

# Scottish **Left** Review

Issue 68 January/February 2012 £2.00



Scottish Local Government:  
**Is it working now?**

# Scottish Left Review

Issue 68 January/February 2012

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## Comment

There is a strong case to argue that the biggest threat to Scottish democracy is the relentless emasculating of local government. This is not a new process – many commentators have noted the irony that the vital role local government played in bringing about a Scottish Parliament was rewarded by that Parliament reducing its role in Scottish life. But like all processes of attrition, at a certain point you have to stop and check if the target of that attrition is even alive any more. We are reaching that point in local political representation in Scotland.

We are seeing what could soon be the terminal decline of local democracy in Scotland, and that itself is a decline from a fairly low base. Let no-one tell you otherwise; Scotland is not a particularly democratic nation. If you look at 'tiers' of representation, the distance between people and the first layer of decision-making over which they have any level of influence is enormous. In some parts of Scotland you need to travel hundreds of miles to get near to the first signs of democratic accountability; in all of Scotland the number of people lumped together in even the smallest of democratic electorates is enormous by comparison with other nations. Eberhard Bort and Lesley Riddoch demonstrate exactly the extent of the democratic deficit in their article in this issue.

So Scotland started with local democracy which was insufficiently local. But at least it was reasonably powerful. It is a broad rule that a democratic institution is important in direct relationship to how able it is to really influence the world within its own boundaries. If we elect people to a body which isn't really capable of changing anything, everyone in the chain loses. The politicians see themselves as bag-carriers and not game-changers, bright people are not attracted to try and become politicians, the electorate senses the weakness of the body, the powerful vested interests see the elected group as weak and expect to win (just as the elected group seems to expect to lose), and the paid officials see themselves as the real centre of power. This creates a body carrying out important functions which does not believe it is important and does not attract good people. What is left is not vacuum – planning decisions and so on still need to be made – but a 'blindspot'. Business goes on but no-one bothers to look.

## Scotland is facing a real problem of democracy - local democracy

As Peter McColl points out in this issue, it was really Labour that started this assault with its expansion of ring-fenced funding deeper and deeper into local government. For a brief moment the SNP looked like it had learned the lesson (where many of its members in local government could see the impact of centralisation) and the Concordat genuinely offered local authorities a much greater level of control. But this was squeezed and squeezed by financial reality – the Council Tax freeze took financial responsibility out of the hands of councils and left them in a tight position financially. It became harder and harder to do anything big because the budget was pared down (especially once the Scottish budget started to face serious pressure) to the point where the challenge was to keep services going.

And it is about to get worse. It already looks like managerialism is about to strip out remaining responsibilities. Despite the fact that surely no-one can still believe that merging public agencies actually saves money (other than the sort of technocratic bureaucrats who always believe such things), still we are going to see a single police force and a single fire service take even more powers away from local areas. It seems that the idea that local policing might be better guided by people who understand local issues has gained more-or-less no traction – in a battle between good policy-making and the mirage of technocratic pseudo cost savings, good policy doesn't stand a chance. Now it looks like the quangoisation of the public sphere is going to drive a close-to final nail in the coffin of local authorities – with education set to be centralised as well.

What is left for local government? To manage contracts and clean the streets? What is left for elected officials? The role of agony aunt and call centre for constituents in need, passing their complaints on to officials? At what point do we simply stop calling this democracy?

But if this reads at all like a valiant band of local politicians are losing a brave struggle against a harsh overlord, that would be to disregard the role of those politicians. It is perhaps the lowest point in Scottish local government in many a generation – just as central government reduces the responsibilities of local government, so many parts of local government simply gave what was

left away. In the creation of 'arms length executive organisations' (ALEOs) we find the nadir of democracy; councillors choosing to give away their own responsibilities. At previous low-points in Scottish local government such as the financial scandals of the early 1990s, at least there was the possibility of un-electing the corrupt. In many cases the scope for corruption has simply been moved beyond the bounds of democracy with entire council services being basically privatised (and those doing the privatising finding ways to get a nice salary out of serving on the boards of organisations which do the things they were getting paid to do in the first place).

So let us not shed too many tears for many of our councillors. They responded to an 'anti-respect' agenda from the Scottish Parliament with their own anti-respect agenda – to their own electorate. This is local democracy in Scotland in 2012 – what started poorly democratic has been further hollowed out from above and what remained was looted by some from inside. And just as with those European nations under attack from financial markets, when democracy becomes weak what flourishes is commercial self-interest – government of property developers, for property developers, by property developers. The politicians step back into the shadows and the technocrats take over. And for anyone who does not yet know what technocrat means, it means 'functionary of the dominant ideology'. Which is a problem given the dominant ideology.

This can all be seen in one grand set-piece event – the Battle for Glasgow. At least here is a vigorous political campaign focussed entirely on a local area. It is a Very Big Issue – can the SNP beat Labour and take over control of Glasgow City Council? In some ways this ought to be encouraging irrespective of your political beliefs; at least there is a democratic struggle. But it isn't encouraging, because the last thing anyone involved seems to care about is Glasgow itself. This is simple a show-trial for the main event – referendum, general election, whatever 'national' event you consider important. No-one seems to talk about the importance of local government unless it is useful for central government.

So now is the time to start again. The power of local democracy? It has no power, it is barely democratic and

it isn't even local. Scotland is at risk of becoming a fish that rots from the tail. Central politics is full of people who cut their teeth in local government but those in the next generation have nothing to get their teeth into. Where do we grow our politicians now? A sort of media X Factor it would seem, producing candidates with exactly the staying-power and depth that implies. How do we respond to local issues? Via a quango a hundred miles away staffed with young career professionals with no interest in your or your locality? How do we shape our country? From 50,000 feet? The government of your community and mine has become like aerial bombing – those pressing the buttons are so far above their targets that they simply do not see the damage being done.

'Local' is the foundation of the Scottish nation. It is the foundation of any nation. The respect we show our country can be read simply and clearly in the respect which which we treat 'the local'. Increasingly that means disdain. We will be a nation with no 'local', only an anarchic wasteland presided over by a coalition of supermarkets and the builders of poor quality housing.

We must take three simple steps. Step one: adopt the principle that all decisions should be taken as close to those affected as is possible. That is never a quango and it is never diktat from central government. Step two: make the local local. We need at least an extra tier of government in Scotland; perhaps two. Scandinavia and Germany could teach us how to build a nation from below. Step three: show some respect. Too much of this is being done by young professionals from the two big cities who see themselves as metropolitan and would just not choose to live in a 'local place'.

This simply cannot go on. Barely a political or media voice in the country is willing to make this an issue. But someone has to. The Soviets managed from the centre because they (wrongly) believed they could do it better from there; our managerial class manages from the centre because they have no interest in what lies beyond. Government of Big Things Only can only lead to the decline and decay of small things. Small things like people, streets, villages, towns, libraries, clubs, neighbourhoods, the sense of community. Change must come, or anger and resentment will. ■

# Radically Local

The notion that government could be used to transform the power structures of society to the advantage of workers was at the heart of much twentieth century radical thought. And the success of this notion is the reason why neoliberalism has a profound attack on government at its core. Many radicals reject this attack. That is why people defend the welfare state, the NHS and state schooling. But there is one area

where radicals have joined the attack on government. And this is in their attitude over the past 20 years to local government.

There is very little support for local government as a way of transforming power structures to the advantage of workers amongst radicals. At best radicals have suggested

that local government should be retained as a way of delivering services. It may be that the concerns of local administration are deemed to trifling for people with radical aims, or it may be that radicals have accepted the neoliberal analysis because there are seemingly more important fights to have. Who wants to advocate visionary local authorities as a solution, when you can proclaim your love for the NHS?

But this retreat by radicals merely strengthens the neoliberal attack on government. It's vital that we not only defend the ability of government to transform economic relations at local level; it's vital that we seize the opportunities local government gives us to remake the political economy of Scotland. We need to bring new and exciting ideas to local government. It must be a front in the battle to reclaim our lives from the reckless imposition of neoliberalism by the Westminster government. It's too important to be a sideshow to constitutional debates. It must be at the heart of our agenda for 2012.

The 2012 Local Elections are a vital

turning point for Scotland. You'd not know that to watch the Scottish media, or the approach being taken by the major political parties. The elections offer the chance to fundamentally reconfigure Scotland's politics. But the vision that could transform our cities and create a new municipalism is almost totally missing.

Local Government in Britain helped to create the modern state. Our

cities were made possible by civic government building very substantial infrastructure and delivering huge increases in the quality of life. If you go to Glasgow, Birmingham, or my own home town of Belfast, the headquarters of the Local Authority can lay claim to being the finest building in

the city. These marble palaces reflected the importance of local government, and the reforming zeal of the corporations responsible for their construction.

In the 1980s a new municipal left emerged that was responsible for the huge strides in rights for women, LGBTIQ, black and minority ethnic groups. Where central government was mired in the institutional prejudice of the mid-twentieth century local government played a key role in breaking that hegemony. Many local authorities were also at the forefront of resistance to the worst excesses of the Thatcherite class war. So it made sense for Thatcher to clip their wings, to cap their rates and to impose a Poll Tax intended to curtail their spending power. She even deployed Section 28 to prevent Local Authorities using their say over education to break down homophobia.

A generation of skilled Labour Party politicians including Ken Livingstone, David Blunkett and John McDonnell came through this route as the prospect of ministerial office faded under Thatcher.

Since then Local Government has slumped to being an almost destitute poor relation of central government. It is dogged by a paralysing managerialism that has reduced local authorities to bodies that merely deliver services, but do not govern. But the powers exist in Scotland for Local Government to again take a leading role in the transformation of our lives. What is needed is a big vision, exciting ideas and a new calibre of Councillor.

But the reality is that since the Concordat in 2007 Local Government has had power unprecedented since Thatcher started to undermine local government in the 1980s. The agreement between Finance Secretary John Swinney and the umbrella organisation for Local Government in Scotland CoSLA had a significance that has rarely been understood.

As the new Scottish Parliament took shape in the early years of this century it very often defined itself against Local Government. It's clear that, rather than seeking more power from Westminster, MSPs sought to 'make local government work'. The main instrument in this strategy was the ring fence. More and more money was released to local authorities in pots that had to be dedicated to a purpose determined by ministers. Councillors were deemed unable or unfit to make strategic decisions, and were left only to decide on delivery.

Finally, Jack McConnell used the second Partnership Agreement with the Liberal Democrats in 2003 to push through a package of proportional representation for local government alongside remuneration packages to encourage long-serving Councillors to step aside. This meant that a very large number of new Councillors were elected and areas that had been run by Labour administrations for decades were suddenly in no overall control.

Then, in return for a three-year freeze on Council Tax Local Authorities were granted freedom from ring fencing in November 2007. They could choose their own priorities, could decide to spend money as they wished and should have been in a position to make big strategic decisions.

But what happened instead was more

## Proportional elections and the greater freedom of the Concordat should have prompted a renaissance in local government. Peter McColl argues that more must be done if there is to be a transformation of local politics.

of the same. Local Authorities continued to do what they'd done before, they were no more strategic; it seemed that they could no longer act with the vigour of their 19th Century forebears, or even the political nous of their 1980s predecessors.

There are several reasons for this. Firstly the Councillors elected in 2007 were elected to administer central government policy, not to make decisions for themselves. It will take some time before the calibre of candidates we need will return to leadership positions – and certainly those elected before such a profound change in the powers of local government were very unlikely to be equipped to handle this level of power.

As Councils became less about local government and more about local delivery of services, so their decision-making became more driven by officials and less driven by politicians. The result is that politicians who want to make decisions don't get involved in local government.

The focus on local service delivery also stifles those with a broader politics. Under the current system, if you are interested mainly in campaigning to save your local park then you might want to be a Councillor; if you're interested in human rights, developing a new economy or changing the world, then you won't want to be a Councillor. But the reality is not only that local government can help to change the world it is also that people who are interested in changing the world often have a better understanding of how a city or area could be better run.

Many of those who did most to make local government effective in the 1980s were politicised by their opposition to nuclear weapons, their desire for equality for women or the LGBTIQ community. Such concerns are much less common in current local government. We must find ways to ensure that these concerns and issues that have become more important are on the agenda of local government.

At a time when Scotland is paying serious attention to constitutional questions, the question of how our communities govern themselves should be ready for consideration. And Local Government should be at the heart of this.

So, what is to be done?

We need a vision for the future. The Transition movement is one of the most exciting movements of the past ten years. Transition takes climate change and the inevitable end of cheap fossil fuels as an opportunity to develop stronger communities. At the heart of this is a 20 or 25 year plan to move communities away from fossil fuel dependence. The plan is drawn up by the community and encompasses the full range of services that each area requires.

Using concepts like this to focus



on what our communities should look like will re-engage people with Local Government. Each area, ward, community council area and Local Authority area should be facilitated to make a 25 year plan setting out how the people want the area to develop.

This will move Local Authorities away from the short-sightedness that necessarily accompanies day-to-day service delivery. The energy from bringing people together to envision the future of the communities in which they live may even allow day to day services to be much better delivered.

We need better Councillors. We're only likely to get once chance in the next five years to improve the quality of Councillors. It's really very important that we get the best Councillors at this election. We need more Councillors with real vision for our cities and communities. Where at present many Councillors are either

concerned with very local problems, or led by officials, what is needed are people who can develop and articulate ideas that can transform our communities. In some ways this is a pretty apolitical requirement. But what is important is that our elected representatives are able to work with their communities and lead their communities. The very act of providing participatory leadership is itself an act of resistance to the continued attacks on those without access to personal wealth.

We must demand more of local authorities. It's really important that we begin to expect more of local authorities. These are bodies run by highly paid and professional officials. They should be capable of delivering high quality services, and more importantly, appropriate community leadership. They are every bit as important as the governments in Westminster and Holyrood. Radicals have seriously overlooked the possibilities that Local Government offers for change. The 2012 elections offer the opportunity to reverse that oversight.

There is an exciting vision for Local Government. It is that it should focus much more on enabling communities to decide on and deliver services. Social media creates the opportunity to deliver more effective local services by allowing much gathering and sharing of information. Where services for much of the twentieth century were provided on the basis of uniform provision, we can use social media and new technology to deliver personalised services.

Local government has as much of a role to play in delivering a better world as national governments do. Failure to properly contest this year's elections and continued managerialism in local government does nothing to promote a radical agenda for a better world. We must recapture local government as a way of resisting neoliberalism and spreading democracy. Let's make the 2012 Local Elections in Scotland the beginning of a revival for local government. ■

*Peter McColl is a writer, activist and charity worker from Edinburgh. He worked as the Local Government Policy Officer for the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations from 2008-11.*

# Size Matters

The process of centralisation of governance has gone further in Scotland than in other countries. Highland Council, to take the most striking example, covers an area the size of Belgium with a population the size of Belfast. Councillors need to drive hundreds of thousands of miles a year to connect with fellow councillors and citizens in their council area. Despite such herculean efforts, many remote communities feel neglected and disenfranchised. That is “damaging democracy and economic development in Scotland,” writes Rob Gibson MSP in the introduction to ‘Small Works’. This consultation document proposes a major shake-up of the Highland Council, and Gibson has made the task his “personal priority” for this parliamentary session. “We have a situation in my constituency, where councillors can decide planning applications for projects hundreds of miles away and where spending

decisions are made by officials with little or no knowledge of the places they are affecting. Ordinary folk in the Far North feel disconnected from their council, and many businesses and voluntary groups feel frustrated by the lack of local involvement in Council matters.”

Highland Council may be the most extreme case but what is amiss there holds true for most rural councils in Scotland. How come? Local Government in Scotland has a long history, from the sheriffdoms, royal burghs and church parishes to the 33 shires created by the Local Government (Scotland) Act of 1889, which marked the beginning of modern local government in Scotland. Until 1929, in addition to four cities, 21 large burghs, 176 small burghs and 878 parishes, there were 430 local government entities until 1974 when the Wheatley reforms gave Scotland a two-tier system, with nine Regional Councils, 53 District Councils and three

all-purpose Island Councils (Orkney, Shetland, Western Isles). The present structure is the result of reorganisation based on the (Tory) Local Government (Scotland) Act of 1994 when two tiers were replaced by 29 single-tier authorities with three island authorities giving the current total of 32-councils, with 1,222 elected councillors.

This whittling down of local councils has been matched by a steady loss of local authority powers, functions and budgets in the fields of public health, hospitals, water and sewerage, environment, countryside, countryside recreation, tourism, public transport, airports, economic development, police, children’s panels, and housing. There’s been a process of centralisation, quangoisation and privatisation hollowing out local democracy. Where ‘decentralisation’ has occurred it has often simply meant privatisation or the transfer of responsibilities to non-

governmental institutions. ‘Downsizing’ of the State in the Thatcher period basically meant that voluntary organisations became quasi providers of public services (e.g. ‘care in the community’ for people formerly in public institutions).

We’ve heard the rhetoric of ‘new public management’ (partnerships, modernisation, etc) on the one hand, and on the other we witness the reality of greater central control through targets and performance indicators. The ‘rhetoric of decentralisation’ is exemplified by Eric Pickles’ Localism Bill south of the Border – which seeks to roll back the state and bypass, not empower, local authorities, undermining democratic accountability and transparency. Real devolution of power, real ‘Localism’, would make local government legally and financially less



## Lesley Riddoch and Eberhard Bort compare the genuinely local politics of our near neighbours to the large and remote local authorities in Scotland and find a very clear case for reform

dependent on central government.

A few international comparisons show how out of kilter Scottish local government really has become. Norway (with a population like Scotland of around five million) has 19 counties, each with an elected county council, and 431 municipalities responsible for primary and secondary education, outpatient health, senior citizen and social services, unemployment, planning, economic development and roads. The average Norwegian municipality has 12,500 people – the average Scottish council serves 162,500.

Finland, (with a dispersed population of five million) has 19 regions, plus the autonomous region of Åland, and 348 local authorities. Sweden has 21 counties (with 20 elected councillors apiece), two regions and 289 municipalities, plus autonomous Gotland. Denmark has 14 counties, 275 local authorities (each with between 9 and 31 elected members). Iceland, with a population of just over 300,000, has eight regions and 79 municipalities (with between 3 and 27 elected councillors).

Devolved governments elsewhere also have more local elected representatives. Baden-Württemberg, in southern Germany, with twice the population of Scotland, has 1,101 communes, each with an elected mayor and an elected council (20,000 councillors in total), plus 35 districts or boroughs (another 2,380 elected members), an elected regional assembly for Greater Stuttgart (since 1994 – with another 93 elected members) and the Baden-Württemberg Land (State) Parliament itself with 138 elected members, plus 84 members of the Bundestag in Berlin and 12 MEPs. That's a total of nearly 24,000 elected representatives against Scotland's total of 1,416.

Even centralist France has 22 regions, 96 départements and 36,000 communes with an average population of just 380 – all with elected members – likewise the federal Swiss with 7.6 million people served by 23 cantons and 2,900 communes (average population 2,600). As the political scientist (and occasional contributor to the *Scottish Left Review*) Michael Keating summed up, the present system of Scottish local

government gives Scotland “the largest average population per basic unit of local government of any developed country”.

Local government is largely financed by the Scottish Government, which supplies about 80 per cent of their revenue expenditure. By contrast, Finnish local government raises half its revenue through local taxation – only one fifth of local government expenditure comes from direct central government transfers; a

quarter is raised through fees and charges (e.g. water, waste, power, transport). In Iceland, 63 per cent of local government revenue is raised through a local income tax, 17 per cent through service income, 11 per cent through taxes on real estate, eight per cent come through central government equalisation.

Scottish local councils are therefore very dependent on decisions made by the Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament -- ring-fenced spending and spending caps further limit the elbow room of local authorities. When the SNP minority government took office in 2007, it promised to liberate and empower local communities. But instead, the former BBC journalist John Knox has argued, the councils were “tied into ‘single outcome agreements’ covering all sorts of central government targets, including a Council Tax freeze”.

There is no land taxation – despite efforts by the Greens and despite its earlier advocacy of a local income tax, the (now majority) SNP government has opted to continue the Council Tax freeze instead. Orkney and Shetland, as a result of their own initiatives, extract royalties from north sea oil passing through their Islands, and can decide themselves how to use these ‘oil funds’ for local social and developmental purposes.

Loss of local authority power and the remoteness of ‘local’ government have undoubtedly contributed to the evident lack of interest in Scottish

local government elections. Turnout is abysmal, even after the introduction of proportional representation. Looking round Europe, a pattern emerges –

councils in Scotland only raise 20 per cent of their budgets and usually have voter turnouts of 30-50 per cent (when not coinciding with Parliament elections); French councils raise half their budgets, and the average turnout is in the mid-fifties. In strongly localist

**Baden-Württemberg in southern Germany, with twice the population of Scotland, has a total of nearly 24,000 elected representatives against Scotland's total of 1,416**

Switzerland 85 per cent of revenue is raised locally and turnout is 90 per cent. Powerful local government also tends to attract a higher calibre of candidates, which in turn boosts turnout. Whenever effectiveness of local government is debated, the focus seems to be solely on cost and efficiency. But there is also a question of civic engagement, building social capital and, through democratic participation, strengthening civic pride.

There is, however, little political support for the resurrection of town councils. Andy Wightman puts that down to “the growing divide between the political classes and the people”. Indeed ‘reformers’ generally urge more centralisation, claiming Scotland is ‘too heavily’ governed, and decentralisation will only mean more politicians, bureaucracy and expenditure. “Let’s halve the number of MPs, MSPs and MEPs,” suggested Edinburgh councillor Martin Hannan in February 2011, “and cut the number of Edinburgh council seats to, say, around 25. We should also quadruple the deposits to stop crank candidates standing, and generally make the whole process simpler so that people can cast their votes in a few minutes every five years. Because frankly, that is all the attention most of our politicians deserve”. Is that a vision for local democracy in Scotland? And is a polity truly democratic if it lacks a local and regional foundation? Would not a return to municipal government be a better way

to restore faith in democracy?

But there's a danger of looking at the past with rose-tinted spectacles. Too often, as Alex Wood has argued in the *Scottish Review*, "Small town politics, including in the Labour heartlands, meant small-minded politics". He supports the return of regional governance. In fact, Scotland needs both: local communities with locally elected councils, and regions with responsibility for spatial and infrastructure planning.

In July 2011, the Association of Scottish Community Councils (ASCC) announced its demise, after a drastic funding cut from the Scottish Government. But the 9,000 or so community councillors now left without a guiding and coordinating body are part of the problem rather than the solution. According to Vincent Waters, the last ASCC president, community councils "are dying off", characterised by ageing and dwindling membership. They are toothless, bereft of real powers; they cannot legally own an asset. The exceptions are a few cases where the windfall from windfarms has given them real cash, and with it real responsibility, and thus real power. Yet, increasingly, development trusts have been set up to handle community orchards, lochs, pubs, libraries, bridges and wind turbines – and in the process a very practical, capable and focused set of people have been gathered together and let rip. But do they compensate for democratically elected and accountable councils?

North or south, Baltic or Mediterranean, most European states are still micro-sized at their local tier. That means more councillors and (perhaps) more cost. It also means more connection, traction, trust, effective service delivery and involvement than Scotland's present configuration of disempowering and distant 'local' government which is, put simply, not fit for purpose.

A further transfer of powers is in prospect for the Scottish Parliament, including substantial fiscal and borrowing powers. And the next 'local' council elections are looming. This is precisely the right time for that Parliament to remember that devolution was never meant to stop at Holyrood – it's at least encouraging to hear just those sentiments included by Johann Lamont in her victory speech as new Scottish Labour leader. "Power will be decentralised in a participative society," wrote Constitutional Convention convener Kenyon Wright optimistically back in 1997. Civic Scotland made a big effort to secure the return of the Parliament – maybe it should get into campaign mode once more to secure greater local autonomy. Rob Gibson's 'Small Works' consultation in the Highland Council area could be a starting point.

#### NORDIC CASE STUDIES – BY LESLEY RIDDOCH

The proof of the pudding is in the eating.

Five summers back I visited the small town of Seyðisfjörður in north-east Iceland (pop 668) and was impressed to see gangs of youngsters mending fences, mowing grass, and painting walls at the local hospital. "Yes, the municipality decided to pay them a small amount

to fix the town every summer. The older kids guide the young ones, they don't get bored, they learn to earn money and we get everything ready for the tourist season."

It made so much sense.

"Doesn't the hospital have to employ unionised labour for work like that?"

"Well the municipality runs the hospital too."

Gobsmacked was too small a word.

Three years ago, in snow so deep it would have brought Scotland grinding to a halt, I visited the Medas Outdoor Kindergarten

in Arctic Norway.

The national Norwegian government had called for farmers to diversify and for children to have at least one full day outside per week. So the local municipality backed a bright idea by local farmers Jostein and Anita Hunstad – a farm kindergarten where the children feed and care for the animals, make hay, grow vegetables and sell eggs and tomatoes in local villages at the weekends to raise funds for school trips. There are now 100 similar farm kindergartens across Norway. A great example of national political direction prompting creative and effective local solutions - not postcode lotteries.

Two winters ago on the Swedish island of Gotland (pop 40,000) I met Development Director Bertil Klintbom who invited me to the opening of a new pier at Slite. For centuries Gotland was a vital stepping stone in Baltic trade and travel until the Cold War ended ferry travel east, causing the rundown of Slite Port.

So the municipality struck on an ambitious plan – in 2008 they controversially gave the Russian government permission to lay a new trans-continental gas pipeline within Gotland's territorial waters in exchange for a contract using Slite as their Baltic pipe-laying base, an (upfront) payment for its refurbishment and a contribution to the cost of a new hydrogen-powered trans-Baltic ferry. Did the Swedish government have a say?

"Why should they?"

People in Nordic communities do grumble, do moan about taxes and do support mergers amongst the smallest municipalities. But they view councillors as respected neighbours not ill-informed strangers, and expect the bulk of day-to-day decisions about their lives to be taken by people they know.

Last winter, by contrast, most Scottish villagers and city neighbours weren't sufficiently empowered to organise their own snow-clearing operations. Genuine localism is low-cost but not no-cost and low-maintenance but not no-maintenance. Without central encouragement, devolving resources to communities and ending Big Brother micro-management by higher tiers, we are doomed to waste human capital in Scotland just as we once flared "waste" gas from oil rigs. ■

**Paddy Bort and Lesley Riddoch are founding members of Nordic Horizons [www.nordichorizons.org](http://www.nordichorizons.org)**



# Feedback - Issue 67

From the next issue of Scottish Left Review we will introduce a regular feature page looking at the constitutional debate. Until then, the following are a couple of selected responses to the last issue.

## A CALL FOR INFORMATION

Very few of us are economists or constitutional experts and thus we are in no position to evaluate the conflicting assertions made by politicians on a whole variety of subjects surrounding the issue of independence. Furthermore when those with the appropriate expertise and qualifications attempt to clarify the issues for us they are liable to be subjected to ridicule from those with an inability to tolerate the expression of opinions different from their own and so:

I believe we should issue a **call** for a commitment to the evolution of a more **informed** and thus more **effective community of citizens**, the initial aim of the call being to convince the various elements of Scottish civil society and the political establishment that it is their duty to take practical steps to encourage informed and intelligent discussion in the run-up to the referendum. The aforementioned establishment must acknowledge that the constitutional future of Scotland is far too important an issue to allow the terms and content of the debate to be dictated solely by those within the political mainstream.

We should not be surprised should some politicians display symptoms of being fearful of losing control of events to an informed sovereign people who seek to take into their own hands the rehabilitation of their democracy, whether within an independent Scotland or within the United Kingdom.

We must encourage open debate and welcome in particular non-partisan contributions from experts in appropriate fields. These contributors should be

reassured, in the face of disparagement, by the certain knowledge that they are answering a call from the community of citizens and are serving the interests of democracy by increasing understanding in such areas as: The Entry into Europe of an Independent Scotland: The Economics of Independence: Would an Independent Scotland be a more equal and thus less dysfunctional society than it currently is?

*John Milne*

## PRIORITIES FOR THE LEFT

Recent issues of the *Scottish Left Review* have tended to concentrate on independence and constitutional issues and the implications for the Left in Scotland. These are undoubtedly important questions but the overwhelmingly major issue is the defeat of the Tory/Coalition's disastrous policies.

The Tory strategy is clear – to use the financial global capitalist crisis to roll back the gains that our people have won by struggle over decades. Destroy the Welfare State, remove workers' rights altogether, extreme austerity for the mass of the people, create a reserve army of unemployed and inflict criminal damage on our young people, support the global corporations who are killing our planet – government's basic purpose is to make the rich even richer and even more powerful. Just as governments are doing basically in Europe and globally.

An intensification of class war which of course was always present.

The SNP Scottish Government, although to a certain extent trying to protect our people, is able to dodge the main flack by focussing on Westminster

Government. And the SNP as a political party is getting away scot-free, to coin a phrase, if questions of referendum and independence tend to be the main headline issues. Where does it stand on confronting coalition policies and on the Labour movement's campaign of action? Is it a Social Democratic party?

Basically Scottish bankers and businessmen are no different from their compatriots down south and dare one mention Trump and the welcome by Salmond (also Cameron) to BP's incursion into Shetland waters, after its Mexican Gulf disaster with workers' deaths.

Of course our other three main political parties have been much the same with the Lib-Dems in total betrayal of any principles whatever and Labour craven and tentative to say the least regarding the trade unions campaigning. Only Patrick Harvie, Greens' MSP, has raised the issues of the power of multi-nationals, taxes for the rich, poverty and inequality.

To quote John Kay (no relation), UK economist, "the strategy of top financiers and bankers and Tory neoliberals who support them is to shift attention from structural problems in our economy caused by deregulation and over-reliance on financial institutions to one that links our current problems to national debt and public expenditure. Unfortunately our three political party leaderships have basically bought this approach".

Surely it's pretty clear what are the main responsibilities facing the Left in Scotland.

*John Kay*



The Jimmy Reid  
Foundation

New website and first report launched January

# Interrogating Non-Violence

Reading Eurig Scandrett's 'Reactions to Violence' in Issue 66 of the *Scottish Left Review* raised a lot of questions for me. Mainly, it's because the completely reasonable account of the non-violence movement that was presented there contrasts sharply with my on-the-ground experience of being scolded by 'mature' and 'realistic' voices within demonstrations and bearing witness to many heated, vicious arguments between people who should be allies. I get the feeling I'm not alone in this. To quote one of many examples, here's what Malcolm Harris has written about his experience at Occupy Wall Street, one of the more

celebrated examples of non-violence in recent months: "In addition to the police, occupiers now have to worry about getting harassed or undermined by self-appointed guardians of the non-violent movement. Try chanting something that deviates from the friendly universalist "99 per cent" line and see what happens" ([libcom.org/library/baby-we%E2%80%99re-all-anarchists-now-malcolm-harris](http://libcom.org/library/baby-we%E2%80%99re-all-anarchists-now-malcolm-harris)).

Rather than choosing a side in the over-wrought debate about violence versus non-violence, I wanted to take a closer look at some of the central arguments for non-violence, and ponder whether the two sides might have more

in common than is normally supposed. While it might be argued that I'm attacking a straw man or being unfair by not naming a specific target, it's not my aim to undermine anyone's position, but simply unpack some common problems in the broader discussion.

Let's talk about Gandhi first as he's so central to the non-violence tradition. I'm sure we all know the traditional account: Gandhi preached non-violence and by enduring colonial repression with dignity de-legitimized the British Empire. While there is much to be argued over here in terms of the direct historical sequence, one thing this account leaves out is that Gandhi was not absolutist in his rejection of violence. Norman Finkelstein, better known for his work related to the Israeli occupation of Palestine, has studied Gandhi's writing in great depth. He finds that, while Gandhi saw the moral and pragmatic superiority of non-violence, he did not condemn violence per se:

"He wants to recommend non-violence, but, he recognises that according to the contemporary standards of rights and wrong, people are allowed to resort to violence, and you have no right to tell people...or tell some people, they can't use violence, because that's the current standard of right and wrong." ([www.normanfinkelstein.com/docs/GandhilectureforWebpage-1.doc](http://www.normanfinkelstein.com/docs/GandhilectureforWebpage-1.doc))

This flexibility is the first point.

The second is this: whatever the status of violence in Gandhi's thought, his legacy should never be invoked to justify non-confrontation or, indeed, obedience and submission to authority, something with which non-violence can often be conflated. In contrast, non-violence, for Gandhi involved all the typical repercussions and risks of violence, but without lifting a hand in response. As Finkelstein quotes:

"I believe that a man is the strongest soldier for daring to die unarmed with his breast bare before the enemy." ... Into the valley of death it must headlong march, unarmed yet "smilingly" and "cheerfully"; "if we are to train ourselves to receive the bullet wounds or bayonet charges in our bare chests, we must accustom

## The new book by Dexter Whitfield

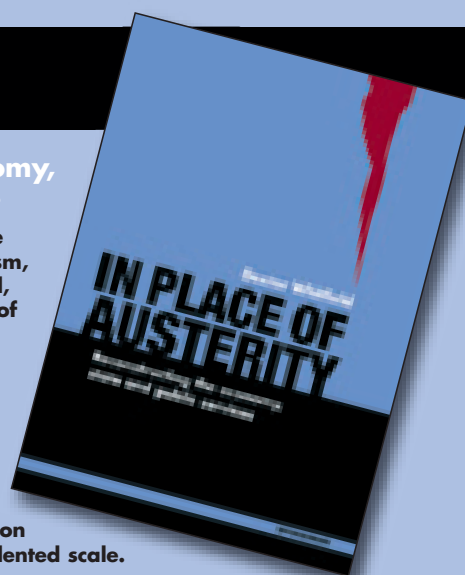
### Reconstructing the economy, state and public services

***In Place of Austerity* uncovers the realities of commissioning, localism, 'big society' empowerment fraud, and the systematic undermining of public services and the welfare state. It perceptively exposes the scale of disempowerment, dispossession and disinvestment, and analyses the dominant rationale, which continues to underpin the financialisation and personalisation of public services, accelerating marketisation and privatisation on an unprecedented scale.**

This is a vitally important book for trade unions as well as for civil and community organisations. It provides a critical understanding of the issues and will aid their intervention in transformation and procurement of public services by forging strong alliances, taking industrial and community action, and advancing alternative policies.

*In Place of Austerity* sets out a framework for policies that reconstruct the economy, invest in local economies, create jobs and rebuild public infrastructure. In doing so, it charts a new role for the state and offers a radical new public service management strategy. It is an equally important resource for all public sector employees. Incisive, timely and detailed, it is original in its research and analysis.

**Dexter Whitfield** is Director of the European Services Strategy Unit and Adjunct Associate Professor, Australian Institute for Social Research, University of Adelaide. He has an extensive and unique track record of research, policy analysis and strategic advice to public bodies, trade unions and community organisations. His recent book, *Global Auction of Public Assets*, has proved highly influential in providing a definitive analysis of Public Private Partnerships and the burgeoning global infrastructure market.



## Joseph Ritchie looks at theories of pacifism and non-violence and argues that they are not the same thing as 'self-policing' of the anti-capitalism movement which may weaken the message

ourselves to standing unmoved in the face of cavalry or baton charges.”

In a context where non-violence on the ground often boils down 'not giving the police an excuse' for violence, this statement could not be more relevant.

The questions of 'violent' and 'non-violent' protest techniques should also be read against the work of Gene Sharp. Sharp, whose support for non-violent resistance - given its greater effectiveness and smaller, though hardly negligible, risk - has influenced successful struggles against tyranny in Serbia, Ukraine, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus and, arguably, Egypt. This is a powerful endorsement of his position, and should make him widely read amongst British activist circles. Crucially, however, he substitutes the concept of violent resistance not with pacifism *per se* but something he calls "political defiance". This typically involves sustained campaigns of non-cooperation, intervention, protest and persuasion aimed at the governing regime. While nothing at all like armed resistance, these methods can cause considerable disorder, strife and government repression: the very things many pacifists appear determined to avoid.

But isn't this only legitimate and useful in situations of tyranny? Indeed, but here I think it's foolish to rely on cold war narratives about which countries are 'free' and which are not, but rather look at the zones in any ruling regime that are tyrannical and those which are open. For example, it's possible to argue that the tax rates are primarily within our democratic purview. Although defiance has certainly been extremely helpful in the past - consider the anti-Poll Tax campaign - legal methods and negotiation may be suitable, at least on paper.

By contrast, the aims of Occupy Wall Street, for example, are much more ambitious. Here, the goal appears to involve establishing democratic control over the economy. To put this in concrete terms, this would mean at the very least dismantling the dominance of the 147 companies that effectively control 40 per cent of the world's wealth, as reported in New Scientist last October (Coghlan, A and MacKenzie, D Revealed - The Capitalist Network That Runs the World New Scientist 19th October 2011).

Such demands are plainly not within the purview of electoral politics: if our political leaders cannot agree on better labour conditions for fear of capital flight, does anyone seriously believe that they are going to redistribute society's productive assets? If not open to electoral contest, I don't see how these dictums are anything other than tyrannically imposed. We are frequently told that the state is increasingly irrelevant in a globalised world, and the current financial coups in the Euro-zone would appear to bear this out. Regardless, while the state might be powerless to control global capital, it appears more than happy to keep it's workforce (that is to say 'us') in line, regardless of the consequences. In this context, isn't it possible that Gene Sharp has some relevance?

The choice of strategy can also have political implications. When any movement develops spontaneously, there will be those who seek to give it legitimacy within the dominant media discourse by producing demands, forming leadership councils and, crucially, agreeing in advance what sorts of resistance will and will not be considered appropriate. This can be (but is not always) an extremely efficient method for taking its teeth out, as the 'responsible' may well police the 'irresponsible' on behalf of the state. To quote Peter Gelderloos: "Nowadays the way that states rule is by accepting the inevitability of conflict and resistance and trying to manage it permanently. And the best way to manage is to have people in the resistance who are managing it for you".

And who are the typical managers? Well, this is where an obvious limitation of the 99 per cent rhetoric becomes clear. While there is an obvious distinction between the one per cent and everyone else, it's important not to ignore the 20 per cent - the co-ordinator class - identified by Michael Albert in *Parecon* and elsewhere. These are those within capitalism who do all the empowering work - the managers, technocrats, intellectuals, lawyers, etc - and as a result are articulate, decisive and organised. If there is any desire to overcome this division, it has to be immanent within the movement itself. State co-option, with non-violence and pacifism as its wedge, tends to replicate this division,

with a leadership calling the shots and the rank-and-file doing the (non-violent) marching.

To be clear, I'm not calling for a purge of pacifists, and I fully endorse the view that militarism excludes people from the movement and frequently fails to achieve its goals. Thinking about all of this, however, what I would like to see is a much broader definition of 'non-violence' and less condemnation of 'anarchists' and 'trouble-makers' from those who have other approaches. What's more, any social movement that seriously threatens the social hierarchy *is* violent, at least for those who feel entitled to their power. Whether it balances out for society as a whole in the long-term is irrelevant for the hypothetical CEO who sees his vast fortune channelled into social projects and redistributed amongst the 'undeserving poor'. In turn, this means that no matter how submissive your posture is, your movement will be seen as threatening and treated as such, making solidarity with the 'irresponsible' a rather valuable commodity.

Basically, I'm proposing that in the emerging movements what's needed more than anything is a cease-fire between those advocating non-violence and those who are less convinced. This means, on the one hand, a little less of the spectacular violence typically associated with revolutionaries attempting to 'short-circuit' the social order by breaking windows and so on to 'wake-up' the population. On the other hand, non-violence advocates need to refrain from attacking the inevitable violence that arises from police provocation and stop becoming agents of oppression themselves. As I've argued, this tends to maintain class hierarchies, make police neutralisation easy and alienate the engaged in exchange for appeasing the apathetic. What's more, they represent very narrow approach to non-violence. The precise dimensions and terms of this cease-fire will have to be fought out within these movements, but what's crucial is that both sides can relinquish their occasionally histrionic moral authority with a view to the larger context. ■

**Joseph Ritchie is a freelance contributor. You can find more of his work at [ascannerdespairingly.wordpress.com](http://ascannerdespairingly.wordpress.com)**

# Imagining a Better Future

Tony Beekman's short story: A New Job, set in a socialist utopia drawn from his own imagination (*Scottish Left Review Issue 67*) struck me as being reminiscent of a recently neglected tradition in fiction: the socialist utopian novel. Images of utopia can, of course be traced back to the 16th century when Thomas More's satirical attack on the values of Tudor England was written, but the socialist utopian novel has its own tradition beginning in the late 19th century. This of course was the period when Oscar Wilde claimed that 'a map of the world which does not include Utopia was not even worth looking at'. But if Wilde, in *The Soul of Man under Socialism*, argues for a world where people would be free from the kind of constraints that an obsession with money places on them, other writers in his own time went further and envisaged how a socialist society in the future would come about and what principles it would be based on.

Two writers from the late 19th and early 20th centuries stand out in this respect: the American liberal journalist Edward Bellamy and the English socialist, artist and designer William Morris. Rather than simply subject them to what EP Thompson called "the condescension of posterity" by looking at the limits of their vision, it is perhaps more constructive to re-examine their work to see if anything can be learned from it. Both of these writers tried to imagine what society would look like if the poverty, exploitation and greed that characterised 19th century capitalism was brought to an end and socialism prevailed. Bellamy's *Looking Backward* and Morris's *News from Nowhere* were highly popular texts with left wing educators and autodidacts in the labour movement for at least two generations after they were written. Their rival visions of how socialism could be achieved and would it operate in a future society are, arguably, still relevant to socialists today.

For Bellamy, who sees socialism developing in America as a result of large corporations (or 'trusts' in the language of the period) being taken over by the state as a result of a social *cris de fois* when the American public lose their belief in capitalism. This he predicted would

have happened before the year 2000, not by class struggle but by a peaceful political work and negotiation. The socialist society that he outlines in his novel is highly regulated, centralised and essentially bureaucratic and as the state deals with all social needs there are only a few occasions when the government has to meet. The government itself comprises a group of enlightened individuals. Ironically there are some limited parallels between this group and Lenin's concept of a revolutionary vanguard but, of course, Bellamy's political leaders have no revolutionary intent and, perhaps more importantly, no alternative ideology. The government, when it acts, acts for the common good. Bellamy's thinking here is close to Rousseau's concept of the 'will of the people' and, like Rousseau himself, he side-steps the problem of competing priorities and the difficult choices that have to be made in any form of politics. Had Bellamy looked back at the history of the French Revolution, and in particular the Reign of Terror, he may have given more consideration to this idea. Robespierre, a well-known disciple of Rousseau, backed by the ironically named Committee of Public Safety, justified the atrocities he gave orders for as actions being carried out for the common good, as he was able to interpret the 'will of the people'. Such are the dangers of vague and nebulous concept in the hands of powerful high minded idealists.

Although the novel seems naive from a 21st century perspective, it must be seen within the context of American bourgeois thinking at the time. In response to Bellamy's novel, Bellamy clubs were formed to debate the themes

raised in the book and Bellamy himself was lionised by American intellectuals. Then, as now, many Americans had a pathological fear of communism but they were also concerned about the power of large corporations and by the deepening gap between the rich and poor. Unable to escape the political and intellectual straightjacket of the dominant ideology of their times, they wanted a more civilised society but the notion of revolution or direct action on the part of the working-class was anathema to them. Bellamy, in other words, told them what they wanted to hear: American history was moving in the right direction and there was no need to adopt what were regarded as dangerous European theories of political and social change. It should be borne in mind that this was a work written in one of the most turbulent periods in American labour history.

What is particularly interesting is what followed. Not only did Morris write his *News from Nowhere*, which like Bellamy's novel is narrated by a man (Morris himself) who travels through time to a future socialist age in response

to *Looking Backward* but he presented a contrasting version of utopia. Morris's socialist future is one based on communities and small cooperatives which allow the creativity of people to flourish. The power of the state

**It may even be time to revive the tradition of the socialist utopian novel, and attempt to imagine a future socialist society from a 21st century perspective, not only to provide some inspiration in dark times but to generate new debates on what a future socialist state would look like**

has ceased to be evident as Morris, an avowed Marxist, tells us that, in his socialist utopia (in Marxist terms a actually communist utopia), the state has all but withered away. This is not the only contrast however as Morris tells us that his socialist state was only achieved after a long and bitter struggle. Morris was deeply influenced by the

## Tom O'Hara looks at the origins of socialist utopian Novels and their relevance to the left today and argues that while they may seem naive, they at least offered a real sense of alternative

economic social and political events of 19th century Britain, a time when, according to EJ Hobsbawm, for the first time in history, a class conscious working class had emerged and was asserting its power through political and trade union activity. Morris was a keen observer of the activities of the labour movement and had been a member of socialist political organisations including the Social Democratic Federation and, later, the Socialist League. So, unlike Bellamy, Morris held a firm belief that capitalism would not evolve or change without a significant and sustained struggle and that the agents of change would be the working class rather than enlightened bourgeois intellectuals.

The creation of any utopia from the imagination, even a socialist utopia, has a clear existential dimension and Morris' utopia is a place where aesthetics have not taken second place to functionality. As well as being horrified by the possibility of excessive centralised state control, he also feared that unbridled technological change if not handled democratically, could also have dehumanising effects. Clearly drawing on his horror of the 'dark satanic mills' and ugly industrial cities that typified the Victorian era, Morris, always the artist and designer at heart, felt a socialist society should not only have a fairer system of distributing wealth and a more efficient system, it should also look and feel different for all of the people. In other words he rejected any model of socialism based solely on economic or technological determinism. Bellamy's vision of work in the future being carried out by an "industrial army" which would operate with "military discipline" was abhorrent to Morris. Whereas Bellamy sees work as "a necessary duty to be discharged" before people can pursue creative activities in leisure, Morris' utopia is one where our creative energies are expressed in our work. This reflected a view central to Morris' thinking in general. For much of his life he mourned the passing of traditional crafts and small communities and cherished the hope that they may return at sometime in the future. Not surprisingly they have been restored to life in his socialist utopia.

If Morris's *News from Nowhere*

went some way to challenging some of Bellamy's cruder assumptions about how state-directed socialism would work in reality, and dismisses naive notions of how socialism would come about, the work that threw *Looking Backwards*' optimism into sharp contrast in America was Jack London's novel *The Iron Heel*. That book, although partly narrated and explained by a historian looking back from a socialist society of the future, has as its central narrative voice the partner of a revolutionary. In the opening chapters of the novel Everhard, the socialist hero, attends a number of debates at dinner parties. Most of the guests see him as an idealist but cannot match his knowledge of history and economics. At a pivotal point in the book he asks, during one such debate, how capitalism will cope when the people rise and take direct action against its exploitative nature. The answer comes from a major shareholder in local mills who tells him in unequivocal terms that any revolution will be crushed mercilessly: "we will grind you down and walk upon your faces".

Although, as mentioned above, London sees a kind of socialist utopia emerging in the long term, this deeply dystopic novel describes a long and bloody struggle which London predicts will be the path to socialism. There is no evolutionary inevitability; rather, London sees a sustained period of strikes, demonstrations and armed battles as being inevitable before socialism is achieved. The 'Brotherhood of Man' eventually assume control when the revolutionaries defeat the 'Oligarchy or Iron Heel': a dictatorship set up to defend capitalist interests. The predictions in *Iron Heel* have seemed closer to realisation since 2008, partly in the catastrophic world-wide failure of unregulated capitalist financial activities, and partly in the rhetoric and political attitudes of right-wing activists in the United States and elsewhere who vehemently reject any notion that the highly inequitable distribution of wealth and resources in capitalist economies may lie at the root of the problem.

As I write people are involved in anti-capitalist demonstrations in almost all Western capitalist economies. While

their grievances are clear, what is less apparent, when we hear demonstrators interviewed, is what they would replace capitalism with and how they see the process of change coming about. The evidence of the peaceful evolution to a fairer society with capitalism developing a conscience is thin on the ground (notwithstanding the words and actions of Warren Buffet and a few other exceptional individual millionaires) but Bellamy is still worth a read as is *News from Nowhere* particularly for the debates that they led to in left-wing circles for much of the 20th century. It may even be time to revive the tradition of what I have loosely titled the socialist utopian novel, and attempt to imagine a future socialist society from a 21st century perspective, not only to provide some inspiration in dark times but to generate new debates on what a future socialist state would look like. It is always easier to criticise than it is to create and as we vent our spleens at the injustices of capitalism it is perhaps necessary to have an image of a better world in our sights and remain positive and optimistic about the possibility of achieving it. That is, if we want to convince anyone of our cause and avoid the pitfalls of political pessimism. Bertolt Brecht's observation, which may be read as a warning, is as relevant now as it was in his lifetime:

'And yet as we know  
Hatred, even of meanness  
Contorts the features  
Anger even against injustice  
Makes the voice hoarse  
Oh, we who wanted to prepare the  
ground for friendliness  
Could not ourselves be friendly

But you when the time comes  
And man is helper to man  
Think of us  
With forbearance ■

**Tom O'Hara taught history at Clydebank College for 26 years. He has previously published articles the work of Brazilian socialist educator Paulo Freire and its relevance to teaching adults in Scotland.**

# Sects, Thugs and Myths Retold

My first encounter with Scottish sectarianism occurred way back in early 1997 in Glasgow. I made the error of going for an after-work pint in the Rosevale pub on the Dumbarton Road. Armed with nothing but a book, I had to leave the pub pretty damned quickly as it dawned on one of the assembled, that 'I looked like a Tim'. As he had just also punched me on the arm whilst making this proclamation, I realised it was time to leave. I didn't actually know at the time what a 'Tim' was. Just like Desdemona I understood, 'a fury in the words, but not the words'.

Coming from Northern Ireland I was more used to the Irish language version of 'Tim' ('Taig'). A nice touch that Northern Irish Unionists support the Irish language renaissance. Living in England I have been bemused that some people believe my accent some kind of mnemonic aid for my name – Paddy - which is more generally applied to all Irish. Acting as though my parents helpfully named me thus to make it easier for the British to accurately name me.

The Tim incident reminded me of being shoved on my way home from primary school circa 1970/71 – then it was because I was unable to enlighten the teenage (Protestant) boy about whether or not I was a 'Fenian'. The nuns had taught me much by then in P4. I could memorise entire biblical passages about people rising from the dead; the names of flowers, US states, Irish counties. It might have been more useful though to have been taught early that I was a Tim, a Fenian, a Paddy. Handier lists. For no other reason than to save me from appearing so socially gauche, particularly post-emigration.

This trip into the personal, and to some perhaps, the seemingly trivial, is to illustrate how efforts are made in everyday situations to locate identities. Not exactly prompted by friendly motivations. Occurring in different countries; at different times; among people of different ages; among males and females.

In late 1996 I moved to Glasgow to conduct a qualitative study on the health of people of Irish Catholic descent. I worked at the Medical Research Council's

Social and Public Health Sciences Unit. The aim of the study was to try to shed some academic light; to explore possible explanations for the persistent, intergenerational quantitative pattern of poor health found among the Irish in England and Scotland. Following a crucial, lengthy research design gestation period (often unfortunately neglected by researchers),

I carried out approximately 350 hours of interviews with people from four ethnic/religious origin communities: Irish Protestants; Irish Catholics; Scottish Protestants and Scottish Catholics (with further comparisons by age, social class and gender). The strength and beauty of this research design has been seriously misrepresented in Professor Steve Bruce et alii's, *Sectarianism in Scotland* (2004).

It cannot be stressed strongly enough that my study (with Dr Rory Williams) was a study of health/health risk. It examined an array of structural and cultural aspects of experience which might explain the poorer health of Irish/Irish Catholics. Initially, sectarianism as an explanatory factor was the last thing on our minds. As some sociologists are prone to emphasise; it *emerged*.

More often than not, researchers of disadvantage and discrimination (and policymakers) get it wrong, and think that the former necessarily implicates the latter. Equally a seeming lack of disadvantage does not necessarily denote the absence of discriminatory practices. Experience of discrimination cannot be 'read off' from statistics situating different groups in terms of educational achievement, housing and employment status, mortality differentials, etc. Any group differences found merely provide a starting point for investigation.

Highlighting this is to flag up the importance of examining the myriad processes which lead to different life chances; whereby experiences of class, ethnicity, religious identity, gender, locality, age, etc. intersect and overlap in producing disadvantage. As Miles and Brown (2003:79) so eloquently explain

in relation to racism, 'Defining racism by reference to consequences absolves the analyst (and activist) from the task of identifying the diverse processes that create and reproduce disadvantage'.

Being a researcher of sectarianism can be as dangerous as an RC dropping into a pub owned by a Rangers FC manager. Some hint is to be found

amidst the pages of *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (2003-05). Published evidence of anti-Catholic discrimination in employment, experienced by er, Glasgow Catholics,

and supported by evidence given by Glasgow Protestants, was 'rubbished' by a Casaubon-like character and his male academic colleagues. The creator of Casaubon (another woman with a 'male' name) tells us he spent his life, unsuccessfully, attempting to write *The Key to All Mythologies*.

Not content with an academic paper, these new myth-makers spread their net; and in 2004, *The Year of the Myth*, published two books on the issue of sectarianism in Scotland. One has the semantically unfortunate title, *The Sectarian Myth in Scotland*. Whilst I recognise that sectarianism is a widely experienced problem in Scotland, I stop short from implying that even Scotland's myths might be incorporated under the 'sectarianism' umbrella.

I am not sure why so much has been published by academics protesting (methinks too much) the non-existence of, in their view, some social fiction. These new myth-makers have any academic investigating any aspect of the experience of Catholics/Irish Catholics in Scotland within their sights. I have therefore become part of a cosy club of admonished academics. Elinor Kelly and I are the token women. It does not seem obvious as yet that those on both sides of this great Scottish academic divide might benefit from the inclusion of women as authors and research subjects.

I do though have a problem with a couple of myths myself. The first is that 'sectarianism' is what we are actually talking about. I hope that sociologists,

**I hope that people will eventually talk about, 'the concept formerly known as 'sectarianism''**

## Patricia Walls offers an Irish-feminist perspective on how the Scots tackle 'sectarianism' and argues that academic complacency is simply exacerbating the misunderstanding of the problem

policymakers and the public, in both Scotland and Northern Ireland will eventually talk about, 'the concept *formerly known as* 'sectarianism'', and describe the relevant practices by the pithier signifier of 'racism'. In both places, this racism is predominantly anti-Irish (or anti-Catholic/anti-Irish Catholic).

The second myth which concerns me is the view promulgated in Scotland that somehow 'sectarianism' relates only to football, and then only to working class men behaving badly. My research and a cursory reading of Section 74 offences reports dispute this focus. Only one third of Section 74 offences in 2005 had anything to do with football. In my research, sectarianism occurred across an array of social spaces and involved women too, as perpetrators and victims.

The composer James MacMillan caused a stir in 1999 when he referred publicly to sectarianism, as the now oft-quoted, 'Scotland's Shame'. On the other hand, Bruce takes the view that, "Scotland's disgrace is not religious bigotry. It is the unthinking way in which sectarianism is assumed, without evidence" (The Guardian, 24/4/2011). Many of the sociologists in Scotland at the turn of the century were woken up by MacMillan's remarks. They were discovered to have largely accepted the un-evidenced view that sectarianism evaporated with the arrival of multi-nationals in the 1960s. Just before MacMillan spoke (and evidently naïve about just how resourceful human beings are) Bruce had claimed, the "decline in sectarianism in Scotland was driven mainly by the lack of opportunity to act in a sectarian manner" (Bruce, 1998:141). I am still sad that around this juncture, Miles, a scholar of racism and class, who included the Irish in Scotland in his theses, didn't just go to (North) Carolina (University) in his mind.

The issue of research evidence should concern everyone interested in Scottish society and policy responses to any societal problem. Unfortunately, to date, Scottish Government research reviews and briefings on the issue of

sectarianism have been disappointing. Allied to this is the problem of an official reliance on a limited number of academics, who ironically espouse the view that this problem to be investigated doesn't actually exist.

In Glasgow, where the problem is perhaps most marked and related to the city's history, just under a decade ago a Glasgow City Council-funded research project on sectarianism, was not open to general tender. One of the new myth-makers acted as the Council's 'adviser for its research on sectarianism'.



Meanwhile in Edinburgh the General Registrar Office (GRO), when consulting on changes to be made to 2001 Census, peculiarly copied Bruce into its replies to consultation responders.

I was involved at the time in efforts to incorporate religion questions into the Census for Scotland, and proposed amendments to the 1991 Census question on ethnicity to include both Irish and Scottish ethnic choices. Is it telling that at one juncture, after the religion question had been settled, a view from GRO was that an Irish ethnic category was not necessary as the Irish would be covered by the Catholic category anyway.

The poverty of academic rigour exhibited by the most vocal academics who write about sectarianism is concerning. No word count can permit the level of explication needed to fully substantiate this last statement. The sheer number of breaches of, and misdemeanours relating to, social scientific principles, the endlessly

repeated tired and unproven arguments in the academic, as well as in the wider press, are avalanche-like.

However, there are real, thorny, research problems to be confronted. A critical, systematic review of the evidence is indeed, critical. New research, using qualitative and particularly ethnographic methods, is a pressing need. Additionally there is scope for thorough analyses of already-existing datasets. We need to know more about the experiences of young people and about females, and about subcultures beyond football.

The shape of Scotland in future and how it copes with 'sectarianism' might be facilitated by some formal recognition of the enormous contribution made by Irish migrants and subsequent Irish generations to the development of the Scottish nation. Perhaps a commemorative plaque at Holyrood to all those Irish (mainly men) who died in the construction of Scotland's physical infra-structure? Perhaps the Irish might be more positively incorporated into the story of Scotland's immigrant mosaic? Perhaps there could be an official apology for their experience of racism ('sectarianism')?

Rather than producing laws which arguably will criminalise the singing of songs; a better idea, which would address sectarianism more widely, would be to introduce a law which compels employers (as in Northern Ireland) to monitor the religious background of their employees. In these economically straitened times, this would cost nothing, as it would merely involve minor additions to standard equality opportunities monitoring forms.

Sectarianism is not an inevitable feature of Scottish society. It cannot be politically and legally bracketed off as football-related. Its effects though do vary by location, age group, social class and gender. Ultimately any society on a quest for future equality and economic success, shall fail in its aspirations unless it deals honestly with unsavoury aspects of its past and its present. ■

**Dr Patricia Walls, is a researcher of ethnicity, discrimination, religion and health; and occasional songwriter. She is currently working on an extended essay about the late Amy Winehouse.**

# A Year of Voting Against

Will the Eurozone survive the next 12 months? If not can the EU survive? These questions, unthinkable 12 months ago, are now asked routinely in financial markets and in every major political forum across the world. The purpose of this article is not to speculate on bailout mechanisms, or even new EU treaties, but to try and assess how the people are voting for political parties and particularly parties of the left and how these votes affect the unprecedented political crisis and the EU leaders message of no alternative to austerity.

2009 was the year bond markets began to focus on Government budget deficits across Europe, particularly Ireland and Greece. 2010 saw austerity programmes introduced across Europe, the beginnings of resistance by worker and community organisations and renewed action by the IMF and European leaders to fund banks' toxic loans to calm markets. Unemployment continued to soar.

In 2011 the crisis related to sovereign debt levels, swollen by recession tax reductions and bank bailouts, across the 17 country Eurozone and questioned whether the Euro could survive. Bonds yields soared not just in Greece, but in Spain, France and Italy. Germany and France, the largest Eurozone countries took unilateral action. In October Merkel, Sarkozy, the ECB and IMF, frustrated by the "democratic process" took the decision to remove the Governments of Greece and Italy and replace them with financial placemen. A new EU treaty was deemed necessary in 2012 to legalise ECB lending and impose austerity and fiscal discipline on recalcitrant Eurozone members.

At the end of 2011 this strategy is not working. Greek bonds yields are at an all time high and anticipate a default of around 90 per cent of value, compared to 50 per cent being negotiated. European banks are still not lending to each other or to industry. A recession in many EU countries seems certain. Democracy Index at the end of 2011 now ranks no Eurozone countries in their top eight democracies. Finland and the Netherlands are ranked 9 and 10. The UK is 18th.

## ELECTIONS 2011

Parliamentary elections were held in 10 EU countries, six in the Eurozone,

representing 23 per cent of the EU population.

**February Ireland (0.9 per cent EU pop).** Fianna Fail was replaced by a Fine Gael-led government in coalition with the Irish Labour Party following the passing of an austerity budget under intense pressure from the ECB and IMF (see *SLR 64*). Both Fianna Fail and its Green partner vote collapsed as they were perceived as having disastrously handled the economy. Critics of austerity including Sinn Fein and anti-capitalist coalitions got 13 per cent, up from 8 per cent. Irish GDP shrank 1.9 per cent in 3rd quarter of 2011, unemployment remains 14.5 per cent. Despite this a new austerity budget is being introduced.

**March Estonia (0.3 per cent).** The Reform Party and its pro-business partners retained power with 49 per cent of the vote, up from 46 per cent. This was despite a 2008 austerity budget (nine per cent GDP cut in spending), leading to a GDP drop of 14 per cent and unemployment reaching 19 per cent. The message of: GDP growth of 6 per cent in 2010; slowly falling unemployment to 14 per cent (partly due to emigration); the adoption of the Euro on 1 January 2011; and that 'the corner had turned' sufficed to convince voters. The Social Democrats and Greens took 21 per cent up from 18 per cent. GDP in 2012 is expected around 3.5 per cent (World Bank) above the Eurozone average.

**April Finland (1.1 per cent).** The election was noted by the dramatic rise in the right-wing populist True Finns party (19 per cent up from 4 per cent). All other parties lost votes. The incumbent three party coalition could not form a majority and there is now a grand coalition of six parties including the left alliance, the Social Democrats and the Greens. Only the True Finns and the Centre Party who led the previous government were excluded. Finland is not in the Eurozone and unemployment is 7 per cent. The coalition's budget is for a deficit of three per cent of GDP in 2012, slightly lower than now with a shift to environmental and health impact taxes.

**May Cyprus (0.2 per cent).** The election result saw only small percentage change from previous votes. However, the communist AKEL now leads a

minority government. The election was affected by talks for a federation of two Cypriot states and the effect of these talks on Turkey joining the EU. Cyprus is in the Eurozone and its unemployment has risen to 8 per cent. In December under ECB pressure it announced an austerity budget for 2012. It is forced to fund its deficit from Russian loans.

**June Portugal (2.1 per cent).** The result was a defeat for the ruling Socialist Party which lost 8.5 per cent of its vote, down to 28 per cent, and the election of the rightist Social Democratic Party. The anti-capitalist Left Bloc also lost 4.6 per cent of its vote, down to 5.2 per cent. The election was dominated by an ECB-demanded austerity budget, which failed to pass precipitating the election. In November a further austerity budget was passed, with tacit Socialist Party support, guaranteeing a deepening 2012 recession. GDP has fallen throughout 2011 and unemployment is 12.4 per cent.

**September Denmark (1.1 per cent).** A Red Alliance of 4 leftist parties, narrowly beat the Blue Alliance of 5 Centre Right parties by 50.2 per cent to 49.8 per cent to form the the new Danish government. The vote was seen as a reaction to the Austerity and anti-immigration stance of the previous right-centre government. Within the Red Alliance, the anti-capitalist Red-Green Alliance improved most to 6.7 per cent from 2.2 per cent; the Radical Left (or Social Liberal) party went to 9.5 per cent from 5.1 per cent, whereas the Socialist Peoples Party went down to 8.2 per cent from 13 per cent and the Social Democrats the largest party in the coalition got 24.9 per cent down from 25.5 per cent. The Red-Green Alliance whilst supportive is not part of the Government. Budget proposals for 2012 plan steady expenditure, with greater investment in renewable energy. Danish GDP was flat over 2011 with a slight fall towards the end, unemployment is 4.2 per cent. Denmark is not in the Eurozone.

**September Latvia (0.5 per cent).** Relations with Russia were prominent during the elections and post-election discussions. The pro-Russian Harmony Centre party took most votes with 28.3 per cent, the newly formed Zatlers Reform Party was second with 20.8 per cent and



## In a turbulent year for Europe – and democracy in general – Gordon Morgan looks at how voters in the ten EU countries with elections reacted to the events unfolding around them and finds them voting ‘against’ rather than voting ‘for’

22 seats, though six MPs have since left. Eventually a right-nationalist coalition government led by Zatlars but excluding Harmony Centre was agreed, followed by massive protest demonstrations. The budget for 2012 envisages further IMF/EU-induced austerity, to finish cutting its deficit from 10 per cent GDP in 2008 to 2.5 per cent in 2012. Between 2008 and the start of 2011 GDP fell 22.5 per cent, unemployment has fallen slightly but is still 16.2 per cent. Latvia is not in the Eurozone.

### **October Poland (7.7 per cent).**

The outcome of the election was for the first time in post Soviet times, a new Government with the same composition of the last, a christian-democratic coalition between the Civic Platform and the Polish Peoples Party who between them took 48 per cent of the vote, down from 50.4 per cent. Palikot's Platform, a split from the Peoples Party standing on an anti-clerical pro-abortion and gay rights basis took 10 per cent. A third christian-democratic party Law and Justice was second with 29.9 per cent and the social-democratic Democratic Left Alliance fell to 8.2 per cent from 13.2 per cent. Poland has not fallen into recession since 1991. It is planning to cut its budget deficit in 2012 to under three per cent by relying on projected GDP growth of four per cent, similar to 2011. Its unemployment rate has remained around 12 per cent for two years. Poland is not in the Eurozone.

**November Spain (9 per cent).** The overwhelming winner was the christian-democratic Peoples Party which took 44.6 per cent of votes and a majority of seats. The loser was the outgoing social-democratic PSOE, down to 28.7 per cent from 43.9 per cent, which was widely blamed for the economic and budget crisis and unemployment at 21.5 per cent, the highest in the EU. Other parties gained from the PSOE decline. The anti-capitalist United Left attracted votes from many protesters getting 6.9 per cent up from 3.8 per cent. The newly legalised left nationalist Basque party Amaiur got the largest vote in the Basque region. Both these parties had campaigned against the austerity budgets. The Peoples Party having been critical of the PSOE budget constraints, has announced on 3 January 2012 that the deficit is worse

than anticipated at eight per cent and is planning significant spending cuts and tax increases. GDP which fell five per cent in 2008-10 had grown one per cent since then. A Spanish recession and further unemployment rises look certain.

### **December Slovenia (0.4 per cent).**

The election was called after the previous government lost a confidence vote largely over budget issues. The largest party was the newly formed centre-left List of Zoran Jankovic with 28.5 per cent with most of its votes switching from the Social Democrats, down to 10.5 per cent from 30.5 per cent. A government has not yet been formed but it is likely to be a leftish coalition. Slovenia is not in the Eurozone. GDP slumped 10 per cent in 2009 recovering two per cent till a recent dip. Its budget deficit grew to 10.3 per cent GDP mid 2011, from 8.8 per cent in 2009 and it faces EU demands for budget cuts. Unemployment has grown to 11.5 per cent from 10.5 per cent a year ago.

### **WHAT DO THE ELECTIONS TELL US ABOUT PUBLIC OPINION?**

Firstly each country's election was specific to that country's economics and politics – there was no overwhelming EU-wide issue. However, given two ‘electable’ parties, and economic difficulties, voters consistently voted out the sitting government which had ‘caused’ the problem. This was seen in Ireland, Portugal, Denmark, Spain and arguably Slovenia. By and large voters readily swap between social-democratic neo-liberals and christian-democratic neo-liberals. See also UK elections.

Secondly the economy seems less central for voting intentions for countries not in the Eurozone, although IMF and ECB threats about budget ‘discipline’ abound. That said unemployment is an issue affecting voting in all countries. Where the economy was deemed ‘on course’, as in Estonia, Finland and Poland, either government's were kept or some other issue dominated, such as immigration in Finland.

The left nationalist and anti-capitalist or at least non social-democratic left, picked up or retained votes in several counties such as Ireland, Denmark, Poland, Spain and probably Slovenia. The exception was Portugal. A clear vote against austerity is still very

much a minority vote. Other elections in Scotland and in German and Italian states bear out these conclusions.

Decisions on new treaties and financial policy within the Eurozone are made at Council of Minister meetings. The exception being when Merkel and Sarkozy deem otherwise. The Council of Ministers is representative of European Governments, not public opinion directly. With the partial exception of Denmark and possibly Slovenia and Cyprus, all governments elected in 2011 are committed to an austerity agenda in their own country. Several though are all too aware they were only elected due to austerity imposed by their predecessors.

Elections will be held in 2012 in Italy, France and Greece and in 2013 in Germany. Given the experience of this year, most incumbent parties will lose. Only in Greece however, are things so bad that withdrawing from the Euro will be a significant issue. Even Merkel and Sarkozy must modify their stance on fiscal discipline to hold on to office. Continued rising unemployment and recession are not vote winners.

So having said I wouldn't speculate, I now will. The Euro will survive, probably without Greece and possibly some other countries. There will be a new treaty setting out revised fiscal rules and creating a true Central Bank; however, these rules will differ from those discussed in December 2011.

What the fiscal rules and penalties should be both for the Eurozone and the wider EU and how we create a redistributive EU, mitigating uneven development between rich and poor countries, is a task for the European left as a whole. The richest Eurozone country is eight times richer than the poorest eurozone country. So to paraphrase; how do we end poverty in the EU?

Finally, the proposed new treaty as outlined by Merkel would remove yet more autonomy from elected governments, who would be forced to have their budgets ‘approved’ by a small group of financiers. Since many countries would reject such a constitution in a referendum which European leaders will therefore seek to avoid, democracy could become a uniting issue for the left across Europe. ■

**Gordon Morgan is a member of Solidarity**

# This Hugely Hopeful Moment

Even though there is huge fear, dislocation, unemployment and suffering powering through Europe and America just as it has been powering through so many other parts of the world for so long.

Even when it becomes absolutely clear that in the current system, in order to keep those at the top 'safe', everyone else is being pulverised as the financiers and their professional and political accomplices are rescued with the money of the rest of us.

Even though that financial crisis is fast becoming a sovereign debt crisis and the free market's gun is being held to country after country's heads in Europe just as the IMF has done for decades elsewhere. Even though the oil tanker of economic growth is fast developing huge holes that no billions of dollars can plug. Even though, or should we say, because of this: we are living in a hugely hopeful moment.

This is not because someone else is going to rise up, or some preordained revolution will happen, but because that oil tanker was and is driving us fast towards the destruction of societies across the planet, towards the destruction of our ecological limits, and towards a six degree Celsius planet in which human life would become virtually or actually impossible.

Our hope is that the holes in the side of the tanker are so huge that it cannot be fixed. We don't need a monetarist Plan A to try and fix it through intensifying exploitation, nor do we need a Keynesian Plan B to fix it through a collective effort in which society is galvanised to restore a market that is for a while slightly more under the control of the state, but still directed by an economic growth model that is destroying the basis of life.

The 'Arab Spring', the movements in Greece and Spain that took back the public squares, the Occupy camps – none of these, nor the financial crisis itself, were predicted by the experts, the pundits, those world-weary told-you-sos who glibly proclaim that fundamental change is not possible.

From here on in, nothing but fundamental change is possible. It is up to us whether we develop a vision

that can enable us to refuse to choose the supposedly least worst option and so end up back in a worse mess, or to choose what we really want. It is up to us whether we regain our ability to live in balance, as humans have been well able to do in the thousands of places where commons regimes have been our way of organising. Commons regimes are not the stuff of history – history is full of empires and power – commons systems of robust resilient conflictual but ultimately mutual care are what we make when we don't bother making history, and instead focus on making community.

So I asked my partner – Eva Schonveld - who has been very involved in the Transition movement here in Scotland, what kind of vision do you have for the direction we should be heading in? I was curious to see that – just like for so many people - capitalism is a word that is back in use, because when there's serious digging to do, it makes sense to call a spade a spade.

## A TRANSITION VISION

Can we begin to articulate a politics and economics of place, which enables us to act from an embedded awareness of, and care for, a particular place and the people who live there; while avoiding the pitfalls of parochialism? In such a system we start from each person as a complex of needs and abilities, each one of us with as much right as any other to the share of space and resources which will keep them fed, clothed and sheltered. Each one with a vested interest in contributing to the wellbeing of the people and place that sustains them.

Such a system, seen in the context of global capitalism, looks a trifle flimsy. But global capitalism is increasingly recognised as unviable. Not because of its inherent injustice and its capacity to make perfectly ordinary people impact on others in monstrous ways, but because its logic leads it to inevitably operate in a way that exploits, ignores and overrides the planetary limits. As those limits

are passed, the systems fundamental flaw becomes increasingly obvious as we watch it efficiently and relentlessly destroying the basis of its own existence, and the existence of humans and fellow lifeforms.

Until capitalism approaches the limits of the planet to supply it with raw materials, it offers the possibility of wealth, convenience and status to anyone it engages with. Not that many actually get these things, but having been forced into relationship with it, people are more or less convinced that these things are potentially available to

them.

Compared to this, a community-based life, where the things that we need are produced largely through balancing the capacity of the local land to provide for the needs of the people who live on it, looks a lot like hard and unrewarding work. But when capitalism is forced to admit that in order to keep those at the top 'safe', everyone else will need to pay the price, the differences between those two options start to dwindle. The difference between a hard reality where I'm engaged in a self-directed creative endeavour to build a long term, sustainable and satisfying way of life – and a hard reality where my life is increasingly prescribed by an elite which seems untouched by similar hardship, can enable people to see the potential value in a locally-focused existence, which can currently seem drab and worthy compared with the glamour offered by the capitalist dream machine.

Communities involved with the Transition movement are beginning to bring the realities of this new kind of politics and economics to life. Transition encourages local people to re-imagine and then begin to re-create their place as a vibrant hub of sustainable creativity; a place where the skills to make the majority of the things that we need to sustain ourselves and thrive are learned and remembered, where people engage in primary production to support

**Transition encourages local people to re-imagine and then re-create their place as a vibrant hub of sustainable creativity**

## The Occupy movement points outwards from the mess in which we find ourselves to something better. Justin Kenrick suggests that the Transition movement can be the radical agenda the movement is looking for.

themselves and their neighbours; a place where those who care for others are cared for in turn by those around them. So far, so Hobbiton, but we do not live in isolation from one another, as individuals or as communities. The more readily we acknowledge our interdependence, the less likely we are to stray into conflict. Most decisions for everyday life are best made at the most local level possible, but it is important to identify those issues and agendas which are best discussed and decided by a wider assembly. In beginning to flesh out how such a politics and economics might develop it is important to think carefully about what level different decisions are made.

It is clear that it is only a matter of time before those seriously applying themselves to attempting this kind of Transition to a sustainable, equitable society run up against any number of the vested interests which keep people from equal access to the means of production, which ultimately always leads back to the land. So land reform needs to be one of the guiding agendas.

### BUT WHAT ABOUT POWER?

In their critique of the Transition movement - 'The Rocky Road to a Real Transition' - Paul Chatterton and Alice Cutler distinguish between the lasting systemic changes they argue we need to work towards, and what they see as the less substantial place-based changes the Transition movement encourages people to focus on. They argue that "changes to place don't really add up to a long lasting and substantial transition, not least globally"

(2008: 33). Chatterton and Cutler argue that the Transition movement is in danger of focusing peoples attention on making changes to their locality, a focus that can deflect them from pushing for the systemic changes that are urgently needed, and they argue that these Transition initiatives carry the potential of inadvertently absolving the State of its responsibilities (to the extent that it still exists) by themselves taking on community service roles.

In this critique, Chatterton and Cutler's understanding of the fundamental nature of power is diametrically opposed to that prevalent in the Transition movement. They write

that, rather than Transition initiatives being able to create resilient places that seek to build need-meeting functions which are not governed by economic growth, they are ultimately subject to the same order of oppression.

In contrast, Rob Hopkins, one of the key figures in the Transition movement, argues that Transition initiatives can "come in under the radar" (2008) - making radical changes which are at first not particularly noticed by the powers that

be - and can thereby help to transform the systems that are driving extinction. He quotes Vandana Shiva: "these systems function because we give them our support, but if we withdraw our support, these systems will not be able to function" (Shiva 2008). Coming from Vandana Shiva, this is anything but simplistic, it is a call to recognise the depths to which we become complicit, as

men or women, in systems that oppress us all.

So can Transition's focus on place-making creatively empower the marginalised while actively resisting a system built on marginalising? Does its focus on the importance of establishing ways to meet our material needs echo Shiva's eco-feminism that "makes no distinction between 'basic needs' (food, clothing, shelter) and 'higher needs' (freedom and knowledge)"? (Brinker 2009)

Rob Hopkins argues that the key distinction to make here is between a focus on *localism* and a focus on *localisation*. He writes that:

"localism can perfectly well take place within a globalised growth-focused economy, a 'business as usual' scenario . . . (hence its appeal to mainstream political parties), whereas localisation carries within it an inherent social justice and resource-focused critique of globalisation (Bailey et al. 2010, North 2010), emerging from concepts such as Limits to Growth (Meadows et al. 2004), Steady State economics (Daly 1977) and Schumacher's (1974) concept of 'Buddhist economics'. Localisation is a social movement and a principle for social and economic reorganisation, whereas localism is a principle for political organisation. (Hopkins 2010)

So is there a way of engaging in place-making so that it can support all others to secure their places against the forces that simply exploit for profit? Is there a way in which attempts to establish sustainable and equitable bottom-up need-meeting structures can work with attempts to focus on system change?

### MAKING THE CONNECTIONS

In practice many people move between at one moment being focused on rebuilding resilient localities in a way which focuses on building relationships and attending to place-making, and at another moment focus on protesting and confronting policies and developments (be they airport expansion, road building or coal fired power stations) which they experience as being imposed on them

by the unequalising system of economic growth. People may be working in a Transition initiative at one moment and engaging in protest the next.

Meanwhile in Occupy camps – as in peace camps, road protest camps, G8 camps and climate camps before them – people devote huge energy to sorting out interpersonal problems in order to build and sustain community, and also devote huge amounts of energy to communicating their message, a message that is all the more powerful if it emerges from a sense of community, from building an alternative world of cooperation rather than exploitation, rather than simply being focused on what it is against. Whether it is an Occupy

camp, an NGO or a carbon-cutting community initiative funded by the Climate Challenge Fund, when all the energy is focused on communicating a message, then the sense of what Tom Crompton calls the ‘intrinsic values’ at the heart of the protest or community building drains away, and the initiative becomes shallow and ineffective. On the other hand, when a camps’ or an initiatives’ ability to enter into open-ended dialogue with neighbours and the public over the issues that matter to it, is overwhelmed or curtailed by becoming lost in interpersonal dramas and conflicts within the group, then it can become exhausting and ineffective in this way.

The Occupy camps may well go

the way of other protests through a combination of being stamped out and becoming exhausted in the winter cold and the incredible hard work of being open to all comers in a society where so many are thrown out. But they have picked up the torch of earlier protests, have brought them right into the heart of where ordinary people walk to work and are realising what the system is they are being made to work for.

My guess is that later this year there is going to be quite a different and more powerful upsurge, and it is up to us whether it is simply one of rage against the system, or is connected to fundamental issues like uprooting the financial system and ensuring energy and land reform that returns real need-meeting ability and power to communities. If we can say once and for all that this system isn’t working and that the worst thing we could do would be to make it work. If we can communicate a clear vision of the enduring alternative, that of building communities deeply rooted in place and working globally with each other to ensure global justice and care. Instead of the current free movement of goods and finance, and severe restrictions on the movement of peoples; we need the free movement of peoples and severe restrictions on the movement of commodities and finance in order to ensure a healthy planet and healthy societies.

How we react to what can easily look like a terminal diagnosis for humanity, could mean that we look back with relief at what turns out to have been a global mid-life crisis: a time to resist through protest and collective action; a time to rebuild place and community. It may turn out to have been the time that we insisted on protecting planet and peoples through burying profit and finding that what blossoms in its place is the chaotic but connected establishment of collective need-meeting structures that rethink economics by starting from the need for food, water, warmth, shelter and care.

Through discarding an economics of scarcity and excess, can we remember how to make do with what we have, how to enable sufficiency and security and a future for all? ■

*Justin Kenrick and Eva Schonveld are active in the Transition movement, fully support the Occupy movement, and take inspiration from the land reform movement in Scotland and from indigenous peoples struggles across the world.*

## ASLEF CALLS FOR AN INTEGRATED, PUBLICLY OWNED, ACCOUNTABLE RAILWAY FOR SCOTLAND

*(which used to be the SNP’s position – before they became the government!)*



**Mick Whelan**  
General Secretary

**Alan Donnelly**  
President

**Kevin Lindsay**  
Scottish Officer

**ASLEF the train drivers union - [www.aslef.org.uk](http://www.aslef.org.uk)**

# Reviews

## TOM LEONARD : SELECTED POEMS. A CD RECORDING MADE AT THE STUC CENTRE, APRIL 2011

Robert Noakes, himself a writer and performer of great distinction has done Scottish culture a decided service in so life-likely catching a toweringly talented poet at his considerable best. This really is a sort of non-commercial 'greatest hits' and demonstrates in every expertly delivered and recorded line, the searing singularity of one of Britain's most lyrically innovative and politically unapologetic poets. In his own texts and in versions of Brecht songs, the sharp, idiosyncratically inflected voice,

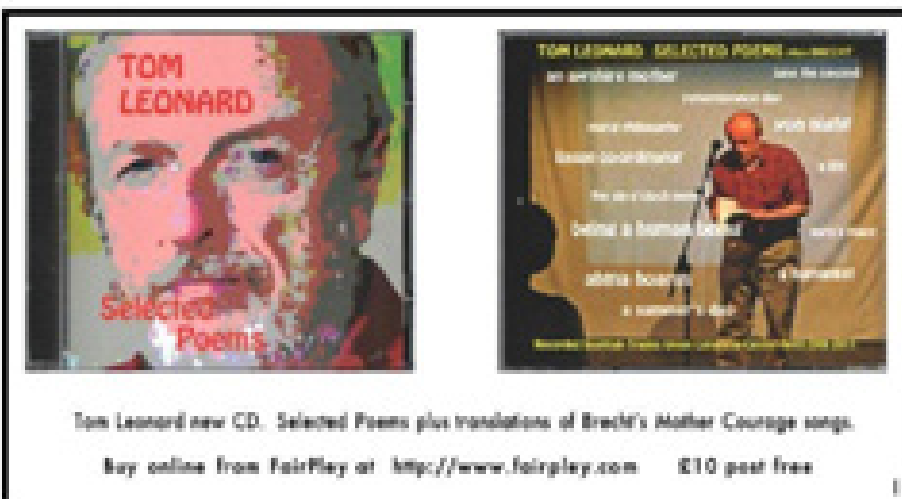
If this exceptionally gifted and influential poet is angry, he has very good cause. Abused as a child, afflicted in adulthood by mental illness, humiliated by the authorities at Glasgow University, forever struggling to make a living freelance and never adequately published nor quite given the honoured place he deserved at the acme of Scottish letters, Leonard bit the hands that fed him, fiercely aware of his own extraordinary originality and brilliance. His excoriatingly left wing politics make him dissatisfied with the lies, greed and selfish inhumanity all around him. What he suffered in boyhood is unimaginably awful. He has begun in recent years to speak about it. Denied by a rival and inferior makar,

the colloquial straightforwardness and seeming simplicity of William Carlos Williams' exceptionally short and short-lined examples. By using a supple, unforced, wryly brusque Glaswegian street-Scots, Leonard made a case for working class, democratic poetry, \*through such poetry. In demonstrating that all language is political and all communication about power, Tom Leonard proved himself to be a truly liberating and empowering figure. And a magnificent, genuinely world class, poet.

On this extremely well produced CD, Leonard's huge capacities can be relished without the risk of unbalanced mood unbalancing the performance. A remarkable reader of his own very performative work, Tom Leonard \*can be relied on for scathing wit, deep humanity, righteous dialectical indignation and, always, persistently, touchingly, love. That huge-heartedness can find expression in tender lyrics about his wife or in poems about solidarity and witness built on a nearly Burnsian scale. This is a writer capable of producing 'accessible' poems in everyday language about everyday life \*and masterworks of the European avant-garde. Both approaches are well represented in these 54 mesmeric minutes. There are 24 tracks, every one a cracker. Of his tormentor at Glasgow University, little is now heard. Everything that older and lesser bard despised about his star student is vindicated here: a Scots still on ordinary people's tongues and not just in scholars' libraries, a politics too impassioned and impatient to be polite, an up to the minute modernity of aesthetic outlook, lessons learned from an America to be praised and reproached as appropriate. At the risk of sounding patronising, one might wish this tormented maestro serenity and ease.

Tom Leonard is a brave and brilliant man and a thoroughly first rate artist. The performances recorded here are certain to enthrall. ■

*Donny O'Rourke, at the invitation of the BBC, is currently picking a Burns poem for each day of the year. He has published, organised readings by, reviewed, introduced, read with, produced television poems featuring and taught the poems of, Tom Leonard.*



unforgettable and unignorable rings out, personal and polemical by turns and indeed often in the same poems. Slick or bland or cosy it is not. Even on CD, the atmosphere is a little tense. As it should be.

Tom Leonard readings are predictably unpredictable. Sometimes he will upbraid the person introducing him for being too gushy or not respectful enough. He has been known to survey the room and the people in it and not liking what he sees, simply to walk away. Audience members who tread too heavily on the eggshell-thin surface of a question and answer session can find themselves being scornfully monstered. School students are not excepted. He once got apoplectic denying he was angry! The 'C' word is liberally used in these vituperative takings-to-task.

on a jealous and condescending whim, the first class degree he so conspicuously deserved as a mature student, Tom Leonard went on to become an esteemed and important Professor at the very university which had disdained him. The devotion of his students and the admiration of his academic peers seemed to 'mellow' him, whatever institutional tensions remained. A proper, more or less collected poems did finally appear a couple of years ago and this CD makes a splendid companion piece. It is difficult to exaggerate the revolutionary - I use the word advisedly - significance of the breakthrough poems he produced in the late sixties and early seventies. Not that more recent work has been anything but high calibre.

His early artistic, linguistic and political innovation was modelled on

# Web Review

Henry McCubbin

I look at the imposition of austerity across Europe by market ideologues and shudder at the fragmented response by the left. Where are those who already suffer from austerity to turn for alternatives? Alternatives that are credible and provide hope that encourages those who are entitled to vote to do so and set a bottom line that those who already suffer poverty do not suffer the neoliberal solution for them of poverty plus austerity. See [yanisvaroufakis.eu/euro-crisis/](http://yanisvaroufakis.eu/euro-crisis/) and [www.levyinstitute.org/pubs/pn\\_11\\_03.pdf](http://www.levyinstitute.org/pubs/pn_11_03.pdf).

Weaknesses in the European Single Market/Single Currency system had been identified and analysed already when the Single Market was formed in 1992 and those member states who objected to centrally-generated reserves then are now still at a loss as to how to handle today's crisis. The authors of the European Commission's Green Paper on the crisis also appear to have had a bout of amnesia when producing their recent publication on stability bonds. In it they ignore the work done in 1993 by Stuart Holland as he points out in his response to the green paper: "The Green Paper opens with the claim that the concept of a European bond was first discussed in by Member States in the late 1990s. The concept of common issuance was first discussed by Member States in the late 1990s, by the Giovannini Group".

It then refers to publication in September 2008 of a discussion paper issued by the European Primary Dealers Association (EPDA) called "A Common European Government Bond".

To claim that there was no other discussion by Member States than of these two technical documents is not only wrong, but displaces the Commission's own recommendation to issue common bonds – Union Bonds – in the Delors White Paper of December 1993 on *Growth, Competitiveness and Employment*. This then was discussed by the Essen European Council in the spring of 1994. Luxembourg and the Netherlands were

in favour. Helmut Kohl, forcefully, and François Mitterrand, with reservations, were against.

But Mitterrand then changed his mind later in the year, when Michel Rocard had been briefed on the case for bonds by the economic committee of the French Socialist Party and called for a 50 billion ECU European Fund for Jobs, financed by bonds, at the autumn conference of the French

Socialist Party. When questioned by the press on whether he supported this, Mitterrand replied: "I agree with him completely, and would even go so far as to say - and I have checked this with the Commission this morning - that his figure could be doubled. If 100 billion ECUs were made available to develop a European infrastructure, we could show that Europe can be a key factor in promoting growth, work and jobs." (*L'Heure de Vérité*, France 2, 25 October 1994)

Jacques Chirac then recommended action on the Delors proposals at his first European Council at Cannes in June 1995. *Agence Europe* reported him as submitting to the Council that Own Resources had been entirely absorbed by the CAP following exchange rate realignments and arguing for "expansion of the new financial instruments" (i.e. the Delors' Union Bonds).

Bonds again were on the agenda of the June 1996 Florence European Council, when only John Major and Helmut Kohl were against a decision to issue them. Both Jacques Chirac and Romano Prodi had called for them not only to finance growth and jobs but also to underpin what at the time was the projected single currency.

All of this was before the "later 1990's" to which the Commission Green Paper attributes the "first discussion by Member States" of the common issuance of bonds, while their discussion of the Delors proposal of Union Bonds at European Council and Ecofin level continued thereafter with high press and media coverage rather than in the at

the time unnoticed Giovannini Group, or a discussion paper published by the European Primary Dealers Association.

Such as when Giulio Tremonti gained discussion of common bonds in Ecofin on the lines proposed by Delors when in the Berlusconi government from June 2001, although Germany still was opposed. As also in the call of Manuel Barroso and Tony Blair in Lisbon in February 2003 for bonds to finance a 10 year programme to create the 15 million jobs which was the employment growth target of the 1993 Delors White Paper. As well as the statement by Manuel Barroso on the relaunching of the Lisbon Agenda that:

"It's about growth and about jobs. This is the most urgent issue facing Europe today. We must restore dynamic growth which can bring back full employment and provide a sound base for social justice and an opportunity for all".

The above arguments were originated by the left and eventually had support from the centre right. It is to be noted that the recent call by the left in the European Parliament in its call for an Appeal for Justice and Democracy is picking up these ideas and running with them. It is doing this through the [www.transform-network.net/en/links.html](http://www.transform-network.net/en/links.html) which has membership drawn from across the European left publications and think tanks.

At beginning of the 20th century we had founders such as Keir Hardy travelling the continent to meet with fellow socialists at international gatherings. Now we can type our publications in English and have them translated on the demand of the recipient in to their own language. But we see the Murdochs, the destroyers of pluralism, which was supposed to provide a theoretical foundation to liberal freedoms for all and not just those that fall at the feet of the press barons. We see military alliances driven by the ideas of the same elite. We even see the mafia operating internationally and basic food production in the hands of a dozen (mainly US) conglomerates.

Now more than ever we need to try to pull together on the left in an exchange of ideas such as those being promoted by the left in the European Parliament and the transform-network. If Keir Hardy could do it under steam power surely we can do it with computer power. ■

## Now more than ever we need to try to pull together on the left in an exchange of ideas such as those being promoted by the left in the European Parliament

# Kick Up The Tabloids

## SALMOND BREEDING FEARS

Every day in *The Sun* newspaper there is a very informative feature which unravels the complex issues behind a particular story of the day and presents it in a form that is understandable and accessible to the general public. Usually on the third page of the paper, it is called News in Briefs, where a young woman illustrates the effects of the recession by wearing virtually no clothes. At the start of this year Magenta, 22, from Dagenham, says she's really excited about 2012 and can't wait for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee.

So what does 2012 mean to you? To Christians it is 2012 AD, to some Londoners it is the year of the Olympics, to Royalists and the educationally-challenged it's The Year of the Golden Jubilee. In the Scottish Conservative calendar, 2012 has been designated the Year of The Short Dumpy Kickboxer, while in the Chinese calendar 2012 is The Year of the Panda.

In ancient Chinese folklore, pandas were rented out at huge cost to gullible governments of small countries on the other side of the World for no obvious benefit to their new hosts. In one of these ancient myths, the leader of the small country embraced the arrival of the pandas so enthusiastically that he grew to look like one himself, developing a fat pointed head and dark eyebrows.

Fortunately, Alex Salmond has so far managed to avoid a photo opportunity with the pandas as it would be incredibly difficult to tell which was which. Of course, as with the Olympics and the Royal pantomime, we are told that this is money well-spent as it will bring in limitless amounts of tourist income. This may well be true, so we should not be surprised later in the year to see millions of Chinese tourists arriving in Edinburgh. They will doubtless be queuing all day in Charlotte Square to observe Alex Salmond in his natural habitat and to wonder when, if ever, he is

going to breed.

Meanwhile, in the Labour Calendar, 2012 is The Year of Ed Miliband Coming Out Fighting. This comes as a surprise to many, following so soon after 2011 which was The Year of Ed Miliband Doing Very Little Except Saying "It's Not Fair".

The Labour leader has been accused of "lacking direction". Given his performance in the job to date, one would have thought this could be seen as some kind of a compliment. However, Ed came out all defensive, said that this description of him was "not fair", and that he is a "Real Man of Steel and Grit". Steel and Grit? Sounds like a rather frightening prospect. Indeed, it reminds me of the state of the underside of the bodywork on my car after a few hundred miles of winter driving on the M8. Is this not what causes rust?

Miliband then went on to claim he has "a clear plan for the future". What worries many Labour voters is that his "Clear Plan For The Future" is probably to lose the next General Election. However, credit where credit's due - as plans go, they don't come much clearer than that.

Of course, history will view 2012 completely differently. Undoubtedly, it will be seen as the year when the recession really began to bite. Only a couple of days into January, we heard the grim news that Black's of Greenock were to go into administration. At a time when millions of people throughout the UK are camping out in protest against capitalism, one would have thought that a company whose core business is selling tents would be pretty much recession-proof.

2012 may well go down in history too as the Year of The Great Marmite Strike. A bitter dispute over pensions shows no sign of reaching a solution at Unilever, makers Marmite and Pot Noodles. While the Army may not have to be called in yet, it is not being ruled out.

Obviously if Marmite workers go

on strike, not everybody is going to like that. On the BBC News Channel, a spokesperson for Unilever reassured the public that supplies of margarine and Marmite are high enough to withstand a lengthy dispute. Pot Noodle stocks, on the other hand, are already at a critical level. Which means we'll soon be having student riots on the streets again in 2012.

Of course, what makes history so compelling is its unpredictability. 2010 saw students taking to the streets of London in protest, 2011 saw mass industrial action and demonstration by Public Service Workers, and the anti-capitalist camps throughout the UK. Who could have predicted that the first group to rise up in anger in 2012 would be women with fake boobs?

David Cameron was quick to respond to the dodgy implants scandal. Having previously decided that we didn't really need an NHS and that the best course of action was to close it down, he has now decided on a more defining role for it, i.e. patching up bodged jobs done by backstreet cowboy operators claiming to be cosmetic surgeons.

I think the real reason for Cameron's U-turn is this: it has long looked to me as if Cameron has a massive silicon implant in his forehead. Indeed, it would not surprise me to find out that David Cameron is made entirely from silicon. Perhaps he should re-brand his party as The Silly Cons.

Surprisingly, Magenta, 22, from Dagenham has got nothing to say about the breast implant scandal. Which seems strange, as it is about the one news story in which, if not an expert, she clearly has some personal experience. ■

*Vladimir McTavish will be appearing, with Keir McAllister, Susan Morrison and guests, in the topical comedy show Breaking The News at The Edinburgh Stand on Tuesday 31 January at 8.30 pm. [www.thestand.co.uk](http://www.thestand.co.uk)*



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