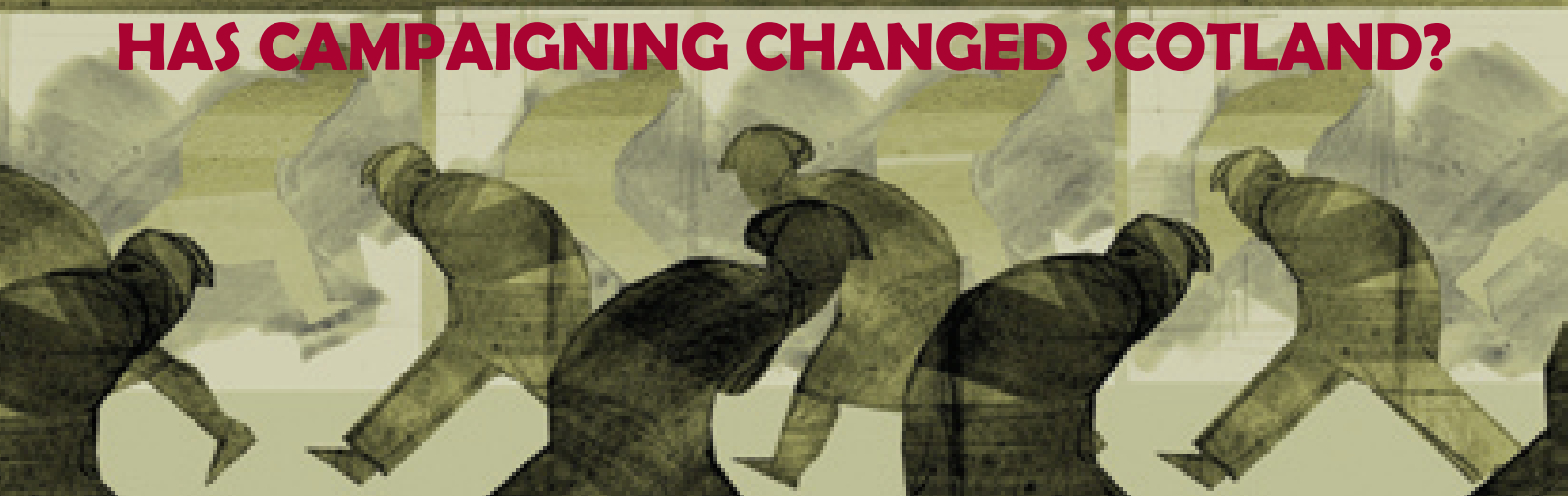




**HAS CAMPAIGNING CHANGED SCOTLAND?**



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# Comment

There seems so much reason for pessimism in Scotland that some of the reasons for optimism seem pretty feeble. So we look on powerlessly as Tony Blair buys another 50 years worth of weapons of mass destruction which he'd like us to look after on his behalf. We can say nothing about the international role of our country at a time at which the Israeli campaign against the Palestinians must be getting close to some sort of definition of genocide with full British complicity. The four big parties have agreed a 'consensus' with the CBI that too many people are employed by the 'state' – presumably meaning that too few are employed by McDonalds. And we can do little more than look on with some trepidation at what is potentially the dawn of a widespread, unpleasant English nationalism.

And the reasons for optimism? Well, England is so far down the road of privatising (which is to say destroying) the NHS that it is not unreasonable to wonder whether it is already too late. In Scotland, by comparison, we're only privatising about 10 per cent. Hurray! And while Blair is desperate to give the private nuclear operators free reign over our energy supply, the Scottish Executive is being genuinely brave in making noises of opposition. Of course, we'll probably lose so this opposition may be pointless.

And at least there are some checks and balances in Scotland. Earlier this year we had a look at the state of the political parties in Scotland (SLR 32). What we have seen since is not encouraging. While the SNP has been strong on some issues, the embarrassing rush to prostrate itself before the altar of neoliberalism means that on almost any economic development issue there is virtually nothing to choose between the SNP, the Tories and the Labour Party. Under Nicol Stephen the Liberal Democrats have almost caught up with the pack desperately chasing the approval of Big Money (Stephen actually discussed the possibility of a flat tax in Scotland – something which makes the Poll Tax look like progressive socialism). There was much hope that the more mature working structures of the Scottish Parliament would lead to greater consensual working. However, that consensus was supposed to be **for** the Scottish people and **against** those who had taken advantage of them in the non-devolved years, not the other way round.

It is important to make sure that we are clear what all this pro-business talk means. If you vote for any of the Big Four, you are voting to spend less of your tax money on the ordinary people of Scotland and more on the super-rich (many of whom may never have been here). Britain is the developed European country with the lowest rates of tax on almost everything, including the massive profits of the multinationals. We are the developed European country with the lowest employment rights for workers. Hell, we even get fewer public holidays than our counterparts on the continent. So we are already doing everything we can to make sure the rich get richer and the rest get left behind (this point is now so widely recognised that it is unnecessary to argue it). Why would 'we' have a consensus in Scotland that Britain isn't quite neoliberal enough? Why would 'we' want to take any more steps in the direction of the gangster capitalism of the former Soviet Union or the medieval theocratic capitalism of the United States?

The answer is that if 'we' is to mean the people of Scotland, we don't. If 'we' is meant to mean a tiny clique of the great power elite, the super-rich, and the gullible politicians who like to be stroked by the rich and the powerful, then it is a strange definition of the word 'we'. It would be easier to understand the political desire to swallow this elitist nonsense if there was a shred of evidence to support it, but there really isn't. Even the high-priests of economic development who graced the Frazer of Allender lectures last year didn't think this pursuit of bribe-onimics (where you hope to create an economy by luring the rich with anything they want) was going to work for Scotland. In fact, for politicians it's all about the image, stupid. They all so very much want to be accepted by the big boys – and just as importantly to be **seen** to be accepted by them – that they'll just keep nodding until they get the editorial approval they so desperately want.

Then there are the alternatives. Both the Greens and the SSP should not only offer another approach, they should be keeping the wilder excesses in check by breathing down the necks of the neoliberal parties. Unfortunately, the SSP seems to be more interested in breathing down each others' necks and it is unlikely the Greens can do it on their own. This is not to say that the role of these parties is to be written off. It is fascinating that the 'political commentators' and even more disgracefully the

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Illustrations:

Cover and pages 11, 14, 17: Nadia Lucchesi  
nadia\_l@hotmail.com

All other illustrations: Andrew MacGregor  
macarenses@yahoo.co.uk

#### Editorial Committee

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Articles for publication: [editorial@scottishleftreview.org](mailto:editorial@scottishleftreview.org)

Letters and comments: [feedback@scottishleftreview.org](mailto:feedback@scottishleftreview.org)

Website: [www.scottishleftreview.org](http://www.scottishleftreview.org) Tel/Fax 0141 424 0042

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

Printed by Digisource (GB) Ltd

Unit 12, Dunlop Sq, SW Deans Industrial Estate, Livingston EH54 8SB

'political analysts' are so clear about what is going to happen in the May election next year. Fascinating because they are relying only on their own prejudice and hunch given the lack of polling data. Before we swallow any of this there are two things to remember. Firstly, a year ago the same people were telling us that the SNP was probably finished as a political party where now they tell us they're going to win the election. Secondly, they base assumptions on non-existent information. One well-known 'academic' recently predicted the electoral fortunes of the Greens and the SSP on the basis of the results of a by-election neither of them stood in.

Still, it is time to be realistic; there is little chance of the government of Scotland taking a radical turn (well, at least not the right kind of radical turn) given the materials the Scottish people can choose to build it from. Which means we're going to need some outside help. Scotland over the last 30 years has relied quite heavily on its civic bodies. Defining civic is not necessarily helpful here – the churches, the NGOs, the unions are obviously included but pre-devolution the role of the local authorities was equally important. What is important is that we continue to recognise the importance of civic organisations; that Donald Dewar should be credited with being the key figure in achieving devolution is a discredit to the decades of work which was put in by people outside the media attention achieved by politicians. In fact, Scotland ought to become an international case study of the power of the civic, non-governmental sector to change a country despite the intentions of the government of the day.

So there is no shortage of credit that civic Scotland can take for creating the new political structures in Scotland. But what since then? In the early years after devolution there seemed to be a collective catching of breath. The opening of the Parliament was such an emotional event for many in civic Scotland who had fought for the day for so long that there was a sense of 'job done' about Scotland. This could be seen as a very big mistake, because it quickly became clear that there were many jobs still to do. And it was during the first of these that the absence of civic Scotland was immediately felt: the campaign to 'keep the clause'. If ever there was an opportunity for civic Scotland to get together and influence Scottish life it was around the Daily Record/Brian Souter/Cardinal Winning campaign to protect

Section 2A of the local government legislation which 'banned' the 'promotion' of 'homosexuality'. This was a horrible piece of legislation and deserved to go. But the people who fought so hard for the Parliament seemed either too tired or perhaps slightly too disorientated to make an effective stand. So it was that the progressive forces took 30 years to bring the Parliament about but the reactionary forces took less than a year to very nearly hijack it. Civic Scotland, in its comparative silence, did not cover itself in glory over those months.

There are reasons why that happened, just as there are reasons why it is unfair to expect civic Scotland to return to its pre-eminent position. For one thing, there wasn't the same unanimity of purpose with the churches and other taking different positions. For another, the devolution campaign was built up over many years and it was clear that 'fast response' was not always what civic Scotland does best. And anyway, there is a difference between creating institutions for the national good and trying to influence individual bits of policy. So it is unfair to be too critical, but it is also wrong to maintain no criticism at all – how was it that there was so very little done to counter the campaign run by Souter?

Since then, civic Scotland has been learning how to work in a devolved Scotland. There are many complications – where before the political parties were partners, now they are sometimes the opponent. And this in turn means that old allegiances come back into play – trade unions have not been vocally critical of the Labour-led Scottish Executive, even where it was called for. Likewise, some NGOs (especially where they rely on public funding) feel constrained in their ability to criticise. The Scottish Civic Forum was established as some sort of focus for the civic sector, as some way to keep it together and maintain momentum. That the Executive has been able to remove its funding and redirect some of it to the utterly facile Centre for Confidence and Wellbeing (an organisation which seems interested only in profit and does virtually nothing you can engage with for less than quite a few hundred pounds) is a significant indicator.

So in what state is civic Scotland and has campaigning made any difference? We asked five writers to consider this in relation to different sectors and issues. That the answers are mixed should give us equal reason for optimism and pessimism. ■

# feedback

Letters for publication should be emailed to [feedback@scottishleftreview.org](mailto:feedback@scottishleftreview.org)

Your coverage of the state of Scottish media in SLR 34 did not miss the mark. The writers highlighted the problems facing the fourth estate and in some cases offered a glimpse of opportunities for solutions. The ownership question has been an issue for most of the last hundred years, in the past it was always that the problem was related to biased political posturing to the tune of Lords Rothschild and Beaverbrook and their ilk. Since the 1980s it has been the likes of Rupert Murdoch whose influences have been brought to bear, dangling the carrots of political support in the pages of The Sun to aspiring prime ministers.

However we are now seeing a more disturbing development which threatens the very future of newspapers in this country. Companies including Trinity Mirror, Johnston Press and Newsquest are consumed in an obscene scramble for the biggest possible returns from their growing media empires. It is the manner of their actions driven by corporate greed which are causing serious damage to the fabric of national and regional newspapers. Broadcasting is no different and in the last year in particular we have seen the whole media industry experiencing cuts across the board. Jobs have been going in every department, regardless of the impact on the workforce's ability to produce the goods and never mind how it impacts on quality. Redundancies across newsrooms in Scotland, with experienced staff moving on or out, have led to crisis situations threatening the production of the news in television and papers in recent months.

The NUJ has successfully fought to avoid compulsory redundancies but it is difficult to stop volunteers who are queuing up in some papers to get out. However we are now saying things have gone too far. In recent weeks we have issued collective grievances to a number of companies demanding they take on extra editorial workers as staffing levels have gone below the water line. At the same time as cutting staff posts, budgets to hire freelance journalists have been slashed, forcing many to look elsewhere to earn their bread. This of course has a knock-on effect in many ways. Not just damaging the incomes and livelihoods of long-standing journalists and photographers but also of reducing diversity of ideas and styles which then make the papers less attractive and so the downward spiral of circulation continues. It also leaves the staff that remain even more stressed out as they struggle to fill the pages.

These issues are damaging to our members and the industry and we are not prepared to let it continue. The union has launched a campaign across the UK and Ireland called Journalism Matters. We are highlighting the massive returns that these companies are making yet still imposing cuts at every opportunity. Healthy companies in the UK usually get returns of around 15 per cent. Johnston Press and Trinity are now pushing their returns to around 35 – 40 per cent, while Newsquest (Herald & Evening Times) more than doubled their profits from the Glasgow based papers between 2004-05.

The importance of the press and media to the democracy of the country cannot be understated, but coverage of Westminster

for example is at risk as Scottish papers cutback their London hacks. And while we do not appreciate the negative interference of politicians we do need their support in campaigning for a better media. The NUJ will be fighting for jobs and investment and improvement in quality and ethical reporting. We will host a major debate at the Festival of Politics at the Scottish Parliament in the autumn on the state of the Scottish media. Quality journalism, corporate greed and the issue of a media regulator or commissioner to replace Ofcom and the PCC will be part of that debate. We need to hold these companies to account and demand a media this country deserves. ■

*Paul Holleran, Scottish Organiser, National Union of Journalists*

In "What's the Point of Scottish Enterprise?" (SLR 34), Danny McKinnon considered the purpose of Scottish Enterprise, and made a call for developing an alternative economic strategy. There is indeed need for a strategy – and one encompassing fundamental monetary and fiscal issues: but we also need to understand in what ways the current Labour/Lib Dem administration has failed to produce, in their terms, 'joined-up thinking' in economic development, and how this failure has seriously undermined economic development efforts in Scotland, including the work of Scottish Enterprise. Any strategy which does not tackle current inadequacies is bound to failure, which is why there needs to be greater powers for the Scottish Parliament and greater accountability within Scottish government.

Consider SE's knowledge economy strategy. Increasing the throughput of research from institutes to industry requires funding of research, collaborative projects between institutes and industry, and a local industry to absorb the research and make the best of it. A definite case where government and its agencies could help - but what has happened? On funding: while agricultural and biological research institutes in England can receive support from the Research Councils (that is UK wide rather than devolved funds), such institutes in Scotland (under Ross Finnie's department), are barred from accessing such funding. Further, Gordon Brown personally oversaw £70 million out of UK reserved funds going to Cambridge to foster links with MIT: no equivalent was made available to Scottish universities. On collaborative projects, much of the funding comes from the DTI or is influenced by the DTI: as a result, although Scottish universities play an important role, this tends to be mainly with businesses south of the border, so assisting competitiveness and business growth outside Scotland. As regards the framing of EU collaborative initiatives, again the DTI is in the driving seat, with scant Scottish input.

Consider trade: Treasury Funding Statements, together with Departmental Expenditure plans show clearly that reserved expenditure by British Trade International for inward investment and overseas trade is disproportionately going to England. Consider tourism: the British Tourist Authority disproportionately supports England – and out of reserved funding. Its tourism

strategy, based on England, should, according to the Prime Minister, be equally relevant to Scotland.

Cross department groups set up to stimulate economic development often have no Scottish representation. Other economic issues which have been mishandled or ignored include fishing, oil, and water. In water, mistakes, primarily by the current government, have led to the position where there are calls for privatisation by those who have most to gain. There is no basis for privatisation. Although unable to answer any of the criticisms made of their handling of the finances of water, no Committee of the Scottish Parliament nor appropriate audit body seems to exist that is capable of holding the Scottish Executive to account. Rather the Executive has used water as a hidden tax.

Finally, the SE funding crisis demonstrates a lack of responsibility by and accountability of the Scottish Executive. While SE acknowledged poor internal accounting, it is now clear that the Scottish Executive played no small part in SE's financial difficulties. Its introduction of resource accounting and budgeting was inflexible and produced results counter to those intended by the Treasury. Consequently, and unlike the RDAs, in England, Scottish Enterprise has been put on the back foot, with a number of its initiatives in jeopardy. Greater powers for the Parliament and greater accountability of the Executive are urgently required for serious economic development to take place. These points are discussed in papers on our website ([www.cuthbert1.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk](http://www.cuthbert1.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk)) ■

*Margaret Cuthbert*

In 1994 British rock group Oasis released *Definitely Maybe*, a decade defining album that gave voice to millions of frustrated youths but made most 'respectable' adults recoil in horror. Anticipating this split of public opinion, Oasis released track 9, *Cigarettes & Alcohol*, as a single later that year. Millions of concerned parents up and down the country complained that the song was brazenly hedonistic and would further corrupt an already ailing youth. Daytime chat shows called for the song to be withdrawn from the charts fearing that it would lead to an increase in loutish behavior.

As a young adult and an Oasis fan, I had the feeling that my seniors were missing the point. Messrs Gallagher & Gallagher were not describing a world coming undone through reckless disregard for the prevailing moral norms, they were detailing

the reactions of a generation who had been failed by twenty years of economic stagnation and amidst the short-termism and financial drudgery associated with youth training schemes simply found they had nothing better to do, or as Noel Gallagher so eloquently put it "...is it worth the aggravation to find yourself a job when there's nothing worth working for, I was looking for some action but all I found was Cigarettes and Alcohol ..."

A decade later and it would appear that the penny still hasn't dropped. While the gap between the world's richest and poorest countries continues to grow and around 12 million British Citizens still live in poverty and suffer the very real associated physical symptoms including poor health, inadequate housing, increased drug and alcohol use and educational failure, our political leaders want us to believe that it is us who are to blame. Night after night we are bombarded with sensationalistic press images of the seemingly morally repugnant behaviors of our poorest citizens where the only solution offered is draconian punitive measures to be implemented by a growing cadre of semi-professional workers who will measure behaviors and analyse mindsets before prescribing the necessary remedies.

It is increasingly hard to justify the logic inferred by those who are supportive of such policies. They appear to believe that there is a section of society that is inherently deficient and deviant, who are pre-disposed to loutish and degenerate behaviors. They have even constructed a badge of shame for these citizens to wear - 'neds' - a language that has even found its way into our Political institutions. These kinds of ideas have a history within politics. Inspired by dodgy science around the end of the first world war, various political movements began to apply ranking systems to the world's populations; citizens were measured according to racial, religious and physical characteristics and complex myths were built up to justify the unequal distribution of economic and material goods. Some groups were just seen as less deserving.

It is worrying that these processes appear to be making a return. Whatever your thoughts about the nature and frequency of anti-social behaviors (I myself believe that it does exist though not in the way that our politicians want us to believe) we have to find a more convincing and ethical way of explaining why it happens. It is simply not good enough to reduce complex social, economic and political processes to the characteristics and lifestyles of certain groups. It is this kind of logic which fuels inequality and human suffering. ■

*Mike Bell (claytonbell@tiscali.co.uk)*

## reviews

**Power to the People, BBC2 Scotland, (six half-hour programmes, broadcast April-May 2006)**

As the initial academic consultant for this series and despite cautioning against the use of certain interpretative narratives, I must profess my great disappointment with the final outcome. The decision to examine the history and dynamics of the labour and trade union movement in Scotland in the twentieth century was a considerable opportunity to produce and deliver an insightful and engaging piece of popular television which could

reflect on where the union movement has been and where it might go. The focus on Scotland was particularly welcome. We are all well aware of the radical heritage of the movement in Scotland – even if this was far from all-embracing across time and space. Even in 2005 there is still something distinctive about the union movement in Scotland: data from the Labour Force Survey shows that union density for Scotland was 33.7 per cent, while for England 27.9 per cent and for Wales 34.3 per cent. Meanwhile, collective bargaining coverage (by workers



covered) was 41.2 per cent for Scotland, 40.7 per cent for north-east England and 28.0 per cent for south-east England. Clearly, there are still significant intra-Britain differences.

Considerable financial resources were put into this television project in terms of prior research, deploying archive footage, and interviewing directly involved protagonists. But, alas, the series ended up being infuriating with its narrow, stereotyped lenses for viewing labour history. Even though the earlier programmes were the stronger ones, by the time the last ones were broadcast I came to the regrettable conclusion that it would have been better for the series not to have been made in the first place, because the narrative displayed a reactionary and anti-union perspective. Indeed, the overall impact of the series was to reinforce dominant, reactionary stereotypes, not challenge or overturn them: strikes are not only bad and unions not only divisive, both for the national interest and for the economy, but strikes were portrayed as reckless and illegitimately posing an underlying political challenge to the established order. Never once was there any question mark left hanging over what and who defines the 'national interest' or the 'economy' and therefore why strikes should have been accorded a degree of legitimacy as the authentic voice and agency of organised workers.

Although the first two programmes were well received by 'virtue' of favourable reviews in the **Herald** and **Scotsman**, they concentrated on John McLean and the ILP 'Red Clydesiders' with no mention of the Communist Party nor the independent stature of the STUC as important actors in the first part of the twentieth century. This marginalisation and omission of other key players and events became a common trait later on: for example, the Chrysler car plant at Linwood became the subject of a whole programme, telling us almost nothing about what was going on in the rest of Scotland at the time. Although **Power to the People** was supposed to focus on the union and labour movement in Scotland, one unintended virtue was that it examined the Scottish situation in regard of what was happening at the level of formal politics at a British level. So the consequence was that we had a sense of what was happening elsewhere in Britain at the time – albeit a stereotyped one where the human interest was often when this or that minister was Scottish. However, the way in which this was done did not allow for any examination of what might be regarded as quasi-distinctive about trade unionism and industrial relations in Scotland (and which could also be found in certain parts of England and Wales), namely, deeply embedded networks of social democracy and radicalism in workplaces and communities.

Underlying the narrative was a strong sense that neo-liberalism was bound to triumph in an inevitable manner, that we live in a post-ideological era given the hegemony of the 'free market' and that conflict and radicalism are antiquated. Anyone with any sense of what a sociological investigation implies would know this is not a promising frame of reference to deploy. In playing to the stereotypes, a picture of unceasing labour radicalism in Scotland was portrayed up until the time of the OILC sit-ins and the Timex strike. Not only was this untrue (there were many 'quiet' times and places in Scotland) but it did not do much to explain the current malaise: how this once 'mighty' radical union movement was so easily disorganised and demobilised. The programmes only explanation was the simplism that the end of industry spelt the end of the unions. Of course, this did not explain why such industry became well-unionised and organised in the first place and therefore does not give much

handle on the prospects for trade unionism today. So, all in all, a very disappointing and infuriating series, and not one which will hopefully be used by teachers or lecturers in their efforts to educate younger generations of the heritage, motivation and dynamics of trade unionism in Scotland. ■

*Professor Gregor Gall, University of Hertfordshire*

**When the G8 Came to My Town, Declan McCormack, NorthernSky Press, £2.00**

A big thanks is due here to Declan McCormack for putting on record the chaotic scenes that lie behind organising and participating in events supported by what can be loosely called 'the left'. We have all been there before; the meetings some held by well-known groups, others under the name of umbrella organisations, some to paper over the sectarian cracks, others as one-offs which like the mayfly hatch and die within one demo. Declan acutely observes the forces at work within the organising groups as some just want to get on and organise the damn thing and others want to be in a handy position to take a ride on whatever has been organised. He also dissects the state-sponsored Make Poverty History march in Edinburgh where well meaning groups were manipulated without conscience by Government. I personally remember switching on the evening news to discover how the media recorded the event to find Gordon Brown the only 'marcher' interviewed telling the nation how glad he was that the other marchers were supporting the Government in its endeavours at G8.

Is state sponsorship over-the-top with regards to describing MPH? Maybe aye, maybe no. It depends if you view the right to demonstrate as a licensed activity as you would expect under authoritarian regimes like New Labour or as a right of every freeborn citizen to openly display their views. MPH was state-sponsored in that it was not obstructed in its activities, but this was not the case with those wishing to take their message to the Princes of Free Market Power at Gleneagles. The state harassment of Brian Haw demonstrating in Parliament Square against war criminal Blair's ability walk free is an example of authoritarian creep in our society. Also there was the conviction of Maya Anne Evans, 25, a vegan cook from Hastings, found guilty of breaching Section 132 of the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act by reading out the names of those killed in Iraq within half a mile of Westminster. May God and the Met police help protect those who send young men to their death and to slaughter tens of thousand innocents but let the guilty go free?

Declan McCormack pursues his task with some humour, an essential aid in the tool box of the left. But he also leaves us without any doubt as to the authoritarian direction this country is heading and the way in which control of the population in general, as illustrated by the police during the G8, is promoted over the need to seek out the isolated few capable of extreme violence. This all came to a head during the G8 when many were slaughtered in London yet Blair and Bush still didn't get the message. But the fact is that thousands elsewhere were made to think about it through the various demonstrations and the result of their contemplations can be seen reflected in the plummeting opinion poll ratings of the two man international community. ■

*Henry McCubbin*

# the missing movement

Stephen Maxwell argues that Scotland is lacking a real campaign for social justice and explores why that is

There is no social movement for social justice today, in Scotland or anywhere else in the developed world. A social movement is the mobilisation of a significant section of the population around a cause. In the post war United Kingdom examples of social movements include the nuclear disarmament movement of the 1950s and 1960s, campaigns to protect the environment and to promote gay rights, the student movement of the 1960s, the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland and the disability movement. In recent decades calls to combat poverty and social injustice have not stimulated anything like the same levels of social mobilisation. Following the 'rediscovery' of poverty in the United Kingdom by social researchers in the 1960s, poverty has featured on publicly funded research agendas but has been unable to sustain a high ranking in the priorities of either the general public or of politicians. Mrs Thatcher denied the existence of large scale poverty in the United Kingdom, dismissing the concept of relative poverty as bunkum. When poverty was reintroduced to the policy agenda after 1997 by the new Labour Government it was as part of a wider social exclusion agenda based on equal opportunities. Indeed the Government went to some pains to differentiate its social exclusion objectives from traditional understandings of equality and social justice. Notoriously the Labour Governments have avoided presenting the significant redistribution of income in favour of some low income groups achieved by Gordon Brown as Chancellor as a major theme of the New Labour narrative. In Scotland the traditional vocabulary of poverty and social justice has remained more popular but, as ever, the lack of substantive powers to act meant that the significance of this rhetorical difference has never been properly exposed to a test of Scottish political will.

The absence of a social movement for social justice marks an important difference from the two previous centuries. There was a movement for social justice in the nineteenth century, variously supported by charities, campaigns for such social reforms as the Factory Acts, the mutual movement - Friendly Societies had around five million members by the end of the nineteenth century - and the retail cooperatives with even more members at their peak. In the twentieth century the development of trades unions and the growth of a mass membership Labour Party with explicit social justice goals represented a peak of social mobilisation for social justice culminating in cross party support for the post war welfare state. In the later twentieth century the level of active social support for social justice has declined. The social movements of the 60s and 70s have no obvious successors today. Closest are the 'equalities' movements, particularly as developed by women, gay people and people with disabilities. But with the combined decline of trades' unions and the co-operative movement and the Labour Party's retreat from an explicit commitment to the

**despite the continuing salience of poverty as a theme of Scottish culture it has not occupied a matching importance in Scottish politics**

redistribution of income and wealth, the social base for claims for social justice has shrunk. Perversely this has occurred when something like a social movement has developed on issues of global justice as evidenced by the growth of socially significant supporter and donor bases for international campaigns such as Make Poverty History.

So how much support is there for social justice in Scotland today? History suggests that Scotland should have a sympathetic ear for claims for social justice. Scottish culture has presented poverty as a badge of honour rather than shame - "is there for honesty poverty?". Even in the last three decades Scottish literature has given far greater prominence to the experience of people who are poor and socially dysfunctional than English literature with its eternal preoccupation with the middle class. The Scottish media regularly gives high profile coverage to some of the more sensational effects of poverty, not least on health and life expectancy. And social surveys show Scottish opinion to be more sympathetic towards welfare expenditure and more supportive of redistribution than opinion elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

Yet despite the continuing salience of poverty as a theme of Scottish culture it has not occupied a matching importance in Scottish politics or policy debate. It was probably at its strongest as a political issue in the first half of the 1970s. Although the 'rediscovery' of poverty in the 1960s was chiefly the work of English university researchers such as Peter Townsend and Brian Abel Smith and the subsequent creation and early growth of the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) was confined mainly to England, the emergence of the SNP as a major political force sparked a highly politicised debate about the levels of Scottish poverty and the options for combating it. As part of its attempt to suborn the loyalty of traditional Labour voters the SNP used its campaign for Scottish control of North Sea oil revenues to target traditional Labour Party causes. Using whatever figures for Scotland could be extracted from Government statistics and

from occasional independent reports such as the National Children's Bureau **Born to Fail?**, Nationalists contrasted Scotland's poverty levels - then well above the average of the United Kingdom - with the swelling flow of oil revenues from the Scottish sector of the North Sea to the London Treasury. The campaign slogan 'It's Scotland Oil' was used above photographs of Scottish victims of the UK's rediscovered poverty - children, pensioners, the unemployed, lone mothers - to make the case for

independence. The media debate reached maximum intensity over SNP claims over the number of elderly people dying each year from hypothermia in energy rich Scotland.

Although the SNP campaign generated plenty of polemical heat it did not noticeably advance the policy debate. At official level

Scottish policy remained firmly focused on the economic issues of how to tackle Scotland's unemployment at a time of rapid deindustrialisation. Poverty impinged on policy-making only as the social dimension of such strategies for urban regeneration as the Urban Programme or the more ambitious area renewal projects of the Scottish Development Agency. The Scottish Office took little interest in the needs of the large numbers of people in poverty outwith the regeneration areas. After all, what it could do for such groups? Until the late 1990s the Scottish Office's staff resource to advise Scottish Ministers on benefits and other forms of income support was part of the time of an inspector in the Social Work Services Group. Not until the later 1990s did the Scottish Office create a unit dedicated to social justice issues embracing income poverty separate from its other social responsibilities such as regeneration, housing and health.

Without a Scottish capacity for state action against the main causes of poverty other potential bases for mobilisation against poverty were inevitably handicapped. However from the 1970s the newly created Scottish Regional Councils did provide platforms for action against local concentrations of poverty. Their enlarged territory gave them some scope to redistribute resources between rich suburbs and poor inner city areas, their range of powers - enhanced by the community focus of the Social Work Scotland Act 1968 - gave them the ability to coordinate action on several fronts, and they assumed power in 1975 armed with a bright new doctrine of corporate management and leadership. Strathclyde Council was the most ambitious, developing a series of Social Strategies through the 1980s which attempted to combine the strengths of its size - it contained half the population of Scotland - with a variety of experiments in decentralisation. But circumstances were against it. The new Councils lacked power over housing and some aspects of planning, deindustrialisation was accelerating driving up unemployment, and before the new Councils had got into their stride the Labour Government cut public expenditure, incidentally undermining prospects for the new social work legislation. At the end of its series of Social Strategies Strathclyde was facing higher rates of unemployment and poverty than at the beginning.

During these years, despite the best efforts of the SNP to highlight the contrast between booming oil wealth and rising poverty, Scottish public opinion remained moved by the evidence of poverty but not stirred. The Child Poverty Action Group founded in 1965 never had more than a handful of branches in Scotland. Two native initiatives - the Scottish Fuel Poverty Action Group (1975) and the creation of the Strathclyde Poverty Alliance (1984) with financial support from Strathclyde Council - were more robust. The SFPAG provided a useful research and policy focus on a problem which had distinctive Scottish dimensions while the Strathclyde Poverty Alliance attempted to give people living in poverty a voice to local, Scottish and United Kingdom policy makers. But both remained voluntary associations drawing support from hundreds rather than agents of a significant social mobilisation. The Thatcherite reforms of the welfare system in the mid 1980s stimulated a

**With only one-fifth of the population at any time now directly experiencing income poverty (as officially defined) within a wider culture of consumerism fuelled by easy credit, the prospects for a social movement against poverty are poor.**

concerted campaign by Scottish civil society groups warning of the effects on some of Scotland's most vulnerable groups. Age Concern Scotland ran a write-in campaign under the slightly archaic slogan The Pen is Mightier than the Sword, the Scottish Trades Union Congress gathered support, from the Scottish Churches among others, for a Charter of Welfare Rights, and the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations organised a lobby of voluntary organisations warning that the replacement of special needs payments by a fixed budget Social Fund could mean the loss of £50m a year to Scotland's most disadvantaged communities. But the grass roots opposition by claimants' groups and tenants groups organised as the Scottish Campaign

Against Social Security Cuts proved unable to sustain itself and merged in 1985 with a UK National Campaign.

Perhaps the largest social mobilisation around an issue of social justice was over the Poll Tax., a flat rate local tax replacing the property-based rates. The tax, introduced in Scotland in 1987, a year before it was applied to England, provoked an instinctive Scots sympathy for the victims of injustice. The campaign against the tax attracted the support of many people who stood to benefit financially from the change as well as of people who would lose. In the first year around 40 per cent of Scots refused to pay the tax and a significant minority of the population was still risking legal action when the tax was repudiated by the Conservative Government in 1989 leading to Mrs. Thatcher's downfall. The campaign had at least some of the characteristics of a social movement including significant popular support, an activist campaigning base, and various nodes of leadership in local communities and in the political parties. But impressive as the anti-poll tax campaign was as an assertion of popular will against an arrogant and politically distanced Executive it did not

translate into support for wider campaigns against poverty and social inequality.

The election of a Labour Government gave new encouragement to campaigners for social justice. While no one was likely to confuse Tony Blair's new government with socialism it made an early commitment to the elimination of social exclusion, however caused, as the guiding ambition of the New Labour project. Anticipating the political devolution also promised in the Labour manifesto, Scottish Office Ministers set up a Scottish Social Inclusion Network (SSIN) broadly representative of Scottish civil society including activists from disadvantaged or excluded communities and groups alongside Scottish Office and public sector. In the new spirit of participation the civil society groups accepted a responsibility to consult with their social constituencies as part of a Network consultation which attracted a hundred responses from voluntary and community groups. The SSIN continued into the new era of legislative devolution. Indeed under the chairmanships of Executive Ministers Wendy Alexander and Jackie Baillie it grew in radical ambition. But new constraints were introduced when Henry McLeish was succeeded as First Minister by Jack McConnell. The high profile publication of an annual Social Justice Report as part of a strategy to promote public debate was replaced by



more technical and discreet website reports on the Executive's Closing the Opportunity Gap objectives. An exploration of options for community empowerment was concluded in favour of improving standards for community engagement in public sector led partnerships. A Ministerial commitment to develop measures of Scottish poverty based on a Scottish popular consensus on the requirements for a minimum acceptable standard of living was quietly sidelined on the grounds of convergence with the United Kingdom. The Network itself shrank into an occasional advisory group to Ministers.

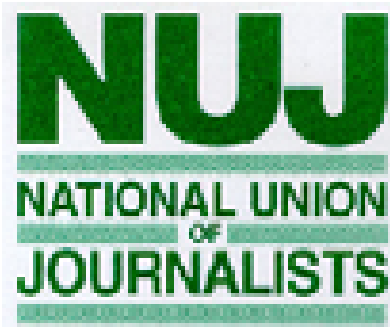
Despite these disappointments the transition to legislative devolution has significantly improved the environment for anti-poverty campaigners. Statistical information on social issues has been improved through the development of a Scottish Household Survey, a Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation and a Scottish Social Attitudes Survey and by the continual reinforcement of health statistics. Even more important the creation of the Scottish Parliament has given campaigners the opportunity to secure action by a Scottish state backed by a £27 billion budget. Scottish civil society responded with successful campaigns, including for the abolition of warrant sales, free personal care, fuel poverty initiatives and pioneering legislation on homelessness. A campaign for free school meals led by the Child Poverty Action Group Scotland and some party political support continues.

But these successes have been piecemeal. The improvement in Scottish statistics simply helped to reveal the continuing scale of Scotland's social justice challenge. In 2005 around 900,000 Scots, about one in five, still lived in poverty. Certainly this represented an improvement on the peaks of poverty reported in the mid 1970s when nearly one in three Scots was in poverty, as on the levels left by Mrs Thatcher. The overall poverty rate in Scotland

has converged on the UK average. The proportion of Scottish children in poverty has fallen from 31% in the mid-90s to 21% and of pensioners from 28% to 20%. But the number of working age adults without children in poverty has risen from 28% in the mid 1990s to 34%. Overall Scotland, like the United Kingdom, has one of the very worst records of poverty and inequality among developed countries and its health record, including health inequalities, is sui generis appalling. So much for fifty years of Labour dominance in Scotland, thirty years of Scotland as a major oil producer and eight years of a New Labour Government.

There are few signs of any significant growth in political or wider public concern at Scotland's persisting problems of poverty and inequality. While the Labour Party in Scotland seems to accept the current UK strategy of welfare reform focused on the labour market, the two principal Scottish opposition parties are increasingly turning their interest to the idea of cutting taxes as a stimulus to economic growth without any direct reference to the effects on poverty or inequality. With only one-fifth of the population at any time now directly experiencing income poverty (as officially defined) within a wider culture of consumerism fuelled by easy credit, the prospects for a social movement against poverty are poor. Perhaps the best chance of building a significant coalition lies less in appealing to traditional self-justifying concepts of social justice as to linking the poverty agenda with more widespread contemporary concerns about health including mental health, and the need for an ethos of material sufficiency built on equal sharing as the basis of social and environmental sustainability. ■

*Stephen Maxwell is Associate Director of the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) and the founding chair of a Scottish charitable company providing support for vulnerable people to live in their own homes*



## **SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

- fighting for public services broadcasting
- standing up for press freedom
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Scottish Organiser

James Doherty  
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# shades of green

## Eurig Scandrett looks at the impact of the environmental movement in Scotland

Sociological studies of the environmental movement have revealed its strongly middle class membership. Some researchers, such as Steven Yearley, have noted that support is predominantly from the professional (rather than the business or managerial) middle class, the class ironically most dependent on economic surplus and therefore with most to lose from a strong greening of society. Within this movement, two strands have been identified: one, whose focus is on wilderness preservation, earth values, deep ecology, is historically identified with John Muir, who left Dunbar as a child and became the father of America's national park movement. The other wing of this movement, emphasising environmental management, resource efficiency, technological solutions, has emerged most recently as sustainable development. In the last decade or two, a third environmental movement has been recognised, outwith the mainstream environmental organisations, made up of working class and poor communities, and in some countries, black, minority, indigenous and low caste groups. This environmental justice movement, or environmentalism of the poor, has challenged some of the assumptions of the mainstream movement.

Scotland has sometimes sat uneasily with this characterisation. Patrick Geddes for example, a contemporary of Muir, is considered by Indian sociologist Ramachandra Guha as a social ecologist whose integration of science and arts defies conventional categorisation. His attempts to use urban and regional planning to challenge urban industrialisation based on fossil fuel consumption (or 'carboniferous capitalism') was well ahead of his time. Some of this spirit continues in the remarkable Centre for Human Ecology, which following eviction from Edinburgh University, has survived a fragile independence and developed a constructive collaboration with the University of Strathclyde. As a think tank for radical ecology, its potential has still yet to be fully realised.

The influence of Scotland's conflicting and ambiguous histories of feudalism, radicalism and intellectual generalism can be found in today's movement. When the Quango Scottish Natural Heritage was formed, 20 years before devolution, from merging the Nature Conservancy Council in Scotland and the Countryside Commission for Scotland, the former's commitment to scientific objectivity was grafted onto the latter's laird paternalism, resulting in conflicts with rural communities between scientific management and indigenous practice. The involvement in land ownership, or management agreements, has created tensions in Scottish environmentalism. The movement is dominated by big, conservative organisations such as the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) and Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), and even more locally-responsive organisations such as Scottish Wildlife Trust and the John Muir Trust own or manage significant tracts of land, albeit with the latter two, often in partnership with community ownership schemes. At the other extreme are the more anarchist inspired direct action groups, small in number, often quite individualistic and without strongly Scottish roots although Faslane peace camp provides a locus for some of this action. Groups such as Earth First! and Reclaim the Streets have intermittent presence and the Big Blether event forms an annual gathering place for such direct action environmentalism.

The presence of activists in tree house protests at Dalkeith Country Park and Bilston Glen makes an important link to local struggles, albeit a rearguard resistance. Anarchist and direct action environmentalists were in Scotland during the G8 as part of Dissent, although apparently without a strong connection to the wider Scottish environmental movement.

However, Scotland is a small country and the various strands of the movement overlap more than perhaps other places. In the lobbying coalition Scottish Environment Link, which comprises 36 NGOs, mostly concerned with nature conservation and amenity, the agenda is set by the more politically experienced groups, mostly Friends of the Earth Scotland (FoES) and WWF (the World Wide Fund for Nature), using resources from the more wealthy, such as RSPB and NTS. Although the result is a watering down of some of the more radical principles, it does enable some resourced campaigns for areas where the groups can find agreement. Many environmental organisations in Scotland are regional offices of UK-wide groups. RSPB has the biggest area of its reserves in Scotland, although a fraction of its membership. The Scottish Office of WWF has a relatively high degree of autonomy, quietly to conduct some surprisingly progressive activities, yet enjoys funding from its wealthy parent body, including from corporate 'partners' such as aggregate multinational Lafarge, known in Scotland for its failed attempts to superquarry Harris. Greenpeace has no office in Scotland although it has good membership and enjoys occasional forays into Scotland, sometimes in collaboration with partners such as Friends of the Earth.

The difference between Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth is largely tactical. Greenpeace is an international organisation which targets discrete issues of global importance through a team of well funded professional campaigners. These targets are identified centrally and the actions designed to draw media attention through their non-violent confrontation and, at times, daredevil machismo.

Behind the scenes, researchers and policy negotiators operate at high level in national and international forums. Greenpeace is very effective at almost defining the environmental agenda, including issues, such as whaling, which are fairly peripheral to international politics. Although militant, Greenpeace can be populist rather than radical and has been criticised for operating uncollaboratively. Although it enjoys widespread support from its local groups, it tends to be less interested in



local issues than international charismatic themes, hence its involvement in Scottish affairs can appear arrogant. Friends of the Earth on the other hand is considerably more focussed on local issues. Incapable of attracting the headlines which Greenpeace does so effectively, FoE none the less punches above its weight in terms of access to the press and influencing policy. FoE Scotland split from the UK organisation in 1978 and was always committed to devolution. The FoE International confederation represents a diversity of political and ideological views, ranging from some European groups who work closely with business, through to Latin American groups whose conflict with business is often militant. FoE Scotland has a reputation for being at the radical end of Europe, and has worked with Ecuador's *Acción Ecológica* after it resigned from FoE International.

FoE Scotland has embraced environmental justice more than any other NGO, and was largely responsible for persuading Jack McConnell to make it a policy commitment. Both the former and current Chief Executives have strong reputations on environmental justice, Kevin Dunion as a campaigner and Duncan McLaren as researcher and analyst. The organisation has been more committed than most at investing resources in supporting grassroots community action anti-toxics groups. This has brought some tensions however: the membership and funding of FoE tends to come from more traditional environmentalist supporters - well educated professional middle classes - which is perceived to conflict with the interests of working class groups most affected by pollution. FoES's espousal of non-violence has also betrayed a timidity at exacerbating conflicts. Arguably, the Scottish Executive's stillborn policy on environmental justice could be tested more strongly with a little more militancy.

The wider political analysis of these tension is illuminating. The Catalan economist, Joan Martinez-Alier has interpreted the environmentalism of the poor as a social conflict occurring between incommensurable valuations of the environment. When the value which people attach to their own environment clashes with attempts to value it financially in a cost-benefit analysis, then social movements emerge to challenge this commodification process. This is most acute amongst the poorest, whose market weakness requires a more fierce resistance to the commercialisation of their livelihood or culture. This analysis shows the critical importance of environmentalism to the left project, and the lines along which environmental battles can be fought. In the rich countries, middle class environmentalists' values are easily 'bought' by bringing them into line with the values of business. In order to retain an effective challenge, the movement must resist this incorporation, through focusing on the victims of pollution, at home and globally, and building alliances with other campaigns against the commodification of life.

FoES has collaborated with global development NGOs such as World Development Movement and Scottish Education and Action for Development, and tentatively, during the G8, with others in G8 Alternatives. However, by identifying with environmental justice, Friends of the Earth Scotland's natural allies could be other justice organisations in the anti-poverty, workers' rights, feminist and anti-racist campaigns. Steps in that direction have been taken falteringly, but the organisation still feels more comfortable with other environmentalists, including reactionary groups for whom social justice is far from the agenda. Trades unionists could be a natural ally in environmental justice struggles when toxic emissions affect a workforce and the local community alike. At the Holinee factory

in East Kilbride, FoES was instrumental in supporting victims of pollution on both sides of the factory wall, and there have been dialogues with the union based Scottish Hazards Campaign, but this work is scarcely seen for its strategic importance. The more difficult discussions with unions in the environmentally polluting sectors, such as the oil industry, have scarcely been approached yet are essential for any transition to a socially just and environmentally sustainable future.

How are we to evaluate the environmental movement in Scotland? Much has been made of the fact that Scotland has poorer success at prosecuting polluters and lower fines than in England. As a peripheral country in Europe, it might be expected that Scotland would become a source of exploitable raw materials and waste depository for Europe's core of economic growth. The environmental movement has succeeded in raising awareness of environmental problems, but its victories, in Scotland as elsewhere, are few: saving southern Harris from a Superquarry being one of the most spectacular. The political parties (with the exception of the Greens who retain good links with the movement) all talk about the environment but deliver little. The Liberal Democrats consistently score well on manifesto promises and badly on delivery when in a position to do anything - for example Ross Finnie's embrace of GM crops. McConnell's Labour found a formula in 'environmental justice' to satisfy both environmentalists and core Labour supporters, especially those in the polluted post-industrial constituencies, but this has had virtually no impact on policy, or on decisions such as the M74 extension through the south side of Glasgow. The Nationalists continue to be inconsistently opportunist: anti-nuclear but pro-oil, roads and airports. No-one is willing to take on the interests of business, so environmental commitment is restricted to where commercially exploitable 'solutions' can be identified.

Whilst membership of environmental NGOs has stagnated, concern about the environment continues to grow but so does the noise created by the anti-environmental backlash - truckers, countryside alliance, anti-windfarm movement, 'pro-nuke' environmentalists. With popular awareness and support for its core issues of waste and energy, but resistance or fierce opposition to anything more challenging, it is perhaps not surprising that the movement is reluctant to move far beyond its comfort zone. However, a key test is emerging with the spectre of a new generation of nuclear power. The industry is mounting a powerful campaign and the terms are being reset as a means to solve climate change. Whilst this makes no sense (would we rather our grandchildren drowned or developed cancer?) it has been taken up by some high profile figures.

Here is an opportunity for the movement to force some kind of crisis in the legitimacy of the environmental claims of policy, coming at the same time as the 'decision' on replacing Trident, and a Holyrood election in which Labour, on this issue, feels the tension both from Westminster and their executive partners. It is a battleground in a core area of environmentalists' competence and will involve some hard mobilising and persuading of potential allies, not least in the trades union movement where pro-nuclear unions wield power. However, if played strategically, this campaign could bring benefits for both the environment and for a wider social movement. ■

*Eurig Scandrett is a lecturer in sociology at Queen Margaret University College, and a fellow of the Centre for Human Ecology. He was formerly Head of Community Action at Friends of the Earth Scotland.*

# rights going wrong

**Scotland had a strong track record on human rights, argues Carole Ewart, but we can't afford to give up the campaigning now that we're falling behind others**

Why is Scotland finding it so difficult to establish a Commission for Human Rights? Despite the momentum built up over several decades, the support of non governmental organisations such as Amnesty International and initial cross party support, the lead Committee on the Bill failed to endorse its general principles, the timetable was derailed and political support is seemingly unsteady. Happily the Bill has now passed Stage 1 at the Scottish Parliament and the argument for a Human Rights Commission, rather than a Commissioner, won. The Bill will be debated more thoroughly at Stage 2, possibly in September, which affords people the opportunity to actively support the detail of a Commission.

After Section 6 of the Human Rights Act 1998 required public authorities to operate in a way compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights, many thought the establishment of a Human Rights Commission for Scotland was inevitable. It is a logical consequence of institutional and cultural change in our new democratic era. Now it is no longer realistic to argue that judges are bad, lawyers are good and elected politicians can be trusted to always 'do the right thing' however we may define what that is. The debate in Scotland reflects a global dilemma. The UN has sought to provide comfort and clarity to states by acknowledging that 'an independent judiciary and democratically elected parliaments' are regarded by many as sufficient to prevent human rights abuses. However the UN believes the establishment of an independent body within states, distanced from the government of the day, will contribute to the protection of ordinary people and 'develop a culture respectful of human rights and fundamental freedoms'. Of course such a body will be required to report to the legislature on a regular basis. A framework on the status and functions of independent human rights bodies is detailed in the UN's Paris Principles.

Politicians can do a lot but they are not enough if the culture and practices remain the same. The recent announcement by the Scottish Executive of improvements in the detection and prosecution of rape is designed to try yet again to protect the human rights of the complainant as well as respecting the right of an accused to a fair trial. Previous legislative aims have not been fully delivered on the ground even though in *MC v Bulgaria*, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that member states have a positive obligation to enact criminal law provisions that effectively punish rape and to apply those provisions in practice through effective investigation and prosecution. States' positive obligations were held to be inherent under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and specifically Article 3, prevention of inhuman and degrading treatment, and under Article 8, the right to respect for your private and family life.

Scotland has a track record on human rights partly due to the work of the Scottish Human Rights Centre which suddenly closed its doors in December 2005. Few could reasonably conclude that its job was done but the shortage of money which had dogged the non governmental organisation (NGO) for decades, had finally caught up with it. The SHRC was a rebrand of the Scottish Council for Civil Liberties which was set up over 30 years ago by some well-kent faces such as the trade unionist Bob Thomson. Originally established as a Scottish Group of the National Council for Civil Liberties, it decided to go its own way to progress matters in Scotland more effectively. SCCL filled an unmet need and embarked on a series of principled but very often unpopular campaigns such as: prisoner's rights as well as for their partners and children; equal treatment for human beings regardless of belief, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation; ending the use of corporal punishment in schools; and upholding the right to organise meetings and marches. As the 1980s progressed with a distinctive political climate, more focus was given to international human rights standards and enforcement mechanisms such as the ECHR, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the UN Convention Against Torture. At all times civil rights had to be balanced by civil obligations.

There were also a range of specific rallying points such as the Miners Strike, the raid on the BBC over the Zircon Spy Satellite programme, the banning of the sale of 'One Girl's War' in Scotland, the operation of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the introduction of 'Section 28', the limit on the political activities of certain local government employees, the infringement of privacy effected by the introduction of the poll tax, public order legislation and the use by the police of 'metered print outs' from people's telephones. The rebranded SHRC had no shortage of issues which just never seemed to get fixed such as 'slopping out' in Scotland's jails, even though the Conservative Government had promised to do that in the 1990s. Recent consistent concerns included fair trial issues, upholding the principles of the children's hearing system to act in the best interests of the child, supporting the establishment of the UK Commission for Equality and Human Rights and making poverty a human rights issue.

So does the demise of such an influential NGO mean that the future for human rights in Scotland is bleak? Like all real stories there is good and bad news. Certainly it remains a matter of concern that a human rights body which talked about problems in its own country failed to secure enough active support, as well as cash, to function effectively. In February 2006, the Justice 1 Committee of the Scottish Parliament argued that a Scottish Commission on Human Rights may not be needed in

**Scotland has a track record on human rights partly due to the work of the Scottish Human Rights Centre. Now we appear to be lagging behind the rest of the UK so support needs to be rallied for the establishment of a Commission for Human Rights.**



a country such as Scotland, 'where breaches of human rights are extremely rare'. Yet there are broad and vocal campaigns on specific issues of human rights concern such as dawn raids in Drumchapel to seize children and their families for deportation. There are some legislative changes which are positive such as enabling same sex couples to adopt children. Some legislative changes are good and bad such as on anti-social behaviour as rightly people should be able to enjoy the privacy and comfort of their own home but not at the expense of preventing groups of two or more children standing on street corners. Very usefully, Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People has two priorities over the next two years which are 'things to do' and to achieve that 'promoting proportionate protection' so that adults are encouraged to support children and young people at play, in sport etc.

The Scottish Human Rights Forum (SHRF) has continued the fine tradition of social movements forging unlikely alliances and bringing together groups and people who are seeking similar changes. Supporters include environmental groups, professional bodies, children's charities and trade unions. In May, it highlighted the gap in the prevention of human rights abuses and the promotion of human rights in Scotland. Without unduly anticipating the areas on which a body would focus it has pointed to the benefits enjoyed by other countries such as the Australian Human Rights Commission work on access to health care by rural communities, the Canadian Human Rights Commission which produced a study on how family relationships affect access to housing and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission which has delivered work on 'human rights planning procedures and the installation of phone masts'.

Many agree that the first challenge of a Scottish Human Rights Commission is to promote the ECHR as a set of rights for all rather than a set of privileges for some. As the SCCL advert used to say 'you don't have rights until you know about them'. This could be delivered fairly quickly as a recent study revealed a 64 per cent increase in public awareness of freedom of

information legislation in just one year in Scotland. In its Stage 1 report on the Bill, the Justice 1 stated that it expects that the human rights issues which shall prove contentious will involve decisions on 'complex and competing economic and social rights' and the Committee has the view that the prioritising of such resources are matters of political judgement. However people can understand the layers of human rights delivery and very often want just the most basic element, the right to dignity, and that usually does not involve finance but a change in practice. For example the Scottish Consumer Council's work has shown that 'most people only want an apology for what has gone wrong and assurances that it won't happen again'. Public agencies do not want to say 'sorry' for fear it prompts litigation. As the SCC points out, the Australian Commonwealth Commission for Complaints has already recognised the problem: 'It is clear that the fear of litigation often produces a defensive unhelpful response... which ... increases the risk of litigation'. Changes in civil liability legislation in most Australian states, which includes that an apology cannot constitute an admission of liability, has now delivered positive results such as a reduction in litigation. For example in New South Wales, filings in the District Court fell from about 20,000 in 2001 to 13,000 in 2002 and to 8,000 in 2003.

The implementation of the Human Rights Act across the UK in 2000 was supposed to change the culture as well as the delivery of public services across the UK. At the time, Prime Minister Blair pointed out that "The Act gives every citizen a clear statement of rights and responsibilities. And it requires all of us in public service to respect human rights in everything we do". An IPPR report of 2005 suggests experience on the ground and the fact that human rights is not one of the tests for Best Value in Scotland means that the human rights culture and agenda has not yet been mainstreamed into the delivery of public services across Scotland. Ironically Scotland got a human rights agenda first with the establishment of the Scottish Parliament Under Section 29 (2) (d) of the Scotland Act 1998, Parliament can only pass legislation which is competent and that includes being compatible with the ECHR. Unlike UK legislation, the Scottish judiciary can strike down acts of the Scottish Parliament which are not competent. Section 57(2) of the Act also obliges members of the Scottish Executive to act in a way which is compatible 'with Convention rights'.

Now Scotland appears to be lagging behind the rest of the UK and support needs to be rallied for the establishment of a Commission for Human Rights with the respect, powers and resources it needs. This is not a chattering classes' hobby but one which is understood and supported. Take the MORI opinion poll for Justice 1 which revealed that 62 per cent of respondents agreed that Scotland would benefit from a body to inform the public about human rights and which could investigate public bodies on devolved matters. Younger people, women and working class people were "more likely to agree that such a body would be beneficial". Human rights are a right not a privilege and we need an independent Commission to make that so. ■

*Carole Ewart is a public policy consultant and Co-convenor of the Campaign for Freedom of Information in Scotland. She was Director of SCCL from 1988 – 96.*



# the place for solidarity

Bill Speirs explores the relationship between trade unions and local communities and makes a passionate argument for the revitalisation of the trade union councils

Trade unions in the community?

Whit?

Where else would unions be?

Ah, but....

What do we mean by unions, and communities? Let's take it that when we're discussing unions we mean trade unions - organising, representing, negotiating on behalf of workers in their dealings with the employers who buy the workers' time and labour, for a price. And communities? There's more than one definition. We're talking about geographical communities, ethnic communities, national communities, social groupings and much more.

Scottish Left Review readers (it is to be hoped!) don't have to be reminded that, in the past, communities and unions didn't have to be so clearly defined. In 1950 the unions in Babcock & Wilcox in Renfrew, where this writer was brought up, represented 10,000 workers who lived in the immediate geographical area (Renfrew, Yoker, Paisley, Govan, Clydebank and around). If you worked for 'Babcock's', everyone knew where you worked - geographically. And if you worked in the Paisley Mills, or (later) in the Linwood car factory, everyone knew where you worked. It was the case for most of the UK.

So it is understandable that in those days Trades Councils (now, correctly, re-named Trades Union Councils), bringing together union-organised workforces in specific geographical localities, became very serious local operators. They helped co-ordinate solidarity work across different workplaces in the interests of the workers - and their particular communities.

But in many parts of Scotland (In practice not on paper) access to skilled jobs was restricted to one community - Prods. And no serious observer would ever think that this is (as it is so often described) 'a West of Scotland problem'. Which Scottish local authority funded a flute band from their locality that victoriously marched past the sites where Catholic kids were killed in Ireland? Glasgow? North Lanarkshire? East Dunbartonshire? .....try West L...(fill in for yourself).

But what has any of this to do with trade unions and communities?

Back to the start - what is a community? A community is a collective of people. Sorry if that seems cheap and obvious - but for so many people it is still true that what defines them is who they are not, not who they are. That is why it is vital for the trade union movement to keep building its work in the community - and in particular, to be recruiting and organising in workplaces everywhere. That might seem obvious, but it is a real challenge.

We need as a movement to keep fighting for the maintenance of manufacturing - of all kinds - in Scotland.

We also need, though, to treat more seriously the relationship of services of all kinds with the community. The trade unions have a big job to do in ensuring that the role of public service workers is fully recognised and rewarded - not least because of the drive by 'new' Labour and Tory bosses to send out the 'private sector good, public sector dreadful' message, and to sell our hospitals, roads and so much else to the big buck bosses.

But the unions also need to work, and deliver, in the sectors that serve and employ the community from the private sector. In Scotland, for better or worse, the hospitality industry is a bigger and bigger employer (although distilling and pubs have seldom been unimportant), and is an industry which engages workers and the community as both consumers and producers. The work being undertaken by - for example - the TGWU to organise workers in the hospitality industry is of vital importance for the workers involved: but it is also of vital importance for the communities they work in. The wages they get are a local asset - but so are the health and safety standards that they, with the union's backing, establish.

Which again brings us back to unions and the community. Wages, health, safety, the community - they are inseparable. Or should be. In our modern world where (for the time being) global capitalism is dominant, it might be argued that unions and communities have little in common. That is not the case. In local geographical communities, unions have a key role to

play in promoting economic development within a healthy and safe environment. They have a role to play within the 'social' communities (ethnic, gender, age etc) to ensure fair access to the workplace, and full participation beyond it.

**The trade union movement has been, and is, at the heart of promoting the rights and interests of a range of communities - from refugees to asbestos victims, via gay people and single parents. But we cannot ignore the centrality of local, 'geographic' communities, because that is where solidarity with and from the workplace mainly derives - our neighbours matter.**

So, as someone once said, 'what is to be done?' Well, there is a lot that is already being done. The trade union movement has been, and is, at the heart of promoting the rights and interests of a range of communities – from refugees to asbestos victims, via gay people and single parents. But we cannot ignore the centrality of local, 'geographic' communities, because that is where solidarity with and from the workplace mainly derives – our neighbours matter. In short, therefore, we need to work to re-build trades union councils, the bodies which bring union activists from different unions and different workplaces together, and link workers with those who live and work around them.

There are still trades union councils that are working hard and effectively, from Thurso to Dumfries. But there is no doubt that everywhere there has been a fall in activists and activity, including some places – such as Glasgow – that used to have trades councils of massive activity and influence, but where they have now virtually ceased to exist, as a number of key players in big unions work to replace existing union structures (including the STUC) with one or two big unions, as has happened in the USA.

This is an ironic situation, because it was a decision of the British TUC in 1895 to exclude trades councils from membership that led to the founding of the Scottish TUC in 1897. So get along to your union branch, get nominated as a delegate to the appropriate trades union council, and get it active, if it isn't already. Contact Grahame Smith at the STUC (0141 337 8104; g.smith@stuc.org.

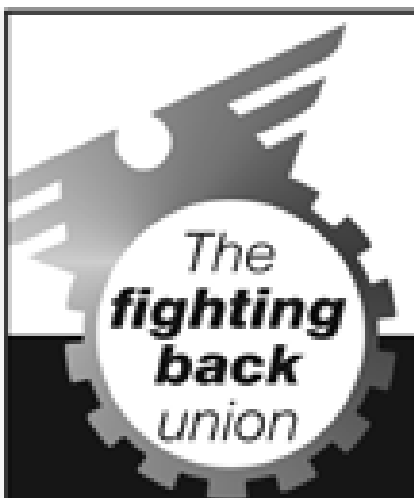
uk; STUC 333 Woodlands Road, Glasgow G3 6NG) for details of which trades union council is appropriate for you.

But of course for our movement, communities don't begin and end next door. As Brother Bhatt said on behalf of the All-India Trades Union Congress when he addressed the STUC in Edinburgh in 1922:

"Indian workers are today at the throat of Scottish workers through the manipulation of one set against another. Don't fight against yourselves. If you have been made to suffer through your fellow worker, do not retaliate when his turn comes to be hit"

He went on to invite the STUC to send a one-man, one-woman delegation to the 1923 All-India TUC, with the concluding message – "It is better to go to India than to go to blazes!" Too right. The trade union movement needs to be involved in every community. ■

*Bill Speirs was General Secretary of the STUC, and a former Chairman of the Labour Party in Scotland*



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# crocodiles can't knit

Stewart Davidson looks at two tales of humans' alien ancestors and finds in them a neat analogy for the human approach to the earth's ecology

In *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*, Douglas Adams volunteers a hypothesis regarding the origins of the human race that may seem strangely familiar to readers of Erich Von Däniken's *Chariots of the Gods*. For Adams the human race, rather than having gone through the overly long, inconvenient and generally overrated – for the crocodile at least – process of evolution, are in fact the descendants of a race of galactic explorers – the Golgafrinchans – who happened upon our little blue planet at some point in the distant past. For Von Däniken, positing such an unearthly origin helps explain humanity's extraordinarily rapid intellectual and cultural development in comparison to the rest of nature. We are obviously of a superior stock to an evolutionarily driven nature: in just a handful of centuries humanity has developed complex language, created astonishing works in the mediums of literature, art and music, harnessed nature through the application of science, learnt to fly, travelled to the moon and found a way to successfully market bottled water. However, Adams's account of the behaviour of our Golgafrinchan ancestors soon after arriving on Earth is less likely to elicit such boastful conclusions.

The story goes that the Golgafrinchan home planet was doomed, thereby necessitating the relocation of the entire population to a more stable lump of rock. Three spacecraft, fittingly named arks, were constructed for this purpose: Ark A contained the brilliant leaders, intellectuals and artists – the achievers; in Ark C were to be found those who actually did anything – the workers; Ark B housed everyone else – accountants, hairdressers, management consultants, etc. – in other words, the middlemen/women. Somewhat curiously, Ark B left first, its automatic pilot locked unalterably on the coordinates of the destination planet – Earth. However, as the circumstances surrounding their departure come to light, it becomes apparent that these poor souls were not part of some planetary relocation; in fact their home planet was in fine fettle. Rather, the whole shebang was an elaborate ruse designed to do away with those occupational sectors of society deemed surplus to requirement. An extreme measure? Yes, but try disagreeing with it after even the briefest encounter with an insurance salesman.

Upon arriving on Earth – or more accurately crashing into it – one of the first tasks set by the now abandoned Golgafrinchans was the formulation of a secure fiscal policy. The adoption of the

leaf as legal tender initially satisfied the lust for an abundance of hard cash but unfortunately led to inflation rates Weimar-style, with the purchase of a ship's peanut setting you back around three deciduous forests. However, a bright young management consultant, displaying the kind of mindless obstinacy that would, and indeed has, become the trademark of management consultants everywhere, hit upon the perfect revaluation strategy: what was needed was an extensive programme of deforestation; in other words, burn the trees. According to an

economic rationality the logic of this is impeccable: restrict supply, increase demand, increase value. However, it would win the Nobel Prize in bam-pottery if judged according to an ecological rationality.

I hear you protest: 'surely this race of lunatics bears no resemblance to us?' Surely if we are looking to the stars for the origins of the human race, Von Däniken's claim that we are descendants of a naturally superior being better fits with the evidence provided by the cultural and technological sophistication of contemporary society and the incredible pace of our intellectual development? I mean, the crocodile can't even knit a jumper yet.

Unfortunately not. It is Adams's account of the genesis of human existence that appears to resonate more with contemporary society.

Our current, market-driven economy is governed by a similar logic to that employed by our Golgafrinchan ancestors; that is, parts of nature rise in value when they become scarce. This mechanism is proudly trotted-out by neo-liberals and business leaders as evidence of the laissez faire economy's ability to engender environmental protection. At the Johannesburg earth summit, business's message was as explicit as it was unsurprising: markets must be free, no regulation or self-regulation. When resources are threatened by scarcity, Adam Smith's invisible hand will come to the rescue, enforce the laws of supply and demand, raise the price of the threatened resource, render its usage economically unviable and thereby ensure its protection. Hurrah! Unfortunately, however, this means resources need to be on the brink of exhaustion or extinction before they are valued and protected. The invisible hand is all too invisible the rest of the time.

At this point the neoliberal normally falls back on the claim that recycling can save the day – 'why, even Green parties support recycling!'. However, although recycling is a necessary component of a sustainable society, it is not sufficient, its

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success being tempered by the tag-team partnership of the competitive dynamic and growth imperative which lie at the heart of the capitalist system. Competition does encourage recycling where it provides firms with savings on production materials and thereby a competitive advantage. However, competition also creates a growth imperative, and thereby ensures that such recycling takes place within a system of ever-increasing productivity. Growth requires new resources to be ploughed into the production cycle, whereas only those resources already in this cycle can be recycled. Material throughput continues to increase and the underlying contradiction remains unresolved.

Other avenues for rendering growth compatible with sustainability include transferring usage onto substitute resources, in which case the global rate of depletion remains intact, and speeding-up natural processes themselves, leading to dangerous experiments like GM.

The crux of the problem lies deeper, though. As Marx noted, the capitalist economy values goods according to the quantity of labour required to produce them; in other words, labour is the only source of value. The natural, qualitative material existence of a commodity is abstracted from when value is so narrowly defined; it is a secondary consideration. Indeed, as one-time Green Party candidate for the US senate Joel Kovel comments, the capitalist world is “a world in which the very materiality of existence can seem an inconvenient afterthought”. Such an abstraction is responsible for much of our environmental abandon: an economy governed purely by exchange value inevitably values quantitatively rather than qualitatively. But numbers are capable of infinite growth, nature is not; numbers multiply in an instant, nature does not. To assume the commensurability of a commodity’s growth-driven value form and its actual material basis is to drag nature onto the treadmill to oblivion and crank up the speed.

Like the Golgafrinchans, our economic rationality is ecological suicide. It is essential that we change the way in which we value nature. Two broad options are available: first, there is the **ecocentric** school of thought, which emphasises the need to view nature as **intrinsically** valuable rather than being merely **instrumentally** valuable; in other words, we should view parts of nature as being valuable because they possess value in themselves rather than being valuable only as means to satisfy of human wants. Second, there are those who wish to hold on to anthropocentrism – the belief that humans are the source of all value – but who wish to enlighten it. A deeper understanding of the interconnected reality of nature reveals to us the extent to which it is in our interest to protect ecosystems and the parts of nature which are essential to their functioning. A debate

over which of these paths is preferable is beyond the scope of this piece; what is certain, however, is that radical change is necessary, even vital, and cannot be undertaken within our current economic system.

Of course, the idea that we have galactic ancestry is fanciful at best, lunacy at worst. However, environmentalists themselves should take heed of a misconception they may share with both Adams and Von Däniken. Whereas these writers view humans as unnatural due to our being ‘not of this world’, some environmentalists have reached a similar conclusion, instead positing as evidence our ability to go against natural determinants, be they biological instinctual or otherwise; in other words, our ability to reason. Such misanthropic conclusions – found most frequently in the deep ecology movement – must be avoided; our capacity to reason distinguishes us from the rest of nature, but it does not inevitably follow from this that we should be considered unnatural. Every species has characteristics unique to itself; the crocodile has a number of them, not least their ability to entice Aussie TV presenters to wrestle with them; however, this does not preclude us from viewing them as a part of nature. And the ability to reason is as much a product of evolution as having large teeth, a pouch or wings.

What is undoubtedly true is that our capacity for rational thought has endowed us with the ability to inflict

unprecedented damage upon the environment. However, it is precisely because of this capacity that we are able to avoid such an outcome: we are not programmed to destroy nature, it is not inevitable.

Perhaps, then, the issue of whether we are Golgafrinchans or Galactic Super-Beings should be approached as question of metaphor rather than a question of lineage; a question not of who we are, but of who we want to be; a question whose answer is to be determined by future action rather than historical investigation. To continue along our current path or to reconstruct the economy along ecologically rational lines: choices such as these should determine how we label ourselves metaphorically.

At the moment, our claim to be Galactic Super-Beings must be suspended, pending evidence of ecologically rational behaviour; and conversely, Adams’s claim that we are Golgafrinchans must be upheld until this evidence appears. However, change must be brought about sooner rather than later, as given the current rate of environmental improvement the crocodile will be doing cross-stitch by the time we get there. ■

*Stewart Davidson is PhD candidate at the University of Strathclyde*

# being tough on the causes

Gregor Gall explains why the Scottish Left Review Press's latest book on the Scottish legal system came about

Pick up any Scottish newspaper, tabloid or broadsheet, on virtually any day of any week, and you can find an almost unlimited coverage of stories about crime, victims of crime and the attendant social disruption caused by crime. Of course, far less space is given to serious discussion concerning the social and economic causes of crime. And virtually no space is given to creating suitable and appropriate means of prevention and remedy. While it is correct to call for full employment, better paid, decent jobs, higher unemployment benefits, better resourced community facilities, greater social protection of vulnerable social groups and the like as ways to the combat and eradicate the underlying reasons for crime, this still leaves a lacunae in the thinking of the left on crime and justice. This lacunae exists not just because calling for something is often an ocean apart from achieving it, but because even if a significant part of these reforms were achieved, it would be naïve to think that all the problems giving rise to, and associated with, crime would simply melt away, either immediately or in the eventual fullness of time.

With justice being under the control of the Scottish Parliament, and the long tradition of the independence of the Scottish legal system, there are opportunities for reform and radicalism that are not present in the rest of Britain. This concerns not just changing existing law on 'crime' but to re-conceiving 'crime' as part of the wider issue of creating social justice and cohesion. Unfortunately, after seven years of the Scottish Parliament, there has not been much evidence of such opportunities being taken. One major reason for this has been the smothering of the possibilities by the Scottish version of 'New Labour'. And knowingly or unknowingly, nothing much afresh has come from the Liberals Democrats or SNP or, indeed, the Greens. If neo-liberalism now characterises new Labour's economic policy then its sibling, neo-conservatism, now characterises its social policy.

The media too has not provided much in the way of free thinking, the characteristic of the supposed enlightened and egalitarian Scottish mind, to stimulate change. The odd article in the **Herald** or **Sunday Herald** does not amount to much. But the left cannot evade its responsibility either for this sorry state of affairs. It has traditionally eschewed any notion that the state can play a positive role in justice. This position seems to be increasingly untenable as the left is unable to attempt to provide remedies and solutions for immediate problems and challenges for those that it seeks to help, empower and liberate. Working out such

remedies and solutions in the 'here and now' does not preclude the project of a more thoroughgoing social transformation; rather, working these issues may help to build the forces for a more thoroughgoing social transformation. So it is incumbent upon those who rightly decry incarceration by the state as pretty much the single solution proffered by the establishment parties to put forward their own credible and constructive alternatives because, to paraphrase Blair, the right to criticise also comes with the responsibility to suggest serious alternatives.

The book **Whose Justice? The Law and the Left** (Scottish Left Review Press, [www.slrpress.org](http://www.slrpress.org)) aims to kick-start some new thinking on the left on these matters. The contributors, high-profile thinkers and practitioners, comprise Professor Jacqueline Tombs, Tommy Sheridan MSP, sheriff Alastair Duff, councillor Keith Baldassara, former-HM prison inspector

Clive Fairweather, MOJO spokesperson John McManus, lawyer Mike Dailly, STUC officer Ian Tasker, Dr Nick McKerrell and SACC spokesperson Richard Haley. The contributors do not pretend to be anything like the last word on the outlining a radical totality for reshaping justice and the justice system in Scotland. For a start, not all salient areas were intended to be covered in this collection, nor could they be some invited contributors were unable to find the time and space to write their chapters. Nonetheless, the contributors have begun to search and lay out serious alternative solutions, and in this they should be highly commended. The common threads of the approaches the contributors have taken are that the neo-conservatism of past Conservative and present Labour administrations has had ample time to demonstrate its ineffectiveness, injustice and redundancy; the issues afflicting individuals, communities and justice in society run deep as do their sources and this requires fundamental

reform; and that one-sided 'one size fits all' solution are demonstrably inadequate. On top of this, the way in which 'justice' and 'injustice' are conceived are is a matter of politics, philosophy and worldviews. Clearly, those with social values of compassion and fairness for the mass of ordinary citizens and the disadvantaged through a socialised democracy and economy begin from a quite different starting point from those who make issues of crime and justice subservient and beholden to economic growth and neo-liberalism.

So in the cases of prison, the police and incarceration, the contributors do not reject these outright or out of hand. Rather, we can detect the persuasive argument for a much more

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selective and targeted approach to their usage, where both the conditions and the purpose of their usage is significantly changed. For example, Tombs and McKerrell argued for a diminution in the use of prison while Sheridan and Tasker argued for its use with regard to specific crimes and offences. These positions are not incompatible – rather they are sensitive to specific situations and the notion of using the law to establish and reinforce our desired moral codes. What all positions here represent is the view that if prison is to have a productive role then the appropriate conditions for this must be understood and not undermined by a knee-jerk, indiscriminant usage. The backdrop to these contributions is a widespread recognition that, to mimic the Tories' 1979 iconic election poster, 'prison isn't working'.

But it is not just prison that isn't working. In his chapter, Daily highlights the improbability of the individual citizen gaining civil justice, and pointed to the need for a new institution, a civil tribunal and working to set criteria. Both Haley and McManus also pointed to the need to establish permanent commissions to protect individuals from injustice and to promote justice. In their contributions, Fairweather and McKerrell suggested a turn to allow more and different types of agencies to play a role in the



justice system – Fairweather, families and McKerrell, mediation. In all the contributions, consideration has been given to the institutions, processes, values, and outcomes of the existing justice system. Creating a better justice system, of course, requires resources. Some may be additional while others maybe internally redirected from those existing resources. Either way, a new political will is needed to allow this and new values to exercise themselves over our justice system.

One of the most stimulating points to emerge, particularly from the contributions of Baldassara and McKerrell, is that those subject to the justice and policing systems – that is, the ordinary citizens – should have a degree of control over determining what they are subject to and how they are subject to it. What are the specific advantages of this? Aside from increasing the degree of popular democracy in Britain through eroding the monopoly of control and expertise held by the state and legal profession in this regard, a far higher level of respect for, and effectiveness and legitimacy of, the justice system would ensue – the very characteristics that are largely missing at the moment. This is

because consultation and participation by the subjects of the justice system **in** the determination of the justice and policing systems would lead to a manifest sense of influence **over** the justice and policing systems. 'Empowerment' is an over- and ill-used term but this is what could come to mean, forming a part of a society of popular, or people's, democracy.

Another issue to emerge is why should statist notions of justice, that is state-centred and structured justice systems, always prevail? In this sense, the traditional point of the left in arguing that the (capitalist) state is often one of the main problems with regard to justice may have some resonance. So, again, can we envisage structured and informed popular participation in justice systems which leads to widespread popular control and legitimacy? Can we have a devolved system of justice that operates at a much lower level than the nation state? These issues are raised merely as questions for there is a host of other considerations to be made here, but we need at base to be able to imagine and construct possibilities outside our well-worn conventions. Without privileging any notion of a superiority of any or all things 'Scottish', the devolved settlement should be at least capable of producing 'Scottish' solutions to 'Scottish' problems – policy developed in Scotland utilising available knowledge from elsewhere to tackle the problems as they are presently configured and as we find them here. It is clear that a roadblock of political will exists here.

To realise these possibilities, a fortuitous environment would be the further advance of the various components on the left of the rainbow politics in Scotland in the 2007 Holyrood elections. The same might be said for the prospects of pro-independence parties gaining a majority in the Scottish Parliament. What would conventionally be termed further 'political fragmentation' would open up space for not merely debate but space for leverage and action. So either under external pressure – for example, the Greens agitating - or through internal compromise – for example, the Greens in a governing coalition - the current roadblock represented by the Labour-Liberal Democrats could be broken. This would appear to be the kind of momentous change that would either force New Labour into policy reversals or see new Labour stand by and watch its neo-conservative legacy being eroded. It is a hope that the ideas represented in this collection would be able to flourish – and have a positive, manifest outcome – in such a reconfigured political scene. So next May, citizens in Scotland will go to the polls to elect their members of the Scottish Parliament. They will have an opportunity to condemn the justice policy of the Labour-Liberal Scottish Executive governing coalition. A wide circulation of the ideas in 'Whose Justice? The Law and the Left' will help push forward not just the condemnation of the Labour-Liberal coalition's neo-conservative justice policies but also map out what the credible and appropriate alternatives are.

**'Whose Justice? The Law and the Left' is edited by Colin Fox MSP, Gregor Gall and John Scott, and published by Scottish Left Review Press. It costs £6.99 and is available from 3f2 10 Henderson Row, Edinburgh, EH3 5DS. Cheques payable to Scottish Left Review Press or from the SLRP website (see advert on back page).**

*Gregor Gall is Professor of Industrial Relations at the University of Hertfordshire*

# scotland's spiritual wealth

Chris Thomson looks at contemporary Scotland and concludes that modernism is failing us

There is a scene in the film **Dances with Wolves** where the Lakota are discussing the threat posed by white people. The tribe's holy man, Kicking Bird, captures the mood of the meeting when he says "The whites are a poor people, but there are too many of them". When he says "poor", he does not mean they lack money or material things. He means they are **spiritually** poor. Of course, that was just a film. Yet the fact is that devious means, modern weapons and superior numbers were used to overcome the indigenous people of North America. That brought disaster to the tribes. Out went the health, dignity and ecological living that were relatively common before then. It is surely no accident that, once they had been overcome by the whites, alcoholism, obesity, addiction, depression, crime and suicide became widespread.

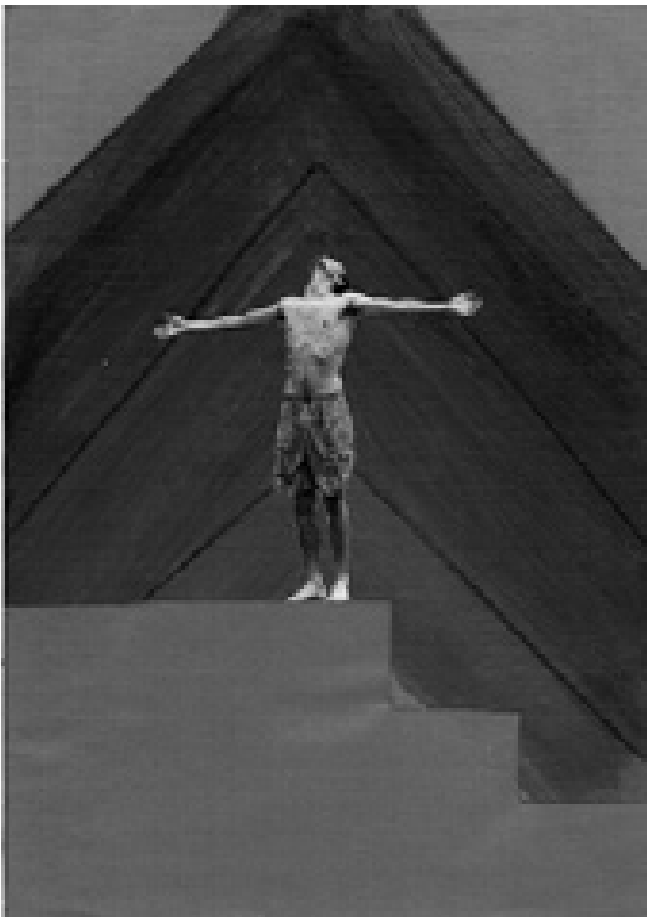
The experience of the North American tribes has a lot to teach us. If Kicking Bird was here today, he would note that poor health, unhappiness and the absence of dignity and ecology are all too common, and he would not be surprised to see that alcoholism, obesity, drugs, depression, crime and addiction have taken hold in many communities. However, unlike many of us, he would probably attribute this to spiritual poverty. While it is true that material deprivation may be the cause of some problems in some communities in Scotland, it is worth noting that the tribes were at their happiest, healthiest and most ecological when they were materially poorer than everyone in the Scotland today. The implications of this for Scotland are immense, for it suggests

that money and material things alone are unlikely to solve our problems. Indeed, there are many in Scotland who believe that the relentless pursuit of money, property and things may be a major cause of our problems, and that the solutions lie instead in replacing spiritual poverty with spiritual wealth. This is a very complex issue, but a useful point of departure is to examine the nature of modernity, because it was modernity, in practice, that defeated the tribes and ushered in their problems.

Modernity is the set of values, beliefs and practices that have shaped the modern world. It has its roots in the worldview of modern science. At the heart of this worldview are some apparently harmless beliefs; "The universe and everything in it, ourselves included, is physical"; "The universe and everything in it is essentially a machine...a very sophisticated machine, but a machine nonetheless. For science, there can be nothing beyond this, such as God."; "The universe has no intrinsic meaning or purpose". Science has become so influential that all metaphysical, religious and philosophical claims that contradict it must be rejected. Yet if, as science insists, the universe began suddenly for no reason (the 'Big Bang'), and life on this planet emerged by chance, then the world that science wants us to believe in must be totally meaningless. The fact that this statement, as part of that world, must also be meaningless is little consolation! In any event, a life without meaning is a bleak life indeed. Many people today are desperately searching for deeper meaning, which no doubt explains the popularity of **The Da Vinci Code**. There is little doubt in my mind that one of the characteristics of modernity and modern society is loss of deeper meaning.

The modern world is also suffering from loss of wisdom. If science rejects the accumulated wisdom of the ages in favour of its own empirically derived body of knowledge, then, since science is the dominant form of knowledge today, wisdom is effectively devalued. Perhaps we should not be surprised that we have become the most dangerous and destructive form of life on the planet. Nor should we be surprised that older people, who in non-modern societies are the respected wise elders, have been pushed to the margins in Scotland, many of them right out of sight into care homes. A wise society values its elders and the group. A modern society produces the cult of the young and the individual. In a wise society, the stock of wisdom increases because wisdom is valued. People wise up. It seems that modern societies have a tendency to dumb down. The modern world is also characterised by loss of ecology. Non-modern societies know just how important it is to live in harmony with each other and with the planet. How many of us can put our hands on our hearts and say that we truly live in harmony with each other, let alone the planet? The modern world has made many of us anxious and insecure. It is little wonder that we engage in frenetic activity, such as work, shopping and travelling, when we should be finding ways to live gently and simply, with ourselves and with the world around us.

When taken together, loss of meaning, loss of wisdom and loss of ecology may be one of the main reasons that we now



live in an era of unprecedented materialism. For many people, acquiring and consuming material things must seem like the only thing left for them to do. Our economics, our politics, our education, our healthcare and our culture have become steeped in material values and beliefs and the behaviours that flow from these. We are paying a high price for this, as we exploit and damage each other and the world. It is short step from materialism and loss of wisdom to economism. Economism is the tendency to view the world through the lens of economics, to regard a country as an economy rather than as a society, and to believe that economic considerations and values rank higher than other ones. Economism is clearly evident throughout Scotland and is a strong influence in Scottish political circles. It is reflected in the growth ethic of the business world and in the widespread belief that happiness is to be found through money and possessions. It is significant that non-modern societies regard economics as a means to an end, whereas modern societies have made economics the end itself, in the sense that perpetual economic growth seems to be the central purpose of most countries today. If the Partnership Agreement (between Labour and Lib-Dems) is anything to go by, it is certainly one of Scotland's central purposes.

By marginalising wisdom, deeper meaning and ecology, we have unwittingly created a spiritual vacuum. Many people in Scotland probably feel this at some level. They feel that something big is missing from their lives. They may not be able to put this into words, but they feel a vacuum inside them that cries out to be filled. They experience this vacuum as anxiety, discomfort, fear, insecurity, despair, or a sense of pointlessness. Understandably, they try to fill the emptiness, and they do this in a huge variety of ways. They overeat, they overshop, they overindulge, they watch a lot of television, they engage in a lot of activity (no surprise that being busy is regarded as a virtue today), or they use sex, drugs and alcohol as pain-killers. These behaviours, unhealthy in themselves, often lead to other forms of ill health, such as alcoholism, obesity, addiction, depression and suicide, as well as the health problems that follow from these, such as diabetes and heart disease. Health professionals in Scotland will recognise this picture. But so long as there is a spiritual vacuum, people will continue to behave in these ways. Telling people to live healthy lifestyles will not change things, so long as the greater influence in society is economic growth and endless consumption.

So, if modernity is indeed the main root cause of the spiritual poverty that is widespread in Scotland and across the world, what can we do about it? What can we do to reverse the downward drift into even more materialism and further loss of wisdom and meaning? There is no single, easy answer to this. However, I do think that it is possible to outline a few of the general conditions that will favour the emergence of spiritual wealth in Scotland.

- **Bring back Older People.** Older people have been pushed to the margins in Scotland while the young occupy centre stage. Many TV programmes, for example, give us the impression that older people have been airbrushed out of existence. Far from being seen as our main source of wisdom, older people are often portrayed as a burden on society or merely as a market for retirement services. Is it any wonder that so many of them feel unvalued and isolated? It has become a self-fulfilling prophecy that as one gets older, one gets less healthy, more dependent, and less valuable. The fact that so much potential wisdom is

being lost as older people are marginalised is one of the tragedies of our times. We could, if we wished, enable the re-emergence of a vast amount of wisdom simply by raising the status and value of older people. That alone would have a profound effect on Scotland.

- **Bring Back Education.** Although we continue to use the word 'education' to describe what happens in schools, colleges and universities, there is not much true education around these days in Scotland. True education is about bringing out the best and uniqueness in each individual, even if that means they end up questioning and opposing prevailing beliefs, values and behaviours. To a large extent, education has been replaced by its opposite, schooling – which is the process of shaping people to believe and follow prevailing beliefs, values and behaviours. There are, of course, some notable exceptions, but these are the exceptions that prove the rule. Education allows wisdom and meaning to emerge. Schooling acts against this. When schooling is combined with economism, 'education' ends up being little more than a training in how to perform well in the economy. In some places it has gone even further than this – young children are being encouraged to become 'entrepreneurs'! It is time we allowed children to have a childhood, and it is time we replaced schooling with education
- **Bring back Self-reliance.** One of the hallmarks of modern societies is their dependency on business, government and experts for goods, services and knowledge that, in many cases, individuals and communities would be better providing for themselves. As a rule of thumb, dependency is unhealthy and self-reliance is healthy. The Lakota and other tribes were self-reliant, empowered communities. They were living cultures, who could do everything for themselves, rather than vicarious cultures, who depend on others for most of their needs. They recognised the central importance of basic human capacities, such as caring, growing their own food, cooking, healing, educating, creating, and entertaining, and would not dream of having these things provided as commodities and services by government and big business. Wisdom and meaning arise naturally out of self-reliance. Insofar as Scotland is a society that is very dependent on business, government and experts for the basics of living, it is a society that inhibits wisdom and meaning. One of the ways of enabling wisdom and meaning is to encourage as much self-reliance as possible.

I am acutely aware that I have covered a lot of ground at some speed. Inevitably, I have been unable to go into much detail. My intention at this stage is simply to draw attention to the fact that modernity is not a health-producing or happiness-producing culture and that the prevalence of modernity and its policy counterpart, modernising, is holding Scotland back and preventing us from becoming the great country we could be. Modernity and modernising marginalise wisdom, meaning and ecology and they lead to spiritual poverty. If we are ever to solve Scotland's problems, we have to replace spiritual poverty with spiritual wealth. This means many things, but ultimately it means allowing wisdom, deeper meaning and ecology to take centre stage in our private and public lives. ■

*Chris Thomson is Director of Central Purpose*

# lessons from a secret history

Jim Cuthbert argues that the history of dirty tricks in Ireland has important lessons for the Scottish nationalist movement

In 1887, the British secret service launched an operation to assassinate Queen Victoria at her Golden Jubilee. This was not, of course, intended to succeed. Instead, it was just one element of a larger plan, aimed against the Fenian movement and Irish nationalists. British agent provocateurs induced Fenian members based in America to attempt a series of dynamite attacks in Britain: most of the unfortunate Fenians involved were picked up by the police on their arrival, and disappeared into British jails. The most unusual thing about the overall British operation, however, is that it is one of the few examples of a black intelligence operation which was comprehensively exposed; the book **Fenian Fire** by Christy Campbell sets out the facts. The real target was not the Fenian movement itself but the much bigger prize of destroying Charles Stewart Parnell. By the mid 1880s, Parnell, as charismatic leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, effectively held the balance of power in the UK House of Commons and had persuaded the Liberal leader Gladstone of the necessity of Irish Home Rule. Bringing down Parnell was therefore a critical objective both of the Conservative Party and of conservative elements in the security services. In 1887, the *Time* newspaper, which was party to the overall stratagem, started to accuse Parnell of direct involvement in Fenian and other atrocities. This led to the establishment, in 1888, of a Special Commission, designed to destroy Parnell.

The odds against Parnell in the Special Commission were formidable. Officially, the commission was a semi-judicial process in which the *Times* confronted Parnell and in which the government was not formally involved. Unofficially, the state was indeed deeply involved. Agents provocateur inspired the original Fenian outrages; a senior civil servant, Sir Robert Armstrong, wrote the major *Times* articles accusing Parnell, (as Armstrong cheerfully admitted in 1910) and behind the scenes, a whole secret unit in the Irish Office toiled away, digging up evidence for the *Times* counsel to produce at the commission hearings, and offering, for example, inducements to convicted prisoners if they would testify against Parnell. However, the Commission strategy backfired disastrously due to brilliant counter-intelligence work undertaken for Parnell by Michael Davitt. Davitt was able to intercept and decipher coded telegrams between London and British agents in America. (Interestingly, Davitt's original intercepts, and the pencilled workings involved in deciphering them, lie to this day, unremarked, in a folder in the National Library of Ireland.) Parnell's lawyers were able to break, in cross examination, the journalist Richard Pigott, who had forged some of the key documents used in evidence against Parnell. Pigott died after fleeing to Madrid, apparently by suicide. As a result of all this, the plot was unravelled - to the intense

embarrassment of the British (at being caught out) and of the Irish nationalists (at being so comprehensively penetrated). There are uncanny echoes, in this mutual embarrassment of the unmasking in December 2005 of the late Denis Donaldson, head of administration of Sinn Fein, as a long standing British agent.

So Parnell was saved, for the time being, and picked up substantial damages from the *Times*. But as history knows, within two years he had been destroyed by the Katherine O'Shea divorce case. (Note that the more commonly used "Kitty O'Shea" is not strictly correct. A "Kitty" was Victorian slang for a prostitute, so calling her Kitty O'Shea was a way of expressing an opinion about her character.) In the aftermath of the divorce, Parnell's party split. This put back Irish Home Rule for a generation, and led to a sectarian divide in the nationalist movement which had been absent under Parnell (himself a Protestant). The actual split of Parnell's party took place after a heated meeting in Committee Room 15 of the House of Commons. In these discussions the lead was taken on the anti-Parnell side by a young Irish MP called Tim Healy. When Parnell said "Who is the master of this party?", it was Healy who famously retorted "Aye, but who is the mistress of the party?" - almost leading to blows. Healy went on to have a long, distinguished, but controversial career as a Nationalist politician and barrister - culminating in his role, from 1922 to 1927, as first Governor General of the Irish Free State.

There is no doubt that Parnell's character weaknesses contributed largely to his disgrace, and to the disastrous split of his party. That might have been the final judgement of history, had not a distinguished Irishman, Sean MacBride, made a startling claim in 1982. Of MacBride's impeccable antecedents there is no doubt; his father, Major John MacBride, was shot by the British in 1916, his mother, Maude Gonne MacBride, was an ardent nationalist, (and the poet Yeats' muse). Sean MacBride himself was chief of staff of the IRA in the 1930s but later became a notable peace campaigner, founder member of Amnesty, Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations, and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. And his claim? No less than that Tim

Healy had been a long standing British agent and that Healy was in fact 'Thorpe', the code name for Britain's highest placed agent within the nationalist movement: (the 'Steakknife' of his day). Unfortunately, unlike the unravelling of the *Times* Commission plot, there is no absolute proof of MacBride's claim. But what is known is that Healy did play a key and murky role in at least two of the seminal events in Ireland's modern history. First, as has been seen, was his role in the Parnell split. But even more important,

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and even murkier, was his role in the treaty negotiations of 1921, when Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith signed the Treaty which led directly not just to the foundation of the Free State, but also to civil war, partition, and all that came after.

Healy's involvement in the treaty is known about through his old parliamentary colleague and friend, William O'Brien. Of particular relevance is O'Brien's book, **The Irish Free State: Secret History of its Foundation**, which has never been published due to its political sensitivity but which can be accessed in manuscript in the National Library of Ireland. In 1921, at the crux of the treaty negotiations, O'Brien was passing through London en route to visit his wife's sick mother in France. While in London, O'Brien was contacted by Healy, who asked him to lend his influence to help prevent the breakdown of the treaty negotiations. Healy himself was not officially involved: he was not a member of the Irish delegation. However, he had come over to London at the request of "an English friend who has been standing for us" (apparently Beaverbrook) and had seen the Prime minister, Lloyd George, the day after he had arrived. At his meeting with O'Brien, he told him of a startling development which had taken place the previous evening. To quote from O'Brien's Secret History:

"He then made a communication to me which he said ought completely to allay my anxiety on the subject of partition. The previous night he had been dining with Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Winston Churchill, whether at Downing Street, or at Lord Beaverbrook's house at Leatherhead, I cannot distinctly recall. ... Mr Healy emphasised the right of secession of the six counties as the point of all others likely to be intolerable to Irish national sentiment and to justify the Sinn Fein delegates in summarily putting an end to the mission. Mr Churchill remarked that he need not worry himself on that point - the right would be little more than a nominal one as a matter of practical politics. "What," Mr Healy asked, "is the meaning of that rather cryptic oracle?" Mr Churchill's reply was that the Government were ready to appoint a Boundary Commission so constituted as to ensure the transfer to the Free State of the counties of Tyrone, and Fermanagh, South Armagh, and (if I remember rightly) South Down, together with the towns of Londonderry, Enniskillen and Newry, and the inevitable result being that Sir James Craig, with the three counties left to him, would be compelled ("compelled" or "forced" was quite certainly the word used) to follow the example. "That", said Mr Healy, "is a matter of supreme importance. Do you mind repeating it, so as to enable me to transmit it to those men. I cannot imagine anything better calculated to silence their objections." It was so done and Mr Healy took the words down in shorthand as they came from Mr Churchill's lips. "Am I to understand", he asked, "that that assurance is endorsed by the Prime Minister?" "It certainly is", was Mr Lloyd George's reply."

According to O'Brien, it was this secret undertaking which was instrumental in persuading Collins and Griffith to sign the treaty - with fatal consequences for Collins and many others. Healy's role, however, was far from that of honest broker. O'Brien warned him that the British could not, and would not, deliver their side of the bargain: yet Healy still sold the deal to the Irish delegates. But then Healy almost immediately switched tack; by 1922, he was saying partition was inevitable, even though the government of the new Free State persisted for another two years in the delusion that



partition would not happen. According to MacBride (as quoted in Tim Pat Coogan's biography of Michael Collins) just before Collins died Collins himself became suspicious of Healy, and was on the point of outing him as Thorpe - which may have contributed to Collins death. There is, however, no proof of this. If Healy was a high placed British agent, should we be surprised? Emphatically not. As Stephen Dorrill's authoritative history of MI6 makes clear, (**MI6: Fifty Years of Special Operations**), penetration of independence movements is a standard technique. The part of Dorrill's book dealing with African independence movements in particular is required reading, and names some surprising names. And anyone who needs convincing that black operations can take place much nearer home should read Seumas Milne's book **The Enemy Within**, on the miners' strike, and its aftermath of bogus corruption allegations against Arthur Scargill in 1990.

So what is the relevance of all this to Scotland? As far as many nationalists go, the answer would be; absolutely none. It is a standard response when things go wrong for nationalists in Scotland to say 'If it is a question of cock-up or conspiracy, I believe in cock-up'. This is normally repeated in a self satisfied tone of voice, as if it was a badge of political maturity to hold this opinion. However, what this response is really saying is 'I may be a nationalist who wants to change the current structure of the British state; nevertheless, I am so fundamentally convinced of the basic decency of that same British state that I will not even countenance the possibility that someone might be playing at dirty tricks'. Put this way, the standard 'cock-up or conspiracy' response can more readily be seen for what it is: a response based on a level of political immaturity, and ignorance, which would be laughed out of court in Ireland, or in any other former colony. What the nationalist community in Scotland needs to do is to open its eyes to the ample evidence for the kind of techniques used against independence movements. Armed then with a healthy degree of paranoia and suspicion (too much would be fatal) it then needs to develop structures and attitudes which are robust in the face of attempted penetration and black operations. Until it achieves this transition, it is open to the accusation that it is merely playing at nationalist politics.

**Jim Cuthbert is an independent researcher, with a keen interest in the political and economic implications of Irish independence**



# a scottish socialist flyteing

In a critique of the new Red Paper on Scotland Eric Canning argues that its marginalisation of independence as an issue for the left is a mistake

A spectre is haunting Britain - the spectre of Scottish independence. All the powers of the archaic British State have entered into an unholy alliance to exorcise this spectre. Monarchy, Lords and Commoners, those of the right, left and centre and perhaps even MI5. Where is the party in opposition that has not been decried as separatist by its opponents in power? Where the opposition that has not hurled back the branding reproach of nationalist against the more advanced opposition parties as well as against its reactionary adversaries? Two things result from this fact;

1. The right to self-determination is an inalienable right, recognised by all to be itself a Power.
2. It is high time that those in support of Scottish Independence should openly, in the face of the whole world, publish their views, their aims, their tendencies and meet this nursery tale of the Spectre of Independence with a Manifesto for Independence itself.

To this end, those of various groupings assembled in Edinburgh on 30th November 2005 to establish the Independence Convention and to publish its aims to all the peoples of Scotland.

Readers will readily recognise this paraphrasing of the preface to the 1848 Manifesto of the Communist Party - a truly revolutionary document for its time. The recently published Red Paper on Scotland hardly measures up to this and to be fair, its editor Vince Mills, makes no such revolutionary claim but puts it forward "as a source of information that can be used to expose the lies of 21st century neo-liberalism....as well as a source of alternative ideas...(to) build the better world envisioned in the Scottish socialist tradition..."

Reviews of this work and publicity for it have been mostly welcoming and constructive. It certainly has some excellent contributions and is loaded with economic facts and statistics to the extent where this heavy ballast threatens its stability rather than reinforcing it. The reason for this is its Brit-centric focus to the point where its title would more accurately be expressed as the 'British' Red Paper on Scotland. In this, Emeritus Professor John Foster, writes more in the context of Britain's global imperialist link up which applies as much to England as well as to Scotland and to many other countries caught in its web. His guiding hand, acknowledged by Vince in this publication, has led to some contributors' partial regurgitation of the long failed 'British Road to Socialism' formula where winning the British Labour Party for 'left wing' and 'socialist' policies will, by Marxist magic, win through to the imagined British Soviet State. Some might retort 'pie in the sky' to this one. By loading the Red Paper with selective academic references and statistics as though calling in a higher biblical authority, John and Vince may consider their position secure. However some

of us iconoclastic atheists 'up there' (as John Prescott recently said in passing reference to the Dunfermline by-election) can easily see through 'the holes in their breeks'.

Several major themes emerge from this work and it is necessary to consider them one by one. First is the devastating damage to Scotland caused by the combined forces of deindustrialisation, export of capital, transfer of jobs south to England and abroad and intensive, enforced privatisation. These are all well documented by Richard Leonard and develop a theme, barely noted by him, that goes back to the Union of 1707 whereby the benefits of that Union have always been to the privileged few while the wealth created by the many in Scotland has been sucked southwards to the London metropolis for use across the globe in Empire building. Whether it be from mining, steelmaking, shipbuilding, heavy engineering or currently from oil and gas, that wealth has mostly passed out of Scotland.

On this latter, where is the comparison with Norway which nation - with half the population of Scotland - has managed its oil wealth to secure its own future?

Only in Dave Watson's excellent essay is mention made of the need to seek "inspiration and best practice from countries similar to Scotland". He mentions the Nordic countries, but what of Ireland or even the Low Countries or the Baltic States? This type of comparison is totally absent in the Red Paper and leads us to a second theme.

This Red Paper is conceived wholly within the ideology of the British Unionist State. Various contributors assume their can be no other perspective for socialists. Unionism, in this context, is a myopic disease. Those afflicted, such as John Foster, whose pamphlet "Breaking the British State" (in effect an apologia for that state) belly-flopped, persist in this delusion and political blind alley. He, along with others, develops the theme at some length, of the damage done to the Scottish economy and its vulnerability within the British State. But then prescribe more of this State prescription, much as a political homeopath might do, but with too high a concentration to be effective.

**Here is the nub of this issue. Surely a Red Paper on Scotland should have included contributions from those in support of Scottish self-determination?**

From a Marxist point of view, this inherent contradiction is the point where revolutionary change can be initiated to bring to an end the British oligarchic State. When Scotland ends the Treaty of Union, there is the catalyst for democratic self-determination, not just for Scotland but for England and for the reunification of Ireland. This is where the dialectic of socialist advance gears in. Independence does not

end solidarity with working people in England and elsewhere. It reinforces and strengthens it. As James Connelly acutely observed, national self determination and the struggle for socialism go hand in hand -as does international solidarity.

The third theme is virtually missing in the Red Paper apart from Vince Mills' somewhat turgid attempts, using almost half his essay to dismiss it. Yes, it's that spectre again, Scottish independence or as Vince predictably describes it "the pursuit of nationalism..." He considers that socialist participation in the Independence Convention would compromise (corrupt?) their "building of socialist ideas...". How sectarian can one get! Unfortunately for Vince's somewhat constipated view of socialism, we in Scotland, with our new Parliament, are developing a more pluralist society which is opening out our vision of how changes can be achieved. Are socialists not to involve themselves in this converse? How else to give voice to socialism, to reach others in a wider intercourse?

Here is the nub of this issue. Surely a Red Paper on Scotland should have included contributions from those in support of Scottish self-determination? The Scottish Socialist Party is one such; after all it is a real socialist party unlike New Labour. Why omit the Scottish National Party from contributing but include the Scottish Green Party; the Unionist Communist Party of Britain but not the independent Communist Party of Scotland; and why no contribution from the STUC? One third of MSPs (43) represent parties or individuals in favour of independence and elected by Scottish voters. Vince Mills uses selective statistics to show only a minority of Scots favour independence while noting that even some socialists in the Labour Party also support a "nationalist perspective". Wow! Perhaps there are more of us than you think. Perhaps that is considerably more than presently support socialism. Quite an uphill task ahead.


Lastly, the fourth fundamental theme. Scottish Labour's Campaign for Socialism, no doubt under some constraints

within the Labour Party's Constitution, has to focus on a socialist advance within that exclusively unionist party. Coincidentally, we have the one hundredth anniversary of the foundation of this party by Keir Hardie - a dedicated supporter of Scottish and Irish Home Rule as it was then designated. It has taken that century to belatedly achieve a devolved Scottish Parliament with comparatively limited powers. We still await socialism from the Labour Party, now more reactionary than ever, with Gordon Brown exhorting us to support the Union and plant the Union Flag patriotically in our front gardens - if we have one! Apparently, it is okay to support the British Nationalist stance and wave the Union Jack (a military flag in its origin), symbol of colonial aggression, oppression and possession; but to hoist the Saltire and support Scottish independence is to run up a blind alley, so to speak. Who's got the blinkers on here? As George Bernard Shaw famously observed, there is more chance of getting socialism from a sausage machine than from the British Labour Party.

So the dilemma for Vince and his comrades is; if, in only thirty years, the then editor of the first Red Paper, Gordon Brown, has not just turned his back on socialism but is a cardinal player in the renascent British Imperialist State, seduced by neo-liberalism and the global imperialism of the USA, how long will it take to turn the Labour Party in a socialist direction; another century? If ever? Or will a messianic socialist host, metaphorically speaking, emerge from the miasma of word spinning that Labour speak has become, to win the day and confound us, the barbarian unbelievers 'up there'? ■

*Eric Canning is the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Scotland*

**67% say no to road trains Mori poll August 2005**



**Shift freight onto rail**  
**Shift rail into public ownership**

**Executive Committee Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen**  
**Keith Norman** general secretary **Alan Donnelly** president **Andy Reed** national organiser

# web review

Henry McCubbin

Nukes are in the news and this time it is for real. Only Blair could declare that he had changed his mind only for us all to discover he had changed it in the wrong direction. If I were a cynic I might think that this was due to him wanting to get his snout in the nuclear industries trough along with other ex-Labour ministers like Jack Cunningham and Brian Wilson when he leaves office. A bit like Zidane ending his career with a head butt but without the glittering career to precede it.

Perhaps Blair should turn again by looking at [www.greenpeace.org.uk/climate/?&CFID=5237529&CFTOKEN=83284110](http://www.greenpeace.org.uk/climate/?&CFID=5237529&CFTOKEN=83284110) and then consider his options; retirement being the preferred one but then there is that guy Brown. Perhaps Blair should also recall an interview he gave to Marxism Today in 1990 where in response to the question "Complete this sentence: If I was dictator for a day..." he answered "I'd make sure my political monument was more than a gesture". Obviously forgot the bit about equality and a better planet for our children – ho hum. As the lad says now he's allowed to change his mind.

And talking about apologists for the nuclear industries where better to start than at the well funded [www.world-nuclear.org/info/inf03.htm](http://www.world-nuclear.org/info/inf03.htm). This organisation sets out to educate us and our children through its schools programme in to the joys of a nuclear future. Lets take 'The Nuclear Fuel Cycle', that horny old misnomer. What are we told by their experts:-

- The nuclear fuel cycle is the series of industrial processes which involve the production of electricity from uranium in nuclear power reactors.
- Uranium is a relatively common element that is found throughout the world. It is mined in a number of countries and must be processed before it can be used as fuel for a nuclear reactor.
- Electricity is created by using the heat generated in a nuclear reactor to produce steam and drive a turbine connected to a generator.
- Fuel removed from a reactor, after it has reached the end of its useful life, can be reprocessed to produce new fuel.

Wow! A completely waste free energy source. Nobody believes that, not even the writers of this rubbish. As a counter to this, complete with a Scottish angle, try [www.foe-scotland.org.uk/elephant](http://www.foe-scotland.org.uk/elephant). The campaign in Scotland against nuclear madness has to be sensitive to our own situation and FOE Scotland is on to this. ■



**Campaigning for the return of rail to the public sector**

**Campaigning to keep Caledonian MacBrayne's lifeline ferry services in public hands**

**Let's put the public back in public transport**

**Bob Crow, General Secretary**

**Tony Donaghey, President**

# Kick Up The Tabloids

## SCOTLAND JOINS AXIS OF EVIL SHOCK

Over the past month or so, those of us who despaired of Scotland ever regaining confidence in itself as a nation were given a much needed tonic, and surprisingly it was provided by the Scottish Executive. Jack McConnell finally stood up to Westminster on two vital issues of national importance, nuclear power and who he would be supporting in the World Cup. Predictably it was the Scots in the Westminster Cabinet who let us down. Firstly, Gordon Brown, surprisingly enough for someone who wants to become Prime Minister of the whole of the UK claimed he would be supporting England, although simple arithmetic of how many votes are to be won in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is the clue to why he did so.

Secondly, Alistair Darling contradicted McConnell by saying that Scotland may need to build more nuclear power stations, to provide electricity for England. This is ridiculous in a nation so rich in potential renewables... tidal, wind, hydro. OK, solar is a bit of a non-starter for 11 months of the year but if anyone ever develops the potential for generating power from mist, fog or light drizzle, Scotland will be the most energy-rich nation on Earth. Incidentally, I can never hear the name Alistair Darling without conjuring up a mental picture of some Morningside Amateur Dramatic group having a production meeting. "Esme Darling, your in charge of costumes, Virginia Lovie you're in charge of make-up, Alistair Darling you're in charge of transport and the regions."

No sooner had Jack McConnell declared his support for Trinidad and Tobago but the New Labour thought police in London had to intervene. Not content with controlling virtually other aspect of our lives, they now appeared to want to dictate what football team we support. Although I think they overestimated the influence Jack has over his fellow Scots. I was surprised that support for England did not swell after his comments, from people refusing to support the same team as the bloke who's stopped them smoking in the pub. Blair predictably got involved with some ludicrous soundbitery. First by claiming Scots were racist for not supporting England, although how it can be racist to support Trinidad baffled most of us. Secondly, he blamed the Tartan Army for attacks on people wearing England shirts. As for the attack on the seven-year-old in Edinburgh's Inverleith Park, my view is the child was plain unlucky. The chances of bumping into a Scottish person in Stockbridge are very rare. And frankly, I also blame his parents. The child in question is called Hugo, so he's going to get a kicking every day once he goes up to secondary school.

While the attacks are despicable, to blame Tartan Army is at best wrong and at worst dangerous. The Tartan Army are as a peaceful bunch of fans as you'll find anywhere. Indeed at most major tournaments, they win the best behaved supporters award, mainly because they're not there long enough to start any trouble. What is dangerous is that as soon as Blair blames the Tartan Army for attacks on English people, George Bush will be adding them to axis of evil along with Iran and North Korea. Even now, he may well be looking up his atlas to find out where Tartania is. The CIA may well be on the case too. "Mr President, it's not just the Tartanians we want to invade, it's the Scots too. They're developing chemical weapons. According to their own newspapers, they're sitting on a diabetes and heart disease timebomb."

Also, this summer the Royal Scottish National Orchestra conducted a poll on what song we wanted as our National Anthem, We had the choice, among others, of Scots Wha Hae, Flower of Scotland, A Man's a Man for A' That and Highland Cathedral (Ironically written by a German). Votes poured in from the Aberdeen area suggesting "If You Hate the Fucking English Clap Your Hands" but thankfully not enough to sway the result. One glaring omission from the list in my opinion was Donald Where's Your Troosers?, which could be updated in reference to the continued vandalism of the statue of the father of the nation as Donald Where's Your Glasses?

Blair further went on to insult Scots by suggesting we should have a State Funeral for Margaret Thatcher. Most Scots don't think this goes far enough. We want a day off work, a bank holiday, street parties and a big televised gig in Hyde Park compered by Ben Elton.

Finally, we had the heart-warming story of Sakchai Makao finally winning his appeal against deportation to Thailand. The whole Shetland community got right behind him, despite his conviction for fire-raising while drunk. In fact, it's probably what endeared him to them. "Look, the laddie's one of us! He burns doon hooses when he's pushed! Now he can get to be an MSP or a member of the House of Lords!" ■

*Paul Sneddon (aka Vladimir McTavish) appears in A Brief History of Scotland at the Edinburgh Fringe Friday 4th to Sunday 27th August at The Stand Comedy Club at 7pm. Box Office: 0131 558 7272*

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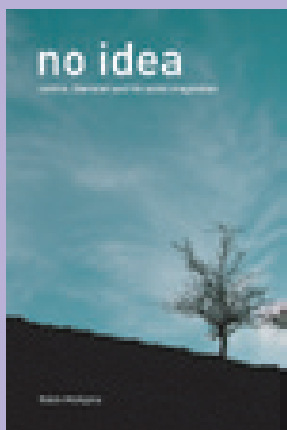
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**Whose Justice? The Law and the Left** is not simply a critique of the current state of our law and justice. Drawing on an array of perspectives and international experiences, the contributors lay out a set of ideas and proposals to resolve and ameliorate the current deficiencies and injustices. In doing so, they cast new light on some of the rather tired and hide-bound traditional approaches of the left to law and justice. Consequently, the political parties contesting the 2007 elections would do well to consider the proposals and conclusions of **Whose Justice? The Law and the Left** if they genuinely want to create the best small country in the world to live in.

**Whose Justice? The Law and the Left** has contributions from Colin Fox MSP, solicitor-advocate John Scott, Professors Gregor Gall and Jacqueline Tombs, Tommy Sheridan MSP, Sheriff Alastair Duff, councillor Keith Baldassara, former HM Chief Inspector of Prisons Clive Fairweather, justice activists John McManus and Richard Haley, lawyer Mike Dailly, STUC health and safety official Ian Tasker, and Dr Nick McKerrell.



**“The free market project has been as much about the contraction of hope as about the expansion of the economy. They didn’t want to defeat the Labour movement, they wanted to defeat the belief that there could be a Labour movement.”**

Almost every change in the history of mankind has come from an idea or vision which was shared by a small group of people which grew bigger. This is the social imagination. Almost every one of those ideas was opposed and resisted and almost every one of those people was persecuted or marginalised. This is the control of the social imagination. A sense of resignation – or even hopelessness – is encouraged in order to suppress new ideas at source. The result is that we live in a grossly unequal society in a grossly unequal world and yet we have no widely-shared persuasive ideas about how things should be changed for the better. **No Idea** argues that if we can understand the ways in which the social imagination is controlled, we can recapture it. If we can recapture it, ideas will come and change will happen.



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