

A new game



Can the left win in a parliament of minorities?

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Comment

The summer of 2007 may turn out to be a mirage, but for social progressives in Scotland suddenly things seem possible. The period since the election in May has opened the eyes even of people who thought they could see the limitations of the last eight years of devolution. Between 1999 and 2007, with the exception of a short period under Henry McLeish, most people accepted that the Scottish Executive had been cautious, often excessively careful. However, it was generally given credit for keeping itself fairly busy and for being 'sensible', even by the more radically-minded (and indeed from time to time by this magazine). This people are suddenly realising was an excessively generous assessment.

The new SNP administration has been busy in its early weeks and it is important that we don't lose sight of the honeymoon effect. On top of that is an important point to be made about personalities – it is undoubtedly the case that Alex Salmond is a much more effective speaker (in every sense) than Jack McConnell and there is an obvious element of interpreting the lack of cringe felt when our First Minister speaks to Parliament or travels abroad as a reason to be inspired. It is not at all impossible that in time the achievements of the SNP administration will be much more modest than many are beginning to hope for. While not a 'Blair thing' (if Salmond under-delivers it is more likely to be about Parliamentary arithmetic than about a secret neo-liberal agenda), we may find ourselves looking back at Summer 2007 in the way we now look back on Summer 1997.

But let us hope note, and let us seek to play a role in not making it happen. One thing cannot be taken away from the SNP administration's actions in its early weeks and that is the raising of expectations. Perhaps only now can we really see how pathetically inactive administrations have generally been since devolution. Most of the socially democratic achievements of devolution took place in a tiny space of time with the rest of the time being bereft of real action. Thus free care for the elderly and abolition of tuition fees took place in a small window when Henry McLeish was running the show. Apart from

that, we got only legislation stolen from the back benches or other parties (such as the smoking ban), things forced on the Executive by Parliamentary arithmetic (PR for local government) and drawn-out regulatory legislation which did little other than keep Parliament from doing anything more useful). As we have pointed out before, that the best that can be said of eight years of devolution is that it didn't do the worst things England did is not exactly what most of us thought the whole thing was about.

So, factor number one is to remove an administration that in hindsight simply looks craven and pathetically unambitious. But perhaps factor number two is minority government. In talking about the new political order, we again start to realise strategies that were put in place mainly to ensure that nothing happened. The coalition government of the last two administrations was about control which constituted a programme for government, coalition was really about ensuring built-in majorities in committee rooms and the chamber. It was, in many ways, a step designed to prevent anyone generating a spark of hope that anything substantial could be done. We all knew it couldn't, because the chances of anything happening had been clearly stitched up in advance. (It is really a bit rich to hear the Labour Conveners of Parliamentary Committees making macho boasts about holding the Executive to account, precisely the thing these people colluded in making sure did not happen for eight years.)

Let's put this simply: before May everyone knew that one person – Jack McConnell – basically had a veto over anything that was going to happen in the government of Scotland. If you had a great idea for how to make Scotland better you could assess the point of saying it out loud basically by working out if Jack was likely to give it the Emperor's thumb up or thumb down. If cautious-old don't-offend-London, don't-offend-any-of-the-big-boys Jack thought it in any way risqué or that it had any sniff of pseudo-nationalism, you could forget it immediately. Now? Well, there is no Emperor with the power on his own to prevent everything happening.

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The Scottish Left Review has always taken the view that it was important to present imaginative, creative, radical thinking even when we knew there was virtually no chance of that thinking getting past the quivering guardians of power. But, as we have signalled with this issue, we are now at the beginning of a new game, and there is more to be won by radicals. There are things that this administration will consider which the last wouldn't because it is not desperate for the approval of London. Other things it can do simply because it seems to be shaping up to be more courageous and radical than its predecessor. Some things which were barred from discussion before because they might accidentally demonstrate good thinking coming from small, independent countries the size of Scotland (there was great resistance to learning from the Nordic countries) are possibilities again. The same applies to things which might have accidentally appeared to involve Scotland having an opinion on world matters – war and peace, global warming, fair trade. And in any case, without the tentacles of coalition government stretched over the Parliament and its institutions, the Executive can't stop something which has broad support anyway.

Which means that the Scottish Left Review now believes the time is right to convert some of the 'wish lists' we have previously produced when asking what the Scottish Parliament should be doing into a practical programme with a chance of success. We asked a number of writers to consider what radical moves could gain enough momentum to actually be implemented. There were only a few criteria: could the current Executive be persuaded to do something which didn't require a Parliamentary vote? Could a cross-party consensus be developed? Was there enough national non-governmental support to make consensus or government support a reality? If a combination of these things can be achieved, then change can happen. We did this quickly to give us a starting place – and already we see an impressive can achievable list. But this is only the start. It is our intention to hold a conference later in the year to take these ideas as a starting point and to see if a real agenda for change can be developed outside the Parliament which has a chance of being implemented inside the Parliament. This would be a significant shift in the nature of power in Scotland. We know this summer may be a mirage, but we certainly think it is worth trying.

So, you're starters (don't hesitate to send us more – editorial@scottishleftreview.org):

- Create an internationally excellent and properly funded research centre for peace and justice in Scotland, developing global solutions and providing leadership and training
- Set up a defence diversification agency with the aim of producing a positive plan for how to convert defence jobs into constructive jobs in a demilitarised Scotland
- Obstruct Trident replacement in any way possible – using transport, planning, human rights and any other branch of law available
- Implement a local income tax, but with banding at the top moving the burden towards the wealthy
- End PFI/PPP by pursuing Public Service Trusts
- Free local government to run its own building programmes, allowing it to benefit from its own assets
- Reduce the prison population by jailing fewer people and cancel the extremely expensive building of two new prisons
- Challenge the private sector energy monopoly by forcing generators to do more in the national public interest.
- Put in place new measurements of national success and economic growth other than the blunt GDP measure
- Change local government procurement laws to encourage local social enterprises which promote ethical behaviour towards people and the environment
- Create an active, collective policy on energy reduction
- Invest significantly more in culture at all levels
- Scrap the Culture Bill
- Increase statutory duties on local authorities in what they should provide in terms of arts and culture.
- Introduce corporate homicide legislation
- Establish Scottish cultural institutes and offices in Reykjavik, Oslo, Stockholm, Copenhagen and Helsinki
- Create meaningful links with the Nordic countries



a scottish agenda for peace

Rebecca Johnson looks at how the election has potentially given Scotland a bigger say in how Britain manages its foreign affairs

Opinion polls show time and again that people living in Scotland and Wales are more strongly opposed than the English to nuclear weapons and the kind of 'punching above our weight' illusions that infuse Westminster and Foreign Office thinking about security and international relations. The May 3rd election most clearly signalled Scottish frustration with two impositions from London: Tony Blair's ill-conceived war on Iraq and Westminster's vote to prolong the deployment of Trident nuclear weapons in Scotland for the next 50 years.

With new administrations in Westminster and Holyrood, there is a historic opportunity to lay different foundations for peace and security in the 21st century and beyond. The tide is turning on nuclear weapons, with several former US Secretaries of State and Defence, including Henry Kissinger, George Schultz and William Perry, now making a compelling case for nuclear disarmament. Scotland can provide the vital first push by refusing to carry on with Trident. Scotland's rejection of Trident would in practice make Britain do without, becoming the first of the nuclear weapon states to fully comply with their disarmament obligations under the 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). The profound international effect this would have should not be under-estimated. Scotland can show that punching above our weight does not require weapons, but integrity and timing.

In recent history, civil resistance has played a critical role in raising awareness of nuclear dangers and making the weapons undeployable. Civil resistance and peace movements have also been a crucible for ideas about security alternatives. Most recently, the Faslane 365 blockades have brought a diverse variety of peace and justice groups to the Trident nuclear submarine base. Our discussions there have underscored that in ridding Scotland of nuclear weapons it will be important to put in place alternative peace and security policies and tools, paying greater attention to the environment, justice and a more equitable sharing of the planet's gifts.

While closing down the Faslane base will take time and concerted legal and political pressure, there are initiatives that the Scottish Executive can immediately embark on that would prepare the way for dealing more appropriately with current and foreseeable security challenges.

Ideas being developed by Scotland's peace movement include: setting up an interdisciplinary centre of excellence for peace and security studies; development of resources and new approaches to peace-building, including training and resourcing Scottish personnel for conflict-prevention and peace service initiatives; and establishing a Scottish Arms Conversion Agency.

Scotland is not only part of the British Isles, but also in Europe. Over time, the European Union has forged a Common Foreign and Security Policy based around international cooperation and the consolidation of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms. While seeking to develop a more independent agenda for peace and security may bring Scottish aspirations – especially the rejection of Trident – into conflict with some of London's current foreign and nuclear policies, at least temporarily, Scotland's peace policies can be integrated more directly with European and United Nations principles, agreements and perspectives.

The 1998 Scotland Act does not make this easy, because it reserved powers to Westminster on matters relating to national security, defence and foreign policy but this does not mean that Scotland should have no voice or policy on these issues. Schedule V of the Act specifies that "observing and implementing international obligations, obligations under the Human Rights Convention and obligations under Community law" are not reserved matters. Moreover, underpinning potential

new Scottish legislation on preventing crimes committed by weapons of mass destruction is the understanding that Westminster cannot reserve and impose on Scotland something that is contrary to international law and Britain's international and treaty obligations. In other words, illegalities cannot be reserved. And there are strong legal grounds to argue that with regard to nuclear weapons, London is making an unlawful imposition on Scotland.

For example, in May 2000, Britain agreed to "An unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear weapon states to accomplish the total elimination of

their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament..." By no stretch of the imagination can the renewal of Trident past 2020 be regarded as consistent with this NPT undertaking.

Furthermore, as set out for the 'Prevention of Crimes Committed by Weapons of Mass Destruction (Scotland) Bill 2007', sponsored by Michael Matheson MSP, the use or threatened use of Trident in accordance with UK doctrine and policy would be unlawful. Therefore not only the replacement, but also the current deployment of these nuclear weapons must be considered unlawful.

Scotland therefore has legal as well as moral and political grounds to reject having nuclear weapons foisted on us. And there are overwhelming environmental and safety grounds. In addition to the nuclear-armed submarines deployed out of Faslane, there are up to 200 warheads transported on Scottish roads for storing at Coulport, on the Rosneath Peninsula.

With new administrations in Westminster and Holyrood, there is a historic opportunity to lay different foundations for peace and security in the 21st century and beyond

Scotland has the right (and powers) to insist that if Westminster wants to strut its nuclear weapons on the international stage, it should find somewhere else to put them. Contrary to the misinformation peddled by some Trident supporters, this will not cost jobs but could create new economic opportunities, as highlighted in the Scottish TUC/SCND study on 'Cancelling Trident: the Economic and Employment Consequences for Scotland'. This looked only at denuclearising Faslane, so more studies are needed to consider options for closing the naval base and freeing up the prime loch-side location for alternative jobs and peaceful purposes, including sport and research and industrial development into renewable energy technologies.

But of course the issues that have to be addressed go far wider than evicting Trident. As exposed in the Blair government's White Paper and hurried debate on Trident renewal, the justifications for getting the next generation of nuclear weapons are very thin. Relying on scaremongering and outdated notions of deterrence, they equate nuclear weapons with an insurance policy - justifications that could function as proliferation drivers for any nation on earth to acquire their own weapons of mass destruction. Not only do nuclear weapons provide no kind of answer to the real threats we face, which include climate change and terrorism, but they contribute to additional WMD threats and get in the way of international efforts to implement coherent nonproliferation and disarmament policies.

Instead of wasting resources on a capability to threaten mass annihilation, we need to learn to think in different ways about war and peace, and base our defence more securely on international cooperation, justice and sustainable development. Overwhelming national force and armaments are now as irrelevant for our defence as bows and arrows had become by the 15th century. Terrorism and climate change will not be defeated by nuclear weapons - or even by smart bombs and the suspension of our hard-won civil liberties. We need greater understanding of the causes (including our own roles and practices) and better policy options for dealing with them.

That's where Scotland can make another difference. There has been much discussion in UN circles of the need for trained civilian peacemakers to be brought into situations of violence and conflict, including war and post-conflict reconstruction. Such initiatives take the concept of 'responsibility to protect' a significant step beyond the superficial recourse to military intervention. The civilian peace service approach relies on establishing early-warning indicators for areas of incipient conflict, recognising the particular contributions and perceptions of women. Ideally, peace service personnel can then work early on with local community leaders and people on the ground and provide training and support for nonviolent conflict-prevention, management and mitigation.

If armed conflict erupts then participating countries need to provide trained, non-military personnel with expertise and experience in dealing with conflict, so that they can help to address the causes, protect civilians (especially children) and build nonviolent structures for peace and security. In

conjunction with Scotland's for Peace, there is already a Scottish Network for Civilian Peace Service (SNPCPS), but it is woefully underfunded. Depending on donations and charitable funding, the SNPCPS receives a minuscule fraction of what the armed services, military interventions and wars are given by governments. A new Scottish agenda for peace should provide significant funding to support training and recruitment to develop a Scottish civilian peace service.

A dedicated institute devoted to Peace and Security Studies could be another way for Scotland to contribute. Bradford University's Department of Peace Studies offers a good example of what can be accomplished when 'peace' rather than 'war' or just 'international relations' is made the focus of research. Bringing a pool of academics and practitioners together from across the spectrum of strategic, security, disarmament, legal, environmental and justice disciplines to focus on peace studies can have synergistic benefits far greater than available to researchers in traditional departments. Students and policy-makers will benefit greatly from an interdisciplinary approach that develops understanding of the links between different components of insecurity and conflict, and the multifaceted requirements for building peace. In time, a dedicated peace studies department or institute can train and educate new generations of community and political leaders and thinkers.

Initiatives like these would also be steps towards fulfilling UN General Assembly resolution 57/60 on disarmament and nonproliferation education. This consensus resolution was first adopted in 2002, and endorses the findings of a two-year UN study which urged governments "to accord importance to disarmament and non-proliferation education and training in their programmes and policies" and "to sponsor training, fellowships, and awareness programmes, on as wide a geographical basis as possible... taking into account present and future trends..."

Today's leaders were brought up to compartmentalise security and defence in narrow military terms and to view peace as an impractical ideal. Tomorrow's decision-makers need a much deeper understanding of human security and they need training and tools that will enable them to turn ideals of peace into practical realities.

None of this will be easy, but a revitalised peace agenda in Scotland could have far-reaching and positive consequences for Britain and the whole world.



Dr Rebecca Johnson is the editor of Disarmament Diplomacy (www.acronym.org.uk) and a former senior advisor to the WMD Commission, chaired by Hans Blix. Grateful thanks to David Mackenzie and Janet Fenton for sharing ideas. Dr Johnson is a member of the Faslane 365 Steering Group, which is organising a nonviolent, all-inclusive Big Blockade on October 1st. See www.faslane365.org for details on how to get involved.

money matters

Gordon Morgan analyses what the SNP can and should do to make better use of public money

The left in Scotland tended to judge the Labour led administration in Holyrood by the same criteria as Labour in Westminster. New Labour went beyond just trying to manage capitalism better than the Tories, they wholesale rewarded the rich and privatised more industries than invaded Iraq. Scottish Labour insofar as it distanced itself from these policies was assessed benignly.

The SNP administration has already shown Labour in Holyrood to have been at best complacent and probably incompetent in its management of public finances and exposed the left as having been largely silent in criticism of these issues. How could Labour commit £500m to digging a rail tunnel under an airport, in opposition to the rail company and the airport operator at a time when air travel is increasingly seen as a major contributor to global Warming? Why did Labour seek to build more private prisons to house fine defaulters and drug users when the alternatives had been shown to potentially save at least £200m a year? Why has the cumulative budget underspend reached £1.5bn whilst hospital trusts ran out of cash and cut services?

Salmond and the SNP have pledged to run the administration more effectively and prove their competence to run an independent Scotland. They also intend to prove that the existing fiscal settlement constrains the Scottish economy and contributes to cultural and actual poverty. The left has to work out new criteria by which we can judge a Holyrood government.

It may not have control over money supply, foreign exchange, many taxes or trade. It does however, control most of the public sector and a substantial amount of public funds. It can materially lessen poverty or reward the rich. It can expand the public sector and grow the economy or use PFI/PPP schemes.

The following is a preliminary outline of the fiscal issues around which the left should assess the SNP government.

The 2007/8 Scottish Budget is £26.1bn. This includes all money for areas like local authorities, health, education as well as funding for capital projects. Most of this money comes as a direct grant from the UK Government under the Barnett formula. As Scottish ministers have no powers to borrow additional money, the Scottish Budget is extremely vulnerable to changes in how the formula is calculated.

The SNP has demanded the return of £23m a year in carers allowances cut from the budget when free care for the elderly was introduced (on the basis that no rebate was due as there was no charge). The SNP quite rightly point out that all persons previously receiving means tested free care (for which the allowance was paid) still receive it, hence it should be included in the budget. More significantly, the same argument will be made by the Treasury if local income tax were introduced with the potential loss of £300m a year in council tax benefit.

Even assuming no sleight of hand, the Barnett formula is likely to reduce the Scottish Budget over the coming years as English population grows relative to Scotland. A Strathclyde University

report in 2005 predicted a squeeze potentially losing five per cent of Scottish jobs. Add to this pressure from English regions to move from the Barnett formula to "redress subsidies" to Scotland and an ongoing fight to maintain the budget for the next four years is virtually guaranteed.

With Wales demanding more fiscal powers and Northern Ireland and English regions wanting fair settlements a radical review of the Scottish budget is more likely than not as part of a new settlement. The SNP and the Tories may both advance proposals for fiscal autonomy – where the Scottish Executive is responsible for raising its budget as well as spending it. Achieving change without wrecking or allowing the budget to be wrecked by Westminster is a major challenge facing the SNP.

The SNP pressed for equalisation of Business rates with England (which Labour has done) and demanded a cut in corporation tax for Scotland. Given the likely effect of a cut in corporation tax would be reregistering of headquarters from London to Edinburgh rather than additional economic activity and a probable substantial cut in the Scottish Budget to reflect reduced overall Westminster take in corporation tax, they best beware Gordon Brown granting their request.

It is very unlikely the SNP will contemplate an adjustment of income tax as allowed under the Scotland Act, unless it coincided with changes to council tax. If the choice is service cuts or up to 3p added to income tax, a campaign could be launched for the latter across several parties.

Whilst any move from council tax will assist the poorest families, a flat rate of local income tax as proposed by the SNP would slightly add to tax paid by two wage families on average wages if it were to raise the same as the council tax. To avoid raising taxes for average earners, the SNP relies on no removal of council tax benefit and also on administrative savings to balance the books. Independent studies for more information look at the work undertaken by Mike Danson, suggest that at the rates proposed by the SNP insufficient revenue will be raised and cuts will be required elsewhere. A proposal such as the Scottish service tax which incorporated a progressive rate for high earners should be argued for as that would both produce additional revenue and reduce the tax burden on average wage earners.

The SNP could introduce new taxes to achieve social goals for example road charges, carbon taxes, planning gain, however, Westminster may challenge their competence. To sell the need for these new taxes, the money raised would need to be closely linked to funding related projects. Given the diversion of funding for the Olympics, if Glasgow wins the Bid for the Commonwealth games, a Scottish Lottery?

The prohibition on borrowing by the Executive or its agencies has fuelled the drive for use of PPP schemes despite their much higher cost and ongoing future expenditure thus restricting future budgets. Alternative mechanisms which greatly reduce the profit going from the public purse to shareholders have been considered by the SNP but not yet acted upon.

At Council level, Edinburgh in the '90s set up development trusts which through land swaps and planning deals provided leisure centres and met various development goals saving tens of millions.

In Glasgow, various trusts have been established allowing council businesses to work commercially. At present council "trust" workforces are building houses on council land with around £100k profit per house going to developers making the proposals. Reputedly Councillors have been asked by senior management why the trust cannot build and sell the houses in accordance with strategic planning goals and use the profit to meet other council objectives e.g. the same trust currently builds schools.

Across Scotland a coordinated approach to linking planning and development trusts together with Council land and property sales could generate tens of millions a year to be used for strategic investment goals e.g. hospitals, schools, social housing, energy conservation and meet many of the objectives of a planning gain tax. If the SNP abolishes Scottish Enterprise and transfers some of its powers and cash to Local Government, this task could be achieved more quickly.

Scotland locks up a higher percentage of our population than any other country in Europe. The SNP has committed itself to abolish prison sentences of six months or less and to cap the numbers held on remand. It has been shown, in evidence to Parliament on Rosemary Byrne's Bill, that each £1 invested in effective drug rehabilitation services saves over £9 in criminal justice costs. Action on these issues should reduce the prison population and allow the two new 700 place private prisons sanctioned by Labour (Low Moss and Addiewell) to be cancelled. We should press the SNP to announce its intention to cancel these private prisons and demand support from Labour and other parties on these policies.

Many in the SNP have been prone to see Public sector bad e.g. complaining too high a percentage of GDP relates to the public sector. Whilst in an independent Scotland, this argument would require to be challenged. In a fiscally constrained environment of devolution it is a pure distraction.

With a fixed budget, the SNP should recognise that



maximising production within the "public" sector and reinvesting surpluses from public sector enterprises aids the Scottish Budget more than giving money to shareholders.

The Executive should publish a simple financial summary of all PPP schemes currently funded by Executive agencies of local Authorities and we should demand that all parties in the parliament push for a freeze on new schemes pending a review of the impact on future budgets. This would greatly strengthen the case for allowing Executive borrowing.

Labour claimed EU rules forced it to put CalMac services out to tender. Most commentators believed essential lifeline services could be exempt and that Labour were ultra cautious. The SNP criticised Labour's actions, however, they will face a major challenge over water and energy.

Despite almost all water infrastructure having been developed using PPP schemes, Scottish Water is still public. This could change under new proposed regulations.

Energy production and distribution has been privatised and is regulated in accordance with EU competition rules. Security of electricity supply is of strategic importance to Scotland and massive investment is required to achieve carbon emission targets.

If the SNP willing to challenge the private sector energy monopoly and force strategic investment in new electricity production and distribution using planning laws and taxes and if necessary set up new publicly controlled energy companies?

The EU is claimed to be looking at Shetlands development fund to determine if it illegally subsidises companies. Is the SNP willing to fight within the EU to secure exemptions from competition rules and demand the right (from Westminster and Brussels) to establish financial and development trusts to meet its strategic carbon emission goals?

The left needs further discussion on such structures (financial and development trusts etc) and how they would operate to ensure democratic accountability yet meet strategic needs.

For eight years the budget discussions in the parliament, the Barnett formula, borrowing restrictions, fiscal autonomy, EU competition rules, financial trusts etc have been incredibly boring subjects even for those centrally involved in the debate. Suddenly with the election of the SNP government and Brown's constitutional review, complacency could be swept away and these become hugely significant live issues. Conferences are being held, books written on alternative economic strategies. The left must actively engage with these issues and seek agreement on common campaigns. I look forward to other contributions on these matters in future issues of Scottish Left Review.

Gordon Morgan is a former Chief Officer in local government

an appetite for change

Peter McColl asks what the new administration can do to transform Scotland and comes up with some interesting conclusions

The new Scottish Parliament's new composition offers a great opportunity for change. The eight years of Labour/Liberal Democrat government have ossified a very particular view of what the Scottish Parliament is capable of doing. While there have been some advances, there are huge areas of government that remain as they were in 1999. Outlined below is a series of opportunities for change that could help to transform Scotland over the next four years and beyond. Of course the list is by no means comprehensive, but points to a number of ways in which the Government could move Scotland forward.

Procurement for Local Government

One of the key reasons that change in local authorities could drive forward change in Scotland is that new authorities are in a better position to take new opportunities. Greens have long argued that the money spent by local government should be used to generate local good as well as providing local services. Historically, Scotland's local authorities seem to have been intimidated by corporate arguments to follow European directives beyond their spirit. Local government deciding to create employment, improve the local environment and regenerate areas of deprivation using its procurement budgets would mean that Scotland could be a healthier, happier and more liveable place.

There is clearly an opportunity for local government. But, where does the Scottish government have opportunity to influence this? Well, in the first place, the government could easily instruct civil servants liaising with local government in how to use procurement to aid regeneration and to maximise benefit from expenditure. Already all PPP contracts in England are reviewed by an expert team at the Treasury, which collates good practice, oversees the actions of Local Authorities and advises on new contracts. The Scottish Ministers could easily do the same with all procurement, given the social, economic and environmental benefits of improved procurement practice.

Social enterprise is one sector that could really benefit from a changed approach to procurement, and could in turn deliver huge benefits to Scotland. While many procurement officers are convinced that social and environmental benefits cannot be taken into account, more recent directives have made it clear this is not the case. It now remains for procurement officers to adapt the way they draw up contracts to make them accessible to social enterprises. Often contracts are bundled, requiring a single contractor to provide a variety of goods and services. This excludes any organisation that cannot provide such a variety, and has meant that many smaller contractors and social enterprises are excluded from bidding. By offering contracts that are not bundled, not only will social enterprises be able to bid, but local authorities are likely to benefit from greater value in their contracts.

Directing local authority spending away from multinational corporations would ensure Local Authority investment could be better directed at communities, but it will also help to improve

workers rights, Union recognition, and the worth of work, all of which could not be valued less than by multinational corporations with their non-recognition arrangements and poor working conditions.

Collective approaches to climate change

Greens have a long standing and deeply held commitment to addressing climate change. The distinctive nature of a Green solution to this problem is that it does not seek bolt on answers, or the hairshirt approach favoured by the main parties. There are huge opportunities available to Scotland as a result of climate change. We must harness these and take the opportunity to transform society that they offer.

While the 2007 election can be seen as the coming of age of Scottish nationalism, it comes at a time when Scottish oil which a key driver for early nationalism starts to run out. This should point us to a future in which our society is no longer dependent on fossil fuels. There are very few examples of what a society that is no longer replete with fossil fuels looks like, but Cuba is one. As a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Cuba no longer had either access, or the financial means to import oil. This prompted the government to take an innovative approach to the environment and sustainability. Rather than the Western approach of regulation and taxation, the government mobilised the Cuban people.

Cuba has seen a massive increase in urban agriculture, to the extent that 90 per cent of fruit and vegetables consumed in Havana are grown organically in the city. Cuba was also the first country in the world to implement a universal low energy lighting programme. By getting students to distribute and install low energy light bulbs, the country has substantially reduced energy use. While it is clear that Scotland, with one growing season, rather than three will find it difficult to reproduce the Cuban achievement of urban agricultural self sufficiency, there are other ways in which Scotland has advantages that it must seize upon.

A pointer to what can be achieved can be glimpsed when looking at the crafting community buy-outs that have been made under the 2003 Land Reform Act. Given the opportunity to control their own estate, and by extension much of their own lives, the crofters of Gigha, Eigg and Assynt have all opted for environmental sustainability as a hallmark of their approach to estate management. Giving all rural and urban communities the right to buy the land in which they have an interest may act as the sort of incentive that those communities need to start taking the steps to tackle climate change.

By giving people more control over their lives, we can make addressing climate change an opportunity to create a fairer, more equal society that is not only more environmentally sustainable, but more socially sustainable. Collective action is clearly missing from the strategies being proposed by the government and commentators like Al Gore to tackle climate change. Rather than accepting the neo-Liberal consensus of

these organisations, a community right to buy, and both a land fund and a climate challenge fund could transform Scotland's approach to climate change. It could also undermine that very neo-liberal consensus, and allow us to see how a new society is possible.

Removal of Regulatory and Compulsory Purchase Powers from Private Companies

Some of the most telling evidence of the Thatcherite intention to transfer much more of the power of the state to private companies than was ever admitted or achieved is the retention of regulatory and compulsory purchase powers by privatised companies. Many of the campaigners against the proposed ship-to-ship oil transfer scheme were astonished to find that Forth Ports, the company that stood to gain from ship to ship oil transfers was also charged with regulating that activity. The powers were retained by Forth Ports after privatisation in the 1992.

The airport operator, BAA, has similar compulsory purchase powers, that derive from its time as a nationalised company. While nationalised industries may need these powers, they are answerable to ministers, and ultimately the electorate. A private company is answerable to its owner. This creates a massive conflict of interest, and should be ended immediately. The Scottish government should move to strip these companies of such powers, and avoid any future conflicts of interest.

Measurement of economic growth

The last Scottish Executive chose to measure its achievement through growing Scotland's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This was a demonstration of its commitment to business, and to the then government's desire to pander to the rich. While GDP is worthwhile as one of a series of measures of economic progress, its use as the sole assessment of the economy will produce massive distortions in government policy.

At heart, GDP represents a measure of the cash flow in the economy. It is like the turnover of a business. It is clear that a measure of the cash flow or turnover is not a measure of success. It may be useful in assessing efficiency and activity, but it does not account for the sum of economic success.

A measure of well-being, or human welfare would allow a measure of the economy's impact on society. It would allow government to measure how it is improving (or not) people's lives, rather than just measuring how it is influencing the cash flow. As Richard Layard (2005) points out, over the past 30 years we have increased material wealth hugely, while failing to improve human happiness. In many ways, one of the major challenges facing Scotland is that of turning what material wealth we have into happiness, and ensuring that any future growth does not occur at the expense of happiness. The simplicity of measuring happiness would be a substantial, if only a first step, to changing the way Scotland approaches economic development.

There are several measures that allow the measurement of human happiness. The Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (ISEW), developed by the New Economics Foundation and Friends of the Earth, for instance, values income inequality, domestic labour, health, education, services from consumer durables, air pollution, depletion of resources, and the costs of climate change and ozone depletion as measures of economic

regress set against growth in GDP. There are a number of tools available to calculate the ISEW here: foe.co.uk/campaigns/sustainable_development/progress/

A similar index is the Measure of Domestic Progress, also developed by the New Economics Foundation (neweconomics.org/gen/well-being_mdp.aspx). Either of these measures could be published by the Scottish Government at the same time as other economic indicators, allowing a real analysis of what government policy and expenditure is achieving in terms of people's happiness. Given this measure, it will be possible to adapt policy to improve happiness, rather than the more abstract economic growth.

Other ideas

There are many other developments for which there is broad support, and that could provide a radical alternative to neoliberal hegemony. Amongst these is the near-universal demand for the Scottish Parliament to have additional powers. The only things preventing the Parliament getting these powers are the reluctance of the parties to talk to one another about it, and possible resistance from Westminster. While all the parties have different notions of what should be proposed, a serious attempt to reach consensus, particularly around fiscal affairs could prove successful. If Glasgow City Council can take on responsibility for incapacity benefits, it is impossible to argue that the Scottish government should be denied this responsibility.

One of the other powers devolved could be that for rail. Even if it is not devolved there are many improvements that could be made without further powers. A real effort to reopen branch railway stations closed after the Beeching report could make a significant improvement to Scotland's transport infrastructure. By connecting towns like Blackford, Greenloaning, St Andrews and Levenmouth to the rail system, and by investing in the £300m of improvements that Network Rail have recommended, the Scottish rail system could become substantially more effective.

The campaign for Free School Meals has a great deal of political support, and could transform much of the Scottish school system if fully implemented. However, one of the real opportunities that seems to have been missed is the chance to regenerate local food and food production economies through the procurement of healthy school meals. Through pump priming local producers and distributors that have a remit to deliver more than profit, it could produce multiplier effects that reinvigorate the Scottish food economy. It is essential that any development in school meals is seen, not only as an opportunity to improve nutrition in schools, but also to create a better Scotland.

The new Parliament has a great opportunity to make its mark on Scotland. A change of government always creates a change of emphasis; the ideas above would make for a better Scotland and a better future for its people. We all hope that a better Scotland is what will emerge at the end of this Parliament.



Peter McColl is a member of the Green Party and has a degree in Geography and a MSc in politics of community land ownership.

a new agenda for the arts

Susan Galloway, Drew McFarlane and Paul Holleran look at how we can influence the new government to reinvigorate Scottish arts and culture

An agenda for the arts

The three to four year period leading to the publication, in the run-up to the election campaign, of the draft Culture Bill was a case study in how not to make policy. As a result the previous administration has produced a deeply flawed and unnecessary piece of legislation which detracts from its achievements, which include the youth music initiative which has delivered free instrumental tuition to all primary school pupils. If it is possible to isolate just three campaigning priorities for the arts in the new political situation then these are firstly to fundamentally reform the draft Culture Bill or scrap it. Secondly to prevent the transfer of local authority culture and leisure services to trusts and lastly to create equitable national cultural provision by extending the statutory duties of local authorities and funding them accordingly.

The fundamental issue for the arts continues to be funding, left out of the Cultural Commission's brief. The kind of redistribution needed to deliver radical change in cultural provision has not been on the cards. Scotland's line of culture Ministers have had to work within the constraints of a policy area that is low status and with little muscle. Representative organisations in the arts and wider cultural sector, including the trade unions, have been highly critical of the Bill. They now need to actively lobby Linda Fabiani, the new culture Minister, as she discusses with officials and political colleagues how to proceed.

First, we need to be arguing for local authorities to be prevented from transferring out their culture and leisure services to trusts, for tax purposes, and for existing moves to be reversed. The creation of Culture and Sport Glasgow on 1 April, achieved at break-neck speed, underlines how the arts and heritage are part of the bigger picture of public service reform, 'regeneration', privatisation and outsourcing. As a result the principle of democratic accountability has been lost over a major area of public service provision. In practice services are being fragmented and distanced from strategic objectives. Guarantees of 'safe in our hands' are worth little when the bigger picture is one in which a raft of measures, including appointments from the private sector, are phasing out of existence democratically accountable local services and undermining the ethos of public service. For a glimpse of the future ten years down the line we need only take a look south of the border.

Second, the question of provision. Addressing the wide variation in arts and cultural provision across the country and ensuring equality of access for everyone in Scotland is an important aim, which the proposed cultural entitlements, do nothing to achieve. They may in fact unintentionally lead to a levelling down, rather than up of cultural provision across authorities. The most effective solution is to extend and strengthen the current statutory duties of councils. This will also rectify the structural weakness that renders arts and leisure services so vulnerable to budget cuts. In England, budget pressures have led 25 local authorities to dispense with arts provision completely. For more information see John Holden (2006) *Local authorities: a change in the cultural climate?*, London: Demos.

Third, the future of the cultural agencies. The advantage of Creative Scotland is far from clear. It is advocated primarily on grounds of financial and administrative efficiency, but with no supporting evidence. Whatever more substantial reasons explain the Executive's preference for this option they are reasons it has chosen to keep to itself. However the Executive's thinking is clearly influenced by the creative industries approach of the UK government, which broadly reconfigures public policy for culture to fit New Labour's general ideological approach. (See The Work Foundation (2007) *Staying ahead: the economic performance of the UK's creative industries*. London:DCMS).

It is this which the new Scottish government needs to resist. Whatever institutional form public support takes, Scotland's cultural development agency(ies) should have primarily cultural aims and objectives. The purpose of public intervention in the arts and cultural industries is precisely to address the particular problems of market failure and the anti-democratic effects of market forces in these areas. These are central questions for artists and cultural producers in Scotland which will not be addressed by uncritically importing creative industries thinking from London. We have our own parliament - let's think for ourselves.

Susan Galloway is a Research Fellow at the Centre for Cultural Policy Research at the University of Glasgow

Cultural divides

We have a new Scottish Executive and the arts and cultural industries like all others in Scotland will have to reorientate their thinking and identify new campaigning priorities to achieve the best possible outcomes. The overall performance of the last administration was fairly lacklustre, particularly within the last three years. The much publicised St Andrew's Day speech in 2003 by Jack McConnell never lived up to expectations and was lost in debates over the much vaunted draft Culture Bill.

The last administration completed neglected those who work within the industry and what rights they should expect, a decent wage, protection of intellectual property, the right to fair employment without fear of exploitation to mention but a few. In short no notion of nurturing the talent base that is at the heart of a cultural Scotland. Whilst those structural debates took place the arts infrastructure suffered and actors, musicians and visual artists felt it at the sharp end with fewer work opportunities.

At the heart of any campaigning is the need for greater investment. A cursory comparison of the funding between theatre producers in England as compared to what happens here will show that we are lagging well behind in investment. If we have an impoverished Industry then the opportunities for Artists are reduced to the lowest common denominator. If there is a paucity of work then the indigenous talent base will move elsewhere. Scotland does not need that. More importantly the oft talked about education and cultural rights for children will be seen as hollow if we do not have anywhere for them to go

in terms of future employment. Their aspirations will be dulled and the increase in courses tailored to the arts industries will be seen by them as cynical manipulation unless the Executive creates the right conditions for them to progress from the classroom. Investment is crucial to that. There also needs to be sufficient checks and balances to ensure that cultural workers are seeing the benefits of investment. The creative industries have certain notoriety, particularly in the private sector, for exploiting those that are the essence of the industry.

The new Executive should not shrink from the so called shibboleths that are the preserve of Westminster. The broadcasting industry, whilst a reserved matter, is a high tech, highly skilled industry which employs a high percentage of our population. For that reason alone the new Executive should not stand back whilst the predators vie with each other to take over Scottish television or local radio with little thought for those who work in the industry. The new Parliament should be seeking amendments to The Scotland Act to enable it to have a greater say in broadcasting. Why the importance of such an industry to the Scottish economy should be left to the creative thinkers in Westminster whose bias is so obviously London centric and full of New Labour spin is beyond us all within the industry in Scotland.

These are challenging times then for all the Cultural Industries and if the new Executive and the Minister for Culture Linda Fabiani are to address them then it will have to respond with more than opening the new Scottish Parliament with the Scottish National Theatre's production of "Black Watch". In the end though, it's up to all to us, those who work within the cultural industries and the rest of us, who feel that culture should be at the heart of the new Parliament, to campaign for greater investment and greater democratic control.

Drew McFarlane is Equity's National Officer for Scotland and Ireland.

Is the Scottish voice getting quieter?

If Scotland is to move towards a new political and cultural consensus the media has to play a major role. News and current affairs reporting, stimulating feature writing, informed interviewing and comment are essential to a healthy press and a growing democracy. Things are very uncertain in the Scottish media industry at the moment. One of the key issues is the newspaper industry attempting to compete with the digital revolution and 24 hour broadcast news provision.

While recognising the competitive nature of the industry, people should be aware of the massive profits being coined. Trinity, Johnston Press and Newsquest are regularly achieving figures of 35-40 per cent return on investment. Newsquest (Herald & Times Ltd) took over the reins from SMG in 2003 with profits more than doubling in 12 months and rising to around £20m in the both of the last two years. This may seem like an amazing performance given that circulation and advertising are apparently falling year on year, but a closer look at their modus operandi is required. At the time of the takeover Newsquest and their American parent company Gannett gave extensive assurances to the Competition Commission (which operates under the OFT) on their commitment to future investment and maintaining quality journalism. However over the last three years they have carried out a systematic run-down of three of Scotland's leading newspapers.

The Evening Times has been an award-winning, campaigning newspaper yet faces major cut backs in the number of experienced staff. The Herald and Sunday Herald are national papers, but also recognised internationally as publications of quality. However with the latest round of savage cuts they will struggle to maintain those reputations. It is not just about losing jobs and having to deliver with less staff but since 2003 at The Herald alone there has been a loss of specialists including the Environment correspondent; a reduction in staff in Westminster down from four to two; London office staff also down from four to two; the European editor was removed; the hub of the Glasgow news-desk (editorial executives) has been cut from five permanent staff to two; five less news sub-editors than last year; less photographers; picture desk staff down from four to two; the business desk is two writers and one sub-editor down; in Edinburgh there has been a reduction of reporting staff from five to two and a number of journalists are required to provide cover for more than one post.

Reductions in the arts budget at The Herald have been severe in recent years but the latest cuts will impact on coverage of the Edinburgh Festival and could reduce the expertise leading to dumbing down of the critique which will directly affect the quality of The Herald's once highly respected arts coverage. The budget-slashing has also impacted on freelance coverage of the arts with some writers having their contracts cut dramatically.

Another stumbling block for the hard-suffering journalists is the management decision to scrap in-house copy-takers, transfer the work to Wetherby in Yorkshire then reduce the amount of hours this contracted out service is available. This restricts the arts and sports editors in commissioning work from live events.

European and international reporting has suffered through cut backs so the readers are facing a reduced coverage on issues from abroad. Journalists from one paper will be told they have to provide copy for one or two of their sister titles. This clearly contradicts assurances that editorial diversity and plurality would be protected. Not a satisfactory situation for Scotland's leading titles and Newsquest have to be held accountable for what is a strategy driven by corporate greed.

The NUJ are demanding the Competition Commission reopen the hearing to ask Newsquest why they have breached the assurances given to the original hearing. They have misled the Commission and the Scottish people and these important newspapers are not safe in their hands.

Ironically while The Herald and Evening Times management are attempting to turn their media from national to local, BBC Scotland management are taking steps through investment and training to add a strong local flavour to their national coverage. The BBC national news is also on the political agenda and the debate about a Scottish Six is once again to become a hot potato. So we have to look forward to an expanded BBC Scotland but a seriously damaged Herald group of papers if something is not done to stop Newsquest. A country gets the media it deserves and sitting back in apathy is not an option. ■

Paul Holleran is the Scottish organiser of the National Union of Journalists

above the law?

Bob Thomson explores the issues around corporate responsibility and asks what more can be done to make employers more accountable

Article 2, the first "right" in the European Convention states "everyone's right to life shall be protected in law". Contrast that with the situation where a family of four is killed in a gas explosion and their relatives and other consumers pay the company's fine through their gas bills. This happened in Scotland. In 1999 there was a gas explosion in Larkhall, which killed the Findlay family. Transco, the privatised gas utility, was fined a record £15 million for safety breaches, but homicide charges were dropped because the Crown could not identify a "controlling mind" ie responsible person(s). Transco's profits did not suffer overall, so clearly the fine was absorbed in charges to customers. Imposing the fine Lord Carloway said, "The corporate mindset of Transco has shown little regret or remorse for the explosion".

Death and injuries in workplaces remain a serious blight in Britain today. There are 270-300 involuntary deaths in the UK per year. In Scotland in 2004-2005 there were 36 fatal injuries to workers, plus 12 fatal injuries to members of the public. The incidence rate of fatal injuries per 100,000 employees in Scotland is almost twice that of Britain. While deaths rightly take the headlines, the scale of serious injuries within the workplace should not be forgotten. In Scotland there were 2,861 major injuries registered for 2004-2005. The Health and Safety Executive figures for 2003/04 show a staggering 179,000 persons in Scotland were suffering illness caused or made worse by their current or past work.

Statistics are cold figures. They do not describe the pain and suffering of workers and their families. Anyone interested in

reading some of their harrowing tales should go to the Families Against Corporate Killings' website at www.fack.org.uk.

Yet the Health and Safety Executive estimates that 70 per cent of deaths/serious injuries are avoidable. Under the current law only 11 directors have been convicted of manslaughter for work-related deaths. There have been no convictions in Scotland, where under Scots Law the offence is culpable homicide. Only five of these directors were imprisoned. All of these convictions have been of smaller companies, where it has been easier to identify the controlling mind test of responsibility.

Trade unions and other groups have long campaigned for effective legislation on corporate killing to ensure that all employing organisations, public, private and voluntary, and the individuals who own and manage them, can be held to account for avoidable deaths and serious injuries at the workplace. This legislation should have a range of penalties, including probation for companies, debarring of directors and custodial sentences.

This campaign has been energised by major disasters over the last 20 years. In 1987 the P & O ferry Herald of Free Enterprise sank with the loss of 150 passengers and 38 crew. The subsequent manslaughter prosecution was unsuccessful, again for the controlling mind test. The Public Enquiry into the incident reported that the company itself "was infected with the disease of sloppiness". The Southall train crash in 1997 killed seven people and injured 150; manslaughter charges were thrown out for the same reason. Likewise after the Hatfield train derailment in 2000, which killed four and injured 100.



The Labour Party's 1997 general election manifesto promised a Corporate Manslaughter Bill. Yet it took until 2006 and a lot of pressure for the Labour government to finally introduce the Bill. However the Bill received a lukewarm response from trade unions and safety campaigners. It does not include new duties on company directors, does not wholly remove Crown immunity and includes a limiting senior management test, which would allow employers to designate the safety function to a level of management, which is not "senior".

UCATT, the main trade union in construction, said of the Bill: "UCATT considers that in order to get this legislation right, Corporate Manslaughter law needs to target both corporate and individual guilt, and that it should cover all employing organisations. UCATT's analysis of the current proposals shows that they fail to deliver on these key issues".

They should know. The construction industry represents 9 per cent of GDP but 30 per cent of workplace fatalities. Between 1998 – 2004 there were 571 fatalities and 30,000 major injuries registered.

Whether, even this watered down Bill becomes law is shockingly still in doubt. The Bill has been to-ing and fro-ing between the Commons and the Lords because of the insistence of the Lords that the Bill includes deaths in custody. The Lords have justification for this, since the law applies to the public as well as workers in other work places eg if a customer is killed in a shopping centre. However the Bill was primarily about workplace fatalities, and the TUC is writing to all members of the House of Lords pointing this out. The Bill must be passed by 20 July 2007. If the government and the Lords remain obstinate, the Bill could fall.

Surprisingly to campaigners in Scotland, the Bill is intended to apply in Scotland. Scots Criminal Law is separate to that of England. Following the publication of the Scottish Executive's own Expert Group on Corporate Homicide in 2005 it was expected that there would be separate Scottish legislation.

The Expert group was made up of civil servants, academics, lawyers, STUC and business executives. It proposed that offences applying to senior officers would be an essential deterrent component of an effective law. In order to achieve this, the group proposed two new offences. First, the group recommended the introduction of a new stand-alone offence for culpable individuals acting with managerial authority, who are directly responsible for the deaths of employees or members of the public. The group also recommended the introduction of a secondary offence to allow individual directors/senior managers to be prosecuted, when their actions/omissions significantly contributed to a corporate killing. This latter type of "aiding and abetting" (in Scotland the terminology is "art and part") offence is on the statute books in Canada.

The main failing in the report is that it does not recommend the criminalization of serious injuries, but vaguely states that "further consideration be given to the issue of injuries". This was primarily as a result of opposition from the Health and Safety Executive because of the implication for additional resources – their budget is being cut with a loss of 250/350 posts.

Notwithstanding this omission, the Expert Group proposals have real teeth. They would, in the opinion of practitioners and campaigners on health and safety make a difference to

the number of deaths and serious injuries at workplaces in Scotland by ensuring that directors/ senior management focus more time and resources on safety issues.

In November 2004 Cathy Jamieson, then Justice Minister, stated in a speech that the Scottish Executive would legislate on Corporate Homicide if it felt it necessary. When no legislation was forthcoming, the Labour MSP Karen Gillon, with the support of the STUC and safety campaigners, introduced the Corporate Homicide (Scotland) Bill in the spring of 2006. The Bill is based on the Expert Group's proposals. In July 2006 the Government published the Corporate Manslaughter and Culpable Homicide Bill. Earlier announcements had talked of a corporate manslaughter bill that would only apply to England and Wales. Out of the blue, Whitehall stated that Health and Safety was a reserved matter for Westminster and the Scottish Bill was not competent. The Scottish Executive cravenly agreed without any discussion, and the Bill was dropped.

There is an argument that it is preferable to have an effective Corporate Killing law that covers the whole of the UK. However faced with a weak and ineffective UK legislation this is not an excuse for Holyrood doing nothing. Devolution was all about the Scottish Parliament, where necessary and appropriate, legislating separately for Scotland.

Criminal law is clearly a matter reserved for the Scottish Parliament. Culpable homicide is an offence under Scots Law to be investigated and prosecuted by the Crown Office in Edinburgh. And the Scottish Executive setting up the Expert Group highlights this.

There is no doubt that New Labour in London understood that more effective legislation in Scotland would draw attention to their failure to honour a longstanding manifesto commitment and cause them, at the least, embarrassment. If that legislation leads to a reduction in deaths and injuries, then the embarrassment would have turned to shame.

Donald Dewar famously said that devolution was a process, not an end in itself. The Labour lead Scottish Executive running up the white flag at the first whiff of gunpowder from Whitehall acted cowardly on this vital issue of deaths in the workplace. It epitomises their alienation from Labour's traditional core supporters, and contributed to the reasons why they lost the recent Scottish elections. If Labour is to regain that support they must be much more principled in opposition.

The political dynamic at Holyrood has changed. Whitehall/ Westminster no longer has the oppressive and interfering influence it had. Campaigners are now seeking MSPs to reintroduce the Corporate Homicide (Scotland) Bill. Hopefully it will get the support of progressive MSPs of all parties. The great majority of Scottish voters wish to see action and consensus from their Parliament on this life and death issue. Some shortsighted and callous business representatives may moan about more red tape. Refer them to the explosions and deaths and injuries at Larkhall and the Stockline factory in Glasgow.

Bob Thomson was a senior trade union official and a former Chairman of the Scottish Human Rights Trust.

flying nordic kites

Jane Denholm, Tam McTurk and David McDonald argue that by building real links with the Nordic countries the SNP has an opportunity to build a strong legacy

The new Scottish government has been quick to cite the positive attributes of the so-called 'Nordic' model and what it likes to dub the 'Arc of Prosperity'. Tangible proposals for links, at any level, have so far been less forthcoming. The ancien regime went down a similar path, even getting as far as hosting a seminar with the Nordic Council and Nordic Council of Ministers on 19 November 2002. The publicity was positive, the goodwill genuine and the outcomes negligible.

So, are Scotland's neighbours forever to remain the kite at the back of the politician's cupboard, dusted down every few years in blustery conditions whenever our representatives tire of the London prism? Or is Scotland about to re-emerge as an integral part of northern Europe? This article hopes to encourage debate about Scotland's involvement with its neighbours in the light of the widespread co-operation that already exists between small nations all across the north of Europe.

The background

Geographically, Scotland is firmly perched on the Arc of Prosperity from Ireland through Iceland, to Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland. We share many similarities with our Nordic neighbours. All are small countries on the northern periphery of Europe with relatively large rural populations, highly skilled workforces, hi-tech industries, life science, biotechnology and pharmaceutical clusters, substantial agricultural production, highly regarded universities and, of course, the sea and all it entails – fish, gas, oil, renewable energy, coastal communities and the threat posed by global warming. The most glaring dissimilarities appear to be the problem of population decline in Scotland and the fact that the Nordic countries tend to be high-tax and high-wage economies, to an extent unlikely ever to be put to the Scottish electorate by any politician hoping to prolong his or her career.

The Nordic approach

As a nation, Scotland is facing huge challenges to which it does not appear to have many solutions. Following its analysis of the major party manifestos in May 2007, the Scottish Council Foundation lamented 'having reviewed more than two thousand policy pledges, we conclude again that the party manifestos lack ideas big enough truly to address the key challenges we face – climate change, demographic change, the quality of family life, drug and alcohol misuse, violent crime'.

Meanwhile, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland all consistently outperform the UK in OECD rankings on a whole

range of topics, from their own standard of living to the amount they spend on development aid. Our neighbours are affluent yet socially-minded. Tax is high but so are wages and social exclusion is low. The political discourse resounds with aspiration rather than with derogatory references and acronyms such as 'sink estates' and NEET. In general, policy is designed to include rather than exclude.

Stuff we in Scotland struggle with, they take for granted. They 'can do' while we look for reasons not to. Copenhagen began constructing a 22-station underground metro system at the start of this decade. Due for completion this year it is jointly funded and owned by Copenhagen City Council and the Danish government. Unlike most major infrastructure projects in

Scotland, there was no accompanying political uproar. A need was perceived, it was met and the plan is that the quality of life and the economy will benefit. Much the same could be said of the various bridge and tunnel infrastructure projects, including the Great Belt Link and the Øresund Bridge, which effectively integrates the cities of Copenhagen in Denmark and Malmö in Sweden.

The Nordic response to globalisation has been to see it as an opportunity to be grasped. The Nordic countries are addressing globalisation and positioning themselves advantageously – co-operating and collaborating where appropriate or where there are benefits to doing so e.g. establishing the Nordic Research and Innovation Area, acknowledging where the Nordic countries are already world leaders and bolstering those clusters by making research co-operation a

top policy priority. Scotland too needs to see the potential and the opportunities rather than problems and challenges.

Nordic co-operation is not static. It has evolved over decades and the point of this article is not to hark back to some glorious social democratic nirvana of the past. Indeed, Denmark, Sweden and Finland under centre-right leadership have left behind parts of the traditional social democratic model and now subscribe to 'flexicurity', i.e. they accept the effects of globalisation and general economic restructuring but underpin it with policies whereby workers receive high levels of benefits and retraining during periods of unemployment. Employers like it because it makes for a flexible workforce. The unions, while critical, are not confrontationally negative and flexicurity has been introduced without mass industrial unrest, without recourse to draconian anti-union legislation and without any perceptible dent in the average Nordic standard of living.

Stuff we in Scotland struggle with, they take for granted. They 'can do' while we look for reasons not to. Copenhagen began constructing a 22-station underground system at the start of this decade. Unlike most major infrastructure projects in Scotland, there was no accompanying political uproar.

Our cities need to look north to Reykjavík, Oslo and Stockholm and east to Copenhagen and Helsinki, as well as west to Ireland, to derive inspiration, find out what they do and why and see which examples might be applied to solutions faced in our urban conurbations. Similarly our coastal, fishing and farming communities have a great deal in common with the north of Europe, from the climate to the needs of sparsely populated areas, rights for minority languages to distance learning and rural regeneration. Scotland would have nothing to lose and potentially a lot to gain from discussing Nordic experiences in these fields. Even the most superficial knowledge of our neighbours on the Arc of Prosperity is enough to suggest that other approaches and solutions, than the ones put forward by London-based parties, politicians, thinks-tanks and journalists, may have something to offer a county like ours.

Scotland and the Arc

Regime change at Holyrood has undoubtedly occasioned a renewed confidence in the Scottish people about making things happen and doing it for ourselves. We need to capitalise on this optimism – it may be short-lived - find out what makes other small northern European countries tick and decide what lessons are applicable to the Scottish political settlement, economic climate and cultural psyche.

And the political environment is also highly encouraging. In his first major statement on the European stage First Minister Alex Salmond was unequivocal that 'the peoples and institutions of the European Union are central to my vision for Scotland'. He went on to speak of recapturing the 'legacy of engagement' of Scotland with Europe and announced 'an era of renewed Scottish internationalism'. We need to hold them to this, get beyond the rhetoric and this time make it real.

The foundations are there. Networks and partnerships already exist or could be re-established at a whole range of levels, including links between Highland Enterprise and the Nordic countries, between a considerable number of Scottish and Nordic companies and through initiatives like the Nature Based Tourism project. While there is a place for events like 2002's Scotland in Sweden tourism-focussed jamboree, we don't really need more Tartan Weeks. Real progress will only happen if more structured and formal policy links are forged and if such movement at the top is mirrored by grassroots initiatives.

With this firmly in mind we make the following proposals:

- The Scottish Executive should invite the Nordic Council and Nordic Council of Ministers back for a repeat of their 2002 visit, only this time as part of an ongoing process rather than a one-off stunt. It should underpin this with a working party to encourage greater Nordic official representation and cultural and economic input in Scotland, perhaps offering a site for the development of a Nordic consulate campus, similar to the award-winning embassy venture in Berlin;
- We should establish Scottish cultural institutes and/or representative offices in Reykjavík, Oslo, Stockholm, Copenhagen and Helsinki;
- Dialogue should also be encouraged through existing contacts and networks at all levels using well-placed existing bodies like the University of Edinburgh Department of Scandinavian Studies and a reactivated Nordic-Scottish Co-operation Liaison Group at the University of Strathclyde,

the Danish Cultural Institute in Edinburgh, the various consulates, etc. Companies with a Scottish presence like Ikea, Sterling Air, UPM-Kymmene, Stena Line, Carlsberg and Landsbanki should also be involved in ongoing discussions;

- Using existing structures, and priming new ones where necessary, we should establish a virtual research network for the study of Nordic public policy in Scotland, focusing on creative and positive ways of policy exchange and co-operation with individual Nordic States and the Nordic Council; and
- We must maintain and improve transport links between Scottish and Nordic airports and ports.

Conclusion

Socially, culturally and economically Scotland has much to gain from greater involvement with the Nordic Countries. We shouldn't stop there either. We need to build closer links with Ireland, Catalonia, and the Benelux countries as well. It would be naive to suggest the wholesale import of Nordic ideas and solutions into Scotland. A critical approach will be necessary – e.g. Denmark's unpalatable policies on immigration would do little to address Scotland's population decline and economic needs and would be politically unacceptable to almost every MSP. The level of routine state involvement in the lives of everyday citizens in the Nordic countries would jar with Scottish citizens.

However, tangible opportunities exist and there is a role for both the Parliament and the Executive. Scotland needs to aspire to new ways of doing things that work and that enjoy popular support and consensus. Building these links with the Nordic countries offers the current government the opportunity to make a difference and, crucially, to leave behind a legacy that others would be unable to ignore in the future. ■

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All three have close family and business ties with the Nordic countries and are involved in discussions to strengthen social, cultural and economic ties with the Nordic Region and to encourage the Scottish Parliament and Executive to play an active role in that process. They would be delighted to hear from anybody with a similar interest.

give change a chance

Recently elected SNP MSP Bill Wilson sets out the reasons why the left in Scotland should support the SNP and concludes that this is the beginning of something new

A few weeks ago I had the honour of giving my maiden speech in the debating chamber of the Scottish Parliament. As I stated then, it was an honour I had greatly looked forward to for some time. I jokingly emphasised the “for some time”. Had I lost slightly fewer elections I should have spent less time looking forward to it. However, I should have emphasised the “looked forward to” part, because I had long believed that becoming an MSP would enable me, as a member of the party in government, to advance the causes of the left (such as social justice) in parallel with advancing the cause of a democratic and independent Scotland.

My maiden speech was delivered as part of the parliamentary debate ‘Safer and Stronger’. I used that opportunity to state my belief that in the developed world many of society’s ills are attributable to relative poverty. I argued that large wage differentials and an uneven distribution of wealth are linked to robbery and crimes of violence and poor health. Importantly, what I said was not out of sync with that of the government minister presenting his case. The argument was made that the Blair administration, and the previous New Labour government in Scotland, had failed to tackle the main cause of crime: relative poverty. The new Cabinet Secretary unambiguously stated that in order to fight crime poverty must be tackled as a priority. Of course merely saying that “the blight of poverty must be tackled” is not the same as taking action. Any doubt about this is dispelled by examining Blair’s “tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime” rhetoric in the light of the statistics published by the Child Poverty Action Group which noted that 18 per cent of the Scottish

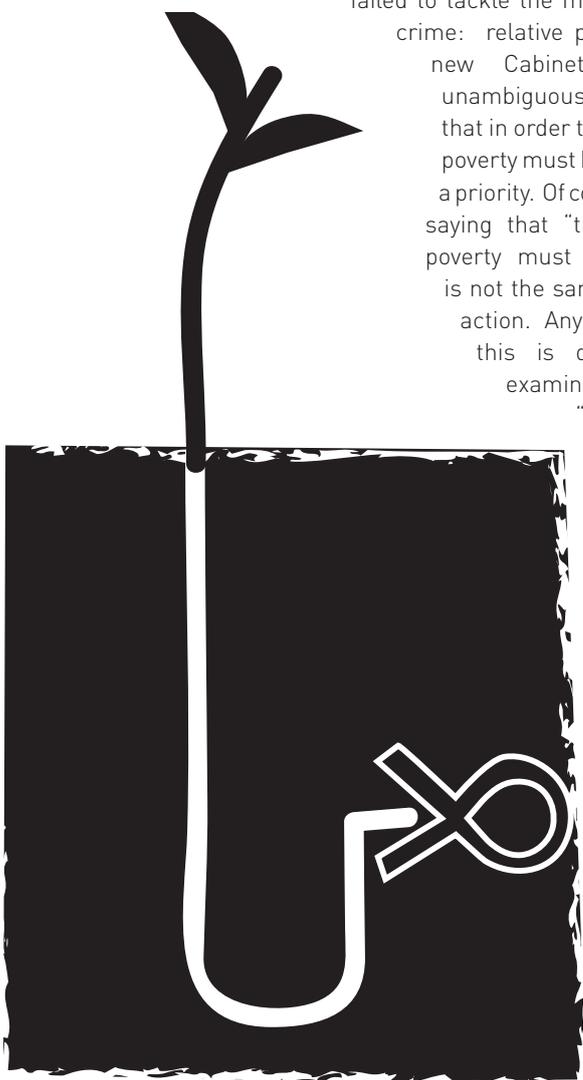
population as a whole, and a shocking 23 per cent of Scotland’s children, live in poverty: nearly a quarter of our children live in poverty!

There is a range of SNP policy initiatives intended to ensure both a fairer distribution of wealth and a fairer distribution of opportunity. First and foremost amongst these policies is the abolition of the council tax. The present council tax is not based directly upon the ability to pay, but upon the supposed value of the property in which the individual resides. Some argue that it does possess some relationship with the ability to pay, and is therefore a progressive form of taxation, because individuals living in more desirable residences tend to earn more. I do not subscribe to this argument: there are too many exceptions for this weak correlation to be fair. I shall consider only a few exceptions here (this is not, after all, an article on council tax):

- * Tenants in rented accommodation pay council tax: their level of taxation is based upon the value of somebody else’s property.
- * A large (and increasing) proportion of our population is retired. The family home an individual spent a lifetime paying for may have been matched to their income whilst employed; but it is, all too frequently, not matched to their retirement income.
- * Some will find themselves living in areas which have increased in desirability after they purchased their houses. Again, in such cases present desirability and income are not related.

By transferring local taxation from a property to an income-based system there will be a real shift in the burden of taxation. Individuals will not find their taxation level based upon another individual’s property; individuals with a higher level of income will pay a higher level of tax while they are still earning, but will see their tax levels fall as their income falls; individuals who have not seen their income levels rise will not see their tax levels rise merely because the area they live in becomes more desirable. A new income-based local tax system, as proposed by the SNP, would relieve the poorest pensioners of tax altogether. It would considerably reduce the burden of taxation on the lower-paid sections of our society. By contrast, the wealthiest 10 per cent of Scotland’s population would pay more — a local income tax, as proposed, will help to redistribute wealth. Of course some will argue that it might go further: local taxation could be related to the lower and upper rates of tax. Nonetheless, the SNP’s local income tax will be a substantial forward step. Compare the SNP policy on local income tax to Brown’s decision to abolish the lower 10p rate of income tax — the contrast is clear. In terms of personal taxation the SNP are leading the way.

There are more radical opportunities to build a fairer Scotland. The SNP supports a citizen’s pension, arguing that in a civilised country, particularly one as wealthy as Scotland, no pensioner should be left in poverty. Alex Salmond has also spoken of a citizen’s income. Such a fundamental change in the social security system might do more to build a fairer society, in a single



step, than has been done in the last few decades. However, both these actions require independence. Neither the social security system nor the pension system can be altered under the present arrangement.

Independence has risen rapidly up the agenda since the inception of the Scottish parliament. Indeed, at each election the number of independence-supporting MSPs has risen. In terms of social justice this is hardly surprising: national movements — as I have argued in 'Is There a Scottish Road to Socialism?' edited by Gregor Gall — are traditionally associated with social reform. (Two obvious examples are Mahatma Gandhi and José Gervasio Artigas, but the list is a lengthy one.) I contend that this is a further reason for those on the left to lend their support to the new SNP government.

A fundamental principle of equality is the right of all citizens (in an independent Scotland we would be able to vote on the monarchy!), to equal access to education. This is a right which has been denied the Scottish people for some time now. Equality of access is denied on two counts. Firstly the charging of fees (calling them something else does not alter the fact that they are fees). The second is the loss of grants and the introduction of student loans. The two combined will inevitably have their greatest impact upon the poorest members of our society. There have been various justifications for introducing student loans and fees, the most common of which is that students go on to earn higher incomes and should, therefore, not be supported during their studies. Rather than detail the arguments which demonstrate the fallacy of these claims I will simply note that the level of income at which repayment is triggered is well below the median value: poor people will have money taken from them. If the politicians who introduced both fees and loans actually believed their own argument then the loan repayment would not begin until the individual was earning over the median (if not over the average) income. It might also be observed that if students did indeed profit so greatly from their studies then a more efficient manner of recouping the costs would be to increase taxation for higher earners — more efficient because the state would not then spend the interim period (between the student borrowing and repaying the loan) paying interest to the banks. That is why the SNP is committed both to ending student fees and to abolishing student loans. It will help ensure equality of access to education, it puts the money in the pocket of the student rather than the bank, and it ensure that society recruits its next generation of engineers, scientists and lawyers from the widest possible pool.

If there is any doubt about the importance of the SNP position on student fees and grants, look at the present situation in England. On the day I first drafted this article (13 June) the Telegraph headline story reported that students were graduating with £30,000 of debt. Meanwhile, English universities are pushing for an end to the cap on fees. While England moves to the adoption of the US system, the SNP is working to retain democratic access to education for the people of Scotland.

According to a recent UK National Report (International Comparative Research: Under-represented Groups in Tertiary Education" prepared by the Institute for Access Studies and UCAS) : "In 2000, using the old SOC90 system, 40% of the population were classed as being Skilled Manual, Semi-Skilled or Unskilled based on their current or most recent occupation (2000 General Household survey). [But nationally only] a quarter

of entrants to higher education aged under 21 come from this sector of the population." The report also states: "A report from The National Audit Office (NAO) ... [suggests] that low socio-economic groups have doubts about the benefits of higher education and the report points out that even after completion of a degree those from the Unskilled backgrounds on average earn 7% less than their Professional class counterparts." I have no reason to believe the situation has substantially changed. Clearly there is a lot to be done, but I maintain that the SNP, acknowledging the links between relative poverty, the deterrent effect of fees and loans, and educational outcomes, can credibly claim to have some prospect of improving the situation.

Public services again highlight the left credentials of the SNP. It has been made clear that water mutualisation (arguably the first step to privatisation) has been rejected. Water will remain a public service. The scandalous PFI/PPP programme, a particularly iniquitous way of transferring public money to private pockets is to wither on the vine. The new government will bring forward alternative funding proposals, designed to provide a cheaper more effective way of funding public services.

Of course whether or not we can deliver on any of our policies depends upon the support we can gain within a Scottish parliament. The advantage of a minority government is that you must pay close attention to the views of the other parties and the disadvantage is that you must pay close attention to the views of the other parties!

The international arena is an area where the Scottish parliament can exert some influence, and for the better. Scotland has no votes on the UN, but it can make its voice heard. The SNP has a strong tradition of opposing the aggressive actions of the UK government. In Kosovo the UK government chose to ignore the advice of its own (and US) military intelligence and participated in a bombing campaign in Serbia. This was a bombing campaign which hit civilian targets and left radio-active waste scattered over both Kosovo and Serbia, a bombing campaign which triggered an acceleration in ethnic cleansing and ethnic killings: the mass civilian graves date from after the start of the bombing campaign. The SNP opposed this campaign, the party was slated in the press, but history has proven it correct. More recently in Iraq the SNP opposed an illegal and immoral war, but the motion opposing the war was defeated in the Scottish parliament. I do not claim that had that motion been passed the war would have been halted, but it would certainly have caused the UK government considerable embarrassment. An SNP government cannot vote in the UN, but it can make its voice heard — that is a considerable improvement on what has gone before. And, until we are independent, and able to refuse to participate in the UK's bloody international practices, it is the best we can hope for.

A fairer tax system, democratic access to education, public services to serve the public rather than for private profit... An SNP government does not offer nirvana, but it does offer a vast improvement on what has gone before.



Dr Bill Wilson is the SNP MSP for the West of Scotland

unlocking history

Kathryn Mackenzie has been working on unlocking the history of the STUC to the wider community and concludes that the results are pretty impressive

The title of the project is Scottish Labour History Unlocked: the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) Archive. This was a nine month post where the job was to catalogue and make the records of the STUC available to the public. This was my first professional post upon finishing my MSc in 2006 and it has been a very interesting and enjoyable project to work on. In addition to putting the knowledge and experience gained on the MSc and through volunteer work in to practice the project has been a great learning experience in terms of professional development, working in a cross domain team, and learning about the history and work of the STUC.

Glasgow Caledonian University Archive has held part of the STUC Archive since 1998 but there were also records that had been at the National Library of Scotland (NLS) since 1985. The records at the NLS were not catalogued or available to the public. Therefore the key to this project was in the title 'Scottish Labour History Unlocked' as the projects main aim was to make the records of the STUC available to the wider community. My role in the project has been to catalogue the records that came from the NLS straight on to the main library catalogue therefore ensuring they are accessible to anyone with access to the internet. The online catalogue is free text searchable so searching by a key word or name will bring up any STUC records containing that word. As all the work catalogued on the main University Catalogue is searchable in this way it means that as well as STUC records the search will also find any other records that contain the key word or search term. This makes the catalogue very easy to use as it means the user will find any record that relates to their search rather than only the records where the word appears in the title. It also means that users not specifically looking for material from the STUC archive would still find it if it related to their search thereby 'unlocking' the Archive to users who may not previously have been aware of the records.

Since I began cataloguing the records I have learnt a great deal about the work and organisation of the STUC. One of the areas that particularly interested me was the extent of the involvement of the STUC in international affairs. There is material relating to Argentina, Paraguay, Vietnam and the Anti-Apartheid Movement. The largest volume of international material catalogued so far has been material recording the STUC involvement in protests against the military regime in Chile. As well as correspondence relating to Congress motions on Chile there are journals of the Trades Union Congress of Chile (CUT) and various newsletters and campaign publications.

The correspondence relating to Madame Allende's visit to Scotland and the discussions about the Scottish Football Team proposed visit to Chile in 1977 (which went ahead regardless of STUC involvement, public protest and protests by some of the players) were also very interesting. I had not previously been aware of how strong the movement against the Pinochet regime had been in Scotland so it was very moving to read of all the work that was done here to support people in Chile and in supporting the exiles who came to Scotland.

Through this project I have learnt a great deal about my own heritage through learning about the social and political history of Scotland. There were areas that I found particularly interesting, for example the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders. Although I had heard of it before working at Glasgow Caledonian my knowledge was very limited, knowing only that it was an industrial dispute and not that it had been a work-in. It was a very interesting time and the records in the Archive are very moving as you can see the extent of support for the UCS workers. All the original records including correspondence about the enquiry, the letter pledging support from John and Yoko and the protest banners are very interesting and are great examples of the impact that seeing original records can have.

I have found that my knowledge of these issues has greatly improved through my reading of the records themselves and the background research necessary to inform this. For background research on the role of the STUC from its creation in 1897 I read the collection level description created by Carole McCallum, the University Archivist, and looked at two books *The Bairns O Adam* by Keith Aitken and *The Scottish Trades Union Congress: the First 80 Years*, by Angela Tucket. The STUC website was a useful site for information on the current work of the STUC. An invaluable source to me was the extensive and varied knowledge of the Research Collections team at Glasgow Caledonian University.

Some of the records have been really surprising in terms of the interest of their content. For example the records of the National Union of Miners may initially have appeared to contain little of immediate interest but on a closer inspection they contained material on health and safety at work, disputes and violations of safety agreements that proved to be very interesting reading and which will be of great use to researchers. The files of the General Secretary contain a wealth of material as they cover so many of the areas in which the STUC were involved. From speaking to the current head of administration at the STUC I found out that the reason for this is that for the dates I was covering (from the 1950's to late 1970's) everything was signed as having come from the General Secretary.

To have all these records available to the public through the main library catalogue is a very important project to be involved in and use of the STUC Archive has already increased before the project is even finished. The STUC Archive is one of national importance and Glasgow Caledonian University Archive already had relatively high usage figures for the STUC Archive. In contrast the STUC records at the National Library of Scotland had never been used for research so cataloguing them and making them available for users is providing a very valuable service for further study.

Kathryn Mackenzie, Project Archivist

More information on the STUC Archive is available at - www.gcal.ac.uk/archives/stuc/ or contact Carole McCallum, University Archivist, T: 0141 273 1188, E: C.McCallum@gcal.ac.uk

NATIONAL UNION OF JOURNALISTS

NOT SAFE IN THEIR HANDS...

The NUJ call on Gannett/Newsquest to abide by the assurances they provided to the Competition Commission in 2003 on the transfer of The Herald, Sunday Herald and Evening Times and stop cutting jobs in these titles. Those assurances included their stated intention to maintain the quality and level of coverage of Scottish issues and opinions.

- For the third year in a row profits have increased at Newsquest (Herald & Times) and for the third year in row management have demanded job cuts across the board.
- The Herald's position as a national newspaper is seriously under threat.
- The Sunday Herald's role as an award-winning quality Sunday title is at risk.
- The ability of Evening Times journalists to sustain the high profile campaigning identity of the paper is being dramatically undermined.
- The real danger to these prestigious Scottish titles comes directly from Newsquest's demand for job cuts in each of the last three years.
- Their profitable return on investment has been over 35% during this period. This is more than double the average company performance in the UK (14.8%).
- Profits from the three titles more than doubled last year to almost £20million.
- Parent company Gannett has a current operating revenue of \$8033 million.
- Now Chief Executive Tim Blott is demanding up to £3million savings from staff.
- Serious health and safety issues (including stress and RSI) have been raised with management following previous redundancies and lack of investment.
- The future of these titles is not safe in the hands of this US owned corporate giant, despite assurances given to the DTI (Competition Commission) at the time of takeover.
- The Scottish public and civic society must stand up for these newspapers, which are much more important to this country than aspirations and demands of Newsquest shareholders.

We need your support to protect titles which are an essential part of Scottish cultural, political and civic life.

Please write to John Hutton MP, Secretary of State for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform, asking him to reopen the hearing.

imperialism in another guise

John Wight analyses the impact of imperialism on the world and concludes that the impact of imperialism is still as catastrophic today as it ever was.

The U.S. occupation of Iraq has spawned the reemergence of the word imperialism into the lexicon of everyday language, after an absence of five decades stretching back to the end of Second World War. U.S. military adventures since then - particularly in Korea, Vietnam and Central America - were dressed up as defensive operations against the spread and threat posed by Communism and all its evil manifestations, namely, national liberation, self determination, and social and economic justice.

The truth is, however, that imperialism has remained as constant and ever present as the changing of the seasons. The only thing which has changed is its packaging, which could be described, to paraphrase James Connolly, as old wine in a new bottle.

The U.S. ruling class emerged from the Second World War as the new imperial masters of the world. As such, they quickly recognised that the plethora of national liberation movements which had sprung up across the globe after the war, determined to shake off the yoke of colonialism, demanded new methods of control than the ones which had been utilized previously by the European powers.

The World Bank and International Monetary Fund's stated aim, when formed by a small coterie of international financiers and bankers (mainly British and American, with the British by now accepting their role as junior partners in the new order of things) at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire in 1944, was to rebuild Europe and stabilize the world's financial markets after the turmoil of the Second World War.

In line with those aims, the newly independent former colonies in the Third World, which had gradually won their freedom, had to be brought to heel and controlled - for they possessed the natural and human resources necessary for expansion under this new global empire.

After suffering the ravages of colonialism, and after the hard struggle for liberation, nations of the African continent in

particular were left with devastated and moribund economies which placed them at the mercy of vultures in the shape of the big international banks and financial institutions.

These banks and institutions loaned enormous sums at predatory interest rates, making it impossible for the Third World to rebuild, develop and repay their loans at the same time.

It had to be one or the other.

Things reached a crisis in the mid 1980's when, to stave off the prospect of a world depression due to the bad debts incurred by Third World countries, the IMF and WB stepped in and took over responsibility for those debts from the big private banks like Barclays, Credit Lyons, Chase Manhattan, etc., which were threatened with collapse.

It was a move which put the IMF and WB into an unassailable position of power which they have never relinquished since.

Since that time nearly 70 countries in the world have been forced to adopt Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP's) designed and developed by the IMF and WB. These SAPs are intended to restructure the economies of said nations in order to best meet the repayment needs of aid or loans provided by the First World, represented by the IMF and WB.

This requires them to impose severe austerity programs on their already beleaguered economies, which translates into the eradication of much needed public spending on social programs in health, education, transport, agriculture, and so on.

These austerity programs pave the way for transnational corporations, always looking to reduce costs and access cheap sources of raw materials, to come in and set up their manufacturing operations, driving people, including children in many cases, from the land into factories, where they are forced to labour long hours under horrendous conditions for starvation wages.

This serves two purposes: it destroys the agro-economies of the Third World, which are now required to import their food

Things reached a crisis in the mid 1980's when, to stave off the prospect of a world depression due to the bad debts incurred by Third World countries, the IMF and WB stepped in and took over responsibility for those debts from the big private banks like Barclays, Credit Lyons, Chase Manhattan, etc., which were threatened with collapse.

from the First World, and ensures the outward flow of wealth to First World transnational corporations and their international investors.

The case of Nigeria is typical. Today, life expectancy in this oil-rich, aid-dependent nation is 47 years for males and 52 years for females. Of a population of 120 million, 89 million people live on less than a dollar a day, this despite the fact that the Niger Delta region contains large deposits of oil.

One IMF loan of \$12 billion has become a continuous unpaid debt of \$27 billion.

The people of Nigeria do not see a dollar of the wealth produced by their oil, which flows unchecked out of their country into the pockets of a consortium of British, Dutch and U.S. oil companies. Theirs are lives reduced to a daily struggle for survival.

Six million children under the age of 5 die each year in the Third World as a whole due to hunger and preventable disease.

This year by year genocide against the children of the poor is the net result of the IMF and World Bank's rape and theft of the Third World's natural and human resources on behalf of the ruling classes in the First World.

It is imperialism by any other name, soft imperialism which arrives disguised as aid but with its real aim indistinguishable to that of the hard imperialism we see now in Iraq with military occupation.

Both are embarked upon in order to feed the insatiable appetite of the free market capitalist powers.

Both spell misery and death for millions.

Both constitute an evil which is inimical to human progress.

John Wight is a member of Solidarity



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web review

Henry McCubbin

No sooner do I read that a new web site has appeared with the URL constitutionalcommission.org than Gordon Brown publishes a green paper titled "The Governance of Britain" promising a debate on the possibility of a written British constitution and Bill of Rights and granting Parliament the right to vote on legislation arising from international agreements such as the recently agreed EU amending treaty.

What is going on? Who would have thought, even one year ago that Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland would be governed by executives containing nationalists? The curse of Mr Blair's sofa extended far and wide such that his cosy behind the scenes dealing with the devolved executives, when they were run by Labour, has brought into relief imperfections in the constitutional settlement.

A recent front page in the "The Herald" illustrates the point with the headline 'Warning to Labour MPs over 'wrecking the Union' The strong words from Jack Straw, Westminster's Justice Secretary in charge of constitutional matters, who warned his English parliamentary colleagues that they were on "very dangerous ground" illustrate alarm that not only are David Cameron's Conservatives raising the so-called English Question early into a Brown premiership but so are Labour MPs south of the border. What is more is that it is a devilishly difficult problem to solve.

In England the problem is perceived to be the unfairness of Scottish MPs voting on purely English matters which are now

devolved. Plus the fact that the so called Barnett Formula, which divides tax revenues within the UK between the devolved nations is perceived to be unfair. In Scotland the SNP has undoubtedly attracted the radicals on which Labour has historically relied for its old majorities simply because New Labour has been ignoring these radicals' demands in order to woo the voters in England who will now be the ones most likely to be whipped up by the Daily Mail and Telegraph over what they perceive as an unfair distribution of mainly English tax revenues.

Brown's response to his "Gordian" knot is nothing more than a smoke screen to be found at number-10.gov.uk/output/Page12274.asp. Elements of his plan to deliver a new "constitutional settlement" for Britain have been designed to ensure that he cannot be accused of being a Scottish prime minister influencing and controlling key parts of the English establishment, ranging from the Church of England to senior positions in England's ancient seats of learning. One also has to question New Labour's past record on openness and reform within the party. The party's Policy Forums are designed to be held behind closed doors. No votes are taken and the outcomes are invariably identical to the executive paper they started discussions on. The so called Warwick agreement with the trade unions is a case in point. Agreed to get money from the unions before the 2005 election and buried without even a decent funeral after the elections.

For sight of the full green paper click on pm.gov.uk/files/pdf/TGoB_print.pdf



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

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Kick Up The Tabloids

WHEN GLASWEGIANS ATTACK

This column does not normally come out in favour of the USA, but I do have to say that any country where Paris Hilton can be sent to jail must be doing something right. For the rest of this article, and for every month hereafter, this column is to follow the lead of American cable channel MSN TV and declare itself a Paris Hilton-free zone.

Besides, there's plenty of proper news. We eventually saw the end of Tony Blair's premiership. Not since the Queen Mother's funeral have we seen such a ridiculously long-drawn-out farewell. Channel-hopping between Queen Tony's exit on BBC1 and Wimbledon on BBC2, I could not help but come to the conclusion that Blair is the Tim Henman of politics. He looked very promising ten years ago, and had the whole of the nation behind him at the time. Now it's all turned into a sad and sorry anti-climax. Both have also had to deal with a geeky awkward Scottish guy wanting to take their place.

No sooner had Gordon Brown settled into the new job than he was hit by the major crisis of the twin failed bombings in London and Glasgow. I don't know what it is about modern terrorists, but they appear to lack the professionalism they had in the 1970's. I blame reality TV and Heat magazine. Everyone thinks they can be a celebrity or a terrorist. Take Paris Hilton, for example. (I thought you weren't going to mention Paris Hilton - ed)

While the attack at Glasgow Airport came as a shock to most of the nation, there were some amongst who felt that it was an accident waiting to happen. If you build an airport only two miles outside Paisley, it's a miracle it's taken over thirty years for some mental bampot to drive a car into the front of it. Hundreds of stunned Glaswegian travellers watched in horror as the car ended only feet away from tragedy. "Christ almighty! Another ten yards and he'd have hit the duty-free shop!"

Many were impressed by the behaviour of have-a-go hero John Smeaton who wrestled the burning would-be bomber to the ground. Taxi driver Alex McIlveen joined in, later claiming on the front page of the Daily Record "I kicked terrorist so hard in the balls that I tore a tendon in my foot." To me this just shows the unacceptable level of violence which we put up with in the West of Scotland. Only in Glasgow is being on fire no protection against getting attacked.

Smeaton was suddenly elevated to near-celebrity status with his own website receiving so many hits in less than a week, that he has now received on-line pledges, promising him a total 1,000 free pints at his local pub. I don't know about any of you, but jumping on a human fireball strikes me as a rather extreme way of working up a thirst. Expect pictures of this mammoth piss-up to receive publicity of Paris Hilton-sized proportions (This Paris Hilton nonsense is going too far - ed)

As the case unravelled, the public were shocked and stunned to find out that the terror gang were all employed in the Healthy Service. "How" we cried "can people intent on mass murder be employed by the NHS?" Harold Shipman was employed by the NHS and he still boasts more British victims than al Qaeda.

The Metropolitan Police immediately took charge of the investigation, with the result that any Brazilians working in the Health Service immediately bought bullet-proof vests.

Then, after four days of relentless worldwide press coverage of the he attack on the burning terrorist, and with little warning, Scottish BBC reporter Alan Johnston was freed after 114 days of captivity in Gaza. Presumably having read the papers, his kidnappers suddenly realised how psychopathically violent many Scottish people are and let him go for their own safety.

And finally, as trailed in a previous edition of this column, Edinburgh University has stripped Robert Mugabe of his honorary degree. And, as predicted, it has swiftly put an end to his appalling behaviour. Either that or it just hasn't been reported in the papers. After all, there's been a lot happening. Paris Hilton has been to jail (That's enough Paris Hilton -ed)

Vladimir McTavish (aka Paul Sneddon), is performing A Scottish History of the World throughout the Edinburgh Fringe at The Stand Comedy Club from Friday 3rd to Sunday 26th August (Except Mon 6th & 13th) at 7.45 pm

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