

Determining our future:
the way we are governed and by who
leaves us with important choices

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Comment

Brown or Blair? Blair or Cameron? Salmond or McConnell? Salmond or Sturgeon? Sheridan or Fox? British and Scottish politics are full of choices. But are these the choices that count? Brown or Blair will pursue more or less the same policies. But so will Blair or Cameron (and on most things, Campbell joins the gang too). In Scotland the differences between Salmond and McConnell are decreasing; there's still the independence thing but the rest seems to be converging. Even the independence thing feels different now that Jack is playing a more nationalistic (with a small 'n') card. The difference between Salmond and Sturgeon would be one of minor detail and presentation. And whatever the differences between Tommy Sheridan and his former SSP colleagues, fundamental policy isn't it.

This point is barely worth making, so familiar is it. The 'triangulation' strategies which were all the rage when they reportedly got Clinton into the White House have turned everything triangular, into a single, undifferentiable shape. In case you aren't familiar with the jargon, triangulation basically meant working out how to appeal to all sides by drawing lines between them and occupying the centre ground. But that is not what triangulation has meant in reality. In reality, it was a codeword for an ideological coup. If these are triangles they are incredibly obtuse isosceles triangles (apologies for the geometry metaphors - an obtuse isosceles triangle is one in which one of the sides is very much longer than the others). What really happened over the 1990s was that the aggressive neo-liberal economic agenda of free markets and profit-sweep-all-before-it found ways to disguise itself as a consensus. And, as we all know, it left us with almost no real choice in political direction.

Or that's what they want us to think. They want us to think that we have no choice but to accept the war on terrorism, accept the thousands of people that have died at the hands of our government and accept that we are living in apparently dangerous times and we need our government to protect us from evil.

But despite what you will be told by many commentators and politicians, there are still many real choices to be made. The problem is that they won't be recognisable by looking at the political scene. Instead you have to look a little more deeply at the questions underlying the simplified political stances.

In this issue of the Scottish Left Review we have picked four to have a look at. Firstly we have the question of what is most likely to drive forward positive change in society, public and collective intervention or the carrot of profit. Make no mistake, while to most this seems like a question which doesn't need to be asked, the prevailing political opinion in Britain is that a bit (quite a lot actually) of profit motive does no harm in delivering better public services. In fact, if you look at the fundamental choice (rather than each individual choice of contract) it is quite clear that there is much harm done. We look at why private financing of public services has spread and if there is anything that can be done to reverse the trend. This issue affects everyone, it affects the schools our children go to, the water we drink and the hospitals that treat us. It looks at the evidence behind private financing and the numbers. Evidence that shows that private financing is not about providing a better service for the people that use them. Evidence that shows that the money invested in private financing results in large profits for companies and that there is no financial reason why, for example Scottish water, should not be kept within public control.

Another is the constitutional issue. Independence or union? A simple choice? Well, no. There is much in between and the absolutist posturing does us all a disservice. We're going to have a coalition government after the next election, right? The option is go-it-alone minority government after all. Well, this is another political assumption which belies the much more complex range of issues underneath.

There are many ways to run a country in a parliament without majorities and we should be thinking and talking about them. We have to have an informed debate about the way in which Scotland is governed and the structures for an effective

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democracy. If we fail to explore the alternatives available we fail to ensure that the voice of the Scottish people are heard and listened to. And do we even need parties at all or are there other ways to organise?

All these issues are considered and they only constitute a small proportion of all the real choices which could be made. But even so, they illuminate where real change would be possible. If we consider some of the other articles in this issue, we can see how fundamental these choices are.

For example, when we consider the Corporate Homicide legislation, is profit really more important to Scotland than saving lives? There are those who will argue that profit saves more lives than the legislation would (although it is worth noting that the people who say this tend to be those whose profit is at risk but whose lives are not. Everyone should have the right to work in a safe environment with appropriate health and safety measures. Companies will continue to flout the law if we fail to put in sufficient deterrents. So there are choices to be made and we need to consider them.

Likewise the issue of water privatisation. There is a growing campaign to make the Scottish Parliament sell its water for profit (and unless something very different than the usual happens, they would sell it once and for all at a price well below its market value). In fact, one newspaper recently commissioned a study which claimed that failing to

sell Scottish Water constitutes not a 'missed opportunity' but a 'waste' – a quite ridiculous definition. We need to think about profit versus public.

In both these cases we'd be in a better position to make those choices with more powers devolved to the Parliament. If Scotland had more powers would this mean it was more effective at representing the voice of the Scottish people? Is this independence or not?

But despite what you will be told by many commentators and politicians, there are still many real choices to be made. The problem is that they won't be recognisable by looking at the political scene. Instead you have to look a little more deeply at the questions underlying the simplified political stances.

Do people want independence? We look at the issue of independence and whether this is crowding out discussion about more important issues and ultimately reducing the choice available to the electorate. It challenges whether or not the notion of traditional statehood is still something that people want and questions if people in Scotland actually consider this an urgent issue that must be addressed.

And in this as in everything else, we need to choose our political leaders. As the debate about who will be the next leader of the Labour party rages on, does anyone really care, in fact does anyone care about who leads any of our political parties? Can we reform and save the parties from themselves or do we need alternatives? And if we end up with the parties, how

do they govern? We hope that this issue demonstrates that, long before we choose a place to put our vote, there are some fundamental issues we should consider first.

briefing

A lot has happened in five years since Bush declared a 'war on terror'. The politics of the world seems to be in a constant state of flux. This briefing provides a short update on what's going on politically in a small number of countries that throughout the world.

Scotland

Scotland's parliamentary elections will be held sometime in 2007 (probably May). We currently have a coalition between Labour and the Liberal Democrats.

Recent polls show that the SNP could win enough seats to gain a majority at the polls next year. A survey by the Ipsos MORI organisation revealed a massive swing to the SNP in both the constituency and list sections of the Holyrood voting system. In just three months, Labour has slipped from a 14-point lead over the SNP to being two points behind them. Just 28 per cent of voters said they would back Labour in a Holyrood election compared with 30 per cent who opted for the SNP. In the second, list vote, Labour's support is now 26 per cent, down from 33 per cent, while the SNP commands the support of 28 per cent of voters, up from 23 per cent, giving them a two-point lead.

The poll also showed the Lib Dems at 19 per cent in the constituency vote, compared with 17 per cent three months ago, and up one percentage point to 19 per cent in the list vote. The Tories were up one percentage point to 15 per cent in the constituency vote and remained at 16 per cent for the list vote. The Scottish Socialist Party share of support was down from 3 to 1 per cent in the list vote projections, whereas the Greens, who only stand in the second voting list, rose from 4 to 6 per cent.

Another recent poll also showed that the majority of Scots would favour an independent Scotland. The YouGov poll, commissioned by The Sunday Times, finds that 44% of Scots want independence, compared with 42% who favour continued rule from Westminster.

The United Kingdom

UK politics are changing almost daily. The beginning of September was almost a bloodless coup d'etat for Tony Blair. Several Private Parliamentary Secretaries resigned and a letter from a number of MPs was presented to Blair calling for him to resign and heckled by the TUC. At the time of print he is still in office but has been forced to set an exit date of when he will leave office next year.

Meanwhile, the race for who will succeed Tony Blair is well and truly on. Gordon Brown is thought to have contributed to Tony Blair's woes, but whether or not this is true, it looks as though the race to fill Tony's shoes may not be so black and white after all. Alan Johnson, John Reid, and Alan Milburn have all emerged as potential candidates for the leadership of the Labour party.

The debate around the relationship between Scottish MPs and Westminster rages on.....

United States of America

The second term of George W. Bush's presidency has been marked by his unpopularity with the American people. Five years ago, immediately after 9-11, American support for how the Bush Administration was responding to terrorism was nothing short of extraordinary. Today, support has plummeted, and more than a third of Americans believe their government was complicit in the events of that day.

According to an ABC news poll, in October 2001, 92% of Americans approved "of the way Bush is handling the U.S. campaign against terrorism." Today, that number has dropped to 53%. The numbers mirror those in a CBS and a Gallup poll.

In October 2001, 71% of us believed "the United States is doing all it reasonably can do to try to prevent further terrorist attacks." Today? Only 38%. And one-in-three of us believe we are less safe from a terrorist attack than we were five years ago.

The mid-term elections will be held in two months time and going on the current polls, the Republicans might not fare very well. The Democrats only need six extra seats to gain control of the Senate.

The presidential elections will be held in November 2008. And of course, George Bush will not be able to stand again (having served two terms).

So who are the likely presidential candidates?

Possible candidates from the Democrats include Hilary Clinton, Wesley Clark (a presidential candidate in 2004), John Kerry (presidential nomination),

Possible candidates from the Republicans include, Condoleezza Rice, current US Secretary of State, Rudy Giuliani, former New York Mayor. Dick Cheney has already said that he doesn't plan to run for the presidency.

An August 2005 CNN/USA Today/Gallup Poll showed that Rudy Giuliani (27%) , John McCain (24%) and Condoleezza Rice (19%) had the most support amongst the Republican candidates

The top three Democratic candidates were Hillary Rodham Clinton (40%) , John Kerry (16%) and John Edwards (15%) Warner).

Iraq

It is hard to sum up the complex nature of the situation in Iraq in a few paragraphs. The political environment in Iraq is still marred by the trial of Saddam Hussien and an ongoing civil war in the country, unleashed by the Bush-Blair invasion .

The current Prime Minister in Iraq is Nouri Kamel al-Maliki and was elected in December 2005. He was the compromise candidate of the Shia-led United Iraqi Alliance. In April 2006 Jalal Talabani, a prominent Kurdish leader, was elected as President of the Republic of Iraq under the new Constitution, and thus became the first President of the permanent Government established by the new constitutional order. The President has



limited powers and most Executive authority belongs to the Prime Minister.

Palestine

Hamas were elected as the ruling party in March this year after a spectacular victory in parliamentary elections. However, international sanctions have crippled Palestine after Hamas failed to recognise Israel as a state.

Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president, reached a deal with Hamas in September for a power-sharing government that the Palestinians hope will end their international isolation and restore the supply of aid.

Ismail Haniyeh of Hamas will stay prime minister, while Fatah will get cabinet jobs, according to Sami Abu Zuhri. Aides to Mr Abbas said a new cabinet could be in place within 48 hours.

The Fatah-Hamas agreement is likely to ease tensions that have periodically threatened to erupt into civil war between the two groups.

Hamas said the new government would be based largely on a document drafted last spring by prisoners in Palestinian jails calling for the creation of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The document does not include any recognition of the occupation.

Israel

Israel is continuing to violate international law by failing to comply with the UN resolution to a ceasefire with Lebanon.

They are unwilling to co-operate with the Hamas-led government unless it agrees to recognise Israel as a state.

Ehud Olmert, from the centrist Kadima party, leads a four-party coalition which includes the centre-left Labour party and the ultra-orthodox Shas party. Kadima won a slim majority in parliament in elections in March 2006.

Mr Olmert says he wants to fix permanent borders for Israel. This would involve a withdrawal from parts of the West Bank and the absorption into Israel of several big Jewish settlement blocs in the occupied territories. The plan would be implemented with or without a deal with the Palestinians.

Afghanistan

Politics in Afghanistan has historically consisted of power struggles, bloody coups and unstable transfers of power. In 2004 a constitution was signed and Hamid Karzai won the country's first direct presidential elections. In 2005 national assembly elections were held.

Recent coverage on the war in Afghanistan and reports of more British soldiers being killed in Afghanistan has brought this war back into the public's conscious. The war against the Taleban, is led by NATO was officially over four years ago. Many commentators suggest that serious mistakes were made by the US coalition. They did not make any serious attempt at reconstruction and they started another war (in Iraq) which led to a diversion of resources.

The Taleban first came to power in 1994. Many Afghans favoured the Taleban as the ruling force as they promised to restore peace and security to the chaos that had been created by the feuding warlords. But their apparent lack of assistance in handing over Osama Bin Laden created tensions with the US and led to the invasion in 2001.



67% say no to road trains Mori poll August 2005



Shift freight onto rail
Shift rail into public ownership

Executive Committee Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen
Keith Norman general secretary **Alan Donnelly** president **Andy Reed** national organiser



saving our public services

Mark Hallowell explores the political environment that has allowed PFI to spread throughout the UK and warns Scotland to be on its guard

The next 12 months could bring significant changes to the political scene in Scotland. The elections in eight months time look set to change the balance of power in Holyrood significantly; with recent polls suggesting the Nationalists will win more votes than Labour. If the political pundits have got it right, the current chancellor Gordon Brown will be moving to Number 10 sometime soon.

Of course, significant changes in government personnel do not necessarily entail parallel shifts in government policy. All of the main parties agree that public services are the key priority, and all agree that extending the role of the private sector should be a major part of the attempt to improve them.

The SNP is probably the most high-profile critic of the Executive's approach to PFI in Scotland. In September, SNP leader Alex Salmond castigated Labour for "the wholesale privatisation of the health service" it has introduced "through PFI." Yet the SNP has been perfectly happy to pursue privately financed infrastructure projects in local government, where they have had executive control. In recent years, they have tinkered with the PFI model, creating the so-called "not-for-profit" variant.

This has allowed them to claim clear blue water between themselves and the dogmatic privatisers of New Labour. But this model (which was rejected by the Executive, ostensibly on economic grounds) could have generated even higher rates of the return for investors, banks and subcontractors. It would have harmed public services by cutting back on staff while constraining budgets in exactly the same way as PFI.

Similarly, the Left knows well that the image of "Red Gordon" as a tax and spend chancellor who will turn the Labour Party back to 1979 bears no relation to the reality. Mr Brown has been **the** key supporter of PFI in government. As chancellor, he has created the largest PFI programme in the world - one that dwarfs the fledgling initiative developed by the Tories.

His 'prudent' stewardship of the Barnett formula, meanwhile, has ensured that Scotland has turned to PFI to an even greater extent than England. North of the border, it accounts for around a third of all state-sponsored capital investment; UK-wide, the figure is about half that.

So it seems that, however the political cards fall over the coming year, private control over public services will continue and indeed gain pace in Scotland and the rest of the UK (Wales may be an exception). There are reasons to believe that this continuance is unfortunate and the probable extensions deeply worrying.

Let's take PFI as a starting point. As of August this year, the Scottish Executive had signed PFI deals worth £4.1bn. A further £2.9bn of deals is currently "in the pipeline" - that is, negotiated with private sector bidders. Across the UK, the respective figures are £48bn and £20bn.

These numbers refer to the 'capital value' of schemes, and are essentially estimates of what the public sector would have paid had private financing not been around. They are very big numbers and they create very big debts - debts that are repaid by the local authority, health board (NHS trusts in England) or government department that signed the contracts, over a 25-35 year period.

This debt (as distinct from the service payments that are usually associated with PFI - for things like cleaning and catering) usually works out at least 10% of capital value per year. This means that, while £7bn is being invested in public infrastructure, every year for 30-plus years, the Scottish public sector will be paying in excess of £500m to private investors.

To see what this means for individual parts of the public sector, consider the case of Norfolk and Norwich NHS Trust's new PFI hospital. Octagon, the private sector consortium involved, has £339m of capital invested in the scheme. Yet payments to Octagon over the length of the contract will amount to £1.3bn - 14 per cent of the trust's income. This compares to 3.5 per cent of income the trust would have paid had the hospital been funded by a Treasury grant. The result is what we are seeing all over the English NHS - huge financial deficits, loss of public support for the NHS, cuts in service provision and thousands of staff being laid off.

Another example is the PFI for The Queen Elizabeth Hospital NHS Trust in Woolwich, London. A starkly worded report by the hospital's auditors PricewaterhouseCoopers, issued in December 2005, gives a good account of the extent of the financial problems facing the NHS south of the border. The trust moved to into its new PFI building in 2001, and the auditors projected a deficit of £19.7m for 2005/06.

This, said the 'public interest report', was because of the "excess costs" of the PFI scheme. They were clear it had nothing to do with efficiency problems, as the government has since claimed. In fact, the trust, said PwC (incidentally, the most important accountancy firm involved in PFI), had achieved 'underlying relative efficiency' once the costs of PFI were stripped out.

In Scotland, the effect of the budgetary pressures created by PFI is rather different from England, because of the different structure of the health system. But it is still significant. Acquiring precise details of why Monklands hospital is being closed by NHS Scotland is not easy, but the high cost of the PFI hospitals in the Lanarkshire area has been a major contributor.

Lanarkshire NHS is currently spending over £40m on its crop of PFI hospitals, a significant burden for a health board of this size. Other areas of the country may soon find themselves in a similar situation: huge new PFI hospital projects are planned for Fife and Forth Valley.

In this context, it is something close to amazing that not a single scrap of reliable evidence has been presented to justify use of this financing route. The so-called "evidence base" has been



provided by leading players in the industry, and is demonstrably so flawed as to be meaningless.

But, despite the warning signs and the lack of evidence, the use of private finance in the Scottish NHS is being expanded from secondary to primary and community care.

The Scottish Executive is, currently planning an initial wave of six to eight "hub" schemes, worth between £20m and £30m each. This programme will be overseen not by the health department but by Partnerships UK (PUK), a Treasury-backed company that is majority owned by eight private sector shareholders - all major players in the PFI industry.

"Hub" is a serious matter. Like PFI, it will generate an affordability gap - meaning that resources have to be diverted from other capital works and clinical services to pay the charges.

But there are additional problems. Important questions need to be raised about its serious implications for democratic accountability. The "hub" approach involves the creation of new public-private companies, which will transfer public responsibility for planning the health estate to the private sector.

The new hubs will be largely owned by the private partner (along with PUK - a private company). They will plan health investment and execute all new health projects under contracts that last 25 years. Local NHS bodies will hold shares in these profit-making entities and take seats on the board of directors, raising obvious questions about potential conflicts of interest. But this issue has not been addressed.

In England private involvement in public services now goes well beyond finance, ancillary services and bricks and mortar. The private sector is now in the business of delivering "core services" in many different parts of public service.

The NHS, with which new Labourites such as former health secretary Alan Milburn and current incumbent Patricia Hewitt have an ambiguous relationship, is playing guinea pig. In England, it is intended that around 15 per cent of NHS elective care should be delivered by the private sector.

A programme of Independent Sector Treatment Centres (ISTCs) has been established - effectively the pilot for a broader 'pluralist NHS market' in which independent healthcare companies, many of them from the US, will play an increasing role in all forms of care, from GP services to acute hospitals.

The ISTC programme has been heavily criticised by the usually compliant Commons' health select committee. It pointed out that the stated objective of the ISTC programme - to help bring down waiting times - had not been achieved. Further, the design of the programme was such that it could not be achieved, since ISTCs were placed in areas where there was no real requirement for additional capacity.

The result, of course, was a transfer of resources from public to private - a privatisation in all but name. Another result has been growing instability within the NHS, which has worsened already acute financial problems. Ultimately, the result will be a fragmented NHS where co-operation between providers, or between commissioners and providers, is all but impossible.

The Scottish Left should be deeply concerned that ISTCs on the English model are to be introduced in Scotland with the justification that they will be there to create extra capacity. Health officials have earmarked £45m to develop ISTCs, the first of which will be at Stracathro and run by Netcare, a South African healthcare company.

Similarly, the white paper 'Delivering for Health' outlined a variety of ways in which the private healthcare sector would be used to "support our objectives for a greater separation of elective and emergency work and for faster access to diagnostic services".

Where the SNP stands on this issue is hard to determine. They appear to criticise the Executive for pursuing the policy, while castigating the SSP for its 'ideological' opposition. The Lib Dems too struggle to find a consistent position on the issue.

PFI has created massive debts for the public sector, which are crippling schools and hospitals. The extension of the PPP principle looks set to do the same, limiting public accountability, democratic oversight and introducing conflicts of interest

Gordon Brown's position on the introduction of markets in public services is, meanwhile, hard to read. He has stood behind Tony Blair as he rolled out its reforms. But as with Iraq he has remained largely silent on marketising reforms. He is not personally committed. Indeed, some policy papers that have come out of the Treasury have unambiguously championed the role of public provision of services where markets fail - services like healthcare.

It is to be hoped that, in time, the changes in personnel at the top of government in Scotland and the UK will provide an opportunity for genuine policy change.

PFI has created massive debts for the public sector, which are crippling schools and hospitals. The extension of the PPP principle into primary and community care looks set to do the same, limiting public accountability, democratic oversight and introducing conflicts of interest.

And the marketisation of the NHS, for which the ISTC programme is the stalking horse, is a recipe for breaking up the currently integrated and co-ordinated Scottish NHS - the great strength of the status quo, whatever the weaknesses.

The next 12 months must be the start of a more rational approach to policy-making in Scotland, and the Left must play its part in arguing for that, whichever party and whichever individual is in power.

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sovereignty or power?

Michael Keating argues that there are more than two ways to look at constitutional change in Scotland and that we could do well to think more clearly about our options

Since 1999, the main dividing line in Scottish electoral politics has been between the SNP and the Labour Party and over the question of independence. Certainly this is a legitimate question and the Scottish people have the right to determine their own constitutional future; but there are at least four drawbacks. It crowds out discussion of other issues, reducing the choice available to electors. It divides the progressive/left side of politics to the benefit of those pedalling the new politics of consumerism and trivia. It is based on an outdated vision of the nation-state in a changing world and a new Europe; and it does not reflect the way in which citizens actually think.

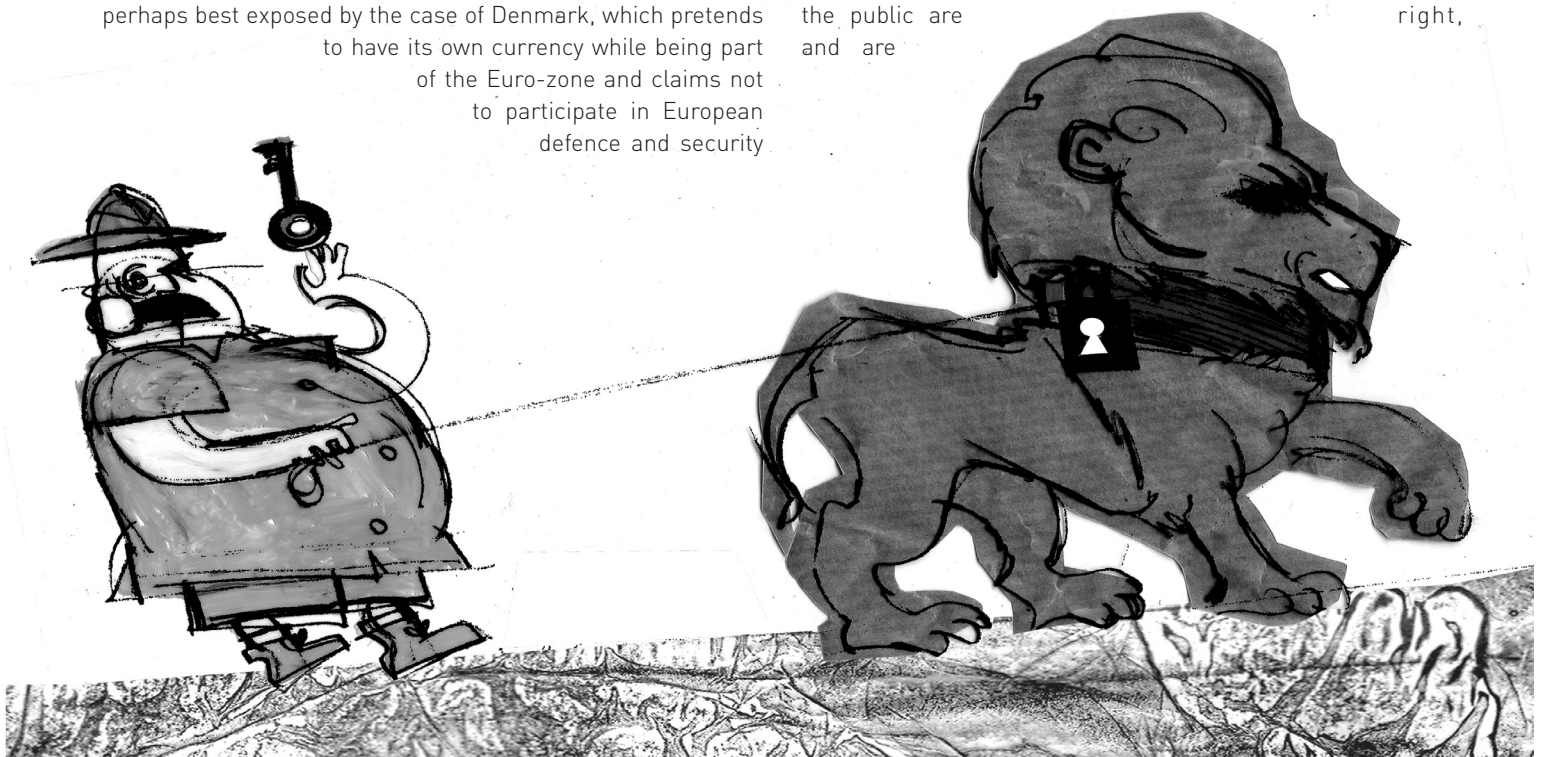
Across Europe, stateless nations and national minorities have embraced European integration, not as something that restricts their sovereignty and autonomy but as an opportunity to enhance it. Europe takes care of things that small nations cannot handle on their own, such as managing a currency in a world dominated by speculators and huge financial institutions, defence, and protection against unfair competition. This allows other state functions to be passed downwards, while a diversity of social and cultural models can thrive. Of course, it is not 'Europe' as such that does this but the policies pursued at the European level, but the European left has long ceased to oppose the whole project in pursuit of illusory national models and instead focused on creating a Europe with a stronger social and territorial dimension, and one that can take its own stance on the great issues of world affairs rather than blindly following the only remaining super-power.

For some national movements (including the SNP), this allows a painless transition to independence in a Europe of proud nation-states co-operating where necessary in an intergovernmental Union but otherwise retaining full sovereignty. This in an illusion, perhaps best exposed by the case of Denmark, which pretends to have its own currency while being part of the Euro-zone and claims not to participate in European defence and security

policy, while being part of NATO. Experience shows, in fact, that if a small nation does find itself independent in Europe, then its best choice is to surrender as much of its sovereignty as it can, take itself into the heart of Europe and make its influence felt there.

Most national movements, however, have moved even further, abandoning nineteenth-century notions of independence in favour of a 'post-sovereignty' stance, in which national sovereignty is shared and divided. In Catalonia, the parties (with the exception of the Popular Party, the equivalent of our Conservatives) share a vision of the Catalan nation as a historic people, open to incomers, with the right to determine its own future, but choosing to avoid the illusions of old-fashioned statehood. Basque parties, more divided on the constitutional issue, are coming around to a similar understanding. Northern Ireland's SDLP has long seen shared sovereignty as the only way to address the division of the island and the community and after more than thirty years has persuaded the others that this is the only way forward. Across central and eastern Europe, where national minorities so often found themselves on the 'wrong side' of a border, a consensus is emerging that, rather than move borders, it is better to work around them and that Europe provides a space for this.

Repeated surveys of public opinion across multinational states (including Canada, Spain, Belgium and the UK) show that citizens no longer make a clean distinction between independence and devolution as preached by old-fashioned constitutional lawyers and politicians. Scotland is no exception, as we have seen from the consistent support for more powers for the Scottish Parliament, combined with great reticence about independence. In this case, the public are right, and are





supported by a new wave of thinking among political scientists and progressive legal scholars. What matters is not sovereignty, but gaining the powers needed to sustain a national community and to mount a social and economic project in a complex and interdependent world. There are three choices here. We can revert to national protectionism, put up barriers to the world and try and manage on our own. This is impossible in a country the size of Scotland and would entail abandoning people in developing countries who need access to our markets. We can prostrate ourselves before global market forces, cutting business taxation, slashing social services and destroying the environment, in an effort to attract footloose investment. This is the celebrated 'race to the bottom'. This option is likely to be self-defeating, since there will always be places with even lower social standards and wages than Scotland. Thirdly, we can put together a coherent social and economic project that combines economic competitiveness with social solidarity, respect for the environment and a flourishing of our diverse cultures.

This last demands a new vision of the nation as a shared community, something that has been remarkably absent from Scotland since devolution. Politicians on the nationalist side seem to take the nation for granted; it just needs the magic of independence to flower. Labour politicians do not want to talk about nation-building for fear of giving sustenance to the SNP. As long as the national question is defined by independence then it, ironically, prevents us talking realistically about the nation. Other nations do much better, sharing a vision of the nation while distinguishing it from nationalism. There is no reason, other than the parties, why this should not happen in Scotland.

It is ironic that in Scotland we should have made such a fetish of independence, since absolute sovereignty is so alien to Scottish intellectual and legal traditions. Like other small nations with large and aggressive neighbours (Catalonia comes to mind) Scotland historically preferred doctrines of limited and shared sovereignty and joined Great Britain in 1707 on terms that, however confused the wording, indicated that it was not surrendering all national rights. Scottish legal scholars like Neil MacCormick and Stephen Tierney have recently reminded us of this tradition and its present-day relevance. There is a great deal that Scotland could do using the powers it already has under the devolution settlement, as is amply illustrated in the contributions to my forthcoming edited book, **Scottish Social Democracy**. Yet further powers do need to be given if the Parliament is to innovate further in a progressive direction.

The biggest question concerns fiscal autonomy. Scottish electors voted in 1997 to give the Parliament tax-raising powers and polls indicate that they have not changed their minds. The balance between taxation and services is one of the key issues in any democracy, presenting fundamental policy choices. Yet a huge effort is currently being made by government, the Labour Party and many academics to show that an enhanced degree of fiscal autonomy is technically impossible and that the current Barnett formula is sustainable in the long term (this, as is well known, provides that increases or cuts in Scottish devolved

expenditure proportional to per capita changes in the equivalent expenditures in England). On the issue of practicability, we can merely note that every federal and devolved system in the world has shared taxes, with the devolved level able to raise a part of its own revenue. Most also have an equalisation mechanism to redistribute resources according to need and wealth. The obstacles to introducing this in Scotland are not technical but political. Barnett's defenders claim that it is simple and predictable. It is neither. There are constant negotiations about ways to by-pass the formula and over the details of the equivalent services and how they are to be defined. It does give the Scottish Parliament a lot of discretion in the distribution of resources but even this depends on pursuing broadly similar policies to Westminster. Take the issue of energy, which is reserved to Westminster, apart from renewable energy, which is devolved. It is likely that UK government will resume nuclear power production and that this will require extensive subsidy in one form or another. If the Scottish Parliament uses its powers to stop it here and goes for renewable energy instead, it will not get any 'Barnett consequentials' and will have to pay the entire cost itself.

What matters is not sovereignty, but gaining the powers needed to sustain a national community and to mount a social and economic project in a complex and interdependent world.

So it is welcome that a debate has started on fiscal autonomy but a pity that the quality of many of the contributions has been so poor. Most of the running has been made by those wanting to cut business and personal taxation to attract investment, often citing the case of Ireland. Some elements in the SNP have even tried to combine Ireland's low tax rates with high level of social services in the Scandinavian countries. Others have indulged in Reagan-type voodoo economics, arguing that tax cuts will pay for themselves in the form of increased production. In fact, there is no evidence that low-tax countries have higher rates of growth. It depends on the structure of the economy and how the money is spent. Scotland, like other small social democracies, needs a large public sector for both economic and social reasons.

The low rate of private research and development is balanced by the superior performance of its publicly-funded universities. Given a degree of fiscal autonomy, Scotland could well join the high-taxation, high spending Scandinavian group of countries, rather than follow the United States, Ireland or a neo-liberal England in a race to the bottom.

In due course, Scotland may move to independence in a more integrated Europe and open world order, but this is not the most urgent issue of the day. Equipping the nation with the instruments to thrive and to sustain its own economic and social project, without being swept away by the neo-liberal tide, is. A serious debate about this is more important than musings about a model of the nation-state that belongs to the nineteenth century and not the twenty-first. Every federal and devolved system in the world has shared taxes, with the devolved level able to raise a part of its own revenue. The obstacles to introducing this in Scotland are not technical but political



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a real freedom agenda

Tommy Sheppard makes a passionate plea for a movement of independent candidates to stand for election in 2007 to challenge the discredited party system

A vacuum exists in the Scottish political spectrum larger than at any time since 1975, and the collective efforts of Scotland's political parties which between them can persuade barely half the population to vote, seem unlikely to fill it. In consequence, there are a vast number of individuals who are politically aware, indeed experienced, but almost entirely disengaged from the body politic. Disillusioned, cynical even, these people are not apathetic. They have not given up on politics per se, just its current practitioners.

Scotland's political parties have not served the country well. Between them they have failed to realise the potential of the new Parliament. They have presided over a legacy of missed opportunities, their elected members appearing keenest to serve their own interests, whilst effectively abrogating responsibility for taking executive power and allowing the county's civil service a freer rein than at any time in their history.

Some are, of course, more guilty than others. Labour's role had been particularly ignoble and it must, as the biggest party and the one leading the show, take most of the blame. Scottish Labour also has been a willing puppet of its disgraced and disgraceful Westminster leadership. Acolytes of a war-mongering Prime Minister whose legacy will be securing US dominance and repression; a Chancellor hell-bent on using public expenditure to make the rich richer; and a Deputy Prime Minister with the moral compass of a kid who's had too much Ribena.

But the SNP has been less than inspiring in recent years. Petty and predictable, the SNP has seldom acted like custodian of the big idea. Sure it is picking up in the polls as Labour declines, but a crusade it aint. So we have an unpopular party of government and an opposition unable or unwilling to embrace those who are deserting it. None of the minor parties appear to have a coherent idea either: some are actively self-destructing.

There is a sizeable constituency now in Scottish – and UK – politics which is almost totally without representation. Enter the centre-left. People quite at ease with social democracy evolved in Western Europe in the latter 20th century. Advocates of tempering capitalism through social regulation, of strong collectively provided public welfare, of progressive taxation where people are encouraged not just to make money but to give some back it they do quite well, of equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination, and of a fair and just international agenda.

Whilst ambitious for Scotland, and proud to be Scottish, for them the Parliament is an expression of democracy rather than nationalism. The aspiration is that people should be governed at the level closest to them as possible. Thus things should be administered by local authorities if possible, and the statutory framework should be set by the Scottish Parliament. Now the debate becomes not which additional powers should be transferred to the Scottish parliament – but which should **not**. Adopting this practical approach to devolved government might yield some surprising results. For instance, shouldn't a country facing depopulation have control over immigration policy so that it could encourage more people to relocate here?

Most things will be better regulated and legislated for in Scotland and the balance of power will surely fall to the country's Parliament, but with a range of things continuing to be run at UK or European level. Is this independence in the UK, or just more devolution? Who cares what it's called? Let's just get on and do it. The continuing evolution of the parliament will of course mean changing how Scotland is represented at Westminster and hammering out agreements between the parliaments on a vast array of things – none of this beyond our collective wit and wisdom. This is not to say that the parliament shouldn't have a role in articulating and leading public opinion in Scotland on world affairs. If most people in Scotland don't support US foreign policy, the Parliament ought to say so.

So back to our rebels without a party; a large body of people, tens of thousands for sure. By and large literate and well educated, thoughtful, concerned, and pretty much totally frustrated. Does this matter? Well, it's is not a good state of affairs that such a large cohort of intelligent and generally aware people are disengaged from the formal





political process. But asking how the political parties should reach out to these people is missing the point. Those days are gone. Welcome to the new politics. When I joined the Labour at the end of the 70s it wasn't because I agreed with every dot and comma of party policy. No-one did. There were four reasons. To begin with a personal judgment that, on balance, Labour was the party most likely to achieve the sort of broad structural change in society which I wanted to see. Today, the main parties have coalesced around a centre-right, pro Atlantic, pro privatisation axis, with differences only of emphasis. Gone are aspirations to change the world.

Secondly, there was an understanding between party and member that if you supported the party overall, you'd be free to advocate your own concerns within it, whether that was trade union rights or banning the bomb. Any semblance of internal democracy has all but disappeared, and the ability of individuals to influence party policy is no more. The privilege of membership has been corrupted into the loyalty of supporters. Labour now makes it explicit that members are there to slavishly offer unqualified support to the party hierarchy and not the building blocks on which the collective organisation is constructed.

Thirdly, political parties used to be a way of being active in politics. Membership was encouraged and parties operated in the community, campaigning off and on. They were a thing you could join, and there seemed to be a point in membership. Today the main parties are hard to spot on the ground, they eschew politics, and most people pursue their political views independently of formal party structures.

Finally, parties were a place where you could get information about politics and learn about things. Today, parties don't have meetings and they are in effect just one more website amongst many that provide political information. The age of mass electronic communication has now made possible the exchange of political ideas and views amongst individuals which was previously only possible in collective organisations like parties.

So here is a remarkable disjuncture. On the one hand a group of political parties which can scarcely motivate half of the electorate to vote, and on the other a large and increasing segment of the electorate seeking a vehicle for their politics. The situation is ripe for a new approach, one that offers a real alternative to the boring and ossified beast of party politics. It's time to encourage individuals to seek office and power outwith formal party structures. And it's time to welcome to the political stage real people with passion and character rather than the cardboard cut-outs presented through the party selection machinery.

A campaign for real candidates might throw up people with real experience. The parties currently conspire with the media to create an impossible ideal of pristine politico. Isn't it time we allowed people who've suffered depression, who've taken

drugs, who've made mistakes, who have a past? If it doesn't interfere with their ability to be a public legislator, who cares. We need many more free thinkers in our government at every level, mavericks with sense and sensibility to examine matters of public policy with a fresh eye. People not afraid to challenge orthodoxy and establishment.

For years there has been a political illegitimacy to the status of independent candidates. I recall in my past condemning such people as chancers or closet Tories hiding behind the independent label as a means of masking their true intentions. But that was a generation ago and things have changed. Now political labels have been rendered almost meaningless by the parties themselves, and such platforms the main parties have left are not regarded as mandates upon election, but programmes of convenience to be disregarded as the party oligarchy choose. Besides, the ability for an individual to communicate en masse with the electorate is now possible.

Without the prism of political minders, people who want to change things can say why and how to the people who want things changed. Independent candidates could set out their broad political stance, letting their potential voters know their instincts and ideology. It would be impossible, obviously, to cover everything. You couldn't know for sure where someone stood on stem cell research, or pub opening hours, but you'd sure as hell know if they wanted to privatise hospitals or build nuclear power stations. And maybe some refreshing honesty might emerge where people could say 'I don't know, I'm still thinking about it and I'm open to persuasion'.

Getting a critical mass of intelligent independently minded people in the legislature who might actually listen to argument would have the added benefit of making community or pressure group campaigning worthwhile. There would be disappointments down the line for sure. Some candidates if elected might end up going a different way on a particular policy than might have been expected from the character of their initial candidature. But being let down by an individual on the occasional matter of policy is hardly worse than a whole political party betraying its entire ideological cannon.

Scottish politics is crying out for a detox, and clearing out large sections of the political parties currently administering the country would be an act of cleansing. In time, the political parties may change or realign to more accurately represent sections of the electorate, but not quickly, certainly not by next year. In the meantime, we should advocate and support independent candidatures next year: people with a common purpose but without a common organisation. There's a hunger for this greater than at any times in three decades - what've we got to lose?

Tommy Sheppard is a former Deputy General Secretary of the Scottish Labour Party -

Scottish politics is crying out for a detox, and clearing out large sections of the political parties currently administering the country would be an act of cleansing. We need to support independent candidatures: people with a common purpose but without a common organisation

one coalition, so many choices

Peter McColl and Mark Ballard MSP discuss the current political structure in Scotland but discover that this isn't the only way to manage coalition government

Coalitions in peace time are unusual in UK parliamentary politics, mainly due to the First-past the Post system. However, the Scottish Parliament with its PR system, almost guarantees a coalition. Scotland has had seven years of coalition governments, based on successive partnership agreements between Labour and the Liberal Democrats. However, this is not the only model that exists. Progressive left orientated parties across the world have used a range of other models to engage with government. In the run up to the next Scottish Parliament it is particularly important to challenge the notion that the current coalition is the only possible form of government.

Speculation about coalitions has risen in the media agenda as we approach the 2007 elections, and it is worth remembering that the current Executive majority is actually very slender. The Labour Lib-Dem coalition need to lose, between them, 3 seats to lose their majority. A total of 3000 votes stood between the coalition parties losing their constituencies of Tweeddale, Etterick and Lauderdale, and Cumbernauld and Kilsyth to the SNP, and Dumfries to the Conservatives. While it may not be these seats that change, the polling data suggest that there is a realistic prospect of changes in Scotland's electoral geography. The SNP claim that is will gain up to 12 seats in 2007 would almost certainly put it into a position to form a government. It is, however, inevitable that the Scottish Executive will be run by more than one party, for the foreseeable future at least.

The introduction of the Single Transferable Vote (STV) as an electoral system for Local Authority elections means that Councils will be elected by a system with an element of proportionality. It also ensures that most of Scotland's 32 Local Authorities will move to no overall control - many local authorities will also move to new models of political cooperation.

The current Partnership Agreement is based on negotiation over political priorities and shared ministries, meaning that the minority party takes responsibility for a range of ministries. Of the 18 ministers (including deputy ministers but excluding law officers), five are Lib-Dems. This is just less than proportional to the number of Lib Dem MSPs, in relation to the number of Labour MSPs. Both of the partnership agreements have been concluded after the election, through a process of negotiation. A common

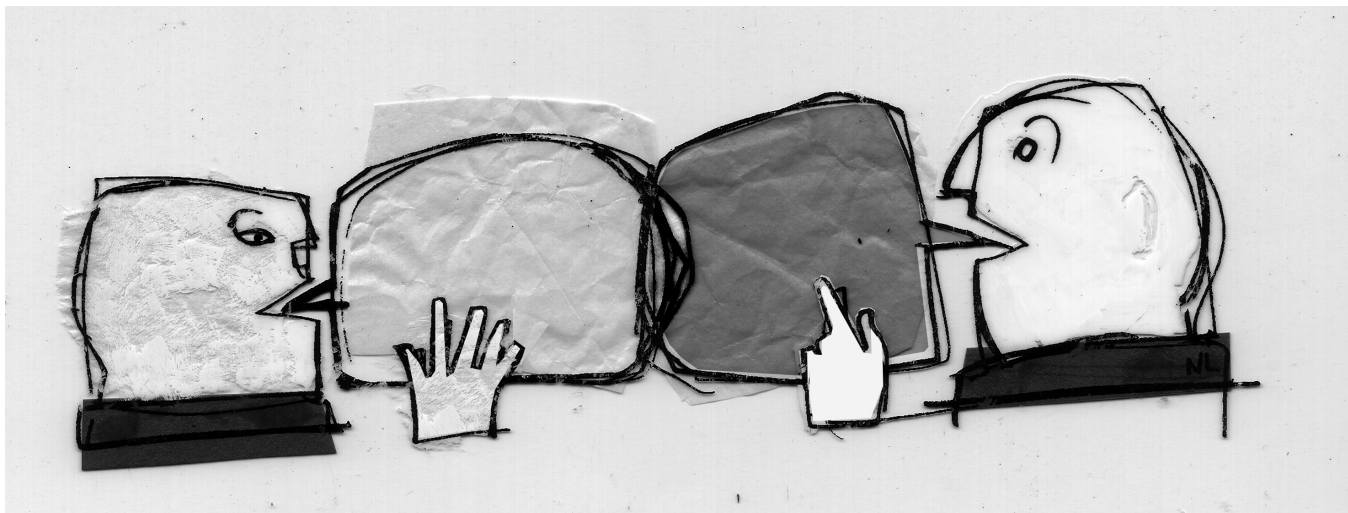
ministerial and legislative programme is agreed, including a division of ministerial posts. This means that in 2003 the Lib Dems secured agreement to introduce STV in Local Authorities, while Labour secured agreement for the strengthening of anti-social behaviour legislation. The Lib-Dem leader is customarily the Deputy First Minister and in 2003 choose to become Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning.

The parties to the partnership agreement vote together with a 'shared whip' on all parliamentary business within the remit of the Scottish Parliament, but are free to vote separately on matters reserved to Westminster. Despite their slim majority, the Executive has only been defeated once in the current parliament, on a devolved issue - the tendering of ferry services in the Hebrides - due to widespread Labour abstentions.

A number of other models of coalition exist across the world. Sweden has been governed by a Social Democrat minority government with Green and Left party support. The Swedish Greens and Left party adopted a similar model to the Lib-Lab pact, though agreed at the start of the term rather than midway through and no ministerial positions have been allocated.

By effectively employing its position between junior coalition partners and being out of government to pursue its agenda, the Swedish Green Party is responsible for the introduction of the Stockholm congestion charge, the spread of renewable fuels and defence cuts. By supporting the minority Social Democratic government, the Greens were able, not only to achieve policies that the largest party were sympathetic to, but also to work with the conservative opposition to reduce the tax and regulatory burden on small businesses. However, the leaders of the Swedish Green Party have become frustrated with their status and would consider a coalition similar to the current arrangements in Scotland in the future.

New Zealand has an even looser form of coalition. This model is called confidence and supply. There is no joint programme and no joint whip. The smaller parties merely guarantee to support the government in passing its budget (supply votes) and in any votes of confidence. In return, the government agrees to a number of concessions to the smaller parties. These may be legislative





or strategic policies, so for example in 2002 confidence and supply agreement between United Futures (a Christian centrist party) and the Labour party required the Labour government to promise that it would establish a Commission for the family; introduce victims' rights legislation; accelerate development of new road infrastructure and not introduce legislation to change the legal status of cannabis.

As illustrated this agreement is considerably weaker than either the Swedish or the Scottish agreements. Nevertheless, it has provided a stable government for New Zealand in a situation where parties did not have enough of a common platform to form a stronger form of coalition. However it does expose the legislative programme to open debate since a coalition must be formed around every legislative proposal. It has been argued in New Zealand that the fact the Government does not have the majority required to automatically win votes on legislation has created a much more pluralist parliament.

The negotiations also have a different dimension to those found in coalition discussions. For example, part of the New Zealand Green Party's price for entering into a confidence and supply agreement with Labour in 2002 was a moratorium on GM, a price Labour was unwilling to pay (hence Labour's choice of United Futures as a partner instead). The New Zealand Green's were able to present this as an example of their integrity rather than compromise in exchange for a share of power.

In the Northern Ireland Assembly, while the fractured political landscape almost guarantees that no one party will hold a majority, the danger of the unionist or nationalist parties forming a majority government is prevented by the use of the d'Hondt mechanism to assure power sharing. The d'Hondt mechanism allows the apportioning of ministries, meaning that the largest single party would get first choice, and subsequent ministries are chosen on the basis of the relative strength of the parties.

While this system is an implemented part of the Agreement of 10 April 1998, there is no reason why the parties in Parliament would not use this as a model of 'consociational' democracy. Consociational is a term developed by political scientists to describe states where major internal division along ethnic, religious or linguistic lines would make majority rule unacceptable to the minority. Consociational states like Belgium have managed to remain stable despite the divisions in their societies, through political systems that guarantee that no cultural group is permanently excluded from power.

Such a system would allow the extension of the proportional principal used in the electoral system to the government of Scotland, which could have a number of benefits. It would ensure that all major parties (those that reach the threshold) are tied into ensuring the success of the Scottish Executive's programme. While assuring the division of power and creating a consensual system of government, this may prove unpopular

with parties that can form a coalition. It may, though, be a realistic alternative for Local Authorities, especially those with a significant number of independent Councillors.

At the moment, the Scottish Parliament is organised around the distinction between Executive and non-Executive parties. Were there to be a minority Executive that relied on a smaller party for support, the Executive/non-Executive split may become difficult to perpetuate. If, for instance a party of minority government agrees to support a bill by a non-executive party, it may be difficult for the very limited existing support for non-executive bills from the Scottish Parliament to allocate the time to all but the least complex non-executive bills. The consistent erosion of resources with which non-Executive members can bring forward legislation needs to be reversed so that parties that are supporting, but not party of the Executive, can bring forward all the legislation they wish.

Similarly, the instability of any minority Executive may mean that it is difficult to deliver on assurances given in any agreement. It may, for example, be difficult for the SNP to deliver market liberalization agreed with the Conservatives because of objections from the left-wing of the SNP.

The current arrangement is facilitated by relatively convivial relations between the coalition partners. Were the coalition partners or the arrangement to change, perhaps with the addition of a third party, or a change in the largest party, the relationship may be markedly different. Were the coalition to become more fractious, or a minority Executive to come under attack from junior partner, the process of government may become much more difficult. While the current arrangement often produces outcomes that one of the parties is unhappy with, there is little of the brewing discontent that characterises many coalitions.

The opportunity offered by coalition working is ambivalent for parties of the left. In Belgium the Liberal-Socialist-Green coalition was a disaster for the Greens, with little of their programme achieved and the loss of 16 seats in parliament. On the other hand, Greens in Sweden have achieved a great deal through their relationship with the Social Democrats. Scotland's new political landscape heralded by a possible shift away from Labour carries both opportunities and threats for the left. While Labour will lose power in many Local Authorities and possibly at Holyrood, this may create more opportunities for the achievement of a left orientated programme. New parties sharing the predominant Scottish social democratic outlook will be open to creative and radical solutions. It is the responsibility of civil society and trade unions to grasp this opportunity by providing these solutions. ■

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Scotland's new political landscape heralded by a possible shift away from Labour carries both opportunities and threats for the left. New parties sharing the Scottish social democratic outlook will be open to creative and radical solutions



the justice process

Henry Maitles argues that peace without justice will fail in the Middle East and this can only be achieved through a one-state solution

The recent atrocities in Lebanon have highlighted the cruel and brutal actions of Israeli governments, army and sections of the population since the formation of the state of Israel in 1948. From the Irgun massacre at Deir Yassin in April 1948, where several hundred villagers were murdered and survivors were 'used' to spread panic and consequent flight into exile, to the invasion and occupation of Lebanon in the 1980s and the massacre of Palestinians in the Sabra and Chatilla camps by the Israeli supported Lebanese fascists to the recent brutal actions against the Intifada and horrors in the occupied territories now and the war crimes against Lebanon in July and August of 2006, Israeli policy has been characterised by fierce and unrelenting reaction. It poses the difficult question of how Israel can ever coexist peacefully with its neighbours in the Middle East.

Indeed, the very question of peace is problematic. It is a tempting call; it seems to unite all – who doesn't want peace? Yet there is not even the prospect of peace until the issue of justice for the Palestinian refugees dotted around the Middle East is at the centre of the process. Without it, there is the short term cessation of formal violence but no lasting peace. This is becoming much more central amongst Jews who want peace, both within Israel itself and in the pronouncements of Jewish organisations in Britain such as Scottish Jews for a Just Peace and Jews for Justice for Palestinians. This question of social justice stems from the fact that Israel is a colonial settler state; a state on territory seized from the original inhabitants and occupied by privileged outsiders backed by the Western imperialist powers. All settler states face the problem of what to do with the people whose land they now occupy.

The best solution from the settlers' point of view is extermination, ideally stretched over several centuries, successfully carried out by, for example, the US, Canada, and Australia. This is unlikely to become a realistic proposition for Israel, although there is a section of Zionism which argues that if the Palestinians are left rotting in the camps long enough, a mixture of economic necessity and physical violence could make enough flee from the area to make the disappearance of the Palestinians a reality. Another solution is to turn the original inhabitants into the settlers' labour force.

This happened in South Africa, Rhodesia, Kenya, and Algeria. This has the big disadvantage that sooner or later the dispossessed get organised and take the country back, as they did in all these cases. The Zionist colonisers drove out millions of Palestinians, most to neighbouring countries and the simmering discontent of the refugee camps. The rest are still subject to Israeli rule, which to differing degrees they resent and resist, with enormous sympathy from the Arab masses. The result is to leave Israel in a permanent state of insecurity. It lives alongside those it dispossessed, in a state of perpetual war with them. Right wing Israeli politicians advocate expelling the Palestinians to neighbouring states (as I discuss below), but this would likely just increase antagonism with the Arab world.

But Israel can't make peace with the Palestinians. The only real settlement, as I suggest at the beginning of the article, would be based on social justice and this would be one that allowed the millions of Palestinian refugees to return; but this would destroy the basis of Israel as an exclusively Jewish state, as it immediately comes into conflict with a cornerstone of Israeli policy – the 'Law of Return' – offering citizenship to all Jews in the world but refusing (contrary to UN resolutions) to allow back Palestinian refugees whose families lived in the area for generations and who fled in 1948.

Of course, their return would alter the demographic and racial look of the state and would challenge the Zionist assertion to their own, exclusively ruled, Jewish state. The Zionists were very clear on this: they argued 'a people without a land for a land without people'; unfortunately, there was a people there, the Palestinian Arabs, and it was they who had to be ethnically cleansed in 1947-48 to ensure a Jewish majority in the new state. So any Israeli settlement with the Palestinians is necessarily phoney. Yitzhak Rabin, the Israeli prime minister who embarked on the "peace process", did so on the cynical assumption that the PLO was an undemocratic organisation that could enforce order on the Palestinians. Hence a dose of real democracy – such as Hamas's election victory – becomes a real threat to this strategy. This is further seen in Israel's attitude to the UN ceasefire of August 2006 in the Lebanon; Israeli politicians and media immediately argued that this was no real peace and they would need to again wage war against Hezbollah – unless, that is, they can get a UN force to do so on their behalf.

Ethnic cleansing has been raised again recently and forcefully within Israeli society by some Israeli Zionist ideologues, including some sections of the Israeli left who should know better, such as Benny Morris. He had previously been a critic of the methods used in 1947-8 to expel some 700,000 Arabs, albeit from within a left-Zionist perspective, but recently (and primarily he claims as a result of the suicide bomb attacks on Israel) in the **Guardian** and the Israeli newspaper **Ha'aretz**, he has become a proponent of ethnic cleansing. The problem, as they see it, is that if current demographic trends continue, Jews will cease to be the majority population even within pre-1967 Israel within the next 40 to 50 years. A younger Arab population with a far higher birthrate makes this almost inevitable, even if there is continued Jewish immigration at the current rate. This fact creates a great deal of anxiety among all segments of Israeli society. Obviously gerrymandering along the lines carried out in, for example, Northern Ireland between 1921 and 1998 would be a possible solution, albeit would seriously discredit Israel's claim to be a stable democracy.

The radical solution to this dilemma is 'transfer' of the Arab populations. Moderate versions of these proposals call for exchanges of territories with their populations; areas in Israel with large Arab populations like the lower Galilee would be given to a Palestinian state in exchange for Jewish settlements in the territories being incorporated into Israel. More extreme solutions to this dilemma call for forcible expulsions of



Palestinians, not only from the occupied territories, but even from Israel itself. This fringe opinion, in the last years has become somewhat respectable, primarily as people like Morris have emerged as its most vocal spokespersons.

The argument goes that the 1947-48 expulsion was not a war crime and that the Irgun and the Stern Gang should have 'done a complete job' and ethnically cleansed all the Arabs from the new state of Israel; that the 'place would be quieter and know less suffering if the matter had been resolved once and for all'. We are to believe that if only Israel had tripled the number of refugees, the situation would be one of less suffering and would be resolved; and this against a situation where all (or all except these Zionists) believe that the refugee problem, resulting from the ethnic cleansing, is the core cause of the suffering!

Yet they go further still; they raise the idea of the Palestinians in Israel being a fifth column and thus they may have to be ethnically cleansed in the future to ensure Israel's security. The Palestinians become 'barbarians who want to take our lives' and consequently they should be treated as 'serial killers'; naturally, this ignores the impact of Israeli policies, such as colonization of Palestinian land, expropriation of their water, ignoring almost all of their freedoms, administrative detention of tens of thousands of Palestinians, systematic destruction of their social and material infrastructure, the erection of walls and fences around their land and brutal attacks on the general population.

This argument ignores the reasons why Israel got and gets such huge support from the West and in particular the USA; the need for a force in the area capable of upholding Western oil and military interests in the Arab world and in particular a force capable of punishing or having the will and potential to punish Arab rulers or populations who may desire to challenge these interests. In the words of a British diplomat, Israel would be a 'loyal little Ulster' in the area, a role seen by an influential Israeli newspaper of a 'watchdog' in the Arab world. To some extent the recent humiliation of the Israeli Defence Force in Lebanon suggests that even the most vicious watchdog has problems with deep rooted resistance. Further, apart from these global priorities, there was the added dimension post war of the Holocaust, the attempted genocide of European Jewry by the Nazis, and the failure of both western and eastern blocs to prevent it. This gave the Zionists the propaganda tool of a moral and ethical case for a homeland which they insisted had to be in Palestine.

Some are surprised at this, believing that Zionism, the political philosophy underpinning the state of Israel, has an anti-western and anti-capitalist agenda, but Zionism has at every juncture seen its role as collaborating and allying itself with reactionary forces in its goal of the Jewish state. Zionism was, and is, a specific response to anti-Semitism. It argues that anti-Semitism is endemic to the gentile population; it is, thus, futile trying to combat it and the only strategy is to isolate Jews in their own state, arm it to the teeth and put up shutters against

a hostile world. Far from Zionism saving Jews, it has always single mindedly had the Jewish homeland as its end and any means, including supping with the devil of racism, was perfectly acceptable. Zionism is not an unfortunate aberration, it is a policy of despair and isolation that ensures that, armed to the teeth and racist itself towards the Palestinians, Israel and the territories it occupies are the most dangerous places in the world for both Palestinians and Jews.

For over 30 years the Palestinian movement, supported by much of the left and progressive opinion worldwide, has had an official policy for addressing this question - the two-state solution. The idea is that a settlement could be reached between Israel and the Palestinians allowing the two to live side by side peacefully in separate, democratic states. The late Yasser Arafat, president of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), justified signing the 1993 Oslo Accord by arguing it was a step towards a two-state solution. But the experience of the 'peace process' since Oslo has produced very clear evidence that the two-state solution cannot work.

One reason is the massive imbalance of power between the two sides. Israel is one of the greatest military powers in the world, backed and subsidised by the US. In contrast the Palestine Authority (PA) is given limited authority over a fragmented territory, and is financially dependent on outside powers such as the European Union that can withdraw their support at any time, as Hamas has discovered. And, Israeli policy has worked to perpetuate this imbalance - to keep the PA weak and dependent, whilst at the same time demanding that the PA polices the radical Islamists. It reached its most bizarre point as the Israelis imprisoned Yasser Arafat in his compound, bombed the PA police stations and demanded that Hamas was disarmed by the PA and its police!

The only real way out lies in the policy that the PLO abandoned in the mid-1970s - a single secular and democratic Palestinian state in which Jews and Arabs, Christians and Muslims live together on the basis of equality. I don't pretend that this is an easy solution or one that holds sway amongst even the left. Nonetheless, even in Israel there are some who understand why it is becoming a necessity and paradoxically the experience of their own authority in the occupied territories is convincing radical Palestinians that the two state solution is not tenable. This may seem completely utopian amid the present carnage. But I go back to my original point - no peace without justice; this is not utopian for the left, it is a necessity.

The only real way out lies in the policy that the PLO abandoned in the 70's - a single secular and democratic Palestinian state in which Jews and Arabs, Christians and Muslims live together on the basis of equity

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are we all really Hizbollah?

Gilbert Ramsay discusses the relationship between the left and Islam and questions how this may change as the Scottish left fragments

The sound of quite so many people who were not apparently Lebanese or Shi'ite chanting their support for Hizbollah at the anti-war demonstrations in Edinburgh and London will surely be seen by many as a new milestone in the ongoing relationship between the British and Scottish left and the various different permutations of political Islam. The chant, of course, echoes that well-known one that originated on the Nasserite Egyptian campuses of the 1960s 'We are all Palestinian'. But to say 'we are all Hizbollah' is something quite different. To be Palestinian is to be a member of a group of people united only by shared history and common misfortune. To 'be Hizbollah' is to be a member of a political and military organisation with a specific ideology and way of working. Perhaps the chant should not be taken entirely at face value. After all 'we are all Hizbollah' has a better ring to it than 'we are all South Lebanese, or from the poorer districts of Beirut'. But this will not quite do.

A brief examination of socialist press's commentary on the chant reveals that, far from representing the over-enthusiasm of the moment, 'support for the [Islamic] resistance' was in fact the considered policy of large sections of the Scottish and British left during the recent Israeli invasion of Lebanon. I don't propose here to write yet another big sweeping article on the relationship between 'Islam and the Left', as if there was something fundamentally paradoxical about the very essences of each. To do so would be to fall into the lazy, Islamophobic cliché of treating all Islamic movements as essentially the same thing. What I will do, however, is ask how far current circumstances can really justify openly supporting a military and, some say, 'terrorist' organisation such as Hizbollah.

To start from first principles, there are three reasons I can think of why any given leftist organisation 'A' would choose to lend support to any other organisation 'B'. First, organisation 'B' may be perceived to be sufficiently close to 'A' in its basic ideology, that it is possible to gloss over the differences that remain. Secondly, even if organisation 'B' is considered to be irreconcilably different at an ideological level, it may nonetheless be considered to be the authentic representative of an oppressed people in their struggle against imperialism, and this alone may qualify it for support, presumably in the hope that once the struggle is over, the oppressed people in question will attain their true consciousness. Thirdly, organisation 'A' may nonetheless choose to lend its support to organisation 'B' for short-term tactical reasons – for example, it may be a way of widening support and generating publicity.

Let us examine how far each of these apply for the case of Hizbollah. Ideologically, Hizbollah is Islamist. This means that it is of the same family as Hamas, the Muslim Brothers and (at least in principle) the Iranian government. This contrasts it with organisations such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, Jama'at at-Tabligh and the Taliban, which are 'Salafist' or 'Neofundamentalist' movements. The difference between Islamists and Neofundamentalists is basically that while Islamists aim to take over and Islamise the structures of the modern state, Neofundamentalists generally prefer to ignore or, in more extreme cases attempt to destroy

them, and to build in their place a virtuous society based on closely imitating the practices of the prophet Mohammad. It is somewhat like the difference between social democrats and revolutionary Marxists or, perhaps better, to Trotskyites and Stalinists. What this means in practice is that Hizbollah, like other Islamist organisations, tends to be relatively open to compromise, to reinterpretations of Quranic law, and to practical considerations of time and place. It is further reinforced by the fact that Hizbollah is Shi'ite.

Shi'ite Islam has always had a particularly lively tradition of reinterpretation of religious sources, and it has been greatly reinvigorated by the demands of running a religious Shi'ite state in Iran. As a result of all this, Hizbollah can be considered a relatively progressive organisation. Its political wing participates constructively in the semi-democratic Lebanese system, and has a particularly strong record on encouraging women into public life. In recent years it has even toned down its insistence on creating an Islamic state in Lebanon, pointing out that the country's unique denominational diversity makes it an exceptional case. In fact, the organisation's domestic focus is primarily on providing essential social welfare services to some of the country's poorest people. Most recently, it promised to re-house all those who lost their homes to Israeli bombings.

Coming to foreign policy, its ideological record perhaps presents more difficulties. Hizbollah has a history of condemning violence against civilians by other Islamic groups – including the September 11th attacks. It does, however, draw the line at attacks on Israeli civilians, whom it generally considers to be fair game, as willing accessories to the crime of occupying Palestine. It professes an ultimate goal of liberating Palestine through the forced repatriation of all Jews who came to the country after 1948. Even for those (such as myself) who would like to see the Israeli-Palestinian conflict resolved through the peaceful creation of a single state in all of what was once the British mandate of Palestine, Hizbollah's objective taken at face value, is, to say the least, a tough one to sympathise with. Overall while Hizbollah is hardly the Taliban, its ideology is one which, if looked at in isolation, makes it an organisation that many ought to feel uncomfortable claiming to belong to.

But of course, Hizbollah's ideology need not be viewed in pure isolation. After all, during the Israeli-Lebanese war, it was very much in a particular context – as the leader of the 'resistance' to what can with some justification be called an Israeli war of aggression. How strong is the case for viewing Hizbollah in this way? Certainly, the organisation has a great deal of sympathy among Palestinians of the occupied territories. But then so did Saddam Hussein, who went into the Gulf War of 1991 vowing to liberate Palestine. Middle Eastern powers have played the Palestine card since Israel has existed. But however sincere it may be in its desire to liberate Palestine, the test of legitimacy for any power must be domestic. Here Hizbollah scores well too, but not immaculately well. It is unquestionably the largest and most popular representative of Lebanon's Shi'ites.





Support from Iran and Syria, and the end of Soviet support for its secular socialist rival Amal is a factor in this, but by no means the only one. Shi'ites, in turn, are the largest and (Lebanese-Palestinians aside) the most disadvantaged demographic in Lebanon. The Lebanese system of government is weighted against them, giving half of parliamentary seats and the presidency to the minority Christians, and the powerful office of Prime Minister to a Sunni Muslim. However, Hizbollah were party to the Ta'if accords that settled on this formula, and it might be said that this unfair political arrangement was the price that Hizbollah knowingly paid for not disarming. At the time, this was perhaps an understandable reaction – Shi'ites had much to fear from Lebanese state power. Today, with a 70% Shi'ite presence in the Lebanese national army, it is harder to find altruistic reasons for why Hizbollah should not disarm in exchange for a more stable Lebanon and a better deal for Lebanese Shi'ites in general.

To conclude that anti-war marchers would declare their support for Hizbollah is understandable. But if it is a principled decision it is, on balance, a dangerous one. Hizbollah is certainly not all bad. But there is enough to be sceptical about in it to suggest that those who cheer for it today may be eating their words tomorrow. Of course, there is the possibility that they don't care. But surely committed socialists wouldn't be as cynical as that. Or would they? Concerning means, it is broadly possible to say that Islamist organisations have a more consistent record of applying violence in the pursuit of their ends than do Neofundamentalist organisations. This follows fairly naturally from their ideological differences. Neofundamentalists can in principle pursue their rejectionist approach peacefully. Where they pursue a policy of violence, this tends to be sensationalist and more or less free from immediate practical purpose. Islamists, on the other hand, tend to be more prepared to use violence of all kinds in the rational pursuit of their objectives.

Hizbollah was, of course, originally founded as a military organisation committed to removing Israeli forces from Lebanon and, ultimately, to destroying the state of Israel through the forced repatriation of all Jewish immigrants to the state of Israel since 1948. In analysing its military actions, it is perhaps better to consider targets than techniques. Hizbollah pioneered suicide bombing in the region, but used it most notably against US Marines, rather than civilians. It has fairly consistently condemned attacks against civilian targets, except Israeli civilian targets, based on its view that all Israelis alike are party to the criminal act of occupying Palestine. For most leftist organisations, even those which do not accept that Israel as Israel has a right to exist, this policy must be hard to agree with.

However, it should be borne in mind that Hizbollah exists in distinct versions as a political and as a military organisation – a distinction which is recognised by, for example, the British government, which considers only one of these to be a terrorist organisation. It is therefore possible, at least in principle, to endorse Hizbollah's political struggle to obtain justice for Shi'ites within Lebanon and for Palestinians outside

of it without approving its employment of military force to this end. Nonetheless, it is probably fair to say that, on balance, Hizbollah's ideological principles, if taken literally, are ones which most European leftists might balk at. Moving on to the second argument, is it valid to support Hizbollah as the chosen representative of the oppressed classes of Lebanon? Despite being a young organization, it is true to say that Hizbollah is by some way the most important political representative of Lebanese Shi'ites.

In Lebanon's last election (and Lebanese elections, within their limitations, are relatively free and fair) it polled around twice the votes of its secular rival, Amal. In addition to its political and military activities, it has an extensive social welfare programme. After the ceasefire agreement with Israel, Hizbollah announced that it would pay a year's rent for those who had lost their homes in the war, and finance an extensive rebuilding programme.

Lebanon's Shi'ites can, in their turn, be regarded with some justification as an oppressed people, if not necessarily a colonially oppressed one.

Despite being the largest single group in Lebanon, Shi'ites are excluded by law from half of Lebanon's parliamentary seats, which are reserved for minority Christians, and from the offices of President (which goes to a Maronite Christian) and Prime Minister (a Sunni Muslim). This arrangement, however, was more the work of Syria than of Israel or America, and was agreed to by Hizbollah in return for not giving up its arms, a fact which, however understandable in the circumstances, must call into question the genuineness of Hizbollah's commitment to democratic

politics and, consequently, its ultimate right to represent anyone other than itself.

Osama Saeed's comments, on behalf of the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) are instructive "many people are looking for new representation in Scotland. MAB values the relationship that it has with the wider left in England - with Respect and Stop the War. These are links that were not made in Scotland. There was a failure of the left to attract Muslim members. This new party has an opportunity to tap into the anti-war and wider movements." If this is the case, the chanting, and pro-Hizbollah tone of the protest in Edinburgh may be the first indication of developing links between the left and Muslim groups. With the emergence of a new left party, centred on Tommy Sheridan and the SWP the early indications of an alignment similar to that of RESPECT are evident.

To sum up then, when judged in its context, Hizbollah is certainly not the insanely extreme organisation which US government propaganda would have people believe. There are indeed reasons to sympathise with aspects of its struggle against what, in the ultimate analysis must be regarded as Israeli aggression rather than self-defence. To openly endorse it, however, would seem to be playing with fire. Whether the Solidarity party wishes to play with that fire remains to be seen.



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Hizbollah is not the insanely extreme organisation which US propoganda would have you believe. To openly endorse it, however would seem to be playing with fire

no profit from death

Nicola Morris explains why the Culpable Homicide Bill is essential to protecting the lives of workers

The Transport and General Workers' Union has long campaigned for effective legislation on corporate killing and for reform of the law to ensure that all employing organisations – public, private and voluntary, incorporated and unincorporated – and the individuals who own and manage them – can be held to account under the law.

Evidence produced by the Health and Safety Commission (HSC) shows that, on average, in the UK:

Each and every day of the week **1 person** dies in a work-related incident

Each and every day of the week **16 people** die from occupational cancers and illnesses

And according to research by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) 70% of all those work-related deaths are the direct result of management failures.

However, not only is the current law failing to prevent work-related deaths, it is also failing to hold to account those who are responsible for them. Research by the Centre for Corporate Accountability shows that:

Only 11 company directors have ever been **convicted** of manslaughter following a work-related death

And, of those 11 convictions:

Only 5 directors have ever been **imprisoned** as a result of a work-related death and a manslaughter conviction

Another 5 directors received **suspended sentences** for manslaughter

And 1 director was given a **community service** order for manslaughter

We believe that a new corporate manslaughter/homicide law is needed because as the evidence shows, work-related deaths are not being prevented, the guilty are not being held to account and justice is being denied.

Last year, the Government's announcement to legislate on this very important issue, albeit eight years after pledges to do so, was welcomed by the TGWU. The union also made it clear that the legislation must be 'fit for purpose'. This means that, in our view, it must target both corporate and individual directors' guilt. Only by addressing this fundamental point will our courts be able to address the cloak of immunity which has time and again been thrown around directors.

The T&G has always maintained that it is not organisations that kill people – it is those who own, direct and manage and who are negligent, incompetent, or display a sheer disregard for the law. Safety in the workplace depends on responsibility in the boardroom. Any new legislation must be able to reach those employers who abuse the safety laws of this country.

The publication of the Corporate Manslaughter & Corporate Homicide Bill by the Home Office in July received a lukewarm response from trade unions and safety campaigners. The initial draft for England and Wales was previously challenged by unions, health and safety campaigners and the Commons Select Committee. Yet the new Bill remains largely unchanged, much to the evident relief of the CBI and Institute of Directors. The Bill does not include new duties on company directors and does not wholly remove Crown immunity. The limiting "senior managers test" also remains in the final bill. More surprisingly to campaigners in Scotland, the Bill expressed the Government's intention for the legislation to cover Scotland despite the fact that legislative action had been expected from the Scottish Executive, following the Expert Group on Corporate Homicide report of November 2005. Despite generally positive statements by the Executive about the report, no consultation was ever undertaken and no further commitment to take definite action has been made as of yet.

However, Karen Gillon MSP, has now launched a consultation on a proposed Private Members Bill, the Corporate Homicide (Scotland) Bill to change the law on corporate homicide in Scotland, which will as well as addressing disparities in Scots law in relation to the offence of corporate homicide will, in our view, also address many of the weaknesses in the Home Office proposals. The Trade Union movement in Scotland has thrown its full support behind the premise of the draft Culpable Homicide (Scotland) Bill, that it is unfair in our society that one of our most serious crimes appears to be discriminatory in the manner in which it is applied. For example, individuals in larger organisations are still less likely to be charged with culpable homicide than those in small organisations.

There is an urgent need to ensure that all involuntary deaths in Scotland, where we have the highest work-related mortality and serious injury rate within the UK, are investigated and, if necessary, prosecuted in a thorough and consistent manner. This should include the possibility of custodial sentences alongside a broad range of penalties, e.g. equity fines; corporate probation orders; "naming and shaming" of negligent companies; disqualification of directors, if we are to effectively deter negligent employers.

The apparent dropping of possible distinct Scottish legislation, as the Westminster Bill has emerged, has threatened to turn a potential good news story into a real negative for the Scottish Executive. However, the real danger through all of the debate on this is that the central issue, justice for the families who have lost loved ones at work, may be overshadowed. As a union with a long track record of campaigning on this issue we believe that the Bill is fully within the competence of the Scottish Parliament and will ensure that all involuntary deaths can be prosecuted and punished on a fair and equitable basis. The T&G in Scotland has also launched a petition in support of the proposed Bill.

The argument for strong legislation in Scotland is largely related to the fact that there is clearly a Scottish dimension to

this issue. It has been known since the mid-nineties and the publication of the Woolfson-Beck report that there is a specific Scottish dimension in terms of fatalities and injuries at work. Scotland has a higher rate of fatalities & major injuries and fewer prosecutions than elsewhere in UK.

Many in the trade union movement believe that the proposed UK legislation will not have any major effect in deterring negligent employers as it does not carry the threat of imprisonment for gross negligence. The regulatory impact assessment for England and Wales for the bill indicates that it would only amount to around another five prosecutions a year. Statistics for Scotland show there were 36 fatal injuries and 2861 reported major injuries to workers in 2004/05 and the HSE estimate 70 per cent of deaths and serious injuries are down to management failures.

Therefore, in light of the fact that there has never been a successful prosecution for culpable homicide brought against a company in Scotland, the question has to be asked - would the proposed UK legislation do enough to address the anomaly in Scotland?

The only ever attempted prosecution of a company for culpable homicide in Scotland against gas utility, Transco, in relation to an explosion in Larkhall in 1999 which resulted in the tragic death of a family of four, also demonstrates the need for the proposals in Karen Gillon's Bill to be adopted. Although Transco was fined a record 15 million pounds for safety breaches, the homicide charges were dropped because the crown could not identify a "controlling mind". 15 million pounds doesn't even scratch the surface of the profits of companies that make billions of pounds a year, and fines will more than likely be accommodated through bill hikes rather than see the profits of the shareholders take a hit. This case also demonstrated the difficulty in using existing law to hold negligent companies to account.

Karen Gillon's proposed Bill addresses the problems in the law identified in the Transco case and widens the definition of negligence to include recklessness. It would make it possible to pursue negligent individuals at all levels of management and proposes a broader based test of management failure, which would properly meet the needs of the justice system.

There is, therefore, a clear case for specific Scottish measures to address this issue. The T&G Scotland have, for a number of years, argued for a formal Standing Committee of the Scottish Parliament to communicate a Scottish viewpoint on health and safety issues and the operation of Scotland's criminal justice system, regarding health and safety cases. A position that was endorsed by the STUC Congress in April this year.

On the wider issue of health and safety in the workplace, the latest fatal accident figures released by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in August reveal that Scotland has, yet again, witnessed a higher fatal injury rate than other countries and regions in the UK.

The figures for the fatal injury rate do show that there has been a reduction in the number of fatal injuries to workers in the UK,

this improvement being partially offset by a rise in fatalities among the self employed. However, it seems somewhat strange the HSE have heralded these figures as "record levels". 212 people in this country lost their lives in workplace accidents; 212 families were devastated by the deaths of loved ones. One death at work is one too many and by the HSE's own admission, quite often simple, inexpensive measures could have prevented the tragic loss of life.

While the fatal injury rate has fallen in Scotland, a closer look at the figures, show that Scotland's incidence rate of fatal injury to employees per 100,000 is almost twice that of Britain as a whole. A figure which is of major concern given that the HSE have recently revealed plans to cut 250 to 350 posts. The proposed job cuts at the HSE are particularly worrying, as they also come at a time when Local Authority resources for

health and safety are being squeezed and an increasing number of Health and Safety Officers are coming up for retirement. Any reduction in front line enforcement activity can only put more workers at risk of fatal or serious injury.

It defies belief that the health and safety of workers can be compromised in this way. Regular enforcement activity is the cornerstone of the protection of workers health and safety. It is a sad indictment on our society and on Government that precious resources for workplace health and safety law enforcement are under threat; that the HSE is starved of adequate funding and that the Government continues to promote a wide reaching and extremely concerning deregulation agenda.

The protection of workers safety is one of the core values of trade unionism. Much

evidence demonstrates that unionised workplaces are safer workplaces and that one of the main reasons many people join a trade union is on the basis of health and safety concerns. Strong trade union organisation at the workplace - backed by effective legal rights - is a key component in improving health and safety standards and reducing workplace fatalities, injuries and industrial diseases.

Much of this article has looked at statistics. What figures do not demonstrate is the reality behind the statistics for the workers and their families who have been seriously injured or killed at work. Statistics do not show the pain, suffering and misery that many Scottish families face as a result. Last year 32 people got up, went to work and never came home again. 32 families are still suffering the consequences of these tragedies. Countless other families, over the years had their lives changed for ever, due to preventable injuries in the workplace. This must be our focus as the debate on these issues continues and it is vitally important that the trade union movement in Scotland continues to fight, both industrially and politically, for safer workplaces and to ensure that all those who have suffered are treated fairly by our justice system.

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Scotland's incidence rate of fatal injury to employees per 100,000 is almost twice that of the UK...HSE have recently announced, plans to cut between 250 and 350 jobs

drowning in self-interest

Jim and Margaret Cuthbert look at the current efforts to privatise Scotland's water industry and discuss what we can do to prevent it

Scotland is about to be faced with an intense struggle to prevent the privatisation of its water industry. Powerful voices have already been raised in favour of moves towards privatisation - including a surprising statement by the Chairman of the Water Industry Commission, that water should be "freed from state ownership". This article outlines the main pressures leading towards water privatisation. Basic fallacies are uncovered in the arguments used by the privatisation lobby and the key challenges that are faced if privatisation is to be avoided. In particular, the critical battleground will be in the campaign to expose the flaws in the currently used method for setting utility prices, namely the Regulatory Capital Value method.

The movement to privatise water in Scotland has been unwittingly assisted by three crucial strategic mistakes made by the Scottish Executive. Firstly, the Scottish Executive made basic mistakes in the implementation of a new system of financial control for the water industry in 2002, which meant consumers were overcharged, (by about £1billion over the period 2002-10). This also meant that the Executive could use water charges as a new source of taxation, transferring funding provision to other parts of the budget. The resulting shortage of public expenditure provision is now impacting on the short-term availability of capital investment for the industry, with adverse effects on levels of service and customer satisfaction.

Secondly the Executive set up a centralised and bureaucratic leviathan in the shape of Scottish Water. The intention was to improve efficiency, and harmonise domestic charges however, the reality has been that Scottish Water has not been capable of responding adequately and flexibly to local requirements. It has also, despite harmonisation, introduced a tariff system with high fixed charges for industry, which adversely affects small firms. It has also reduced local contractors to a peripheral role in the

delivery of much of its capital investment programme, through its approach of developing Scottish Water Solutions, an unusual partnership with specific private sector companies, which has had adverse effects on efficiency due to the loss of local contractors' detailed knowledge. The overall results have been damaging to customer satisfaction and local economic development.

Lastly the Scottish Executive sanctioned the implementation in Scotland of setting water prices via the Regulatory Capital Value (RCV) method, which leads, as we show below, to significant overcharging and ultimately generates a substantial financial surplus for the operating company. Because of the profits generated by the RCV method, water is now regarded in the City as being a rich source of corporate profits.

These mistakes have set in train powerful forces, which work towards the privatisation of the water industry in Scotland. Public dissatisfaction can be manipulated to blame problems with water on Scottish Water's public sector status - and this dissatisfaction can only get worse, as prices start to increase rapidly again in 2010, inherent in the RCV approach. The Scottish Executive in due course will come under severe temptation to cash in on the financial surplus which the RCV method will generate, by selling Scottish Water for a one-off gain of several billion pounds and the City wants to get its hands on the profits to be gathered from a privatised water industry.

These pressures towards privatisation are supported by the widely held view that the Scottish Executive won't be able to afford to maintain Scottish water as a public sector body in the longer term, since water has been privatised down in England and therefore there are no Barnett consequentials to benefit the Scottish budget. It is unfortunate that this argument has been too readily accepted - without, apparently, anyone sitting down to do the arithmetic, which shows that the argument is a myth with no validity.

At present the borrowing provision for water in the Scottish Executive budget is £182 million per annum. If we suppose that Scottish Water has a continuing investment requirement of £500 million per annum in real terms, then financial modelling shows that, in the long run, Scottish Water would need to borrow about £120 million in real terms and would have interest and debt repayment charges substantially below those implied by the RCV method. In other words, the Scottish Executive could significantly reduce its public expenditure allocation for Scottish Water in the long term while the industry could still afford



to maintain an investment programme on an ongoing basis at its currently high level. In fact, the Executive would be unwise to reduce its long term public expenditure allocation for water as low as £120 million, since more than this would be required if inflation increased.

A similar myth also exists that while it might not be necessary for the Executive to sell off Scottish Water, the Executive might judge that the money could be better spent on other priorities. This view may have had some validity at times in the past, when water and sewerage were unexciting topics but this view is emphatically ceasing to be the case nowadays, as water emerges worldwide as a limited resource of key importance. It would be folly for the Executive to give up the Scottish people's ownership of water just as the comparative advantage, which Scotland could gain from its water resources, is becoming clear.

Now the issue of RCV, which reveals fundamental and damaging flaws in this method and is in many ways the nub of this paper. On the face of it, there may appear to be little ground for questioning the RCV approach, after all, it is the established approach to utility pricing supported by the World Bank and major accountancy firms and it is applied to a whole range of utilities, not just in the UK but internationally. But because the RCV method is widely applied does not mean it is right - particularly since, even at a superficial level, there are a number of awkward questions about the RCV approach.

For example, the RCV approach is an application of current cost accounting. But why has current cost accounting been abandoned everywhere else in the private sector apart from the price setting for utilities? And how, if the RCV approach is correct, can we explain the massive profits earned, under RCV price setting, by the water companies in England - where, for example, annual dividends to equity owners have frequently run at a level of 30% or so of the equity capital actually raised by the industry. Also, if the RCV approach is indeed generating appropriate incentives, how can the reluctance of the privatised water companies in England to deal with chronic leakage problems?

The answers to these questions become clear when we probe below the surface of how the RCV approach actually operates. This modelling shows that the RCV method is fundamentally flawed and has the effect of turning capital investment, particularly long-term capital investment, into an activity, which yields a substantial financial surplus for the utility.

For example, a company investing in a 30-year life asset, with inflation at 2.5%, and interest rate of 5%, will reap under RCV pricing a financial surplus of no less than 43% of the value of the investment. Note that this surplus is of purely financial origin - the company will reap the surplus whether or not the underlying investment project actually makes an adequate real

return to the company: In the bizarre world of RCV, the company would make a substantial profit out of putting up an expensive 100 year statue of its founder, provided it was allowed to class this as capital investment. The RCV financial surplus leads to overcharging, and to large profits for private companies but it also distorts the investment programmes of the utilities and in a way, which is consistent with their unconcern about leakages.

How could the RCV approach have gone so badly adrift? The basic answer is that the RCV approach calculates consumer charges on the basis of assumed costs of capital assets valued at today's prices whereas, in reality, an industry with very long lived assets, (as water is), operating in an era of even moderate inflation, will face actual costs which relate to the lower prices of capital goods several years ago. The RCV approach then makes a further mistake, in attributing this difference between assumed and actual costs as a reward primarily to equity holders - overstating, and over rewarding, the equity holders' contribution to the finance of the business. This accounts for the excess profits generated by companies in England.

Faced with the above pressures, the challenges to which we must rise are to resist the move towards privatisation, whether this comes as an outright move; to mount an effective intellectual campaign against the RCV method and to campaign for much greater democratisation of the water industry in Scotland.

While privatisation is the issue, which is liable to make the headlines, in many ways the key strategic ground for the

struggle is the need to question the validity of the RCV approach. If the RCV approach were abandoned, the excess profits to be earned from a privatised water industry would no longer be available - and most of the pressure for privatisation would disappear. Conversely, if the RCV approach is maintained, even without privatisation, then the Scots will still be overcharged for water. So an important requirement now is to have a full, and fully informed, debate on the RCV method.

Given the essentially technical nature of the issues involved in constructing an effective critique of the RCV method, it will be essential that those who are arguing on the anti-privatisation side focus on the detail, not just on emotion: and that they put sufficient resources into researching the technical aspects of RCV. The rewards of success, however, will be large. A successful critique of the RCV method will have important implications not just for Scotland but also for the international campaign against the excesses of globalisation.

For more information visit www.cuthbert1.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk.

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The pressure towards privatisation is supported by the view that the Scottish Executive won't be able to afford to maintain Scottish water since water has been privatised in England and there are no Barnett consequentials. It is unfortunate that this argument has been accepted without anyone sitting down to do the arithmetic.

feedback

US consul and the Scottish cringe

In a farewell address, Cécile Shea, the outgoing US Consul for Edinburgh, criticises the Scots for their negativity and lack of self-assurance. She is not the first observer, foreign or home-grown, to identify the crippling Jekyll and Hyde cringe and bluster syndrome that afflicts so many Scots. Ms Shea castigates the Scots for their failure to grasp just how much they have contributed to the greater good of the planet. She lists inventors, philosophers, medics and others who grace the souvenir tea towels of the tat shops on the Royal Mile.

What Ms Shea herself may fail to grasp is just how pernicious and widespread the indoctrination of cringe may be. Take any town or village in Scotland. Even through the long dark, damp months, knots of youngsters can be seen gathered round the chippie, the Spar shop, or any focal point or sign of light. Adults glare suspiciously, publicans debar them, shops display signs demanding the admission of no more than three kids at a time. Cafés don't want them; restaurants are too dear, amusement arcades just eat coin yet return minimal amusement.

When our kids do manage to speak in adult company, the reaction all too often is, **and what would you know!** We feed them a diet of hyperactivity then tell them to sit quiet **and watch the telly**. The manufacturers of alcoholic drinks are well aware of the exclusion of our youngsters from society. Alcopops disguised as fun drinks in bright pastel colours contain enough vodka to place a drinker over the breathalyser limit with just one bottle. Massive three-litre bottles of once innocuous cider are sold for a couple of pounds – alcoholic content up to a staggering nine per cent. A three-litre bottle is the equivalent of almost four standard bottles of wine.

We deplore the sight of our children making fools of themselves; talking garbage and being sick, yet Scots adults have been doing precisely that for generations. The 'what would **you** know' put-down matures into I kent his faither amongst adults. The Punch joke of a century ago captured this dismissal with the famous line; **Willie Johnson a Poet? How could he be? I was at school with his faither**. Accordingly, Scots speech is alive with put-downers such as, **She is no better than she should be; If she was chocolate she'd eat herself**. Then there are the Presbyterian put-downers, just in case anyone might get carried away with enjoyment. If adults and drink are involved it's, **cheery nights make dreary morns**. Any prolonged spell of sunshine merits, **we'll pay for it later**. Pay for it, no less! Pleased with an achievement? **Dinnae get above yersel**. Country folk are mocked as Teuchters or sheep-shaggers and just about every grouping has a put-down for another one, whether it be Glasgow's distaste for Edinburgh or the reciprocal feelings in the capital.

No Scottish press report on Séan Connery is complete with the tag, **the ex-Tollcross milkie**. Similarly Lulu who is in her fifties is perennially **the lassie fae Drumchapel** though she is now quite anglicised and has been for several decades.

The single most destructive force in Scotland is our confused attitude to our ethnicity and nationhood. Historically the Scots have served the Empire, the Commonwealth and the body

politic with a hugely disproportionate number of senior people. Blair, Brown, Reid, Darling, to name only a few from New Labour, while the Liberals have been led by Scots such as Jo Grimond, Ming Campbell and Charles Kennedy. There are few Tory grandees who are Scottish simply because there are now no Scottish MPs, even their MSPs are in situ purely because of PR.

The Jekyll and Hyde schizophrenia we feel is bred from confusion. On the one hand we can produce generals, banks of world renown and politicians of powerful appeal from Keir Hardie to George Galloway but we are incapable of running our own affairs. The BBC for generations was the voice of the Home Counties. Kids were forced not to say aye. Gaelic was marginalised. A well-spoken person was one with a posh English accent.

Yes we can have what Billy Connolly dismissively calls our own 'pretendy wee parliament'. Yes we can administer our own health, education and laws but when it comes to absolutely deadly serious issues such as the location of Weapons of Mass Destruction we're not grown-up enough. Yes we can march in the streets to express our disgust of western foreign policy in Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon but no we don't have the power to prevent Westminster allowing George Bush to parks his planes with their evil cargoes on Scottish soil.

Like some wee wifie, we can make decisions about domestic issues but we must leave the big decisions to daddy in London. Either we cannot see that all the decision makers in London are Scots or we see it all too clearly, and by Pavlovian training we have learned to accept our non-existent limitations.

When Ireland took its first faltering steps as an independent nation, it had no coal, no steel, no manufacturing sector and its greatest export was people. But it held Ghandi's philosophy that it is better we rule ourselves badly than be ruled by strangers. Now, despite a history of seven centuries of oppression by England there is actually less resentment of England to be found in Ireland than there is in Scotland. Ireland found its self-assurance with economic growth with EU membership, with a seat at the UN and a voice in world affairs. It has its own flag, its own small military, its own national anthem and it can tell George Bush not to land his planes on Irish soil. Scots though an ethnic group have no such identity. Even our presence in the Olympic Games is as a distant cousin of the mighty English family.

All the arguments for and against independence for Scotland revolve around economics or trivia such as, will we still get BBC2. Like Ireland, India or any of the newer independent states, Scotland needs independence to save its very soul. The cringe and the whinge would peter out. There would be nobody to whinge about. The buck would stop here. With the intelligence, the natural resources, the self-sufficiency in food, the water, the wind, and the great inventiveness, Scotland could surpass the Irish economic boom and sit alongside its Celtic brother in the EU and the UN while looking the ex-spouse, England, in the eye with confidence and a new-found amity. ■

Derrick White

The war on terror

In this era of vicious plutocracy, terror and Harry Potter we wish to draw your readers' attention to a little-known formula for a magical tool, the "spectacles of truth". The formula may be found on the pages of Noam Chomsky's "Imperial Ambitions", Ryan Dawson's "Welcome to the USSA" and on the internet (http://www.projectcensored.org/downloads/Global_Dominance_Group.pdf).

Once constructed and propped on the nose, the spectacles reveal an amazing vision. To the far right a trio may be seen. Two benignly grinning men, resembling the British PM and the US President stand to the fore, the latter has the former on a collar and lead. (Yes, many of you don't need the spectacles to see this!) More significantly, behind these two stands a much taller man, grizzled, with an Australian accent and a US passport. Could it be Rupert Murdoch? Whoever he is, he has both the others on choke chains. And now we can see some other people standing chummily alongside the Australian, with strange resemblances to the heads of BAe, Halliburton, ExxonMobil and various other arms and oil companies. Ooh, yes, it looks like the leaders of the US Republican and UK Conservative Parties are there too, and — what a surprise! — some of the leaders of the more conservative "Christian" churches. Have they defaced their bibles? Yes, the bits about helping the poor have been struck out! And surely not the entire Bin Laden and House of Saud clans? All these men, and Hillary Clinton, are wearing dollar-spangled suits and waving the dollar-spangled banner. Oh — why did we not see this before? — there's a titanic figure in the middle, waving a \$10-billion wad, banded "courtesy of the US taxpayer". He's chanting "Zionism forever! To hell with the Israeli people, to hell with the Palestinians, to hell with the Lebanese, to hell with peace!" Ehud Olmert, Israeli PM? But that doesn't make sense, does it?!

Now they're all singing, in perfect multi-part harmony:

"Oh let's go a-killing, we'll get the poor to pay, we'll make lots of lovely weapons, and all take our cut,

Who cares if the poor and stupid are left stuck in a rut? 'Cos we're the neo-Cons and friends, and we don't pay no tax,

We line our pockets and spin them lies, who cares about the facts? They read The Sun and watch Fox News and believe our every word!

This War on Terror's a damn good thing, even if it's absurd! Hooray!"

We call for an immediate ceasefire in Lebanon. We call for tax loopholes for the super-rich to be closed. We call for severe restrictions on cross-media ownership. We call for powers over broadcasting in Scotland to be given to the Scottish parliament. We call for a boycott of The Sun and Fox News. We call for the amount of money political parties spend on campaigning to be drastically curtailed. We call for the impeachment of President Bush and PM Blair.

Dr. R. Eric Swanepoel, Mr. Joe Middleton, Ms. Julieta Pineda, Dr. Douglas C. Speirs, Mr. Ian M. Taylor

Arms trade

The Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) is currently campaigning to shut DESO (Defence Exports Services Organization). The Defence Export Services Organisation is a government department dedicated to promoting exports for private arms companies.

Two crucial steps in the campaign are the

- 1) lobby from Sept to November 2006, and
- 2) the Shut DESO Action Day on Monday, 16 October 2006 in Central London

For this, we need as many people as possible joining us. For more information on the Campaign Against the Arms Trade please visit www.caat.org.uk or contact our press officer Symon Hill on 020 7281 0297.



Campaigning for the return of rail to the public sector

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

Let's put the public back in public transport

Bob Crow, General Secretary

Tony Donaghey, President

reviews

Edinburgh Film Festival

Maggie Gyllenhaal is one of very few American actresses willing to act with their face. The art is best developed in Iranian cinema, where bodies and hair swathed in chadors are, literally, out of the picture. As Sherry Swanson, titular character of **Sherrybaby**, (making its UK premiere at this year's Edinburgh Film Festival (14-27 August). Gyllenhaal balefully gazes at us through sunken, pear shaped eyes that hint darkly at horrors best forgotten.

Sherrybaby bears a passing resemblance to Olivier Assayas' **Clean** (2004). Not unlike Maggie Cheung's jaded lounge singer, Sherry is an ex-drug addict and petty criminal, released from a three year-jail term and looking to reconcile with her young daughter. What distinguishes Laurie Collyer's debut from that serviceable piece of Eurotrash is its raw, ethnographic truthfulness, centred firmly in a blue-collar world of lowered expectations, squandered chances and breadline accounting. In the first few minutes we learn the necessary aspects of Sherry's character as she fidgets on the bus home; bruised, hard-bitten, nervous, strangely formidable. She knows her faults all too well, but such self-awareness is all too often undermined by her Pavlovian social graces. Collyer has clearly given Gyllenhaal reign to develop her onscreen persona and the opportunity is clearly relished; her character is laced with a cold-eyed awareness of what her bargaining chips are (her body) and when to cash them in.

Performances are often called 'brave', but few actresses are as willing to expose their own physical quirks and imperfections as Gyllenhaal, whose other eponymous turn in *Secretary* subjected her to indignities Julia or Charlize would scarcely contemplate. A woman of extremes, her Sherry either teeters on brazen heels or pads sheepishly in trainers, simultaneously ashamed and shameless. Aside from the aesthetic rewards of fine performances and its understated, eloquent cinematography, *Sherrybaby* is small political in the best sense. Sherry's struggle towards respectability involve compromises of Machiavellian magnitude.

Gyllenhaal will rightly take a lot of credit for her work in this film, but it is Collyer who has set her stage. She is a subtle, detailed and in the best sense, feminine. These qualities combine in her handling of the building confrontation between Sherry and her sister-in law Lynette. Collyer sits her two women around it and listens in as they talk about makeup, watch daytime TV and dose substantial amounts of wordless vitriol between every line.

Speaking of euphemisms, the usage of the word 'special' has become particularly insidious, favoured in different guise by flatterers, salesmen and playground bullies. Les (Michael Rappaport) the protagonist in **Special** (Dir. Hal Haberman and Jeremy Passmore) is beset by the entire godless trinity. Rappaport is another fine face actor; his craggy, thick featured face carry countless frustrations, disappointments and humiliations. As a comic-book-obsessed, sweet-natured parking meter attendant Les is low on the Californian food-chain, a hulk of a man pressed into schoolboy shorts and regularly soft-soaped by spoiled valley brats whenever he tries to give them a ticket.

But a cocktail of superhero comics and a drug ('Special') still on clinical trial changes all of that. The drug promises what the American dream demands; self confidence, self-belief and self-possession. It delivers with interest, giving Les the quixotic delusion of possessing actual superpowers – flight, super-strength, and teleportation. What follows is a tragicomic sequence of events whose denouement may be simultaneously uplifting and unsettling.

American mythology also pervades Ashim Aluwhalia's documentary **John and Jane**, which puts 'names' and faces to those disembodied Indian voices with the phoney Anglophile names that dominate helplines and telesales. The call centre featured in this film (the vaguely Orwellian Amway) sells to Americans; so, its employees must be trained to act, and think like Americans. The company gives reductionist seminars in 'American culture' (reduced to casual clothes and credit cards), elocution lessons, and gives each employee an American name.

Making much of the stark contrast between the call centre's clean, clinical interiors and the organic chaos of Mumbai, Aluwhalia presents his six character studies as a journey through escalating levels of Americanisation – which, serendipitously enough, relate roughly to the positions each person holds in the Amway hierarchy. On the floor we find 'Sydney', probably gay, sweetly bitchy when he talks to his mother. He hates the call centre and just wants to be a dancer while fellow peon Glen nurses a much deeper, more choleric hatred of his work. And yet, he has bought into the western ideal, convinced he will one day model for Versace.

At such moments Tom Petty's **American Girl** resurfaced from my mental goo and got fairly well stuck there. This medical-grade injection of western values into a postcolonial culture seems to have spawned a generation of fantasists who are also brute realists. 'Osmond' does not hate Amway as it will propel him on his path to become, not a millionaire, but a billionaire. This Elvis-obsessed Napoleon divides his days robotically between work, and a collection of self-improvement tapes. By contrast, 'Nikki', though equally sold on the dream, is a warm-hearted girl whose love of the company stems from its sense of family, and a strange sort of transcendence she finds in her given name and imagined identity ('...a little more life, somewhere else' as Tom sang it). Such spiritual allusions become alarmingly literal when we find that Amway also sponsors its own Pentecostal Church, with Nikki being one of the converts.

There is an element of caricature here, and one suspects Aluwhalia has cherry picked his cast for the most extreme cases – but he never judges, painting each portrait with commendable sensitivity. And he does his own thinking through various narrative juxtapositions. Amway is a surrogate family, a faceless father figure that subsumes them in dreams of American individualism. Both Nikki and Osmond are orphans whose decision to embrace this dream has a clear logic to it; in the case of Nicholas, he has recovered a form of second childhood. Obsessed with MacDonald's toys and shown wandering in solitude around empty amusement arcades. But the last level of Americanisation in this fascinating film is occupied by the



extraordinary 'Naomi' a 'natural blonde' who seems to have bleached out her Indianness from every part of her – from her accent to her blonde eyelashes to her suspiciously blotchy, pale skin. She is bizarre even in an India hungry to 'globalise' yet in her extremism there is an element of courage all of her own, defiant of pity or condemnation.

The notion of a renaissance for political film was bolstered by this year's festival. In fiction there was Paul Andrew Williams' **London to Brighton**, easily the debut of the year, and Elaine deLatour's immigration-themed **Birds of Heaven**. Al Franken dealt with American elections in **Al Franken: God Spoke**, Al Gore the environment in **An Inconvenient Truth**, Kirby Dick censorship in **This Film is Not Yet Rated** and Laura Poitras Iraq, in the poignant **My Country My Country**. All are to be recommended (though Al Gore remains deeply boring) though a word should go to Rex Bloomstein's **KZ**, a timely reminder of why the legacy of anti-Semitism continues to complicate our moral and political landscape. KZ-Mauthausen was an Austrian Nazi concentration camp, mostly for gypsies and political prisoners until the intensifying process of genocide swelled its population with Hungarian Jews. Now, the houses of SS soldier's are let to middle class commuters and the camp itself is a museum, replete with dioramas, coach park and a cadre of tour guides who don't so much relate history as channel it; 'That's what I mean' says one of the guides his hands stroking the thin air by a museum display 'You feel it? There...'

The weight of the past is tangible, at least in the camp 'Mauthausen won't let go of me' says the guide, a portly, morose man with a drink problem brought on in part, by his daily reliving of past atrocities. 'You always feel you have a mirror held up to you, and you're taking it home with you.' But if history hangs heavy in the camp, then outside it, the country that elected Jorg Haider seems to wear it all too lightly, evidenced by the gaiety in the Frellerhorf, an SS pub that still peddles cod-Deutsch to the tourists.

But rather than spend time wagging the finger, Bloomstein's film concentrates on capturing the feel of Mauthausen itself, the orderly layout of the camp, the idyllic nature of the surrounding countryside. The result is a horribly beautiful film about the educational process itself, and the fine line between commodity and commemoration. The schoolchildren who pour out of the buses into the camp make in themselves a fascinating study in the immediate, visceral effects of the truth; giggling nervously, fashionably dressed, their efforts to stay cool are ruthlessly stripped away by the young guides who greets them – who with his shaved head, gaunt features and serious expression might be an example of ultimate empathy with his subject, or some strange pastiche of Holocaust iconography. He is, we learn late in the film, the grandson of an SS officer, who chose the camp as his preferred form of National Service.

Mitchell Miller ■

Dick Gaughan, Lucky for Some, Greentrax CD Trax 290

'Maybe somewhere along the road you just stopped dreaming' Gaughan sings on the timely opening song of this CD, an angry lament for those radicals of his, and other, generations who have turned their backs on their politics. His body of work stretching now over three decades is one of the finest expressions in song of the struggles and cultures of the left not just in Scotland.

Lucky for Some marks a departure for Gaughan in two significant respects. It is the first album where his own writing accounts for the majority of the songs. He has in the past defiantly asserted the importance of the art of interpreting songs, arguing that pushing singers into only sing their own songs has been driven by commercial interests. His own song writing output, has been significant, with his songs being covered by the likes of Billy Bragg and Christy Moore. The arrangements on the album are also more 'produced', with ventures into electronically programmed backing on some songs. This is markedly different from his last solo CD 'Outlaws and Dreamers' which was something of a triumph due to largely being just him and a guitar.

Both these departures have slightly mixed results. There is some fine material here, both in terms of songs Gaughan interprets and his own. His version of Jim Page's great song 'Anna Mae', about the state sanctioned murder of the Native American political activist in the 1970s, manages to be moving and passionate while also capturing the fury at her assassination. His rendition of 'The Bleacher Lassie O'Kelvinhaugh' is as strong an interpretation of a traditional ballad as any in his repertoire. There is the devastatingly sharp and witty 'The Devil and Pastor Jack'. This chronicles the struggles of Pastor Jack Glass, who he notes Ian Paisley described as something of an extremist, with both the devil and cancer. It draws out the pernicious effects of his obsession with the devil, I suspect as a broader statement about the influence of Calvinism and other narrow versions of religion on Scottish society. On 'The Hunter Dunne' Gaughan turns his ire on mercenaries and the arms trade in a hard lyric which recalls the venom of Hugh MacDiarmid's 'Another Epitaph for an Army of Mercenaries'.

There is some weaker material here though. The arrangements on some of his own songs are over produced. 'Come Gie's a Sang', from the Timewaves suite commissioned for the Celtic Connections festival, has the dubious distinction of being accompanied by what sounds like an electronically generated orchestra. This is a pity as the song is engaging and develops some interesting reflections on the politics of singing and knowledge through a dialogue between a singer and a poet: 'What fame is there for one like me? Reciting poor folk's history?' the poet notes.

Two of his other songs here marked by his encounters with the music business and life on the road recall strongly the ghosts of Five Hand Reel the hard edgy folk rock band Gaughan fronted together with Bobby Eaglesham in the 1970s. There is some sharp writing on both, but again the arrangements are poor, with a drum machine cutting across the songs, and leaving a rather muddy texture to the sound. It is to his credit that Gaughan keeps experimenting with new ways of arranging work and has avoided the temptation to merely reproduce a well trodden formula, but to my reckoning he needs to work with other producers and musicians for this sound to really work.

There is some strong material here and it is refreshing to see Gaughan taking up new challenges both as a songwriter and musician when others of less integrity might be tempted to trade on past glories. His own song writing though deserves the sparser, less arranged treatment he gives to the songs he interprets. As ever Gaughan gives many reasons to keep fighting and dreaming, though there could be slightly more hope and positive vision with which to keep the embers burning.

Dave Featherstone ■



web review

This week I sat down to read the soap opera that was the life of our man in Washington Christopher Mayer I found myself on mental freewheel through some chapters on how good he and "Catherine" were at the domestic chores in the Embassy. Suddenly he made reference to a post graduate year he spent at the School of Advanced International Studies in Bologna, later to be called the Paul H Nitze School. For any student of international politics Nitze's name should be enough to tell you what territory you are at but not, it appears, our future ambassador to the USA. In his own words he later discovered that the school was funded by the CIA. What do they teach them at Cambridge? Nitze was the arch cold warrior of the US a friend and promoter of the views of Edward Teller.

Now at this point I felt that I needed a diversion to remind me of all the crimes of this group that coalesced around Reagan. If you're interested you can follow this meander through the murky funding of front organisations by the American political elite. Let's start with Nitze and his life at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2004/10/22/db2202.xml&Sheet=/opinion/2004/10/22/ixopright.html>. How could our ambassador to Washington not clicked that their was something odd about where he was studying?

But being the recipients of CIA generosity is not confined to toffs like Meyer. My search took me back to the 1960s and an organisation based at Leiden University. At a meeting of the Socialist International in 1990 in the Haig I accompanied the late John Smith. With John was a woman whom he introduced as his foreign affairs advisor, Meta Ramsay now Baroness Ramsay

Henry McCubbin

of Cartvale, she was quite familiar with her surrounding for Meta was the assistant secretary of the CIA funded International Students Conference. She later became secretary of the Fund for International Student Co-operation. The organiser of this fund in Scotland was none other than George Foulkes. For this thread try http://www.nuclearspin.org/index.php/Fund_for_International_Student_Co-operation

Searches on Nitze's name throws up other well kent faces for one of the hits I had was on the site of the British Atlantic Project for the Successor Generation. The head of the Nitze School at John Hopkins University in the US is a founder of this organisation set up in the 1980's to be helpful to impressionable young political activists in Britain and to call in their credit when the US needed help with the stationing of nuclear weapons or wars for oil. Both Wendy and Douglas Alexander have appeared as alumni as has Peter Mandelson, Jonathan Powell, Baroness Elizabeth Symons, Lord George Robertson and Baroness Scotland. For more try: <http://www.baponline.org/history7.htm>.

Perhaps I should get back to Meyer's book now but not before I direct you to another document I tripped over on this ramble through the google thicket. Robin Ramsey, no relation to Meta, gave a talk some time ago on new Labour a topic he follows with close scrutiny. Apart from revealing more about the spooks in new Labour he ended with the following idea "I don't know how you get the party back. Only the failure of corporate funding will drive the leader back to the party." Let's hope he's right:

http://labour-reform.org.uk/main_pages/n_l_history.htm

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Scottish Left Review Fringe, Saturday 4 November, lunchtime at
Craiglockhart campus, Napier University

Kick Up The Tabloids

Will he stay or will he go?

By the time you read this, Tony Blair may no longer be Prime Minister. And, to be honest, he has been losing the plot for some time. In August, while conveniently stranded on holiday during the airport terror crisis, he exhorted us all to join the fight against the religious extremists in our midst, while staying at Sir Cliff Richard's mansion in the Bahamas. More recently, he suggested that problem children could be identified in the womb. This Nazi-sounding policy does have something going for it. Imagine if someone's father was an alcoholic actor who tried to set themselves on fire. You wouldn't touch them with a barge-pole, let alone marry them.

But don't hold your breath. Blair, according to Blair, may go in weeks, in months or in days. What is becoming increasingly uncertain is whether Gordon Brown will succeed him.

To be publicly savaged by a political colossus such as Charles Clarke (Okay maybe not "political colossus" but definitely "colossus") could be terminally damaging. Clarke chose the pages of that well-known Labour-supporting paper The Daily Telegraph to claim that Brown being photographed smirking on leaving a crucial meeting with Blair was "stupid, stupid, stupid".

Now, there are degrees of stupid. For example, one can be pictured smiling smugly after leaving a showdown with the boss or one can allow several hundred foreign sex offenders to be released onto the streets of Britain.

The alternatives to Brown are pretty depressing. One can move further right by choosing John Reid or Alan Milburn or go to the left in the shape of David Cameron. Cameron is currently carrying out a comprehensive re-branding of the Tory Party as the green alternative. This conjures up the intriguing prospect of an environmentally-conscious Tory government which cares deeply about the future of the planet, but doesn't give a flying fuck about ninety-five per cent of the people that live in it.

A letter to the last issue of Private Eye jokingly compared the new Conservative logo to the opening credit sequence of "Six Feet Under", the American TV drama about undertakers. While this is apt, I find the new Tory brand reminiscent of two things, the Lebanese flag and the shirt badge of Nottingham Forest Football Club. Both are particularly relevant. Lebanon is in a state of chaos thanks to the USA and Tony Blair. Nottingham Forest once ruled Britain and Europe in the late 70's and early 80's under a charismatic but barking mad leader who was brought down by an over-fondness for strong drink.

On which subject, I have received a great deal of feedback following last month's article, where I mentioned Tony Blair's plans to give Margaret Thatcher a state funeral. I also received a number of suggestions from audience members when I raised the issue during my Edinburgh Fringe show last month.

The great surprise to me was that, in general, the feedback has been positive. Indeed, many people don't think we should wait until she dies. While we would obviously want Thatcher to pay for the whole thing herself, most people think the British public should have some say in the nature of the ceremony.

A popular choice was to have her cremated at Ravenscraig, with the possible added attraction of chucking her son onto the pyre at the last minute. Many, however, were in favour of the cortege starting out from Bilston Glen colliery with bets being laid on whether it would reach Mortonhall Crematorium before being set on fire. My own particular favourite is to stuff her and send her over to Argentina as a peace offering.

I did receive a heckle from a punter with a rather sinister Northern Ireland accent suggesting we took out a weekend block booking at the Grand Hotel in Brighton to see if they could do the job properly this time.

On the subject of political assassination, the far right have made a great deal of fuss about an upcoming Channel 4 drama in which George W. Bush is "assassinated". I must confess, I too am disturbed by this idea, although I personally am offended that it's only a fictional drama. The right wing argue that the programme is irresponsible in that it might give people ideas. Like nobody's ever thought about assassinating George Bush.

And finally, we had the heart-warming story of Molly Campbell who chose to live with her father in Pakistan rather than her mother in Stornoway. Without doubt, this would be a difficult choice for any 12-year-old to make. On the one hand, one can live in a far-flung outpost of the former British Empire considered by many outsiders to be technologically backward, where many live a life of grinding poverty, struggling to come to terms with the 21st century, their lives governed by the rules of religious fundamentalism. On the other hand, you can live in Pakistan.

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Whose Justice? The Law and the Left is not simply a critique of the current state of our law and justice. Drawing on an array of perspectives and international experiences, the contributors lay out a set of ideas and proposals to resolve and ameliorate the current deficiencies and injustices. In doing so, they cast new light on some of the rather tired and hide-bound traditional approaches of the left to law and justice. Consequently, the political parties contesting the 2007 elections would do well to consider the proposals and conclusions of **Whose Justice? The Law and the Left** if they genuinely want to create the best small country in the world to live in.

Whose Justice? The Law and the Left has contributions from Colin Fox MSP, solicitor-advocate John Scott, Professors Gregor Gall and Jacqueline Tombs, Tommy Sheridan MSP, Sheriff Alastair Duff, councillor Keith Baldassara, former HM Chief Inspector of Prisons Clive Fairweather, justice activists John McManus and Richard Haley, lawyer Mike Dailly, STUC health and safety official Ian Tasker, and Dr Nick McKerrell.



“The free market project has been as much about the contraction of hope as about the expansion of the economy. They didn’t want to defeat the Labour movement, they wanted to defeat the belief that there could be a Labour movement.”

Almost every change in the history of mankind has come from an idea or vision which was shared by a small group of people which grew bigger. This is the social imagination. Almost every one of those ideas was opposed and resisted and almost every one of those people was persecuted or marginalised. This is the control of the social imagination. A sense of resignation – or even hopelessness – is encouraged in order to suppress new ideas at source. The result is that we live in a grossly unequal society in a grossly unequal world and yet we have no widely-shared persuasive ideas about how things should be changed for the better. **No Idea** argues that if we can understand the ways in which the social imagination is controlled, we can recapture it. If we can recapture it, ideas will come and change will happen.



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