

A black and white photograph of a group of people, likely at a protest or rally, standing in a circle. Many of them have their hands raised in the air, some with clenched fists. The background is dark, making the people stand out. The overall mood is one of solidarity and collective action.

*Tax:  
fighting back*

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# Comment

OK, we paid too much for our Parliament building. The £430 million-odds it cost simply doesn't reflect good value for money. But it is certainly fair to say that there was some degree of holding-to-account, if only in media scrutiny. It was the defining scandal of the first eight years of devolution in Scotland.

Let us compare with what should really be considered another national scandal. The Scottish Executive is paying £200 million in annual bribes – our money – and in return we are getting nothing. Every two years from now on we will hand over the equivalent of a Scottish Parliament building, cost overrun included, and there will be no scrutiny of what difference it makes. Speak to anyone in the Scottish public sector and ask them to imagine such a thing – a free £200 million a year, no strings attached. They'd laugh at you.

Yet this is the cost of the business rates cut about to be implemented by the Scottish Executive. Even accepting the 'best' defence of this policy, the £200 million is being spent on a hunch. There has been no impact assessment, because there can't be – there will be virtually no impact. In fact, if you talk to anyone about it they will more or less admit that there is no impact. There is certainly no target for impact and no plans to measure the value we got for it. Let us quickly consider why this is.

What do you get if you give a corner shop or a hairdresser or a garage a couple of hundred or even a couple of thousand pounds? The small business owner might employ another member of staff and expand the business. But why would more people want their hair cut or buy more groceries or fix their car more because of rates cuts? The few hundred pounds certainly wouldn't be enough to make the service cheaper at a rate which would make the business more competitive. No, the owner of the shop or garage would go on an extra holiday or buy that flat-screen telly they've been hankering after.

At the other end of the scale, let's think of a giant Tesco. How much money do you think you have to give Tesco to create extra jobs which are not justified by the spending power of the

consumers in an area? If it's profitable they do it anyway. Even giving it all of the £200 million would probably not make it do anything very different. Grasping for straws you might claim that the injection of the money into the economy will have its own multiplier effect. Perhaps, but giving it to business is certainly the least effective way to stimulate the economy with financial bungs. Do you really believe that this rates cut will create jobs or increase productivity?

If the answer is no, then you're in company with the people introducing the cut. Privately most politicians will say what they don't publicly – that this is about 'sending the right message' or 'strategic positioning'. Which is much the same thing as you might say about any bribe. This £200 million is not an investment for the people of Scotland, it is a pay-off to keep the CBI from saying unpleasant things about the parties. The Labour Party does it because it is the doctrine of 'triangulation' which defines its very existence (certainly at a UK level). The Liberal Democrats do it because their new leader considers it to be a great pose. (Nicol Stephen seems to exist in a giant gap between what something means and what something sounds like – which can be the only basis on which he has talked about a flat tax in public.) The SNP is in thrall to an analysis by Jim Mather which amounts to 'nothing is too much to spend to stop business from criticising independence'. Only the Tories really believe in this stuff.

So the people of Scotland are paying in a game of poker played by the 'social democrat' parties with the CBI dealing all the cards.

Scotland is about to start forking out a Holyrood-building's worth of bribe every two years from now on with nothing in return simply because the political parties are scared of the CBI. This must be challenged; the business lobby must be asked in a year's time to show that it has produced well more than £200 million of identifiable and measurable value for its money. After all, this is how everyone else is treated. When it fails to show any link the money must be taken away and used for things which

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actually help increase prosperity in Scotland – investment in education, investment in failing communities.

But that is not the end of what must happen. There is an unchecked juggernaut of nonsense careering through UK politics and it is all about tax. Outside the ideologues of the ‘Washington Consensus’, few people now believe in the trickle-down economics of tax cuts. Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz recently told an Edinburgh audience that the evidence for tax cuts being the economic panacea suggested by UK politicians is weak to say the least. For every example of an economy which is growing and has low tax rates there is another growing on the basis of high tax rates invested in education and yet another shrinking despite low tax rates. As with all ideologues the neo-liberal economists take the beneficial effects of tax cuts to be an article of faith – which means that evidence is unnecessary. Which is just as well because if you run an input-output model based on a reasonably complex model of the Scottish economy you will discover that spending £200 million on almost anything else will trump the economic benefit of a tax cut.

More money makes it into the economy by paying nurses more than by giving the money to business – because nurses spend it and business hoards it. When the rich spend money they spend lots of it abroad (holidays, foreign-built sports cars). When the poor spend money they spend it locally.

**Scotland is about to start forking out a Holyrood-building’s worth of bribe every two years from now on with nothing in return simply because the political parties are scared of the CBI. This must be challenged; the business lobby must be asked to show that it has produced well more than £200 million of identifiable and measurable value for its money.**

And then there is the lie that people won’t accept higher taxes and that tax-raising is a vote loser. The evidence for this is also poor. Two quick examples of this include the regular and entirely consistent evidence of social attitude surveys that people are happy to pay taxes if they are well used, and a study which showed that in fact the reason Kinnock lost the 1992 election wasn’t about tax but about personality. The tax-cut bandwagon is built on these two lies – that tax cuts work and that tax is always unpopular.

So where is the pro-tax campaign? Tax is, after all, a great symbol of everything that is great about the human species. The willingness to work together for something better, the acceptance among the affluent that the poor should not be abandoned to their fate, the recognition that to build great things we can’t just keep our fingers cross that wealth will deliver. Tax Is Good, the opposite is barbarism. If the fawning bribe-givers do not feel the stick of our anger at money wasted and see the carrot of our support for the cost of the good society, things will drift further towards the devil-take-the-hindmost attitude of the US.

The CBI has now been given every single thing for which it asked prior to the last Scottish election. Imagine – everything in its wish list is now in its pocket. Having gorged at our expense, do we expect it now to be sated? We shouldn’t. It’ll be back for more, and the way things are going it’ll be given it again. It is the very definition of scandal, and it is time that it is called such.



# do corporate tax cuts work?

Christine Cooper examines the pro-business agenda that is infiltrating all Scottish parties and ask do tax cuts actually result in a more prosperous Scotland?

The three major Scottish political parties are currently vying for the "business vote". But the ideological programmes they are proposing are more than simply rhetoric aimed at winning the business vote in the May 2007 election. Scottish politics are dominated by a pro-business agenda which is based upon the trickle-down economic neo-liberal ideological position. Proponents of neo-liberalism claim that by lowering the taxes of corporations and the very rich they will promote new investment and economic growth, thereby indirectly benefiting everyone in society. In other words, that by giving more to the rich, some wealth will eventually, mainly through investment, trickle-down to the poor. Yet, there is scant evidence that the neo-liberal economic agenda is working anywhere in the world and certainly not in Scotland.

A recent example of this bid to get the business vote, is to be found in the SNP's 'Small Business Bonus Scheme' launched in September 2006 which sets out the SNP's proposals to support the business sector. The SNP state that an "SNP Executive will abolish business rates for 120,000 small businesses with a rateable value of £8,000 or less

and increase business rates relief for 30,000 small businesses with a rateable value of between £8,000 and £15,000. Larger businesses will also benefit from a return to business rates parity with England". It has been argued that smaller businesses pay a higher proportion of their turnover in business rates than larger ones much in the same way as the super rich pay a much smaller proportion of their incomes in council tax compared to pensioners.

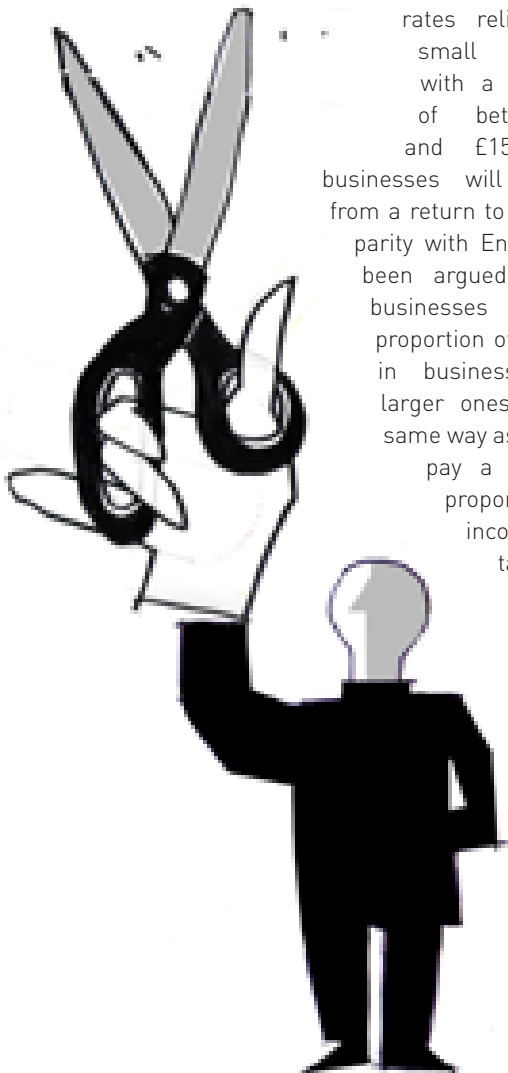
Thus the SNP could claim that their business rate proposal will bring about a fairer business rates system.

The SNP's proposal to bring business rates in line with those in England is exactly the same as the Labour/Liberal Democrat coalition announcement that from April 2007 business rates in Scotland will be cut to bring them in line with those in England.

The cost of the SNP business rates proposal is estimated at £150 million. The Labour/Liberal Democrat proposal has been costed at £200 million per year. It isn't clear what would be cut in order to fund these packages. Business rate cuts could well mean cuts in much needed services by local authorities and/or large council tax bill rises which will severely impact on the poorest in society. Yet the case for cutting business rates is not based upon sound empirical evidence. As RJ Bennett argues in an article on the 'Impact of Non-Domestic Rates in Profitability and Investment' published in Fiscal Studies. He states: "The non-domestic rates which are paid by business enterprises have been a source of particularly strident claims as to their impact on businesses, but as yet little systematic analysis has been undertaken to quantify their effects".

Many arguments have been put forward to suggest that business rates do not significantly impact negatively on business. For example, it has been argued that rates are only a small proportion of business costs; that the marginal rate is reduced by the deductibility of rates from corporation tax; that increased business rate charges can be passed onto consumers in increased prices which changes the effective incidence of taxation; and that business rates are due payment for services received. Whereas, cuts in public services are not only costly in human terms, they can also create costly social problems for the future.

The SNP's pro-business agenda is further reinforced by its commitment to cut Corporation Tax from 30 per cent to 20 per cent. While a cut in business rates might be of marginal benefit to small businesses, the proposed cut in corporation tax would only benefit a relatively few large businesses. At the moment companies do not have to start paying 30 per cent corporation tax until their profits reach £1.5 million. Companies whose profits are less than £300,000 pay 19 per cent corporation tax. Therefore it is possible that for many small businesses, the SNP proposals may mean that they pay less in Business Rates but at the same time they would be paying more in Corporation Tax (a rise from the current 19 per cent to the proposed 20 per cent). What is clear is that the SNP proposals would benefit big business. In proposing a big business tax cut agenda, the SNP has jumped onto the same bandwagon as the other main political parties in Scotland, imitating policies which have been pursued in many other countries.



A recently published KPMG survey of Corporate Tax rates in 86 countries found that there has been a consistent and dramatic reduction in corporate tax rates since 1993. KPMG argue that once one major industrialised economy cuts its rates, others seem compelled to do the same, in a process of international tax competition that continues and intensifies over time. So are countries now locked into a “race to the bottom in corporate tax rates”? The KPMG report suggests that given the intense global competition for tax revenue it may make sense for governments to consider strategies other than simple price (taxation) cuts to attract and retain “discerning customers” (large corporations). The report goes on to argue that

“As transport, communication, and trading links improve across the world, corporations are finding it progressively easier to site their operations wherever they can find the best combination of resources, skills, finance, security, and the effective rule of law.

Tax, under these circumstances, becomes effectively a price that multinationals have to pay to make use of the goods and services that a country can provide. Like any astute consumer faced with this kind of choice, corporations are shopping around globally for the best combination of price and value”.

The KPMG report suggests that Scotland can attract inward investment not necessarily through low taxation, but rather through the provision of excellent resources. Nordic countries have much higher taxes and public expenditures overall, better public services and infrastructure, better performing economies, and a lower reliance on such inward investment. What is clear is that if tax cuts impacted negatively on education, health, transport, then while they may attract companies to locate to Scotland in the short run; in the long run, companies would leave Scotland for countries with better public services. Moreover, expenditure on public services may address another key issue facing Scotland – the growing economic divide.

Social deprivation and social mobility in Scotland are among the worst in Western Europe. One must question whether the neo-liberal economic agenda is the correct one for dealing with poverty in Scotland. If one imagines for example the impact of corporate tax cuts on a large supermarket chain. It may use its larger financial muscle to squeeze more profits from the producers of products. It may use its increased after tax profits to pay higher dividends. It may also, as other large Scottish companies have done use its increased profits to go down the overseas acquisitions route. None of these actions would directly impact on social deprivation and poverty in Scotland. In any case even if the large retailer did decide to invest in building new Scottish stores, thus creating low paid jobs, this may be at the expense of local businesses.

A more innovative solution to the problem of creating and stimulating growth in the Scottish economy was contained in Tommy Sheridan’s Scottish Service Tax Bill which would have made approximately 83 per cent of households in Scotland better off. This bill was in part founded upon the economic principle of the marginal propensity to consume (MPC). MPC is an economic term for the amount that consumption changes in response to an incremental change in disposable income. Typically the MPC is higher for the poorest in society. If you give a poor person an extra pound, it is likely that they will spend it on something they need, increasing demand in the local economy. Thus it is possible to stimulate the economy by (say through tax cuts), giving the poor more money.

A further aspect of this Bill which has received little coverage was the proposals to reform Business Rates. This aspect was intended to improve accountability and to improve the match between the local costs of providing services to businesses and the revenues raised from those businesses. Perhaps a return to a local system of setting business rates should be explored. As a series of first steps, there seems no reason why taxation of sporting estates should not be reintroduced, with the revenues being retained by the local councils involved. With the abolition of sporting rates in 1995, land in Scotland attracts no tax burden for the first time in a millennium and this anomaly requires redressing.

We have argued consistently for taxation on land values to address those who continue to own large estates, land and property in

Scotland yet declare small incomes. A tax on the value of land in place of business rates would capture these large land holdings and the ability of their owners to avoid much taxation. It would also restrict land speculation, allow the community as a whole to benefit from windfall gains from public investments, and allow the individual some protection from reduced land values due to the actions of others.

It is time that the Scottish executive took a more innovative approach to governing Scotland rather than following an unproven ideological economic agenda which is proven to help only the richest in society. By blindly following this ideological position they are ensuring that things will only get worse for the majority in Scotland. ■

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*With thanks to MD and GW*

# Taxing issues

## Henry McCubbin examines the position of our political parties on tax and the possibilities after the election in May

No sooner have our political parties had their annual conferences, where taxation was discussed, than two of them, the Tories and the Lib Dems produce reports on the topic from internal committees. In the case of the Tories its two committees, one for Britain and one for Scotland, all chaired by a party eminence gris. In the case of Scotland the Tories chose Lord (Michael) Forsyth and the Lib Dems chose Lord (David) Steel. The SNP has published their take on fiscal policy dispensing with the offer of help from the former freelance media producer Mike Russell - once a freelance always a freelance. The SSP and Solidarity have had a couple of mini conferences and have decided in a manner that Wilde would appreciate that a map of the world that does not include two Utopias is not worth even glancing at. Meanwhile the Scottish Greens like Labour have still to officially set their policy commitments at conference.

When the Greens do meet they will find that they have already written a large part of the fiscal policies for all of the other parties, more strangulation than triangulation! Green is truly the shade of the epoch as long as it doesn't cost too much for no sooner had Blair decided to save the planet than the Sun ran the headline "I will save the planet - you will pay for it." A further problem is New Labour's fascination with market failure. Global warming according to Stern, is due to market failure. Not at all, it is an indication that a capitalist market is working to maximise profit and externalise costs. The boy David (Milliband) had an immediate dose of fiscal rectitude from Gordon Brown and green taxes became "carbon trading" which will need an IT project even more complex than that of the Child Support Agency to make it function.

The above does bring home the big issue of future directions for Scotland's body politic. With so many environmental taxes being designed such that they can only be set and collected by our unitary state at Westminster and these same taxes proposed to replace existing taxes, some of which could be devolved, will this lead to greater centralisation of governments' income from tax and greater reliance by Scotland on Barnett? Is this indeed the time to federate or separate?

### Conservative tax

Key quote "The party is split on the tartan tax; some want us to cut it and others are worried that it will cut across Cameron's approach if we do." - **A Tory insider**

According to the Conservatives, powers to cut excise, stamp and fuel duty would be transferred to Scotland under proposals to give Holyrood more control over tax. A final decision has not yet been made on the plans but senior sources have revealed the Tories are close to agreeing a new approach of "partial fiscal autonomy". However the party is backing away from the idea of cutting income tax.

The Forsyth policy advisory forum, which was set up to suggest innovative policy ideas from outside the party, has

recommended "fiscal autonomy" from Westminster as a key Tory policy for the elections in May 2007. The party is not bound by the recommendations of the advisory forum but it would be surprising if the Scottish Tories decided to ignore its central recommendation completely.

At British level they are looking to target cuts in council tax at pensioners so presumably the Scottish wing will come into line. David Cameron told the Forum for Private Business in London: "Our strategy will have three key components. First, economic stability as our number one priority. Second, to simplify business taxes - which would help pay for lower headline tax rates. And third, to rebalance our tax system - shifting the burden of tax from families, aspiration and opportunity, to pollution and carbon emissions." Not much there for a Scottish parliament to get to grips with apart from business taxes, a territory already crowded out by the SNP, the Lib Dems and Labour.

### Lib Dem tax

According to Lord Steel of the eponymous Steel Commission "No self respecting parliament should expect to exist permanently on a grant from another parliament. The Scottish Parliament is unique in having considerable legislative power, but very limited control over taxation.

"It is time to change that. Transferring substantial revenue-raising authority to the Scottish Parliament should enable future Scottish Governments to have a free hand in developing policies which will stimulate growth in the Scottish economy and remove the democratic deficit. The Scottish Government should have control over a number of taxes so that it can pull the levers necessary to develop the economy and to meet important policy goals like protecting the environment and improving health.

"There is also a strong case for giving the Parliament new policy and legislative powers. In areas like energy policy, there is a growing argument for taking more decisions here in Scotland."

The Lib Dems want to replace council tax with a local income tax; new 50% tax rate on earnings over £100,000 a year; raise stamp duty threshold to £150,000 to help first-time buyers; increase green taxes as a share of national income; reform the climate change levy raise vehicle excise duty on polluting cars; keep fuel duty in line with inflation; tighten allocations in the EU emissions trading scheme, and auction 10 per cent of the permits and tax emissions not passengers

Once again the central control of these taxes denies Lord Steel's wish for greater accountability at the Scottish level.

### Labour tax

Labour in Scotland has a draft document for its manifesto conference. In a set of proposals it puts an unprecedented emphasis on green issues and public health, other commitments

include banning unhealthy snacks from sports centres and letting local authorities fluoridise water

Investigating an overhaul of business rates to allow councils to keep a share of the money raised in their own area.

Part of Labour's strategy is to increase financial incentives for "going green", so anyone who insulates their loft, installs double glazing and takes other energy-saving steps will get a reduced council tax bill, although there is no detail on how much. Nationally they are looking to road pricing which already looks as though it will make the NHS computer system look like an abacus. Satellite global positioning, mobile phone real time communications from all vehicles to a huge computer centre to process it, even the Stasi in the GDR would have baulked at this intrusion in to an individuals privacy when Vehicle Excise Duty could be scrapped and it all could be collected through fuel duty and congestion charges specific to local authority areas.

If at the British level green taxation is pursued then how that income is distributed will bear on whatever residual autonomy is left for the Scottish parliament to exercise. Labour's position on local taxation is to keep the council tax but increase the number of bands. This will remain unfair because government failure to provide sufficient housing to meet demand will automatically increase value and therefore the level of taxation hitting those on fixed income.

#### **Greens tax**

The Greens have pledged to replace VAT with eco-taxes on pollution and waste; scrap the Council Tax and Uniform Business Rate, introducing a Land Value Tax to encourage more efficient use of land and accelerate urban renewal; increase taxation on corporate profits and reduce tax breaks for the rich. They

have pledged to reduce tax on labour and increase it on capital. Personal tax free allowances are to be replaced with a "citizens wage". They have also pledged to bring essential public services under public ownership and under public control located as close to community level as possible.

#### **SSP and Solidarity tax**

Both are against Council tax and for a service charge. Under their proposed Scottish Service Tax, they claim that 77 per cent of the population would be better off than under the grossly unfair Council Tax. They also call for a fully independent Scottish republic with full control over defence, immigration, taxation, welfare energy and other areas currently reserved to Westminster. They SSP stand for a radical rewrite of the taxation system, setting an income tax that would redistribute wealth from the super-rich and they again claim that this will bring to bring an end to Scotland's record of poverty and inequality. They say that under New Labour cuts in top rate Corporation Tax amount to £11 billion - over £20 a week for every pensioner in the UK.

They also stand for a clampdown on the £80 billion tax scam which, they say, sees the equivalent of three times the total budget of the Scottish Parliament spirited away to overseas tax havens. They also claim that a £30 a week uprating of state benefits would cost around £13 billion at UK level, or £1.3 billion within an independent Scotland. This is almost in line with the tax handouts given to shareholders by New Labour in the form of Corporation Tax cuts, which they say they would claw back. They are also pledged to the introduction of a two tier VAT system, with luxury goods taxed at 20 per cent, with VAT on all other goods slashed from 17.5 percent to its 1979 level of 8 per cent.

*Henry McCubbin is a former Labour MEP*



**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**

# Tax and poverty

## Mike Danson and Geoff Whittam discuss how we can use the tax system to effectively address the effects of poverty in Scotland

The UK tax system is regressive<sup>a</sup>. The poorest fifth pay more of their gross income in taxes than the richest fifth: 37.7 percent compared with 35.5 percent. While indirect taxes take up 28 percent of gross and 31 percent of disposable income for the poorest, they absorb only 14 percent and 16 percent, respectively, of the incomes of the richest. Critically, the only direct tax which exacerbates this is the Council Tax which costs the poorest 4.9 percent of their gross income – even after Council Tax deductions and Council Tax Benefits – but only 1.7 percent for the richest. If the Council Tax was replaced with a tax based on ability to pay, then the overall tax system in Scotland would become progressive and a start could be made to reducing income inequalities and poverty. The Scottish Service Tax (SST) is a form of local income tax which seeks to achieve this.

This reverses the current reality of council tax where research by the Economic and Social Research Council exposes the fact that the bottom 20 percent of households pay three times more in taxation as a proportion of their income than the top 20 percent. In line with all economic research, the significant improvement in disposable incomes for the almost 80 percent of Scots who would benefit from the SST would lead to a vast expansion in economic demand and activity across Scotland.

In this article, we look at poverty in Scotland, and then outline the proposed SST before examining the alternatives being offered in Scotland.

The Scottish Executive Report, "Social Focus on Deprived Areas" (September 2005) paints an extremely grim picture of how people living in poverty suffer in all aspects of their lives in Scotland. The survey which compares the lives of people who live in Scotland's most deprived areas with those in other areas shows how the poorest people fare in terms of education, health and employment. The gap between the rich and poor areas is growing. In terms of poverty, the blunt truth is that things are getting worse in Scotland. Many of the findings of the Executive study came as no surprise. The study's findings tended to reinforce previous research, and confirm the negative effects on health, education, employment and other elements of living.

The Scottish Service Tax (SST) emerged as a practical, progressive and redistributive replacement for the increasingly unpopular council tax<sup>c</sup>. After several iterations, it was decided to base the tax on personal income with marginal increases applied to five specific income ranges. The first £10,000 of anyone's income is automatically exempt. This effectively removes the vast majority of pensioners and hundreds of thousands of low paid workers from any liability. On an income of £10,000 or less, citizens should not have to pay the SST as they are effectively living in poverty. The rates proposed are £0 - £10,000 = 0 percent; £10,000 - £29,999.99 = 4.5 percent; £30,000 - £49,999.99 = 15 percent; £50,000 - £89,999.99 = 18 percent, and more than £90,000 at 20 percent. These are marginal rates, so someone on £40,000 pays percent on their first £10,000, 4.5 percent on their next £20,000 and 15 percent on their last £10,000. Thus, such an individual's SST bill would amount to £2,400.

The SST is certainly radical at first sight, but seen within the context of the change in taxation away from direct taxes to indirect taxes over the last two decades, it hardly takes us back to the effective top rates of income tax implemented by the Thatcher government during its first seven years. Between 1979 and 1986 top rate income tax across the UK was in the order of 60 percent. The SST top rate of 20 percent means Scotland's highest earners will likewise confront a 60 percent top rate income tax. The old rates system had a differential as high as 14:1 between those in the most and least expensive properties. The current council tax has a differential of only 3:1. Hence the occupier of Scotland's most expensive home in Barnton Avenue West in Edinburgh, cost: £2.2 million, pays a council tax only three times that of the smallest tenement in Niddrie or Pilton. Given the vast income differential between such households, such a difference is hardly fair. Given the principal thrust of the proposal is to tackle income poverty by taking less money from the pockets of low paid workers, then more money has to be taken from someone else in order to provide a broadly "revenue neutral" tax overall, although our proposals will raise more revenue than the council tax. It is likely that the better paid on incomes above £40,000 a year will pay more. Politicians on £50,000 and more will certainly have to dig deeper.

	Salary	SST payment	C/T band	C/T	Difference
<b>Bus Driver</b>	17,352	331	D	1,053	-722
<b>Nursery Nurse</b>	8,000	0	D	1,053	-1053
<b>Pensioner</b>	8,001	0	D	1,053	-1053
<b>Teacher</b>	24,174	533	D	1,053	-520
<b>Refuse Collector</b>	14,560	205	D	1,053	-848
<b>Social Worker</b>	23,970	629	D	1,053	-424
<b>Police Constable</b>	26,016	721	D	1,053	-332
<b>Nurse</b>	20,798	486	D	1,053	-567
<b>Firefighter</b>	23,175	593	D	1,053	-460
<b>Solicitor</b>	36,400	1860	G	1,755	105
<b>MSP</b>	50,300	3954	G	1,755	2,198
<b>MP</b>	57,485	5247	G	1,755	3,492

The "winners" and "losers" of the SST proposals are set out in the table above. The information is based on research conducted by the Scottish Parliament Information Service (SPICE, 2003) and details by occupation who would benefit and who would lose out if the SST were introduced. The Scottish Service Tax replacement



for council tax is legal, practical, fairer, transparent and able to generate more revenue for local government. We believe SST rates should be set nationally to ensure fairness across Scotland and that the Inland Revenue should be contracted by every local authority to collect the tax. The Parliament should distribute the SST revenue to each local authority according to need and in consultation with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Scottish Trades Union Council.

Local government should not just be judged by the level of local taxes it sets, but to ensure no loss of fiscal autonomy, through the introduction of the SST, the business rate should be re-localised. Using the most up to date Inland Revenue statistics available had the SST been deployed in 2002-03 in place of council tax. It shows that even if Westminster insists on retaining the approximate £300million sum paid in council tax benefit, which we should resist, the SST would have raised £2,022 million, or £269 million more than council tax, but in a fairer fashion. The pensioners and low paid would pay less or nothing at all, while the highest paid and wealthy would pay more. As a percentage of their income, individuals on salaries around £168,000 - GHA boss Michael Lennon<sup>d</sup> for example, would only be paying 16 percent of their income while a hard pressed teacher or social worker on £24,300 would pay 2.6 percent of their income.

There have been alternatives suggested to the SST:

Adding to or broadening the bands of the existing Council Tax. This would not address the fundamental criticisms with CT as it would still be a regressive tax within a regressive tax system, the complex and means tested council tax benefit would still be required to exempt low income individuals and families from paying some of this tax, and it would still not be based upon ability to pay;

The local income tax proposed by the SNP would be set at 4.3 percent which would have raised £1,599 million a shortfall of £154 million of the actual collected CT plus CTB for that year - to meet the shortfall either their flat rate and so regressive tax would have to be set at a higher rate or more funds would have to flow from Holyrood to each



Council;

The analogous Lib Dem local income tax set at an average rate of 3-4 percent (their press releases seem to vary on this) would similarly leave a shortfall of several hundred millions of pounds, so at £4 percent in 2002-03 £1,488 million would have been collected £266 million less than CT plus CTB;

The Conservatives have proposed funding schools directly from Holyrood, claiming this would cut council tax by an average of 35 per cent, and they would give pensioners a further 50 per cent discount up to a maximum of £500 per household. This continues with the idea of a deserving and a non-deserving poor and would still leave CT as a regressive tax, with education funded out of a regressive tax system;

There have also been proposals for the scrapping of the council tax and the uniform business rate and their replacement with a land value tax which should encourage more efficient use of land and enhance urban renewal, however, it is relatively untested in developed and large economies and could make council incomes unstable.

Of the above, we have previously supported moves towards looking at land value taxation and there are arguments in favour of funding certain elements of public services directly from Holyrood, e.g. education.

To address the shortfalls in the local income tax schemes of the Lib Dems and SNP higher rates would be needed - but they each want a regressive model of a flat rate tax - so that one regressive tax would have been replaced by another. Alternatively, they would need to transfer more support grant to local government from Holyrood so diminishing their own arguments that the SST was in some way undemocratic as its rates were set centrally. They also want to cap the amounts that local authorities can raise, effectively constraining them anyway. Neither of these parties explains how fiscal flight within Scotland can be managed under their forms of local income tax; nor do they admit that the SST would be cheaper to organise and collect.

The logic of the SST model of a local income tax has been made: it replaces the regressive council tax, is effective and efficient in funding local government, exempts the poorest in society from having to pay and demands citizens contribute to the financing of public services according to their ability to pay. Within the context described here, it should be supported by all socialists.



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# eat the rich

## David Miller looks at how the some of the country's wealthiest people get rich and keep getting richer and asks what can be done to stop the ultra-wealthy.

Life for the super rich in 2006 'just gets better and better' reports the **Sunday Times**. The list records 'a near 20.6 per cent increase on last year and is one of the highest rises in a year we have recorded since our first list in 1989'. The rich have got much richer under Labour than ever they did in percentage terms under a Tory government', the **Sunday Times** records. According to the latest figures from the Office of National Statistics the wealthiest 1 per cent of the population in 2003 owned 21 per cent of the wealth, while the poorest 50 per cent of the population own just 7 per cent. If you remove property from the equation the figures are even more stark, with the top 25 per cent owning 85 per cent of the wealth and the top 50 per cent on 99 per cent.

Naturally enough the defenders of corporate privilege say such rises are healthy. David Lonsdale, deputy director of the CBI, reportedly said 'No doubt some will seize on these figures in order to peddle an anti-business message, but executive pay has to be driven by the realities of the market place', ('Scotland must maintain high pay for bosses', **Scotsman**, 3 October 2006)

The realities of the market place are such that we must expect greater inequality and learn to like it. Since 2003 the inequalities have only increased. According to Income Data Services in November 2006, 'average remuneration packages for chief executives of the UK's biggest 100 companies rose 43 per cent from just under £2m to £2.8m last year.' This 'means that the executives now earn approaching 100 times the pay of their average employees and follows previous inflation-busting pay rises which have doubled the remuneration of the top directors since 2000'. Scotland is no exception to the boom in fat cat pay awards, Sir Fred Goodwin, at RBS, saw a pay rise of some 35 per cent last year, receiving a basic salary of £1.09m, a performance bonus of £1.76m plus a £1.53m increase in the value of his pension fund.

In 2006 there were fewer Scots in the top 1,000, (61 as compared to 69 in the previous year) but the overall wealth of the top 100 Scots, 'has risen sharply by about £1.2 billion to nearly £14.5 billion.' Glancing down the list of the top 100 in Scotland one is struck by the absence of many of the directors of Scotland's biggest corporations. The richest people in Scotland are apparently largely from traditional industries or from the service sector.

All of these (with the partial exception of Souter and Glog) are predominantly national capitalists with business largely based in Scotland or Britain. Where are the directors of the RBS, HBoS and Standard Life? Maybe they are not in the rich list partly because their personal fortunes, though huge, do not measure up. Equally, it is difficult to measure their wealth since many of them choose to hide what they are paid through arcane tax and revenue avoidance measures, most of which are perfectly legal. Sir Angus Grossart is an example - because 'careful accounting' masks a full picture of his wealth.

Also not listed are those who are hugely influential in Scotland but who are based outside Scotland. Two examples from the two largest corporations in Scotland suffice. Peter Sutherland is a non executive director of the RBS and Dennis Stevenson is chair of the board at HBoS. Both are serious players in the transnational business elite. Both are hardly noticed as having anything to do with Scotland. Yet they and the rest of those running Scotland's financial establishment have the whip hand in decisions affecting Scotland.

Their financial affairs are murky but they are seriously wealthy, 'earning' in excess of £1million a year. But the most important thing about this faction of the new rich is their integration into the transnational corporate elite. Peter Sutherland, is a former Attorney General of Ireland, and was the first director of the World Trade Organisation in 1997. A consummate corporate networker Sutherland is on a range of boards and lobby groups. Stevenson is also an arch new Labour connected fixer, friend to Peter Mandelson, think tanker, Special adviser to Blair. Their role in the Scottish economy is to promote its further integration into the world market. Stevenson himself argues that the Scottish financial sector is 'in no sense a branch factory - quite the opposite'. They have an emerging different set of interests to the Scottish bound business rich whose dairies, car repair outlets and shops cannot be so easily moved to Shanghai, like the activities of the financial sector. This is the new 'Rich-rich' divide noted by former US Labor Secretary Robert Reich between those who still work within a 'national' economy (like Britain) and those at the top of the global corporations who share an 'increasingly similar cosmopolitan culture'. Their income and wealth 'far surpass those of national elites', (Robert B. Reich, 'The New Rich-Rich Gap', **Newsweek**, 2006)

### What do the rich do with their money?

The 21<sup>st</sup> century rich are rediscovering the pleasures of times past. In their leisure time they consume conspicuously; in looking after themselves they make sure to buy themselves out of the public sector by availing themselves of private health provision and send their kids to private schools. For example financier Angus Grossart spends his spare time renovating his weekend retreat a 16<sup>th</sup> Century castle near St Andrews, while Irvine Laidlaw indulges his 'taste for vintage racing cars and yachts'.

But the new rich-rich divide is as nothing compared to the increasing divide between those at the top of the society whom Reich describes as 'symbolic analysts' and those at the bottom. Reich notes the accelerating collapse of the middle tier of the work force - those involved in producing goods in factories and offices - and the massive expansion of the bottom tier in the service sector. As he notes, the increasing wealth of the new rich in society - the symbolic analysts (he puts it at about 20 per cent in the US) is 'helping to fuel the growth' of the lowest tier, the personal service workers. Reich notes that the richest 10 per

cent in the US (about the same in Scotland) now have so much discretionary cash that 'they can afford lots of pampering'.

Those who think that the rich are lazy are quite wrong; they spend lots of their time and some of their money in ensuring that they are able to keep as much of their money as possible. Tax avoidance, offshore accounts and other ruses are heavily used. The Sunday Herald and Who Owns Scotland estimate that the 'UK Treasury is losing hundreds of millions of pounds a year in Scotland alone because millions of acres of land are held in offshore trusts or nominee companies that hide the true identity of the owners.', ('How Scotland's landowners avoid paying at least £72m in tax, **Sunday Herald**, October 2006).

The rich must also cultivate the not so rich - the politicians - who act as their agents, smoothing the path of many a piece of unpopular legislations. So Lord Laidlaw pays large amounts to the Scottish Conservative Party. Others who like to remain more in the background make sure that resources are channelled to neo-liberal political actors via direct funding or via indirect funding by the corporation they run. This money goes to think tanks and other neo-liberal lobby groups. One of the lowest profile members of the Scottish corporate rich is Lord Dennis Stevenson, the Chair of the board of HBoS who 'earned' £538,000 in 2004 and £563,000 in 2005 not including bonuses or his myriad other jobs. Stevenson made sure that Pearson stopped all funding of political parties when he joined its board in 1996. Stevenson prefers to channel money and other benefits of his influence to market friendly think tanks and has been associated with the Social Market Foundation and Demos. HBoS has a long history of supporting similar organisations in Scotland as have the other Scottish corporate giants. Together with RBS, Lloyds TSB Scotland and Standard Life, they have funded the David Hume Institute, while Stagecoach and the Barclay Brothers bankroll the ultra right Policy Institute. The notionally 'centre left', but in reality pro market, Scottish Council Foundation is meanwhile funded by BP, BT, Diageo and Pfizer, amongst others.

This indirect money funds the ideological allies and flunkies of the corporate rich to make the case for more privatisation and less democracy - so long as it is bound up in soothing phrases such as 'modernisation' and 'good policy'. The project run by Wendy Alexander with the Fraser of Allander Institute (funded by Tom Hunter and the 'private sector') is an obvious example. It involved bringing leading neo-liberal economists to Scotland to lecture the Scots on how to enact more privatisation. The resulting book project sets out the neoliberal agenda clearly as it 'emphasizes the role of greater openness, incentives and capabilities in stimulating future growth. But it also stresses the importance of winning the battle for people's hearts and minds in support of good policy, because if the politics do not make sense, the policy will rarely change', (Coyle, Alexander and Ashcroft (eds), *New Wealth for Old Nations: Scotland's Economic Prospects*, 2005). In other words, the art of politics is to manage public perceptions so that the voters will put up with the dominance of the rich or be misled into thinking that 'modernisation' is good for all.

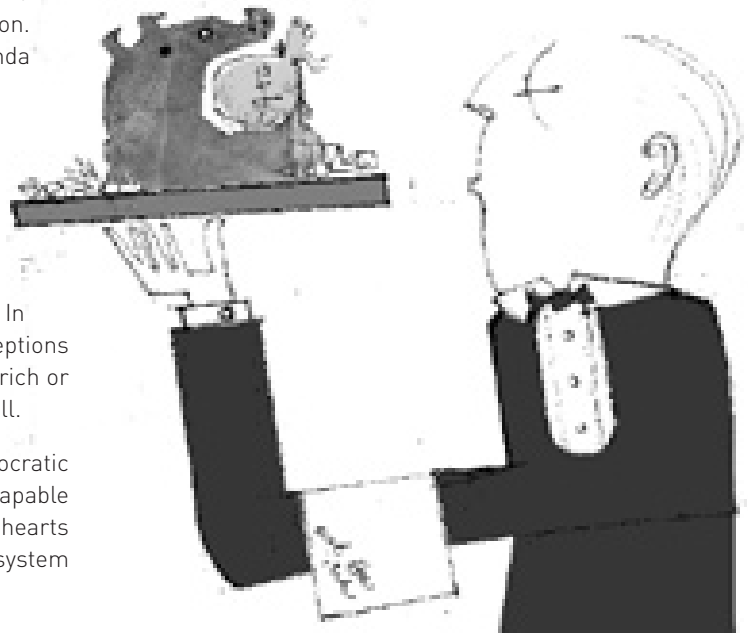
This is how the rich attempt to ensure that the democratic process does not produce any political forces that are capable of constraining their wealth. Among the key battles for hearts and minds is their attempt to pervert the education system

at primary and secondary schools and in further and higher education. Thus the rich plough significant resources into propaganda designed to insist that there is no alternative to hyper competitive capitalism.

Sometimes this is described as giving to charity. But in the manner their Victorian forbears would have recognised, they gain kudos for charitable giving, which at the same time is designed to shore up their wealth. Scotland's rich seem keen on ploughing money into pro-business propaganda campaigns. Known as 'enterprise education' this teaches children that getting rich is socially acceptable, that it is within the grasp of anyone regardless of their social class, and that all it requires is a positive attitude. Irvine Laidlaw's charity venture the Laidlaw Youth Project, which shares the same address as the Scottish Conservative Party has been 'engaged in ongoing dialogue' with the Scottish Executive on funding pro-market education initiatives and 'has funded places for Scottish headteachers to attend a two-day leadership conference in London'. Tom Hunter has also been heavily involved in promoting business propaganda in schools: 'Working with the Scottish executive, the [Hunter] foundation has ploughed millions into the Schools Enterprise Programme since 2001 - delivering enterprise education to all pupils aged five upwards - making it available in every primary school in Scotland. They are working on introducing it across all secondary schools.'

For those who think that an independent (non socialist) Scotland would necessarily make things any better there is sorry news. The conflict between the national and international fractions of the capitalist class would remain and it is perfectly plain that the rich who run devolved Scotland would be the same as the rich who would run independent Scotland. They are not held in place by the mechanism of the devolved Executive. On the contrary they run the country with the connivance of the Executive and they would continue to do so with the connivance of an independent parliament. Unless and until the problem of the democratic system is sorted out and it is able to respond to the wishes of the people. Whether independent or devolved, Scotland needs a democratic politics which can take on the rich and end the obscenity of ever increasing social division. ■

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# the future of socialism

John McAllion tells us what's different about SSP and Gordon Morgan does the same for Solidarity.

## Solidarity: Scotland's Socialist Movement

Solidarity: Scotland's Socialist Movement was launched on 3rd September at a rally attended by 700 people and on 4th November held its inaugural conference. It has therefore become Scotland's newest political party.

The past two months have been hectic with a series of rallies across the country—Edinburgh, Dunfermline, Cumnock, Paisley, Dundee, Inverness, Hamilton, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Dumfries, Motherwell. At all of these activists involved in local industrial disputes spoke alongside local campaigners Against Stock Transfer, Against the War and Islamophobia, in support of Asylum Seekers. Support was pledged from leading Trade Union officers from PCS, T&G and other unions in a personal capacity.

Through these rallies, Solidarity has begun to establish a presence across Scotland. Over 600 people have joined and we are hopeful of 1,000 by the new year. The rallies have shown the type of organisation we hope to be: involved in local struggles, active in trade unions and communities, supporting and defending asylum seekers, the poor and dispossessed, attacking racism and Islamophobia and active in all major progressive campaigns. As our launch statement put it we aim to become in time:

“the broad party of socialism in Scotland – bigger, better and bolder than that which has gone before, a fresh movement with an attractive, pioneering, and inclusive spirit, welcoming to all who join.”

It is fair to say that all genuine socialist organisations could start out with such a statement, so what makes Solidarity different? Firstly there is the political climate. Not since Vietnam has there been such a mood of disillusionment and discontent with the major parliamentary parties – particularly Labour. Labour is the party of War on Iraq and Afghanistan; of attacks on immigrants, Muslims, youth; of defence of nuclear power and UK nuclear weapons; of unrestricted expansion of airports, supermarkets and environmental pollution; of attacks on trade union rights, workers pensions and conditions; of the corporate state and restrictions on liberties. The traditional base of Labour is fed up and looking for an alternative.

Secondly, a party like Solidarity containing, as it does, many experienced activists fighting in communities, workplaces, parliament and the streets on these issues can make a difference and win support. Solidarity members are or have been key activists in most ongoing industrial disputes in Scotland; most major campaign on the war, globalisation, defence of refugees, against stock transfer etc. A high percentage of those joining Solidarity have never been in any other party and have been won through our members activity in areas of concern to them personally.

Thirdly there is our experience of previous mistakes, our willingness to draw lessons and organise differently and in a way which will encourage all those joining to get involved in the campaigns they are most concerned with in the knowledge that they will receive solidarity and practical support from other Solidarity members.

Given we have only just formed and have not yet organised branches in every area we are active in, it is impossible to show exactly how we will organise differently, however, such discussions have been at the heart of those including myself who helped draft, debate and eventually agree the constitution adopted by our founding conference.

Solidarity sees itself as being a unifier of many Movements. This is set out in the Constitution of the party under Aims where we say: “Solidarity will be a political party which will be a coalition of groups, parties, organisations, trade unions and individuals” and then says it will encompass the following movements and detailed aims associated with them – a campaigning movement; a democratic movement; a workers movement; an anti-war movement; a grass roots movement; an environmentalist movement; a young peoples movement; an internationalist movement; a socialist movement.

In the course of discussions on the constitution, it became clear that there are (at least) 2 partial conceptions of how a party relates to broader movements. There is the old conception of labour party and labour movement, essentially updated for new movements, whereby the socialist party exists independent of the movements but swims within them. There is the other concept of the party or globalisation movement as a movement of movements, not separate from the movements but acting as a vehicle for them for certain purposes such as elections. The latter concept had to date its highest expression in Italy where at one point Refondazione Comunista broke from a centralised organisational form to embrace the movements of millions of workers and activists.

At our party conference, these partially different conceptions were focussed around a vote on whether the party should be called Solidarity or Solidarity: Scotland's Socialist Movement, with the latter narrowly being endorsed.

The agreed constitution embodies both forms, both party and coalition of movements. For a party of 600 to 1,000 people, the key to success and dialectically resolving these contradictions is a welcoming and tolerant approach to people from different traditions both cultural and political; a recognition that whilst solidarity should be universal, the theory of socialism is a learned not an innate process so comradely debate and discussion is essential; and above all a willingness to keep the organisation open to and involved in movements and campaigns and to never allow ourselves to become focussed on internal discussions – go forth and multiply.

In our public activities we aim to work with all groups and parties in campaigns and movements and in the parliament to further progressive aims and causes and oppose soulless bureaucracy, intolerance, war, poverty, capitalism and environmental disaster. We will be standing in the Scottish parliament and council elections next May and hope to offer a choice to voters across Scotland. We intend to build a movement and party for Socialism - Solidarity: Scotland's Socialist Movement. We need you to join us at [www.solidarityscotland.org](http://www.solidarityscotland.org)

*Gordon Morgan is National Treasurer for Solidarity* ■

## Scottish Socialist Party (SSP)

As I write the third Scottish General Election is already under way. From the union with England, all the way to a second Forth Road Bridge and saving the planet - the mainstream parties are positioning themselves around their "hot" election issues. Without exception, they are totally focused on how to maximize their core vote next May.

Press speculation is endless on the range of probable or possible coalitions that might emerge following the third round of Scottish elections. There is no consensus. Safety-first unionists talk up the prospects of another New Labour/Liberal administration but are prepared to contemplate a minority New Labour one. Moderate nationalists point to recent opinion polls showing the SNP just ahead of New Labour and a narrow majority for independence. They dream of a rainbow coalition of SNP, Liberals and Greens.

The coming Scottish election is genuinely open and, at this stage, entirely unpredictable. Political pundits are divided and in the dark, they just can't pick a winner. The only thing that unites them is their collective certainty that the socialist candidates standing next May will do badly.

All predict that the acrimony and bitterness of the split will have horrified those who voted socialist in 2003 and might have voted socialist in 2007. They predict that the soft socialist vote will turn away to the Greens or the SNP or won't vote. They see the core socialist vote that remains splitting between the SSP and Solidarity. Their perspective is that the socialist foothold in Parliament - so bravely fought for and won in 1999 and 2003 - will be surrendered by a once united Scottish Left now split and bereft of any political sense.

Well, we now have the gift of seeing ourselves as others see us and it is far from pleasant. The view from outside our own ranks is certainly harsh. But is it inaccurate or unfair? And can we afford to ignore or dismiss it?

I spoke recently at a thinly attended public meeting where one socialist pensioner literally raged against our internal navel gazing while he and other pensioners were crucified on the cross of the council tax and rising energy bills. Where he demanded were the socialist voices speaking up for the likes of him on these issues? Like all criticism, this has its fair and its unfair elements. The party was not split on a whim. The divisions were real and about fundamentally important issues. But, as that pensioner made clear, there are other issues that should matter to socialists as well and giving a voice to these issues should be what any credible socialist party is about. Tragically our socialist voice has been drowned out by a tide of media coverage over internal problems.

None of this would matter if all that was at stake were the personal futures of the socialist candidates standing in next May's elections. But those candidates carry with them into that election the remaining hope that there is a realistic, democratic and socialist alternative to a capitalist system now careering out of control and threatening to destroy the planet.

I believe the SSP remains the only serious force in Scottish politics that opposes capitalism with a range of policies and a programme that will take us in a socialist direction. I also believe that for the first time in generations political space

has opened up for a party like the SSP to build a solid base of popular support for socialism. All of the other parties on the so-called social-democratic left of Scottish politics have simply sold the pass on socialism.

The old Labour Party stood accused of talking socialist while acting like a Fabian collective of inch worms set on eroding by fractions the capitalist conditions that immiserated workers everywhere. But New Labour has abandoned socialist talk and Fabian reformism alike. Like their old Tory enemy, they now idealise the world as capitalism has made it. Thatcher's "there is no alternative to capitalism" has become Blair's "opposing globalization is like trying to turn back the tide".

The SNP, sniffing the prospect of power, have thrown themselves into the arms of Scottish capital. Alex Salmond woos the likes of Tom Hunter and Crawford Beveridge and his Enterprise spokesman, Jim Mather, promises that an SNP led government will use its tax powers imaginatively and in a pro-business way. Some nationalists still hanker after the idea that the SNP are only doing what is required to win in a capitalist Scotland and will revert to their true social-democratic selves post independence. Socialists in the Labour Party used to think the same about Blair and Brown before they won in 1997. All the talk about facing up to reality in opposition inevitably ends with them surrendering to capitalist reality in office.

In the "Strange Death of Liberal England", George Dangerfield described the landslide Liberal Government elected in 1906 as a kind of capitalist left wing advancing upon social reform with noisy mouths and mouse-like feet. In the succeeding century we have witnessed similar capitalist left wings come and go under various political banners. We have learned to our cost that there is no such thing as a capitalist left wing - only parties that capitalism will use to defend its profits and power.

It was to exploit this new political context - the absence of pseudo-socialist parties on the centre left - that the SSP was formed. If the idea of socialism was to survive, then there had to be a socialist party in the political game. In every public space there had to be women and men giving voice to the case for socialism. For that to happen there had to be unity across what until then had been a fractious and divided Scottish Left.

The success the SSP enjoyed in 1999 and 2003 was built around the building of that unity and the creation of a single Scottish Socialist Party. All of the progress that has been made is now put at risk by the setting up of a rival socialist party that can only divide the Scottish left and return it to its pre-1999 political impotence and irrelevance.

That must not be allowed to happen. Socialists who stand against socialists in 2007 serve only the interests of capitalism. If socialism is to avoid the fate of ending in a whimper for a generation to come, the disastrous decision to split has to be reversed. There really is no alternative.



*John McAllion was a Labour MP and MSP*

# not in my backyard

## William Walker examines the debate around the redeployment of Trident and what options Scotland has to resist decisions taken in Westminster

Tony Blair informed the House of Commons in June 2005 that he would “listen to Honourable Members before making any decisions on replacing Trident”. In subsequent statements, the government promised to hold a parliamentary debate on the nuclear deterrent’s future. In Blair’s words, this is “a huge decision for the country and it will probably be done in a far more open way than decisions that have been taken before”, (Blair’s evidence to Commons Liaison Committee, February 2006)

Why the sudden enthusiasm for debating an issue which previous governments had been notoriously loath to discuss in public? Possibly, in John Reid’s words, because “we are not going to have a secret Chevaline-like decision taken by some of the cabinet which then proceeds without any public discussion or debate”. He was alluding to Callaghan’s secret and very costly upgrading of Polaris in the 1970s which caused great ructions in the Labour Party when it was revealed after Mrs Thatcher had taken office.

But why announce that a decision was required when the Trident submarines would not need replacing for over twenty years? This question is more puzzling. A plausible answer is that a decision to maintain the nuclear deterrent over the long term, and to begin working on Trident’s replacement, was linked to the US-UK Mutual Defence Agreement’s renewal by Washington and London in 2004. Under this Agreement, which dates back to the 1950s and is unique among nuclear armed states, the UK and US trade nuclear materials and technologies and engage in joint research on warheads. The surmise is that its renewal sparked intergovernmental discussions on what Trident’s life extension and eventual replacement would entail, including the upgrading of Aldermaston’s warhead design capabilities. Friends in Washington have also told me that the Bush administration put heavy pressure on the British government not to consider abandoning the deterrent.

If this surmise is correct, which seems increasingly likely, Blair and his government are not interested in an open public debate which will weigh all the options, including Trident’s abandonment, before arriving at a decision. They are seeking Parliament’s rubber stamping of a decision already arrived at. I’ve heard sceptical government officials speak of their “resignation” to the outcome. The rubber stamp is needed to lend stability to a heavy programme of investment extending over several decades and to discourage a subsequent government from trying to modify or overturn it.

Whatever Blair’s intentions may be, the decision on Trident is clearly regarded as a decision that will be taken in Whitehall, in close consultation with Washington, and approved by Westminster. No role is envisaged for Scottish political institutions. This is consistent with the Scotland Act of 1998 which reserves defence and foreign policy to London and takes

particular care to ring-fence everything connected with nuclear technology. Yet the nuclear deterrent has a Scottish dimension that can’t be ignored. It is little appreciated in England, among politicians let alone the general public, that the UK’s nuclear forces are now located only in Scotland. The weapons deployed in England were dismantled when the Army and Air Force gave up their roles in the late 1990s. Whatever the Scotland Act may say, the nuclear Navy’s basing at Faslane exposes Scotland to potentially grave risks which, it is reasonable to argue, justifies the Scottish people’s special inclusion in the debate.

The counterargument is that the UK is a unitary state with a unified defence policy, and that no single region of the UK has rights to obstruct the sovereign UK Parliament’s decisions on defence. Furthermore, Scotland is represented in Westminster

by MPs who have full rights to express their opinions and cast their votes in the debating chamber. On top of this, Scottish MPs hold a disproportionately large number of ministerial positions in the present government and can be expected to be alive to Scottish interests.

Were it so simple. Beyond the immediate surroundings of Faslane where Trident generates employment, there is a long tradition of Scottish opposition to nuclear weapons in general and their basing in Scotland in particular. It has been repeatedly expressed by the Churches and the Iona Community, by anti-nuclear protest movements, and by members of all the political parties. And of course there is one party – the SNP – which has placed the eviction of nuclear weapons

from Scottish soil at the centre of its political agenda. Come independence, the SNP has pledged to remove Trident and renounce nuclear weapons under international law.

Scotland’s political institutions are involved in Trident’s operation even under devolution. Although London retains sole responsibility for defence policy, the Trident system could not operate out of Faslane without the Scottish Executive and Parliament’s extensive cooperation. This is because responsibility for policing, transport, land-use planning, environmental discharges and emergency services are devolved to Edinburgh. With Labour administrations in both Holyrood and Westminster since 1998, that cooperation has been unquestioned. It could no longer be taken for granted if different parties came to dominate the two Parliaments, especially if an SNP-led coalition hostile to Trident were to take office north of the border.

When these factors are taken into account, a decision by the government in London to replace Trident begins to look like a gamble upon Scotland remaining part of the Union over the next several decades, or at least upon the Scottish Parliament, whatever its complexion, being willing to cooperate fully and eternally with the MoD. But is it such a gamble? Why has

**Trident could not operate without the Scottish Executive’s extensive cooperation, because responsibility for policing, transport, land-use planning, environmental discharges and emergency services are devolved to Edinburgh.**

the SNP, despite Alex Salmond's initial fiery response to Tony Blair's announcement in 2005, so far appeared reluctant to take a strong stand against Trident replacement? Trident is not, for instance, to be found among the campaigns currently listed on the SNP's website. Is it conceivable that the Party is softening its position even to the extent of being prepared to countenance Trident's stay in Scotland for reasons of political expediency? Or might it be moving towards adopting an essentially political rather than a principled approach to Trident and its replacement, allowing its stance to be determined mainly by calculation of its effects on the Party's more fundamental goal of attaining power and independence?

Inattention is one possible explanation for the SNP's reticence. With so much else happening, the Party's elite may be waiting for the government's publication of its White Paper on Trident replacement (expected before Christmas) to kick start its own deliberations on strategy. It might also point to its activism in the House of Commons this autumn when it joined others in successfully pressing the government to grant a vote on the issue. Yet the SNP did so mainly, it seems, to ensure that the Labour Party would be exposed to division within its ranks, one of its main objectives across the board in Westminster and Holyrood, when the time for decision arrived. This tactic was also evident when Nicola Sturgeon challenged Jack McConnell in the Scottish Parliament in June 2006 to say whether he supported Gordon Brown's indication, in his Mansion House speech, that he backed Trident. She drew blood through Mr McConnell's obvious embarrassment, his bizarre proposal that the UK should offer to disarm if Iran disarmed, and his subsequent slapping down by the Party in London for having strayed into defence matters.

The SNP's uncharacteristic caution probably has other roots. With its eye on gaining power and laying the political foundations for a future referendum on independence, the Party's leaders realise that the usual grandstanding on nuclear weapons might no longer serve their political purposes. Why? Because if establishing a reputation for sound governance and cooperation is paramount prior to the referendum, it will have little choice but to assist the government in London with the operation of Trident once it holds power in Holyrood. It cannot pick a fight with London, the US and other NATO members, on such a sensitive issue without significant risk to its reputation.

It may even have dawned on the Party's strategists that Trident could be an asset if and when the time comes to negotiate the terms of independence. At that moment achieving international recognition, membership of the EU, and a favourable economic settlement with London would become the highest priorities. On all counts, its negotiating partners would probably be less cooperative if Trident were being evicted, and more cooperative if a prospective Scottish government would consent to the rump UK's retention of the base at Faslane.

Taken together, this may explain the anodyne "with Independence, the SNP will pursue a non-nuclear defence policy". However, the Party cannot afford to be too expedient, or to depart too far from hallowed principles, if it is to carry its members with it. A tougher stance may be both inescapable and advantageous in the run-up to the Scottish elections. When opportunity arises, it will also do whatever it can to cause difficulty for the Labour Party in Holyrood and Westminster, for instance initiating a debate on Trident replacement in the Scottish Parliament after the White Paper's publication. This would also put officials in the Scottish Executive in a pickle, as they would find themselves drawn into advising Ministers on a reserved matter.

Come what may, the decision on Trident will depend mainly on how the argument develops within the Labour Party, and how it may or may not become entangled with the question of Blair's succession. Within Scotland as elsewhere in the UK, the Labour Party faces strong opposition within its own ranks, as demonstrated earlier this month by the West Lothian Council's call on Tony Blair and Des Browne to scrap Trident. There have also been signs of cracks at the top of the Party following Margaret Beckett's observation, in an interview in the Sunday Times in October, that circumstances were "very, very different" from when the UK deterrent was developed, and that it would be "a very good thing for all of us as a country to think carefully about what the situation of today is".

This said, the vote in Westminster on Trident will doubtless be presented as a test of Party loyalty now that Blair and Brown are apparently adopting a common front and the Party is aware of the electoral damage caused by internal division. As the Conservatives are likely to support Blair and the Liberal Democrats are equivocal on this issue, the outcome will depend more on the scale of the revolt against him than on the opposition that the SNP and others can muster.

The trouble for the government is that the case for Trident's replacement is not cut and dried. It will probably argue that the UK can ill afford to abandon its nuclear force when North Korea, Iran and other states are acquiring nuclear weapons, when Europe and NATO need to retain their capabilities now that the nuclear-armed China and India are on the rise, and when the UK's international standing hangs on it. The implication that France would attain a nuclear monopoly in Europe if the UK disarmed would be registered in the public mind even if the government could not draw direct attention to it.

However, the UK is no longer directly threatened with nuclear attack. There are plenty of voices, inside and outside government, saying that the UK's security would be better served by spending the tens of billions of pounds on other things. With the armed forces embroiled in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Balkans and with heavy demands for expenditure on other equipment, it is not easy to defend keeping Trident so that it can wander aimlessly, as currently, around the Atlantic. On top of this, any British proposals to reinvest in nuclear weapons sits uneasily with its signing on to the "unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear-weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament". This was a pledge solemnly given by the UK government at the 2000 Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Lastly, there are concerns in several quarters that Trident's replacement will again tie the UK to American coat-tails when it should be seeking greater independence to avoid further disasters in foreign policy.

So the decision on Trident's replacement may be a close call. Where the politics of the Union will become truly interesting is if Westminster approves the decision yet a substantial majority of Scottish Labour MPs votes against it and a message of strong dissent is conveyed by the Scottish Parliament. The decision would lack legitimacy in Scotland, would probably be unstable down the line, and could even be corrosive to the Union. There are people who are aware of this deep inside the MoD. As recently expressed to me, Scottish discontent should nevertheless be containable with some "deft politics". I wonder. ■

***William Walker is a Professor of International Relations at the University of St Andrews and author, with Malcolm Chalmers, of *Uncharted Waters: The UK, Nuclear Weapons and the Scottish Question****

# the future of Catalonia

John McInnes examines the political history of Catalonia and looks at the opportunities as a result of the recent elections

Like Scotland, Catalonia is a small (7 million) 'stateless nation' with its own executive and parliament established in 1980. About two thirds of the population live in Barcelona: a cultural powerhouse boasting astounding architecture but surrounded by a metropolitan 'red belt' of altogether bleaker high rise estates where the workers from the car factories, chemical industries and docks live. The rest of Catalonia is rural, given over to farming, tourism and small businesses. The country that Orwell wrote his homage to still harbours a radical tradition. The Partido Popular (PP) – the Spanish Tories – struggles to keep its share of the vote in double figures. When George Bush snr. complained in 2003 that he wasn't having US foreign policy decided on the streets of Barcelona (almost 1 in 5 of the country's entire population had turned out for the anti Iraq War demo) the collective civic pride was tangible.

Only about half of Catalonia's current population was actually born there. Most migrated from impoverished Castilian-speaking areas of Spain in the 1960s as Franco's moribund dictatorship embarked on industrialisation. Catalonia was also the cockpit of the Spanish Civil War and a key player in the 'negotiated' transition to democracy. Franco's declared enemy were the 'Rojoseparatistas' who wanted not only a democratic and secular Spain, but a federal one. This is a lesson the Catalan socialists took to heart. The Partit dels Socialistes Catalans (PSC) is federated to but independent of PSOE, the state wide socialist party led by Spanish President José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. It is socialist, but also nationalist. It easily wins elections to the Cortes, the Spanish equivalent of Westminster. It was also favourite in the first democratic elections to the Catalan Parliament, the Generalitat, in 1980. However they were won by a nationalist coalition *Convergència i Unió* (CiU) led by Jordi Pujol who proceeded to govern for 23 years, partly because many PSOE voters in the red belt abstained, presumably alienated by the solidly nationalist character of Generalitat politics.

Bogged down by corruption scandals, weakened by an unpopular alliance with the PP to hang on to power and facing the PSC's Pascual Maragall, the former Barcelona mayor who brought the Olympics there in 1992, CiU lost in 2003. Owing to an electoral system that systematically favours CiU by under-representing Barcelona, the PSC was forced to form a 'Tripartit' government with the republican nationalists *Esquerra* (ERC) and the Communist-Green alliance (ICV) to secure a parliamentary majority. Its flagship policy was to renegotiate the Catalan Statute of Autonomy, the equivalent of the Scotland Act.

Much was expected of the Tripartit. And its untold story was how much social reform it delivered, ploughing resources into public services that had been systematically ignored for a quarter century. 23 years of CiU government had left Catalonia,

one of the richest areas in Spain, with some of the lowest per capita budgets for health and education anywhere in Europe. The Catalan middle class treats itself in private hospitals, hires immigrants from Latin America to care for dependents and packs its children off to well-subsidised private schools. Many forecast a grim future for CiU once it no longer had the considerable spoils of office at its command (patronage is rife in Catalonia). Both its nationalist and conservative supporters could now vote for the real thing: *Esquerra* or the PP.

The Tripartit's social policies rarely made the headlines, eclipsed by the roller coaster trail of Statute re-negotiation, replete with brinkmanship both amongst the Catalan parties and between Barcelona and Madrid. Zapatero had to balance support for his Catalan comrades against the hostility to Catalan nationalist demands across the rest of Spain; hostility that gave

the struggling PP an invaluable lifeline. The Statute dominated Spanish politics for two years. Throughout, CiU played a predictable game of arsonist in Catalonia and fireman in Madrid. In a masterstroke characteristic of his acumen, President Zapatero did a deal with Artur Mas, new leader of CiU, to secure the final passage of a Statute acceptable to the Cortes. This simultaneously chastised the PSC (while giving them a Statute they and CiU could support without problems) and enraged the radical nationalists of fellow Tripartit members *Esquerra* enough to tip them into opposing the deal – along with their arch-enemies the PP. After months of being accused by the PP of being a Catalan ETA in sheep's clothing *Esquerra* spokespeople struggled to explain how they now found themselves on the same side of the debate.

*Esquerra*'s reaction meant the end of the Tripartit and early Catalan elections. It had repeatedly been weakened anyway by the never less than bizarre behaviour of *Esquerra* who appeared incapable of exercising the merest shadow of collective responsibility in government, condemning the administration to lurch from one crisis to another. Its leader Carod Rovira set the tone early on, when without informing his fellow ministers he met secretly with ETA leaders to negotiate a cease-fire: for Catalonia only. The universal outrage forced Maragall to sack him.

José Montilla (secretary of the PSC and industry minister in Zapatero's government) replaced Maragall as PSC candidate for president. Maragall paid the price for the Tripartit's failure to get beyond the nationalist agenda of the previous quarter century. Montilla's most important credential was his birthplace: Andalusia. The party gambled that although Maragall's rating in the polls was higher, alienated socialist voters in the red belt would turn out for one of their own.

The parties' apparently anodyne election slogans each spoke volumes. CiU, favourite in the polls, plastered Barcelona with

**This election may prove something of a turning point. For the first time in many years the Generalitat has a few non-Catalanist but radical deputies and its first ever President born outside Catalonia. Catalonia may realise its radical potential once again.**



portraits of its photogenic leader proclaiming **'Love Catalonia, Govern well'**. Four short words said 'the Tripartit could not organise a school trip without a crisis summit first. Moreover, when the chips are down, they'll obey their Spanish masters, just look where Montilla was born'. Catalan PP leader Josep Piqué, an intelligent man with an impossible job, appealed for **'Time for common sense'**. This message was really for his own party leadership which had spent two years denouncing the Statute as part of a terrorist plot to dismember Spain. Only the Communists and Greens campaigned openly for the re-election of the Tripartit, a **'Government of the Left'** Its youth wing's novel campaign of distributing free condoms bearing the message 'Fuck the right' caused some controversy. Esquerra's campaign, typically, was odd. Posters of Carod Rovira shaving proclaimed he was **'Human, Like You'**. Its No. 2, Joan Puigercos was pictured with a power drill in his hand. Maybe this was a subliminal riposte to the PP: we **are** psychopathic driller killers! The PSC's strategy was low key, their posters of the uncharismatic Montilla announced that **'No-one does more for the Catalans'**. Finally the newly formed socialist anti-nationalist party Ciutadans-Partido de la Ciudadanía (Citizens Party) called for an end to 'the obsession with identity and the past'. Its leader (a lawyer of 27) dressed only in his birthday suit announced 'Your party has born'.

As the tables shows, the elections were won by CiU, the party written off by many after its 2003 defeat. The socialists lost a sixth of their vote and five seats. The Communists and Greens did very well, almost increasing their vote enough to push the PP into fifth place. Esquerra, rather than being punished for their poor record in government and U-turn on the statute, lost the same share as the socialists and two seats. The PP lost only one seat: a good performance from a candidate so embarrassed by his party leadership he had asked them to stay away. However the biggest winners on the night was the Citizens Party. It took up to 5% of the vote in Barcelona securing 3 seats.

#### 16 November 2003 (turnout 62.5 percent)

Party	Votes	Percent	Seats
CiU	1.024.425	30,94	46
PSC	1.031.454	31,16	42
ERC	544.324	16,44	23
PP	393.499	11,89	15
ICV	241.163	7,28	9
CPC	-	-	-
Absention	20.184	20.91	
Total	3.097.122		

#### 1 November 2006 (turnout 56.8 percent)

Party	Votes	Percent	Seats
CiU	928.511	31,52	48
PSC	789.767	26,81	37
ERC	413.067	14,06	21
PP	313.479	10,64	14
ICV	218.474	9,56	12
CPC	89.567	3,04	3
Absention	60.025	2,03	
Total	2.885.678		

As the results became clear, everyone was, of course, a winner. The PP had avoided meltdown. CiU won both the popular vote and the most seats. ERC, thanks to CiU's advance, held the balance of power: a much stronger card to play in the post-election poker game of alliance negotiations than they had achieved in 2003. Mas immediately offered a coalition pact to the Tripartit's black sheep, offering the deputy leader's position to Carod, in the full knowledge that PSOE leaders elsewhere would balk at Montilla making such an offer, although Zapatero's public position was that the PSC had freedom to do what it thought best. Montilla might have lost votes and seats, but the Tripartit's partners had enough for a working majority if they could agree on a programme. The nationalist wing of the PSC could now argue that ditching Maragall was foolhardy: it gifted votes to Convergència.

The socialists could argue that the obsession with the Statute had already done the deeper damage. One price paid to keep CiU on board was dropping electoral law reform, worth about 5 seats to CiU. By Sunday night, three days after the polls closed, Tripartit mark 2 was formed, with Montilla as President and Carod as his deputy. This result meant that once again, the Catalan socialists had done Zapatero few favours. CiU will no longer give him their votes in the Cortes, and the PP will make the most of Carod Rovira's role.

However a Tripartit with a less nationalist project would be no bad thing. Hell will freeze over long before either Scotland or Catalonia gain independence, and deep down, even the most ardent nationalists know it. Beneath the elevated discussion of historic rights and identities lies a much more prosaic fight for resources from the central state. In Scotland, characterised by **some** areas that need extra state aid (Edinburgh, for example is hardly the UK's most impoverished city) this has a certain legitimacy. In Catalonia, one of Spain's richest areas, it has none at all. Nor is it only a question of economics. Barcelona is, and to some extent has always been, a vibrant innovative city. There used to be some truth in the rather clichéd contrast between the bureaucratic, sluggish but dignified ex-imperial majesty of Madrid and the commercial bustle of its northern rival. Now it is Barcelona that is stuck in the past, its political and commercial elites incapable of outgrowing an increasingly inward-looking politics of victimhood in which Madrid plays the role of eternal villain.

It is ironic that in one sense Franco is the father of contemporary Catalan politics. It was the Cuadillo, after all, who equated socialism and peripheral nationalism. One of the more surreal aspects of the Statute negotiations was listening to PP leaders hijack the language of the left: solidarity; a central state strong enough to re-distribute resources, equal rights for all. Yet this election may prove something of a turning point. For the first time in many years the Generalitat has a few non-Catalanist but radical deputies. It has its first ever President born outside Catalonia. A quarter century late, Catalonia may realise its radical potential once again.

*John McInnes is a Reader in Sociology at the University of Edinburgh*

# The pensioners' dilemma

**Lou Howson discusses how the development of pensioner power and concludes that the only resolution is to create a Pensioner Parliament**

On 8th October 1996 over 350 delegates representing 87 Pensioners Groups from all over Scotland met in Glasgow to discuss resolutions concerning the welfare and well being of older people. The Congress was convened by Age Concern and Scottish Pensioners Forum and Chaired by the Scottish Trade Union Congress. Pensioner Groups had been asked to submit resolutions for discussion. Some resolutions were composited but many were grouped together to facilitate debate. A spirit of unity prevailed and many of us looked forward to the end of seventeen years of Thatcherism and hoped that things would get much better.

A resolution moved by STUC "That this Scottish Pensioners Congress demands that when a Scottish Parliament is established, the Parliament should establish mechanisms to ensure that Scottish pensioners are able effectively to influence those decisions which it takes which will affect their lives and welfare". The resolution was carried unanimously. A similarly straightforward resolution "That this Scottish Pensioners Congress asks the Congress sponsors to convene a seminar to establish the way in which we seek to participate in decision making". This resolution was also carried unanimously.

10 years later and we are no further forward; to the best of my knowledge neither the Congress sponsors nor the STUC have made any serious attempts to progress the above resolutions. Like Tony Blair's specious promises that "we will encourage the development of pensioners' councils and forums so that pensioners' voices can be at the heart of decision making in local authorities as well as central government". Such visions have proved to be distant mirages. Many of those who were present at the Congress are no longer with us some of us are still around and are becoming veterans of the struggle for unity in the face of the pernicious perjury perpetrated by our political masters.

Many of us are lifelong Trade Unionists and had hoped for leadership from STUC but so far they appear to be sulking in the background. On two occasions attempts have been made to bring about a united front. A group of pensioners from across Scotland set up the Confederation of Scotland's Elderly. We succeeded in getting the Scottish Executive to set up an older people's unit under the control of a junior minister. National Pensioners Convention to which several Scottish Groups have long been affiliated decided to form regional structures, a senior group of NPC officers came up to Scotland to discuss the setting up of a Scottish NPC. Several groups met with them and an amicable settlement seemed possible. At a meeting with the National Secretary of NPC, and attended by pensioners from across Scotland, it was decided by an overwhelming majority to set up NPC Scotland. Following from this and with the help of Help the Aged discussions began with a view to opening discussions with the Scottish Executive to perhaps bring about a Scottish Pensioners Parliament similar to the Scottish Youth Parliament, unfortunately one group again decided to swim in the opposite direction so stalemate ensued.

The Scottish Executive are still playing the old game of divide and rule. Some groups manage to get a foot in the door and perhaps get the odd promise now and again. If we are to make any impact then we must be united.

West Scotland Seniors have now taken the initiative to form a united front prior to the Scottish Elections next year. An all Scotland older people's hustings is proposed to be held in Stirling next April. All of the political party leaders will be invited and given an opportunity to tell us where they stand. The only First Minister who had the courage to meet an all Scottish pensioners' audience was Henry McLeish and after listening to us he invited a representative group to meet him in Edinburgh where he listened carefully to what we had to say. Unfortunately he got his come-uppance when he incurred Downing Street's wrath when he granted us partial free personal care (Tony Blair pigeon holed the Sutherland report on the care of the elderly). Mr Dewar never did face the pensioners, the only time he agreed to meet us we were left standing outside St. Andrews House on a November morning. We were left in the cold and were told that he had been called to London. Perhaps 'Jumping Jack' will decide whether he owes his allegiance to Scotland or to Blair and invite us all to meet with him.

The Scottish Executive spews out documents concerning the care of the elderly at the rate of two or three each year. These are pushed out by expert groups without any real consultation with older people. A recent document entitled 'The Future Care of Older People in Scotland' has never been discussed with the general body of pensioners in Scotland. Likewise, another document, which has immense implications for the well being of older people 'Building a Health Service for the Future' has never been discussed. If our Scottish Executive believes its own proclamations regarding consultation then both of these documents deserve to be fully discussed with older people whose opinions should have some bearing on the eventual outcomes.

This will only be achieved when we have a Scottish Pensioners Parliament with representation from every one of the thirty-two Local Authority areas in Scotland. Real consultation can only take place when the beneficiaries meet face to face with the decision makers. We hope to bring such matters before our aspiring rulers next year. Should we be denied a Pensioner Parliament, or something similar then we will know that our Scottish Executive is as described by St. Paul 'as sounding brass or tinkling cymbals'.

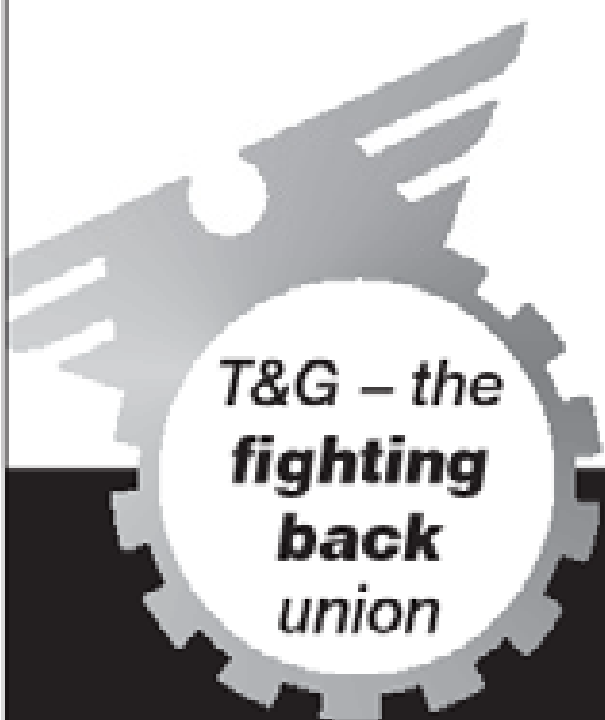
"How we treat old people is a crucial test of our national quality. A nation that lacks gratitude for those who have honestly worked for her in the past whilst they had the strength to do so, does not deserve a future, for she has lost her sense of justice and her instinct for mercy". Lloyd George when introducing the pension's bill in 1909.

**Lou Howson, Chairperson, Dumfries and Galloway Elderly Forum (3500+ members), 82 years of age**



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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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# feedback

## Corporate Homicide; one step forward two back

As reported in the article by Nicola Morris in the last edition of Scottish left review Karen Gillon MSP was progressing with proposals for a Private Members Bill in the Scottish Parliament to amend our law of culpable homicide to ensure it applies across all of our society and does not provide immunity for corporate killers. There have been 124 Scottish workers killed since 2001 and not one single director or company has been convicted of anything other than health and safety offences.

The STUC and a number of affiliates supported Karen Gillon's proposals and our legal advice from Thompsons Solicitors, supported by the views of a parliamentary draftsman was that the Bill was fully within the competence of the Scottish Parliament as it was dealing with matters of criminal justice.

Unfortunately, this view was not shared by the former Lord Advocate Colin Boyd who failed to grasp the arguments put forward by Karen Gillon MSP and our lawyers and continued to run the line that the proposals were too closely associated with the reserved areas of health and safety and business for the Scottish Parliament to legislate.

Why then did the Emergency Workers Act become law, it even mentions workers in the title; it has a single focus on protecting the health and safety of emergency workers and the former Lord Advocate was involved in meetings with the STUC that led to this legislation. He had no concerns on that occasion.

Why did the smoking ban come into effect? Albeit a piece of health legislation it has a secondary effect of protecting the health and safety of workers, especially in the hospitality industry. The Scottish Licensed Trade Association would also argue has had an effect of their business sector that has not been suffered by their English and Welsh counterparts as yet.

Unfortunately, the barriers the former Lord Advocate and his team were throwing up began to cause problems in relation to being able to progress the Private Members Bill before the elections next May. Karen Gillon, therefore, reluctantly decided to withdraw her Bill temporarily and work with Westminster MPs to seek changes in the legislation to ensure companies face effective justice.

The Westminster Bill that now includes the new offence of culpable homicide in Scotland has now been through the standing committee stage and there have been changes to the existing senior management test, a major concern for trade unions. However, systemic failures by senior management will still have to be evident for a prosecution to proceed.

In our discussion with our affiliates it is clear that trade unions are going to have to fight for further changes as the Bill progresses. This business friendly new labour Government appears to be intent on protecting corporate killers. The STUC believes that further changes are required to ensure the public can be satisfied that deaths caused by corporations are prosecuted in the same way as any other case of culpable homicide and the penalties on conviction are the same. This should include imprisonment of "senior managers" whose decisions or actions play a significant part in the breach that led to a death.

Government Ministers should speak to the families who suffer loss, they should listen to their concerns regarding their often shoddy treatment by the justice system, including interminable delays in getting cases to court and they should act to ensure their cases are treated in the same way as any other family who unfortunately loses a loved one as a result of involuntary homicide by others.

A fringe meeting, Corporate Killing - the need for effective legislation will be taking place at the Scottish Labour Party Conference; Studio Bar, Corran Halls on Friday 24th November during the lunch break. Speakers invited include Karen Gillon MSP, Frank Doran MP, Frank Maguire Thompsons Solicitors and Louise Adamson from Families Against Corporate Killing, whose brother was killed at work.

**Ian Tasker, Assistant Secretary, STUC**

## England vs Scotland

In a recent interview former foreign secretary Jack Straw made some revealing remarks about the British union. Straw is quoted on the BBC website as saying: "Historically, England called the shots to achieve a union because the union was seen as a way, among other things, of amplifying England's power worldwide. And the reverse would certainly be true. A broken-up United Kingdom would not be in the interests of Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, but especially not England.

Our [England's] voting power in the European Union would diminish. We'd slip down in the world league GDP tables. Our case for staying in the G8 would diminish and there could easily be an assault on our permanent seat in the UN." [security council]

We should be grateful to Straw for his honesty. What he is effectively saying is that countries like Scotland and Wales and other potential independent states such as Cornwall or the Isle of Mann are expected to give up their unique voices in the

international community so England can enjoy 'amplified' ie undeserved international status.

The case for union then is simple if, like Gordon Brown, you support England's interests over Scotland's then as Straw says there is an excellent case for retention of the union because it was designed to amplify England's voice and it still does today.

If however you support Scotland's right to have our unique voice heard then the only logical choice is independence.

If the 'cost' of that decision is the loss of Britain's (as Straw points out effectively England's anyway) seat in the UN security council, which the Blair government currently uses to back George Bush's lunatic foreign policy, then I'm sure that is a price well worth paying for any internationally minded Scot.

Joe Middleton



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# reviews

**How Bush Rules - Chronicles of a Radical Regime, Sidney Blumenthal, Princeton University Press / Guardian Books, 2006**

Journalism likes to think of itself as the first draft of history - and that is exactly what Sidney Blumenthal's book is: a collection of newspaper and online articles published since the autumn of 2003. Almost all of these pieces are the standard newspaper-column size of a thousand words - one-bite snags which match the spirit of the google age, but which seldom allow the author to formally enjoy the thematic coherence and cumulative narrative impetus of a unitary thesis.

Still, **How Bush Rules** is a terrifying window into the domestic-and-foreign-policy worlds of American planning and execution under the leadership of the world's best-known draft-dodger and best-loved rhetorician.

The book highlights the immensely deep ideological cleavages of modern-day American political culture: and it highlights too the often-rotten core of the political system that the stricken giant of the American Empire is pleased to call democracy. Readers on this side of the Atlantic are already familiar with much of Blumenthal's material: the rise of the 'religious right', the shameless manipulation of an often supine media, the use of torture and kidnap as instruments of state policy, the secret Gulag and the secret dirty-war through Prestwick and across the globe; and the suborning of the American Constitution in the cause of the narrow interest of a military-capitalist junta as corrupt at times as any of those which the United States has traditionally maintained in the banana republics to its south.

Blumenthal takes a swipe at Bush's policy on leading-edge sciences: for no other president has been so stupidly hostile to science. And while US climate-scientists are silenced and the idiot-dogma of creationism encouraged, the words reproductive health and condoms were banned from websites of agencies or organisations that received federal funds.

Nor does the conduct in recent years of the American news media - which usually likes to think of itself as a robust and essential pillar of the Constitution - escape Blumenthal's critical eye. Central to this has been the image-management of the September 11 2001 attacks on that epicentral symbol of America's imperialist domination of the globe: the World Trade Centre. Maintaining support for Bush's foreign policy demands relentless domestic polarisation - including defining critics as giving aid and comfort to the enemy.

Blumenthal does not overlook the United States self-styled Christian Right - in comparison to which, that same Osama Bin Laden and his objectively anti-imperialist struggle must seem like shining citadels of justice, courage and reason. After all, Elliott Abrams, one time chief of Middle East affairs at the National Security Council, argued that, Tomorrow's lobby for Israel has got to be conservative Christians, because there aren't going to be enough Jews to do it.

Blumenthal is enlightening too - albeit at something of a tangent - on the critical dimension of class in the American economy (although class is not, at least at present, a dimension

that clearly reflects itself in the American political system). But however the matter might be presented, it is an ugly one. The tax-cut became Bush's chief instrument of social policy and Enron was the biggest financial supporter of Bush's political career.

Blumenthal notes, The lobbying expenses from every industry, from financial services to computers, are staggering. Broadcast media firms spent \$38.5 million on 2004 alone on lobbyists in Washington, according to the Centre for Public Integrity. The drug industry during the same period shelled out \$123 million. In the 2004 election cycle, the drug industry paid out \$87 million in campaign contributions for federal officials, 69% of them flowing to Republicans.

But Blumenthal is at his strongest with regard to foreign affairs, and especially long-term empire-building ambitions in the Middle East. According to this game-plan, once democratic order had been established in Iraq, the country would become, a base for the projection of US influence throughout the Middle East. Instantly, Iraq would become a beacon of democracy. Awestruck, the Palestinians would forswear terrorist groups like Hamas. From the Iraqi bastion, the United States would topple the regimes of Syria and Iran, by military force if need be. The Iraq example would serve for invasions elsewhere. Saudi Arabia and Egypt would have no choice but to democratize, their rulers yielding to secular figures.

This strategic ambition had earlier been given theoretical underpinning by the Project for the New American Century (which, inter alia, proposed the imperial militarisation of space). In September 2000 the promoters of the project issued a statement calling for a process of transformation in US foreign policy, which would, however, be unlikely without, some catastrophic and catalyzing event - like a new Pearl Harbour. Exactly one year later, the World Trade Centre collapsed and Bush had his excuse for the long-planned attack, less than two years later, on Iraq - courtesy of this new Pearl Harbour.

There is an American election due in 2008 at the latest. What precisely happens when things - as they certainly will - fall apart in the blood-dimmed Middle East? What happens when the centre of the Imperium can no longer hold, and the Republicans face defeat in 2008? What about a coup to protect public order, naturally, and to defend the Constitution and the vision of the Founding Fathers? Or perhaps, of course, by the time this review appears, the Democrats will have seized control of Congress - and US foreign policy might have begun to return to the realms of sanity. ■

**Iain Fraser Grigor**

**A New World Order? A Personal Reflection on "Failed States" by Noam Chomsky: published by Hamish Hamilton, 2006**

Whenever I read anything by Chomsky, I feel uncomfortable, partly because he keeps telling me that the world is in a mess, but mainly because I do not know what to do with this knowledge. Chomsky's latest book "Failed States" is no different. Although I learned a few new details, the general picture was familiar to me: the United States is a hypocrite on



a grand scale. The United States is fast becoming the world's pariah. And the United States has given itself the right to be the unique exception to international law and standards.

When the Berlin Wall was pulled down in 1989, we were left in no doubt that there was to be a "new world order" and that this would be shaped and led by the world's remaining superpower, the United States. To ram the message home, Frank Fukuyama told us, in *The End of History*, that the American version of free-market capitalism would be at the heart of the new order, and that it was the only game in town. What Frank did not tell us was that this would be a new world order of unprecedented hypocrisy, violence and greed.

It did not take long for the new world order to become the new world nightmare. It should not have surprised us that some small groups felt the need to take matters into their own hands, by starting their own wars. As we now know, when a state prosecutes violence, it is called "war" when the violence is done to other countries and "law and order" when the violence is done to its own people. When small groups do the same, it is called "terror". The main difference between state violence and small group violence is that the former is regarded as "legitimate" and is usually very destructive, while the latter is "illegitimate" and usually much less destructive. The slaughter of innocents on 9th September, 2001, is put into uncomfortable perspective when set alongside the slaughter of a much larger number of innocents in Fallujah, Iraq, in November, 2004. However, the slaughter carried out by the small group of Saudis received unprecedented media attention, whereas the slaughter carried out by the United States military received relatively little. The former has gone into history as "9/11", while the latter will no doubt be airbrushed into oblivion.

The world looks on in astonishment as the US berates Iran for even thinking about nuclear weapons, while it casually makes itself the exception to the Non-proliferation Treaty. Even the Blair government in the UK cringes in embarrassment as the USA unilaterally decides that international law applies to other countries, but not to America. Although most Americans will never know it, because their media will not tell them, the United States has made itself a laughing stock in Europe by passing what many are calling the "Netherlands Invasion Act", a piece of legislation that authorises the President to use force to rescue Americans brought to the International Criminal Court in the Hague. If we are ever to have a new world order, then it really has to be a world order, applicable to the whole world, including America.

Being the world's hypocrite is part of the reason the US is seen by many as the world's pariah. But there are other reasons. For example, America is currently the world's greatest per capita consumer of energy and other resources, and the single biggest cause of climate change. While it is true that there are many American cities, communities and individuals who have signed up to Kyoto, the overall picture is still poor. Climate change is one thing. America's propensity for violence is quite another. The United States has been the world's bully for as long as I can remember. As William Blum documents in his book *"Rogue State"*, America has been at war more or less continually for the last 50 years. With few exceptions, the United States has taken the side of right-wing dictators against the poor and minorities. In this, it has done exactly the opposite of what it preaches. It will be interesting to see how the US reacts if progressive,

enlightened government ever emerges from the carnage of Iraq.

In the penultimate page of his book, Chomsky gives us "a few simple suggestions". He suggests that the United States should:

- \* Accept the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court and the World Court
- \* Adopt the Kyoto protocols
- \* Let the UN take the lead in international crises
- \* Rely on diplomatic and economic measures in confronting "terror"
- \* Give up the Security Council veto and "have a decent respect for the opinion of mankind"
- \* Cut back sharply on military spending and sharply increase social spending

On the face of it, these seem very sensible suggestions, but we know, with reasonable certainty, that this is exactly what the United States will not do. How do we know this? We know because not adopting these measures has been at the heart of US policy for decades. Where does this leave us? Will Americans vote Bush out of office? And would that make much difference, given that, for the foreseeable future, anyone occupying the White House is likely to continue with neoliberal policies and to use the military as a blunt instrument to get America's way. Although there is massive disenchantment with, and disengagement from, mainstream politics in the USA, this has yet to translate into fundamental policy shifts.

If we are serious about wanting to create a world in which people and planet are enhanced, rather than exploited, then each of us has to live our lives as if this were already a reality. If we are waiting for our political and business leaders to make a better world for us, then we shall wait an eternity.

**Chris Thomson** ■

# web review

Henry McCubbin

Just where do we look for Scottish party policies? The whole territory of policy formation is becoming more difficult to follow. The major UK parties have just changed leaders, or are about to, therefore the previous manifestoes are being torn up bit at a time. Policy announcements are being dropped in to the public sphere daily and policy forums of various sorts are letting hares run on behalf of party leaderships every other week. Meanwhile Blair is whizzing around with his thought for the day tour rewriting whatever policy it was he believed in before it too went belly up.

In Scotland we have the Executive to look to find out what the best brains in the Lib Lab coalition are capable of. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/News-Today> will provide a good place to start for a department by department trawl.

Next however will be the need to look at how the these two parties interpret their coalition agreement. For this try -<http://www.scotlibdems.org.uk/conference/premanifesto2006/premanifesto.pdf> there you find their pre manifesto manifesto ready for alteration at the first sign of rough water (yes I know only the LibDems could have one of these). The New Labour party in Scotland has not had its final manifesto conference but once you past the negative campaigning already on the first

page of its website you should try <http://www.scottishlabour.org.uk/holyrood/> in which they will tell of the of the virtues living in the last but greatest small nation in the British Empire under New Labour.

Then we have the SNP. They've had their conference and at the address <http://www.snp.org/policies> you will find a menu with all of their policies laid out. They could do with some a précis under each topic's rubric but I fear its been written by a party member for party members.

The Greens are still running on their previous manifesto but will no doubt get up to speed after their winter conference in Edinburgh meanwhile keep looking in <http://www.scottishgreens.org.uk/site/id/4/title/Policy.html>

And so to SSP/Solidarity they both have their own websites under respectively <http://www.scottishsocialistparty.org/> and <http://www.solidarityscotland.org/> but policy development appears to have been derailed by their "train crash". Having read their previous web manifesto my advice to them would be to provide a paragraph on each policy topic with links to their separate policy documents. I happen to know what each International stands for and like other socialists have my favourite but I fear they may bypass the masses with that appeal. ■



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# Kick Up The Tabloids

David Cameron last month unveiled the Tories' new policy on immigration from EU accession countries. This has become a particularly contentious issue as both the Express and the Mail print scare stories on a daily basis about the impending influx of six million Romanians who will be arriving here on January 1st 2007 to sign on, become career criminals, be at the head of any NHS queues, or probably all three.

As one would expect from David Cameron, the author of Michael Howard's overtly racist 2005 Tory manifesto, it is against letting more people into Britain. However, in keeping with the New Conservatives' image of the caring, planet-loving party, it is dressed up in the most compassionate terms. Cameron says he is against Bulgarians and Romanians taking jobs that could be filled by disabled British people.

Superficially, this appears to be a strikingly benevolent and caring attitude, looking after the most vulnerable in our society. After all, no-one can doubt the Tories' commitment to giving the disabled a hand-up, given that their new "tree" logo looks as if it was designed by a child with severe learning difficulties. However, scratch beneath the surface and you find it is, in effect, two very old Conservative policies rolled into one. Namely:

1. "We don't want to let any more filthy foreigners into this country. This will only cause trouble and overcrowding, and will lead to an increase in racism."
2. "Get these work-shy scroungers off benefits, especially those on the so-called long-term sick. As soon as we stop these malingerers from claiming incapacity benefit, and make them clean hotel toilets for twelve hours a day, we'll find out how disabled they really are."

Like many Conservative policies down the years, this harks back to an idealised picture of Victorian Britain, a time when the weakest people in society were only too happy to do the shittiest jobs for very little money. What will be the next policy statement? "No more chimney-sweeps from Poland, thank you very much. A British 7-year-old could be doing that job."

One suspects the very reason why this particular ethos will appeal to the average Mail and Express reader is that it is predicated on an inherently-racist notion. Namely that any job an able-bodied foreigner can do must be a piece of cake for your average disabled Brit.

If nothing else, this ignores the specialist skills which many Eastern Europeans bring to the UK labour market. For example, Stilian Petrov was signed for Celtic Football Club by Kenny Dalglish in 1999 as a raw teenager from the Bulgarian league. He was sold this year for six million pounds, having given seven seasons of outstanding performances at home and in Europe. Had Dalglish instead chosen to sign a blind amputee from the

Calton, one suspects he would not have provided subsequent Celtic managers with Petrov's trademark surging runs from midfield.

The right-wing press would have us believe that these dastardly Bulgarians and Romanians will not be content to simply come over here and take our jobs. On top of that, they will be employed by organised criminal gangs specialising in identity theft who will rob us all of our savings, with old-age pensioners being a particularly soft target.

On the other hand, according to the tabloids, the old disabled person intent on conning the elderly out of their hard-earned cash is Heather Mills-McCartney. Heather recently reacted to press stories branding her as money-grabbing, by threatening to sue every paper in question for every penny they were worth. (Very few in the case of the Sun). At the same time, she was telling any scandal sheet that would listen about the appalling abuse she suffered at the hands of the monstrous Sir Paul. She should count herself lucky. What she went through is nothing compared to the abuse handed out to his first wife Linda, who was forced to join Wings and play tambourine on the video of "Mull of Kintyre".

It appears that a large percentage of the Scottish population are currently in a state of temporarily disabled through the intake of Buckfast. This drink actually styles itself as a "tonic wine", doubtless working on the supposition that anything which tastes that revolting must be good for you. According to the Executive, Buckfast is the sole in all the social evils in modern Scotland. Crisis talks with its distributors, who rightly point out that the brand itself is never advertised. It has, however, received almost daily prime-time TV news name-checks of late, courtesy of Cathy Jamieson and Andy Kerr.

While no-one can deny the role that "Buckie" plays in many acts of anti-social behaviour, it is naïve to assume that withdrawing it from sale would result in any scenario other than Scottish people getting off their faces on any one of a number of alternatives. In the 1970's, the Jakey's tippie of choice was VP Sherry, Lanliq, or El Dorado. Or in the more extreme cases Belle-Air Hair Laquer, boot polish or meths. However, I do not remember government ministers having crisis meetings with hairdressers, ironmongers or the manufacturers of Cherry Blossom.

If the problem were simply Buckfast, Devon would be full of monks stotting about paralytic drunk, pissing in the street, fighting at bus stops and vomiting on cows. However, one suspects that the only time the good people of Devon have to put up with such behaviour is when the Young Conservative conference comes to Torquay.





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