

scottishleftreview

Issue 5 June/July 2001

SMALL COUNTRY, BIG WORLD

Scotland's international role



Cathy Jamieson on modern mutuals

Robin Harper on green economics

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scottishleftreview

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A journal of the left in Scotland brought about since the formation of the Scottish Parliament in July 1999

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All contributors are writing in a personal capacity.

comment

Jimmy Reid

Foreign Policy played no part in the General Election. Politicians that lectured us for years about the globalisation of markets, that promoted with enthusiasm the concept of Village Earth, suddenly were struck dumb on matters pertaining to anything that was happening beyond the white cliffs of Dover. The Tories wanted to slam the door on the Euro, at least for five years. New Labour promised not to cross the threshold until certain criteria applied. One element in the criteria is that a specific exchange rate between Euro and Pound must be reached. We were not told what that exchange rate would be, even in general terms. All agreed that at the end of the day there would have to be a referendum. As a chasm between the two main parties, this was more like a tiny crevice that could have been sealed with putty in seconds. Notwithstanding, it generated much huffing and puffing from Hague and Blair about 'patriotism', that bunker mentality which Samuel Johnson once described as 'the last refuge of a scoundrel'.

Not a cheep was heard in the election from anyone about 'Star Wars', the latest foray into madness by President Bush. When asked about it Blair, surprise-surprise, supported Bush. The President's refusal to honour the Kyoto Agreement undermines that global co-operation which is vital if we are to limit and reduce the pollution of our atmosphere, and it didn't feature at all. The conflagration in the Middle East also didn't rate a mention. The plight of the Palestinian people shames the international community. When voicing these criticisms, I am told the people were not interested in such issues. If true, is that any reason why political leaders should not raise them and haven't they a moral duty to do so in this 'shrinking world' that they so often preach about? An even more compelling argument is that politicians who simply hold a mirror up to society and reflect what is there limit themselves be administrators of the prevailing status quo. Political leaders of the Left have to recognise what is, while promoting that which could be better and more just. There is nothing wrong with being popular; there is everything wrong with being populist.

We have tried to redress this imbalance of the election with an issue of the SLR where the emphasis is on globalisation. It is there and cannot be denied. It hasn't come about overnight but has been building up since I was a lad. Modern communication technology has sped the process in recent years. The argument is about whether companies playing the global market should be allowed to do so without restraint on their pursuance of profit. The global companies want de-regulated global markets. The

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Tories support this and the New Labour Government is the most enthusiastic supporter of market de-regulation in the EU. We are not talking here of bureaucracy but of laws to protect peoples against the depredations of capital that wants to be able to operate without restraint or civic responsibility anywhere in the world. Playing one nation off against another. Playing one region against another. Moving in, moving out, plundering the planet like Blue Beard the pirate – writ large – and rendering national democracies an irrelevance. This would be a world controlled by faceless men answerable to no one except in the provision of profits for shareholders.

John Watson shows what this means in his essay, **Choosing our globalisation**. The price is the impoverishment of many millions in Third World terms, within which corruption rages. How it threatens the ecology of our planet as it scours for new sources of raw materials and profits. We are not helpless in a confrontation with global corporations, given the political will to do so. The EU with all governments acting in concert could dictate the terms in which these companies are allowed to operate and trade within Europe. One snag is that Tony Blair and Gordon Brown are arguing for Thatcher-like de-regulation of markets within the EU. Jim Mather in his essay looks at globalisation and how it impacts on Scotland both in the here and now and in an independent Scotland. He is right, as others will concur, that Scotland's "over reliance" on global companies was fraught with risk, as we can currently see. The need and support for Scottish indigenous companies should be seen not as an alternative to inward investment but as complementary to it.

Cathy Jamieson renders us good service in her essay on co-operatives and the role they could play in a new approach to public ownership. Nationalisation did not and will not equate with socialism. It is state control and not public control. You can have a nationalised industry in a fascist state. I think it was Bismarck who nationalised postal services in the coalescing of principalities that developed into the German Nation State. He didn't do so as an act of progressive social engineering but on the contrary to fund and subsidise postal communications that were then vital for emerging and developing German capitalism. The concept of common ownership was something fundamentally different. It is alive, if not exactly kicking, in our society today, in many varied forms. Many more could be developed, again, given the political will. Rosemary Burnett's essay is really about internationalism and how it expresses itself in Scotland. Inevitably and

rightly she raises the plight of the asylum seekers in Glasgow. As a dyed in the wool Glaswegian I feel shamed by the assaults on the poor unfortunates who came to our shores for succour and instead are brutally attacked by lumpen proletarian louts. The rhetoric of Jack Straw and Anne Widdicombe has not helped but there can be no excuse for the perpetrators. If the authorities can't stamp it out then the Glasgow Labour Movement must consider what it can do. It does not have the luxury of doing nothing.

choosing our globalisation

John Watson

If I earned a dollar a day for every complaint I've heard about globalisation I'd be a fully paid up member of the fat cat club. Yet although we all know and use the word, and most people I talk to seem concerned about it, there is no agreed definition of the term 'globalisation' and no one accepted synopsis of what exactly is so bad about it.

The UK government, in its White Paper on globalisation, defined it simply as 'interconnectedness', which doesn't sound too bad at all. E-mailing friends and contacts around the world, learning about different cultures, histories and peoples, travel to exotic places, buying pineapples and mangoes on a cold Scottish morning - what's the problem with that?

Yet if asked about globalisation, most people will think of more than a networking world, drawing people together through new technology. They will immediately conjure images of growing inequality (both between and within nations), of jobs lost here to be replaced by sweatshops in the 'Third World', of environmental degradation and the ever-growing empires of MacDonalds, Nike and Shell. What's really going on?

While you can't, and shouldn't, stop interconnectedness, those who throw up their hands and say that globalisation is inevitable are missing the point. There's more than one way to globalise, and much of the blame for the above problems lies firmly at the feet of the way we've (they've) chosen to do it. For the massive opportunities presented by the 'global village' are being trampled underfoot in the headlong rush towards the 'global market', a very different beast indeed.

The World Development Movement (WDM) is a campaigning group tackling world poverty by challenging the political and economic conditions that cause it. WDM has been at the forefront of efforts to understand globalisation, what it has to offer the world's poorest people and how it is currently failing them. Explaining rather than complaining you might say.

There is a great need for explanation. I've heard too many protestors confuse the World Bank with the World Trade Organisation and, although it might seem an easy mistake to make, we need to do better than that. What links these organisations, and most of our political leadership, their advisors and the lobbyists who surround them, is the dogma of liberalisation. Based on the idea that business always knows best, liberalisation (neo-liberalism, or whatever you want to call it) is the dominant ideology of our time. Far removed from Adam Smith's idea of a local

market of competing, small traders the central tenet of liberalisation is that the best thing governments can do is get out of the way of business, allowing companies to generate wealth that will 'trickle down' to the benefit of all. Companies not governments, it seems, are to be the custodians of human rights, the environment and poverty eradication.

So the liberalisers will tell you that when they grant sweeping new rights to multinational companies, or place increasing restrictions on the ability of governments to regulate their activity, they do so with the interests of the poor at heart. The results of several decades of an increasingly liberalised global economy tell a different story. Now 51 of the world's 100 largest economic units are multinational companies (the remaining 49 being national governments). Meanwhile the number of people living on less than a single dollar a day has grown to 1.2 billion. In 1960 the combined income of the richest fifth of the world's population was 30 times greater than that of the poorest fifth. By 1991 it was over 60 times and in 1998 the United Nations latest figure puts this at 78 times as high. In the real world, Hoover up is stronger than trickle down.

To see how it all works, consider the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the intergovernmental body with powers to devise and enforce the rules of international trade. It's been around since 1994 but its public launch only took place in Seattle a year and a half ago. The WTO has a membership of 140 countries, including all the major trading nations. If you want to be a player in world trade then you sign up to the WTO - the only game in town.

The WTO states that its prime function is "To ensure that trade flows as smoothly, predictably and freely as possible" and understands this as a mandate for liberalisation. Consequently when the WTO makes trade rules, it has no obligation to ensure that workers' rights, environmental concerns or poverty reduction are pursued. Quite the opposite in fact.

The WTO ruled against the European Union's attempts to support poor farmers in the Caribbean by guaranteeing markets for their goods. A US ban on shrimps caught using nets that also killed sea turtles was ruled unlawful, despite the turtles being protected under various international environment treaties. A European Union ban on US beef treated with a controversial growth hormone was outlawed, despite scientific reports about its health risks. All of these actions were stopped because they interfered with the free market. Any government trying to emulate the anti-apartheid movement by supporting the Burmese

democratic opposition's call for sanctions against their military regime could be challenged in the same way. Using such reasoning the poorest countries have had their economies prised open to the activities of Western companies.

To see how such an agenda could impact upon Scotland, consider the WTO's latest wheeze – the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) currently being strengthened at the WTO headquarters in Geneva. Public services represent a lot of money. In the year 2000, global public expenditure in the education sector alone was more than one thousand billion US dollars. In the eyes of the private sector that's a huge market that's closed to you but that you'd love to get your hands on. And that's where GATS comes in.

GATS defines 160 service sectors from health and education to telecommunications, rubbish collection and legal advice. Its remit can loosely be described as 'anything you cannot drop on your foot'. The 'barriers to trade' that could be targeted in the service sector are not import tariffs or restrictions that apply at national borders. The limits on international trade in services are local regulatory structures, and the concept of public services being distinct from the private.

Advocates of trade liberalisation think that private companies are more efficient at delivering services than governments. Gerhard Cromme, a member of the European Roundtable of Industrialists (an influential lobby group) believes that "Schools will respond better to paying customers, just like any other business".

The US Coalition of Service Industries (CSI) is a powerful corporate lobbying group dedicated to the reduction of trade barriers to US service exporters. Robert Vasine, the Coalitions President boasted that his organisation has played an "aggressive advocacy role in writing the General Agreement on Trade in Services". The CSI have also stated that "We believe the negotiations [will] allow the opportunity for US businesses to expand into foreign health care markets.... Historically, health care services in many foreign countries have largely been the responsibility of the public sector. This public ownership of health care has made it difficult for US health care providers to market in foreign countries..."

The Scottish Parliament's Health Committee is now considering the impact of the GATS negotiations on health provision in Scotland, after 58 MSPs signed a Motion calling for a full debate on the matter – a clear majority of the backbenchers able to sign such motions. The STUC and SNP have also agreed strongly worded resolutions of concern.

The implications for our public services are bad enough. When commercial interests run essential services in developing countries it is the poor who lose out. A chilling example of this occurred when Bolivia, following instructions from the World Bank, sold the city of Cochabamba's water system to an Anglo-American company Betchel Corporation. Water bills increased by 35 per cent and people had to obtain permits to collect rain water. Violent demonstrations erupted and six people died before the government caved in and renationalised.

Southern members of the WTO have called for a balanced assessment of the actual effects of service liberalisation as a condition for further talks. India, for example, has expressed concern that health has been included in the GATS negotiations and asked that the parameters of a study commissioned by the WTO called "The Benefits of Deregulation and Liberalisation of Trade in Services" be changed to address the drawbacks as well as the benefits. This request was never formerly addressed.

It doesn't have to be this way. The tail end of a short article is no place to set out an alternative economic vision. Yet there are some simple, achievable changes that could be applied at once if only the political will existed. WDM's "Making Globalisation Work for People" proposals include the following:

- Governments should immediately promise to put poverty eradication and the attainment of the 2015 International Development Targets at the heart of all international policies;
- Poverty reduction and sustainable development should replace liberalisation as the legal objectives of trade and investment agreements;
- Any new international rules on foreign investment should strengthen the rights of governments to ensure that inward investment meets sustainable development priorities and enforce the responsibilities of foreign investors towards the communities and societies in which they invest;
- Governments should enforce multilateral agreements on labour and human rights and the environment, rather than allowing trade agreements to take precedence.

Although hardly radical in themselves, such proposals would represent a fundamental shift in the direction of globalisation and could play a major part in delivering a global economic system that could have something to offer for all – and help us to bring the global village back to the fore. ■

a scottish accent abroad

Rosemary Burnett

People all over the world are watching the Scottish Parliament with interest. Every week another party of distinguished visitors comes to Scotland to see how our new democratic child is growing and thriving. Yet it seems as if this excitement and enthusiasm is something not shared by the people of Scotland themselves, if the newspapers are to be believed. Perhaps, as Joyce Macmillan wrote in the April/May issue of this Review, it is "time to learn the art of strengthening our political institutions as well as tearing them down." One area where both political institutions and civic society can contribute substantially, it seems to me, is in the international arena.

The legislation on the International Criminal Court is currently going through the Scottish parliament. This will be an opportunity to establish an important principle in international law – that those who have committed crimes against humanity should be brought to justice wherever and wherever they are. If the Scottish Parliament accepts Amnesty International's recommendations, no one suspected of genocide, war crimes or crimes against humanity would find a safe haven in Scotland.

The dispersal of asylum seekers to Glasgow has brought the international problem of refugees and those fleeing persecution and harassment to our own doorstep. Although many speak of Scotland's proud tradition of tolerance, the fact remains that there have been over 90 attacks on asylum seekers since dispersal first started over a year ago. OXFAM's recently published report 'Asylum - The Truth Behind the Headlines' finds that much of the press coverage on asylum is negative to the point of being hostile and relies heavily on the use of false assumptions and exaggeration. How can politicians and civic society tackle this issue? Scotland is bound by the UK's international obligations under the United Nations Convention on Refugees to offer asylum to all those who fear persecution in their own country. Although asylum and immigration policy is reserved to Westminster, I would argue that the obligation to support asylum seekers and refugees lies clearly with the Scottish parliament and people. Those seeking refuge in Scotland have valuable skills – they are doctors, nurses, engineers, journalists and academics. Adopting a more positive and pro-active response to refugees and asylum seekers would have

many benefits – to take the opposite approach risks creating a marginalised and disaffected group of people and a store of problems for the future.

Another area in which Scotland could provide a lead is in the establishment of a Human Rights Commission. Although the implementation of the Human Rights Act has made it possible for people to pursue their rights through the domestic courts, Scotland lacks a Commission which would educate, protect, monitor and provide access with respect to these rights. Scottish parliamentarians have no one to advise them on the human rights aspect of forthcoming legislation. Public authorities have no body from which to seek impartial advice on how to comply with the Act. Ordinary citizens have no organisation to which they can turn to help them take a case, as they would if they had an equal opportunities, racial or disability discrimination case. There is no-one to monitor the impact of policy or legislation on human rights. There is no body charged with human rights education. This Commission would be one of the first in Europe. There is a Commission in Northern Ireland, but it lacks a crucial power – the power to compel evidence. So many of its investigations have been obstructed by public authorities which have chosen to hide behind this caveat. Let us make sure that a Human Rights Commission for Scotland is something of which we can be truly proud.

There is much activity on the international front. Apart from the succession of visitors interested in the new Scottish parliament, a delegation from the All-China Federation of Women's Groups came to learn about women's role in the democratic process here. Lest we forget that Scotland leads the way in progress towards gender equality in our parliament! The parliament has a Cross-Party Group on International Development to facilitate the exchange of information and concern amongst the many Scottish organisations working in this field – SCIAF, Scottish Refugee Council, Scottish European Aid (now Mercy Corps), Scottish Jubilee, SEAD, Scottish Development Education Centre, Just World Partners, and Equal Exchange to name but a few. They are joined by the representatives of UK organisations working in Scotland – Amnesty International, OXFAM, Christian Aid, Population Concern, VETAID, International Rescue Corps, Helsinki Citizens Assembly and UNA all playing their part in ensuring that

Every week another party of distinguished visitors comes to Scotland to see how our new democratic child is growing and thriving

Scots play their part in the international arena. NIDOS is a recently formed network of international development organisations in Scotland which is taking an active role in, for example, organising hustings meetings for the recent election.

Another positive development on the international front is the presence of many more consulates in Scotland. Not only does this give us an opportunity to make our views on, for example, the persecution of the Falun Gong direct to the Chinese Consul in Edinburgh, it also means that reports of activities in Scotland are sent back directly to the countries concerned.

There is also a lively exchange in the academic and local government sphere. The recent visit by Glasgow councillors to Cuba certainly provoked a debate about human rights in Cuba as well as the merits and demerits of council junkets. The Scottish Development Education Centre has developed an education resource for students in Scotland and South Africa, working with teachers in both countries and using the issue of land reform as one of common interest. Scottish Education and Action for Development specialises in forging links between deprived communities here and abroad – a recent project involved visits by activists from and to the Dominican Republic.

Foreign students come to Scotland in ever increasing numbers, thanks in part to the high fees they earn for the universities, but all of whom experience life in Scotland and share their own cultural background with Scots. Conversely, many Scottish students spend part of their university courses abroad. Edinburgh College of Art, for example, sends selected students to Florence, Seville, Salamanca, USA, and Munich as part of their third year. The Planning School is linked with a university in China. Law students can spend time working with death row prisoners in the USA. Such experiences, even for those who cannot afford a gap year, broaden perspective and add an international dimension to Scottish society which has

already seen Glasgow and the second city of the Empire. Scottish administrators and soldiers played a crucial role on the international scene then, Scottish parliamentarians, businesses, churches, trades unions, educators, development agencies still do today.

So what of the future? Scots have traditionally gone (or been sent) abroad to further their careers or better their prospects. Although 'economic migrants' are now seen as dirty words, that is what Scots have done for centuries. So if there are skills shortages here, why should the places not be filled by those who are qualified to do so, whatever their skin colour or their country of origin? Scotland would be richer – although the converse is that their countries of origin would be the poorer. If we handle the dispersal of asylum seekers to Scotland with compassion and enlightened self-interest, if we welcome students and foreign visitors warmly. We need to teach children the values of other cultures and ways of life, we need to

improve our language skills and to look outwards. There are many splendid educational initiatives underway – internet links, civic twinning, academic and business partnerships, parliamentary links, trade union solidarity. There is much greater scope available to us for a sustained programme of serious twinning, establishing lasting links which do not have to be confined to richer societies. New technology has opened up the possibilities of fairly low-cost communication. The expansion of twinning programmes can be promoted both by the Scottish Executive, especially in education, and also by civic organisations

Scotland could also establish an International Civic Centre, bringing people from all over the world to share ideas about good governance, social and cultural change. For a modest investment Scotland could establish a positive international profile. The future is not about isolation and xenophobia. It is about broadening our world view and building a well-informed and compassionate society. ■

Scotland could also establish an International Civic Centre, bringing people from all over the world to share ideas about good governance, social and cultural change

our mutual friend

Cathy Jamieson

In the lead up to the General Election, many political commentators have focussed on the ways in which the Scottish Parliament has taken a different approach from Westminster. Sutherland, tuition fees, McCrone – some seem determined to portray such differences as a fault line in policy rather than as perfectly legitimate Scottish solutions to Scottish problems, and an entirely understandable outcome of the devolution process.

But there is a danger that such differences become the sole focus of political thinking and direction in Scotland, and that the underlying principles of why certain policy directions are important are forgotten, as arguments rage about what (if any) additional powers the Parliament might want. Sterile arguments about fiscal autonomy for Scotland are all very well, but will do little to challenge increasing trends towards globalisation.

As a socialist, who joined the Labour Party because of a strong desire to tackle poverty and inequality at all levels, the means to the end are important to me. The principle of common ownership has always been central to my political beliefs, and the time has come for a new approach to how this principle can be put into practice. From the days of the Fenwick Weavers, and Robert Owen's community at New Lanark, there has been a strong commitment to the idea that people can work together to provide for their communities, sharing ownership of resources, providing services which benefit all, redistributing surplus for the benefit of the community, and having a democratic say in the decision making process.

In the present day, common ownership continues in the co-operative and mutual sector, although many have forgotten the roots of such businesses, or are unaware of the difference between them and PLCs.

The number of co-operatives and mutuals is expanding in number and across different sectors. Hopefully this signals a growing recognition of the benefits offered by mutuality. The large retail co-operatives and mutuals in the financial sector share a common ideology with agricultural co-ops, housing and health co-ops, community based credit unions, food co-ops and LETS schemes across the country.

Mutuals in the financial services industry, such as the Nationwide and Standard Life, are under continued threat from carpetbaggers who recognise that these are highly successful businesses, by any standards. But the key difference is that they are there primarily for the benefit of their members, not to make profits for individual shareholders. As such, they can develop services which other institutions would have no interest in.

The Co-operative Bank was an industry leader in teaming up with post offices to offer banking services, helping to sustain a viable service to rural communities.

The low cost lending and financial services offered by credit unions are an alternative to traditional financial institutions which have a particular benefit for those on low incomes. The Scottish Executive recently announced a strategy for the expansion of the Scottish Credit Union sector, with funding to take this forward, and the Parliament and Executive have just signed up to a partnership with Capital Credit Union, ensuring that all their employees have access to this facility.

An increasing interest in mutuality has arisen in football, where supporters have come to realise that where clubs exist only to make profits for shareholders, the interests of those who support the team are not always looked after. The advent of Supporters Direct in England has enabled a number of new initiatives promoting mutuality in football to take place which are not yet possible in Scotland, although there is a very clear interest in setting up Supporters Trusts. Recent media speculation about a new share issue at Celtic FC prompted Peter Carr, spokesman for the Celtic Supporters' Trust to comment:

"If they go ahead with another pitch, I don't think supporters will be able to pay. That could leave the way open for City of London institutions and/or media groups interested to buy their way in. We want Celtic to be owned by supporters, not faceless people."

The desire exists among football supporters, not merely to own a small piece of the club but also to have a say in the running of the club. A mutual form of ownership would

There are those who will happily promote public ownership as a concept and might even quote their Granny's Divi number while today they bank with PLCs

give the supporters a voice in the running of their club, either by full mutualisation or through supporters trusts.

and recall the good old days of co-operation, while today they bank and insure PLCs instead of mutuals!

A new co-operative model for care of the elderly is being developed, which will offer local people facilities in their own area. The proposal is to bring together the two types of co-operatives currently working in this field – where some of the retail co-operatives have diversified into providing residential care as a part of their business activities, and the worker co-ops which have been set up to provide services and employment. The new model aims to provide a high quality package of care, based on need, ranging from home care to day and full residential or nursing care if required. The model is being developed by the Co-operative Union, in co-operation with Unison, and each new co-op would be managed by professional care managers, but given strategic direction by an elected board, made up of equal numbers of staff and consumers.

In Scotland, mutuality has jumped to the top of the agenda following the publication of proposals by the Scottish Executive for the future of the water industry. People in Scotland have very strong views about the need to keep the water industry out of the hands of the private sector. A commitment was given by Sam Galbraith, when he was the Minister responsible for the industry, that he wished to see it remain in public ownership. The real challenge at present is to ensure that a model is found which allows for this, and ensures that the industry gets the investment it needs to bring the infrastructure up to the standard required. The Community Mutual Model, developed by the Co-op Party, has been submitted to the Executive for consideration, and a presentation was recently made to a number of MSPs. The Campaign for Socialism recently brought together Labour activists along with MSPs, MPs, Trade Unionists and the Co-op Party to look at this option in more detail

People often tell me that the Co-operative movement is old-fashioned and out of date with modern thinking. There are those who will happily promote public ownership as a concept and might even quote their Granny's Divi number

The key difference is that mutuals are there primarily for the benefit of their members, not to make profits for individual shareholders

But I would argue that the fundamental principles of common and co-operative ownership are as relevant today as they ever were. These principles can be applied in today's society just as they were in the early days of the movement. Indeed, there are now many more opportunities to promote co-operation, not just in the traditional co-operative sectors, but also in internet technology and telecommunications.

'Co-operation amongst co-operators' is one of the fundamental principles of the co-operative movement, which is now being taken much more seriously. The Scottish Co-operative and Mutual Forum has been established to bring together the large retail and financial services sector with the small community co-ops. The 'social economy', taking in not just the co-ops and mutuals, but also not-for-profit organisations in the voluntary and charitable sectors, now plays a significant role in local economic development and job creation, as well as the traditional role of service provision. The Co-operative Commission has looked at the sector across the UK and brought forward proposals which could see the movement play an even greater role in the future.

But the skills and knowledge of the movement have yet to be fully recognised. People with a background in the social economy sector have a wealth of experience in providing high quality services within a framework of social responsibility. The time has come to make greater use of this wealth of experience and see the social economy as an integral part of the delivery of services rather than being added on as an afterthought.

Mutuality is not just a nice idea – it works in practice. And it works in the interests of ordinary people, regardless of local, national or indeed international boundaries. But it takes individual action to make it work for the collective good. In today's world, common ownership brings a responsibility to participate in the process. It is not enough to sit back and expect others to solve problems. We must all be part of the solution. ■

becoming part of the solution

Jim Mather

Most people know that global corporations are hardwired to seek grants, loans, tax breaks and research subsidies. It is no secret that they will organise their operations to produce products where the costs are lowest, sell them where the market is most lucrative, and account for the profits where the tax rates are lowest.

They are huge, with many of them turning over much more money than most countries. And they are exceedingly powerful, seeing no automatic social or moral role for themselves. Instead, they focus exclusively on survival, profits and growth.

To that end, they have a certain integrity of objective that many governments could well adopt. But those objectives often avoid social responsibility and hence are directly at odds with the aspirations of individual workers, consumers and national governments.

However, we should not be surprised that they did not evolve to be social institutions, because when they cause damage, we can trace the root cause back to the rules laid down by our own government and/or international treaties, to which our government has acceded.

Meanwhile, to paraphrase David Korten, author of "When Corporations Rule the World", the objectives of every democratic nation continues to include quality jobs, rising living standards, technological and industrial developments, ensured rights for workers and consumers, and a high quality environment. Therein lie the seeds of conflict between global companies and national governments.

But for Scotland, as part of the UK, this conflict is even more dangerous, because in the Union we are powerless to resolve the issue in our favour. Instead, the Union continues to widen the wealth gap between Scotland and the other countries in the Western world. Not only that, but we can also expect to be overtaken economically by Spain and Portugal, as Ireland has already done, and find ourselves competing for inward investment with former Soviet-bloc countries.

That outlook is grim, but it is the best that Union will be able to deliver for Scotland. New Labour are tacitly admitting this, by encouraging inward investment on the basis of low regulations, low wages and low closure costs, based on low redundancy payments. A formula for long-term despair and all the accompanying attributes that diminishing living standards can produce.

In my opinion, only governments acting in concert will control and bring the best out of multi-nationals. Nothing

else will produce reasonable obligations and enforceable rules. Nothing else will save these same multi-nationals from the temptation of easy options that benefit them at the expense of workers, local communities and countries.

Only the action of Governments working together can encourage global corporations to have more long-term attitudes in their commitment to people and communities. This is something that is both long overdue and well worth tackling, because it must be possible to produce an outcome where Governments, multi-nationals and employees all win.

Only with sheer clout and by acting together with our European colleagues can we hope to wrest back control, enabling us to develop the carrots, sticks and partnership approach that will discourage the constant search of cheaper locations and lower wage costs. Moving away from a strategy that can damage both the countries of production and their people, as well as the countries in which they are sold.

But first things first! Scotland does not have its own voice in Europe, let alone control of our own economy. We may have a Parliament with economic development responsibility, but it has negligible control of the UK tax regime and without that the Scottish Executive is not a government in any full and meaningful sense of the word. Therefore with Scotland not having that power or being represented at the top European table, the current scenario prevents us being part of the solution.

That certainly is the only outcome that New Labour's strategy can deliver. Their vision for Scotland might at some point in time include improved means of controlling global companies across Europe and the adoption of the Social Chapter, but there is no sign of that yet.

For most of my lifetime, Scotland has attracted inward investors with grants and loans often eclipsing any other qualitative factors, and as a result the Scottish economy has become dependent on what I call 'thin inward investors'. They are companies that do virtually no research and development, and who, when times are tough, will cut jobs (and even their whole branch operations) ruthlessly and quickly.

Long before the recent Motorola decision, there were many people in Scotland who felt that our disproportionately high level of state-subsidised 'thin inward investors' would cause problems, and draw support away from indigenous businesses. Especially as, in countries like Denmark

and Norway, most long-term employment stems from indigenous small to medium-sized businesses.

These people were right, but being right provides no comfort. Comfort can only be derived from having a sustainable and effective economy that provides the opportunity for fulfilling quality of life for everyone. And that goal, in my opinion, can only be achieved in an Independent Scotland.

Successive Westminster governments have tried to produce policies that will simultaneously fix the problems of Salford and Saltcoats, Hackney and Haddington and it cannot be done. The one-size-fits-all approach is a recipe for waste and inefficiency. The Westminster approach offers Scotland nothing better than finishing a distant second to the South East of England in terms of wealth and growth, and a permanent first place in all the UK measurements of poverty, ill-health and premature death.

New Labour will never address our lack of Independence, lack of autonomy, lack of competitiveness, which are each different ways of describing the single core problem facing Scotland. Everything from unemployment, low wages, part-time work, short-term contracts, poverty, ill-health, premature death, low birth rate, drug abuse, low confidence to depression can be traced back to that source.

Meanwhile, the Unionist politicians, who must know this, will continue to build their careers cynically attending to these symptoms of Scotland's relative decline, without any attempt to address the core problem. No matter what Scotland spends on education and incentives, we can at best only match what is offered by our international competitors, who then trump us by either offering access to bigger local markets or offering a more competitive rate of corporate tax.

If we stay in the Union, as a small country lacking our own lower rates of corporation tax, we will be forced to be grateful for the jobs provided by global companies. We will see our best and brightest talent, educated at our expense, leaving Scotland, and we will see successful small Scottish companies being sold before they reach maturity. Yet just across the North Sea, Norway with 0.1 per cent of the world's population has one per cent of world trade and 10 per cent of the world's merchant shipping.

After 300 years of Union, we only have a handful of global companies, some built in the finance sector over many years, and the rest mainly companies formed from privatisation and de-regulation - nothing compared to the

100-plus global companies based in Catalonia. This is evidence along with low business birth rate and tiny spend on research and development that proves that Scotland is a poorly performing branch of the UK economy, which only benefits a small proportion of our population.

An Independent country could tool up and educate for the new knowledge-based economy that will compete with other countries for quality inward investment and enable our own indigenous companies to grow and flourish internationally.

However, an Independent Scotland could not only solve its own problems, but also play a positive role in shaping a better way forward. I personally believe that our recent over-reliance on global companies will make us better, more enthusiastic and more valued Europeans. We would have the experience and the insight to help frame a new approach that re-invented obligation and social responsibility for global companies that, as I have said above, could benefit all parties.

In many ways, I believe we will be pushing at an open door, with many global companies realising that large cohesive markets like the EU reward ethical behaviour and penalise those who transgress the public's standards.

Increasingly consumers punish firms that fail to face up to their social responsibilities, and the companies know that. Governments need to catch up and realise that they have a positive role to play and are not simple bystanders hiding behind 'international market forces'.

To provide themselves with financial stability and protection from currency fluctuations, multi-national companies will need to have a material presence in every major currency bloc (Dollar, Yen and Euro) and this, in turn, will also increase the EU's power to negotiate a better way. Admittedly, this may involve some robust dialogue with the World Trade Organisation, but that is probably overdue.

In the meantime, we are duty bound to improve matters and win investment from global companies on much more worthwhile factors than low wages and low cost of closure.

This can be done. But it can be more easily achieved as an Independent country than it can as a branch of a larger economy that favours the South-East of England. Only then can we hope to compete with the best and grow our living standards across the board, growing both at least at the same rate as the best of our European competitors, with a strong element of belated and welcome catch-up. ■

the win-win economy

Robin Harper

How can we set up a sustainable Scotland? I prefer to ask another question that will provide many of the answers. What are the opportunities for Scotland in the coming decade in terms of win-win policies that will deliver more jobs, a better quality of life, help reduce pollution and global warming, and produce export markets for goods manufactured in Scotland?

I believe there are at least three opportunities crying out for further investment and encouragement.

Renewable energy, recycling, and insulation products and technology all offer the chance to investors and inventors to flourish in an economy that has barely started to take on board these ideas, where the opportunities for growth are almost unlimited, and where rapid development will also deliver huge export potential.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in renewable energy. I will deal first with the one source that seems to have government backing; wind energy. Scotland has 40 per cent of the total potential wind energy resource of the EU, but of course we could never exploit all of it; we would lose too much land. However the prospects for wind are quite good. We should not forget that its contribution is country wide, and so it can be included in base load calculations – the wind is always blowing somewhere in the UK! The price is increasingly competitive, which comes as a direct result of the economies of scale produced by mass production of parts, and sufficiently large sites being available. There are lessons to be drawn from this for all other renewable technology development.

What is actually happening? On the plus side, wind will qualify for assistance under the Renewable Obligation Scotland. With all its complicated certification and internal trading systems, we must not forget one very important point. The cost is borne directly by the electricity consumer – us – not the taxpayer (also us). There is absolutely no element of Government subsidy in this system. This places us renewable campaigners between a rock and a hard place in Scotland. Any achievement beyond the very modest five per cent increase in renewable electricity production in Scotland will result in higher prices for Scottish consumers, unless it can be a shared target with England and Wales. We have our first

experimental full-scale wave power device on Islay. Set up by Wave Gen, it channels the energy of waves as they hit the coast, driving an enclosed wind generator. It cannot run at full power, as it would blow the fuses in the local grid, which highlights already one major obstacle to full exploitation of wave power on the West Coast – we need an upgraded grid. We also need to invest heavily in research right now – the sums presently available will not allow us to get ahead of the Danes or anyone else, and we could lose a golden opportunity to lead the world. The main things missing are research backing and capital grants for start up for new technologies such as wave.

Recycling provides another opportunity for creating many thousands of jobs, and lessening our impact on our environment. I am not convinced that we are on the right path in terms of long-term investment. SEPA – the Scottish Environment Protection Agency – have been given

the task of overseeing the preparation of the waste plans of the 32 Scottish Local Authorities, who have grouped themselves in nine area planning committees. I wrote to all of them, and had a surprisingly high response rate. Nearly all have replied, and though it is clear they see the long term advantages of intensive recycling, most seem inclined to accept at least some waste to energy plants as being the only way they can meet EU directives. We really must beware of investing huge sums (£140 million for each incinerator) in a technology that will perversely commit us to produce enough waste over a period of 25 years to make it economically viable, at the very time when the Government says it is keen to introduce waste minimisation strategies as part of the most sensible way forward!

We need an economy where growth is in the areas of recycling, renewables, resource use reduction, organics, public services, entertainment, the arts and education,

Newspaper and packaging makes up the biggest single fraction of our daily municipal waste generation. Newsprint can now be recycled as paper but, more importantly, it can also be used to make a very effective and cheap insulation product, commercially patented as 'Warm Cell'. I have seen this used in the Link Housing Project of Abbey Hill in Edinburgh. There were no new building techniques required, and with a few other simple energy saving ideas built in, the houses only cost three per cent more than exactly similar houses built to the usual specification. This sum could be saved within three to five years on fuel costs alone they are so energy efficient. Housing creates

30 per cent or more of our green house gas emissions, so you can see what a huge contribution higher building standards, which we do not have yet, and a continued commitment to retrofit insulation which we have in part, will make to our Kyoto promises

We have an option now, under EU regulations, to switch farming subsidies from production to Organic Conversion, and agri-environment schemes, where farmers are paid to look after the environment better. This is called 'modulation'. Unfortunately, we can only get as much as we put in, so as our government is not prepared to put in very much, we cannot get much money out of the EU. This must change, and one way to do it is to reassure farmers that they will be just as well off in this scheme, over all, as they will be swapping occasional fat profits for greater security, and a steady source of income.

We need to achieve an economy that is relatively static, recycles and reuses its resources, shares out its wealth more evenly, and with good public transport, education, support for local marketing and production. An economy where growth is in the areas of recycling, renewables, resource use reduction (especially through insulation

and efficient uses of energy), organics, public services (especially transport), entertainment, the arts and education, and where contraction is in all those polluting activities that can be replaced by more benign alternatives.

To achieve these objectives we are going to need either more control over our own economy, or the political machinery to set common objectives with Westminster and Europe. These I would say are in their infancy, but they are there, through Scotland House, the links we have with the commission, the Committee of the Regions, and the Secretary of State's office. One example of how we can work together to make a difference can be held up. We, in common with the rest of the UK, have a target of five per cent new renewables by 2010. We cannot exceed this, because otherwise our electricity consumers would be paying higher prices than down south, so far from being in a position where we could, if we wanted, really go for expansion, we have effectively been put in a straight jacket. I fear there will be many more obstacles like this to setting up our own sustainable economy, but we must do our best to overcome them. ■

The Fire Brigade Union

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a historyless world

Andrew Noble

The still ongoing BSE and Foot and Mouth crises are a near perfect paradigm of our present political state: a covert, recklessly criminal agricultural group seeking profit in a manner which quickly overwhelms our depleted, demoralised, national veterinary services. Lincoln's government for the people (forget government by the people) seems nowhere to provide defence against **any** form of money making. Among the multiple knock-on effects of leaky mass burial grounds and toxic funeral pyres will be, presumably, radical changes in senior governmental holiday plans. Tony will not be able to celebrate his Roman electoral triumphs in dappled Tuscan woods. Gordon will have to forgo his annual economic textbook-laden pilgrimage to Cape Cod where sun, sand and various salty stringencies will fine hone, for another year, the apparently unceasing functional operations of that prodigious brain. The visionary works of that darkly prescient Bard of the Great Republic, half-Scottish Herman Melville, never appear to feature on his holiday reading list.

Blair's cultural and intellectual vacuity (he once allegedly toyed with **Ivanhoe**) is so manifest as not to require comment. Whatever takes him to Italy is not an Augustian desire to reconnect poetry and power. Unlike Blair, Brown is deeply enigmatic. How is it that the Red-Papered wunderkind of the Edinburgh history school has totally abandoned all his previous values in order to embrace a contemporary America which has entombed its own radical past and where even a leftist liberalism is under siege? This is the Brown who with neither parliamentary assent nor party knowledge directed a hundred million dollars to M.I.T. so that it might impregnate England's Cambridge with its capacity for entrepreneurial IT.

This is the Brown who, as I write, bestraddles the dark Millbank Tower control centre, where, Excalibur, the instant response computer whirring in the background, presides over six ex-Clinton team members, alleged masters of focus group and hard-ball dirty electoral tactics. This is the Brown who recently had to tea in Number 11 the lunatic ex-fringe who now cluster round Bush with their crazy repro-Victorian notions that the state, in the face of increasing inequities produced by an IT inflated stock-market can withdraw and leave social care to varied private, religious charities. This grotesquely wrong-headed notion of the condition of the industrial poor in the nineteenth century is related to the thesis that the cause

of **all** our trouble is derived from the promiscuously soft liberalism of the '60s creating a culture of dependency. This is what Clinton, for electoral self-preservation, and Bush, as ideological truth, were and are intent on destroying. If Brown once read J.K Galbraith he seems now more interested in Marvin Olasky's **Compassionate**

If Brown once read J.K Galbraith he seems now more interested in Marvin Olasky's **Compassionate Conservatism**

Conservatism. Olasky, in fact, is a caricature of Brown's own apostasy in his movement from socialism to entrepreneurial licence. A passionate Leninist, he went to Russia, but then purged himself by doctoral work on Western films: a man has to do what a man has to do.

What we can expect from Blair and Brown after the election is further addictive doses of privatising American fiscal and jargonistic managerial methods. All addictions, of course, are based on an insatiable craving for the very thing that is destroying us. The great virtue of classical American pragmatism was that it envisaged error, even tragic error, as inherent in the human condition. This alleged amoral imported pragmatism that New Labour is high on is in fact a self-sealing ideology that wilfully allows it to disregard the overwhelming mass of contrary empirical evidence to its increasingly rabid, market solutions. Central to this is a degradation of political intelligence by ignoring creative culture. Who now reads a novel or a poem among our politicians? They are, indeed, Thatchers's philistine children.

In Derek Mahon's wonderful new **Collected Poems** (The Gallery Press, 1999) we find these lines from "America Deserta":

Not long from barbarism to decadence, not far
from liberal republic to defoliant empire
and thence to entropy; not long before
the great money scam begins its decline
to pot-holed roads and unfinished construction sites,
as in the dark ages a few scattered lights

The British, of course, have a habit of discounting Irish witness but contemporary American literary vision (Lowell, Bellow, Roth, DeLillo, Ellroy) nowhere impinges on New Labour. Brown, in particular, seems to live in a historyless world, a vacuum which his ever-tight suit seems to suggest he desires to expand to fill having already single-handedly terminated the inherent stop-go rhythm of capitalism.

This is an extraordinary state of mind for a once professional historian. Perhaps he should read Mark Twain this summer. Like Melville, Twain thought American imperialism in the Pacific (“Don’t fuck with the white whale”) was not only genocidal but would eventually destroy the nation. He also believed that militarily, economically, ethnically Anglo-Saxon values (World War Two was, at best, an aberration) had corrupted America with violent greed and that America would re-infect Europe. This from **The Anglo-Saxon Race** (1906):

Our Public motto is “In God we trust”, and when we see those gracious words on the trade-dollar (worth sixty cents) they always seem to tremble and whimper with pious emotion. That is our public motto. It transpires that our private one is, “When the Anglo-Saxon wants a thing **he just takes it.**” Our public morals are touchingly set forth in that stately and yet gentle motto which indicates that we are a nation of gracious and affectionate multitudinous brothers compacted into one – “**e pluribus unum**”. Our private morals find the light in the sacred phrase “Come, **step** lively!”...

Something more than a century ago we gave Europe the first notions of liberty it had ever had, and thereby largely and happily helped to bring on the French Revolution and claim a share in its beneficent results. We have taught Europe many lessons since. But for us,

Europe might never have known the interviewer; but for us, Europe might never have experienced the blessing of extravagant imposts; but for us the European Food Trust might never have acquired the art of poisoning the world for cash; but for us her Insurance Trusts might never have found out the best way to work the widow and orphan for profit; but for us the long delayed resumption of Yellow Journalism in Europe might have been postponed for generations to come. Steadily, continuously, persistently, we are Americanizing Europe, and all in good time we shall get the job perfected.

Twain was a popular American comedian with a Swiftian terror of where populism might take the Republic. Where it might take it (another, key text for Brown’s beach holiday) is Thomas Frank’s recent **One Market Under God: Extreme Capitalism, Market Populism and the End of Economic Democracy**. A swinging indictment of how we believe, despite unending contrary evidence, that economically, politically, and indeed spiritually the unfettered forces of the market have delivered us into a permanent pig-heaven. Ironically, perhaps tragically, New Labour, inexcusably in Brown’s case, seems quite ignorant of both American history and radical American intelligence which would provide it with the perfect antidote to its toxic consumption of imported transatlantic junk ‘ideas’.

What we can expect from Blair and Brown after the election is further addictive doses of privatising American fiscal and jargonistic managerial methods. All addictions, of course, are based on an insatiable craving for the very thing that is destroying us

reporting scotland, accurately

Robin McAlpine

What we know of Scottish politics we know mainly because of the Scottish media. Even the handful of professional Parliament watchers and the politicians rely on television and newspapers for the big picture – far too much happens to consume un-mediated. So much of the modern political culture relies on rumour and opinion that is never voiced in the chamber or the committee rooms that there really is no choice but to look to the media. And if the professional relies unavoidably on the Scottish media, to the Scottish public it is omnipotent. A falling tree that the tabloids choose not to hear really doesn't make a sound.

But what we 'know' is only what we are told. Most of Scotland 'knows' that the Scottish Parliament is making a mess of things because most of the Scottish press spent the first year telling them that. The Daily Record also made enormous swathes of Scotland believe that abolishing an unjust prohibition on public acceptance of homosexuality meant that teenagers would be taught in school how to perform homosexual acts. And if this is the only information you receive, what else are you to believe? The broadcast media in Scotland is already regulated in a manner which requires them to act in an unbiased manner. Surveys have shown that a majority of people get their information from broadcast news. But it is the press, probably to a greater extent than politicians, which sets and defines the public agenda.

Despite corporate apologists who claim that government in the modern world isn't actually all that important, it is. Politicians around the world decide everything from what we pay pensioners to whether we launch a nuclear strike. And while schools teach us how to resolve differential equations, they teach virtually nothing about how to understand these agendas. This job is left wholesale to the media. It is time we woke up to the constitutional significance of this state of affairs, and questions must be asked about the unaccountable power of the press.

But surely the press is accountable? Simply refuse to buy newspapers which promote views you dislike and, if others do the same, the editorial line will change quickly.

It is a fact we must accept that few people choose a newspaper on the basis of its public affairs coverage. Gossip, sport, features, columnists, promotions, price, even – god help us – topless models rank above political coverage when it comes to the selection of our media. It is simply true that people will not boycott a newspaper because of the way it covers the Scottish Parliament. The

Scotsman has undertaken a sustained campaign against Scotland's liberal professions, with teachers and social workers particularly in its sights. Despite the fact that these are the people who make up the core readership of the Scotsman, their circulation figures have not nosedived as they ought. A newspaper can villainise its own readers without too much negative fallout. The contract might as well have been written by Mephistopheles – ex-Record editor Martin Clarke has only as much power as his readership gives him, and yet he can run a one-man campaign against Scotland's gay community while millions of disgusted Scots can do nothing to stop him.

Which means that discussion on how to regulate the power of the media is high on the public agenda in Scotland? Check your contract. This is an issue that all of the commercial media have a strong financial interest in suppressing. Not only would a politician talking openly about regulating the power of the press not receive fair coverage, they would be concertedly discredited. On a whim editors can take public figures and turn them into villains or fools with no redress – even if they aren't given a reason.

Like the Papacy in late medieval Europe, the press is untouchable. No public figure will broach this subject seriously because the consequences are clear. When Presiding Officer Sir David Steel tried to do so over blatantly inaccurate reporting of MSP holidays and office allowances, the editorials universally denounced him. And, more significantly, every one of the 'victims' of this reporting (the MSPs) sided with their persecutors for fear of retribution.

The exception is the question of privacy. People value their privacy, and the media knows that. The media is less quick to discredit the right of privacy (much as they would like to) because they know it would not sit well with the instinctive views of their readership.

The measure by which invasion of privacy is justified is public interest. Yes, it is in the public interest to know if a junior royal is using her position, knowledge and influence for personal commercial gain. Yes, it is in the public interest to know if a politician campaigning for family values is an adulterer. No, it isn't in the public interest to know the sexual orientation or drug habits of a soap star. But this is the crux of the matter, because it is in no real way *against* the public interest to know if a soap star is a cocaine addict. It might seem unfair that a family birthday was ruined by paparazzi invading their personal lives for no higher purpose than to entertain the bored, but it

does no real harm to our society, our economy or our environment. Meanwhile the wilful distortion of the truth which makes us believe that all of our politicians are lazy and corrupt has a very serious and corrosive effect on our society, but goes unchallenged.

Scottish media law is designed to protect the individual – person or corporation – but not the greater good of our society. We have the Press Complaints Commission and one of the world's more stringent libel laws. As defenders of your right not to be lied about or harassed they can be powerful; as defenders of public interest they are weak. And yet, what they demonstrate is that it is perfectly possible to put in place structures which prevent the abuse of power – in fact it is the norm.

We need a new structure to check the power of the media to protect the public interest. There is no doubt that this is a fraught area – defining the public interest seems daunting and there is potentially a very real risk to the freedom of the press; a freedom that is essential. But this need not be as difficult as it might seem. The public interest is not about interpretation but facts. Freedom of thought gives us the right and ability to make our own interpretations of the facts we are given, but only if they are accurate. Detestable as it seems, if the Daily Mail can make a rationed case for the deregulation of labour markets it has the absolute right to do so. What it does not have the right to do is to use false information to make that case. All we have to do is apply the same burden of proof on statements made affecting the public interest as we do to those affecting individuals or financial interests.

The following examples, while clearly my own interpretation, show how a burden of proof applied in such a manner would protect the public interest without affecting any defensible 'freedom of the press'.

To claim that the abolition of Section 2A is the same thing as promoting 'gay sex lessons' is not true – teachers are not allowed to 'teach' any kind of sex. To make such a claim is against the public interest. To say that the abolition of Section 2A allows teachers to discuss gay sex with pupils has similar implications, but is not against the public interest in terms of factuality.

To state that the time when the Scottish Parliament is in recess is a 'holiday' is incorrect, as MSPs continue to have duties to perform. This would be against the public interest. To say that Parliamentary recesses leave politicians the discretion to do as much or as little work as

they wish is not against the public interest in terms of fact. To claim that office expenses are the same thing as salary is incorrect and against the public interest.

To say that independence would bankrupt Scotland is an interpretation. Unsubstantiated as is, it is not against the public interest in terms of fact. To call Tommy Sheridan a 'slug crawling in the dirt under a rock' as the Daily Record did recently may be abhorrent but is being presented as a metaphor and clearly not as a fact.

Press comments about the country being 'flooded' by 'bogus' asylum seekers or public finances being threatened by social security 'scroungers' are at best misleading and socially damaging. They may be justified as comment, but they are examples which would be tested on the grounds of accuracy.

Protecting the freedom of the press is very important. In a democracy it is essential that electors are in possession of accurate information on which to base their decisions, but it is also essential that the behaviour of legislators should be scrutinised openly. Any body which was ruling on or enforcing a public interest clause would need to be just as separate from government as the judiciary. But it would need to be powerful. The only things which inhibit the actions of the media are financial. To be found guilty of breaching the public interest through the misrepresentation of facts should bring with it a heavy fine as well as a duty to print a correction. This is the only thing which makes an editor think twice.

The above is not intended to produce a blue print for a solution, but only to indicate that solutions are possible and should be discussed. Scotland is of a size where we can address an issue like this, and it is not a party political matter. Defence of the public interest is something around which all of public and civic Scotland ought to be able to make common cause.

The need for the freedom of the press is not in dispute, just as an individual's freedom to maintain reasonable privacy or not be lied about in public is not in doubt. But the freedom of an individual to make an informed choice on the basis of accurate facts or the freedom of a group of people or set of beliefs to be pursued without being publicly misrepresented are just as important. And for society to be free from 'truths' which are manufactured out of lies by the wealthy and powerful must be a goal. There is not one freedom but many and we have to find better ways to balance these freedoms. ■

web review

Henry McCubbin

Truth to be told Tony Blair was really a political unknown when he was elected as leader in July 1994. When scratching around for the reasons behind this Fetesian becoming leader of a socialist party his various biographers have pointed to his relationship with several leading lights connected with Marxism Today and his membership of Labour CND not CND as he always reminds those who bring the topic up. He is as fortunate in this as many other aspects of his career that many journalists are not versed in the web of connections that make up the left. Labour CND was always a front for the International Marxist Group within the Labour Party, a most destructive force within any political organisation. One has only to look at the short history of the Scottish Labour Party to see this.

This makes one wonder if Blair was at all active in Labour CND or was this a necessary lapel badge for recognition. I would guess the later for if he was fully aware of the nature of the beast he certainly would not have wished it to be publicly associated with it. Also if he had any allegiance to the principles of nuclear disarmament would it have been possible for him to be seen to be crawling to the most reactionary militaristic US Republican President of our generation with regards to Star Wars?

Just what does New Labour stand for? I suppose we should look to the Parties objectives in its constitution. The debate over Clause IV was rightfully dominated by the arguments over common ownership. For that part I would ask readers to look up socialism in any reasonable dictionary and draw their own conclusions. But also in Clause IV was contained the Labour Party's position on international relations. The original read thus:-

Inter-Commonwealth: 6. To co-operate with the labour and socialist organisations in the Commonwealth overseas with a view to promoting the purposes of the party, and to take common action for the promotion of a higher standard of social and economic life for the working population of the respective countries.

International: 7. To co-operate with the labour and socialist organisations in other countries and to support the United Nations Organisation and its various agencies and other international organisations for the promotion of peace, the establishment and defence of human rights, and the improvement of the social and economic standards and conditions of work of the people of the world.

We were to co-operate with labour and socialist organisation but importantly to support the UN. This was changed in the new Labour version to:

Labour is committed to the defence and security of the British people, and to co-operating in European institutions, the United Nations, the Commonwealth and other international bodies to secure peace, freedom, democracy, economic security and environmental protection for all.

Old Clause VI 6 & 7 were added after WW II to ensure "the adjustment and settlement of international disputes by conciliation or judicial arbitration". We had endured the second major war in Europe in 30 years and this was recognition of a better way. It is no coincidence that four years after Labour had its new constitution it had bombed Baghdad and instigated the first war in Europe since World War II bypassing the UN on its way.

All of this fits with the direction the Labour Party is being taken by its leader and his chief of staff at No 10 Jonathan Powell. In order to support Star Wars Blair will need to aid the US to ditch several international treaties regarding the use of space for peaceful purposes and the anti ballistic missiles treaty. It is therefore essential that the left tool up intellectually to defeat this diabolical change of political direction. Remember the Scottish branch of the Labour Party still officially rejects Trident.

Below therefore is a list of sites worthy of a scan.

<http://www.globenet.free-online.co.uk/index.htm>

<http://ds.dial.pipex.com/cndscot/>

<http://www.gn.apc.org/cndyorks/index.htm>

<http://www.gn.apc.org/cndyorks/fdales/uk&starwars.htm>

<http://www.spacecom.af.mil/usspace/LRP/intro.htm>

<http://www.fas.org/spp/military/program/sp97/index.html>

<http://www.clw.org>





What we need in Scottish politics is a significant increase in secret tape recording. Hearing Henry and Helen bitching about their colleagues while an amused nation listened in suddenly put Big Brother in the shade (which, up until that point has pretty well trumped the 'election'). So it turns out that John Reid patronises Henry? No surprise, but it raises the question why Henry picked him out of the multitude. Meanwhile Helen is batting her eyelids and proclaiming that being presumptuous isn't like her (thank God there weren't visuals – imagine the single tear rolling down her snow-white cheek).

This is a public service. Anyone who argues that a private conversation should remain private is missing the key point. In modern politics the relentless emphasis on media management means that we seldom discover the true thoughts of our political leaders. We are asked to vote for people whose every answer is scripted and who are kept away from the public for fear of bad publicity. Secret tapes such as these reveal things we would never find out any other way. I mean, who would have believed that two members of the Scottish Labour Party could agree on something. The irony is that if it had been Big Brother, Helen and Henry's bonding session would have been directly followed by the two of them nominating each other out of the house.

So let's expand the practice. Let's film Jim Murphy practising in the bathroom ("Sound-management-low-mortgages, sound-management-low-mortgages, public-services, sound-management-low-mortgages...") Let's record Raymond Robertson desperately trying to persuade his imaginary friends to come out and play. Let's catch John Swinney in the forecourt shop ("I quite like salt and vinegar, but I quite like ready salted too").

We need something to lift Westminster Elections in Scotland. Most of the things people are interested in don't get decided during this election. So instead we get to watch Wendy Alexander and Andrew Wilson exchanging impenetrable economic statistics in a sort of spectator sport designed so the spectators don't understand the rules.

Some attempts were made. The SNP tried to ape the tactics of the Labour Party in England by taking a

photograph of a political leader and digitally transplanting on the hair of another figure in the same party who is strongly disliked by the public. However, whereas Margaret Thatcher's hair on William Hague's head genuinely seemed to spook the voters, it turns out that Henry McLeish doesn't actually look any different when you give him Helen Liddell's beehive.

But none of this means that the election didn't affect the Scots. Far from it – one got promoted and one lost his house.

Tony Blair wanted to find someone to take charge of making sure that the Government is delivering on its promises. The person specification was fairly simple; it had to be someone that could crack a whip over civil servants and cut through the bureaucracy to make sure that the watchword was pro-active rather than procrastinate. It can therefore only be described as lateral thinking to select the politician in charge of the Department responsible for the single biggest mess of the last four years. But then, Gus McDonald only became the Prime Minister's first choice after he discovered that Stan Laurel was dead.

Meanwhile, Robin Cook's heartrending speech at his adoption meeting ("When I came into politics as a young man, it was because I was driven by a heartfelt desire – I wanted to meet young women and have a big house") seems to have fallen on deaf ears. His house has been repossessed and he has once again proved the New Labour maxim to be true; you really can't cast of too many of your principles if you're serious about promotion.

Which leaves international relations in the hands of Jack Straw. In times past this would be a worry, but the nature of international espionage has changed, and Foreign Office's vigilance need not be what it once was. In the '60s and '70s, Russia spent enormous amounts of money developing surveillance systems that could pick up the private conversations of leading politicians from miles away without raising the slightest suspicion. In this much more relaxed decade you only have to sneak up and attach a microphone to their lapel. ■

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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.