

Flogging a dead granny

Can they save the Jubilee in Scotland?



Tom Nairn, Alasdair Gray, Richard Finlay, Isobel Lindsay

Bill Bonnar on trade union funding

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comment

A full-page advert in a tabloid newspaper costs tens of thousands of pounds. You would pay thousands of pounds a second for television advertising. So do the maths for yourself – we have just seen one of the most expensive advertising campaigns in history. In the space of a week or so, we have seen a campaign run which, if any of us was to try to replicate it, would have cost us hundreds of millions of pounds. And what have we been urged to buy? On sale was a vision of a deeply conservative Britain of subjects of a monarch and her dysfunctional family. We were sold a Jubilee which they were petrified was going to be stillborn. And as we all know, it worked a treat; en masse, Britain was persuaded to come out in misty-eyed support for one of its most reactionary symbols.

Or so we have been led to believe. Even the left-wing commentators in our more thoughtful media have been scrambling to try to make sense of the groundswell of support for an institution their instincts had told them was slipping from the nation's understanding of itself. OK, they have said, we got this one wrong; people still love their Queen. The whole debate seems to have been turned around and much of the left (particularly in England) are trying to find a way to reimagine a Britain in which a belief in egalitarianism and the hope for change can be integrated seamlessly with an deep-rooted sense of tradition and genuine affection for the most visible remnants of a completely inegalitarian past. Imagine if the biotech corporations could run a campaign which would convince even the sceptical scientists with laboratories full of evidence of the dangers of genetically modified foods that they should be accepted anyway. Or a poster campaign that could persuade the Countryside Alliance just to accept that fox hunting had been banned and to accept it. That is what we have just seen.

'What could we do?' say the left – this was not a normal advertising campaign. It is more like a government-backed advert for Coca-Cola which banned all publicity for Pepsi. We are just going to have to accept the fact that the people of Britain have been brought up in a state-backed ideology-monopoly. That some on the left have given up the ghost so quickly seems perverse. We have all been fooled.

Anyone who knows television knows how partial the lens is. When the Westminster Parliament first agreed to allow television coverage of its proceedings the one thing it was very strict about was camera angles. There were to be no long-shots revealing the reaction of backbenchers to what was being said. There was to be no close-ups of opposition politicians (or more damagingly backbenchers of the same party) grimacing or mocking during a speech.

They knew perfectly well that, depending on selection, visual images can have a very powerful subverting effect. Irrespective of what the journalist is saying in voice over, the pictures set the tone. Naturally, no one knows this more than television producers who are very careful about the images they use. They were here to praise a granny, not bury her, and that was damned-sure what they were going to do.

So when you see unusual angles being used to show the floral tributes spontaneously laid in front of palace gates, you know for sure that these are the best they could do. And anyone who was actually looking would have noticed that, even in a tight shot, they were pretty sparse in the first days. In recent years various football tragedies (for example) have certainly brought out more of a floral tribute, and that is often without the clever angles.

Then there is the queuing. 200,000 people waiting to see the old dear lying in state, we are told. The fact that almost all the vox pops taken from the queue revealed either fairly dispassionate curiosity or a zeal which would be described as fanaticism if it had been in support of anything else tells us much. Remember, if these are the nosy ghouls and nutcases that were deemed the best for broadcast, the rest were certainly much worse. And that quite a few of these odd-balls were queuing for the third or fourth time drastically reduces those inflated viewing figures.

Then there is the funeral. Have you seen a wide-angled shot of the crowds outside Westminster Abbey, either in print or broadcast? Does that not seem strange? Then there were the crowds on the route. In the television footage it was hard to see points on the procession where people were more than three or four deep. Again, if those are the shots chosen what did the other shots look like? And then there is the unchallenged assumption that these people came to see the funeral and didn't just happen to be there. If a random person were to travel the same route tomorrow with a similar procession, how many people would be there? How many people would look round? Surely there are more than a million people on the streets of London on an average day?

And then consider your experience of the real world as opposed to the vision of the world mediated by the Baron Munchausens. Who do you know that was actually upset? Or even interested? How often did you dance the don't-offend-tango – shuffling, itching to say in company that this is a lot of nonsense but scared of the reaction even though you are virtually sure you can see everyone else shuffling as well? Then there is the incontrovertible

evidence of the real world; 1,700 calls to complain that Antiques Roadshow was cancelled and two calls of support for the coverage. If the evidence of the state seems pretty ropery, the objective evidence contradicts the official line and your personal experience comes down heavily in the other direction, why the hell would you swallow the propaganda? The left was right about the direction of the public view on this issue and still is.

So what should we be talking about? Well, the trailer is over and the feature presentation is about to begin. In a few weeks time the Queen will be leading us in a group rendition of The Beatles' All You Need is Love to mark her Golden Jubilee (wincing yet?). The Palace is getting its act together and seems to have finally learned the act of media manipulation. We are being drip-fed trivia (the Queen Mum did Ali G impersonations indeed...) which is getting uncritical coverage. The momentum that coffin generated will not be allowed to dissipate. (The only surprise in the increased professionalism of the Palace's media machine is that they didn't organise a few more calls to the BBC in support of the coverage to bolster those two real callers – a fairly basic step surely?)

Whether a referendum would actually lead to the abolition of the Monarchy if held in the near future is an open question. Naturally, the debate about republicanism must go on, but it is a mistake not to realise that behind the propaganda lies a genuine constituency in favour of the monarchy. What the left should be pushing for now is the politicisation of the issue. What was remarkable was that hundreds and hundreds of pro-monarchy punters got unlimited airtime while the vast numbers of people opposed to the Monarchy were disappeared. There was a brief disclaimer on the BBC after 15 minutes of forelock-tugging vox pops that these did not represent all views. Damn right they didn't. Where was the balance? When will the BBC at least pay lip service to its Charter and the enormous number of republicans in this country and give us a right to reply? The future of the Monarchy is no longer a consensual issue and this must be recognised right now.

It may be premature to assume there is mass popular support for a British Republic, but that there is now a debate is indisputable. And in Scotland, even given the sectarian symbolism, support for the Monarchy is certainly much lower. It is time to fight for balanced coverage of what Mike Small calls in this issue of SLR the Dead Monkey Society. The Canutes can't ignore this for much longer. If this really is a democracy, a publicly audible voice must be returned to those who see the Jubilee as a

the party is over

Tom Nairn argues that nostalgia may be sustaining the place of the Monarchy but that constitutional change is making steady progress

I no longer recall the name of the village. On a sunny afternoon in June, 1977, somewhere in Somerset or Devon, we ended there by accident, after taking a wrong turning off the main road from Bristol down into Cornwall. Attempting a U-turn in the narrow High Street, I backed the Volkswagen van into a Jubilee street party.

There were trestle tables set up in the middle of the side street, with odd assortments of chairs brought out from the terraced houses. Plates of sandwiches and cakes were lined up, with big metal tea-pots, and red, white and blue bunting was draped over the garden railings and in between the front doors. A large framed print of Queen Elizabeth II was propped up at the end of the row, just where I finally stalled. People came forward to see if they could help. "It's our Jubilee party", one of them explained, "...I hope we're not in your way."

They explained how to get back to the main road, simultaneously inviting us to the party. It was all done with such kindness there was no way to refuse. My partner of that time, Christine, was handicapped, and they could see the wheel-chair in the van. We needed space to put down the ramps for it, and someone led me into an adjoining street with wider pavements. I explained we had come from Scotland. "You'll be ready for a cup of tea, then!" said a bright, organising lady who had taken charge of events. She led us back round the corner, and cleared enough space for Christine at one of the trestles.

The conversation was not of Empire or grandeur, and I don't remember the Monarchy itself being even mentioned. These were taken for granted among the scones and sandwiches. It was like finding oneself in an unexpected and astonishingly extended family. On that day I had noticed how the signals of familiarity multiplied south of the border: there were no flags in Scotland, but they became visible in Cumbria and Lancashire, even from the motorway.

In 1977 the parameters of this re-imagined community were still vast. They extended to Vancouver and Auckland, and were 'spontaneous' in the sense of popularly willed and enjoyed. The local council 'encouraged' the event (the same lady explained) but it was almost all voluntary. If the weather stayed fine they would clear some of the tables later on, and make part of the street into a dance floor. Not too late, she insisted: a kind of superior self-restraint was built into the display, at once stuffy and reassuring. But within its profound conservatism, there was also something innocent and protective. It had grabbed, bullied

and exploited a quarter of the habitable globe. Yet 'decent' was the code word for the resulting metaphorical kinship: the homeliness of living icons with foibles. They were 'what we stood for', and it was still important to show it.

Half an hour or so later, we were back on our way. Twenty-five years later, I look back on that distant summer with curiosity, verging upon disbelief. The heart of those times has ceased to beat. It was two years before the winter of discontent, when Margaret Thatcher emerged out of the ruins of post-war social democracy; and twenty-three years before the fiasco of New Labour's Millenium Dome. In 2002, everyone knows that what 1977 did stand for can never be recreated. It lives on only among some Ulster Protestants, for motives no longer shared by the mainland nations. Among the latter it can only be half-heartedly simulated, by stilted professions of loyalty, or clammy calculations that the state requires the Monarchy to stay United.

Official fears of a damp-squib Golden Jubilee are justified, now unrelieved by wild hopes of 'inspiring' enthusiasm from above. Yet the Great and Good should not despair. They still have something pretty significant to work on, and with: nostalgia. Between 1977 and the present a huge sea-change took place, on the level of economics and (hence) social relationships. The solvents of belated modernisation destroyed an older sense of deferential community. Although this had itself been artfully built up over a century and a half, by the '70s it was tradition, and capable of figuring today as 'the world we have lost'. Naturally, people are attached to such customs in common. They inhabit a neo-liberal or 'entrepreneurial' society (hall-marked 'Thatcher', currently franchised to Tony Blair); but their emotional sense of significance ('what we stand for', etc.) dates from antecedent times, which in the rear-view mirror appear more comforting than was really the case.

Such attitudes and sentiments 'decay', or wither away. But they are not being allowed to: that's the point. In the United Kingdom, society has changed but the state remains essentially unaltered. Since 1979 it has been ruled by unbending Royalists, apostles of 1688 and 1707, fervents of first-past-the-post Sovereignty, and apparatchiks of Britain's 'pivotal' posture in world affairs. Blair's tinkering with the constitution is a way of keeping that show going. Because there are now few differences in socio-economic policy, political ideology has grown more important. And here the 'Great' redemption formula has become: ossified

conformism of opinion, plus respectful devolution, plus nostalgia. All three need the Monarchy to survive.

This was demonstrated the year New Labour won power, twenty years after 1977's street party. Princess Diana's aberrant death produced an astonishing wave of popular feeling and demonstration. This was directed immediately against Royal officialdom and stodgy out-of-touchness. A people so long schooled in imagined Royal communalism could manifest discontent and longing solely in this mode. It produced the mightiest wake of modern times - in fact, the true funeral rites of Victorian Monarchy. But officialdom is of a piece, as Blair and his New apparatchiki at once realized. They had to save and restore the cadaver of Windsordom, in order to keep Westminster (and their own authority) intact.

Nostalgia is often conceived as a sentimental excess, or a kind of indulgence. In reality it is one of the deepest social emotions: the emotive terrain most people stand on, most of the time. It goes to the root, and this is why in 1977 republicans were still treated as outcasts, aliens or cranks. Also, disappointed or insulted nostalgia turns readily into sheer vitriol - that cynical disenchantment which has in the intervening generation come to mark British politics and public life. It attained a new depth at last year's general election, when forty per cent of electors simply stayed away, and New Labour 'triumphed' on less than one quarter of the vote. Nor is there any indication of this descent stopping, or even

slowing down. It seems to have assumed vicious-circle characteristics, within which the current Golden Jubilee will signal a further slump.

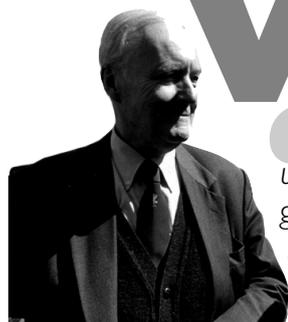
The only factor likely to mitigate this effect is death. There is nothing surprising about the large numbers attending the Queen Mother's obsequies. They were being sorry for themselves, and not without some cause. However, the scale of such grief may provide an excuse for the dismal and low-key 'celebrations' to follow. That's how they would have been anyway, but the Blairites can explain it in their usual cant. Many more exaltations of think-tank 'community' will perturb the ether this summer, as British statehood settles back into its coffin.

In Scotland people should be quietly working away on their own wooden stake and silver bullets. Republicanism no longer needs to be strident and hysterical - just workmanlike and patient. Most voters don't yet profess it, but this is now largely the work of a scumbag press and hobbled media - the artificers of an increasingly strained nostalgia-culture, the termites of 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it!' In truth it has been broken for years, and Scottish self-government is quietly assembling the means to fix it, by joining the ranks of modern democracy and constitution-building. It will get round to holding far better parties than the UK Monarchy ever did; and in our own time. ■

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consuming identities

Richard Finlay argues that rather than declining in significance, symbols like the Monarchy may become even more important in a depoliticised Britain

The death of the Queen Mother this Easter has helped to bring back to the public's attention the role of the monarchy in Scottish national identity. Now while this may seem a rather arcane subject in Scottish politics because there are certainly more important issues that politicians should be debating, it may rear its head due to a number of factors. Firstly, issues of national identity in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, England and Britain have become more politically charged by the impact of devolution. Secondly, notions of citizenship have become a bit of a buzz word. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the politics of identity are cheap and do not threaten a fundamental redistribution of society's wealth.

This is an issue that few commentators have picked up on. In an era of global capitalism in which there is a consensus that the market can neither be bucked nor challenged and that all 'serious' politicians and political parties must adhere to an unwritten constitution of low taxation, private enterprise and 'value for money' in the public services, the ability of political parties to offer radical alternatives has been greatly diminished. Presentational skills and spin have become the most important weapon in the political armoury in that the established political parties basically are contesting not alternative programmes and objectives, but management styles. Even the SNP has found that its ability to project a different Scotland under independence has been compromised by the fact that most European governments operate with broadly the same socio-economic policies and that with the expansion of the European Union the remnants of the powers once enjoyed by nation states are on the decrease. The argument for Scottish independence essentially boils down to the belief that Scotland would work better under new management. Hence, debates about identity and citizenship are on the increase because they do not raise the thorny issue of class which would mean discussions of the issue of redistribution which would follow on from that. Discussion of citizenship and

what it means to be Scottish, British or European will not redress any problems of social inequality.

It is with reference to the latter point that we may expect to see the issue of monarchy become a feature of debate in Scottish politics. Whereas much of the debate surrounding nationalism and the creation of a parliament in Edinburgh

If Law, education and the Church formed a historic holy trinity of Scottish national identity in the period after the Union, British identity was maintained in Scotland by the holy trinity of Parliament, the armed forces and the monarchy

in the eighties and nineties was a reaction to the imposition of Thatcherite policies on an unwilling nation and a belief that some measure of political autonomy would lead to a fairer and more just society, the momentum of political change as a means to social change has stopped dead on its feet. Now it might be said that within the parameters offered by political devolution, radical alternatives are not on the agenda, but even so, the parliament has demonstrated a marked reluctance to push at those boundaries nor has it to any great extent questioned the assumptions which bound current political culture into accepting the virtue of the market place. So what is left? Was the Scottish radicalism of the eighties and nineties nothing more than a hypocritical sham in which the Scots were quite happy to make the most of Thatcherite policies while being able to publicly bleat about social injustice? What was the purpose of the new found sense of Scottish identity for? Has it achieved recognition in its new parliament only to forget the rhetoric of the eighties and nineties which begot it in the first place?

It may be that a parliament in and of itself is enough to satisfy the aspirations of Scottish national identity. Yet, there will remain the question of how far that identity can be pushed away from Britain and the political ramifications which will follow. This is a serious issue as it is the objective of the second largest political party and the objective of the largest is to halt that process. Debates about identity will have the added bonus for both organisations in that it will help deflect attention from the altogether more awkward issue of economic redistribution. The SNP got its fingers burnt with the hardly radical penny for Scotland and has since backed away from issues of wider reform. The idea of the eighties

and nineties that either an independent or self-governing Scotland would be a more radical and fairer society has not been borne out by recent developments, although there has been a degree of tokenism in that direction; a sort of Scottish feel-good politics.

In the battle of the politics of national identity north of the border, Scottishness has had it all its own way in recent times as Britishness has been too strongly identified with the Thatcher legacy. Yet, we can expect that to change. Whereas New Labour was initially hostile to history and looking backwards in its enthusiasm to present itself as new, it has recently come to appreciate that in the contest of spin, history and tradition are formidable weapons that can be made to work for good political advantage. As the social problems attendant on mass poverty have proved more insuperable, much of New Labour rhetoric has taken a backward and nostalgic look at the past as family values, decency and citizenship have been brought in to check the collapse of traditional morality. A new identification with English nationality which does not belong to the right and some soul searching as to the meaning of Britishness has also moved issues of national identity higher up the political agenda. This, together with a media preoccupation with the past as witnessed by the popularity of Simon Shama's *History of Britain* means that a reinvented British identity is fair game for political strategists. As might be expected, central to that identity is the role of the monarch, especially in this Jubilee year and also the fact that the 400 anniversary of the Union of the Crowns comes up in 1603.

The crisis of the monarchy which engulfed the Royal Family following the aftermath of the death of Diana has largely been checked and the Buckingham Palace PR machine has demonstrated itself to be as formidable as that operating from 10 Downing Street. The monarchy has also shown itself to be especially aware of its Scottish dimension. If Law, education and the Church formed a historic holy trinity of Scottish national identity in the period after the Union, British identity was maintained in Scotland by the holy trinity of Parliament, the armed forces and the monarchy. Although Westminster may have

declined in symbolic significance following the opening of the parliament in Edinburgh, the royal family and the armed forces remain potent symbols of Britishness (interestingly the latter have also increased their Scottish dimension as a means to encourage recruitment). Whereas the Scots have been debating questions of identity for the best part of two decades, the issue of Britishness and Englishness has received little attention. That may be about to change.

A reinvented British identity which emphasises inclusiveness, fair play, historic institutions and a nostalgic rendition of the past, may be unrecognisable to professional historians, but then it would not be for them. Rather, as social and economic policies become straight-jacketed into accepting the consensus of the global economy, the feelgood factor of having a fine history and tradition which keeps a sense of Britishness alive in a world where global economics curtail national government's ability to take independent measures might emerge as an attractive political panacea and keep alive the memory rather than the reality of an independent British nation state. Such a strategy would also have the advantage of ameliorating the impact of the European Union. It might be argued that this will have little to do with Scotland. Yet, it should be remembered that the campaign for home rule arose as a reaction to Thatcherism. Similarly, if the wider political interests of the British state require a new sense of history, little thought

will be given to the consequences north of the border. The new sense of Scottish identity which promised much politically, but as yet delivered little, may face a challenge from a new British identity in the competition for the feelgood factor. If politics becomes increasingly dominated by consumer national identities, Scottish politicians ought to remember that the advantage of the market place lies with the greater purchasing power and distribution networks held by the British political system. ■

Debates about identity will have the added bonus that they will help deflect attention from the altogether more awkward issue of economic redistribution

Dr Richard Finlay is a historian at Strathclyde University

calling their bluff

Isobel Lindsay argues that the debate over the Monarchy shows just how risk-averse our politicians are - wrongly

On a visit to the Western Isles many years ago, I was struck by the number of people who said they had no objection to Sunday openings but there were a lot of people who would be offended by it so it was best to say nothing. On many issues in the wider Scottish context, there is the perception that there are 'a lot of people who would be offended' by the honest expression of opinion. Added to this is the problem of 'a lot of newsprint that would be offended'. It may be that the conventional political wisdom has got it wrong and that there is no great loss and possibly some gain from the well-argued expression of opinion which departs from the orthodox. The evidence suggests that this works for the individual politician; it may also work for the parties.

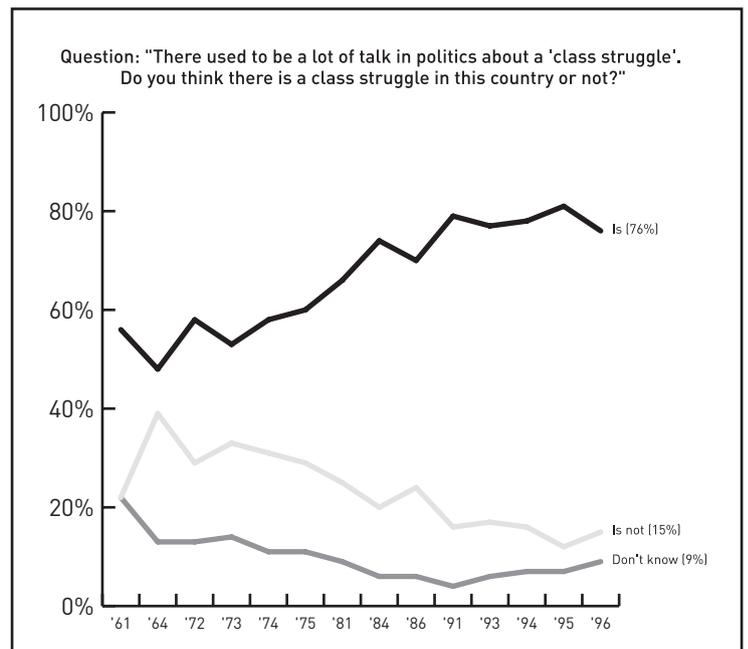
Even in much more deferential times, Willie Hamilton's notorious anti-monarchy stance caused him no electoral disadvantage. George Galloway's radical positioning on a variety of issues does not appear to have caused him electoral problems. Similarly with Dennis Canavan. Roseanna Cunningham's republicanism was not a bar to re-election in a constituency that might have been expected to be prone to conservatism on the monarchy question. Also in retrospect the massive media assault aimed at Alex Salmond over his opposition to the NATO Kosovo strategy, together with the over-the-top attacks on the penny tax rise proposals, produced a vote for him and for the SNP which was probably not much different from what it might have been if these issues had not arisen. The case of Tommy Sheridan and the SSP has been interesting in this respect. If a mass-circulation tabloid could destroy politicians and parties, then Tommy and the SSP should be looking into the abyss. Instead their prospects are of steady gains and the abyss is probably where the Daily Record editor and circulation are going. In this instance we cannot blame the proprietors since the Mirror in England has been allowed to move somewhat to the left to give it a better chance to halt its decline.

Public respect is currently at its lowest for the apparatchiks - the politicians who do what they are told by the party managers, who work hard at suppressing any independent thought and who will move in the direction of the leadership line no matter how sharp the opinion turns they must take. Not only do the public not respect them, they don't remember them. They come off a production line; if one

goes, another replacement will appear. A politician who challenges starts with an advantage. Who is going to remember the scores of sycophantic speeches about the Queen Mother at Westminster and Holyrood? But if one MP or MSP had said that this was a woman of enormous privilege and self-indulgence with fifty servants and a six million pound overdraft whose lavish funeral ceremonial was designed to boost the flagging fortunes of 'the Firm', think of the impact. The Daily Mail would have been apoplectic but many electors would have agreed and others would have had cause to think. People would at least have remembered the rebel's name.

For Labour and the SNP the big problem that is emerging is how to motivate working-class voters and young voters. Is the fear of offending the tabloids and dominant vested interests inhibiting their capacity to relate to substantial sections of the electorate? Do the parties have their finger on the public pulse or are they trapped in the straightjacket of orthodoxy, worrying about a supposed 'lot of people' who would be offended?

One outstanding example of this emerged in an article by journalist Brian Deer (New Statesman, 23/8/96). He discovered that Gallup had been asking the same question on social class since 1961 and the trend of the answers had moved in an unexpected direction. These were the findings:



What is notable about these figures is not only the upward trend of those thinking there is a class struggle but the small number of Don't Knows. Over this period, mainstream political, media and academic opinion has emphasised the

decline in class politics and the growth of the life-style/consumer society that transcends economic divisions. It looks as if many centre/left politicians lost the place.

We shouldn't really be surprised that a large majority feel that society is more class-divided in the 1990s than in the 1960s. There are substantial sections of the middle-class who have more experience of insecurity and arbitrary power now than in the past. Company take-overs, privatisation, increased workload with down-sizing, more ruthless and intrusive managerial power - these are now commonplace experiences for many who were more protected in earlier decades. The traditional unionised working class in the earlier post-war decades could from time-to-time flex their muscles and win. That rarely happens now. Today we have a large section of the young in higher education but they have to sustain themselves in low-grade jobs. They have direct knowledge of what it's like. This extensive personal knowledge of inequality and powerlessness compared with increasingly unrestrained and greedy elites, is the raw material of political opinion. However it finds little expression in the larger political parties.

It does not, of course, follow that those who see society as class-divided will support a left political position. They may want to identify with the winning side - it was the aspirational skilled working class in England who played a key role in sustaining Margaret Thatcher. Or they may be the fatalistic, cynical non-voters who are a growing group in our electorate. They come from those in the community who need politics most but who do not believe that politics can produce change for them. But if the awareness of inequality and conflicting economic interests is widespread, you would expect that the major parties would see this as a prime theme to which they should relate. Yet are any of the large parties offering an equality agenda? Labour have made it clear that they will not seriously touch the privileges of the top five percent never mind the top ten percent. The recent Budget involves more redistribution from the middle and touches only earned income, not unearned. In comparison with the huge increases enjoyed by the wealthy, this is small change. They will talk about social inclusion but rarely social equality and class is a taboo word. One of the main justifications for their privatisation and PPP programmes is that ultimately wages and conditions will be worse and employee bargaining power fragmented. The SNP is currently placing most of its emphasis on a private business agenda. There may be a social equality programme to come but it does not look like a priority. The conclusion has to be that either they genuinely do not believe that reducing the differentials between the richer and the poorer is a good idea or they are frightened to promote policies that would bring down the wrath of the media and the wealthy.

Many other areas of public policy have been considered off-limits for free debate. We have had over twenty years of increasing problems in relation to illegal drugs and an assumption that no mainstream politicians could even query the existing strategies. A policy was clearly failing but could not be questioned. Paul Flynn, the independent-minded Welsh Labour MP, was treated as a pariah around ten years ago for suggesting a change in the law on cannabis. But there are strong grounds for the view that many of the public were well aware that Government policies were not working and that it was time for an honest examination of alternatives. It took some senior police officers to break ranks on this issue to open up the debate marginally. Why was this a political no-go area? Were the politicians really in touch with the electorate?

Monarchy, of course, has come into this category. What many people in public life say in private, they will not say in public. Labour, SNP and the Liberal Democrats still appear to consider it essential to display their support effusively. Does this matter? Is monarchy merely the soap-opera lather of public life, not worth making a fuss about? To a considerable extent this is true. The demise of empire and the difficulty in hiding the dysfunctional nature of the personnel have undermined much of monarchy's potential to shore up hierarchical values. If presented with the option of taking a risk on either some major policy area or on the monarchy question, many on the left would have little hesitation in opting for the former. But we do not have to choose from a menu of radical options. It may be more effective to go for consistency and coherence. If we are encouraging people to demand greater equality and democratic accountability, rejection of monarchy is simply part of a wider theme. By challenging it, we reinforce these values; by not challenging it, we implicitly accept the culture of dependency and deference.

So what is it that keeps (or turns) so many of our politicians orthodox? Do they simply become more incorporated into the values of the prosperous and powerful? Many do. Or are they just frightened of tabloid rage? Many are. Or is it the public they fear? Some do. We need to put them on the spot. There are good grounds for calling the press's bluff and that of those whose priority is protecting their own privilege. The parties will not win the enthusiasm and involvement of the majority of voters by not taking risks. Playing safe and avoiding giving offence to those who have a strong voice may seem the route to political credibility and a quiet life but it is also the route to indifference and cynicism. ■

Isobel Lindsay is a lecturer in sociology at Strathclyde University

the dead monkey society

Mike Small argues for a Scottish republic

The way in which men cling to old institutions after the life has departed out of them, and out of themselves, reminds me of those monkeys which cling by their tails – aye, whose tails contract about the limbs, even the dead limbs, of the forest, and they hang suspended beyond the hunter’s reach long after they are dead...

- Henry David Thoreau

Football grounds are one of a very few places where groups of people meet in large numbers now. That’s one reason why they’re chosen as arenas where a minutes silence should be seen to be observed. Like a cold press of official public opinion clamped down over the masses. Be silent.

Now probity, respect for the dead, and old fashioned good manners are all fine things. But as Celtic fans disrupted the Minute’s Silence for the Queen Mother, all I could feel was pride that someone, somewhere, was rebelling against the clawing shameful deference being so extravagantly embraced by the English public and the State media. The thirty days of Official Mourning seemed to harken back to Britain in the ‘50s, (or even Romania in the 1970s), as even the youngest toddler were asked to spout forth on what the Queen Mum had meant to her. If we hadn’t seen such an orgy of emotion not so long ago for Tony’s ‘People’s Princess’, it would have been difficult to believe. But the scandalous disruption of the dominant ideology had also been given a preview recently, when a dissident Jambo cried “Vive la Republic!” during the hushed moments intended for Princess Margaret at Tynecastle.

I don’t want to bestow Celtic or Hearts fans with unique powers of political analysis, nor exaggerate their significance, but our response has been markedly different from that South of the Border. Maybe if we had Buckingham Palace and all the Busby Hats coining in the tourist lolly, or had been conned by all that ‘being able to look the East End in the face’ malarkey, we’d have been filling the flasks of tea and manning the streets with all the gusto of a Wimbledon weekend. But a Lesley Riddoch tribute programme in the days after the death of the Queen Mother was inundated with calls arguing that the thing was a farce. Even the ‘mourning’ at Holyrood, it was admitted, was ‘muted’. Maybe we’re not so susceptible to the media lore being further away from the centres of spin. Or maybe we’re not as caught up in the zeitgeist of psycho-babble – express yourself or die. Either way the mood in Scotland seemed sceptical at best.

Expressing his sympathy for the Queen and the Royal Family as a whole, Iain Duncan Smith said: “Their grief is shared by millions – not just here but throughout the world.” Whilst

Scottish Secretary, Helen Liddell added: “She was a truly Scottish Queen and her love of Scotland stayed with her to the end.” Scotland’s First Minister, Jack McConnell, chipped in adding: “Her dedication brought joy to countless people, and Scots from every walk of life will mourn her death.” Described as a “commoner”, though she was the daughter of Lord and Lady Glamis born at their Castle on the 4th August 1900, Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon had been the Empress of India. It’s time for a Scottish Republic.

You might have expected that with her passing an age of subservience and blind allegiance would have also disappeared. But evidence from the estimated two hundred thousand people who lined the streets was quite different. People spoke of having found ‘a renewed feeling of Britishness’. One patriot, David Roberts, decided on a whim last Wednesday to board a plane from Canada to attend the Queen Mother’s funeral. He summed it up saying: “It was a grand day and she deserved it all. It was absolutely spectacular. It certainly restores your faith in the age and is an example for young people. I don’t think there is a journey in my lifetime that I have wanted to complete more than this.” As the days of television tributes continued and continued and newspapers lined up their pull-out specials, you had to remind yourself that this was the scaled-down media coverage. But David’s line stuck: “I don’t think there is a journey in my lifetime that I have wanted to complete more than this.”

There’s a General Strike in Italy. The Americans have just tried to overthrow Hugo Chavez, the democratically elected President of Paraguay. An Israeli military official has confirmed that Israel has re-opened the notorious desert detention camp, Ketziot, where thousands of Palestinians were held in tents during the 1987-93 uprising against Israeli occupation. As evidence of ethnic cleansing in the West Bank town of Jenin started to filter through to western media sources, the British Government was recalled in Emergency Session. Sanctions, boycott, humanitarian aid or military intervention were not however on the agenda. Instead the elected body of Britain had been recalled to mourn the death of a woman who’d lived to the ripe old age of 102. It’s degrading to everyone.

As the emotional feeding frenzy of grief reached its crescendo, it wasn’t difficult to remember the last time such a display of black ties and hawing gush was on show. Yes the Scottish Queen was preceded by the People’s Princess, and, after a slow start, the emotional fascism kicked in like a mixed-up episode of *The Crucible*. But any sense of closure, of moving on, was ruined by a newspaper announcing that the road was now open for

Camilla and Charles to wed. Another one pondered on the possibility of Harry joining William at St Andrews. Yet another featured the story 'The Future of the Debutante', and explained the history of The Season (it dates back to Queen Anne). When these people are given the oxygen of publicity you see they capitalise on it. While Official State Mourning is due to continue till the 20th April, it might be a good idea to use the lull in blanket media coverage to consider the future.

It's not easy. As Jonathan Freedland wrote just after the funeral: "The result is a public phenomenon that republicans have to face up to. It's no good trying to dodge it, claiming the police fiddled the numbers: one wag says the Met took all those they forgot to count when estimating crowds at leftie demos in the 1980s, and added them into the figures this time. Others note that 200,000 over four days is no big deal, not when you consider half a million are expected to queue up to watch this weekend's London Marathon." But, so what? People love a spectacle, and the English love a queue. We can't reform the licensing laws to those of a modern European standard, but we can keep the pubs open late (and early) for the Jubilee. Bread and Circuses are never the most sophisticated politicking, but they do the trick.

Throughout the disasters of the 1990s, courtiers and royalist commentators consoled themselves with the thought that the death of the Queen Mother would pull indifferent or hostile subjects back into line behind her less than perfect family. So has the Queen Mum saved the day? And which nation needs re-defined? All that her death and subsequent elongated funeral phenomenon has done is highlight the gap between the political cultures of Scotland and England; the leitmotif of that element of the Scottish psyche which is thrawn and difficult. That love of queues – with their reassuring sense of order – against the dynamism of Scotland's frustrated sense of self. If the Royal experience reinforces Englishness and notions of heritage, it does so without taking contemporary Scotland with it.

As pressure mounts to release key documents about the politics of the Royal Family in the 1930s one begins to wonder what affect this will have on the image of the nation's (former) favourite grandmother. In 2000 Oxford University published papers lodged with it by the family of Lord Monckton, lawyer to the Prince of Wales. One cache, 'Box 24', was kept private. George VI's famous letter to Lord Halifax (then Foreign Secretary) in 1939 requested

the government 'to check the unauthorised emigration' of Jews. It's long been speculated that the papers reveal more detail of the appeasement views of the King and his wife. What many forget is that the trips round bombed-out London were much needed ones, as resentment grew over the realisation of the extent of this appeasement. Historians believe that Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's policy commended itself to the Royals for a number of reasons. It was considered self-evident that another war would spell doom for the British Empire. When the secrets of the famous Box 24 are revealed, one wonders how the public will reflect on the truth about the Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon. She opposed immigration her whole life, was an ardent Thatcherite, and, like her wider family, appeased Hitler to an extent as yet unclear.

If, as seems likely, the truth about the actions of the Israeli army seems as inevitable as it is gruesome, then there'll be an awful symmetry to the death of this appeaser. Tam Dalyell's efforts to inject some reality to the set-piece of a recalled parliament were as unlikely to succeed as the Labour rebels' efforts to halt a war on Iraq. Will the parliament be recalled when next we go to war?

If the Royal experience reinforces Englishness and notions of heritage, it does so without taking contemporary Scotland with it

Whilst some claim that the death of the Queen Mother provides a catalyst for reform of the Sax-Coburg dynasty, a chance to re-marry Charles, and promote the popular Princes to the fore, doubts must remain. For one, the whole modernising project of New Labour sits uncomfortably with the national embarrassment of that expensive clan of liggers. In an age of spin what do you do with Prince Philip? As the liberal movement for reform joins with the truly modernising elements of Labour,

pressure will mount for change. In the 21st Century how could you have a multi-cultural parliament with an elected second chamber ruled by a King? Whilst England basks in the grand pathos of a state funeral and glories in the orchestrated grief of a nation, another model appears. While Scotland surely contains large demographic pockets of true blue Royalists, it also has a parliament that runs smoothly without the need of such an ingrained sense of ceremony. Black Rod doesn't bang the door, the House of Lords doesn't hover uselessly wafting the stench of feudalism across the body-politic. The Scottish Parliament is online even if it's off-course. Like it or not, it's a modern invention. So, as that great English Republican Billy Bragg said: "Take down the union jack, it clashes with the sunset". It's time for a Scottish Republic. ■

Mike Small is a freelance writer

only queens and refugees

Alasdair Gray argues that an oath of allegiance is no substitute for a constitution

It is hard to write sensibly about the brainless proposal that permission to live in any part of Britain depends on swearing an oath nobody born here is expected to make, apart from The Ruling Monarch. I believe that at her coronation our Queen swore (like every other monarch since 1688) to uphold the laws of the land. Parliamentary lawyers, deriving it from the Magna Carta, devised this oath to protect the lives and property of wealthy folk from tyrant kings, and many poorer folk benefited too. So why should not new settlers here swear to uphold British laws like the Queen did?

Because the laws of Britain are so fluid not even lawyers nowadays can give an incontestable account of them. The Magna Carta was once praised because it ruled that nobody could be arrested and held in prison unless charged with a crime, or condemned without trial before a jury of their social equals. The Scots never had a Magna Carta but their laws also adopted these rules, rules our police need no longer obey. If suspected of a crime by our security forces anybody can be arrested and held for an indeterminate period, without a formal charge against them, or immediate information given to their friends or relatives, or any other old-fashioned safeguards. The police and/or security forces claim such people are prosecuted by The Crown. Under this new system (whose first stage was introduced after IRA bombings in the 1970s) several people since proved to be innocent were tortured and jailed for years, despite which The Magna Carta's rules have been breached yet further.

The Magna Carta, in fact, was **never** the foundation stone of Britain's political constitution. The rulers of Britain (unlike those of the USA and France) have never allowed a written constitution to inhibit them. Our political constitution is simply this: a Westminster parliamentary majority can make or abolish any law it agrees upon. This fact is too disturbing to be openly admitted so new members of that Parliament swear an oath of loyalty to The Reigning Monarch. Since The Reigning Monarch automatically ratifies all acts of parliament this oath disguises the fact that Westminster MPs are swearing loyalty to themselves, instead of to the people who elected them.

When members of the Scottish parliament also swear loyalty to the queen they accept the domination of a Westminster majority who find the charming spectacle

of hereditary millionaires a useful front for their doings. So why not make new settlers in Britain ALSO swear allegiance to the Westminster Parliament by swearing allegiance to the Queen? If they broke the law afterwards they could then be accused of treason on top of it, and jailed for life. But since that hasn't happened to Jeffrey Archer then I see no reason why it should be inflicted on a Serbian, African or Asian refugee who breaks the law in a similar way.

Until Britain has a constitution which asserts that all people are born free and have equal rights to the pursuit of happiness, or asserts something equally inspiring, new settlers should be equally protected and equally penalised by laws that protect and penalise the rest of us. ■

Alisdair Gray is an artist and novelist

When members of the Scottish parliament also swear loyalty to the queen they accept the domination of a Westminster majority who find the charming spectacle of hereditary millionaires a useful front for their doings

web review

Henry McCubbin

It's Budget time again and as usual the Chancellor has the upper hand for headlines in the first few days after the event. A search of www.hm-treasury.org.uk will let you read his speech in full. You can also read the press handouts from which our intrepid press corps glean the information they publish. The problem is that the real info is in the weighty Red Book. (This bears no relation to "The Red Paper on Scotland" edited by G. Brown when he was going through his difficult socialist stage.) For an analysis based on this you sometimes have to wait weeks as the academics and tax consultants work their way through it. Some work has already been done by our old friends at www.catalyst-trust.co.uk and I would recommend a visit.

The task for journalists is immense and the temptation to cut corners does arise, which means that the first few days tend to follow the headlines made by the Chancellor. The justification for the NI rises and more importantly

the freezing of allowances, which may keep some people paying tax when otherwise they wouldn't, was writ large in the end of the speech. It was to improve the health of the nation in fact another £1 billion was to be found this year.

Missed by all was the short item between "keeping to our fiscal rules" and "an extra £125 million for foreign aid" was yet another £1 billion which was found this year for defence. Out of 9,131 words in his speech Gordon Brown devoted 39 to the billion extra for defence and 2,221 to using the NHS to justify his tax rises overall. That's what I call spin.

Other sites worthy of mention try the Institute for Fiscal Studies at www.ifs.org.uk and www.ft.com which provides you with a Pdf version of the Red Book chapter by chapter. ■

forging new unions

In the last issues of the Scottish Left Review, Ken Cameron argued that even though trade unions were not happy with New Labour they had to maintain the influence through funding. Bill Bonnar rejects this argument.

Ken Cameron makes an unconvincing case for maintaining the trade union link with the Labour Party - whether it be remaining affiliated to the party or continuing to fund the party. In fact, at times, it reads as if Ken is trying to convince himself. This debate is now gathering pace in the trade union movement. Some unions have already decided to cut their contributions to the party in protest at what they see as the party's anti-working class and anti-trade union policies while many rank and file activists want to go even further and 'break the link'. This writer believes that trade unions should 'break the link' and use the money that would have gone to New Labour to fund campaigns and political causes which these unions support as determined by their union conferences. For example, if it is a trade union's policy to support Unilateral Nuclear Disarmament that union should be able to give substantial financial support to CND. At the moment, a number of trade unions affiliated to the Labour Party have a clear position in support of this issue yet give vastly more money to fund a Labour Party committed to maintaining Britain's 'nuclear deterrent'.

At the heart of this issue is a debate about the nature of New Labour. Some, even on the Left, believe that there is essentially no difference between this right-wing Labour Government and its right-wing predecessors. Tony Blair is simply the modern equivalent to Harold Wilson. The party can still be won to a different path to the one now being followed and trade union influence within the party is crucial to this. This leads to the argument that the trade union link needs to be strengthened not ended. Added to this is the position of many a trade union leadership who argue that the trade unions need to be able to influence government policy and that this is best achieved by developing as close as possible relationship with the government. Both views are profoundly mistaken.

The reality is that New Labour is now a completely different party from old Labour; even the right wing variety. Old Labour regarded itself as the mass party of the working class and the party which directly represented the interests of the working class, albeit within the confines of the

capitalist system. A social-democratic party in which the trade unions played a key role and in which the Left were an influential minority. An essentially democratic party in which rank and file members, Constituency Labour Party branches, the parliamentary party and individual groupings could shape and influence policy and direction. The transformation of Labour into New Labour begun under Neil Kinnock and continued with John Smith. Tony Blair has changed Labour completely. The Left have been systematically defeated within the party and it is now difficult to envisage the circumstances in which it will make a comeback, despite the best efforts of well-meaning socialists such as Tony Benn and George Galloway. In fact, the main opposition within the party now comes from traditional right-wing social democrats like Roy Hattersley.

The trade unions have become increasingly marginalised and now wield a fraction of the influence they once did. The same can be said for the Constituency Labour Parties. The Annual Conference has been turned into a carefully controlled rally with most formal democratic processes within the party circumscribed. The policy-making process is now completely driven by the party leadership and informed by unelected and unaccountable advisors while the parliamentary party is simply used as voting fodder. In power, New Labour has embraced policies far to the right of even some previous Conservative Governments; in comparison the Heath government of the early seventies would now be seen by New Labour as dangerously left wing. The idea of it being the mass party of the working class has been rendered meaningless as are any pretensions towards anything which could remotely be described as socialist. When New Labour ditched Clause Four they were not abandoning socialism but rather abandoning social democracy and wholeheartedly embracing a Thatcherite agenda. In fact, it could be argued that Thatcher's lasting legacy has been to create an opposition which would carry out her project even when the Tories were not in power. No wonder the City love them and wouldn't rush to get the Tories back.

It is against this background that many trade unionists are

The trade unions should recognise that New Labour has embraced a big business agenda to such an extent that to try and influence government through their influence in the party is futile

re-evaluating their position. Ken Cameron argues that the link should remain both as a way of moving the party to the Left and of influencing government. That either objective can succeed in the current situation is extremely doubtful. New Labour has now gone so far down its present road that an about turn is simply not on the cards. Those forces likely to fuel such a change have never been weaker. The Left within the Labour Party and wider labour movement should face up to this fact and look to build a Left alternative to New Labour. This is already happening in Scotland with the rise of the Scottish Socialist Party. As for influencing government through its influence within the party, the trade unions should recognise that New Labour has embraced a big business agenda to such an extent that this strategy is futile. Instead, trade unions should campaign around their agreed policies and if this puts them on a collision course with the government; so what? In fact such a strategy would be far more effective than cosy, behind the scenes meetings with government ministers. There is now little difference between this government and the previous Tory governments which inflicted so much damage on the organisations of the

working class. They haven't even scrapped the anti-trade union legislation put in place by Thatcher. The trade union movement needs to recognise this new reality and act accordingly. They have to ask the question that if this New Labour Government were to be replaced tomorrow by a Tory Government would they notice the difference?

Of course, the decision on links with New Labour may be taken from them. As New Labour builds ever-closer links to big business and with big business showing no enthusiasm for a return to the Tories, the government may want to go further and formally replace the Conservatives as the party of big business. If this were to occur two things would happen. Symbolically, New Labour would want to ditch Labour from their name and they would want to formally sever its links with the trade unions confident that any shortfall in funding would come from their new friends in the City. Rather than wait for this scenario to unfold the trade unions should take the initiative and find new parties and campaigns to build political links with. ■

Bill Bonnar is....

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liberalisation, equality, fraternity?

Bill Patterson argues that far from promoting the values of liberty, fraternity and equality, free trade and the WTO subvert them

The World Trade Organisation has argued that free trade would cause the liberty of the individual to be enhanced, states and corporations would gain equal access to world markets and therefore equal access to prosperity, and so a trading world community would evolve through such co-operation, generating world peace. Taken together, it would appear that free trade promises the universal realisation of the liberal values of liberty, equality and fraternity between individuals and states. But does political rhetoric marry to the consequence of free trade policies.?

The WTO has been instrumental in liberalising state economic control and enhancing the activities of these Transnational Corporations (TNCs) and their transnational flexible model of production and working practices. As China has just demonstrated, the acceptance of the policies on General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS), Trade in Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) and Trade Related Investment Measures (TRIMS) are crucial imperatives for any state wishing to join the WTO and gain access to world markets. By accepting these prerequisites TNCs have been given greater freedom to locate and relocate in different countries, according to where they can generate the optimal profit and employ a workforce flexible to market demands.

As the WTO's policies create an accommodating environment for TNCs on the justification that these policies will generate the above universal benefits, it appears to represent a golden opportunity for mankind. If we examine the relationship between states, however, we can see that all three liberal principles are restricted rather than enhanced by the WTO. In the first instance, though the WTO operates a 'consensus' decision-making policy, not all states exercise the same power and influence, which undermines the principle of liberty and autonomy in decision making. For example, states that can afford to employ the best lawyers will be able to interpret legislation and WTO policies to their advantage. Therefore, relations of subordination and domination are still prevalent within this institution.

In the realm of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), inequality of access for states is evident. Governments are now dependent upon FDI to stimulate employment and growth. Yet extensive research illustrates that the deregulation of national financial markets, from the implementation of TRIPS, has concentrated FDI in the developed triad of Western Europe, North America and Japan. This triad, which accounts for 14.5 per cent of the world's population,

was the main recipient of 60 per cent of all FDI in the period 1991-1996. If the top 10 developing countries are added to this list, thereby encompassing 46 per cent of the world's population (including China's 1.2 billion population), it accounts for 86 per cent of all FDI, so that 54 per cent of the world's population received only 16 per cent of all FDI in this period. Therefore, since investment is primarily limited to the developed world, the promised universal prosperity from deregulation is limited to less than half the world's population. As such this undermines the principles of equality and impacts on fraternity.

Access to markets for trade also suffers from inequalities, which again undermines any sense of fraternity amongst states. The textile and agricultural markets of the rich states have remained closed to developing states resulting in the world's 48 poorest countries being prevented from gaining tariff- and quota-free access for all their exports. Thus the wealthy states continue to subsidise producers, while insisting that developing states stop subsidies to experience the gains from a global free market. This has now caused developing states to openly vent their frustration, to the point that the Dominican Republic's trade ambassador remarked after Seattle that "there is no trust" between the developed and developing world. Therefore liberty, equal access to markets and fraternity are not being realised from free trade. On these grounds it can be argued that the most powerful states in the world promote a Neo-Liberal agenda through international organisations because it satisfies their self-interest and perpetuates their dominance, thereby undermining fraternity.

At the individual level WTO policies allowing transnational production also appear to be frustrating enhanced liberty, equality and fraternity. As TNCs enforce flexibility in the workforce, exclusion and polarisation are growing within societies in the developed and underdeveloped world. Flexibility can be divided into 'functional flexibility' (the movement of a highly skilled and responsive workforce between different tasks as production requirements dictate) and 'numerical flexibility' (the possibility of changing the size of the workforce in response to in the level of demand). In doing so this polarises societies into privileged and deprived, as a small skilled core provide 'functional flexibility' and receive security of employment and relatively good pay and conditions, while a large number of employees provide 'numerical flexibility' with inferior standards of employment, security and working conditions. This disparity has been magnified by WTO's enforcement of the state's steady withdrawal from the provision of public services and erosion

of comprehensive system of welfare, thus eliminating a cushion to the effects of a volatile market economy.

The level of insecurity and exclusion in today's workplace can be seen from the following examples. On the 21st August 2001 The Independent reported that Fujitsu was to axe 15,000 jobs, Seimans 10,000, Alcatel 6,000, Hewlett-Packard 6,000 and Marconi 4,000 jobs. Thus in one day 41,000 individuals were deemed 'surplus to requirement' by the market and left insecure throughout Europe. With unemployment in Europe increasing towards 10 per cent it is not surprising that respected academic writers conclude that unemployment and inequality appear to be endemic properties of increased flexibility of the labour market. What this also highlights is that those who are forced into flexible working hours are not experiencing enhanced liberty, equality and fraternity but the very opposite. The consequences for social cohesion and the legitimacy of governments due to these gross disparities in wealth and polarisation of societies are not difficult to predict.

The events of Seattle, Prague, Washington and Genoa clearly illustrate that transnational social forces are forming and aggressively asserting their disapproval at the consequences of the economic policies of international organisations, such as the WTO. Demonstrations have attracted a variety of groups, as evidenced at the WTO Seattle Round of Trade Talks in 1999 when over 1,000 organisations from 87 countries converged on the city. All that participated were united against those whom they blame for their grievances - free trade capitalism perpetrated by the WTO. Division and conflict seem to be more endemic of free trade than fraternity.

These sentiments are shared by Chris Patton, who said after the September 11 attacks "we have seen the dark side of globalisation. Now we know where huge injustices of the global economy can lead". Weight is added to the possibility of future conflict when considering the demographic changes of the next ten years. The population of Asia will increase by over 570 million, and the developing world as a whole will have 700 million young people looking for work. If the free market global economy does not incorporate these people the poverty and unemployment that will ensue may cause new political regimes to evolve embracing nationalism in a 'West-versus-the-Rest' polarisation. What we can see here is that the failures of neo-liberalism to produce enhanced liberty, equality and fraternity may have consequences for global stability.

The reaction of leading statesmen to this mounting critique also impacts on individual liberty and democracy. The reality

is that alternative policies are not entertained or debated. This is clear from Prime Minister Blair's condemnation of the demonstrations and the possible legitimacy of their claims. Blair said of the Gothenburg anti-capitalist demonstrations in June 2001: "We shouldn't dignify [them] in any shape or form by saying that this is some reasoned political argument. Insofar as they have an argument, it is an argument that is completely and totally wrong and misguided and we should challenge it at every level."

So as far as world leaders are concerned, there is no alternative to free trade market economies. Since the protests at Genoa on July of 2001 European leaders have ordered that anti-capitalist demonstrators be subject to surveillance. Not only do these developments curtail individual freedom they also circumvent democracy. There are serious implications for democracy when an electorate has no alternative to further neo-liberal policies. Moreover, with the stricter enforcement of WTO legislation, a 'democratic deficit' is appearing as the accountability of the distant policy making institutions is not subject to the 'the will of the people' nationally or internationally. One also has to consider whether the violence seen at each meeting of an economic international institution will soon escalate, causing greater repression and curbing of civil rights, by the State. This would cause a cycle of frustration and violence to evolve between the state and society

The liberal virtues of enhanced liberty, equality and fraternity appear to be unattainable by following the free trade principles of the WTO. Current conditions allow the developed world to dominate WTO policies and remain the main beneficiary of world trade and financial transactions. Transnational flexible production, not only excludes the developing world, it also divides and excludes groups within states. Polarisation is taking place within states, which is exaggerated by gross disparities in wealth. The dissent orchestrated by anti-globalisation protesters at these outcomes is deemed - by world leaders - to be misinformed and democratic choice is limited to a market discipline. Therefore, at the level of the state and the individual, liberty, equality and fraternity are not being realised. If deregulation continues to favour the developed world and the interests of private corporate elites, it may have serious implications for national and global stability. In essence, an ideology that promotes competition promotes conflict and will, therefore, reap what it sows. ■

Division and conflict seem to be more endemic of free trade than fraternity

Bill Patterson is a Postgraduate student at Stirling University working on the illegitimacy of the World Trade Organisation

the enlightened dream negated

Book Review: *The Captive State: The Corporate Takeover of Britain*, George Monbiot (Pan, 2001) £7.99. Andrew Noble.

In this excellent paperback edition of Monbiot's appropriately acclaimed analysis of New Labour and the prehensile world of Anglo-American corporate capitalism, the author quotes a despairing Abraham Lincoln in a letter of 1864: "I see in the near future a crisis approaching that unnerves me and causes me to tremble for the safety of my country... corporations have been enthroned and an era of corruption in high places will follow." Even the tragically prescient Lincoln could hardly have foreseen that the corruption of the Grant administration, accelerated by train and telegraph technology, would lead to George W. and the Texas Oil Mafia in not only in charge of the country but with violent planetary aspirations.

Arguably the main thread in modern history, now perhaps approaching its (apocalyptic) zenith, has been an anti-democratic strain of amoral, insatiably greedy corporate capitalism of which America is by far the purest and most potent brand.

BBC 2's recent admirable *The Century of the Self* was, especially with regard to the early twentieth century, deeply instructive about how corporate America, empowered by a deviant Freudianism, had manipulated the mass subconscious towards acquisitive materialism as the sole good. In the early Twenties an apparently ever-upward stock market seemed to have turned the country into a cornucopia from which poured an endless stream of goods and services. This whole bubble, as later Japan, was inflated by the degeneration, indeed criminalisation, of the banking system. When it disastrously imploded, FDR had to find ways to regulate the market. The culminating stages of The Cold War and its aftermath under Reagan saw the rapid deregulation of these control elements. Hence fiscal black-holes like Enron. Worst of all, however, is the manner in which the deviant, aggressive, deeply dangerous form of hyper-capitalism is not the way in which it negates Adam Smith's enlightened dream of the market as benevolently self-regulating, but the degree to which we now live in a world which sees its bizarre (post-modern) excesses as normality.

Thomas Frank's *One Market Under God: Extreme Capitalism, Market Populism and The End of Economic Democracy* (2001) reveals the sinister, self-destructive

abnormality of our condition. Seminars should be given on it at the court of King Tony, but New Labour is too 'pragmatically' busy to pay attention to either dissident intelligence or the mass of contradictory facts of which Monbiot's book is an outstanding example. In cogent detailed chapters on PFI initiatives in prison and hospital building, the power of supermarkets, the degeneration of the educational system, Monbiot drives home his central thesis:

Corporations, the contraptions we invented to serve us, are overthrowing us. They are seizing powers previously invested in government, and using them to suit their own ends. *Captive State* tells the story of this coup d'état.

Monbiot's chapter on "The Skye Bridge Mystery" is of particular interest to Scottish readers. The only law that seems to have been upheld is that most mendaciously anti-democratic one of commercial confidentiality. The Ten Commandments have been replaced by a sole injunction: "Thou Shalt not open The Books." Partly from interviews with the locals, what Monbiot has pieced together is, however, a truly appalling story.

The bridge was 60 per cent oversubscribed on the assumption of subsequent rich pickings. These assumptions were not to be disabused. The Tory Government funded it to the extent they might as well have been funding a normal, public project. They made no attempt to procure EEC money. As Monbiot writes:

Far from Westminster and the offices of the national newspapers out of sight, out of mind, Skye was the ideal location in which to launch a corrupt and unpopular initiative, in which private companies were granted monopolistic control over public works.

The sole winner in this is The Bank of America, in a previous existence the somewhat fiscally suspect Bank of Italy, which now possesses 997 of the 1,000 shares. What a story for The West Highland Free Press! A transformed Brian Wilson, along with Henry McLeish, other than disparaging "a vocal minority" did absolutely nothing to investigate, never mind correct, the whole

The Ten Commandments have been replaced by a sole injunction: 'Thou Shalt not open The Books'

sordid business. New Labour's current Scottish apostates make Ramsay MacDonald look almost heroic.

From the bitter experience of being an educationalist myself, I find Monbiot's analysis of the penetration of the educational system as peculiarly acute and depressing. The degree to which the universities, both in research and teaching, dance to the corporate tune is grimly self-destructive. Publicly under-financed, we inevitably take our begging bowls to big business. Such financing is, of course, biased towards quick-fix, short term research suitable for market production. Much worse, however, is the repression of objective analysis of the profound, indeed increasingly terrifying, impact our technological productive processes are having on the environment. Apocalypse now? Further, big business seems to think that it knows precisely the degree and methodology of increasingly vocational education it requires so that we are intended to live in an ahistorical, functional present. Absurdly, given its constant complaints of red-tape, this corporate mentality has swathed British education in constant restrictive testing so that much of teachers' energies all levels are spent in conforming to and, indeed, subverting the systems imposed on them.

The historical great dream of laissez faire capitalism was that it would pacifically produce wealth for all. It now appears almost as inverted in its practises as Soviet Marxism. American capitalism's need for armed security seems endless. Within and among nations the polarisation between rich and poor runs unchecked. "If", as J. K. Galbraith remarked, "you feed enough oats to horses, the sparrows may be able to extract some nourishment from their shit." "Comrades, keep your peckers up!"

Or, as Monbiot writes when dealing with the Multilateral Agreement on Investment, a charter to allow corporations global fiscal intrusion into the affairs of all states:

No one else will fight this battle for us. There will be no messiah, no conquering hero to deliver us from the corporate leviathan. Most of our representatives have been either corrupted or crushed. Only one thing can reverse the corporate takeover of Britain. It's you. ■

Andrew Noble is a lecturer in English Literature at Strathclyde University

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STV's coverage of Afghanistan

David Miller in his article 'The First Casualty' (**Scottish Left Review**, Issue 9) claims that in the media coverage of the war in Afghanistan distortions and omissions were the norm. Mr Miller states that Scottish Television failed to cover the conflict, while in our main news programme **Scotland Today** we failed to mention the demonstrations against the war. He is wrong on both counts. In fact the first casualty in David Miller's piece was accuracy and his description of Scottish Television 'not bothering to cover international news' appears to betray a misunderstanding of independent television.

First the facts. **Scotland Today** did report on the anti war demonstrations. In our news programmes in October both pictures of demonstrations and interviews with anti-war protestors were carried prominently. We also interviewed Tam Dalyell MP and George Galloway MP on their opposition to British involvement. Since then we have reported regularly on Scottish opinion to the war, most recently giving significant coverage to the emergency Commons debate on the deployment of Scottish troops.

On David Miller's wider point about international coverage he fails to explain the structure of ITV - a structure that's been in place for more than 40 years. As things stand Scottish Television's remit is to provide Scottish news. British and International news is provided by the ITV news.

However within this structure Scottish Television has reported on the conflict where appropriate. In our Sunday morning Current Affairs programme **Seven Days** we covered the war in Afghanistan in 10 of the 13 editions broadcast from September to December 2001. Guests included Mohammed Sarwar MP, Sir Malcolm Rifkind, Tam Dalyell MP, Lord Douglas Hurd, Professor Yasir Suleiman, Casper Weinberger, John McAllion MSP, Menzies Campbell MP, Eric Joyce MP, Bill Speirs and George Galloway MP, together with live reports from Pakistan and Afghanistan with the **Sunday Herald's** Foreign Editor David Pratt and the former Scottish Television reporter Alan Fisher.

David Miller replies:

Paul McKinney does a good job of defending the journalism produced by Scottish Television on the war in Afghanistan. He also does appear willing to enter into discussions with critics of its coverage. This is of itself an encouraging development, since many broadcasters are reluctant to enter into debate or to accept that they can get things wrong. But it will not do to pretend that STV have adequately reported Scottish opposition to the war.

This year **Seven Days** has continued to cover the war in Afghanistan - most recently on March 24th when Alex Salmond MP appeared live on the programme questioning the deployment of British troops. We also carried a report from Somalia - a possible target of the next stage of 'the war against terror'. David Pratt was one of only a handful of European journalists to get into the country and he provided a superb piece of television journalism including interviews with the Prime Minister of Somalia and the country's main warlord. Our foreign coverage has also included in depth reports on the Zimbabwean elections and the conflict in Palestine.

In the month following September 11 three of the four editions of our political programme **Platform**, with Bernard Ponsonby, were either entirely or substantially devoted to the war in Afghanistan. Studio guests included George Galloway MP, Professor Yasir Suleiman, Professor Paul Wilkinson and Lord David Owen. In the week the war wasn't covered we carried a report on the first anniversary of the **Scottish Left Review**. Following the end of the **Platform** run Grampian TV's Crossfire programme continued to cover the unfolding conflict on a regular basis until the end of the year.

Elsewhere **Scotland Today** has of course carried foreign news reports where they fit with the Scottish remit of the programme. In the last six months we have reported live from the Netherlands and Washington on the Lockerbie appeal verdict; from New York on the Tartan Day celebrations; from Afghanistan on the deployment of Scottish troops; and from Pakistan on the work of a Scottish charity in the refugee camps in the North West Frontier Province. In fact our main presenter Shereen Nanjani was the first western reporter after September 11 to get into the biggest and worst of the camps, Jalozei. On her return Scotland Today ran three extended reports from the camps and we also broadcast a documentary on the conditions faced by the Afghan refugees. ■

Paul McKinney is Head of News and Current Affairs at Scottish TV

The exchange of letters on this page is the result of discussions which took place after Paul McKinney wrote to the Scottish Left Review criticising my piece. As a result of this letter I visited SMG's premises in Glasgow and viewed the disputed material, noting precisely what was covered and how it had been handled. **Scotland Today** did cover two Glasgow demonstrations against the war on 13 and 27 October and they did include a further two clips of protestors lasting a total of 6 and 12 seconds respectively on the 9 and

10 of October. It was inaccurate to say that they did not cover the demonstrations at all. My apologies to readers. But a full examination of STV's coverage does illustrate the problems of distortion and bias that can affect Scottish news programmes. In my original piece a key argument was that the strength of opposition to the war was being misrepresented by mis-reporting of opinion polls, underreporting of dissent and the framing of news by assumptions that opposition was a minority (possibly extremist) affair.

So demonstrations were under reported. For example, there were demonstrations and rallies in Glasgow alone on 22 and 29 September, 8, 9, 13, 29 October and 15 December (compiled from Scottish CND's website). Other rallies and vigils were held in Edinburgh and Aberdeen and other Scottish towns. There were also a large number of teach-ins at Scottish universities (in Glasgow, Aberdeen, Stirling, Edinburgh, Dundee), a phenomenon not seen on such a scale since the Vietnam war. These were reported in the press (www.sundayherald.com/18870), but none were mentioned on **Scotland Today**. **Scotland Today** reported only the demonstrations on the 13 and 27 of October. STV did film at one of the rallies in Glasgow's George Square in September, but did not broadcast anything on the demonstrations. The footage was however briefly used on the 9 and 10 of October (six and twelve seconds of it) as the newscaster noted 'another anti-war rally is scheduled to take place in Glasgow later tonight' (9/10/2001). This was ironic since **Scotland Today** had until then not mentioned any of the anti war rallies. The next day **Scotland Today** used the same footage to note that a rally was being planned for 13 October. Overall in the period between September 11 and the end of the year **Scotland Today** devoted two minutes and twenty three seconds to covering demonstrations against the war. **Seven Days** did not cover the demonstrations at all.

According to CND the 'unbelievable response' to their word of mouth and 'email tree' call for a vigil in early October showed that a 'majority' of people 'do not want any more innocent people to be killed' (www.cndscot.dial.pipex.com/peace/020322d). George Bush, Tony Blair, Jack Straw and others by contrast have suggested that the public supported the bombing of Afghanistan. Given the dispute on the facts we might have expected a 'balanced' news report to note the dispute, rather than endorse one side. Instead **Scotland Today** repeatedly endorsed the view that Scottish opinion supported the war, as the following statements indicate:

- Although public support for the action appears to remain strong, more anti-war protests are planned (9/10/2001)
- As America begins a fourth night of bombing in

Afghanistan Scottish Muslim leaders have called for an end to the attacks. But public opinion here remains strongly in favour of the action as shown by a Scotland Today poll in which thousands of you registered support today. That backing is echoed by the families of Scottish servicemen and women. (10/10/2001).

- Today's poll suggests that the vast majority of Scots want no let up in the war on terror. 76 per cent say the Allied attacks should continue. 24 per cent say they should stop (10/10/2001).
- Today's poll suggests a clear majority of Scots still support these kinds of strikes on the Taliban (30/10/2001)
- None the less it appears that whilst the anti-war campaign remains highly vocal, its supporters remain in the minority (30/10/2001)

These statements are interesting because the basis of the statements is rather tenuous. In the first case on 9 October, no opinion data was cited. In fact by this stage only one opinion poll had been taken in Scotland by ICM for the Scotsman (19 September). This showed that 71 per cent of Scots supported 'military action', but when asked if they would support such action even if civilians were killed a majority (45 per cent - 40 per cent) said they would not. Given that civilians would inevitably be killed (3,767 documented cases in the first eight and a half weeks of the war, www.medialens.org/articles_2002/mh_civilian_victims), this is a less than whole hearted endorsement. The coverage on 10 and 30 October was based on two telephone polls conducted by **Scotland Today**. Telephone polls are self selecting and therefore scientifically suspect. Moreover the questions asked - should the attacks continue - assume that people in Scotland knew what was happening in Afghanistan. Given the misrepresentation of most network television news (the main sources on international affairs for most people) and specifically the lack of coverage of civilian casualties this is a dubious premise (see www.medialens.org/frameset_alerts). Thirdly, the question did not give any alternatives. When polls have given respondents alternatives the answers have been quite different. Furthermore, there was one other poll taken in Scotland during October. It showed an extremely low level of support for the war (17 per cent in favour of assassinating Bin Laden and only 5 per cent in favour of bombing Afghanistan) and majority support for alternatives such as diplomacy, sanctions or due process (69 per cent **Sunday Mail** 21 October). This poll was not reported by **Scotland Today** who chose to rely on the tabloid gimmick of the cheap phone poll which attempts to foster the illusion that viewers can 'interact' with the broadcasters. This poll is a

particularly good example of the way that cost cutting and commercial pressures in broadcasting can come together with suspect news judgement to distort the reporting of public issues. If SMG are going to continue with such polls they should either reserve them for issues of no political importance or give proper alternatives in their questions to minimise distorting public opinion.

The problem with the reporting of the demonstrations was replicated in wider STV coverage. In all the coverage of **Scotland Today** and **Seven Days**, there was no hint that Scottish public opinion might oppose the war or even that Scots might be split. The closest that Scotland today got to acknowledging such reservations was on 27 October by which time there had been much debate about civilian casualties in parts of the press. They reported 'peace protestors in Scotland **say** more and more people are turning against the government over the war in Afghanistan' (my emphasis).

When politicians or others had doubts about the war or were opposed to the bombing, their views were broadcast without any context or endorsement. There was no commentary which suggested that the views of George Galloway or Tam Dalyell represented a 'growing' or 'significant' number of the Scottish public, never mind a majority. The closest Scotland Today got to that was in a single phrase reporting opposition to the War at Westminster, where it was said 'voices are rising to oppose the bombing' (27/10/2001). This stands in stark contrast to **Scotland Today's** repeated endorsement of the view that a majority of the public supported the war, which is at best factually dubious. This is arguably a violation of the legal requirement to provide unbiased news.

Muslim views were reported against a background that stated that a majority of Scots supported the war; 'the [Muslim] community is divided over the war' (9/10/2001); 'whilst the majority [of Scots] back the strikes opposition is growing in Scotland's Muslim community' (10/10/2001). Reporting dissent in the Muslim 'community' becomes, by definition, a means of marking Muslims out as different

from the mainstream. No wonder some Scottish Muslims who were interviewed felt they had to pretend that most Muslims supported the bombing. By contrast although Church of Scotland leaders were interviewed opposing the war, there was never any suggestion that their views indicated a divided 'Christian community' or that there were divisions over the war amongst the Scottish population at large.

Given the arson attack on the Edinburgh Mosque, which **Scotland Today** did cover, the worry is that by misreporting dissent, news programmes contribute to the marginalising of specific groups alleged by the news to have dissenting views. In this respect, without any conscious intent by the reporters involved, such coverage may contribute to marginalisation of Scottish Muslims, themselves already vulnerable as the fire at Edinburgh's Mosque showed. STV and other broadcasters urgently need to address this issue, which some might see as a sort of institutional racism.

On the question of international coverage, my point was that it is a significant problem that there is no significant coverage of international news on STV and that such news is supplied by ITN. This means that on stories such as Afghanistan all we get are local angles on stories rather than proper international reporting from Scotland. **Good Morning Scotland**, for all its faults, was able to bring international issues home by interviewing outside the normal range of establishment experts. As I noted in my piece, this coverage is inadequate and the BBC's journalists are often not up to the job of interviewing Noam Chomsky or Robert Fisk, but at least they were there. The reason for this gap in STV coverage is, as McKinney say, that the structure of ITV prohibits proper international reporting in Scotland. That structure is a direct barrier to the establishment of a properly functioning democracy in Scotland.

It is a positive sign that STV appear willing to engage in debate about their coverage. But the acid test of such debate will be whether they improve their coverage of the ongoing Scottish opposition to the 'war on terrorism' and an attack on Iraq. ■

David Miller is a member of the Stirling Media Research Institute

Proportional voting

One surprising omission from your Comment in Issue 9 was any mention of democratic renewal. This was all the more surprising because you clearly want to redress the balance between the roles of our MSPs as party members and as independent representatives. Perhaps part of the disillusion of civic Scotland has its roots here too, as concern about the excessive influence of party politics was a recurrent theme by civic Scotland at the Parliament open days in both 2000 and 2001. Changing the additional member voting system for one that allowed the voters to choose freely among all the candidates would soon redress the balance of party power.

That is not on offer for the Scottish Parliament - at least, not yet. But it is on offer for local government elections after 2003. Those who want to revitalise our democratic structures and processes must not let this chance go by. They must respond to the current White Paper consultation to tell the Scottish Executive loudly and clearly that they want the voting reform recommended by the Kerley Working Group. STV-PR would return real power to the voters, reduce the control of the political parties and encourage more collaborative way of working. Once they've seen it in local councils, the electors will want it for the Parliament too. It's a long game, but the outcome will make it all worthwhile. ■

James Gilmour



JENKINS LAMBASTES NEW LABOUR

The ultimate in embarrassing verdicts on New Labour was delivered recently by none other than that grandee of the old Labour Right, Roy Jenkins.

The occasion was a televised interview on the twentieth anniversary of the Hillhead By-election (can it really be that long ago?). Jenkins was waxing lyrical about the legacy of the SDP. "I suppose we made it possible for Blair to become an electable Labour Prime Minister. I don't regret that. Mind you I was never THAT right wing." Ouch.

CORINE, CORINE, WHIT'S THE SCORE

Congratulations to Northern Ireland Secretary Dr John Reid on his recent marriage. His new wife Corine very quickly discovered though that some old west of Scotland habits die hard. The day after the wedding Dr Reid was spotted in a pub in Horseferry Road surrounded by his usual entourage of Special Branch Officers. One or two other MPs quickly joined him at the Bar. The occasion? No it wasn't the need for a wee curor following the excesses of the previous day. Apparently the pub in question was one of the few in London that was showing the old firm game that day.

AFF WITH A FLEA IN HIS EAR

Spare a thought for David Kerr. He's the Newsnight Scotland Producer turned SNP By-election candidate turned BBC producer again. The amiable Mr Kerr is aff tae London to work on the big Newsnight after declaring that he was not seeking a seat for next year's Parliamentary elections. It seems David has found playing the political black arts a tad more difficult than television production. After running Eric Joyce close in the by election the boy, David has not had much success finding himself a seat. First up he tried for Cumbernauld only to find that the guru of the SNP New Right (Andrew Wilson) had beaten him to it. Then it was off to Alex Neil's old stomping ground in Kilmarnock. No success there either. Before he failed to land Clydesdale he withdrew from the selection. Seems David is in danger of becoming the Anne McGuire of SNP selection conferences.

ARCHIE PLAYING N THE LEFT WING

With the Scottish Parliament elections now only a year away, the parties will be busy signing up celebrity supporters on the stupid premise

that voters are actually swayed by who the celebs are backing. The SSP of course are never short of the backing of such luminaries as Peter Mullan, Ken Loach and Jackie McNamara (the faither). They can now add commentating doyen Archie MacPherson to the list. At a leaving party in Coocadens last week various hacks contributed to a goodbye video for Head of Sport, Denis Mooney. Archie informed the assembled gathering, 'Well Denis we have a lot I common - our roots and the fact that we rather sentimentally give Tommy Sheridan a vote'. The Glasgow list member had better watch out though. The Diary smells a bit of entryism - that barnet of big Archie's is distinctly Scargellite.

MEDIA SLUT AWARD LAUNCH

Each month The Diary will pay tribute to our Media Slut of the Month - the MP or MSP who grovels shamelessly for publicity even when they have nothing to say. Scotland Office Minister George Foulkes has kindly agreed to be Patron of the Awards. So to this month's shortlist. First up is Falkirk West Labour MP Eric Joyce. Mr Joyce has been camping outside various broadcast studios ready with the usual battery of quotes to support our boys in Afghanistan or wherever President Blair sends them to next. But Eric has been far too measured in his analysis to be this month's winner. The runner up is Brian Donohoe a man who has an eye for publicity all the way from Cunningham North to wherever he happens to be fighting the good fight. His latest initiative has been to launch an all party Coronation Street Group - apparently the purpose is to help maintain standards in the Street. This is scraping the bottom of the barrel. However our first Media Slut Award goes to Cathcart's Tom Harris for a recent midweek appearance on BBC TV's Holyrood. Clearly flattered to have been invited on, Harris was going to explain the finer points of Blair's proposal to reduce family allowance for those parents who have naughty weans. Cue the first question - "and tell me Tom Harris, how will this proposal work in practice?" To which our Media Slut replied "I don't know but it's worth considering". What was that one about the brains not going with the job.

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ASLEF calls for the Government to introduce a charter of workers rights that would include, the right to full employment, rights from day one of employment, the repeal of oppressive anti trade union legislation and positive laws encouraging trade unions to represent their members individually and collectively.

Mick Rix, General Secretary. ASLEF, 9 Arkwright Road, Hampstead, LONDON NW3 6AB.