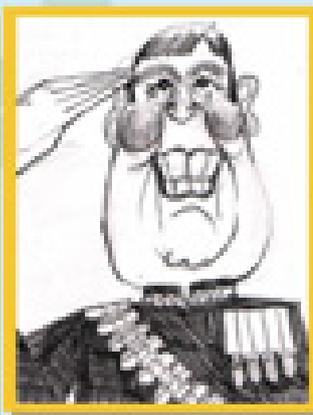
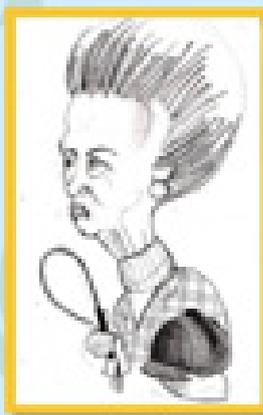


Scottish **Left** Review

Issue 70 May/June 2012 £2.00

THE FIRM



Her empire strikes back



Scottish Left Review

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Cover and illustrations: Nadia Lucchesi
nadia.shemail@gmail.com

Articles for publication: editorial@scottishleftreview.org

Letters and comments: feedback@scottishleftreview.org

Website: www.scottishleftreview.org Tel 0141 424 0042

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

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Comment

In the new preface to his book on the Royal Family, Tom Nairn describes the current phase of Royal presentational politics as “the hysteria of counter-decline”. It captures well the sense of what is happening in this Jubilee year. Many commentators marvel at how the Royal Family has managed to revive its image in the public eye and posit ‘remarkable skills’ to the Palace for this transformation.

Really? Is the never-ending flurry of unlikely stories a sign of self-confidence? Prince Harry, alone among a field of polo players and spectators (and presumably including physios, doctors and security) is the one alone to run to the rescue of an injured player freshly fallen from his horse? Do we believe that Camilla really, really likes *The Killing* given how zeitgeisty she is known to be? And Kate, oh Kate, need you press release the fact that you can speak continuous sentences?

The perceived wisdom is that the Royals Are Back, that their place in the British heart is once again as secure as ever it was. We love our new royals in a *Hello Magazine* sort of way, just as we loved our old royals in a *The Kings Speech* sort of way. They have shaken off their stuffy old ways and have allowed themselves to be themselves. And what do you know, they are like us.

Well, they are like us but with unrestricted access to an uncritical media, an entirely politically biased broadcast sector with no dissent, a global network of contacts and connections, a massive army of what are to all intents and purposes PR advisers and an absolutely unlimited financial resource. Want to get married? We'll close the country down no problem. Yet another Jubilee? For that we can have a two-day national holiday.

Harry is a bit of fun, Kate is a nice ordinary girl, William is a fine young man and so on. And it seems to be working - across the UK 80 per cent of people now say they take ‘pride’ in the royals (thankfully this number drops to 40 per cent in Scotland). Truly, we are a subject nation and happy to be so.

Why? Why does this matter? Well, royals are useful for all sorts of things. They are the initial building-blocks of national ideology - Great Britain, God Save the Queen, for King and Country. And don't for a second forget the message they send about our individual places in the world. In a quite literal sense, the

The hysteria surrounding the Royals shows a Britain with just about as much openness and balance about its head of state as Putin's Russia

US gets Donald Trump and we get the Queen. Each offer clear stories about national ideology. In the US it is made clear that all that

matters is personal success. You may be a gibbering buffoon with monumentally bad taste and utterly ridiculous self-styling that seems oblivious to

any form of criticism. And such is US ideology and politics. The important thing in the US is not to have money but to make it. All Trump's propaganda is about the money he made and is distinctly less keen to highlight the money he inherited.

Here, however, it is slightly different. There has been an important but unheralded rebranding of the elite generally. For most of the last century the standard view of the Etonians was that they were posh, rich and stupid. What was important was that they were born and bred to lead, it was in their genes. That was how Britain was constituted. But by the 1980s the idea of meritocracy had taken hold. Suddenly Eton was no longer just a 'good school' but a 'good education'. Etonians needed to fit into the meritocratic model to maintain their grip on Britain and that meant they had to pretend they were clever, not just well bred. And so suddenly Eton was a sign of intelligence.

This is the nature of the elite - it becomes what it must to maintain control. *The Kings Speech* takes us back to a time when Britain simply wanted to follow a good accent. No-one really cared whether the nation's leader were clever or not. But when the elite needs to justify itself in a new era it will become what it needs. And what it needs it Harry.

The Harry point is a particularly important one. It is Harry that is being lined up to carry out the important functions of monarchy - and that is selling weapons to dictators. The role of the Royal Family in opening doors for the British arms industry, particularly in monarchic regions, is explored by Kaye Stearman in this issue. It is Harry who is to do this - William is just for the stamps.

So we needed William to marry someone outside the aristocracy - and he did. Charles must disappear - and he has (we see more of Camilla these days).

And we need a reason not to accept them but to love them. So they because sort-of high-end celebrities.

This is the counter-decline, the concerted attempt to regain control. And yes, it has worked. But it has required monumental effort, and just that touch of hysteria. It works because there is no pretence of political balance on this issue, no alternative voices are heard.

But this hysteria (as with all

hysterias) cannot last indefinitely. The thing about rebranding is that once you start it becomes hard to stop. And doubt will creep in again (this hysteria is in part a fear of the upcoming reign of Charles, a truly unbrandable monarch). What then?

Well, something. Unlike the Nordic royal families, we need our royals - or rather the British elite needs them. And so the hysteria will recede, matters will move on but in the end the BBC, the private sector and the people who really control Britain will find a way to make sure they are long to rule over us. The alternative would be real democracy. Vladimir Putin would be proud of us. ■

A FEW MORE POLL OUTCOMES

You can find the details of who won our opinion poll to become a Scottish head of state in the Kick Up The Tabloids Special on page 10. But we had a fine range of suggestions, some serious, some not so serious. So here is a round-up of some of the suggestions we didn't have space for.

First of all, we got a large number of quite serious suggestions for who might actually be a desirable head of state for Scotland (whether an independent country or not). There seems to be a pretty clear signal that what you would really like is someone opinionated, thoughtful, disinterested in diplomatic niceties and unafraid to speak up. Many respondents specifically raised the question of who might be a Scottish 'Mary Robinson'.

Well, we had mentions for William McIlvanney, Joyce McMillan, Annie Lennox and Muriel Gray, all of whom would certainly appear to fit the description. We also had a number of votes for Tom Leonard, although most pointed out that he would of course be likely to decline, and possibly not all that politely... A few people emailed in to suggest that Elaine C Smith should be on the list of serious suggestions and not our humourous list. Another popular choice was Dennis Canavan. But perhaps the most popular choice of people who sent us more serious suggestions was Lesley Riddoch.

It is to be noted that a few suggestions seemed to envisage the head of state role as something akin to a 'holding cell' which could be used to keep Alex Salmond busy post-

independence. But another option raised a couple of times would be to invite people from other countries to come over and take the job for a year at a time. The aim is to try to get people of real stature - a Mandela, a Castro - without having to worry if we have the talent pool domestically or not. Meanwhile, the choice of those inclined to seek a new head of state for Britain as a whole seems to be a quite unequivocal shout-out for Tony Benn.

But a couple of special mentions. One contributor makes a special case for Silvio Berlusconi. The justification? "Is interested in becoming a head of state to help ensure that his legal difficulties do not come to a head. May be persuade to bring his considerable wealth to Scotland, thus solving any economic problems. Could possibly also be persuaded that AC Milan should play in the SPL. Advantages: Scotland would become the new Ibiza, albeit for octogenarians. Would set the bar very low for his successors. Has connections. Disadvantages: Has connections. (See also: Trump, Donald.)"

But a favourite of ours is the succinct suggestion that no living person should be allowed to take office as a head of state. They could stand, but only taking up office upon death, stuffing being an advantageous means of ensuring effective display for state occasions. However, term of office would need to be strictly limited given the problems of decomposition.

Not sure we completely resolved that question then... ■

Ruling the airwaves

Every so often I try to answer questions from overseas journalists about the nature of the UK's curious relationship with its monarchy. Outside observers feel that it must require a special explanation. This is because British society strikes many of them as odd, putting one in mind of a quip of Jean Baudrillard's, when (to paraphrase) he noted that 500 years after the discovery of America 'we have yet to discover England'.

Attempting to comprehend a society where front page news is made by the 'relaxed' demeanor of the Duchess of Cambridge in her first public engagement, and in which public broadcasters encourage compliance toward rituals of subjecthood (lining the streets for weddings and funerals, organising garden parties) is bound to pose deep questions about statehood and collective identity. Historians, prominently among them Tom Nairn and Perry Anderson, have furnished a theoretical apparatus with which to account for an apparent degree of refusal within British society, also perhaps its attendant psyche, of the condition of modernity. There are some interesting contrasts between the manner in which European nations perform their monarchies, including in their media, and the very different British case, in which the monarchy seems invariably to represent the past, along with veneration of 'tradition'.

Leaving these larger questions in the background, there are specific aspects of the media representation of monarchy inviting separate definition. First there is a matter of categorical difference between monarchy as a topic, and the royal families who provide human interest stories in such abundance.

The constitutional aspects of monarchy are little-visited by the British media. This, in a country in which attempts to define British citizenship to incomers reveal how little it has ever been defined, is not surprising. Somewhere in a seldom-articulated substratum of national consciousness lies the notion that the monarchy as institution exercises a protective democratic function. Perhaps the mass of its accumulated tradition is believed to produce a social inertia which, though resisting change, somehow

does this in a good way, preventing disorder. The lack of interest within the media here in any real scrutiny of monarchy in its constitutional operation is notable, not least by comparison with practice elsewhere. That this neglect performs an important ideological operation by omission is self-evident.

What we get in the main is a

continuous human interest narrative (royal character and behaviour) and much visual spectacle, for example through the rituals of

royal visits, anniversaries and pageants, marriages and deaths, also matters such as royal fashion and style. The focus of interest is very extended in the UK, so that co-opted or semi-attached members of the Family (Mike Tindall, Pippa Middleton) become available as an ever-replenished media resource. In this way, something is always happening, there is always a royal story, even when it is only that the newest adoptee by marriage is 'relaxed', or might be losing weight. And should Pippa oblige with a mock gun incident in Paris then much else can be wiped off the front page to give it priority.

There is a very specific question about displacement. There are only so many stories in a broadcast news bulletin or a newspaper. Of necessity most news is news we don't get, since space and attention are finite. Royal stories push other stories out. In extreme cases (royal weddings and funerals) only the advent of both the internet and satellite/cable television have provided potential release from the news blackout which once descended on the UK when royal events were deemed sufficiently major to block all else from sight.

Generally the need to prioritize news stories produces a news hierarchy which, though very variable (say, from the *Sun* to the *Independent*) can, at the quality end of the media, usually function within some social consensus

about what is important. Royal stories, on the other hand, invade this consensus with sudden insouciance, so that serious items on the Arab Spring or eurozone meltdown share valuable space with concoctions about Prince Harry in a uniform, or Camilla helping a charity (good of her though it is).

Another effect apart from displacing

news which may go unreported is of further magnification of the focus on human interest which already challenges hard news almost everywhere.

The lack of interest within the media here in any real scrutiny of monarchy is notable. That this neglect performs an important ideological operation by omission is self-evident.

Few royal stories have any hard news element. In fact there will seldom be any justification for royal stories other than their nature as royal stories.

As to 'balance', the largely supportive intention of incorporating Royal 'news' precludes balance entirely. For sure, there are times when Andrew, say, or Camilla, will fall foul of the press, in the latter's case once enduring a period of very nasty harassment. Even Diana was subject to criticism in her latter days. Generally, journalists and editors quite like to have a misfiring royal in order to produce character contrasts and narrative variety. But the recuperative powers of royalty in media accounts is infinite, not least since core characters (the Queen, Princess Anne) usually serve as exemplars of public service.

In fact, rather than observing criteria for hard news or balance, royal media accounts are most often indistinguishable from public relations work on behalf of the palace(s). Worse, this tendency slides some way into the practice of misrepresentation, in other words, of downright bad journalism and editorial standards. Let the so-called 'outpouring of grief' at the death of Diana stand for bucketloads of similar exaggeration, all supportive in ultimate effect of the monarchic institution (some editors dispute this). There was no evidence of 'grief' in 1997 at this unfortunate event. Upset, sadness,

Neil Blain looks at the way the media reports the Royal Family and not only fails to find political balance but fails to find even solid news values. Ideology by omission results.

by all means, but even an empirical investigation at the time which carefully searched for 'grief' amongst many interviewees found none. Yet the absence of journalistic interrogation of this phrase has led to the consolidation of a historical factoid, now re-used as a milestone in recording British emotional habits.

However there is an even more serious concern about the nature and effect of both the quantity and quality of royal media coverage. The United Kingdom is not only deeply stratified socio-economically, with widening inequalities, but produces some appalling social indicators by comparison with other developed countries. Its present coalition government is the least representative imaginable. Arguments about the problematic nature of the UK as a modern state are as pressing now as ever.

It is in this context that the editorial embrace extended to the royal family is especially unprepossessing. There is a cumulative effect of excessive royal coverage which deflects concern with alarming social issues, replaces hard news with the very softest of news, issues positive messages about the organisation of a society which is dysfunctional in many aspects, and valorizes stasis and tradition over change and progress. That this is not a matter which appears to worry, in particular, public broadcasters, is a matter

of concern. The scant evidence that exists suggests that broadcasters take a strong stance when criticised on these grounds.

Can we explain all this, at least in term of media behaviour? Will it change? The old argument that the public gets what it wants has been substantially undermined by evidence from the blogosphere and elsewhere on the internet that actually many readers, viewers and listeners balk at the extent, and the unbalanced nature, of media coverage of the royal family. Readership demographics of newspapers may produce cases where older, conservative readerships find these royal obsessions more acceptable. One or two newspapers, too, do resist the call of the palace. But it is quite likely that editorial judgement is often not synchronized with public opinion.

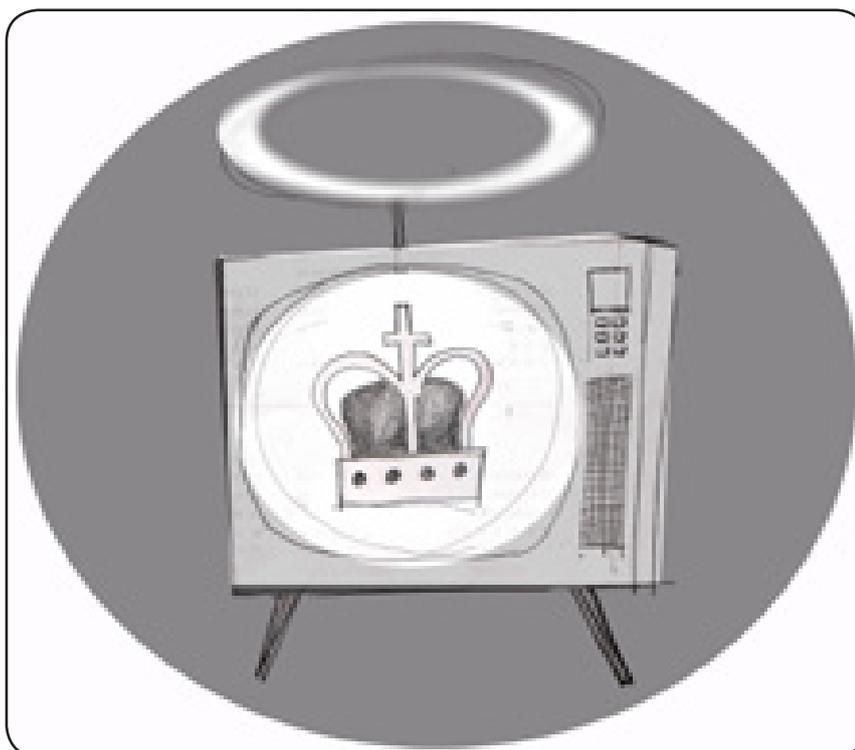
There are some specifically very appealing aspects of royal coverage from a media point of view. First, it's easy. Breaking real stories is hard but picture-led stories about Kate and Pippa, not least those posed, fill space with little effort. This is not to belittle the efforts of hard-working specialised royal correspondents plying their mysterious trade, but a lot of pictorial royal news is really a sort of flower arranging. Also, from a TV standpoint, royal spectacle is controllable, predictable, and owned by large broadcasters, unlike the news which now breaks via social

media and citizen journalists. iPhones don't compete with privileged TV shots from high up in Westminster Abbey. Likewise, royal correspondents can break stories which only 'palace insiders' receive. Many journalists are now conscious of following news broken by non-professionals, a product mostly of technological change. Additionally, there is an editorial perception that people are, at the very least, always mildly interested in (especially) photographs or film of the royals (as perhaps with meerkats or giant pandas).

And here we get close to a truth, which is that probably people are very mildly interested in the royal family, but that their interest and approval, even among recorded approvers, are both marginal. If the British media reported the royal family less, public interest would wane. If the British media didn't report them at all, one wonders about whether beyond the specialised audiences of *Hello!* or perhaps the *Daily Express*, there would be much protest. Weddings and funerals by all means, of course, but it's quite possible that a fraction of present news levels would be as acceptable as the present overload.

One agent for change, however, has already been mentioned, and it is the new technologies which now come to the fore. The transition of media contents from traditional broadcast and press platforms to social media and the internet produces many questions for debate. One of them concerns migratory effects on the operation of ideology. This is not to repeat an old claim about the medium being the message, just to acknowledge the specific effects of different media. The favourable treatment accorded to the monarchy and its family members is a product of press and broadcasting institutions which are ceding ground to other voices. As yet we should not exaggerate this effect since most people still get their information from long-established media. In a decade or so we may know more about how royalty in the UK can adapt to change in its main life support. ■

Neil Blain is Head of Communications, Media and Culture at the University of Stirling, and writes about media and cultural politics, including *Media, Monarchy and Power* (2003, with Hugh O'Donnell)



Arms and the Royal Man



The royal family and the military elite are two pillars of the British establishment and the links between them are strong and enduring. It's been a few hundred years since a royal has actually led an army into battle - just as well, given their generally lamentable record. The last was 'Butcher' Cumberland, youngest son of George II, notorious for his Scottish slaughter during and after the Battle of Culloden in 1746.

It is still common practice for male royalty to join the military, whatever their aptitude or qualifications. The current Queen's sons and grandsons have undertaken military training or service, as have many of her other relatives.

In addition, most royals also

hold one or more honorary military commissions, linked to specific services or divisions. For example, in addition to his regular military commission, Prince William, Duke of Cambridge, holds honorary commissions as Commodore-in-Chief of Scotland, Commodore-in-Chief of HMNB Clyde, Colonel of the Irish Guards, Commodore-in-Chief of the Royal Navy Submarine Service and Honorary Air Commandant of RAF Coningsby.

The roles that the lesser royals take

Other members of the royal family will now share the trade role with the spotlight firmly on Prince Harry

on after they leave the military are often overlooked. As it happens, the combination of royal descent and military service is seen as a good qualification for promoting the British arms industry. This has been the pattern for two minor royals - the Duke of Kent and the Duke of York, with Prince Harry lined up as a likely third.

Prince Edward, Duke of Kent, served in the military for over 20 years, rising to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel (in the topsy turvy world of royalty he was promoted to Major-General and Field Marshall after retirement). Thereafter, for almost a quarter of a century, he served as Vice-Chairman for British Trade International, which later became UK Trade & Investment (UKTI). During that time he made over one hundred overseas visits. At least some of his trips were focused on supporting arms sales. At this stage, arms export promotion came largely from the Defence Export Services Organisation (DESO) in the Ministry of Defence.

In November 2000 it was announced that Prince Andrew, Duke of York, would take over as roving ambassador after he retired from the Navy in April 2001. Andrew was a considerably more high profile figure, for all the wrong reasons. He was known

mainly for his jet-setting lifestyle, dubious friendships, love of golf and other leisure pursuits. Like the Duke

of Kent he had no formal business experience, but was nevertheless deemed to be the right person to represent UK business abroad.

Far from being a bit of 'harmless fun', in fact the Royal Family is a crucial institution in promoting British militarism and supporting the UK arms trade. Kaye Stearman examines the royal role in selling guns to dictators.

From the outset there were concerns about his probity, his rudeness and his willingness to mix personal recreation and business affairs with the UKTI role. One government Minister was reported to have said "there is no way we will let British trade policy be determined by the location of the world's best golf courses."

As Special Representative, Prince Andrew was not paid; however he did get expenses and very generous they were. He flies first class or on chartered aircraft and

stays at five-star hotels. In 2011, the Telegraph reported that over a decade the Prince's UKTI role had cost taxpayers almost £15 million, over £4 million in direct expenses and over £10 million in security support. Labour's Chris Bryant said in 2011 "he would travel in style

with an entourage of six... His profligacy begs the question: Whose interests are being served here?"

One of the most concerning aspects of Prince Andrew's duties is his role as cheerleader-in-chief for the arms industry, a situation strengthened by changes within UKTI.

In April 2008, responsibility for arms promotion was moved into UKTI, following the closure of DESO. The outcome was that many DESO staff and priorities moved to the new UKTI Defence and Security Organisation (DSO). DSO is extremely well resourced, employing more staff at UKTI's London headquarters than all other industry sectors combined, although the arms industry provides less than 1.2 per cent of UK exports. Its head Richard Paniguan, is paid over £200,000 a year.

With a tightening of military budgets in the UK and much of the western world, the arms industry aggressively mines old and new export markets. The largest and fastest growing

are in Asia and the Middle East and North Africa. It is for this latter region that Prince Andrew, with his royal connections and military background, best fits the UKTI DSO agenda. His personal presence opens the doors of the kings, princes, emirs and sheikhs of the Gulf kingdoms to the arms company executives who negotiate the export deals.

A Buckingham Palace spokesman was quoted in the *Guardian* (9/3/12):

"Middle East potentates like meeting princes. He comes in as the son of the Queen and that opens doors that otherwise would remain closed. He can raise problems with a crown prince and four or five weeks later we discover that the difficulties have been overcome and the contract can

be signed. He brings immeasurable value in smoothing the path for British companies. We don't send him to developed countries like France and Sweden, where a member of the royal family would not make a difference, but in developing countries, or the far east, a prince can get in because of who he is."

But it is not just royals but quasi-royals such as dictators and their family members where Andrew's presence works wonders. He supposedly had a close friendship with Saif Gaddafi, son of Colonel Gaddafi, and hosted a lunch at Buckingham Palace for Sakher el Materi, son-in-law of Tunisian dictator, Ben Ali, despite being warned of his corrupt activities by the British Embassy in Tunis. Both dynasties have now fallen.

Still in place are the dictators in the republics that arose from the ruins of the former Soviet Union. Andrew is close to the family of Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev - he has made eight trips to the country since 2005 and is reported to have private business dealings there.

He sold his former family home to the son-in-law of the Kazakh president for a vastly inflated price. These former Soviet states are not buyers of UK weaponry (as yet) but it was visiting Kyrgyzstan in his UKTI role that Prince Andrew revealed his true position.

Speaking to an audience of British business people, he blasted the Serious Fraud Office for investigating arms giant BAE Systems alleged corrupt practices around the Al-Yamamah arms deal between the UK and Saudi Arabia. Furthermore he condemned "[expletive] journalists" who "poked their noses everywhere", making it hard for businesspeople to do deals. The information on the Prince's "boorish" remarks came from the US Ambassador via a WikiLeaks cable.

These and other indiscretions (such as continuing a friendship with a known paedophile) resulted in media and parliamentary pressure on the prince to account for his actions and in July 2011 it was announced that 'Airmiles Andy' would step down from the UKTI role. Not that this stopped him travelling at taxpayer's expense. Between July and January 2012 he managed 17 trade trips, to such salubrious destinations as China, Abu Dhabi, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.

Supposedly other members of the royal family will now share the trade role with the spotlight firmly on Prince Harry. His recent trip to Belize and Brazil focused on dancing girls and barbecues but is worth watching to see if there will be a shift to aircraft and armoured cars.

Royalty, arms and the military certainly go together but it would be wrong to conclude that getting rid of royal patronage would improve the situation. The sad fact is that government, whatever party is in power, is in thrall to the dubious charms of the arms industry, despite its unethical nature. The government supports and promotes arms exports, whether through generous R&D subsidies or trade support through UKTI. It's time to break the links and get rid of the financial, political and moral support - and that includes royal patronage. ■

Kaye Stearman is the Media Co-ordinator for Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) - www.caat.org.uk

End of the Kingdom

The argument for the abolition of the monarchy often focuses on the political and democratic reasons, constitutional nuances and financial implications. Republicans argue that it would be better for democracy if we elected our head of state, that the money paid out to the Queen and her family is disproportionate and unfair and question the principles and ethics of the family who are supposed to be the moral figureheads of our country. However, it is less often that the deeper impact upon society is examined. How would a republic be structured? What would the role of the head of state be? And perhaps most importantly, in what way would it benefit the people of Scotland and indeed the UK as a whole?

When a recent study showed that people in Scotland were more likely to back independence if it meant having an extra £500 in their pockets each year, it was evident that it is not the complex constitutional and economic factors which matter to people but what the benefit would be to their daily lives. With Britain entering another period of recession, record unemployment and pay cuts and freezes affecting every sector of the job market, few people would consider the fact we do not elect our head of state to be a pressing issue. However, the benefits it could have on our society, both collectively and individually could be wide ranging, from inspiring young people, to providing extra income for the state and culturally reinvigorating the nation.

Before examining the impact being a republic would have on the country, it is of course important to look at what the political structure of the country would be. One of the best examples of a well-functioning, democratic republic is the Republic of Ireland and it is this system upon which campaign group Republic bases its proposed structure for the UK.

Republic advocates a head of state, known as the president, directly elected by the people for a maximum of two five-year terms. Any British citizen could stand for president, and as well as being ceremonial, the role would hold reserve constitutional powers such as the power to appoint a prime minister, call a general election and sign acts of parliament into law. The head of state would be equal

before the law as every other citizen and would take an oath to serve the people, uphold the law and protect the constitution. Unlike the monarchy, the president would be required not to involve his or her extended family in the performance of their duties. Crucially for many, the office of the head of state would also have no constitutional links with any religious faith.

So what would the benefits on society be? For a huge proportion of the population, the difference between the roles of the head of state and the head of government are ambiguous and few know exactly what the job of the monarch is beyond cutting ribbons and hosting garden parties. However, if the head of state were to be elected it may encourage more politically apathetic voters to take an interest in exactly why they are electing this person and in what way they differ from the prime minister. In Ireland the president is seen by many as someone to represent the country abroad and entertain foreign dignitaries whereas the Taoiseach is seen as the person who runs the country. While by no means a thorough understanding of the roles, this often means that presidents are elected apolitically and based on their personalities while governments are elected on policy, as it should be. For this reason, if we in the UK had the chance to elect a president, it could end the habit we have fallen into of electing presidential-style prime ministers and instead the focus could fall back onto policy. Furthermore, the president would be put under more scrutiny than the monarch. In a bizarre juxtaposition, those who are elected in this country generally face more scrutiny from the press than those who are not. Any

immoral or allegedly illegal activities which today could be carried out by the royal family and covered up or go unpunished, would be subject to the impeachment procedure which would be in place. The accounts of the office of the president would also be open and transparent, unlike those of the highly financially secretive royal household.

Today, the idea of aspiration and self improvement is so deeply entrenched in Thatcherite ideology that it is often ignored by the left. However, there is little doubt that religious, ethnic and other minorities would take pride in seeing a minority figure being elected to the highest office

in the land and being chosen as the figurehead and representative of the nation. The sense of pride felt by black Americans upon Barack Obama's election is a prime example of this. Not only did it inspire Americans but it was a clear sign to the rest of the world that the country was progressing. A president who was for example, muslim, gay or of Asian origin, who has worked to gain the respect of the country and earn votes, someone who has lived a real life rather than been pampered and hidden away from the real world in a bubble of opulence is far more inspiring than what we have right now. The royal family no longer represents multicultural Britain and the fact that it is a hereditary system with constitutionally binding ties to the Church of England means that it never can.

Closely tied to this is the British obsession with class. This has been a massive social barrier in this country for hundreds of years. While it could be argued that the lines between the working and middle classes are slowly blurring, the divisions at the top are

The deeply-entrenched boundaries ensure that it is incredibly difficult, even for the rich to enter the tight circle of aristocracy and therefore gain proximity to the royal family. This ensures that they remain alone and inaccessible at the top of the class pyramid.

Paul Leinster argues that while removing the royal family would be no panacea to the UK's problems it could at least go some way to inspiring a new sense of possibility, equality and pride in the nation

almost as strong today as they were a hundred years ago. This state-enforced class structure ensures that those at the top stay at the top and only a carefully-vetted few from each generation are permitted entry. Monarchists last year praised the royal family's modern attitude in allowing Prince William to marry a "commoner." It says a lot about our society that someone who is educated at a £30,000 per year private school, who's parents are millionaires, is considered to be a commoner. The deeply-entrenched boundaries ensure that it is incredibly difficult, even for the rich to enter the tight circle of aristocracy and therefore gain proximity to the royal family. This ensures that they remain alone and inaccessible at the top of the class pyramid.

We're constantly being fed the lie that the monarchy brings tourism into Britain. Monarchists argue that the Queen is the reason why millions of people visit this country every year, yet of the top 20 tourist attractions in the country, the only royal residence to feature on the list is Windsor Castle, at number 17. On becoming a republic, the royal residences will not cease to exist and rather than being closed off except to a select few, could be opened to the public, to serve as revenue-generating monuments, museums and galleries. For the best example of how this can be carried out effectively we need only look across the Channel to France. The Palace of Versailles, once home to the French monarchy, attracts three million paying visitors a year, generating large amounts of revenue for the French state. Furthermore, the world's most famous and most visited museum, the Louvre, was once home to French monarchs, before being turned into a museum after the revolution. If we followed this lead it would give the opportunity to display the Royal Art Collection, 150,000 works of art which are the property of the nation but to which very few people outside the royal family have access. This art could be distributed throughout the country and displayed in existing galleries and in space freed up in former royal residences, showing the public for the first time the art which we as a nation own, and instilling within the population a new sense of cultural pride, giving everyone

the pleasure which is currently open to a select few.

No-one knows what Scotland's constitutional future will be but whether or not Scotland remains part of the union, it is possible that after the abolition of the monarchy, the revenue generated from the Crown Estate in Scotland would be paid directly to Holyrood, as opposed to the Treasury as it is now. In the 2010-2011 financial year this amounted to £11.9 million and while not a vast amount compared to the Scottish Government's £33 billion total budget for the same year, it could pay for a new primary school or more than four hundred new nurses. Indeed there are already talks underway for matters relating to the Crown Estate in Scotland to be devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

While it would be naïve to presume that the abolition of the monarchy could serve as a panacea to the UK's social, political and economic problems, there is no doubt that it could at least go some way to inspiring a new sense of possibility, equality and pride in our nation. We could create a society with less defined class boundaries, leading to more opportunities. A society in which anyone, regardless of their background, can become head of state through hard work

and by gaining the respect of the people, rather than by accident of birth. ■

Paul Leinster is chair of Republic Scotland, and a recent language graduate from the University of Glasgow – www.republicscotland.org



Kick Up The Tabloids

Head of State Special

In this Diamond Jubilee year, it would appear that now, more than ever, Scotland has turned its back on the idea of the monarchy. So who should we have as Head of State come independence ?

You, the readers, were asked to make your choice and your voice has been heard. If you remember, here are the options you were given by the editor of this magazine:

Alasdair Gray (Because every state occasion would become unpredictable and possibly interesting)

Archie McPherson (The reliable voice of bad news for Scotland)

Some Name Picked at Random from the Phone Book (Might as well since the job requires no actual skill)

An Arbitrary Lord, Laird or Member of the Aristocray (Just for the accent and generally unhingedness)

Elaine C. Smith or Susan Boyle or Elaine C. Smith as Susan Boyle (Because people actually know who they are)

Sean Connery (Because he's got the accent *and* people know who he is)

And there were also some interesting suggestions from yourselves, the readers. Anyway, to give the results in reverse order:

An Arbitrary Lord, Laird or Member of the Aristocray came in last, unsurprisingly. However, one of you did suggest The Queen on the following grounds:

"She has experience. Would give her an opportunity to work outside the family environment, which she may find attractive. In the interests of transparency, she would not be allowed to use her stage name, and would need to be known as Ms Elizabeth Windsor. Would give her the chance to prove that her loyalty to her citizens is more important to her than her subjects loyalty to her; this may be a sticking point.

Advantages: Salary unimportant. May have distant Scottish connections. Would possibly work freelance, as she already has several client countries. Works from home. Disadvantages: May not interview well."

This attitude, however, seems at odds with the general mood in Scotland. A recent survey published in the *Scotsman* showed that only 40 per cent of Scots say the Queen makes them proud to be Scottish, whereas 70 per cent say haggis makes them proud to be Scottish. In other words one can deduce from this that most Scots would prefer a sheep's stomach filled with offal to a hereditary monarch as their Head of State. And you thought this magazine's suggestions were daft ?

Of course, going back to those earlier times, the leader of the country was seldom elected. We did not always go about this business in such a democratic manner. For example, Robert the Bruce became King of Scotland after stabbing his rival John Comyn to death in a fight in a graveyard in Dumfries. I am not sure this is a system which we would want to employ in this day and age, for two reasons. Firstly, it is at best morally-flawed. Secondly, in a country such as Scotland, with a high rate of knife crime, it simply isn't selective enough. If the only criteria required to become head-of-state is prowess with a blade, then 25 per cent of the population of Paisley could lay claim to the title.

In an age where politicians tend to shy away from getting into a fist-fight, it is refreshing to see that in Eric Joyce we have a public figure unashamedly of the Old School. In a recent interview the MP for Falkirk claimed to be better at fighting than at politics, so I was very disappointed that none of our readers offered him up as a potential candidate for Head of State. Joyce is currently banned from every pub in the City of Westminster after a number of head-butting incidents in the House of Commons. This follows hard on the heels of the scandal where it was revealed he had had a sexual relationship with a 17-year-old. And people say that politicians are out of touch with the general public.

A recent opinion poll carried out on the streets of his constituency at closing

time last Saturday night found that: 19 per cent of the public were embarrassed or ashamed by his behaviour, 12 per cent thought he should resign immediately or face the sack but 69 per cent of the public thought he was some kind of a f***ing lightweight

The real King of Scotland is, of course, some eccentric bloke in Belgium who still claims to be the rightful heir to the Throne of Scotland (and by implication the Throne of the United Kingdom) as he is the the last surviving ancestor of Bonnie Prince Charlie Scottish people, however, no longer have much pride in the Queen.

Sean Connery gained surprisingly few votes. It could have been his age, it could have been the fact that he lives outside Scotland, it could be his enthusiasm for domestic violence. He may have been the best Bond, but I reckon most people reckon that 007 was pretty rubbish compared to modern-day spies. For example, when did James Bond ever manage to padlock himself in a sportsbag from the inside?

Elaine C. Smith or Susan Boyle or Elaine C. Smith as Susan Boyle

Likewise, this option gained little support. I suspect this is because most people would confuse any of the three for Johann Lamont.

Some Name Picked at Random from the Phone Book

Surprising, coming in third was the idea that we should randomly pick our Head of State from the telephone directory. I actually think this may be the best option. Indeed, we could make it like Jury Service, where if you were picked you had to the job whether you wanted to or not.

However, nowadays this is not as straightforward as it might once have been. How many people still have a phone book ? Nonetheless, there is a nice egalitarian touch to this proposal as it automatically disqualifies anyone with ideas above their station who have decided to go ex-directory

Archie McPherson came a very

close second, although I do think that, were we to employ the same system as the French presidential elections, Archie would walk away with the title in the second round of voting. If ever there was a true Everyman figure that embodies our nation's core values it is Archie McPherson. Even Donald Trump has adopted his hairstyle in an effort to curry favour with the people of Scotland.

So the votes are now in, you have had your say, and as returning officer I declare that the votes cast in the 2012 Scottish Left Review Head of State were as follows: McPherson, Archie (Comb-Over Party) 23%, Gray, Alasadir (Let'shavea Party) 37%, Name from Phonebook, Random (BT Party Line) 19%.

And, therefore by the somewhat questionable electoral system though-up by the editor of this publication, I hereby declare that Alasdair Gray has been duly elected as Scotland's first Head of State for over three hundred years. A good choice, someone who represents the cultured, questioning, intellectual traditions born out of the Scottish Enlightenment. A true polymath, both an author and a painter. And, despite the fact that Hitler and Winston Churchill were both authors and painters, will make a fantastic figurehead for our nation, at a time when there are

few personalities in our political scene. All we need now is for the Proclaimers to write us a national anthem in his praise. He will provide an alternative to Alex Salmond as a recognisable public figure

The public likes personalities,

they respond to recognisable figureheads. Say what you like about Saddam Hussain, everyone in Iraq knew who he was. Mainly because there was a f***ing huge big fifty-metre-high statue of him at every major roundabout and traffic intersection in Baghdad. Yet while a lack of personalities is one thing, it's going a bit far to fill the void by bringing in

Donald Trump. When Donald Trump came to speak to the Scottish Parliament, a lot of people were genuinely surprised, because until he did, most of us had assumed he was some kind of fictional character.

Teetering on the edge of being beyond parody, Trump is like some evil character out of Thunderbirds. A millionaire called Trump, who lives in Trump Tower and travels the world on his Trump Jet. Many of us are expecting to name his golf resort Trumpton. But will there be a job there for Windy Miller

? The serious point here is that the whole issue of wind power received minimal media coverage, before it became the bête-noire of the man who presents the American version of the Apprentice. It's understandable that a man with such a precariously-assembled combover would not be particularly keen on the idea of wind turbines..

Scottish politics is in serious danger of becoming a one-man band, to the extent that the following question is often asked: What would happen if Alex Salmond were to fall under a bus tomorrow? I contacted Lothian Buses, and a spokesperson issued the following statement: "We simply don't have a vehicle in our current fleet which could withstand that kind of impact. These boys are trained not to drive under low bridges". More pertinently, people in Edinburgh may well ask: "What would happen if Alex Salmond were to fall under a tram tomorrow?" People in Edinburgh can make up their own punchlines for that one. ■



The Constitutional Debate

In every SLR between now and the referendum we'll pick a policy issue and ask four writers from across the spectrum of constitutional opinion to argue the pros and cons of independence. In this issue we look at Monarchy.

The monarchy plays a largely symbolic but still dangerous and profoundly anti-democratic role within the British political system. When Walter Bagehot wrote his celebrated work on the British constitution in the nineteenth century he sought to propose ways in which Britain's deeply unequal capitalist society could be maintained in face of demands for universal suffrage. His main proposal was to strengthen the powers of executive cabinet government and its control over an elected parliament. But he also gave a central place to monarchy. The 'display' of monarchy would, he argued, be

critical in maintaining deference to the existing order and mobilising popular emotions for a royal 'family' and thereby for all gradations of rank and wealth. This manifestly remains the case today.

In addition, however, the crown also plays a potentially decisive constitutional role at moments of political crisis. It is the crown, advised by the Privy Council, which has the constitutional power to call on political leaders to form governments in circumstances of a hung parliament or where a particular administration loses its parliamentary majority. The Privy Council, largely made up of superannuated cabinet ministers, is in turn advised by senior servants and can be relied upon to seek to frustrate any attempt to create a government that would be hostile to the existing order.

The decision of the SNP to propose the continuation of the monarch as head of state in Scotland is unfortunately all of a piece with the proposal to retain Sterling as currency, to seek full membership of the EU Single Market and, most recently, to consider membership of NATO. It demonstrates the intent to govern on behalf of the

financial institutions, largely based in the City of London, that own virtually every sector of Scotland's economy – as well, it seems, of the big business interests that control its media. It would leave an independent Scotland bound to the macroeconomic policies determined by the Bank of England and unable to intervene economically in any way

Presiding would be a transformed 'Scottish monarchy', now burnishing its Stuart credentials and surrounded by its 'lairds and lackeys' from the Scottish aristocracy

that contravened Single Market regulations or the new EU Stability, Coordination and Governance Treaty. And presiding would be a transformed 'Scottish monarchy', now burnishing its Stuart credentials and surrounded by its 'lairds and lackeys' from the Scottish aristocracy.

For the left this would appear to be a singularly unattractive and dangerous prospect – dangerous because it will seek to harness national identity to a reactionary project that will in turn transform the character and content of national identity itself. When Bagehot wrote of the ideological role of monarchy in undermining any democratic challenge to the existing order, he had in mind precisely such a transformation. Those sections of the Scottish left who believe that independence as framed by the SNP would somehow be the start of a process that would lead to a 'break up of the British state' need to face this reality.

When Michael McGahey proposed a Scottish Parliament at the 1972 Scottish Assembly, this was certainly not the kind of Scotland he had in mind or this type of constitutional structure he advocated. He called for a Scottish parliament that linked the demand of Scotland's working people to control national resources, the country's productive economy, to a wider class challenge to the British state and its pro-capitalist institutions, a united struggle

which, as actually witnessed in the 1970s, could also change the content of national consciousness both within Scotland and the other nations of Britain.

John Foster

I'll start by declaring that this is a purely personal view and, although I have colleagues in the SNP who are also republicans, it is not party policy. The last time I looked at that, after Independence there would be a referendum at some point on whether we in Scotland have the full blown monarchy, an edited version or go for a republic. I have no problems with that, being a whole-hearted democrat.

I first ditched the whole notion of monarchy as early as nine when the Queen came to Holyrood in her Coronation year on a Round Britain Tour. But back a bit. On the announcement of the death of her father, we were rampaging to "Music with Movement" in the gym when the loudspeaker came on and we were commanded to "sit". Then in sombre tones a BBC announcer – in the pukka Beeb cut-glass voice of the 1950s announced "The King is dead, long live the Queen". I was quite impressed. That continued through the Coronation itself which I watched on our telly, the first in the scheme with a screen the size of a shoe box and a body the size of a tumbledrier. We kids drank lemonade through straws and the grown-ups got sherry, and it wasn't even Christmas! Those were the days. The BBC spoke really posh, hardly anyone had a telly and it only broadcast for a few cherished hours. It was a time of privilege when we were allowed from a respectful distance to watch these special people.

But back to being nine and waiting at Holyrood Palace with my dad and brother, with our periscopes at the ready. Well there was no need for periscopes because there was only a sprinkling of people when she turned up and so I saw her eyeball to eyeball. Gone was the glamour of that coronation gown, the big crown, the sceptre and orb

and there she stood, a wee wumman wi a handbag. I know because in my disappointment that's what I said to my dad. There has been no turning back. But from that Emperors Clothes moment through my own development in life and politics, it has grown into a critical hostility to privilege and all the honours and flummery that tries to give it an alibi. Of course the royal performance/presentation continues. Give them credit they are good at the re-inventing malarkey. After the Dianna nonsense when complete strangers lemming-like threw themselves into publicity-driven grief, through Charles and Camilla's redemption, we are now spoon-fed the William & Kate Show, the latter ironically committed like her deceased predecessor to remaining stick thin for photogenic reasons. No doubt others are mumbling that it's about time she was pregnant.

Now none of this is personal. Wills may be a decent chap, his brother a good sort and Charles is after all 'green'. But how far have we really moved from the fifties and the bunting and the flags? Well quite a way. Not many people will 'out' themselves as republicans but many are indifferent. John Lewis has Union Flag stuff everywhere – as a Scot that also gets my goat – but that aside-not many folk are buying it. Street parties in Scotland can be counted on one hand. Perhaps in their own way, people are putting together for themselves that while their jobs are gone or on the line, while fuel bills reach mortgage heights, young people have no work to go to and old people have seen the value of their savings plummet the royals, the dukes, the lords and ladies prance about in big silly hats (men and women) and yes no fascinators – far too common.

"Revolution" does not come naturally to us, but drop the royal "R" and I think we are moving in the right (do I mean left?) direction. So while it may not be "Vive la Republique", today of all days (this is being written on May 7th) "Vive la France"

Christine Grahame MSP

Ever since I have been young I have been amazed at 'job lot' buying of political views and have tried to resist it all my life. Some political views are totems that we could all have a view on and other are less appealing – such as land reform. Monarchy is maybe the ultimate totem. We can't fail to encounter it. From the people's favourite magazine *Hello!* in the dentist surgery to

documentaries on the BBC, opinions are easy to gather. For a politician looking for another political badge, especially a radical left field badge, surely polices on monarchy are even easier to create for notice.

So with a Scottish background that is as peasant as it comes, from Highland crofter classes, whose ancestors before that were descended the defeated Jacobite side it may be easy for me on many levels to allow my knee to jerk and get myself a policy on the House of Windsor, the legitimate successors of the Hanoverians. There must be shelves full of polices with a variation on the flavour 'abolish the monarchy' and if some other lefties feel the same this 'job lot' purchase could be a comfortable slide.

But hang about; Scotland wants to emulate the Scandinavian countries. The country we most identify with seek to emulate, Norway, with its impressively egalitarian left-of-centre society has, shock horror, a monarchy. As does Sweden and so does Denmark! Despite anti-monarchical types warning darkly of what this totem may say about a society, none of these three countries have become victims of the Chicken-Licken effect, namely the sky has not fallen in – quite the contrary in fact.

Some may say that I am pro monarchy because I don't want any silly distractions from the independence debate. There is logic to their suspicion as

After independence there would be a referendum at some point on whether we in Scotland have the full blown monarchy, an edited version or go for a republic

independence is about moving political powers pertaining to Scotland from Westminster to Holyrood – it is no more complicated. However, there can be a temptation for a part of the group who want independence to get bored waiting for it and to meander into other policy areas that can block the core objective of independence. Logical as that reasoning is, it is not my reasons for being pro monarchy either, it's more practical – why bother with a figurehead alternative?

Ireland has Michael D Higgins as its President, an impressive figure. He is an Irish Gaelic speaker and a poet – a profession more valued to the Gael than the Goill (English Speaker). However, Micheal D was impressive long before he was president and he is no more impressive now.

On Ireland; while I have mentioned my effectively Scottish peasant background, I failed for completeness to say I was half Irish. My late mother's was from the Tipperary/Waterford area and her maternal uncles John Joe and Martin Carey got very agitated about monarchy. In the early 1920s so much so they went to fight each other over it. Not a quick box around the ears one afternoon for them; nope this passion over Kings took the serious guise of the time, with John Joe in the Free State Forces and Martin in the Irish Republican Army. A story with such a spicy label for the 1980s that my mother was in no rush to share it with anyone outside the family.

The sum achievement of Martin and John Joe's efforts according to my mother was to keep Great Grandmother Carey awake and worried sick on moonlit nights in Munster fearing for her sons' lives as the odd gunshot rang out. The anti-republican side won. Old Grandma Carey didn't care. When WWII came, Ireland remained neutral despite having what some would call the 'British King' as head of state - such was their political independence. Today, in 2012 I have no idea quite what my granduncles fight was about in concrete terms, although the abstract a child can understand and maybe till get agitated about.

The case for monarchy is positive – it binds many countries convivially. The Queen has 16 realms, and would it not be fantastic to present Her Majesty with another realm, an independent Scotland soon? Scotland will be the 17th realm, an independent country on the world stage like Canada, Australia or New Zealand with the Queen but free of politicians and Prime Ministers (think Thatcher, Blair, Major, Cameron) from Westminster.

What is more, the Queen's favourite place to visit when given the choice, and she has travelled the world remember, seems to be the Hebrides, so I am also a little biased. And finally if all that were not good enough, her esteemed Private Secretary's first cousin has just been elected as an SNP councillor in Stornoway! Therefore argue about land reform and housing instead. God Save the Queen!

Angus Brendan MacNeil MP

The Silent Crisis

So another election comes and goes and once more the political commentator class struggles to tell us what the results 'prove' about the nation. And that's the problem – local elections aren't meant to 'prove' anything about the nation.

Local elections are supposed to be a way of making decisions about your local community. The fact that they're not seen that way in contemporary Scotland was the starting-point for the latest policy report produced by the Jimmy Reid Foundation.

Called *The Silent Crisis: Failure and Revival in Local Democracy in Scotland*, it became clear from a very early stage that there was no simple 'reform' of existing local authorities which would resolve the problems. There are many things we should be doing to strengthen existing local authorities – above all by ending the drive of centralisation, granting them proper accountable fundraising powers and

The 'trickle up' effect of allowing people in their own communities to make decisions for themselves would be transformative

assuming a power of General Competence across the board. But while doing that would make the existing authorities stronger, stronger local authorities are not the solution if they themselves do not reflect the democratic wishes of the communities they serve.

The report proposes a 'thought experiment' – think of any aspiration your community might have, imagine every single member of your community agrees, and now try to think of a

way that you could all use your votes to achieve the aspiration. You can't, can you? Because no matter how big or small you consider your 'community' to be it almost certainly elects no more than one or two councillors to the largest local authorities in Europe. Local democracy in Scotland is an elaborate form of pleading.

Below you can find a summary of the findings of the report. The report authors are confident that it is possible

to redesign local democracy in Scotland in a way that means its actually working but without excessive disruption and cost. And the prize if we succeed is enormous – a Scotland that begins to re-engage with politics and decision-making rather than being left on the sidelines to complain. The 'trickle up' effect of allowing people in their own communities to make decisions for themselves would be transformative.

We're delighted at the response to the report. We've had strong cross-party support, many very enthusiastic messages from local campaigners across the country and a commitment from the First Minister to hold cross-party talks on whether a consensus can be achieved on the recommendations in the report.

But while the response from within and outside politics has been great and we've also had lots of support from many writers and commentators, still one group seems intent on failing to learn from Scotland's mistakes. There remains a sort of pressure group in Scotland which continues to believe that the best way for the country to be run is for the people to be allowed to voice a sort of

REPORT SUMMARY

Scotland, with its many diverse communities, is a nation with a rich and diverse local tradition. However, this thriving 'localism' is not matched by a thriving local democracy; in fact, quite the opposite is the case.

It is time we fully recognised the state of democracy in Scotland. Below the national level, Scotland is the least democratic country in the European Union; some have argued that it is the least democratic country in the developed world. We elect fewer people to make our decisions than anyone else and fewer people turn out to vote in those elections than anyone else. We have much bigger local councils than anyone else, representing many more people and vastly more land area than anyone else, even other countries with low density of population. In France one in 125 people is an elected community politicians. In Austria, one in 200. In Germany one in 400. In Finland one in 500. In Scotland it is one in 4,270 (even England manages one in 2,860). In Norway one in 81 people stand for election in their

community. In Finland one in 140. In Sweden one in 145. In Scotland one in 2,071. In Norway 5.5 people contest each seat. In Sweden 4.4 people. In Finland 3.7 people. In Scotland 2.1. In every single indicator we were able to identify to show the health of local democracy, Scotland performs worst of any comparator we could find.

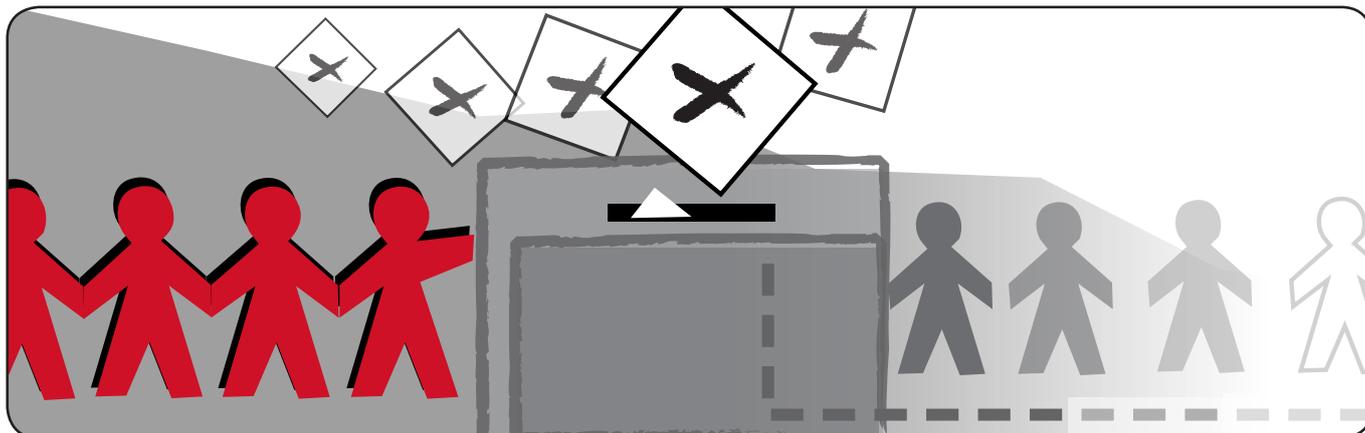
In most of Europe community politics is 'normal' – people you know, your friends and family or neighbours will routinely contest elections to represent your community. In Scotland we have created a system where community politics is 'strange and distant' – you probably don't know many (if any) people who are involved in local politics. You probably don't vote. You certainly end up with a council which is by far the most distant and unrepresentative of your community of any comparable country. And you wonder why confidence in local democracy is low?

This is an existential crisis for local democracy. If we do nothing to address this very clear problem we will end up

with a nation in which politics is the preserve of a tiny cadre of professional politicians who are separate from the rest of society. We will continue to live in a country where professional managers make decisions *for* your community with little reference *to* your community, and they will continue to do it in 'job lots' – not building a school for you but building half a dozen schools for a standardised notion of what a community is. And these blanket policies applied across diverse communities will simply dilute diversity and create homogenous 'clone towns'. Disillusionment and alienation will continue to rise and the gap between politics and the people will continue to widen.

In Scotland we have been kidding ourselves on that a few successful audits of local authority bureaucracy have shown there is no problem. But worse than that, the letters pages of many newspapers suggest that we aren't even widely aware of our status as the least locally democratic nation in the developed world. This cannot be allowed to continue indefinitely.

The Jimmy Reid Foundation launched its second report during the local elections (www.reidfoundation.org/library) calling for major reform of local democracy. But Robin McAlpine explains why local democracy is just the start.



general opinion about the state of the country. But (this is the crucial bit) the task of ‘interpreting’ what opinion has been expressed and then acting on it is certainly not for the people but for a governing class. This class sees every vote as a commentary on economic policy, every outcome as evidence that politicians must pursue an ever-more neoliberal response and every four-year period in between elections as the sole preserve of professional administrators. Communication with the public is inefficient unless it is one-directional. No public service isn’t better run if the

views of the public are ignored in favour of the views of professionals. The voice of people matters only if it is expressed in terms of individual consumption. No unit of administration is ever big enough or distant enough from those it serves, no two bodies not ripe for merging. The bigger it is, the easier it is to outsource and control. This remains the dominant opinion which surrounds government - the business lobby, much of the ‘think tank’ set, the professional writers, much of the civil service and many of the senior professionals who run public sector Scotland. This attitude is sometimes seen

as a problem of the public sector, but this is also wrong. It is a truly public-private partnership between a governing class in which big accountancy firms have as strong a voice as public sector managers.

The Silent Crisis is a report about local communities, but it is also a report about the very nature of Scotland. It is time to reclaim Scotland from the unelected (and often unelectable) governing class. For convenience, we’ll just call it democracy. ■

Robin McAlpine is Director of the Jimmy Reid Foundation and Editor of Scottish Left Review

So there are three core conclusions from this report:

- Local democracy is important in principle and in practice
- There is a clear democratic deficit in Scotland at the local level

To resolve this the Scottish Government should set up a Commission to devise a layer of democracy which can be established below the level of the existing local authorities

In considering how that might be done the report recommends:

- There is no justification for any major restructuring of the administrative bureaucracy of existing local authorities; what is needed is not an extra layer of bureaucracy but an extra layer of democratic decision-making to guide and instruct that bureaucracy
- There are some core principles that must be adhered to in devising that layer of democracy,

central among which is that democracy must be universal and not ‘voluntarist’

- The proposals should be bold in following the principle of subsidiarity – we should trust communities to make as many as possible of the decisions which impact on them themselves, which means making sure they have the maximum possible power
- However, it is important to also make clear that national government does have an important role in establishing national policy frameworks and in ensuring national minimum standards.

It also seeks to set the debate in context:

- Cost should not be seen as a deterrent: as there is no proposal for restructuring the administrative function of existing local authorities the cost of introducing democratic

councils should be no more than a few tens of millions of pounds at most

- Fear of ‘competence’ must not inhibit the debate: the tendency of some professional politicians and administrators to assume communities are not capable of managing their own affairs is clearly contradicted by the experience from across Europe
- This is not a low-priority issue: the current structure which sees politics and decision-making take place distant from and with little reference to the people the decisions affect lies at the very heart of many of the major problems of disillusionment with democracy that are regularly identified in Scotland and the UK as a whole

We believe that this is a matter that should command strong cross-party support and urge politicians of all parties to support these calls for reform. ■

Rise of the Legal Loan Sharks

Scotland today is suffering acutely; the pain from years of neoliberal orthodoxy is biting hard. The manifestations for the Scottish people include unemployment, fuel poverty, frozen wages, rising living costs, the doubling of people using food banks and of course the overall consequence: great swathes of poverty. While for many Scots the oft-trotted out phrase of choosing between 'heating or eating' has become an everyday decision.

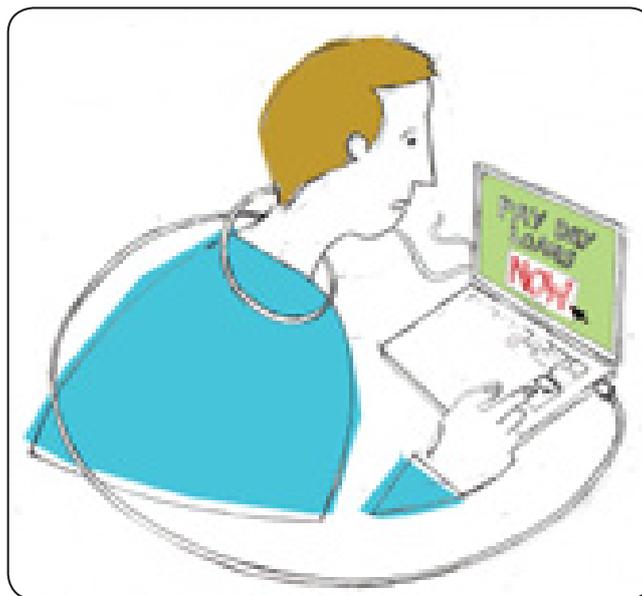
In this climate financial vultures are circling, looking to swoop on all those who find their lives blighted in an era of unprecedented crisis due to unemployment, house repossession or ill health. This article will look at the worst example of these: pay day loans companies and the economic and legislative context which allows these legalised loan sharks to thrive. Conversely, alternatives will be considered; chiefly this will focus on credit unions and how they could be used to fend off the legalised loan sharking of pay day loan companies. However, prior to that discussion we think it is important to understand the economic context in which pay day loan companies operate.

The material consequences of the current, austerity-led policy course being taken in Westminster and largely replicated in Holyrood, are grim. Unemployment has increased by 78 per cent, from 130,000 to 231,000, since 2007. Youth unemployment in Scotland is now at levels which are reminiscent of Thatcher's Britain of the 1980s. Long-term unemployment among our young people has almost doubled - up from 37,000 to 66,000, while the long-term claimant count among 18 to 24-year-olds has nearly quadrupled, rising from 3,700 in May 2007 to 13,655 at the last count. At the same time the vacancies for Scots seeking work have decreased from 33,836 to 19,394.

The Campaign to End Child Poverty recently reported that in Scotland this year 13 Councils had rates of child poverty of 30 per cent or more. On average it's said that one in four children live in poverty. Shamefully, the UK, as a

whole, has one of the worst rates of child poverty in the industrialised world. But, when considering poverty we should be clear, this includes children from families both on benefits and in work. In-work poverty is assisted by the undoubted fact that wages are plummeting - note attack on jobs, pensions and the pay freeze policy in the public sector.

Stewart Lansley, author of 'The Cost of Inequality: Three Decades of the Super-rich and the Economy', recently told the Scottish Parliament how the share of output going to wages in the UK economy was 64 per cent in the 1970s but has been on a permanently downward slide since that high point and now stands at around 53 per cent. Many attempts to explain that lost 11



per cent have been cited. But let us be clear: it's as a result of a concerted and deliberate strategy to redistribute wealth from the less well off to the super rich. Since 2000 According to the *Sunday Times*, the top 1,000 people now have £250 billion more than they did in 2000. One entrepreneur hoping to enter these realms is Errol Damelin of the pay day loans company Wonga.com.

Wonga.com is one of literally dozens of pay day loan companies where people can access quick money, but it is probably the most high profile of the companies currently capitalising from poverty and people's misery. Formed in 2007 Damellin proclaims Wonga.com is seeking to change the world and that its client base is made up of "the 'Facebook

Generation' - the couple whose boiler breaks down at 7am or the teenager who has to find money for a Glastonbury ticket" (*Observer*, October 2011). This is a grotesque PR offensive that represents a complete distortion of the truth.

The truth is people use Wonga or any other pay day loan company because they are desperate and have no money and as they have no other alternative means to quick money. Pay day loan companies target the poorest people, the people who are already struggling with their bills and who turn to these companies often just to pay their rent and mortgage. These people can accrue huge debts as their loans roll over each month; hence the OFT inquiry begun in February 2012, which will consider the pay day loan sector and the 'alleged' irresponsible lending in the sector.

Pay day loans companies need legitimacy as well as business. Advertising and marketing are the most obvious ways to seek that. They practice blanket advertising and sponsor football clubs (shame on Hearts and Motherwell). Other methods are much more cynical. In 2010 Wonga.com was accused of being predatory when it focused an advertising campaign amongst students. They suggested that students take out high-cost short-term loans so they could buy plane tickets to the Canary Islands. This short-lived campaign - it was

withdrawn after a public outcry - also misleadingly suggested to students that their short term loans might be better than student loans. Despite the fact that the annual interest rate with Wonga.com is 4,214 per cent and its only 1.5 per cent with a student loan; a fact unsurprisingly omitted from their advert.

Equally unsurprisingly, poor people often do not or cannot pay the money back quickly enough - or at all. In short, as described by the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) in their 2011 'Drowning in Debt' report, people are subsumed in debt. The CAB report how 26 per cent of all new issues they dealt with were debt issues. This equated to ,566 new debt issues that were dealt with by CAB in 2010/11, the equivalent of 400 new

Pay day loan companies may advertise themselves as a social service but they are quite the opposite, argues Neil Findlay. It is time that people were offered a real alternative to this legalised loan-sharking.

debt issues for every day of the year. Of these, 21,515 were in relation to personal loan debts. Given the APR rates charged by Pay Day Loan companies we can presume that these debts include people unable to pay back Pay day loan companies.

A joke doing the rounds recently linked the national debt of the USA with taking a Wonga.com loan – “America has reached a national debt of \$14.3 yet they only asked Wonga.com for a loan of \$200”. Is this a ridiculous outcome? Actually, Martin Lewis of Moneyexpert.com fame calculated that if you borrowed just £100 from the company at their APR, you would owe more than the US national debt after seven years! That said, we should be clear that the terms and conditions of pay day loan companies vary greatly. Common to them all is the exorbitant APR if the loan is not paid back quickly and/or on time.

For any fair-minded person it's obvious that what Pay Day Loan companies are doing is plain wrong. So how can they go unchecked without apparently any intervention by Government? Currently they are within the law, so arguably the current legislative framework is woefully inadequate. Margo McDonald MSP who sought to introduce a Scottish Parliament Members Bill on the issue said that “the current UK legislation is not fit for purpose” and that it is “ridiculous that as things stand we are unable to, in Scotland, effectively regulate these businesses”. At Westminster, Walthamstow MP, Stella Creasy, has been fighting to legislate with a view to curbing the exploitative practices of the Pay Day Loan Companies. She has tabled an amendment to the Financial Services Bill on the issue.

The Financial Services Bill at Westminster covers many issues including reforming the way banks are regulated and the creation of a new Financial Conduct Authority. Crucially the new FCA will also oversee consumer credit – and have the power to act against companies who offer ‘toxic’ financial products. This amendment by Stella Creasy would give this new body specific power to cap the charges firms make for credit. Stella Creasy is arguing that this is a vital first step towards tackling the “legal loan sharking”

practiced by the pay day loan companies. However, no doubt she would agree that this is only one small step amongst many that are needed.

Long-term we need to make our banking system more socially productive, one which acts in a way that meets the needs of our society. Last month Friends of the Earth alongside various partners, including Unison, organised an important and timely conference into the UK Banking sector. Speaker after speaker argued the urgent need for reform. One, Richard Werner, was uncompromising in his analysis: banks are currently not, but need to be changed into becoming, socially useful entities. He continued, stating that wider government intervention is needed to get banks to use their means for socially productive reasons and that introduces a regime of credit guidance which returns the power to create and allocate money to the people.

Having socially productive banks with a moral compass would negate any need for pay day loan companies. However, as desirable as this is it's obvious that root and branch reform of our banks is not going to happen any time soon. But, what we can do now is assist those financial organisations who are already working in socially productive ways; particularly the credit unions who across the country are doing such valuable work

But, as Richard Werner told the ‘Just Banking’ conference credit unions are seriously restricted at the same time as banks are unrestricted. We could of course make the same claim about pay day Loan companies, who are getting away with activities that would not be allowed in most other countries across Europe. In this context Werner posed some profound questions. Why are there so many restrictions on socially useful banks, while simultaneously there are so few restrictions on the profit-oriented, private sector commercial banks? Why not abolish all restrictions on credit unions, but introduce direct restrictions on the amounts banks can lend for speculative transactions?

Nevertheless, credit unions, despite restrictions, can provide a good alternative. In West Lothian there are two shining examples of small local

credit unions which, like so many others throughout the country, are providing a great service to local people and keeping them away from the loan sharks, both legal and illegal. Their role in assisting people in the most vulnerable of communities is widely recognised; including by the Scottish Government. However, life for local credit unions is difficult and getting harder and they need help not platitudes.

Recently, alongside Margo McDonald, I met with John Swinney to discuss how the Scottish Government could and should help credit unions. We felt the Scottish Government, with the right level of political willingness and imagination, could feasibly assist with.

For example, it could develop a specific fund to assist credit unions. This could be used to a national advertising campaign for credit unions, raising awareness that an alternative exists and pointing people towards www.findyourcreditunion.co.uk or a dedicated new site. The Scottish Government could also consider a levy on high-cost lenders who are based on Scottish high streets or knocking doors across the country to fund the promotion of credit unions and to pay for high street premises so that the ethical alternative can compete on an equal footing despite not generating the same massive profits from members/customers. A possible precedent has been established with the proposed supermarket tax.

To conclude, it's obvious that the current economic context is providing fertile ground for legalised loan sharking. Likewise, the current legislative framework is assisting in the growth of pay day loan companies and the corresponding exploitation of the poorer members of our society. The UK Government must curb the activities of pay day loans and lift the current restrictions on credit unions. Here in Scotland the Scottish Government must help our cherished credit unions thrive. Long-term, and this is the fundamental question, our onus has to be the creation and development of a much more socially useful and productive banking and financial system. For without that the vultures will always find their prey. ■

Neil Findlay is Labour MSP for the Lothians

Prozac Nationalism

In 2010, the Scottish Government quietly abandoned its commitment to reduce antidepressant use within Scotland. The original commitment came amidst a wave of concern and worry that ten per cent of Scots were taking antidepressants, and the SNP promised to promote alternative treatments. Recommending this abandonment, the Scottish Government Audit Committee suggested that the reduction commitment did not reflect the complexity of treatment options within Scotland. Importantly, it argued, recent research concluded most GPs were prescribing appropriately anyway. Thus concerns over the high use of antidepressants within Scotland were unfounded.

At present the mental health strategy, *Towards a Mentally Flourishing Scotland*, is under review, but the abandonment of that commitment is a cause for concern. And abandoning it on the basis of the Aberdeen University research is extremely concerning for it accepts a very controversial view of mental illness that reduces complex emotions to a single biomedical cause. Depression, for instance, is caused by chemical or biological abnormalities of the brain, and should be treated accordingly. Accepting the study's conclusion that GPs were prescribing appropriately then means they also accept Depression is biomedical in origin. As a consequence, it promotes antidepressant medication above, say, counselling, CBT or even exercise.

The biomedical view additionally prevents any social analysis of unhappiness or desperately low mood, and medicalises these problems. It ignores the correlation between poverty, inequality and poor mental health, for instance. Research suggests that poor mental health is caused by poverty, for instance, with Bristol University suggesting that as many as 50 per cent of people in poverty have

signs of depression. Reverting to a biomedical discourse of poor mental health prevents these social and economic connections from being established, siting responsibility on the individual's biology, and not society. And thus any sense of collective social responsibility for our health and welfare is abandoned. We don't need to change society to make it more mentally healthy, we just need doctors and scientists manipulate the brain.

The SNP's change in strategy is important then because the biomedical discourse moves away from a social analysis of health. It is also often seen as a discourse that is of considerable benefit to the pharmaceutical industry. There was a 234 per cent rise of antidepressants between 1992 and 2002, for instance, and this has steadily increased since then. The pharmaceutical industry's profit has risen accordingly, outstripping most other industries in terms of median profit. The industry is staggeringly

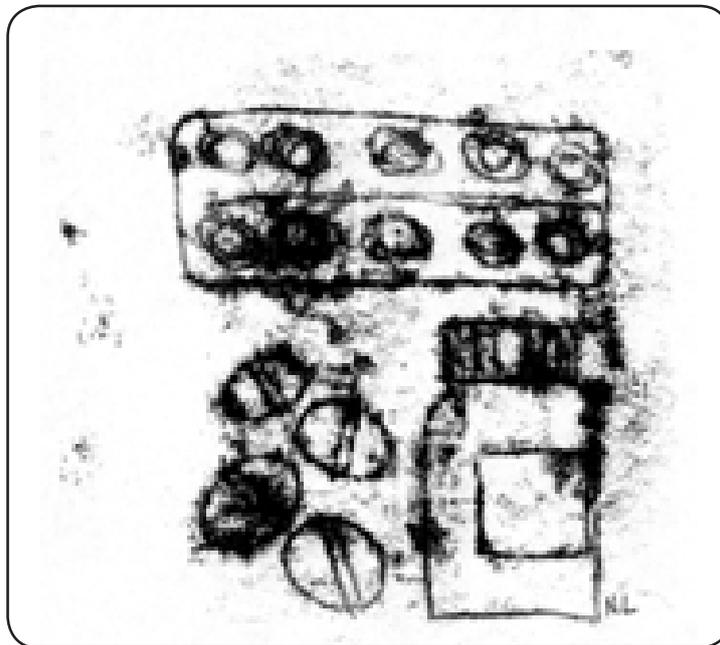
mental health support.

This alignment with industry is actually disturbing when we consider that the actual usefulness of antidepressant medication is under question. The Scotland Action on Mental Health (SAMH) study, for instance, stated that around 50 per cent of people found medication did not actually improve their mood, and that 60 per cent of people reported side effects from the most common antidepressant type (SSRIs), when taking it and when trying to withdraw. More generally, Joanna Moncreiff, Psychiatrist and critic of the 'chemical cure' states that the biomedical origin of depression is a myth and that the only reason medication works is because they put people in a chemically-induced altered state that suppresses or masks emotional problems. Antidepressant medication does not really solve the issues of Depression then. At best they mask people's feelings through drugs.

Worse, the side effects reported by SAMH are severe, including anxiety, anger and even violence. Some critics even accuse this medication of being dangerous, and point to thousands of deaths caused by such drugs. A very public example of this was Glaxo Smith Kline which was accused of withholding important clinical trial information regarding the high likelihood of under-18s having suicidal thoughts when taking Seroxat. Some independent trials suggested the suicide risk was up to six times higher than normal. It was suspected that such information was

withheld for nearly a decade. One ex Pharmaceutical industry chemist suggests that we have a billion dollar industry making a lot of people sick and profiting from it. Antidepressant medication as 'appropriate' treatment is a statement that should be treated with extreme caution then. Something the Scottish Government clearly has not done.

Behind the Aberdeen University study then lie a lot of question



massive, the *Guardian* newspaper comparing their size to 'behemoths', 'outweighing entire continents'. 'Big Pharma' (as they are often called) has promoted and pushed antidepressant medication continuously, facilitated by the biomedical discourse. That the Scottish Government accepts current antidepressant use as 'appropriate' then shows a strategy more in alignment with industry's needs than those who need

The SNP's encouragement of the Pharmaceutical industry's control over mental illness in Scotland might seem to offer economic hope but it is harming our wellbeing, argues Siobhan Tolland

marks over their assumed truths of antidepressant medication. As a result the Scottish Government's acceptance should be seriously questioned. The fact that the side effects of these drugs are so common and sometimes so terrible seemed to have no impact on the study's conclusion or the Scottish Government in accepting it. It seems that antidepressant medication does not actually support or help people with poor mental health, but merely serves to put people into a drug-induced state. This ultimately functions as a form of social control because it prevents any serious questioning of the system that causes such poor mental health in the first place.

Given the controversy over antidepressants then, it seems strange that the Scottish Government saw no relevance in the fact that two authors of the Aberdeen University study were on the payroll of various drugs companies as speakers or consultants. Objectivity in such research is often questioned because of the considerable influence the industry exerts over it. In such medical research one-third of writers have substantial financial interest in their published work, through sponsorships, consultancies and general payments by the industry. Indeed, a lot of the time the industry doesn't need to offer financial incentives because they ghost-write over half of all publications about medication. Financial interest and profit skews a lot of medical research and there is often not even a pretence of objectivity. It is this influence that the Scottish Government is rigorously trying to encourage, as it entices Big Pharma into Scotland and open NHS research up to that influence.

Since the opening of the Scottish

Parliament, the lobbying organisation of the pharmaceutical industry (the ABPI) set up camp in Scotland and has continuously lobbied the government. 'Big Pharma' has the biggest political lobbying budget in Washington and spends more on marketing and advertising than they do on research and development. The ABPI is open about creating 'foot soldiers' within important areas such as support groups and sympathetic health professionals to weaken the political and ideological defences. And their presence in Scotland has initiated a political and cultural change that transforms science and health care to meet the needs of the industry. SNP's change in policy

regarding antidepressant medication highlights this influence.

SNP's policy change reflects a wider financial strategy to bring more of the industry in to Scotland. In 2007, the Government announced a 55-acre Bio-quarter project beside the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, as site of excellence in Life Sciences research. Attracting investment was one of the key objectives and the pharmaceutical industry now sits in the grounds of the hospital and research facilities. The next year, the Scottish Life Sciences Advisory Board (SLCAB) was set up. This was a joint government, academic and industry initiative to develop innovation and growth within the life sciences (of which the drug industry makes up seventy per cent). This has led to government initiatives, grants and a close working relationship between the health minister and the ABPI, determining policy and future initiatives according to the needs of Big Pharma.

More worrying, by 2011 the

SNP was openly promising to open NHS Research Scotland up to the pharmaceutical industry. This involved a mission to double the economic contribution of life sciences and accelerate growth with an emphasis on business and institutional collaboration. Promoting health seems pretty absent against this language of business interest. One example of such a promise was a joint partnership with companies carrying out clinical trials which involved streamlining the 'regulatory approval processes', meeting the open demands of the ABPI. Since Psychiatry and Neuroscience are proposed areas for NHS Research/industry development, the biomedical influence of mental health and illness seems pretty inevitable. Certainly the interests of industry will be higher up the agenda than ever before, as health becomes business and profit.

As the SNP prepares for the vote on independence then, it has been busily trying to develop the economic and financial future of Scotland. Life Sciences is one area where the SNP has seen an opportunity to develop wealth, making Scotland a viable independent economy. And it seems to be working. Scotland is bucking the European trend by attracting more drug industry investment in clinical trials, for instance. There is a real worry, however, that in the mission for independence, we have become lured by the promise of wealth and the might of Big Pharma.

The consequences of allowing the drugs industry this level of control over our mental health is terrifying, as SNP's promotion of alternative treatment becomes less compatible with Big Pharma's interests. Donald Trump's permission to have a practically free reign over parts of northern Scotland has been met with incredulity and even horror. Allowing Big Pharma control within our health sector, however, has been met with very little opposition or even analysis within Scotland. The ABPI makes it clear: treating poor health is irrelevant if it cannot meet the needs of shareholders. And we are allowing this industry control over our mental health. ■

Dr Siobhan Tolland researches the politics of health in contemporary Scotland.

Iran: Editing Out the Doubts

There appears to be a constant stream of information on Iran's nuclear programme, reports regarding this programme are regular features of the UK press. The Times ran at least 25 articles between January and March of 2012 discussing Iran's nuclear programme. A few of the headlines were:

US Air Force chief plans to help Israel hit Iran nuclear sites (02 March 2012)

Iran claims nuclear breakthrough that puts it one step away from the Bomb (16 February 2012)

Israel prepares for Iran to test nuclear bomb this year (10 January 2012)

Between the 26 and 29 March the *Guardian* ran at least 11 articles touching on Iran's nuclear programme. The wide range of articles in the *Telegraph* included the somewhat bizarre (29 March) "Benjamin Netanyahu is right – the free world must act against Iran to avert a nuclear holocaust". One is presumably supposed to forget that a) Israel also possess nuclear weapons and b) Israel is in illegal occupation of Palestinian territory and, as such, is an aggressor state. One thing is certain, the UK press leave little room for doubt, Iran is building, and presumably is prepared to use, nuclear warheads.

Alongside the stream of press stories, the various site inspections and threats of UN sanctions, there has also been the assassination of Iranian scientists. Western reporting of these acts of murder have provided a fascinating insight into 'press impartiality'. It is difficult to find any reporting which unequivocally condemns the killings. How would the press in the UK and the US have reacted if a nuclear scientist had been killed on the streets of Glasgow or New York? Would there have been speculation as to our weapons programme, or would the cold blooded killing of an unarmed civilian have gained widespread condemnation? Had the nuclear scientist been killed on the streets of Tel Aviv would we not have been hearing of acts of terrorism and the need for Israeli to respond to such a

blatant act of aggression? The *Guardian* (11/01/12) described the killing as "Goading a regime on the brink". "Goading"? Four (possibly five) scientists killed within two years – goading? Would the *Guardian* have described the murder of a UK scientist by Iran as "Iran goads the UK"?

This March we saw a slew of news stories on an International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report. To quote the *BBC* (03-03-2012) "Drawing on evidence provided by more than 10 member states as well as its own information, the IAEA said Iran had carried out activities "relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device". *Time World Report* (07-03-12): "Iran May Be Cleaning Nuke Work". Reuters (05-03-12) IAEA has "serious concerns"

as Iran boosts nuclear work, Amano told a news conference at the IAEA in Vienna there were indications of unspecified "activities" at an Iranian military site which his inspectors want to visit as part of a probe into fears Iran may be seeking nuclear weapons capability. His remarks confirmed comments made by IAEA diplomats to Reuters last week when one said: "we have heard about possible sanitation" of the Parchin site that he called "very concerning," suggesting Iran may be delaying access while it removed evidence of suspect activities.

So what do these news reports tell us? Firstly that this is not an independent IAEA report. Only 10 nations contributed to it – it is emphatically not independent. Secondly that the news agencies are clutching at straws. "Possible sanitation" - Iranian diggers have removed sand. Here is an equally viable

alternative explanation. Iran is building, or preparing to build, lots of sand pits for city children to play in. If you want to build sand pits you have to dig up, and transport, sand. This is exactly what Iran appears to be doing. This is worrying.

An important issue is raised. If Iran builds sand pits for children to play in, and given that Iran is not a democratic regime, does this mean that children's play areas are inextricably linked to a lack of democracy and abuses of human rights? Iran's movement of sand at Parchin clearly could be an indication of a significant effort to indoctrinate children. The one thing that stands out from these reports is that everything is couched in terms of, possible, probable, might, if. If this is evidence it might

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possibly, may even probably, be perhaps slightly indicative of a lack of hard facts. There is an interesting footnote to this story. In 2006 the IAEA issued a report on Parchin which stated that "[the IAEA] did not observe any unusual activities in the buildings visited, and the results of the analysis of environmental samples did not indicate the presence of nuclear material" (BBC 6 March). So if anything has happened in Parchin it has occurred after 2006. Possibly.

In spite of the massed agreement of the UK press there are other voices. *Democracy Now* (21-11-11) Seymour Hersh: "Propaganda Used Ahead of Iraq War Is Now Being Reused over Iran's Nuke Program" (surely not, must be some mistake). In Hersh's recent articles he notes a complete lack of evidence to suggest that Iran has had a nuclear weapons programme since 2003.

Bill Wilson looks at the western media reporting of Iran's development of nuclear technology and finds once again that taking 'maybes' as facts and then editing out the 'maybes' is ratcheting up the case for war

Not only is the IAEA report not independent, but there are serious concerns that the new head of the IAEA is not independent either. As noted by *Media Lens* the new chief of the IEAE Amano "has described himself as 'solidly in the U.S. court on every key strategic decision, from high-level personnel appointments to the handling of Iran's alleged nuclear weapons program.'" Not something any of the mainstream press noted in their recent reports on Iran and

the IAEA.

In contrast to UK News Agencies *New Scientist* took a rather different line on the IAEA report (10 Nov) stating that the IAEA report found evidence of a programme until 2003 but no solid evidence of any weapons development since then. Indeed in contrast to the UK press *New Scientist* has ran a series of articles since 2004 casting doubts on Iranian nuclear weapons development; "Iran nuclear weapons ambition still

unproven" (13 Sept 2004) "Iran's nukes – more politics than reality" (29 April 2006). Apparently not everybody shares the conviction that Iran is developing nuclear weapons. Or to be more precise, that Iran did not abandon its development programme in 2003.

How is it possible that doubting voices are so rarely heard in the mainstream UK press? How is it possible that might, perhaps, maybe, could be, if have become evidence? How is it possible, so soon after Iraq WMD and 45 minutes to launch that we find ourselves, once again, preparing to beat the *pas de charge* on the basis of such elusive and limited evidence?

The UK Foreign Secretary William Hague ratchets up the tension "The onus will be on Iran to convince the international community that its nuclear programme is exclusively peaceful" (*Telegraph* 29 March 2012). (No innocent until proven guilty, the accused must prove a negative). On 29 March Arutz Shiva noted "A new report prepared for the U.S. Congress indicates that neither the U.S. nor Israel knows exactly where all of Iran's nuclear facilities are". The article goes on to say "The authors noted that one U.S. official said in April 2011 that there 'could be lots of workshops in Iran' ". And in the same article; "according to Bloomberg, a former U.S. government official with 'direct experience' in the issue told the researchers that 'Iran's centrifuge production is widely distributed and that the number of workshops has probably multiplied many times since 2005'".

Do not know where the facilities are, could be lots of workshops, probably multiplied. In what sane world is this news, in what sane world is so much news space wasted on "do not know", "could be", "probably multiplied". Jan 8, Face the Nation, Defence Secretary Leon Panetta; "Are they trying to develop a nuclear weapon? No. But we know that they're trying to develop a nuclear capability. And that's what concerns us...". Do you know what I cannot see in US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta's comments? The word probably is notable for its absence. ■

ASLEF CALLS FOR AN INTEGRATED, PUBLICLY OWNED, ACCOUNTABLE RAILWAY FOR SCOTLAND

(which used to be the SNP's position – before they became the government!)



Mick Whelan
General Secretary

Alan Donnelly
President

Kevin Lindsay
Scottish Officer

ASLEF the train drivers union - www.aslef.org.uk

Bill Wilson is a former SNP MSP

Money for Nothing isn't Wealth

What is the real cause of the current international financial crisis? Ask five economists that question and you will get five different explanations. We are told that every country in the world is in debt (except China which we will leave out of this for now) and that they have all been borrowing too much and need now to pay their debts. Well if that is so, who has lent them all this money? Who do they owe these trillions of Pounds, Dollars and Euros to? How did this massive debt accumulate?

Most people borrow money for specific purposes and pay it back over a specific period of time, and of course by the law of averages, if X number are in debt; then Y number are in credit. This means debts and credits would normally balance each other out. So how did a whole number of national economies all get into massive debt at the same time with none in credit and who do they owe the money to?

When we ask reasonable questions like that we get answers which are clearly invalid given the scale of the debt (it was 'sub-prime mortgages').

There is however a relatively straightforward explanation for this phenomenon if we look at what Marx had to say about the instability of capitalism. In addition to the tendency for the free market to be cyclical Marx also pointed out that the capitalist market system had within it the "seeds of its own destruction" which would in time destroy it from within. This is something else which Marx noted from studying Smith's work and he pointed out that Adam Smith had made an error which if not corrected would have a long term and terminal effect on the capitalist market. When Smith was observing early capitalism in Glasgow he noted that almost all of the 'capitalists' were not initially rich men, and indeed most never became rich. So when he was putting together the 'basic' requirements for capitalist production he reduced them to three basic elements: labour, land (which includes all natural resources) and rent (which later became capital as we will all now know it)

The people Smith was observing did not have great land and resources (land was still in the hands of the aristocracy)

so he noted their need to 'rent' such resources from the aristocracy as an 'element' in the production process. Years later when Marx was studying Smith's work the world had changed and the capitalist producers owned the land resources. So he defined Smith's 'rent' simply as capital rather than a separate 'element'. He pointed out that capital was merely another name for 'consolidated' labour in a storable form.

But there was a problem. If we assume that no production can be undertaken without all three elements

being secured and being rewarded per unit then over time (as Smith had shown) through division of labour and the increasing use of capital, wealth was being created more 'efficiently' and at an ever-increasing rate. Therefore if we start in Adam Smith's day with each unit of production being composed of 90 per cent labour, eight per cent resources and two per cent capital, the capital ingredient in each unit of production is small. By Marx's time however if we do the same calculation we

find that each new unit of production is composed of 70 per cent labour, six per cent resources (the production system gets increasingly efficient at using labour and recourses therefore reducing the amount per unit) and 24 per cent capital. If we fast forward to our time the relevant figure is more like 15 per cent labour four per cent resources and 81 per cent capital per new unit of production.

That is the calculation which Marx made so what did it tell him, and what does it tell us? It is clear that this system of rewards for contribution per unit of production is entirely unsustainable, it

was flawed from the start and it is getting worse at an increasing rate. Our capitalist system demands that we give a reward per unit of capital at an ever increasing rate per unit of production (as Marx predicted). Put another way, we must pay a greater and greater percentage of the wealth we create to the 'moneylenders'.

This is the foundation of the present financial crisis. The financial system pays out in money terms the capital required to go into the production system and the percentage of this per new unit of production is constantly increasing.

Therefore the more productivity the workers achieve the more capital we require and the more interest we need to find to reward it. This extra-profit which the system demands at an increasing rate Marx called 'surplus value'. Does this not exactly describe our current economic crisis? Every country is in debt and needs to find more money to invest so that it can produce in order to pay this debt – except this means more debt again and the rate per unit of production of debt is rising.

Why could the Victorians afford major capital infrastructure projects in Scotland like the Forth Bridge, and the Caledonian Canal, yet we can't? Why could the British Government establish the NHS in 1947 when we had just emerged from a devastating war and were saddled with enormous war debts yet we can't afford to run it properly to-day when all these war debts are paid and we are many times richer than we were then? Each year we improve workers' 'productivity' so we get more output from the same amount of natural resources. So why is everyone who is employed making this massive

The more productivity the workers achieve the more capital we require and the more interest we need to find to reward it. This extra-profit which the system demands at an increasing rate Marx called 'surplus value'. Does this not exactly describe our current economic crisis?

Andy Anderson concludes his series on economic theory by pointing out that Marx's prediction that demanding ever-greater profit from the same resources would create constant economic crises has proved true. But what next?

new wealth not getting richer and richer?

If you think of this in relation to your own practical experience, you will realise this is not an untested economic theory but a well tested economic fact. I started work in Blairhall colliery in Fife in 1953 and worked with my father. At that time the coal-mines had been nationalised and big improvements had been made in investment. The average production per employee by the National Coal Board at that time would have been around 20cwt per man/shift. Which means one ton of coal produced ready for sale for every shift put in by *all* NCB employees (who would then have included the bath attendants in the colliery baths, nurses in the colliery health centre and office staff in the sales and supplies offices). When my father started work at a Fife colliery some 35 years earlier, it was a privately owned pit, there were no baths, there was no health centre, and many fewer white collar staff. The out-put per man/shift would have been around 5cwt. Today there are advanced systems of mining in Yorkshire fully mechanised and using retreat mining technology which are producing 100 ton per man/shift.

Now money is not wealth, money is merely a medium of exchange for the transfer of wealth. Production (or more accurately the goods and services produced) is real wealth – though it is normally 'measured' or 'evaluated' in money terms. When we ask if we can afford something, the real question is do we have access to the real wealth which we will need to pay people to make something?

If we apply the original 'elements' of production which Adam Smith used over time we run into the problem which Marx identified: the return to capital per unit of production is constantly rising while 'labour' and 'land' (remember this includes all natural resources) are falling. Over time this makes capital per unit of new production 'top heavy' and what it means in social terms is that a small wealthy section of the economic community (which is now international) become super super rich, while the vast majority run into debt.

There are of course a number of things Governments in capitalist

countries can do to try to mitigate against this problem, like writing off specific debts or taxing the super rich, and some of these are being suggested. But if you don't deal with the basic problem, whatever short term fix you apply will soon prove inadequate. The answer is simple, but has huge social implications; we need to reclassify capital as consolidated labour which is not a separate 'element' of production but is a resource for production which can be used or stored like natural resources and which has no value other than its intrinsic value. If we did that tomorrow we could overcome the world debt problem and move forward at a much higher production rate. But this would cause a major redistribution of wealth; without us taking anything from anyone that they currently hold we would have dramatically changed the market value of the holdings of the supper rich.

Of course a Keynesian approach to the problems in the present capitalist world, while it will not resolve the long term contradictions, would be a much better and easier first step to take for any Government in the capitalist sphere of influence. Since the present system can't continue indefinitely, because it will continue to get worse, this would be a wise route to take.

If Marx is right about this (and the evidence seems clear to me) then where will the system fail first in today's world? I believe that the present system will fail in the financial sector where the strains are already manifest. The failure of international financial institutions and international currencies seems to me to be the weak point in the system and where it will break under pressure, because in a desperate attempt to retain the value of the 'currency' attempts will be made to force people to restrict the development of 'real' economic growth. As in Greece today. Once that happens and there is a failure in one or more of the international currencies then we are in new territory and economic development on the old capitalist model will be extremely difficult if not impossible. Britain's bloated financial sector and the pound as an international currency are very vulnerable to be early victims of this collapse.

Scotland's best chance as a small nation in a world hurricane is to keep free from our holdings of UK financial assets (which could be worthless) and to do what the current Scottish Government is trying to do – invest in local renewable energy and build an economic infrastructure based on real natural resources. Then when the unreal resources evaporate over night we will have a real basis on which to rebuild. Our oil reserves for example, which are currently based on the oil dollar, would still be a valuable asset even if the dollars we had hidden in our wardrobe were worthless.

It is not possible to predict what a failure in the international capitalist financial system will result in, or indeed if it will come in one huge surge like a tsunami, or in several surges over a period of time; many will make great efforts to save the system and patch-ups and adjustments will be made to try to preserve it. What is however beyond doubt is that if the 'exchange system' fails people will fall back on real assets rather than paper assets which could be worthless, and therefore economies which depend very much on 'financial assets' such as the USA and Britain will be hardest hit. In such a situation there will be considerable dangers because the production system will be in chaos in many countries and social systems will break down.

What is beyond dispute is that the system that emerges in Europe after this chaos will be more socialist and collectivist because it will need these qualities to survive. Since it seems to me that this is what the crisis is about I believe that we need to take positive actions to prepare for the storm economically and politically and the better prepared we are the better we will be able to protect ourselves and help others. ■

Andy Anderson is an ex-coal miner, ex-Ruskin and New College Oxford student, ex Nupe official and author of "The Skye Bridge Story" dealing with the community campaign which defeated the first PFI in the UK.

Reviews

CLASS STRUGGLE - FILM FROM THE CLYDE AND UCS 1 DIR. ANNE GUEDES 1971

One of the most memorable sequences from *Class Struggle - film from the Clyde* (itself a most memorable film) is the sequence shot in the double bottom of a ship being built during the UCS Work-in. The sequence is like a scene from hell. The noise of hammers and welding torches reverberate off the metal, making the men's voices redundant - although that doesn't stop the chat (lipreading must have been a by-product of experience in that job). The film itself is reduced to black and flaring white lighting up occasional shots of the men working. It is no wonder that the Joint Co-ordinating Committee initially refused Cinema Action - the collective that made the film - access to that job as too dangerous!

Mind you that was the only refusal of access that Anne Guedes and her cameraman (and future husband) Eduardo Guedes received when they shot the two films that were screened recently as part of the 40th Anniversary of the UCS Work-in - and that was eventually rescinded. The film collective was given unique access to the Upper Clyde yards during the 18 month Work-in and has produced two remarkable films. The longer *Class Struggle* tells the story of the shipyards of the Clyde and the full story of the Work-in from the perspective of the work force. The shorter *UCS 1* is a campaigning film concentrating on the

marches, the meetings and the stewards and their impact on the politics and community at the time (and many would say since).

Both films use the voice of the workers (and apprentices) to tell their own story. There is no 'voice of God' narrating the films. Neither do they edit to deliver a didactic message. Criticisms of the participants are both implied and stated (watch the wonderful sequence of Boilermaker's leader Dan McGarvey managing to appear cynical about victory while falling asleep at the same time!). But what comes across magnificently is the level of pride from both the workforce and the community (both locally and internationally) for the innovative tactic, for the stewards who came up with it and organised it, and for the job (dirty and dangerous though it was) that they did.

Ann Guedes, the co-founder of Cinema Action, who flew over from her home in Lisbon for the Screenings in Glasgow's Mitchell Theatre, is herself a remarkable woman. Her life has taken her from interrogation by the French security forces to sleeping on Paisley floors.

The events that brought her to Glasgow and the shipyards could be a

feature film themselves. They go back to the occupations and strikes of Paris in 1968. Ann, a journalist in the English language service of French broadcaster ORTF, was part of the occupation there, and soon came to the attention of the security forces.

"The difference between Cinema Action and the mainstream media," she asserts "is that in working class film you listen to the workers."

Expelled from France along with her three children, but without any possessions or her then-husband's writings, she eventually got back to Britain via Germany and the West German student movement. Her Paris experiences led

directly to the Clyde.

"The French actions," says Ann. "linked workers' struggles, students and other sections of the community - something that had not happened before. Occupations too, were a new development, the idea of workers taking direct control over their workplaces was very important to all of us in Cinema Action. When I read about this happening on the Clyde, I had to get there to record it."

Cinema Action was formed to record workers's struggles and film campaigning films for them. Initially the collective produced five-minute 'Cinetracts' for workers in disputes as diverse as Merseyside Docks, GEC, Rolls Royce Coventry and Vauxhall, and against the In Place of Strife legislation proposed by the Labour Government in 1969.

Glasgow was "Everything I could have dreamed of," Ann now recalls. Cinema Action first came up to record demos in early/mid-1971. From this they produced the short campaign film, *UCS 1*. This gained them unique approval from the Co-ordinating Committee to access the Work-in, and they travelled up many times, often staying on floors, in particular the floor of Paisley folk singer Danny Kyle. Indeed, shipyard apprentice Stephen Farmer - adopted by the Cinema Action crew - says he once woke up to find Billy Connolly making breakfast!



Anne Guedes with Arthur Johnstone and Jimmy Cloughley

This support was crucial, Ann says. “We had the constant support of the Stewards, and they recognised the need to have their side of the Work-in documented.” Money from the support fund was donated to fund the films, and practical support given too.

In return Ann was clear that the use of the film was to support workers in dispute. “The difference between Cinema Action and the mainstream media,” she asserts “is that in working class film you listen to the workers.”

In Ann’s view it was the support across the community and internationally that made the Work-in a success. “Many people thought that the workers hadn’t a chance”, she remembers. “But the spirit was abroad. The spark was all-embracing and international donations flooded in.”

That support hasn’t diminished. Ann was grateful for the opportunity to revisit some of the places and people that made such a difference 40 years ago. She says “It was excellent of Unite the union, to bring me over. I was particularly glad to see the films again. I hadn’t seen them for such a long time, and to meet the veterans again renewed my enthusiasm for the fight!”

Ann is also clear that remembering the Work-in is not nostalgia. “The UCS Work-in was about looking forward,” she proudly claims. “We need a similar approach from current activists. It inspired other takeovers then and should be doing so now. I was losing confidence in the possibility of people learning those lessons. But when I arrived in Glasgow hope and confidence were rekindled. It is possible. That fire, that humour, is not something in the past, it’s there in every man, woman and child in Scotland.”

Chris Bartter, 2012

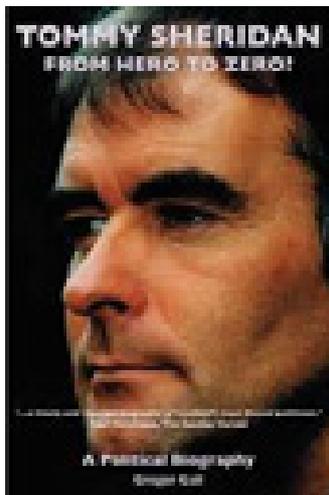
TOMMY SHERIDAN: FROM HERO TO ZERO? A POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY

**GREGOR GALL, WELSH
ACADEMIC PRESS 2011, ISBN-13:
978-1860571190, 384PP, £25**

This is the second book to be written by an SSP member about Tommy Sheridan. Without doubt Gregor Gall’s *Tommy Sheridan: From Hero to Zero? A Political Biography* is an improvement on Alan McCombes *Downfall*, a book so full of bitterness and anger that it failed to offer any meaningful political analysis into Sheridan’s ‘downfall’. Gall’s book sets out to be different, and he declares his intention is to write what he calls a

‘middle way’ account of Sheridan.

The book starts with an examination of Sheridan’s formative political years as a community campaigner in Glasgow. Gall takes us through the anti-Poll Tax struggle, the campaign that brought



Sheridan to national prominence. The success of the anti-Poll Tax struggle established Sheridan as a Scottish folk hero and in the words of Gall a “genuine man of the people”. These were crucial years in the political development of Tommy Sheridan and they laid the basis for his becoming an MSP. There is not the space to go into detail here but the opening chapters of Gall’s book should be essential reading for anyone wishing to understand why Sheridan made the impact he did on Scottish politics.

Tommy Sheridan was the Scottish Socialist Party’s (SSP) only MSP between 1999 and 2003. Gall refers to this period as Sheridan’s ‘golden years’. Sheridan’s clenched-fist salute in the first Scottish Parliament remains one of the great iconic images in the history of radical Scotland. He explains how Sheridan’s major achievement was the successful Bill to abolish warrant sales. In addition to this, Sheridan introduced legislation to replace the council tax with a fairer alternative, and he introduced a Bill for universal free school meals. According to Gall, these Bills illustrated that Sheridan never lost

sight of the pragmatism of his earlier years. He was radical without being ultra-left and pragmatic without losing sight of his principles and he continued to demonstrate to working class people that he was someone who ‘could get things done’. Sheridan acknowledged, unlike many others on the far left, that to truly change the system you first have to get inside it and ‘play the game’. ‘Playing the game’ meant developing credible and workable policies in the here and now. It meant taking electoral politics seriously and it required engaging with the mass media in order to get the message out. It is only when you start to ‘play the game’ that the establishment begins to fear you, and Sheridan could play the game better than anyone.

In 2003, Sheridan was joined in parliament by five SSP colleagues. Many on the left today see 2003 as the high point of Scottish Socialism. In a sense it was, but Gall, always the realist, never allows himself to get carried away by the parliamentary breakthrough. He notes that the ‘big breakthrough’ was always likely to be a ‘transient and temporary phenomenon’ and concludes that the SSP “failed to make a lasting and sizeable impact upon politics in Scotland”. The reasons are complex and would merit a separate essay, but Gall highlights a number of issues worth mentioning here. Firstly, he argues that the SSP lacked a defining issue noting that the Campaign to Scrap the Council Tax did not catch on in a way the party had hoped for. He adds that organisationally the party was ill prepared for the election of six

From 2004 onwards a civil war broke out in the ranks of Scotland’s socialist movement and so began the long decline of both Sheridan and the SSP. This is a crucial part of the book and Gall has difficult territory to navigate.

MSPs and that the MSPs themselves were unsure how to operate as a successful parliamentary group. I would also question quality and calibre of some of the new MSPs. When in 2005 four of them walked out of the chamber during First Ministers questions, Sheridan (and many others in the party) thought their stunt was ‘infantile’. Iain MacWhirter, writing in *The*

Herald, hit the proverbial nail on the head when he pointed out, that “Tommy

was a serious politician compared to the others who were more interested in staging student occupations and walkouts”.

From 2004 onwards a civil war broke out in the ranks of Scotland’s socialist movement and so began the long decline of

both Sheridan and the SSP. This is a crucial part of the book and Gall has difficult territory to navigate. In the end he provides us with an account that is problematic. Sheridan and his closest supporters withdrew their co-operation from Gall’s book (a mistake in my view). This meant that Gall had to rely primarily on the testimonies of those who testified against Sheridan. To be fair to the author he does his best to counter their zeal, but nonetheless his desire to find a ‘middle way’ narrative is compromised.

On the 23rd November 2004 Tommy Sheridan sued News International over allegations about his private life, a decision described by Gall as a “spectacular political misjudgement”. Few people, including his closest supporters, encouraged Sheridan to sue. The CWI group argued it was a mistake to seek justice in what they called the ‘capitalist courts’. Gall concludes that with this single act Sheridan carelessly sacrificed his achievements. Whilst this is partially true Gall fails to offer substantive criticism of the SSP leadership. For example he dismisses the claim that the debacle was badly handled by the SSP leadership almost from the word go. Consequently, he fails to analyse why it was that instead of adopting a crisis management approach, the SSP leadership actually made the situation worse. Gall also dismisses the suggestion that there was a plot against Sheridan. However, if there was no plot against Sheridan, why was it that within hours of the infamous Executive Committee meeting Sheridan’s opponents were briefing the press about his resignation? Why was it that they tipped off the

Sheridan gambled that the dualistic nature of the court room would simplify moral dilemmas. That he had no right to present socialists with this choice is a fair point. But he did, and sometimes you have to deal with what is, not how you would like things to be.

the press about alleged minutes, an action that encouraged News International to delve further into the internal matters of a socialist organisation? Gall misses the point that it was a result of their actions that the SSP leadership became involved in Sheridan’s defamation case.

The SSP’s involvement in the case meant that in order to win Sheridan had to be ruthless, perhaps more ruthless than he wanted to be. He presented SSP witnesses with a simple moral choice: give evidence to aide him or give evidence to aide News International. Sheridan gambled that the dualistic nature of the court room would simplify moral dilemmas. That he had no right to present socialists with this choice is a fair point. But he did, and sometimes you have to deal with what is, not how you would like things to be. In the minds of Sheridan’s witnesses, testifying against a fellow socialist, and aiding News International, was an act that was unthinkable.

Sheridan of course, won his 2006 defamation case but the path to his downfall began the moment he stepped outside the court room. Gall notes that Sheridan should have been magnanimous and attempted a ‘constructive dialogue’ with moderates in the SSP. Instead, Sheridan went to the Daily Record (the New Labour supporting rag that once called him a working class zero!), and branded as ‘scabs’ those who testified against him. This is mistake number one and a strategic blunder of titanic proportions. Gall reveals how it encouraged SSP witnesses to engage in a ‘rearguard struggle’ to overturn the jury’s verdict. This ‘rearguard struggle’ involved open collaboration between members of the SSP and Lothian and Borders Police and News International. Gall explains how ultimately it was the SSP witnesses not News International that led to Tommy Sheridan being jailed in 2010.

Sheridan’s second mistake was his decision to split the SSP and form

Solidarity. Gall describes Solidarity as an alliance of Sheridanistas, independents, the CWI and the SWP. From the outset it was the wrong alliance, and whilst in the early days Solidarity organised large rallies, Gall points out that they did not translate into new recruits, activists or electoral success. Moreover, in the years of political decline, Gall argues that Tommy Sheridan’s image changed from Scottish folk hero to ‘celebrity politician’. He notes that Sheridan became increasingly renowned more for his ‘celebrity activities’ than his socialist or political activity and this devalued his previous public image. ‘Big Brother’ was a mistake and so too were numerous tabloid articles more to do with Sheridan’s family than politics. Gall argues that Sheridan encouraged the ‘celebritisation of politics’ and the outcome was a deepening of the celebrity at the expense of not just the politics but socialist politics in particular. This is an astute point. Moreover, Sheridan locked himself into a battle with News International at the expense of real politics. The result was that in 2007 he lost his Glasgow seat.

I have already noted that the latter part of book is too dependent on unreliable sources and as a result the book loses its objectivity. Then there is an unnecessary chapter entitled ‘Person, Persona and Personality’ which only serves to highlight why Marxists make bad psychologists and Gall, a professor of industrial relations, not human psychology, is out of his comfort zone here. Rather than offering any meaningful insight into Sheridan’s psychology the ‘Tommy haters’ and ‘crackpot feminists’, the very people Gall says are guilty of ‘tactical ineptitude’ (meaning he questions their political judgment) are given yet another platform to tell the world why they hate Tommy Sheridan. The mistake in this chapter is that it will be readily used by Sheridan’s supporters to dismiss the whole book.

Did Gall write a book that provided a middle way? The answer is yes and no. Perhaps he was too close to events, and too close to some in the SSP leadership to be truly objective. Moreover, a list of his sources in the second part of the book reads like a who’s who of SSP witnesses, and this alone dispels any claim by Gall to have written a middle way narrative. Nonetheless it is a decent book that covers a difficult subject matter. ■

Gary Fraser



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