

SLR WAS RIGHT



HOW WE PREDICTED THE ENTIRELY
PREDICTABLE, AND HOW THE ENTIRELY
PREDICTABLE CAME TO PASS

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Comment

OK, we know this risks sounding smug, triumphant and arrogant. But surely it's our turn? The Scottish Left Review was pointing out the manifest madness of PFI when the rest were writing in terms of shrewd financial management with teething troubles. If it was so shrewd, why weren't we allowed to see the contracts? Why didn't the mainstream media or any of the politicians ask? Weren't they at all suspicious? What about when serious, respected academics set out the case against PFI with a clarity that should at least have prompted some serious doubt about this gigantic fraud? Between them George Monbiot, Alyson Pollock and others had at least given reason to pause for thought. The SLR was born in 2000 with an issue in which we looked at the landscape (what everything does upon birth). When we looked for a theme for our second issue we choose PFI. You can go back and look at it on-line – see if there was any major point on which our authors were wrong. See if there wasn't a case for a serious rethink from the very early years of PFI. And yet it was a full seven years before there was a serious look at this on our television screens. Quietly, no-one believes in PFI anymore, not even the business lobby. We were right and the 'mainstream' should have listened – to us and others.

If we were right about PFI then we were right about the economy in bucket loads. It is almost sad we aren't three years older because then we'd have got to write about the Dot Com Boom That Could Never End. It ended. What happened next is crucial. All the money that was splashing around the dot-com casino had either to go somewhere else it could breed or it was going to cause major problems for neoliberal capitalism. So what was a safe bet for a safe bet? The housing market. It was about 2000 when Gordon Brown decided (this is unfair – the Masters of the Universe decided and he just went along with it) that the housing market would be restructured as an investment portfolio for the very rich. Do we really have the energy to repeat one more time the relevant statistics about what happened to house prices (and, a small inconvenience, the people who live in them)? Suffice to say that some incredible proportion of the UK's richest people are now 'property developers'. (Alan Sugar sits in front of desperate 'apprentices' telling them about entrepreneurship but almost every penny of his net worth came from property speculation, not entrepreneurship.)

The dot-com bust was channelled into the housing boom and now the housing bust is being channelled into (hold on, you won't believe this...) the 'food derivatives boom'. Food prices are rising in part because of growing conditions, in part because of demand but largely because the wise money came rushing out of housing and went for... Well, what would be a safe bet for a safe bet? Everyone needs food, right? That's not going anywhere...

It's madness. We have an economy which is driven at the top by crazy gambling and secured at the bottom by crazy borrowing. Thing is, the gamblers are Very Big and have the cards stacked in their favour and aren't going to lose (on the whole at least – the Northern Rock thing gives you the flavour). The borrowers are very small and will not be let off with a penny. We know this now. We all know this now. The evidence is everywhere, the data is irrefutable, the people responsible are clear and identifiable, the people who were complicit are even more identifiable. There has to be a revolution in the streets, surely? And there is. Just not our streets. We get information from the newspapers. In the majority of cases in the UK, that means almost precisely the people responsible in the first place. It's on the other streets, where they get their information from the prices at the market stalls, that the riots are beginning. And they are almost certainly just beginning. And we should be warned – if momentum grows it may not be just two million people walking peacefully through London to protest at a war far away. It could be very much nastier.

We were right, we were right, we were right. It is much harder to imagine now but we were right about the environment, climate change and sustainability when it was still hard to be heard even if you were right. OK, Al Gore has taken credit for persuading the world, but we were providing the warnings when he was still licking his wounds in 2001. And – OK, on this one we weren't exactly alone – it turns out that neither Afghanistan or Iraq turned out all that well. Nor, for that matter, did Kosovo. There cannot be much that has been written about the neoconservative policy of international domination in the pages of the SLR which has not come true.

Finally (for the purposes of crowing) we have consistently pointed out that Scottish elections appear to have been decided by the

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left. We know this isn't generally accepted, but it is nevertheless the best explanation of what has happened. Mainstream analysis has not proven to be very accurate – the SNP in a stronger position in 2003 than 1999, the SSP and Greens dead in 2003, the SNP no chance in 2007 and so on. These predictions are the correct ones if you start from the assumption that voters can either be 'mainstream' or 'protest'. It's just that the assumption is wrong.

We picked these five themes to explore but we could have picked many more. Our role in international development and the whole 'we saved the world at Gleneagles' thing? Does even Bono believe that stuff any more? We were dubious. The media? More powers for the Parliament? The rise of interest in nationalism? The political disregard for the arts in Scotland? These are all issues we covered from a perspective different from the mainstream. And there will be fewer people who would disagree with what we published now than there were when we published it.

The decade that began and ended with Tony Blair was a bad decade for clarity, awareness and understanding. In 1997 we began to eat only what we were fed. It was only in 2007 that we started to really see some of it being spat back by the mainstream. There were noble exceptions – there were and are writers and politicians who challenged the cosy consensus. And there were matters so blatant that it was simply too difficult for people to swallow ("we thoughts there were weapons of mass destruction, honest it had nothing to do with oil"). But there was far, far too little great thinking going on in the mainstream in Britain or the wider world.

And yet at the same time there has been a glorious boom in the quality of dissent. The rise of the internet has helped enormously. So have simple technological changes – the Scottish Left Review is commissioned by email, put together on a home computer and digitally printed, making a short run economical. Dissident websites make access to some of the most incisive writing easy.

Change comes when the mainstream realises what the dissidents were talking about. There is always a time-lag. But there is reason to worry in Scotland. Which journalists are capable of breaking through the consensus and discovering about the real world? If the current rise of the SNP and the collapse of Labour surprised them, how will they deal with the discovery of the real state of the UK economy and society?

But there is a serious reason for our crowing. Change comes when the mainstream realises what the dissidents were talking about. There is always a time-lag. But there is reason to worry in Scotland. Which journalists can we believe are capable of rising to the challenge of breaking through the cosy consensus and discovering something about the real world? If the current rise of the SNP and the collapse of Labour surprised them, how will they deal with the discovery of the real state of the UK economy and society? For three years running the best political journalism has been judged – by other journalists – to be petty and pointless

stories about minor expense fiddling which were nothing more than the result of persistent Freedom of Information enquiries. No-one has been rewarded for actually learning in-depth about the subjects they write about. Instead they consider that using a handful of politicians and their staff as sources covers all the issues of importance in the world as we know it. We deserve better, and those of us on the left would be very glad indeed if it wasn't only us who were being proved right about the state of the world. ■

easy money, hard fall

John McAllion looks at the current financial crisis and points out that not only was it entirely predictable – it was accurately predicted years ago

In 2005 New Labour fought the UK general election on the back of an economic record showing 50 consecutive quarters of economic growth. At that time, the Guardian newspaper described Chancellor Gordon Brown as having played New Labour's strongest election card by delivering record levels of employment and generally subdued inflation. The paper's editorial cooed about what it described as the 'Goldilocks economy' – not too hot, not too cold. Back then the Guardian's verdict was widely shared across the media and politics. The BBC's economics correspondent praised New Labour's delivery of long-term economic stability through the elimination of the 'boom and bust' cycle. Tony Blair hailed Gordon Brown as the most successful Chancellor in a hundred years. Gordon Brown modestly claimed to be presiding over the longest period of sustained economic growth in 300 years.

Their 2005 manifesto crowed that New Labour had finally laid to rest the view that Labour could not be trusted to run the economy. Indeed, it boasted that unprecedented economic success had enabled New Labour to link together the dynamism of markets and social justice in a way that would make globalisation work for all. There were few back then who dared to challenge the myth of the steady hand of a New Labour Chancellor who had had already outlasted in Number 11 Downing St Lloyd George and every other British Chancellor since the beginning of the 19th century.

The Scottish Left Review was one of the few voices at the time that dared to dispute New Labour's story of 'unprecedented economic success'. In the January/February 2005 issue we warned our readers that behind the spin about sustained stability and making markets work for the poor lay a very different kind of global economy – one we described at the time as "the mutant hyper-capitalism of today", a global system run by and for the rich. We, after all, remembered the Communist Manifesto's insight that under capitalism "all that is solid melts into air". We understood that what Marx and Engels had predicted in 1848 was now beginning to happen in a 21st century neo-liberal and deregulated global economy that was driven by capitalism's lust for ever expanding markets and profits. We pointed out that by 1995, 95 per cent of all global financial transactions were now purely speculative and unrelated to the real economy where goods and services were made and traded. We knew that by

2005 that position had worsened and was sustained then only by an ever-swelling house price bubble and global gambling on the direction of share prices in the then mania for company mergers and acquisitions.

It was not difficult to forecast the end destination for such an economy based on greed and the hunger for easy money. There would be, we projected, recurring crises threatening workers' jobs, pensions and living standards. There would be growing inequalities as the gap between rich and poor got wider. We even recognised that the engine driving this global hunt for profit – the US economy – was itself vulnerable to sudden shocks. We foresaw that we were returning to the kind of conditions that presaged the Great Depression of 1929. So while New Labour boasted that Britain had "the strongest capital markets in the world" and asked voters to put their faith in the future prosperity of Britain's financial services industry, we issued warnings on the inevitability of a future crisis in a sector controlled by the rich and designed, as we said then, to leave "a tiny group of the powerful free to rob from the rest of us". While Gordon Brown bragged to a bankers and merchants' dinner about the billions generated through the City of London by cross-border lending, foreign exchange turnover and trading in derivatives and secondary bonds, we cautioned against ignoring or neglecting the social, environmental and economic dangers that threatened workers in the real global economy.

Subsequent events proved that we were right and 'the most successful Chancellor in a hundred years' was wrong. Gordon Brown had claimed that 'light touch regulation' and 'competitive' taxes had made London the capital marketplace of the world and home to more foreign banks than any other city in the world. He promised that London's openness to the rest of the world along with its global outlook would provide the basis and the template for the success of the wider British economy. Instead, this very openness allowed American banks to import into our financial sector dodgy sub-prime mortgages via special purpose vehicles and collateralised loan obligations that ultimately spread panic and fear like contagion throughout the British and global banking sector. Where Brown had anticipated soaring tax revenues on the back of British banking success, he was left with a £25 billion taxpayer bail-out of Northern Rock and the imperative of committing up to a further £100 billion of taxpayers' money to shore up a collapsing financial sector. The alternative was to stand by and watch the meltdown of the entire British economy.

As we predicted, the biggest losers have been ordinary workers. Home repossessions in Britain have already risen to their highest level in a decade and will rocket further when the inevitable house price bubble is finally burst on this side of the Atlantic. In the US, almost nine million homeowners are already in negative equity, with a tenth of the \$11 trillion home mortgage debt market classified as sub-prime or dodgy. In the financial sector, thousands of jobs, like those of the 900 Barclays credit card workers in Cumbernauld, have disappeared as markets begin to adjust to the consequences of their own folly. The CBI



is predicting 10,000 job losses in the three month period up to June alone. Workers' pensions at Grangemouth and elsewhere have come under renewed attack. Food and energy prices have soared while the Bank of England warns against the perils of wage cost inflation. The Masters of the Universe who run the Banks and the financial institutions may have caused this crisis, but – as ever – it is the workers who will pay the ultimate price for their recklessness.

So, to coin a phrase, this is another fine economic mess that the neo-liberals have got us into. We even have the IMF agreeing with us now following their recent description of the current credit crisis as "the largest financial shock since the Great Depression". However, being proved right is little consolation when such a heavy price will be paid by workers everywhere. Better to ask ourselves how and why we let the neo-liberals get away with doing this to us?

Some of the answers to those questions can again be found in back copies of the SLR. Back in 2005 we highlighted what we described as the "economic ignorance" of almost all of us.

We argued that the general public, almost all politicians, nearly every journalist and a large proportion of business people and economists had failed to fully understand the surreal craziness of deregulated international financial markets. We did not intend to slur one and all by such a remark, but rather to draw attention to the way in which the financial elite quite deliberately mystify all matters financial and economic in order to hide from the general view what they are really up to. In 2005 few people fully understood what the term 'sub-prime mortgages' really meant. Fewer still would have been aware of the dramatic increase in these kinds of mortgages on the other side of the Atlantic – their value more than tripled to \$600 billion in a five-year period. Outside of those engaged in selling and profiting from them, no-one would have known that house salesmen were signing up hundreds of thousands of mortgage customers known as 'ninjas' – people with no income, no job and no assets. In other words, US salesmen were pocketing generous commissions for selling expensive mortgages to poor customers who had no prospects of ever paying them back.

Even if we had known, most of us would have seen no connection between the excesses of America's domestic housing market and our own economic prospects on the other side of the world. But then we probably hadn't fully understood the true implications of the liberalisation and deregulation of global financial markets that all of our pro-business political parties were assuring us were the key to our future economic success. Most of us probably didn't understand that a more competitive financial sector had a down as well as an up side. We didn't grasp that the banks freed from tight scrutiny and regulation, and itching for ever higher profits, had themselves embarked on a binge of borrowing that they used to support hedge funds, private equity buy-outs and a variety of structured investment vehicles, including the

now infamous mortgage backed securities. We didn't really appreciate that trading in mortgage-backed securities was more lucrative the higher the risk attached to those mortgages. We hadn't heard of securitisation or collateral debt obligations that allowed the higher risk associated with these high profit mortgages to be spread in packages around the global financial system. We didn't know that our biggest and supposedly most responsible banks were up to their ears in this dodgy business and accounting for it 'off balance sheet', away from the prying eyes of regulators in the Bank of England.

Had we known, we would then have been able to understand why millions of defaulting mortgage payers in the US would have a major impact on jobs, houses and pensions here in Scotland and in the rest of our interconnected and neo-liberal world. We might even have been able to see that this entire speculative asset bubble was kept aloft by unsustainable levels of corporate and personal debt that guarantee short-term gain for the banks and finance industries but long-term misery and suffering for the rest of us. (Through their gold and platinum cards,

finance houses charge 18 to 20 per cent for money for which they themselves are paying three to four per cent). But, of course, the entire system is predicated on keeping as many ordinary citizens as possible in the dark and ignorant of how our economy really works and who really benefits from it.

As the SLR editorial said long before the credit crunch hit, capitalism is a crazy system that gets crazier the longer it survives without effective challenge. Estimates of the final cost of this latest crisis vary – but as of February this year the IMF was estimating total losses in the region of \$945 billion. That enormous sum will only get bigger as time goes by. We know that the ruling elite want us to believe that there is no alternative to capitalism. We know that they want to hide the truth about capitalism from us by a combination of esoteric language and complex financial structures (usually referred to as financial innovation). But we cannot blame our ignorance on them alone.

This crisis has thrown a light into the darkest recesses of turbo-capitalism. It is now our responsibility to see and to understand capitalism for what it is and to expose what we described in 2005 as the "distortions, lies and omissions" of "a nexus of power which protects itself from egalitarian reform". The SLR's bottom line is simple and clear. There can be neither political democracy nor political freedom while economic power remains in the hands of a narrow and unaccountable elite. Our role is to spread as widely as possible the confidence and belief that there is a better way and that together we can find it and make it happen. ■

John McAllion is a member of the SSP and a former Labour MP and MSP

the bombs didn't work

Isobel Lindsay looks over eight years of anti-war, anti-nuclear writing in the *Scottish Left Review* and shows how what once was seen as dissent is increasingly seen as mainstream common sense

The two big war and peace issues involving the UK since the founding of *Scottish Left Review* have been the Afghan and Iraq wars and the further entrenchment of Britain's nuclear commitment with the decision to undertake the Trident renewal programme. The enthusiastic militarism of New Labour went further than most people on the left could have expected and, far from there being any interest in phasing out the Trident base, we had the decision to commit us to another fifty years of nuclear weapons (all of them now in Scotland).

SLR was far from being alone as a critic of these decisions. That went well beyond the traditional left and the peace organisations and involved much of civic Scotland. But we did produce a consistent critique since the Afghan war and have explored new approaches to international justice and peace issues. In the middle of the first phase of the Afghan war we said the implications were (January 2002):

1. The brutality threshold has been lowered. If you say you are engaged in an anti-terrorist campaign, you can do anything no matter how brutal and the NATO powers will give at least tacit support. You can destroy a whole city as in Chechnya or hundreds of Kurdish

villages in Turkey and this will be 'understood'.

2. Civil rights are disposable. If you say it is in the name of anti-terrorism, you can lock people up without trial or access any form of private communication.
3. The cowboys are in charge. International institutions and treaties are completely marginalised and the US will do what it wants, where it wants.
4. The UK is seen by the rest of the world as the European voice of America, just another client state.
5. Unless those with grievances are encouraged to develop non-violent resistance strategies, terrorism will be regarded as the only way to make an impact. The type of terrorism will become even more underground and difficult to track.
6. Good news for the arms industries. The message is that those with the most powerful modern weapons win. No-one may feel they can take on the US in a conventional military conflict but in relation to their own regional conflicts, the drive to acquire new weapons systems is set to increase.

A very accurate prediction except we have retrospectively to modify the last point. It was certainly good news for the arms industry and the security services industry but the 'winning' of this war and the later Iraq war was very short term.

There were many, including some on the left, who went along with the Afghan attack on the assumption that it would have a liberating effect from an oppressive regime, especially for women. Some simply thought it was inevitable that the US would have to find someone somewhere to bomb in revenge for 9/11 and that a 'big bang' success would be sufficient to satisfy the dented pride and prestige of the US. It might as well be the unpleasant Afghan regime

as anywhere else and it was weak enough to be defeated quickly. Never mind the massive destruction of infrastructure and people in a poor country and the franchising of much of the fighting on the ground to brutal warlords. But even we underestimated how stupid and arrogant the Bush government would be in failing to focus on economic and social development for several years in Afghanistan before embarking on another



major military adventure. While few can now defend the Iraq war, we are still subject to a stream of propaganda with the Labour Government, the Royals and the media spinning together a Boy's Own tale of goodies, baddies and the prospect of victory, all of it just as deplorable and stupid as the initial war.

With the Iraq war we were in the mainstream and that mainstream has seldom been so right in its predictions. While opposition to the war brought Scotland's largest demonstration for decades, it was one of the low points of the Scottish Labour Group at Holyrood that they refused to support a motion against the war that would have reflected the majority view of the Scottish public. In retrospect, it would have been opposition to this war and later to Trident renewal that could have given Scottish Labour a distinctive, non-Westminster identity but there was no vision or courage to offer that leadership.

The Iraq saga undermined most of what remained of Labour's moral authority and, while there were individuals who honourably stood out against their leadership, the impact of the war diminished even further the numbers and conviction of the rank and file. On the other hand it encouraged alliance-building among all the others – the trade unions, the churches, the SNP, the Liberal Democrats, the SSP, the Greens, the Muslim community. This alliance was to continue around the other big war and peace issue – Trident – and was important, particularly for the SNP in helping it to gain acceptance among the left and civic activists.

In the third issue of SLR (February 2001), the late Tony Southall comprehensively outlined the case against Trident and the British nuclear role.

“When we take on Trident we should be clear that we're taking on a critical part of the British capitalist state. Nuclear weapons were developed from 1946 when a state that had been getting economically weaker and politically less influential since the late 19th century tried to reassert itself by becoming the world's third nuclear power and developing its own supposedly independent nuclear deterrent. Thus Britain was able to continue to justify a permanent position on the Security Council and its claim to sit at every table. The British bomb was one of the components in promoting the myth for its own population that Britons still ruled the waves. It took its place alongside the royal family, the supposedly democratic parliament, the legal system and a myriad of institutions that provided the kernel for the kind of flag-waving patriotism that's a feature of English culture in particular.....It [the Blair Government] showed its manifesto commitment to pursuing worldwide nuclear disarmament was so much hot air as it voted against a UN resolution to set up a conference with exactly that aim.”

The only British nuclear weapons are now based at the Coulport/Faslane complex so the constitutional issue is closely interlinked with the disarmament issue. Were Scotland with full state powers to decide that Trident should go, it would be very difficult and expensive for Westminster to find a suitable site and build the necessary infrastructure. Campaigning against Trident had already accelerated over the past decade with the

base blockades and hundreds of arrests so the announcement that the UK Government was proposing to spend billions on a new generation of nuclear weapons that would be operational for another fifty years was seen by many beyond the organised peace movement to be an outrageous decision and one that flew in the face of our commitments in the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Even before the vote was taken at Westminster, a massive and expensive project related to the new Trident programme was well under way at Aldermaston. This involved building the largest computer in Europe, a huge laser and other experimental design facilities and new bomb manufacturing development at Burghfield. The assumption was always that even if some Labour MPs rebelled, it would go through the Commons with Tory votes.

The reasons for taking what many, including some pro-nuclear sources, considered to be a premature decision was probably explained by technical developments in the US, the commercial interest of Lockheed Martin which runs Aldermaston, and the determination of Blair to commit to a long-term nuclear weapons strategy. It is to Brown's shame that in the notorious Mansion House speech, he unequivocally said 'Me Too'. This was a shock to many in Scotland who still believed that Brown would be different when he became Prime Minister. As with the Iraq war, opposition in Scotland covered a wide institutional range as well as a substantial popular majority.

But changes have taken place in Scotland over the last year. After the new Government came in last May, the Greens took the initiative to table a motion against Trident replacement. This time Labour abstained and the Liberal Democrats voted with the SNP and the Greens so the motion was passed with a substantial majority and is now official Holyrood policy. It has enabled the Scottish Government to convene a working group on Scotland Without Nuclear Weapons to examine what initiatives the Government could take within the devolution powers.

There is, of course, another dimension to the war and peace issues. What positive initiatives could we take in Scotland to promote peacemaking and global justice? Over the years in this magazine activists like Helen Stevens, Margaret Lynch, Judith Robertson, Liz Law have written about our need to develop alternatives to war and exploitation. Scotland needs to generate a new international vision. The Left has been right in its critique of militarism. It needs also to show that there are alternatives.



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canute is dead!

Robin McAlpine remains convinced that commentators are misunderstanding Scottish politics

As the Scottish politico rolled up his trousers and stepped out onto the beach he moved with the serenity and assurance we find only in those entirely certain of themselves. Of course he was; he had spent a lifetime writing/talking/strategising/campaigning/influencing/ridiculing Scottish politics (the verbs are interchangeable depending on which bit of the Scottish scene was his speciality). There is nothing new in this land and damn few surprises. We see him; he steps forward in the early evening light and stands a metre above the tide line. "The tide shall not come in tonight" he whispers – no need to raise one's voice about something so obvious. "The tide shall stand still." Eager watchers might momentarily have wondered about our hero, standing in front of a sea and denying that it will move. But his assurance, his calmness... Oh, and the woman standing next to him, also in bare feet, also staring at the sea, also expecting the tide to freeze. And the man next to her and the man next to him and so on, down the beach and into the horizon. Surely they can't all be wrong? Thankfully they are. In minutes they are knee-deep in water. But our modern-day Canutes are cleverer than their 10th century predecessor – they will look at each other for a second and the surprise will pass from their expressions and the serenity and calmness will return. "We knew this would happen" they whisper as one. And immediately the land becomes once again as it was – a land with nothing new and no surprises.

And that is a short version of the last ten years of 'received wisdom' in Scottish politics. The universal truths just would not change no matter what happened in the real world around them. So, for example, no party could expect success by proposing a rise in income tax. See – the SNP just stood on that platform and they didn't win. Well, yes, they did get their second highest share of the vote ever. And yes, four years later they dropped the policy and did significantly worse. But that doesn't change the truth, does it? This article will refrain (with some effort exerted) from identifying individual journalists, commentators, politicians or others. However, there remain an alarmingly large group of people who will reflexively write that "of course, a party which proposed a tax rise would be punished by the voters just as the SNP's Penny for Scotland policy was in 1999". This statement is false and can be demonstrated to be false on the basis of empirical voting data, data derived from polling on voting attitudes and an intellectual analysis. The evidence in favour of it is – well – 'common sense'. On one occasion I spent an hour talking to a well-known Scottish political journalist on this exact subject. I cited explicit polling data of a number of sorts, material from social attitudes surveys, rational argument on the basis of what had happened in recent years to parties on the basis of their approach to progressive policies in relation to tax, even simple analyses of the actual effect of tax changes on different social groups. "C'mon" I was told, "no-one believes that stuff". What; evidence? Was I really being told that "what everyone knew" (despite being supported by no sort of evidence at all) trumped large volumes of verifiable data proving that "what everyone knew" was wrong? And there really is no evidence to support this claim. The best that people come up with is "well, Kinnock in 1992 and the Sun and all that". In fact, reputable studies carried out at the time demonstrated that the

factor which was most pertinent in Kinnock's defeat was a lack of public confidence in him personally and not the tax question (I am aware of no qualitative study to refute this point).

The problem is that people follow 'the narrative' and just run along with it. But the narrative is wrong. The narrative runs something like as follows: Scotland as a nation is a bit to the left of the rest of the UK because of its stronger sense of community. It has also become culturally averse to the Tories because of Thatcher. But in fact it isn't notably more socialist than the rest of the UK and is often more conservative on social and 'moral' issues. It also dallies with a bit of romantic nationalism but remains rationally attached to the UK. The primary interest among Scottish people is competence in government. This meant that for many years the people of Scotland supported a moderate Labour Party – a little bit more left, reliable enough, safe enough, willing to give Scotland a little more breathing space but sure to secure the union. A vote for Labour was culturally closer to Scottish roots and values but politically safe enough not to worry about. That is the Scottish orthodoxy. There are two strands of alternative politics in Scotland. One is the old, land-owning aristocracy and the suburban upper middle classes which held for cultural reasons to the Conservative Party. These people did not identify with the communitarian identity of Scotland which was too heavily linked to small-L labour. The other was a small group of ideologically-driven nationalists who for purely cultural reasons wished separation from the UK. They were almost exclusively grouped outside the urban central belt and political views were heavily subordinated to cultural views. This is Scottish Politics – one dominant, two subdominant. The remainder is Protest – disillusioned who drift to the SNP for reasons other than positive choice, or who dabble in other forms of fringe politics. (You can add a sub-subdominant strand as well – those who were uncomfortable with the Labour-labour culture but equally uncomfortable with the harsher policies of Tories – the LibDems.)

This is the narrative. It is wrong. Not miles wrong, but wrong enough. The first major mistake is the idea that there are three options plus 'protest'. In fact, the three options are narrow and have become ever narrower. The Labour Party in Scotland has never been a real option for election and radical at the same time. It has been progressive and reformist to varying degrees, but in the last 40 years never more than that. The Conservatives in Scotland have never been particularly radical either, tending towards the wetter end of Tory politics. A higher degree of radicalism could be found in the SNP at various times (usually a slightly more radical tinge of the more progressive elements of Scottish Labour politics) but the energy of the movement was probably more cultural for much of its existence. This simply does not cover anything like the spectrum of political opinion. To stray beyond these narrow confines no more represents protest than does changing breakfast cereal. "But Ms McHendrie, everyone buys either Cornflakes or Weetabix. Is this muesli a protest?"

The second major mistake is that it assumes that people are stupid, selfish, docile and interested only in personality. The

national phraseology is 'competence', 'good management' and (two words which have come to mean something directly opposite to what they should) 'public services'. To hear one more time talk of 'the people's priorities' – which means schools, hospitals and roads and nothing, absolutely nothing else – will result in haemorrhaging of the remaining political sense we have in our heads. It is the political equivalent of being told "don't you worry about the bank account dear, just pick yourself out a nice frock" ("don't you worry about the international banking system, look at your shiny new PFI school"). Now, the corollary of this isn't meant to be taken – most people do not want to be deeply involved in complex political analysis. But the caricaturing of the 'ordinary, working family' makes people misunderstand. People have values and they are more complex than a convenient 'moral compass' (which seems only to point in the direction most suited to financial interests). They don't want to be fully up to speed with the implications of financial derivatives and complex securities arrangements. But they (a) don't generally want to see the rich becoming increasingly richer by directly exploiting the very poorest and (b) they sure as hell don't want their own modest prosperity and wellbeing to be dragged down as a result. It is not a "give us a clean hospital and do whatever else you want to the world – especially if you're charming". Want to know what are people's priorities? Why is the price of petrol and gas skyrocketing for punters while profits are breaking records for the Big Guys? Why is food costing so much and does it have anything to do with great big profits being made on the back of gambling on the cost of food? If we weren't either bombing or privatising poor countries into a pervious era might I feel safer – and better about myself? How much money do I give to support the sale of cluster bombs? People don't always start out seeing it that way, but politicians would be scared how quickly they come round to seeing it that way when they are given just a very little information. People are not stupid or docile by nature – they are kept that way by the 'narrative'. And they don't care only about personality – Gordon Brown's poll ratings were absolutely fine when people thought he was dull but well-meaning and effective.

And still none of this changes anything. The narrative remains, the beaches are strewn with politicians agreeing with each other about something which is wrong and the surprises just keep hitting them. Remember they said that the Greens and the SSP were just a one-off fluke in 1999, only to return six-fold four years later? Remember they said the SNP would be in a much stronger position to fight in 2003 having dropped the Penny for Scotland policy? Remember we were told there was no chance for an SNP breakthrough in 2007? It's a little like going to the garage to have the problem with your car misdiagnosed. Again and again. But still knowing that the same thing will happen in the next garage.

Thankfully, there is somewhere to come for a better take on things. Here. Let us tell you; again – look at every pre- and post-election special of SLR and you'll find we've been getting it right. Of course, much of the narrative is true. Scotland isn't so different from England in attitudes because much of England is much more like Scotland than people think. The

support for Labour is remarkably strong all things considered and it is largely cultural. But that culture is an expression of a more progressive mindset and one which is more inclined to cultural and economic egalitarianism. So yes, Labour is largely what they think. The Tories are indeed a cultural and political hangover in Scotland. And there is a fairly narrow-minded cultural element to nationalism. That much is right. But the narrow nationalism isn't represented by the SNP. The party has its flaws, but the 'crazy-ginger-bearded' stereotype is an establishment character assassination, not an analysis. People are not looking for stability – Jack McConnell offered that and it was rejected. Nor competence – I don't think anyone would

claim Jack McConnell was incompetent. But above all, to vote outside the ken of the just-a-little-too-smug commentator class is not a protest but a choice. Let us one more time set out our analysis of a decade of Scottish politics.

There are big blocks of voters who have barely moved – a large chunk of Labour voters, a bigish chunk of SNP voters and two smaller chunks of Tory and Lib Dem voters. There is virtually no evidence of a constituency to the right of this (they had their chance to vote for the People's Alliance among others and they either

got lost or don't exist). But there is a constituency significantly to the left of this group and it is every bit as consistent as the other groups. They are probably bigger than the Tories or the Lib Dems and they are certainly more influential than any of the other party groupings. They are Scotland's king-makers and they are socialist (or very close). In 1999 when we were all getting used to the new system and didn't know what it could do they split; half went to the SNP in recognition of its Penny for Scotland campaign, the rest spread between the SSP, the Greens and (in the expectation that it might be more radical than its southern wing) the Labour Party. So we got small parties, a big SNP vote and a Labour administration. Next time they knew what to do, they left the SNP which had dropped its Penny for Scotland campaign and left the Labour Party (which was now waging war in Iraq) and went to the Greens, the SSP and the independents. We ended up with a big group of them after 2003. They chose a Rainbow Parliament and they got it. But by 2007 they were done. The SSP split had quite a bit to do with it, but it was probably more to do with a renewed determination to get rid of the pro-market Labour Party combined with a return of Alex Salmond whom many identified as a radical. And that's what we got – they went SNP and that is our Government. This left grouping – as big as the Tories – has decided every Parliament Scotland has had. The evidence is compelling and – to their credit – the better politicians are beginning to realise it.

So we were right. Now just watch: it isn't Salmond they really like, its transformation. The party which shows it can transform things and will not just accept the world as it is handed to it will be the one that gains momentum. Barring an unexpected discovery of transformation by one of the other parties, that looks like it will mean social democratic nationalism with a strong Nordic socialist flavour. Let's see – I guess we'll know in five years.

Robin McAlpine is Editor of the Scottish Left Review

green lessons not learned

Peter McColl looks at the way SLR has covered green politics over the last eight years and finds much which seems ahead of its time even now

Determining whether you've been right on a green policy is all too often all too difficult. Greens haven't had the opportunity to try out many of their radical policies to deliver social and environmental justice. This means that it's difficult to say whether Greens were right or not. However, it has become clear over the past couple of years that the concerns central to Green politics are concerns of importance to us all.

The highest profile example of Greens being right was in their concern about Climate Change. This has moved from being a fringe concern, subject to widespread contestation. Now figures as senior as Government Chief Scientists take it seriously. Where Greens have yet to be proved right is in their contention that there are practical solutions to climate change that will improve quality of life not diminish it.

Another area where Greens have lead debate is on measuring domestic progress. Only Greens have consistently rejected economic and reductive measures of progress such as GDP growth, measures of industrial output or house prices. The extensive research by organisations such as the New Economics Foundation has demonstrated that, while the economy, money supply, rapid circulation of capital and individual wealth have increased over the past 35 years, happiness, contentment and the fabric of society have suffered drastically. Similarly, Greens have had a long term interest in delivering health through creating a healthy society, rather than through health insurance schemes (private or national) that take no account of the causes of ill health. While there is clearly a need for a national health service, it is also a clear that a society that does nothing to promote positive health merely creates more need for a health service.

Robin Harper in one of the earliest editions of the Scottish Left Review (Issue 6 – 2001) set out a series of provisions for a win-win economy. This vision has been recognised in the actions of larger parties attempting to steal green clothing – the SNP's commitment to a 'greener' Scotland (where little money is spared to deal with social and environmental justice, while spending on totemic road projects such as the M74 is prioritised) and the Liberal Democrats' short-lived claim to be the 'real green party'. Mr Harper's article outlines the role that renewables, recycling and organic agriculture can play in relocalising and decarbonising the economy. Whilst a partial picture, this was well ahead of its time in showing how green politics could shape an economy, rather than being merely being the regulatory framework beloved of environmentalists or the 'green' tax cash cow beloved of Alistair Darling and Gordon Brown.

Scottish Left Review has carried a good deal of material about Green politics with both a big and small 'g'. Eurig Scandrett surveyed some of the ideological tensions arising within the Scottish Green Party in SLR 32 (2006), with an interesting case study pointing to questions over where Greens will go on questions of equality. It is in the area of economy that perhaps Green politics is yet to be fully understood by other parties and commentators. In SLR 36 Molly Scott Catto explores the role

for cooperatives in ending global poverty. While not uniquely Green, the role of cooperatives in promoting socially-just jobs, goods and services in a way that accounts for the social and environmental impact is essential to green politics. The antipathy of the current UK government to mutuality can be seen in its regulatory drive to push Standard Life out of mutuality and into being a shareholder-controlled Public Company. Meanwhile the shoddy practice of Northern Rock is rewarded with billions of public money. It remains to be seen if the travails of the banking system, and the neo-Darwinian posturing of Northern Rock's former chairman will lead to a resurgence of cooperatives and mutuality – but it's something I'm fairly certain greens have got right.

The Green enterprise strategy in the 2003-2007 Parliament focused on the broader aim of promoting social enterprise. Mark Ballard headed up this strategy, and writes at some length about it in SLR 22. It is here that the Green economic approach has become most successful. Social enterprise has been taken up by the SNP government and is spearheading much of the Government enterprise strategy. While the SNP government sees social enterprise in a rather different way to greens – more



focussed on providing government services at lower cost – the commitment in rhetoric to social enterprise is encouraging. By creating a synergy of voluntary sector good practice with a move away from dependence on charity the opportunities to deliver social and environmental justice will grow.

In SLR 26 (January 2005) Molly Scott Catto provided an interesting analysis of the links between this green economic analysis and the commitment to delivering well being. Her statement that when...

“assessing the costs of the economic system we live within on people, the facts and figures are, frankly, staggering. The costs of the negative consequences of escape routes from the society capitalism has created are vast: illegal drug use and alcohol each cost the UK around the same as the law-and-order budget. Meanwhile, the quantities of Prozac and related feel-happy, keep-working drugs being prescribed are so great that the amounts being excreted and recycled through our water system are at levels that may amount to mass medication. This is clearly not a very happy society.”

This comes very close to being the ideal description of what, for greens, is wrong in society. Her sketch of the solutions is radical, far reaching and would certainly address the problems she outlines. The key is to provide a citizens’, or basic income scheme that would be the “wolf that will tear apart the link at the heart of capitalist economics between paid labour and survival”. By assuring everyone of an income sufficient to meet their needs, Greens would deprive big business of the threat of penury that makes low pay, poor conditions and demeaning work acceptable. The citizens’ income is based on the principle that the products of the earth and of society form a common treasury to be shared by all. At heart this is a demand based on the principles of equality and fairness.

Similarly, the SLR 26 article restates the Green case for a Land Value Tax. This has become particularly relevant in the light of the debate on local income tax. Again, the Green policy focuses on sharing wealth (as opposed to sharing income) and would act to tax the forms of privilege that are the hallmarks of the class system. It is large houses in good locations that have always been the foundation of class dominance and these are what a Land Value Tax would target, while a local income tax punishes those who have to work. Of course, a land value tax would have to be accompanied by a democratic planning system with the strength to deliver sustainable communities. Greens are the only party proposing a wealth tax that includes property that is also progressive. The failure of the Council Tax should not condemn the concept of taxing property, and given the current impasse over local income tax, we may yet see a Green policy in action. SLR’s focus on this issue at a time when it was relatively obscure shows foresight.

Reviewing what green literature SLR has featured shows a focus on the economic aspects of green thought. The mainstream media chooses to ignore this – much to the cost of green politics in particular and Scottish politics in general. It is – as

with all politics – in the economics that Greens will be judged. It is encouraging to see a growing consensus around issues like climate change that Greens have long championed. It is unfortunate that the solutions seem much harder to achieve consensus on.

It is clear that a Green future would be a much more liveable future – a future where people matter to the economic decisions we make much more than abstract notions of comparative advantage and the brute profit margins of private companies. At the heart of Green economics is the person – and this will reflect itself in the health and happiness of everyone in a green society. Indeed the great failure of the left has been to respond

in an effective way to the challenge of individualism on the right. For too long the right has successfully delivered a form of individual liberty that is at the same time intoxicating, but also fundamentally destructive. Greens seek to reclaim the interests of people without simultaneously making those people pay the price of servitude to free market dogma. It remains for the Scottish Green Party to make a serious appeal on

the issues around poverty, social justice and economic equality that could lead to Green economics becoming a significant trope in Scottish politics. The work on social enterprise and on land value tax has provided valuable opportunities for serious achievements for social and environmental justice. With Green MPs seeming ever more likely at the next UK election, the chance that Greens will provide dramatic progress for the left in the UK and Western Europe.

The choice of SLR to focus on Greens’ approach to social justice and the economy is also interesting, as it points the way to a more effective Green politics. While the politics of reformist environmentalism has some traction, the need for Scottish Greens to focus on social justice and the green economics has become clear with the 2007 Scottish Parliament election failure, and the relative success of Greens in London standing on a clear left platform.

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after the cash-grab

The anti-PFI case was always overwhelming. What now asks Henry McCubbin?

Since a series of articles since our second edition of *Scottish Left Review* in December 2000, we have been tracking the malign effects of PFI/PPP on public sector policy in Scotland. It gives us little pleasure to be able to report that we had predicted the problems for public services of national importance that this method of corporate welfare would provide. We started with the Skye Bridge project which was the most blatant attempt by a dying Tory administration to construct a financial system that would allow a private company to divert a tax revenue stream i.e. tolls into their bank account. All other PFI/PPP schemes have been a variation on this theme. It could be compared to someone being legally permitted to branch their domestic electric supply from before their meter. This however was never how it was sold; it was sold as though the private sector was providing funding out of thin air whereas the truth is that capital, revenue and profit is totally covered by taxation thus - privatising profit and socialising costs - New Labour's leitmotif. Recently two of our contributors, Jim and Margaret Cuthbert, have presented an analysis of the funding of Hairmyres Hospital in Lanarkshire. Their findings give serious cause for concern at the waste of public funds. So outrageous was the additional cost of using PPP/PFI in this case that Alex Neil MSP was able to claim that the NHS could have built two and half hospitals for the same outlay using our previously more efficient public sector funding methods.

What we have paid less attention to has been the propaganda battle to popularise the alternatives. This, though in some way disappointing, should in no way be surprising since Labour, Liberal and Conservative parties are all fully subscribed to the inherent neo-liberalism of the Washington consensus as are all of the proprietors of our national media outlets. But in Scotland we have a new political framework in place. After years of being harangued by Labour politicians telling us that there was 'only one show in town' along come the SNP putting alternatives into effect. Not that their Futures Trust will necessarily prove to be a working alternative but it and the decision with regards to the traditional funding arrangements for Glasgow Southern hospital show that there are alternatives. A recent book in the Socialist Renewal series 'New Labour's Attack on Public Services' by Dexter Whitfield has in it a well thought out set of proposals, one might almost call it a manifesto of action for publicly owned and democratically controlled public services which we should consider. There is an alternative to modernisation by marketisation and to its negative impacts and drastic consequences. Below are the central themes and core policies of an Alternative Modernisation Strategy. It should be part of a wider economic and social strategy for Britain.

- Restatement of public service principles and values which are embedded in all policies, programmes and projects.
- Democratic accountability and transparency including a revitalisation and empowerment of local government.
- Integration of strategic policy making and service provision with the abolition of the commissioning/outourcing agenda.
- Long term planning for social needs.
- Better horizontal and vertical integration of local, regional and national public bodies.
- Equalities, social justice and sustainable development mainstreamed.

- Integrated impact assessment of policies, programmes and projects required at planning and implementation stages.
- Increased capacity of local and central government and public bodies, drastically reducing the use of management consultants.
- Quality employment and a better skilled workforce, with education, training and learning, workforce development, and good quality pensions.

An alternative modernisation agenda would include:

- National and regional planning - New national economic and spatial strategy with designated growth strategies developed for each region. Integration of investment strategies, innovation, research, knowledge transfer, cluster development and local regional production and supply chains to maximise local employment and more sustainable economies.
- Increased public investment in the infrastructure and termination of the Private Finance Initiative (including NHS Local Improvement Finance Trust and Building Schools for the Future) and Strategic Service-delivery Partnerships.
- Refocus on social justice and reducing inequalities through redistribution and targeting together with equality impact assessment of all policies and projects. Comprehensive equality legislation covering all equality strands.

Democratic accountability, participation and transparency to include:

- Local government to takeover responsibility for primary care and public health.
- Democratisation of the NHS and regional bodies and abolition of Foundation status for hospitals.
- Return all quangos, arms length companies and trusts within the framework of local government.
- Genuine user/employee and community organisation/trade union participation in the policy making process, together with additional resources for community organising and fuller disclosure of information. Community and voluntary organisations to be involved in the design, planning and evaluation of public policy instead of being coerced into service provision.
- Harness potential of information and communications technology to widen community access, e-citizenship and e-democracy.
- Replace business domination of task forces, arms length companies and other organisations with elected members and wide community representation.
- Public sector consortia or lead-authority concept to develop joint approach to information and communications technology and corporate service provision for local authorities, health and other public bodies where desirable, using secondment employment model and democratic, accountable organisational structures.
- Abolition of market based mechanisms in education, health, social care and other services including the removal of competition and procurement requirements. Service Improvement Plans agreed and monitored by Elected Members, users and trade unions, to serve as basis for in-

house service provision.

- More radical approach to sustainable development: A new sustainable development framework for national and international action devoid of the liberalisation agenda, new standards for sustainability, emphasis on local and regional production and supply chains.
- Extensive training programme in public service principles and values to reinvigorate public service management and the implementation of an alternative modernisation strategy,
- Choice and flexibility in the public sector: Increased choice is possible within public services by extending and expanding in-house services, and using spare capacity and peaks and troughs to widen choice without establishing markets. Choice with collective empowerment exercised with other users is more powerful and meaningful than individual market-based choice. Abolition of market based mechanisms.
- New public service management: Replace competitions for pilots and pathfinders by planned and negotiated projects which are fully evaluated before they are mainstreamed.
- Re-regulation of markets to address social needs, increase public control, and improve environmental, health and safety, economic, and sustainable development benefits.
- Genuine community schools with child care, health, adult learning, leisure and other local services operating extended hours.
- Implementation of the 4th option for Council Housing with immediate additional public investment and the transfer of arms length management organisations back to local authorities.
- National Public Transport Plan rebalancing rail/bus transport and road building with new investment in inter-city and local public transport.
- Opposition to the World Trade Organisation General Agreement on Trade in Services liberalisation proposals: Demand exclusion of public service, and welfare state functions together with strengthening of adherence to human rights and labour regulations.
- Remain vigilant on how the modified European Union Service Directive is drawn up and reflects the agreed compromises.

Dexter Whitfield also recognises that marketisation is still being rolled out at this moment so not only do we need to consider alternatives but we need to oppose policies already in the pipeline and to expose the inefficiencies and undemocratic nature of those already in place. Since the process of marketisation consists of the interaction of a series of initiatives and policies, it is very easy to get drawn into relatively small-scale policy changes at the expense of the bigger picture. It is essential to maintain an overview. This section provides a summary of the action which can be taken to minimise the impact of marketisation and privatisation.

Sustained and organised opposition to marketisation and privatisation must initially come from alliances and coalitions of local trade union and community organisations. Most local government organisations which opposed similar Tory policies in the 1990s are embedded in the Blairite agenda. National trade union opposition is tempered by constraining local activity arising from traditional control mechanisms and the unwritten part of the Warwick Agreement of not mobilising opposition to Labour's policies. It is crucial that officers, managers and staff in public services be able to express their views and take action outside of the 'constraints' of their workplace. Similarly, many service users

want to be able to express their views beyond the locality and discuss the implications and take action on a city-wide basis.

- Critique government policy proposals and communicate them widely to members and other organisations and show how choice, personalisation and contestability will affect services, users and staff.
- Opposition to Strategic Service-delivery Partnerships and public private partnerships must be intensified since they have enormous impact on the accountability, quality, employment, organisation and provision of public services, the social and physical infrastructure, and the regeneration process. Exposing the problems of private finance initiative/public private partnerships has little effect unless it is part of a wider organising and action strategy.
- Expose the longer-term consequences of the private finance initiative/public private partnership and a secondary market for the infrastructure and public services.
- Continue to research the design, quality, economics, cost, employment and refinancing of the private finance initiative/public private partnership.
- Advocate public service principles and values in the formulation of policies and implementation.
- Build public support for public service provision, good quality, services and jobs through education, information, and use of the media.
- Challenge the policies and propaganda issued by trade associations and business organisations.
- Expose poor contract performance by private and voluntary Organisations.
- Expose the failure of participatory and consultation 'exercises' to fully engage communities and staff.
- Expose the erosion of democratic accountability and transparency through 'commercial confidentiality' and the increased role of business in the public policy making process, leading to growth of a corporate welfare complex.
- Challenge business and vested interests and demand new controls over capital with re-regulation, rigorous monitoring, scrutiny and evaluation.
- Challenge the ability and community objectives of black and ethnic minority and women only businesses, social enterprises and voluntary organisations, and the exploitation of these organisations by the government to make its marketisation and privatisation policies more 'palatable'.
- Prepare critiques of options appraisals and outline business cases on the basis that they have not established need, excluded or dismissed public sector options, failed to assess the impact on the local economy, have not addressed equalities and sustainable development, made unsubstantiated claims about the capacity and experience of the private sector, ignored secondment employment models, and assumed TUPE provides full security.

It is encouraging to read how resistance to PFI/PPP is organising outwith Scotland. We at SLR have certainly tried to raise the level of debate and help to inform that debate of the pernicious nature of these reforms. With a Scottish government now opposed selling off our national and municipal assets, both physical social and to giving back power to local level, now perhaps is the time to step up our support for these alternatives to PPP/PFI and our opposition to the commercial and political forces that still have easy access to the corridors of power to promote them. ■

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globalization's new deal

Adapted from a recent lecture , Tom Nairn looks at the effect of globalization on nationalism and tries to predict what this might mean for the future of the UK

I know, far too much has been said and written already about 'globalization', **mondialisation**, **Globalisierung**, and also about their opposite numbers, anti-globalization, 'glocalism' and so on. No-one should propose adding to this untidy heap, without doubts and reservations. Yet I would like to try my hand again and ask your forgiveness in advance. The only excuse possible is that of approaching the *Zeitgeist* from a different angle. Rather than adding one more interpretation, I will try to decipher something that is in course of being said, and said not (or not only) by intellectuals, academics and '**intéllos**', the shamans of our age. The emerging message I'm after is the one that may be coming from below, from the electorate of Scotland.

Part of that message was delivered last May. It was a message favorable to fuller self-government, or possibly formal Independence, and it seems certain to carry us forward to one or more referenda on the matter fairly soon. But I suspect that a great deal more than this was already being said, or half-said, in such a striking shift. At least part of that may have come from deeper sources, which surely relate to the current way of the world as well as to party struggles, the plight of the Labour Party, and the weird dilemmas of Westminster's archaic constitution. Political leaders naturally hope people are voting for policies on this and that, after canny calculations of gains and losses; but of course voters are also concerned with 'directions': general inclinations of society, affected by passions or longings that may well be in the background of debate.

There is perhaps a feature of the Scottish electorate that may help us towards such a diagnosis. It's the one indicated by Professor Tom Devine in his recent history **The Scottish Nation 1700-2000** (1999), where he argues that the Scots have been the leaders in

modern emigration. Comparatively viewed, they appear to have outdone the Greeks, the Irish, Jews, Italians and Norwegians from the 18th to the 20th centuries, and deposited a very extensive global diaspora whose size remains difficult to estimate. Most guesses put it at eight or nine times the size of our present-day population. But my point is less the migrants than as what they left behind, a population unusually affected by so much departure, over such a prolonged period of time. In Scotland Romany or Gypsy nomads are usually called simply 'travelling people': an appropriate label from residents who, if not travelling themselves, invariably have well-travelled relatives in Calgary, Cape Town, Nova Scotia, Auckland, Chicago or Perth (Western Australia) and who either go there, or receive fairly irregular visits from them and their descendants.

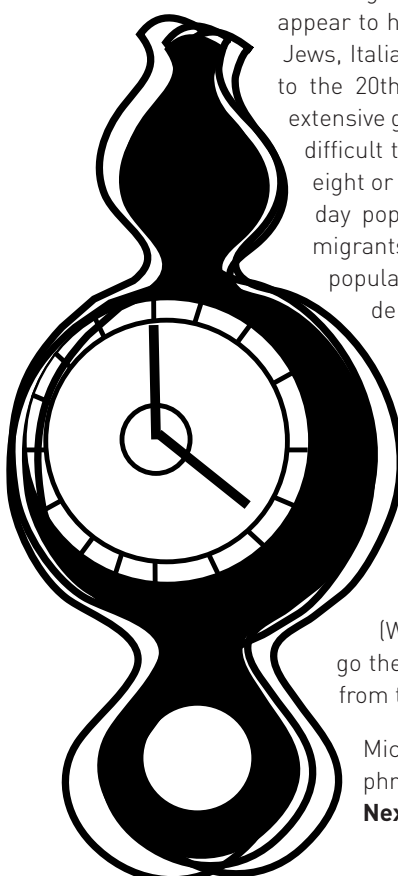
Michael Russell has some amusing phrases about this in his book **The Next Big Thing** (2007). Wherever

you go, he points out, you find that 'Insecurity is part of the Scottish condition. We come from somewhere else, and settle where we feel least uncomfortable. We belong to places that we only visit, yet we are visitors in the place where we live...'. In his book Devine diagnoses what he calls 'Highlandism' as one byproduct of this sustained communal haemorrhage: a projection of imagined origins, the famously synthetic folklore of 'Auld Lang Syne', an identity deploying the most colorful items from successive wardrobes and cabin-trunks, with appropriate music and displays.

This outstanding hemorrhage from such a small population may have fostered an unusually exposed and outward-looking mentality, a mind-set forcibly attuned to a wider view, and to contrasts of culture and custom. More than most other nations, Scots have been so to speak 'pre-globalized' by such mundane circumstances. This matter-of-fact **Weltanschauung** has little to do with the new **intélló** fad of 'cosmopolitanism', the aloofness deemed ethically appropriate for the globalizing times. When Scots explorer Charles Macdouall Stuart reached the centre of the Australian continent in 1860, during his famed South-North expedition, the flag he proudly planted there had to be the Union Jack. Such was the old 1707 deal, the enchantment of that age. And what one might call the 'self-colonization' implicit in such triumphs has proved much harder to recover from than other, cruder forms of imperial hegemony.

Returning to the enchantment of today: in spite of my earlier reservations about 'globaloney', **some** theory of what global circumstances means is of course needed. And here, one way forward in the morass may be to look back more carefully at certain neglected views of nationhood. What I have in mind is the curious question of the scale of modern countries and states. This tends to be taken for granted in most commentary and policy-formation; but should not be. It relates quite directly to what the last century's main theorist of nationalism, Ernest Gellner, always posed as the crucial problem in his field.

The underlying puzzle has always been not why there are so many nation states and distinct ethnic cultures but **why are there so few?** In his classic **Nations and Nationalism** (1983) the social anthropologist Gellner observes that there can't be less than somewhere between six and eight **thousand** identifiable ethno-linguistic populations scattered round the globe. Why, then, are there less than 200 or so national states? Gellner's characteristic explanation of this disparity was in terms of overall social and cultural development. The culprit had been first-round industrialization and urbanization. These were not processes planned by some celestial council from a suitably all-powerful centre. No, industrialization evolved chaotically out of the unlikely fringe location of the North Atlantic seaboard, and was marked throughout by chronic unevenness and widespread antagonism. It was impossible for industries, larger-scale commerce, greater market-places and banks to develop at a small-town or region scale. Nor were they ever likely to be set up by the sprawling dynastic and military empires of antiquity, whose essential concern remained expansion, hierarchy and secure military dominance of an inherited rural world. By contrast, Capitalism was able to evolve only at an intermediate



level, within societies smaller than the antique dynasties but much bigger than most ethno-linguistic groups. It demanded the formation of **relatively** large socio-economic spaces, to be viable. Viability in that sense may never have been a fixed or unalterable condition. However, in retrospect we perceive that for over two centuries it did come to mean something like France' or like England: not something like Brittany, Provence, Monaco, Wales or Ireland. The Scots had already situated themselves within the bigger-is-better expansion, via the 1707 Treaty of Union. Their fate was to be the unusual one of successful 'self-colonization' in that world. That is, they avoided conquest or assimilation, and conserved a distinct civil society but only by accepting the broader rules of the new age, as laid down by France, England and other more viable polities.

As Gellner points out, such rules required a sufficiently common culture and language, and the cultivation of popular assent. This should not be confused with present-day 'nationalism'. Nationhood and nationality culture and politics may have been primordial; but the '-ism' is a different and far more peculiar story. Nationalism didn't enter common parlance until the last third of the 19th century, after Abraham Lincoln's victory over the American secessionists, and the Franco-Prussian War. Gellner always emphasized the general point, and newer historical analyses have confirmed it. In all languages, nationalism became commonsense in conjunction with 'imperialism', as part of the climate leading into the world wars, and finally the Cold War of 1947-1989.

'Nationalism is not the awakening and assertion of mythical, supposedly natural and given units...' is how he sums it up, 'It is, on the contrary, the crystallization of new units, suitable for **the conditions now prevailing**'. The conditions **then** prevailing were the emergent ones of primarily capitalist socio-economic development, at first in the North Atlantic area and then more globally. It was those conditions that favoured the norm, the typical scale and standards for the political entities of (approximately) 1789 to 1989. British nationalism was of course just one chapter in that story, a value-parade both enforced and widely exported — and defended down to the present with mounting desperation by New Labour governments. But what I want to suggest is that it is precisely 'those conditions' that are changing. Gellner was thinking in the 1980s, when the old identikit 'nation-state' rules remained in place, albeit shakily. But one aspect of globalization has been the collapse of at least some of them. When commentators declare so confidently that it 'undermines' borders and flags, as well as customs posts, they usually fail to make a vital distinction. Yes, possibly blood is draining out of an '-ism'; but there's very little sign of it deserting nationalities, identities, cultural contrasts, and the wish to have, or to win, different forms of collective 'say' in the brave new globe.

Speculation in this zone has been limited by a curious monotheism of out-look: the child, doubtless, of Christianity, Islam, and their kind, as well as of the odd theatre of the Cold War's Iron Curtain. Globality is decreed in advance to possess

one overall or commanding meaning: either Neo-liberal progress or some new universal oppression, choose your side. It's treated as if it had come out of a grand blueprint, when most people accept there was no such design — or any conceivable way of finding out, should Deities be invoked. But in fact, may not globality simply be true to its more discernible origins? That is, a range of conflicts, 'thrown up' rather than devised for any numinous cosmic purpose? it may be too much to say 'battlefields' — but certainly terrains of decision, alternative directions and possibilities. Umberto Eco has identified one of these alternatives clearly, and amusingly, in his **Putting the Clock Back**.

Look at the world since the First Gulf War, he asks: just **who** is so plainly clinging to past patterns and habits? We see the explosion and spread of what he labels 'neo-war', the curse of US-led globalization. That is, of threatened and actual incursions against largely phantasmagoric enemies like 'Terrorism' and Islam or 'the West' and crusade-style Christianity or Evangelism. The aim of these is to maintain and mobilize the mass public opinion upon which capital-letter Great power élites still depend, against the individualism, privatization and indifference that accompany so many transnational blessings and successes. Societies have mutated far more than states. And this is why the latter find themselves tempted into another version of the 19th century Restoration that tried to impose stability, values (etc.) between Napoleon 1st and the 'Springtime of Nations' in 1848. Brown and Bush can't literally put the clock back; but at least they can try

to slow it down a bit, with plausible aggression and of course the new forms of persuasion provided by the revolution in communications.

The guilty parties here are unmistakable: they are the old lags of Gellner's bigger-and-better epoch, plus new members and applicants to join the Body-builders Club — countries endowed with that favourite attribute of British Leaders, 'clout'. America First, naturally, but with Great Spain, Great Russia, Great Serbia alongside cheer-leader Great Britain, plus rising muscle-flexers like India, Indonesia, Iran and China. The latter is currently bidding to take over the clout market, as Americans and Brits move towards retreat from Mesopotamia, and (soon) from Afghanistan. In Tibet the clock is being put back with a Great-nationalist vengeance: a menu of colonial repression once believed anachronistic, where no feeble alibis about 'democracy' required,

I suppose pidgin Chinese will very soon dominate Club soirées, or at least share them with pidgin English and Russian. But right now the loudest voice defending values is now that of John Bolton, President Bush's Ambassador to the UN. He has published his political memoirs as **Surrender is Not an Option** (2006). However, the great-at-all-costs Club is busy acquiring its own academic credentials as well. That is, Professors who

seriously believe that the globe is safer with well-padded, first-round veterans in control. An astonishing volume entitled **No More States?** appeared last year from the stables of University College, Los Angeles, arguing not only that there should be no more of these small nuisances, but that possibly a reversal of thrust may be possible, in the sense of 'agglomerationism' — returns to one or other metropolitan fold by populations tempted astray by romantic delusion or bad verse. In case anyone fears I'm making this up, let me quote from Professor Richard Rosecrance's summing up:

'Potentially dissident Scotland, the Basques, Quebec and other provincial populations have gradually come to see the federation-metropole as a less hostile environment, and their independence movements have declined in proportion...(hence) few new states are likely to be created...It is possible, even, that the number of fully independent states may decline as political units begin to merge with each other...'

This conclusion had the good luck to be published not long before the 2007 elections in the U.K., and in that sense comment may be superfluous. But the general sense is unmistakable: global history must be frozen in its tracks, for the convenience of existing agglomerations, including the US and loyal fan-club Great Britain. Only the consolidation of a retrospective blueprint will allow stability and reasonable global order prevail. 'Bigger is Better' was therefore not just a phase social evolution had to go through, to improve the general lot. No, it has to be made permanent, virtually eternalized, in the imagined interest of a species whose values have become indistinguishable from the established interest of the Big Lads Club.

And on the other side, what about all the no-hopers? Here the list could hardly be more different, but in newly surprising ways. The best approach to it remains **Foreign Policy** magazine's 'Globalization Index', a now long-running attempt to estimate and compare national successes and failures of the global times. I only have the 2006 'Top 20' list with me, and have only just received 2007. But so far its overall aspect has changed little from year to year: 'Singapore, Switzerland, Ireland, Denmark, Canada, Netherlands, Sweden, New Zealand, Finland, Norway, Israel, the Czech Republic and so on, and on, down to Slovenia, currently at No. 20. True, there have also been some exceptional entries. The USA appears in the Top 20 because in spite of manufacturing decline and job exports, it can't avoid showing up because most of the new globe's spare cash has been washing irresistibly through it, at least down to the regrettable 'sub-prime' property hitches of 2007. However, the broader picture remains unmistakable: a springtime of victorious dwarves, one might say. 'Small is beautiful'?

Sooner or later, one or more formal referenda will be of course be required for such entrants, but a kind of referendum movement, or direction, is already under way in Scotland, a gathering mixture of questioning and hardening conviction. Among Scots this takes the form of a firming 'self-confidence', a kind of matter-of-factness I mentioned earlier.

As we have seen, the old question used to be: 'Are you big enough to survive and develop in an industrializing world?' The advent of globalization is replacing this with another, something close to: 'Are you **small and smart enough** to survive?' 'Smart' in the new circumstances refers of course to education, or to 'consciousness-raising' as feminists used to put it. And not too surprisingly, the most common answer coming up from the bowels and steerage accommodation of the common ship is:

'You bet we are...nor do we mean to be deprived of the chance.' I think some sense of this may have been part of the election groundswell last May, in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland — and maybe most notably in Scotland. On the emerging global vessel, it's presence or nothing: speak up and act up, or the already existing officer and first-class passengers will not only stay there, but reinforce their grip over the lower-deck rabble of dependents, servants and migrating stowaways.

In a remarkable recent essay called simply '**Presence**', the Dutch social historian Eelco Runia has made the point with a humorous metaphor. Globalization can't help meaning that we're all 'in the same boat'; but on this noble vessel, most of the occupants can't help being virtual 'stowaways', travelling either on fake documents and overdrawn credit-cards, or just secretly, smuggled or bribed aboard at night or in disguise. However, as the global process continues its erratic course, this rabble has begun appearing on deck, in broad daylight. No, **they want their tickets**. It's time they were released from the dank lower levels of ballast, coiled ropes and awful stairwells. 'Equality' is the demand: demands for use of the cafeteria and TV lounges, new cabins and beds, ideally with fresh bedding, as well as some formal presence by representation on the bridge. There used to be bigger-is-better techniques for avoiding this kind of nuisance. Allow them enough folk-dancing and local government down in the bilges, that'll keep them out of trouble.

But of course **presence** in Runia's sense represents something more than these palliatives. The spirit of Gertrude Stein is turning out to be quite strong up on deck: something to do with the democratic air. On this bigger, final boat everyone now cannot help finding themselves aboard, 'self-government' is self-government is self-government. What Charles Stewart Parnell meant in the famous remark about nobody having 'a right to fix the boundary of the march of a nation', in the sense of its will and sovereignty. The motto prefixes the recent Scottish Government's 'National Conversation' on Scotland's future. In the new context, does that mean 'six or eight thousand' states corresponding to Gellner's original sources of human diversity? Nobody can know this, but what it already does imply is that no court of fixers and blueprint-fiddlers should decide who is in or out, or what their relationships with one another should be. To an increasing degree these are likely to relate to one another via formulae of **confederation**, quite different from federalism, subsidiarity, devolved regionalism and other dodges of the bygone era.

And it's worth emphasizing something else too, at this point — something fundamental that globalization is bringing home, everywhere and to everybody. While the threats of globalizing uniformity are often exaggerated, they do remain real enough to have brought something else, something really new, into recognizable perspective. One might call this, the threat to Babel. Globalization can't help a degree of sameness; but, more strongly than empires of the past, the new mode may be forcing something more profound into existence. The counter to 'all-the-same-ism' can only be **cross-fertilization**, the societal equivalent of Darwin's new species and forms. That's what 'the universal' has always been, the capacity to transcend, to fuse, to breed hybrid novelty rather than merely 'agglomerate' in Professor Rosecrance's sense.

However, the power to do this rests at bottom upon more than the maintenance of diversity — it demands that differentiation be favoured, that it be positively fostered by globalization. The basic problem that Globalization confronts is having to

perpetuate 'Babel', as well as confronting all its difficulties and contradictions. The reason is that human universals arise only via contrasts, by the transcendence of borders rather than their suppression — via cross-fertilization, through hybrids and surprises, from the unheard-of, in communities not just 'imagined' in Ben Anderson's celebrated phrase, but previously unimaginable, from presences whose spell makes the past into a bearable future. And how on earth can anything like that be achieved without 'independence'? In this context independence surely isn't backward-looking or inward-looking me-first, chip on the shoulder time, and so on. It's more like seizing the chance as the clock-hands move so decisively forward, the chance to contribute and to endure with an emerging purpose not yet wholly known, because societies must retain, or rediscover the power and confidence to surprise themselves.

With all its daft twists and turns, and hopeless exaggerations, globalization may be undermining the older, late 19th century nationalism and simultaneously providing new stimuli for 21st century nationalism, or at least nationality-politics. In the most widely read popularization of globalization theory, the Oxford **Very Short Introduction** to the subject, my Austrian colleague, Manfred Steger, puts it at the end of his account, 'there's nothing wrong with greater manifestations of social interdependence as a result of globalization'; but what matters above all are 'the transformative social processes that arise to challenge 'the current oppressive structure of global apartheid', new societal vehicles capable of 'ushering in a truly democratic and egalitarian global order'. The emergence of new communities of will and purpose may be right in the main-stream of globalization, rather than futile attempts to stave the latter off.

Imagine an email to the cosmos from Edinburgh, notifying whoever is listening of events recent and soon to come. It could read something like: "Back in state-political presence after three centuries, on different footing following lessons at once painful and positive; no deaths, comparatively little resentment, modest ambitions to make a difference." No heaven-shattering utterance, I concede. Yet there would have to be an attachment going with this message too, about which I have so far deliberately said nothing: I sometimes think of it as 'Adam Smith', a connotation that renders boasting unnecessary, and which is also quite peculiar, in the sense that the family of myself and my brother happens to come from Kirkcaldy, the same small East coast port as the author of **An Inquiry into the Wealth of Nations** (1776), the foundation of modern economics.

In Scotland, this kind of allusion can be fatal. It's guaranteed to arouse a deep-source genetic sarcasm that long preceded Social Darwinist nonsense: 'So...they think their fathers must have kent some o'**their** fathers...Hm-m-m-m!' It may be recalled that Smith's actual father was the Kirkcaldy 'Comptroller of Customs', preoccupied with doubling his official wages by extorting harbour fees and tariffs from the coal and salt trades, as well as from Baltic, Russian and Dutch sea-captains. The birth-pangs of Neo-liberal Economism were every bit as dishonorable as those of other faiths. While they might have been suffered in Bremen, Tallin, or any number of other places, it so happened that Kirkcaldy was the decisive venue, and something of that took up permanent lodgings in modernity. And it can't be denied, this does add a certain weight to endeavours at demolishing 'the authority of the old system', and a distinct edge to the 'more daring, but often dangerous spirit of innovation' now in charge across the River Forth from the old seaport.

A few years back, Arthur Herman published **How the Scots Invented the Modern World** (2002). Mistaken theorists of an earlier moment — myself among them — used to complain about Scotland having missed or neglected its national opportunities, by failing to participate in earlier waves of anti-colonial liberation. But of course, the Scots never belonged there. Not having been colonized they 'did it themselves' via self-colonization, the subordinate affirmation of a kind of flightless or contained nationality, which implied exemption from many rules of the former imperial world.

Today that time is ended. I have suggested that resuming the power of flight simply means participation in the new forms and rules, alongside many others. It's a matter-of-fact need, neither too late nor too soon, and I suspect that something of this has already sunk into popular sensibility — the nascent 'common sense' of a different, dawning moment in history, the moment when Eelco Runia's 'presence' is possible for **us**, as well as for 'them'. I have drawn a general contrast between Old Lags laboring away on restoring the grandfather clock, and new, smaller arriving vehicles impatient with tradition, and anxious to move faster. In the British-Irish archipelago, this contrast has become in effect a 'front line' between Anglo-Westminster and former peripheral accomplices. Most clearly, the clash will be manifested in the battle over nuclear weapons, and the decision to replace the Trident weapons system with something better. This is of course partly Great-Power pantomime; but it happens to be located in western Scotland at the Faslane naval base. More than pacifism and general nuclear disarmament is involved: and it's hard to imagine any 'compromise' over such an issue.

So there will be endless problems and pitfalls, sure; but they are taking place at a great border crossing, as the world gets used to a different landscape. I suspect that one of the few useful tourist guides here may be Roberto Mangabeira Unger's **Free Trade Reimagined** (Princeton, 2007). Unger's argument is that the victory of 'managed capitalism' was unavoidable, but not necessarily linked to a tide of socio-political reaction derived from the 1960s. The rising waters of resurrected conservatism naturally appropriated a re-emergent capitalism — but did not succeed in making the free-trade world into its own. The lunacy of Neo-liberalism has been disproved by globalized reality, as well as that of centralized or State-Socialism. Hence managed capitalism is in desperate need of new management — the 'reimagination' of his title. There's no chance of turning clock-hands back; yet the the new chronology signalled by their advance is quite different from what prevailed before 1989 — on both Right and Left.

What happened in the 2007 elections was part of 'everything else'. It did not betray but expressed the grander shift, the avalanche under way. Only a small bit of Globalization's drawing-board, but definitely on it, contributing to the designs of a new and still mostly hidden hand. ■

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Tom Nairn is one of Scotland's leading writers and political theorists

will red and green ever be seen?

Tim Gee explores the changing relationships between socialists and greens in Scotland, suggesting a logical progression from contraction and convergence towards the ultimate goal of co-operation

Following a recent article on 'Transitional Alliances' by Justin Kenrick in Scottish Left Review, a question on many people's lips has been how and whether activists with a common cause can work together to win positive, equitable change for people and the environment. This article will attempt to answer this question, coming up with some possibilities for progress. It will show that Green and Socialist ideas have converged somewhat, possibly clearing the path for future co-operation.

For some commentators, the 2007 election spelled the end of the left. The Greens' seats were reduced to two while the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP), Solidarity and the Socialist Labour Party won no seats at all. Across Scotland, 109,539 people voted for a radical anti-capitalist party however votes were down for these parties compared to previous elections as left voters opted to display their frustration with Labour by voting SNP (perceived to be to the left of Labour). So far, being in opposition has not created a move to the left inside the Labour party as evidenced by the lack of challenge from the Labour Campaign for Socialism to Wendy Alexander. Meanwhile, the stances of the SNP show that an independent critical left is more important than ever. On one hand, we should provide support if and when the new Scottish government delivers on free education, opposing PFI and Trident. However, we should be vocal in our opposition if and when it disappoints by reducing taxes for corporations and the rich, accepting donations and advice from Stagecoach boss Brian Souter and backtracking on climate change commitments.

Greens and Socialists in the UK have traditionally been somewhat suspicious of each other. To simplify, Socialists have viewed Greens as having the wrong analysis and Greens have worried that Socialists do not sufficiently take seriously the threat of ecological crisis, which could make all of their promises null. However in the past 15 years Green and Socialist positions have changed sufficiently to be compatible, as this section shows. To clarify, by Green I do not simply mean 'environmental', I mean a politics based on five pillars: environment, social justice, democracy, decentralisation and peace.

From an ecological perspective, orthodox Marxist analysis is somewhat un-environmentally friendly. Marx claims that the extraction of natural resources from the earth is a positive step in the creation of surplus which will lead to human emancipation when the proletariat rise up to redistribute it. Those natural resources only acquire value when they are transformed by

human initiative. Because of this, in the past, there has been much resistance to the language of socialism amongst Greens. Famously, in 1984 Jonathan Porritt claimed that communism and capitalism were nothing but a 'super ideology of industrialism'. Marxists dismissed such a stance, seeing industrialism as the harbinger of socialism/communism, and Greens as attempting to return society to a bygone mode of production. Yet the picture 15 years later is somewhat different: former principal speaker of GPEW, Derek Wall explicitly calls himself an eco-socialist while Caroline Lucas' book on Green alternatives to economic globalisation takes a historical structuralist approach to the world economy. In Scotland the Greens were represented between 2003 and 2007 by a committed Socialist, Mark Ballard. Socialism too is changing in line with scientific realities and

many Socialist activists from all parties, including Greens, see the struggle against capitalism and the struggle for environmental justice as one. Thus we see two paths converging.

Another potential difference comes with the fact that a central point of Green thought and practice is to engage in struggles as well as the class struggle, for example calling for equality between sexualities, genders and races, arguing against the exploitation of nature by the human and against the oppression of the human from the worst excesses of the state. In the opinion of some of the SSP's predecessors, any struggle other than the class struggle is a distraction at best. Again though, this notion has almost entirely disappeared from recent language and practice of the Socialist movements of Scotland, with Socialists

at the forefront of struggles for all forms of equality. Many Greens too have come to recognise that pollution is a class issue because it is the poorest and most marginalised that live in the most degraded environments.

Another perceived difference is in attitudes to the state. Greens are usually characterised as influenced by anarchist, anti-state thought. Characterisations of Socialists are more varied: at the more reformist wing are those who embrace the state as a tool of emancipation, and at the revolutionary end of the spectrum are those seeking to overthrow it. In fact, a more nuanced position can be detected in Scotland. For instance in the period 2003 – 2007, SSP and Green Party MSPs voted to oppose ID cards. This implies suspicion of state power. However they also both argued for a stronger role for the state in providing free education, free school meals, and a nationalised railway system. Thus the state is viewed by both as holding the potential to oppress and also

Most socialists consider their natural allies those in the Green coalition, and the fact that so many Green activists consider themselves Socialists implies that this works both ways. It seems greater co-operation would be a sensible next step.

(at least transitionally) to emancipate. Whilst revolutionary Marxists seek the eventual withering away of the state, Greens too provide a vision of the future based on social enterprises, co-operatives, subsidiarity and consociational democracy, to make certain that as Peter McColl argues, "the workers ensure the full fruits of their labours".

Both the SSP and the Green Party are coalitions. The SSP was born of the 'Scottish turn' by the members of the Committee for a Workers' [O]International, who joined up with unaffiliated socialists, ex-members of the Labour party and members of smaller groups such as the International Socialist group, the Alliance for Workers Liberty and the Scottish Republican Socialist Party to form the Scottish Socialist Alliance, then the SSP. They were later joined by the Socialist Workers Party. The Scottish Green coalition is less clear-cut, but a recent study revealed that the Scottish Greens are essentially a coalition of leftists, social libertarians, feminists/liberation campaigners, anti-war activists and environmentalists. The research also revealed that 73.9 per cent of council candidates surveyed considered themselves 'eco-socialists' followed by the labels 'ecologist' and 'feminist'. Most socialists consider their natural allies those in the Green coalition, and the fact that so many Green activists consider themselves Socialists implies that this works both ways. It seems greater co-operation would be a sensible next step. But what strategies of co-operation might work? 3 options come to mind:

1 Outside the electoral arena.

Many Greens and Socialists have positive memories of working together in the campaign against the M77 in South Glasgow in the 1990s. Similarly the campaigns against the Iraq war and Trident have brought Greens and Socialists together, leading in part to the election victories of 2003. Greens and Socialists at Edinburgh University have long co-operated, by for example supporting each-other's candidates in student elections, running joint campaigns for free education, and in 2004 campaigning together for congestion charging in Edinburgh (in the latter case the student Socialist group rebelled against their elder counter parts).

Such co-operation would make sense in the wider student and trade union movement. A possible joint campaign might be to persuade the STUC to increase its political bargaining chips by taking a more independent approach to financing political parties, which would be more in the interest of their members. On both levels they might co-operate in making the case for a citizens' income.

Yet it is worth remembering that the relationship has not always been cosy. Tensions grew due to differences of opinion and approach during the M74 campaign and around the G8 summit. Could future co-operation overcome differences in style? Could we avoid the acrimonious splits of the past that have done so much to limit the success of progressive and socialist movements? Again, I don't know the answers to these questions. But I hope that they exist.

One easy step towards this would be to use the non-party/all-party autonomous radical network already existing in Scotland, Democratic Left Scotland, to bring together radicals and socialists in all parties and none, with the intention of working as a cross party movement for justice and to bring the overall debate to the left.

A second option is to unite inside the electoral arena. Another look at the 2007 election shows that Socialist and Green votes combined could have won further seats in Glasgow and Central Scotland. Looking to the European election, the SSP with 61, 356 votes in 2004 and the Greens with 79, 695 votes in the same year would each have to double their votes for either to have a chance of a seat in 2009. This is made harder by the possibility that the SSP vote could half because of the SSP/Solidarity split. The only logical way forward seems to be co-operation in some capacity. By merging voters and activists there might be a chance. This indeed was proposed by the SSP in 2003, and rejected by the Greens.

This is a path with many obstacles. How would we come to an agreement which includes the membership, not just leadership bargaining? Would everyone agree with the chosen candidate? Although Green and Socialist activists may be converging in their philosophy, are Green and Socialist voters doing the same? If the previous statement is true, would an alliance change that? If it didn't work, would each party end up worse off than when they started? Again, I don't know the answers to these questions but a good way to test the water would be to co-operate in a by-election. This would involve finding a way of choosing a mutually agreeable candidate and merging activists and voters for a high profile and possibly successful campaign.

A third option is to launch a Scottish equivalent of Green Left - an explicitly eco-socialist current autonomous from the Green Party and open to all, with the dual aim of running campaigns outside the electoral arena and bringing the Greens to the left. Such a move would make sense in making the Greens more Socialist in their language. On the other hand, Green policies are for the most part already Socialist but communicated in such a way that the public and non-Socialist members feel comfortable voting and campaigning for them. Greens and Socialists might want to ask themselves whether that is something they would want to change. Indeed, what is more important, the language or the outcome?

The ideas laid out above are preliminary and discursive, designed to help foster a discussion that might lead to a more constructive relationship between activists of the same cause. I have shown that Socialist and Green thought has converged over the years and suggested that the logical next step should be to work together more closely. Some ways that this might take place have been proposed. The very basis of the ideas of many activists in this movement is that co-operation is better than competition. Let's see if we can live up to this in practice. ■

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a new voice on global warming

Matthew Crighton reports on the first ever trade union conferences on global warming, one in London, the other in Scotland

The world's first ever trade union conference about global warming took place in London on 9 February and as such, may have marked a turning point for the movement to prevent harmful climate change. It was organised by the Campaign Against Climate Change (CCC) and attended by 300 people.

National trade union representatives, beginning with Frances O'Grady, Deputy General Secretary of the TUC emphasised that climate change is a trade union issue. She said "the battle against climate change is central to our movement's values and cause. It's not just about the future of our natural resources and the environment we all share. It's not just about the quality of life for our children and our children's children. At its heart, this challenge is about global justice".

"It is the most vulnerable – the poorest countries and populations – who will suffer earliest and most, even though they have contributed least to the causes of climate change". Just as important, they brought to the environmental movement the need for a green industrial strategy and the message that market forces of capitalism cannot be relied upon. "Only the organized intervention of working people across the world can prevent climate change" said Matt Wrack, General Secretary of the FBU.

There was no doubt about the seriousness of the problem and the need for action: "It is ordinary working people who stand most to lose from the seismic changes that climate change will unleash. We either put an end to climate change, or climate change will put an end to us" said O'Grady. Equally it was clear that trade unions had to face up to it: "When we have to end the economic reliance on burning fossil fuels, the environment is not an optional extra for trade unions" said Chris Baugh of PCS.

Recognising the anxieties about loss of jobs in some existing industries, Frances O'Grady spoke of the need for a Green Industrial Strategy: "We need to make the case for a just transition to a low-carbon economy – a just transition that protects those most vulnerable to industrial restructuring by guaranteeing the growth of alternative green jobs and industries, and the offer of re-training so people can move into them. To develop a green industrial strategy that will smooth the transition to a low carbon economy".

This would involve greening workplaces with plans to reduce emissions, promoting renewables and building skills for workers needed in the new industries. Speakers explained that changing to renewables would create jobs: renewables create many more jobs per terawatt of power than traditional power generation.

Caroline Lucas, the Green Party MEP suggested a Green New Deal, in light of predictions of an economic recession.

An underlying theme starting to be heard in some of these contributions, and developed fully in one of the workshops, was that carbon pricing/trading is fatally flawed. The issues here remain poorly understood but one facet which is congenial to union activists is that it is folly to rely on the market to direct the massive changes needed. However the most important point is that carbon pricing isn't working and won't work as the core element of the strategy. Since this is the central element of the Kyoto Protocol and the European Union strategy many speakers were pointing towards a more planned and interventionist approach.

From a spectrum spanning Green to Labour, the conference heard that tackling climate change could not involve merely superficial shifts in how electricity is generated: "A zero carbon economy holds the opportunity of moving to a more equitable way of living" said Caroline Lucas, Green MEP. This was echoed by Michael Meacher MP, a former Labour Environment Secretary, who stated that "we can't bolt this on to the whole deeply-unjust capitalist system with its relentless drive for profit, driving the poor to greater poverty, death and destruction at the hands of climate change".

Perhaps the most exciting new message heard at the conference was about the role of unions alongside environmental campaigners. Chris Baugh of PCS suggested that "Trade unions can give an impetus to the creation of a mass movement on climate change". Equally, he said "the environmental agenda can be part of the strategy to revitalize the unions".

However, the starting point he said, is to introduce these issues into the bargaining agenda. Trade unions stewards and members should be proposing sustainability plans for reducing emissions in their workplaces. Linda Newman of UCU called for the appointment of environmental representatives and explained how her union is already providing training for them.

If the CCC's was the first trade union conference on this subject, the Scottish TUC's Climate Change conference on 15 February must have been the second, and the first organised by a trade union body. This focused on the practical questions of what trade unions

and enterprises can do now and what the Scottish government strategy should look like.

Scotland has perhaps the best renewables resources in Europe, one of the reasons the conference was told by John

It is ordinary working people who stand most to lose from the seismic changes that climate change will unleash. We either put an end to climate change, or climate change will put an end to us

Swinney MSP, why Scotland can be an exemplar. Swinney is the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth in the Scottish Government. His attendance and his title underline the importance the SNP is giving this issue. More importantly, so is the target of 80% reduction in emissions by 2050 which they have set for their Climate Change Bill – more ambitious by 20% than Labour’s in Westminster.

If the SNP might be seen as unusual partners for the STUC then so might some of the other speakers – Brendan Dick of BT or Alan Barclay of drinks company Diageo. Both were there to say that their companies had implemented plans to significantly reduce emissions and to urge others, including the public sector, to do so too.

Paul Noon of the trade union Prospect and chair of TUSDAC (Trade Union Sustainable Development Advisory Council) talked about the need for green representatives and what they can do to raise the issues in workplaces, whether or not the employer has a forward-looking plan like BT.

By inviting the minister and some large private companies to contribute to the event the STUC was signaling the serious intent to work out an industrial approach to achieving the 80% reduction targets. They will need what John Swinney accepted were “difficult decisions”, the most immediate regarding the proposed massive Lewis wind farm, about which a presentation was made by its developers AMEC. This has won support

from the STUC and the CBI but has divided the environmental movement because of the effect on vulnerable habitats.

Two different approaches can be seen at these two events, but at each there was no doubt of the importance of the trade unions. The final resolution passed at the London conference said:

“We recognise that trade unions have a central role to play, both in developing just and equitable solutions to climate change and also in building a mass movement around the issue. We therefore urge all trade unions to use their full industrial, political and organisational strength to force government and employers to take urgent and effective action to tackle this potentially catastrophic threat”.

If trade union members and leaders do this, it might make all the difference between success and failure. ■

Matthew Crighton is International Officer of City of Edinburgh UNISON



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John Leach, President

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beware of the deal

Jim Cuthbert delves into Michael Collins' past and brings back a warning for Scotland's future

This is the third of an occasional series of papers in the Scottish Left Review (see SLR 35 and 40) intended to illuminate some little known aspects of Ireland's transition to independence and to draw appropriate lessons for Scotland. This article looks at intriguing indications that Michael Collins was offered a clandestine deal by the British, and considers what sort of deal might be offered to an emerging Scottish government today.

The starting point for this story is the following quotation from Tim Pat Coogan's well known biography of Michael Collins: "One of his principal agents in the Castle, Thomas Markham, a senior civil servant, produced a report for him which gave an insider's account of 'how it really worked'." Coogan's biography then goes on to quote extracts from Markham's description of the system of British political control in Ireland. The essential point made by Markham was that there was a continuity about the system to which political change made little material difference.

The three salient features of the system were:

- a) The grasp of human weaknesses and vanity.
- b) A correct appreciation of the value and use of duplicity, and Pecksniffianism, [that is, hypocrisy].
- c) A clear conception of the truth that success in governing depends on well-contrived antagonisms in the economic and social structure of the State."

Anyone reading the first quotation above would naturally gain the impression that Markham was working undercover in Dublin Castle, in daily danger of discovery and possible death at the hands of the British. However, Tim Pat Coogan's book is slightly misleading here, and Markham's actual situation was very different from this. For one thing, Markham's report to Collins is dated 26 June 1922. This is some six months after the signing of the Treaty which had put an end to active combat with the British and five months after Michael Collins had taken office as Chair of the Provisional Government of Southern Ireland. During the interim period, and until the formal establishment of the Free State in December 1922, the British recognised the Provisional Government as the constitutional government of the South. The Provisional Government had formally taken over responsibility for the civil administration on its formation in January 1922 but in practice, the British maintained a strong administrative presence in Dublin Castle; the senior British civil servant was the Assistant Under Secretary, Alfred (later Sir Alfred) Cope, who was known to have been close to Lloyd George.

Further, and indeed clinching evidence about the peculiarity of Markham's position is given in a letter from Markham himself, part of the Mulcahy papers in University College Dublin. After Collins' death on 22 August 1922, Markham clearly felt cut off: quite possibly, no-one in the Irish Government knew who Tom Donovan (Markham's cover name for reporting back to Collins) actually was. So on 4 September 1922, Markham wrote to Richard Mulcahy, Collins' successor as Commander-in-Chief of the Irish Army, introducing himself. In his letter, Markham

explains how he came to be at the very heart of the Castle, in the Chief Secretary's office: "About four months ago, Miceal introduced me to Cope, sent me to the Castle to watch things British, documents etc." In his position in the Chief Secretary's office, Markham was able to access the kind of administrative detail which he recorded in his report to Collins of 26 June. In addition, he saw documents which identified spies and informers: "I have discovered some rather sensational stuff - spies' letters, applications for jobs, confidential reports, etc., etc. From information etc I supplied to Miceal, he agreed that the utmost care and confidence should be exercised with respect to these documents - otherwise guns might continue to click for many a year." Markham was also able to see correspondence between Cope and Churchill, the Colonial Secretary.

So, far from being a lonely spy working in daily danger of discovery, Markham had been placed at the centre of the residual British administration by Cope himself, at the suggestion of Michael Collins. Clearly, there was a perfectly good and legitimate reason why the British might have wanted to do this - to reassure Collins that the British were acting in good faith and intended to implement their side of the Treaty. But equally, it must have been absolutely clear to the British that Markham would report back to Collins with any material he was allowed access to. It must therefore be assumed that the bulk of the material Markham passed back to Collins was material which the British were perfectly happy for, or even actively wanted Collins to have.

In this respect, it is more illuminating to look at the full version of Markham's report to Collins of 26 June than the rather selective precis quoted by Tim Pat Coogan. The full version of the report (the original of which is in the Mulcahy papers at UCD) can be found at www.cuthbert1.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk in association with the text of this paper. Markham's report is not just a description of how the old system worked but of why it failed: "In the recent fight, administration was partly military, partly civil - on old system lines. Towards the end it was assuming the shape of a Military Autocracy - and of this the Civil Administrators began to grow afraid. ... Apart from all other circumstances a continuance of such rule for any prolonged period was really impossible." And Markham's report also contains strong pointers about the way successful civil government should develop: "In Britain the Treasury is now being called the State Secretariat. It is resuming its normal control over many Departments, and extending it to others. It is tending in the direction of the Castle system. Experience has shown that centralisation is necessary in order to prevent inconsistency and confusion."

So what was really going on? The most plausible explanation is that through Cope, Lloyd George was offering Collins a deal. Effectively he was saying, "Here are the levers of power, Michael, and this is how they work. Take hold of them, and be the strong man who runs the new state in our joint interests." It is highly unlikely that the British would have been so open with Collins unless they were being given some indication from him that he was likely to play ball. To say this is in no way to detract from

Collins' reputation. It is now very clear that Collins had long-standing contacts with what might be described as the Lloyd George faction of the British: indeed, one would expect no less from him. But the ultimate test is where Collins' true loyalties lay, and the actions Collins was taking at exactly this time with respect to the situation in Northern Ireland leave no doubt that his ultimate loyalties were to Ireland and not collaboration with the British.

So what relevance, if any, do the above events have for the Scotland of today? Of course things in Scotland today are very different from the Ireland of 80-odd years ago. For one thing, Scotland is evolving through a purely political process rather than emerging from a bitter military struggle. Moreover, whereas in the 1920's the world was moving into the era of centralisation and dictators, the nature of government today is very different. In many ways what is remarkable about modern Britain is the extent to which government has come to be dominated by the interests of big business and the financial sector. There is a telling incident in the Alistair Campbell Diaries where Tony Blair visited Bill Clinton in 1996. How, asked Blair, do you win support for more equity and justice without it meaning more tax? Clinton replied: "the private sector was the key, that we must not be defined simply as a public sector government, but bind in the private sector, emphasising their role in wealth creation." Much of the history of the Blair/Brown years can be read as blind endorsement of this approach, even as it has become crystal clear that the deal offered by the private sector, be it through PFI or through privatised utilities, is astronomically costly and socially divisive.

But this domination of government by business and financial interests does offer a clue as to the kind of deal which may be offered to an emerging Scottish Government. The deal may not come from the British Government at all but rather from powerful business or financial interests, and how seductive such a deal could be for a nationalist government: "just sign on the dotted line (of water privatisation, PFI, social housing privatisation, or whatever the latest gimmick might be) and we can not only solve your budgetary problems, we will also give you the credibility you so desperately need, both nationally and internationally."

If Michael Collins had taken up the deal apparently on offer from the British, then there is a real danger that Ireland could have fallen into the trap of becoming a colonial client style dictatorship of the type which has become so depressingly familiar. Similarly, if Scotland were to sign up to a deal with the financial/ business world, there is a real danger we could end up mortgaging control not just of future oil profits but also of our freedom of action. Certainly, Scotland will require a strong and successful financial sector but the danger is that a deal could put the sector in the position of the rider and not the horse, in relation to a newly independent Scotland. ■

Jim Cuthbert was formerly Chief Statistician at the Scottish Office

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Reviews

In Pubs, Stuart Murray, Streetlevel Photoworks, 2007, Limited Edition. www.stuartmurray.co.uk

In 2005 Stuart Murray produced a book of drawings called *On the Street*. It consisted of a series of faux-naive hand drawings of what some would consider the detritus of society – drunks, prostitutes, the homeless and so on. The drawings were accompanied by short fragments of what appear to be quotations from the characters themselves. The aim of the book was, through a cumulative focus on people we see daily in our cities but largely ignore, to raise our awareness of a ‘subculture’ in Scotland which is being ‘disappeared’. Ever since the rebranding of Glasgow in the early 1990s there has been little space for the less shiny elements of its cultural history. The culture may remain alive in parts of the public consciousness only through satire (at best Rab C Nesbit, at worst some ad-man’s idea of a comic Scots drunk) and in some literature (some of James Kelman’s work).

It is therefore particularly appropriate that some writing by Kelman accompanies this book. It is also appropriate that there is a forward by Alastair Gray; there is a strong echo of Gray’s contrariness as to what constitutes an appropriate subject for art, not to mention an echo of his sparse, almost gothic and often humorous illustrations. This time we leave the streets and head into the pubs where Murray catalogues the characters who inhabit the few Glasgow bars which have not been redesigned as ‘style bars’. We have the same faux-naive illustrations, the same life-in-an-expression reportage and the same fragments of dialogue. And it works just as well (especially the humour). Murray documents his subjects almost like a loving entomologist, and it stands as an interesting record of what sometimes appears to be a dying culture. Above all, it is a beautifully packaged piece of art.

There is one thing which strikes me about the book, however. The characters we find are almost all middle aged men, almost all from a pre-1980s working class culture, almost all like something from a William McIlvanney novel. The effect feels almost historical, and certainly very male. It will be interesting to see what Murray does next – I would love to see him dissect the lives of the new generation of ‘detritus’, the young binge drinkers (male and female), the disoriented stag and hen parties, the dazed clubbers. Fragments of their lives would make an interesting comparison. ■

Robin McAlpine

New Labour/Hard Labour? Restructuring and Resistance Inside the Welfare Industry, edited by Gerry Mooney and Alex Law, Policy Press, 2007, £22.99 (paperback)

Despite ‘third way’ theorising, the ‘new’ Labour project has, in effect, been a continuation of the neo-liberalism first instigated by Thatcher and the Conservatives. Letting the market ‘rip’ and stopping the public sector ‘crowding out’ the private sector have been key tenets and practices in this

restructuring of state, economy and society. Of course, it has mattered that there has been the ‘third way’ nomenclature and policy support, just as it has mattered that ‘new’ Labour has been the overseer of the project. Both have contributed to the blunting and disorientation of potential opposition as the social and ideological bases of social democracy decomposes. The particular means has been contracting out rather than privatisation so that ‘new’ Labour can supposedly square the circle of saying that the NHS and welfare state remain in public hands and operate on the basis of market methods.

New Labour/Hard Labour? surveys the wreckage caused by the ‘new’ Labour project in the welfare industry by examining its motivation – the political and economic rationale, its effect and its consequences. Thus, ‘modernisation’ is regressive not progressive. Specific areas covered include PFI hospitals, nursing, teaching, higher education, social work, the not-for-profit ‘voluntary’ sector and social security. The effective denationalisation and privatisation of much provision has been achieved by the contracting out of many services, whereby (limited) extant democratic and popular control is also lost.

The key contribution of the book is to bring together a collection of chapters that lay out the contours and causes of the resistance to the neo-liberal restructuring and change programmes by the workforce of the welfare industry. These are the workers that gave Blair, as he told us ‘the scars on his back’ in 1999 when he was trying to implement his ‘modernisation’ of the public services and finding that resistance was a considerable obstacle to the realisation of his and ‘new’ Labour’s plans.

Often using original research, the contributors locate the dynamics of the imperative for deepening management control in the employment relationship where employers are dependent upon the coercively derived cooperation of the workforce for the intensification of the wage-effort bargain, this being a key component of the drive towards neoliberal restructuring. Concomitant, they identify the contradictions, fissures and tensions which provide the wellspring for resistance. Neoliberalism has challenged extant notions of professionalism of the workforce and their purpose of compassion and provision of services for their clients. Here the key linkage of common interests between providers and recipients of welfare is made in resisting the diminution of conditions and services. And therein lies the basis for an exploration of the idea of a public services alliance to maximise the extent of mobilisation for public sectors as well as preventing the unions in the industry from being marginalised as merely defending vested producer interests.

One of key limitations of the book is the marked tendency by the editors and their chapter co-writers in particular, to celebrate resistance in and of itself and then, as it were, leave it at that in the implicit belief or hope that further resistance, ‘the shape of things to come’ is likely. The starting point for this perspective is the correct recognition of resistance, particularly marked by strikes, but the consequent failure to properly locate this within the wider trends of collective action in Britain. On the one hand, two swallows do not make a summer no matter the coordinated strike action of 24 April 2008. On the other

hand, any single strike by welfare workers looks bigger, more 'militant' and more successful than it actually is by virtue of the absence of widespread resistance elsewhere or in the specific sectors when strikes are localised. Thus, for example, the 21 days of strike action in the DWP in the last four or five years alone can, and should be read as both a sign of strength and of weakness: strength to take and sustain action defending jobs and conditions, and weakness often because of the discontinuous nature of the strikes in not being able to bat back and stop the attacks. A rigorous assessment of the collective resistance would help create an understanding of why relatively little has been achieved in stopping neo-liberalism in the welfare industry and more widely in society. In other words, the absence of widespread strike action in the private sector which dwarfs the public sector in employment proportionality can be seen to be 'holding back' any breakthrough in the public sector.

From this basis, the identification of politicisation (read left-moving politicisation) among union members and the emergence of so-called 'political unionism' are then also overstated by many of the contributors. Members and unions are always inherently political, whether they choose to act or not, and act in one way rather than another, because these choices always relate to the terms of the contestation of the wage-effort bargain. But what needs to be borne in mind is that public sector labour unionism is additionally political in a different way because of its members' provision of collective goods and the subversion of market mechanisms in the public sector. This is often reflected in strikes in the public sector being used as a means to create political rather than industrial leverage. Another limitation is

that New Labour/Hard Labour? needed to examine the internal processes and politics of PCS and Unison in a far more detailed and sophisticated way in order to understand their dynamics and thus what was and is possible and probable under any given set of circumstances that the unions operate under (Indeed, the contrast of the two in this way would be highly illuminating). So, no matter that PCS has been at the forefront of resistance, this resistance has been less than the national leadership wanted. Unfortunately, quoting press reports and speeches of the general secretary does not allow this.

So, to conclude, New Labour/Hard Labour? is strong on explaining what is going on in terms of what the resistance is responding to. It is on weaker ground when it comes to the issues of understanding the dynamics of the forms of mobilisation that the resistance has taken. ■

Gregor Gall

Argyll, 1730-1850: Commerce, Community and Culture, by Robert A A McGeachy, John Donald, 2006

At the risk of some over-simplification, we can say that most discussions of the events we call the Highland Clearances fall into one of two camps. The first regards the introduction of capitalism in the Highlands as an inevitable process which had parallels across most of Europe, including England, and whose effects were ultimately beneficial, whatever the short-term problems it may have caused the peasantry. More right-wing versions are briskly impatient with the perceived Scottish obsession with the Clearances, often to the point of rejecting the term itself. More left-wing versions tend towards the mournfully elegiac, perking up only when contemplating the success of many Highland Scots in North America and Australasia. But

in both cases the peasants themselves are treated as passive and, explicitly or not, the heroes are the active class, the landowners. The second camp rejects the idea that there was anything positive about the transformation of the Scottish Highlands. It empathises unreservedly with the peasantry, often treating their fate as emblematic of the oppressions supposedly suffered by Scotland as a whole. (The notion that the clan chiefs 'betrayed' their followers by turning to commercial agriculture is a common theme.) But with very few exceptions (mainly to be found in the work of Eric Richards, James Hunter and Iain Fraser Grigor) the peasants are treated here too as essentially passive in the face of social change.

The problem with the first position is that it worships the established fact: what happened had to happen and was for the best. The problem with the second is that it has no conception of what alternatives there might have been: the implication is that the existing form of Highland life was desirable and could have been sustained, but for the treacherous chiefs and their damned English notions. It is to the very great credit of Robert McGeachy that his new book avoids both of these untenable positions, without attempting to find a compromised middle ground. On the contrary, McGeachy is clearly on the side of those he collectively refers to as 'the commonality'. Moreover, he stresses their active role in resisting the landowners and celebrates their local victories – about which he provides a great deal of very welcome new information, often from hitherto underused unpublished sources. But McGeachy never falls into the trap of romanticising or idealising the pre-existing society, which he rightly describes as suffering from deep crisis long before the '45. Equally, he acknowledges that at least some of

the improvers, notably the Church of Scotland ministers, were engaged in a conscious attempt to overthrow 'all vestiges of what was termed feudalism' - a task with which, given that socialism was not on the historical agenda during eighteenth century, might be thought to have some progressive content.

This book is concerned, not with the Highlands as a whole but with a particular region, that dominated by the Houses of Argyll and Breadalbane. In one sense, Argyll was an unusual region in that the leading families had already opted for 'improvement' on their estates before they were forced to after 1746, when all other options were removed. For this reason any conclusions reached about their activities are unlikely to be applicable to others of their class. However, this is of minor importance since McGeachy is mainly concerned with the exploited.

Given that the introduction of capitalist social relations began in Argyll earlier than in most areas of the Highlands, this spatial focus allows McGeachy to situate these changes within an extended time-scale which reaches further back than the dates (1746, 1792) which are often misleadingly taken to signify the start of the process. Indeed, one of the pleasures of this book is the way in which it eschews one-dimensional notions of 'the clearances' by emphasising the complex and often contradictory progress of the transition. In particular, McGeachy is excellent at conveying the active role played by the 'commonality', which was far from rejecting every change: 'The commonality's resistance...was not opposed to innovation and enterprise in themselves but tended to occur, instead, where such initiatives were perceived to clash with their own interests.' This is a

million miles away from the picture so often painted of the peasantry as desperately clinging to its old way of life - a false impression which unintentionally supports the right-wing view of the tenants as the main obstacle to capitalist development.

That said, the issue still remains of whether there was a realisable alternative to the eventual consolidation of the great estates and mass migrations which followed. What McGeachy gains in focus by confining his discussion to Argyll he loses by excluding consideration of the relationship of its population to that of the rest of Scotland. One of the great counter-factual questions in this whole discussion, it seems to me anyway, is what the consequences might have been if connections could have been established between the Highland resistance and the various Lowland radical movements from the Friends of the People through to the Chartists. But it is probably unreasonable to tax McGeachy with failing to discuss this given the massive areas he has covered in what is, after all a relatively short book. We can only hope that his example will inspire further committed but sober surveys of the rest of the Highlands during this period. ■

Neil Davidson

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Kick Up The Tabloids

REFERENDA CONFUSION REIGNS

This issue celebrates how successful Scottish Left Review has been in its predictions over the past eight years. Looking into my crystal ball and sifting through my tea leaves, I think it is fairly safe to predict that within the next eight years, the following shall come to pass:

New Labour will still not be able to agree on a referendum on Scottish independence. At the moment, Wendy wants one, shouting "bring it on". Gordon does not. It could easily be that by the time you read this both will have taken an entire U-turn. I think the only way forward is for New Labour to hold a referendum about whether we are to have a referendum.

Wendy Alexander is, I think, playing the cleverer game of the two, even from a Unionist perspective. My guess is that she is hoping that the referendum is run from London, and that her brother is given the job of running it. Following his spectacular success 12 months ago in turning the Scottish parliamentary election into an utter fiasco, Douglas Alexander could no doubt make an even bigger balls-up.

A straightforward referendum ballot paper would read:

Should Scotland be independent? Yes No.

Please place a cross in the appropriate box.

A Douglas Alexander - designed referendum ballot paper might read:

Question 1. Should Scotland be independent?

Yes....go to question 2

No....go to question 2

Maybe....go to Berwick upon Tweed

Question 2. How independent should Scotland be or not be? Please place in order of preference:

1 Very independent

2 Independent

3 Quite independent

4 Sort of half-way between independent and not independent

5 Not independent

6 Not independent at all

Cue confusion on a national scale, widespread panic, a rise in fuel prices (any excuse will do) and irate Edinburgh voters rampaging round polling stations wielding golf clubs. From a Nationalist perspective, if Alex Salmond is genuinely serious about delivering independence he should insist on a UK-wide vote. If English people get a say on the matter, Scotland could

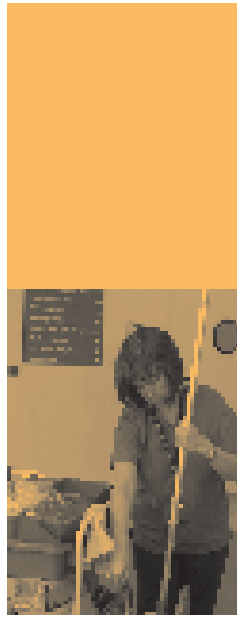
be independent within months rather than years. My prediction is that Scotland will gain independence, perhaps within the next eight years, although not necessarily via the referendum route. There are alternative roads to freedom:

By going on hunger strike, as Ghandi did in India. As I have written here before, it is highly unlikely that Alex Salmond would consider this to be a viable option. By setting yourself on fire in protest. In Scotland, this will only earn you a severe kicking from a passing baggage handler. By fighting a war. Funnily enough, I quite fancy Scotland's chances at this one. After all, if the British are going to be stupid enough to leave their nuclear weapons in Scotland..... By penalty shoot-out. Against England! It's a shoo-in for the Scots. By chalking graffiti on public buildings on the Royal Mile with the slogan "End London Rule". This mysterious, one-person campaign has been running for the past eight years and will undoubtedly run for the next eight.

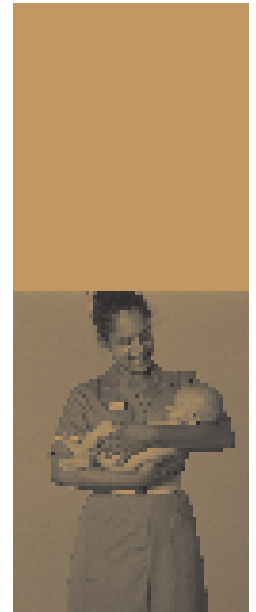
Meanwhile, in London over the next four years, Cockneys will have to rely more than ever on their cheeky, chirpy sense of humour. I lived in The Smoke for five years and what I really liked about living amongst Londoners was their in-your-face, take-the-mickey sense of humour. For example, someone on the other street would try to gain your attention by shouting "Oi, mate!". If you looked their way, they would immediately make an obscene hand gesture and shout "Wanker!". Now and again, they would overstep the mark. Now and again their humour would go too far. Which it has now done on a major scale. They've elected Boris Johnston as mayor. Fifty per cent of Europe's largest city have effectively taken the piss out of themselves. Or have they? Maybe the joke is on Boris. I predict that the following scenario has probably already taken place. The mayoral limo pulls up at traffic lights next to a white van. A guy in the passenger seat shouts "Oi! Boris!" followed by "Wanker!".

On the subject of buffoons, in eight years time, John Prescott will still be struggling with his embarrassing condition of being embarrassing. Two jags, sex in the office and now, "my fight with bulimia". If anyone looks to have successfully conquered bulimia it is John Prescott. However, any time he appears in public over the next eight years, he will have to put up with the chant "Who threw up all the pies? Who threw up all the pies?".

Two final predictions. Scotland will qualify for the 2010 World Cup. In the run-up to the UK general election, Gordon Brown will support England who will go out on penalties to Iraq. In 2016, Rangers will still be bleating about the SPL's refusal to extend the 2008 seasons. Finally, less a prediction and more a fact: in the next eight years, it is likely that Margaret Thatcher will die. Not all bad, eh ?



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