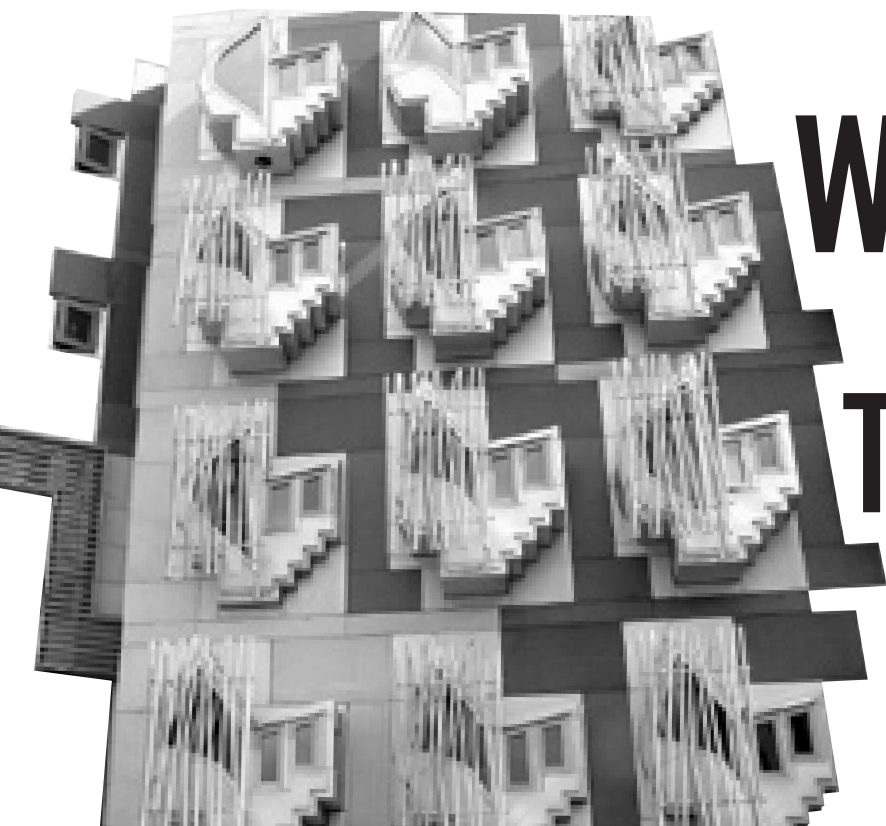
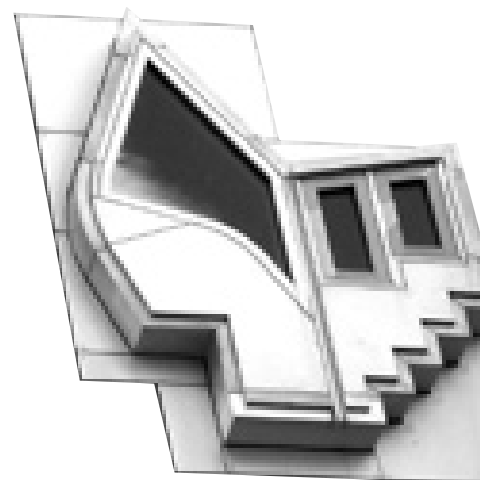




**SO NOW WE'VE  
GOT A BRAND NEW**



**PARLIAMENT  
BUILDING**



**WHAT ARE  
WE GOING  
TO PUT IN IT?**



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# Comment

If you stop and think about it, it makes no sense that a minute before midnight on a friend's birthday we studiously **don't** cry happy birthday; we do this because if we didn't choose arbitrary moments to stop and take stock then we probably wouldn't stop to take stock at all. So it may be nothing more than a moving of the furniture but the move to the Scottish Parliament's new Holyrood building **feels** like it could have the potential to be some sort of fresh start. For that reason the Scottish Left Review invited a number of writers to consider the condition of the political family that is about to move into its new house. What they have written give us cause both for concern and for hope.

There is one theme which comes through clearly and that is that our Parliament just seems **too damn safe**. There is a lack of ideas and a lack of vision and it is leading to a Parliament which many people hoped would be bold and active being cautious and anaemic. In fact, it is a symptom which is identified by almost all of our writers. What at first seem different is their diagnoses. Perhaps it is a structural problem in which procedures such as the control of the content of Parliamentary business are created in a way which tends towards a cautious middle ground. Perhaps it is a problem of the attitudes of individual politicians who seem not to have discovered the courage to make their own voices heard. Perhaps it is a party system which simply will not tolerate anything other than total obedience. Perhaps the Parliament lacks the powers it needs to really inspire. Perhaps the collective political body in Scotland has taken too long to come to terms with what is needed to function effectively in a new parliamentary democracy. Perhaps there is a 'group psychology' affecting collective behaviour. Perhaps we have underestimated the power of the interest groups hovering around the Parliament and whispering in the ears. Perhaps civic Scotland has failed the country by failing to bring new ideas or enthusiastic engagement to the table. Perhaps the media has everyone too scared to raise controversial issues. Or perhaps it comes from the top; from a commitment to 'do less'.

The only mistake here is to believe that these diagnoses are somehow unlinked or even mutually exclusive. In fact, these things are all true and all contribute to and feed off each other. But why should this have happened? A suspicious Parliament has been created and this is in part because of the problem of proximity. If you remove the Tories from the equation the political parties in Scotland form an almost seamless strand of political positions which moves across a comparatively compact area of land between the left and the centre left. So in a context in which the political parties **think** they have no major ideological differences (we'll return to this) they have to differentiate themselves simply by disagreeing in a disagreeable way. And because they largely know that their vote could quite happily shift to one of their politically-neighbouring opponents they feel they must fight them in a permanent total war. (It is a cause for concern that it is possible to imagine the Greens and the SSP concluding at some point in the not too distant future that further advance for one must come at the expense of the other.) We wanted consensual politics in Scotland and we got it – but a mutant form of political consensus in which the fighting is even more vicious precisely because the differences between parties is so slight.

But surely if there is so much agreement the right things must be getting done, even if there is animosity built into the process? Well, no. There is a model of 'radical consensual politics' hidden in there (a consensus which ends up being more radical than any of the stakeholders would themselves have made it). The best example might be the manner in which tuition fees were abolished. The Cubie Inquiry brought ideas together from opposing stakeholders and created a package which was, frankly, a better outcome for all concerned than any one of them could have hoped for. But that radical consensual model is rare. Much of the rest of what has happened has been disappointing or worse. So how does such disillusionment emerge from so much consensus? Well, the answer is that we are largely still scoring the business of the parliament like a boxing match; we award points for technique but fail to ask what the fight is over in the first place.

There is one supreme example of this, and that is the vote over the Iraq war. Again setting aside the Tories, there was a

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phenomenal consensus on this issue; hardly anyone from any of the other parties would voice support for the war in private. Scottish politics did not want that war. But Scottish politics voted for it. The means through which this happened was quite remarkable; the crucial waverers on the Labour benches seem to have finally come on board with Blair on the bases that John McAllion (the leading anti-war voice in Labour) extended his criticism of the war to the Blairites who had championed it and that voting against war would be a boon to the SNP. The positioning of the competing parties was a sufficient excuse for one of those parties to collectively vote for something they did not like one bit. On that occasion all of the shame lies with Labour (and as we survey the smoking remains of Iraq through the lies one hopes that that shame lies very heavily indeed). But the other parties are also culpable, with the SNP's race to the right to make sure it is not out-free-marketed by Labour being particularly damaging.

The parties think that they are ideologically close (all think they are inheritors of left-of-centre Scottish collectivism) and yet what they are most ideologically distanced from is themselves. Labour has embraced privatisation (the ownership of public service infrastructure such as schools and hospitals by private companies is surely privatisation) and a very Tory approach to law and order; the SNP has adopted Thatcherite economics (when will trickle-down finally be discredited in the political imagination?). And yet politicians in both would profess a profound and deep-rooted ideological hostility to these things. Make no mistake, the Parliament that we are dropping into Holyrood is very ideological. The four big parties which provide the centre of gravity are all committed first and foremost to the business agenda (which at best they see as a necessary condition for achieving their social goals). As a riposte to right-wing media criticisms of the Parliament's 'obsession' with 'unwanted' social policies, then-Presidenting Officer David Steel produced statistics that showed that nothing had occupied the Parliament more than discussion of how best to facilitate greater private profit in Scotland. And nobody seemed horrified by this.

So there is certainly cause for concern. But where is the cause for hope? Well, there is plenty. Need the Scottish Left Review

once more remind the political classes in Scotland that the Scottish people voted in 2003 to move the Parliament to the left after it saw it in action for the first term? Labour and the SNP argued over who was the businessman's friend so the electorate shifted away to their left. We have a block of 17 radical left (or at least independently-minded) politicians. And if anything the other parties have responded by moving even further to the right. How many votes do they think the business community has? So the first cause for hope is that there is every reason to believe that the people of Scotland want them to stop talking about tax cuts for business and start talking about a fairer Scotland.

The second reason for hope is that as soon as this message can get itself through to Holyrood there is a naturally supportive consensus. If Labour MSPs had been allowed a free vote on Iraq they would have voted with the people of Scotland and not against them. There are structural and cultural problems to be overcome (Labour and the SNP in particular need to find some way to work more constructively together). But there is also hope that the biggest barrier – the terrible wrenching effect which Tony Blair is having on the Labour movement across the whole of the UK – will one day disappear. As soon as Scottish politicians have the courage and freedom to voice something like what they believe then we will see a radical shift in Scottish politics.

But there is a final cause for optimism, and for that we return to where we began. The views of our writers reflect the wider views of the body politic in Scotland in at least one way. No-one is happy with the timorous beastie at the top of the Mound, no-one wanted this pallid imitation of home rule, no-one wanted a Parliament that did less. So if this isn't what anyone wanted, perhaps the unsullied corridors of the Holyrood building will cause MSPs to be more critical of what they have become. Perhaps the flitting to Miralles's up-turned boats will provide Scottish politics with an arbitrary moment in which to ask itself what it wants to be. If only this could happen the price tag might actually start to look quite reasonable. ■

# feedback

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

Bob Thomson wrote an interesting article on New Labour's campaign to prevent UK workers obtaining the same benefits as their colleagues in the rest of the European Union ('A Europe against workers?', SLR Issue 23). He is correct that "an Independent Scotland in or out of the European Union would be able to incorporate the Charter (of Fundamental Rights) into our legal system" but mistaken when he claims "with the SNP adopting an increasingly neo-liberal economic policy, similar to the other main parties, it is questionable how likely this would be". In fact the SNP fought the European Elections on a manifesto commitment to "implement and enforce all EU legislation protecting workers, so we can deliver a high-skill, high-wage, smart, successful Scotland – where workers are treated with the respect and dignity they deserve.... Scottish workers put in longer hours and have fewer rights than their continental counterparts. The average UK working week is the highest in Europe, much of it unpaid overtime... Denying workers in this country equal rights and expecting them to spend longer at work than their European colleagues does nothing to increase our competitiveness – it merely results in low productivity, increased stress, and family breakdown, as well as discriminating against women and men with caring responsibilities".

Independence will also enable Bob and the other discontented Labour members to achieve the social justice that Tony Blair and Michael Howard are determined to prevent. The campaign for Independence does not have to be confined to members of the SNP, Greens and SSP. Members of other political parties and non-party members can also play an active part. ■

*Colin Darroch*

It was amazing to discover Northern Ireland being described as Ulster by Tom Nairn ('The World Thing', SLR Issue 23). As though to emphasise this inaccuracy, he even implied that Ulsterfolk are British, rather than Irish. The mere fact that such rudimentary misconceptions can be disseminated by an academic, exposes the continuing lack of general knowledge about Ireland on this side of the North Channel and the Irish Sea. For the record, Northern Ireland comprises just six of the nine counties of the Province of Ulster. The Ulster counties of Cavan, Donegal and Monaghan are located in the Republic of Ireland, not Northern Ireland. Unionist (Loyalist) politicians, amongst others, refer to the six counties as Ulster in an endeavour to convey the impression that Northern Ireland is, somehow, totally apart from the remainder of Ireland.

From the time of the initial incursions from Plantagenet England during the latter part of the 12th century, Ireland continued to be accepted as a single national entity. This situation was not disturbed until 1920 when the British authorities resolved to partition the island so as to appease militant unionism. As a consequence, Northern Ireland came into existence as an artificial statelet attached to Great Britain and based on institutionalised discrimination to ensure permanent unionist dominance. Sure enough, unionists (loyalists) and nationalists (republicans) have perceptible traditions, often grossly exaggerated, within the context of Ireland's historical development. For instance, it's not always appreciated that a Pontifical High Mass and Te Deum

were sung in Rome as thanksgiving for Protestant King Billy's victory at the Boyne. Even so, reconciling the different traditions continue to be a perplexing component in advancing the peace process across Northern Ireland.

It's an important facet of the Belfast Agreement of April 1998, coming along in the aftermath of the devolution referendums in Scotland and Wales, which strives to displace the pre-1972 scenario and create an entirely new political situation, including an elected Assembly recognising the rights and interests of all sides of the community. Against this background, the use of precise terminology – political correctness, if you like – is to be highly recommended when referring to Northern Ireland. ■

*John Merrett Bloom*

A lot of people on the SNP left must be scratching their heads wondering what to do next. Alex Neil's decision to not challenge for the leadership has left many party members (including myself) very disappointed. Roseanna Cunningham and Christine Grahame are, in my opinion, the best chance of a change in direction for the party back to the radical(ish) left and I wish both of these candidates every success. While I admire Salmond's abilities, his rule by proxy won't work and I don't believe he would unite the party after his comments on the possibility of working with Alex Neil as leader.

It is clear that there are three unionist centre-right parties and therefore independence will only happen by a concerted push from the left in conjunction with the other independence supporting parties. Unfortunately there remains a vocal (if minor) grouping in the SNP that appears determined to undermine our anti-nuclear policy and suicidally align us with the Conservatives. Unfortunately the combination of OMOV and a media-informed general membership could easily leave us with Messrs. Salmond and Ewing leading the party, which would probably mean a continuation of our current inconsistent approach to policy.

The Scottish Republican Socialist Movement is affiliated to the SSP but is open to membership of all political parties and none who believe in a clear republican stance for an independent socialist Scotland. The SRSM (formerly the SRSP) has a long and distinguished history of campaigning for republicanism and independence and publicising the life and works of John MacLean. (It is easy to join the Movement through their website and it only costs a fiver). It may well be that this grouping can eventually bring together all the diverse elements of the nationalist left like Alex Salmond, Roseanna Cunningham, Margo, Jim Sillars, Campbell Martin, Lloyd Quinan, Tommy Sheridan, Alex Neil, Gil Paterson and the rest (while recognising and retaining their independent status or SNP or SSP membership) within one body to discuss regularly and seriously how to move socialism and independence forwards.

While some of these people may not join it is up to the rest of the nationalist left to work together. I have joined the SRSM (though I am still in the SNP) and I encourage all other republican nationalists across the SNP and SSP to do the same. ■

*Joe Middleton*

# briefing: know your parliament

## Some recent sources of secondments into the Scottish Executive

Scottish Power  
 Stagecoach  
 NFU Scotland  
 Ernst and Young  
 PriceWaterhouseCooper

## Location of some recent secondments out of the Scottish Executive

Lloyds TSB Foundation  
 McGrigor Donald  
 Scottish Leadership Foundation  
 Scottish Power

Source: Parliamentary Question

## Top ten issues discussed in the Scottish and Welsh Parliaments in the second quarter of 2004

1	Scotland's Constitutional Status	Wale's Constitutional Status
2	NHS Structure	NHS Structure
3	Prison and Probation	Management of Schools
4	Criminal Justice and Sentencing	Local Government Funding
5	Management of Schools	Rural Communities
6	Rural Communities	NHS Personnel
7	Energy Policy	Farming
8	Disabled People	Lifelong Learning and Further Education
9	Public Health	Training
10	Farming	Roads

Source: www.scottishpolitics.com

## Hours of debate spent on various issues in the first term of the Scottish Parliament

<b>Fox Hunting</b>	9 hours 48 minutes
<b>Section 28</b>	9 hours 48 minutes
<b>Breast Feeding</b>	45 minutes
<b>Scottish Business</b> (including new economy, tourism, the textile industry, the oil and gas industry, Scotland's skills for tomorrow, employment in rural Scotland, enterprise networks, business rates and local economic development)	Over 130 hours

Source: Presiding Officer

## Previous Occupations of MSPs and Members of the Welsh Assembly

	Scottish Parliament	Welsh Assembly
1	Business (24)	Teaching (15)
2	Political Advice/Research (23)	Political Advice/Research (11)
3	Teaching (20)	Civil Service (9)
4	Legal (14)	Business (9)
5	Lecturing (13)	Lecturing (8)
6	Civil Service (11)	Health Service (6)
7	Journalism (11)	Legal (4)
8	Health Service (10)	Journalism (4)
9	Farming (9)	Farming (3)
10	Accountancy (3)	Charitable Sector (3)

Source: www.scottishpolitics.com

## Average contribution per MSP to their political party

SSP	226.3
SNP	195.1
Green	189.1
Labour	140.1
Lib Dem	138.6
Tory	124.1

# was this the settled will?

## Susan Deacon considers the state of the Scottish Parliament

We've finally made it. After five years in our temporary quarters on the Mound, we now have our feet firmly ensconced under our (very nice) new desks at the other end of the Royal Mile. They say that, after bereavement and divorce, moving home is the third most stressful experience in life. I suspect that in this case, the anticipation and sheer relief of getting into Holyrood has, for most of us, far outweighed the disruption and disorientation of the flitting. And few - even the harshest critics of the project - could fail to be impressed by our new surrounds.

MSPs are not alone in being wearisome of the controversy surrounding the Holyrood building project. The issue has been an albatross around the neck of devolution and has eclipsed the policy debate for far too long. Indeed, the forensic analysis of the building stands in marked contrast to the often scant and superficial examination of many of the major issues we face as a nation. There is, I sense, a genuine and widespread desire to move on - to refocus attention on what we do, rather than where we do it.

The move to the new Parliament building is an important watershed - an opportunity to take stock of our experience to date and to recraft how we 'do politics' in Scotland. There is an acute awareness amongst MSPs that we need to live up to our new surrounds. The mantra is that we need to 'raise our game'. The challenge is for us to walk - not just talk - that talk.

There is a job to be done to restore confidence in the body politic in Scotland and to ensure that the Parliament delivers real, sustainable change for the people of Scotland. That requires big thinking and bold decisions and a marked change to both the style and substance of what we do.

'Raising the game' is everyone's business and responsibility inside the Parliament and beyond. The stakes could not be higher. We are not just dealing here with how people feel about their Parliament, but how our nation feels about itself. Self confidence and self respect matter to the success of a nation, just as they do to the success of an individual or organisation.

Robust debate and reasoned criticism are necessary components of a healthy democracy. No-one in politics and least of all in Government, should expect an easy ride. But cheap knocking copy devalues us all. The tribalism of old style party politics has created a default mode of snipes, spats and point scoring. This may play well with party activists and in internal party selection battles, but the evidence is clear; it leaves the voters cold. At the end of the day the Scottish Parliament will be judged by results. Not on whether Jack McConnell, Nicola Sturgeon or David McCletchie has won on points at First Minister's Question Time.

It is hard to break away from these terms of engagement, but we need to try. The truth is that no one political party, politician or indeed lobby group has the answers to the complex issues we face in a modern world. Our nation's Parliament should be a place where we can explore issues with consideration and maturity, where there is scope for people to think aloud, to fly

kites, to share the complexity of the issues, to listen and to learn in the Chamber and beyond.

To some this may sound overly ambitious or, at best, naive. But the evidence screams out at us - that more of the same will not do. If we are serious about 'raising the game' we must face up to that.

Some would suggest that MSPs simply do not have the intellectual rigour to engage in such debate, that the current crop is not up to the job. This emerging conventional wisdom misses the point. There is a critical mass of talent and a capacity for independent thought across the Parliament and within all the Parties. The question is why we do not hear and see more of it.

Part of the problem is that we are constantly looking over our shoulders at how our utterances will play with the press. All too often this results in politicians going for cheap hits to get headlines and playing it safe to avoid them. This combination is debilitating.

The internal dynamics and discipline of political parties adds to this self denying ordinance. Consequently, more honest - often more critical or reflective thinking - becomes confined to discussions behind closed doors or in 'off the record briefings' to the press.

Similarly, at a local level, not least because of the List system, a disproportionate amount of MSPs' time is spent competing for local airspace. The phrase "well I've got my local press release now" is oft to be heard following a speech or question in the Chamber. Surely devolution is about more than this?

In private conversations many MSPs have expressed frustrations and shared concerns about the sterile nature of some of our debates and self imposed limitations. Some admit even to being bored. Privately too, there is a growing concern that in our desire to be seen to 'do something' we may, at times, have done the wrong thing. That perhaps some of the consultation, regulation or legislation we have generated has, albeit unintentionally, served to impede rather than to facilitate change. Many also express concern that we are shying away from hard decisions because they may be unpopular or simply too difficult.

Those who engage with the Parliament - or whose work is affected by it - are voicing similar concerns. But they too are more likely to speak their mind in private rather than in open forum. Often individuals will share very different views with MSPs away from the public gaze than those they are, for example, prepared to offer in evidence to Parliamentary Committees.

So if we're all so unhappy and self-critical why have we not done something about it? Perhaps it is, as one senior opposition Member said to me recently "No-one's prepared to blink first".

Well maybe now is the time to blink. After all, we encourage others to be confident, to take risks, we should be prepared to do the same. It is possible – necessary even – to do things differently. And there are encouraging signs of an appetite to do so.

One of the less visible achievements of devolution is that it has spawned a hinterland of networks and discussions which are starting to generate real fresh thinking and powerful alliances. Within the Parliament itself, MSPs have got to know each other as human beings not just by Party label. Shared interests and concerns have been identified and, in many cases, personal trust established.

Outside Parliament, at conferences, seminars and dinners – especially where Chatham House rules apply – a wider discourse is taking place. Here, safe from public view, politicians can be found engaging in meaningful dialogue across Party lines together with leaders from the private and public sector, academics, professionals and a host of others involved in Scottish public life – even sometimes journalists!

Such discussions are a far cry from what the public see and hear of their elected representatives. They are not about grandstanding and point scoring, nor geared towards hits and headlines. Rather they are about people who share a desire to make our country better seeking solutions on how this might be done. The dynamics and exchange could not be more different from the narrowly focussed debates and tightly whipped votes which are all too often the stuff of the Parliamentary Chamber. So too are such discussions altogether more illuminating and challenging than the strictures of a Parliamentary Committee evidence session or a formal Ministerial meeting, carefully choreographed by civil servants.

Let me venture to suggest that it is time to bring more of this type of dialogue and exchange out of the shadows and into the

mainstream of the Parliament. A more open and constructively critical analysis of what is and is not working in post devolution Scotland is long overdue. I don't doubt that in the short term this would generate some unwelcome headlines. But maybe, just maybe, it would help to 'raise the game' in the press as well as the Parliament. The danger is otherwise that we stagnate in our thinking, are risk averse in our actions and that we compound errors in our decision making – and that, ultimately, would be far, far worse.

We need to get better at 'telling it like it is', free from some of the hyperbole and rhetoric which is the stock in trade of party politics. We need to get better at coming together to deliver change rather than just expecting everyone else to do it for us. And we must get better at accepting responsibility rather than just apportioning blame.

There are welcome vibes around Holyrood that many politicians are up for a change of approach. People are growing into their environment and heads are being raised. That bodes well for the future.

The decision to create an iconic home for the Nation's new Parliament was a very visible manifestation of the hope, vision and ambition which existed when devolution was in its infancy. Rekindling that hope and aspiration will be no mean feat – but it can be done. ■

*Susan Deacon is MSP for Edinburgh East and Musselburgh*

## **Transport to European Social Forum**

The European Social Forum takes place in London from 15 - 17 October. Transport to London is available.

### **Train - £50**

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### **East Coast and West Coast coaches £20 or £30**

Depart from Scotland on Wednesday 13th at 24.00 hours  
Return from London on Sunday 17th at 23.00 hours

**To reserve a place contact SMC-ESF on 07951443656**

# new parliament, new view

**Rob Gibson calls for bolder Parliamentary debate and an open ear to public demands**

Its Catalan architect undoubtedly provoked a great deal of debate on the costs and style of our new Parliament building. The late Enric Miralles deliberated thoroughly on his design, but can MSPs rivet the voters with their force of argument in the new debating chamber? It depends what you expect of parliamentary debate. We need to assess the kind of debates and decisions taken in other countries' legislatures in this age when globalisation cuts down the choices local representatives have to make.

Let's remember that Scotland's parliament is not yet 'the settled will' like those in Norway or Switzerland. We don't have all the powers of normality. So that immediately skews the kind of debates we can have. A fair amount of opposition debating time inevitably refers to the reserved powers held by Westminster. Others stem from the passage of unambitious bills offered by the New Labour/LibDem partners to tick boxes in their Partnership Agreement.

What should be our focus for debate? When the young and radical Robert Bontine Cunninghame Graham MP argued in the House of Commons for Scottish Home Rule in 1889 he suggested that the demand came 'from no sentimental grounds whatever, but from the extreme misery of a certain section of the Scottish population, and they wish to have their own Members under their own hands, in order to extort legislation from them suitable to relieve that misery.' Over a century later that misery takes startlingly similar forms, such as lack of steady work, poor health, shortage of decent housing, serial misuse of our land and sea resources and yet more unwanted wars. But added to these are the post industrial problems imposed by supra-national bodies like the EU, WTO, G8, the long arm of multinational business and indiscriminate acts of global terrorism.

So our brand new Parliament must debate all these topics. But the Executive balks at raising them itself. Nevertheless members have tackled quite a long list in the past year. Scrapping and replacing Council Tax, wind farms, GM crops, health service deficiencies, maternity service centralisation and the plight Iraq have raised the biggest interest from vocal voters. Furthermore Jack McConnell's crew have justified doing less by using Sewell motions to send more sticky subjects to Westminster; for example, to regulate nuclear and renewable energy and create civil partnerships. That has to be stopped if Holyrood's prestige is to be enhanced. A concerted effort has to be made to introduce agenda-setting debates this session.

Pressure groups demand change and ceaselessly lobby parties and MSPs to initiate debates and offer amendments to Bills. Perhaps the most vocal lobbyists until now have been the nursery nurses and the ill-fated chorus of Scottish Opera. But inside the Chamber we have heard Labour Ministers brush off responsibility. Ministers continue to repeat the incantation that 'the communities tell us' to justify Government attention on the measures to tackle anti-social behaviour that were introduced in

the last session rather than action to give local people more hope of changing the circumstances that lead to addiction problems and the 'Ned' culture as defined by New Labour rhetoric.

There has been no willingness to bestow powers at a local level to tackle local issues. Contrast this with the ward meetings held regularly in Porto Alegre, in the poor southern Brazilian state Rio Grande do Sul. Residents have the right to make decisions on local public budget spending and do in large numbers. Such a radical solution to empower local people here could light up debate in the new Holyrood Chamber. It isn't enough to reform local council voting; you have to give local people more direct say in how councils raise and spend their cash and build real subsidiarity into the Scottish process of governance.

Can you imagine Margaret Curran offering voters at ward level a change to decide budget priorities in their locality, or elect the boards of SIP programmes? Choice of a very different sort is the New Labour mantra that involves prioritising private profit over public service. I believe that Scots citizens could well be enthused by debates to extend democracy if they devolved more real powers to them. Reawakening democratic instincts could work wonders for the quality of parliamentary debate itself as higher standards of involvement are engendered all round.

As noted above the most pressing issues we face have been raised in the debating days allocated to the opposition by the 'modified de Hont' system of proportionality. These can last a maximum of two and a half hours. Additionally the non-deliberative members' debates at 5pm for about an hour on Wednesdays and Thursdays offer more time to raise constituency issues. It is far too tight a schedule to press home detailed concerns in four or five minute speeches. Nevertheless the wind farm debate induced many people round the country to view the web cam that afternoon. Consequently it is obvious why the Government keeps debate on highly emotive issues to a minimum while covering self-congratulatory pap about Cleaner Beaches twice in five months.

At its heart Holyrood, the working parliament even without full powers, applies remarkably open access for public participation. Subject committees have instilled cohesion among those new to the parliamentary processes without stifling controversial debate. But the press cares little for this as a sensational strap line is more easily conjured from some trivial tiff or faux pas. Frank McAveety's pie and roast potatoes come to mind.

As will soon be seen Sen.Miralles has designed beautiful airy committee rooms. So MSPs can emerge from the stale air of our temporary home on George IV Bridge and breathe the air of adventure should they choose. Committee Conveners could be far more independent and follow the lead that John McAllion set in Public Petitions before his dismissal by the voters of Dundee East. Committees are whipped like all other parliamentary deliberations but can often be more united than the parties in the chamber. Unfortunately committee members' grasp of

detail cannot be easily transferred onto the floor of the chamber at the debates that mark a Bill's passage. However exciting the proposition, Holyrood shares that problem with all other legislatures in this respect.

More and more cross-party groups have been set up since May 2003. MSPs in the first four years signed up for many and attended only a few through time pressure. Yet the new intake spurred on to discuss even more subjects of interest. Most crowd the lunchtime and early evening spaces after other parliamentary business is finished. Interested citizens and experts debate with MSPs and form campaigns to influence the Executive. In the new Holyrood they should be given a report back debate in the Parliamentary year. At present an AGM report and re-elections alone are published. Maybe cross-party groups were seen as safety valves when first approved but they often reach consensus that spans the parties. And it's consensus that demands action.

Affordable Housing is a case in point. In a debate last session on a report of the now-defunct Rural Development Committee, speaker after speaker agreed this was the top priority issue. But did the Government listen? Social housing needs a range of responses but the homeless don't tend to demonstrate and the search for affordable rented property in decent neighbourhoods goes on, barely noticed by elected representatives. Meanwhile the young and ambitious may just quietly leave their communities for the cities or leave the country itself.

I believe that the new venue at the bottom of the Royal Mile has to rage at this draining of self-confidence and indeed of the country's lifeblood and expose the pitiful lack of coherent Executive policy. Jack McConnell's attempts to attract replacement workers in the Fresh Talent scheme are laudable but when will he insist on investment in land and affordable homes, planning aids and a package of measures that work for resident Scots?

When the quality of debate issue was raised by the Editor my thoughts turned to great parliamentary moments from history. In 1923 Red Clydesider James Maxton MP protested in the Commons against budget cuts in health estimates for Scotland. His wife had died caring for their child.

Insensitive Tory taunts at him created

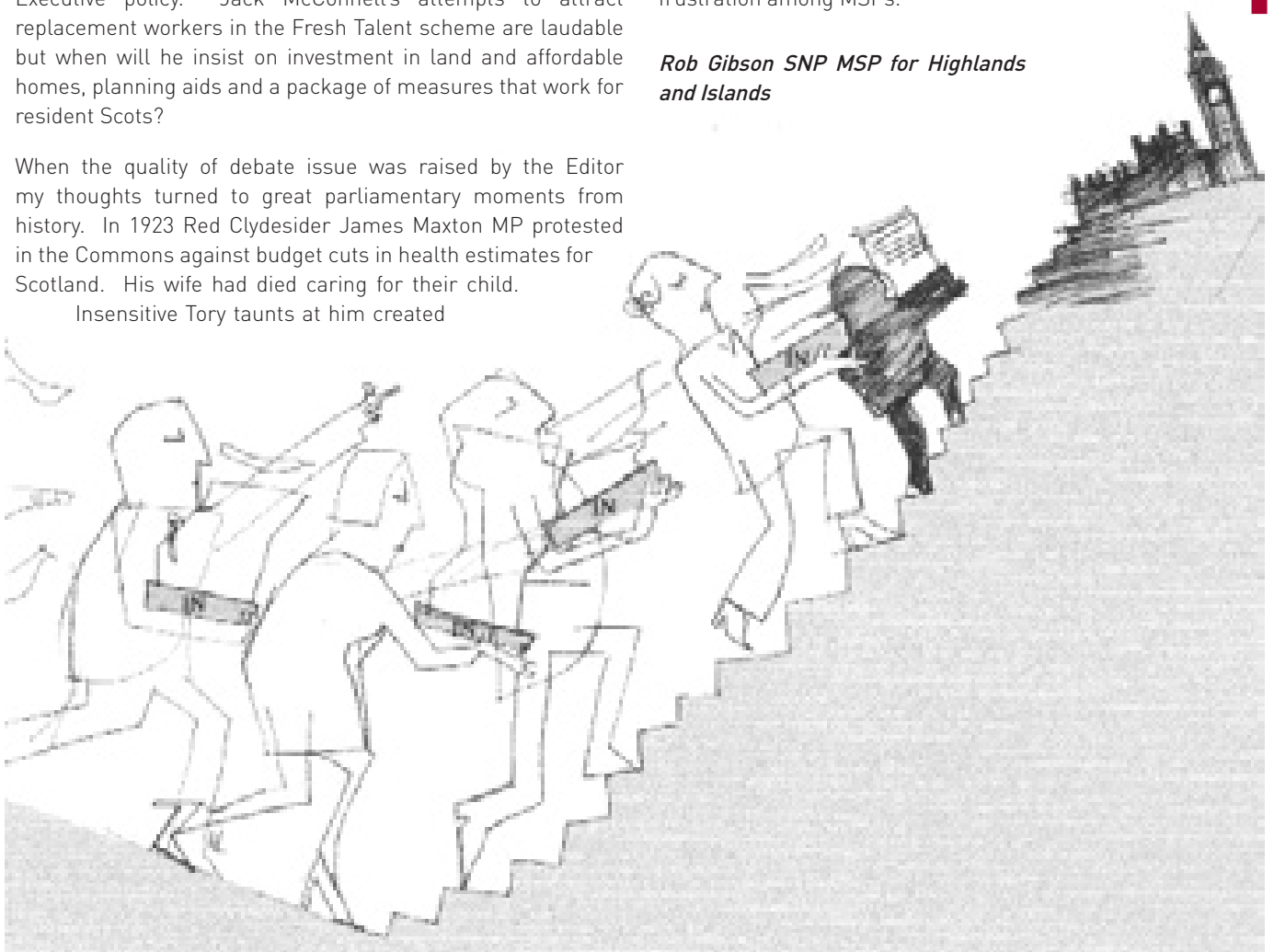
a passionate scene that led to his own and several other members' suspension after Maxton had accused the Tories of 'murder'. At least the government increased some health spending as a result. In 1988 the young Alex Salmond MP dared to intervene in the Chancellor's Budget Statement and was suspended. But as minorities often do, they grandstand on issues and pray for censure to boost publicity. The SSP promise of 'madness and craziness' didn't materialise, and that itself didn't noticeably raise the quality of debate.

The coming of age of the Holyrood Parliament will be due to a telling debate. At university I learned that a three day debate in the House of Commons in 1940 led to Chamberlain's downfall through force of argument including that from formally loyal back benchers even though the Government won by a big majority. Crunch issues facing Scotland will attract support across the parties to change government decisions or even the government itself for all parties are now minorities. But looking back to the 1999 to 2003 sessions the only big Government defeat on fishing issues was quickly reversed.

In the last session an SNP-initiated GM debate brokered cross-party accord between Conservatives, Greens, Independents, SNP and Socialists leading a Government majority of just one vote. The licensing and planting of Chardon LL maize could have been stopped by Scottish Executive veto in the UK. In consequence the debate was sharp and interventions telling but the outcome and implications received little detailed coverage.

We can only hope that the new Holyrood chamber and committee rooms will encourage fresh energy. But a continuation of the Government's lack of ambition for Scotland will still provoke frustration among MSPs.

**Rob Gibson SNP MSP for Highlands and Islands**



# silence built in

Lorna Bett asks whether relocation to Holyrood might mark the beginning of a more free-spirited parliament.

The long awaited Scottish Parliament – the realisation of the nation’s hopes and dreams, Scotland’s newest seat of democracy – is now open. When the first members of the new Parliament gathered on the Mound on 12 May 1999, the inimitable Winnie Ewing portrayed the significance of the event and indeed, the hopes of the Scottish people, when she said “The Scottish Parliament, which adjourned on 25 March 1707, is hereby reconvened”. At long last, we thought, a Parliament by the people for the people.

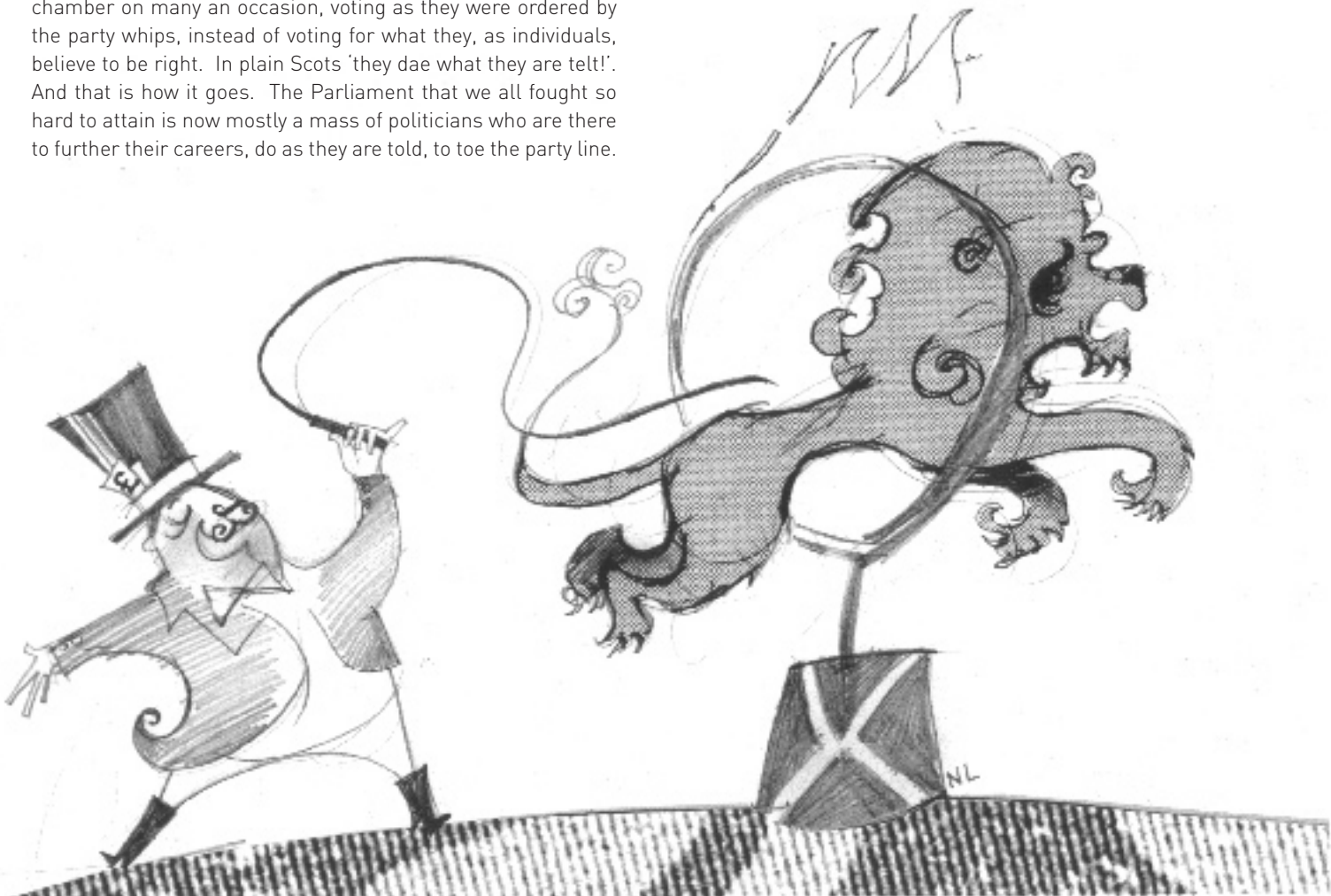
I was brought up in a family where my father and my uncles discussed politics. I was always interested but what truly caught my attention as a youngster was those like Michael Foot and Tony Benn. They were people who spoke their minds, who truly believed in what they were saying and spoke with a passion. What politicians in the Scottish Parliament do we find ourselves looking forward to hearing with anticipation, who inspire us with their wit and oratory? Where are the free spirits in the Parliament? Now and again we see an MSP going against the grain, telling it as it really is, like when Elaine Smith stood out against the war in Iraq. But sadly, those occasions are as rare as members of the Jack McConnell fan club.

So what type of Parliament are we putting into Holyrood? A Parliament ruled by a coalition of New Labour and the duplicitous Liberal Democrats. I’ve watched them in the chamber on many an occasion, voting as they were ordered by the party whips, instead of voting for what they, as individuals, believe to be right. In plain Scots ‘they dae what they are telt!’. And that is how it goes. The Parliament that we all fought so hard to attain is now mostly a mass of politicians who are there to further their careers, do as they are told, to toe the party line.

They appear afraid to speak their minds, to speak up for what is right because they may be ostracised by their leadership or even suspended.

So what has the Scottish Parliament accomplished in the last five years? Sadly many would suggest very little. With the odd exception like the Abolition of Poindings and Warrant Sales Act 2001 and free personal care for the elderly, all too little has changed. The disappointment in this parliament has been crushing. In 1997, 71 per cent of **Scotsman** readers said that they hoped the new Parliament would bring about an increase in standards of education and 50 per cent thought that it would bring about an increase in the standard of living for the population of Scotland. Sadly, by May 2003 57 per cent thought that the parliament had made no difference.

Who can ever forget the words of Tony Blair when he was asked about Labour’s plans for the new Scottish Parliament in 1997? “The powers are like those of any local authority... once the power is given, it’s like any parish council, it’s got the right to exercise it.” Westminster control over reserved matters such as Immigration and Nationality has meant the people of Scotland felt powerless in the face of the incarceration of children at Dungavel. Never in my own life have I felt so ashamed to be Scottish as I was on the day I sat in the Chamber and heard Jack



McConnell constantly repeating that the Dungavel situation was "a reserved matter". The situation surely serves as example that this Parliament has too little power. For Scotland to have control over its own destiny, Scotland has to be independent. Not only independent of the Westminster machine, but also of the Monarchy. An independent Scottish Republic, where the Parliament makes its own decisions according to its own sense of what is right.

The Scottish Parliament's annual budget, now £25 billion, rises each year. But the use of this money appears to bring fewer and fewer results. Parliamentary control of the agenda is in the hands of those who wish to stem radical issues being brought forward, especially by the new smaller parties. We only need to look at the way the nursery nurses were treated to see how ineffectual the parliament really has become. It is all about safety. Maintaining the Executive's position and power. Earning a wee pat on the back from Mr Blair appears more important than serving the people of Scotland and ensuring freedom from poverty, the right to decide whether we go to war, the right to get rid of nuclear weapons from our shores, the right to decide who lives in our country.

The parliamentary business agenda is used to prevent the smaller parties getting 'air time'. A good example is the proposed change to rules governing members Bills. Until recently, an MSP needed to amass the signatures of eleven others to allow his or her Bill to proceed. Now it is proposed to increase this to 18 and add that at least three parties must be represented therein. A change clearly designed to prevent the

smaller parties from introducing radical Bills. Coincidentally the Greens, SSP and Independents total 17! And they call this democracy?

The question is – how free spirited is our Parliament? Sadly the answer is – it's not. The Westminster controlled parties make damn sure of that. They are smothering democracy in Scotland, which means that the desires and needs of the Scottish Public are not being met. The new Scottish Parliament Building is an awesome, beautiful building and one which I look forward to working inside. But its arrival has been tarnished by adverse publicity, spiralling costs and delays.

In the new building we have a Parliament Scots remain fully committed to. But a Parliament most Scots would like to see have more powers – 66 per cent of Scots according to a Joseph Rowntree Trust poll. But they also want to see a Parliament where members have the courage of their convictions and remember why they were put there in the first place. To uphold and further the interests of the Scottish people, to ensure, indeed demand, greater democracy at all levels. ■

*Lorna Bett is a member of the SSP and is the Parliamentary Assistant to Colin Fox MSP and Rosemary Byrne MSP*

## **An Alternative Economic Strategy for Scotland** **A one-day workshop to help build a practical alternative to Neo-Liberalism**

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Across the globe there is a developing tide of resistance to neo-liberal economics. As the harmful effects of free market economic policies become more widespread, there is an urgent need for new thinking in developing an alternative and more progressive strategy.

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# a new vision for a model parliament

John McAllion takes the floor to move for a Scottish Parliament fit for the Scottish people

At its first meeting in May 1999, Winnie Ewing called on the 129 Members of the Scottish Parliament to “make it a showpiece of modern democracy”. Weeks later, at the official opening in July, the late Donald Dewar described the moment of the Parliament’s coming into existence as “a turning point – the day when democracy was renewed in Scotland.”

Today, it is difficult to reconcile the almost reverential tone of these high hopes placed in the Parliament with the controversy and criticism that has dogged it during the first five years of its existence.

From rows about MSP expenses and commemorative medals, through Lobbygate and Officegate, to the out-of-control costs of the new Holyrood building, the headlines haunting the Parliament have had little to do with the renewal of Scottish democracy. Indeed, the reverential tones of just five years ago are now in danger of turning to hoots of sour derision from a tabloid press scenting blood and sensing that they might yet bring the new Parliament down.

Much of this harrying has been grossly unfair. In the row that erupted over the repeal of the infamous Clause 2a prohibiting the promotion of homosexuality in schools, it was the then Minister, Wendy Alexander, and the parliamentary majority that backed repeal who fought for a new, enlightened and tolerant idea of democracy. Their opposition in the ‘Keep the Clause’ campaign represented an older, darker and intolerant tradition that had to be defeated. Their ultimate defeat by a huge parliamentary majority was an important landmark in the struggle for Scotland’s new democracy.

The Parliament has also risen to the challenge of great occasions. It was the only national forum where Scotland debated with itself and with passion the arguments over the illegal attack against Iraq. The Bill to abolish poundings and warrant sales created what Westminster could never deliver - the space in which to debate the moral limits of debt recovery from the poor. The repeated attempts to introduce free school meals have generated fierce arguments across the country over means testing, universality and the fight against poverty. Arguably, the Parliament has been at its best when it has dared to go beyond the limits of devolution to take on areas reserved to Westminster. It has looked least like a real Parliament when it has settled into the subsidiary posture of doing what Westminster allows it to do.

The real achievements of the Parliament are also underplayed. Free care for the elderly, a better deal for students and reform of local government through the introduction of proportional voting will all make a real difference to the lives of thousands of ordinary Scots. The Members’ Bills to promote breastfeeding,

ban hunting with hounds and to raise the difficult case of physician-assisted death show an effective and open parliamentary system that leaves its Westminster counterpart a long way behind.

Much of the press criticism has also focused on matters that, in the longer term, are peripheral and inconsequential – the cost of grass for the MSPs’ garden, the flooding of an office during an unseasonal downpour, the choice of a private member’s bill and so on. An increasingly hostile home press has seized every opportunity to have a go at a Parliament that in their eyes is not living up to the initial billing of a new beginning for Scottish democracy..

**Tragically, most of the MSPs who sat in the Parliament during these first five years have lacked the necessary vision and understanding of the Parliament’s huge democratic potential**

Yet, in their hostility they miss many of the aspects of the new democracy that do matter. The working of the powerful committee system rarely registers in the press and media. Little attention is paid to the family friendly hours that have encouraged so many women to take up parliamentary politics for the first time. The proportional system of voting that smashed big party politics and opened the door of national politics to Socialists, Greens and Independents is hardly remarked upon.

Nor is the cutting-edge nature of the Parliament’s electronic communications. Every MSP can be contacted through an e-mail address. Executive and parliament alike have excellent, interactive websites. An e-petitioner system provides direct access to the Public Petitions System. There are live web casts from committees and plenary sessions of the Parliament. Partner libraries sit in every constituency in the country. In the space of just five years, the potential for a new e-democracy is already taking shape in a way that puts Westminster in the shade.

The Public Petitions Committee itself is an innovation in participatory politics that by comparison leaves the Westminster system of petitioning through Honourable Members looking like a distinctly out of touch and ancient regime. For the first time in the history of British parliamentary politics the ordinary citizen has gained an officially recognised place in the political process in between elections and in Scotland progress towards active citizenship has been significantly accelerated by the establishment of our own Parliament.

Even the much maligned new building contains the seed of a new and more progressive form of democratic politics. The deliberate choice of a hemicycle debating chamber breaks with the Westminster tradition of Government and Opposition lined up in ranks across a no-mans land divide and ready to do battle with each other to the death. At Westminster crossing the floor that separates the parties is regarded as being the ultimate

betrayal. By contrast our Parliament is designed to promote consensus and cross-party co-operation around issues that matter to people.

Tragically, most of the MSPs who sat in the Parliament during these first five years have lacked the necessary vision and understanding of the Parliament's huge democratic potential. Labour, the largest party in the Parliament, used its selection procedures to weed out most of the candidates likely to cause trouble for their big brothers and sisters at Westminster as loyalty to the British Labour Party line was the chief quality looked for in a Labour member. A determination to see off the SNP and the nationalist threat to the Union became the driving force behind their stewardship of Scottish government. Using the Scottish Parliament to do less better fits exactly with a vision that sees the Parliament as a secondary and subsidiary institution and, above all, as a means of strengthening the Mother Parliament in London.

For their part, the Liberal Democrats have become the victims of the coalition politics they fought so long to bring into existence. Tied into supporting hard-line approaches to law and order and to a spreading social authoritarianism, they have been forced to surrender liberal principles in return for a handful of seats around the cabinet table of an Executive no-one would ever accuse of being liberal.

## **This is a Parliament designed by dreamers who wanted a different, transparent and open style of democracy**

For the SNP, self-inflicted leadership rows and a disastrous turning in on themselves at the very moment of democratic renewal in Scotland has meant five lost years. Their failure to understand the Parliament's potential to make a decisive break with the old politics and the old union has cost both them and Scotland dear. Whoever emerges as their new leader must learn the lesson that our new Parliament is designed for a new kind of politics and can only succeed if the parties in it play by the rules of that new politics - no party sectarianism, no opposition for its own sake, no ritual confrontation, but consensus and cross-party co-operation. The Parliamentary machinery is in place for that kind of politics. All it needs is politicians committed to making it work.

The potential of the Scottish Parliament to make a real difference to the political life of our country and to renew our damaged and dying democracy has not been snuffed out by the disappointments of its first five years. This is a Parliament designed by dreamers who wanted a different, transparent and open style of democracy. Their blueprint survives. It simply awaits a political generation with the vision and the commitment to use it to the ends they dreamed about. ■

*John McAllion was a Labour MSP from 1999 to 2003 and an MP prior to that. He is now Campaigns Manager for Oxfam Scotland.*



**ASLEF calls for the Government to introduce a charter of workers' rights that would include, the right to full employment, rights from day one of employment, the repeal of oppressive anti trade union legislation and positive laws encouraging trade unions to represent their members individually and collectively.**

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# profit and parliament

## David Miller looks at how the corporate agenda has infiltrated the Scottish Parliament

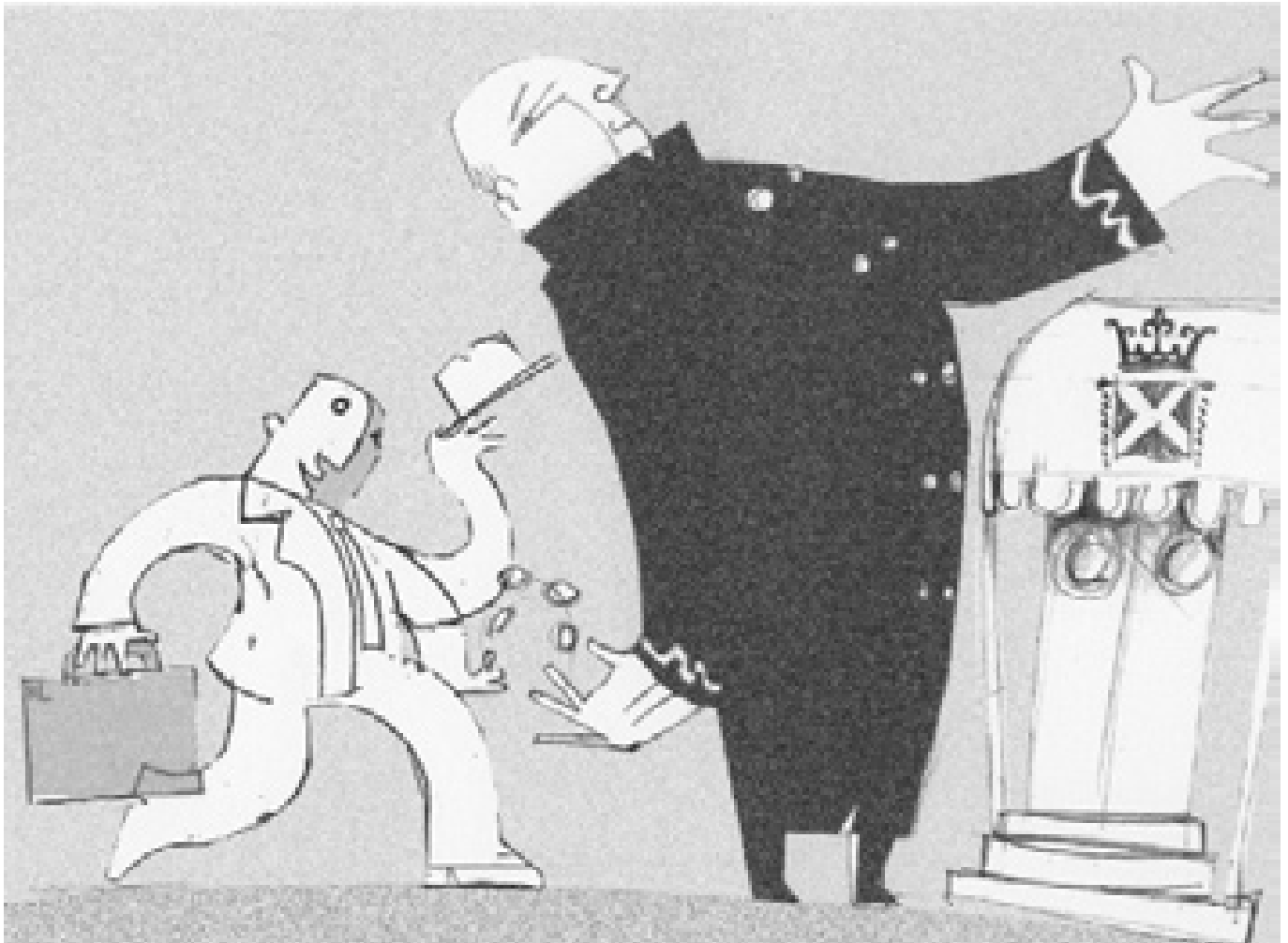
Devolved government in Scotland was supposed to bring democracy closer to the people. It was a risk to vested interests. As Members of the Scottish Parliament finally move into the newly built parliament this month, we can ask about the extent to which that risk has been averted.

Jack McConnell is notionally the most powerful or 'First' Minister in the allegedly democratic Scottish polity, bequeathed by the devolution settlement. But Jack is not really in charge. Jack is run; by New Labour in London, by the 'permanent government' of the British civil service. But behind the puppeteers stand the owners of the circus in which Jack's little dance is performed. The men and women of the business classes are the power behind the throne.

They are not unchallenged and they are not always able to get their way, but they rule through the three pillars of business power identified by political scientist Neil Mitchell in his book *The Conspicuous Corporation*. The first of these is the pro-business assumptions of policy makers and politicians, nowhere more clearly demonstrated than in the physiognomy of New Labour. Jack, for example is not shy about his penchant for profit, noting in March this year that, 'By being the party of public services, Labour has not always been the party of enterprise and growth. For too long Scottish politics has been dominated by a consensus that public services came before

enterprise and growth. That enterprise was even something to be ashamed of or embarrassed about. Scottish Labour must embrace enterprise. We must be the party of enterprise because a dynamic economy means opportunities for Scots and resources for schools and hospitals.'

And embrace enterprise they have tried to do by diving headlong into the murky world of PFI and PPP, a policy that the Tories found difficult to get off the ground. It took New Labour to remove the legal barriers to PFI (within the first two months of taking office in 1997), which were largely to do with limiting the financial risk for the private sector, thus undermining its alleged 'dynamism'. The conversion of Labour to a party of business has also had significant effects on the machinery of government. Also following on reforms of the civil service set in train by the Thatcher administration, Labour has presided over an influx of business representatives into the machinery of governance and an increase in secondments from the civil service to business. Since the creation of the Scottish Executive, business representatives have had access as secondees to the Executive and civil servants have been seconded outwards to the private sector. Companies involved include the biggest Scottish and Trans-National corporations, Inward: Scottish Power, Scottish and Newcastle, Stagecoach, Ernst and Young, PriceWaterhouseCoopers. Outward: Lloyds TSB Foundation, Scottish Power, McGrigor Donald (law firm and lobbyist),



Scottish and Newcastle and business lobby groups Business in the Community and the Scottish Chambers of Commerce.

The Scottish Parliament itself has a secondee from the big legal firm (and lobbyist) Shepherd and Wedderburn and the Executive runs a scheme to second staff from road building and consulting firms to their Road Network Management and Maintenance Division. The biggest firms in the area such as Babbie, Scott Wilson and Fairhurst bid to be included in the scheme in which they supervise road building projects and even assist with the procurement process for such projects. Executive Minister Andy Kerr has noted inward secondments 'foster and promote links, co-operation and a mutual understanding', not to mention the financial benefits of helping to decide which consultants get which road contracts.

The Blair government has recently signalled that it wants to 'open the way for former ministers and senior civil servants to accept lucrative jobs in private industry without having to wait months to take up the posts because of their inside knowledge of government decisions'. This will weaken the already minimal and inadequate safeguards against the revolving door between business and the civil service.

The second pillar of business power is said to be the political activities of business including its sponsorship of party conferences, donations to parties, lobbying, PR, the creation and use of front groups, seemingly independent institutes and apparently enlightened business networks. One such that has emerged in Scotland in recent months is the creation of the Scottish steering group of the Business Council for sustainable Development- UK (BCSD-UK), itself an affiliate of the World BCSD (<http://www.wbcds.ch>).

Blair's comment in a speech in 2000 that 'Fifteen years ago, if you said business will help save the environment people would have laughed at you. Today, I believe this is a serious proposition', simply shows the degree to which he operates in a parallel universe. In fact the WBCSD is at the forefront of corporate attempts to undermine environmental action, lobbying worldwide against regulation and in favour of voluntary 'solutions'. In Scotland the environmentally conscious members of the BCSD include road building consultancy Scott Wilson, the biggest users of natural (Water) resources Scottish Power and the brewers Scottish and Newcastle and the oil giant Shell. Even more unsavoury is the membership of Pegasus-International, the debt collectors, hardly a sustainable business. Furthermore, the Scottish BCSD is involved with the Executive in the Scottish Waste Minimisation Steering Group, in the Scottish Industrial Symbiosis Programme and in the Scottish context of FutureBuild. Don't know what these are? Don't worry, you are not meant to. The beauty of partnership working between government and industry is that you never have to tell the public what you are doing; you just get on with it in subterranean discussions and quiet agreements.

Handily enough the Executive have invited the BCSD into its consultation on the Scottish Green Jobs Strategy. The WBCSD is a peak business lobby group dedicated to resisting environmental progress. In Scotland it is at the heart of the policy process and indeed the Executive 'agreed [BCSD Scotland's] programme of work' and even 'provided financial support to the initial stages of this, up to the end of March 2004'. Maybe this is quite routine these days, but when was the last time you heard of a business lobby group set up to influence

government policy being funded by the very government being targeted?

For some pulling the strings the election of the parliament posed a problem since it had the potential to represent some elements of popular interests, thus there was lots of discussion about how the parliament could be 'educated' (read lobbied) about business. In particular it was argued that most MSPs had no experience of business and that their main experience was in the public sector. To rectify this, the Scottish Parliament Business Exchange was set up to allow MSPs to be educated about the realities of business life. To ensure that education - not lobbying - took place the scheme was required to be 'non-lobbying'. But in practice three quarters of the business representatives taking part were lobbyists. The SPBE's other founding principles were openness and accountability. But as a public limited company it is not accountable to the Scottish Parliament. Its openness is compromised by its refusal to release any documentation or minutes of its meetings despite parliamentary questions and repeated requests. The latest position (July 2004) of the Exchange is that there are no minutes for any of its meetings. As a coda to this sorry tale, data released in July 2004 shows that the biggest single category of previous job experience of the 129 MSPs in the Scottish Parliament is in business (24 of them, with a further 9 in farming and 3 in Accountancy). If anything it is these MSPs could do with broadening their social experience by being educated about living in poverty or suffering marginality. But there is no chance of a Scottish Parliament Poverty Exchange programme.

This was emphasised in April when the Scottish Parliament held a 'Business in the Parliament' conference. Over 100 business delegate trooped in and sat in the elected members seats. Amongst the delegates were all the key peak business associations representing big business including the CBI, the Chemical Industries Association, the Scottish Food and Drink Federation and the Scottish BCSD. The press release from the parliament announced that the delegates were 'the people driving Scotland's economy'. The trick here is to convince yourself that it is the business class not the workers who create the value in production. Otherwise you might come to the conclusion that the Parliament spin doctors are in the business of issuing corporate ideology dressed up as neutral official information. The final insult to the Parliament's founding principles of openness was that the discussion sessions in the conference were held in private. Pro-business assumptions amongst policy makers and lobbying by corporations result in reflex secrecy.

The third pillar of business power, according to Mitchell, is the mass media. While political coverage may not always support business interests, it is worth observing that the core assumptions of even the liberal Scottish media do not encompass any serious regulation of business power. Indeed it is so much common sense that much of the mainstream no longer notices the pro-business assumptions in government policy. As testament to that, virtually none of the empirical data in this article has appeared anywhere in the Scottish mainstream.

The risk that the Scottish Parliament might bring democracy closer to the people and challenge vested interests has effectively been contained. Market democracy under business rule has been established. ■

*David Miller is Professor of Sociology at Strathclyde University*

# afraid of the bathroom mirror

Psychologist Derrick Whyte argues that the inability of MSPs to look themselves in the eye has resulted in the shrill aggression of Holyrood

The series of articles in the SLR on the subject of personality using prominent people as exemplars prompted the Political Editor of **Scotland on Sunday** to ring me. He sought my opinion on apparent collective stress levels within the Scottish Parliament. Though gratifying to learn that one of Andrew Neil's staff should read a publication as radical as the SLR, one instinctively reaches for a long spoon when invited to sup at the Barclay Towers table. I gave my views but not being a reader of Mr Neil's organs I cannot claim they were considered of value.

It was only on deeper reflection that the poignancy of the **SoS** question sank in. C.G. Jung wrote that mental illness was "characterised by disunity of the personality, while mental health is manifested by unity, towards which the personality strives". The primary purpose of personality assessment tests is to obviate or at least reduce the risk of the square-peg syndrome (SPS). The first choice for a Butlin's Redcoat would not be Tam Dalyell, nor would The Samaritans be over enthusiastic about Margaret Thatcher manning their help-line. Where the SPS exists the employee may suffer from stress which in turn leads to reduced performance along with illness and/or absences. Thus neither the employee nor the employer is happy. Personality assessment tests look at two aspects of the psyche, the **natural** self and the **persona**, also known as the adapted style. Most of us have to adapt to some degree to our working environment, but where adaptation is too demanding, disunity may be too pronounced and Jung's caution becomes a risk.

The Holyrood Parliament regularly displays discernible signs of what Jung called disunity. There is all too often a sourness and irascibility which transcends the normal cut and thrust of party politics. The Dail in Dublin, for example, though fiery at times is a much more good-humoured forum. The Scottish problem stems from a form of collective disunity, shared by most and highlighted by the few who are free of the malaise. Such unease could have been written off in the early days of Holyrood when MSPs were noticeably self-conscious – not unlike children playing shop, half expecting a parent to tell them to put away their toy money and get off to bed.

The Holyrood malaise is a close relative of the SPS; it is the Bathroom Mirror Syndrome (BMS). None of the major parties is at ease with itself. The old adage that there is none so unforgiving as the wrong-doer pertains here. The BMS victim is none too happy with his own reflection so to disguise his self-dissatisfaction he stabs at his opponents with a level of rancour which is disproportionate to the arguments made.

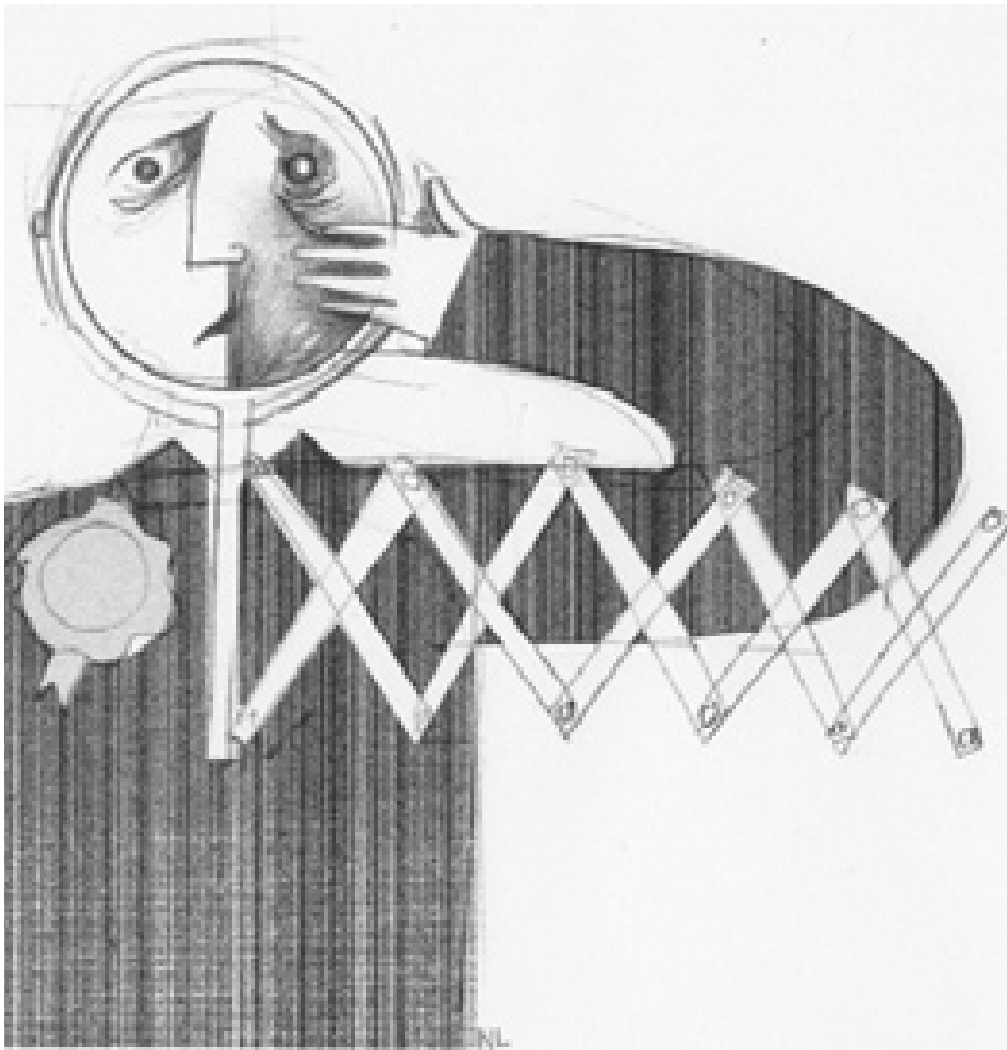
The Conservatives fought tooth and nail to prevent Devolution. They spearheaded the 'No – No' campaign in the run up to the referendum. They also strenuously opposed Proportional Representation. Yet when the Scotland Act was passed and the Scottish Parliament was re-established using PR for the election of its representatives the Tories found themselves entitled to eighteen Holyrood seats. How many were of sufficient honour to state that they could not in principle take a seat in a parliament they disapproved of especially as the seat

was by virtue of PR which they also opposed? Not one – all uncomplainingly accepted their fifty thousand pound salaries and lavish expenses.

Scottish New Labour are the heirs of Keir Hardie, John McLean, Jimmy Maxton and the Red Clydesiders; they are the brothers and sisters of Mick McGahey, Denis Canavan, John McAllion, George Galloway and Robin Cook. Yet their London masters have abandoned every core belief from Clause IV to Nuclear Disarmament. They are not proud of themselves and it shows. Jack McConnell by nature has a warm smile and a caring disposition yet under his Holyrood persona he appears a man perpetually under siege. He is not just defending the issue of the day he is defending the entire **volte face** of his party. He is acutely conscious of his daily dichotomy, on the one hand being the Scottish Premier and on the other his subservience to London Labour. At their Scottish New Labour spring conference the star of the show was not Jack but the UK's PM, Tony Blair, whose speech had as its main thrust the danger of a resurgent Tory party. Mr Blair appeared unaware that the Tories in Scotland are an irrelevance. Clearly the message was not meant for Scotland, giving yet more credence to the belief that Jack McConnell is seen as just a lowly branch manager of the New Labour firm in London.

The UK Liberal Democrats are led by Charles Kennedy who took a principled stance against the invasion of Iraq. The LibDems were also advocates of an extra penny on tax specifically for education. In a UK context they are drafting a replacement for the inequitable Council Tax. Yet the Holyrood LibDems, in return for three cabinet positions, keep their heads below the parapet and avoid rocking the New Labour boat. Jim Wallace won the Enterprise portfolio. A measure of his competence might be deduced from his comment when Amazon.com announced several hundred new jobs in Greenock; Mr Wallace averred that this would be very welcome news in Renfrewshire. Alas, Greenock is in Inverclyde, which, **en passant**, happens to be a LibDem Council.

Once a vote for the SNP was a vote for Independence. Remember 'Free by 93'? Rousing Braveheart stuff; no equivocation there. But the John Swinney leadership strove to assure us it was a safe pair of hands with the economy and that an SNP vote is no longer a vote for independence but that there would have to be a referendum. Why? Would the Green Party say there would have to be a referendum on whether to save the whale or protect our environment? For years the SNP was, quite logically, a predominantly republican party. Why would any emergent independent nation wish to retain an unelected head of state, domiciled in a foreign country? The Irish tried it much to the distaste of the majority; 'Dominion Status' is a term not likely to enhance a nation's self-esteem. The Swedes tried it but opted for their own monarch; the Aussies tried it but will shortly, and not before time, nominate their own head of state. Canada endures it but few take it seriously. Now the SNP with Fawltian angst whispers **don't mention the monarchy** lest it upset the pro-monarchy vote. This level of gutlessness has caused the party to haemorrhage members on a par with New Labour.



As Jung cautioned against psychological stress, the stress of two-facedness is taking its toll. Fissures are beginning to show. The Tories don't even take themselves seriously any more; their Euro-vote leaflet carried the strap line 'always putting Scotland first' - irony lives. The occasionally fiery voice of the LibDems has been quenched by virtue of who they are in bed with. New Labour is holed below the waterline, mainly by broadsides from within. Tony Benn, Clare Short, Robin Cook, and Tam Dalyell could hold their tongues no longer. George Galloway slates New Labour with his customary indefatigability. He, Canavan and McAllion are only the ones we see actively rebelling. Under New Labour's Etna how furious is the lava of resentment bubbling? Already the unthinkable is happening; Scottish Trades Unions are beginning to withhold their donations to the party which sprang from their loins.

Those with misgivings about their own positions or arguments tend to revert to anger, defensiveness or a shriller volume. Witness the splenetic Brian Wilson, the thuggish style of John Reid, the metallic and staccato delivery of Jack McConnell or the raspishness of Helen Liddell. Poor Cathy Jamieson sounds so beleaguered as to merit speculation if she can go on much longer. Examine the patent discomfort of the MoD's Hoon or Ingram when defending their position on Iraq. Blair himself is incapable of using a sentence without the word **absolutely**. He never believes, he **passionately, sincerely** or **genuinely** believes. Too many adverbs indicate that the laddie protests too much. Compare with David McLetchie who is wise enough to know that he and his crew are in situ under false pretences, hence the laconic style and freedom from bluster.

The reason Tony Benn remains so supremely confident and relaxed, filling public meetings to capacity, is simply because he is a man at ease with himself. Compare with Jack McConnell or the angst-ridden Cathy Jamieson - or John Swinney for that matter. Agree or disagree with Benn, he has consistently retained his core beliefs and he is unafraid to declare that it is not he who is the traitor but Mr Blair's New Labour.

So far no-one has abandoned the Greens or the Scottish Socialists. They still promise what it says on the tin. The same self-assurance displayed by Tony Benn is evident in both Tommy Sheridan and Robin Harper. The press may be generally hostile to the SSP but they cannot accuse it of spinelessness. Cheap jibes of sensation-seeking are levied at Tommy Sheridan for being prepared to go to jail over his revulsion at nuclear weapons (which was once the highly moral stance of the Labour Party) or at Rosie Kane for taking asylum-seekers into her

home. Such playing to the **Daily Mail** gallery may go down well in parts of darkest Perthshire or Morningside but humanitarian Scottish hearts see if for the political propaganda it is.

The only whiff of compromise the SSP has shown was in their stance over segregated schools. At the SSP's spring conference there seemed to be a level of ambivalence as to whether the principle of separate schools was anathema to the party or not. Hopefully the risk of losing some Catholic votes will not influence the SSP's policy of unsegregated schooling. One look at the shallowness of the other parties should be sufficient warning of the risks of compromised beliefs.

From a psychological standpoint, it would be most interesting to devise a psychometric test for MSPs which gauged their heartfelt satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the direction their party was taking. Questions would vary from party to party but there are many which could apply to all parties:

On a scale of five, how satisfied are you that the UK's arsenal of nuclear weapons (aka WMD) is stored next to Scotland's densest conurbation? ■

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# opposing but not imposing

Jim and Margaret Cuthbert argue that the SNP has been sucked into the systematic failures of the way the Parliament works rather than seeking to remedy them.

A conventional view has been that successful implementation of devolution would neuter the SNP. The pressure for independence would disappear once Scotland had control of its own domestic agenda while continuing to enjoy access to the presumed benefits of the Union. We argue that the SNP has indeed been damaged by devolution. The damage, however, has come from failures in the implementation of devolution, rather than from its success: this has profound implications for the strategy to be adopted by the new SNP leadership. Here we identify four fundamental failures in implementing devolution, all of which have impacted adversely on the SNP. While the primary blame for these failures rests with the parties in government, nevertheless, overall responsibility for the way devolution has been implemented rests with the Scottish body politic as a whole, including the opposition parties.

First, there has been the failure of the new parliament to establish proper financial responsibility and control. The most visible example of this has been Holyrood, but there have been other mistakes, and some are arguably even more damaging: way in which new financial controls for Scottish water were implemented, leading to serious overcharging; the inadequate costing of free personal care for the elderly; the laxity in the way in which the McCrone agreement on teachers' pay and conditions was introduced; and, perhaps most significant of all, the failure to recognise the gravity of the financial situation facing the health service where, because of the Barnett squeeze, there is not the head room that exists in England to introduce new approaches and new technology. These examples suggest a failure on the part of officials to make sure that sound financial discipline was implemented. Perhaps officials did not appreciate the extent to which devolution would disrupt the close day-to-day working relationships which exist between government departments and the Treasury, and that it would be necessary post-devolution to make an extra effort to establish the equivalent of normal Treasury control. In addition, the Gordon Brown spending boom set a context where the Scottish Executive was not operating under any severe financial constraints, and so financial discipline was not an obvious over-riding priority. The consequence of poor financial discipline has not just been that the credibility of the new parliament has been damaged; it has also contributed greatly to the impression of Scottish dependency on largesse from Westminster.

Second, there has been a failure to establish proper mechanisms for scrutinising the operation of the Executive. One example is the poor quality of the monitoring information

published by the Executive, as anyone who has tried to understand what underlies the Executive's spending plans will attest. Most significant, however, has been the failure of the system of parliamentary committees to develop an independent and probing scrutiny role. Far from being a semi-independent scrutiny mechanism, the committee system has become an extension of the party political process.

One reason for these failures of scrutiny relates to the attitudes of officials. Coming from the background of the old Scottish Office, which was largely insulated from democratic scrutiny, some officials are undoubtedly reluctant to be open. Indeed, one senior official argued that MSPs and Committees were too inexperienced and immature to be provided with disaggregated budget information. This might suggest an element of contempt for the very concept of public oversight. Underlying the tight grip which the governing parties have kept on the committee system there appears to be a lack of confidence: (this is perhaps not surprising, given the extent of media comment on the poor quality of current ministerial talent). The Executive have not realised that, if a parliament does not have a voice of its own, exercised through committees performing a genuine scrutiny role, then the whole project is in danger of becoming just an expensive puppet theatre. The lack of adequate scrutiny has

contributed to the general dumbing down of the political process, which means that issues tend not to be fully understood and that wrong decisions are much more likely to be made. It also contributes to a certain mis-placed deference towards perceived authority which is an unfortunate feature of current Scottish culture: that is to say, it is not for us to understand issues and make our own decisions, but to follow what presumed experts advise us to do.

Thirdly, there has been the failure to establish a satisfactory interface with Whitehall and Westminster. One symptom is Scotland's failure to benefit fully from key reserved programmes (that is, programmes which should be run for the benefit of the whole of the UK) including trade, science, and tourism. The same is true for European decision making and funding. It can also be seen in the failure of Scotland's Westminster MPs either to

have developed a clear role for themselves post-devolution, or to necessarily identify Scotland's interests. It is scarcely credible, for example, that substantial numbers of Scotland's Westminster MPs voted for top-up fees and foundation hospitals in England, when the effect of these measures, given the way the Barnett formula works, will be to penalise Scotland financially. The Executive has not grasped how important the interface with Whitehall is, and has not realised that, psychologically, devolution has made English departments

**The Executive have not realised that, if a parliament does not have a voice of its own, exercised through committees performing a genuine scrutiny role, then the whole project is in danger of becoming just an expensive puppet theatre**

more inward looking: English departments have tended to run reserved programmes as if they were devolved programmes for England. Meanwhile, the interface mechanism, the Scotland Office, has been downgraded. As regards the failure of Scotland's Westminster MPs, a primary reason appears to be self-interest. The Labour government at Westminster is critically dependent on the votes of Scotland's Labour MPs; the biggest threat to Labour nationally would be if these MPs were to pursue a distinctively Scottish agenda.

Fourth is the failure to establish an effective opposition. As the largest opposition party, the blame for this must rest primarily with the SNP - although none of the opposition parties has performed well. The symptoms are clear to see - quite simply the Executive has got away with the above failures without the opposition exposing them to public ridicule. A primary reason for this is that the SNP has been seduced into taking the new parliament at face value. A new parliament can be a seductive place for an opposition party: there is a natural feeling of self-importance, nurtured by carefully measured doses of flattery from the Establishment: there is the consuming drudgery of debates and committees - how busy everyone is, even if the activity is largely designed to keep the opposition (and backbench government party MSPs) out of mischief. And there is a natural element of goodwill towards the new institution, so that perhaps the opposition is too inclined to give the benefit of the doubt when civil servants do not provide information, or when advisers produce questionable advice. The upshot is that the SNP has participated in a lot of activity which amounts to an empty charade (there is little point in participating in parliamentary committees if the government parties are in an automatic majority and vote as a block). The SNP has too readily accepted the agenda as set by the Executive (section 28 and fox hunting are irrelevancies compared with the social and economic malaise of west central Scotland). But above all, the opposition has failed to bring home to the Scottish public the flawed nature of Holyrood's processes as identified above.

What has been the wider effect of these failings? This has to be viewed in the context of a Scotland whose economy has chronically under-performed, which almost uniquely has a declining population, and which, as a recent study indicates, contains in Glasgow one of the UK's worst concentrations of poverty. Far from devolution bringing a new dawn, the tragedy is that there is little evidence, even after five years, of the development of constructive policies designed to tackle these problems. Indeed, in many respects devolution has meant stepping backwards. For example, as regards business taxation, the Executive has abandoned the policy of uniform non-domestic rates across the UK in favour of higher non-domestic rates in Scotland. It has also, in effect, invented an entirely new tax for businesses in Scotland, in terms of needlessly high water charges. As regards access to some of the key DTI programmes designed to assist industrial development, like the LINK programme, the situation post-devolution is that these programmes are less likely to be tailored towards the needs of Scottish industry than they were before.

Despite the gravity of these wider implications, our concern is with the impact of the failures of devolution on the SNP. These failures threaten the SNP in a number of ways - fiscal

indiscipline makes us look continually dependent, the failure to mobilise Scotland's Westminster MPs blocks off what should be the primary dynamic for change in British politics. But the main effect arises because having a dumbed-down, unsuccessful parliament feeds the peculiar inferiority complex of the Scots; if we cannot even manage devolution successfully - if, in fact, it is a bit of a joke - how could we possibly move forward to independence. Because of this deep-rooted Scottish cringe the paradox of devolution is that, even though the failures of devolution are primarily down to the parties in power, the adverse effects are to a large extent felt by the SNP.

What does this mean for the new leadership of the SNP? First of all, there is a requirement for a new kind of opposition in the Scottish parliament. Playing the role of a conventional opposition, that is, picking up policy points, is largely a waste of time within the context of the current flawed set-up. The SNP should take a step back and concentrate on process. They

should identify the shortcomings in procedure in the parliament and they should hammer these points, both in the parliament and in the media, until they are put right. There are two big advantages to this course of action. First, it will operate on the expectations of the Scottish people: they must be convinced that government is not a matter of mystique and there is no inherent reason that Scotland has to put up with a dumbed down parliament. Moreover, if the SNP can convince the public that the SNP is the primary engine for improvement in the processes of devolution, this prepares the ground for further change ahead.

Secondly, the SNP must develop a much more coherent strategy towards Westminster. The ultimate aim should be to have Scotland's Westminster MPs of all parties operating as a block which acts with Scotland's interests primarily at heart. The only lever the SNP has, but it is potentially a powerful one, is through the example set by the SNP's Westminster MPs. To date this group has had little impact, primarily because they appear to lack a clear role. The new leadership needs to articulate the role for this group. We suggest this role should involve two main functions. First would be the detailed scrutiny of the operation of the reserved powers of Westminster, as they affect Scotland in areas like trade, industry, Europe, tourism, transport and energy. The other main function would be to champion Scotland's budgetary interests; given that Barnett is driven by the spending decisions which Westminster makes for England on matters like health and education, Scottish MPs must play an active role in English domestic politics, since this is Scotland's only democratic means of influencing the largest component of the Scottish budget. In effect, the West Lothian question requires to be stood on its head.

The challenge for the SNP is therefore clear. But there is also a challenge for the parties in government as well. Since, as we have argued, the failures of devolution tend to damage the SNP, this in a sense gives the parties in government a vested interest in failure, or at least in running a chronically dumbed down parliament. This is a temptation which they must resist. In the long run, a chronically failing Scottish parliament is not a sustainable model. ■

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## The SNP must convince the public that it is the primary engine for improvement in devolution

# the ideas leaders

## Chris Thomson considers the potential and conditions needed for a new Scottish Enlightenment

There was a time when Scotland led the world in some significant respects; shipbuilding, medicine, engineering and education immediately spring to mind. Without necessarily knowing it at the time, Scotland was a global thought leader. This took two forms – inventions and philosophy. For a long time, Scotland punched well above her weight in inventiveness. The list is long – television, telephone, refrigerator, microwave ovens, tarred roads, pneumatic tyres, golf, steam engine, radar, modern banks, antiseptics, antibiotics, quinine, fax machine, logarithms, iron bridges....the list just goes on. Few other countries can lay claim to such inventiveness. There must have been a reason, or reasons, for this extraordinary creativity.

As if this were not enough, the philosophical foundations for modernism and for the market economy were also laid in Scotland, during the Scottish Enlightenment (roughly 1740-90). Many of the ideas emerging in Scotland during that heady period are now at the heart of most modern economies and at the heart of the programmes of most political parties. Of the personalities involved, Adam Smith and David Hume are perhaps the best known, but there were others who made significant contributions, such as Thomas Reid, Adam Ferguson and John Millar. It is difficult today to appreciate just how influential Scotland was during that period. Scotland's thought leadership was so powerful that Voltaire was moved to write: "...we look to Scotland for all our ideas of civilisation". Coming from one of the leading thinkers of his age, that was praise indeed.

That was over two hundred years ago. Much has changed since then. If Voltaire were alive today, he would be unlikely to say what he said then. For a variety of reasons, which could be argued for a year and a day, Scotland is no longer a global thought leader in the ways that it was during the Enlightenment or during the heyday of its inventiveness. There is no doubt in my mind that Scotland needs something big to boost its confidence. It needs a world-class project. Much as it pains me to admit it, Scotland no longer leads the world in any significant respect. Yes, it is true that we are still the home of golf, tartan and whisky and that we produced Dolly the Sheep, but, although important, these pale beside the influence of the Enlightenment. The question I keep asking myself is; can Scotland become a global thought leader again? If we could, that would put Scotland on the world map again, and it would do wonders for the self-esteem and confidence of the Scottish people.

Thought leadership is consciously revolutionary and, in the nature of things, often subversive. It would not be thought leadership otherwise. It is often uncomfortable for those in power or in secure positions

because it cannot help questioning the status quo. Indeed, if the status quo cannot be questioned, how do we expect to move forward? It is all very well for us to look back to the Scottish Enlightenment with pride, but we would do well to remember that these thinkers were revolutionary. And it was precisely because the culture in Scotland in the 18th Century encouraged original thinking and questioning of the status quo that the Enlightenment was able to take place. We need to remind ourselves that what we regard today as the self-evident truths of modernism and market economics were seen as revolutionary ideas two hundred years ago. Although we might not like to admit it, we have modernism and market economics largely because Scotland used to support revolutionary, subversive thinking. If we are to make genuine progress towards whatever is going to replace modernism and market economics – one thing is certain, these will not be with us forever – then we have to encourage revolutionary, subversive thinking. If we do not, we are unlikely to move forward in any fundamental sense. One thing is clear: if Scotland does not take the lead in this, some other country will.

There is absolutely nothing, **in principle**, to prevent Scotland from becoming a thought leader once again. The personalities are here and they are world class. My only question is whether Scotland is willing to encourage and support thought leadership? Does Scotland currently encourage and facilitate revolutionary, subversive thinking or does it discourage this kind of thinking? If the former, then we have the possibility of becoming a global thought leader once again. If the latter, then we really have to decide whether we ever want to lead the world again in some significant respect.

**Scotland's thought leadership was so powerful that Voltaire was moved to write: "...we look to Scotland for all our ideas of civilisation". Much has changed since then. If Voltaire were alive today, he would be unlikely to say what he said then.**

A culture of encouragement would mean, for example, that the Scottish Executive and Scottish business actively encourage and support thinking, ideas and activities that challenge them and make them feel uncomfortable. But it would have to mean more than this. It would also have to mean that Scotland's people and organisations adopt a much more positive attitude towards change and uncertainty. Rather than seeing change and uncertainty as threats to be resisted, they need to learn to see them as exciting opportunities to do something new and different. The healthiest attitude to change is that you lead the change. The unhealthiest attitude is that you resist the change. Which of those two attitudes best describes Scotland today? The simple fact is that no nation can be a thought leader unless it is able to welcome change and uncertainty. Of all the culture changes needed in

Scotland, this is the most important. Scotland is unlikely to take its place among the confident nations of the world until

the culture changes. Our leaders can, if they are willing, help to lead this change by encouraging radical, original thinking that questions deep-seated beliefs and the status quo.

I can think of two big subjects in which Scotland could be a thought leader. They are sustainable development and health. Why? Partly because there are historical precedents, but mainly because these are, in my opinion, the two areas that most urgently need global thought leadership. The historical precedents are striking. For example, Scotland's inventiveness in public health and medicine helped to pave the way for what has become the modern medical model of health and healthcare, and there is no doubt that this has been immensely useful. However, there is a growing sense, in and beyond Scotland, that we need to fundamentally rethink what we mean by 'health' and 'healthcare' because, however hard we try, we are hardly making a dent in some important health statistics. Modern medicine is undoubtedly good at some things, particularly mechanical repair, emergency intervention, pain relief and vaccination. But it is less good at other things, such as mental and emotional illness, as well as the so-called 'diseases of civilisation'. And it is ill-equipped to deal with some of the deeper, root causes of ill health, such as the pressures and values of modern living. There is a growing sense that we need to develop and adopt a new model of health and healthcare. Scotland could, if she wished, lead the way on this, just as she led the way in the past.

There is another important historical precedent. Scotland played a large role in developing what has become modern market economics. Although, like modern medicine, this economics has been very useful in many respects, there is a growing body of opinion that thinks that it may have outlived its usefulness, in the sense that the benefits it brings are increasingly outweighed by its negative effects, be they social, environmental, cultural, or in health. Although the current model of economics clearly brings more money and material things for many people, it does not seem to bring the 'higher things' of life, such as happiness, fulfilment, health, peace and wisdom. If it does not bring these things, then we have to wonder what model of economics would bring them. I strongly suspect the answer would be a model of economics that had sustainable development at its heart.

For the avoidance of doubt, I am not talking here about sustainable development as it seems to be understood in most business and government circles – who interpret the concept to mean 'economic growth as usual, while trying to do as little damage as possible to the natural environment'. I am talking about something quite different. I am talking about the original meaning of sustainable development, which goes right back to the Sixties. It differs from the current interpretation in two important respects. First, it does not assume that 'development' means economic growth. It assumes that 'development' means development, and we really need to decide what it is that we

wish to develop, in social and human terms. Do we want, for example, to develop people as people and communities as communities? If so, what does this mean in practice?

The second difference is that the original meaning was not restricted to the sustainability of the natural environment. It went beyond that, to embrace the other vital systems that we need to sustain and enhance if we are to survive and move forward. So, while it is undoubtedly true that we must wisely care for nature and the planet if we are to survive, we must also wisely care for ourselves – as individuals and societies. If we do not, we will decline as individuals and societies. That is clearly unsustainable. When I speak with thought leaders in Scotland, I am left in no doubt that the health of individuals and society is under just as much threat as the natural environment, and that we urgently need to redefine 'sustainable development' to include the sustainability of individuals and societies.

Scotland was eminently able to develop a powerful model of economics in the past. It was a model appropriate for the conditions of its time. I see no reason why Scotland cannot develop a new model of economics appropriate to the very different conditions of today. However, this will happen only if Scotland's

brightest thinkers are actively encouraged to question current beliefs and assumptions and the status quo. If Scotland wishes to become a significant world leader again, the field is wide open for us to lead the way in developing new models of health and economics, and in applying these models in practice. We already have two of the three necessary components in place – original thinkers, and the global need for this thinking. All that remains is to put the third component in place – a culture that encourages and supports original thinking and original action even when, at the time, it seems to be revolutionary and subversive.

If anyone doubts the need for a fundamental re-think of health and economics, perhaps because they feel the current models are 'correct' and 'true', it is well worth reminding ourselves that nothing is constant. Much of what we are convinced is true today will be replaced by broader, deeper, more accurate knowledge in the future. This should help to put our current knowledge into perspective. We are all familiar with the amused astonishment we feel when we look back and recollect how limited our understanding of something was in the past compared to our current understanding of the same thing. We would do well to recognise that the same process operates forward in time as well as backwards. Our current understanding, which we may well feel to be adequate if not complete today, will almost certainly come to be regarded in time with the same amused astonishment with which we regard our past efforts. Humility is in order as well as excitement when considering our achievements! ■

*Chris Thomson is Director of Central Purpose*

# ownership and control in scotland

Sandy Baird, John Foster and Richard Leonard raise serious questions about the assumptions in the Royal Bank of Scotland's report on the Scottish economy

**W**ealth Creation in Scotland was published by the Royal Bank of Scotland in May 2004. It represents the first major attempt for a generation to examine the ownership as well as the performance of the companies that dominate the Scottish economy. John Finn undertook similar research in the 1970s. John Scott carried this forward in his **Anatomy of Scottish Capital** (1980) and **Directors of Industry** (1984). Since then little has been done.

The Royal Bank findings have already made their way to the heart of Scotland's policy community. In his Foreword to the report, Enterprise Minister Jim Wallace praises the value of the research and goes on to stress that it confirms his opinion that it is "businesses who create wealth - not governments". At the launch of Scottish Enterprise's Operating Plan to 2007, the new Chief Executive Jack Perry used the document to justify his switch of SE policy away from supporting small firms and social inclusion to a focus on helping large companies to grow.

The main conclusions of the study are threefold. First, that Scotland possesses a significant array of major companies of global weight. Scotland has 15 firms generating over £400m value added per annum. This compares to the Irish Republic's seven, Austria's 11, Denmark's 15, Belgium's 17 and Finland's 19. These Scottish firms are themselves very big. Their aggregate value added exceeds that of Belgium's top 17 and Finland's top 19. Second, however, these big Scottish companies are not typical. They are confined to just four economic sectors; banking, oil and gas, electricity and transport, and are isolated. Compared to Finland, Belgium, or even Ireland, Scotland lacks the medium sized firms from which big globally competitive firms can grow. Such is the level of concentration that the top ten alone generate almost 70 per cent of the **total** value added produced by the top 100. The rest are marked by significantly below average levels of investment in research and development. This, it is argued, represents the 'Achilles' heel' of the Scottish economy.

Hence, the report's final conclusion is that public policy should seek to promote large companies and then turn them into global corporations. Securing a broader range of fast-growing and dynamically investing companies is presented as key to raising Scotland's competitiveness and retaining the brightest and most innovative of its young people. Support for this policy is drawn from contributors to the recent Allander lectures, notably William Baumol and Paul Krugman. The question is how. The report's answer draws closely on the recent Scottish experience. This shows that large company growth has derived mainly from two sources: privatisation and external acquisition. The report stresses that the majority of today's big Scottish firms are themselves the product of privatisation. "The Scottish corporate sector has been heavily influenced by the dynamics

of privatisation and deregulation. The background of 14 of the top 20 Scottish firms is linked to this process. The slow down of this process is one reason why no major new Scottish firm has emerged over the last ten years." Echoing the GATS plan to extend WTO rules to services, the report refers to the opportunities that would be presented by the privatisation of Scotland's water. It continues: 'Further liberalisation in other sectors (e.g. health, education) could also provide significant growth opportunities for Scottish firms...'

The second source of growth is seen as external acquisition. Again this is based on recent experience - of which the Royal Bank is itself a remarkable example. The report notes that such acquisition has to be 'largely outside Scotland' because of the 'limited size of the domestic market'. Hence, argues the report, 'the challenge for Scotland is to encourage its firms to grow - both within and outside of Scotland - through acquisitions while also retaining high value added activities within Scotland.' For the Left, therefore, **Wealth Creation in Scotland** poses a significant challenge. The report is likely to be highly influential. It has already been used to shift Scottish Enterprise further in a neo-liberal direction. It is clearly intended to have a similar effect on the Scottish Executive. This makes it correspondingly important for the Left to subject the report findings to close scrutiny. What follows is an attempt to do so.

The research's key measure is value added. This is calculated by adding together a company's operating profit, its total employment costs (wages, insurance and pensions), and its costs for depreciation and amortisation (used by RBoS as a proxy for annual investment). Companies are then ranked by the size of their value added. This ranking covers all companies either registered in Scotland or headquartered in Scotland. By way of illustration the top 15 are listed on the next page with an added column referring to share ownership.

**Going for growth is not enough. There needs to be an understanding of where economic power lies underpinning all public policy decisions.**

While all these firms are either registered or headquartered in Scotland, their formal ownership status quickly illustrates a problem with value added. Six of the seven oil companies are direct subsidiaries of non-Scottish parents. Together they are responsible for £5.9 billion value added or 18 per cent of the total for the top 100. For these companies much of the operating profit will return to their holding company and only a very small fraction come back to those who happen to be Scottish shareholders. Should this be construed as 'Scottish' value added in terms of its contribution to Scottish national income? The answer is pretty certainly No.

The Royal Bank figure illustrates another problem. In common with a number of the companies listed many of its own 110,000 employees are outside Scotland. Should this employment income therefore be considered as part of 'Scottish' value added? Statistically, in terms of the

Name	Sector	Value added £m	Status	Share ownership
Royal Bank	Banks	10,861	Scottish	Institutional: UK/ overseas
HBoS	Banks	5,269	Scottish	Institutional/ diversified
Scottish Power	Electricity	2,195	Scottish	Institutional: UK/ overseas
TotalFinaElf	Oil and Gas	1,902	Foreign parent	Overseas holding company
BP Exploration	Oil and Gas	1,657	UK parent	UK holding company
Scottish and Newcastle	Beverages	1,485	Scottish	Institutional: UK/ overseas
First Group	Transport	1,316	Scottish	Institutional/diversified:
British Energy	Electricity	1,157	Scottish	Institutional: UK/ overseas
Stagecoach	Transport	1,119	Scottish	Scottish family + institutional: UK
Scottish and Southern Energy	Electricity	1,105	Scottish	Institutional: UK
Britoil	Oil and Gas	762	UK parent	UK holding company
Talisman Energy	Oil and Gas	664	Foreign parent	Overseas holding company
ConocoPhillips	Oil and Gas	530	Foreign parent	Overseas holding company
John Wood	Oil and Gas	430	Scottish	Scottish family
Texaco North Sea	Oil and Gas	416	Foreign parent	Overseas holding company

way government calculates GDP, it should not. Finally, there is the issue of share ownership. This is a category that has been added by ourselves to those used by the Royal Bank. It is draws on John Scott's work on company ownership and his characterisation of different types of share ownership (see note to the second table).

Using these categories there are only two firms in the top 15 that qualify as Scottish family owned: the Wood Group and Stagecoach. Both also have very significant institutional shareholdings at UK and Scottish level. In all other cases the great bulk of the operating profit will be distributed to shareholders outside Scotland and for the most part subjected to the short-termism of the London Stock Exchange. By way of counterbalance, there are of course workers in Scotland who add value working for companies not separately registered in Scotland and therefore not part of the current Royal Bank survey. BAE or Sainsburys would be examples. The Scottish Executive says there are 561,000 such employees. But do these numbers balance out? The two Scottish banks alone, the Royal and HBoS, employ nearly 100,000 outside Scotland. What about the other 98 companies listed? Similarly, it is true that people in Scotland will also derive income from London based financial institutions. But at first sight it is improbable that the return income matches that paid over by Scottish registered companies to institutional shareholders and holding companies outside Scotland. Either way, more research is needed before claims are made about the value added contribution of the top 100..

The authors of the report would probably respond that all this is beside the point and that the key is that Scotland provides the physical base to some of the world's biggest companies. The fact that these companies are run from Scotland is important

because it ensures that Scotland has access to world class technology and information and provides a local market for sophisticated support services. The development of more big companies can only enhance this. At a general level, there is a certain amount of truth in this argument. Yet when we look at specifics a somewhat different picture emerges. Almost half the total value added is provided by the two big banks, RBoS and HBoS. They contribute significantly to the financial sector in Edinburgh and no one would question the importance of having headquarters in Scotland. But the great bulk of their recent investment has been outside Scotland. It is very doubtful that their vast agglomeration of retail banks across England, Europe and America adds by any means proportionately to the development of high value financial services in Scotland. The same could be said of the two privatised transport companies and the four privatised electricity companies. The quality of their input to the Scottish economy is by no means proportionate to the scale of capital invested in acquisitions overseas.

It is at this point that we come to the broader issue of capital export and how much it actually contributes to the Scottish economy as against the profits of institutional investors. The six oil subsidiaries do not by definition operate outside the UK. Their future contribution to technology growth in Scotland is likely to be limited as they administer the rundown of mature assets in the North Sea. Only two companies in the top 15 could be described as owing their position to globally competitive technology: the Wood Group in oil field services and to a lesser extent the brewers, Scottish and Newcastle.

In light of this quite different conclusions can be reached. First of all capital export in the form of external acquisition can be seen as weakness not a strength, corroding Scotland's productive base and exacerbating its relatively poor investment

record. The **lack** of a specifically Scottish focus and control has fuelled this. The main characteristic of Scottish corporate development over the past two decades has been its parasitic dependence on privatisation. These new big companies have relied on highly developed assets from the public sector; then on either securing a continuing revenue stream from government or on acquiring semi-monopolistic market niches (and sometimes both). The availability of such 'easy' profits has diverted resources from other potential uses. The policy of aggressive external acquisition has placed them very largely under the ultimate control of external institutional investors. Hence the Royal Bank proposals for more of the same, while certainly offering profitable opportunities for banks and institutional investors, provide no solution to Scotland's economic problems. Further privatisation can only worsen Scotland's poor physical infrastructure and, if extended to health and education, will heighten not lower the challenge of developing Scotland's human capital. Further external acquisition will inevitably bring more external institutional control and with it still stronger pressure for short-term profit maximisation. Critically there is no strategy for directing investment into Scotland's struggling manufacturing sector, a blind faith in corporate 'trickle down' theory and a hint that the off-shoring of productive jobs might be a price worth paying for developing global corporate prowess.

Finally, it is important to be clear about the issue of Scottish ownership and control. Closer scrutiny shows that the claims made by the Royal Bank for the strength of Scotland's corporate sector are quite misleading. When John Scott undertook his research in the 1980s he used share ownership to identify Scottish control - not Scottish registration. If Scott's criteria

are used, very little of the Scottish corporate economy could be claimed as Scottish in terms of ultimate control. Our final table applies Scott's criteria to the top 40 companies in the RBoS list covering 85 per cent of total value added. This shows that less than eight per cent can in any way be described as owned and controlled from Scotland.

On these terms Scotland remains a predominantly branch economy. Calls for an independent Scottish economic policy on the one hand and for wealth creation from a new wave of Scottish economic imperialism on the other both carry a hollow ring. The Royal Bank's call for the creation of more big companies, primarily through further privatisation and external acquisition, fails to address the main problem which they themselves identify: the lack of technologically-strong, research-based medium sized companies.

Going for growth is not enough. There needs to be an understanding of where economic power lies underpinning all public policy decisions. We hope that this analysis of the Royal Bank report will contribute to that understanding and provide a platform for the development of a sustainable, socially responsible alternative.

The main characteristic of Scottish corporate development over the past two decades has been its parasitic dependence on privatisation. ■

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Type of share ownership*	Scottish family	Scottish family/ Scottish institutions	Scottish family/ UK+ overseas institutions	Scottish family/UK Institutions	UK institutions	UK+ overseas institutions	UK holding companies	UK diversified	Overseas holding companies
Value added	1114	206	1119	280	1891	17110	2809	56585	5402
Per cent	3.2	0.6	3.1	0.7	5.3	48.2	8.1	15.9	15.0
Companies	Arnold Clark Grampian Foods William Grant Wood Group	Menzies	Stagecoach	Johnston Press	Weir MITIE Scottish and Southern Electricity Shanks	Abbot Group Aggreko British Energy House of Fraser Hewden Stuart Premier Oil RBoS Salveson Scottish and Newcastle SMG Scottish Power	AWG Construction BP Exploration Britoil Scottish Widows Services	First Group HBOS	Chevron Clydesdale Conoco ENI Kerr Magee Mobil Scottish Equitable Talisman Technip Texaco TotalFinaElf

\* Institutional is where more than 10 per cent of shares are owned by institutions. Family is where more than 10 per cent is owned by family members. UK+overseas institutional is where UK and overseas institutions both own more than 40 per cent of the declared institutional shares - and similarly family/UK. UK diversified is where there is no dominant owner and named institutions own less than 10 per cent of shares.

# reviews

## Way out on the West Bank: Two new documentaries on Israel

**Checkpoint**, directed by Yoav Shamir

**Promised Land**, directed by Norah Meyer

The Edinburgh International Film Festival started life as a celebration of documentary, and it maintains a just reputation for championing the form, long before Michael Moore and Morgan Spurlock made the form fashionable (and box-office friendly). The 58th Festival does include **Super Size Me**, but has also programmed two documentaries that exceed the cheap gimmicks of Spurlock or Moore's grand-standing stunts. They explore the effect of Israel on the cultures that surrounds it and that which champions it; Yoav Shamir's **Checkpoint** and Nora Meyer's **Promised Land**.

In interview, Yoav Shamir answers questions economically and precisely in a noticeable Israeli accent, never embellishing or riffing beyond the subject. This personal clarity and economy transfers smoothly into his art. In **Checkpoint**, he never intervenes, asks questions or precipitates the action, just watches and records. This feature resulted from filming at the roadblocks that line the border between Israel and Palestine, the necessary means of access for those wishing to move between the two. These checkpoints are heavy with significance; military (a security outpost and monitoring facility), economic (most Palestinians work in Israel, and Israel in turn depends upon such labour), social (the barrier that must be negotiated by families, friends and lovers) and symbolic, the grim interstice of two cultures locked in conflict. The idea is beautifully simple and devastating in its achievements. Shamir's restraint allows him to be forgotten by the protagonists just enough for them to lower their guard (if not their weapons).

What this technique uncovers is a complex picture of humanity at its worst, the more shocking for the banal, often petty nature of the injustices witnessed. Because Shamir offers no commentary or narrative, just an edited, cyclical series of brief encounters between two sides, we must judge for ourselves, case by case. And it is a casuistic environment – the soldiers stop some people, wave on others, and make small-scale pacts and accommodations that last only as long as their daily patrol. The decision-making process is always arbitrary and often opaque in logic, but the effects – whether relief, frustration or despair – are immediately captured on camera. And such images – young Israeli soldiers, bored out of their skulls and cradling semi automatics as Palestinian families open their bags and lay out their belongings, simultaneously intimate and arbitrary – play on the mind long after the film ends. It is the human cost on both sides that resonates. Some of these tooled-up kids (and that is all they are) are scared and homesick, while others have become cynical, fully aware of both the superficiality of their situation and the irrelevance of those values they live by back in Tel Aviv to such a situation. Our first encounter with a soldier is summative of what is to follow; '...when the Palestinians come, we put on our show'.

And everyone is aware that they **are** on show, however unselfconscious they can appear. One anxious private, smiling wide at the camera, pleads jokingly at Shamir to 'make him look

good' on the film. This contrasts wildly with a more bitter and jaded comment by a soldier only a few years older who refers to Ramallah as a zoo and its inhabitants as 'the animals'. He recommends to Shamir that he send the tape to the Discovery Channel. The Palestinians are equally aware of the opportunity the camera represents. One old man, fuming as he waits to pass, mutters to Shamir to "film this, let **them** see". A young woman, arbitrarily refused access, glances briefly at the camera as if to ask for its help. But whatever it promises or prompts, the camera is only an add-on to a daily drama between the powerful and the powerless – circumstances mean that none of these people can ever behave as human beings towards each other, the power remaining with the soldiers (and the safety catches on their guns) at all times.

Civilian responses range from the dignified to the mutinous, and shed light on the dynamics of this society. Israeli Arabs are more confident and vocal, shouting at soldiers in fluent Hebrew. Palestinians meanwhile, are more guarded, pleading their case and shyly invoking God's help when offering promises. Their only common tongue is Arabic or broken English, most vividly expressed by an old soldier whose incomprehensible English is so forcefully and pathetically expressed he is let through by the bewildered yet amused Israeli grunt. We feel some sympathy for another Israeli soldier who mutters to camera that "all these languages confuse me". It is this same soldier who confuses 'Taliban' with 'Ta'aban' (Arabic for 'hurt'), one of many points of incidental humour in the film. Shamir's non-chronological structure, often making leaps in time from hours to months, capturing all of the seasons, allows for startling juxtapositions of comedy, tragedy and skin-crawling abuses of power. It is possible to smile at an 18 year-old soldier, daft as a brush and generally erring on the side of decency when he has fun with a self-righteous Swiss pastor, only in minutes to recoil at the leering cynicism of a group of Border Police at another checkpoint in Bethlehem. The contrast between the soldiers and the police is possibly the only example of deliberate polemic by Shamir; made up mostly of Druse and careerists, the latter proclaim their patriotic duty while sexually harassing female students from Bethlehem University. Meanwhile, the men of the town must stand in line while the officer in the booth laughs at the photographs on their identity cards. And it is the control that the Israelis are able to exercise over the personal dignity of the Palestinians that comes across. At a checkpoint, their bodies become the property of Israel, to be disposed at the will of its representatives; boys of 18 deciding where men in their forties can go, can stand, can wait. Some are made to do so in freezing rain, others are turned back and separated from their kin – even toddlers from their mother.

**Checkpoint** has generally been well received by both Palestinians and Israelis as an accurate, dispassionate study of life around the concrete breezeblocks and barbed wire. The Israeli far-left has criticised it as too lenient on the Israeli army, and it is interesting that the Israeli army itself has taken

the film to heart and now uses it to train troops (its vignettes are examples of bad, not good, practice). But Shamir himself denies any censorship; the checkpoints are public land, and no licence was required for filming. Neither has he experienced any difficulty in getting the film seen – it has been shown in cinemas and the Israeli Channel 2 will broadcast it later this year. The same impulse that excited condemnation from the Israeli far left means it is equally unlikely to be popular viewing in the settlements at Hebron.

Which brings us to **Promised Land**, a much more discursive and polemical piece by London Jew Nora Meyer. Nothing the Israeli soldiers do in **Checkpoint** makes the skin crawl as much as the smiling antics of this bizarre cast of Westchester financiers who lead the 'Friends of Israel's Defense Force'. This New York organisation fund-raises for the already well funded Israeli army, and allowed Meyer to accompany them on their annual tour (which, with appropriate Commando-comics Messianism is called 'The Mission') to see how their money is spent, meet with Army representatives and reconfirm their faith in Israel and its cause. What they see in fact seems to be the tourist sites of Jerusalem, a firing range and a multimedia historical experience straight out of 'Pirates of the Caribbean' – "A recruitment video disguised as a history lesson" as Meyer tartly observes. The only soldiers they meet are not at the checkpoint or on the front line, but sunbathing at the Paratroopers visitor's centre. For their part, the soldiers grin and, we suspect, with tongue in cheek, thank the tourists for their support.

Meyer's subjects are as scary as they are unintentionally funny. From the moment the FIDF president greets an Israeli with the redundant interrogative, "shalom...how are ya?" we know we are in for a narrative that will veer between these extremes. One can hardly condemn Shamir's teenage warriors, but what of these smiling, smirking armchair strategists? Their certainty in their cause and solidarity for the troops seems easy to express when they are so distant from the consequence of their actions. The viewer slowly realises how abstract and neat their world is. Their knowledge of post-1948 history is textbook but lacking nuance, context or complexity. They cannot countenance a change in context or priorities – the Europeans are derided as 'sensitive' or as being paid off by some mythical UN conspiracy – an Arab octopus, perhaps? The pleasure they take in knowing that 'untidy' Arab housing was bulldozed to pave a clean, Disneyland-style plaza for the Wailing Wall speaks volumes of their Manichean, hygienic world view, but it is the episode where the FIDF President's daughter, a nice-but-dim Princess, plays soldier that will stay with me. Her body shaking as she shoots a machine gun at a target, Dad applauds and someone jokes about another martyr getting his 72 virgins. It speaks of a political ideology and a constituency that **must** be engaged with and countered. Furthermore, it underlines the need for serious, investigative documentary of this kind. **Checkpoint** and **Promised Land** are sufficient to raise a bitter smile – and bad dreams – long after the credits. ■

*Mitch Miller*

## web review

Henry McCubbin

One of the greatest problems confronting net users seeking background statistics and verifiable facts is the validity of the web site presenting itself after an initial google. It pays therefore to always have a couple or three handy sources favoured away. My own first reference points on social statistics tends to be via Labour Research, run by the trade unions. This site [www.lrd.org.uk](http://www.lrd.org.uk) publishes all articles below 300 words to casual visitors but if you are a member of a trade union check if your union will give you the access codes. Next on my list the Joseph Rowntree Foundation provide a veritable gold mine of findings from their reports in to social problems. They can be found at [www.jrf.org.uk](http://www.jrf.org.uk).

"We don't do body counts." So said the US generals in Iraq. Unfortunately for them others do. In this case a group of respected Iraqis. Their report can be found at [english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/66E32EAF-0E4E-4765-9339-594C323A777F.htm](http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/66E32EAF-0E4E-4765-9339-594C323A777F.htm) or [blog.zmag.org/index.php/weblog/entry/iraqs\\_civilian\\_fatalities/](http://blog.zmag.org/index.php/weblog/entry/iraqs_civilian_fatalities/). Why two addresses? Because someone keeps fouling up the path to these sensitive details. How many bodies did I hear you ask? Sadly the count now stands at 37,000 non combatant Iraqis. And if you're surprised that you haven't seen this number in the press then so are we. But we are also as appalled as Greg Dyke at the fear of the UK press to take up a story and if they don't agree with it at least explain why.

No doubt our readers will be aware of Rose Gentle who met with Deputy PM Prescott and told him what she thought of Tony's war and the fact that she had lost her son. Well there are a number of things going on worth following. First in the States two groups, Military Families Speak Out at [www.mfso.org](http://www.mfso.org) and Bring Them Home Now at [www.bringthemhomenow.org](http://www.bringthemhomenow.org) are campaigning to end the conflict and are a perpetual thorn in the side of Bush.

But what can we do? Try this site [www.impeachblair.org](http://www.impeachblair.org) – it is trying to do what it says on the label. It has been launched by Adan Price MP and is supported by the Welsh and Scottish nationalists. It has been prepared by Glen Rangwala and Dan Plesch, both experts in their fields, Glen being the person who discovered that the dodgy document was plagiarised from a ten year old PhD thesis. The report argues that the Prime Minister's refusal to resign for his misleading statements meant that he breached parliamentary conventions. Therefore, not only should he face impeachment for misleading Parliament, but judgments should also be cast for his failure to respect constitutional conventions by resigning. In addition to these charges, there is evidence that prior to March 2003, he made an agreement with President Bush to overthrow Saddam Hussein. As in the case against Palmerston in 1848 this charge is equally impeachable. ■

# Kick Up The Tabloids

## Hearts and MSPs in Ground-share Shock

After the freak weather conditions in Lochearnhead and Cornwall, Edinburgh bookies are giving short odds on hundreds of tons of spilled Starbucks coffee sliding down the Royal Mile and sweeping the Scottish Parliament away now that it is finished. We knew that the upturned fishing boats design would be appropriate in the end. Luckily, we are well placed for this climate change given that two Scots have just won Olympic gold and silver medals in yachting and canoeing. Let's forget the football and start teaching Yngling skills in our schools.

As the moaning about the cost of our new legislative building carries on unabated, the Scottish Executive is looking at new ways of making it pay its way, one option being renting it out for Hearts players to change in before their SPL games next season. As a number of second holiday homes were washed away in Boscastle, the tragedy of some people having only one million-pound property left to live in finally began to hit home.

The problem of overweight and unfit Scottish children continues as local authorities respond by building Protestant and Catholic schools on the same sites so the bairns don't have to walk too far to fight each other. Talking of which, the recent row over joint campuses in North Lanarkshire focused on the issue of shared staff rooms, with concerns that Catholic teachers would always have to buy the teabags and dish out the fags. First Minister McConnell played down the whole debate, pointing out that many Scottish kids don't bother to go to school anyway.

The Democratic Convention in the US saw John Kerry state that he was 'reporting for duty'. Obviously at that point someone from the US military should have thanked him, given him a rifle and an air ticket to Falluja and seen how he coped on patrol the next morning. The crew members from Kerry's 'small' gunboat were seated behind him in about forty rows, suggesting he'd actually been commanding the QE2. Meanwhile Bush has taken the moral high ground, questioning Kerry's Purple Heart awards and stating that he himself never ran away in Vietnam, not having been there in the first place. Rather, at the time George W was earning a Jack Daniel's-inspired Purple Nose. In Iraq itself the battle around Najaf continues, with coalition forces trying to avoid hitting the revered Imam Ali mosque, because "We don't want to offend global Muslim opinion". Possibly a bit late there, George and Tony.

Talking of Tony, our PM has sought to rebuild trust in his non-corrupt premiership by accepting a free holiday on Sardinia courtesy of Silvio Berlusconi. The Italian PM is ever more frequently compared to Mussolini, which may be a bit harsh (on Mussolini). Tony has been getting a well earned break, although

not as permanent as we may wish, and his relaxation on the tennis courts has only been rudely interrupted by the need to write a letter of condolence (two months late) to the family of a Scottish soldier killed in Iraq. Silvio is giving his advice to Blair about priorities for the third Labour term, including ensuring that by 2009 Tony owns the BBC, has introduced topless presenters to Newsnight, gets his mates to write every compact and non-compact size newspaper, and has a nice sideline in dodgy EU construction deals.

Which completely coincidentally ties in nicely with Mandy's arrival in Brussels. The drive for high ethical standards in public life has been given a boost by the two-times resigned Peter entering the gates of the Commission on a £145,000 salary, plus a £100 a day allowance (which even for him is a lot of text and pager messages). Mandelson has been made Europe's Trade Commissioner, although whether this includes trade in mortgages and passports is not yet clear. His office overlooks the famous Manequin Pis statue of a small boy urinating into a fountain, which is a very good summary of Mandy's contribution to socialism in the Labour Party.

In the SNP leadership contest ballot papers have now gone out to all eight members. The front runner is Alex Salmond who argues that it's a doddle for him to run Scottish affairs from Westminster (in the words of Thatcher, Major, etc., etc.). This radical approach to independence thinking will be further spelt out in new Salmon/Sturgeon manifesto policies such as the saving of tax payers' money by doing away with that St Andrews flag nonsense and only using the good old Union Jack.

Finally, as the rain continues to pour down, Scottish Water executives have been paid £250,000 bonuses. Yes, the same Scottish Water which laid off thousands of staff a couple of years ago. The climate may change, but the world keeps turning in the same old ways... ■

*Kick Up the Tabloids is the Stand Comedy Club's monthly satirical comedy show. Totally live and interactive, it offers an irreverent take on who and what has been making the news in Scotland or beyond. The Kick Up the Tabloids team include regulars Bruce Devlin, John Flint, Susan Morrison, John Scott and Paul Sneddon, with surprise guest appearances. The show takes place on the third Wednesday each month at The Stand, Yorkhill Place, Edinburgh (Tel 0131 558 7373 or visit the website at [www.thestand.co.uk](http://www.thestand.co.uk)).*

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## ERADICATE FIRE DEATHS IN SCOTLAND

*The FBU in Scotland is calling upon the Scottish Executive to use the forthcoming Fire Bill to adopt a policy of Zero Tolerance to Fire Deaths*

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