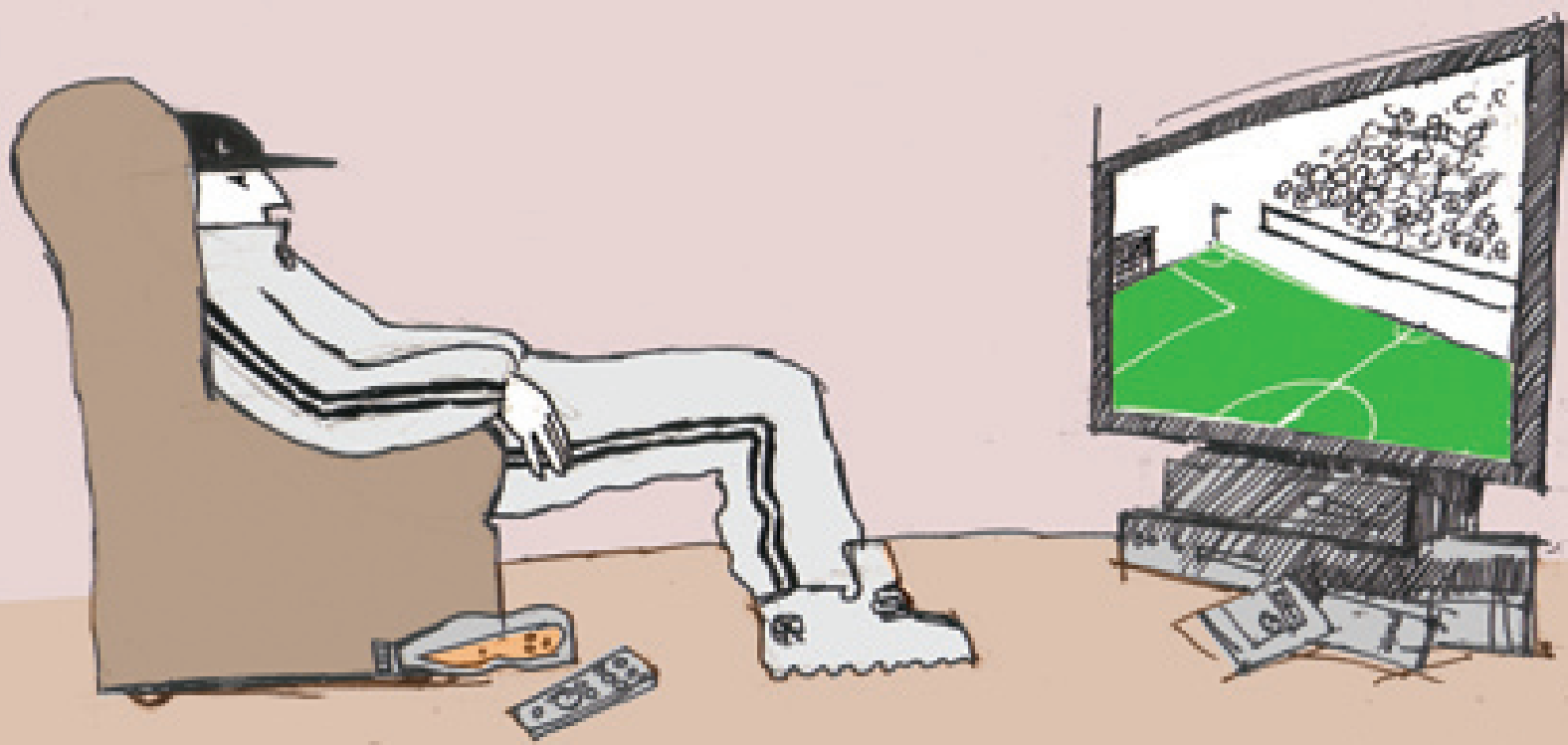


on the sidelines



why doesn't the left talk about sport?

Contents

Comment	2	Time for change	14
The promise of Scottish sport.	4	Elaine C Smith	
Grant Jarvie		Wales after Britain?	16
The people's game	7	Leanne Woods	
Sean Hamil and Stephen Morrow		Just a transistion?	18
the Murray effect..	10	Eurig Scandrett	
Hugh MacDonald		The death of reason	19
The free market will not make us fit	12	Elle Matheuse	
Robin McAlpine		Is poverty history yet?	20
		Tim Gee	

Comment

When we were choosing the theme for this issue of the Scottish Left Review we assumed that this summer would be marked by a triumphant-feeling SNP looking forward to a rest after a very satisfying year and a confused and demoralised Labour Party happy to have time to regroup. So we thought that with the European Football Championship, the Olympics and a Scot making waves at Wimbledon it might be a good time to look at the issue of sport and its relationship to the left in Scotland.

What we didn't expect was that we would end up with quite so many games being played in the political realm. First of all we have the spectacle of Wendy Alexander marching off the field rather petulantly. This wasn't really a case of a red card or even two yellows (although many spectators may well feel she did enough during the game to merit at least a second yellow), it was more a matter of accumulated penalty points over the course of a season (although there are those who might be inclined to feel that it is in fact more a case of a player so frustrated with their own performance that they decide to walk irrespective of the effect on the team). Then we get what can surely only be seen as the own goal of Labour inflicting upon itself a by-election of the worst possible kind; one in the heartlands which brings no plaudits if they win but will result in disaster if they lose. Whatever the reasons precipitating this poll (and many observers are more than a little surprised that the party didn't do everything in its power to avoid another election at this delicate time) it has at least eclipsed the leadership issue as the biggest problem facing Labour in Scotland this year. And then when it seemed that we had got more than enough action for one close season Nicol Stephen decides to depart the field for the Lib Dems. It may just be that his timing was dictated by the desire to have an election for his replacement underneath the cover of the noise and heat of the Labour contest, but it certainly makes for a rapid period of transition in Scotland.

The Glasgow East by-election is about appearance. And the appearances are that Scottish Labour is to be sacrificed to London Labour (or perhaps to Fife Labour depending on who you think did the arm-twisting)

What does it all mean for Scottish politics, and in particular for the left? Perhaps the first thing to say is that as usual no-one seems to be seeing this as a 'political' matter in the sense of an ideological shift left or right. In the acres of media coverage and comment, we have heard only analysis of where the constitutional positioning of the leadership candidates places them on the governmental axis between the Edinburgh and London. This is of course significant – will the momentum towards greater devolution be lost in the transition? But it is only part of the story. As usual, the actual political and policy approach of the changeover is not being discussed.

There now appear to be three candidates (we rule out Charlie Gordon on the basis of the sheer brass neck of someone who narrowly avoided a criminal enquiry wishing to be redeemed as a national leader within what feels like minutes) – Iain Gray, Andy Kerr and Cathy Jamieson. Both Andy Kerr (who may not go for the job) and Cathy Jamieson are what might be considered continuity candidates. Not continuity with Wendy, but continuity with what Scottish Labour has been doing since devolution. They both basically stand for the limited-but-competent approach to running Scotland and are culturally very much of the 'four decade' labour movement in Scotland which still sees a Labour-leaning majority as somehow inherent to Scotland. Iain Gray is a different matter. He is an

Edinburgh MSP and so has some cultural differences. But above all he appears to be much closer to the London end of the axis, having been very quickly offered a job in the Treasury when he lost his seat in 2003. Gray would probably be more devo-sceptic and closer to the MPs than would either of the other two.

This doesn't make for a phenomenal amount of political difference. None of the three are strongly 'New' Labour and none retains any radicalism (a fact that has caused many in

Direction, location, destination and
a compass 22

Willie Sullivan

Reviews 24

Kick Up The Tabloids..... 27

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the left to feel bitter towards Jamieson who once did – and was in fact on the Editorial Board of the Scottish Left Review from its inception until she attained ministerial office). But it seems likely that Gray may be more inclined to import UK policies to Scotland than the other two and would almost certainly be less inclined to make the case for more powers for the Parliament. There is very little likelihood that the next leader will be able to implement any policies (to go back to the sporting analogy, this is very much a holding role) but he or she might well have some effect over the direction of the party. At best they might make possible a new direction for the next leader. But it is almost certainly too early for that degree of optimism.

The Lib Dem leader, on the other hand, might have an actual impact in the next three years. It is not that they are still seen as the ‘deal-makers’ – they may have destroyed that role for a generation by demonstrating that they can’t actually function as ‘deal-breakers’. It’s about whether they choose to act strategically or as an opposition. Again, it is probably too early to know for sure, but there are some very broad general indications; the more closely an individual candidate was involved with the old coalition Executive, the more they are likely to see themselves as an opposition to the SNP. That may simply be a matter of having had the SNP act as an opposition to them, but it is probably also something cultural in which the Lib Dems came to see themselves as a part of the ‘establishment’ alongside the Labour Party, and came also to see the SNP as the outsiders. A Tavish Scott-lead Lib Dem group might be more likely to try to obstruct anything radical the Scottish Government proposes.

These are substantive changes; the Glasgow East by-election is much more about appearance. And the appearances are that Scottish Labour is to be sacrificed to London Labour (or perhaps to Fife Labour depending on who you think did the arm-twisting). Margaret Curran was a serious contender for Labour leader (though perhaps not quite as serious as some suggest) and is certainly one of Labour’s strongest performers in the Scottish Parliament. Labour is not over-endowed with quality personnel and the fact that the Scottish group of MSPs is to be weakened for the sole purpose of trying to prevent embarrassment for Gordon Brown probably tells us more about the state of Scottish

Labour than the election campaign will. This is a party which doesn’t know if it can win one of its safest seats and which for the sake of appearances (we sometimes forget Brown still has a large majority and doesn’t need the vote) will weaken Labour’s position in Scotland. That Labour now probably faces a Scottish Parliamentary by-election (although they may choose to simply tough it out for three years and hope there is no fallout) seems to be a secondary concern, even though this is a legislature in which every vote counts. While some people are trying to read the runes of the implications of the extent of devolution within Labour by guessing at the attitudes of its future leader, observing the plight of someone who now won’t become leader actually tells us an awfully lot more.

The game is changing in Scotland, and it matters. Again and again in this issue we come back to the point that we need to have a government in Scotland which is willing to address problems of participation in sport by intervention and not simply contracting the problem out to consultants who advise to leave it to the private sector. This is a crucial dividing line in the UK labour movement and until now it has run across the border. As this summer madness kicks off for real, it looks like we already have a London 1 Scotland 0 scoreline. ■

Correction - Neil Davidson

In the last issue of the Scottish Left Review (Issue 46) we wrongly ascribed the review of Argyll, 1730-1850 to Iain Davidson. It should have been ascribed to Neil Davidson.

the promise of scottish sport

Grant Jarvie looks at Scotland's place in the world of sport and how we can use sport in Scotland to dramatically change our society

Scotland has given a lot to the world of sport and in sports such as curling, bowls, golf and shinty it has the right to claim cultural ownership of four sports. As early as the 1920s the social credit movement recognised the social role that sport had to play in terms of social welfare, education and social mobility. Scottish writers such as Neil Gunn throughout the 1930s have commented upon the in roads being made by a commercialised culture which was failing to recognise the importance of local tradition at events such as the Highland Games. The importance of sport as a form of local pride has been grasped by local authorities which saw places such as Motherwell dominate Scottish, British and indeed European competition in the 1940s and 1950s through the exploits of Motherwell Amateur Swimming and Water Polo Club, Glasgow in the 1960s and 1970s when football clubs such as Celtic and Rangers won European competitions by fielding teams hewn out of exploits of local inner city housing schemes and towns such as Kingussie which throughout the 1990s dominated national shinty.

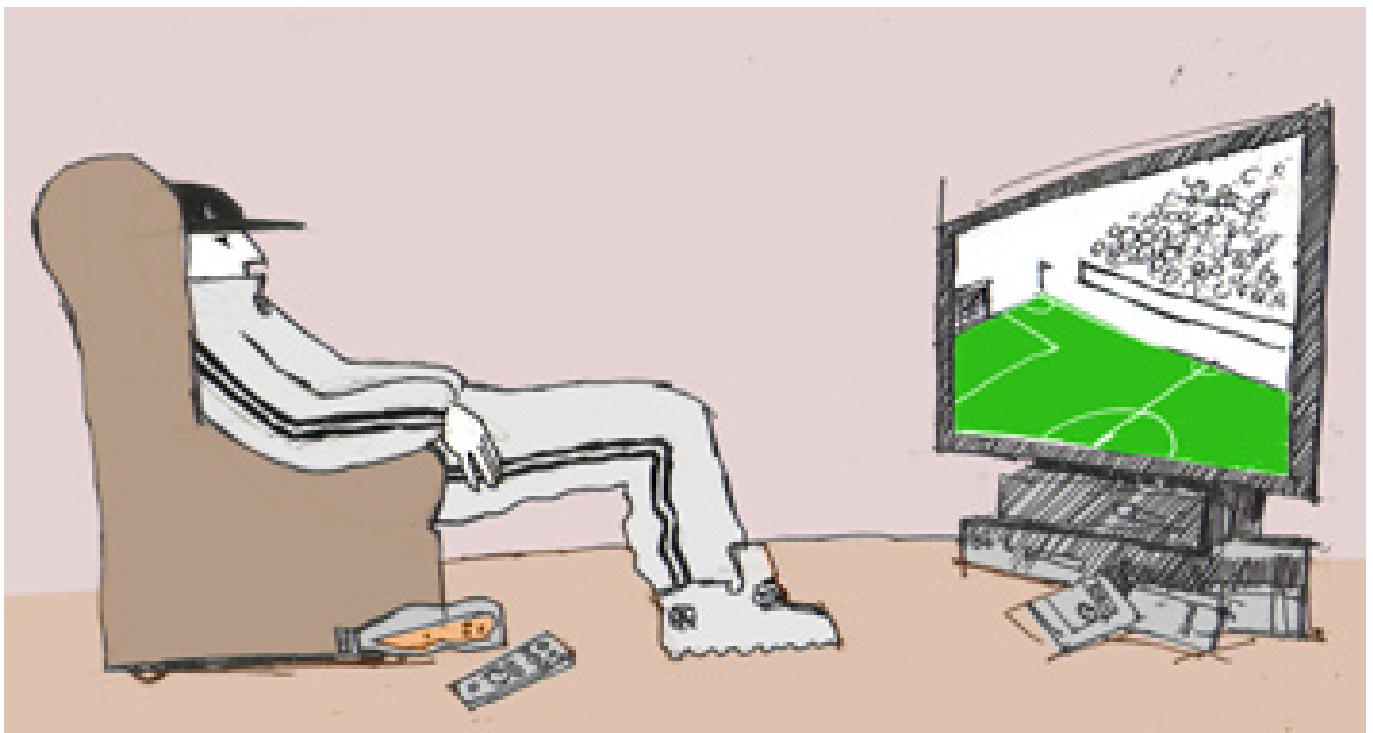
With the 2014 Commonwealth Games being awarded to Glasgow the opportunity exists to build upon Scottish medal winning success which goes back to at least 1930 when nine medals were won by Scots in the first Hamilton Commonwealth Games held in Canada. In winning a silver medal for golf in the 1900 Paris Olympic Games Walter Rutherford became the first Scot to win an Olympic medal. A visit to the Scottish Sports Hall of Fame (www.sshf.co.uk) provides an insight into Scots who have performed on the world stage. The 2006 success of athletes such as Richard Ramsay, only the second Scot in 100 years to win the US Amateur Golf championships is testament to the contemporary role of specialist higher education institutions which understand the promise and possibilities of sport and education to give individuals a positive start in life.

The traditional framework for sports policy in a devolved Scotland has been built on the back of a horizontal axis of health and well-being and the importance of hosting major sporting events and a vertical axis of sports participation and sports performance. The essence of any framework for sports policy that ignores the capacity of education and sport to improve life chances for Scots or ignores the capacity of sport to win friends for Scotland through international development misses an opportunity of realising the national dream.

What is being suggested here is that Scotland should grasp the opportunity to be at the forefront of practical sports policies that recognises that sport has helped to: change some people's lives; symbolize change but also contribute to broader sustainable change and work across societies and agencies to help or attempt make the world a better place.

Some of the richest and poorest sectors of society identify with forms of sport in different ways. Contemporary patterns of sports participation in Scotland are illustrative of the fact that sport in Scotland is socially differentiated. Arguably football is the national sport. It's popularity amongst young boys and increasingly girls in Scotland should not be underestimated. In 2002, Scottish football clubs released 350 players. That was 30 per cent of the workforce with the most common age being that of 19. The following example is not atypical of the youthful cultural patriot who wanted to live the dream of Scottish football and found out that he was being released from a premier professional football league club? His mother worrying about the effect this would have on her son said:

'I would have done anything for him not to experience the hurt, but I didn't have a choice because all he has ever



wanted to be is a footballer. I wouldn't mind my son being a footballer, but it would be better if he was one with letters after his name and educational qualifications in his pocket'

Agents of education through sport might reflect upon a system which itself has been critically reviewed but remains internationally respected. A fact acknowledged by the recent Horizons Taskforce which reported in June 2008 on the potential new relationship between Universities and Government. The consultative report acknowledges the role that Universities have to play in developing sport. The partnership of education through sport can really make a difference to the quality of life in Scotland. Yet an effective partnership in action is still in the making. A natural sustainable pathway from education and sport provision from school through further and higher education is a proven winner. It is important not to let down or forget the boy or girl who wanted to live the Scottish dream but look after them better, help to create the conditions to let the relationship of education through sport thrive - that would truly be a partnership in action worth trusting and striving for.

Scotland are World Football Champions having won the World Cup in 2007 and are preparing to defend the World Crown in December 2008. For many Scots the thought of winning the World Cup is but a dream. To be ranked number one in the world ahead of the likes of Portugal not to mention England is not fiction but reality. The first Homeless World Cup took place in July 2003 in Austria. Eighteen countries participated and teams were completely formed by homeless people or by people making their income on selling street papers. There were 109 games played in front of more than 20,000 spectators. The 2008 Homeless World Cup will be staged in Melbourne with the 2009 tournament having been awarded to Italy. Seventy seven per cent of players involved have said that playing certainly changed their lives. Scotland won the tournament in 2007 defeating Poland 9-3 in the final. At the time Scottish Coach David Duke commented that "After changing my own life through football and the Homeless World Cup it is just great that I can help others do the same. To take Scotland to victory is just superb."

Very few sports policies in Scotland have been specifically associated with addressing issues of poverty in Scotland and yet it might be suggested that sport might develop a sustained evidence based argument about the contribution that it can make. Many examples from around the world might be given. In 2000 the former World Boxing Champion Jim Watt returned to Possilpark in Glasgow to open the then Possilpark Millennium Centre Sports Complex and suggested to youngsters that 'sport could provide a way out of the poverty trap'. A 2003 survey enquiring into the motivations behind Kenyan women runners recorded that the primary motive was money (48 per cent). One former Kenyan male runner Stephen Cherono added 'an athlete in Kenya runs to escape poverty and I fight to survive'.

The social challenge should not detract from the fact that increasing competition within some of the poorest areas of the world often depletes social and human capital and leaves its potential fragmented. The informal sector sometimes dissolves self-help networks and solidarities essential to the survival of the very poor and it is often women and children who are the most vulnerable. For example an NGO worker in Haiti, describes the ultimate logic of neo-liberal individualism in a context of absolute immiseration:

'Now everything is for sale. The women used to receive you with hospitality, give you coffee, share all that she has in her home. I could go get a plate of food at a neighbour's house; a child could get a coconut at her godmother's, two mangoes at another aunt's. But these acts of solidarity are disappearing with the growth of poverty. Now when you arrive somewhere, either the women offers to sell you a cup of coffee or she has no coffee at all. The tradition of mutual giving that allowed us to help each other and survive- this is all being lost'

The key accountable agents for social welfare at the local level have been local authorities. The advent of free swimming schemes has been a selective rather than a universal policy across all local Authorities. Scotland unlike the Finns does not have a legislative Sports Act which enshrines a minimum level of provision and entitlement in every town and therefore local provision is very much left to the capacity of different local authorities to provide and they do so differentially. There remain issues concerning the governance of local sport in Scotland. The statutory position is that local authorities are required to ensure adequate provision of facilities for the inhabitants of their area for recreational, sporting, cultural and social activities. It is for each local authority to determine what is "adequate provision". Traditionally these services have been delivered by local authority departments of leisure services. Councils retain control of the process through the normal system of committees of elected members. At least 20 of the 32 Scottish local authorities have surrendered that control by hiving off the delivery of some or all leisure, sport and culture services to Trusts. The purpose of setting up Leisure Trusts is to make savings based on 95 per cent national non-domestic rates relief and savings on VAT. Trusts are also able to attract external grant aid from sources not available to Councils. Trusts are normally Charitable Leisure Companies limited by guarantee and not having share capital. Council facilities are leased to the Trust for up to 25 years.

Why is this a matter of concern? Firstly, most of the publicly owned sports facilities in the country are now being managed by unelected bodies. This has received little publicity and it is highly unlikely that the average person knows who the Board members are or how they came to be appointed. Audit Scotland (2008) has reported that Councils invest substantial sums on sports facilities. Between 2002 and 2007 Councils invested £385 million of capital expenditure on recreation, sport and parks. This is in addition to an average annual revenue expenditure of £511 million. It seems extraordinary that having invested heavily Councils hand over the facilities to bodies which, under Charities legislation, they cannot control. Secondly, this process of transferring responsibility from elected Councils to unelected Trusts has happened without any national debate or Government approval. Thirdly, in the absence of co-ordinating machinery, the amount spent on sport varies markedly between local authorities. In 2005-2006 Edinburgh spent £36 per head of population compared to Glasgow's £118. There is no national strategy to control local or direct expenditure on local sport.

The supporters of trusts argue that they are best placed to get the best value for the public pound while opponents argue that key public services in sport are left to the market place. The issue for Scotland as a whole is that local authorities act differently, have different priorities and therefore the opportunity to narrow the gap between rich and poor through education and sport is left to chance and the market.

There is one further aspect of local democracy that is worth mentioning and that is the relationship between sport and civil renewal. Sports participation in Scotland tends to get headline news because sports participation is viewed as being important in health terms and yet the civil renewal argument is just as compelling. It is an argument that should have a particular resonance for volunteers and non-governmental organisations. A 2005 Department of Culture Media and Sport Report which included Scotland in the aggregate UK data, demonstrated the part played by sports participation and organisation as being a catalyst for civil renewal. Scotland lies below many European Countries in the league table of sports participation. Membership of sports clubs appeared to have a number of beneficial impacts, members were more likely than non-members to vote, contact an official and sign a petition. Countries with high levels of sports participation tended to have higher levels of social and institutional trust.

The correlations were substantial for the level of sports participation and levels of social trust. Life satisfaction was also strong although perhaps not as significant. Countries with high levels of membership of sports groups tended to have high levels of membership of cultural and social groups, suggesting that participation was cumulative. In short membership and participation of sports clubs is associated with being more satisfied with life, more trusting, more sociable, healthier and more positive towards state institutions. Sports members also tend to have slightly more liberal views about immigration.

The opportunity for Scotland to assist other parts of the world through sport remains an under-resourced and under-valued facet of sports provision in Scotland. Scotland does not have the equivalent of Denmark's International Sport and Culture Association (ISCA) or a specific source of Scottish funding that matches UK Sports International Development Assistance Programme. The Scandinavians and to a lesser extent the Dutch have for some time financially supported and encouraged the capacity of sport to influence relationships with communities and non-governmental organisations. The Norway Cup has taken place every year since 1972. It is one of the world's largest football tournaments for children. Every year more than 25,000 kids play in the Norway Cup. The aim of the tournament is to create bonds between children and nations - particularly poorer areas of the world. The Minister of International Development in Norway in recognising the role that such a projects play recently stated that 'producing internationalism and co-operation between Norway and many other countries such as Brazil, Kenya, Palestine is important to us and sport can help us do this'.

However such a message is just as important within Scotland in terms of improving life chances through sport. Improving life chances requires a co-ordinated effort and as such any contribution that education through sport can make must also build upon a wider coalition of sustained support for social and progressive policies. It requires harnessing a strong political narrative and action plan that fits with many people's intuitive understanding that life should not be determined by socio-economic position and that people do have choices, whilst drawing attention to the fact that some people and places face greater risks and more limited opportunities. Equalising life chances and focusing on areas such as poverty should sit together as part of a vision for a better society. In part the promise and possibilities of education through sport are encapsulated in the words of the former Olympic and Commonwealth athlete

Kip Keino (Interview-with the author 5th February 2007):

'I believe in this world that sport is one of the tools that can unite youth- sport is something different from fighting in war and it can make a difference- we can change this world by using sport as a tool. I've run a lot for water charities and children's charities. I believe we share in this world with members of our society who are less fortunate. This is important. We came to this world with nothing and we leave this world with nothing. So we can be able to make a better world for those who need assistance'

Listen also to the likes of Nelson Mandela or Kofi Annan talking of the role of sport in International Development. The former United Nations Secretary General in 2005 noted the potential of sport to effectively convey humanitarian messages, help to improve the quality of people's lives while helping to promote peace and reconciliation (www.un.org/sport2005/index.html). It is precisely this type of thinking that Scotland needs to engage with and incorporate further within an evolving framework for sports policy which at present is not international enough. Recent events such as the Commonwealth Games Sports Development Conferences show what can be achieved but such work needs to be firmly embedded within day to day sports policy and not simply around major sports events.

There is no single agent or group that can carry the hopes of humanity but there are many points of engagement through sport that offer good causes for optimism that things can get better. Historically the power of education and sport in Scotland has been a tried and tested avenue of social mobility and while we need to acknowledge that a changing Scotland provides different challenges the power of education through sport to make a difference to people's lives remains a very real resource of hope for many. The promise and possibility of sport being able to meet national targets is perhaps the wrong way to approach bringing about real change but even if it were it may be more easily realised if sport not only harnessed the resources and possibilities within the current portfolio in which sport is placed but also the education portfolio. Education through sport in Scotland is important because it can be a symbol of democratic change, it can promote internationality, it can contribute to different ideas of community, it is central to employability but it can do all of this within a context that everyone has the right to education and sport. Education in Scotland has historically always been associated with preparing people for life as equal citizens in a common culture of community and sport has the potential to contribute to this way of life.

The late novelist Susan Sontag once said about the novel that any novel worth reading is an education of the heart, it enlarges your sense of human possibilities and what human nature can be. She was a fervent believer in the capacity of art to delight, to inform and transform the world in which we live in. Education through sport is the jewel in Scottish sports policy and without its capacity recognised the promise of Scottish sport remains just that a promise but the possibilities are tangibly close. The creation of Scotland's University for Sporting Excellence at the University of Stirling is but one progressive, radical development that provides a real opportunity to make a difference through harnessing the combined capacity of education and sport. ■

Grant Jarvie is Deputy Principal and Professor of Sport at the University of Stirling.

the people's game?

Sean Hamil and Stephen Morrow examine the current structure of football clubs within the UK and question whether or not this helps these clubs fulfil their wider social and cultural obligations.

Football clubs are ostensibly uncomplicated organisations: they exist to facilitate participation in, and the spectating of, organised football. But beyond this plain statement there is a complex and contested debate about the objectives and purpose of these clubs. In England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland most football clubs are constituted as private limited companies with private shareholders. Yet they rarely make a profit their owners seeming more intent on 'utility' maximisation and despite a huge increase in revenues over the last 15 years the football industry remains financially unstable. In fact clubs are effectively regarded as social and cultural institutions by their supporters. This raises the question: if football clubs are effectively not-for-profit institutions then would it not be more appropriate to structure them as such, as explicitly not-for-profit community benefit mutually owned organisations controlled by their supporters?

A review of the recent financial history of the Scottish Premier League is chastening reading for anyone who believes that Scottish football operates according to the profit-maximising principles of market economic theory. Following combined pre-tax losses by the 12 SPL clubs of -£63m in 2001/2002, -£53m in 2002/2003, and -£14m in 2003/2004, the combined SPL clubs made their first ever combined profit in 2004/05 (£3m) since the league's inception in the 1997/98 season. However when one delves below the surface it becomes apparent that this profit only came about because of a £15m accounting gain at Rangers, a £3.5m write-off of loans at Dunfermline, and another £2.8m write off at Dundee as part of financial re-structuring whilst the club was in financial administration having gone bankrupt. Of the 12 clubs in the league at the time only Dundee (debt write-off) Dunfermline (debt write-off), Hibernian (in part helped by shrewd transfer policy), Motherwell (debt write off in previous year – as part of a re-structuring initiated whilst in administration having become bankrupt - but now making small profit) and Rangers (accounting gain) made a profit. In 2005/2006 the clubs again returned to the well-established pattern of a pre-tax loss, of -£9.4m.

As in England financial turnover has increased dramatically but at most clubs any new income has been spent on players' wages. For as every football fan intuitively understands, the more clubs spend the better playing talent they are likely to attract, the more successful their team is likely to be on the field of play. In the SPL most clubs have consistently lived beyond their means through internally generated revenues. In this context clubs only survive through shedding debt through the administration process, through investors funding losses and player sales. In this context debt has ballooned since the establishment of the SPL. The debt situation is only sustainable because so much is held by connected (major/controlling shareholder) parties. Debt has been shed through the administration process, debt forgiveness by "related" parties, and new investment. And the situation is little better in England where since its inception the

combined Premier League clubs have never made a collective pre-tax profit in any one season – in 2006/2007 the 20 clubs made a combined loss of -£285m. At the end of that season the 20 Premier League clubs owed a combined £2,462m.

Essentially, the structure and organisation of football and its clubs in the UK is paradoxical. The elite level of the sport is generating record levels of revenue however the distribution is skewed towards a smaller number of super leagues and towards a few super clubs. As a result, competitive balance within elite leagues is weaker than ever before, the outcome of leagues becoming very predictable. The direction of travel is towards a self-perpetuating system – super clubs are more successful on the pitch; as a result they receive more revenue; consequently they are more successful on the field of play. Some see this as a virtuous circle which showcases the market economy at work, while to others it is practically a form of sporting fraud. However, even though the financial dominance of Celtic and Rangers allows them to dominate their domestic league, there is still an incentive for them to over-spend in order to compete more effectively in European competition. In this sporting version of the Arms Race every club is encouraged to pauperise itself. Expected shareholder return is not a phrase commonly used in this area of our economy. Instead the principal beneficiaries at the elite end of football are the workers, or at least some of them, with clubs' top players capturing more than half of clubs' revenues.

In a sense the financial pressure from wages brings us full circle. The fact that almost all professional clubs in the UK are structured as limited liability companies can be traced back to the late 19th century; this structure being motivated by a desire to protect the founders and officers of the clubs from personal liability, in the event of clubs developing unpayable debts arising from increasing player wages. Yet this decision also contributed to a division between those who own and run the clubs and those who supported them, a division which continues today.

But of course, irrespective of their corporate format, football clubs are much more than businesses – while the elite end of the game has become economic in basis, it remains social in nature. Supporters invest not only their financial capital in clubs, but also their human and emotional capital. In addition football clubs have a deep rooted identification with particular regions and hence with communities. The existing ownership model does not prevent clubs from acting as social institutions and delivering on their obligations to society. But this activity is marginal to the core objective of achieving success on the field of play.

The existing ownership model is risky both in a conventional business sense but also from a societal perspective. When any company is badly managed and/or goes into liquidation then clearly there are losers. But the financial and social consequences for a firm's employees and their families, for the

companies it trades with, for organisations in the community in which the company is located go much deeper. Given the emotional and social ties between football clubs and their stakeholders then the consequences and risks of poor financial management become even more pronounced. The fact that clubs are structured as companies compounds this problem as suddenly social institutions can be bought and sold, managed or mis-managed by individuals, whose only qualification for the role of football club owner is their wealth. The very nature of shareholder capital is the root of the problem for organisations which have a social purpose – shareholders do not create value for a business and they do not need to share in the values of the organisation. Shares are simply financial instruments which may generate financial value for an individual shareholder.

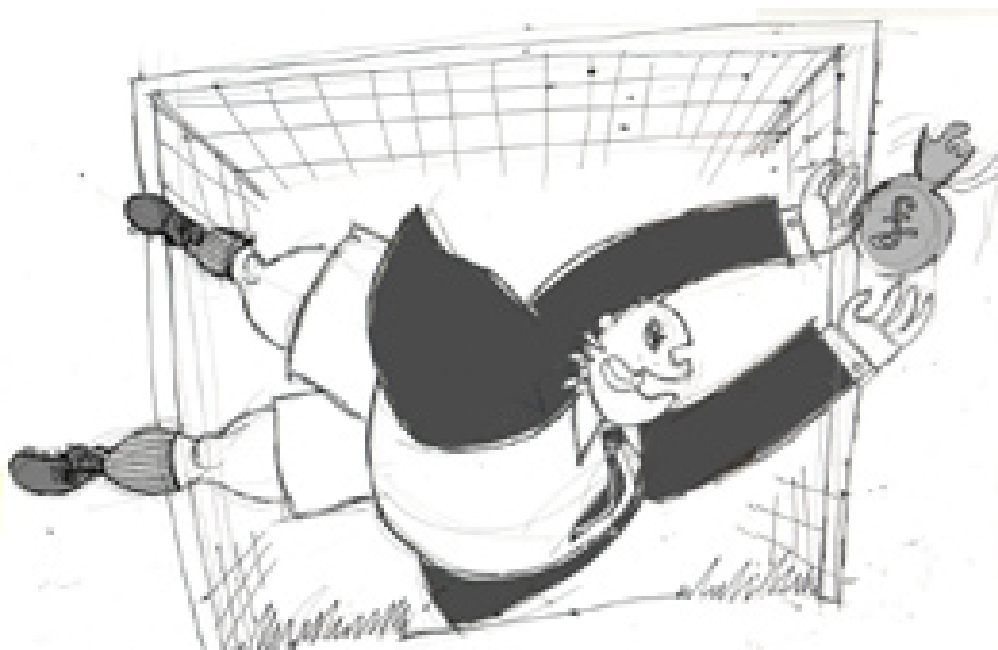
Three high profile Scottish examples illustrate the risks of the private limited company form of ownership structure. Back in season 2001/02, Gretna FC was playing its football in the Unibond League in England. By season 2007/08 it had played in the Scottish Cup final and had been promoted to the Scottish Premier League, the transformation having been brought about after the club was bought by businessman Brooks Mileson. However, after five years of financial support and football success, health problems coupled with an unwillingness and/or inability to provide continued financial support has seen that club ultimately placed into liquidation, having entered administration mid-season jeopardising the integrity of the SPL competition in the process.

Perhaps of even greater concern is the situation at Heart of Midlothian. Since the Lithuanian businessman, Vladimir Romanov, invested in the club in 2005, the club has been embroiled in constant turmoil on and off the pitch. At its 2007 financial year end, the club had a debt of £37m, but a turnover of only £10m (a record high). In the 2005/2006 season Hearts had a wages-to-turnover ratio of 97 per cent, as Mr Romanov gambled in an attempt to compete more effectively with Celtic and Rangers, a gamble that he lost. Hearts' debt is held by the Lithuanian bank, UKIO Bankas, in which Vladimir Romanov is the biggest shareholder. So while the bank earns interest on the debt, it is also clearly in a position to call in that debt. And given the club's main asset is its Tynecastle ground this raises questions about its future there should Mr Romanov decide he would like his debts repaid.

The threat to the existence of football grounds by rising debt or opportunistic owners is perhaps best illustrated by the example of Clydebank. In 1997 the owners of SFL club Clydebank, the Steedman family, sold the club's Kilbowie Park for £2.2m for development. The club became homeless and embarked on an ultimately fruitless search for a new ground. The Steedmans then sold the club to John Hall who tried to move the club first

to Galashiels and then to Dublin where he was rebuffed by the Football Association of Ireland (FAI). In 2002 Hall put the club up for sale. The SFL then took a pragmatic decision to allow Glasgow businessman Jim Ballantyne to purchase Clydebank for £185,000, change the name to Airdrie United, and move the club to Airdrieonians old ground. Airdrieonians had earlier collapsed into insolvency and exited the league; ironically to be replaced by Gretna. Essentially Jim Ballantyne was able to buy, debt free, a merchandisable "franchise" SFL league place, much more cheaply than it would have cost to buy the original Airdrieonians. In all of this the biggest losers were the Clydebank fans. With the support of the Supporters Direct organisation, the Clydebank supporters had in fact formed a co-operative, or supporters trust, called United Clydebank Supporters (UCS) as a vehicle to buy the club themselves, and had raised £170,000, but were outbid. They then went on to form a new fans-owned Clydebank as a junior club who now ground share in Duntocher.

What these examples illustrate is that the limited liability structure of ownership for a football clubs allows for the potential expropriation by a large or majority investor but more importantly of its other stakeholders too. While expropriation is usually thought of in terms of cash flows, the disappearance of a social and cultural institution which has been an integral part of a community might be considered the ultimate expropriation by many of a football club's stakeholders. More generally, the conventional limited liability model was never designed for relatively small-scale community-based enterprises like



football clubs. In truth the conventional limited liability company only makes sense to many football club stakeholders if all / any profits are immediately ploughed back into the club.

Interestingly other countries have quite different models of football club ownership, both for elite clubs and for community-based ones. Elsewhere many clubs continue to be just that – 'association[s] of individuals in ... way[s] that involve to some degree the factors of free choice, permanence, corporate identity and the pursuit as a common aim of some joint interest other than the acquisition of gain, such as those provided by membership of a trade union', (Martin, J.N. (1979), *Daly's Club Law*). Almost all of the British football clubs began this way.

But while they converted to limited status, many European clubs have retained their traditional structures. The best known example is Barcelona, a club which is owned and run by its 142,000 members and which offers not just football but also other sports like basketball. Other Spanish clubs, including Athletic Bilbao and Real Madrid are similarly structured. Some German clubs, including Hamburg SV and Schalke 04 are pure member associations, while others have a corporate and an association structure, but even here the company must be controlled by the members' association.

It is important to stress that such clubs are still competitive on their respective fields of play and managed in a business-like manner. Moreover it is still possible for members' clubs to raise new investment from its members. The key difference is that the club's decision making is in the interests of its members rather than external providers of financial capital, whether those shareholders are corporate or individual. If people do not like the way a club is being run then they can vote the club leadership out. As such they provide mechanisms for inclusivity, responsible representation and good governance. Of course the challenge for clubs in the FAPL, as well as for major clubs like Celtic and Rangers, is that the financial value of these clubs has been seen to act as an effective block to supporter ownership. That said, supporters of Liverpool FC have launched a scheme – ShareLiverpoolFC – which aims to provide democratic ownership of that club by its supporters. And there are now four supporter-owned clubs in the English Football League who utilise the supporters' trust co-operative model: Stockport, Brentford, Exeter City and Notts County. In addition a number of other clubs, such as Lincoln City have significant minority shareholdings by supporters' trusts. In Scotland Clyde is 50 per cent owned by a supporters' trust.

The supporters' trust co-operative model, represents an evolutionary route to change in the ownership of football clubs via the Supporter Direct initiative (see www.supporters-direct.org). Back in 2000 the UK Government set up Supporters Direct to provide legal and practical support for supporters looking to form trusts as a vehicle to becoming actively involved in the ownership of their clubs. Founded on a democratic, one-member, one-vote principle, trusts provide a collective structure through which clubs and their communities can influence behaviour and governance within their club. All trusts are set up as Industrial and Provident societies – co-operatives. Trusts are now in place at over 140 clubs across England, Scotland & Wales, with 100 of these clubs holding equity in the club. In 13 of the clubs, the trust has a controlling shareholding, while 18 clubs have supporter representation on the board of their club, where that representative is directly elected by the trust's membership.

Challenges exist for trusts, particularly in the extent to which trusts are and can be representative of the broader grouping of supporters. The trust movement has also been criticised by some on the left for being consumed by a consumerist ethic. It is indeed the case that it is consumerist in its inspiration; that inspiration being that of the original co-operative pioneers of Rochdale, who in the 19th century banded together to combine their purchasing power for the purpose of buying better quality food at affordable prices for working people facing cruel exploitation by unscrupulous merchants. In that sense the Supporters Direct initiative transcends New Labour, having its roots in the very beginning of the Old Labour & Co-operative movement. It is also the case that the trust movement has a

business ethic, in the sense that they are concerned to manage their football clubs in a financially sustainable way; hardly a reactionary position.

Critics from within the traditional football establishment take a different line. In September 2007 former England and Leeds United manager Howard Wilkinson resigned from the Board of supporters' trust-controlled club Notts. County. His principal objection appeared to be that if a supporters' trust is in control then new private "investment" is deterred; but was another private investor owner gambling on future success what Notts County needed? A supporters' trust led coalition of investors had previously saved Notts. County from collapse during financial administration; it is worth noting that since 1992 nearly 50 out of 92 English Football Leagues' clubs have been in administration, this in a period of stellar revenue growth. In response to Wilkinson's comments one poster on a Nottingham website called for one team in Nottingham. But there was a serious undercurrent. If a private owner acquired Notts. County could a merger proposal be ruled out. Only by having supporter ownership could such an option be categorically rejected and the demise of the founding member of the founding member of the English Football League be prevented in perpetuity.

Regardless of the ownership structure, the pressure to pursue success builds in a propensity to gamble on player expenditure at any football club. Underpinning the trust model is the belief that football supporters' underlying concern to preserve their club as an institution for community benefit will be their first priority and more likely to be diligent guardians of their club's future than private owners. In doing so supporters' trusts offer an opportunity for organised collective ownership which is increasingly rare in an economy where the imposition of market mechanisms on every area of economic and social activity is becoming more pronounced. In doing so they represent a case of "back-to-the-future" with their commitment to the traditional co-operative ideals of Robert Owen and the Rochdale Pioneers. And the fact that they can compete in a market-driven environment is demonstrated by the fact that in the 2007/2008 season four English trust-owned clubs enjoyed promotion to higher leagues; Stockport County, Exeter City, AFC Wimbledon and FC United of Manchester (FCUM)

It is worth concluding with the story of FCUM, as it is an instructive example of what co-operatively owned clubs can achieve and their underlying ethos. Following the takeover of Manchester United by the Glazer family, such was the sense of disenfranchisement of one group of supporters that they decided to form a supporter-owned club, Football Club United of Manchester, or FCUM; a club they could really call their own. Since their foundation FC United have been promoted to within two divisions of the English Football League, regularly attracting crowds of 3,000, and are prospering, confidently expecting to join the Football League in the not-to-distant future. In 2006, a **Daily Mirror** journalist reported from a Manchester United press conference (Mullock, S, 16th April, 2006, "Triumph of Heart and Soul". **The Daily Mirror**) that: "...when given the chance to acknowledge the achievements of FCUM in being promoted]... Sir Alex Ferguson walked away from a press conference in some embarrassment." A shrewd man, Sir Alex could recognise the real radicals when he saw them. ■

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the murray effect

Hugh MacDonald looks at the Scottish attitude to sport and analyses ways in which we can use sport to improve the lives of all Scotland's young people.

The vision for Scottish sport is skewed by a propensity to look in the rear-view mirror. The debate on Scottish sport is constantly tugged back to the perceived failure in football. It is almost symptomatic of a national obsession. The past is glorified, the present is vilified and the future is shrouded in a dismal, Scottish haar. There has to be clear-thinking and a clear-eyed focus of what sport signifies and how it can enrich a nation in ways far beyond mundane commercialism even, almost sacrilegiously, beyond the bounds of the football pitch.

The first step is to abandon our attachment to the lies of the past. Scottish football has rarely been great. Club football enjoyed a spectacular degree of success from the middle sixties (Celtic's victory in the European Cup of 1967) to the early to mid-seventies, a period that included Rangers lifting the European Cup-Winners Cup in 1972. Aberdeen and Dundee United had isolated success in Europe in the 1980s and Rangers reached a European final this year, but these have been moments of glory, not part of a sustained pattern. The Scottish international team has never won anything, bar the Home International tournament.

The days of Ian St John, Jim Baxter and Billy McNeil were marked with repeated failures to qualify for international football. This was reversed in the seventies when the World Cup and European Championships were expanded to allow more nations to qualify for the finals. A move to make the European Championships even bigger, instigated tellingly by Gordon Smith, chief executive of the Scottish Football Association, represents the nation's best hope of qualifying for the major stage again.

Scottish football's success has been viewed through a pair of spectacles that magnifies achievement. This is a sport which we exported to the world without any significant return in silverware. We should move away from placing all our hopes in the basket case of Scottish football. There are signs that this is slowly happening with Scottish sport not being simply synonymous with the round ball game.

Football did, however, hold a huge significance for the nation. It was the only mass participation sport. Those of us brought up in the sixties were sentenced to 12 hours of football a day during the summer holidays and a couple of hours when school was in session. It was the only game in town.

Without descending into Monty Pythonesque squeals about living in a shoe box, homes were places to escape from in those days. In-house entertainment was scarce, there were no computer consoles, bedrooms were cramped and the great outdoors beckoned, sometimes with the aid of the end of a dad's toe.

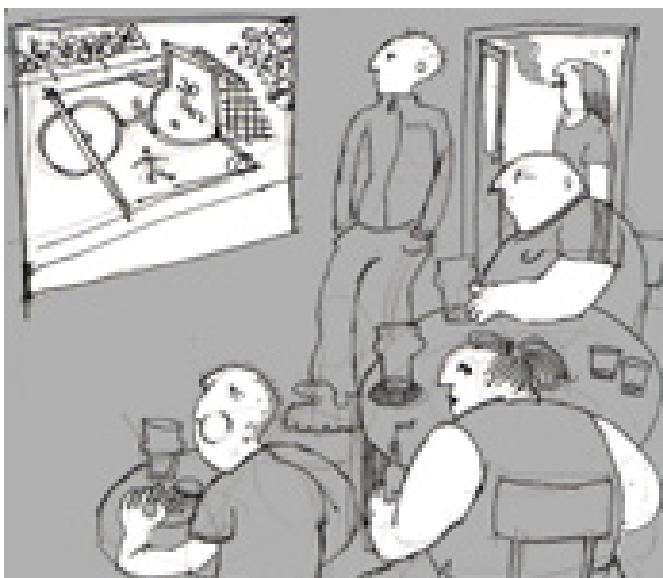
The present is different. Children have more options for their leisure time. Sport has to compete in a market place that includes past-times that range from the entertaining to the self-destructive. We must inform our vision of Scottish sport by focusing on what the nation wants and what it needs.

The truth is that Scotland now has a vibrant, burgeoning sports culture. Sport has been developed as a science and a business in university courses. Its scope has widened enormously. In Chris Hoy, for example, Scotland has one of the pound-for-pound great sportsmen of the age. Scotland, too, has world-class performers in swimming and tennis. Now, the nation had the occasional great swimmer - David Wilkie springs to mind - and at least one world class cyclist in Robert Millar, but there were individuals in a specific time. They were lone Scots. Now there is a culture of success in Scottish cycling, swimming and tennis.

The tennis phenomenon has been led by one family. A newspaper once blamed Judy Murray for all the problems in British tennis. She should have more kids, the columnist joked. But the success of Andy Murray and his brother, Jamie, has lit the fuse to an explosion of tennis in Scotland. This shows no signs of abating. Scotland has a top 10 girl in the European junior rankings and one of the best 10-year-olds in the world in Maia Lumsden from Glasgow. There is promise, too, in women's golf with the emerging Carly Booth. Scottish sport then is in better shape than the doom-mongers would suggest. It can, indeed most get better, though. This is where the vision is needed. There will always be driven individuals who want to climb to the top in sport. They should be encouraged by elite programmes. Many of these are in place although the SNP government showed a strange attitude towards the immensely successful Institute of Sport.

The pursuit of sporting excellence is vital to a nation. It can carry uncomfortable overtones of narrow-minded chauvinism but these are surely outweighed by the benefits. One Andy Murray can encourage thousands of children to take up tennis. One Gregor Tait can encourage children to jump into the pool. Few of those enthused children will make the grade as top-class professional sportsman but this is where the vision for sport in Scotland must become clear.

Sport must be part of a holistic health programme that improves the lot of every child. The opportunity to play sport must be made available to every pupil, regardless of she might live. The late and



unlamented Scottish Executive made the first tentative steps with its golf initiative that offered tuition to all children. There have been sporadic attempts to encourage participation in other sports. But an all-inclusive strategy must be formulated.

This drive presents difficulties. Should a child be forced to take part in sport as part of the curriculum? And should the competitive nature of sport be re-introduced at a young age? I give a trembling yes to both questions as I duck to avoid incoming flack. The mandatory sport need not be unduly arduous. It should be fitted to suit the individual's needs and capabilities. But sport must be presented as fun and all-inclusive. Competitive sport should also be available to those who want to participate.

These two strands - the idea of sport as something that is fun to do and also something that can satisfy the will to win - can run side by side. The success of both are dependent on two factors.

The first is the will of the nation. Health is the greatest issue facing a nation routinely described as the sick man of Europe. This illness has many symptoms, several causes. It comes from poverty, it suppurates from poor self-esteem. It involves addiction in all its varying forms and its murky origins. It would be naive, indeed, to suggest that sport could neutralise the heroin epidemic that sweeps this nation. It would be optimistic to propose that it would lead us from the beer belly to a nation of sculpted bodies. It may be wishful thinking to believe it could banish forever the threat of national obesity.

But it would surely make an impact on these scourges and it would certainly help us to feel better about ourselves. A dedicated national sports strategy would have its greatest triumph not in

producing another Andy Murray or even a Kenny Dalglish but in changing the habits and outlook of a constituency that has been disenfranchised by a lack of opportunity and a lack of interest in their welfare. The second factor to produce a successful national sporting plan is, of course, money. The sports portfolio has regularly been under-funded and viewed as trivial. It should be moved quickly under the umbrella of health. This is both where it belongs and where it will receive the attention it merits.

This endeavour will face many difficulties, or challenges as elite athletes like to call them. How can a sporting culture be integrated into schools where the infrastructure is poor and the morale is worse? Can the ingrained thinking of a generation of young be suddenly changed? Can sport be made attractive to most, if not everyone? Where will the money be drawn from? What suffers if we make sport such a priority?

The first step is for the Scottish government to establish how it attempts to move forward on sport. There are more than enough educated, experienced voices to advise it on all the issues. A committee should then come up with a strategy with dedicated aims. The future for sport in Scotland should be bright, focused and realistic. Let us not aim for greatness. That comes as a by-product of a well-run strategy. But let us not rest until the lot of the nation is improved, until every child has access to the sport of his or her choice. The priority must be simple. The aim is not to have a national football team that will win the World Cup. The vision must be to have a nation that is at least fit enough to jump about in frustration when the lads again come up short. ■

Hugh MacDonald is chief sports writer of The Herald



Fighting for trade-union freedom

**Justice for temporary and
agency workers**

Union rights are human rights

Bob Crow, General Secretary

John Leach, President

Phil McGarry, Ian Macintyre Scottish Organisers

the free market will not make us fit

Robin McAlpine looks at an example each of public policy approaches taken to sport in Britain and in Finland and argues that it is time people were honest about the need for intervention

What has sport got to do with the left? Let me make two quick suggestions. The first is that there is something philosophical at the heart of the relationship between people and sport which is very directly and clearly a matter for those concerned with justice. The second is that there is something structural about the relationship between government and sports policy which is a direct cause of the former. An ideological governmental position resulting in alienation of those without resources from part of their human expression, all tied up with Big-Money interests? It really is time the left spent more time talking about this. We shall look at two very simple case studies which will draw out the main issues. The first of these is the philosophy and approach taken to sports policy in Finland. The second of these is the rationale for the London bid for the 2012 Olympics.

Let's start with Finland. In the late 1960s the Finns began to shift the emphasis of their sports policy from national excellence and elite sport to community participation in sport. This was in part an echoing of the philosophies of the late-'60s Nordic countries but was a direct result of a report of the planning section of the State Sports Council in 1970. At the time Finland had one of the worst health records in Europe and in part the drive for the report was a parallel to the healthy eating initiatives which were also being pioneered. The report basically suggested that participation in sport could be seen as a key tool in promoting the wellbeing of the Finnish people. An obvious point, you might imagine, until you realise that to this day Finland is one of a tiny number of countries which have gone beyond recognising that health and an active life are linked and actually produced parliamentary legislation aiming to make some use of the link to improve health.

The report began a process which saw a Sports Act start to be developed in parliament by the mid 1970s and the first Finnish Sports Act being introduced in 1980. The second Sports Act was passed in 1999 and between these times there were a wealth of reports, initiatives and action plans. In fact, there were well over 20 major attempts to get the Finnish people to become more active. There really isn't space or need here to go over all the details of what the Finns did – an excellent summary has been produced by Ilkka Vuori, Becky Lankenau and Michael Pratt (www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=1497635) to which this article is heavily indebted.

But it all amounts to one major point – if you want to increase the rate at which people participate in sport, you have to do something. There are probably three major lessons which can be learned. The first is that you don't get a country active by putting your money into the elite. You might want to do that for all sorts of reasons, but the arguments about encouraging the population to become active because the national football

team is winning simply don't stand up. What makes people more active is an awareness of the benefit combined with access to opportunities and – crucially – awareness of the opportunities. And what do you know? That old Nordic habit of identifying a problem and doing something to fix it worked. They shifted some of their sports funding away from elite sport and towards community sport. They did it in a very decentralised way, helping local authorities to build facilities or more often to improve or improve access to existing facilities. It was also very heavily reliant on partnerships with local organisations which actually provided many of the activities (imagine, a whole strategy and no consultants...). Everything from local exercise classes being expanded and subsidised to the building of cycle-to-work routes was pursued. The fascinating thing was that the average award for a project was little more than £1,000. But the major point is that it was largely exercise for fun and for fitness. There wasn't an emphasis on improving performance (although there was nothing to prevent this) and there was no assumption that this was about competitive sport. (On the creative side, it also involved encouraging doctors to prescribe exercise – not to suggest or recommend it but to write down a regime as specific as a list of medications.)

The localism and interventionism is the second lesson – this isn't a problem that can be solved by the Anglo obsession with the free-market or the centralised initiatives beloved of Westminster in particular. But it is perhaps the third lesson which is dispiriting in Scotland. All the evaluation work suggests that the strategy worked – there was a steady increase over a decade in activity rates and now 60 per cent of Finns take exercise for at least half an hour twice a week (defined as leading to at least mild sweating and shortness of breath). But what the evaluation work also showed is that public information campaigns simply don't work. People basically already know that being fat and taking no exercise is not good for them; an advertising campaign only tells people what they know but offers them no solutions.

Compare and contrast. In the UK, the energy and exertion goes into securing showpiece events like the Olympics. The cost of bringing the Olympics to London is currently estimated to be about £10 billion. That's a lot of money – a lot of public money. The justifications of this are various, but they basically fall into three categories – economic development, social development and prestige. The problem is that none of them really holds much water.

The economic benefits are those most dubious. Studies of recent big sporting events show that basically none of them have recouped their costs in any identifiable way. It just isn't the case that throwing a three-week extravaganza and building a bunch of sports stadiums generates more income than the cost of producing them. There is also much talk of the knock-on benefits,

mainly to tourism. However, this income goes to a very small number of big operators (mainly in the hotel and leisure sector) which are typified by providing low-pay employment. There is almost always a case made for local economic development in the place where the big event is staged, usually a run-down area with lots of available land for development. The problem is that again the evidence just doesn't support the claims. In fact, usually the economic impact takes place in the city centre and the negative economic consequences (such as rapidly rising housing prices) are suffered by the local area. The jobs created are all short-term and mainly poorly paid, being as they are primarily in construction and the service sector. If the economic case is so strong, why the massive government subsidy? And where's the evidence? You would think the Millennium Dome had never happened...

The evidence on social development makes the evidence on economic development look comprehensive. There is almost nothing which really suggests that (for example) building a large and expensive velodrome in the middle of a deprived area is likely to have any effect on the rate of cycling to work. The 'legacy' effect of big games has been studied and very little can be found. Meanwhile, All the infrastructure development arguments can also be easily dismantled by again citing the case of the Millennium Dome, where it becomes clear that there is more to making a community lively and active than putting in an expensive underground system that no-one locally uses because they tend to live and work locally..

The prestige element stands up – hey look, we can run a giant event and we're an international city/country. But how much is it worth? £10 billion? And £10 billion which is being taken from community sport and projects from elsewhere around the country?

The political point in the comparison is important. The Anglos worry about people living sedentary lifestyles and they do what the Anglos always do – they give a giant financial bung to some advertising agency which then takes a proportion of that bung and passes it on to the commercial print and broadcast media which then encourages the population to go out and give another big bung to Duncan Bannatyne or whichever 'fitness entrepreneur' can 'sell' 'health' to the punters. And if it isn't the private sector which delivers, it is the public sector charging like the private sector (if in the course of a week you go for a quick swim and a short period in a municipal gym you won't end up with much change from £10). We are all consumers and we will burn off the calories we consume in a massively marketed fast food joint only if the market can make a sufficient case for us to do so. The problem is that the market is heavily loaded. The thing about exercise is that it isn't inherently profitable, requiring only the expenditure of human energy. If two people were to buy a £1.99 Frisbee and go out into a field or a park and throw it around for an hour, it would be great for their fitness. Unfortunately, the prevailing ethos of the nation makes clear that it would be economically irresponsible – there is virtually no profit so virtually no economic growth and everybody but everybody will tell you that everything else comes after economic growth.

We are all consumers and we will burn off our fast-food calories only if the market can make a sufficient case for us to do so. The problem is that exercise isn't inherently profitable.

The point is not abstract; if the marketing budget which goes into selling games consoles was put into encouraging people to fly a kite, go for a walk, kick a football about (without the need for expensive training shoes) then the UK would look like a different place. A slimmer, less wheezy one. Hypercapitalism does not want us to be fit, it wants us to be profitable. If it can think up a way to make a profit from us getting fit it'll do it. It's just easier to make a profit from making us fat. Which is why the Finns realise the need for intervention. The amounts of money needed to make a difference would make a Sony advertising executive laugh into his bonus (which would probably be larger). But it runs counter to everything our politicians believe in – the inability of government to fix anything the free market can't.

So intervention is off the cards? Of course not. This is the death-throes of upside-down capitalism where you intervene only on behalf those who could do it for themselves but never for those who can't. The best way to think of the London Olympics is to think of it as a cross between an all-you-can-eat party for the construction, hotel and corporate sponsorship industries and a virility contest for politicians. One gets the money, the other gets to tell the world how dominant they are. Put it like this; where is the free market when it comes to the Olympics bid? If it is really such a great

thing for 'the economy' why isn't 'the economy' spontaneously making the rational decision to fund the bid? Surely it is in the interests of these beneficiaries to get together and bring this international event to Britain at any cost? There can surely be no need for government subsidy?

There are two things we need to face up to (assuming we have now fully accepted that overweight people who take no exercise are not a sign of success). The first is that in the modern age, participative sport requires intervention. Everything from access to facilities to countervailing consumerist pressures mean that this is a problem that won't solve itself. Finland has shown it can be done, and has shown that it isn't necessarily expensive. The second is that our obsession with big ticket events has to be redefined. In fact, I personally think that there are lots of things we could do with a big, national bid for sporting events. We could send messages just like London, but rather than bragging about our size, we could encourage some soul-searching. We may have won the Commonwealth Games for Glasgow on the old-fashioned method, but howabout a bid for the Olympics which was based around a sponsorship ban and a requirement that every competing athlete spends one full day in a Scottish school. We could define an event as being about sport and community and not money. We wouldn't win it, but we could start a debate. There's nothing wrong with international ambition – its just a question of 'ambitious for what?'.
■

Socialists have always talked about the redistribution of wealth. But it isn't enough. We need to redistribute the things which years of unequal wealth distribution have taken away from many. The redistribution of life experience means the redistribution of health. And the redistribution of health means the redistribution of sport. It just won't happen on its own.

Robin McAlpine is Editor of the Scottish Left Review

time for change

Elaine C. Smith looks at how the Scottish political landscape is changing and makes a plea to the Left to consider the arguments for an independent Scotland

Well, it's all firing up now eh? Does Labour want a referendum? Is it London's wish or is it Wendy's or whoever is in charge by the time you read this? Who is running the show? Do the Unionist pals want a referendum too? Is the Calman Commission ever going to meet? And if they do will they have anything to talk about?

Since starting to write this piece I have had to alter my opening remarks more often than I would wish. Not that this has been due to any massive change in my personal views but because the political landscape in Scotland seems to change on a weekly if not daily basis. Initially I was asked to comment on many things from the point of view of the Left and why it should be supporting Independence in my role as Chair of the Scottish Independence Convention.

Obviously the situation facing the Independence movement with regard to Wendy Alexander's statements on a Referendum were initially relevant...but all that seems to have disappeared in a puff of smoke and as I now write the Labour Party has no leader and it appears that all the contenders are drawing lots to see who gets the short straw and yes you've guessed it...the one who does gets the Leaders job. A bit of a poisoned chalice these days...

The party structure imploding. a Scottish Parliamentary Party unable to deal with being in Opposition having believed in their divine right to rule as part of the labour hegemony in Scotland for as long as they can remember, not to mention the tension between the Westminster MP's who are out of touch with their own supporters and members, so much so that they use bullying tactics in trying to get these "Uppity Jocks" back in line. PLUS a Leader of their Party nationally that has the worst poll ratings recorded in decades. Who'd want to be Leader in that quagmire...

Of course it may all change again...the oil crisis may lessen, money will become cheap to borrow again and food prices will fall...along with a healthy serving of flying pigs!!

The confusion plays into the hands of the SNP government...no bad thing, in my book but frighteningly for the Labour movement David Cameron, and his Public School boys and girls have to do little but stand and watch. They will probably win the next election by just turning up with no one caring what they stand for or what their policies are...the people just don't want Labour anymore. Meanwhile the profiteering warmonger that is "Blair and Co." walk away rich, privileged and free.

Increasingly the political landscape in Scotland is changing, the most important change in my view is the distancing of our country from London. For the first time we are able to see what it is like to be governed by a party free of London and British considerations and constraints... and it is liberating. How envious must previous leaders here be to see the freedom exercised by the new government...able to tackle the issues that the people are most concerned about being dealt with without interference or having to slow every process down by getting permission from London. Word has it that even the Civil servants are loving it.

But do the people of this country actually know what's going on with regard to the Independence debate? With such a chronically poor coverage of the debate and politics in general in our Broadcasting media, particularly television, it is small wonder that the belief in Independence has moved little. Fear still looms large in the Scottish psyche...300 years of being told that we're not capable of running anything ourselves eventually, and a possible genetic link to the failed Darien scheme does penetrate a nation's sense of itself.

As psychologists will tell you, people prefer death to change... even when they know that change should be beneficial...there is something primal there perhaps. Given that situation, it amazes me that so many have held the belief in Independence for so long and so passionately. It has not come so easily to me as I was one of the non believers, a leftie with a belief in internationalism and a deep rooted fear of the small, the parochial and that real power and movement lay in big nations...but no more.

It appears the Labour opposition and the labour movement in general don't know what is going on? Or how to react in this post devolution Scotland with its first ever Nationalist administration? Does the Left know what to do? Many questions.... any answers?

The truth is that this is all new territory.

I would like to be able to say that the Scottish Independence convention had all the answers but that would be a lie...but we are asking the questions, we're

discussing, debating and listening to the thinkers, the intellectuals, the agitators, the believers, the sceptics and the Left are and must be a huge part of that debate.

What kind of Independence do we want if we are indeed to have it?

As I now write the Labour Party has no leader and it appears that all the contenders are drawing lots to see who gets the short straw and yes you've guessed it...the one who does gets the Leaders job. A bit of a poisoned chalice these days...

Our organisation is aligned to no particular party but it stands to reason that the more progressive parties like the SSP, the Nationalists, Solidarity and the Greens are fellow travellers because of their stated belief in Independence (though movement has been detected in the Lib Dems and Labour too). It seems a no brainer for me that the Left should support Independence because it is the radical, progressive thing to do.

In my teacher training I remember a visit to Summerhill School where the noted educationalist A.S.Neill espoused his theory that small was beautiful...that small was more powerful, more accountable and more progressive. He applied it to education where at the time he was seen as quite off message as schools were being built to house thousands of pupils at a time. He was right...as recently as last week the head of the WTO said that being a small country within the world markets was perfectly acceptable and was for the main beneficial to the country itself. It seems only right to me that staying and working closer to and for the people and culture you represent would be better on all levels.

The real answers to all our questions, lies in the hearts, the brains and souls of the peoples of Scotland. We all have to tread warily because what we hold are the hopes and aspirations of a people...a precious, delicate thing. Hence the confusion and the delicate dance that is taking place at the moment....because nobody wants to get it wrong!

It took me a long time to cross that mythical bridge that led to a belief in Independence for this country of ours.....and therefore

I understand how difficult it is for the Left and the once proud Labour and trade Union movement to do the same.

It is really hard to look at what has been fought for and won and where the activists and footsoldiers have worked so hard to then wake up one day to see that the people have moved on and that the relevance of the movement is condemned to another era.

I liken it to eras of music where the revolution of Sinatra, was followed by his replacement Elvis and then subsequently the Beatles, then the Stones, then Dylan, then Punk and on and on...the permanent revolution...yet each era still clinging to its belief that theirs was the best and the truest!!! Unfortunately in Scotland the revolution got very stuck and the rot set in.....an almost constipated state with no movement. Labour councils and MPs once so sure of their absolute power they have now become moribund and irrelevant, open to corruption and bereft of ideology.

I met a retired Lanarkshire Labour councillor who is now in his 70's when at my dad's 80th birthday party the other day... he sought me out because he wanted to talk politics...but the truth was he wanted to put his views across...he had no desire to listen.

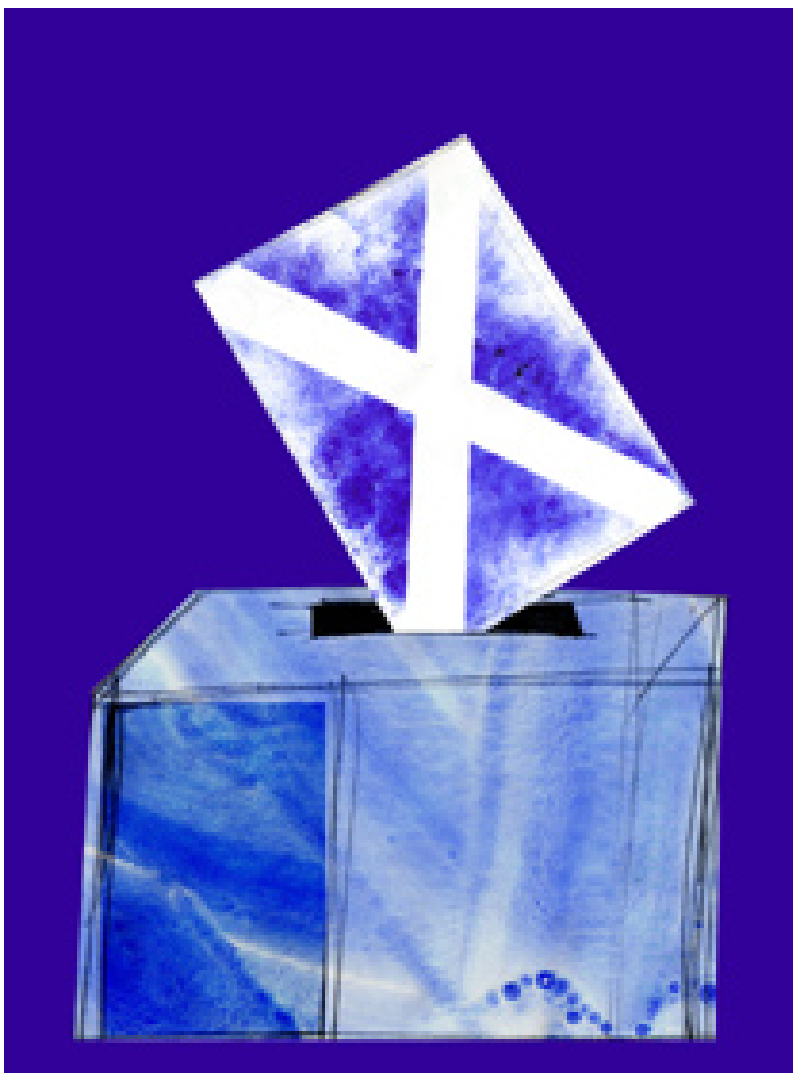
While listening to his opinions about why he was anti Independence (a rambling, ill thought through rant that basically just said "Naw") and a poor defence of the war in Iraq (all George Bush's fault nothing to do with Blair or Brown), PFI, Trident....I started to zone out and all I could hear was his pain and confusion over what was going on. He felt abandoned by the people he believed he had worked his whole life to serve.

I understand that bitterness and anger, but my argument was and is that I am sorry for their loss but they have had 50 years to get things right and what has taken place is not good enough. The poorest and most disadvantaged have seen little or no change while the party who was supposed to put their needs first has forgotten them.

I am well and truly across the bridge from labour left roots to a belief in independence for this country of ours, and the only question that remains is "What took me so long?". I believe that the enlightened Left is and should be doing the same.....

For those afraid of the small, the parochial, the racist, the sexist, the triumphalist, the small minded... I would urge them to read Arthur Hermanns book on the Scottish Enlightenment and see the radical thinking and experimentation that so influenced Europe and remember that being Scottish has little to do with where you were born, being Scottish is a state of mind that I believe is progressive, just with a belief in their fellow man and woman. The only way to release and harness that potential is to be truly Independent. ■

Elaine C Smith is an actor and Convener of the Scottish Independence Convention



wales after britain?

Leanne Woods looks at the progress of devolution in Wales and asks how long can the United Kingdom survive?



Politics in Wales has changed dramatically in the last decade. From winning the yes vote in the referendum to set up the Assembly in 1997 by just 6,721 votes, it's difficult to imagine now how devolution could be rolled back.

Tom Nairn has been arguing for more than 30 years that the break-up of Britain is inevitable. More recently he points to the devolution referendums in the two and a half of the four countries which make up the British Isles to show that he was right. He argues that devolution will gather its own momentum, and that the future of Britain is over. The unanswerable question is how long has it got left?

In response, Gordon Brown and his New Labour mates are playing the "Rule Britannia" card in a desperate attempt to shore up a British identity which is on its way out. "British Jobs for British People", wrapping himself up in the Union Jack, suggestions of a British day and a British motto runs alongside anti-immigrant and asylum rhetoric and demands that everyone speaks English. In a country where more than 20 per cent and growing of the people speak Welsh, and our citizens who were born or who have relatives in other countries speak a wide variety of languages from all over the world, this sort of talk doesn't go down too well. I'd guess it's irrelevant, if not offensive to many people in all four countries.

Meanwhile, there are a group of "progressive English patriots" who agree with Nairn's break-up theory. They see Scotland and Wales wanting to free themselves from Westminster rule, perhaps also eventually a free and united Ireland. They want to make sure that England is not confused with Britain, and that their nation isn't left behind. At the same time they are acutely aware of the need to couple their patriotism/nationalism with an anti racist stance and they are keen to distance themselves from the New Labour response to devolution as well as the fascist parties. It's an interesting development which deserves attention and support from Welsh, Scots and Irish left nationalists. If the call for an English Parliament grows, the progress towards independence for the nations of Britain will accelerate.

So what are we doing in Wales? A year ago, Plaid Cymru entered into government for the first time in our history as part of a centre-left coalition with Labour. A key plank of that agreement was a commitment from Labour to deliver and campaign for a successful outcome in a referendum for a law making parliament within this Assembly term. If we get that yes vote, we'll still have only a fraction of the powers currently enjoyed by the Scottish Parliament. We will be able to legislate freely on matters currently devolved, which would be an improvement on the current situation where Westminster can veto Welsh laws. But we'd still have no powers over criminal justice or any real macro-economic muscle. We'll also still have no means to raise our own revenue.

Wales is at the bottom of the UK's economic performance table. While the city of London continues to skew its economic policy to benefit the areas its immediate vicinity, the periphery loses out. With a history of significant industrial production, Wales should now be rich. But the areas which produced the wealth for Britain are today among some of the most economically disadvantaged in the whole of the European Union. These are the areas which were targeted by Thatcher in her obsession to crush union power, then forgotten. And these are the areas that now face further decline from New Labour's regional pay plans and sickness benefits purge. It doesn't have to be this way.

There is a group of "progressive English patriots" who see Scotland and Wales wanting to free themselves from Westminster rule. They want to make sure that England is not confused with Britain, and that their nation isn't left behind. It's an interesting development which deserves attention and support from Welsh, Scots and Irish left nationalists

An autonomous government responsible for two and a quarter million people could do a much better job of gearing macro-economic policy to meet the needs of people in the former industrial areas of Wales. It's clear those needs have not been considered by successive Westminster governments.

If scientists are right about peak oil, and we can now be confident of a united scientific position on climate change, then the way economies work will have to change. Energy, food and water will become increasingly important and the economy is bound to reflect that. If oil prices continue to rise as they have of late, we'll be forced to rethink how we use and obtain our energy. When Cuba's energy supply was cut off at the end of the USSR, Cuban's lost 30 per cent of their body weight in a year. Can we afford not to plan for a dramatic reduction in the availability of energy and potential implications?

Wales is in a fantastic position to become energy self sufficient. We have a large coastline with opportunities to harness the tides. We have lots of wind, rain, peat bogs and open countryside. A long-term plan to expand research and development, invest in new skills and training and government support for small Welsh businesses to produce microgenerators could put the infrastructure in place. This could be coupled with a national awareness raising programme, incentives for reducing consumption and growing and buying local food. Food and energy self-sufficiency could provide the key to self-government. According to the WWF, Cuba is the only sustainable country in the world. We could learn a lot from the Cubans.

While there may not be a consensus among political parties for Welsh self-government, there is for more devolution. There is also a growing awareness and consensus around climate change. Oil prices are forcing people to think about alternatives, while there is a strong anti-nuclear tendency in the Welsh government. To put the building blocks in place for food and energy self-sufficiency, there has to be more devolution. These challenges have reminded some of us in Plaid that we need

to argue the case for self-government more clearly than ever before. Support for the idea won't build until the debate takes place.

Left-wing Plaid MP Adam Price has recently called for a new "movement within a movement" to reaffirm the party's long-term goals. He correctly claims that the younger members, those under 45, are strong believers in independence. It's encouraging to note that we have a healthy-sized and growing youth membership and activist base. For a quarter of a century our opponents in the unionist parties have been allowed to define what Welsh independence means, which has resulted in smaller levels of support than we would like.

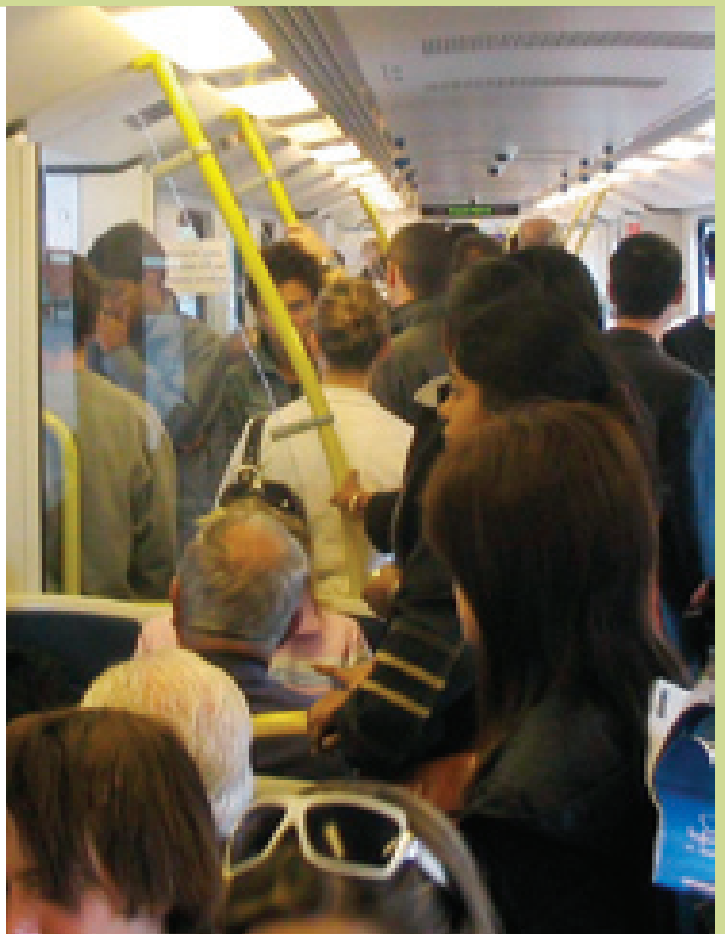
Vision is what is missing in politics today. A vision of a Wales without fossil fuels and nuclear is one which shouldn't be difficult to sell. Armed with the arguments for self-government, Plaid Cymru offers a vision of a different, more equal, sustainable Wales, one that can inspire a younger generation. With the independence debate raging ahead in Scotland, Plaid cannot allow Wales to be left behind. The thinking and the campaigning for a better Wales after Britain has to start now. ■

Leanne Wood was elected to the National Assembly in 2003 to represent the South Wales Central region. She is now Plaid Cymru's spokesperson for Sustainability and the Environment.

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A just transition?

Eurig Scandrett looks at how we can reduce our dependence on the oil industry and the positive effective this would have and not only on the climate.

In the past few months, outbreaks of industrial unrest and protest have been occurring throughout Europe in the industries most affected by the rising price of oil. Starting with Grangemouth refinery, Unite workers in went on strike over reduction in pension rights. Workers in haulage companies delivering to petrol forecourts followed in a dispute over pay. More recently we have seen the protests of the haulage companies themselves demanding special reductions in tax on fuel – by the time this article goes to press, we will know whether Gordon Brown has held his nerve on that. In France, railway workers and fishermen have been involved in industrial action and in Spain public transport workers have likewise struck over the impact of the rising price of fuel. Meanwhile, oil companies continue to make record profits. These are signs of things to come. At the end of June, the list of oil companies invited to tender for lucrative contracts in Iraq was published. On the same day, the price of oil increased to \$140 a barrel, the highest ever recorded. Each month for the past six months, the price of oil has been the highest on record. As we approach peak oil, when supply cannot meet demand, the price of oil is spiralling upwards, and the distribution of the costs and benefits of this are profoundly unequal and increasingly contested. Ten years ago, the economist James O'Connor described how states treat oil as not just a commodity but as an extension of state security, backed by military apparatus.

These are elements of the supply side of the oil industry. If we look at the waste stream, the carbon dioxide emissions which are accumulating in the atmosphere and disrupting the climate, we are seeing increasing frequencies in the occurrence of cyclones, hurricanes, floods, although the debate often takes an apparently more arcane, esoteric form. Is it possible for the climate to withstand a carbon dioxide concentration of 450 parts per million, or will it be necessary to reduce to 350 ppm or less? Just how disrupted will the climate be with each 0.1 degree Celsius and at what point do the changes become irreversible? Essential though these debates are – and each scientific report which hits the public domain points towards more worrying scenarios – it should not be forgotten that two thirds of the excess carbon dioxide in the atmosphere originates from the G7 countries, with currently 13 per cent of the world's population. There is no doubt that there is a crisis, and that the rich countries need to cut oil consumption almost to nothing.

Currently, the principal mechanism for cutting carbon dioxide emissions is carbon trading, which essentially entails enclosure of the last remaining commons – the carbon absorption capacity of the atmosphere – by allocating property rights to those who are already destroying it. This is none other than a neoliberal extension of commodification of the atmosphere, whilst shifting costs onto the poorest who are dispossessed by 'green

development projects'. Ideological justification is provided by individualising responsibility as a form of consumer choice. Climate disaster is happening because western consumers made the wrong choices! Whatever happens to the climate, the interests of global capital cannot be jeopardised.

How are we going to get out of this mess? In short, we don't know, but the solution must be radical, it must be socially just and it must challenge the interests of big business. We can transform this oil-drenched economy **and** overturn poverty **and** have decent jobs. Potential solutions are emerging in debates across the left, but a solution must emerge from social processes more than ideas. As we stand in Scotland, the only party in Parliament which is opposed to the interests of big business is the Green Party whose support comes, more or less, from the professional middle classes who support the NGOs and the 'new' social

movements of which they are part. The most directly affected working class movements are challenging the oil companies, but in terms that ignore the climate crisis that we are facing. The other left parties are recognising the ecological challenge, and despite their current relative weakness, remain active in community and working class struggles. We need the collective knowledge of all political movements critical of or operating out with the neoliberal framework of economic growth, all groups whose interests are being actively damaged, in Parliament, in communities, in the social movements and in the trade unions. Only by working towards some kind of bloc will we shift the hegemony sufficiently to implement change. We need such a broad alliance like never before if we are to work out a just transition to a sustainable solution.

Justin Kenrick, in SLR earlier this year, argued for a transitional alliance to tackle climate change. This has been interpreted in different ways and stimulated an important debate, generating significant connections across the left as well as raising fears. As a result of these debates, a conference is being organised by activists from across the left and green movements to explore how we can move forward. None of the parties which might form a government in the foreseeable future will implement a radical changes needed on their own, and to imagine that they can be persuaded otherwise before the damage is done is unfortunately a false dream. The damage is already well underway, and it's time for a new dream. ■

Conference: transition to tackle climate change, Edinburgh
18th – 19th October 2008

Eurig Scandrett is a member of the Scottish Green Party and Democratic Left Scotland

the death of reason

Bemoaning the ubiquity of the recalcitrant reactionary and their refusal to see sense, Elle Matheuse predicts an end to reasoned debate

Being **slightly** more considered about my approach to life than, say, your average BNP aficionado, I'm sometimes accused of being politically correct, whatever the Jesus Christ that means. However reasonable or unknowing the challenge to someone's belief or opinion, the accusation is often made and usually with some force, akin to that displayed by Oliver's Mr Bumble when the wee tyke dared to question the one-bowl-per-tyke orphanage catering policy.

Depending on the social nightmare we might find ourselves in, all we need utter is one word, one phrase, one wrongly placed cough, and before we know it, someone's brought out their Big Book of Reactionary Clichés. You know, tightly-sprung types who espouse hateful slaverings, claim free speech as their one and only vindicator, bombard you with stupid questions designed to illuminate the holes in your 'politically correct' argument and then deny you the opportunity to explain why not all Muslims are terrorists, or why you shouldn't say bender

And we don't even have to open our Commie mouths to betray our allegedly pc agenda: just whip out a cotton shopping bag at the tills, politely refuse another round at the pub, ride a bike, know a Pole, lose the bra, eat brown rice, live in a caravan. For many, this is the end of things, a time of political correctness gawn maad. Our personal, often private choices and beliefs can render such reactionaries apoplectic, sometimes to the point where you worry that their rage engorged heads might explode, showering you in barely digested fox cubs and anger.

How has the joy that can be a difference of opinion become inevitably welded to notions of political correctness and freedom of speech? Sure, that particular combo is more than possible in certain contexts, but it's a huge, hypocritical leap, and somewhat impolite to threaten to smash someone's face in just because they don't own a frying pan or refuse to laugh at fat people. Thrashing out opposing views by batting ideas back and forth, or having a 'conversation', used to be common practice, was fun, even. Great idea that. Things might seem a little easier these days, interaction-wise, if we could at least let each other finish our.

But increasingly, conversations seem to consist largely of one person saying 'immigration' or 'continuous assessment' or something equally benign, and the other triumphantly screaming 'political correctness', as if they'd just shouted 'House!' at bingo. This verbal trumping is neither conversation nor free speech, and nobody wins. What happened to reason? I forget how we displayed our dissent before this lazily pejorative term was so effectively thrust upon us. Sure, we still argued, disagreed, still hated each other; I guess there was just one less ill-defined, arse-headed war cry at our disposal. Good times.

The reactionary's embrace of this media-friendly form of dispute settlement has allowed the term to mask the simple truth that we don't always agree, can't always agree, **shouldn't** always agree. The opinions of others are bugger all to do with the rest of us, generally speaking, but if they do happen to differ from ours or echo those of the current numpties in charge or the latest eco-darling, then heigh ho, that's life. We **need** to disagree, to debate, to listen, to evolve, and occasionally agreeing with The Man or Woman doesn't inevitably entail blind, stumbling compliance to political correctness, unless you think life's as complicated as a game of Ludo. Aww.

Notions of political correctness encourage us to forget that it **is** possible that others might hold what they also believe to be reasoned, considered opinions and that these may wildly contradict our own, but that they're entitled to them, in theory at least. By making a choice or holding a belief or just saying a word, we aren't necessarily passing judgement on that thing, or those who disagree with us, or those who would do things differently. Some might be, but who cares? And if you're that bothered, ask and find out. It's a free country, after all. For now.

Surely it's better to reason with, question, learn from each other than to casually dismiss opposing views or yield to bullish ignorance whenever the opportunity arises. Impossible if we

keep wailing 'political correctness' and shouting each other down every time someone asks a difficult question or says something humane. We'd be **much** worse off if we all just agreed that life's peachy and that no questions need to be asked, acquiescing to a singular vision of a complex world, denying the horror.

Without measured conversational conflict and reasoned negotiation, we'll stagnate and die in our own

ignorant, gelatinous filth. Sorry, I mean we'll be rendered temporarily immobile and reduce our oxygen levels to zero in our personal, unenlightened, mucilaginous effluence. Freedom! ■

Elle Matheuse is a writer and charity worker

is poverty history yet?

Two years on, how much difference has the Gleneagles deal made in alleviating third world poverty, asks Tim Gee?

Summer 2008 marks three years since the biggest demonstration in Scottish history spilled onto the streets of Edinburgh. 250,000 people formed a massive white band around the city to make three central demands of the G8 – more and better aid, debt relief and trade justice. Activists were somewhat sceptical about the sight of the (then) minister for international development Hilary Benn appearing on the march. Guardian columnist George Monbiot mused a few days later, “What would he be chanting – ‘down with me and all I stand for?’”. Others hoped that this might herald a new era of governments and NGOs working together to do the right thing.

The evidence points to an answer somewhere between the two. The G8 communiqué did feature some encouraging promises. It declared that G8 countries would work towards giving 0.7 per cent of GDP in aid that the World Bank, the IMF and the African Development Bank would cancel 100 per cent of remaining debts owed, and that developing countries should define and implement their own economic policies. Similarly, Tony Blair’s ‘Commission for Africa’ report (released a few months earlier) declared: “Trade liberalisation must not be forced upon Africa as a condition of aid and trade negotiations”, and Europe’s trade barriers and export subsidies which do so much to impoverish developing world producers to be “disgraceful”. The introduction to that report is revealing when it states, “too much of the history of the industrialised world’s involvement in Africa is a miserable history of broken promises”. Our mission is to stop history from repeating itself again.

Let us begin with the promise of ‘more and better aid’. A closer investigation reveals that much of what was promised at the G8 was a rehashed version of funds already pledged, and even then Britain is far off the unambitious 0.7 per cent target (it has pledged to reach it by 2013). Nevertheless there have been some notable achievements in school building and funding for health. Yet, excluding debt relief, aid from the richest countries (including the UK) actually fell in 2007. Across Europe, governments continue to inflate aid figures by including commercial debt cancellation, refugee costs and international student education in their calculations. There are also too-frequent instances of official development assistance being used for the ends of the supplier. For example, British aid money has been paid to PriceWaterhouseCooper to act as ‘consultants’ to Sierra Leone to implement disastrous water privatisation. A 2007 report from student NGO People and Planet notes that British aid is being used to finance yet more oil extraction. This comes despite the well-documented problems of pollution, climate change and human rights abuses which hurt the poor the most, despite the fact that even the World Bank’s ‘Extractive Industries Review’ had advised against such projects, and despite the fact that much of the South has the capacity to be entirely energy self sufficient – in solar power. Aid can help the poor. However it is clear that the G8 still has some way to go.

Let us next visit the promise of 100 per cent debt cancellation. In fact, from the start this was not ‘full’ cancellation of debts at all but only cancellation of the debts for 40 potential countries (classed as the poorest countries), and even then only after completing the ‘Highly Indebted Poor Country’ (HIPC) initiative – that means changing their economic policies at the behest of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. What followed were more of the same economic conditionalities which have caused so many problems for the poor in the past. For example Tanzania was forced to privatise water (to a British company – Bi-water) which led to a worse service and higher prices. In practice, only 19 developing countries signed up to the HIPC initiative. Even then, only the debt to the public international financial institutions was cancelled (so Indonesia’s illegitimate arms debts, for example, were not covered – see below). Even then the debts will only apply to a cut off date of 2003. And all this despite the fact that the Commission for Africa report noted that in many cases the debt has in practice been paid back many times over, and that the debt was often accrued by illegitimate governments propped up by rich countries. The money has mainly been channelled to strategic partners, but even then aid loans have also decreased. There is no doubt that the partial debt cancellation has done some good – Zambia for example is now able to provide universal free healthcare and Tanzania has increased its education spending. There is also no doubt that we still have far to go to reach the needed 100 per cent.

Jubilee Scotland is currently highlighting the issue of Indonesia’s illegitimate arms debt. In this case, British arms companies produced weapons for the brutal regime of General Suharto. These exports were granted licenses and guarantees by John Major’s UK government, meaning that should Indonesia not pay up, the UK Treasury would cover the cost to the arms companies and chase the debt later. This very equipment was used to suppress democracy activists, trade unionists and ‘those of left wing views’ during Suharto’s reign of terror. Even now that the Indonesian people have removed Suharto, Britain is still chasing the debts. Indonesia now spends more than three times as much on debt repayment as on health and education combined. One might have thought that the British government owes a moral debt to the Indonesian people after supporting Suharto for so long. But the British government does not (yet) see it that way.

Thirdly, we turn to the issue of Trade Justice. As has been shown above, developing countries have often not been allowed to decide their own economic policies. Nor has any change been made to the unbalanced architecture of the international financial institutions. At the International Monetary Fund, rich countries continue to command two thirds of voting power, despite only contributing to a quarter of its income (the rest comes from debt repayments), having less than a quarter of the world’s population and being subject to none of the IMF’s programmes. At the World Bank the illegitimate ‘one dollar one

vote' system continues. Having said that, the rhetoric coming from DFID is encouraging, seeing the international system as a serious problem for developing countries. They even temporarily withheld payments to the World Bank in protest at unfair conditionalities, although payments have now increased to a higher level than before.

There was some hope that the Doha round of trade talks at the World Trade Organisation might herald some progress for developing countries. Indeed the round had been dubbed the 'development round'. Yet the dispatches from anti-poverty activists at the 2006 Hong Kong Ministerial went from sceptical to despondent. In return for a promise to deliver miniscule cuts of five per cent in the rich world agricultural subsidies by 2013, the US and EU tried to force developing countries to open up even further their markets in 'services' (e.g. education, financial services, transport, water etc.) and reduce their tariffs for imports. The process was non-transparent, featuring an estimated 450 meetings, many of them secret. The EU, USA and Japan combined boasted 1417 negotiators, as compared to smaller countries who could often afford only a few – two in the case of the Gambia. NGO observers report that the WTO secretariat successfully suppressed an alternative proposal on trade in services advocated by some of the poorer countries, a 'divide and rule strategy' by the rich countries and the continuation of 'Green Room' talks between rich countries and selected poor countries with no minutes or scrutiny. Activists present from the Make Poverty History coalition were so disappointed with EU Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson that they demanded that he should remove the white band he had been wearing during the negotiations. In November 2006, the talks were put on hold with the rationale that 'no deal is better than a bad deal'. Peter Mandelson's response was that "the alternative is a system of bilateral agreements...in which the large can strong-arm the poor".

This is what the EU is currently trying to negotiate in the shape of 'Economic Partnership Agreements'. This name is somewhat misleading because Economic Partnership Agreements will not be good for developing countries' economies, are not based on partnership, and are not even agreements in any meaningful sense of the word. They are not good for developing countries' economies because they force poor countries to lift tariffs by 80 – 90 per cent. This has two effects. Firstly, it opens countries to floods of imports. According to Traidcraft, Kenya's unemployment levels are three times higher now because of past deals like this. Secondly, it removes a large chunk of the money available for health education and infrastructure. This is \$7 million in the case of Scotland's 'twin' country, Malawi, much more in many others. For example, Zambia stands to lose \$15.8 million - the same as its annual spending on HIV/AIDS. Proponents of EPAs argue that VAT and income taxes are better forms of taxation. However, a) these are not very useful in the context of skyrocketing unemployment, b) with vast informal economies in many of the poorest countries tariffs are often the most effective form of revenue raising and c) VAT is a 'flat' tax which disproportionately impacts on the poor.

They are also not based on partnership. Partnership implies equality, yet despite what the poor countries stand to lose, the EU stands to profit \$1.9 billion from West Africa alone. Although the EU says it too will open their markets for developing countries in Europe, in fact it will only affect half of a percent of imports. They are also not really agreements. Governments

around the world are being threatened with decreased aid or huge increases in EU taxes on their exports if they do not sign. Trade Justice Campaigners intend to stop EPAs, yet the fact they have such a battle on their hands shows that the G8 did not deliver trade justice to the world's poor, or even live up to its promise that developing countries should be able to decide their own economic policies.

It can be seen then that the G8 in Scotland did not deliver significantly better aid, nor 100 per cent debt relief, nor trade justice. So was it worth the effort? Absolutely! The Make Poverty History initiative changed the parameters of the development discourse – no longer is the talk of 'poverty alleviation' but of abolishing it altogether. It inspired a new generation of activists and got people involved in campaigning who had never been involved before. Unpredictable alliances and friendships were built across the coalition, giving rise to the potential of greater co-operation in the future. The mobilisation put paid to those 'rational choice' theorists who believe that people only ever take political action for their own selfish reasons. Were the 250,000 people marching in Edinburgh, not to mention the hundreds who gave up the bulk of 2005 to the campaign, really contributing to an act of mass selfishness?

We can also learn something about event management and campaign 'framing'. The government too easily persuaded the press to believe there was a distinction between 'good activists' (MPH) and 'bad activists' (opposing the G8) when both were legitimate, indeed necessary. Participants in the Gleneagles march against the G8 will remember a largely peaceful march consisting of Green Parties, Socialist Parties, SNP, CND, the Quakers, Free Tibet campaigners, WDM and War on Want. What the world saw in the press was a battle in a field with a Chinook helicopter. Some have even suggested that the marchers were framed in order to create a flashpoint with the police for the press, to undermine the protest. In future we will need to be fully aware, and able to respond to, the skills of the spin machine that we are up against.

The most important legacy of the protests however, is that promises even partially implemented are nevertheless changing and saving people's lives, especially as a result of the debt deal. Additionally, the summit made commitments on trade and aid to which campaigners can now hold them. Numerous studies from the environmental movement show that the way to win progress is first to win 'soft' commitments and to use that to win 'hard' policy change. That is exactly what it is our job to do - to inform people of the government's successes and failures and make it an election issue in 2009 and 2010. We didn't Make Poverty History in 2005, but we won a lot, and laid the groundwork to win a lot more. ■

Tim Gee was involved in both G8 Alternatives and Make Poverty History, ahead of the G8 in Scotland. He now works for a development charity. With thanks for comments and suggestions from Ben Young

direction, location, destination and a compass

Willie Sullivan mourns the loss of some of the fundamental values which could help play a part in the regeneration of the Labour movement in Scotland

Back in the early 1980s under the sage advice of the 'mad monk' Keith Joseph and waving Friedrich Von Hayeks polemic book 'The Road to Serfdom' Margaret Thatcher declared that 'Economics are the method. The object is to change the heart and soul'. Thatcher successfully released the power of 'self' and denied the existence of social beings, now we were all individuals.

Of course Scots were not immune to this highly seductive view, although many seemed to instinctively know it was only half of the story. Scotland and the world was being presented from a new perspective. The ideas expressed in sayings like 'Ah kent his faither' and 'we're awe Jock Tamson Bairns' started to be labelled as 'anti-success' and showing a 'kaleyard' envy. It seemed that these sayings were an expression of ideas that were a shameful part of our cultural heritage. What they really say about Scots is that we are largely egalitarian and that we believe status should be about something different than material success or celebrity. We are, as a nation somewhat suspicious of wealth and ego, both as a reason to be respected in itself and particularly in contrast to other more worthy conferrers of status such as real wisdom, honesty, trust and humility. This suspicion of wealth and wealth generated status are often well founded. Whether its getting rich in retail from selling cheap clothes in high street stores (sweat shop labour in Asia) or selling complex financial instruments between international banks (poor US citizens mis-sold sub prime mortgages), someone somewhere is being exploited.

Come the 1990s Scotland was the 'fort of Labour' with a population whose values were still instinctively collective but from which New Labour sought to launch its assault on the rest of the UK. A UK, much of which had bought Thatcherism along with their council houses and personal pensions. Were the Scottish people in tune with New Labour? Did it matter? The Scottish Labour Party was not the Scottish people. The first step of the New Labour project both here and in the UK was to take control of the party machine. The intellectual arguments for New Labour had developed from the then-left through people around the Marxism Today publication (Geoff Mulgan, Tony Giddens, Martin Jacques) who had argued in their groundbreaking and largely accurate 'New Times' analysis of the late '80s that the left had lost touch with modernity. Not many people – if any – in the Scottish Labour Party were that deeply aware of or attached to the ideas of New Labour but several saw an opportunity. And while the initial intellectual basis of New Labour had come from the left, the 'machine style' organisational politics which were required to implement the project came from the right.

In Scotland there was a longstanding almost latent, leadership loyal right wing, based around some of the Unions and West

of Scotland Local Government. This was mobilised in a brutal fracturing of old truces to completely route the left from Scottish Labour's Executive Committee in 1995. It later followed that Scottish Labour Party conference voted for the symbolic changes to Clause Four of the party's constitution rejecting public ownership many months before the rest of the UK party. Under Blair, Labour had changed to appeal to the hearts and souls that Thatcher had created. He connected Labour with modernity but it was a modernity created by the right. Those of us who expected him to shape and contest that modernity felt badly let down. Many Scottish minds appreciated the material logic of economic prosperity but Thatcher had not captured our hearts and souls and we knew that it was not enough. We needed each other, we felt life was better for being part of something, something like society.

Despite uneasiness the Scottish people stuck with Labour. It was a party founded by Keir Hardie and one that espoused Celtic collective values over many generations. However that bond of trust and identity was stretching. The decision to go to war in support of a rightwing republican US president certainly upset many of the opinion-formers and cultural producers in Scotland. However it was the realisation that we had done so under the false threat of weapons of mass destruction that finally snapped that bond for much of the Scottish masses.

In May 2007 and today, Scots suspect that all is not well. There is a nagging insecurity; it's a feeling that something important is stretched to breaking-point. It manifests itself in greater inequalities, increased use of drugs and alcohol, epidemic levels of addiction in prescribed and street drugs, in real poverty and in time poverty, in treadmill lifestyles, stretched credit limits and unsatisfactory relationships. People perhaps lack the analysis or the language yet to express it but they know they're not living in 'the good society' promised to them. A great disappointment for Scottish people was that Labour appeared to be on the side of the rich and powerful. Labour forgot or was scared to do what the left has always tried to do – to critique capitalism and to make markets the servants of society.

That critique had no need to repeat some of the mistakes made by the old left. It was necessary to understand that people liked material things, they enjoy shopping in moderation, and want material security for themselves and their children. What should have been exposed was the inherent problems of a neoliberal economy. Thatcher/Blair capitalism is a hungry beast always seeking new markets and seeking to turn new and different things into products that can be bought and sold. This onward march of markets has consequences both in the public and personal realms.

In the public realm there has arisen a tripartite movement of those that identified the obvious failings of a badly managed, undervalued and under-resourced public sector; an alliance of neoliberal analysts who see a large state per se as wrong; of well meaning academics and managers who sought to protect and improve public services through an over emphasised 'choice' agenda and of business seeking new markets in public services. This powerful force has led to the application of private sector business models into UK public services with the consequence that 'public service ethos' was undermined and that additional resources were swallowed up by continuous structural reorganisation. This is the inevitable 'modus operandi' of what Professor Richard Sennet calls 'impatient capitalism'. These 'organisational techniques' arose in the private sector where firms are continuously changing structure for all sorts of surface reasons but in reality in order to send signals to the markets with the purpose of driving share value. The 'choice agenda' which dominated the English debate was largely avoided by the Labour Scottish Executive which forgot to tell the Scottish people. Scots remained unclear about the difference devolution brought and were uneasy about a political agenda communicated through the national media and designed to appeal to middle England rather than devolved Scotland.

In the personal realm a Thatcher/Blair economy requires further intrusion into our personal lives in order to find new markets. This is generally facilitated through deregulation then advertising and marketing. We are increasingly being convinced that we can use consumer goods to fulfill parts of what it is to be human that will never be fulfilled by consumption. And it is advertising that has convinced us probably as children ourselves that such fulfillment was possible. This is best illustrated through the example of how childhood has been 'consumerised' and what an alternative viewpoint might be. We all know that our children want and have more and more consumer goods, driven by a barrage of product placement, peer pressure, celebrity endorsement and advertising that exploits the insecurities and fears of parents and children. But what if the marketers are wrong? What if children don't need the latest trainers; they need respect? What if they don't need wardrobes of clothes? They need to feel loved and they need excitement and variety and beauty. What if children don't need electronic entertainment; they need fellowship and something fun and worthwhile to do with their time? The 'good Scottish society' would be one that gives our children the space to find these things within themselves and those around them. A market society does not leave that space.

A Scotland that can admit and articulate its non-material needs would provide much higher levels of human fulfilment. Surely this was the role of the left and of Labour to create ideas and a language that allowed the expression of social needs and wants and to identify ways to fulfil them? New Labour descended into a dry economism and a language of slogan words and shallow

motifs. With markets clearly failing to deal with the problems they have created globally and locally, there is a new opportunity for Scotland to build a social democratic consensus, inverting the neo-liberal agenda and making society the master of markets.

Milton Friedman, a great hero of Mrs Thatcher, said "the institutions of freedom do not just exist, we have to build them". When Hayek, Friedman, Thatcher, Reagan, Keith Joseph or Peter Mandelson talk about freedom they generally mean

freedom to make money and they did build their institutions, mainly at Canary Wharf. The right knew it had to build its institutions large and strong and build them into the very fabric of society. When Labour came to power the so-called social democrats of New Labour continued the weakening of our institutions the institutions of social democracy; the public services, local government, the trade unions, the cooperative movement. This was a strange thing to do. The reason that even a right wing government in Sweden must adopt social democratic policies is because the social democratic institutions are so strong, they are so imbedded in the society there that any government

of any colour just does not have an option.

So our medium-term strategy must be to consolidate in Scotland a progressive consensus for social democracy and at the same time rebuild the institutions of social democracy. Imagine if the Coop had as much market power as Tescos and used it for progressive ends? As mutual supermarkets do in places like Denmark and Finland. Our shorter term tactics must be to build a new electoral coalition. Scotland could lead the rest of the UK in this project as culturally we are already close to such a consensus. At this time of anxiety and insecurity we can speak loudly about fairness about social solidarity and social security. If we can find the right language, nuanced correctly, we can tell the same story to the middle classes; public service workers; to ethnic minority communities and to our core vote who have felt abandoned in the last few years. We can rebuild a new coalition around a progressive consensus that reasserts our values.

These are values that reject the neo-liberal deceit of meritocracy. We must restate that we believe that, if you are not lucky enough to be born with a quick mind or access to networks and resources or a pretty face or a strong body that your merit and value is not in your ability or what you own or what you look like but in the fact that you are a human being, you are an end in yourself not a means to any other end – and because of that our society will support and nurture you to be free and to be equal. ■

Willie Sullivan is Vice Chair of Compass and Labour spokesperson for education on Fife Council

Reviews

The Scots and the Union by Christopher A. Whatley, Edinburgh University Press, 2006, £25.99

As I sit down to write this review, the Scottish newspapers are full of the Union between Scotland and England. Our Scottish Government has already initiated a series of conversations from which it wishes to proceed to a multi-option referendum encompassing the status quo, enhanced powers for the Scottish Parliament and the nationalist's goal of independence. The aim of the conversations is to provide details of the three alternatives in order that the electorate make an informed opinion on the subject.

Hard though Gordon Brown has tried, nowhere in these newspaper reports can I find the words British or Britain used. The term UK, as in UK government appears because Jack Straw has laboured hard and on this same day produced a mouse of a report about the future constitution of that land we fondly refer to here as the Yookay. But more on that later, for although two initiatives on the same topic would normally be considered enough fare for any political day, the opposition in the Scottish Parliament announced the belated formation of what they call a Commission - Gordon Brown prefers the term review - to look into the working of devolution ten years after the Act.

The commission has been set up by the Tories, Lib Dems and New Labour, somewhat embarrassing for the latter in that after making the announcement earlier this year they had to go to Westminster to get permission to set it up. But now we have it. It can discuss anything but independence. Or as the chairman Sir Kenneth Calman, Chancellor of Glasgow University and former Chief Medical Officer said at the launch "independence is not relevant". As in all good pantomimes the audience of journalists couldn't resist participating and a cry of "OH YES IT IS!" filled the room.

Welcome to street politics Scottish style Sir Kenny. Not that academic politics is mortality free; the difference lies between the scalpel and the club with a spike through it as the chosen weapon. Was it ever thus? Chris Whatley's *The Scots and the Union* is refreshing on this 300-year old topic. Whatley and a team of researchers have scoured the archives, both official and of the great families of the period, a task of no small measure, to reveal a fresh take on the motivations of those playing the leading roles in this drama and how their judgement was affected by churches and monarchs both here and across the water, and of course street politics..

300 years on, the reports on the above mentioned contemporary political events lead with the possibility that the Act of Settlement

which bans Catholics from becoming monarch could be abolished. That this should be chosen as the lead issue must be perplexing to non-Scots looking on and possibly to indigenous Scots who have been ignoring the issue in the hope that it would go away. Why this issue one may ask? Well, at the beginning of the 18th Century the issue of succession was a make or break issue between Presbyterian Scotland and Episcopalian England on the one hand and the popery of the Stuarts on the other. Scotland had just passed through what became known as the killing times when covenanter and Episcopalian were literally at each others throat.

As for the Scottish economy, in an age of imperial rivalry and mercantilism, the lack of military and naval power hampered Scotland's colonialist adventures, a state of affairs that came to a head with the Darien disaster in 1698 where an attempt to set up a Scottish trading post in Panama failed with the loss of the majority of Scotland's investment capital. Add to these three years of failed harvests with an accompanying population decline of 13.5% and the scene is set for the lead up to the 1707 Treaty of Union.

Whatley spends some time establishing the shifting allegiances that led to the successful vote on the Union on 1 May that year, arguing that the more common view that the parliamentarians were "bought and sold for English gold" as expressed in Burns' song 'Such a Parcel of Rogues in a Nation!'

was not the whole story. Yet he does remind the reader of the amount of effort that went into negotiating the 'Equivalence', the compensation given to the Scottish establishment for its losses over Darien, and of the Lords and gentry with their bags packed ready to dash to London as soon as the treaty was signed to avoid missing out on the possibility of preferment under the new regime. So it goes.

The interwoven complexities within Scottish society which led up to that vote are covered in detail by Whatley but one has to be mindful of the sources for his study. Much of it is based on correspondence between the participants, the elite in Scottish society but on occasions he points to other elements whose ideas break through into public cognisance. For instance, Whatley states that "Union opposition had a plebeian character with Presbyterian ministers concerned with the attitudes of the poor". This is further elaborated with the statement that the "Covenanters introduced a radical, sometimes egalitarian and highly effective system of public finance" and that "landowners should support the poor" with "day to day relief in the hands of the church". Radical grassroots thinking also emerged in Presbyterian tracts against the union calling for rejection of the monarchy, hereditary offices, most taxes and the establishment

of a commonwealth confirming a link between Scottish Presbyterianism and social levelling.

There is little doubt that the signing of the Treaty did not end the controversy of the relationship between Scotland and England. Open rebellions occurred in 1715 and 1745 with attempts by the Stuarts to regain the throne. A further complication found in the web that was woven around the settlement is that Jacobites were found on both sides of the Union debate, however their leader, without doubt had his eyes firmly fixed on being king of a United Kingdom. A plea of 'trust me as a Stuart to give you freedom of worship', seen by some as worthy of support, was rejected in the end at Culloden, not a battle between Scots and English but between Jacobite Catholics and Redcoats whose numbers included many Scots recruited before the Union. Daniel Defoe, who operated as a Union spy, had earlier written that "Scotland would do better selling goods rather than men's services in other armies, a sure sign of the supplier nation's poverty".

(A digression: The National Trust of Scotland recently called for descendents of those who fought at Culloden to join in celebrations at the opening of a new visitors centre. They could find Jacobites scattered worldwide but try as they might failed to find one person confessing to be a Scottish Redcoat.)

To return to the issue of the Act of Settlement and why it should surface on day one of our contemporary debate on the Union, it was certainly a major element in the debates in 1707. Accompanying this Act was also the Act of Security which made those accepting public office kneel before the altar. In Scotland this was seen as a papish posture, the presence of Bishops in the House of Lords a condoning of prelacy. Is this relevant to today's debate? Perhaps, when our political leaders start to talk of oaths of citizenship and participate in oaths to the monarch, it is. Lord Roxburghe, when asked to comment on support for the Act of Union is quoted as having said "Trade with most, Hanover with some and ease and security with others". It was strange indeed to read the letters columns in the Scottish press on the day following these contemporary announcements. All of the old arguments surfaced as if 300 years hadn't passed, which left me with the question, why since in 1707 secular ambition took precedence over religious rectitude do we still carry that baggage with us? Our Leveller forbears lit a spark soon doused by church leaders in hock to the wealthy and powerful. How like our 21st century political elite. Surely it is time for us to establish a secular republic or would that idea now, as then, be looked on as the crazed musings of a "fanatic"? ■

Henry McCubbin

Imagined Communities: England after Britain, Mark Perryman , Lawrence & Wishart, ISBN 9781905007738, £16.99

Nations, as historian Benedict Anderson argued 25 years ago, are 'imagined communities'. But whether they are imagined in progressive or regressive ways matters - because the hold of national identity upon people's psyche and on society continues to be a strong one. So although Billy Bragg said he was only looking for another girl in his 'New England' song of 1983, he and others in a new collection called **Imagined Nation: England**

after Britain, are looking for whether there can be a progressive version of English national identity.

The left is well aware that English national identity continues to be associated British nationalism, which in turn is continues to be associated with fascist parties, imperialism, being white and xenophobia. But under pressure from developments towards devolution in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as mass immigration and Brown's backward-looking crusade for Britishness as 'new' Labour's star wanes, the notion of what it means to be English is coming up for debate.

Therefore, it is refreshing that the Mark Perryman, a writer on Englishness and English football, has brought together an array of different authors, including important thinkers like Andrew Gamble (author of **Britain in Decline**), Tom Nairn (author of **The Break-up of Britain**) and Paul Gilroy (author of **There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack**), to examine whether the left can and should try to shape what is meant by English national identity. They are not the only ones thinking like this - George Orwell thought along these lines in his **Lion and the Unicorn** of 1941 and anti-globalisation activist Paul Kingsnorth (author of **One No, Many Yeses: a journey to the heart of the global resistance movement**) has just published a new book called **Real England**.

The contributors to this new collection begin by making it clear that English is not Britishness, and Britishness is not Englishness. They consider why and how national identity in England, of England, can be formed as a means by which to express progressive politics - of tolerance, multiculturalism, social provision, compassion, peace and equality. Their starting point is that national identity is the product of changing social relations, and that social relations made and unmade by people. They argue it does not have to be the politics of either alleged victimhood like the 'disenfranchised white working class' of the recent BBC TV series or the politics of oppressing others.

The question of why they do this is important. It is not because they have given up on leftwing politics and now espouse rightwing politics. Rather, it is because of the destruction of social democracy at the hands of the 'new' Labour project, and because of the weakness of the existing left to response to this. In other words, the contributors see that the left is unable to adequately answer the pressing questions of our times and/or mobilise people behind its answers.

This perspective needs to be given serious consideration, not just because it says don't leave issues of English national identity to the right but because it also says national identity can take progressive forms under certain conditions. Here the contributors are all well aware of the relative advances made in Scotland and Wales in resisting the 'new' Labour, and that the SNP as one expression of national identity in Scotland has moved from being a 'Tartan Tory' party to one with a social democratic veneer.

The other reason why these arguments must be seriously examined is that if the left in Britain is to be truly inter-nationalist, this means understanding the relations between nations that will continue to exist and what role national identity will play in forming what the dominant values of these nations are. ■

Gregor Gall, University of Hertfordshire

web review

Henry McCubbin

Every now and then a political party decides it needs a sports policy. Unfortunately the driver for this move is invariably the thought that a few pictures of the relevant minister and the prime minister smoozing with fit, healthy and good-looking sports personalities can be nothing but good for their vanity and what greater vainglorious event that hosting the Olympics.

No public cost is too much for these events. Queuing up you find these great benefactors of mankind the international brand names, construction companies and property developers. All of these organisations plan to come out of this event in pocket.

The political parties will look to these sponsors to attend their party fundraisers and so it goes round. What goes round? Your money of course, but I doesn't go completely round, it never does. No it stops with the self same international brand names, construction companies and property developers pocketing the difference. Developers in particular benefit as land, never previous thought to be available, suddenly becomes available to them. Early on to this leading Olympic sport of dipping the public purse has been the World Socialist Web Site which you can find at www.wsws.org/articles/2005/aug2005/olymp-a02.shtml

But what about our political parties? As usual New Labour, now playing in the Scottish second division, has got its self in a twist. Frank (who ate all the pies and was late for his debate?) McAveety, Labour's sports spokesperson, is following New Labour's old strategy of attacking the SNP for not having carried out already a sports policy that New Labour itself had failed to carry out over the past seven years. Click on www.scottishlabour.org.uk/labour_slams_lack_of_snp_targets_for_sport

The Conservatives are concerned about Scottish footballers not being allowed to play for the Yookay at the Olympics probably in the hope that such an act would see members of FIFA deciding that one team for the Yookay is enough for all football internationals. Click on www.scottishconservatives.com/search_results.aspx?cx=006206254225053623875%3Abwb_gjpfj_4&cof=FORID%3A9&q=sport&sa=Go#1119 for more if you can stand the suspense. For LibDem sport you can see vintage footage not of their well-known Olympian Menzies Campbell but of their former leader Nicol Stephen and yes they like sport too. Click on www.scotlibdems.org.uk/bright-future-for-sport

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The SNP has of course a definite advantage over the other contestants in this field in that they are in power therefore their policies can be found at the Scottish government's web site and their policy called Reaching Higher is available for download at www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/03/07105145/13

Oh, almost forgot the Greens, the only page that came up under the rubric sports was www.scottishgreens.org.uk/site/id/5648/title/SURFERS_AGAINST_SEWAGE.html hmmm. ■



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Kick Up The Tabloids

EX-PAT SCOTS IN CLICHÉ TORTURE

To me, summer and sport never seemed to go together that well. Watching sport, or in other words football, especially on the telly, was always something to do when the weather was a bit crap. I've never seen the appeal of sitting indoors, on a baking-hot summer's day, watching sport on the TV. Particularly since most summer sport is a complete borefest. Cricket is basically a lot of guys standing about, and taking the odd break for meals and refreshments. Grand prix is like taking valium, but with a lot of high-pitched noise in the background. And golf has always struck as being a terrible way to ruin a walk in the countryside.

So, I always look forward to the alternate summers when we have a major football tournament on the telly. And Euro 2008 did not fail to live up to the expectation. My only regret was, obviously, Scotland's failure to qualify, our campaign ending in glorious failure. I think all Scots should take pride in our ability to do Glorious Failure better than anybody else. However, having lost to Italy in November and thereby failing to get to Austria or Switzerland, we were down on the floor. Gutted, inconsolable, our dreams and hopes shattered. For four whole days. Until England lost to Croatia and also failed to qualify. Suddenly the whole national mood in Scotland was lifted once again. You can't keep us down for long!

One summer sport I can watch is tennis, although it seems that Andrew Murray has yet to totally capture the imagination of your average Scottish fan. I would love to see the Tartan Army descending on Wimbledon, with sales of Buckfast and pies outstripping those of strawberries and champagne.

Having missed the tournament last year due to a wrist injury (20-yr-old guy, how did that happen?), Andy was back at Wimbledon this year, and SW19 was once more stuck down with "Murraymania". To mark the occasion, 21-year-old Andy brought out his autobiography. I don't know if anyone's read it. I don't know if he's read it – he certainly didn't write it. Must have been an interesting meeting at the publishers: "What am I going to write about, all I've done is stayed at my mum's and played tennis". "Write about your life, Andrew". "But that's all I've done. Apart from the wrist injury, and I don't want to write about that 'cos it's a bit embarrassing. You see, mum came in and caught me....."

Of course, the British summer being what it is, the chances are that much of the planned sporting action will end up being rained-off. If so, there is always the alternative of going to the pictures. And, if the reviews are to be believed, it looks as if this summer's sure-fire flop is going to be "Stone of Destiny",

the stirring tale of four SNP activists removing the eponymous lump of rock from Westminster Abbey in the early 1950s. The stone had resided at Westminster, after having been looted by Edward I in 1296,. However, it is now thought this was a fake, as the original had been hidden before Edward's raid and replaced by a big lump of rock. It is also widely believed that when the stone was returned to Westminster in 1951, the young Nats had hidden what they thought to be the original and replaced it with another copy. So what we have is a copy of a copy.

Who cares, at the end of the day? All it's used for is to crown the king of Scotland who is either the Queen or some bloke in Belgium who can't speak a word of either English or Gaelic. Either way, I don't give a monkeys. In Ancient myth and Legend the Stone of Destiny was originally Jacob's pillow and was brought over from the Holy Land. In other words, we nicked it in the first place. In that case why not send it back to the Palestinians. At least they'll get some use out of it, by chucking it at Israeli tanks.

If you thought this summer's sporting fare was bad, get ready for 2009, which promises to be the worst sporting summer since records began. Because next year, if you did not already know is going to be Homecoming 2009. In June Alex Salmond announced a year-long festival to encourage ex-pat Scots to return home. This will feature a parade of massed pipes and drums in Edinburgh, featuring as many as a million bagpipers, the world's largest highland games, and a virtual Burn's supper (whatever that is) and worst of all, The World's Largest Highland Games. In other words all the things they left Scotland to get away from in the first place.

Now, I am aware that not all expats, or more accurately their forebears, had a choice as to whether they left these shores or not. But have these people not suffered enough already?

Two hundred years after their ancestors' cottages were burned down, and they were dispatched on boats to Canada, to drag these people back over the Atlantic once more to subject them to this shit is gratuitously sadistic. ■

Vladimir McTavish (aka Paul Sneddon), is performing The Top 50 Greatest Scots of All-Time Ever throughout the Edinburgh Fringe at The Stand Comedy Club from Friday 1st to Sunday 24th August (Except Mon 11th) at 6.40 pm

Reclaiming the

ECONOMY

Alternatives to Market Fundamentalism
in Scotland and beyond

edited by **Andy Cumbers and Geoff Whittam**

The takeover of the economic policy agenda by business corporations and their supporters in the political mainstream is one of the defining characteristics of the age. The 'free' market, trade liberalisation, privatisation and the protection of property rights now dominate the concerns of our political classes and the opinion formers who influence them, with only lip service paid to labour rights, social inequality and the environment. Challenging the dominant policy agenda, the contributors to this book argue for the construction of a more humane and sustainable economy.

The book develops a set of alternative visions, which both de-couple discussions of the economy from vested corporate interests and ask more fundamental questions about what an economy should be for and who it should serve. Departing from mainstream policy and economics orthodoxy, it is geared towards building a radical left agenda, yet, at the same time, one that is grounded in a practical politics. This book emerges from a particular initiative within Scotland, the Alternative Economic Strategy Network, bringing together progressive academics, trade unionists and activists to debate and explore alternatives to neo-liberalism and mainstream economics.

Reflecting this 'local' context, some of the papers develop critiques and policies directed at the Scottish public policy agenda, whilst others have a more general application. But all seek to contribute to a broader global vision challenging the free market fundamentalism of our time.