

A new horizon?

An alternative strategy for changing Scotland



Contents

Comment	2	Safe as houses	12
Reclaiming the economy	4	Sarah Glynn	
Andy Cumbers and Geoff Whittam		Forza Scozia	14
And they call it 'Regeneration!'	6	Guy Puzey	
Chik Collins		We don't need no thought control	16
Tax, poverty and devolution	8	Mark Hirst	
Mike Danson and Geoff Whittam		Running after them with fruit and flowers... 18	
The winds of change	10	Colin Clark, Kevin Adamson and Laura Cashman	
Andy Cumbers		Will there ever be peace?	20
		Duncan McFarlane	

Comment

The problem with democracy is the places it doesn't reach. In Westminster there are two states. One deals with the matters of the everyday lives of us – straightforward things like how much tax we pay, how our hospitals work, the state of our schools. This is the state that people mean when they say 'stick to the issues which matter to real people – schools and hospitals'. The other state deals with the matters of the lives of very rich people – defence contracts, wars fought over market access, regulation of large corporations. Democracy does not really reach this second state.

We can see this in the simple fact that there hasn't really been a significant change in foreign policy since the Second World War, just gentle evolution. There is no government which has come in and fundamentally reordered our international relations or their purpose. To a lesser extent, the same applies to the regulation of the very rich and very powerful. The history isn't as long here but for at least 30 years not only has no-one really challenged the assumption that we need to keep helping the rich become richer, the issue has increasingly disappeared behind closed doors much as the reality of our foreign policy. In the last couple of weeks there was a revelation that large swathes of the super-powerful corporations don't pay corporation tax in this country and over the last six months people have started to notice that some of the richest in society (especially in London) don't really pay income tax either. The scandal is not just that this is happening, but that by 2007 it should generate any surprise. These companies and individuals have been successfully avoiding tax for years, decades even. Early in the Blair years a tax expert caused a brief flurry of condemnation when he pointed out that, if you're sufficiently wealthy, paying tax in the UK is optional. But the issue quickly crept back behind the closed doors and the rulers of the second state got straight back on with making tax even more optional for the rich.

Nothing changes this inexorable process of giving the rich and powerful what they want and taking no notice of any democratic distaste. There is a widespread, shared and very powerful interest in making sure that the wider population is kept misinformed about the rich-person-policy-agenda. Had a financial arrangement quite as blatantly against the public interest as the current

PPP/PFI deals benefited trade union members, civil servants, the unemployed and poor or foreigners, there would have been enormous hostility in the press and in Parliament. But when the deal (still every bit as crooked) has 'the right people' as the beneficiaries, all remains quiet. The same applies to boardroom pay – if anyone other than the Masters of the Universe (as our big corporate executives have been accurately named) were rolling in it like this, there would be outrage. And let no-one tell you that the difference is that they are doing it with their own money; in fact, they are doing it with the money which belongs to their shareholders (which, in case you forgot, is you, because most of their shares are in your pension funds which you pay for) or to the taxpayer (who is being cheated out of the rightful contribution to the infrastructure of the country which these corporations require to fuel their profit). Oh, and if the corporation is anywhere near the defence or energy sectors, the direct subsidies and, in the shape of big-old wars, indirect subsidies also come from your pocket.

There is a Lenny Bruce sketch in which he advises a cheating husband to keep denying the affair no matter what. No matter that his wife has photos, no matter that she catches him in the act, no matter that she has a signed confession from the other woman, deny it anyway. Because as soon as you admit it, you're in trouble. And so it is with the corporate/government racket. The evidence that the UK has become a ridiculous, pseudo-medieval two-state society is overwhelming – hell, even the law applies differently to the big guys who can kill through negligence and never be prosecuted for a crime that if committed by an individual's negligence would result in jail time. You don't really need to do any digging anymore, the evidence is everywhere. But the corporate media, the corporate leaders, the super-rich and the compliant politicians are all following Lenny Bruce's advice – just keep on denying it and it'll go away eventually.

So what? So Westminster is now, as it was 400 years ago, a slightly more sophisticated device for making sure that the powerful retain power? We know that. What about Scotland? Well, there is the nagging fear that, having been given our first 'state' with a democratically-elected Parliament, we are starting to observe the establishment of another parallel state. The signs

Reviews	22
Web Review	26
Kick Up The Tabloids.....	27

All illustrations:

Nadia Lucchesi
nadal_@hotmail.com

Liberty and Security cartoon:

Lewis Peake
mail@illustration-art.co.uk

Editorial Committee

Mark Ballard	Robin McAlpine	Kirsty Rimmer
Moira Craig	(Editor)	(Deputy Editor)
Colin Fox	Peter McColl	Osama Saeed
Gregor Gall	Henry McCubbin	Jimmy Reid
Isobel Lindsay	David Miller	(Convener)
John McAllion	Gordon Morgan	Tommy Sheppard
	Tom Nairn	Bob Thomson

Articles for publication: editorial@scottishleftreview.org

Letters and comments: feedback@scottishleftreview.org

Website: www.scottishleftreview.org Tel/Fax 0141 424 0042

Scottish Left Review, 741 Shields Road, Pollokshields, Glasgow G41 4PL

Printed by: DigitalQuill

16 Tern Brae, Livingston, EH54 6UQ

www.digiquill.co.uk

of it began with 'consensus' between the big four parties on a number of economic issues. Consensus can be a good thing and may signal that an issue is one on which people genuinely agree. But consensus can also be the start of the Lenny Bruce doctrine – look away, there's nothing to see here. The reasons that should lead us to believe that when it comes to economic policy we are dealing with the latter is the difference between what people say behind the door and in front of the door. In front of the door, everybody says that cutting business rates will boost economic activity. Behind the doors, in private, most of the same people admit it won't, but rather that it will 'send a signal'. And the signal is to business (mainly big business) that a special place is being created for them where they won't have to answer any difficult questions. A second state.

People claim that the new SNP administration is inconsistent in its policy positioning, but this isn't quite true. In fact, just like Westminster/Whitehall, it is consistent but in parallel.

When it comes to state one – the government of us – it is fairly progressive and socially democratic. When it comes to state two – the government of the big people – it is willing to do what it is told. Only in the field of big business would it be possible to put together a gang to advise on policy which consisted only of those who already agree with the rights of big business to demand more. Every single person on Salmond's 'economic council' is a paid-up member of the 'whatever business wants' school. There is no recognition at all that the economy is something more than a selection of big businesses, nor that the economy impacts on the rest of us. This just wouldn't be possible in any other context (imagine a committee to set teachers' pay which was made up of five bolshy teachers, a commission on trade union rights with ten union leaders on it and no-one else, a report on the ethics of cheese written by mice).

It is not yet too late. Scotland is not yet compartmentalised into two states with two sets of rules, one in the light and one in the shadows. We can keep the whole lot in the light and make the business leaders face the same kind of scrutiny that everyone else does. You want money? What do we get? You want more freedom? What will you do with it?

the revolutionary legacy of Gramsci

Augustine United Church, 41 George IV Bridge, Edinburgh

with **Chris Bambery** (editor of Socialist Worker and author of *A Rebels Guide To Gramsci*); **Peter Thomas** (author of the forthcoming book *The Gramscian Moment*); **Adrian Budd** (author of forthcoming book on Robert Cox and the neo-Gramscian perspective on international relations); **Adam Morton** (author of *Unravelling Gramsci: hegemony and passive revolution*); **Neil Davidson** (author of *Discovering The Scottish Revolution 1692—1746*)

organised by
International Socialism Journal
bookings & info 07884 345 731
glasgowwp@btinternet.com

Sat 6 Oct 10am—4.30pm

sessions on
THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY & THE UNITED FRONT > RECLAIMING THE PRISON NOTEBOOKS > THE USE AND ABUSE OF GRAMSCI TODAY > INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, PASSIVE REVOLUTION > THE RELEVANCE OF GRAMSCI TO SCOTLAND TODAY

reclaiming Scotland

Andy Cumbers and Geoff Whittam explain that this issue of the Scottish Left Review seeks to put forward an alternative Scottish agenda to tackle social justice, inequality, poverty and sustainability

In the 2005 UK General Elections, Labour was 'returned to power' – we use the words here advisedly for reasons that will become obvious below – with 35 per cent of the popular vote. By receiving the votes of one third of those who turned out, or around 22 per cent of the total electorate on a turnout of 61 per cent, the Labour Party, under the dismally undemocratic first-past-the-post electoral system, was able to command a workable majority of 60 MPs. Within two years of this result, the Government has been able to continue with policies that fly in the face of the vast majority of public opinion. Recent momentous decisions, which will haunt the British and Scottish electorate for many years to come, include the decision to replace nuclear weapons, the reopening of the debate on building new nuclear power stations, the continuation of the war on Iraq, and the further encroachment of private sector and free market values into the public sector.

Equally significant have been the policies that Labour has not pursued during its decade in office. Progressive taxation is taboo for any aspiring New Labourite, despite almost universal condemnation – even in normally pro-business newspapers such as the **Daily Telegraph** and **Daily Mail** – of the widening chasm between rich and poor, and the effect that the stratospheric wage increases of those in the top five per cent of the population are having on house prices in London, Edinburgh and beyond. Public ownership, too, remains off the agenda, particularly with regard to the railways and the utilities. Meanwhile, in the area of employment and industrial relations reform, progressive policies have been kept to the minimum that the Labour government could get away with. Modest concessions have been made to keep the trade unions as the Party's lenders of the last resort – such as a minimum wage and the Employment Relations Act – without breaking with the anti-union and coercive labour market reforms of the Conservatives. Indeed, the New Deal and welfare regimes have extended the attack on the unemployed, and legitimised a policy divide between deserving and non-deserving poor.

Outside the Labour Party, other mainstream parties have shown a similar willingness to curry favour with business and media opinion. The Liberal Democrats have ditched their higher rate tax proposals, whilst the Scottish National Party has prioritised the cutting of corporation tax. Business taxes in the UK are already among the lowest in the European Union, but apparently not yet low enough in the Dutch auction of 'respectable' party politics. In fact, despite protestations to the contrary, there was little to divide the main political parties in the Scottish Parliamentary

elections of 2007. Despite the rhetoric of tackling poverty and social exclusion, all are pursuing variants of a competitiveness agenda. As the Scottish Executive's dismal record in tackling poverty since devolution suggests, a real assault upon the social problems of Scottish society would need a far more radical agenda than anything currently on offer. Continuation with current economic policies will only exacerbate the social divide.

The retreat of all the mainstream parties from progressive politics reflects a wider malaise in the public sphere, particularly in debates over the economy. A dominant policy agenda of free markets, trade liberalisation, privatisation and the protection of property rights over labour, human or environmental rights, has seeped into the mindset of our political classes and the opinion formers who influence them. From the World Bank, through the European Union, to national governments, to the devolved

administrations of the UK, free market thinking and the protection of big business interests remains the paramount concern. This agenda – known as neo-liberalism (Harvey, D. (2005) **A Brief History of Neoliberalism**) – is all pervasive and – and has been constructed in relation to the 'problem' of globalisation. The realities of a global economy: the ability of powerful corporations to relocate to other world regions; the new competition from Eastern Europe, India and China; the difficulties in controlling finance capital from escaping territorial boundaries; and the need to make local economies attractive to inward investing firms; are all used to promote the competitiveness agenda. In other words; tax cutting policies, particular for business and the rich, to retain their prized investment;

cuts in, or at best neutral, public spending over the economic cycle; and increased privatisation to create new markets for business in the face of declining traditional markets.

The starting point for those of us involved in this special issue is that this self-serving view needs to be confronted and rejected if we are to construct a fairer, more humane and sustainable economy. To do this, we need a set of alternative visions, which de-couple discussions of the economy from vested corporate and business interests and ask more fundamental questions about what an economy should be for and who it should serve. This not only involves a critique of the politics of TINA – Margaret Thatcher's famous aphorism that 'there is no alternative to market capitalism' – but also the promotion of

From the World Bank, through the European Union, to national governments, to the devolved administrations of the UK, free market thinking and the protection of big business interests remains the paramount concern

practical alternative proposals which draw upon experiences in the here and now. In doing so, we dissent from the academic mainstream, which is increasingly intolerant of research and ideas that do not conform to a narrow market based view of the economy. The research assessment exercise, the state and the dominance of mainstream economics in British Universities. Modern economics syllabuses increasingly exclude some of the great heterodox thinkers such as Keynes, Schumpeter, Polanyi and Marx, writers, who, in their different ways, warned of the dangers of unfettered free market capitalism. Who would have thought 30 years ago that it would be possible to graduate from an economics degree without having come into contact with Keynes's **General Theory**? Yet in many university departments it is now the norm.

The articles that follow all seek to depart from mainstream policy and economics orthodoxy in helping to build an alternative and radical left agenda, yet, at the same time, one that is grounded in a practical politics. This means developing serious and radical ideas that tackle social injustice, inequality, poverty and environmental sustainability. In this sense, they are part critique and part policy alternatives, although the balance varies between the different authors. These articles emerge from a particular initiative within Scotland, bringing together progressive academics, trade unionists and activists to debate and explore alternatives to neo-liberalism and mainstream economics. Reflecting this 'local' context, some of the papers develop critiques and policies directed at the Scottish public policy agenda, whilst others have a more general application. But all seek to contribute to a broader global vision.

In summing up, we acknowledge that there are topics that are not covered here and in the forthcoming book, that are important in developing an alternative strategy. More detailed work is needed on national macroeconomic policy in the context of a global economy. The continuing vitality of Nordic economic models, with higher rate taxes far in advance of those in the Anglo-American world, show that it is possible to prosper whilst having low levels of inequality, good public services and a more regulated capitalism (Birch, K. and Cumbers, A. (2007) 'Public sector spending and the Scottish economy: crowding out or adding value' *Scottish Affairs* 58 (Winter), 36-56). Financially, the myth of capital hyper-mobility also needs to be questioned with more debate about international regulatory mechanisms and the prospects for new initiatives such as a Tobin Tax. No doubt there are other concerns that could be added to the list. The chapters offered here reflect a first round of discussions from two conferences, held by the Alternative Economic Strategy Network, with the kind cooperation of the STUC, at their Woodlands Road headquarters in Glasgow in 2004 and 2006. If you would like to be involved in 'The Alternative Economic Strategy Group' please email Geoff Whittam at geoff.Whittam@paisley.ac.uk We thank all the contributors of these events and hope that further similar events will follow. We would also like to thank the **Scottish Left Review** for agreeing to publish the collection and, in particular, Gregor Gall, for his assistance in the final editing of the forthcoming book.

A final note to add is that this collection is about **alternatives** rather than **an alternative** per se. Readers will find that the contributions vary in their prescription and diagnoses,

reflecting different theoretical and political perspectives. There is no one party line as a guiding thread here. Some of us are members of political parties but others are not. Whilst we all share a common commitment to a fairer economy and certain principles such as progressive taxation, greater economic democracy and more sustainable models of development, we make no apologies for offering a range of alternatives rather than a single model. Indeed, we would agree with the political theorist, John Holloway, that alternative visions should be debated and forged out of particular experiences in time and space. There are no 'tablets of stone' from which an economic model of a better world can be handed down by the high priests of a revolutionary movement. Instead, we believe that alternative economic policies must be built from the grassroots upwards, by people living and working in the communities at the sharp end of capitalism. Here, we seek to open a debate on the Scottish Left rather than close one. The contributions here are just that. Contributions, to what we hope will be a growing debate and movement, to reclaim our economy.

This article is an abridged version of the introduction to a forthcoming book, 'Reclaiming the Economy: Alternatives to Market Fundamentalism in Scotland and Beyond' Cumbers and Whittam eds (2007), Scottish Left Review Press, Glasgow. ■

Geoff Whittam is a reader in the Business School of the University of the West of Scotland.

Andy Cumbers is senior lecturer in political and economic geography at the University of Glasgow.

Reclaiming the Economy

Alternatives to Market Fundamentalism in Scotland and Beyond

Edited by Andy Cumbers and Geoff Whittam

The new book from Scottish Left Review Press will be available in October. Ordering details will be in the next issue of the Scottish Left Review.

To express an advanced interest in ordering a copy please email contact@scottishleftreview.org or write to Scottish Left Review, 741 Shields Road, Pollokshields, Glasgow G41 4PL

and they call it 'regeneration'!

Chik Collins argues that the pursuit of regeneration is part of a drive to legitimise a wider neo-liberal agenda that has long been favourable with Scotland's political parties and shows no signs of changing

About five years ago some curious noises began to emerge from the 'regeneration' policy network in Scotland. In the previous five years the talk had been about 'social inclusion' and 'social justice'. But as it became increasingly apparent that the Social Inclusion Partnerships were seldom able to prevent further degeneration, never mind foster meaningful regeneration, frustration grew. The Executive's 'social justice milestones', the subject of annual progress reports between 2000 and 2003, saw frustration give way to embarrassment and then silence. The talk turned to recapturing the 'dynamism' of the late 1980s and early 1990s, when Scotland was, apparently, at 'the cutting edge' of 'regeneration'. Ministers then, in the words of a key civil servant, 'felt the need to say something about regeneration'. The process of articulating it was eventually to lead, in the spring of 2006, to a new policy statement – **People and Place: Regeneration Policy Statement**, Scottish Executive, 2006.

People and Place is an important document. It helps us to grasp what is going on in those high profile waterfront developments in Glasgow and other places, but also, perhaps more importantly, how these developments are conceived as a key part of the implementation apparatus for a much wider neo-liberal policy agenda across Scotland. This shines a light on the concerted attempt to intensify the application of that agenda under the Labour-Liberal coalition of 2003-2007. However, in tracing the key lines of influence that connect all of this to the Scottish 'business community', it becomes apparent that this agenda, and the method of its pursuit, will remain in place in the new parliament. If anything, it is likely to be pursued with even greater zeal as the parties vie for the title of 'the friends of business'. Crucially, it becomes apparent that the notion of 'regenerating' some of 'our poorest communities' is seen as vital in securing the legitimacy of an agenda which otherwise might be liable to mobilise troublesome opposition. If this is grasped by the left, then there is the potential to challenge the legitimacy of that agenda, and to pose serious difficulties for its implementation.

The key to grasping **People and Place** is its relationship to the shift in the Executive's economic policy between 2001 and 2004. This shift reflected the increasing influence of the Royal Bank of Scotland. (See S. Baird, J. Foster and R. Leonard, "Ownership and Control in the Scottish Economy", in V. Mills, ed. **The Red Paper on Scotland**, 2005). In May of 2004 the latter published **Wealth Creation in Scotland**. This argued that the Scottish Executive's economic strategy overemphasized

entrepreneurship and business start-ups, and neglected the role of "large, globally focussed companies" as the "key components in a successful economy". (Royal Bank of Scotland, **Wealth Creation in Scotland: A Study of Scotland's Top 100 Companies**, 2004, p.4). The imperative was to 'grow' more large, globally competitive firms, particularly in service provision, and this, it was declared, would require further privatisation – with health and education specifically identified as targets. Within a few months the Executive had reformulated its economic policy to reflect this new emphasis. (Compare Scottish Executive, **A Smart Successful Scotland** in 2001, and then the revised edition published in 2004).

Crucially, it becomes apparent that the notion of 'regenerating' some of 'our poorest communities' is seen as vital in securing the legitimacy of an agenda which otherwise might be liable to mobilise troublesome opposition

People and Place reveals an attempt to use 'regeneration policy' to get this 'firm growing' agenda moving. Tellingly, it was trailed with a slogan which did not mention poverty or social justice: "The Scottish Executive is open for business". This was, of course, a more general statement of economic intent. But it was simultaneously indicating the key role of 'regeneration' in translating intention into reality. Crucially, it wanted to convince that those businesses engaging early in the process would reap rewards. Henceforth, 'regeneration' was to be about "creating value" and ensuring the "sustained commitment" of the public sector to **the needs of the private sector**. (**People and Place**, foreword, and ps. 15, 22 & 49). It was to be about ensuring Scotland's communities – with their many 'development opportunities', but also with their health and social services and their education services – would be

"open for business", and that their potential to fuel the growth of large service provider companies could be realised.

This thinking is concerning enough. What is perhaps more concerning is that **People and Place** revealed a reasonably coherent framework to try to ensure its implementation "at regional, local and neighbourhood level where regeneration initiatives actually happen". (**People and Place**, p.21).

Broadly, the approach was to use some of the implementation apparatus set out around a 2002 regeneration policy statement – **Better Communities in Scotland**. This heralded the transition from Social Inclusion Partnerships (SIPs) to Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs). Under the subsequent Local Government in Scotland Act (2003) all local authorities are obliged to "initiate, facilitate and maintain" a CPP, and other public bodies are required to participate in them. They have a particular duty to the needs of the poorest 15 per cent of areas as identified by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. While the thrust of

policy had changed since 2002/2003, the CPP apparatus was retained in **People and Place**. This was because that apparatus was designed to ensure a much firmer central grip over local implementation, and much clearer 'accountability' for those failing to 'deliver' the required outcomes. This implementation focus meant that, despite the changed context by 2006, the CPPs retained their functionality.

However, **People and Place** did not conceive the CPPs as the main drivers for the newer agenda. A smaller number of areas identified as having particular potential were to play that role. And here, in particular, it was recognised that centrally driven implementation would not be sufficient. Action in these areas would need "clear political commitment from key players" (of the kind now very familiar in Glasgow). Without this, it was feared, "the technical, financial, economic and legal complexities" posed by the new agenda might "prove insurmountable". The aim was to draw upon, and extend, existing experience in dealing with such "complexities" – the experience of PPPs, of the Community Ownership Programme in housing, of public-private joint venture companies (like the EDI group in Edinburgh), and of "bond issues, land trusts, and Property Investment Limited Liability Partnerships". There would also need to be further movement towards a "mixed economy of investment" and more "dialogue with the private sector on new forms of financial instrument", (**People and Place**, ps. 12, 22 & 18).

People and Place identified seven areas in which all this paraphernalia of privatisation was to be drawn together and further developed. Six of these were designated as Urban Regeneration Companies (URCs). Already in 2004 three such URCs had been established (in Clydebank, Craigmillar in Edinburgh and Raploch in Stirling) "to drive forward the delivery of complex, tightly focused urban regeneration initiatives", (**People and Place**, p.23). People and Place announced a further three. The first was the "Clyde Gateway" project, along the route of the M74 extension. Here the URC was required to "provide the long-term certainty needed by investors". (**People and Place**, p.33). The other two designations were in Inverclyde (the Riverside Inverclyde URC) and on the Ayrshire coast (the Irvine Bay URC).

Together with the highly significant Clyde Waterfront Strategic Partnership (CWSP) in west Glasgow (not requiring URC status), these areas provided the immediate geographic priorities for **People and Place**. But the broader intention was to disseminate the innovations from these areas as 'best practice' across the rest of the country – via the CPPs. Moreover the focus of the URCs was to extend beyond property development to the broader agenda of "public sector reform". One significant passage in **People and Place** commented that: "The relationship between regeneration, renewal and public sector reform is a complex but critical one: we will bear it firmly in mind in the context of the forthcoming debate on the future of public services in Scotland". (**People and Place**, p.54).

Thus the 'fit' between **People and Place** and the economic perspective laid out by the Royal Bank seems clear. 'Regeneration' policy in the late 1980s and early 1990s was 'dynamic' and at 'the cutting edge', not in its addressing of the needs of the poorest communities in Scotland (where continued degeneration was generally in evidence), but in establishing and disseminating a centrally driven neo-liberal agenda in relation to property development and the reform of public services

(particularly housing provision). This, sadly, is the 'dynamism' which **People and Place** aimed to recreate – only now with the kind aspirations of which the thatcherite 'bogey men' of the earlier period (the Ridleys and Forsyths) were only able to dream.

Much has changed in Scottish politics since the publication of **People and Place**. Unfortunately, what shows little sign of changing is the degree of political commitment to the implementation of the neo-liberal agenda it reflected. As one commentator observes: "The Salmond government ... is as business friendly as the newest of New Labour stalwarts. ... We could shortly find ourselves in a weird sort of bidding war as executive and opposition compete to satisfy the creators, so-called, of wealth." (Ian Bell, **The Herald**, 18th August 2007, p.15)

One clear indication of this came with the backing given to the SNP this spring by two of the key figures most strongly associated with the neo-liberal agenda – Brian Souter of Stagecoach, and Sir George Mathewson, former Chairman of the Royal Bank of Scotland. Another came with the appointment of Mathewson as Chair of the new Council of Economic Advisors. In Salmond's words, the formation of this body: "sends out the clearest message, both domestically and internationally, that Scotland is serious about tackling economic underperformance, and has asked serious people to advise upon achieving that goal". (Cited by Ken Symon, **Sunday Herald**, 1st July 2007. There can be little doubt as to the nature of the advice that will be received. It is already very apparent in the framing of **People and Place**.

The scenario that **People and Place** sets, it seems clear, will have a continuing relevance – and needs our continuing critical attention. It crystallizes the ongoing attempt to translate the economic perspectives of Scotland's biggest business, shared by large sections of the wider 'business community', into the policy and practice of the Scottish government. And it starkly reveals the willingness to (ab)use the moral legitimacy that still goes with the claim to be attempting to 'regenerate' some of our poorest communities to help to achieve that translation. The faces may have changed, but the Scottish Executive remains "open for business", and if anything is likely to prove even more so.

Now, as in the late 1980s and early 1990s, what gets called 'regeneration' is a key battleground for those promoting and opposing neo-liberalism in Scotland. It is to be hoped that in the coming period the left can grasp and act upon this more successfully than it did in that earlier period. ■

Chik Collins is senior lecturer in the Politics and Sociology Group in the School of Social Sciences at the University of the West of Scotland.

tax, poverty and devolution

Mike Danson and Geoff Whittam outline the problems with Scotland's current tax system, put forward an alternative and look at the opportunities for change

Our research into alternatives to the regressive tax system which has become a hallmark of the neo-liberalism agenda has been underway for many years and we have published widely on this issue. Of necessity, because of the devolution settlement, our focus has been on alternatives to the regressive council tax. The arguments which we have applied to this specific tax can be applied generally across all tax systems, that is, regressive tax systems hit the poor the hardest and hence should be rejected in favour of progressive tax systems. From the outset the motivation for our research, prompted by the Scottish Socialist Party, and Tommy Sheridan in particular, was to develop a local income tax which would meet the criteria of 'a good tax' with a particularly emphasis on putting the case for an equitable tax which would attempt to address the issue of people living in poverty and move the burden of taxation from those least able to pay to those with the resources to pay. Whilst the Scottish Service Tax (SST) is far from perfect we believe it is by far the 'best' alternative to the regressive council tax which has been fully costed and has stood up to rigorous scrutiny from presentation at various academic and practitioner conferences. This short article will outline the limitations of the so-called trickle down effect which has been apart of the neo-liberalism agenda for the last two decades, some indicators of the level of poverty within Scotland, focus on the problems with the current tax system, outline the key components of the SST and conclude with the current status of the debate regarding the replacement of the regressive council tax.

A blatant example of the limitations of the 'trickle-down' effect was reported in **The Herald** newspaper (June 13 2007) on page 7 under the headline 'Housing estate will offer high flyers a helicopter'. The report informs us 'Plans have been given the go ahead for an upmarket housing estate with its own helicopter taxi service to allow its high-flying residents to beat jams. Millionaires of industry on Solsgirth estate

Scotland's traffic and captains the planned near Dollar.

Clackmannanshire, where some of the 25 houses will sell for more than £1m, will get access to up to 60 helicopter flights a week.' This contrasts with a further news story on page 6 of the same edition of the Herald, 'More cash sought for affordable housing as homeless rate soars'; 'A parliamentary answer by Stewart Maxwell, the Communities Minister', showed the number of people registering as homeless stood at 36,625 in 2005-6, nearly 2000 more than the year before ... Kenny Gibson, the SNP back bencher whose question led to the publication of the figures, ... said 'It's quite obvious that there is a chronic shortage of affordable housing ... there has to be enough supply to meet demand'. Perhaps the captains of industry could be persuaded to demonstrate the trickle down effect by renting out their spare room(s) from their million plus houses at affordable rates and offering lifts to the homeless in the helicopter. What these news items illustrate is the extent of income inequality within our society and we would argue that this has been partially fuelled by changes to the tax system over the last 30 years. It therefore suggests that to try to tackle income inequality a redressing of the tax system is required.

The reality of inequality is reflected in government findings. A recently published Scottish Executive Report, "Social Focus on Deprived Areas" (September 2005) paints an extremely grim picture of how people living in poverty suffer in all aspects of their lives in Scotland. The survey which compares the lives of people who live in Scotland's most deprived areas with those in other areas shows how the poorest people fare shoddily in terms of education, health and employment. Moreover, the neo-liberal economic dream is working. The gap between the rich and poor areas is growing. In terms of poverty, the blunt truth is that things are getting worse in Scotland. Many of the findings of the Executive study came as no surprise. The study's findings tended to reinforce previous research (Palmer, Carr and Kenway, Palmer, G., Carr,J., and Kenway, P., [2004] "**Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion in Scotland**" Joseph Rowntree Foundation. An earlier executive report (1999) found that poverty and deprivation in towns, cities and rural communities throughout Scotland were severe and endemic.

The relationship between poverty and poor health is laid bare in the Executive Report. The Executive figures revealed that early mortality rates for the under-75s were three times higher for those living in disadvantaged areas than for those living in the most affluent communities. Reinforcement of the Executive's figures came in a recent report by Scotland's registrar general, Duncan MacNiven which showed that men in Scotland's wealthiest areas can expect to live almost a decade longer than those in the poorest. The gap between the highest and lowest male life expectancies across Scotland has grown by a year over the last decade. Disappointingly, the most recent comparisons show that life expectancy in Scotland is lower than that of other European Union countries except for a few of the new Eastern European members.

Whilst these inequalities are not solely due to the tax system the overall regressive nature of the UK tax system increases



the problem. The poorest fifth pay more of their gross income in taxes than the richest fifth: 36.4 per cent compared with 35.5 per cent. While indirect taxes take up 26.9 per cent of gross and 29.7 per cent of disposable income for the poorest, they absorb only 10.8 per cent and 14.3 per cent, respectively, of the incomes of the richest. Critically, the only direct tax, which exacerbates this, is the Council Tax which costs the poorest 5.2 per cent of their gross income – even after Council Tax deductions and Council Tax Benefits - but only 1.7 per cent for the richest. If the Council Tax was replaced with a tax based on ability to pay, then the overall tax system in Scotland would become progressive and a start could be made to reducing income inequalities and poverty. The SST is a form of local income tax, which seeks to achieve this.

The SST would be dedicated to local government expenditure and the expansion of budgets, particularly in Scotland's poorer areas, would lead to significant improvements in the health, education and housing conditions of Scotland's citizens. It would be established at the Scottish level, with revenues distributed across local government areas according to need.

The SST emerged as a practical, progressive and redistributive replacement for the increasingly unpopular council tax (the Full Report is available from the authors). After several iterations, it was decided to base the tax on personal income with marginal increases applied to five specific income ranges. The first £10,000 of anyone's income is automatically exempt. This effectively removes the vast majority of pensioners and hundreds of thousands of low paid workers from any liability. On an income of £10,000 or less, citizens should not have to pay the SST as they are effectively living in poverty. The rates proposed are £0 £10,000 - 0 per cent; £10,000 £29,999.99 - 4.5 per cent; £30,000 £49,999.99 - 15 per cent; £50,000 £89,999.99 - 18 per cent, and more than £90,000 at 20 per cent. These are marginal rates, so someone on £40,000 pays 0 per cent on their first £10,000, 4.5 per cent on their next £20,000 and 15 per cent on their last £10,000. Thus, such an individual's SST bill would amount to £2,400.

Importantly, we have calculated the impact for the SST of the potential loss of council tax benefit to Westminster so even if Westminster insists on retaining the approximate £300 million sum paid in council tax benefit, which we should resist, the SST would have raised £2,022 million, or £269 million more than council tax, for the financial year 2002-03, but in a fairer fashion. The pensioners and low paid would pay less or nothing at all, while the highest paid and wealthy would pay more. As a percentage of their income, individuals on salaries around £168,000 GHA boss Michael Lennon for example, would only be paying 16 per cent of their income while a hard pressed teacher or social worker on £24,300 would pay 2.6 per cent of their income.

There have been alternatives suggested to the SST:

- adding to or broadening the bands of the existing Council Tax (CT). This would not address the fundamental criticisms with CT as it would still be a regressive tax within a regressive tax system, the complex and means tested council tax benefit would still be required to exempt low income individuals and families from paying some of this tax, and it would still not be based upon ability to pay;

- the local income tax proposed by the SNP would be set at 4.3 per cent which would have raised £1,599 million a shortfall of £154 million of the actual collected CT plus Council Tax Benefit (CTB) for that year – to meet the shortfall either their flat rate and so regressive tax would have to be set at a higher rate or more funds would have to flow from Holyrood to each Council;
- the analogous Lib Dem local income tax set at an average rate of 3-4 per cent (their press releases seem to vary on this) would similarly leave a shortfall of several hundred millions of pounds, so at four per cent in 2002-03 £1,488 million would have been collected, £266 million less than CT plus CTB;
- the Conservatives have proposed funding schools directly from Holyrood, claiming this would cut council tax by an average of 35 per cent, and they would give pensioners a further 50 per cent discount up to a maximum of £500 per household. This continues with the idea of a deserving and a non-deserving poor and would still leave CT as a regressive tax, with education funded out of a regressive tax system;
- there have also been proposals for the scrapping of the council tax and the uniform business rate and their replacement with a land value tax, which should encourage more efficient use of land and enhance urban renewal, however, it is relatively untested in developed and large economies and could make council incomes unstable.

Of the above, we have previously supported moves towards looking at land value taxation and there are arguments in favour of funding certain elements of public services directly from Holyrood, e.g. education.

The new political make-up of the Scottish Parliament offers potential new opportunities for local taxation. One of the first bills passed by the new parliament was committing the parliament to the principle of a local income tax to replace the council tax. Interestingly Tommy Sheridan put a similarly worded bill forward in the latter days of the previous parliament, the SNP and the Liberal Democrats voted against on that occasion. Whoever suggested politicians were opportunistic! We suspect without mass pressure it will not be the SST, which finds flavour with the current new regime.

However, the logic of the SST model of a local income tax has been made: it replaces the regressive council tax, is effective and efficient in funding local government, exempts the poorest in society from having to pay and demands citizens contribute to the financing of public services according to their ability to pay. Within the context described here, all socialists and progressive minded people should support it.

The authors wish to acknowledge the assistance of Christine Cooper in preparing this paper. ■

Geoff Whittam is a reader in the Business School of the University of the West of Scotland.

Mike Danson is a Professor in Scottish and regional economics and policy development at the University of the West of Scotland

the winds of change

Andy Cumbers compares the development of the renewable energy sector in Scotland and Denmark and asks why Denmark leads the world in this area while Scotland lags behind

Imagine a country with five million people on the north western fringe of Europe. The country has a wet and windy climate and, as such, has the perfect environment for renewable energy. As concerns about climate change grow, this country becomes a world leader in alternative energies. In less than 30 years it increases the percentage of electricity generated from renewable energy from virtually nothing to around 15 per cent. It also has a wind turbine industry employing over 20,000 people with 50 per cent of the world market.

Is this the vision for Scotland – with its vast untapped potential of renewable resources - for 2030? No, it is the current reality for Denmark, a country with less in the way of 'natural' resources than Scotland. Indeed, its landmass is far smaller than ours (about 50,000 km² compared to 78,000 km²).

So, why, from a similar starting point in 1980, has Denmark done so well, becoming a beacon for other countries to follow? And, why do Scotland and the rest of the UK – despite the environmental rhetoric of the former prime minister - continue to bring up the rear? Britain currently produces around two per cent of its electricity from renewables. An obvious reason is the continued dominance of the corporate energy lobby over policy-making, signalled by the government's recent U-turn over nuclear power, but also by its unwillingness to challenge the carbon-economy that benefit both government coffers and the oil majors.

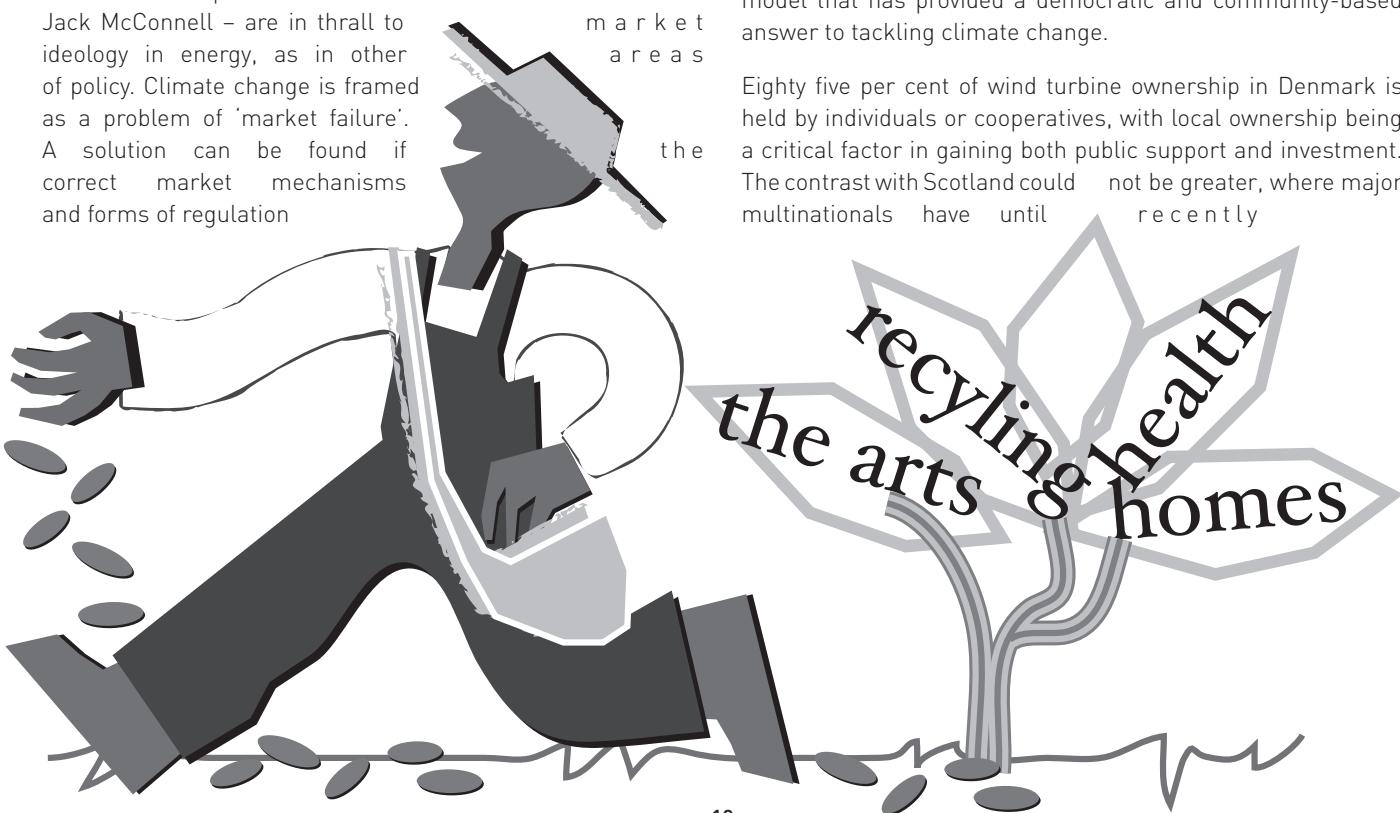
But, another factor is the institutional and economic context within which energy policy is delivered. The UK Government – and the previous Scottish Executive under Jack McConnell – are in thrall to ideology in energy, as in other areas of policy. Climate change is framed as a problem of 'market failure'. A solution can be found if correct market mechanisms and forms of regulation

can be put in place. Simple! So we have carbon trading schemes, by which concerned consumers can offset their air-miles. We have a deregulated energy market with lots of suppliers who can compete for green consumers. Tax and rebate incentives are available for those who have the funds to be able to refashion or build new homes and offices for the sustainable future. It's a matter of demand and supply. Given the right incentives, we can all make rational choices that can save the planet.

However, as we know all too well, this is simply not the case. Growing evidence of misuse of carbon-offsets shows the limits to relying upon markets. The failure of a sustainable market for recyclable materials points to problems in another direction. The energy market itself is not Adam Smith's nirvana of perfect competition between small firms, but one of nasty monopolistic power that favours entrenched corporate interests and promotes disastrous and inhumane foreign wars. Meanwhile, most people cannot afford to be ethical consumers of energy and many more simply do not in reality have the choice.

Whilst Denmark often features on the TV news and in the print media as a model to emulate, we rarely hear how it has achieved this remarkable feat of becoming the world leader in renewable energy. Perhaps this is because the story does not fit with the market vision that our political leaders and media conglomerates bombard us with. Indeed, it is a little known fact outside Denmark that public ownership has played a major role in this success story. Not public ownership of the large monolithic corporation, chastised by both Conservative and recent Labour Governments, but a smaller, decentralised model that has provided a democratic and community-based answer to tackling climate change.

Eighty five per cent of wind turbine ownership in Denmark is held by individuals or cooperatives, with local ownership being a critical factor in gaining both public support and investment. The contrast with Scotland could not be greater, where major multinationals have until recently



dominated the renewable agenda with massive projects against local community wishes. A critical element of Danish policy has been what has been termed 'distance regulation' whereby ownership of turbines is restricted to those living in the municipality where the turbines are sited. This has been a major constraint on private and corporate incursions into the industry whilst simultaneously spurring local collaborative ventures.

Another key element has been strong intervention through by the central government to keep prices for renewables below the market norm, thus stimulating demand and investment. Compare this to the UK Government's continuing forms of visible and hidden subsidy of the nuclear and oil industries, whilst providing pitiful investment in renewable technology. The Government has spent only £80 million on its Low Carbon Build Programme, a fraction of the £3 billion currently being used to widen the M6 motorway. What is interesting is that the market case – nuclear is unworkable without massive state subsidy – is ditched where it works against the corporate interest. The case for nuclear, for example, is now being made in terms of security of supply and contributions to climate change, although as many critics have noted, the timescale for developing nuclear is probably too long to make the rapid changes required in the here and now.

The recent Scottish Parliament elections open up a space for an alternative politics of energy. If our elected representatives are serious about maximising Scotland's contribution to tackling climate change, about following the lead set by Denmark, then some form of public ownership is required. At present, of course, many of the powers over energy are reserved. But, as the devolution process unfolds, it is likely that energy will be at the frontline of political debate between those who want a greater transfer of power against those who want to preserve the status quo. The evidence that local ownership and community involvement are the best means of ensuring a more rapid transition to renewable forms of energy was confirmed by a conference of climate change experts in Bonn in 2004. Not just Denmark, but Germany too – the largest renewables' producer in the world – has learned this important lesson.

In the recent book edited with Geoff Whittam (Reclaiming the Economy: Alternatives to Market Fundamentalism in Scotland and Beyond), I set out five principles for an alternative energy strategy for Scotland. These are:

- achieving long term security of energy supply within Scotland;
- creating an environmentally more sustainable energy policy;
- enhancing the redistribution of income from rich to poor;
- developing progressive forms of employment relations;

- widening participation and decentralising economic decision-making.

In this respect, the Left has to learn from its earlier mistakes with past nationalisations avoiding a return to the over-centralised and monolithic state entities of the 1940s: for example, the National Coal Board that was run by ex-army officers far removed from the miners and their communities.

Prior to nationalisation the first time around, many local authorities played a key role in the ownership and management of gas and electricity supplies. This tradition could be revitalised by promoting more localised forms of public ownership. In particular, it is proposed that a new Scottish Renewables

Association (SRA) be created, in which local authorities have a 50 per cent stake in decision-making. The SRA will be charged with releasing funds (through bond financing) and co-ordinating the shift towards renewable energy. The various existing hydro-electric schemes would also come under the SRA's remit. The SRA's main role would be to co-ordinate and regulate the action of the Sustainable Energy Network (SEN). The SEN would provide the main impetus for achieving a shift towards renewable energy and would be composed of local energy companies (LEGCS) established under local community control throughout Scotland. The LEGCs will be concerned with the development and running of renewable energy

plants and will receive investment for start up and research and development from a renewable energy fund, drawn from revenues from North Sea oil and administered by the SRA.

As part of all this, it goes without saying that there will need to be a real devolution of powers down from the Scottish Executive in Edinburgh to the local councils. If we are serious about tackling climate change and getting the mass public support that is needed, the debate about devolution has to be far more radical than that currently envisaged. Against the received wisdom in governing circles, localised public ownership is not only a practical possibility but an urgent imperative in facing up to our environmental responsibilities. ■

Andy Cumbers is senior lecturer in political and economic geography at the University of Glasgow.

safe as houses

Sarah Glynn asks why there has been so much emphasis placed on home ownership, looks at the consequences and sets out an agenda for change

That homes are for living in should go without saying, but with 60 per cent of Britain's wealth tied up in housing, this basic function is increasingly being put second to that of generating profit. For developers this has always been the case, but the investment function of housing is now dominating the housing decisions, and indeed the lives, of the majority of British households. And this is a situation that has been deliberately encouraged by nearly three decades of government obsession with home ownership, and exacerbated by the liberalisation of mortgage lending, which has enabled house prices to rise out of all proportion to incomes.

As a result, growing numbers of households are tied up in crippling debts, their lives dominated by the need not to risk endangering their mortgage payments and joining the rising tide of reposessions; and growing numbers of other households are working overtime and delaying starting families in a desperate bid to get on to the housing ladder and join them. Some will even take up interest-only mortgages, which are the equivalent of paying rent and also being responsible for maintenance, in order to secure their future purchase price. Meanwhile, other households, who know that they will never be able to buy, know too that they and their descendants will be excluded from the financial gains generated by rising house prices.

A booming house market is a very efficient mechanism for enlarging existing disparities of wealth, and the emphasis on homes as investments has even more ways of increasing social division. Those who cannot buy their own home are seen as failed home-owners - indeed as failed members of our consumer society. Social (or subsidised) rented housing (the term 'social housing' includes both council and housing association homes, and its use in official documents deliberately blurs the important distinction between these tenures) is regarded as poor housing for poor people, with the restricted funding and stigmatisation that that implies. The new entrepreneurship welcomes the revival of private letting encouraged by the housing boom, which transfers more money from the poor to the rich. And Real Estate Investment Trusts, introduced into Britain under the 2006 Finance Act, provide yet another vehicle for gearing housing towards the extraction of profit). The attempted sticking plaster of subsidies for first time buyers and key workers only makes the overall situation worse by pushing prices still higher. It is also easy to forget that housing markets can crash too. This has happened in the past, and with the current levels and spread of indebtedness, the consequences would be even worse for even more people.

For those at the bottom of the housing hierarchy, Britain's housing crisis is hardly news, but now that the housing ladder appears to be receding in front of the sons and daughters of managers and professionals, housing has moved up to the top of government in-trays at both Westminster and Holyrood. The immediate response of market-centred analysts has been to regard this as a problem of demand exceeding supply, which will be solved by building more homes. Since there are growing numbers of households, this is clearly important - as is the

(never-discussed) revival of economic planning to bring jobs to where housing is more plentiful - but these will not solve the problem of housing being used to increase social division. If all houses were the same, then we need only be concerned with total numbers, but this is clearly not the case. House types and values vary hugely, and so long as prices are rising there is scope for those with some money to use houses as a medium for making more money.

Greater equality in housing cannot be separated from greater equality in other areas, but it could be improved by reducing the incentives to use housing as an investment. With 70 per cent of Britain's population owning their own homes and 67 per cent in Scotland, a government that allowed house prices to fall would be committing political suicide, but a determined government could do much to try and keep them more in line with other prices if it wanted to. Fiscal measures could include restricting inflationary mortgage products, taxing homes left empty; taxing (or forbidding) second homes; closing capital gains tax loopholes on buy-to-let, currently no capital gains tax has to be paid if a house was the owner's principle residence up to three years previously and ending the ability to offset mortgage interest against rental income when calculating tax; more use of capital gains and inheritance taxes; and land value tax to prevent land speculation, capture any increased land values for the public good, and encourage development. Dependence on housing as investment would also be reduced by the resurrection of a properly financed pension scheme. Some of these changes can only be made at the Westminster level, but not all.

It will be argued that many of these changes would act to stifle investment in the needed new housing, but this is only a problem if we rely on building being done by profit-making developers - which have not succeeded in meeting housing need in the past. Reliance on the market is also creating pressure to relax important democratic and strategic controls afforded by the planning system. Public housing, however, does not have to make a profit for the developer, and, as I will argue, it provides the vital key to achieving a much more fundamental solution to the housing problem.

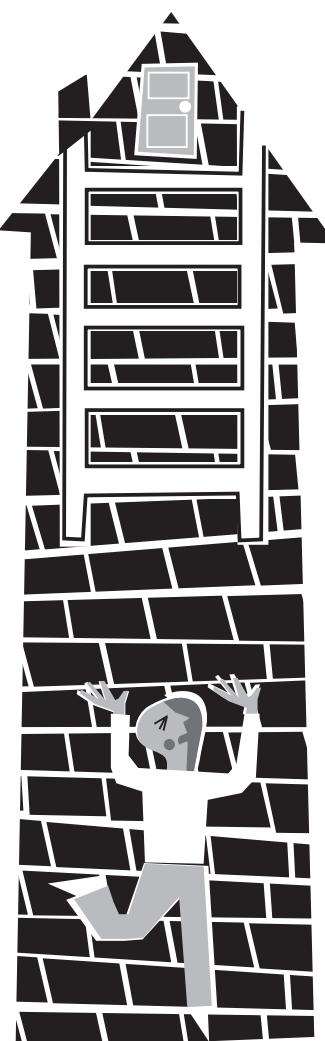
The type of fiscal measures outlined above could make house purchase a possibility for more households, but this is never going to be the answer for everyone. There will always be people whose financial circumstances or lifestyles make this not an option, and there is no reason why they should be penalised by an economy based on real-estate. There is no reason why renting cannot be as attractive as ownership - even an arrangement that people would deliberately choose. In fact this would make a major contribution to breaking down social exclusion and creating a more equal society. There is nothing inherently 'natural' about home ownership, and surveys that show large preferences for ownership need to be treated with caution as they take no account of wider financial pressures and the availability of other options.

For renting to be as attractive as ownership, rented homes have to be of good quality, rental agreements have to be both secure

and flexible, and rents have to be affordable and significantly less than the cost of paying off a mortgage. As was found in the past, this can only be achieved through the use of subsidised social housing; which, for best value for money, as well as democratic control, should be provided by local councils rather than through housing associations. These ideas are gaining support, and a recent survey of Chartered Institute of Housing members found that 83 per cent of respondents agreed that 'there is too much emphasis on home owning at the expense of renting'. The growing tendency to rely on the private rental market clearly will not help as the laws and demands of the market tend to reduce quality and security and increase rents, and if these are controlled then that will suffocate supply.

More council housing may sound like an expensive option from a government point of view, but it is necessary to look at the wider picture. First there are the direct savings. Current plans for large-scale demolition and provision of small amounts of new housing-association housing are dependent on subsidies from the Executive, and would cost much more than upgrading existing buildings. Large savings (both one-off and running costs) could also be made by ending the drive towards stock transfer and investing directly in council housing. See www.support4councilhousing.org.uk. More tenants paying low council rents would mean less housing benefit subsidising private landlords. Devolution adds some complications – Westminster has been providing money for stock transfer and also pays housing benefit – but negotiations might be possible. And there are also the much more significant, but harder to measure, savings that result from better housing, better health and life chances, and greater social cohesion.

Good quality, good value rented housing plays a crucial role in decoupling housing from investment and returning it to its primary purpose as homes. It breaks down the social divisions between those on the housing ladder and those unable to reach it, and removes some of the massive financial burdens being taken on by what is becoming increasingly a nation of debtors.



Investing in expanding as well as improving council housing is also the best way to end the residualisation of the tenure that has resulted from years of under-investment and from the right-to buy sales of most of the best homes. Concern over concentrations of poverty have led planners to adopt the mantra of 'mixed tenure' development, despite lack of evidence of the benefits of having a home-owner next door. See www.enhr2007rotterdam.nl. The main result of these policies has been the sale of publicly-owned sites in city centres and more desirable districts to private developers, with social housing becoming increasingly marginalized. But if council housing was allowed to expand, then so would the social base of its tenants. The possibilities were clearly recognised by Nye Bevan, whose plans for post-war

reconstruction concentrated on homes of uncompromisingly good quality built by the local authorities, which would be rented by people in different walks of life and of different ages in mixed communities.

After Bevan, while council housing increased its share of housing tenure, it was regarded by governments of both parties as a residual tenancy for those who could not afford to buy their home, and suffered the effects of severe financial constraint. However, although council house failures make headlines and legend, they only affected a small minority, and, to quote Alison Ravetz, ...it must be assumed that throughout most of its history the bulk of council housing functioned as the housing managers would have it, to give tenants 'the quiet enjoyment of their own homes.' (Ravetz, Alison [2001] **Council Housing and Culture: the History of a Social Experiment**, London, p175)

The first step in creating an attractive rental sector in Scotland is to discard the current assumptions used by the Executive to calculate social housing need. These are based on the premise that social housing should only be made available as a last resort - with everyone else having to rely on the market - and on the arbitrary decision that councils should have to meet only one tenth of the backlog of housing need each year. This model currently allows councils with growing housing waiting lists and homelessness to claim that they have surplus housing, and to proceed with large-scale demolition plans that will result in the net loss of thousands of socially-rented homes. Reassessing need is basic to addressing the worst symptoms of our housing crisis, but, as I have argued above, social housing has to be more than a second choice for those who **need** it. It is also important to discard the arguments, repeatedly brought out to support plans for demolition and cuts in social housing provision, that there is lack of **demand** for social, and especially council, housing. These arguments make use of spurious empirical evidence (Sarah Glynn [2007] **'Home Truths: the myth and reality of regeneration in Dundee'** www.geos.ed.ac.uk/geography/papers) and, more importantly, demand for council housing, or social rented housing more generally, is not a fixed number waiting to be discovered, but will increase if this housing is improved or otherwise made more desirable.

The Scottish Executive should stop promoting and subsidising stock transfer and large-scale demolitions and invest in building new council houses and improving existing homes and estates. It should also replace the Right to Buy, which creams off the best homes, with genuinely affordable rents, and with rent holidays for long term tenants.

In sum, if we are to address the crisis in housing we need to ensure that housing returns to its primary function of providing homes. This can be done through fiscal controls to contain the use of housing as investment and end runaway house prices, alongside a commitment to finance good quality public rented housing. But, for this to happen, government will have to make a major shift of emphasis and look beyond the demands of the market, basing its policy instead on the wants of society. While some changes can only be made in Westminster, enough can be done in Holyrood to make a significant difference, and perhaps even act as a lever for change on a British scale. ■

Sarah Glynn is a lecturer in political and economic geography at the University of Edinburgh, currently researching and teaching on housing studies

forza scozia!

Guy Puzey looks at how the Holyrood elections were reported overseas and the (mis)conceptions about the SNP

If radio phone-ins and newspaper letter pages are anything to go by, concerned voters in Scotland had sleepless nights worrying about what kind of an image this May's election would give Scottish politics abroad. In reality, the story of the Scottish elections that has had the greatest impact in the news media across Europe is the SNP's narrow conquest of the largest number of seats. This news made such an impression on some that a Venetian independence movement, 'I Veneti', even held a post-election celebration on May 12 in front of the Doge's Palace in honour of Scotland.

Italy is indeed no stranger to electoral controversies. Following the close result of last year's general election, it took former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi three weeks to concede defeat. Ballot boxes were found allegedly discarded in back alleys, appeals were made and recounts ordered, which only served to reconfirm the victory of Romano Prodi's Union coalition. Therefore any similar problems we may have had are almost a non-story in comparison.

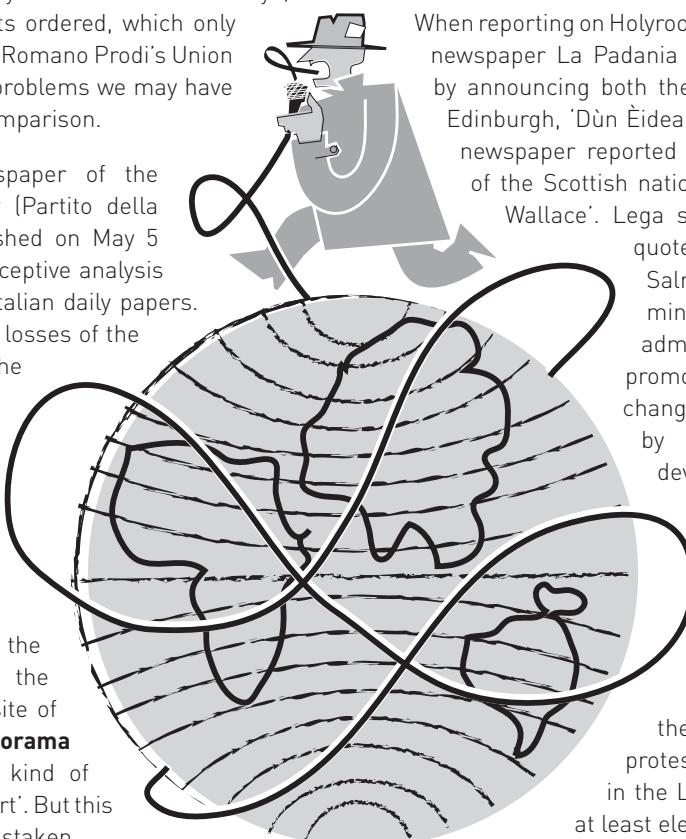
Liberazione, the official newspaper of the Communist Refoundation Party (Partito della Rifondazione Comunista), published on May 5 what was probably the most perceptive analysis of the Holyrood election in the Italian daily papers. Martino Mazzonis wrote that the losses of the Greens and Socialists were 'the real disaster' of this election, and commented sarcastically on the 'brilliant idea' that was the SSP/Solidarity split.

For many Italians, the SNP's advance is reminiscent of the breakthrough of the Lega Nord (Northern League), led by the charismatic Umberto Bossi, in the early 1990s. A blog on the website of mainstream news magazine **Panorama** described Alex Salmond as 'a kind of Umberto Bossi in a chequered skirt'. But this analogy is, hopefully, painfully mistaken.

The Northern League calls for the independence of the north of Italy, which it terms Padania. While many Leghisti liken their campaign to that of other independence movements outside Italy, including the SNP, some of their policies are more akin to those of the BNP. The League staunchly opposes immigration, especially by 'extracomunitari'. This word originally denoted non-EU citizens but has now, partly through the rhetoric of the League, acquired a particular association with north Africans. In 2003, League representatives even proposed introducing separate train carriages for extracomunitari, whom they accused of taking up too many seats.

League activists see themselves as Celtic warriors, and they can often be spotted proudly brandishing Saltires in their parades.

When Umberto Bossi made a return to public life following a protracted hospitalisation, the secretary of the 'Padanian' trade union declared 'Bossi è immortale, è un highlander' ('Bossi is immortal, he's a Highlander'). Party members draw inspiration from such masterpieces of pseudo-history as a certain Scottish-themed film by Mel Gibson. The word 'libertà' ('freedom') – as voiced with more than a soupçon of fury by the protagonist of **Braveheart** – has become a shibboleth of the Padanian movement and especially its youth section. As Colin McArthur testifies in his book **Brigadoon, Braveheart and the Scots: Distortions of Scotland in Hollywood Cinema**, this film is 'the modern "Ur-Fascist" text par excellence' and is popular with the extreme right across the world, from German neo-Nazi rockers to the Ku Klux Klan.



When reporting on Holyrood affairs, the Northern League's newspaper **La Padania** customarily begins its articles by announcing both the Gaelic and Italian names for Edinburgh, 'Dùn Èideann (Edimburgol'. On May 5, the newspaper reported on the 'triumph' of 'the spirit of the Scottish national hero William "Braveheart" Wallace'. Lega senator Roberto Calderoli was quoted toasting the SNP and Alex Salmond's success. As reforms minister during the last Berlusconi administration, Calderoli had promoted wide-ranging constitutional changes, which were partly informed by the Scottish experience of devolution, a word which has now been imported wholesale into Italian: 'la devolution'. This is the same Calderoli whose impromptu partial TV striptease, revealing a t-shirt emblazoned with one of the cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammad, led to protests outside the Italian Consulate in the Libyan city of Bengasi, in which at least eleven people died.

Mario Borghezio, a League MEP, was even more enthusiastic in his praise of the SNP, claiming that the result in Scotland and Sarkozy's electoral success in France made the score 2-0 for Leghist ideas. His unique perspective on these recent events was that they represented a 'victory of those who promise a strong hand in matters of security and immigration.' He said that this would create 'better prospects for a Europe of the peoples, which is neither Islamified nor Turkified.' Apparently, Borghezio also wrote to Salmond personally before the election to wish him luck.

It would appear that the League has got the wrong end of the stick with the SNP, whose nationalism is relatively inclusive, certainly compared to the ethnocentric and xenophobic jingoism of the League. While the League favours a *jus sanguinis*

definition of nationality, the SNP commendably prefers a broader definition. According to the party's current proposals for independence, Scottish citizenship would be open to all those resident in Scotland. This arguably gives the SNP the most liberal immigration policy of the largest four parties.

The SNP has frequently expressed admiration for Scotland's close neighbours in the northwest European 'Arc of Prosperity', with the most consistent praise reserved for Norway, which regularly tops international surveys such as the Global Peace Index and the Human Development Index, in which it has come first every year so far since 2001. Since the exploitation of the SNP's favourite North Sea fossil fuel began in earnest, Norway has been the obvious comparison for pro-independence groups to make when debating the economic viability of an independent Scotland. Alex Salmond has said that Scottish independence would bring similar prosperity to Scotland, and he would even expect life expectancy in Scotland to reach Norwegian levels within ten years of independence.

Norwegians are aware that their country is an SNP pin-up, and Norwegian newspapers gave considerable space to reporting the disrupted count, as well as coverage of what the result really means. Daily newspaper **Aftenposten** even sent a journalist to Cowdenbeath in the run-up to the election to speak to Gordon Brown's constituents, many of whom voted SNP for the first time this year.

In an essay published in **Bergens Tidende** on May 8, visiting senior fellow at the University of Surrey Kenan Malik referred to opinion polls on independence and described how the SNP strategy of toning down its rhetoric on independence worked so well. As a result, he wrote, 'Scotland will be governed by an independence party that won't talk about independence, and which has come to power largely thanks to voters who don't want independence.' (Go to www.kenanmalik.com/essays/bergens_snp.html to read the essay in English).

In the weekly newspaper **Dag og Tid**, editor Svein Gjerdåker described the SNP as a 'variant' of Venstre, a political party whose name literally translates as 'Left', but is best described as the Liberal Party. This party was instrumental in securing Norwegian independence from a union of kingdoms with Sweden that, from its beginnings in 1814, had in fact granted Norway a considerable degree of autonomy. Norway had its own parliament and its own constitution throughout that period although, as in our own United Kingdom, there were reserved matters, such as foreign affairs, which were dealt with from Stockholm.

When, in the early 1890s, a more radical faction of Venstre started pushing for separate Norwegian consular representation and the creation of a Norwegian foreign ministry, they were returned with an absolute parliamentary majority, but the Swedish-Norwegian king vetoed the new government's first moves to fulfil its aims. The government fell, to be replaced by a minority right-wing administration. Nevertheless, the momentum of Norwegian independence was growing, and in the August 1905 plebiscite, 368,208 voted to dissolve the union, with only 184 voting against.

The **Dag og Tid** editor recognised that the SNP objective of giving Scotland its 'own voice in the international community' would remind many Norwegians of the rhetoric of their country's anti-EU campaigners. He was quick to point out, however, that

this is a false comparison. Where Norwegian 'nationalists' are afraid of European federalism, the SNP sees the potential for separate Scottish EU membership as a means of strengthening the case for independence. According to Gjerdåker, the Scottish experience flies in the face of those who say that Europe will end up as a continent united only by loyalty to a European constitution. In the case of Scotland, the EU could actually be working to reinforce the idea of the nation state.

Writing for **Dagbladet**, Professor Åge Johnsen of Oslo University College outlined how the popularisation of the SNP mirrors the rise of the Progress Party in Norway, a radical right-wing liberalist party, with which the SNP reportedly has good relations. What is perhaps most surprising about foreign reporting of the May election is how the SNP is frequently compared to parties with policies so different from its own predominantly left-of-centre social democratic platform. The SNP must see such misconceptions from our neighbours in Italy and Norway as a warning. Many voted for the SNP for the first time this year, hoping for the early days of a better nation. To ensure that this aspiration is not spoiled like so many ballot papers, all our political parties would do well to define their political allegiances and identities more clearly.

The greatest identity problem for many parties seems to begin with their names. Although the SNP is the 'National Party' and not 'Nationalist Party', this does not translate well, and the only adequate descriptor for its members is still 'nationalists' in any language. Even though the SNP's nationalism is unconventionally inclusive, it is still tarred by the brush of other nationalisms. If the SNP were called, for example, the Scottish Independence Party and distanced itself from parties such as the Northern League, it would not have the same problem.

As for socialists who support Scottish independence, they would of course be ill advised to call themselves national socialists. When asked by Gordon Brewer on **Newsnight Scotland** why he was a nationalist, an incredulous Tommy Sheridan replied that, although he is in favour of independence, he sees himself as an internationalist. Sheridan has indeed shown a flair for innovative choice of words in naming his new party Solidarity, possibly partly inspired by Lech Wałęsa's Solidarnosc. There was, however, some disagreement at the founding conference of Solidarity in November 2006 as to whether the rest of the party's name should include a reference to socialism, and the name 'Solidarity: Scotland's Socialist Movement' was only chosen by 119 votes to 111.

What's in a name? Quite a lot, it would seem. However, while new names have the potential to help resolve crises of political identity, they can also be used to cloak negative changes, or a lack of change. For examples of this, we need look no further than 'New Labour', or any new names David Cameron may be thinking of after having chosen a new logo to make his party look less Conservative and more conservationist. Whatever the SNP choose to call themselves, Scotland as a whole should strive to be a nation defined not by **Braveheart** patriotism, with all the related chauvinist phallocentrism and historical howlers, but rather by the inclusive modern values shared by its inhabitants. ■

Guy Puzey is a postgraduate student in the Division of European Languages and Cultures at the University of Edinburgh

we don't need no thought control

Mark Hirst argues that the body responsible for censoring news covering national security matters is unnecessary due to uncensored internet activity

It grew out of a "mutual concern" between senior newspapermen and civil servants in October 1912 worried that the press may inadvertently give away state secrets which would be useful to the then German naval build up. But now, 95 years later the system of official censorship operated by the UK Government, in cahoots with senior print and broadcast executives and administered under the innocuously sounding Defence, Press and Broadcasting Advisory Committee (DPBAC) is increasingly seeing its role undermined by ever expanding internet activity.

Many are beginning to ponder whether the days of the quasi-official British censor are soon to be brought to a close by the Internet. Others worry that the UK will follow China's lead to stifle free expression and information flow over the World Wide Web by censoring personal web pages and blogs aided and abetted by giant US corporations like Yahoo, Microsoft and Google. Just this month this technological axis of imperialism and seventeen other major Internet providers signed up to a new, somewhat perversely entitled "self-discipline pact" which, according to Reporters Without Borders demands service providers operating in China "monitor and manage comments" as well as delete "illegal and bad information." Such a pact is not yet imminent here, but then we have a far more traditional body in DPBAC which acts as gatekeeper and effective censor. No other nation on earth, not even the most paranoid closed states like North Korea, have a system of censorship like that operated by DPBAC in the UK. DPBAC vehemently deny that their role amounts to official censorship, but clearly that's its intention and ultimately its lasting effect.

The system, which operates five standing DA-Notices (Defence Advisory Notices), known up until 1993 as D-Notices, gives supposedly non-binding general advice to editors on what should or should not be published or transmitted. The Committee, which meets just twice a year, is chaired by the Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Defence and he is joined by four members representing Government departments, one each from the Home Office, the Ministry of Defence, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Cabinet Office. Thirteen representatives from the "mainstream" media are also nominated and the Committee's work is funded by the Ministry of Defence, although the MoD stress that the DPBAC is independent of them. The Secretary of DPBAC, a post which has always been filled by a senior retired Military officer, is responsible for offering advice to journalists and Editors on a day-to-day basis and he reports to the committee every six months on the guidance that has been sought and offered. The system is designed, its proponents claim, to uphold the integrity of that ambulatory concept known as **national security**. "It's like Humpty Dumpty's 'It means just what I choose it to mean,'" says Rear Admiral Nick Wilkinson, the former Secretary of DPBAC, "but in practice it **[national security]** is indeed quite hard to define concisely."

The very nature of what constitutes a **national security** issue or story has been particularly stretched in recent years following the 11th September attacks and subsequent invasions of

Iraq and Afghanistan and that undoubtedly has led to greater restrictions imposed on publishers and broadcasters.

The Blair Government's acquiescence to pre-emptive military action which had its roots in the Bush Government's "**National Security Strategy of the United States of America**" published in September 2002 demonstrates clearly that what constitutes national security may not necessarily be the same as what constitutes the wider public interest and therefore legitimate journalistic investigation and analysis. Maintaining and upholding **national security** certainly does not require a sound moral dimension to it as the events which led to the death of weapons inspector David Kelly clearly demonstrated. So why then would journalists simply accept what is, according to DPBACs own propaganda, a purely voluntary system of guidance?

One factor is the myth, or set of myths that continue to surround the DA Notice system. Many journalists are simply unaware of how the system actually operates or how far reaching, or not as the case is, the DPBACs real powers are. Of those journalists who are aware, some fear, not without foundation, for their future career prospects should they opt to stand up and defend the integrity and substance of their story. Other, more establishment journalists are regrettably inclined simply to accept DA Notice guidance without much of a quibble or fight. It should come as no surprise to learn that the BBC for example has been particularly fervent in its application and interpretation of issues and stories related to **national security**. It has worked closely with the Security Service for decades ensuring that both in terms of content and personnel the organisation, the world's largest broadcasting corporation, never deviates from the official line when it comes to dealing with issues covering **national security**. Until relatively recently BBC staff were routinely required to sign the Official Secrets Act before being offered a permanent contract and MI5 maintained a full-time office at Broadcasting House to vet staff, rubber stamping the files of potential subversives with, somewhat bizarrely, green Christmas trees.

The BBC's Middle East Editor, Jeremy Bowen recounted the moment when, as a 24-year-old trainee the Official Secrets Act form was laid out for him to sign. "I hesitated for about half a second and then put my name to it." Bowen said, "We must have been a conformist bunch, all ambitious, focussed on the careers that were going to emerge from our places on one of the BBC's elite training courses... even to my innocent mind it was a strange thing for journalists to do." The BBC remains tight lipped over the extent of present day Security Service involvement in the journalistic activity of its staff.

Of course such levels of close working, involving the vetting of staff and effective gagging clauses, incorporated in the OSA does not mean that the Corporation is incapable of making ground breaking, investigative and critical programmes of the Government of the day. But equally such interference cannot be conducive to independent journalism and leaves the BBC open to criticism that it can, at least on occasion, act as little more than an official mouthpiece for certain Government departments.

Following the Hutton Inquiry rigorous self-censorship is now very evident in the BBC fuelled by hypersensitive corporation lawyers.

Last year I asked for details on the number of official DA notices issued by DPBAC. I asked for the information under the Freedom of Information Act, given the committee are funded directly by the taxpayer, only to receive a response some weeks later that stated, "The DPBAC is neither subject to the UK Freedom of Information Act 2000, nor to its Scottish equivalent." However they did, to their credit, disclose some of the figures. Since 1993, according to their own records, there have been 41 formal DA notices issued by DPBAC's Secretary. There was however an intriguing addition in the covering email that suggests a far greater level of censorship is operating than the formal notice tally suggests. "The Secretary," responded Air Vice Marshall Andrew Vallance, strangely referring to himself in the third person, "also offers oral advice to journalists, editors and officials. Records of the oral advice offered commenced in October 2005, and thus far number 191. However, for reasons of confidentiality I am not at liberty to give further details of this." So whilst there has been six official DA notices issued since October 2005 over the same period there have been more than 30 times as many pieces of so-called "oral advice" issued to journalists and Editors.

DPBAC is not subject to independent audit nor is it accountable to any close public scrutiny yet this same group of people, which the former Secretary of DPBAC described as "gossipy and full of testosterone" and made up of predominantly white, middle-class males is effectively responsible for deciding which stories related to issues of **national security** reach the public.

Things are changing however. The World Wide Web offers a window on the world which even the internet's original creators could not have imagined when they were devising ways of how to improve, somewhat ironically, the US defence department information sharing capability. For the time being the Internet remains, with the notable exception of China, where "normal service has been temporarily suspended", a vehicle for free and frank expression of opinion. It is a place where genuine newsworthy, investigative stories can and do appear and where mainstream broadcasting and publishing executives have historically feared to tread, for either commercial reasons or for reasons ultimately related to their own worldly view, a view clearly shared and shaped by the establishment committee, the DPBAC, of which they are members.

The supreme device used by DPBAC often trotted out to journalists who are seriously thinking about ignoring the DA Notice Guidance and who have some gem of sensitive information they wish to disclose, is that publication would place at risk the lives of British citizens, usually agents of the Security Service. It's the DPBAC equivalent of "Danger, Bull in Field" and has proved an effective, if disingenuous deterrent for years. How can journalists challenge such a powerful presumption and justify running such an unquantifiable risk to their editors?

However without the most rigorous and continuous monitoring of the Security Service and other agencies "responsible" for

maintaining **national security** then we run the far greater risk of repeating the catastrophic mistakes which have been so evident in recent years and which have demonstrably cost lives both here and overseas. The claim by DPBAC and the Government that such potential stories will place lives at risk has become a hollow one and had there been far greater scrutiny of the intelligence sources, the Security Service and of those overseeing our **national security** interests in the run up to Iraq and indeed prior to 11th September, then perhaps we would not be facing the very real threat to life we see today, not just in the UK but globally. What is needed is greater access to and publication of uncensored material because the self appointed guardians of our **national security** have proven they cannot be trusted to determine what is genuinely in the public interest. On the most popular Internet video website YouTube personal views are exchanged, some authoritative although most are not. In general these views are laid bare without censor and oblivious to the potential impact on **national security**.

In war zones such as Iraq and Afghanistan the wide range of material on offer through YouTube gives an impression of these conflicts which no mainstream media organisation could ever achieve, or more importantly be allowed to broadcast. These

videos and blogs demonstrate, in all its inglorious folly, the futility of the Government's foreign policy objectives initiated, we were told, to enhance our **national security**. Whatever value the notion of **national security** once held the reality of Blair's illegal and dangerous adventurism abroad has led to the concept being irreversibly soiled. DPBAC is slowly wakening up to the reality of the information available through the Web and they are already looking at ways to extend their censoring influence here. However it appears those attempts have ran into difficulty after it became clear in recent talks with the Secretary General

of the UK Internet Service Providers Association that "present circumstances" made it "impractical to offer general advice on the public disclosure of **national security** information". However DPBAC will continue to offer individual advice to ISPs on a so-called "notice and take down basis."

In democracies it is vital that we have a free and independent press, free to investigate and if necessary challenge outdated concepts of what constitutes **national security**, particularly given the very differing views that exist about what that concept really means. It cannot be healthy for our democracy to have that concept defined and determined by a small, testosterone-loaded group of unaccountable middle and upper class white males. Editors and journalists who pride themselves on maintaining the highest standards of integrity and a determination to tell a story as accurately as possible must make a stand and without being utterly reckless challenge the current DA Notice system by making rational, journalistic decisions on what is in the public interest to disclose, regardless of how badly that reflects on the current Government and some of its more shadowy agencies. ■

Mark Hirst is a member of the National Union of Journalists and a former Government Press Officer and has previously lectured on the role of the Security Service and the subject of censorship in the media, in both Scotland and Ireland.

running after them with fruit and flowers

Colin Clark, Kevin Adamson and Laura Cashman look at Roma migration to Scotland and conclude that wider socio-economic inequalities should be examined before making any judgements

There is something I don't quite get. What do we owe these people? Can someone explain that? Were the social workers running after them with fruit and flowers? What have they or will they do for us? I bet these people [Roma in Govanhill] get more from social services and the council and so on than the Scottish people. Frankly, it's vomit inducing.

Online comment, posted in response to the article Playground by day... battleground by night', **The Evening Times**, 16.03.07.

A spectre is haunting the Southside of Glasgow. And that spectre appears to be Roma families from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) who have settled in Govanhill. In recent months a series of articles have appeared in the Scottish press relating the everyday 'dramas' of the Roma who have moved to Glasgow and the impact of their arrival. It seems the 'exotic' and 'troublesome' Roma are deemed to be more newsworthy than the Poles, and they are less equipped to defend themselves against some of the claims being made. Articles have left few stones unturned, with allegations surfacing about the 'anti-social behaviour' of the Roma: they are 'muscling in' on 'Scottish' Big Issue vendors via criminal gangs, they ('Romanians') are out on the streets selling 'fake gold' to the foolish and unwary, women and children are pick-pocketing in the centre of town, 'feral gangs' are roaming wild in Govanhill. There has also been disturbing reports of an alleged 'child-prostitution ring' involving nine and ten year old Roma girls. Even the few 'sympathetic' articles want to pander to racist stereotypes rather than engaging with the issues, see Mackay, N, 'Isolated, abused and victims of decades of persecution', **The Sunday Herald**, 05-08-07 for more information. The author of one article, who had attempted to offer a more historically nuanced picture of the problems faced by the Roma, was accused of being 'naïve' and 'middle-class'! (See 'a minority we must not abandon at the margins', **The Herald**, 12-06-07. Adamson, 2007).

What should we make of this? Is this fear of 'dangerous classes' (Roma) or of 'dangerous places' (Govanhill)? As social

scientists living and working in Glasgow we want to challenge 'common sense' and 'taken for granted' approaches by moving beyond stereotyped imagery, simplifying headlines and crass commentary. More broadly, we are interested in challenging 'popular thinking' on migration, especially in the Western world. Why has the 'story' of migration come to be dominated by images of out-of-control Western/Northern immigration policies acting like broken-down dams, trying, in hope, to hold back the huddled masses who are eager to make a transition from a land of poverty and hopelessness to one of 'milk and honey'?

As social scientists living and working in Glasgow we want to challenge 'common sense' and 'taken for granted' approaches by moving beyond stereotyped imagery, simplifying headlines and crass commentary. We want to challenge 'popular thinking' on migration, especially in the Western world.

The truth is this: three decades of free movement of labour from the Southern to Northern countries of the EU has illustrated that economic returns (wages) are not enough to induce mass migration: 'even large differences in economic returns... are not sufficient to induce migration in most people' (See Glover, S. et al. (2001) **Migration: an economic and social analysis**, Research Development and Statistics Directorate, RDS Occasional Paper 67. London: The Home Office www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs/occ67-migration.pdf). There is, to our knowledge, no evidence that the case is any different from East to North-West. If better wages are not enough, then what does fuel such cross-border movement? It's quite simple: across CEE the Roma have lost faith in their politicians and

governments and are having a harder time now than ever before (and their history across the region is not a pleasant one, see Crowe, D. (1995) **A History of the Gypsies of Eastern Europe and Russia**). Their situation is difficult to imagine, such is the nature of the virulent racism, exclusion and discrimination Roma face. And yet, as early indicators show, the World Bank/Soros-funded Roma Decade programme, charged with bringing about real changes in the lives of the Roma between 2005 and 2015, just isn't producing change on the ground (or in the corridors of power) fast enough. Presented with opportunities to move, the most ambitious, qualified and imaginative families are taking

their chances at airports and ferry terminals in the West and North of Europe.

And they are coming. The symbolic image of 'Roma migration' is a powerful one, capturing both popular imagination and newspaper headlines. However, 'Roma migration' is not some overarching general phenomenon that somehow characterises all Roma communities across CEE. The impression of 'eternal nomads' is both misleading and inaccurate, especially in the CEE context where State Socialism, quite literally, removed the wheels from Roma caravans. An examination of the different routes of Roma movement across Europe, especially from CEE to Britain over the last century, shows a rich and heterogeneous picture among Roma communities, families and individuals (for example, see Stevens D. (2003) 'The Migration of the Romanian Roma to the UK: A Contextual Study', **European Journal of Migration and Law**, 5(4): 439-461 on patterns of Romanian Roma movement to Britain). Crucially, 'Roma migration' cannot be assumed or reified across an entire population group: it has rarely, if ever, been a simple response to economic hardships 'at home' and better opportunities 'over there'. Also, it would be misleading to say that migration has been a product of **de facto** or **de jure** persecution. Most Roma people are not in a position to undertake a juggling act of their complex economic, social and legal positions. Without wishing to romanticise the 'blood, sweat and tears' of Roma experience, or to endorse the notion of poverty as a 'motivator', it is worth appreciating the often ingenious Roma entrepreneurialism that emerges out of extreme social exclusion, and to acknowledge that such activities are even rendered possible against seemingly impossible odds.

Of course, the state clearly and decisively shapes the opportunities (as well as the constraints) of the marginalised. So comparative questions of integration must be focused on the context that's provided by states: what are the consequences of different integration strategies of 'host' societies? Mobility can be made use of, as it often has before, in accommodating new opportunities within 'free' (for whom?) markets. At the sharp end we find some families who have made the leap and struggled to find a foothold. This is a dominant image of the Roma, as a 'dangerous class', where they are presented as 'offering little but taking much'. However, this exaggeration of the reality of **separation** only serves to reproduce and sustain a neo-liberal ideology that justifies the total exclusion of 'the Gypsies'. This is all the worse when you realise that their exclusion produces such 'problematic' or 'dangerous' behaviour in the first place. It is Catch 22 and then some.

It is also difficult, at first sight, to escape caricatures of 'Roma culture'. Whether romanticised or demonised, Roma culture is often portrayed as being one that is 'on the move', 'unstable' or 'in transition', yet, somewhat ironically, it is also a culture, in certain contexts, that is viewed as remaining fixed in time and escaping wider processes of modernity and social change. What is better, here, as for other migrating groups, is to look at their political and social marginalisation and the various policy measures that seek to promote integration. This is starting to happen in Glasgow in relation to A8 country migration [Blake Stevenson CRCA (2007) **A8 Nationals in Glasgow**, A report

for Glasgow City Council]. Across CEE it is evident that with projects such as the Roma Decade programme (2005-2015) shining a spotlight on the Roma, we have witnessed a kind of ethnicisation of the 'Roma issue' and the poverty and exclusion they endure. With encouragement from organisations such as The World Bank and the Open Society Institute, governments in the region have started to make limited inroads to tackling some of the worst excesses of poverty and marginalisation. However, such efforts are not preventing, or even slowing down, Roma migration from East to West and this, in reality, has little to do with ethnicity or culture and instead everything to do with the wider, global arena in which migration patterns are being played out (in itself this often coming down to class relations). It is the socio-economic and political realities that need to be looked at, as a part of a greater transformation in global labour markets and the uninterrupted movement of both labour and capital across Europe and beyond.

From the evidence, it seems clear that we like simple solutions to complex issues: why bother looking at historical precedents or assessing wider socio-economic inequalities when you can simply pour scorn on 'bloody foreigners' (Winder, R. (2005, 2nd edition) **Bloody Foreigners: the story of immigration to Britain**). This cannot be allowed to continue. In order to meet the challenges, it is essential to view recent waves of A8/Roma migration in their proper economic, social, political and human contexts. We need to move beyond the inaccurate, inflammatory and paranoid political rhetoric that has been evident in sections of the press, as well as the online commentary accompanying such articles. This is not about 'running after them with fruit and flowers' as one online commentator suggested, merely extending a hand and looking for positive ways forward that ensure different communities can live and work together. ■

Dr. Colin Clark is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology, Department of Geography and Sociology, University of Strathclyde c.r.clark@strath.ac.uk

Dr. Kevin Adamson is a Lecturer in Politics, School of Social Sciences, University of Paisley adam-as1@wpmail.paisley.ac.uk

Dr. Laura Cashman is a Postdoctoral Researcher, School of Slavonic, Central and East European Studies, University of Glasgow cashman_laura@hotmail.com

All the authors are founding members of the Scottish Universities Roma Network (SURN) which was launched in September 2007.

will there ever be peace?

Duncan McFarlane looks at the reasons behind George Galloway's suspension from Parliament and the wider issues surrounding the Iraq conflict

It wasn't only lefties who were calling for an end to sanctions that were killing ordinary Iraqis without removing Saddam from power - Senior US Generals and UN officials were too - but was the chair of the Parliamentary Standards and Privileges Committee?

George Galloway MP, a leading member of the Stop the War Coalition, was suspended from parliament by the Parliamentary Standards and Privileges Committee in July. It's worth noting the real reasons for Galloway's suspension. He's accused of having accepted money from Saddam's regime for the Mariam Appeal a charity he founded which campaigned to have the sanctions on Iraq (pushed through the UN by the US government) lifted, provided medical supplies to Iraqis and flew Iraqi children like Mariam Hamza to Britain for medical treatment. Galloway's call for sanctions to be lifted is routinely misrepresented as extreme or as kow-towing to Saddam. In fact narrowing or lifting sanctions was supported by a wide range of people including high ranking members of the UN staff and US military.

The four star US General Anthony Zinni supported narrowing sanctions to cover only military equipment under Clinton, but was ignored. Colin Powell as Bush's secretary of state also tried in vain to get Bush to do the same (see Thomas E .Ricks (2006), ' FIASCO - The American Military Adventure in Iraq ', 2006 , page 18. The reason was that the sanctions killed ordinary Iraqis without removing Saddam from power. Indeed by weakening ordinary Iraqis they made the overthrow of Saddam less likely.

According to two successive UN co-ordinators of the sanctions – Dennis Halliday and Hans Von Sponeck, sanctions were killing hundreds of thousands of ordinary Iraqis by denying them sufficient food and Iraqi hospitals sufficient medicines and equipment (www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,,608578,00.html). Halliday rightly called the sanctions "genocide".

We've heard a lot, 20 years too late, about Saddam's genocide against the Kurds in the 80s, when he was armed and funded by the American and British governments before and after the gassing of Halabja. Tony Blair refused to sign even one of the many Early Day Motions condemning that atrocity at the time. George Galloway did though. How many of the MPs on the Standards Committee did?

So George Galloway stands accused of acting unethically by attempting to stop two genocides which some of the hypocrites

on the Standards Committee supported or ignored. It seems lying to start an unnecessary war and bribing torturing dictators with public money to buy a private companies' arms are also apparently considered acceptable.

There's been blanket coverage of £1.5 million alleged to have been paid to the Mariam appeal by the torturing dictatorship of Saddam Hussein – and much less focus on the reports by the BBC, Financial Times and the Guardian among others that the Blair government approved the payment of £1 billion in public money to Prince Bandar, one of the torturing dictators of Saudi Arabia, as a bribe to get the Saudi monarchy to buy BAE Systems weapons. This is even more surprising since Galloway denies the allegations against him while Blair and Goldsmith admit those against them, only denying that they hid the transaction or that there was anything wrong with it. BAE's defence is that the payments were approved by the British government.

Isn't getting money from dictators to treat sick children and end civilian deaths a morally right action? Isn't giving taxpayers' money to dictators in bribes to get them to buy arms from you wrong? Blair's claim that thousands of British jobs are at stake is also empty. If civilian industries got a fraction of the public investment British Aerospace has wasted on bribes and over-charging for inferior products far more jobs would be created for the same expenditure – and the money saved in the process would allow tax cuts or increased spending on public services (such as a decent wage for front line soldiers).

There's been blanket coverage of £1.5m alleged to have been paid to the Mariam appeal by Saddam Hussein – and much less focus on the reports by the BBC and others that the Blair government approved the payment of £1 billion in public money to Prince Bandar, one of the torturing dictators of Saudi Arabia

If you want to hear about the (dis-)service provided by BAE to the British military and taxpayers don't listen to Tony Blair – read former Royal Navy officer (and marine) Lewis Page's excellent book ' Lions, Donkeys and Dinosaurs'. So why is it that the adjective 'odious' is so widely used by political commentators against George Galloway when he was one of the few British MPs attempting to stop the needless loss of civilian life just as UN officials and American generals were? True he's a self-publicist, but no-one who doesn't publicise themselves is likely to get elected or re-elected in politics. He uses hyperbole and over the top language sometimes, but then who doesn't sometimes - and colourful language is sometimes necessary to get media coverage for serious issues. He's made some mistakes, like saluting Saddam's 'indefatigability' but who doesn't make mistakes - and his mistakes haven't cost large numbers of lives. I disagree with his claim that the end of the Soviet Union was a tragedy,

but then no two people agree on everything. Could it be that some of those commentators are either ignorant of the subject they're commenting on and have never bothered to do basic research on it? Or do they have guilty consciences? Or are they just from the 'my country right or wrong' brigade? You'd have to ask them.

As for the politicians this is just part of a long campaign of attempts to smear Galloway by his political opponents who have failed to provide any evidence to support the slanders made by their allies in the newspapers of Rupert Murdoch in court cases, which these newspapers have lost time and again. The politicians who supported blanket sanctions on Iraq and then an un-necessary war for control of oil supplies have no excuses for their behaviour so they resort to throwing lots of mud at those who did oppose both in the hope that some will stick. I hope people will see this shoddy tactic for what it is.

Nor is the sanctions issue merely historical. The same kind of blanket economic sanctions are being imposed on Palestinians in Gaza who are dying due to lack of food and medical supplies because they voted for Hamas not Fatah. Fatah are favoured as "the forces of peace" by the Israeli, US, Egyptian and EU governments (including the British government) but Fatah lost elections to Hamas (even if they didn't lose by much) due to their corruption and misappropriation of aid money. The Israeli government permitted Egypt to arm Fatah with tens of thousands of AK47s and ammunition for them last year while the US government sent officers to provide training and uniforms to the Presidential Guard of Mahmoud Abbas of Hamas. See Oxfam Apr 2007, 'Poverty in Palestine: the human cost of the financial boycott' for more information.

Hamas won Palestinian elections but the US, EU, Israeli and Egyptian governments refused to recognise them as Hamas refuses to recognise Israel until it stops forcing Palestinians off their land to make way for more Israeli settlers and unless Israel withdraws to its 1967 borders. Some Hamas spokesmen have even suggested they refuse to recognise Israel full stop. The result of the refusal to recognise the results of the Palestinian elections (which observers said were as free and fair as was possible under Israeli military occupation and with Israeli checkpoints being widespread) was civil war between Hamas and Fatah which Hamas won in Gaza but lost (so far) in the West Bank. The US, EU and Israeli governments then lifted sanctions on the West Bank (or at least sent more funds to the office of Mahmoud Abbas of Fatah) while continuing them to this day on Gaza.

So what will happen this time? Will we repeat the slow motion genocide of blanket sanctions meant to force an entire people to replace their government with one our governments prefer (despite the fact the current government was democratically elected) or will we demand an end to comprehensive or blanket sanctions as a barbaric and ineffective form of warfare that kills innocent adults and children. It would be justifiable to have a ban on arms sales - but that would have to apply to all sides. Instead Fatah has been armed by Egypt and the US with Israeli collusion (while Iran funds and arms Hamas and Islamic Jihad) and the US has increased military aid to Israel and is selling billions in arms to it, Egypt and other Sunni regimes such as Saudi Arabia's. See *Guardian* 16 Aug 2007, 'US offers Israel \$30bn in military aid'. The question is do we want peace in the Middle East or just to continue attempting to maintain and

expand US and EU dominance of it by backing undemocratic and torturing client regimes comparable to Saddam's (another of our former clients) as long as they are 'pro-western' or anti-Iranian. We can be sure that if we choose the latter many civilians - including the people of Gaza starved of medicines and food - will continue to die as a result of our governments' actions.

We can also be sure that Iran will respond by increasing its military and its support of armed Shia groups across the Middle East as its government and many of its people perceive our governments' current actions as a serious threat. Nor are this perception wrong given the Bush administration's actions so far and the history of relations between Iran and the US/UK which are still defined by the US and British backed military coup against the elected government of Mohammed Mossadeq in 1953 and the 26 years of western-backed dictatorship under the Shah which followed. See Pollack, Kenneth M.(2004), **The Persian Puzzle**, Random House, New York, 2005 paperback edition, pages 27-140. Nor will the Chinese or Russian governments hold back from competing for power with us if we choose to attempt to continue dominating the Middle East through client regimes. Both have been arming and trading with Iran to try to prevent the US monopolising the world's oil and gas supplies for itself and its allies – and to secure and expand their own power no doubt.

This may seem a long way away from Scotland but Scottish troops are dying in Iraq and Afghanistan and the attempted attack on Glasgow airport shows that Scots are not immune from the effects of the British government's foreign policy any more than Londoners are. Lifting sanctions on Gaza and ending British (or, if we become independent, Scottish) involvement in military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq could not only save the lives of Palestinians, Iraqis or Afghans but those of English, Welsh and Scots people too.

This is not to say terrorist attacks are justified. Two wrongs don't make a right and if our foreign policies were morally right and saving lives it would be right to keep our troops in place no matter whether we risked terrorist attacks as a result or not. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq though are neither justifiable nor winnable though. The former is about securing a pipeline route for the oil and gas supplies of former Soviet Republics to the ports of Pakistan. (A \$10 billion contract to build this pipeline has been given by the government of Pakistan to the US firm International Oil. The latter is about controlling the second largest known oil reserves in the world. Our troops are being made to act as junior partners a US administration which Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch report has a policy of torture – sometimes torture to death – from Iraq to Bagram airbase in Afghanistan. See Human Rights Watch March 2004, **'Enduring Freedom:' - Abuses by U.S. Forces in Afghanistan**. So far this year in Afghanistan NATO forces have killed more civilians than the people they're fighting – and five years into that war the Taliban can still make rocket attacks on Kabul. As a PM with a Scottish granny once said "It's time for a change". 'We should all let our governments know our views on this - in letters, in protests and by voting against them until they bring our troops home from Iraq and from Afghanistan and end the sanctions on Gaza'. ■

Duncan McFarlane is an amateur political writer with a Masters Degree in International Politics. He's also a member of the Stop the War Coalition. His website is www.duncanmcfarlane.org.

Reviews

Glad to be unhappy: Edinburgh International Film Festival 2007

How well do the programmers of the Edinburgh International Film Festival get on with their parents? The extent to which this year's crop of filmmakers have delighted in the angst surrounding the relationship between sons, daughters, mothers and fathers makes us wonder. Perhaps **Glad to be Unhappy by the Mamas and Papas** has been tis year's download of choice on film industry iPods? Whatever the truth of it, mammies and daddies proved to be a far more prevalent theme than 'Cinema and the written word'. Familial masochism ranged in magnitude from the sweetly acidic feuds of debut director Julie Delpy's on (and off) screen family in **Two Days in Paris** to Colin Firth's sulky resentment of Jim Broadbent in **When Did you Last See Your Father**. **When Did You Last See Your Father** seems perfectly pitched at a broadsheet-rustling audience; angst aplenty for **Guardian** readers, angry enough for the **Independent** and sufficiently glossy for a **Scotsman** promotional tie in.

Director Anand Tucker was not the only British filmmaker to mine the possibilities of filial impiety. Andrew Kotting's **In the Wake of a Deaddad** is a uniquely accessible art film that recreates the titular patriarch as an inflatable sculpture, sometimes towering over the artist and unsuspecting passers-by, at others sagging under its own weight. The grandfather who embarks on a Georgian bus in **The Legacy** is not a deaddad, but scheduled to be one two or three stops along. Sacrificing himself instead of his fresh-faced grandson to settle a clan feud his own heart fails him, with disastrous consequences. But the real villains of (father and son) Gela and Tembur Baluani's superbly balanced, poetic 'thriller' are the three French hipsters travelling into the Georgian provinces, whose conviction in their own superiority wreaks havoc. Whether motivated by ghoulish voyeurism (two of them are 'filmmakers' who want to film the execution of the old man) to the moral outrage of the third, their attempts to intervene, gilded by the certainty that they do not have to bear the consequences, are disastrous.

What all these films had in common was their interest in the parent's ability to damage, protect or smother their children. This was nowhere more strikingly than in Dan Klores' doc, **Crazy Love**, a blackly hilarious, everyday story of love in the Bronx. It is 1959; Burt Pugach, a young, ugly but wealthy Jewish lawyer meets stunning Jewish shopgirl Linda, notable for her flashing eyes, broad smile and impregnable underwear. He proposes, forgets to mention he's already married, is rebuffed. Burt becomes obsessive, stalks Linda, and discovering she has a new man, decides no-one else will have her. He hires Heard Haden and two other accomplices – African American gangsters – to throw lye in her face. Linda is blinded, Burt goes to prison, but continues to write to her, is paroled 17 years later, proposes on national television – and incredibly, Linda accepts. After 20 years and an extramarital affair, they are still married...

If nothing else, its makers are to be congratulated on avoiding 'love is blind' as a title, and **Crazy Love** is restrained compared to the permutations open to one of Jeremy Kyle's producers. With a plot made for such programmes, the film is a potentially

fascinating essay on the American media. Ultimately, Klores' take is engaging, if shallow. More serious perhaps, is the film's wilful ignorance of the elephant tap dancing in the corner of the room; that a New York Jew hired a New York Black to mutilate his New York Jewish girlfriend. Through the ghoul-reflex familiar to the hipsters wreaking havoc in Georgia the media turns Pugach into an American anti-hero; Heard, Smith and Macmillan languish in prison and into obscurity. Were there not so much casual racism among the film's participants this might not matter so much. 'Bob', Pugach's seedy ex-colleague recalls that he recommended killing the three hitmen. Pugach's biographer was for his part, outraged not so much that he used his time in jail to help lifers with their appeals, but that he helped 'black guys' get back on the streets.

Klores might not endorse these views, but his failure to explore this dimension to the story amplifies them. **Crazy Love** is in truth, another entry into that curiously introspective American sub-genre, the warped Jewish family, as pioneered in Andrew Jarecki's **Capuring the Friedmans**. As in that film, and in Susan Stern's **The Self Made Man** and Doug Block's **51 Birch Street**, home movies and old footage are plundered to create a putative archaeology of a psychosis or malaise. And, as in those films, the mother emerges as the rogue element; Linda never knew her mother, and Burt's used to loathe him so much she made him go to school wearing a dress. Whatever the sins of the Papa, Mama is the real threat.

Those who find such a thesis alluring would do well to catch Jennifer Venditti's **Billy the Kid**. Shot over eight days in a town in Maine, it follows the titular Billy Price, an Asperger's teenager during his first serious crush. Potentially even more exploitative than **Crazy Love**, the film's redeeming quality is Billy himself, endearingly gauche and bewildered, but fundamentally humane. His handicap is also his strength; when he points to his chest and tells his mother 'it hurts, here' there is no saccharine aftershock. Intentional or not (Venditti is a casting Director) other inversions are at play. Billy's 'trailer trash' mother is both compassionate and capable- in this lucky accident of film built literally and thematically, on strength of character.

Jim Haddock son of the 94-year old Doris 'Granny D' Haddock, the formidable subject of Marlo Poras' **Run Granny Run** is worried he spends too much time with his mother. No wonder – since 2004 she has been solidly campaigning for electoral reform and as of 2006, Campaign manager for her attempt to run the New Hampshire senate seat, he frets at one point over whether a grown man should spend quite so much time with his mother. The raw, naïve style of Pora's documentary perfectly suits the subject, a raw, naïve and brave attempt to show that an ordinary citizen can run for the US Senate. But beyond the cuteness there is of course, much more at stake, larger puddings to proof, not least that the American system has the power to redeem itself, that there is a Virginal America waiting to be reclaimed. **Run Granny Run** makes an interesting comparison with **Breach**, in which Chris Cooper's FBI man is a technocrat withered into moral paralysis by the frustrated sense of entitlement fostered by the poisoned republic he serves. Both filmmakers are convinced the system can be cleansed within

– though or without a considerable struggle to maintain their integrity in the face of what is required by on the one hand, their allotted task and the other, their stated ideals.

Critics such as Jonny Murray have pointed to the current cinema as evidence of a 'second 1970s', where political cinema is not only found in abundance, but in mainstream cinemas. If correct, then the 2007/08 crop will be a little more low-key and uncertain than *Syriana* or *Babel*. From Britain comes Jim Threapleton's promising debut, **Extraordinary Rendition**, a fraught, economically told story of an edgy university tutor's forced abduction under the Extraordinary Rendition clause. The sharp, ragged edits and grim palette recall the airbrushed dinginess of a music video, but the setting is Kafka, the set-up decidedly Brechtian; Zaafir is examined by two parties, one hostile (a creepier than usual Andy Serkis), another potentially so; that is, us. The audience considers Zaafir's case in flashback, notably his provocative teaching style, his ambivalence towards his own Arab heritage, and post-return (shown while the interrogation is still ongoing) the very real threat he may become precisely what his captors think he is. Most disturbingly, he is beyond the help of loved ones. As a meditation on the effects of terrorism on our values, the very fabric of our lives,

In a sense, the political cinema emerging at this year's EIFF is decidedly bleaker than those recently given their day at the Oscars. Desperately upbeat, **Run Granny Run** ultimately proves is that an ordinary citizen CAN'T get elected to office in America, though if they live in a small, eccentrically minded American state and happen to be a loveable 94-year old 'Granny D', they can amass a decent protest vote. In and of herself, Doris Haddock is a woman to admire; intelligent, principled and able

to show her vulnerabilities (not least the horrific rattle in her chest as she prays at night) – she in short, has that strength of character we all profess to value, but rarely seem to vote for.

More's the pity perhaps. But are there not real dangers in foregrounding character over more prosaic issues such as policy or ideology. The real function of figures such as Granny D, or the rip-roaring Reverend Billy, star of Rob VanAlkemade's **What Would Jesus Buy?** is to act as a personification of an America to believe in. The existence of such gloriously unconventional types serve as an inverted scapegoat, reassuring us that someone will carry these burdens for us, so long as we believe in them. In Debbie Melnyk and Rick Caine's **Manufacturing Dissent**, we come to grips with the granddaddy of them all, Michael Moore. A television piece recast as a cinematic documentary, it fails as a film but does achieve astonishing moments of clarity. Attempting to secure an interview, Melnyk and Caine dog Moore's steps in unintentional parody of **Rodger and Me**, revealing along the way his factual inaccuracies, his perversion of truth of what happened in Flint (where **Rodger and Me** is set) Melnyk reveals that Moore omitted the vast popular front of unions and community groups opposed to General Motor's bid for Tax Abatements in favour of casting himself as the lone crusader. Moore himself remains remote – even slightly monstrous. Melnyk and Paine gain access to one of Michael Moore's speaking engagements, an event every bit as jingoistic and hysterical as a Republican Party Rally. The Right Rev. Moore is here skilfully rhetorical, knowing his audiences do not want answers, but a focus for their anger, and which he obliges; Bush, Cheney, Ralph Nader are invoked to tumultuous applause by his followers, all so glad to be unhappy. ■

Mitchell Miller

Scotrail's job is to make profits for its investors - not to provide a service for the Scottish public.

**Take back the franchise.
Make rail work for you.**

Executive Committee of ASLEF – the union for the UK's train drivers
Keith Norman: General Secretary
Alan Donnelly : President
www.aslef.org.uk

The Great War for Civilisation - the conquest of the Middle East, Robert Fisk, pages 1350, Harper Perennial (revised edition) 2006

So that's the Democrats comfortably back in control of Congress and the front-man for the occupation of Iraq - perhaps the worst-managed imperial adventure in history - increasingly isolated in his White House. In his remaining time there, the documentary record of policy with regard to Iraq will come under ever-more intense scrutiny.

It remains to be seen just what documented skullduggery might yet come to light, not least with regard to the role of the Fettes Whore at the strutting heel of Bush the Son: that Colossus of Freedom, that Leviathan of Democracy.

What happened in Iraq is already perfectly clear, of course. A junta in America's corporate and neo-Conservative foreign policy establishments saw an opportunity to use American military might in the cause of destroying Iraq, establishing in its place a post-modernist Fort Laramie for the strategic domination of the region, and so ensure preferential - and fantastically profitable - American access to its oil and gas resources. For this, Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction and the neo-Narodnik spectacle of the Two Big Towers were timeous and highly convenient excuses.

Had the venture been properly managed, it might even have worked - and established US hegemony in the Middle East for the next quarter - or half-century. But it did not, has not and - according to all the present signs - will not. Iraq, certainly, along with its once-glorious capital, has been destroyed - and the Middle East is more unstable than ever, and America's position there even more exposed than ever.

The why and the how of this murderous imperial disaster for the people of the region is, *inter alia*, the subject of Robert Fisk's magisterial memoir of his thirty years covering the conflicts of the Middle East. In the shadow of Fox News (and, at times, the BBC) one hesitates to describe Fisk as a journalist. After all, Western reporting of the seemingly endemic wars and troubles that arc from Lebanon to the far and dusty shores of Afghanistan bring no credit on what - at times - can be an honourable trade. But Fisk is indeed a journalist - and a writer and historian - of the highest quality and integrity, and his mighty epic of reportage is lyrical in its detail, savage in its judgements, and enormously and expertly informed in turn.

The book recalls the Armenian Holocaust of 1915 (a Holocaust denied² by Simon Peres of Israel), and casts a jaundiced eye over Britain's own last adventure in armed imperialism at Suez, as well as the fearsome bloodbath inherited by the Algerians in the wake of the long French imperial venture there. Nor does Fisk omit scrutiny of the popular overthrow of that US satrap, the Iranian Shah, in the 1970s, and the terrible war between Iraq and Iran in the 1980s. But Fisk also brings his critical eye to rather more recent events in the region - the first invasion of Iraq by America and her puppets, the terrible reign - or rain - of sanctions that followed there, and the post 9/11 invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. And then, of course, there is the continuing situation in Palestine

None of this, it can be said with absolute certainty, make pretty reading, from the corrupt proto-fascist regimes kept in power by the Americans to the extensive use of depleted uranium ordnance in Bush the Father's invasion of Iraq.

Naturally, the intelligent Western reader will be aware that Fisk's allegations about the subsequent plague of tumours, gangrenes, missing limbs, child mastectomies and congenital shrunken heads can, of course, be no more than an Islamist lie.

After all, they were denied by no less an authority on these matters than Douglas Henderson, Britain's then-minister for the armed forces, who felt able to assure all educated and liberal opinion in 1998 that, the Government has not seen any peer-reviewed epidemiological research data on this population to support these claims and it would therefore be premature to comment on this matter.

Or what about the extensive physical destruction of the socialist and communist Lefts throughout so much of the Arab and Muslim worlds, at the bloody hands of secular-fascist and clerical-fascist regimes - a subject surely worthy of a book in English in itself, and one which would doubtless be marvellously illuminated by the files of the CIA? Among other things, after all, this might help explain why so much of the anti-imperialist struggle in those worlds is in the hands of reactionary Islamists - tholed to a powerless politics of gesture and rhetoric born ineluctably from a long history of humiliation and defeat.

Nor does Fisk flinch from comment on the extraordinary lockgrip that America's Zionist lobby has on American media and political debate on Palestine, or on America's policies there (to no discernible advantage to the United States either). And the Western media does not emerge with much credit at all from Fisk's account of coverage of recent imperial adventures in the Middle East - journalists as fans with gasmasks, embedded propagandists, characterised by enormous self-importance and equally enormous ignorance, and all in thrall to that unwritten but immensely powerful code of self-censorship and balance.

But what does this matter in the grand scheme of things? After all, when the Americans occupied Baghdad they watched all the ministries burn down (apart, of course, from the ministries of oil and the interior), along with the National Library and its archives, and the capital's collection of priceless Korans.

In all, this book is a testament to Fisk's moral and often physical courage and energy. It is one of the great books of journalism, and one of the great books about journalism. It is also one of the great books in English about the Arab and Muslim world in the Middle East and beyond.

Where, one wonders, is that world's version of Fisk working from Europe today?

Iain Fraser Grigor

scottishleftreview

The Scottish Left Review is a non-profit making publication. Please subscribe or make a donation by filling in your details in the form below and returning to Scottish Left Review, 741 Shields Road, Pollokshields, Glasgow G41 4PL

Name _____

Address _____

Tel: _____ e-mail: _____

Subscription/Donation _____

Date: _____

I42

Subscriptions: £15 waged/£10 Unwaged. Additional donations will be gratefully received
Cheques should be crossed and made payable to: Left Review Scotland Ltd.



Campaigning for the return of rail to the public sector

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

Let's put the public back in public transport

Bob Crow, General Secretary

John Leach, President

web review

Henry McCubbin

Twas odds, belike, when valiant Warwick fled:
Oft have I heard his praises in pursuit,
But ne'er till now his scandal of retire. Richard in Henry VI

Whilst recently researching the Warwick Agreement between affiliated Unions and the Labour Party it struck me that large sections of the agreement could be under the control of the Scottish Government. This begs the question has there been any contact between the STUC and our Government in Scotland over relevant issues?

Such a contact could prove to be of interest with all of the shadow boxing taking place over the likelihood of an early Westminster election. It is particularly of interest when one hears that members of the TUC General Council are reported to have declared that there will be no Warwick II agreement and that it should be all hands on deck to ensure a Labour victory. This, taking into account the way Warwick has been disregarded in the main by the Labour Government. George Monbiot's recent contribution to this debate in the Guardian is illuminating and can be found at www.monbiot.com/archives/2007/07/10/union-with-the-devil.

A list of the union's demands can be found at www.unionstogether.org.uk/articles/employment.html

A debate on agency workers and the watered down response British Government response can be found at www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmhansrd/cm070302/debtext/70302-0010.htm

Three of the leading unions' leaders have laid out their union's views on this agreement at respectively www.amicustheunion.org/Default.aspx?page=1194

www.gmb.org.uk/shared_asp_files/GFSR.asp?NodeID=95563 and

www.tgwu.org.uk/Templates/Internal.asp?NodeID=93490&int1stParentNodeID=42438&int2ndParentNodeID=90594

Their lack of fighting spirit could easily lead politics back to 1979 when the unions' public sector members rebelled at wage cuts and the party that Callaghan declared as over turned out to be the Labour party.



Kick Up The Tabloids

Buckfast, anyone?

This has been a summer of whirlwind change during the first 100 days of Alex Salmond's Scottish Government, which started that 100 days as the Scottish Executive. We also saw the launch of Eck's roadmap to Scottish Independence, A National Conversation. The title of this paper if nothing else should be an illustration of how our sights have been lowered over the centuries. In 1320, we published the Declaration of Arboath, proudly declaring: "For so long as a hundred of us remain alive, we shall never in any degree be subject to the dominion of the English. For it is not for honours or riches that we fight, but for liberty alone, which no good man gives up but with his life". In 2007, it seems a declaration is a tad strong. So, instead, we have a conversation, doubtless claiming: "For so long as a hundred of us remain alive, we shall carry out an ongoing dialogue, as to whether or not we shall remain subject to the dominion of the English. And to have a conversation as to what riches, honours and liberties we can have further devolved back to us, without a fight".

Meanwhile, Edinburgh City Council have decided to stop their rather short-sighted policy of providing publicly-funded education and instead to look at other ways of better spending our money. Council leader Jenny Dawe wants to close down half the city's schools and also to bring back ceremonial robes for councillors. In her words, this will "distinguish them from the hoi-polloi". The fact that the "hoi-polloi" will no longer be well-enough educated to know what "hoi-polloi" means appears to have escaped her.

A somewhat more familiar problem raised its head again this month, namely Scotland's difficult relationship with the booze. Justice Minister Kenny McAskill wants to combat our drunken slobbish lifestyle through banning 3-for-2 drinks offers in supermarkets and off-licences. Such multi-deals, and the accessibility of cheap alcohol, are said to fuel drunken, violent anti-social behaviour. Indeed, if only such a law had been in place in 1999, where the government's irresponsible attitude to sales of alcohol led to Kenny McAskill himself being arrested at an England-Scotland game on suspicion of being drunk and disorderly. Other bills coming before the next session of parliament will include The Shutting of Stable Doors (Scotland) Act 2007.

In any case, all of us know that binge drinking is not caused by cheap alcohol. You only need to pick up a tabloid paper to find out it is caused by Amy Winehouse. I personally am a big fan of the work of Amy Winehouse, on and off stage. Some people claim she is tortured and misunderstood. In reality, she is a young woman who just likes to get off her face and has enough

cash to do so any time she likes (3-for-2 drinks offers or not). How difficult is that to understand?

Her in-laws believe that if all of us were to boycott her records, that this would bring Amy to her senses. I can think of few things more utterly pointless. Firstly, she is already rich enough to drink herself to death several times over. Secondly, if she is so permanently hammered as has been claimed, she's likely to be far too pissed to notice the odd royalty cheque not coming through the post. Any sensible person, however, can see the answer to Amy's problems is to do what dads of my father's generation used to do the first time they caught a teenager smoking, namely to make them smoke a whole packet in one go. I think Winehouse's record label should set up a John Smeaton style website, where she can have thousands of drinks bought for her. That should put an end to it, one way or the other.

Talking of Scotland's number one celebrity baggage-handler-cum-national-hero, Smeato has been invited to appear in New York at the sixth anniversary ceremony for 9/11. While we all were impressed by his bravery in jumping on a burning terrorist at Glasgow Airport, quite what he could have done to prevent 9/11 is open to conjecture. Unless the Americans view him as some kind of Marvel Comics superhero, who on seeing the first plane approaching the World Trade Centre, would have abseiled down the North Tower and punched the plane before it hit its target. Celebrity would appear to be going to Smeato's head, if his column in the Sun is anything to go by. He has a pop at Scotland's number one man-of-the-people-cum-chat-show-host, claiming "Tommy Sheridan is too tanned to be a grafted".

Smeato really needs to have a word with himself on three counts here. Firstly it's the perma-tanned population of the West of Scotland, grafters or not, whose regular trips to Magaluf and Fuerteventura keep John Smeaton in a job. Secondly, if Smeato's act of heroism had gone even slightly wrong, he would have ended up a lot more tanned than Tommy Sheridan. And finally, he confuses lack of a tan with hard graft. As a child, I remember the old man who dug the ditch on the Loch Awe road six days a week, 52 weeks in all weather. He was tanned the colour of mahogany as a result. Correct me if I'm wrong, but this strikes me as being harder work than loading other people's suitcases onto a trailer and occasionally making sure they end up on the right plane.

Do yourself a favour, Smeato. Stay out of the Sun!

It's Scotland's Water

revitalising
our public
services

~~Privatisation?~~ ~~Mutualisation?~~ **How should we deliver Scotland's Water?**

**How about a democratically-controlled, publicly-owned service
delivering water at half the cost of England's private companies?**

Come and hear how from:

Chair

Bill Kidd - MSP for Glasgow

Jim and Margaret Cuthbert - from the Public Interest Research Network. Experts in the financing of the water industry.

Dave Watson - Scottish Organiser (Policy) UNISONScotland - the largest water union

Friday 26 October, 12.30 - 1.30pm, Strathspey Suite, Aviemore Conference Centre, SNP Conference Refreshments and Buffet



If you want to find out more about the campaign to keep Scotland's water public, contact UNISON.
d.watson@unison.co.uk, 0870 7777 006. www.unison-scotland.org.uk/water/water