

## Filling the policy vacuum

What should be in the party manifestos for 2003?

### Manifesto 2003

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David Miller on coverage of the war in Afghanistan

Ken Cameron on trade unions and the Labour Party

# scottishleftreview

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## comment

It is one of the orthodoxies of the politics of recent years that parties are more interested in style than substance. As with all orthodoxies, we quickly forget what this actually means. The purpose of government is to shape the future of a nation. This should mean tackling problems such as poor health and poverty. It should mean protecting and enhancing the infrastructure of a society such as its transport networks and the education system. It should put in place frameworks which prevent new ills from arising - to encourage behaviour which doesn't harm the environment, to change habits which prevent ill health in the first place. It should create the conditions to ensure prosperity for the people, by ensuring everyone has access to proper education and that high quality sustainable jobs are supported. And it should also provide vision; to instil confidence, to encourage the arts to flourish, to create a place for Scotland in the world. For a party to be in a place to achieve this it must persuade the people that they are capable of making these things happen.

It is no new phenomenon to see these things inverted - "the aim of our party is to win power and only then can we effect change". But this inversion has become more deeply ingrained than simply a reordering of priorities. Persuading people that Party X (fill in the blanks) is capable of changing Scotland has taken such a precedence over thinking about **how** to change Scotland that it seems as if we are on the brink of the death of policy. It is hard to think of more than a couple of examples of genuinely new thinking coming out of the political establishment in Scotland in recent years.

This is not intended to be another dig at the Scottish Parliament. An enormous amount has been done - tuition fees, fox hunting, free care for the elderly, ending warrant sales. There is no doubt at all that we are living in a better Scotland than the one Westminster bestowed to us. But much of this looks more like unfinished business than innovation. There is nothing wrong with this - the fact that we have waited generations to see the back of fox hunting doesn't make it any less significant. But once the unfinished business is finished, where next? If we don't start to develop an agenda for the future now, we will be left with no agenda, and all we will have left to do is oil the wheels. Perhaps one day we will live in a socially just, prosperous, sustainable Scotland where we can feel like we are at an end point, but we are clearly not there yet.

Nor is this intended to be a simple dig at Scotland's political parties. Developing new thinking does not seem to be high on the agenda of Scotland's political establishment,

but to a great extent this is understandable. We live in a continuing cycle of elections and the next campaign is never far away. Our MSPs are under-resourced and generally over worked to do this kind of thinking. And indeed it is doubtful whether new ideas ever really came from within politics - the best were adopted by political parties but were born elsewhere. This is not to let political parties off the hook altogether. As well as taking substance more seriously and looking for that vision, the proximity of the political position of most of Scotland's parties should make it possible to break out of party confines and create a joint agenda. The four examples of the real difference made by the Parliament cited above were only achieved by working in this way. Politicians of all parties must find the next half-dozen issues on which they can agree and make a difference. Such a joint vision would begin to mark this Parliament as different, exactly in the way Scotland expected it to be.

But there are other who are also culpable. The rest of the UK - and indeed parts of the international community - looked to Scotland as an example of how civic society can effect change. The establishment of the Scottish Parliament is, in large part, due to the work of the civic partners which formed the Constitutional Convention. And yet, what has come out of civic Scotland since? Civic Scotland was disgusted by the Keep the Clause campaign but failed to organise against it. There has been little new thought or clear ideas coming out of key players - the trade unions, the voluntary sector, academia, communities. The Civic Forum has yet to find its feet. Scotland's think tanks have generally been a disappointment. There is a very real policy vacuum in Scotland.

Perhaps is it disillusion. Perhaps it is the hangover from two decades of fighting for the Parliament. Perhaps is it the additional workload devolution has meant for many organisations. But whatever the cause, Scotland has to engage with ideas again, and the Parliament must search out the best of them. Scotland has to re-harness the energy with which it pursued devolution and convert it into a drive towards change within the devolved Scotland. Just as in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Soviet Union, the mundane business of shaping a country may not inspire

in the same way as a consensual drive towards a single shared objective, but that is the business of a grown-up country.

Now, when the parties are preparing their manifestos for 2003, it is the time to resurrect policy. In this issue of the Scottish Left Review we asked a handful of people with expertise in different areas to tell us what they think

ought to be in those manifestos. In these pages you will find enough new ideas to be going on with. A Scottish Service Tax could replace the Council Tax and make the funding of local government progressive. We could adopt European practice in early years education. A single Public Health budget used to improve lifestyles choices in all policy areas could address the root causes of Scotland's poor health record. An incentive scheme to discourage property owners from selling for quick profit and instead offer properties for rent would address the problem of a lack of affordable rented accommodation. A Public Service Trust could help finance public services without the leakage of money into the private sector which PFI and PPP results in. For the cost of the M74 extension, every school child in Scotland could be provided with a 'safe route to school', removing the need for the 'school run' and greatly relieving congestion. The establishment

of indicators other than GDP to measure progress and assess the effectiveness of policy could focus activity in all policy areas. These are the kind of ideas which will emerge if we can stimulate debate in Scotland about 'where next?'

Scotland cannot afford to sit through the death of policy - a nation cannot survive on consultation papers alone. We need a vision, and no-one is excused from looking for it.

- The Scottish Left Review Editorial Board would like to thank everyone who helped make the benefit gig in January such a success. Those of you who came along will know that it was a very enjoyable evening, as well as being a good fundraiser. A particular thanks to The Stand Comedy Club for hosting it and to Elaine C Smith and the other comedians and musicians who donated their time for free. We hope to repeat the event in the near future. ■

## **Persuading people that Party X is capable of changing Scotland has taken such a precedence over thinking about how to change Scotland that it seems as if we are on the brink of the death of policy**

# a fair way to pay

Professors Mike Danson and Geoff Whittam argue that a Scottish Service Tax would introduce a redistributive tax system to tackle under-investment in the public sector

The fiscal constraints imposed by Westminster and by the more rigorous application of the Barnett formula are restricting the ability of the Scottish Parliament to address problems in health, education, housing, poverty and jobs. Few could doubt that there are pressing needs for improvements and investments in public services in Scotland, while social inclusion and the strategies for a competitive and dynamic economy are putting further pressures on local authority budgets.

At a time when social inclusion is being prioritised, there is a need to review the tax system as a whole to ensure that it does not undermine the relative position of the poorest even further. So, not only have the highest paid seen their incomes rise the fastest since 1979, but the richest now pay a lower proportion of their income in taxes. While in 1987-88 the highest rate of marginal income tax was 60 per cent, with a progression in five percentage point steps from 40 per cent beyond the basic rate of 27 per cent, now it is 40 per cent maximum. Since the late 1980s, there have effectively been but two rates, giving Britain an even more proportional, rather than progressive, income tax system compared with the position in much of the rest of Europe. The concomitant shift of taxation onto indirect taxes has had two important impacts: continuously increasing the regressive nature of the system as a whole and introducing means testing to a wider range of groups.

Summarising much analysis and given the demands on the Scottish budget, the challenge is to raise finance for the public services whilst shifting the burden onto those who have the ability to pay. This means looking at the current system of local government finance as it provides both the greatest problems and also, because of the form of the devolution settlement, the opportunity to introduce a progressive new tax to replace the council tax.

The regressive nature of the Council Tax makes problems of inequality even worse; under the former rating system the ratio of the highest to the lowest rates payable was 14:1, under Council Tax it is 3:1. The large numbers who rely on the means tested Council Tax Benefit in Scotland – 590 thousand – are testament to the regressive nature

of this tax. To address these needs and to improve the nature of the tax system requires an innovative approach. A progressive local income tax can be justified on the grounds of equity and the other characteristics of what makes a good tax. Plus, through a more just distribution formula to apportion rate support grant between Scottish local authorities, it will free up resources to be delivered locally for the benefit of the socially excluded.

In many respects in proposing the replacement of the Council Tax with a progressive Scottish Service Tax nothing new is being argued for. What makes it appear radical is the new political and economic climate regarding fiscal policy, namely that income redistribution cannot be achieved through direct taxation. However, starting with the **Commission on Local Government and the Scottish Parliament**, there have been calls by many local authorities and COSLA for an overall review of the system of local government finance in Scotland. This finally has led to the Scottish Parliament Local Government Committee inquiry into local government finance.

The sort of devolution of powers granted to Scotland in 1999 is a new departure in the arrangement of government structures in the UK. There is no obvious economic history within this country to call on, therefore, to guide possible policy interventions so that it is necessary to draw upon economic theory and experiences elsewhere.

In an attempt to redress the identified problems within Scotland it is suggested that a form of local income tax is required to replace the Council Tax. This would be progressive, based on ability-to-pay and would be set at marginal rates sufficient to increase the revenues raised to permit an expansion in public investment. It would be established at the Scottish level, with revenues distributed across local government areas according to needs. The Scottish Service Tax would be dedicated to local government expenditure and the expansion of budgets, particularly in Scotland's poorer areas, would lead to significant improvements in the health, education and housing conditions of Scotland's citizens. Such an improvement in essential service provision across Scotland delivers the name of the new tax proposal: The Scottish Service Tax.

**The regressive nature of the Council Tax makes problems of inequality even worse; under the former rating system the ratio of the highest to the lowest rates payable was 14:1, under Council Tax it is 3:1**

Such a local income tax was proposed by The Report on Local Government Finance and by designing the Scottish Service Tax within the context of a devolved Scotland we believe all the principles of a good tax have been met. In particular, the Scottish Service Tax addresses three major criticisms: fiscal flight, which would violate the need for fiscal neutrality; costs of administration; and it would compromise the impact of UK fiscal policy in terms of demand management. We believe that all these are answered sufficiently to make this proposal sound in legal, fiscal and economic terms.

Given certain assumptions, none of which is problematic in a technical sense, the Table below shows that the Scottish Service Tax would have raised about £1.109bn in 1997-98. This compares with **actual** Council Tax revenue (excluding Council Tax Rebate grants from the DSS of £260m) of £1.070bn, and suggests a gain of about £40m would have been realised. These figures are for illustration only, given the lack of access to comprehensive statistics on Scottish income taxpayers. However, they demonstrate that the actual tax raised would be at least of the same order as Council Tax revenues, would be raised on grounds of ability-to-pay, and could be levied at marginally higher but not penalty rates to increase the income for local authorities.

**A SCOTTISH SERVICE TAX 1997-1998**  
**Tax payable by individuals and tax raised across Scotland**

Range of total income of the individual (£s)	No. of taxpayers (,000s)	Marginal SST rate (%)	Average SST paid by an individual (£s)	SST paid by this income group (£000s)	Income paid in SST (%)
less than 5000	84	0	0	0	0.0
5000-9999	716	0	0	0	0.0
10000-14999	567	4.5	112	63775	0.9
15000-19999	420	5.5	362	152238	2.1
20000-24999	266	6.5	662	176216	2.9
25000-29999	140	7.5	1012	141745	3.7
30000-39999	92	8.5	1625	149496	4.6
40000-49999	42	9.5	2525	106048	5.6
50000-69999	20	10.0	4000	79999	6.7
70000-99999	22	15.0	7250	159498	8.5
over 100000	6	20.0	12409	80454	11.2
<b>Total revenue £1,109,469.74</b>					
<b>Revenues realised from SST rates illustrated</b>					
<b>1997-1998</b>					
Scottish Service Tax		Revenue £1.109bn			
Council Tax Collected		Revenue £1.070bn		<b>gain with new tax £39m</b>	
<b>1998-1999</b>					
Scottish Service Tax		Revenue £1.200bn			
Council Tax Collected		Anticipated £1.154bn		<b>gain with new tax £50m</b>	

Projecting forward to the following financial year, and applying a modest four per cent wage growth in 1997/98-98/99, would have realised over £1.2bn in 1998-99; against an estimated Council Tax collection of £1.154bn (assuming Council Tax Rebate grants from the DSS remain at £260m);

an improvement of about £50m. As the proceeds of the tax are still to be applied to the same policy goals, there is merit in meeting such a modest Council Tax Benefit obligation, while the advantages of an automatic stabiliser in the Scottish economy could be significant.

A replacement of the regressive Council Tax with a more progressive Scottish Service Tax is feasible and appears to be legally competent. Increased revenues could be raised by such a tax without a significant danger of fiscal flight, disincentive effects, or unacceptable costs. To address the evolving situation with regard to social exclusion, poor housing, city region imbalances, and other problems introduced by local government reorganisation and fiscal flight from the poorer areas, a new needs assessment is required for local government. In particular, it can be argued strongly that the grant aided expenditure distributed to councils on the basis of the 'client group assessment' more closely reflects social inclusion than simple population aggregates.

The Scottish Service Tax has the potential to increase local authority expenditure with the positive consequences of increased employment, improved local services and a raising of standards of education, health and housing across Scotland. The academic literature, based on experiences around the world, also points to the positive multiplier effects on the poorest communities, the regions and also the wider national and UK economies which can be realised by such expansion.

Critically, the Scottish Service Tax is progressive and re-distributive. It places income redistribution at the heart of service provision and delivery, and taxes citizens according to ability to pay. The Scottish Service Tax would raise the standard of life for many of the poorest in Scotland, particularly pensioners and the low paid. Their level of disposable income would be increased by the abolition of the standard Council Tax and its replacement by the Scottish Service Tax. The multiplier effects are enhanced by targeting financial assistance on low income groups with

consequent expansionary effects on the Scottish and UK economies, moving the tax and benefits system in Scotland towards the mainstream continental practice. ■

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# learning from wherever we can

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## Donald Christie calls for the debate on education in Scotland to have the courage to ask difficult questions

The Government has declared that it is committed to “A Scotland in which every child matters, where every child regardless of their family background has the best possible start in life”. How might this commitment be expressed in relation to education? Scotland’s new Minister for Education and Young People, Cathy Jamieson, has called for a National Education Debate. In this short article some issues will be suggested as being worthy of consideration in any genuine attempt to, as Cathy Jamieson said, “take stock” and to move towards an education system “fit for the 21st Century”.

Firstly, we should examine some of the assumptions being made in the statement the Minister made in launching the initiative. She commends the system for delivering “a high quality education for many of our young people”. There is evidence to support such a statement. A recently reported comparative study of school attainment in 32 countries by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development showed Scottish 15-year olds scoring well on measures of performance in reading (6th), mathematics (4th) and scientific literacy (9th). These results were very much welcomed by a Scottish Executive, more accustomed to having to account for low performance on such international comparisons. Even if we accept that there is some evidence of improving standards, there are no grounds whatever for complacency. The system may appear to be working for “many of our young people”, but for many it is still failing.

Very significant features of our society are the degree of social inequality and, in particular, the level of child poverty to be found in Scotland - among the highest in the developed world. The figures have been rising, seemingly inexorably, for the last 20 years, resulting in a current situation in which more than one child in three is living in poverty. The link between social disadvantage and low educational attainment remains very strong and a key feature of the school system in Scotland, perhaps not often enough highlighted, is the very wide range of attainment it produces. It can be argued that many of our attempts to improve standards are not only failing to close the gaps which exist but may in fact be serving to exacerbate differences in attainment. In this article I shall mainly discuss issues connected with the primary stages of schooling. This should not be taken to imply that secondary education is less in need of review.

The Early Intervention Programme (EIP) was designed to address the problem of under-attainment in literacy and numeracy among vulnerable groups of children, largely

taken to be those who grow up in socio-economically disadvantaged circumstances. Careful analysis of the outcomes of EIP shows there were overall gains in measured literacy and numeracy in Scotland as a whole. However, the gap in attainment between the socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged was not significantly reduced - except perhaps in some local authorities where the available resources were targeted on fewer schools. The strongest predictors of attainment in literacy and numeracy remain those associated with measures of social advantage/disadvantage. This is a challenge which demands a response for politicians and policy makers. If there is to be any kind of equality of opportunity for Scotland’s children, additional resources must be directed to those with greatest need. Any political party claiming a commitment to social justice needs to demonstrate a willingness to grapple with, and attempt to reverse the operation of, the ‘Inverse Care Law’ which has for too long characterised social provision in this country. This has meant that those with the greatest need paradoxically receive the poorest provision of services, including education.

Other findings of the evaluation of EIP are also worthy of note. The introduction of nursery nurses or classroom assistants working alongside primary classroom teachers was generally seen as beneficial. In the classrooms involved the effective adult to child ratio was significantly improved. It was also found that the younger children in any age cohort were significantly disadvantaged in terms of educational attainment. International comparisons are very interesting on these particular points, since in most comparable countries, unlike in Scotland, children aged between four years six months and 6 years are not considered old enough to begin formal education and instead are provided with various kinds of pre-school or kindergarten experience. In Norway, for example, a typical kindergarten catering for children up until school age at seven years might have a ratio of one adult to four children. In such a well-resourced context it is undoubtedly possible to provide a very rich variety of experiential learning opportunities, which are simply impossible to achieve in the less favourable circumstances of a P1 or P2 classroom with up to 30 children being taught by a single teacher, even with some support from a classroom assistant.

In any radical review of education in Scotland there is a serious need to examine the current provision for children in the early stages of primary school. The policy announcement by the SNP of a maximum class size of 18 in the early stages of primary education is perhaps a move in the right

direction. However, the age-appropriateness of the demands of a formal educational curriculum in these critical early years also needs to be very carefully reconsidered. The potentially damaging effects of early failure in school should not be underestimated. It has been argued that many children aged four-and-a-half years currently being admitted to primary schools are simply not developmentally ready for the formal aspects of schooling associated with literacy and numeracy. Like many claims made in the contentious field of education, this is an oversimplification. With enormous commitment and dedication, some talented P1 teachers working in socially disadvantaged communities manage to enable all their pupils, even the younger children, to overcome these supposed 'developmental' barriers and achieve very high standards of literacy and numeracy, but many teachers simply find it impossible, despite their best efforts. For a range of reasons, many children experience difficulties early in their schooling, which may persist throughout their education.

It is a matter of concern that the most recent pre-school curricular guidelines place demands on nursery schools and nursery classes to introduce formal elements of literacy and numeracy even earlier in children's educational experience, potentially compounding these problems. Elsewhere in Europe, educationalists have entirely rejected any such approach. Can we not learn from their successes? In our National Debate, therefore, let us seriously address the two issues of class size and nature of the curriculum in the early years. The way would then be open to challenge existing structures. Should the period of more informal, pre-school education, with more favourable adult to child ratios, be extended to age six, or even seven years? The next stage might then span the years six/seven to 14, followed by a more concentrated and possibly more worthwhile period of secondary education, as can be found in many comparable countries in Europe.

I will pick up one other issue here. Will the Government have the courage to address the place of Religious Education and in particular the place of religious observance in schools in our largely secular society? Again we can perhaps benefit from a comparative perspective. France, arguably, evinces a much stronger religious tradition than this country and yet its education system is strictly secular. Richard Holloway, among others, argues that while the establishment of Denominational Schools was a justifiable measure in 1918 to protect the Catholic faith community from flagrant persecution, this does not justify the creation of more publicly-funded faith schools for any religion today. Instead we should be perhaps be examining the moral values associated with democratic pluralism, celebrating and learning about the diversity of beliefs and practices to be found in the world, but at the same time acknowledging and trying to counteract the injustice, intolerance and discrimination which is also prevalent. It has been recently argued that consideration of values, beliefs and moral decision making should have a more important place in

any revised school curriculum, but not within a subject called 'religious and moral education'. Again, if we look elsewhere we might learn from secular education systems, which include ethics and moral philosophy as integral components of the curriculum.

There is an unfortunate tendency in education to seek a panacea for all problems. Some fashionable prescriptions include: playing ambient music, drinking water, sitting in a circle, analysing phonics, synthesising phonics and, best of all, talking about 'brain-based' learning. Such fads and fashions must be subjected to rigorous scrutiny and evaluation. What we need are professional communities of enquiry operating at all levels ranging from the individual school through clusters of schools to large scale samples of schools involved in national initiatives. The New Community Schools initiative has shown the potential of this model as a way of developing and sharing good practice.

One key issue to be addressed by educational policy makers is, therefore, the need for evidence on which to base informed policy decisions. Reference has already been made in this article to the potential insight to be gained from comparisons with other education systems. This is, sadly, one valuable source of evidence, which has been largely ignored in this country. For generations Scotland has taken pride in its distinctive education system. Unfortunately there has been a tendency towards complacency inherent in this view, sustained by what might be portrayed as almost a degree of self-congratulation in relation to the one comparison which we have been happy to make, namely, the comparison with our near neighbours in England. For the present educational debate to be worth anything, we must be willing to avoid such narrow-minded complacency, engage in honest self-criticism and genuinely question current assumptions about so-called 'good practice'.

It is vital, therefore, that future policy for education should include a clear strategy for educational research in Scotland. The Scottish Executive Education and Young People Research Unit is about to announce its research priorities for the next three years. It would have been a good example of 'joined-up' thinking if the National Education Debate had been allowed to inform the process of prioritisation.

In conclusion it is indeed timely that we should be holding a National Education Debate in the year 2002. There is much to discuss. However, let it not simply be a token exercise. In seeking new directions for education in Scotland let us be willing to ask difficult questions and accept that the answers themselves may also be complex and problematic. ■

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# our nation, our health

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## Andrew Lyon argues that the NHS cannot create health in Scotland - we need a more fundamental change of attitude

However you measure it, Scotland's health record is poor. Let's have a look. Comparing Scotland with the rest of the UK we find Scotland has the highest rate of deaths from all cause of any UK region for both men and women. Life expectancy at birth is lower in Scotland than any other UK region for both men and women. Scotland has a greater proportion of its population living in deprivation than England and Wales (18 per cent versus 9 per cent ).

Comparing the experience of the richest with the poorest, we find that Scotland has greater mortality in each deprivation quintile than England and Wales. On top of that, the difference in mortality between the richest and the poorest in Scotland is greater than between similar groups in England and Wales - i.e. the link between deprivation and mortality seems to be stronger in Scotland than in England and Wales. This pattern is persistent, and true across all causes of mortality. In fact Scots are 25 per cent more likely to die before their 65th birthday than their counterparts in England and Wales.

Our mental state as a nation can be discerned from increasing suicide rates, especially amongst the young and the increasing frequency with which people report mental symptoms to their GP - one in five adults in some parts of the country.

Comparing Scottish local authority areas with English regions - yes you've guessed, Glasgow City has the worst record and even the best Scottish areas struggle to keep up with the worst English regions.

Moving onto to international comparisons it becomes clear that Scotland's mortality and morbidity experience is more like an emerging eastern European country than a western one. Barring Portugal, only eastern European countries had worse mortality than Scotland in Europe in 1996. Using W.H.O data Scotland had almost 50 per cent excess mortality when compared to Sweden and slightly worse mortality than Slovenia. An even more depressing picture emerges if we look at cause specific mortality. Here Scotland's standing compared to theirs only gets worse and is especially poor for heart disease and cancers.

In life expectancy at birth, Scots again come in the middle of the table with all other western European countries ahead of us and only eastern European ones behind. Trends in life expectancy are mostly on the up, Scotland's improvement is slower than elsewhere in Western Europe. Trends in disease are down, Scotland's rate is slower than elsewhere in western Europe. Our relative position is therefore worsening.

If these results were in a football tournament there would be a national outcry. The newspapers would carry the story everyday, a national emergency would be declared and managers would be running for their lives as we searched for a scapegoat. Yet when our people are dying, particularly our poorest, we are slow to move and really don't seem to care all that much, until it's our turn or the turn of someone we love. This situation is unacceptable and needs to be changed. But how?

I don't know where the idea came from that the National Health Service can create health, but it can't. The NHS spends almost all of its budget treating people after they become sick. The idea that the NHS could create health - if only we gave it more money - now forms a major obstacle to the real work of addressing the origins of Scotland's woeful health record and doing something about it which might actually help.

The purpose of this piece is not to criticise the NHS, though there seems to be plenty that needs changing. In terms of preventing the main causes of early death and excess illness, diminishing returns have set in to health service activity some time ago - as they have in every other modernised nation. In any case, health policy needs to go beyond death and illness and find the paths which will lead us to a place where we each have a better chance of not only a longer but a more fulfilling and happy life.

This is my main point. The best way to ensure that the NHS has a viable future is to commit ourselves to building a healthy Scottish population, and thus change the nature of Scotland's relationship with its health services. The NHS is an incredible institution, but it cannot, and was never designed to, create health. To do this we need to start from a different and more holistic point of view.

The 1948 World Health Organisation definition of health says: " .....health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease....." This means three main things:

1. Health is a state of being. It is not an activity. It is not health care, not decent housing or a good local environment, not welfare, or health and safety at work. It is not jogging, eating a balanced diet, or stopping smoking. It is not enjoying yourself, relaxing, being in a loving relationship, having great friends, laughing or being connected to the world around you. It is the outcome of how stuff like this stacks up to make your everyday life. It is possible that our aspiration as a nation could include being the healthiest nation on



- earth. We need to choose this and having chosen it we need to work together to make it happen. It's up to us.
2. This brings me to the second point. There is great hope in this definition of health. It means that health is amenable to change. Health can be created and improved everywhere in Scotland. We create the conditions which give rise to health and we can change them for the better.
  3. Health and well-being is not the responsibility of any one organisation, profession, sector or individual working on its own. It requires partnership, joint working and joint budgeting. Joined up thinking needs to be accompanied by joined up action. We need inter-connectedness in our approach to the health challenge, not fragmentation.

## If these results were in a football tournament there would be a national outcry

OK! What does this suggest by way of policies and actions to create health in Scotland? We need to start with values. In a world which is increasingly uncertain, where fear and anxiety drive policy and action more than care and compassion, where we seem to prefer homogeneity as an outcome rather than diversity, the role of values should not be underestimated. I would suggest that we start with the following set: Justice, Equity, Participation, Respect, Connectedness and Inclusion. I appreciate that others will add or subtract from these. I would welcome the conversation which this implies. These values need also to be applied at each and every level and type of action - international to interpersonal. There are some early actions which could be taken.

- Living and Working Conditions need significant attention. Aspirations need to be high here and integrated with wider environmental and global concerns. An adequate housing programme should reduce greenhouse emissions, improve comfort and reduce fuel poverty. A good housing programme should include environmental issues green space, waste and resource effectiveness. A really good one would openly and transparently engage locals fully in the decision making process. And ensure that housing is barrier free. A good starting point would be new housing legislation which has a simple objective - for example no household in the country should have to pay more than 10 per cent of income for fuel. This would stimulate action on many related fronts all of which would show health benefits. There are many talented people in Scotland who have done magnificent work in this field. It needs to become the norm rather than the exception. The outcome of the cities review could give us a good starting point for discussion on these issues.

- Eliminate poverty, reduce inequality: There is a strong relationship between poor health, low income and inequality. There is a debate raging among the cognoscenti about this issue currently. However, it seems safe enough to say that any action which reduces both poverty and inequality will have a positive effect. The concept of citizen's income needs to be debated further and extended into the later lifecycle in the light of growing concerns over our pension arrangements as we grow older as a nation. Some action on the long high income tail which explains much of income differential in the UK needs some attention.

- Support for healthier everyday life: Education, Learning, Food Policy, Transport Policy all have an impact on health. It's time

to take a long hard look at these and develop policies and practices which equip each of us to be effective citizens - to become collective individuals strong for ourselves and strong for others; support the development of less travelled and more natural food at prices which we can all afford; and transport which encourages us out of our cars and into other more active modes of transport. I suspect that 'quit driving' classes may be needed to cure us of the driving addiction!

- Fresh budgeting ideas need investigating. With the right will, networks and budget arrangements to share and co-create and develop good practice across civic life could become a powerful vehicle for health creation.
- A regional single public health budget allocated to partnerships across all services is worth thinking about and could get us beyond partnership in name only at the local level. At this level a fresh look at health care arrangements would also help. What has the Healthy Living Centre experience got to offer thinking about one stop delivery at the local level? What do we know about the impact of our action in other areas - e.g. housing, employment, transport and education upon health?
- Finally it would do no harm to develop a set of healthy indicators, rather than a set of illness and death indicators. The Dutch play host to a happiness index. Maybe us dour Scots would do well to think about how we could measure the generation of health rather than its absence. We have little to lose and a lot to gain. Incremental change is not enough. If Scotland is to be rid of this national shame we need a radical change in approach. An ever expanding health budget is not the answer. It is time to start looking in the fabric of our everyday lives, where everyone has a role to play in the creation of health. ■

*Writing in a personal capacity, Andrew Lyon works at the International Futures Forum of the Scottish Council Foundation*

# not a housing policy

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Kathleen Caskie argues that Scotland does not need a housing policy but needs all public policy to address housing problems

Suggesting that the political parties should have a section headed 'housing' in their manifestos somehow feels old-fashioned and a bit 'last century'.

The days when parties pledged to build ever-greater numbers of council houses are long gone. Not only do councils rarely build houses these days, increasingly they don't even manage them, and if the Glasgow house stock transfer goes through we will be playing the end game for council housing. Maybe housing associations (and other 'social landlords') will do a better job in managing housing stock built with public money than the councils ever did, or maybe our democracy will be weakened by us losing any kind of control over 'social' housing (beyond subsidising it). Anyway, it's a minority interest these days. The majority of Scots have chosen to buy their homes, and young people aspire almost universally to become owner-occupiers.

Even homelessness is no longer viewed as a housing problem; it's an issue of social exclusion. It's not solved by offering more council houses to homeless people.

Even the phrase 'council housing' sounds dated. Nowadays we talk of 'socially rented housing', and can it be long before we fully adopt the language of the USA and start calling our publicly funded housing 'projects' or even 'ghettos'? Scottish Homes, the Government's housing quango, has changed its name to Communities Scotland. housing has become politically invisible. It is a fragmented and disparate series of issues, which cannot be solved by anything as straightforward as a 'housing policy'.

Yet for the young families and single people struggling on low incomes, particularly in the over-heated housing market of Edinburgh, finding affordable housing is a huge problem. Socially Rented housing is allocated mostly according to need, and it's hit or miss whether a family will meet the criteria of an individual housing association. The decent council housing stock in areas that people want to live in has been bought up by its tenants under the right-to-buy, or is rented by families who have been in the house for a long time and have no desire to move. Of course, there are always vacancies in the hard-to-let stock, where the internal problems of dampness and decay are matched only by the external problems of drug dealing and crime.

A flourishing private rented sector would be an asset. It would offer people the chance of quick-access housing, normally in an area that people want to live in. But the laws facing private landlords grow ever more restrictive,

and the costs of private renting are usually comparable, or higher, than the costs of paying a mortgage. It's an option that is appealing only to the most mobile – students, young workers – and not a long-term housing option for families.

Given this picture, it's very unlikely that any political party will give much space in its manifesto to 'housing', and it's difficult to think of what we should be looking for under this heading anyway. But that doesn't mean we don't have a housing problem. Homelessness remains at record levels. House prices in Edinburgh and its surrounds are leading to problems for companies seeking to recruit in the area. As for the 'residual' housing stock on peripheral estates, policy-makers and influencers don't live there and rarely go there. In return the residents of these estates increasingly don't vote. This doesn't stop them from living in some of the grimmest housing estates with the worst social problems in Europe.

Specific areas for action include; reform of the benefits system, help to maintain and repair older properties, programmes to help those on low incomes to access and keep accommodation, and urban regeneration in the broadest sense, tying in with policies to tackle social exclusion.

Theoretically reform of the benefits system should be straightforward. It's obvious what needs to be done. Of course, constitutionally it's a nest of vipers. Benefits are a reserved power. It's time for the political parties to be bold enough to demand change on this. We must give the Scottish Parliament the ability to tackle the range of social problems that Scotland faces, and it cannot do that without also having the power to change and reform the benefits system.

Housing Benefit is paying rents in homeless hostels and specially designated flats and houses at ridiculous amounts. It would be cheaper for us, as tax-payers, to buy homeless people flats and to pay the mortgages on them than for us to continue to pay rents at these levels – rents of £500, and £600 a month for low-quality accommodation, such as a bed in a hostel, are common for homeless people. And once the rent is that high you can give up any notion of the homeless person returning to work. keep them in this accommodation, and you keep them unemployed, with no chance to earn money to provide for themselves and their families and to make their own housing choices. We need greater flexibility, and we need

to structure benefits in such a way that it is possible for people to make the transition from homelessness and unemployment into employment. The Scottish Parliament needs to demand control of this.

One of the negative side-effects of owner occupation is that many owner occupiers are unable to pay the costs of maintaining their properties, something that is particularly crucial given the age of much of Scotland's current housing stock. The simple Thatcherite arithmetic that equates owner-occupation with national wealth is fundamentally wrong; Bangladesh has one of the highest rates of owner occupation in the world. For those on low incomes we need to introduce repair and maintenance grants that will prevent owner occupied houses becoming slums.

For those who cannot afford owner-occupation, particularly in areas of house prices increasing to stupid levels, we need a vibrant, affordable rented sector. Accepting that the days of council housing are past, we need political will and action to create and nurture alternatives. We should reform the tax system to encourage landlords to rent out their houses rather than sell them off for quick profits. While health and safety in private rented accommodation is a genuine concern, grants should be made available to private landlords to make their homes safe.

It's crucial we do something about our grim housing estates, regardless of who the landlord turns out to be. We can expect every manifesto to include fine-sounding phrases about the need to rebuild communities, regenerate urban areas and tackle social exclusion. Working out what specific actions will be taken in support of these goals will be more difficult. The problems in these estates are many but what causes the greatest fear and lowers the quality of life the most are crime and anti-social behaviour caused by abuse of alcohol and in particular heroin.

In Scotland more than 55,000 individuals are abusing drugs such as heroin. These 55,000 are not scattered

equally throughout the nation, but are concentrated in the areas of grimmest poverty. To feed their habits they commit crimes. Government policy towards those who are already addicted to heroin is to offer them methadone, equally addictive but available legally and free of charge. It's hardly rehabilitation, and in many areas methadone

is sold on on the black market. Even in Glasgow, where methadone taking is often supervised, there is a black market in 'spit methadone', where an addict appears to have drunk his or her methadone, but has in fact held it in his or her mouth until s/he leaves the chemists.

No amount of regeneration of council estates – no number of community food co-operatives or after-school homework clubs or even of repairs and improvements to the fabric of the housing – will improve life for those on these estates until the problem of heroin addiction is tackled. Yet the Government plans more of the same; more educational initiatives, more projects funded through Scotland Against Drugs, greater access to the methadone programme, despite the fact that in the past ten years these policies have totally failed. The only party that is debating this and suggesting alternatives to current policy are the Scottish Socialists. Everyone else seems to have been dragged into the soggy failure of consensus on this issue.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century 'housing policy' is a series of different problems requiring different solutions. Even if we wanted to, we can't turn the clock back fifty years to the days when political parties aimed to outbid each other in the number of council houses they pledged to build if elected. Instead we should be looking for a more sophisticated response that recognises the links between housing and employment,

housing and health, housing and education and even housing and citizenship. Instead of a separate section headed 'housing', we could make progress if we recognised it as an issue that underpins most other domestic policies. ■

*Kathleen Caskie is Director of Public Affairs with The Big Issue in Scotland*

**As for the 'residual' housing stock on peripheral estates, policy-makers and influencers don't live there and rarely go there. In return the residents of these estates increasingly don't vote. This doesn't stop them from living in some of the grimmest housing estates with the worst social problems in Europe**

# a risk too far

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Jim and Margaret Cuthbert argue that when it comes to financing public services PFI need not be the only game in town

Successive governments have had two main objectives in promoting PFI: first, to keep capital expenditure out of the government's borrowing requirement, and secondly, claiming that PFI will produce a significant improvement in value for money. A fundamental part of both of these objectives relates to the idea of transfer of risk from the public sector to the private sector. In this article, we argue that confusion about risk transfer is responsible for major weaknesses in PFI schemes: greater clarity on risk transfer offers the potential for radical improvement in the operation of PFI.

On reading the government's published explanations of the PFI process, it is clear that there are two basic principles which underlie the operation of risk transfer in PFI. A primary consideration when PFI was introduced by the Conservatives was to move the acquisition of capital assets off the government's books. Under the government's accounting standards, if sufficient risk is transferred to the private sector the assets do not count against the government's borrowing requirement: if there is only a limited transfer of risk, the transaction should be regarded as a disguised form of borrowing, and so the assets do count against the government's borrowing requirement. The first principle relating to risk transfer and PFI is, therefore, that there must be sufficient risk transfer to ensure that the public sector is not simply acquiring a capital asset which needs to be shown on its balance sheet.

The second principle of risk transfer in PFI relates to value for money: it states that risks should be allocated between the public and private sectors to the party best able to manage them to ensure best value for money. This principle in itself seems unexceptionable. However, in terms of this principle, there is no point in transferring to the private sector any risk which the private sector cannot handle more cheaply: such a transfer cannot be value for money, since it merely involves the public sector paying a premium to the private sector over and above the unaltered cost of the original risk. In particular, there is no point in transferring interest rate risk to the private sector, since the private sector can only borrow at a premium relative to the public sector.

A major problem in the implementation of PFI in Britain is that the above two principles of risk transfer have not been clearly enough distinguished, and the requirements of the first principle – to get projects off the government's books – have in practice tended to be dominant. This has led to a situation where the emphasis has been on claiming

a sufficient amount of risk transfer within a given PFI project to satisfy the first principle, without considering whether the nature of the risks transferred is appropriate under the second principle; that is, ensuring value for money. It has also meant that PFI schemes tend to bundle together a number of different components, for example design, build, and facilities management, to form large individual projects. Such projects qualify on the first principle on the basis of a few risk elements within the package, but without considering whether appropriate risk transfer under the second principle has actually been achieved for each of the individual components of the project. In other words, the way the risk transfer principles have been interpreted has tended to result in large individual PFI projects, incorporating potentially inappropriate risk transfers.

A classic example of such a project is the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh scheme. The contract for this £180 million project for the replacement of one of Edinburgh's main hospitals was signed in 1998. According to the Business Plan, the total risk transferred to the private sector was estimated at £65 million, of which no less than £42 million represented interest rate risk. We have argued above that interest rate risk is a completely inappropriate form of risk to be transferred to the private sector.

The drive towards large PFI projects itself leads to other adverse consequences:

- Paradoxically, the very existence of a large PFI project tends to defeat the basic intention to transfer risk to the private sector. Ultimately, with large projects, the risk rests with the public sector, or with the service recipient – usually the public. This is because, if a large project were to fail, the potential costs to the public sector, in terms of the consequences of disruption to service provision, are usually much more severe than the potential financial cost to the private sector. As an example of this, witness the recent bail out of the air traffic control system.
- Large complex PFI contracts weaken the operation of a competitive market. This is because these contracts can only be undertaken by large firms or organisations: hence, such contracts will typically attract bids from a very small number of large firms or consortia. The small number of bidders in itself weakens the competitive process and reduces the chances of obtaining value for money. It also opens up the danger that bidders might choose to operate as a cartel.

- Large contracts, bundling together design and build with an operational stream, also tend to be long contracts, commonly lasting for 30 years. There may in practice be insufficient flexibility in the specification of such contracts to cater for the changing demand for services through time.
- Within large complex PFI projects, there is a danger that land deals and other issues can be swept up, without their financial and operational aspects being given the due attention that they deserve.
- Finally, because all these factors, including the transfer of inappropriate risk, increase the cost of large PFI deals, such deals can commonly only be made affordable by reducing the basic specification of the service to be provided. The first 14 PFI hospitals involved bed reductions averaging 33 per cent from the outline business case stage.

These adverse consequences have tended in practice to far outweigh the claimed benefits of bundled projects – namely, that such projects would enable efficient synergy between design and operation, and also encourage the development of innovative solutions for service provision. In fact, examination of PFI schemes to date suggests that such synergies have not been achieved.

Is there a solution to all of these problems? The answer is surely yes – and it is to do with better unbundling of PFI projects into smaller constituent projects, where the risk transfer in each contract is firmly rooted in value for money.

Unbundling provides a potential solution to each of the identified problems. First of all, it means that only risks which the private sector is demonstrably better at handling need be transferred. Second, it is much easier with smaller contracts, either to take the activity back into the public sector, or to transfer it to another private sector provider, in the event of failure. As a result, the risk transfer to the private sector becomes genuine. Thirdly, with smaller contracts there is likely to be a genuine market, with more suppliers, including smaller local firms: this has the added advantage of potentially providing greater help to the local economy. Fourthly, it is much easier for the public sector to maintain control of the overall project specification. Finally, the greater value for money achievable should ensure that there is less pressure for reduction in the level of service provided.

## **There is a solution to PFI via the mechanism of unbundling, facilitated by the establishment of public service trusts.**

There are, however, two potential problems with going down this unbundling route. Will the capital expenditure in the unbundled projects indeed be 'off the books' as regards the government's borrowing requirement, and are local public sector agencies sufficiently expert to successfully co-ordinate the large number of unbundled contracts which would be involved in the building and running of, say, a hospital.

In fact, the first of these problems is something of a red herring. With the improvement in the public finances over the last five years, there has been little requirement to get capital expenditure off the government's books. Further, changes in accounting standards, and in particular, the introduction by the Accountancy Standards Board of amendments to accounting standard FRS5,

mean that conventional PFI schemes are anyway likely to come back on to the government's books. In other words, it appears that PFI has latterly been driven by another agenda than the requirement to get capital expenditure out of the government's borrowing requirement.

As regards the second problem, of managing many smaller contracts, there is a potential solution in the creation of specialised not-for-profit trusts. Such a trust, for example, might be responsible for the design, build, and operation of a number of hospitals across Scotland. As a specialist agency with a national scale of operation, such a trust would have the expertise to unbundle each individual hospital project into constituent components, which it would then let to private sector, or indeed public sector, contractors. This solution, of the creation of public service trusts, was originally proposed by the SNP. But it is interesting that the recent report by the Institute of Public Policy Research recommended the creation of not for profit trusts to handle certain public/private partnership schemes.

After ten years of PFI, the controversy still rages about whether or not PFI gives value for money, and whether it should be extended into further areas of public sector provision. We have argued here that there has been confusion on the risk transfer process, and that this has largely contributed to some of the more controversial features of past PFI schemes. We suggest that there is a solution via the mechanism of unbundling, facilitated by the establishment of public service trusts. ■

*Jim Cuthbert was formerly Chief Statistician at the Scottish Office. Margaret Cuthbert is an economist at MC Economics.*

# moving priorities

## David Spaven argues that the political parties have to commit themselves to new priorities in transport spending

It's simple really. The big problem with transport is that there's too much traffic on our roads. Too much traffic damages the economy, divides communities and degrades the environment, in rural as well as urban areas. The biggest congestion may be in the heart of our cities but the fastest growth in traffic is taking place in suburban and rural areas, fuelled by short-sighted land use planning and centralisation of services.

People are travelling further and further to do the same things, putting unnecessary strain on transport networks. Meanwhile those without cars (over a third of Scotland's households) suffer increasing social exclusion. Two thousand people a year die prematurely in Scotland because of pollution from road vehicles. Child pedestrians from poorer communities are four times more likely to be killed on the roads than children from higher income groups.

The impact of our road traffic stretches far beyond Scotland - transport is the fastest growing sector for production of climate change emissions. We are already falling behind England in reducing emissions from transport, and while the UK climate change strategy requires the transport sector to deliver 40 per cent of all proposed reductions, no targets have been set for Scotland.

Instead of pursuing the illusion of ever-growing mobility based on encouraging more travel by all modes of transport - the unsustainable 'more of everything' approach - we need to re-focus policies towards improving access to employment, schools, hospitals, shopping and leisure facilities by the more sustainable modes of transport. Three key policy objectives are needed:

- **Modal shift.** This means a higher percentage of trips made by public transport, walking and cycling, and a bigger share of freight being carried by rail and sea rather than road haulage.
- **Less road traffic.** We require concerted effort to reduce the overall level of traffic, in accordance with the two Road Traffic Reduction Acts on the statute book.
- **Reducing the need to travel.** Perhaps the most urgent objective is to reduce the need to travel, avoiding the planning errors of previous decades in undermining local services.

In Scotland many politicians remain hooked on outdated policies which would actually make matters worse. Incredibly - despite the evidence of the M8 and M77 in Glasgow, the Edinburgh City Bypass, and the notorious M25 with its insatiable appetite for extra lanes - the

Scottish Executive still thinks we can build our way out of gridlock. The Executive's grotesque £500 million-plus roads programme threatens to repeat all the worst transport mistakes of the Conservative Scottish Office years.

The parties that control the Scottish Executive have misled voters on transport. Neither Labour nor the Liberal Democrats promoted a vast road building programme in their 1999 manifestos; they did however promise major improvements in public transport.

Contrary to the claims of the fuel protesters, the price of motoring has remained constant in real terms for 25 years, while the same period saw a 50 per cent increase in rail fares and an 80 per cent increase in bus fares in real terms. Making private transport even cheaper would only exacerbate our problems of pollution and congestion.

There is no single panacea for the transport crisis. Spending money on the correct priorities will make a big difference, but there is also a crucial role for changes in taxation/charging, regulations, and enforcement - all designed to influence transport choice and travel behaviour. However, there are two main areas where we must take action if the transport crisis is to be solved:

o Civilising the streets. We must make journeys by walking and cycling more attractive: too many people are discouraged from making journeys by these healthy modes of transport because of the speed and aggression of motorised traffic. We give far lower priority to cyclists and people on foot than most European countries.

o Targeted investment in public transport and alternatives to road haulage. We must reverse the historic under-investment in quality public transport by road and rail - and provide the strategic route infrastructure to ensure that more of Scotland's goods can be moved by rail, building on one of the few Scottish Executive success stories, the Freight Facilities Grants scheme for rail and shipping terminals investment.

You wouldn't know it from the political and media obsession with grandiose long-distance transport infrastructure, but most journeys are very local. Half of all trips are shorter than two miles, and 70 per cent less than five miles. Most local journeys are made on foot but a quarter of car journeys are less than two miles. Many of these trips can - and should - be made either by public transport or by so-called 'active travel' - walking or cycling. Only by active travel are we likely to meet national public health targets for exercise.

Reclaiming residential streets means redesigning streets and road junctions to give greater priority to walkers, disabled people and cyclists. There should be a commitment to fund traffic-calmed 20 mph zones or very low speed 'Home Zones' (where people on foot have legal priority over vehicles in the same way as they do on pedestrian crossings) on all residential streets where communities want them.

Making better use of road space, with more priority for buses, cyclists and people on foot, will go a long way towards civilising our streets. Urban road pricing/congestion charging has a key role to play in rationing road space, but motoring anywhere on the road system is adding to climate change - a gallon of petrol burnt on a rural single-track road in the Highlands is just as bad for global warming as a gallon burnt on the M8 in Glasgow, so fuel taxation must remain a key instrument of transport policy.

Travelling everywhere by car establishes car dependency at an early age, reduces childrens' ability to act independently and impairs their fitness and future health. It is estimated that £250 million could provide all school age children in Scotland with 'Safe Routes to School.' This looks extremely good value for the same price tag as bulldozing 5 miles of M74 Northern Extension deep into the heart of Glasgow.

Traffic-calming, pedestrianised areas, wider pavements, better signing, lighting and footway repairs can all encourage people to walk. Unfortunately, the Executive spends a pittance on this most sustainable and healthy form of transport. Total expenditure on all walking, cycling and safer streets schemes will be just £21 million over the five years from 1999 to 2004 - the cost of less than half a mile of urban motorway.

70 per cent of motorists admit to breaking speed limits, the real figure is no doubt even higher. Spot checks consistently find that around a quarter of heavy lorries are breaking safety regulations. This brings a high price in deaths and injuries and fear of crossing roads, particularly to households without cars. Enforcement of speed limits should be a top priority, creating the conditions for a major revival of walking and cycling in our cities, towns and villages.

We live in a country that has become one of the most dependent in Europe on cars and lorries for motorised transport. Government should reduce this overdependence and promote real choice in how people and goods are

transported. We must refocus road expenditure on high quality maintenance of the existing road and pavement networks for the benefit of all road users.

Priority should be given to improving rail services - such as electrifying the Edinburgh-Shotts-Glasgow Central line to create a fast inter-city link - and to strategic extensions of the rail network, in particular to the Borders, the only mainland region of Britain without a rail service.

Promoting rail freight offers a real opportunity to get heavy lorries off the roads - especially for the 27 per cent of Scottish road freight that travels over distances greater than 400 km. Major strategic improvements should be the reopening of the Stirling-Alloa-Dunfermline line and the clearance of the route to Aberdeen for tall containers.

Local buses will continue to be the main form of public transport for most people. Properly-enforced bus priority and action to reduce fare levels are the best ways of promoting bus use - reducing journey times, improving reliability, and offering competitive prices.

Glasgow and Edinburgh are amongst the largest cities in Europe without light rail systems, while there are also potential applications in Aberdeen and Dundee. Urban light rail (the modern 'tram') could and should be at the heart of the revival of sustainable rapid transit in our biggest conurbations.

While the kind of policies and programmes needed to secure more sustainable and socially-inclusive transport are clear, challenging targets are also required to measure progress towards a more civilised transport system. The key target areas should include:

- road traffic levels (as a proxy for climate change emissions from transport)
- the modal share of passenger and freight traffic taken by the more sustainable modes
- the service standards people should expect from transport
- physical accessibility to transport

Scotland is stuck in a backwater when it comes to transport. We need to learn lessons not just from our European neighbours, but also from the 'smart growth' cities of North America. The Scottish Parliament elections of 2003 should give us the chance to vote for progressive policies which will allow Scotland to move towards the leading edge in sustainable transport. But will the politicians - and the media - give us that choice? ■

*David Spaven is Chair of TRANSform Scotland*

**Expenditure on all walking, cycling and safer streets schemes over five years will be less than the cost of half a mile of urban motorway.**

# growth is not the only answer

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Osbert Lancaster argues that, if we are going to achieve a sustainable future, we need to redefine what we mean by progress

“The biggest challenge for the early 21st Century is to combine economic progress with social and environmental justice,” said Jack McConnell. Mainstream politics had certainly come a long way when the First Minister outlined his commitment to sustainable development in a speech on 18th February 2002. It will be a significant step forward for Scotland if this leads to real manifesto commitments, and then, if Labour form the next Executive, to concrete action.

McConnell's version of sustainable development does not, however, go far enough. A credible political programme for sustainable development must include four things: scrapping the mantra of economic 'progress'; targets that reflect the reality of the challenges of achieving sustainability; a plan to reshape taxes to promote sustainability; and a clear recognition of the international implications of our actions.

The link between economic progress as measured by GNP, and health, happiness and social justice is spurious. The indicators that matter are ecological quality and social wellbeing. If these indicators improve, GNP may rise - but it might not, and it really does not matter. All policies should be geared to improving ecological quality and social wellbeing now, and for future generations. This not a recipe for uncontrolled spending because the wellbeing of future generations means we must take account of the long-term financial implications of our actions today. There must be a commitment to scrapping economic performance as the primary indicator of national success - adding environmental and social indicators alongside the economic is not enough.

If sustainable development is the journey, a sustainable society is the destination. In a sustainable society materials extracted from the earth, such as fossil fuels, heavy metals and nuclear waste, will not build up in the environment; nor will substances produced by society, such synthetic chemicals like DDT and PCBs. Renewable resources will not be harvested faster than they can be recreated; and there will be fair access to energy and other resources. Any political party that wants to be taken seriously on sustainability, must not only embrace these objectives, but also set out policies and targets to achieve them.

This understanding of sustainable development must inform every aspect of policy: from housing to health, from tourism to trade. A real commitment to sustainable development must set out the ultimate goals: such as 100 per cent renewable energy; zero persistent pollution;

zero health problems caused by chemicals resulting from human activity. Only by setting goals which really challenge the status quo, and setting out the steps needed to achieve them, can any party demonstrate a credible commitment to sustainable development.

The technologies to make this possible may not be financially viable now, but they are available. Taxes, incentives and regulations must be re-shaped so that these technologies become not just financially viable, but competitive. There must be a vision of a sustainable economy where the pursuit of profit by business enhances ecological quality and social wellbeing. It should be more profitable to recycle than to use virgin raw materials, renewable energy should be cheaper than the alternatives, locally made products should be preferable to those that travel from afar. Many of the powers to address this are reserved to Westminster, and the European Union and the World Trade Organisation both have over-riding influence in this area. There are still opportunities, however, for Scotland to use its devolved powers, and its influence, to drive this agenda forward. There should be a commitment to establish a Commission for a Sustainable Economy. The Commission's tasks - to consider what can be done in Scotland with devolved powers, and to identify opportunities to influence change at other levels to create an economic framework that promotes sustainability.

Scotland must address its own problems as a priority. McConnell's emphasis on environmental and social justice should continue, deepen and be embedded throughout the Executive. But there must also be a clear recognition of the international implications of our actions. Scotland must not try to achieve its goals at the expense of people and environments in other countries around the world. A clear manifesto commitment to develop public purchasing policies which include human rights and environmental considerations is essential.

These four themes - redefining progress, challenging targets, a Commission for a Sustainable Economy, and recognising our international impacts - are essential to any meaningful attempt to achieve a sustainable future. Essential but not sufficient.

Even with a vision, government - politicians and civil servants - can only go as far as public opinion will allow them. A government with a vision of a sustainable Scotland in a sustainable world, will only succeed if it creates not just acceptance of change, but a demand for change.



To create a demand for change, people must believe change is possible, that the political process - local, national, international - matters and that they can influence it. Communities must be strengthened and the potential that is in all of us to care and to make a difference released. This must happen not just in the communities where there is real poverty, danger and injustice, but also in the middle class communities where there is a poverty of spirit, where the increasing demands of work and the addiction of consumerism isolate people from their families and their neighbours.

Only by stimulating creativity can this potential be liberated. From creativity, engagement and action will flow. We need manifesto commitments to support creativity by switching spending away from top-down 'culture as a spectacle', like Scottish Opera, to grassroots culture which is about participation. We need to direct spending to enable more people to make music together, to dance together, and to create beautiful - and useful - objects together. The unconvinced should look at the achievements of the GalGael Trust in Govan, where people rejected and forgotten by society have found pride, identity, and skills and have reclaimed their history by hand building traditional wooden sailing vessels.

Alongside creativity we need to stimulate people's relationship with nature. We need more opportunities for people to get out there and experience the natural world, to understand it, and to interpret the landscape. People need to experience the beauty of Scotland, but must also be angry about its ugliness, and to long for what could be. As people travel through the wet desert that covers much of Scotland and see the trees that flourish along the fenced-off ribbon of railway, and the remains of the crofts in the empty glens, in their mind's eye they will see the beauty of a regenerated woodland and new, thriving communities.

Understanding the rural natural environment also helps understand the places where most of us live - the towns and the cities. We can see the historical connections, the shift from the land to the towns, and start to understand why towns and cities developed as they did. We can see the ecological benefits of healthy cities and the potential for making them better places with vibrant neighbourhoods. There must be commitments to continue and enhance the work of organisations which bring people and nature closer together.

Concerted action to stimulate creativity and strengthen relationships with nature will go a long way, but to accelerate change towards sustainability there must also be a commitment to citizenship. Citizenship that goes beyond rights and responsibilities and understanding political institutions. An approach to citizenship that empowers people to make their voices heard, to demand change and to challenge the status quo. We need manifesto commitments to fund projects that will break through apathy and helplessness, that will stir up anger and channel it to drive change forward. It means funding to encourage and support people who feel strongly about the state of their community, their country, their world, to find the confidence and self belief to say so; to enable them to join with others who share their concerns; and to train them to become effective, knowledgeable and passionate campaigners and activists.

It can be done, the Centre for Human Ecology is not alone in achieving results with this approach.

Scotland needs a commitment to popular opposition. Popular opposition that will keep local government, civil servants, MSPs and MPs on their toes. Given political realities, direct support would probably only be given to local issues and to issues in line with government policy. The energy and expertise however, will transfer to other issues such as transport, GM trials, benefits reform, anti-consumerism, employment rights, and to campaigns not yet imagined. A bold political party, which really believes in the value of effective, popular opposition will welcome it in their manifesto. They will know it is not the easy option, but that it is necessary to breathe life back into the politics of Scotland beyond the parliament, the council chambers and the media.

Creativity, re-connection with nature, and popular engagement stimulate civic pride, a sense of belonging and social cohesion. They shift apathy and increase participation in the political process. They reduce costly social problems like crime and drug abuse. These are reasons enough for a political commitment to this agenda. More importantly, they are the essential to create the public demand for truly sustainable development, for a journey that really does lead to a sustainable society. ■

*Osbert Lancaster is Executive Director of the Centre for Human Ecology*

## **The link between economic progress as measured by GNP, and health, happiness and social justice is spurious**

# no need to act?

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Bob McLean goes in search of possible changes to the Scotland Act, only to find that the concerns of those with the greatest experience of making devolution work lie elsewhere

As our infant devolved government grows it naturally produces a succession of 'firsts'. This is certainly true of the situation created by 'Jack the Knife's' morning of the stiletto. For the first time Scotland has a group of senior politicians who are informed by their experience of government but are now free from the shackles of office.

These 'ministers over the water' would seem to be an informed source of opinion as to changes required in the devolution statement, and indeed they share a largely uniform critique of the shortcomings of devolved government. For them, however, the priority is not to alter the point of inter-face between Westminster and Holyrood, but to ensure that the powers which are currently the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament and its Executive are working effectively to achieve the objectives set out in the programme for government. So if the parameters of the Scotland Act are not the cause of frustrations clearly harboured around ministerial offices at Victoria Quay and St Andrews House, what is? Among those seeking to construct the New Scotland there is a widely held view that the major obstacle to change is the British civil service in Scotland, the body formerly known as the Scottish Office and now trading, confusingly, as the Scottish Executive. The thesis is as follows.

Throughout its one hundred plus years of existence, the Scottish Office developed as one of the quieter backwaters of the British home civil service. Free from effective structures of accountability, the Scottish Office was used to dealing with a handful of ministers spending one day a week in Scotland. Small wonder it now feels challenged by a new political accountability, the very essence of devolution, which since May 1999 has been enforced by a largely young and energetic cabinet, and its special advisors, prepared to work 24/7. An early symbol of the new approach was John Rafferty, Donald Dewar's first senior special advisor, whose physical presence around the cabinet table at Bute House was a particular irritant to the old school. There is no doubt that his head was regarded as a major trophy by the colonial regime.

During the eighteen Tory years the Scottish Office developed something of a siege mentality, losing its way around the changing map of civic Scotland. This produced a bureaucracy unsure about its own role in policy implementation, a factor which may have contributed to year-end unspent surpluses in policy areas identified

as priorities by the new Parliament and its Executive. While critics acknowledge that the centres of deliberate opposition in the bureaucracy, while powerful, are limited, they also point to a wider problem of a collective lack of the skills required in servicing and promoting modern government with a change agenda.

To what extent is this the true and under-reported story of devolved Scotland? Is it simply an alibi provided by former ministers eager to disassociate themselves from the blunders of the past three years by claiming it "wisnae me"? The major gaffs that have punctuated the last three years, Ruddell, the SQA, the Erskine Bridge and the Holyrood Project, bear the stamp of bureaucratic blunder, and a cabinet fed a diet of poor or misinformation.

The Holyrood Project, more than any other single issue, raises hard questions. Let's transpose the details of the Holyrood row on a local government example. What would be the fate of local authority leisure officers who advised elected councillors that a new leisure centre, with wet and dry recreation facilities, would cost £6 million only to discover that the final bill was closer to £40 million?

But if the big story of devolved Scotland is the relationship between the two wings of the Scottish Executive, the cabinet of elected ministers and the civil service, why has it gone under-reported? The New Scotland has adopted the old Westminster conventions regarding the anonymity of civil servants. Some of Scotland's senior politicians, in the first days of devolution, and inherited senior civil servants who came from the same generation and social backgrounds and may even have been members of the same networks. When it comes to the media, the people's watchdog thinks twice about biting the hand that feeds it with scraps of information.

So what can be done about the situation? There is talk at Westminster about a civil service bill during the lifetime of this (Westminster) parliament. Should pressure begin now to revisit the primary devolution legislation with a view to creating a separate Scottish civil service? Those who have seen inside the machine take different views. One of the arguments in favour of retaining a British-wide service was to facilitate staff promotion across the United Kingdom, and 'promotion' to London is one way of creating space for change and new blood in Scotland. It is also argued that some parts of the Whitehall machine

have been fashioned into a cutting edge for reform and modernisation in government, and unnecessary obstacles should not be placed in the importation of best practice.

Jack McConnell does not come from the social strata which has traditionally spawned Scotland's senior mandarins, and is from a different generation. He leads a cabinet the members of which, with the honourable exceptions of Lord Mike Watson and Malcolm Chisholm, have never played the Westminster game. His major opposition, the neutered Nats, are becalmed, and given the distinctly managerial tone that Jack has struck in his championing of Scotland's public services, he, more than either of his predecessors, may be better placed to shape the civil service as a weapon for change in his efforts to turn the notion of a New Scotland from vision to reality.

Control of the bureaucracy aside, the lack of clamour in senior Scottish Labour ranks for changes to the primary legislation should not be mistaken for a complete lack of vision when it comes to bolstering the devolution settlement. Former ministers who have experienced the European dimension believe that their presence in European councils, along with representatives from regional governments from across the community, underlines the normality of devolution in today's Europe. When it comes to pushing the envelope of the current settlement, former Health Minister Susan Deacon has publicly argued that the 3p Scottish discretion on income tax should not be dismissed out of hand. This

contrasts with Jack McConnell's comments on Scottish television's Seven Days on 15 February, which effectively ruled out the use of that option during the 2003-2007 Scottish Parliament, while Helen Liddell, speaking on the BBC's Scottish Labour Party Conference coverage, appeared to rule out using that power at any time in the future.

There is one area of the primary legislation, however, over which there is a clamour for reform, the link between the number and boundaries of the Scottish Parliament first past the post constituencies and Westminster's Scottish constituencies. It is not my intention in this article to enter into the argument over 129 or otherwise, other than to acknowledge that the confusion created by a multiplicity of administrative and political boundaries is a real point for consideration, and to caution that informed judgement has to be exercised over the dangers of a Westminster backlash that might root out the proportional element of the Scottish Parliament's electoral system completely.

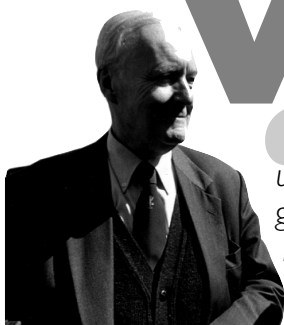
On a personal note, my main concern is that the only amendment to the devolution settlement four years on will be restricted to the number of MSPs that will occupy the Holyrood debating chamber following 2007.

If retaining 129 is the sole change sought, our current crop of MSPs will send out all the wrong messages regarding the nature of their motivation and the depth of their ambition. ■

*Bob McLean is the former Secretary of Scottish Labour Action*

## The lack of clamour in senior Scottish Labour ranks for changes to the Scotland Act should not be mistaken for a complete lack of vision. Former ministers believe that their presence in European councils underlines the normality of devolution in today's Europe

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# mobilising for change

Ken Cameron argues that, despite the Blairite's disdain for "the wreckers", the Labour Party can still be harnessed by the trade union movement

The recent election of trade union leaders apparently less malleable to Labour's political machine has highlighted problems in the historic labour movement link between the party and the unions. These problems are not of the unions' making. It is New Labour with its agenda of crypto-privatisation and of seemingly valuing links with big business rather more than those with affiliated unions which has brought the relationship into question. We are now well into the fifth year of the New Labour Government. Welcome advances have been made in stabilising the economy and in reducing unemployment. But many of the underlying problems of British society remain to be adequately addressed, let alone solved. At last substantial sums of additional money have been allocated to the public services. Yet even here, because of the government's obsession with encouraging private sector involvement, results in the shape of improved service provision are slow to come through or non-existent. You only have to look at the travesty which passes for a national rail service to understand that there are serious shortcomings in Labour's general approach to the public sector.

These developments have put a considerable strain on traditional Labour movement loyalties. Thousands of activists are cheated off and disoriented - indeed over 140,000, one third of the membership have voted with their feet and left. For those whose political memories go back further than the occasion on which Tony Blair first kissed the Queens' hands, this is nothing new. The 1945 Government (Old Labour) was led by a public school-educated reformer, always anxious to reassure the City that Labour's intentions were pro-business and pro-American. Socialism was not on Attlee's agenda then and thousands of activists in third world countries paid with either their lives or their liberty as Ernie Bevin did all he could to maintain the stranglehold on the British Empire.

What are new are the almost total collapse of the Tory Party and the absence of any effective Parliamentary opposition. This has corresponded with the growing weakness of the left both in and out of Parliament. Is it any wonder that union activists are getting increasingly uneasy about New Labour?

There are many aspects of the New Labour Government's policies with which I profoundly disagree - cuts in Disability benefits, omissions in the legislation applicable to rights at work and trade union rights, the bombing of Serbia and

Afghanistan - to name but a few. As an individual Labour Party member I am unhappy about changes to Party rules and structures, which centralise power in the hands of a few people close to the prime minister. As a former trade union General Secretary I know that the resources of the trade union movement are the mainstay of election campaigns. They are part of that highly motivated army of activists, the foot soldiers of the party who do the hard work week in week out in their wards and on our local councils that maintains members. I have felt on more than one occasion that they seem to be treated with a degree of contempt which is not acceptable. Yet New Labour badly needs trade union money. They need trade union shoulders to the wheel to keep the Party ticking over. The trade union movement has mulled over and over Tony Blair's Fairness not Favours assertion. We have baulked at the slights against public sector workers.

I believe the time is now right for a debate - a constructive debate with New Labour about the future relationship of the unions and the party. There are comrades who are determined to maintain the historic link between us and, in the final analysis, I am one of those comrades. However, in the new millennium the ties that bound us together in the early years of this century seem somewhat frayed and ragged at the edges. Why? Because trade union activists feel bruised and battered by Labour local authorities intent on bashing the unions and, in the case of my union, the Fire Brigades Union, imposing life threatening cuts. During those long dark years of Tory government trade unions repeatedly expressed our support for these Authorities struggling under draconian legislation aimed at rendering them powerless. We knew they were being starved of cash. We knew the Tories were trying to discredit and destroy Labour councils. We offered to campaign jointly with them for proper funding for the fire service. Some responded positively, some did not and some have seemed set on revenge for what they, like "Pony Blair", see as scars inflicted on them by public sector workers - "The Wreckers".

Electurally, the Labour Party is still the only show in town. However, I feel that the interests of trade union members are best served by using our funds to campaign on specific issues crucial to working men and women as well as paying our dues to the Labour Party. Nor should trade unions confute themselves to a narrow agenda which affects only people in work. They must throw their weight and their

**Electurally,  
the Labour  
Party is still  
the only show  
in town**

money behind the unemployed, the poor, the sick, targeting their funds to where they can be most effective

Two considerations qualify my 'keep the link' position. As TUC General Secretary John Monks has said, it is undignified to be treated like an embarrassing elderly relative by the Labour hierarchy. This was exemplified at the recent Scottish Labour Party conference where the majority of affiliated trade unions, including some traditionally seen as right wing, were forced to vote against entire policy document on public services because of New Labour's refusal to give guarantees on wages, conditions and pensions for staff caught up in PPP and PFI projects. Many constituency delegates opposed to privatisation didn't support the trade unions because it would have meant throwing out many good things in the these documents. Trade unions and Labour Party activists must insure that policy making is change to ensure that amendments can be made to specific parts of policy documents.

There are and still will be many campaigns on which the Party and the unions will agree. In general, union representatives accept that politics is a long march. While there is no golden age of Labour Government there is always the possibility of building support for economic and social advance and this potential is more likely to be realised by a Labour Government. Past Labour Governments may have disappointed but the trade union link has been kept and was instrumental in revitalising the Party in the 1930s and the 1960s. The challenge for trade unionists is to organise better at workplace, TUC and Labour Party levels to campaign more effectively for the policies which socialists want a Labour Government to follow. Activists need to devote more of their considerable talents and energies to mobilising mass membership support for the policies of their unions.

The free hand conferred on Labour's leaders has always been loosely constrained by party policy into which the unions have a direct and potentially decisive influence. Unfortunately it is part of the Blair project to undermine this democratic restraint on the leadership's freedom of action. Historically unions have often been divided on crucial policy questions. This has to change if Labour is to be won for an agenda of social change based on socialist values. The unions must get their acts together to forge a level of unity seldom seen in the past. Full employment, anti privatisation, anti poverty at home and abroad would be good places to begin.

Unless and until Government policies change in a socially progressive direction there will be an accelerating reduction in unions' financial support for the Party, with more and more affiliated organisations democratically deciding to spend a far greater proportion of their Political Funds on campaigning for pro-union, pro-worker policies.

## **The interests of trade union members are best served by using our funds to campaign on specific issues**

Unions will remain affiliated, will continue to be active in the Labour Party at every level, and will work for the election of Labour candidates perhaps on a more selective basis than hitherto. On some issues small parties on the left may have policy positions more congenial to the majority of union activists. But unions have no say in these organisations, and the Socialist Labour Party et al. have no possibility of establishing significant political influence in the short to medium term. Unions will not throw away

the potential benefits for their members who come from a united labour movement with a strong voice in Government and Parliament.

The policies shaped by activists and determined by union democracies must become the property of the membership as a whole and then vigorously campaigned for. For example, the future of the public services is the concern of all working people, not simply those employed in the Health Service, the Fire Service etc. Yes Prime Minister, we do want to conserve what is best in the public services against the ambitions of potential wreckers, the private profiteers. And we know that public opinion supports small "c" conservatives on this because they know that putting people's needs before those of shareholder's interests is what good public services are about. The task for trade unionists is to help build such a powerful movement in support of the public service ethos that even the Treasury has to reconsider its socially-regressive and economically-damaging obsessions with private capital grid management techniques.

The challenge is to transform the union-Party link so that the unions are respected as the representatives of over eight million members and their families and their views are sought out. History has shown that when Labour Governments stop listening to the unions, the whole country suffers. That was the case in 1979 when the Callaghan Government tried to impose real wage cuts on low paid public service workers. Then came Thatcher. ■

*Ken Cameron is former General Secretary of the Fire Brigades Union and member of TUC General Council*

# the first casualty

In analysing the media coverage of the war in Afghanistan, David Miller finds distortions and omissions are the norm

According to some of the Scottish media a majority of Scots supported the bombing of Afghanistan and the policy of both Blair and Bush. Eight days after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the **Scotsman**, citing a poll from ICM reported that 'SCOTS OVERWHELMINGLY BACK A JUST WAR' (19.9.01). The report claimed that "An ICM opinion poll for The Scotsman today shows massive popular support for British participation in retaliatory action against terrorists and the countries that shelter them... Support for allied military strikes rises to 78 per cent among Labour voters, while Tony Blair's handling of the crisis is supported by 87 per cent of Scots." Immediately following this is a big hint that all is not as it seems: "But backing for military action dropped to 40 per cent if it meant civilian casualties, with 45 per cent against."

This poll matches other UK polls before the bombing started. All except one of these showed a majority of British public opinion against bombing if it would cause civilian casualties. At that stage it was apparent that even if the US and UK tried their best to avoid civilian casualties innocents would inevitably die as a result of bombing. In the Gulf war according to official figures only seven per cent of the ordnance used was 'smart', 93 per cent being indiscriminate bombs. Further, fully 40 per cent of the smart weapons missed their targets, targets which themselves often contained civilians.

Elsewhere in the media, almost every poll has been interpreted by both polling companies and the media to indicate popular support for the war. Where that interpretation is extremely difficult journalists have tried to squeeze the figures to fit. One example is from a **Sunday Mail** poll carried out by Scottish Opinion. It asked "Is bombing Afghanistan an effective way to strike back against Osama bin Laden?" At best this is a question which asks about the efficacy of the action rather than its morality. Answering Yes in no way necessarily indicates support for the action. In any case only 52 per cent of Scots agreed with the question. When asked to select the "best way of dealing with Osama bin Laden" with a list of alternatives, a huge majority of Scots were in favour of peaceful solutions (diplomacy, sanctions, freeze finances, capture him and bring him to trial - 69 per cent), 17 per cent were in favour of assassination and a tiny five per cent were in favour of bombing.

The **Sunday Mail** misleadingly claimed that Scots were "split" on bombing in its headline (21.10.01). The only other Scottish paper that picked up the poll was the **Scotsman**, but it reported only "SCOTS' WAR UNEASE" (22.10.01) and omitted any mention of the question showing

five per cent support for bombing. Only a week later the **Herald** published a poll showing only six per cent of Scots supported the then current policy of bombing alone. This was picked up by the **Press Association** but simply ignored by the London papers. Perhaps this comprehensive misreporting also misled MSPs about the nature of public opposition, or perhaps the lack of MSPs who spoke out against the war is an indication of a serious rift between the Scottish public and their elected representatives. The general view is that Scottish opinion was not much different than British opinion in supporting the war and there was very little hint in the press or in broadcasting that opposition might be widespread.

Senior **BBC Scotland** journalists expressed surprise and disbelief when shown the evidence from the opinion polls. One told me that she didn't believe that the polling companies were corrupt and that she thought it unlikely that the **Guardian** would minimise the opposition to the war. This was days after the **Guardian** published a poll purporting to show that 74 per cent supported the bombing (12.10.01). What the **BBC** journalist hadn't noticed was that the **Guardian's** polls had asked only very limited questions and failed to give respondents the option of saying they would prefer diplomatic solutions. In the poll on 12 October one question was asked but only if people thought enough had been done diplomatically. Given that the government and the media had been of the opinion that enough had been done and alternative voices were marginalised, it is surprising that as many as 37 per cent said that enough had not been done.

Furthermore, the **Guardian's** editorial position offered (qualified) support for the war and it did not cover the demonstrations in London and Glasgow on 13 October. As a result of a 'flurry' of protests this was raised by the readers' editor at the **Guardian's** editorial meeting on 14 October and the editor agreed that this had been a 'mistake'. But, the readers editor revealed that it is the papers' general policy' not to cover marches, thus condemning dissent to the margins of the news agenda and leaving the field open for those with the resources to stage 'proper' news events.

TV news reporters routinely covered demonstrations in Britain and the US as if they represented only a small minority of opinion. The underlying assumption is that demonstrators only represent themselves rather than seeing them as an expression of a larger constituency of dissent. Thus **BBC** reporters claimed that 'the opinion polls say that a majority of UK public opinion backs the war' (BBC1

Panorama, 14 October 2001) or in reporting demonstrations in London that 'Despite the strength of feelings here today those opposed to military action are still very much in the minority' (BBC1 News 13 October 2001 21.50). These reports were at best naïve, and arguably a violation of the legal requirement of the **BBC** to be balanced.

In Scotland the reporting of demonstrations was not so obviously distorted. This is largely because they were hardly reported at all - **STV** does not bother to cover international news. This is by itself a disgrace, but **Scotland Today** did not even feel able to mention that large demonstrations against the war took place in Glasgow, Edinburgh and elsewhere in Scotland that there were anti war groups in most Scottish towns. Not a breath is spoken about the widespread teach-ins and rallies at Scottish Universities. These are 'Scottish' issues, but not a peep from the 'Scottish owned' corporation.

The **BBC** by way of slight contrast reported some of the demonstrations. Here is one report: "More than a thousand people have been demonstrating in the centre of Glasgow today against the bombing campaign in Afghanistan. Speakers including MPs and MSPs called for an immediate end to the strikes." (Reporting Scotland, 13.10.01)

Apart from the rather vague estimate of numbers (the organisers claimed 5,000, the police 1,000), why not say speakers from five Scottish political parties, or, all the parties represented in the Parliament bar two (Lib-dems and Tories)? Both of these statements would have been true and could have been made with only a few extra words. But who was demonstrating?: "The demonstrators included representatives of organisations such as CND and members of the Muslim community."

Also true, but why not refer to the thousands who were not members of such organisations and why single out Muslims rather than Christians (whose 'community' representatives also spoke on the platform)? In fact, why mention Muslims at all at a predominantly (but not exclusively) white demo? The report closed by noting: "The rally which was followed by a march through the city centre passed off peacefully." Here we see the political agenda at work behind the report. This was not a demonstration reflecting widespread (majority) unease and opposition to the killing of civilians, but more akin to rent-a-mob who might be expected to kick off when allowed out in public. This kind of reporting is seemingly neutral, it is certainly truthful, but it distorts the scope and depth of dissent in Scotland.

Coverage of the war in Afghanistan in the London media was extremely limited, with dissenting views appearing only sporadically and 'anti-terrorism' the order of the day. But what of the Scottish media? There was international coverage in the daily broadsheets and the **Record** printed front page pictures of child victims of US bombing. The **Sunday Herald** provided a platform for a range of critical

views on the conflict including printing the views of Noam Chomsky and others. But when we turn to the broadcast media there was a virtual desert of international coverage. This is the direct effect of the devolution settlement which left broadcasting as a reserved power and has starved Scottish viewers of any distinctive window on the world.

The compromise solution to the, hardly revolutionary, demand for a Scottish six was the **Newsnight** opt out. After a period of repeating exactly the same international news we had just heard on **Newsnight** from London, **Newsnight** has dropped any pretence of covering international news. This leaves only the fleeting references to international affairs available on commercial radio and the more substantial offerings served up by **Good Morning Scotland** (GMS) and its evening sibling. **BBC Scotland** has no foreign correspondents and news experts on foreign affairs. They rely on the **BBC** in London. In covering the war in Afghanistan the international inexperience of the presenters on **GMS** shows badly. It gives fuel to those who argue that a Scottish six would be a parochial central Scotland affair. **Radio Scotland** news programmes tend to follow the official agenda set in London with an endless procession of 'experts' on the middle east, Afghanistan or simply 'terrorism'. Strangely many of these people are called Mike and almost all of them have connections with the British military or intelligence services or military affiliated think tanks. These people are not disinterested 'experts', but partisan witnesses with an agenda. This would be fine if they were balanced in number and frequency with alternative 'experts' on US foreign policy and imperialism, but they are not. In fact the alternative voices are not described as experts and the inability of some presenters to even understand views outside the official frame of reference is woeful. To hear badly briefed newscasters cross examining interviewees on Israel and Palestine is shameful, but when the likes of Robert Fisk and Noam Chomsky were interviewed on **GMS** (as they were - and two cheers for that), the inability of the hacks to think outside the official frame of reference was simply embarrassing. There is a wealth of experience in Scottish and UK universities and journalism which could have given a different view. Unfortunately such views are not popular with the editorial hierarchy of **GMS** even though some hacks in the **GMS** team do try and give a different view.

The coverage of the war in Afghanistan and the distortions of the Scottish media do raise the pressing question of Scottish originated broadcast coverage of international affairs. But they also raise the questions of concentration of ownership in the Scottish media (still regulated on a UK wide basis) and the lack of alternatives to the dominant pro war drumbeat. We need a Scottish broadcasting service, but we also urgently need the breakup of media conglomerates like **SMG** and the encouragement of a wide variety of voices in what was supposed to be a new open Scotland. ■

*David Miller is a member of the Stirling Media Research Institute*

Pensions are once more hitting the headlines. The Institute for Public Policy Research's recent publication *A New Contract for Retirement*, a summary of which can be found at [www.ippr.org.uk](http://www.ippr.org.uk) calls for the raising of the pensionable age to 67 and the scrapping of the minimum income guarantee is merely the parcelling up of the former income support. The figures as usual tell all. During the last Tory Government spending on state pensions increased by approx £4,000 million. During the same period of a New Labour Government pensions rose by the virtually the same amount in real terms. Soon in excess of 50 per cent of all pensioners will be means tested. Not a good prospect at all for all those bright young things that saw New Labour as a new dawn not a false dawn.

According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation at [www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/nearlytwo-fifths](http://www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/nearlytwo-fifths) of people who regarded their 'expected' pension as definitely inadequate would not or could not pay higher contributions. Conversely, more than half those who regarded their 'expected' pension level as definitely adequate would and could afford to pay something extra. If ever a government was squandering the future it must be this one. Who is going to save if they are taxed at punitive rates and receive a small occupational pension.

At the Catalyst Trust [www.catalyst-trust.co.uk](http://www.catalyst-trust.co.uk) you can download Jay Ginn's paper *From Security to Risk: Pension privatisation and gender inequality*. Again a great injustice to pensioners, this time to women, is revealed and analysed. Why can't Britain adopt the Danish system, which counts years of residency against your final pension entitlement and not your years in employment? At a stroke one of the great gender injustices would be eliminated.

The most recent campaigns by pensioners' charities include a survey by Age Concern/MORI showing that the majority of people in Britain do not have confidence in the Government's strategy to tackle pensioner poverty, and many people are apprehensive about their income in retirement or cannot afford to save towards it - [www.ageconcern.org.uk](http://www.ageconcern.org.uk).

Help the Aged's report into age discrimination discovered that half the population believes that this country treats older people as if they're on the scrap heap, and forty four percent believe that older people are considered a burden on society - [www.helptheaged.org.uk](http://www.helptheaged.org.uk). For official information try [www.thepensionservice.gov.uk](http://www.thepensionservice.gov.uk) and for a grey power listing try [www.seniorsnetwork.co.uk/miniwebs](http://www.seniorsnetwork.co.uk/miniwebs). ■

It's Thursday 24 April 2003 and I've finally managed to get hold of all the parties' manifestos for next month's Scottish Parliament election. I make myself a cup of tea and sit down to decide who I'm going to vote for.

Ruling out the Tories, I go quickly to the Lib Dems. Following the current trend for 'naming' manifestos to indicate the 'vision' the party wants to get across ("Building Scotland's Future", "Investing in the Future of Scotland", "Scotland, Future, A Good Thing"), the Lib Dems have called their manifesto "Things We Might Do Depending On What They Offer Jim". On page after page we find vaguely 'right'-sounding ideas but with small print at the bottom indicating that "The level and amount of Lib Dems commitments can go down as well as up". Not quite reassuring enough.

Next comes the Nats. This year's manifesto has clearly struggled to reconcile the more fundamentalist wing of the party's desire to stress independence with the moderate's desire to present themselves as a sober government in waiting. Nonetheless, I'm not sure calling your manifesto "A Steady Hand for Scotland: Down with England" strikes the right balance. It is mainly page after page of insipid filler about hospitals and schools but every so often they manage to slip in a word such as 'freedom' or 'treason' which they print triple height, bold and in blood-red. It is like



a tedious two-hour meeting with a ginger-bearded accountant who drones in a monotone but punches you in the face every fifteen minutes.

I find the dull-cop/foaming-at-the-mouth-cop approach confusing, so I turn to the People's Party. This year the Labour manifesto has an attractive picture of an upwardly-mobile young family playing in a swingpark on the cover. I open it to find a picture of an upwardly-mobile pensioner doing her shopping in Marks and Spencers. Then there is a picture of an upwardly-mobile road traffic accident victim (remarkably clean looking, considering) being tended to in hospital by an upwardly-mobile nurse. In fact, after a few minutes I realise that there aren't actually any words in the manifesto this year, just aspirational pictures. I find this disconcerting.

A few weeks back I found a small advert in the classified section of the Sunday Mail offering "A Cure To All the World's Problems - just send a cheque or postal order for £1.99". I got the SSP manifesto. Still, at least this one was a good read. And finally the Greens, whose manifesto tried very hard to be a fearsome menace to the global corporate state but in a genteel, non-threatening sort of way.

So perhaps I'll move to Falkirk - does Dennis Cannavan have a manifesto? ■



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The National Union of Rail Maritime and Transport Workers

The Scottish Regional Council of the RMT is proud to support the 'Scottish Left Review'.

The RMT argues support for its policy objectives and argues for:-

1. The return of our Railways to Public Ownership.
2. The repeal of all the Anti-Union Laws and to replace them with fairer laws which enshrine International Labour Organisation conventions 87 and 98.
3. To oppose the concept of Public Finance Initiative and Public Private Partnership projects.
4. To keep Caledonian MacBrayne in the Public Sector and oppose any plans to privatise our Ferry Services.
5. To support the International Transport Federation's campaign against 'Flags of Convenience'.

Jim Ferrie  
President

Phil McGarry & Steve Todd  
Regional Organisers

Jim Gray  
Secretary