. In the context of the booming economy and increasing employment growth that was experienced from the mid 1990s until recently, it was easy for some policy-makers and politicians to believe that they had done all that was needed to 'make work pay'.

But organisations working with communities, whether they were faith groups, trade unions, voluntary organisations could see that many people were simply exchanging the hardship of the benefits system, for the difficulty of making ends meet in the world of deregulated flexible labour market. The experience for many people working in low paid employment is not simply that of poverty, but it is also the lack of dignity, respect and power that comes with a low paid job. Furthermore, tax credits have in many ways become an effective subsidy that allows big business' to pay just above the minimum wage, regardless of their ability to pay more.

Campaigners for living wages have recognised this experience and the campaigns that have developed in the UK, whilst all different, have sought to ensure that they not only deliver improved pay but also begin to afford low paid workers the dignity and respect they deserve. To date the most significant campaign for living wages has been that led by London Citizens, a coalition of grassroots organisations, faith groups, schools, trade unions, and others. By building a vibrant and active coalition they have scored some notable successes, including winning the living wage for cleaners in HSBC Bank and Barclays at Canary Wharf, securing a compact with the Olympic Games Authority to ensure that the 2012 Games pay the living wage, getting Ken Livingston to set up a Living Wage Unit within the Greater London Authority (GLA). Partly inspired by these successes, the Scottish Living Wage Campaign (SLWC) has been working together since the end of 2007. Much of the first year of activity was spent building the case for the living wage and carrying out the necessary task of establishing the level of the Scottish living wage. These were time consuming tasks, but necessary to establish credibility. Basing our calculations on the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Minimum Income Standard, we arrived at the figure of £7 an hour for 2009-10. There is no denying that this is a modest target for the living wage in Scotland; for a full time 35 hour job this would provide an annual salary of just over £12,700. But it should be remembered that this is still £2,000 more than would

be received on the minimum wage.

Now that the figure has been set, we have started to see real movement in the campaign for a living wage in Scotland. In April this year we made the first Scottish Living Wage Employer award. This was given to Glasgow City Council in recognition of the fact that they have decided to pay all their staff at least £7 an hour. This was an important step forward for the campaign, particularly as around 20 per cent of workers employed directly by the state are paid less than £7 an hour. Having the largest local authority commit to the living wage was also symbolic of the important role that the public sector can play in leading the way in tackling low pay. Glasgow has wholeheartedly adopted the idea of the living wage, going as far as to launch their own Glasgow Living Wage Employer award. This was launched in October and so far more than 110 organisations, many of them in the private sector, have been given the award. It will be important to see how this new Glasgow award is monitored and how it will apply to workers who are subcontracted by companies, particularly cleaning, security and catering staff. But there is little doubt that Glasgow's approach has put the issue of low pay in the public sector firmly on the agenda.

The role of the public sector in setting the standard in local economies will become increasingly important during the recession. It is important that more local authorities commit to the living wage as part of a programme of activity to protect the poorest during and after the current recession. This will be challenging given the state of public sector finances, and the cuts that we can expect to see for the coming period. The initial signs outside of Glasgow do not look entirely encouraging; both Edinburgh City Council and West Dunbartonshire Council have recently rejected the possibility of a living wage for their own employees. The Scottish Government has also been lukewarm about the possibility of ensuring that all NHS staff in Scotland are paid the living wage. A report due out at the end of 2009 should clarify the Scottish Government's approach to paying the living wage. The SLWC has also been in discussions with other public sector employers, and we are encouraged that despite the reservations of some in the public sector, others see the wider benefits of paying a decent wage to their staff. However, the living wage will not have its biggest impact in the public sector. It is the private sector where the real problem of low pay exists in Scotland; just under 70 per cent of workers in hotels and restaurants and around 60 per cent in retail and wholesale were paid less than £7 an hour in March 2009. The challenge for the SLWC is how to have a bigger impact on these sectors of the economy.

Central to making a bigger impact on the private sector will be the greater involvement of local community activist and local trade unionists in the campaign. Work is already underway in North Edinburgh to build up a local coalition of groups that can put pressure on the large retail employers in the area. The STUC's Scottish One Fund for All has made funds available to help local groups get organised to take action to support the living wage in their area. These are currently small steps, and more resources need to be found to ensure that the campaign can have the impact that is required. But there is little doubt about the need for this campaign, and the potential for it to bring together the kind of broad based coalition that is required to push for greater social and economic justice in these tough times. ■

To find out more about the Scottish Living Wage campaign visit: www.povertyalliance.org/scottishlivingwage

Peter Kelly is Director of the Poverty Alliance

the english postman

Tom Nairn discusses past, present and future of Anglo-British identity

'A mentally invisible man...Nobody ever notices postmen somehow', said Father Brown, '...yet they have passions like other men, and even carry large bags where a small corpse can be stowed quite easily.'

G.K Chesterton, 'The Invisible Man', in *The Annotated Innocence of Father Brown* (Oxford 1987, originally 1911)

The old postman's uniform is known as 'Britain', often prefixed by 'Great': archaic Victorian coat with red cuffs and collar, trousers and durable boots, complete with epaulettes, buttons, a splendid cap with the Crown, and naturally a capacious shoulder-bag sagging with packages from all round the globe. It used to be carried by lots of different men and women, including Australians (winter style), but the numbers are shrinking fast. Chesterton's point was of course that the uniform can eclipse the bearer, until he himself is hardly noticed:

Have you ever this - that people never answer what you say? They answer what you mean - or what they think you mean...All language is used like that; you never get a question answered literally, even when you get it answered truly.

His central figure, red-haired Scotsman John Angus, told 'four quite honest men' to look out for a man going into a house, and they reported seeing nobody - '...whom they could suspect of being your man'. However, someone did go into and emerge from the house (committing a murder en route): the 'invisible man' or postman.

The Great-Brit uniform used to be shared, as an imperial vestment wearable by archipelago minorities - Scots, Welshmen, Irishmen - as well as by colonies and representatives of the UK's 85per cent majority of Englishmen and women. In the 20th century the overseas possessions mostly departed, and the minorities have begun to resign from the burden, seeking their own roads to emancipation (which will eventually including their own postal services and stamps). But this leaves the abandoned majority with a most unusual configuration of passions, assumptions and interests - or (as is now routinely said) an unusual 'identity' and self-imagery. The central wearer of the old costume has worn it so long it can't imagine abandonment: nudity and disorientation might result - a nation lost rather than liberated.

In that sense the Royal Mail represents a world-view: a has-been with considerable if diminishing vitality - enough for more than mere survival. 'Royal' means 'larger than', transcending both the bearer and what he has done, and bestowing inclusion in a wider, even a universal, realm of social being. It still means meaning. In Central Europe, this vital dimension was once provided by the Hapsburg or Austro-Hungarian empire - the high road to world impact and significance, irresistible to politicians and intellectuals (whether they admired or deplored its results). That meaning-imperium collapsed after World War I, but certain structures both east and west of it survived, via metamorphosis. The Tsarist order mutated into Communism after 1917, and would survive in the redesigned uniform until 1989. The Anglo-British world system has lasted much longer, through many losses and traumas - so that something of it

has endured into the present. It has proved tougher and more adaptable than predecessors like the French and Hispanic states.

The explanation of such endurance lies in a unique bond between the English nation and its acquired external habitat of uniformed 'Britain' - a 'habitus' in Bourdieu's sense, acquired so early, and listing so many victories over three centuries, that it has come to feel simply natural to most inhabitants. In 1962 US statesman and advisor Dean Acheson said that Britain had 'lost an empire but not yet found a rôle' in post-imperial times. The implication was of course that the British state as it was - the veteran of industrialism, colonisation, and world wars - should find or invent such a stance and function, advised by local wise men like Acheson.

All theories and histories of nationalism stress the indispensable role of cross-class communication and literacy in forming nation-states. 'Communities' have to be 'imagined' in order to work; and the imagining requires a vehicle of intimacy, beyond kinship and village. But the greatest poet of early-modern times, William Shakespeare, happened to write in Elizabethan/Jacobean English. While from a linguistic-science angle 'English' may appear in lists alongside 'Slovak', 'Welsh', 'Urdu' and so on, in Chesterton's sense this counts as merely true, rather than meaningful. No derogation of other writers and languages is implied in pointing out that this is bigger than inheriting a means of communication and social solidarity. The French term for it is 'rayonnement', shining forth, the conversion of particularity into universal recognition or validity. Both they and the English led Europe in nation-building, because they had enough of it. A population inheriting a large enough dose of the drug alongside the pragmatics of cohesion, joint activity (etc.) will naturally resist retraction into 'itself' - , that is, the ordinary or standard-issue mechanics of nationality-development.

Liah Greenfeld has indicated England's place in the latter, in her analysis of *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (1992). It was ahead of the French after Queen Elizabeth - in fact, 'God's First-born'. France and then the others found themselves driven to meet the challenge by emulation - each community in turn forced to imagine post-mediaeval nationhood, necessarily in 'its own terms' as well as those imposed by the archipelago threat. However, the English 'model' also remained just that: what it was, rather than 'typical'. It reacted to the global success of its post-17th century impact, naturally, but at a deeper level essentially unlike its never-ending progeny.

At present, we find the archipelago fragmenting into something like the pre-Elizabethan condition, with fairly 'typical' nationalisms discovering themselves in Wales and Scotland, as previously in Ireland. But it is wrong to believe that England (or 'little England', as many contemptuously describe it) can or should follow that well-trodden path. Pursuing the metaphor farther: it built the path originally, and takes it for granted, but for that very reason is most unlikely to take it in the standard 19th-20thcentury sense.

This has always been disconcerting for nationalists of the archipelago periphery. These find themselves faced with an archaic (or at least, early-modern) stance, naturally somewhat

hostile to their antics but (after the Irish independence struggle) less inclined towards repression or assimilation. 'Devolution' was invented to solve the problem: limited regional self-rule to defuse rising discontent with the Westminster postman's decline. The latter has continued, if anything accelerating after 2000. But it must be remembered that 'decline' is nothing like defeat. The latter provoked new constitutional starts in Spain, France, Germany, Italy and the USSR. The staged retreat of Anglo-Britain, by contrast, brought a compensatory turning to pastness.

Non-Identity?

Identity is of course a collective metaphor; but metaphors are malleable, and re-usable (part of their point) and in this case they have awarded a strangely rural dimension to the past of the first industrial nation-state - as Greenfeld says, the principal parent of urban capitalism and commerce.

The story is best recounted by Krishan Kumar in his chapter on 'The Moment of Englishness' in the best book on the subject, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge U.P. 2003). This 'moment' was in the last third of the 19th century, when the British state found itself in need of what one might call internal reinforcement. Its economic foundation was moving away from industry towards international finance-capital; and it had to compete in a 'world of nations' - the nationality-politics provoked by its own earlier impact, and now generalized as the nation-state order. Strangely enough, it had to become more of a nation-state itself, with credentials less tied down to the primitive accumulation of capital and the industrial revolution. The dilemma was resolved by what one might call a second-stage imagined community: the rurality once marginalized by manufacturing returned as a confected 'soul' or source. The identity-change was brought about by popular romantic culture, broadcast via a new intelligentsia and the developing educational system. A partly fake 'civil society' was dreamed up to support an over-extended state.

Of course 'Englishness' was indispensable to that shift: the non-English periphery had no option but to follow the overwhelming majority- absurd as it seemed in Glasgow, Belfast and Cardiff. Here, the culture factor - literature, and now to a noticeable extent music as well - was important. Its resources enabled the mutation, and thus saved the 'bigger than' identification mode imperialism and finance-capital required. So the Westminster 'postman' could carry on his daily rounds, into the age of world wars. The minority nationalities stayed within his reinforced and more capacious bag, albeit less happily and amid mounting resentment. Unfortunately, Kumar's 'moment' is still with us

Surprising as such persistence seems, there is still another factor that helps explain it. We need to bring in something that figures prominently in academic international relations, and diplomatic histories, but comparatively rarely in culture theories. That is, the 'deep-structure' special relationship of Great Britain to the United States. Mentioned (and criticized) often enough in specific policy agendas, like the Cold War, and recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, it also deserves a broader framework.

Again, the end of Austria-Hungary may be an appropriate point of reference. Disoriented by the post-1918 disappearance of the huge imperium based on Vienna, Austrian politicians and intellectuals sought compensation by turning to closer alliance with the greater Germany of Wilhelmine times. Competition was replaced by collusion, even subordination: full of problems, yet

preferable to Central European ordinariness, semi-invisibility. Naturally enough, the episode has been occluded from contemporary view by its disastrous consequences: Imperial Germany turned into the Third Reich, and the budding special relationship of the 1920s became the Anschluss of 1937.

Honorary Americans?

In the same post-World War I era, Britain's equivalent was of course the relationship with the emergent Great Power over the Atlantic: a more enduring 'special relationship' cemented during World War II, which has endured right down to the present. When Gordon Brown at last became Prime Minister two years ago, his first important move was a visit to Washington D.C., where he declared to a joint Congress-Senate session that 'no power on earth' would ever come between the USA and Britain. He made manifest a degree of prostration hitherto unknown, in the quite long history of Anglo-American accords.

Sycophancy of that order goes far beyond diplomatic or even military cooperation. It's more like an identifying choice of 'civilization' - the 'American way', as ultimate goal of the shrinking British way (which Brown had already been labouring to rebuild for years). It was at the same time a refusal of any European goal, the other alternative avenue simultaneously being opened up via modes of E-U sponsored 'integration'. Like Tony Blair before him, Brown was reassuring the Washington public he intended to remain an 'honorary American', not an 'ex-American', or anything else. No doubt he also hoped that the new President Obama would notice, and eventually reciprocate in policy terms.

In truth, few in today's USA notice or care much about it: obedience is appreciated, but not confused with specialness or identity. No American feels Britons to be honorary Yankees, and most would deride the notion. The point here is not to mix up either Bush's or Obama's America with what became of inter-war Germany. However, there is a parallel: it is surely arguable that this deeper-level identification has borne the United Kingdom into inextricable association with a declining great power. Ironically, Brown's proffered slavishness was to a grander reiteration of Britain's own past fate. In a world of mounting great-power contestation, the master equivocator has both shackled his own country to the only contestant certain to be 're-dimensioned' and prevented (or at least discouraged) from contributing more strongly to the confederation of middle-powers likely to keep and augment its place in the new globalising balance: Europe.

While England might conceivably 'find a new role' there, the pathetic Anglo-British postman appears doomed to the tragicomic posture of treading water in the new delta of globalization - and inevitably, sinking under the weight of that sacred non-discardable uniform. The English nation's need for rediscovery and re-start as a polity isn't based on mere convenience to European Union, or obligation to the Scots and Welsh, or simply a wish to be normal. Much deeper currents are at work.

By definition, Greenfeld's primacy could never be restored: surrogates are futile, like contrived nostalgia and imagined specialness. And yet, the combination of factors mentioned - literary and musical culture, fading rayonnement, a willed externality meant to outlast empire, enough periphery quiescence - have been sufficient to preserve the limbo of Englishness, and bear it forward into the globalising times. None the less, there are now signs of the 'moment' ending

relatively quickly, in terms of the secular cadences that built it up, both historically and geographically.

Ostriches Forever?

Plenty of people would be happy for it not to end. In *The Politics of Englishness* (Manchester 2007), Arthur Aughey describes Englishness as an 'absorbative patria' favourable to interpenetration and inclusion, such that everyone in the U.K. is 'half English' as well, with most enjoying the fate. Why shouldn't this continue, unless '...politicians choose to make it impossible for such messiness to continue', especially nationalists from the periphery? Aughey winds up his plea with a statement indistinguishable from those of most old Tories, as well as Labour conservatives: 'The uncodified British constitution has been more resilient than its written counterparts, and its conventions often more robust than strict formalities, its monarchical gloss less significant than its democratic substance' (p.214). The author was driven to write the book by worry that the reappearance of the English national flag (the Cross of St George) at football internationals and similar events, instead of the composite 'Union Jack', might indicate an awakening of majority political nationalism. In areas like Northern Ireland this would be contentious (putting it mildly). But it's too soon to worry, he concludes, echoing Robert Hazell's introduction to *The English Question* (Manchester 2006): the problem 'is not an exam question which the English are required to answer...and it can remain unresolved for as long as the English want'. (quoted on p. 202 of Aughey, op.cit.).

Reviewing the same book in *Public Law* (Spring 2007), Vernon Bogdanor pointed out how 'Exhorted by polemicists both on the Right and the Left to become lions, (the English) prefer to remain ostriches, and when the polemicists insist on an answer, they simply refuse to acknowledge that there is a question'. But can ostrich indifference really be unaffected by what the other non-English peoples want? At the time of writing, the First Minister of the Scottish government has proposed holding a referendum on full independence for Scotland. The Welsh Assembly is planning a vote on fuller self-government for Wales in 2011. These votes will almost certainly take place under renewed Conservative government at Westminster, with little or no representation from the countries concerned. Whatever their result, they are certain to reinforce what one might call the referendal process and mentality among the minorities, and unlikely to be satisfied by minor or symbolic gestures. That process will be the reversal of the long-term one which fostered the singularity of 'bigger than', 'absorbative', 'indeterminacy', 'half-this' or that - and all their kindred. However strong inertia and past-hypnosis may seem, is it conceivable that they will simply endure forever?

English Empiricism?

This kind of speculation confines the argument to the imponderables of collective feeling and psyche. But there is in any case another dimension likely to obtrude, above all via Scotland. Aughey's admiration for resilience and conventions hinges upon the absence or unimportance of 'strict formalities'. He forgets that the whole Anglo-universe of informality is itself based upon a formal, international agreement between states: the Treaty of Union of 1707. The 'substance' he discerns as outlasting formal rhetoric would probably vanish rapidly after any such vote (if not before). It has always depended on other states accepting England as de facto Britain or the 'United Kingdom'.

The aim of the Scottish National Party is usually described as 'renegotiation' of the 1706-7 accord, a replacement of it (i.e. of the United Kingdom) by something other and better. Whatever that formula turns out to be ('confederation'? reciprocal recognition of statehoods? appeals to a grander international tribunal?) it will undoubtedly make it possible for all third parties to disown the existing set-up. Naturally, others would 'rally round'. But how many would be happy to declare suspension or hostility, towards a professed lackey of American power and NATO? One suspects, a growing number, for a growing variety of motives: the obverse of 'bigger than' was always exposure to a range of denunciations and ridicule. The conviction of inevitability attaching to an ex-great power, however pretentious and down on its present-day luck, has been insufficient to arrest relegation thus far. How would it fare after a successful separation, and the possibility of supporting new states in their demands for recognition and international membership?

Another implication of the argument suggests itself here: nothing less than outright separation is likely to make a difference. The Postman régime has sought to stave off fate via its Calman Commission (June 2009) recommending still more devolution: practically anything short of independence. Michael Russell responded for the Scottish Executive by saying: 'The best way to resolve the debate about improving Scotland's governance is the free and fair referendum that the Scottish Government propose for next year, when we will offer people the opportunity to choose independence and equality for Scotland.' And generally, the Calman last ditch gesture aroused more derision than argument about the supposed new choices. The demise of Aughey-Hazell Englishness can no longer be postponed by more devices of this kind. In which case, a different formula for an English polity must surely be sought, distinct from the ancient equivocations. And probably a Scottish vote - or simply determined persistence along Russell's indicated route - is the trigger likely to make it happen.

But once it does, I suspect that the genuinely native-English tradition of philosophical empiricism will re-emerge and quietly take over. The best guide to how this might come about is probably Patrick Hannan's *A Useful Fiction: Adventures in British Democracy* (Seren, 2009). He ends up reminding readers that England has already produced an ideal Postman-Anglo-nationalist in the form of John Enoch Powell - 'He was about as British as you could get and Enoch was wrong', is his conclusion (p.200). What is so plainly indicated by realities will not only impose itself, but (in a short time) be welcomed as necessity: facts of the matter that just have to be accepted, and made the best of.

Whatever the problems 'Englishness' poses, it would surely be surprising if they could not find answers, in an archipelago already remarkably reconfigured. Last century the question of Northern Ireland seemed insoluble by anything short of military victory by one side or the other. Today, the success and endurance of the Belfast Peace Agreement has come to be almost taken for granted. Another multi-cultural country looks like contributing to the new settlement, alongside reborn Scotland and Wales. As for post-postman England, the historic first of nationalism's world can't help being last in the transition to post-nationalism (or more exactly post-old-nationalism). And that also will be a challenge, and a kind of emancipation. ■

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Reviews

An Anarchist's Story: The Life of Ethel MacDonald

Chris Dolan, Birlinn 2009, 224 pages, £9.99, ISBN-13: 978-1841586854

When the BBC Film *An Anarchist's Story: The Life of Ethel Macdonald* was released in 2006 it came as a bolt from the blue, bringing to light two events, both greatly hidden from history. The first was the experience of the Spanish Revolution of 1936, the second the involvement of a hitherto obscure political activist in that revolution. In a reversal of the usual pattern, journalist Chris Dolan's book has now appeared based upon the research he and others undertook for the screenplay. Like the film, the book aims to revisit the Spanish Civil War from a different, dissident angle, that of the anarchists and others who hoped that the events in Spain were not merely the latest episode in the struggle for democracy against fascism but the opening shots in a world revolution. This bigger story is told through the biography of Ethel Macdonald, the Motherwell born anarchist who, briefly, achieved worldwide recognition as the English language voice of the Spanish Revolution.

At the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War Ethel Macdonald was a member of the United Socialist Movement (USM) in Glasgow, which like most organisations featuring 'united' in the title, was the product of a schism. The USM had emerged in the early 1930s following the defection of Guy Alfred Aldred from the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation (APCF). Aldred, one of inter-war Glasgow socialism's most colourful and controversial figures had briefly joined the Townhead branch of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) before establishing the USM, bringing with him the entire Townhead ILP. A former ILP youth organiser, Dolan claims "[Ethel] called herself a Marxist throughout her life" p.27 and this may indeed be true, though given the political milieu in which she worked it is more likely that she self-described as anarcho-marxian. Whilst the famous International Brigades were mobilised by the Communist Parties of each country and benefited from their size and resources, the non-International Brigade activists who made their way to Spain found the trip even more difficult. As Dolan puts it "The USM barely had the price of a single ticket to Carlisle" but when, following an invitation from the CNT, Spain's anarcho-syndicalist union, Ethel and fellow USM militant Jenny Patrick volunteered to represent the Scottish anarchist movement they didn't let the little detail of being broke stop them. Neither did the fact that neither could speak a word of Spanish!

Dolan manages to capture the heady atmosphere of revolutionary Barcelona which greeted Ethel in October 1936, a city whose industrial working class had deep-rooted anarchist traditions and which was seen as the urban stronghold of the two million member CNT and the libertarian movement. It was from Barcelona that Ethel sent her reports on the Spanish political situation to not only the revolutionary press but the *Bellshill Speaker* and the *Evening Times*. And it was from a Barcelona studio that she spoke to the world via short wave Barcelona Radio, station of the CNT. Dolan refers to Ethel's international

audience, which stretched to the United States, and offers extracts from her speeches. Her frustration with the lack of action on the part of the international working class in solidarity with their Spanish brothers and sisters comes across strongly. The high profile which her broadcasts attracted brought Ethel not only to the attention of the listening world but political enemies in Spain itself.

The May events in 1937 brought the tension between those who wanted to defend and extend workers power and those who wanted to call a halt to such developments in favour of prosecuting the war against the Nationalists. When the anarchist controlled Telephone Exchange in Barcelona was occupied by Republican government forces, a civil war within the civil war erupted. Although this ended in a military stalemate it signalled an era of repression for the anti-Stalinist Partido Obrero Unificado Marxista (POUM) and, rapidly, the anarchists. Dolan's chapters 'The May Days' and 'The Scots Scarlet Pimpernel' covers this period in some depth, a period in which Ethel would be imprisoned and instead of being a commentator on revolution she would be "...actively engaged in its defence." P153. For the reader not particularly versed in left history or the finer points of political theory *An Anarchist's Story* serves not only as an excellent introduction to the Spanish Civil War and Revolution but also exhibits a remarkably astute understanding of anarchism. Certainly someone new to anarchist thought will, in part thanks to the quotes from Noam Chomsky and Mike Gonzalez, come away with the realisation that the mainstream of anarchist thought and action has been based upon class analysis and class struggle organisation rather than abstract notions of individuality or acts of random violence.

That said, some of Dolan's assertions do need challenging. Describing Ethel's politics as "somewhere between anarchism and Trotskyism" p.89 (a somewhat uncomfortable place to be!) is plain wrong. More accurate would be somewhere between anarchism and the Marxist council communist tradition of Anton Pannekoek and Herman Gorter. Likewise, whilst lazily describing the POUM as Trotskyist has become almost universal, Dolan's assertion that the USM were "not classical Trotskyists" p.51 is even less accurate. Also, using a capital 'C' when referring to Communist Party politics would have helped to put Ethel's 'anti-communism' (i.e. anti-Stalinism) in the right perspective. That and a few other minor historical errors are, however, as nothing when compared to the overall quality of the writing which keeps the reader engaged as Dolan's obvious enthusiasm for this previously unjustly ignored anarchist's story comes across in every page. Anyone interested in Scottish socialist history, the Spanish Revolution, Glasgow politics in the inter-war years and particularly the interface between individuals and world-historical events will gain from this fascinating book. ■

Declan McCormick

web review

Henry McCubbin

Is there anybody there? Well, yes there is. It is heartening to find through SLR's internet activity that several thousand are visiting and reading articles from our site monthly. But it is also heartening to discover that the political and philosophical responses we support with regards to the crisis in capitalism, which we are all confronted with, are shared by others throughout the world. Could it be that the immunosuppressant that is new Labour, new Conservatism and the original variant neo-liberalism is no longer so virulently effective?

Who's into the sport of kicking capitalism whilst it is down? I would like to direct you to www.coldtype.net/Assets.09/pdfs/1009.Reader40.pdf. For instance William Blum tells how NATO pressurised Germany and Japan to drop their resistance to fighting in the war on Afghanistan. "NATO (aka the United States) can take satisfaction in the fact that the Germans have put their silly pacifism aside and acted like real men, trained military killers." Danny Schechter writes that the press is still ignoring the story of fraud and the economic decline still to come. The New York Times features a generally very good piece, "Buyout Firms profited as a Company's Debt Soared" by Julie Creswell that falls short in one important respect: it fails to call a prevalent and destructive practice of private equity firms by its proper name.... George Akerlof and Paul Romer called that activity looting in a famous 1993 paper and depicted it as criminal: 'Bankruptcy for profit will occur if poor accounting, lax regulation, or low penalties for abuse give owners an incentive to pay themselves more than their firms are worth and then default on their debt obligations....' These articles are accompanied by much more surgical political comment across the globe. On home turf we have the site www.european-services-strategy.org.uk, which gives us background and policy critiques of the privatisation of public utilities and essential services. Here you will find a table indicating a 12.5 per cent failure rate in PPP contracts. It also draws attention to Dexter Whitfield's new book **Global Auction of Public Assets: Public sector alternatives to the infrastructure market and Public Private Partnerships**.

Now here's a proposition to redistribute wealth. The rulers of the world (the bankers) have decreed that for them income should be decoupled from the quantity of labour applied. Take for example banker's bonuses and MP's expenses. This was proposed in the 1970's by the social ecologist André Gorz. He said then "A progressive reduction in working time to 1,000 hours or less per year gives completely new dimensions to disposable time. Non-working time is no longer necessarily time for the rest, recuperation, amusement and consumption; it no longer serves to compensate for the strain, constraints and frustrations of working time. Free time is no longer merely the always insufficient 'time left over' we have to make the most of while we can and which is never long enough for embarking on a project of any kind. These activities, taken as a whole, should not be viewed as an alternative economic sector which forms part of a 'dual economy'. These activities are characterised by an absence of economic rationality and have

no place in the economic sphere. The act of performing them is not the means to achieve an end, to achieve satisfaction. It produces that satisfaction itself; it is an end in itself. The time we devote, for example, to music, love, education, exchanging of ideas, to creative activities, to looking after the sick, is time for living, and cannot be bought or sold at any price. Extending this time for living and reducing the amount of time devoted to necessary tasks or work for economic ends has been one of humanity's constant aims." (To be found in full at www.antenna.nl/~waterman/gorz.html)

On August 15, 1971, Richard Nixon announced that the US dollar would no longer convert to gold, effectively ending the Bretton Woods system. Tobin suggested a new system for international currency stability, and proposed that such a system include an international charge on foreign-exchange transactions. A Tobin tax is the suggested tax on all trade of currency across borders. Named after the economist James Tobin, the tax is intended to put a penalty on short-term speculation in currencies. The original tax rate he proposed was one per cent which was subsequently lowered to between 0.1 and 0.25 per cent. The idea lay dormant for more than 20 years and was revived by the advent of the South East Asia economic crisis in the late 1990s. In 1997 Ignacio Ramonet, editor of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, renewed the debate around the Tobin tax with an editorial titled "Disarming the markets". Ramonet proposed to create an association for the introduction of this tax, which was named ATTAC (Association for the Taxation of financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens). The tax then became an issue of the global justice movement or alter-globalisation movement and a matter of discussion not only in academic institutions but even in streets and in parliaments in the UK, France, and around the world.

Adair Turner, chair of the United Kingdom Financial Services Authority, in August 2009 in an interview for *Prospect* magazine supported the idea of new global taxes on financial transactions, warning that a "swollen" financial sector paying excessive salaries has grown too big for society. Lord Turner's suggestion that a Tobin tax should be considered for financial transactions is on a par with bankers showing the way forward by decoupling the quantity of individual labour input from level of earnings. Now here's a twist that only someone with Gordon Brown's previous could add. Remember Gordon's moral compass was capable of directing him to hijack the "Make Poverty History" rally in Edinburgh, during the G8, as public support for Gordon Brown the no more boom or bust chancellor. But not to be outdone the same person, now Prime Minister, turns up at the G20 in St Andrews to steal the idea from those who designed it as a tax to eliminate third world poverty and present it as one to be used to hand back cash to the banks should they require future bailouts – surely charlatanism of the breathtaking variety. For more see www.stampoutpoverty.org/?lid=9889.

Kick Up The Tabloids

'FOREIGN MAN NOT DEAD YET' FURY

So he we are, three months after the Lockerbie bomber was released by the Scottish Government on compassionate grounds to return to Libya as he was suffering from terminal prostate cancer and had a life expectancy of less than three months. And guess what? Three months later, he's still alive. Personally, however, I do think the decision to release al-Megrahi on compassionate grounds was the correct one to take, just as I believe the life sentence he was handing by the court in The Hague was correct. It was the decision to house him in Greenock Prison which provided him with the legal loophole he needed. Few people would could argue against a life sentence, with a recommended minimum term of twenty-seven years, for the murder of 270 innocent people. However, to condemn anyone to life in Greenock, either inside or outside prison, is a violation of their most basic human rights, no matter how heinous their crime.

At this autumn's SNP conference, Alex Salmond not only backed up Kenny McAskill's decision but compared his Justice Secretary to Ghandi. A strange comparison, and also a somewhat disturbing one. The idea of Kenny McAskill squatting on the floor of the Scottish Parliament dressed only in a loin-cloth would doubtless cause his fellow MSP's sleepless nights at best. Furthermore, I saw Richard Attenborough's excellent film on the life of the Mahatma in the cinema. I can't recall there being a scene in which Ghandi was arrested for drunk-and-disorderly at Wembley Stadium.

Nonetheless, crime must be seen to be punished. Similarly, people should not be seen to benefit from corruption. How fitting it was, then, to see disgraced ex-Speaker Michael Martin being punished for his previous indiscretions by being given a life sentence to the House of Lords. No doubt his first action in the Lords was to fill in his expenses form.

Meanwhile, Sir Christopher Kelly has made a number of recommendations about MP's expenses. The most contentious amongst these is that MP's will no longer be able to employ their wives, or other family members. The smarter members will already have noticed the obvious loophole in this, namely that they can simply employ one another's wives. Or, alternatively, they can engage in the age-old parliamentary tradition of shagging their secretaries, which Kelly appears to condone through omitting to mention it.

It is, of course, not certain that the Government will act on Kelly's recommendations. He is, after all, merely advising them. Like Professor David Nutt who was sacked for issuing expert advice on drugs, which contradicted the government. It seems somewhat obtuse to appoint "experts", and then base

your policy on your previous ill-informed judgement. To then sack the "expert" when he points out that all expert knowledge contradicts the government's ill-informed policies strikes me as being the action of someone who was off-their-face at the time. Besides, if you are to appoint a guy called Nutt to be in charge of your drugs policy unit, you do have to expect some of his findings to be slightly off-the-wall. My favourite statement of Prof Nutt was that more people died show jumping than taking ecstasy. And it has to be pointed out, no-one who takes ecstasy has ever killed anyone but themselves as a result. Whereas, some chinless son of the shire in charge of a horse is a potentially lethal weapon. Whether or not this will lead to a fad for going clubbing on horseback, or for the county set to starting taking E is anyone's guess.

I thought I had taken too many drugs when I saw Nick Griffin on Question Time and found myself agreeing with him. Not, I hasten to add, on any of his policies or views on immigration. But in his claim that if he were alive today, Churchill would be in the BNP. Hard to argue against that, really. OK, Churchill may have won World War II but he was a nasty racist bigot.

Which leads us seamlessly onto swine, and thence to swine flu. The Scottish Government has also launched its Swine Flu vaccination programme. Unsurprisingly, Swine Flu Minister Nicola Sturgeon was present at the event and the papers duly recorded this. However, for weeks afterwards you couldn't open a paper or turn on the TV news without witnessing a smiling Nicola sitting next to some member of the public receiving their immunisation shot. This raises three important points. Firstly, surely as Deputy First Minister as well as Health Secretary, the woman surely has much more pressing business to attend to. Secondly, does she have so little faith in our health care professionals that she feels compelled to attend each vaccination in person. Thirdly, could this not dissuade the public from coming forward to get their jabs? Many people are not too keen on getting injections in the first place, but who would want to get a swine flu jab with Nicola Sturgeon and several camera crews looking on. ?

It could be, of course, that Nicola really is too busy to attend all these photo opportunities in person and instead sends her stand-in and lookalike, Jeanette Krankie. I think we should be told. ■

VLADIMIR McTAVISH's first book THE TOP 50 GREATEST SCOTS OF ALL TIME EVER! will be available in bookshops throughout Scotland from St Andrew's Day or online from Kenton Publishing



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