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Scotland's War

Are we just bystanders?



Isobel Lindsay, Margaret Lynch, Kay Goodal, Helen Stevens

Lou Howson on better government for older people

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comment

Isobel Lindsay

There is not much we have to thank the C.I.A. for but coining the term 'blowback' has been a useful addition to political vocabulary. It was originally used to describe the unintended consequences of US foreign policy but it could also usefully apply to the UK.

Current events are a perfect blowback case study and they underline the message that having a genuinely ethical foreign and defence policy may be the viable option, not the unrealistic one. Scotland today may not have power but that should not prevent a serious attempt to have influence.

The origins of the September 11 attacks have two roots. One is the big picture of increasing global inequality and the festering sores of unresolved conflict in which the American role has been that of unprincipled pursuit of crude self-interest. And the second is the very military strength and dominance of the US that by its nature invites terrorism – the militarism of the weak. Those of us opposed to the militarism of the strong and of the weak can see the inter-relationship.

That international economic inequality is growing needs little elaboration. Even when positive initiatives are agreed, the reality is often more hype than delivery. For example the commitment made two years ago to write off \$100 billion of the debts of 52 of the poorest countries, has resulted in \$18 billion cancelled in four countries. One of these is Tanzania which has just been sold a £28 million pound air traffic control system which it does not need to make money for a private company with Tony Blair's vigorous support. Just a little example of how corporate power and the interests of rich countries so often dictate agendas and outcomes. If those in poor regions feel intense frustration and bitterness at their own elites and Western power, it would be surprising if there was no spill-over effect

In the Middle East the US has had one over-riding objective – securing client states who will protect oil interests. Iran under the Shah was promoted. Saddam Hussein was promoted when he was executing the Iraq communists and fighting Iran under the Ayatollahs. The Saudi regime is promoted irrespective of any political or civil rights issues. Whatever the Israelis do is supported because it will always be dependable as a military ally in the region.

The story in Africa and Central and South America has been the same: Mozambique and Angola, Nicaragua, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala. Use the rhetoric of democracy while supporting any kind of appalling regime as long as it is 'sympathetic' and suits US corporate interests. This is not a chorus of anti-Americanism. There is always a distinction between state and people. The American State

has been hijacked by the rich and economically powerful. And the British State is going in the same direction.

The blowback of hostility to the US is hardly surprising given this record. It is not a simple resentment of wealth and power. It is the direct experience of the hypocritical and ruthless pursuit of that wealth and power.

The Afghan connection is a particularly striking example. Because undermining the Soviet Union was the top priority, any means was acceptable. In the early 1980s the US poured weapons covertly through Pakistan to anyone who was fighting the Soviets. They were 'freedom fighters'. I can recall at this period people who knew the Afghan scene, like the journalist Jonathan Steele, warning that those who were being armed were often exceptionally brutal and hostile to what we would consider minimum human rights, especially those of women. This was of no concern to the US and British governments. Once the Soviets withdrew, they were completely uninterested in helping Afghanistan recover. The Afghans were only there to be used as pawns in a larger Western game.

What are the key messages to emerge from this conflict?:

- 1) Good news for the arms industries, bad news for mankind. The big message, which is no doubt being noted by many governments, is that those with the most powerful modern weapons win. No-one may feel that they can take on the US in a conventional military contest but in relation to their own regional conflicts, the drive to acquire new weapons systems is set to increase. The arms budgets increase, the social welfare budgets decline.
- 2) The brutality threshold has been lowered. If you say you are engaged in an anti-terrorist campaign, you can do anything no matter how brutal and the NATO powers will give at least tacit support. You can destroy a whole city as in Chechnya or hundreds of Kurdish villages in Turkey and while such actions in the past might produce a little marginal pressure, now expect them to be 'understood'.
- 3) Civil rights are disposable. If you say it is in the name of anti-terrorism, you can lock people up indefinitely without trial or access any form of private communication. Anti-Globalisation protesters look out.
- 4) The cowboys are in charge. International institutions and treaties are completely marginalised and the US has made it clear that it will do what it wants, when it wants.
- 5) The UK once more is seen by the rest of the world as the European voice of America, just another client state ever so anxious to please.
- 6) Unless those with grievances are encouraged to develop non-violent resistance strategies, terrorism will be regarded as the only way to make an impact, especially in dealing with the US and its corporate interests. The type of

terrorism will become even more underground and difficult to track. Effective terrorism does not need thousands of people, training camps and host states or anything else that can be bombed from 30,000 feet. The surprising thing is not how effective the al Qaeda network has been, but how limited its terrorist strategy has been.

If we go along with these developments, we are storing up future trouble. More resources going into arms purchases will channel vital support away from the education, health and infrastructure projects that produce social stability. The restraints on the use of violence by states were already weak without weakening them further and the Israeli behaviour and the India/Pakistan conflict are a warning of where this can lead. American determination to do whatever it wants and its obvious contempt for international treaties and institutions seriously undermines the modest steps the world has taken in recent decades to develop international co-operation. And when so much conflict arises from social and political injustice arising from the denial of basic human rights, what precedent are we setting in rushing to undermine these?

Given the role of US cheerleader which the British government has taken, can Scotland do anything meaningful? We should not underestimate the importance of a confident, consistent voice. There are many millions of people in the world who want to hear a voice that opposes this lowering of the brutality threshold, that challenges growing inequality, that seeks the development of effective international institutions for conflict resolution. Before we can do that, we have to be clear about our values and be confident about them. We need substantial sections of political and civic Scotland to engage in these debates and to have the courage, if need be, to oppose the stance of the present British State.

A Scandinavian group presents the Alternative Nobel Peace Prize (the Trident Ploughshares Group were last year's winners). Perhaps we could develop the Alternative Foreign Policy Centre, giving a platform to those at home and abroad who have a different analysis and different vision from that of the US/UK establishment. We could do this both by inviting people here and by establishing a Scottish International Affairs web-site. We already have many well-established links like the STUC/Palestinian connection. The recent well-attended and enthusiastic Scottish Civic Forum **Beyond Twinning** conference suggested that there was an interest in Scotland in developing these kinds of direct links. At the very least this would be a valuable educational exercise for Scotland.

The pseudo-sophisticated 'realistic' pose that has typified so much of our foreign and defence policy has justified making allies on the basis of expediency not principle, selling arms to whoever has the money, putting short-term economic advantage before human rights. In the longer-run there is often blowback. An ethical foreign policy might be worth trying. ■

peace-work

Helen Stevens argues that it is well within the power of the Scottish Parliament to promote Scotland as an international centre of peace

Of recent days our dreams have taken a serious battering. In the wake of September 11 we have known fear, vengeance, grief, and international power politics on a terrifyingly violent stage. Our government seems irrevocably tied to the coat-tails of an unashamedly power-hungry US foreign policy of "full spectrum dominance"; our international treaties, set in place to the very fabric of our planet, are being systematically abrogated, thereby creating the backdrop for environmental and nuclear catastrophe. The media are muzzled, human rights trampled, and people have become increasingly afraid to raise their voices in protest.

In such a context, how can one talk of dreaming? "Decade to Overcome Violence"; "Culture of Peace" Surely they fell in the ruins of the Twin Towers. And yet, more than ever, it is now, when crisis can become opportunity, that we must dream, and that we must weave these dreams into reality. And as dreams must start somewhere, why not in Scotland?

Recently the anti-nuclear campaign, Trident Ploughshares, was given the Right Livelihood Award (known as the 'alternative Nobel Peace Prize') and we spent some days in Stockholm for the award celebrations. There was something most heartening and inspiring spending time in a country with a strong tradition of working for peace. Not only was this expressed in an openness of attitude and a warm welcome, but peace, environmental concerns, and world development organisations were well resourced in spacious, adequate premises. Some indication of where priorities lie. This is where dreaming starts. If in Sweden, why not in Scotland?

The World Trade Centre did not, as some claimed, represent 'Western Civilisation'. Rather it epitomised global capitalism. The attack, tragic in its consequences, has nevertheless given many people pause for thought. How long can the gap between very rich and desperately poor continue to widen? How much longer can we in the West simply use other nations and peoples as commodities to be used and exploited at the cost of human rights, liberties, and the environment? These are global questions, but we Scots also must seek the answers.

We can start by making our voices heard. Defence and foreign policy may be reserved to Westminster, but we Scots must continue vociferously, noisily and publicly to deny a foreign policy that drags us meekly behind a U.S. policy of global domination in which some of the poorest peoples in the world are being obliterated by some of the wealthiest. An innate sense of justice must cry 'Halt', and if our Westminster representatives have ears to hear, that cry will reach Westminster.

Scots people are well known for their strong worldwide links and connections, with perhaps a unique historical position of being both oppressor and oppressed. Such links can be expressed in an attitude of mind that is more open, receptive and welcoming of other peoples and cultures, but this must go beyond mere platitudes and myths of hospitality to practical concrete reality. We are already a multicultural society in Scotland. Recent race attacks in Glasgow and Edinburgh are a shame and a disgrace to our people, but they arise partly out of a failure to bring communities together to listen and understand one another. It was heartening in the immediate aftermath of September 11 to see MSPs visiting the Mosques and talking with the Muslim community, but it is a sad reflection that it should take a disaster of such magnitude to make this happen. A Scottish Christian/Muslim forum for dialogue has recently been established and must be encouraged and extended.

Local councils in Scotland are already tackling some of the issues concerned with the dispersal and settlement of refugees and asylum seekers. I would suggest that this should be viewed not as a problem, but as an opportunity. Refugees bring with them a wealth of experience, skill, and cultural diversity. Scots could live up to our reputation of hospitality by developing a whole programme of welcome. This would involve designating housing, not in the poorest areas, but in a variety of neighbourhoods. Local communities could be prepared with reception programmes designed to encourage sharing of cultures, histories and perceptions, and training could be given in problem mediation and conflict resolution. Eventually this might all come together in a pioneering International Cultural Centre for Scotland where diversity and difference is celebrated.

Perhaps the most ambitious dream of all however, is to develop a whole culture of peace in Scotland. Just as the Scandinavians have a well-deserved reputation as international peacemakers, with their personnel often deployed as UN peacekeepers, so Scotland could become internationally renowned as a nation devoted to building peace worldwide. This will require action at many levels, all well within the scope of the Scottish Executive.

For a start we would require to change the cultural mindset of so many Scots (and others) who perceive Scotland as a land of kilted warriors. This begins in our perception of history. Elise Boulding's book **The Underside of History** shows how in global historical terms, both women's history and the stories of peaceful nonviolent progress have been

submerged under a glorification of war and battles. The 'underside' of Scotland's history needs to be honoured and taught in our schools.

Developing from this, there is a need to develop a career structure in peace studies. A tremendous amount of excellent work is already under way developing peer mediation work in schools to counter bullying and violence. This needs to be incorporated into the school curriculum as a fully integrated and funded educational programme of study right up to Sixth year level.

Following from that, a university course in **Nonviolence; from Theory to Practice** is already being pioneered at Masters level at the Centre for Human Ecology in Edinburgh, and Edinburgh University is exploring the possibility of an undergraduate course in nonviolence and conflict resolution for Moray House. If this were to be extended into full-scale degree courses, then already a career structure in Peace Studies could be offered. Linking in with Bradford School of Peace Studies, Lancaster University and the Responding to Conflict course in Birmingham, a whole range of diplomatic skills, including negotiation and mediation skills and international relations could equip a whole generation of highly qualified Scottish diplomats for foreign service.

As I write a possible 3,000 U.K. troops are on stand-by to be sent to Afghanistan to restore peace in that war-torn country. My question is have they been adequately prepared with anything other than a military training for a situation that requires the most delicate of negotiation skills, coupled with a profound cultural and historical awareness of the country in which they will be operating? I suspect not.

My vision is of an International Peacekeeping Training Centre in Scotland, perhaps comparable to the International Peacekeeping Centre at Cornwallis in Nova Scotia, which trains UN peacekeepers, describing itself as a 'centre of excellence'. I attended a two-week training there, and learned much of value, but its emphasis was still largely military, where the demands of complex UN peacekeeping require a much wider range of skills. In Scotland we have the skills in the civilian sector to develop an excellent all-round course for peacekeepers, which would include negotiation, mediation, nonviolent conflict resolution, legal and human rights expertise, cultural awareness, and trauma management. As a result,

Scotland could make a highly skilled contribution to UN peacekeeping operations.

There is a growing movement worldwide to recognise the crucial role of well-trained nonviolent civilian peace teams, ready to intervene quickly in a crisis situation. A programme of intensive training is being developed through European Peaceworkers, based in London and Brussels, and with Global Civil Peace Teams based in the U.S. Already the Scottish Centre for Nonviolence in

Dunblane has been recommended as the training centre for any Scottish participants. This has the backing of the Church of Scotland through a motion at last year's General Assembly, and of the Helsinki Citizen's Assembly, the U.N.A. in Scotland, and Amnesty International, and a proposal for financial support is being put to the Scottish Executive. It is a thrilling and innovative idea, and if we move quickly to develop its potential, Scotland could lead the way in providing skilled peacemakers.

However, simply to send people overseas to 'sort out other people's problem' smacks of cultural imperialism and an unacceptable degree of smugness. Participants in international peace teams would be required to have previous experience of working with violence in their own country first – and there is no lack of opportunity in Scotland. It has been suggested that community workers and teams dealing with aspects of local

community violence might gain a qualification in nonviolent conflict resolution through an SVQ accreditation, similar to that already developed by Scottish Mediation Network.

An impossible dream of a Scotland that is open, welcoming, peace-loving and active in developing a global culture of peace? Perhaps not so impossible, and certainly all within the remit of the Scottish Executive to initiate, given the impetus from the people.

But Trident, the greatest symbol of world terrorism, still remains in our Scottish waters. Until we can rid ourselves of dependence on the nuclear threat for our security, and until we can build an economic base that is not dependent on the arms trade, we are still slaves to global capital. The Scottish people must resist terror in all its aspects, and that may mean freeing ourselves from both US and UK dominance. ■

Helen Stevens is the Director of the Scottish Centre for Non-Violence and a leading member of the Iona Community

Scotland could become internationally renowned as a nation devoted to building peace worldwide. This will require action at many levels, all well within the scope of the Scottish Executive.

not safer but less free

Kay Goodall argues that the Government's 'anti-terrorism' legislation will do nothing to reduce the threat of terror but will restrict freedom

In the mid-90s, a change occurred. Laws formerly used to isolate and harass Irish people in the UK began to be used against refugee communities. Gradually, in the eyes of the police and the security services, refugees became criminals and terrorists. Then steadily our law was amended to make them so. The events of Sept. 11 have not allowed the creation of a racially discriminatory criminalisation of some of the most poor and desperate people in this country. That was already there. They have allowed it to go public.

Lord Jenkins admitted recently in the House of Lords that the terrorism legislation he introduced in 1974 was "not one of the legislative measures of which I am most proud" and that "associated with the mood of that time there occurred some of the worst miscarriages of justice in the recent history of British criminal law... There was undoubtedly a certain atavistic desire to get any Irishman and convict him. That affected police, prosecuting counsel, judges and juries."

In complete disregard of this shameful history, from 1995 onwards the UK did not unpick its terrorism laws but instead extended this "atavistic desire" beyond the Irish conflict. New and unclear provisions on possession, incitement and conspiracy were created and used almost exclusively against refugees. At first only tiny numbers, mostly living around London, were targeted, until the Terrorism Act 2000 and the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 came into force.

The two Acts made a whole range of political activities into crimes. They institute an extraordinarily wide concept of 'terrorism'. An act or threat of terrorism is defined so widely that it would include something as innocuous as a plan to cut down genetically-modified crops in Ayrshire or India – under the 2000 Act s.1, causing serious damage to property anywhere in the world to influence others for ideological reasons is terrorism. You commit a criminal offence if you do not inform the police of any information you have which might assist them in preventing such an act of 'terrorism'.

Even when we consider the more traditional definition of terrorism, the taking up of arms against the state, we find that the law seems led by political expedience rather than consistency. The Kurdish PKK for instance are struggling for self-determination in Turkey under a violent regime which outlaws any political party representing minority rights. They have maintained a ceasefire for over two

years. A US federal judge stated in a recent ruling that the PKK are party to an armed conflict, not terrorists under international law. Yet they are now a proscribed organisation here and their members are designated 'terrorists'. You become a 'terrorist' if you arrange a meeting of three people at which a member of the PKK will speak. You have committed a criminal offence if you merely wear a PKK emblem in a public place.

The legislation is so extensive that it is not just a control on violent uprising but a gag on free speech. The House of Lords struck out the provisions planned for the 2001 Act on incitement to religious hatred because they saw them as a restriction on free speech. How much more of a restriction on free speech is it when a community fighting state torture and murder cannot speak about their resistance?

These sweeping measures work in tandem with the asylum and immigration legislation to operate most harshly against refugees. In some parts of the 2001 Act such racist discrimination is absolutely explicit. Certain rules only apply to you if you are the wrong sort of non-British national. Only non-nationals will routinely have their fingerprints retained on file (unconnected to any crime), or will find their assets/bank accounts part-frozen. Only non-nationals can be thrown into jail simply because the Secretary of State "reasonably believes" that they are a threat to national security and "suspects" that they are a terrorist who cannot be deported. A "terrorist" includes someone who supports or assists an "international terrorist group" – and this is not just a proscribed organisation. The wide definition from the 2000 Act is used, so it could refer to a group of anti-GM crop activists.

Should you fall foul of this, your case will be processed under a second-class sort of law where there is a truncated procedure, no presumption of innocence and no right for you or your lawyer to see all the evidence against you. You will not face a fixed term but an indefinitely renewable jail sentence. The state never need find enough evidence to actually charge you with anything at all. It is effectively internment.

The deeper problem is that these provisions will act as an instrument of fear. They make criminals of whole communities because some communities are largely composed of political refugees, escaping persecution because they were fighting for democracy and had become targets of repressive regimes. Such people are caught in a hellish trap between the terrorism laws and the

asylum and immigration provisions. If they say they were persecuted for supporting a proscribed liberation movement, they are open to suspicion of being terrorists. If they say they were wrongly targeted, they may be deemed to “have no well-founded fear of persecution” and be deported or be forced to go on the run.

I realise that many people will think three things. They will think, first, that it is sad that governments do this, but necessary. They will think secondly that these measures are a last resort and thirdly that they will work. None of these beliefs is correct.

In fact no other Western state has such extensive anti-terrorism legislation as that which the UK **already** possessed before September 11. To use the latest powers of detention, the UK must derogate from Article 5(1) of the European Charter on Human Rights which protects people’s right to liberty. Detaining people for lengthy periods on the basis of suspicion alone, moreover, is nothing new or extraordinary and it is no ‘last resort’. Most only remember internment in Northern Ireland, but people were interned here during the two world wars, the Falklands War and the Gulf War, and we had to derogate repeatedly from Article 5 in the 1950s in the pursuit of colonial repression. Most infamously, nearly 80,000 individuals were detained in Kenya (some of whom died in custody). Lengthy detention is not an aberration from our fine rights tradition: it is a normal part of the armoury of the modern British state.

Worse still, lengthy detention will not work. It regularly fails at the job it is supposed to do, which is prevent crime. It failed spectacularly in Northern Ireland and Kenya and wherever it took place it alienated and angered wide sections of the target community. Lord Dubs of this very government stated only three years ago that they were removing internment provisions from the previous legislation because “frankly, it has not worked... The Government believe that to get rid of the power is sensible... We do not believe that it in any way weakens the power of the Government to deal with terrorism... the Government cannot see any circumstances in which they would wish to use the power of internment.” Today it seems that the only lesson the government have learned from those mistakes is how to redouble them.

Although minorities will suffer most, we are all becoming less free. In 2000, we witnessed the Orwellian creation

of the ‘Regulation’ of Investigatory Powers Act and the ‘Freedom’ of Information Act – which in reality free up police investigatory powers and lock away information we need. The boundary between serious and minor crime has been muddied by a series of legislative changes. And now, the 2001 Act permits Scottish ministers until July 2002 to incorporate certain EU provisions by ministerial regulation, implementing significant changes to Scottish criminal procedure and sentencing with next to no parliamentary debate.

More pressure needs to be put on the Scottish Parliament to contest all this. The EU proposal originally covered wide areas of criminal justice, yet a majority in the Scottish Parliament voted to send it through Westminster instead of debating and enacting it here. Many MSPs have been too willing to surrender legislating on devolved matters to Westminster.

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Furthermore, the Scottish Parliament has the power to debate not just devolved matters but also any reserved matter such as asylum, immigration and terrorism. We should demand that our MSPs do. The EU’s next plan is to create databases of non-EU nationals and “suspected” protesters, monitored by largely unaccountable officials such as those running Europol and the Schengen Information System. Will

we leave the debate over this to the secretive halls of Europe?

We should not think of these developments in isolation. They add up to a constitutional transfer of power away from elected Parliaments. During the passage of the 2001 Act, David Blunkett complained that the Lords were “disembowelling” and “knee-capping” the bill, a claim which must have had some civil liberties lawyers reaching in disbelief for their dictionaries. In reality it is those who seek to control the executive who are being knee-capped.

The truth is that such laws do not primarily make it easier to prevent terrorist crime: we already had enough law to do that. Instead, they and their predecessors make it easier for the state to harass, frighten and imprison people who are not criminals. We must all resist this. As John Wadham of Liberty insisted, such laws make us not safer but less free. ■

Dr Kay Goodall is a lecturer in public law and jurisprudence at the University of Glasgow. She is a member of several civil liberties campaign groups.

choosing a mindset

Robin McAlpine argues that what is stopping the Scottish Parliament from taking a more active international role is a limited mindset rather than limited powers

When the bombs started dropping on Afghanistan the limitations of the Scottish Parliament seemed apparent. The crowing of the underemployed Scots backbenchers at Westminster and anti-devolutionists such as the facile Andrew Neil had one message for the Scottish Parliament; sit back kids, this one is for the grown-ups.

Unfortunately, most commentators (even those sympathetic to the Parliament) were inclined to agree. After all, this was a crisis for foreign policy and defence, both of which are reserved to Westminster –there seemed to be little argument. But what was the Scottish Parliament unable to do without the powers of foreign policy and defence that the rest of the world's nation states were able to do? We were unable to have an offer of troops rejected by America. We were unable to have our strategic advice ignored by America. We were not consulted, as opposed to formally not consulted, by America. Certainly, the Scottish Parliament was powerless to oppose the military might of America. But then, so was the rest of the world.

The Westminster Parliament did not do anything significant in the war. The British Government provided a few specialist troops and a token amount of hardware. It is unlikely the war would have been any different without a British military involvement. The significant thing that Westminster did was **around** the war, and this it could only do because it **believed** it was powerful. Westminster's role was to build the international coalition of muted support for the war which the isolationist Bush administration couldn't. And to do this it needed only two things; the resources available to any Australian backpacker (a plane ticket and some informal chatting) and the confidence to believe that anyone wanted to listen. It is in this that we find the three questions the Scottish Parliament needs to consider. Should it be getting involved in world events? Can it get involved in world events? And what is stopping it getting involved in world events?

First, should we be involved? Without getting into either party political or academic discussion of at what level a group of people have the right to be heard on the world stage, it is undeniable that the Scottish Parliament is the only democratic voice of Scotland. Westminster represents the views and interests of Scotland only as much as the EU represents the views and interests of Britain. The Scottish Parliament is the only institution which has the right to speak for Scotland alone because it is the only institution which Scotland alone can hold to account. If the world community (supported by

Westminster) decided to ban Scotch whisky, there is no question the Parliament would speak out and there is no question that the people of Scotland would expect them to. If politicians, or commentators, believe that the people of Scotland don't want their Parliament to speak for them because of a technicality of legislative drafting, they have profoundly misunderstood the hopes that delivered the overwhelming referendum victory. And those who argue that this is a waste of the Parliament's time profoundly misunderstand what a Parliament is for. Civil servants are there to manage, Parliaments are there to shape the country they represent and the world around them. It is not the case that the Scottish Parliament should be involved in the world; it is the case that the Scottish Parliament must be involved in the world.

There is another reason why Scotland should be involved. The Scottish Parliament is one of the world's youngest and, in combination with much stricter lobbying rules than most of its counterparts, is much less susceptible to individual interest groups than other parliaments. It does not have a military, and so the interests of the military and its suppliers (so often directly opposite to the interests of people) do not have the level of influence we find elsewhere. It is also based in a country where employment is dominated by small to medium enterprises and the public sector, and where few international corporations are headquartered. This does not mean that the interests of business are not heard in Scotland, it means that the interests of civic Scotland and others are also heard. In a war being run by the military, weapons manufacturers and the oil industry, smaller and less powerful countries less in thrall to the military-industrial complex must act as a counterweight. This means much of the developing world, Scandinavian countries, parts of the former eastern bloc. And it means Scotland recognising its international duties and responsibilities.

So the second question – can we be involved? Again and again in this issue of the Scottish Left Review you will find writers putting forward clear ideas for things the Parliament could do. But, perhaps ironically, no-one has shown us the role Scotland might take more clearly than Tony Blair himself. As indicated above, Blair has combined the democratic mandate he has with his own personal messianic mindset (oh, and the giant snarling beast that is the American military standing six feet behind) to persuade, cajole, charm, bribe and threaten the rest of the world to fall in line. This 'coalition' is usually referred to as fragile. Even that fails to recognise how fragile it is. This is a coalition of soundbites, with no

partner committing itself to anything apart from not criticising America too much for just now or a little short-term logistical support. It didn't even need a senior politician to put it together.

All it took was a mindset which believed that we (Britain) had an important international contribution to make. An international mindset. So what might have happened if the Scottish Parliament had adopted a similar mindset? Setting aside the party politics of the matter, what would have happened if a Scottish First Minister had booked tickets to some of the Scandinavian countries, the German Landers, the Canadian provinces, North Africa, the Middle East. What if that First Minister had offered the politicians, parties and even parliaments who were visibly squirming at having to support what they saw as unjustified American bullying an alternative coalition. At one end of the spectrum that coalition could have given limited support to American action but have campaigned for a proper humanitarian solution and monitored war crimes perpetrated during the military action. At the other end, it could have opposed military action and built a coalition calling for the judicial response to an act that was always a crime rather than a declaration of war.

This may seem fanciful, but is nothing like as fanciful as the idea that the whole world is behind the American action, and that the dissent is limited to a small group of the counter-culture usual suspects. There is no doubt that there are an enormous number of people in the world (almost certainly a significant majority) who would like to oppose the way America operates its international military and trade policies but who don't want to be seen as anti-American or pro-Bin Laden. The only thing they lack is a democratic focus. There is no reason in the world that the Scottish Parliament could not have become a significant part of that democratic focus.

Too late, too late, of course. A massacre of Afghan civilians which will probably dwarf the lives lost in the World Trade Centre has proved the doubters wrong. To the visible glee of Tony Blair, the warlords won the day. But as we pick through the debris of a world not changed, only revealed for what it already was, the need for international coalitions is greater than ever. The force-feeding of the world on GM foods, the attempts to dismantle the European public services by big corporations, the extortion rackets which force the third world to buy things they don't need, the patenting of the individual units of life which surcharge the world's healers for saving lives; the whole panoply of injustice being perpetrated by the international corporations in pursuit of profit must be opposed. The

democratic voices which cannot be controlled by the military-industrial complex are needed now, and Scotland's is one of them. (This is not anti-American; many of these are also against the interests of ordinary Americans).

So, if Scotland can play a central part in giving a democratic focus to the international concerns about all of these things, why haven't we just 'done a Blair'? Why haven't we got onto the phones and into the planes? Why aren't we talking to the world about these things?

There are two reasons. The first and smaller reason is, of course, politics. The Scottish Labour Party has yet to develop the independence from the UK party which would free MSPs to form common ground across party ranks on issues such as these (and none of the other parties has yet learned how to balance electioneering with changing Scotland for the better). But let us hope that this will change.

The second reason is the real problem, the real block. Too much of the political class in Scotland has a limited mindset about what it is there for. The orthodoxy is now that the Parliament is here to fix hospitals and schools and no more; a Parliament of painters and decorators. The managerial culture which Blair brought to government in Britain (don't think, just work out which button you're supposed to press) has mutated itself even further in Scotland. "Don't waste time on the chattering classes", "what works is what counts", "dump the crap". You can hear it in the language of Scottish politics where too many of our elected members have not just become painters and decorators, they have become the painters and decorators from **Chewin' The Fat**. "Let's talk about the corporate takeover of European services", "Whoa, you've gone too far you huv".

The limits of the Scottish Parliament are largely self imposed

The Scottish Parliament can play a real and meaningful role in the wider world. Indeed, in an era when the world is developing a sneaking suspicion that elected government might just be superfluous, a parliament which believes in itself, which has the space to think about the real issues, and which has the freedom from the vested interests to do something about it could make a real difference. With the confidence, that Parliament might be found in Scotland.

The limits of the Scottish Parliament are largely self imposed. It needs to become a Parliament of ambition which believes that what counts is not only what works but also what could be achieved. We need to stand on the international stage with confidence and lose the mediocre mindset which is condemning us to be a nation of painters and decorators. ■

Robin McAlpine is Public Affairs Officer with Universities Scotland

betraying the victims

Margaret Lynch argues that the humanitarian failure in Afghanistan poses questions which the Scottish Parliament might help to answer

Humanitarian Principles refer to the Prosecution of War and Delivery of Aid in areas of conflict. Humanitarian principles are not new, they have existed in many different times and cultures; how they are expressed and the extent to which they are respected is historically determined. It goes without saying that determining the limits of war is an intensely political process which is largely determined by politicians and soldiers and not by those involved in delivering humanitarian aid.

International Humanitarian Law is modern expression of this idea of establishing rules of engagement for the decent prosecution of war and were finally incorporated into Geneva Conventions (1949) which laid down the rules for the treatment of victims of war. The Geneva Conventions place obligations on states. For Non Governmental Organisations they found expression in the Red Cross Movement's ethical framework referred to as Fundamental Principles which elaborate the core values of impartiality, neutrality and independence for NGOs. These were set out in 1964 and more or less universally accepted as the Code of Conduct by NGOs and governments alike. Today most effective aid organisations are signatories to the Red Cross/NGO Code of Conduct and the Sphere Project (Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response which codifies the Fundamental Principles for the purposes of humanitarian relief operations on the ground).

Together the Geneva Conventions and Fundamental Principles create a social contract between the belligerents who agree to respect humanitarian principles and the humanitarian agents who agree not to interfere in conflict. This social contract has been buttressed by the development of human rights law, refugee law, the genocide convention and parts of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In legal terms at least, the victims of conflict now enjoy an elaborate framework of protection. The central tenets of the Fundamental Principles are that:-

- Humanitarian Aid is supposed to be impartial: delivered to those in greatest need irrespective of sides taken during conflicts;
- Humanitarian aid is supposed to be neutral: designed to ensure that relief does not advantage any one party or side to the conflict (that aid gets to whom it is intended and does not end up on the black market or diverted for military purposes) ; and
- Humanitarian aid is supposed to be independent: not driven by foreign policy objectives or subject to conditionality.

Today belligerents are not usually states but factions within states where civil society is too weak to hold them to account. Nine out of every 10 victims of war are civilians – direct attacks on civilians and other abuses of IHL are often a deliberate strategy of war. At the same time that powerful states interest in non strategic wars has declined, there has been weakening of state sovereignty and a tendency for humanitarian action to substitute for international political engagement. This has in certain significant circumstances compromised the impartiality and neutrality of NGOs.

If we look at Afghanistan and try to apply the Fundamental Principles we can see just how far they have been left behind.

- In the prosecution of this war, civilians were bombed – and cluster bombs were used. Cluster bombs afford no real military advantage when it comes to taking control of territory. They are a weapon of psychological warfare – brightly coloured yellow balls spread over a large area, specifically designed to attract the attention of children whose limbs are blown off when they are picked up. Particularly devastating when the food packages dropped from the sky were also coloured yellow – and hungry children went in search of them. These Cluster bombs were used to minimise the appetite of the local population for the Taliban by injuring children.
- The humanitarian aid drops consisted of parcels of food chucked out of passing fighter jets at 72,000 feet. No control of the aid distribution process here, no ensuring that aid got to those in most need. I hardly need mention the bombing of four of the five Red Cross storage warehouses in Kabul to press the point home.
- The deliberate precision bombing by the Allies of Taliban prisoners which resulted in over 200 deaths and casualties.
- The closure of borders to Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan to refugees fleeing the bombing.

Each of these on their own is a serious violation of IHL by states which are signatories to the UN Conventions and in the case of Britain and America members of the Security Council of the UN. A glass house is a dangerous place from whence to cast a stone – as no doubt the Western leaders will be reminded the next time that they seek to take the likes of Robert Mugabe, Daniel Arap Moi or others to task for violating fundamental human rights.

Humanitarian organisations were very disconcerted by the pollution of humanitarian assistance – driven as it was by the war aims of the Allies. Colonel Bob Stewart (Former NATO Commander in Bosnia) let the cat out of the bag when he said that “Guns with aid alongside them works well in keeping international public opinion behind what is happening”. The problem with this is that if humanitarian aid is used to prosecute a war, in future conflicts the social contract between belligerents which has ensured access by aid organisations to distribute essential life saving supplies will implode and much suffering will result.

Who would have thought that the Government which launched its ‘ethical foreign policy’ at the beginning of its first term of office would be the one responsible for some of the most serious violations of the Geneva Convention at the beginning of its second term in power? Perhaps most astonishingly of all has been the dearth of opposition to the conduct of the war from even the ‘usual suspects’. The STUC with its long and honourable tradition of defending human rights remained silent, very little was heard from the Churches and only a handful of parliamentarians raised their voices (George Galloway, Tommy Sheridan, Dennis Cannavan, Llyod Quinan, Dorothy Grace Elder and John McAllion). Most of our elected representatives, political pundits and media commentators were too mesmerised by the conduct of the private lives of our MPs/MSPs and the manner in which they construct their expense claims to leave much time and attention for the plight of between five and eight million starving Afghans whose lives had been placed in extreme jeopardy by the disproportionate reaction to the murder of 3,000 Americans by the Al Qu’aida terrorist group. Its about time that they took their noses out of the midden and followed the advice offered by Clackmannan Council on their coat of arms to “look about ye”.

There are some who would argue that the Scottish Parliament has no locus in the affair – that Foreign Affairs are a reserved power and therefore outwith their sphere of competence. This is a poor excuse when the Parliament has an International Development Committee which could inquire whether or not the \$330 billion set aside to wage the war on terrorism could be better spent waging a war on want. After all, it might even prove to be a more effective means of combating international terror – these organisations do not find fertile ground in countries where

children are well fed, well educated and where people enjoy liberal amounts of parliamentary or other forms of democracy. (\$50 billion is what the rich nations of the world will spend this year bringing food, clean water, sanitation, education and access to basic health services to the poorest and most destitute people on the planet – it is clearly not enough).

The International Development Committee could investigate the effectiveness of the dropping of aid packages from fighter jets – and form an opinion on whether or not the £26 million already spent, and £20 million yet to be committed by the Government to the aid and rehabilitation effort is enough when balanced against what was spent bombing civilian populations and destroying the infrastructure of Kabul and Kandahar.

The Education Committee could demand that civic education be a compulsory subject in all schools, and that a good grounding in humanitarian principles form a core part of the curriculum. At least then we might have a population equipped with the tools to assess whether or not their government is infringing the human rights of others. After all, our own Government regards human rights training as being a reasonable thing to request of African states who are recipients of UK aid.

But all this is really tinkering at the edges. What is really needed is a public debate about the kind of relations which modern Scots want to have with the modern world. Do we really want to accept a foreign policy which constantly has us hanging onto the coattails of the US and demotes our Prime Minister to the ranks of chief cheer leader for the American President? Better by far to have the neutrality of Switzerland when it comes to fighting wars, the generosity of Sweden when it comes to lifting people out of poverty, the sagacity of Norway when it comes to peace-building, and the enterprise of Ireland when it comes to international business relations.

Some say that the civilisation can be measured by the way a society looks after the most vulnerable and the manner in which it deals with dissent. At the beginning of the 21st Century we have eight million starving Afghans and only six dissenting Parliamentarians. I think the barbarians have it. ■

Margaret Lynch is Director of the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund

At the beginning of the 21st Century we have eight million starving Afghans and only six dissenting Parliamentarians

be the best - break the law

Jason Beckett demonstrates that, in the light of international law, the war in Afghanistan is clearly illegal

It is one thing for the Army, in their recruitment campaign, to fail to mention the risking death, killing, and maiming people bits of the job – think about those TV ads: after all who wouldn't rather be stealing CDs and pulling beautiful women than blowing up bits of the globe they'd never previously heard of? It's another thing entirely for the Government to disguise, indeed lie about, the legality of the actions the army undertake on their (and therefore our) behalf. But make no mistake; the current bombing campaign against Afghanistan **is unlawful**.

I do not propose to examine the morality of the US/UK response to the atrocities of September 11. This is for two reasons: first I neither am, nor claim to be, a moralist or ethicist; second because I do not want even to engage in conversation with anyone who would suggest that risking millions of lives by creating the conditions of starvation, or that carpet-bombing an already poor country to the pre-Stone Age, is morally acceptable. Instead of this I shall simply show that the current campaign is illegal under Public International Law (PIL), and so our leaders cannot hide behind international law to insulate themselves (and ourselves) from moral scrutiny.

The general rule of PIL regarding the Use of Force is article 2(4) of the UN Charter; this prohibits the use of force between States. There are a few exceptions to this rule, including the use of force in self-defence (article 51 UN Charter) and the use of force authorised by the Security Council (article 42 UN Charter). NATO has sought to justify their conduct on these. There are two fatal flaws in this line of argument: first the US is not acting in self-defence; second the Security Council did not authorise any use of force against Afghanistan. NATO's apologists have sought to get round this by conflating the two arguments and eliding their answers. In short they have relied on the Security Council's affirmation of the "right of individual and collective self-defence" – while ignoring the Security Council's deafening silence regarding the activation of the right in the present crisis – to claim that the right is now active. The right is not, however, active, because the preconditions for activation have not been met individually, let alone collectively.

I shall return to these preconditions presently, but first I would like to deal with the argument claiming that the Security Council authorised the use of force, because this is an argument easily dismissed. When the Security Council authorises force, it does so explicitly. Consider, for example, Security Council resolution 678 with its unambiguous

authorisation to "take all necessary measures" to ensure Kuwait's liberation; or resolution 929 in response to the Rwandan genocide, which authorised France to "use all necessary means" to establish a secure environment. In contrast, Resolution 1368 acknowledges – in the abstract – the US's "inherent right to self-defence". No one disputes the existence of this right, but acknowledgement of its existence by the Security Council does not even come close to UN authorisation to use force!

So far then, the apologists have proven, not that NATO can bomb Afghanistan to their heart's content, but that the US has a right of self-defence. The key question now is whether this right has been used lawfully, or offered as a fig leaf to disguise an illegal resort to force to ensure revenge and assuage US grief and anger. Unfortunately we must now get on with the technical bit, defining the conditions for the lawful exercise of the right of self-defence, and seeing whether these have been met in the present case.

The inherent right of self-defence becomes operative only in the event of an armed attack by one State on another State. Horrific though the events of Sept. 11 were, they do not constitute an armed attack, because armed attack is defined in reference to the perpetrator(s), not the results. It is an attack by the military or paramilitary forces of one State against another State. Al-Qaida are not military forces, nor are they Afghanistan's forces, so how can they be Afghanistan's military forces? But, it is enough that their actions be attributable to Afghanistan. True, but this means attributable – under the laws of State Responsibility – to the State of Afghanistan; in short they must have acted as agents of the Afghani Government, and no evidence of this has been offered. There are of course continuous allegations of a de facto symbiosis of Al-Qaida and Taliban, though these seem to change periodically (and indeed were absent from initial justifications), and do not even amount to direct claims that the particular actions of the particular terrorists on Sept. 11 were attributable to Afghanistan as a State.

So, no armed attack, but even if this is not accepted, even if we assume that the actions of Al-Qaida amount to an armed attack by Afghanistan (and the Security Council has already stated, in 1988, that the Israeli bombing of Tunisia could not be justified by Tunisia's sheltering the then terrorist PLO) the current NATO action would still be unlawful. This is because it has three more hurdles to fall on. Was the response necessary? Well no actually,

negotiations were not attempted; offers of extradition if evidence was produced or promised (an intolerable demand according to the US) were rejected; no-one took the time to go through UN routes, neither General Assembly, nor Secretary General, nor (really) Security Council.

Was the action proportionate to the elimination of the threat or unlawful state of affairs? This depends on whether there was a threat, or an unlawful state of affairs, to be eliminated. If so, was it one that had to be eliminated by force? If so, was the force used proportionate to that elimination; i.e. was the force, with a reasonable margin for error, the minimum that could have been used to eliminate the unlawful state of affairs? These questions are less difficult to answer than they may appear, because there was simply no unlawful situation which could be eliminated by the use of force. The attack of September 11 – whatever its legal status – was over. There was no war to fight.

Self-defence is predicated on fear, not on vengeance. It must therefore be motivated by fear, not by vengeance. This is true even of the disputed doctrine of anticipated self-defence. Under this doctrine (if it exists) the NATO response would need to be proportionate not to stopping the attack carried out, but to preventing further attacks. The defence would still have to be necessary and proportionate – and I would argue that it would still fail these tests – and the threat would have to be of an “immediate” attack precipitating an “overwhelming” need to respond. There were, to put it bluntly, no such attacks, neither in reality, nor even in the fevered rhetoric of NATO apologists.

Finally, the actual conduct of the campaign against Afghanistan – regardless of the legality of resort to violence – was itself unlawful. It was in breach of the Geneva Conventions of 1949, their Additional Protocols of 1977 (API and APII), and customary international law. As General Sir Michael Rose (the NATO commander during the Bosnia campaign) correctly observed, NATO’s Kosovo campaign was unlawful because high altitude bombing is itself, intrinsically, unlawful. High altitude bombing is always unlawful, so it was unlawful in Afghanistan. The reason for this is simple; the central tenet of the Laws of

War is that civilians should not be targeted (article 51 API, which has crystallised into customary international law, binding on all States) and means and methods of warfare that cannot distinguish between combatant and civilian are unlawful. There is a margin of error here, innocent people die in wars, but it is severely restricted by the duty (under article 57 API; which has crystallised into customary international law, binding on all States) to “take all feasible precautions” to avoid civilian deaths. ‘Unavoidable’ civilian deaths go under the euphemism “collateral damage”: avoidable civilian deaths are termed “indiscriminate”.

When the UN Security Council authorises force, it does so explicitly. No one disputes the existence of the US's right to self defence, but acknowledgement of this by the Security Council does not even come close to UN authorisation to use force

When bombing from 15,000 feet, even NATO admit you can't tell what you're dropping the bombs on. This is not the end of the matter. Not only do they bomb from 15,000 feet, NATO carpet bomb from there, and they do so using Cluster Bombs. A cluster bomb is basically a whole pile of Anti-Personnel Mines which disperse as they drop, and (hopefully) blow up at about waist-high from the ground. Better than that, any that don't blow up are activated on contact, and they are nice little yellow things – just like America's celebrated food packages. What will the kiddies get today, peanut-butter and jelly, or torn into bloody shreds?

So what can we in Scotland do? We could put pressure on Scottish Labour MPs to stand up to the UK party and the government. They could represent a distinctive Scottish Labour position instead of falling in with the orders given from above. We could also persuade MSPs to take up the issues in the Scottish Parliament and debate them there. Writing to the Foreign Office, to Jack Straw and his deputy Ben Bradshaw (both of whom avoid the tricky questions by hiding behind unsupported assertions that this campaign is lawful), is another option.

The conduct of this campaign can be described simply as murderous, or legally as indiscriminate, imprecise, and uncaring: it breaches every central tenet of International Humanitarian Law. It is not easy to challenge the legality of a conflict such as this, but at the very least it is important that we raise awareness of what is being done in our name. ■

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stemming the grey tide

Lou Howson documents how the government's promise of better government for older people has become better government of older people

Prior to the election of 1997 a leaflet entitled "The Tories have betrayed pensioners" was published by Tony Blair, John Prescott, Harriet Harman and Gordon Brown. It stated that: "Millions of people face poverty in retirement. Today's pensioners have lost £20 a week through the government breaking the earnings link with the basic state pension. Millions have been encouraged to join personal pensions which, for many, are costly and inadequate". The leaflet went on to say that "We will tackle the unfair lottery of community care – pensioners now have to pay for the care they used to get free on the NHS". The leaflet concluded by declaring that "Labour's election manifesto includes a commitment to a review of the position of pensioners in Britain. The review will report on the following priority issues as a matter of urgency and receive representations on the state pension including the earnings link, second tier pensions including SERPs and community care. Labour will put pensioners' voices at the heart of government. We will ensure wider consultation of pensioners about issues which affect their lives. We will encourage the development of pensioners' councils and forums so that pensioners' voices can be at the heart of decision-making in local authorities as well as central government. We will include pensioners' organisations in this process".

Many pensioners took them at their word and waited, but what is the reality? In July 1997 a pensions review body was set up on which pensioners were represented. So far I am unaware of the publication of any report of its findings; they are either languishing in Whitehall's vaults or they were sneaked out so silently that no one noticed. In June 1998 the report of the Pension Provision Group was published, this was the report of a group of professionals under the Chairmanship of Mr Tom Ross of Aon Consulting. Its findings, which are factual, received little publicity and were perhaps not entirely to the Government's liking, although they must be read by anyone interested in pension provision (or the lack thereof). In December 1998 the Government published its Green paper entitled "Partnership in pensions". This is the basis for the means testing proposals which are still being mulled over but which will be the basis for expected announcements in the forthcoming budget. These proposals will do little to provide a decent basic pension nor will they resolve the problems to be faced by those retiring in the next 50 years.

In June 1998 the Cabinet Office set up a body with the title "Better Government for Older People" declaring that

it was "a new national Government-led programme which will aim to improve public services for older people by better meeting their needs, listening to their views, and encouraging and recognising their contribution". To bring this about they set up a steering group consisting of six nominated members of the establishment, none of whom were representative of pensioner groups. (The Chairperson of National Pensioners Convention has recently been invited to join the group). A programme director was appointed and a network of 28 'pilots' was set up in various local authority areas throughout the country, three in Scotland. All this was done without consulting existing pensioners organisations. If existing pensioners organisations had been consulted they could have saved two years of expensive and often pointless palaver. The pilots were supposed to cover the whole spectrum of services used by older people and to get them involved in policy making as well as focusing on issues of concern. The pilots were to run for two years and were to produce a "Guide to Best Practice" to be published in April 2000 to encourage local initiatives and draw out policy lessons nationally. Many pensioners believe that had such a document been published (it wasn't) an appropriate title would have been "How to teach Granny what she already knows". In December 1999 a meeting was convened by Better Government in Edinburgh to which about ten pensioners' groups were invited along with around one hundred representatives of local government bodies.

The hospitality was excellent but did not compensate for the paucity of ideas put before us. The next two open meetings in Scotland were held in Glasgow and confirmed many pensioners' fears that we were being 'conned'. The culmination came in February 2001 when at a huge jamboree organised by the Scottish Executive we were treated to a series of puerile presentations under the guise of consultation all presided over by various luminaries of the Scottish political establishment. Several pensioners left in disgust, but those of us who stayed the course were presented with a document entitled "Better Government for Older People Report – All our futures in Scotland" which described itself as "a report from the Scottish Pilots on the implications of the activities, achievements and learning of the Better Government for Older People in Scotland with a response from the Scottish Executive". One pensioner on reading the document described it as "jargonised self deluding bunkum with a minute grain of truth based on unsustainable assumptions" and most older people who have read the document agree with this description.

BGOP have recently held a series of meetings in Glasgow which have been described as meetings of Scotland's Older Peoples' Advisory Group. The attendance has varied between 11 and 25. The attendees, in most cases, can hardly be described as democratically elected. So far these meetings, after an election process which would not be acceptable in a democratic body, have nominated three people to attend as Scotland's representatives to a British Older Peoples' Advisory Group. Another six people were selected to attend the AGM of the British Older Peoples Advisory Group in Brighton. As one of those chosen I attended this meeting. The only thing of note which happened was the presentation of a document described as a "Constitution". This document would have passed muster in the old Soviet Union but should have no place in a democratic society.

I made the only dissenting comment on the sixteen page farrago that it was "verbose, prescriptive and an outstanding example of democratic centralism". After the meeting three other pensioner activists told me that whilst agreeing with me there would have been no point in pushing the matter, one woman said to me that it would have been equivalent to throwing pearls before swine. Since then the so called Scottish OPAG has had a meeting to elect officers. To anyone conversant with procedure and experienced in human affairs the meeting could only be described as hilarious but sadly it will be recorded as though it was some sort of democratic model. Some people raised the question of finance but were politely informed that none was forthcoming except to cover the cost of OPAG meetings in Scotland or in UK. There are to be four such meetings in Scotland and at least eight delegate meetings possibly in Wolverhpton. The Wolverhampton meetings will be two day affairs, what they will discuss could be described as largely nebulous nonsense of little value to older people, but then, no doubt the hospitality will be first class. So far no one has ever volunteered the cost of all this but by putting together a few informed guesstimates it must be in the region of £3 million and so far without managing

to "to put pensioner's voices at the heart of government". But we live in hope. One large group of working class Scottish pensioners described BGOP as the biggest waste of public money so far and perhaps they are right.

When BGOP was first set up a group of older people was brought together at a conference at Ruskin College in Oxford at which around seventy older people present. They put forward proposals with which many of us agreed.

A Scottish pensioner was asked to present a paper. He, believing that they would only be interested in the truth, prepared a paper on the realities of life for many pensioners. Paid officials tried to prevent him from presenting his paper, he persisted and as a consequence his name was struck from the list

After this several potential dissenters were weeded out. One particular case of what can happen to dissenters concerned a Scottish pensioner who was hailed as being the ideal type to speak for others. He was presented to the Prime Minister and his wife and the photo of the event was used in the glossy publicity material. Unfortunately the man in question was asked to present a paper to a selected audience which included Ministers of the Scottish Executive. He, believing that they would only be interested in the truth, prepared a paper on the realities of life for many pensioners. Paid officials tried to prevent him from presenting his paper, he persisted and as a consequence his name was struck from the list and he was 'sent to Siberia'. Many others have written about their experiences of BGOP. The following are some comments made by reputable older people's groups. "Participation in BGOP went from high hopes to deep frustration with the realisation that BGOP was the voice of Government not of pensioners." "Lacked pensioner involvement and is carried through by paid professionals." "Part of government's window dressing, a show about nothing, safe in bland hands scared of causing controversy."

Despite this, a few of us in Scotland participate in the hope that the Scottish Executive may be influenced towards creating a genuine method of consultation between Scotland's elderly and all those in the Parliament. Many Elderly Forums and groups have established good relations with their Local Authorities, some of which could be written up in to a genuine guide to good practice. Unfortunately COSLA seems to be following

a BGOP line and, taking their cue from the Government, have appointed an "Older People's Champion". They seem to be unaware that the Government's "Older People's Champion" evokes derisive laughter when he is mentioned at any gathering of pensioners as does the mention of the Government's "Older People's Ambassador". He was given a hostile reception by over 300 pensioners at the Labour Party Conference. These posts are held by Alastair Darling MP and Ian McCartney MP respectively. The person appointed by COSLA is a man of ability but he should get to know some of the more active Forums before it's too late.

The Scottish Executive have set up an Older People's Unit. Malcolm Chisholm in announcing the setting up of the unit has made several statements, some of which evoke feelings of dismay but several give cause for hope. We are reliably informed that his successor in office (Hugh Henry) comes from a similar school of politicians who have a social conscience and who consequently listen and learn.

The Older Peoples Unit has convened two consultative meetings with a rather disparate group with conflicting interests where older people's representatives have been in a minority. The reports of the meetings, at which no votes were taken, appear to be slanted towards BGOP. Consequently at a meeting of Older People's groups where over fifty delegates representing organisations which have collective memberships of over ten thousand pensioners, it was unanimously agreed to write to Malcolm Chisholm asking that he consider options of a straightforward and democratic nature. In his reply he announced that the Older People's Unit was setting up a body with the objective "to establish sustainable and inclusive working arrangements which will enable older people's voices to be heard, and make a real contribution to policy for older people across the Executive. Such working arrangements will help the Executive to get a better understanding of the needs, concerns and priorities of older people, and so respond better to these". He goes on to state that "We intend to establish a consultative forum of older people's organisations".

The proposals for membership of the forum are a bit out of balance with older people's groups in the minority, but for starters it is acceptable. It will be Chaired by the Deputy

Minister for Health and Community Care who has special responsibility for the Elderly. Readers might ask why don't Scotland's pensioners speak with one voice? In conference on Tuesday October 8th 1996 we did and passed several resolutions, all of which are still relevant to today's situation. Three of them are very relevant and should have been incorporated in to Government policy by now, unfortunately this has not come about as yet but hopeful signs are on the horizon. The three resolutions were as follows.

One pensioner on reading the document described it as "jargonised self deluding bunkum with a minute grain of truth based on unsustainable assumptions"

- This Scottish Pensioners Congress demands that pensioners, and organisations representing older people, have the right to make positive and essential contributions to decisions made by local and central government and any other body which affect their lives
- This Scottish Pensioners Congress demands that when a Scottish Parliament is established, the Parliament should establish mechanisms to ensure that Scottish pensioners are able to effectively influence those decisions which it takes which will affect their lives and welfare.
- This Scottish Pensioners Congress asks the Congress sponsors to convene a seminar to establish the way in which we seek to participate in decision-making.

Unfortunately the sponsors of the Congress, Age Concern and Scottish Pensioners Forum, don't seem to have got round to implementing the third resolution, but five years is a long time. Many of those who participated in the Congress are no longer with us. Perhaps by showing a united front we might alter things soon. The National Pensioners Convention is discussing the setting up of a Scottish body and this might happen before too long. We read that our new first Minister expects the Scottish Parliament to take responsibility for our own affairs and get on with the business of governing Scotland. He goes on to say "For the reputation of the Parliament and the reputation of government in Scotland we need to get focused on the key priorities and we need to deliver tangible differences". Who knows – perhaps Jack's new broom will sweep clean and we will get real better government for all older people in Scotland which will ensure a better future for the many not the few. ■

Lou Howson is the Chair of the Confederation for Scotland's Elderly and Secretary of the Dumfries and Galloway Elderly Forum

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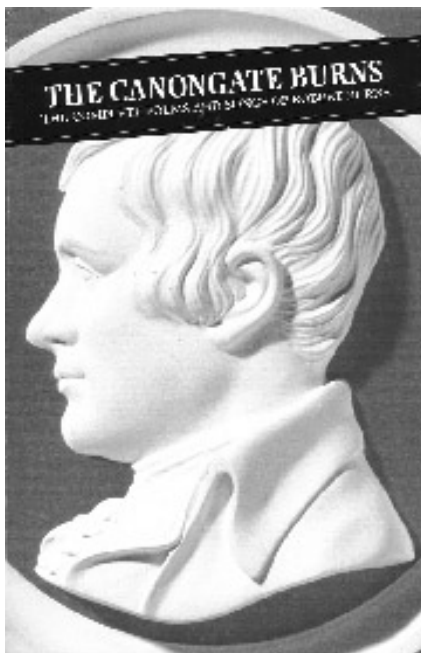
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web review

Henry McCubbin

Just the Facts

Much conjecture surrounding the so-called 'war on terrorism' is being offered both by journalists and our own politicians. But on what is all of this conjecture based? Some is undoubtedly based on a synthesis from today's facts and knowledge of political history. But sadly our politicians are being exposed as, to put it mildly, lightweight in this area. I can't help feeling that our Prime Minister's knowledge froze at his O-levels in geography and all he is now doing is auditioning for Bollywood presenting foreign affairs as the Tony and Cherie clothes show.

The lack of history in our new politics can be overcome via the web. Again, though, care is required with your choice of sites. All of the sites mentioned in this edition provide the surfer with a clear statement of the sites aims and policy and also provide sources for their facts. They also present a worrying picture as to how our freedoms are being 'buried' by hasty post 11 September 2001 legislation. Our extract from Chomsky's lecture dwells on the ambivalence of the term terrorist. This edition's web review is an attempt to support and enlarge on the themes in the journal.

School of the Americas Watch at www.soaw.org covers the activities of the US training camp at Fort Benning for military and police personnel in Latin America.

World Organisation Against Torture www.woatusa.org provides up to date information on US compliance with international treaties.

Further information on the training of Latin American Militaries Abroad can be found also at www.ciponline.org/facts

Now why should the CIA be so coy about handing back the files for the security forces in Haiti? This organisation is not usually noted for being a shrinking violet. For the answer try members.bellatlantic.net/~advocacy

Somalia is again being mentioned as a suitably defenceless ass to kick. This article will perhaps explain why www.zmag.org/zmag/articles/shalomsomalia

Why is the US so interested in other people's chemical weapons? Is it just that they want a monopoly on them? Al Capone could only dream of this. Try www.stimson.org/pubs/cwc/execsum

While we're at it let's not forget the drug war out of the same intellectual school as the war against terrorism www.colombiasupport.net

Meanwhile back home (that's the UK, the sales arm of Diplomatic America) our Home Office (Department of the Interior) have been pursuing the Government's theme of social inclusion by including most harmless democratic activities as liable to be interpreted as terrorism. Fortunately Statewatch keeps us alert to their machinations at www.statewatch.org

And finally, if you are in denial about the connection between American global corporations and the US National Security Agency try www.techweb.com/wire/story/twb199900903s0014

Now answer the question – whose mouse is controlling your PC? ■

THE SCOTTISH LEFT REVUE

A benefit gig for the Scottish Left Review

Music and comedy featuring a galaxy of stars including

Elaine C. Smith

Wednesday 30 January 2002. The Stand Comedy Club, 333 Woodlands Rd, Glasgow

£7/£4 Doors 7.30



REID ATTACKED AGAIN

The bevy merchants were out in force for the Herald's Politician of the Year Award, won by a smiling Jack the Flash seated shoulder to shoulder with his good lady. A special award was given to David Steel (presumably for services to the Edinburgh establishment). Dame Magnolia's Deputy George Reid introduced him in glowing terms, which drew the riposte from Steel that Reid 'was a patronising bastard'. It must be in the name. The Debater of the year went to Tommy Sheridan but ideological correctness dictated he didn't attend. That didn't stop his missus. Gail Sheridan, accompanied by Euro MP turned SSP Press Officer Hugh Kerr, entered into the spirit of things. At an ungodly hour she bribed the waiting staff, telling them they could all go home if they delivered another case of champagne. What would tee total Tommy have made of it as she supped with the capitalist establishment. Novelist Iain Rankin certainly enjoyed himself – he gave up attending another awards ceremony that night at which he was to be named as writer of the year.

HIYA BUDDY

Alex Neil, the pugnacious miners son from Patna is currently trying to change the way in which appointments are made to Scotland's vast array of public bodies. The SNP List member thunders constantly against Labour cronyism. A little delve into Mr Neil's past reveals that when a senior Executive at the company Development Options, the consultancy firm hired a young graduate by the name of John Swinney. Around this time Mr Neil also chaired Network Scotland an information support charity which among other things ran the National Aids helpline. The Chief Executive was one Michael Russell. After Mr Russell's departure to follow a career in television production, the Neil/Russell run Organisation appointed a Ms Margo MacDonald as Chief Executive. The Diary would like to make it clear there is no evidence of cronyism in these appointments and that they were all made on merit.

TARTAN BOLLOCKS

The Scottish Parliamentary Journalists Association had their annual shin dig the other night. Highlight of the evening was the presentation of the Tartan Bollocks award - a prize that goes to the most bizzare story written or broadcast by the country's hacks. As you can imagine the shortlist for this award is inordinately long. First prize this year went to The Jockperson's Scottish Political Editor, Hamish MacDonnell. His splash predicting that Scots Tory leader David MacLetchie was about to be dumped in favour of up and coming Murdo 'The Horse' Fraser caused a few raised eyebrows. Poor Hamish was left to protest the story was nothing to do with him – he had been instructed to write it by Jockperson editor Rebecca Harding. As Hamish doesn't appear to have any balls, perhaps the award should be renamed Tartan Eunuch.

BY THE RIGHT QUICK MARCH

Amazing the conversions that have been going on recently without any roads being travelled to Damascaus or elsewhere. Chief among those on the sell-out bandwagon is Bill Butler, Campaign for Socialism stalwart and Left Wing firebrand par excellence. Bill is a man who has championed party democracy, railing against the party establishment's taste for one nominee election contests. And yet he couldn't find the conviction to nominate John McAllion (or anyone else) to force a contest for the Scottish Labour Leadership. At the Labour Group some weeks ago, he moved 'next business' when some wanted an election to put forward a Group nominee for Deputy Presiding Officer. The anger engendered by the First Minister's attempt to impose a nominee paved the way for Tory Murray Tosh claiming the main prize. His new love of everything with McConnell's paws all over it has also led him to remain remarkably silent when fighting Glasgow's corner for a better share of local Government resources. Glasgow MSPs have been arguing behind the scenes for nearly two years for a fair deal for the dear green place. Seems Bill now thinks this campaign is decidedly old hat. But then again when the Butler household is raking in more than f.110,000 in salaries from the public purse it doesn't pay to be too disloyal. ■

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The National Union of Rail Maritime and Transport Workers

The Scottish Regional Council of the RMT welcomes the establishment of the newly formed 'Scottish Left Review' and supports the declaration by its Editorial Committee.

We believe a forum of this nature is long overdue and we congratulate the founder members for taking the initiative. We are proud to be associated with the 'Review' and wish it every success for the future.

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

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

Willie Welsh
President

Phil McGarry & Stevet Todd
Regional Organisers

Jim Gray
Secretary