

Issue 9 March/April 2002

## Protest in Scotland

What does the new activism mean?

Amir Saeed on Muslim identity in Scotland  
Edwin Morgan's Scottish Left Review lecture

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# scottishleftreview

Issue 11 July/August 2002

A journal of the left in Scotland brought about since the formation of the Scottish Parliament in July 1999

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# comment

This is the second anniversary issue of the Scottish Left Review. We started the magazine two years ago to provide a space in which people on the left in Scotland could explore current issues and think new thoughts. That we have survived even this long is probably a testament to the need for such a space to exist. If there were any doubt, let us consider what people have written about in this issue.

The theme of the issue is protest in Scotland. Alex Bell writes an overview of this subject to introduce articles on the community-based protest of the campaign to save Govanhill Swimming Pool, the move into the mainstream of the anti-GM foods campaigns, and the resurgence of the anti-trident movement. The four writers who discuss this subject suggest many reasons that we are seeing a renaissance in protest. But what is certain is that these protests are not arising against the backdrop of widespread, informed and inclusive debate on the issues concerned. We read the tale of a City Council – an elected body which exists, at least in theory, to represent local people – which uses the bag of New Government tricks such as focus groups, ‘consultations’ and consultants not to assess and represent the views of the people affected but to control and manage them to ease the implementation of decisions already made. We are told about the use of government as a pseudo-consultant for the bio-tech industry to ensure that inconveniences such as local producer or consumer concerns do not stand in the way of big business’s profits. And we learn of the penalties faced by people for trying to abide by international law by preventing governments from breaking it.

Protest is about changing the decisions made by government, but it exists as much because of the failure of ‘space’ as because of the failure of government. The reason protest exists (apart from providing an outlet for the frustrations of angry concerned citizens) is because protest is newsworthy, and things which are newsworthy find space in the media. The media is virtually the only space in which most people learn about what is happening beyond the strictly local, and without the lobbying resources of the multinationals and the big interest groups, it is only the concerns of a mass of people with votes which is likely to change the mind of governments. It is a failure of space which means that the only way to explain to people that weapons of mass destruction like Trident are illegal and are in Scotland (and a big thanks to George W for finally bringing into mainstream language a proper description of what Trident is) is to see Tommy Sheridan being carried away by police after peaceful demonstration. The only

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way to get people to understand the potential implications of the planting of GM food is to break the law so you can get your arguments into the papers. Protest is, at least in part, a reaction to the failure of space.

We then have an article on the World Trade Organisation, an organisation which seems actively to seek obscurity to ensure that its workings do not become the subject of popular discussion. And well might it be concerned; if there was a widespread understanding of what it is and what it does, it would be significantly more difficult for it to pursue its economic imperialism unfettered. A mindset has been encouraged among the populations of the Western democracies that issues of this type are difficult (as opposed to 'fun', the new opium of the masses) and therefore to be avoided – particularly in the 'personal' time after the working day is finished. Crimes and scandals carried out nominally on our behalf are allowed to take place almost unchallenged because the space in which to debate them has been assiduously closed off. The space where we used to think has been colonised by adverts and trash-pop-culture and is now a space where we do nothing but consume.

There are then two articles in which different aspects of the 'war on terrorism' are considered. Perhaps we are now beginning to see space to ask these questions opening up in the mainstream – even the Daily Mail is expressing doubts about the purpose of instigating a war against Iraq. However, Tony Blair and George Bush are demonstrating another of the failures of space; where you can't stop the space appearing, just make sure that it is isolated from the spaces where decisions are made. The last few months have been an object lesson in how to isolate space you don't want to deal with. Firstly, refuse to even enter the arena ("No

decision has yet been taken and the time for debate is when those decisions are being taken"). Then, when the space is becoming too large to just ignore, use all the power at your disposal to distort it by using other spaces, through the use of some pretty pathetic black propaganda, the refusal to engage with the difficult questions, and the meaningless reduction of complex issues to fairytale moralising. One space is occupied by intelligent and informed commentators raising extremely important questions about the implications for maintaining an international legal system or the hope of preventing an entire part of the world from disintegrating. The other is occupied by Tony Blair saying "I know I am morally right, and that should be enough for you". On the day of writing, Blair has been telling us that it could have been London or Berlin which was attacked and not New York. Not one voice seems to have been allowed the space to say "no it couldn't – it was America which was attacked and for a very specific set of reasons".

And the final article is an extract from the lecture Edwin Morgan gave to the Scottish Left Review's lunchtime lectures during the Edinburgh Festival. A literate, intelligent, thought provoking and witty discussion of Scottish literature, Scottish culture and the fate of Scottish politics, it is essential to ensure that there is a space in which writing and thinking of this quality can exist.

We continue to be convinced that there is an ongoing need in Scotland to create as many spaces as is possible, squeezed in between the billboards and the soap operas, enabling people to engage with important issues which are far too prone to disappear. The Scottish Left Review is one such space, and it is now a firmly-established part of the Scottish political and cultural scene. Our readership is not big enough to claim any impact on the views of the population generally, and perhaps there is little evidence that the space we are providing for debate is influencing the shape of policy-making in Scotland. But at least it is enabling some of the questions which have to be asked if we are to overcome what has been called 'knowledgeable ignorance' – the choice not to know something when the means are easily at our disposal to know it.

We have spent the first two years trying to build up a body of good writing and to produce a magazine of quality and substance. We think we have largely achieved this, and we now need to expand our readership. If every reader of this magazine can get one other person to subscribe, it will ensure that there is a space for the left in Scotland to think, debate and discuss in public. ■

## Protest exists as much because of the failure of 'space' as because of the failure of government

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# democracy's forest fire

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## Alex Bell charts the resurgence of protest and argues that it remains an essential part of democracy

Don't you miss marching? Walking behind rain-soaked banners, shouting "out, out", signing various petitions and then retiring to a bar to wait for the revolution to start. By closing time the barricades had still to be erected, so you went home, disappointed that the world hadn't changed but buoyed by the craic of the protest.

It's vogue to say that people aren't interested in politics anymore, and apathy reigns, but this edition of the Scottish Left Review looks at the return of the protest as a political tool. Perhaps we should ask if in truth it ever went away? Its unclear why people think it did fade away. There seems to be a vague sense that the authoritarian politics of Thatcher and Blair diminished protest, or alternately the general apathy towards politicians seeped into local campaigning. I suspect neither is accurate.

What certainly changed is the motive for marching. Some of the key issues of the 1970s and early 1980s went away. I marched against American intervention in Latin America and then Grenada. That kind of overt sponsorship of right-wing regimes stopped, so the marches went too. I marched against racism, and apartheid in particular, frequently. The official policy of discrimination against non-whites in South Africa ended in 1991 with the release of Nelson Mandela and the reforms of De Klerk. Racism continued, but the evocative symbol went and with it the urgency. Protest against nuclear weapons was high profile in the 1980s, with Greenham Common woman challenging the Archers as a picture of a rural community. The collapse of the Soviet Union reduced the sense of immediate danger, and so this issue also lost its dynamism.

The last issue to get me out on the streets was constitutional change for Scotland. 25,000 of us hit the streets of Edinburgh in 1993. Four years later we were back, voting in the referendum which created Holyrood. So the badges plastered over protestors denim jackets from the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s - nuclear power, no thanks - simply faded.

The first possible cause for thinking protest died is that of Thatcherism and the centralization of power. This is symbolised in the miners' strike. After a year of dispute, its end is seen as a landmark of political change. It's taken to signal the moment when citizen lost out to state. Devastating as that strike was on many levels, it didn't kill protest. Six years later Margaret Thatcher's demise was driven by the citizen rebelling against the state. Her plan

to introduce a poll tax was so vigorously rejected through a can pay, won't pay campaign coupled to huge protest marches, that she had to go. Margaret Thatcher's demise coincided with the end of the cold war, and it appears we made a gear change in our response to politics then. The big ideological issues were gone, and we learnt to think local. Sure we still marched against the Gulf War, and for Scottish constitutional change, but increasingly our anger was about new things.

We protested at animals being transported live to slaughter over long distances. People built tree houses and underground bunkers to prevent road by-passes. Our green sensibility developed so animal rights, organic food and GM crops became protests focus. Despite these running throughout the 1990s, we associate that decade with a decline in political enthusiasm. We read falling voter turnout as general apathy, and in so doing make a mistake. Just because we got turned off by John Major's greyness and Tony Blair's self-righteousness, and just because the West lost one set of ideological issues and slowly found another, didn't mean we weren't still democrats.

Protest is democracy's version of a forest fire. It burns off the scrub that clogs the forest floor while leaving the big trees untouched. Far from being anti-democratic, it's essential to its health. Apathy towards party politics reflected a sense that the suits don't change anything - but we've always thought the citizen could at least try. One protestors badge from the 1960s hadn't faded after all. It read "if voting changed anything, they'd ban it". So we didn't rediscover protest so much as relearn its validity.

The classic critique of British protest is that it's the middle classes what get things done. Pushy professionals hold influence, while working class campaigns fail. This isn't borne out by the evidence. The tone of surprise that middle class ladies in Marks and Spencer cardigans were angry at animal transport or road building simply reflected how the mainstream had forgotten its political history. The suffragettes, Labour intellectuals and Alderminster anti-nuke marchers were all drawn from the chattering classes. The recent campaigns to save Peterhead jail from closure or swimming pools in the Borders from being shut shows that you don't need a qualification in one hand and Volvo keys in the other to get things done.

The irony is though that the universities, once hot beds of radicalism and reliable suppliers of bodies to fill out any

march, became less active over the last fifteen years. The twist is that this coincided with the expansion of third level education, so cherished by the party who once thrived on protest, Labour. Great to be the first in your family to get a degree, but all that debt ensures you are too preoccupied to get bolshy.

For the left, the emergence, or new attention given to protests, has an enjoyable sense of nostalgia. Burning GM crops echoes the bras, flags and banners burnt thirty years before. However protest isn't solely a left wing preserve. Britain came to a standstill last year because a few truckers decided to get angry about hikes in road fuel. They stopped driving the tankers from the refineries to the forecourts and the nation panicked.

This is greeted with horror by the left, and I heard of one trade unionist describing it as being like Pinochet's Chile. This double standard between 'good' protest and 'bad' is evident in the way we respond to the countryside alliance marches. Getting tens of thousands to march through London or Edinburgh is impressive by any standards, but we might mock the wealthy landowners for interrupting city dwellers lives. Such jibes merely mirror the accusations from the right about feckless lefties too busy protesting to get a job. In both cases either side think the protestors could be doing something more worthwhile, and only have the time

to march through some economic fluke. The question may seem abstract, but if the left could bring Britain to a halt in the name of anti-nuclear concern, for example, wouldn't it? Nor is there much difference in tactics. As animal rights people are slammed for direct action by the Telegraph, so the Guardian will lambast the truck drivers and farmers on motorway go-slows.

The most striking example though of aggressive protest is over abortions. Initiated in the United States, and now crossing the Atlantic through radicalised religious groups, banner waving picket lines seem to easily spill over in to personal threats and at its most alarming, death threats and murder. It appears that creative protest is more effective than direct action. The Faslane protestors have won attention and respect from a combination of clever use of the legal system, by winning a case concerning weapons of mass destruction, and benign base invasions. There is no sign that either left or right is more effective. The threat, and delivery in Scotland, of a ban on fox hunting

galvanised supporters and radicalised rural communities. There were marches, lobbies, spin and billboard ads, but to no avail north of the border.

Perhaps the relevant question, if protest never went away, is why we are more interested in it? Clearly it presents itself as a counter-weight to the idea of apathy, and as such challenges assumptions about our society. It also acts as antidote to the media presentation of politics. The media culture of talking heads and confected difference is mind-numbing. We yearn for passion and determination, which protests give us. Local campaigns are the bit of rough amid the missionary position politics of the main parties. And it seems to get things done. Simple objectives are

either realized or not. We like obvious and clear outcomes, in contrast to the diet of fudge the political system feeds us.

Yet our renewed interest in protest tells us something important. While we are busy campaigning for local issues, we realize that international campaigns, such as those against racism decades before, don't exist. You could interpret our flurry of protest as a sign that on the big ideological issues in the West, we are quite happy. I suspect this isn't true, but it is true that we no longer seem to think marching against world poverty for example is worthwhile. The global issues we have deferred to pressure groups and politicians, possibly with a sense of resignation that little will happen.

The second warning about protest is that it is, by nature, simple. Stopping a closure in your community might be victory for you, but may not contribute usefully to wider planning and policy issues. It may be that collectively all the protests do is contain a message for political parties. Not the obvious one that all politics is local, but that as citizens we yearn for the passion and determination mustered in communities to be reflected in our national leadership. But when was the last time you saw Tony or Jack on a march? ■

*Alex Bell is a freelance journalist*

# far more than a swimming pool

## Andrew Johnston describes how a community was galvanised into protest

On July 14th 1914 Daniel Macaulay Stevenson, Lord Provost of Glasgow, opened the Calder Street baths he designed. It was a baths and a bathing house for the health, recreation and fitness of the people where hot water came from kettles and bathrooms were dreams. On August 7th, 2001, 87 years and 28 days later, after protesters had occupied these same baths for 147 days, Lord Provost Alex Mosson and his Council leader Charlie Gordon, in spite of urgent appeals to do otherwise, stood mutely by as 250 police, aided by helicopters and horses, stormed Calder Street just to ensure their Council had its pool back. Macaulay's philanthropy was trampled in the process. This is a sorry story about far more than a swimming pool.

When half a dozen intrepid swimmers slipped quietly into Macaulay's pool around 8pm on March 18th 2001 set on an occupational mission in his name and to protest against Glasgow City Council's outrageous and secretive act of closure, we little realised the community energy, force and rage we were tapping into. Armed with locks and chains and an idea that early arrest was inevitable we had no idea where the occupation might lead or even if it would succeed. Nor did we realise that the 'saveourpool' campaign would become one of the most sustained and imaginative acts of social resistance seen in Scotland for many years. Never could we have contemplated the moral support and regular donations of food from local homes and businesses. As people realised what we had done and were doing, enthusiasm became palpable.

Govanhill Pool indelibly marks a Scottish sense of place, history and struggle that local Labour Councillors and their MSPs deny to their shame. A sense of struggle when in 1914 and 1915 the women of Glasgow in places like Govanhill, Clydebank and Paisley were mustering to the call of John Maclean to put a stop to the local law that allowed 10,000 annual evictions. It was local women who called demonstrations and rent strikes, and it was they who attacked bailiffs and rent collectors, pelting them with flour and rubbish. When nearly 1000 people gathered at the Pool on August 7th to oppose the ending of the occupation, the songs commemorating Maclean reverberated round Govanhill. Lord Provost Alex Mosson is the current incumbent. Sledgehammering through windows in front of aghast community members, (many of whom were simply out shopping, walking their dogs and taking the evening air but found themselves caught up in a police brutalising scenario never before witnessed on these quiet streets), his privatised agents reached new heights of symbolic and literal violence on his Council's behalf that would have had Macaulay Stevenson turning in his grave. A violence that incensed the community and pool users. It connected a present with a past.

A few months earlier the Scottish Executive whimpered;

"The best ideas often come from within the community. They know the gaps and failures in services in their area. Service improvement and innovation come best in response to pressure from demanding, informed and confident consumers. To make sure community consultation and involvement is improved across Scotland and that people have a voice in decision-making in their own communities, we are finding new ways to give communities more influence over the delivery of local services.

We believed an occupation might influence the Council's attitude and understanding of the issues involved. Made indignant and angry by the shoddy manipulative secrecy of the Council as it furtively operated under the dark cloak of elective democracy, the occupation was the last resort of "empowerment". But what empowerment it was. We really thought we would be arrested on the first night. A picket line formed because we felt people should not be left alone inside. Days turned to weeks and months and we became a cause celebre of the Scottish press with over 300 articles in print. Alarmed by a Council that had no effective mechanism in place with which to gauge a community's feelings and needs and disgusted by Council sports and recreation officers who appeared (once) in our midst to issue platitudes, edicts and vacuous sympathy, we were further incensed by local Councillors, tongue tied, mute and even absent from the city chambers when the vote to close the pool happened on February 8th 2001.

In Brazil in September 2001, a priest, Pdraig Leonard, who had been told of the "saveourpool" website, published a letter in the Glasgow Herald, part of which said bluntly;

I was horrified to learn recently of the latest developments in the long struggle to save the Govanhill Swimming Pool for the local community and the people of Glasgow. I had thought that the tactics used by Glasgow City Council to impose its will were restricted to the type of dirty dictatorship that I lived under as a missionary in Brazil for 20 years. However the experiences of the peaceful protesters at Genoa in July, and Govanhill and Sighthill in August, have shown me that mini-dictators and their bootlicking followers continue to exist, even in the most democratic countries. The circumstances are the same - a just cause and fierce suppression. The more just the cause, the fiercer the reaction.

Pdraig captured the mood of the protesters and many others. His views exposed how far the Council had moved

from an idea that essential facilities should be born out of a shared, civic, collective and common agenda and much more besides. Despite high profile rhetoric about 'social inclusion' policies and local community consultation, leader Charlie Gordon sprang news of the pool's closure early in January 2001 in the Glasgow Evening Times. He did so without any consideration whatsoever of the massive impact it would have on the lives of so many people in Govanhill, the Southside of Glasgow, and beyond. When he finally communicated with the users his letter, dumped at the pool, was dated four days before the Council formally ratified its closure - a just cause for complaint, and one of many. He also told people that a feasibility study would report on the best future use of the building but only after the pool was closed.

Time for swimmers and local people to gather any case or argument against such a closure was cynically paired to an absolute minimum of 14 days. Yet 10,500 people signed a petition within those 14 days and said no to the closure. Within three months nearly 30,000 signed, not only to keep the pool open but to support the ongoing occupation. The only consultation that was organised for users and local people before the closure was by the pool campaigners through public meetings. Subsequently there was not one jot of consultation with the local community or users unless it was carefully orchestrated to avoid any dissenting voices.

In the months that followed there were major street marches around Govanhill and to George Square, a series of street parties, a weekly singing vigil outside the pool, brief occupations of two other pools and a 24 hour picket line in support of the occupiers. A website was set up, a CD and song book were produced and numerous fund raising activities such as barbeques and street parties were held. Donations ranged from £2,000 downwards from businesses, trade unions and sympathisers from all over the world. Messages of support flooded in and still arrive. Noticeably the Scottish Parliament and its Culture and Social Justice Ministers ignored the issue and, predictably, meekly supported Glasgow City Council's dictatorial closure plans. Maybe anaesthetised by its own pomp and power, Glasgow's Labour-packed Council refused to acknowledge this tide of dissent

The director of the Scottish Health Board drawing on national and international research reported that he had advised the Council that once local health and recreation facilities were removed from already disadvantaged communities, people stopped being active and their health deteriorated. Well over 400 homes in Govanhill still have no proper facilities and a 100 still have no bathroom. Professor David Stone of

the Department of Child Health at the University of Glasgow highlighted a respected study which shows that of the 15 'worst health constituencies' in Britain, nine were in the Clydeside conurbation and the worst six were in Glasgow. The worst of all was Shettleston, which includes Govanhill, where the chances of dying under the age of 65 were 2.3 times the British average. It is no coincidence that this concentration of ill-health mirrors high rates of poverty, unemployment, poor housing, and other manifestations of social and economic deprivation.

And yet, in spite of the Health Board's clear advice and without a hint of embarrassment, Glasgow City Council closed down a unique healthy living and cultural centre set in the heartland of the unhealthiest constituency in the United Kingdom. A Healthy Living Survey mounted by the Campaign points dramatically to those who have stopped exercising altogether now the Govanhill pool has closed. It identifies a highly significant proportion of the elderly who had free health or medical passes for pool use and now have nowhere to go because they cannot travel.

Many in Glasgow are sickened by this closure and the words of a pool campaigner best sums up the mood of many;

"My family used this pool for 15 years as countless others have over generations. It was, and still is, a deeply loved community resource. What hurt so many people was the manner of its closure and the refusal of the leader of the Council Charlie Gordon to do anything but be rude and deeply offensive and indeed bullying to the campaigners, ignoring the many requests to discuss the issues and forcing the extreme action of the pool occupation. This was truly a community pool in a multiracial community and the new so called 'state of the art' places are not! It was all the policy makers could ever have wanted - creating and maintaining a cohesive and diverse community. Yet the Council ransacked it without asking. And now with other closures and the proposed motorway scheme it seems clear that the Council has an interest in delivering on social inclusion and justice policies only when it suits it or maybe other interests. The hypocrisy is profound - no wonder so many refuse to vote."

And the Council's feasibility study? It concludes that if the most disadvantaged community in the UK wants swimming pool and a healthy living centre (without the main pool), it must raise the money and run the thing itself. This protest is about far more than a swimming pool! ■

***Andrew Johnston is an organiser of the campaign to save Govanhill Pool***

# the central dogma

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## Mike Small argues when GM crops are cross-pollinated with neo-liberal government, direct action is the only alternative

As each day nearer the deadline for this article went by, a new revelation about GM crops announced itself. On the day this has to go to press, Ross Finnie has been further embarrassed by the news that, whilst he is still 'considering' whether to agree new crop trials, DEFRA in London have announced their go-ahead on the basis of the Advisory Group on which Aventis sits. Scottish democracy is thrice undermined. First, Ross Finnie ignores his own party's votes against GM trials, and the overwhelming public outcry against the imposition of a GM crops. Second, the devolved settlement of Scotland managing its own Environment is shown to be a pathetic hoax as Finnie's own mismanagement is overruled by London. Third, the role of Aventis on an Advisory Group exposes the whole process as a sham. If direct action ever needed justification or motivation, it has it now.

After the BSE-burger-munching antics of John Gummer, the whiff of stale eggs from Edwina Currie and the apocalyptic scenes of pyres of cattle during the foot and mouth crisis, this was never going to be a good era to launch a controversial new food brand. GM crops were launched headlong into a public increasingly suspicious of scientific advice, which was suffering from Blairite spin-exhaustion and which was experiencing the biggest anti-capitalist movement in forty years.

As Tony Blair argued at his tirade against anti-GM protesters to the Royal Society in May this year: "My plea is really very simple, it is: let the debate be won between open minds, not a retreat into the culture of unreason." It's difficult to keep things in perspective when reason is patenting seeds and holding the Third World to ransom. It's difficult to take seriously this rallying cry for rationalism that backs mice with human ears, the rhesus monkey born carrying the gene of a luminescent jellyfish, cloned pigs and corn that contains a bacterial gene that renders it poisonous to earthworms. But let's take Tony's advice and let reason be our watchword. Let's use the luminescent monkey as a beacon to seek out the truth in an objective, rational manner.

Genetic engineering is predicated on a belief stretching back to the discovery of the DNA double helix. All scientists working in this field proceed from the basis that molecular structure is the exclusive agent of inheritance in all living things. This theory, known to molecular biologists as 'the central dogma' has unhappily been proved false. Barry Commoner, senior scientist at the Centre for Biology of Natural Systems at Queen's College in New York explains: "Tested between 1990 and 2001 in one of the largest and most highly publicised scientific undertakings of our time,

the Human Genome Project, the theory collapsed under the weight of fact. There are far too few human genes to account for the complexity of our inherited traits or for the vast inherited differences between plants, say, and people." In short, Commoner continues, "the most dramatic achievement to date of the \$3 billion Human Genome Project is the refutation of its own scientific rationale."

The real problem is not pioneering scientific enquiry but the fact that the central dogma has been merged with the economic dogma of neo-liberalism. The massive investment in research and in public relations campaigns to convince us to chomp down on their Frankenfoods. With the overwhelming backing of Tony Blair, and the tacit approval of Union Jack McConnell and his most illiberal Environment Minister, the battle in Scotland is unlikely to be easily won.

Despite the propaganda war that GM will feed/save and cure the world of all its ills, people haven't bought it. In fact, bored and disillusioned with parliamentary politics, people in large numbers have been taking things into their own hands. As Scottish Genetix Action declared: "The first votes of election day were cast not in a ballot box, but in a field of Genetically Manipulated Oilseed Rape". In the early hours of Election Day, campaigners cut an 'X'-shaped swathe through the controversial GM crop currently growing at Munloch on the Black Isle, Inverness. The GM trial has been vociferously opposed by the local community from the start. "Non-violent direct action against this crop is an inevitable consequence of the Government ignoring local democracy. These individuals are voicing the concerns of countless other citizens in the Black Isle and all over Scotland" said Matthew Herbert, a campaigner for Scottish Genetix Action.

Campaigners have voiced concern that whilst the Black Isle group has had the highest profile, it's not the only one. Nor are the recent attacks and arrests as new as the media (slow on the uptake as usual) portray. Scottish campaigners are no different from others as groups around the world such as the fantastically named SURGE, ELF, Reclaim the Seeds, Cropatistas, Weevils, Loddi Loppers, Ambridge Against Genetix and the Jose Bove Federation have acted to defend the natural environment, the integrity of the food chain and the hopes of a local food economy.

Nor is it true that the Americans are wholeheartedly behind GM foods as sometimes portrayed. There are certainly some signs that the wider American public is waking up to the issue. For example, Monsanto withdrew GM potatoes



from the US market in 2001 after a series of major market rejections, including by McDonald's, Burger King, McCain's and Pringles. US farmers sought state bans on GM wheat planting, and concern among growers and millers has forced Aventis to postpone introduction of GM rice. US opinion polls consistently show consumer concern about gene altered food. A recent Rutgers University Food Policy Institute poll showed 90 per cent of Americans want labels on GM food. This confirmed an ABC National News poll that also showed more than 90 per cent support for such food labels, and found that 57 per cent would be less likely to buy GM food if it were labelled

As the cracks begin to appear in the united front that was the corporate world's advance, the prospects for democracy and nature improve. It's only now the full extent of the gap between hype and reality is becoming clear. Since the first commercialisation of GM crops in the mid-1990s, the industry's main strategy has been to deny any possibility of crop contamination and other environmental hazards. But now urgent checks are to be carried out on genetically modified seeds after a trial of GM rapeseed crops at 12 sites in England and two in Scotland was contaminated by rogue seeds. McGovernment minister Elliott Morley said an "urgent investigation" will be carried out into how seeds from a GM crop experiment became mixed with a strain unauthorised for planting.

The UK Government has proved itself to be a supine supporter of the biotech business world. The dereliction of the public interest that has been witnessed by the Scottish public over the past two years has been exacerbated by the duplicity of Ross Finnie. Having exposed himself as a soft-bellied eco-Quisling, Finnie's role has had the effect of exposing the inadequacy of the powers laid before the Scottish Executive. Finnie has staked his political reputation - and perhaps his career - on his support for genetically modified crop trials. This makes him both vulnerable to long term attack and difficult to budge from his entrenched position.

But if the battle has been successfully taken to McGovernment with sustained actions across the country, some think that the movement is not broad or deep enough to win out. Campaigners complain of burn-out, and confused strategy. Mark Ballard, a veteran anti-GM activist and Green Party member has argued that: "What with Friends of the Earth moving into Environmental Justice and Fife Earth First! squabbling about anarchist theory, the movement is at a crossroads." Certainly if the movement has succeeded as the wider public have grown weary of public health mismanagement and increasingly interested in the quality of the food they eat, it cannot rest on its laurels. The Daily Record - Scottish New Labour's farting mouthpiece - is typical of a media which will turn on the issue in an instant. The ability of New Labour to vilify

the movement should not be underestimated. Just as sex education was sidetracked and misplaced by the media as an issue about homosexuality, when it was an issue about sexuality, genetically modified crops will be caricatured as an issue for the middle-class food police. To combat this we need more, not less direct action, but also pro-active media activity. The Green Party needs to learn to live with the urban poor as well as disenchanting rural émigrés.

Where perhaps the anti-GM movement needs to work is to widen the focus of its analysis and the basis of its support. GM crops cannot be allowed to become the preserve of the rural farmer or the Lothian Greens. Scotland has some of

## **The ability of New Labour to vilify the anti-GM movement should not be underestimated**

the worst food poverty in Europe. We are the original 'sick man of Europe'. This issue cannot be allowed to become a peripheral issue about avoiding the contamination of the middle classes' organic muesli. The method (direct action) tells us as much about the message (food is being turned into a private commodity) and we must heed this understanding clear enough to go forward. If the issue can be simultaneously

broadened and sharpened to be about food and local economy it can have a bigger impact.

Direct Action should be taken to supermarkets in town and cities, and to the companies which will profit from the experimentation with our environment. In parliamentary terms the Liberals - who have for so long allowed the shambles of their party's co-habitation with Labour - should be called to account. The real target must be the mini-state that is the Scottish Executive and its palpable inability to recognise the public interest.

The combined forces of the central dogma and Blair's love affair with big business seem like an insurmountable foe, but that is not necessarily true. In August, Andrew Mylius, a farmer in Tayside, offered over his land to Fife Against GMO's for a permanent camp. All the signs are that the opposition to GM development could prove as potent and powerful as the campaign against Trident. Over the next few years this movement must grow and make links across Scotland and bring the perverted logic of the elite to its knees. Much of the case for GM crops is dissolving in the Executives hands. Like the stand-off between renewable energy and the options for Hunterston C, the green movement is on collision course with New Labour in Scotland, and for once there is the energy and the opportunity to take that challenge on. Political movements need three things to make them kick; powerful motivation, a popular alternative strategy and the ability to 'do' as well as 'think'. Opposition to Frankenfoods has all these elements in bundles and threatens to gain real momentum in the coming years. ■

Mike Small is a freelance writer

# inaction is not an option

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## Jane Tallents explains how Trident Ploughshares has helped to put the nuclear question back on the agenda

In the mid nineties the small number of us still working away in CND in Scotland knew that we if hung on and kept the campaign going things would eventually get better – either it would happen naturally when the time was right or that new energy and ideas would have to come from outside. We were reactive to events both at the Clyde bases and in the political world but didn't have the resources or people to get things going beyond the routine kind of campaigning or the annual demo which never attracted more than a hundred participants whatever we tried. Whether Trident Ploughshares came along at the right time or would have succeeded in rejuvenating the peace movement whenever it came along is a matter of opinion but many consider that it has been a major factor in the current revival.

So what is different about Trident Ploughshares? The whole campaign is based around nonviolent direct action, and not just symbolic action, but actual direct citizen's intervention to halt or disrupt the work of Trident. When the campaign was launched in May '98 an open letter was sent to Tony Blair saying that if the government didn't make a start on the disarmament process that it had committed itself to under the Non Proliferation Treaty then we would do it ourselves. This was not a threat but just a straightforward statement of 'it needs doing and if you won't do it then we will'. In the four years since, we have had 1790 arrests, 338 trials, collectively spent over four and a half years in jail and been fined a total of £47,380. Those statistics don't begin to capture the real story

Many readers will have followed the highs and lows of the campaign either as active participants and supporters or by catching a snippet here and there in the mainstream media. Just to jog your memories: four Big Blockades of Faslane, many incursions into the Trident berths by sea and land, the disarming of the barge Maytime and resulting acquittal at Greenock Sheriff Court, The Lord Advocates Reference on the Greenock trial, the disrupting of the Scottish Parliament and much much more. If you've missed all this then catch up on our website [tridentploughshares.org](http://tridentploughshares.org).

But isn't this just CND with hammers? Scottish CND has a very special role to play in the peace movement and it's vital that it is strong and effective. While Trident Ploughshares has a good relationship with

Scottish CND, it is important that it has it's own identity and in particular I believe that its structure has opened up new opportunities and empowered people in new ways. TP doesn't have members, we have 'pledgers'. These are people who have undergone a two day nonviolence workshop and then signed a pledge committing themselves to do all they can to disarm the Trident system or to support those that can. Currently there are around 200 signed up pledgers. They are organised into affinity groups – groups of between four and twelve people who plan actions together, support each other and feed in to the decision making process. At any one time there are a number of people between groups or not yet in a group but the majority of pledgers are in affinity groups spread across the UK and Europe. All groups can send two reps (or a written contribution) to twice yearly meetings where future plans are thrashed out. As well as practical things like dates for future camps and actions, strategy is worked on and in fact every year the question is asked 'do we continue next year?' How many campaigns actually make a positive commitment to continue unless they are in some kind of crisis? The decisions are put into action by a Core Group, currently seventeen people who all have responsibility for different areas of the campaign, and who work together on an almost daily basis.

TP tries to make the most of new technology to aid communication and decision making. The Core group meets in person about every two months, but in between that has fortnightly meetings in an internet chat room. There are some issues that have to be thrashed out face to face but the virtual meetings have proved very helpful for keeping day to day work progressing. The camps and big actions are planned by working groups who will keep reporting back to the Core Group and all pledgers on progress made or ask for advice on how to proceed. Of course all our decision making is by consensus and as minutes of meetings can be sent out by e-mail any pledger can raise concerns very quickly

There are four main camps or actions a year and so far we have been to Faslane, Coulport, Aldermaston, London and will be having our first camp at Devonport Docks, Plymouth in November as the Trident submarine HMS Vanguard is now there for a refit. These camps and actions act as a focus to bring people together and

**Often a frustration with the more conventional means of protest plays a part**

although they are well publicised so that the bases and establishments in question are expecting us, a lot of creative actions still take place. In between these it is 'open season' for any affinity group to plan and carry out actions as long as they stay within the TP nonviolence and safety guidelines. Although the campaign was originally set up with a hope that lots of people would do 'maximum disarmament' actions (for want of a better term) involving getting into the Trident bases and damaging submarines or other equipment, the value of any act of direct resistance however small it may seem is recognised. When we sat in the public gallery at Greenock Sheriff Court supporting the three women who had thrown £80,000 worth of sonar testing equipment into Loch Goil I realised that most of us had our own court appearances due in the coming months. Although we would be in lower courts on much less serious charges the arguments we would make would be broadly the same.

So where do blockades fit in? Alongside the actions carried out by TP affinity groups the mass blockades of Faslane, organised in co-operation with CND have become an important part of the NVDA spectrum. The blockades have been hugely successful with mobilisation across a huge range of groups. The partnership with Scottish CND has been beneficial to both organisations and the fact that we can work so well together to organise NVDA shows that all those splits in the movement back in the days of the Committee of 100 and even in the Greenham days are well and truly consigned to history. The reasons that so many people who have long been opposed to nuclear weapons have now taken the step to risk arrest, court cases and even jail by sitting down at the gates to Faslane are many. Often a frustration with the more conventional means of protest plays a part as well as a feeling that people's opposition to Trident is recognised in a very tangible way if they have to be bodily lifted from the road and put through a lengthy custody process. While there is a great feeling of solidarity between people taking part in a blockade it is clear from what people say in court there is a very personal decision taken at some point and

that for many people standing on the pavement is no longer enough.

The blockade working group have established a reputation for giving out good information before the event so that people know what to expect. A good relationship has also been built up with Strathclyde police whereby, without in any sense negotiating and thereby watering down our plans, we have a fair idea of the expected police response. The practical support continues throughout the action and into the months beyond as week after week people are brought back to court to face Breach of the Peace charges. Rather than being the punishment for standing up (or laying down!) to be counted for many this is an empowering experience and a welcome opportunity to explain the reason for taking part. In spite of an unrelenting litany of impassioned pleas about the legality and morality of Britain's weapons of mass destruction the courts cannot see beyond a minor crime of stopping the free flow of traffic. Even though the police, the base and everyone for miles knows there is a blockade on that day our Justices of the Peace (!) consider we have caused serious disturbance to the community....well they ain't seen nothing yet! On April 22 2003 (the Tuesday after Easter) we will have the biggest blockade yet. We aim to have every gate impassable for the entire working day and we need you all to come and join us.

As someone once, said 'Inaction is not an option!' ■

*Jane Tallents is an organiser with Trident Ploughshares*

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**While there is a great feeling of solidarity between people taking part in a blockade it is clear from what people say in court there is a very personal decision taken at some point and that for many people standing on the pavement is no longer enough**

# rules are not enough

## Clare Coughlan explains how the World Trade Organisation is more about protectionism for rich countries than it is about fair trade

Trade now impacts on the livelihoods of people all over the world. Whether we like it or not, global trade and investment flows far surpass aid budgets and the consequent potential of trade for alleviating poverty cannot be ignored. But of course the poorest people do not automatically benefit when their countries start trading - just as within national economies, the rules governing the trading system play a large part in determining who gets the benefits. So there's everything to play for in getting world trade rules right.

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) is the international body which makes the rules that govern trade between countries. It was established by the Marrakesh Agreement in 1994 "with a view to raising standards of living, ensuring full employment and ... in accordance with the objective of sustainable development". Today, the WTO website claims that it oversees a fair, rules-based trading system which promotes equality, gives smaller countries a voice, boosts job and wealth creation, encourages good government - and even advances world peace!

Sounds great. So why has the WTO been demonised by some so-called 'anti-globalisation' protestors? Why is it that putting a senior figure from the WTO, a Fair Trade campaigner from Nicaragua and a health activist from India on the same platform (as will happen at World Development Movement's annual conference this year) automatically makes a 'debate'. What's going wrong?

Officially, each of the 142 member states of the WTO engages in negotiations on a 'one member, one vote' basis. But the reality is that of the notorious 'Green Room' process, where ministers from a dozen or so rich and poor countries are called in to a private session to be brow-beaten by the US and EU and the results sent to the wider assembly of WTO members for rubber-stamping. The last Ministerial Meeting, in Doha a year ago saw 20 Ministers taken aside on the final day so that the WTO Director General, Michael Moore, could push recalcitrant countries into accepting a new round of trade negotiations. When Yash Tandon from the Ugandan delegation tried to join the discussion he was forced to leave. Later a trade counsellor from a developing country, who wanted to join the meeting to advise his Minister, was refused permission to attend.

The richest countries have the finance and human resources to wield power over poorer countries in the WTO. The EU and the US, which represent approximately 10 per cent of the world's population, had a total combined delegation of 553 at the WTO Ministerial meeting in Doha, Qatar, in November 2001. China and India, representing over 40 per cent of the world's population, had just 92

delegates between them. Haiti, the poorest nation in the Western hemisphere, had no delegate at all.

At the WTO headquarters in Geneva, most poor countries cannot afford to send representatives to the 30 or so meetings that can take place in any one week. Nor can poor countries easily defend themselves against violations of trade rules by richer, more powerful nations. Under the Dispute Settlement Mechanism, the WTO will judge whether trade rules are being broken, but it is up to the applicant country to enforce any penalties. According to the WTO, "Rich and poor countries alike have an equal right to challenge each other in the WTO's dispute settlement procedures". But what good is this right if poor countries do not have the economic clout to enforce it? The Secretary-General of UNCTAD, Rubens Ricupero, has commented; "In the old GATT, there was a mistaken view that competition only requires clear rules and an impartial arbiter. But no-one imagines a lightweight should fight a heavyweight in boxing". The great majority of disputes are brought by the richer nations, who alone have the resources to fight the legal battles and to enforce the decisions.

Recently John Braithwaite and Peter Drahos conducted a 10-year study on the WTO and its precursor the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT). They state, "When the US and EC can agree on which direction global regulatory change should take, that is usually the direction it does take." Even at Seattle, which was hailed as a triumph for the 'anti-globalisation' movement, it was the failure of the US and EU to come to an agreement that allowed the breakdown of the WTO negotiations.

Given the power imbalances in the system, it is hardly surprising that the resultant WTO trade rules are biased in favour of the rich and powerful. But it is surely shocking that the United Nations estimates that poor countries lose £1.3bn a day due to unjust trade rules - some 14 times the amount they receive in aid. Poor countries are prevented from imposing tariffs on imports from rich countries. Yet the tariffs imposed by rich countries on imports of manufactured goods are, on average, four times higher for products sourced in poor countries than for those from other rich countries. But it is the dumping of heavily subsidised commodities, such as grain, in local markets that is the real kick in the teeth for smallholder farmers in the developing world. For them, selling produce in local markets is the only way to make that bit of cash needed to pay for medicines or school fees. These are producers who couldn't even dream of exporting to the West. They can't even compete with Western producers in their own local markets. Millions of smallholders in developing

countries are struggling to survive on less than £260 a year in total income. They are competing with American and European farmers who receive an average of £15,000 and £11,500 a year respectively in subsidies alone. Subsidies to British farmers mean that white sugar is sold overseas at prices that are one quarter the cost of production. This amounts to double standards; trade liberalisation for poor countries, but protectionism in the West.

Given that the most powerful players at the WTO (the richest countries) are also those with the strongest companies, it is not great surprise that the majority of WTO rules aim for increased liberalisation (i.e. exposure to the world market) and enhanced rights for companies to do business where and how they please. But while competing in a free market can be challenging enough for weaker economies, they don't even get off that lightly. In a variety of key ways, such as the import tariffs and production subsidies mentioned above, the market is skewed - in favour of the rich.

This Western protectionism, legitimised by the WTO, is spreading to new sectors, with outrageous consequences. The WTO Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights Agreement (TRIPS) allows international companies to buy patents on staple crops that have been used by farmers in developing countries for generations. TRIPS protects pharmaceutical companies against the production of generic AIDS drugs, while in poor countries, 30,000 people die every day because effective medicines are too expensive or simply not available. At a recent WDM conference in London, the in-coming Director General of the WTO, Dr Supachai Panitchpakdi has described TRIPS as "one of the glaring examples of the pressure from the corporate sector on governments - that ultimately resulted in some agreements being forced on countries".

The WTO is dominated by rich countries, to the detriment of the interests of the poor. This reality is a far cry from the original aims of the organisation, "to ensure that developing countries ... secure a share in the growth in international trade commensurate with the needs of their economic development". Is it any wonder then, that people in developing countries are disillusioned with the WTO system? According to Walden Bello, Director of Focus on Global South: "The World Trade Organisation (WTO) is often promoted as a rules based trading framework that protects the weaker and poorer countries from unilateral action by the stronger states. The opposite is true: the WTO is meant to institutionalise and legitimise inequality."

The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) takes the trade debate one step further. As Dr Supachai himself recently admitted in an unguarded moment, the focus of trade negotiations is moving on from tariffs and quotas which impact at national boundaries and towards the national regulations inside countries which can be seen to restrict the activities of multinational companies. A part of the original WTO package agreed at Marrakesh, and now being

strengthened at negotiations in Geneva, GATS recognises the conflict between the ideas of government regulation and the unrestricted market and comes down heavily on the side of the latter. The negotiations now underway set out to progressively increase the liberalisation of trade in service sectors from banking and insurance to health, education and water supply. So the European Union, home to many of the world's largest water companies, is keen to prise open new markets in what could be a bigger business than oil. Those who may be in no position to pay for their water may wonder at the implications of removing government's right to control the water market and restricting the ability even to regulate it.

So what is to be done? As the smoke from Seattle and Genoa clears, a key question is whether this developing protest movement will be calling for the abolition of global trade or pushing for reform of the rules. In the latter camp, the World Development Movement has joined with over 40 other organisations in the UK to form the Trade Justice Movement (TJM). The energy of this new coalition became apparent when it organised the biggest ever lobby of Westminster on June 19th this year. The TJM is now presenting a detailed critique of the failure of the WTO (and its member countries) to live up to its stated ideals, telling the story of how the richer nations came to dominate proceedings in their own interest and stressing the need for wholesale reform of the process of deciding the rules of trade.

WDM, as part of the Trade Justice Movement, is calling for:

- Increasing capacity of developing country delegations - so that all countries can actually have the chance to represent the interests of their people
- Playing fair - an end to stitch-ups such as the Green Process which distort the negotiating process in favour of the powerful nations
- Greater openness of WTO activity - so that civic society in both rich and poor countries can hold their Government representatives to account
- Changing agendas - so that trade rules can consider goals such as poverty eradication or sustainable development, rather than simply the rush for liberalisation
- Space for democracy - where trade rules allow Governments the right to regulate and set basic standards on the activities of companies rather than continually granting increased rights.

In sum, we call for an end to the power-based system of developing rules and a beginning of the democratisation of globalisation. ■

*Clare Coughlan is Events Assistant for WDM Scotland*

**These issues will be discussed at the World Development Movement conference "Small World - Big Challenge" which will take place in Edinburgh on the afternoon of Saturday 19th October. Tickets (free) can be booked from 0131 226 1488 or online at [www.smallworldbigchallenge.info](http://www.smallworldbigchallenge.info)**

# a community under suspicion

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**A year on from September 11, Amir Saeed argues that British-Muslim views are not at odds with 'British culture' but that hostility and suspicion from the majority culture is the main obstacle to integration.**

During the 1990s, interest in the whole Muslim community in the UK increased significantly. Beginning with national issues such as the Rushdie affair and international matters such as the 1991 Gulf War, a series of events brought Muslims into the media spotlight and adversely affected the Muslim population in the UK. New components within racist terminology appeared, and were used in a manner that could be argued were deliberately provocative to bait and ridicule Muslims and other ethnic minorities. Many social commentators have noted that media language has been fashioned in such a way as to cause many to talk about a 'criminal culture'.

Since September 11, British-Muslims' loyalty to Britain has been further questioned with polls indicating that British-Muslims should make a special effort to emphasise their Britishness (The Observer 25/11/01). Furthermore, recent disturbances in the North of England have in some quarters been presented as a particular problem with the Muslim community and not with the British-Asian community as a whole. The perceived support amongst British Muslims of Bin Laden, Palestinian suicide bombers and Kashmiri separatists have been further fuelled by these recent events in the North of England.

Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities in particular have been represented as separatist, insular and unwilling to integrate with wider society. Furthermore the old stereotypical image of 'Asian passivity' has been replaced by a more militant aggressive identity which is meant to be further at odds with 'British secular society.' The concept of culture clash have been re-introduced to imply that British-Muslims are at odds with mainstream society. Recent comments by a variety of mainstream politicians appear to substantiate these populist beliefs. David Blunkett and Peter Hain have both made recent comments that have suggested that British-Muslims must make more of an effort to integrate into society. Blunkett has suggested 'oaths of allegiance'; 'not marrying spouses from the Indian subcontinent' and the introduction of 'English Language Tests.'

It could be suggested that from these recommendations the onus is on the minority community to integrate within mainstream culture. Failure to do so then implies

'problems' with that particular minority community. The implication here is that due to their Islamic identity, Muslims cannot by nature be loyal to the British State.

However it has been argued that mainstream politicians are pandering to the Right and fuelling populist beliefs for their own political agenda. If, however, they were to look at recent research done in the area of national identity and ethnic minority communities many of their concerns would appear to be unsubstantiated.

Post September 11 polls done by the British-Asian newspaper Eastern Eye (23/11/01) show overwhelmingly that British-Muslims perceived themselves as loyal citizens despite opposing US/UK bombing of Afghanistan. This right to disobey is one of the cornerstones of democracy and one should consider that white Britons who may oppose government policy are not usually questioned about their loyalty. Indeed the most recent survey on Muslim opinion (The Guardian 17/6/2002) show that the majority consider themselves British-Muslims.

Both these polls however do indicate that despite British-Muslims emphasising their loyalty, they are concerned about the rise in Islamophobic attacks in Britain and Western Europe, with the vast majority in the Guardian survey noting that they are perceived with hostility and suspicion by mainstream society.

Academic work by Professor Tariq Modood notes that the 'Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, often regarded as culturally conservative and separatist, are more likely to think of themselves as being culturally mixed than some groups'. That research was the largest ethnic minority study conducted in Britain and Professor Modood and his colleagues certainly found that British Pakistanis and British-Bangladeshis did see themselves as belonging to two cultures and did not perceive a major problem with this dual identity.

Further empirical work again clearly shows that Asians and Muslims living in Scotland regard themselves as having a bi-cultural hybrid identity. Furthermore, just as indigenous white Scots regard themselves as Scottish not British, ethnic minorities living in Scotland highlight Scottishness over Britishness.

**Scottish-Pakistani is more likely to be acceptable. Scottish-Muslim would probably conjure up images of Saddam Hussein in a kilt!**

However, just as Muslims in England are concerned about anti-Islamic hysteria, Muslims in Scotland have also voiced concern about acceptance in the mainstream. Due to this they felt terms like 'Scottish Pakistani' rather than 'Scottish-Muslim' might be more preferable to wider mainstream culture.

For example several of the Pakistani participants noted that;

**Male respondent:** "Scottish-Pakistani is more likely to be acceptable. Scottish-Muslim would probably conjure up images of Saddam Hussein in a kilt! Let's face it Islam/Muslims are the new basis of hatred and prejudice."

Whilst another linked this with wider images of Islam;

**Male respondent:** "I think Scottish-Muslim would maybe make white Scots feel a little more at unease due to the negative image of Muslims these days."

**Female Respondent:** "For most people white is Scottish, white is Christian, Muslim means Paki for most white people. You have to challenge the whole belief system, this is still not happening in Scotland."

For the Scottish-Pakistani sample in this study, it was apparent that biased Western perceptions of Islam were behind the reluctance to introduce a 'Scottish-Muslim' identity to the debate.

Minority ethnicity is neither simply a racist attribution nor a set of private practices but has become a feature of British society. This means a re-thinking of Britishness and the varieties and forms that it can encompass.

Unfortunately at the moment the onus still appears to be on the minority communities to 'assimilate' and 'give up' their culture. Evidence does suggest that this in fact may lead them to becoming more assertive in displaying their identity (witness the growing numbers of young British Muslim females now willing to wearing the hijab).

Given the recent debates post September 11 and the disturbances in the North of England in 2001, it is apparent that debates about the Britishness and loyalty of Muslim communities are ongoing. It could be argued that since these events there is a growing hostility towards Muslims in wide section of the community, even from so called liberal quarters. However it appears that this process of redefinition of national identities will by no means be rapid or problem-free. Recent polls in Scotland (Scotland on Sunday 28/4/2002) indicate that nearly half of all Scots would back policies designed to repatriate immigrants. Despite three quarters of Scotland's ethnic minority being born in Scotland it is clear that for many white Scots they are still immigrants.

The Left must challenge these populist views in Scotland and show that Scotland can accommodate, needs and benefits from immigration and has done so for centuries. Unfortunately it appears that in the North of England, Labour politicians are falling over themselves to lay blame at communities who they argue are unwilling to integrate. This further fuels animosity and plays into the hands of the racists. ■

*Dr Amir Saeed is a lecturer in Media Studies at the Univeristy of Sunderland*



**ASLEF calls for the Government to introduce a charter of workers' rights that would include, the right to full employment, rights from day one of employment, the repeal of oppressive anti trade union legislation and positive laws encouraging trade unions to represent their members individually and collectively.**

Mick Rix, General Secretary. ASLEF, 9 Arkwright Road, Hampstead, LONDON NW3 6AB.

# soothing witless warriors

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**Scott Hames, a Canadian studying in Scotland, doubts that Britain's more palatable approach to the 'war on terror' is substantively different from America's**

One of the great benefits of living in Scotland is the slight but meaningful relief you gain from the martial thrum of the North American media,

It is a small mercy every morning to see the fraudulent 'war on terror' still chaperoned by those faithless quotation marks, the phrase left cautiously mannered, 'so-called', sloganistic. Likewise the grubby confections of 'regime change' and the 'axis of evil'; in much of the British and European press, the jargon of American imperialism retains like training wheels those jeering diacritics. Small beer in a time of laid-back irony, you say, but I cannot help feeling heartened. Like minuscule tugboats guiding a destroyer to port, those gallant little ticks betray the clumsiness, the gaucherie, the sheer slobbering ham-fistedness of power in vulgar proportion. What is more, they show up the almost pathetic reliance of that power on cretinised language, so hinting at how it might be resisted. But first, for me, those doubtful additions provide a comforting sort of boundary. So much we are prepared, even obliged to take seriously, they seem to concede, but we shall abstain, thank you, from 'ridding the world of evildoers'.

Likewise late at night, when the BBC World Service carries bellicose 'war' reports from ABC radio, I savour the gust of silence which precedes the English anchor's bromide commentary afterward, on the latest uninflected drivel about 'enemy detainees'. Probably it's just a signal delay, but to me this hiccup sounds like the rhetorical hush you might let swallow the ravings of a naif or a crank. I take it as an implied "Mm, quite" of polite dismissal, and relish its condescension. This pause, too, feels like a sort of border, a membrane separating that there from this here.

But I hear protesting sighs. It would, of course, be absurd to gloat over the dependable liberal sobrieties of British culture at a time when the Blair government is transforming this country's role in the 'special relationship' from that of lap-dog to attack-dog, from obsequious junior-partner to bootlicking, bloodthirsty errand-boy. Indeed, Blair's part in the American 'war on terror' media pageant, wheeled-on as the credible bit of class, epitomizes the paint-thin staginess of the liberalism he oversees back here at the ranch. Lately even the careful orchestrations of official multiculturalism (ahh, a taste of home: la cosmetique Canadienne) are being exposed as equal parts window-dressing and lipservice.

The EU's anti-racist media monitor recently singled-out UK media "for using negative stereotypes of Muslims and portraying asylum seekers as terrorists and the 'enemy within' after September 11" (Ian Black, Guardian, 24 May). The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia rebuked newspapers and politicians here for "pandering to populist prejudice" in demonising immigrants and asylum-seekers, portrayed as "eradicating British values and exploiting its social welfare system". To be sure, most examples were taken from the famously tasteless tabloids, but this lapse into bigotry does extend to the elite political class. The government itself has lately legitimized racist and xenophobic debate in a 'crackdown' on immigration policy calculated to woo the moderate right and contain any drift toward extremism a la the resurgent, anti-immigration French National Front. Proposals include sending Royal Navy gunboats to the Mediterranean to make early interruptions to the refugee trail (Australian-style), introducing bulk deportations and making UK aid to developing countries conditional on their readiness to accept back unfounded asylum applicants. Nowhere in the new proposals is there any mention of the Geneva Convention responsibility to shelter and assist the persecuted, or the complicity of current British foreign policy (not to say past colonial adventures) in many of the very conflicts that generate the despised refugees. And so much for an enlightened political culture.

Blair's penchant for appeasing brutal maniacs like Bush and Sharon is proven beyond doubt, but this latest nod to the mouth-breathers of Europe's radical right has upset many of the New Labour faithful, for tactical if not moral reasons. "You do not put the far right back in their box by being tougher than they are," scolds the Guardian. The charm offensive is, however, rationalised by some on the New Labour left as a necessary sacrifice to Blair's push for closer ties with continental Europe. This plot is in turn imagined to point in the direction of - eventually, just maybe - a coalesced, broadly liberal European political bloc able to restrain American hegemony. No challenge to the lone superpower, of course, but perhaps with enough ballast to exert a meaningful, civilising influence on her more brazen designs. (A bigger, nagging tugboat, if you will.) Pooling the ink of its dissolved internal borders might just afford a line around the European corral so thick as to fashion a sort of political drag-parachute, capable of dampening American zeal in the pending 'war on terror' which after all, says Dick Cheney, "may not end in our lifetimes". (Scant comfort that this decree was left to the



highly-susceptible-to-massive-heart-attacks, could-keel-over-at-any-moment Cheney, but I'll take what I can get.)

And so nose-held British solidarity with other regional governments playing paramedic to Le Pen is supposed to (maybe, one day) pay the dividend of a Europe sufficiently collected as to place a credible, enlightened hand on the American rudder. In the meantime, these very wall-raising concessions may condemn the tens of thousands of Europe-bound refugees produced by the 'war on terror' to mandatory 'refuse and return' policies like that Britain is now threatening in negotiations with France, over shoddy channel-tunnel security. And so the actual, innocent victims of the criminal 'war on terror' are those first abused by what some ideologues see as the only realistic plan for restraining it.

The rationale is a chilling turn of Blairite 'liberal realism': for restraint of warmonger Bush, union with temperate Europe; for integration with Europe, placate British xenophobes; for appeasement of racists, 'get tough' on asylum-seekers fleeing unlawful persecution by, among others, Bush and Blair. For anti-imperialists here the European question now seems the choice between combining with a worrying proportion of pseudo-fascists, so as potentially to be capable of swaying the biggest war-machine in history; or enlisting with that juggernaut so as to exert some paltry pressure on its direction from within. A job plugging leaks in a wobbly tugboat, or onboard the American behemoth itself, buffing the gunmetal so as to secretly erode it.

The latter is what Blair's anti-war apologists claim he has done, the former what certain New Labour fantasists think he will do. But in reality - the reality of people for whom the 'war on terror' is more than a news item - the distinction is immaterial. We need only consider how both scenarios treat borders. The strategists and schemers delight in the vigorous flux of political divisions - within and among European countries, between parties and factions, over policy and gradations of ideology - while ignoring the human consequences of this 'policy shake-up': the indifferent hardening of the concrete and social obstacles actually faced by asylum-seekers. Domestically, meanwhile, those in power pursue the ingenious tactic of punishing the racist agenda by granting it an authority so weighty as to smother it; just a month ago the government

inexplicably proposes that refugee-status children should be schooled in segregation, which they currently are not. While some borders fade, others lurch into view.

As in Canada, the sexy dynamism of Europe's redefined boundaries will only benefit those empowered to see borders principally as sites of exchange: as places to trade political means for ends, causes for effects, concessions for inducements, in a Great Game modelled exactly on the 'open' market. Outside this circle, however, borders are not corridors but remain boundaries: closed, boringly solid, and increasingly stringent. And so political legitimacy for racist thugs passes freely and swiftly from Paris to London, should but a few thousand more teeth-filing French fascists vote Le Pen this election than last. Meanwhile Afghan asylum-seekers risk death nightly, for months on end, to stowaway on Calais trains for the thirty-mile journey to Dover.

British culture may insulate me from several more tasteless aspects of the American ritual, but it does little to blunt awareness of a deeper, more sinister transatlantic harmony. The well-bred hectoring of BBC interviewers I once so admired amounts to mere polish when you read that Britain is still peddling missiles to India and Pakistan. This leaves me with a peculiar mix of feelings about trading the political and intellectual fast-food of home for the comparative decency and delicacy available here: relieved, consoled - no doubt a bit smug - but never disentangled from a continuous, underlying venality, here only more agreeably masked. And so I cannot treasure widespread contempt for the hubris of North America's witless warriors without forgetting that those soothing quotation marks show a distinction without a difference. It's a concept - in some ways, a pious privilege - both Canadians and Scots will find familiar; a border without a boundary. Of course for many, many others, the reverse condition - a wall without a gate - is the more pressing reality. It's something not many fewer Scots than Canadians find easy to ignore, and so despite the splendid sneering, we are, alas, basically 'shoulder to shoulder' where it counts. ■

*Scott Hames studies modernist aesthetics and politics in Aberdeen*

# scottish fiction

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## In August Edwin Morgan gave a lunchtime lecture as part of a series held by the Scottish Left Review. This is an extract.

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

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

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

applied also to things like concrete poetry, which was an international movement that turned out to be strong in Scotland but not in England. When Ian Hamilton Finlay and I began to publish our concrete poetry, eyebrows were raised; could this be poetry? could this be Scottish?! I was ready to answer Yes to both charges. It was a new time.

Between that time and the 1980s there was, of course the 1979 referendum and its failure to deliver a Scottish assembly. This political event, which caused a sort of numbness in Scottish politics, had the opposite effect on Scottish writing, a galvanizing effect that was unexpected but powerful. As Cairns Craig has written, 'The political activism of the 1970s, made redundant by the referendum, became the cultural activism of the 1980s.' This was the decade of Alasdair Gray's **Lanark**, James Kelman's **The Busconductor Hines**, Iain Banks's **The Bridge**, Liz Lochhead's **Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off**, Janice Galloway's **The Trick is to Keep Breathing**, Tom Leonard's **Intimate Voices**.

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

We brushed the dirt off, held it to the light.  
The obverse showed us Scotland, and the head  
of a red deer; the antler-glint had fled  
but the fine cut could still be felt. All right:  
we turned it over, read easily One Pound,  
but then the shock of Latin, like a gloss,  
Respublica Scotorum, sent across  
such ages as we guessed but never found  
at the worn edge where once the date had been  
and where as many fingers had gripped hard  
as hopes their silent race had lost or gained.  
The marshy scurf crept up to our machine,

sucked at our boots. Yet nothing seemed ill-starred.  
And least of all the realm the coin contained.

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

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

As you move through the 1990s, however, there are signs that things are not going to be so clear-cut. When Irvine Welsh's **Trainspotting** came out in 1993, it broke various boundaries and set up various challenges. It was another modern urban novel, but its language was Edinburgh/Leith instead of the Glaswegian people had become used to in works of this kind; it lifted the lid off the wildness of urban life without moralizing; and although it was obviously very Scottish it was also anti-Scottish. As the hero Renton says, watching some violent, mindless, swaggering guys in a pub:

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

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

Item: 1 pot. Item: ¾ lb mince. Item: 2 onion, medium sized then a ½ lb carrots, a tin of peas and also a no - not at all, don't use a frying pan to brown the mince; what you do is fry it lightly in the same pot you're doing the actual cooking in. Saves a utensil for the cleaning up carry on. So: stick mince into pot with drop cooking oil, lard or whatever the fuck - margarine maybe. Have onions peeled and chopped. Break up mince with wooden spoon. Put pot on at slow heat that it doesn't sizzle too much. While breaking up mince all the time in order that it may not become too fucking lumpy. Toss in onions. The

pepper and salt to have been sprinkled while doing the breaking up. Next: have your water boiled. Pour a ½ pint measure in which you've already dumped gravy cube viz crumbled into the smallest bits possible. Stir. When mince brownish add mixture. Stir. Place lid on pot. Having already brought to boil. Then get simmering i.e. once boiling you turn gas so's it just bubbles and no more.

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

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

Between mince and cold turkey there's quite a gap. Drugs are not a problem in Kelman's world. In Welsh's world no one would waste time making mince and potatoes. Both books reflected aspects of Scottish life, but when Renton and his pals appeared, they made us look back on the busconductor with different eyes, not necessarily more critical, but different. And it may be that one of the legacies of **Trainspotting**, even though it has been much imitated, has been to establish or encourage difference rather than schools of writing. The sense that a referendum, this time likely to be a positive one, was in the offing may have induced a certain feeling for creative freedom instead of the linearity of striving towards that particular change. At any rate, in the last decade it has become much harder to see the wood for the trees and in fact there may not be a wood. Take a handful of recent notable books: Toni Davidson's **Scar Culture**, Jackie Kay's **Trumpet**, Alan Warner's **Morvern Caller**, James Kelman's **Translated Accounts**, Ali Smith's **Hotel World**. Have they anything in common? **Scar Culture** is a powerful, complex story of child abuse and psychotherapy. **Trumpet** is the touching story of a black jazzman who is found after his death to be a woman. **Morvern Caller** has a rural setting (Oban, plus a visit to the Mediterranean rave scene); it's written in the first person of a very cool young woman, amoral, unsettled, ready for anything. **Hotel World** interlinks in an oblique but moving way the lives of five women who have a connection with a big hotel. **Translated Accounts** shows a new aspect of Kelman: non-Glaswegian, written in a fractured, jargon-ridden English, set in an unnamed police state. The variety of approach in these five books is

an argument in favour of diversity, a new phase in which Scottish writers have decided to boldly go wherever they feel impelled to explore. Categories are thin on the ground. Risks are taken. But this mixed, scene is not all that different from the Scottish scene in general.

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

It's quite natural for writers and artists to be wary of governments and governmental bodies. Writers and artists want recognition, but they also want independence. That's the crux. The Irish poet Yeats served for six years as a senator in the first Irish Free State parliament, but became increasingly disillusioned by its politics. One thing he did do was introduce a new Irish coinage - surely the most beautiful coins in Europe. That was alright; but really Yeats's value lies in his poems and plays. How far a government can be proactive for the arts is always an arguable point. I think a Minister for the Arts would help. At the moment we have a Minister who includes the arts with a portfolio bulging with other things, and that's not good. The arts, and especially the literary arts, explore and expose and express the soul of a country (the Scottish Executive seems to be either unwilling or unable to make any kind of strong commitment to Scottish literature, perhaps in the mistaken belief that this would play into the hands of political nationalists). Take a small example. After I was appointed Glasgow's Poet Laureate by the City Council, a number of people began to ask why there wasn't a

Poet Laureate for Scotland, especially since it now had its own Parliament. There was an English Poet Laureate - Andrew Motion - so why not a Scottish one? The answer is of course that Andrew Motion's post is a UK post, and it doesn't matter that no Scottish, Irish or Welsh poet has ever been crowned, that's just the way the cookie crumbles. Well, a proposal was, I believe, put to the Scottish Executive, but received a dusty answer. There are no plans for a Poet Laureate in Scotland. It may seem trivial, but symbolism is never unimportant. The Scottish Executive is still thinking in UK terms and cannot get its head round the fact that there really has been a change, and it must be recognised.

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

LA CORBIE: Country: Scotland. Whit like is it?

It's a peatbog, it's a daurk forest.

It's a cauldron o' lye, a saltpan or a coal mine. .

If you're gey lucky it's a bricht bere meadow or a park o' kye.

Or mibbe ... it's a field o' stanes.

It's a tenement or a merchant's ha'.

It's a hure hoose or a humble cot. Princes Street or Paddy's

Merkit.

It's a fistfu' o' fish or a pickle o' oatmeal.

It's a queen's banquet o' roast meats and junketts.

It depends. It depends ... Ah dinna ken whit like your Scotland

is. Here's mines.

National flower: the thistle.

National pastime: nostalgia.

National weather: smirr, haar, drizzle, snow.

National bird: the crow, the corbie, le corbeau, moi!

How me? Eh? Eh? Eh? Voice like a choked laugh. Ragbag o' a

burd in ma black duds, a' angles and elbows and broken oxters

feathers, black beady een in ma executioner's hood. No braw,

but Ah think Ah ha'e a sort of black glamour.

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

*Edwin Morgan is a world-renowned poet. The full text of his lecture is available on the Scottish Left Review website.*

# feedback

Tell us what you think. Contributions to [feedback@scottishleftreview.org](mailto:feedback@scottishleftreview.org)

## The Case for Public Sector Housing in Glasgow

There is no mandate to privatise Glasgow's Council Housing as only 37 percent (29,000 tenants) supported stock transfer with 63 percent (47,000 tenants) not endorsing housing privatisation at the ballot, on the 5th of April 2002. The Glasgow Housing Association Limited has failed miserably in trying to establish housing privatisation in Glasgow because many tenants are walking away from the housing stock transfer process by resigning from local housing organisations (LHOs). They have discovered that the 62 LHO's (who would manage the housing stock of GHA Ltd) will not be ready to manage housing stock in Glasgow at the proposed date of transfer on the 28th November 2002. They have also walked away from proposed housing privatisation because they realise that there is no community ownership; that such concepts are a sham when the big players such as the Scottish Executive and the private financial institutions would be the only beneficiaries of privatising Glasgow's housing stock.

£770 million would be borrowed from the private financial institutions under the GHA's business plan. Add to that a £300 million soft loan from the Scottish Executive and Glasgow's projected 60,000 tenants in eleven years time would owe £1 billion under housing privatisation. The New Labour Scottish Executive keeps telling everyone that the current £950 million debt with 82,000 tenants is unsustainable, yet it does not take a rocket scientist to work out that with a £1 billion debt and only 60,000 tenants that in eleven years time rents would soar and there would be a massive increase in homelessness due to an expansion in evictions for rent arrears. Therefore the private financial institutions cannot be guaranteed a consistent rental income stream. Housing privatisation will not work.

The Glasgow and West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations who represent 30 so-called community based housing associations involved in the stock transfer process, have stopped working with GHA Ltd on local investment and management plans because they believe the GHA is not going to devolve real power to them. Therefore this in conjunction with tenants deserting the stock transfer process means that the policy of housing

privatisation in Glasgow is doomed to fail. It is my belief that the stock transfer will not take place this or any other year. The Scottish Executive will face insurmountable pressure from Glasgow's tenants, homeowners, trade unions and opposition political parties demanding that housing stock transfer be abandoned.

## The social needs of the tenants of Glasgow has to be the starting point, not the greed of private financial institutions

New Labour in Scotland has always claimed there is no alternative to stock transfer, a complete lie. South of the border where councils rejected housing privatisation New Labour has handed over £336 Million of public money to those councils setting up arms-length management organisations where the council owns the above organisation through a 100 per cent shareholding, has a decisive influence on the business plan, and the above organisation borrows its capital through the public works loans board, thereby remaining within the public sector. The trade unions have

spoken out in favour of the above as a future model for public sector housing. The danger of the arms-length management organisation is that it could be the start of the slippery road to privatisation of housing.

What has to be done in Glasgow is the Treasury must write off the £1 billion debt without stock transfer, which would release £132 million each year for the next ten years for the proper repair, refurbishment and modernisation of Glasgow's housing stock. In addition, housing support grant has to be restored to the pre-1980 levels to enable the needed new build of council housing in Glasgow. The social needs of the tenants of Glasgow has to be the starting point, not the greed of private financial institutions.

With New Labour facing electoral defeat in Glasgow they would implement the above to stay in power, because they want to survive in power by any means possible, even abandoning their free market principles for a time. I believe that continued collective action will ensure that this 'privatisation too far' will not happen and with the defeat of housing privatisation in Glasgow this would send out the clear message that public services be given the resources that they need from general taxation and that privatisation of public services be stopped and reversed.

*Sean Clerkin, Glasgow Campaign Against Housing Stock Transfer*

## Restoring the influence of trade unions

This letter was written before the (welcome) upsurge in trade union action by public sector workers and firefighters and the defeat (also welcome) of Ken Jackson in the Amicus election, but I think these events coupled with increasing dissatisfaction with New Labour policies which has been gathering momentum for some time. All these strengthen the case for the unions to step up their independent campaigning on behalf of their members and to begin to seriously consider the argument for breaking the traditional links with the Labour Party despite the connection's long history.

The central issue for trade unions is, as always, how best to advance and protect the interests of their members; does the link with Labour progress these aims in any fundamental or meaningful way? Relevant to this debate is the nature of the Labour Party. From its inception Labour has been overwhelmingly concerned with elections. It has never been a campaigning organisation outside of elections, or a force which would mobilise the movement or people on issues - neither on peace, nuclear weapons, Vietnam, the Poll Tax, devolution, or any major issue. This is one of the reasons why it has never been able, or indeed been willing, to defend trade unions against anti-union legislation passed in parliament, for example.

While one can well understand the reaction of many in the trade unions regarding withholding funds from the Labour Party because of present government policies, the issue goes much deeper. The historic links between the trade union movement which founded the Labour Party, its political wing, are treasured by many. I think it is time to seriously reconsider this relationship, not only because of concern at New Labour policies but also because of the whole situation in British politics and far removed.

I first heard the issue raised at a Scottish miners conference some years ago when Thatcher was in power. The discussion centred around the need for a healthy, functioning, strong trade union movement speaking for millions, not just its members, as an essential part of a viable economy and society, and how could the unions develop an independent political campaigning style so that people would see them as meaningful and relevant to their lives; restoring a caring society and social cohesion. This was obviously a perspective going far wider than sectional interests and it was argued that all struggles on behalf of members must, wherever possible, link up with the wider public. Also that unions should become involved in communities' problems as the miners had tried to do in the course of their own struggles. It is interesting to note that the STUC was

praised for its role in Scottish political life as illustrating that perspective, and also that it would be a major force in the battle to win a Scottish Parliament.

The battle for our parliament is a good example of problems in relationships with the Labour Party. When it was first raised by Mick M'Gahey and the miners union at the STUC the right-wing of the labour party mobilised against it, and the miners were forced to remit to avoid defeat. Later the STUC was finally won for the Parliament despite continued opposition from the Labour Party, and it was not an enervating experience for the movement with trade unions trying to decide policies while looking over their shoulders at the party. Labour has never been strong on constitutional questions and this has unfortunately had a negative effect on the whole movement's attitude on these issues.

The problems continue today with some appalling speeches from trade unionists on proportional representation at the recent Scottish Labour conference. However, it is very welcome that some trade unions are now coming out against PFI and the so-called 'reforms' in the public services. Here the unions are in tune with people as its perfectly clear that the public view of public sector workers is pretty favourable, and there is great potential today for united struggle linking up with public concerns on health, education, pensions, jobs, transport, the environment and peace.

John Monks of the TUC made the call some time ago for trade unions to remember that their members hold a range of political views, and there was a need to engage in dialogue with other political parties and forces for change. He also referred to the tendency sometimes for the movement to be talking to itself. It is pretty obvious that the relationship with the Labour Party has not been a two-way process and that Labour, far from looking over its shoulder, has invariably gone its own way, especially today.

When Tony Blair says "fairness not favours" and that New Labour will govern for all, not sectional interests, the movement can agree, but that should be the signal for trade unions to move on a new road. A great deal of the Thatcherite agenda still remains. The trade unions are great democratic institutions that made great gains for millions over more than a century - they were born and developed in a certain historical situation, now they must respond to a new set of circumstances, they are essential not only on the major issues of the day but for developing the democratic process, in Britain and Europe. ■

*John Kay is the former Scottish industrial organiser of the Communists Party of Great Britain*

# web review

Henry McCubbin

The end of August and the beginning of September will see half a million tonnes of carbon dioxide expelled in to the atmosphere as 65,000 delegates fly out to Johannesburg and the World Summit for Sustainable Development. This figure, for CO2, discounts post banquet and rostrum flatulence. This edition's web review is to offer a little help to readers to cut through the polluted media outfalls and find source material on what is going on in our name. With luck you may even catch a glimpse of the love bites left on the bottoms of the big business representatives invited along by our Prime Minister.

Johannesburg is of course a follow up to Rio ten years on. Much has happened since then including huge improvements to the web - not least the ability for us to produce this webzine for you. The earlier information is therefore quite different in its presentation in comparison with today's. It also helps us spot the genuine article in many cases.

So to item one the Rio Summit, background to this can be found on [www.un.org/geninfo/bp/envirp3.html](http://www.un.org/geninfo/bp/envirp3.html). The official UN web site for the summit resides at [www.johannesburgsummit.org](http://www.johannesburgsummit.org) (slow to load by the way) and the host countries site is at [www.joburgsummit2002.com](http://www.joburgsummit2002.com). Here you should find translations of all the major contributors speeches. You will of course be spared George W's pearls of wisdom because he decided it wasn't worth breaking his hols to share his thoughts on saving the planet as that does not appear to be what American politics is about at present.

The following sites will provide you with a continuing commentary on and a set of definitions of sustainability (yes, there's more than one!) For example, is oil production in Nigeria sustainable a) for the national government? b) for its peoples? or c) for the shareholders of Shell? For some answers try [www.sdcn.org](http://www.sdcn.org) and to find out how our government answered the above try [www.sustainable-development.gov.uk](http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk)

For the NGO's attending click on to Friends of the Earth at [www.foei.org](http://www.foei.org) for up to date information and a host of links to other NGO sites including [www.tradeobservatory.org/pages/home.cfm](http://www.tradeobservatory.org/pages/home.cfm) run by the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy with links to WTO watch and to [www.globalisationguide.org](http://www.globalisationguide.org), the who what and where of globalisation with links to academic papers on the subject.

And if you thought that the Blessed Tony's adoration of the fat cat wasn't enough, how about this quote; "Thriving markets and human security go hand in hand; without one, we will not have the other." By Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General.

You can find out more about how the UN plans to make the world a safe place for global capitalism at [www.un.org/partners/business](http://www.un.org/partners/business) and as a satirical antidote try [www.earthsummit.biz/awards](http://www.earthsummit.biz/awards), the Greenwash awards.

Question, what is the cost to peoples of the world of the group photograph of world leaders? ■

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