

THE STATE OF THE PARTIES



gauging the mood as the 2007 elections approach

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Comment

This feels like a particularly turbulent time for political parties in the UK. We have the show-boating arrival of David Cameron to rejuvenate the Tories and to make them look like contenders again. He is playing the game exactly by the Clinton/Blair/Bush-in-2000 rule book – triangulation, stealing your closest opponents ground. And it is working. It is working because perhaps the most profound change in a party is the least obvious one. From early in 1996 until early in 2005 we knew what the Labour Party was, and that was largely whatever Tony Blair decreed it to be. But suddenly the Labour Party seems awfully unsure. The one-sided battle of temerity versus desperation was what made Blair such an effective leader – the party wanted into power and he knew how he wanted to get there. But the new battle lines – zeal versus timidity – are not working so well. Blair is becoming ever more extreme in his policies and ever more detached in his response to criticism. His parliamentary party seems no longer willing to let him charge off unchecked, but hasn't yet decided it is going to rein him in. And so they vote for compromises no-one wants and think they are walking a line between 'unelectability' and 'betraying their principles' while in fact they are looking less and less electable and less and less principled. Meanwhile the Lib Dems are finding out that some kind of philosophy is pretty essential in politics. There has been a hidden war between liberal-values and libertarianism and whatever else he may have failed in, Charles Kennedy at least prevented it breaking out into a public dispute. It seems that many hope that Ming Campbell can paper over the cracks for just a few more years. It seems unlikely.

In Scotland the Tories appear to be the timid ones. Having lost David McLetchie to the demons of schadenfreude, many in the party wanted to take a sharper, more radical tack (probably under Murdo Fraser). Apparently unwilling to bring that fight into the open a compromise was struck and the party is now lead by a very able politician but one who probably more comfortably belongs in the Lib Dems. Labour in Scotland is where it wants to be (in power) and seems little interested in taking any chances. The Scottish Lib Dems have the same ideological battles to fight as the UK party, but there is something slightly bizarre about

it. It increasingly seems to be the case that Nicol Stephen is attracted to the idea of 'modernisation' and so uses the rhetoric, but seems unaware of what it means – some of his recent comments would make more sense if they were coming from a Texan Republican neoconservative (such as his vague support for flat tax). Surely the Lib Dem leader in Scotland hasn't drifted to the right of the Tories without realising it? This is certainly the direction that the SNP seems desperate to take, certainly under the leadership of Nicola Sturgeon. It is with despair that many look on and realise that Nicola seems to have got hold of a copy of an Introduction to Triangulation for Children. Does no amount of evidence suffice for the modern SNP? The further left it goes the more votes it wins (1999), the further right it goes the more votes it sheds (2003). The SSP seems to have got over its leadership debacle, but at the expense of its self belief. The Greens, meanwhile, have done some good work without really convincing us that they know what they want to do with the power they have gained.

The six articles in this issue taking the temperature of each of the parties expand these observations, challenge some and add a lot of information. But there is certainly something missing, something we need to return to in a future issue of the SLR; and that is the **interstate** of the parties. Scotland is not Westminster, a world in which a self-contained party engages with only the electorate once every five years and its own strategists the rest of the time. What is going to be crucial in Scotland is not only the health of individual parties but the geometry that emerges between them. From the perspective of SLR readers, the crucial pressure point is around the two smaller parties. If the SNP continues its current approach of hating the SSP more than anyone (understandable, given that in 2003 the SSP took all the left-wing votes that gave the SNP its strong result in 1999) then it will continue to drift rightwards, failing to take vote from Labour or the Conservatives but doing their work for them in marginalising the Socialists. The Greens are talking to many suitors, but seem to have walked away from the SSP as well. The SNP may now be able to deal with the Lib Dems under Nicol Stephen (Jim Wallace would never have walked away from Labour), but what do they offer the Lib Dems? As things stand it seems unlikely that the SNP is going to make the kind of breakthrough that would make it worth the

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Lib Dems time. And as the 'big four' keep drifting to the right (the only dissenting voice over the £200 million gift to business that was the business rates cut cried faintly that it should have been more), for how much longer will the Tories really be the 'untouchables' of Scottish politics? They've got Labour through a number of scrapes already and much of Nicola Sturgeon's rhetoric sounds more conservative than much of Annabel Goldie's.

What is important is that Scotland has a different voting system. This is what gives us hope and that is why there are people

shaping up to 'explain' to us why we should not be allowed to have the Parliament we vote for. In Westminster the parties choose what they want to be and then try to make the voters vote for them anyway. In Scotland it is still possible that the four main parties will dictate the terms of politics and the real world will reject it. It is of course a disgrace that some MSPs think that they have the right to decree whether the SSP is a legitimate part of Scottish politics. That is not their decision. It is up to the people of Scotland in 15 months to make sure that the state of the parties is not mainly smug, deluded or petrified. ■



Campaigning for the return of rail to the public sector

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

Let's put the public back in public transport

Bob Crow, General Secretary

Tony Donaghey, President

surveying what's left

Pauline Bryan argues that, despite many bitter disappointments, the Labour Party remains in shape as the best option for those who want to see social progress

2006 is the 100th anniversary of the Labour Representation Committee's adoption of the title The Labour Party. One hundred years ago the Party had a clear goal of representing working people in Parliament. Its federal structure gave it strong links into the trade unions and a number of socialist groups, particularly the Independent Labour Party. Its 1918 Constitution introduced individual membership of Constituency Labour Parties, but it retained a structure based on group representation and block votes rather than individual membership. In the past it was difficult to calculate the individual membership of the party as constituencies affiliated on the basis of a minimum of 1,000 members regardless of the actual number. With the introduction of one member one vote for leadership and National Executive Committee (NEC) elections the actual membership figures were clearer, though by no means entirely accurate. The antiquated system of membership records run at Labour Party HQ has been replaced by the outsourced and equally inaccurate systems of modern technology. The membership figure used at the time of the 1997 election victory was 400,000 individual members. The vast majority of these were inactive and some probably barely aware of their membership, in some cases gaining it through joining a local social club in other cases staying on the books long after they let their membership lapse.

One means of assessing the active membership is the number voting in the NEC elections. While the 2004 membership figure was given as 208,000 the number of voters was 64,000. Blair came to power with the ambition of one million members, but instead has presided over the halving of membership. Blair believed he needed a mass party of members who were unencumbered with ideology in order to dilute the influence of hard core political activists. In the run up to the 1997 election he found most party members were actually compliant and prepared to tolerate almost anything to win. He was able, therefore, to ditch Clause 4 with barely a murmur from the membership. Within a few years these smaller, less active local parties were easy pickings for young ambitious New Labourites. People have left the party over the past 10 years at various times and for various reasons with different individual having different breaking points. Even with the formation of the Scottish Socialist Party there was not an organised exit in order to regroup elsewhere. Many of the departed comrades have gone out of party politics and some out of politics altogether. Those on the left who stayed remained because of they have a view of the potential role of the party, its links with the trade unions, its remaining links into communities and the analysis of political change that can't allow them to write it off. It is not an easy option, but over time as the alternatives develop, it shows itself as the right analysis.

Tony Blair is quoted in The Times in November 1998 as saying that he would "break GC [General Committee] culture". What he meant was that he wanted to replace activists' influence with leadership from the centre. Not all party members look back to earlier times through the rosy glow of nostalgia. Policy-making

at Party Conferences was in the power of a handful of people who could decide how the trade unions' block votes would be cast. 'Resolutionary' politics tended to be oppositional and rarely allowed discussion of positive alternatives but simply condemned what either a Labour or Tory Government was doing. There was no structured opportunity to discuss policy in detail or to look ahead beyond the next election. The Partnership into Power process was attractive to some members who could see the weaknesses of the left's failure to develop policy. However, the central controlling tendency put the process in a straight jacket so that only ideas acceptable to New Labour would make it to the conference and then on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. The process has created cynicism and disillusionment amongst the membership and it was only in 2004 when the unions decided to use their muscle at a meeting in Warwick that there was any effective dissent. Unfortunately the unions did not involve the constituency delegates, not even the organised left. At the 2004 and 2005 conferences the big four unions made a number of challenges while the constituencies supported the leadership. It is significant to compare the compliance of constituency delegates at conference with the success of left candidates in the one member one vote NEC elections. This suggests that the delegates attending conference may be 'mis-representing' their constituencies (perhaps a lesson learnt from Militant). Many constituencies think that it is a waste of resources and only a handful Scottish delegates attended the 2005 Conference in Brighton. The Scottish Policy Forum has, in its latest round, been more responsive. This is because the unions are playing a more active role in the process rather than waiting to amend the documents at the final stage. Better communication between union activists and constituencies would improve the chances of a successful outcome when the Scottish Conference decides on the final drafts next September.

The Labour Party has never been a socialist party. It was established as a federation of different interest groups driven by different political beliefs. The trade unions will always have their own agenda, which may from time to time, align with the left. The status of the organised left has often been problematic with periodic expulsions of members associated with organised Trotskyist groups, most recently Militant. Marxists of various persuasions have survived within the party without attracting a purge largely because they have not been successful enough to be threatening. In the past many party activists have taken their perspective from the Communist Party's British Road to Socialism. There was a happy confluence of CP intellectuals, trade union activists and Labour Party members who accepted the central role of the Labour Party. Unfortunately when the Communist Party experienced the Eurocom phenomena it had its consequences within the Labour Party. The centrality of class politics was challenged, as was public ownership and demand side economic policies. Kinnock was enamoured of Communist Party intellectuals who took him seriously and he helped pave the way for Blair and Brown to usher in New Labour. What Blair and Brown have done is more than move the party to the

right within the spectrum of social democracy. They have attempted to strip its core purpose of representing the needs of working people. Whether they have succeeded in making an irreversible shift is yet to be seen. This may in part depend on whether enough members stay and fight for radical politics. Without being over-optimistic there were successes at the National Conference in 2005 and if the trade unions recognise the need to carry constituency members with them there could be an effective basis to challenge the neo-liberal agenda of the leadership.

Labour lost four million votes and 47 seats in the last Westminster election. Blair at first appeared to be slightly chastened by the experience, but recovered quickly to claim a personal third victory. It is still relatively early to see the impact of his reduced majority. The vote on the anti-terrorism Bill was a major victory for the left. The worrying aspect for the Party in Scotland was how few Scottish MPs were prepared to oppose draconian attacks on civil liberties. The next batch of difficult votes will involve issues that will not apply in Scotland and there will be bitter resentment against Scottish MPs if Blair succeeds in imposing changes in health and education in England only by the votes of Scottish MPs. With some very notable exceptions the Labour MSPs have been a pretty timid crowd. There was at least a tradition in Westminster of MPs who were prepared to forgo advancement in order to be the voice of socialism with the Parliament. Many of the MSPs elected to the Scottish Parliament had come from the left including a group who were in the Campaign for Socialism and who had stood for selection quoting their left credentials. It did not take long, however, to find there was a personal price in transferring the rhetoric of party meetings into the Parliament, a price some left MPs were not willing to pay. Trade Unions are continuing to support MPs and MSPs who consistently vote against the interests of the union membership. This is something that they need to consider along with the automatic reselection of sitting candidates without questioning how they have spent their time in office.

The establishment of the Scottish Parliament created a strange anomaly in the Scottish Labour Party. Scotland is treated in the same way as the regions of England for the appointment and accountability of paid officials. However, when it holds its annual conference it is supposed only to deal with devolved issues and should not discuss reserved issues such as going to war. Hence an attempt was made to bar the 2003 Scottish Conference from discussing the impending war in Iraq. This was overturned by a challenge from some of the unions and constituency parties. There is a degree of tension between the Party at UK and Scottish level, there is tension between the Scottish MPs and the MSPs, and there are differences in policy direction on health, education and legal issues. With the presence of a number of Scottish MPs in the cabinet there is a real sense of schizophrenia. During the period when John Reid was Secretary of State for Health he tried to put pressure on Malcolm Chisholm, then Minister for Health in the Scottish Parliament, to move to adopt New Labour policies such as foundation hospitals. All credit to Chisholm for resisting, even though he was eventually moved from that post. He failed, however, to involve the Party in resistance, and as has happened so often he de-politicised the issue and prevented it from becoming a cause which could have encouraged voters to see the Scottish Parliament as more than an expensive talking shop.



2007 will see the third election for the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish Parliament is a wonderful example of an organisation becoming a self-defensive institution. Within the space of few years most of its members have lost the capacity to be self-critical and are prepared to defend practices that they would have previously condemned. MSPs who originally thought the list system totally unfair now don't want it tampered with. Those that thought Constituency Parties were central to the organisation of the Labour Party defend the fact that boundaries for the different Parliaments are not co-terminus even though for ordinary party members it is nonsense. Why? Because any change could unsettle their cosy institution.

In this article I will not comment on the likely outcome for other parties, but assuming the election goes ahead on the same basis as the previous two, the Labour Party's position will be similar to now. It may lose some first past the post seats and gain some through the list system and after the result is declared the leadership will try to negotiate a coalition with the LibDems. For many Labour Party members the way that deals were done behind closed doors was unacceptable. The concessions made in 2003 included the introduction of a form of STV in local government elections that was in total contradiction to Party policy. This has left many members ready to challenge any repetition in 2007. This will be an important issue at the 2006 Scottish Labour Party Conference and it is hoped that a combined campaign between the unions and the Constituency parties will ensure that party cannot be excluded from any post election deals.

For the Labour Party members who have stuck it out over the past 10 years it has not been an easy option. There have been many bitter moments when it would have been easy to walk away, but for many members their political analysis is that the Labour Party is still the place to be. Not for what it is doing now, but for the potential it holds that no other party can, as yet, replace. The Campaign for Socialism has for the past 10 years brought together socialists who share this analysis and supported public representatives who have stood up to New Labour. It has helped ensure a socialist voice remains within the Labour Party and it has worked with comrades in the UK to win the Party back to its roots of representing working people. ■

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saved by democracy?

Bill Wilson argues that attempts to stifle Scottish National Party democracy have largely failed, and that it is that very democracy that offers a way forward

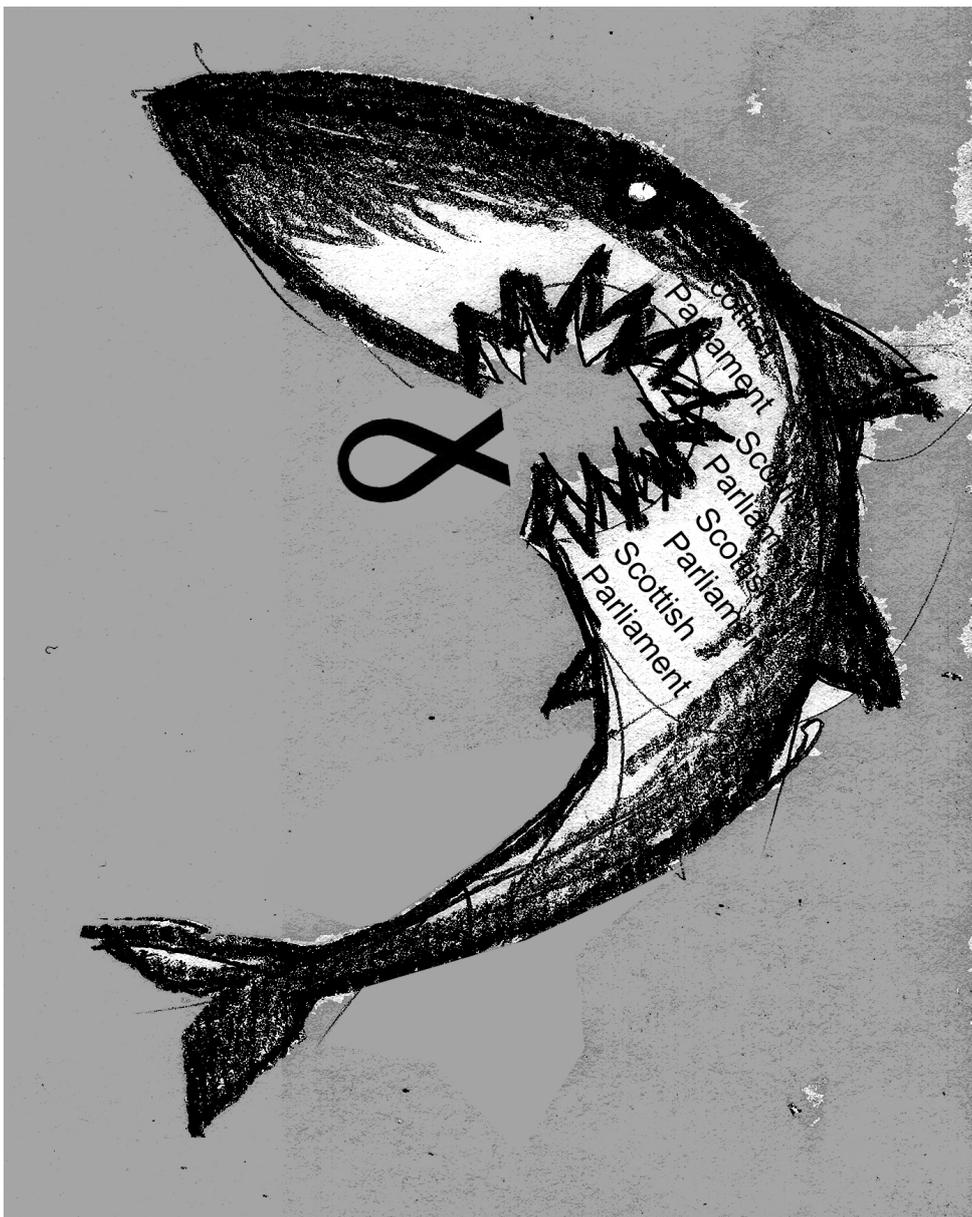
The last few years have seen almost continuous change for the SNP: a leadership challenge, a bad European result, a leadership resignation followed by a new leadership selection procedure, a Westminster election, and in the same year ten local by-elections and two parliamentary by-elections. Busy times. However, after six years of almost continuous decline I believe the SNP can look forward to the next two years with genuine hope of recovery.

Party membership has been a cause of concern for some time a considerable time. Over the previous six years the party membership had all but halved. However, since the change in leadership the membership has increased. Whilst it is true that some hoped for a more spectacular increase, no increase can be viewed as other than positive. Furthermore, there are two developments which bode well for a growth in membership over the next few years. Firstly, the shift to a centralised party

database. Whilst I continue to worry about the potential effects on party democracy, it has forced branches to accurately record membership numbers. The result of this improved record keeping was that many branches declined in numbers. At first glance this does not appear positive. However, it suggests that the fall in membership during the previous leadership was greater than appreciated, which in turn means that the present upward trend may also be greater than appreciated. Secondly the Westminster election is hardly the SNP's favourite electoral period, yet party membership continued to increase throughout the election. With the increased attention that is inevitably paid to the SNP during the Scottish parliamentary elections, and the significance of 2007 in historic terms, the SNP has the opportunity to raise its profile, and use this enhanced profile to further broaden its membership base.

Closely linked to membership strength is internal democracy.

The SNP has a strong democratic tradition and an open policy-making process. This democratic tradition contributed both to the rise of the party and in the enthusiasm of many of its active members. However, in recent years party democracy has taken some knocks. Whilst the members were not written out of the equation entirely, their input was diminished. Policies voted for by the members were often sidelined (for example local income tax and housing stock transfer) while the party leadership showed an increased tendency to build policy 'on the hoof'. The reduction in the influence of the party grassroots saw a corresponding decrease in membership and activity levels within the party. The new constitution introduced in 2004 was, in my view at least, intended to 'New Labour-ise' the party, centralising control in the hands of the apparatchik. The reversal of this trend is central to an SNP revival. Again, there is hope on the horizon. Even if the new constitution has removed some safeguards, the democratic traditions of the party survive. If the leadership can rise to the challenge of democratising the actions of bodies such as SOAC, then the SNP will remain one of Scotland's more democratic parties. Unlike New Labour or the Tories, the SNP must have an



active membership. The SNP is not funded by big business, and has no trade unions to provide activists; it is the membership or nothing. The looming selection procedures for the Scottish Parliament, then the pressures created by the 2007 Scottish elections, should give a very clear indication of the state of democracy within the SNP.

The SNP is traditionally a left-of-centre party, with its ideology being driven by the membership – an advantage of not having significant inputs of cash from multinational businesses. Whilst the SNP appeared to lose its way for a while, it now appears to be moving back to its roots. The word 'Independence' is used rather more frequently than in recent years, and our local taxation policy has moved up the agenda. The earlier mistake in letting it slip down the agenda was highlighted during the Westminster elections when it became

a significant issue and the SNP discovered it had lost ground to the Liberals. The engine behind the left's recovery is, however, the campaign for a citizen's pension and a citizen's income. The latter still has to receive full party backing, and be determined in detail, but it leaves little doubt as to the direction in which the party is heading. The message, however, needs to be more clearly delivered. There is still an irritating tendency in some spokespeople to argue that in order to improve social justice we must increase economic growth. To have Alex Salmond argue for redistributive policies and some spokesmen argue for the Thatcher/Blair 'trickle down' effect is, to say the least, a little confusing. A further note of confusion is added by senior MSPs calling for the party to remain in NATO, demanding a move to the centre ground, or suggesting alliances with the Tory party. These, of course, remain suggestions; they are anathema to the bulk of the party membership so they are not brought to the vote. Ultimately it is the response of the membership to attempts to move the party by non-democratic means (through the right-wing Unionist press rather than by democratic vote), which would offer real hope of an SNP recovery. As the old year ends, and the new dawns, some constituencies are rising to that challenge.

Perhaps the most worrying aspect of the SNP in recent years was its tendency to lose its dissenting voices; Dorothy Grace, Margo MacDonald, Campbell Martin, Bruce McFee. For a small parliamentary group to lose quite so many of its dissidents is unhealthy; parties need internal debate, they need some 'annoying' people (for the record I like them all) to challenge policy and keep the party fresh. When they go, or become silent, then you end up with the Poll Tax effect, a bloody awful policy and nobody to tell you. Equally worrying was the trend in double standards; to many in the membership it appeared that some exalted members might say what they pleased, while others would be stamped on. It is the sign of a nervous, uncertain and weak leader when criticism cannot be voiced without persecution following. Alex Salmond is no nervous or weak man (or he hides it well), and

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having been expelled himself is open in his dislike of expulsion. On the other hand, he is not overly well known for encouraging dissenters to air their views. But Alex has far more experience now than he had when he was leader first time around. Alex has the opportunity to allow greater freedom for dissenters, which in turn can only build a stronger party. Alex, when I challenged

John Swinney you backed John, but said a democratic challenge could benefit the party. You were right. Open debate is good for the party – it is the sign of a healthy party. Now is the time to ensure that in future internal dissent will be met with toleration and debate.

The previous year has provided rather mixed signals. At the Westminster election the SNP showed signs that it had finally mastered targeting, with a resultant increase in seats. However, the party was no nearer the central-belt breakthrough without which

independence cannot be attained. That does, however, have to be placed in the context of a press which all but ignored the SNP during the election. Night after night the television put forth the LibDems as the alternative, night after night it ignored the hypocrisy in LibDem politics (such as being against the war, except when it comes to Scottish Parliament votes). Of course the SNP was not the only party to suffer from this disadvantage – the Scottish Greens and SSP were in a worse position. But that again gives some grounds for a positive outlook; there will be but small hiding place for the LibDems in 2007. Another positive development is the series of local council by-election results, five out of ten gains. This stands a little in contrast to the two parliamentary by-elections, one good, one not so good. In the latter case there was a failure of organisation. Why the party had not began campaigning in that area long before the MSP's trial is well beyond me. However, both followed upon disappointing General Election results in the central belt, and both showed positive swings - on the whole positive rather than negative.

So, what are the prospects for the party in 2007? I believe that all the pro-independence parties will benefit from the anniversary of the Act of Union, but the SNP is uniquely placed to do so. The SNP is still identified as the party of independence, by increasing the emphasis on the policies of independence the SNP can only enhance that position. For a long time the party fell into the devolution trap, it allowed the Unionists and their allies in the press to determine the agenda. If that process can be reversed, if spokespeople insist on always giving the independence argument before the devolution argument, then I believe that the opportunity for a

breakthrough is there. The question is whether or not the SNP has the courage to seize that opportunity. It is time to bury the gradualist corpse; independence in one to two thousand years, but not this century, appeals to nobody. Carpe diem. ■

Dr. Bill Wilson is a member of the SNP and has stood as a candidate for the party at several previous elections.

passionate about moderation

Denis Robertson Sullivan argues that the contradictions inherent in the Liberal Democrats may be tested by coming political changes in Scotland and beyond

The Liberal Democrats are, and remain as 2006 dawns, a party with a small centre and a great deal of local independence. The 'central party' has little or no sway over the tentacles of the party, hence the reference to the anarchist. There is a very strong anti-centre tendency in the LibDems exacerbated or cultivated by MPs, and now MSPs, who unwittingly act as clan chieftains protecting their seats from outside interference. This often leads to a fiercely myopic view of the world. Visions and great ideas have a hard time surviving in such an alien environment. The rights of ordinary members, or the supremacy of the ordinary members, are an oft-repeated mantra when, in reality, it is local politicians who control the party by dint of member apathy. All membership is basically apathetic, interested but apathetic.

This seeming contradiction is common to all political parties but in the LibDems it tends to shape how the party is actually organised, rather than the theoretical model it espouses. When local memberships are relatively inactive, this then passes power to local politicians. Add to this tendency a small membership, and you have a party run by coterie of individuals. The ordinary LibDem party members, unlike the population as a whole, are by and large very trusting of the elected members and politicians. As Jim Wallace, former Leader of the Scottish Liberal Democrats and ex Deputy First Minister is reported to have said, "People see politicians like dung in a heap – we stink but, spread across the ground, we actually might do some good". Not a very flattering analogy but remarkable frank and certainly honest as Jim is.

LibDems are passionate about moderation. There is an apparent contradiction in that statement but is nonetheless true. PR for local government will put strains on the party in areas where the membership is very small, and the Party has been slow to face up to that reality. It has been so busy winning first-past-the-post seats that it has failed to realise the challenge presented by fielding candidates everywhere, as PR demands; reformed local government with PR means having candidates everywhere in 2007. The Party has struggled in the two Scottish Parliamentary elections to build a popular vote. It has been infinitely more successful in the first-past-the-post seats, yet it is an electoral system it detests. The LibDems quite rightly built up well-oiled 'targeted' machines to fight first-past-the-post elections but what has it done to build up its popular vote since it came off its highs of the 1980s? Very little, because those 1980s highs of popular votes did not win seats, while targeted efforts have. With a relatively constant vote in the low- to mid-teens, LibDems have achieved significant results; but targeting and PR do not sit organisationally well together.

The general philosophy of Liberal Democrats is one of being socially aware, responsible and concerned, rather than

adherence to previously recognised political traditions or philosophical positions. It epitomises modern British politics – centrist, and soft-centrist at that, and managerial. Again Jim Wallace is quoted as having said, "We don't have, today, and probably haven't had over the last ten years or so, the great battles of ideas we once had. And political debate is very much about efficiency, effectiveness, and management.... the perception is one of politicians not necessarily delivering." This an astonishingly honest remark, if you remember that the Scottish Parliament came into existence in the last ten years,

and this second-term Labour is a product of those same ten years. If Wallace is right, what will local government and the Scottish Parliament do post 2007? Have we, as a nation, really run out of big ideas?

If Wallace is right, then the challenge for the elected LibDems will be to ensure that, in the drive for 'efficiency, effectiveness, and management,' we remember why we are doing it. If the game is now getting 'bangs for our tax bucks', we must ask who will benefit? If it is to create a more just and socially responsible society, then sign me up; but if it is done with Pavlovian thoughtlessness, we are heading for an even less-caring, self centred, I-am-alright capitalist society.

Those LibDem elected members who are given a remarkably free hand to do what they like – and they do, within their own groups, be it council, Holyrood, Westminster or Brussels – must re-examine why they are doing it and not simply follow the herd. Managerialism can seem to be heartlessness, but it need not, and should not be, if accompanied by a clearly expressed and understood vision. This is the great challenge for the LibDems as they move towards greater power in local government and the mid-point in their second term as a coalition partner in the Scottish Parliament.

The Party membership remains stubbornly small, in the thousands rather than the tens of thousands; but they are committed (if not involved – that contradiction again), paying a larger subscription than other Scottish parties; not for them the annual £1 or a fiver; more likely a fiver or a tenner a month by direct debit. And they are active for their size although this still makes for a small number of activists for a major political party. This is a concern for democracy, especially if local party independence is effectively unchecked from the centre. The membership is small but stable, and its income is buoyant. Yet the activists, like the membership, are growing old; not yet geriatric, like the Tories, but definitely a pack of grey wolves. It remains to be seen if Cameron can reverse the fortunes and age profile of the Tory membership. Charles Kennedy under his late tenure did not reverse the trend in the LibDems. A UK membership of fewer than 75,000. There is a great deal made



about the sovereignty of LibDem conference in policy making, but its decisions are observed by elected representatives more in the breach than reality. The sacred cows of policy may be adhered to, but the vast majority of everyday decisions are made by elected politicians as 'good' people – they are trusted to do it right. The underlying vision, perhaps simply hidden by practical politics, is indiscernible. It should have a revival if the LibDems are still to be seen as a party that cares. Elected politicians and activists must ask the fundamental question of themselves – 'Why are you in politics?'

Under Charles Kennedy's late UK leadership, obvious alignments such as Paddy Ashdown's dream of a Lib/Lab coalition have been avoided. Paddy, I suspect, was more ideological about coalition than Jim; Wallace was probably friendlier to Labour but less philosophically committed to similar policies – viz, his now-quoted view that it "...is a very much about efficiency, effectiveness, and management". And the new leader, Nicol Stephen, is even more comfortable with an entrepreneurial and market-driven government. Which is wonderful... if the wealth created is being used to meet the Scottish Parliament's wonderful housing commitments, for instance. But is it? It looks like local government has additional burdens without the funding to meet them. Now that Charles Kennedy has gone, the UK party is likely to take a more obvious position in the political spectrum. The current candidates are more obviously in right and left wings, despite Charles admonition on resignation not to use these phrases. Many MPs – in both Scotland and the UK – are defending ex-Tory seats. Ming Campbell will be an acceptable face to Tories but I am less sure that his patrician appearance will play well in more disadvantaged areas. He is a formidable mind and will take seconds to no one. Resurgent Cameronian Tories may suddenly make the right-wing tendency and philosophy seem very attractive to elected members, and the LibDems may find it easier to defend their seats in more obviously right-wing clothes. This in turn could generate LibDem policy that is more in tune with the right. The son of the manse policies – heart with Labour and the trades unions – would have probably played well with Paddy Ashdown but do they play with current LibDems elected members? The irony in all of this is that only a third of LibDems would vote Tory as a second choice and in Scotland the figure is even smaller.

LibDem politicians are differentially effective at the various levels of government. Local council politicians, very effective in their own areas and wards, are genuine community activists but they consistently fail to display an understanding of the vision (perhaps unsurprising, given that their leader for over a decade did not believe that there were any '...great political battles of ideas...'). Few LibDems represent 'socially challenging' wards – they tend to represent more-affluent areas, and the Party and membership reflects those values and concerns. It does not make for great commitments to social change or renewal. The Council groups are highly independent of the centre and of each other. Not for LibDems a coherent common social policy. Notionally, they stand on a common manifesto; in reality, they are islands, invariably pragmatic and not radical, despite their fabulous tradition. MSPs have not made the impact hoped of them by those involved in bringing the 'new' politics into being. Maybe the leadership was to blame, and I accept a measure of responsible for that. They generally work hard, but it is increasingly blancmange-like in its appearance. The LibDems MSPs are very, very good at exploiting their successes from Holyrood, and equally skilful at escaping from the opprobrium of 'Labour' decision making. They are good people, but tomorrow demands ideas as well as good intentions. One wonders how long this coalition can go on without the injection of fresh and dynamic thinking.

There are five major factors that will influence the outcomes of the elections in 2007 – three external to Scotland, and two internal. The first external factor is how the UK economy will perform over the next eighteen months. A slowdown or recession at the UK level would see the Scottish budget shrink and would cause real pain for LibDem coalition MSPs. Real pain would stress the Partnership and test its mettle. The second is the Cameron factor. If the Tories were to make a resurgence that rippled into Scotland, it would strike panic into many LibDem seats – Council, MP and MSP, who all tend to represent rural or affluent areas where the Tory might see the first signs of revival. A LibDem/Labour Partnership might be an easy target for an effective Conservative party that believed in its future. The greatest irony here is a resurgent Tories might force a hung parliament and the LibDems would once again find themselves in power no matter what their number or performance at the next General Election. The third is what will a new Westminster Leader offer the party? Charles despite his charisma, was absent these last months. A new leader will want to build his name recognition. The internal factors are the SNP – can they wake from their torpor? – and the Scottish media. The Scotsman reported Jim Wallace as believing that politicians are not the only players in the political system, and there needs to be greater honesty from others – particularly the media. If you look at the poll data, the only people who are trusted less than politicians are journalists. The same article indicated his frustration with a media approach that demands instant soundbites. I think it was Bradford who said "there is a simple solution to complex problems – and it is wrong". Unless the media learns how to explain difficult topics in an interesting way, rather than simply look for controversy and blame, the outlooks for politics and politicians grows grimmer. This is true of all politics and not just the LibDems. ■

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back to a tory future?

A poor general election but a strong leadership election. Was 2005 the year the Conservatives turned the corner, asks Stephen Kerr?

Scotland's Tories are looking forward to the next year with a renewed spirit of optimism, yet only seven months ago our hopes of a revival in Scotland had evaporated. So what's happened to us? The first news of our result in Stirling came to me at just after one in the morning when my campaign manager told me that it looked like McGuire had held on but with a much-reduced majority. I felt momentary disappointment, but there wasn't a thing I would have changed in our strong local campaign. The Liberal Democrats had taken some of the swing votes we needed for me to become Stirling's MP and handed McGuire a majority for her non-existent campaign effort.

My consolation was that we had increased our share of the vote to 26 per cent and had achieved a five per cent swing from Labour. After the declaration, the re-elected MP managed to thank the returning officer before her mask slipped to show her true colours, delivering the most vitriolic speech that anyone could remember in Stirling. Proof positive that we had rattled Labour's cage good and proper and that McGuire resented being called to account. Her rant cheered me up no end.

As we watched the election coverage we saw Peter Duncan lose his seat and David Mundell win his. Won one, lost one, a dismal outcome. David now has the dubious distinction of being Scotland's first million pound MP. The following day Michael Howard told us that he would not fight another election as leader and effectively resigned. Then followed a summer of party machinations about how the leadership election would be conducted. The party hierarchy was defeated and the members retained their right to a one member-one vote election between two finalists chosen by our MPs, a victory for common sense and a democratic party.

Many of us were critical of Michael Howard's decision to hold a protracted leadership election. How wrong we were! The campaign proper was a hugely positive and cathartic process for the party at large; we had a Tory party conference that really mattered! The contenders took to the stage in turn and the Tories took to David Cameron. He became a national political figure overnight after only four years as an MP. David Davies dropped the ball, and an old Tory law was reaffirmed: front-runners are never chosen as leaders.

What followed was the re-emergence of a confident and hungry Conservative Party that has found something it misplaced for nearly 15 years: we are debating policy ideas and we have recovered the will to win. The British Conservative Party is not the most successful political party in the world for nothing! However this new mood of positive self-belief was somewhat delayed in arriving in Scotland.

David McLetchie's expenses saga trundled on and on before he finally recognised the damage that it was doing and fell on his sword. More than anyone David has made an outstanding contribution to the revival of the Party in Scotland since the meltdown of 1997 and history will speak warmly of the way David took command of a rudderless ship that so nearly floundered in the huge waves that engulfed us in the post-devolution settlement; David simply made it work. "It is thanks to David we now have an MP at Westminster, 18 MSPs at Holyrood, two MEPs, and about 120 councillors." Not my words but those of Brian Monteith MSP. Perversely, Ian Martin, the editor of Scotland on Sunday, chose to label Monteith's words as hypocrisy to justify his taking the most extraordinary step of publishing private 'off the record' e-mails that he said showed there had been a concerted effort to undermine McLetchie from

within the Parliamentary group. Martin's actions will certainly change the relationship between politicians and hacks for years to come and will probably be his only legacy to the Scottish media. So it was that Brian Monteith, one of the Scottish party's few political thinkers, took his turn to resign first from the Tory whip and then from the party altogether. Whilst something really exciting was happening on the national scene, the party in Scotland resorted to the old methods of a by-gone age and a new leader 'emerged' thus denying the membership in Scotland the openness and transparency of a contest.

But then it was time for the result of the Cameron v Davis contest - the morning breaks, the shadows flee! Politics is made up of such



moments and this was surely one of them. But how did our UK leadership election have such an electrifying effect on us and the media and country as a whole? There is any number of theories about the reason for this revival but I would rehearse two here.

First, Blair is all but finished. In May he said he had "listened and learned", but apparently not enough for his own party to feel good about him. The one thing that unites the Labour Party at the moment is their impatience for Blair to go. Second, Prudence Brown has now been rumbled as an old fashioned 'tax and spend' socialist. His pre-budget statement was the latest illusion in a long series, but this time the audience saw through the smoke and mirrors. Our public finances are in a mess; the economy is in recession and grinding under the weight of massive levels of state interference and a welter of new taxes. The massive increase in spending on public services has produced minimal improvements in delivery in England and none at all in Scotland. Brown is the ideological dam to the progress of pragmatic reform. The day before Cameron was elected leader a young fresh-faced George Osborne scored a number of hits on the tired and aging Brown, fast becoming Labour's Rab Butler.

Even Jack McConnell, our realist First Minister, met David Cameron on his first visit to the Scottish parliament and they discussed how a future Tory Government in Westminster could work with a coalition in Scotland: cue frothing at the mouth from the ranks of the Neanderthal Left. So in just two days in December Middle England was presented with its stark choice for 2009: more bluff, bluster and dissembling from Brown or the fresh optimism and charisma of Dave Cameron. The day after his election David Cameron boldly told Tony Blair what everyone now thought about the New Labour project. In truth, he spoke also for the sullen ranks of Labour members sitting behind the lame duck Blair and the scowling Brown when he said "You were the future – once!" Early opinion polls show the first fruits of the Cameron 'bounce': a lead from one to nine points. This is just the beginning.

But what of the Tory party in Scotland? Happily it's being pushed along by the Cameron wave and I have little doubt his message to Goldie is plain and simple – the Scottish Tories must raise their game. Much depends on the talents of Deputy Leader Murdo Fraser in sculpting and refining the policy ideas that he is known to be capable of bringing forward. He and others like him are the Conservative future. Our mood like the country's is clearly towards a modern, youthful and relevant leadership; we must shake off forever the image of blue-rinses and the strands of pearls. We have to reach out in Scotland to the new generation of voters as we are now doing in the rest of the UK.

There is a mountain to be climbed but thanks to Michael Howard and now David Cameron nationally the Tories are already dug in at base camp six and are planning for their assault on the summit. In Scotland we are as yet still camped in the foothills. Scots are conservative in their outlook; sometimes I think we

must be one of the most conservative nations on the planet. The lesson of the last 30 years is that even when people say they liked our ideas – e.g. council house sales – they didn't like the salespeople; people buy from people. It's all about trust. They looked at us on television or listened to our plummy voices and thought 'these people live in a parallel world'. Blind testing of political ideas and opinions consistently shows that three out of five voters prefer the Tory brand until the sightcreens are removed and then two of three change back to the brand they normally buy even though they know that the socialist product consistently fails them. Blair was quick to realise this. We have to improve our brand image and our salespeople.

It's an exciting time to be a Scottish Tory but none of us believes that the decline of the Scottish Party is going to be reversed in a single electoral cycle. True, a long string of successful Scottish by-election results at council level are a testament to happier days ahead. Even in the midst of the McLetchie resignation and its aftermath, a good candidate won a resounding by-election victory over the Liberals at Murrayfield. The 2007 election will undoubtedly bring fresh and youthful talent to a Tory MSP group, which should have made a much greater impact but has a tendency to punch well below its weight.

The prospect of a policy overhaul presents the Tory party with a massive opportunity to truly re-position itself as a party of the centre-right. The Scottish political marketplace is crowded out on the left and centre-left. Indeed, there are at least six socialist parties in Scotland but only one party on the centre-right. Scots can play the world and win, but we are laggards in terms of our international competitive strength. The growth of the public sector is strangling the vitality of our wealth creating private sector. The best jobs, higher salaries and benefits packages are all now in the public sector. It consumes wealth and drains the talent needed to create wealth; but this is not something that is understood by the occupant of Bute House. Our country needs an honest public debate about how we reverse the decline in private sector economic activity in Scotland.

It was Abraham Lincoln who said: "You cannot strengthen the weak by weakening the strong. You cannot help small men by tearing down big men. You cannot help the poor by destroying the rich. You cannot lift the wage earner by pulling down the wage-payer. You cannot keep out of trouble by spending more than your income. You cannot further the brotherhood of man by inciting class hatreds. You cannot build character and courage by taking away a man's initiative and independence. You cannot help men permanently by doing for them what they could and should do for themselves." That's the direction we will go. Scotland needs a Tory revival in 2007 and it's up to us to convince the Scottish electorate that we offer a more positive and hopeful vision of a free and prosperous Scotland. ■

Stephen Kerr was the Conservative candidate for Stirling County at the 2005 General Election. He has recently been reelected to fight Stirling County at the next election whenever it is called.

problems of the big tent

Eurig Scandrett argues that the strength of the Scottish Green Party – the breadth of the views of its members – may also make it difficult to steer

In the 1970s, many radicals throughout Europe looked for models of political organisation and representation outwith the mainstream left. These were groups who found themselves disillusioned by, or antagonistic towards, many Communist Parties' continuing adherence to the Soviet Union. They couldn't stomach the compromise with capital represented by the social democratic parties, but yet were not drawn to the various Trotskyite revolutionary groups. These were politicised activists of the 'new social movements' and the New Left; second wave feminists, pacifists, radical ecologists, gay activists, non-Leninist Marxists, non-Marxist communists, libertarians and anarchists. Whilst many in these social movements remained outwith the formal political process, others started experimenting with new political parties with names like Radical, People, Rainbow, Green-Left. In many parts of Europe these parties started to form around common agendas – decentralisation, egalitarianism, ecological respect, non-violence - and some morphed into what are now the Green parties, although their politics continued to vary somewhat according to local contexts and leaders. Green parties have since built strength throughout Europe to the point where they joined coalition governments in several European national and regional parliaments, with varying degrees of success. Best known is of course Germany's red-green coalition which ended in 2005 with the formation of the Grand Coalition government under Angela Merkel.

Around this time in the UK, radicals formed the People Party which became the Ecology Party in 1975 and the Green Party in 1985, and which was effectively excluded from parliamentary representation by the UK's electoral system.

Under the

leadership of Jonathan Porritt in the 1980s, the Greens sought to position themselves outwith the traditional political spectrum, as 'neither left nor right but forward', and no doubt attracted support because of this. The 1980s saw a rise in awareness of environmental concern which the Greens capitalised on, achieving a pivotal 14.5 per cent of the UK vote (but no representation) in the 1989 European elections. Increasingly, reformist environmentalists were attracted to the party. Until 1991, the New Left formed an influential bloc in the Communist Party of Great Britain (and beyond, through the CPGB's **Marxism Today**), and subsequently in its successor, Democratic Left, arguably to the detriment of the left within the Green Party. The purpose of thumbnail history is to contextualise, politically, the Scottish Green Party (SGP) which devolved in 1990 through a velvet divorce from the Green Party of England and Wales. In the preparations for devolution, SGP chose not to join with other left groups in forming the Scottish Socialist Alliance, a decision which has proved to be wise in terms of electoral representation. Although the SGP has attracted many green socialists, including from other parties, the relationship between the party and the radical left remains complex.

This background helps to explain some of the tensions faced by the current broad coalition in a small party. Whilst having family roots in the radical left, it is now seen as – and sometimes behaves like – a single issue reformist environmental party. Its membership encompasses liberals as well as radicals; feminists and post-feminists; green capitalists and eco-Marxists; right-wing libertarians and left socialists. To some it is the archetypal post-modern party. Its membership tends to be drawn from the same educated professionals who join Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, Oxfam or Amnesty International. As a relatively new manifestation of the Green political movement, the SGP lacks a collective memory of the new left struggles of the 1970s. As a party which has suddenly found itself with electoral responsibilities, it inevitably finds itself negotiating the relationship between professional politicians and membership, and developing policies on issues where no policies previously existed.

The SGP's policy bank still contains quite detailed prescriptions for all manner of environmental protection, from organic aquaculture to carbon sequestration, but little yet

on such fundamental

issues as

women's

rights.

Whilst the

SGP shows

no sign of

forming

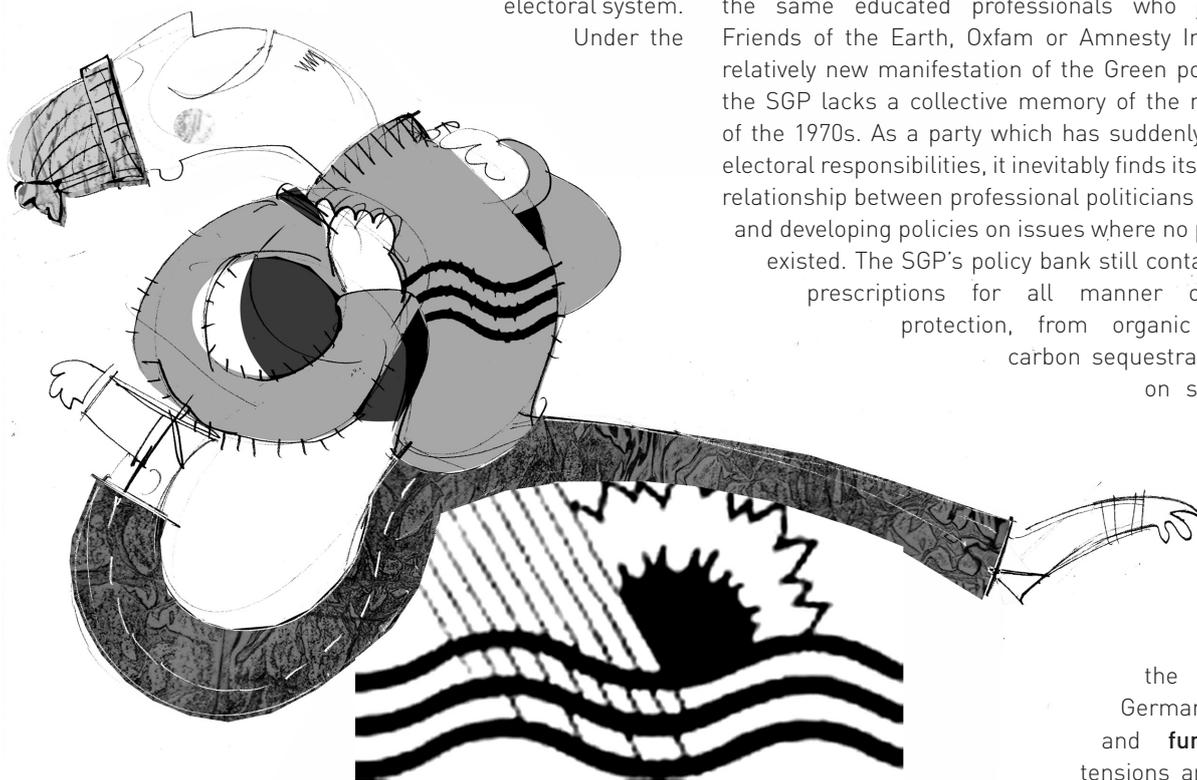
factions along

the lines of the

German Greens' **realos**

and **fundis**, there are

tensions around certain key



policy issues, and who controls policy, which without careful management could be damaging.

All parties are coalitions, but SGP's weakness lies in it being a particularly broad coalition in a small party with weak links to its historical roots. Whilst it has largely shed the dark side of the environmental lunatic tendency – misanthropic and racist population controllers and new age conspiracy theorists - there is a risk that its direction could be distorted by small but very vocal factions within the party. Libertarians have orchestrated some anti-feminist policies and encouraged bad blood with the SSP, and this tendency could shift the party to the right or lead to splits. The anti-feminist turn is particularly problematic for a party which has attracted support from women, in part from its non-macho (some would say 'cuddly') tendency. A more likely risk perhaps is a drift towards liberalism and abandonment of its radical roots. The left within the party is significant however and has a role in linking the party's future to roots in the social movements and equality struggles.

The party continues to enjoy a close relationship with social movements, not only environmental and peace campaigns, but also development, human rights, women's and LGBT organisations, and even the more anarchist-inspired direct-action groups. It has less strong links with anti-poverty and anti-racist campaigns, where the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) is stronger, and the SGP is in no position to compete with the Socialists in its heartland of the housing schemes or even anti-war Muslims. The relationship with the SSP is an important strategy to get right. Neither party has the capacity to gain greatly from ground occupied by the other, and recent fallings-out over parliamentary protests and Edinburgh's congestion charge have not helped anyone. We will disagree at times, but the future of radical politics in Scotland can only benefit from healthy Green and Socialist Parties. The electoral arithmetic requires the SGP to appeal to liberal sensitivities publicly – there is no doubt that portraying itself as another socialist party could be damaging to sections of its vote. And whilst it benefits from association with reformist environmentalism, so it stands to lose out should McConnell (and the Lib Dem turncoats) actually start delivering on some of the environmental reforms which they occasionally promise (although there seems little risk of that at the moment). We are in a fragile situation. I wrongly (fortunately) predicted that the Greens wouldn't do well in 2003 because the support would be too diffuse and spread throughout too many small parties and independents. This could happen in the future however, and there is every indication that the success of independent candidates is a growing phenomenon which could eat away at small parties' votes.

Why is the SGP needed? No other political party, even on the left, takes (or seems likely to take) as seriously the ecological limitations to economic growth and the subsequent impact this has on the poorest under global capitalism. The strengths of the SGP do lie in its radical approach to ecological economics and politics. The radical decentralising of economic power, the integration of the macro-economy into ecology and the alternative valuation of quality of life issues lie at the root of the

party's value. As with socialists in other parties, SGP struggles at times to reconcile this radical economic vision with the more pressing need to defend social democracy against the neoliberal onslaughts. The Party's other strengths lie in the opportunities it has to develop alternative ways of doing politics. This is always a difficult problem for Green Parties in parliaments, with

their commitment to decentralisation, radical democracy, non-hierarchical structures and an uneasy attitude to the state. However they draw on a rich source of organisation from the social movements, cooperatives, participatory models and anarchist groups and there are opportunities for creatively integrating these into the more formal structures of representative politics. Such an approach stands to distinguish the Greens from other 'new ways' of doing politics, whether of the focus-group dictatorship of New Labour (and perhaps Cameron's New Tories) or firebrand street-fighter, beloved

of many Socialists. A genuinely open mechanism of political discourse could appeal to sections of the population such as women, youth and the disenfranchised.

The pioneer Robin Harper has created that space for a different politics, with his ubiquitous accessibility and big-heartedness as well as his endearing eccentricities. As he becomes more elder statesman (with press speculation about his elevation to the House of Lords), spaces are opening up amongst other talented politicians, researchers and activists for the next generation of leadership. The Green MSPs have demonstrated their value in raising awkward questions of conscience in the parliament, especially on environmental, peace, human rights, asylum and LGBT issues. Coalitions are already being discussed in public and there is every sign that within the next few elections the Greens could find themselves occupying similar positions of conscience in a governing Executive. Unlikely in the near future, a coalition could involve choice between propping up the existing Labour-Lib Dem partnership or forming a new one of pro-independence parties, although the latter would require a significant change in the fortunes of the SNP. The presence of Greens in either such coalition could bring out the red-green tints of politicians in the other parties and provide a real added value to governance. On the other hand this strategy carries a very high risk. The Finnish Greens helped to hold together a Communist-Conservative coalition in 1995: they were never strong enough to influence policy but alienated their own grassroots, ultimately resigning from government over its decision to build a new nuclear power plant.

Whether or not more formal post-election coalitions occur, the SGP needs to see itself as part of a broader left alliance within parliament and beyond, in the social movements. It is able to form bridges where others can't and needs to play this card tactically to prevent the strains tearing at the seams. In order to play this role, the left of the party has a crucial role in developing Green policy, practice and self awareness in the political and historical context of the wider left movement. ■

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the margin, not the brink

Gregor Gall argues that the SSP has survived the leadership change but that the 2007 Scottish election could be make or break

Shortly after the resignation of Tommy Sheridan as national convenor in November 2004, the political obituary of the Scottish Socialist Party was written by many commentators and politicians. To these people the SSP's political death was then confirmed by the May 2005 general election results and the public backlash over the June parliamentary protest. The slightly more cautious have made this kind of judgement in private but have deferred saying so publicly, rather waiting upon the more definite outcome of the 2007 Scottish election result. Whilst the SSP has suffered internal and external damage as a result of the leadership debacle (see *Scottish Left Review* January/February 2005), a few steps towards reinvigoration have been taken since mid-2005. These concern recruitment, positive national media profile, Colin Fox easing into Sheridan's shoes and the establishing, and further building upon, relationships with an array of progressive pressure groups and campaigning organisations.

Party membership remains around 3,000 organised in 86 branches. This level of membership was attained in the period of the run-up to the 2003 Scottish election, and represented a substantial increase on the 500 members that founded the SSP in 1998. Geographically, branches extend from Orkney, Thurso and Stornoway in the north to Dumfries and Tweeddale in the south. Greater Glasgow retains the largest number of branches (20), representing 15,000 members with around ten branches each for the other regions. The SSP has a weekly 12-page newspaper with a staff of four as well as eight full-time paid officers and organisers. The composition of membership is skewed towards the 30-50 age group but there is a youth organisation, the Scottish Socialist Youth (SSY) of some 150-200 members which has its own full-time organiser. In addition to the SSY, there are networks such as the Women's Network, Grey Panthers and LGBT.

The number of regular activists can be put at around 400-500 members, judged by attendance at annual events like conference and the educational weekend, and participation in election work and on various demonstrations (SSP or non-SSP called). The size of the cadre, the key human capital of the SSP, is between 150-200 members in terms of those who are active in branch life, attend the quarterly national council and participate in SSP campaigns and organisations like the SSY and internal networks like the Women's Network. Attendance at branches ranges from six to twenty depending on the size of the branch and its health. A healthy branch is one where about a quarter of its members attend meetings on a regular basis and where the branch is engaged in street and community campaigning in between fortnightly branch meetings. In addition to explicit SSP activity, the active SSP members are involved in a number of campaigns and organisations in civic society like trade unions, tenants' association and community

and cultural groups. Nonetheless, the health of the state of membership participation has decreased over the last two years for reasons outlined below. However, it is likely that at least in relative terms, if not also to some degree in absolute terms, this is still healthier than other political parties in Scotland. If the number of elected representatives and party officials are stripped out of the cadre of these other parties, the number of activists is likely to be quite low by comparison to the SSP

National policy is determined by two forums, of which the annual conference is the supreme body. Between conferences, the national council sets and implements policy. Membership of both bodies is by branch elections on the basis of one delegate per five members in the former and one delegate per 20 members in the latter. Such elections are contested as are the annual elections at conference for the national convenor, national officers, executive positions, spokesperson positions and committee positions. Motions to both forums can come

from branches, platforms, and the executive. Wide ranging debate over issues is common, with debate encouraged by the leadership where conducted fraternally. For example, 'big' issues like the Independence Convention and party strategy have been debated over several national councils and national conferences. An internal culture of accountability and participation is prominent. The scale of motions submitted and

Today, the ability to take advantage of the continuing disillusionment and anger with New Labour is hindered by being soiled by the leadership debacle

the extent of debate can be gauged by the constant falling off the agenda of motions because of time constraints and, in particular, the extension of time given over to many debates. A founding cornerstone of the SSP has been its pluralist and multi-tendency nature – there are five internal platforms (one ex-Militant, two affiliates of the SWP and Socialist Party, two republican) of note and these have internal organisational rights in return for being subject to certain party strictures on how they operate. A further layer to SSP organisations is its eight regions, which elect list MSPs candidates and regional organisers, act as forums for discussion, oversee policy implementation and take initiatives specific to their area.

The SSP was founded on its commitment to the pillars of 'socialism, internationalism, independence' and 'socialism, struggle and solidarity'. It denotes itself as a left-wing socialist and (working) class struggle party, uniting revolutionaries and reformists. Although it has become common for ultra-leftists to accuse the SSP of the 'crimes' of succumbing to nationalism, reformism and opportunism, its key debates have concerned policy issues relating to how to move towards securing these goals, and not about rescinding them. Initially, the SSP had positions and orientations on many major issues adopted from Militant. Over time, a process of re-appraisal and fleshing out of these has occurred where, for example, rather than just calling for nationalisation as solution to economic collapse or the means to take into public ownership the 'commanding heights of the



...economy', the SSP has developed policy on various forms of social ownership as well as the form of nationalisation. Similarly, the statist traditions of what socialism has traditionally been understood to be are being reappraised. Elsewhere, the SSP has developed policy on areas hitherto untouched by the left – for example, crime, anti-social behaviour, internal education, and the environment. A mark of this overall process of unity in the development of policy was that in the recent leadership contest, there were no major significant political differences. What differences did exist concerned emphasis, tactics and secondary issues.

Therefore, the SSP appears well aware of the historical tendency of the far left to succumb to either purism (and marginalisation) or revisionism (and abandonment of socialism). Since its foundation, its political compass has not changed but so far it has yet to make much progress towards understanding and articulating how campaigning for reforms in the present can help build the forces capable of creating socialism in the future. Thus, lack of attention to the issue of a transitional method means that it can be legitimately accused of being either 'old Labour' where it concentrates primarily on the former or having a schizophrenic personality where the two goals seldom meet.

In proportionate terms, all the SSP MSPs have enjoyed a higher profile for their work than the MSPs from the other political parties. Compared to the Greens with seven MSPs, this is also true. This profile is an indication of the way in which the SSP has attempted to use its MSPs – each uses the platform of being an MSP to raise issues and create leverage on them which then increases their profile as MSPs, whether this be on areas in their constituencies or policy areas they are charged with working on. The SSP's three local councillors also attempt to do the same. The MSPs are accountable to the national executive, national council and annual conference while the specific work of the MSPs on Bills and the like is monitored and guided by the SSP's parliamentary committee. The MSPs meet in weekly group meetings where again they are accountable to each other. This enmeshing means that the MSPs (and parliamentary staff) have not become an elite vanguard group within the SSP. Nonetheless, as previous leading lights their party standing and influence have been augmented by being MSPs. But more

portantly, the impact on the SSP of moving from one MSP to in 2003 has not been without its problems (see below).

Whilst the SSP is an independent socialist party and has no sister organisations elsewhere in Britain, it has fraternal links with the new left projects of Respect and Forward Wales. Although the relations with the former have been subject to certain strains over comments of George Galloway about the possibility of Respect operating in Scotland, the links are cordial because of the common purpose of creating a left project outside Labour. This has led to the involvement of the respective SSP and Respect leaderships in campaigns organised south and north of the border. The SSP also maintains fraternal relations with the Socialist Party (ex-Militant) and SWP. In terms of Britain-wide trade union work, the SSP is involved with these organisations in broad/united lefts within various unions.

The 2007 Scottish election is widely now seen as 'make or break' for the SSP. As the SSP will exist after 2007 whether it has six, more than six, one or no MSPs, the most salient issues are what impact this will have on party activists and members, its wider standing amongst sympathetic voters and its credibility amongst progressive milieus. Standing still would represent a huge triumph while losing most of its MSPs would set the organisation back by many years by dint of the ensuing demoralisation and disorientation at the loss as well as the comprehension of the huge amounts of hard work (in favourable circumstances) required to get back to 2002-2003 position. Some success in the council elections may offset a poor parliamentary result.

Understanding why the SSP did well in 2003 is crucial to understanding the scale and nature of the task it faces for 2007. Although not an electoral party *per se*, elections have become a key terrain for the SSP to fight on as well as offering the means to connect with people. The tireless and high-profile work of Sheridan between 1999 and 2003 as well as the conducive context of rising social struggles (Iraq, anti-globalisation, fire-fighters, nursery nurses etc) gave the SSP a good platform to ground its propagandising in agitation. As significantly, the membership put its shoulder to the wheel to capitalise on this. Today, the ability to take advantage of the continuing disillusionment and anger with new Labour and neo-liberalism is hindered by the SSP being soiled by the leadership debacle and the post-2003 demobilisation. This latter process has comprised a) members who helped get the six MSPs elected sitting back and watching the MSPs do 'their' work, b) the inability to replenish the ranks of extra-parliamentary activists who became employed by Parliament, c) MSPs feeling obliged to step in to fill these extra-parliamentary voids, and d) the absence of a comprehensive understanding of the transitional method, particularly in regard to the role of parliament. And on top of this, there have been few big strikes and mass campaigns to be involved in. Nonetheless, the SSP's prospects essentially revolve around whether it can re-energise and re-motivate its members to tap into the not inconsiderable possibilities that still exist for it. ■

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raising what we spend?

David Purdy explores whether Scotland should seek greater fiscal autonomy?

The Scottish Parliament has wide discretion over public spending, but its powers of taxation are limited. The SNP routinely deplores this asymmetry, demanding 'full fiscal freedom' for Scotland, a status that falls short of independence, but exceeds the degree of financial separation from central government found in other, federal European states. With certain exceptions, the provision and finance of public services currently covering the whole of the UK would be devolved – including social security and retirement pensions – while Holyrood would reimburse Westminster for services which continued to be centrally provided – including defence and diplomatic representation abroad. Since floating this idea five years ago, the SNP has refrained from producing a detailed blueprint, preferring to berate the Executive for its stewardship of the Scottish economy and insisting that if Scotland had wider fiscal powers, it would be able to follow the example of other small European countries – Ireland in the recent past and the Baltic states today – which have cut business taxes in a bid to attract foreign investment and stimulate home-grown enterprise. Nevertheless, the idea has gathered support among other parties. The Liberal Democrats have long favoured the principle of federalism, while some Scottish Conservatives, traditionally diehard Unionists, have recently taken up the cause, seeing it as an opportunity to campaign for lower taxes and spending.

Evidently, fiscal autonomy can be supported for a variety of reasons. Some see it as a recipe for enhancing economic performance, as measured by some compendium indicator such as the rate of growth of GDP or GDP per head of population. Others are more concerned with the size of the public sector or the distribution of income. And still others advocate fiscal autonomy on democratic and cultural grounds, insisting that responsibility for **all** aspects of public finance – not just planning and controlling public expenditure, but also raising the money to pay for it – is an essential attribute of self-government which, in turn, breeds responsible, autonomous citizens. Before examining these arguments in detail, we need to consider more carefully what fiscal autonomy means. There are seven dimensions in which public finance can, in principle, be devolved. Sub-national parliaments or local authorities may be empowered:

1. to establish tax instruments, set tax rates and frame rules governing allowances, exemptions etc.
2. to assess tax liability and collect tax revenue
3. to retain tax revenue
4. to decide on the allocation of expenditure to specific purposes
5. to implement expenditure decisions
6. to decide on the nature and scale of financial transfers between different levels of government
7. to undertake borrowing

It makes no sense to consider any one of these dimensions in isolation from the others. Elected authorities may raise a high proportion of their resources from taxes that they control (1),

but have little discretion over the allocation of spending (4), or be required to hand over most of the revenue they collect to a higher level of government (3). Scotland, by contrast, depends on transfers from Westminster for over 75 per cent of its revenue (6), but enjoys almost total freedom to decide how this money is spent (4). The old Scottish Office had no such freedom. It was simply another Whitehall department and had devolution never happened, would have been subject to detailed Treasury control just as the Department of Work and Pensions or the Ministry of Defence are.

It is, of course, one thing to enjoy a certain power and another to exercise it. Consider the power to raise or lower the standard rate of personal income tax by up to three pence in the pound. Since 1999, this power has remained unused, largely because it has not been needed. UK public expenditure in real, inflation-adjusted terms has grown almost twice as fast as GDP, and Scotland has benefited via the Barnett formula, which is designed to ensure approximate parity in public spending as between the constituent nations of the UK, taking into account their differing populations and needs. To be sure, these halcyon days are now drawing to a close and from spring 2008 onwards, the Treasury is planning to rein back the growth of aggregate public spending, while continuing to increase spending on education, health and overseas aid relative to GDP. But whether the Scottish Executive will see fit to deploy its tax-varying power in order to ease the coming fiscal squeeze seems doubtful. For although the potential yield of the 'tartan tax' is greater than it was in 1999 thanks to intervening changes in tax bands and rates, the point at which people start to pay income tax is lower, making it harder to raise such a highly visible tax in a climate where voters are tax-averse and public services are closely scrutinised.

Even if Scotland's public finances were entirely separate from the rest of the UK, its fiscal options would be tightly constrained. Globalisation has reduced the scope for taxing corporate profits and high salaries, forcing governments everywhere to shift the burden of taxation on to consumption and payrolls. Similarly, if Scotland left the pound and joined the euro, it would be bound by the rules of the Stability and Growth Pact, though in truth these are no more onerous than the self-imposed budgetary rules laid down by Gordon Brown. (The creation of a separate Scottish currency would be considerably more risky and costly than membership of either monetary union).

But if the room for fiscal manoeuvre is more restricted than in the past, it has not vanished altogether and given that the Scottish Parliament has already used the freedom it enjoys on the spending side of the public ledger to pursue different policies from those favoured at Westminster – notably, in relation to long-term care for the elderly and the finance of higher education – one might suppose that if it had more control over the revenue side as well, it would have even more scope to follow a distinctive path. Control over taxation would not, however, turn Scotland into a 'tartan tiger'. Even if we assume a global environment in which business confidence is buoyant and there is plenty of foreign investment on tap, the rate of corporation tax is only one

of several factors influencing multinational firms when they are deciding where to locate new capacity. Hence, to make any impact at all, a tax cut would have to be substantial. Indeed, given the downward trend in corporate tax rates, Scotland might well have to emulate those Eastern European states where profits are not taxed at all. But as more countries adopt this course, others may be driven to protect themselves by following suit, setting off a race to the bottom and tightening the fiscal straitjacket all round. To prevent mutual ruin, we need an EU-wide agreement putting a floor under tax competition.

Greater fiscal autonomy might enhance civic vitality, but two caveats should be noted. One concerns the trade-off between freedom and equality. Fiscal devolution is bound to produce variations in social entitlements or standards of public provision in different parts of the UK: that is the point of it. At present, fiscal policy is relatively centralised. This permits territorial equalisation – for example, with respect to social security scales. There is a case for greater decentralisation, but at some point the resulting spatial inequalities may become unacceptable. Self-reliance could also entail tough choices. At present, public spending per head in Scotland exceeds the corresponding figure for England.

Under the Barnett formula, this discrepancy is gradually being phased out. According to most experts, however, for years to come public spending in Scotland will be higher than it would be if it were financed entirely from tax revenue generated in Scotland.

This proposition is disputed by the SNP, which insists that Scotland could easily maintain current spending levels if it enjoyed its rightful share of the revenue from North Sea oil and gas, but the SNP's argument depends critically on three imponderables: the division of the remaining spoils under the North Sea, the future prices of crude oil and gas and – since these prices are denominated in dollars – the future exchange rate between the dollar and the pound. At the moment, fuel prices are high and the dollar is low, but in the past both have been volatile, giving rise to corresponding fluctuations in tax revenue. Thus, a Scotland with 'full fiscal freedom' would need to borrow during periods when revenue fell short of expenditure. This presents no great problem, though Scotland would have to pay a higher rate of interest on government bonds than the UK since its taxable capacity and credit-rating would be lower. It does, however, raise an interesting question. Scotland could hardly expect to wrest full borrowing powers from the Treasury without agreeing to share responsibility for the UK's accumulated national debt, incurred as a result of past borrowing. But in that case, why stop short of independence?

Suppose Scotland seeks a lesser degree of autonomy, without oil and gas revenues and with limited borrowing powers. The risk here is that reopening the devolution settlement would unhinge the Barnett formula, and if the mainstream view of Scotland's fiscal position is correct, the end-result might well be to reduce the scale or accelerate the withdrawal of the

annual subsidy it receives from England. Scotland would then face an unpalatable choice between raising taxes to maintain services and cutting spending to hold down the tax burden. This explains why some Scottish Conservatives have become belated converts to the cause of fiscal freedom.

So is fiscal autonomy a can of worms that should be kept shut, at any rate until the transition to public spending parity has been completed? On the contrary, rather than relying on an arcane institutional fix to sustain public spending in Scotland,

the left should be looking to take on the free marketeers and defeat them in open combat. There is a range of intermediate options between the status quo and complete fiscal separation and there is no reason why modest additions to Scotland's arsenal of tax instruments could not be accommodated by modifying the Barnett formula rather than scrapping it.

The real issue about taxation is not so much whether it is controlled by Westminster or Holyrood, but how best to counter the widely held view that governments should spend less and tax less, so that individuals can earn more and own more. With greater fiscal autonomy, Scotland could lead the way for the rest of the UK. Take the finance of higher education.

England is about to introduce variable tuition fees and income-contingent student loans, whereas in Scotland up-front tuition fees have been rejected, but new graduates are required to make lump-sum contributions to a Graduate Endowment Fund which is ring-fenced and used to provide means-tested grants to students from low-income families. This impost amounts to an embryonic graduate tax, though its visibility is low because it is simply added to the debt students have incurred in meeting their maintenance expenses. But student debt would be a thing of the past if higher education were financed – in some agreed and well-publicised ratio – by a combination of general taxation and a proper graduate tax, levied as an additional charge on the taxable incomes of all university graduates of working age – including those who obtained their degrees in the past, as well as new graduates – with the proceeds assigned to defraying the tuition and maintenance costs of current students.

Commercial norms and practices have no place in universities and this scheme shows how to keep them out. It apportions the costs of higher education between direct beneficiaries and general taxpayers in a manner which is fair and transparent; it creates an institutional framework for building inter-generational solidarity; and once the system had bedded in, it could be extended to further education and eventually, perhaps, transformed into a Young Citizen's Income. With the decline of class and nation as poles of social identity and the decay of risk-pooling institutions like social insurance, we need to recast the social dimension of citizenship and revitalise the public realm if we are to challenge neo-liberalism as the dominant paradigm of public policy. ■

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the meaning of citizenship

Robina Qureshi finds her meaning of citizenship in the campaign against the dawn raids on asylum seekers

I never thought much about citizenship before. As a child, my parents instilled in us that it's not our country and one day we will be going back 'cos the National Front will take over and send us back to where we came from (even though I had never been 'back to where we came from'). So I guess I had more pressing concerns. But I did fight for my right to stay in this country from an early age. Eight years old. My mother was on a tirade. She gets to the classic bit: '...and just remember this isn't our country...' So I told her 'it's not yours either'. And so she chased me and I ran - for all the running you can do in a one-bedroom Pollokshields tenement - and hid under the bed with a half packet of Jaffa cakes till she cooled down. Not exactly a dawn raid but... And to the outside world, we didn't belong either. Our colour wasn't so fashionable then. There was always the feeling that we should 'know our place' and not assume too much in terms of rights because we didn't **really** belong to this country. We weren't **really** citizens.

Fast forward to Saturday, 17 September. The Vucaj case. There's been protests. Never been to Brand street immigration offices. Heard about the Drumchapel school kids' petition for one of their families. I'd got a few emails asking for help with the Vucaj family. I've got a few hours spare so I sit down to the computer. Read up the BBC news and Children Commissioner Kathleen Marshall's comments for the rest of the country to shout with her about the dawn raid on the Vucaj family. I call the family at Yarl's Wood Removal Centre. The line constantly cuts out every few seconds. Keep trying. The music they put you on hold to sounds dead sleazy. Speak to Saida Vucaj for the first time. Thirteen years old. Feisty. Determined. Eloquent. Asks questions all the time. Demands answers. Soft voice. Glasgow accent. Talks and talks. Good. Now here's someone who's quite clear where she's from, no question about it. Quite clear she should be back where she belongs. In Glasgow. She's been in Glasgow since she was seven or eight. She tells me what happened when the sixteen strong immigration snatch squad entered her home at dawn, "People were shouting... I thought I was in a dream. Four people came in my room, told me get up, get ready. I didn't know how to make myself dressed. I thought I'm going to wake up and this is a bad dream. In the living room, my father, my brother in handcuffs. My father is pure crying, my mother is crying. I told the lady, 'What is wrong with you? I can't go to detention, I am 13 and I am going to school today, and why are you putting handcuffs on my father?'" Saida talked about belonging to Glasgow, missing her friends, her neighbours, her teachers. Her mother made sure she and her brothers were always occupied, at school, in extra curricular activities. Keep busy, keep out of trouble. Mrs Vucaj and her husband both attended college hoping to eventually find work if they got permission to stay in Scotland. It was fixed in their minds that at no point should they do anything to jeopardise their asylum claim.

They followed every rule. Reported to Brand Street weekly like immigration told them to. Lived with the threat of removal 24-7. They were good neighbours. Hard working pupils. Had loads of friends at school in Drumchapel and in the Kingsway blocks where they lived. Knew everyone. Everyone knew them. They were part of a community they helped create for five whole years. A community that was literally devastated when they were taken away. "Will you help me?", Saida asks in a small voice; "we've done nothing wrong".

Scotland. Fastest declining population in Western Europe. More people leaving the country than we can afford. We're not having enough babies. We won't be able to sustain ourselves, our pensions a current standard of living in twenty years unless we turn things around now. The First Minister's launched the Fresh Talent Initiative to get graduates into the country. But the economists say we really need all kinds of workers, professional, skilled, unskilled. Thousands needed each year to stave off population decline. Meanwhile, Glasgow is the asylum capital of the UK. We now have 12,500 asylum seekers and refugees. Loads of professionals, skilled and manual workers

right here right now waiting to contribute and do their bit. If we would let them. But 'asylum rules' means that these would-be citizens are forbidden to work for years while their asylum claim is assessed. Meanwhile they put down roots as best they can, stick to the straight and narrow, jump through every torture test. Why aren't we letting them work and settle here? It would be good for Scotland, good for asylum seekers. Let them be citizens. They want to work. They want to settle. They're law abiding. What's the problem? Can't. Why? 'Cos Asylum is 'reserved' to Westminster. Oh, right. Wrong.

September 22 2005. First Minister's Office. With the Glasgow girls. He's standing there looking flushed. Nervous. Smiling. There's a mural in his room. He seems quite proud of it. Looks like cheap wallpaper to me. There's a desk with nothing on it. And a small conference

table with some chairs. Is this his real office? Words exchanged about dawn raids, fear, the Vucaj family. Would he do what he can for the Vucaj family? Says something about seeing what he can do. I was really hopeful that he could help. He looked like he wanted to. He looked sincere enough. At First Minister's Questions there's talk of a protocol to end dawn raids. Wow, perhaps a result. So we thought. September 28 2005. I'm on the phone to Saida. They have been told one of two things is gonna happen. Either they are gonna go to another [detention] camp for interview or they will go back to Glasgow. "I'll be pure, pure excited if they pick for us to go back to Glasgow". Saida Vucaj loves Glasgow. Her dreams and aspirations and personality are shaped by Glasgow. They can't possibly be removed from Scotland. Can they? She talks about the First Minister; "Is he helping? I haven't been to the Scottish Parliament. Have you

Now here's someone who's quite clear where she's from, no question about it. Quite clear she should be back where she belongs. In Glasgow.

been there? I love my Glasgow, I remember going shopping with my friends, having fun, listening to music in my own room, not worrying, having my own space. If we come back to Glasgow, I want to finish the book, the ragged boy, anyway I'm writing my own book now, in here, I don't know how my book finishes, but I'll see tomorrow what's gonna happen."

September 29 2005, 4.21 am. Phone call in the night. Saida. Her voice is small and choked. She's very upset. "They said we have to go back to our country". Phone cuts dead. Those words 'our country' are stuck in my head. But her country is Scotland. She's gone. I'm crying my eyes out. What kind of game was being played here, to allow a family to stay here for five years, fill their children's heads with Scottish dreams and aspirations, and then think its okay just to uproot them and send them back? It just was not the end of the story. You could not just stand back and let this happen, could you? The next day there's a phone message from the First Minister's private secretary Owen Kelly saying something about the First minister having tried. Maybe he did. We all tried. But it wasn't enough.

Hundreds of letters and emails begin pouring in about the Vucaj family, people who are similarly devastated. I'm reading every single one. The sense of outrage is overwhelming. People are really angry and want to do something, anything they can to help. Amidst the deluge, there's one email. Jamie O'Neill, 18 years old, friend of Elvis, Nimet and Saida, former pupil at Drumchapel High secondary school, now working for McDonalds. He goes straight for the jugular. "Today, this country lost great people, sent back like an unwanted present. The Vucaj family were not just another family - they made a difference in my life and my friend's lives. Trust, hearts and people have been broken. I hold [the government] responsible. They are wrong, we know it, they know it and now, my friends, Elvis, Saida and Nimet know it ... it doesn't make me want to belong to Glasgow, Scotland or any part of this country - it shames me."

It's October 9. Peter Mullan and I are travelling with a small independent film team to Northern Albania to see the Vucaj family. I meet Saida and her family for the first time. Strange putting the voice and the face together. Things are bad. These are Scottish children transplanted in an alien environment. You might as well put them on Mars. They want back. There's no schooling for Saida. Northern Albania is the main sex traffic route into the west. There are dangers in her even attending school. It's lawless. Police are easily bribed. We saw that for ourselves. The worst feeling in the world was on our return trip when the plane took off from Tirana. The houses turned into specks and it was a truly awful feeling, almost like a betrayal, for us to be leaving Albania without Saida and her Scottish dreams and aspirations. We had no choice.

We arrive back to hear Tony McNulty, immigration minister attacking the Children's Commissioner and defending dawn

raids, claiming "We are not knocking down doors at four in the morning...most of the removals occur around half-five, half-six, seven in the morning". He was supported in his stance by none other than John Robertson MP (the Vucaj family's MP) and the obscure Tom 'Who?' Harris MP who proceeded to launch vitriolic personal attacks on me and the charity I work for simply because we would not shut up about the inhumanity of dawn raids on Scottish asylum families. And Harris is supported in his stance by none other than the BNP.

Forget citizenship ceremonies and classes, Saida Vucaj and Jamie O'Neill could teach governments and Members of Parliament a thing or two about what citizenship really means. For Saida it's the love of a country that she and her brothers were never born in but want desperately to contribute to, be a part of, and cling onto in their hearts, their souls and dreams. For Jamie, it's about fighting for friends who should never have been taken away in the brutal, inhumane manner that the government ensured they were. He knew the difference between right and wrong. Pity the state didn't know it. He wrote later: "I feel so gutted for Elvis, Nimet and Saida. I don't know what hurts me more, the fact

that they were not even given the chance to say goodbye, or that the only thing I have left of them is photos and memories. I can hear their voices, see their faces and feel their fear, why is this 'Government' still pretending that they cannot and why do they still refuse to do anything about it. The family are still as much part of this country as I am."

And for me, it's about Scotland's future and where we are going as a society. Am I prepared to stand by and allow the Home Office to conduct a 24-7 campaign of fear against Scottish asylum families in my city? To send would-be citizens back like 'unwanted presents'? Are we prepared as a society for our humanity to be so compromised by the calculated, unremitting barbarity that is UK asylum policy? I don't think so. My active citizenship has taken me from the First Minister's office to the gates of brand street holding dripping candles in the freezing cold alongside Church of Scotland ministers and even Tory MSPs. This isn't about right or left of course, it's about right or wrong. Dragging children from their beds at dawn is wrong. Subjecting them to the fear of being dragged from their beds is wrong. Subjecting whole families to a weekly routine of reporting at Brand Street Immigration Office, from where you might or might not be removed from your community, your roots, is wrong and utterly inhumane. Like Martin Luther King said: "We may have all come on different ships, but we're in the same boat now". That's how it should be and one day this country is going to be haunted by its legacy of sending back Scotland's life blood when we could least afford it. ■

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from red to brown

To mark the launch of *The Red Paper on Scotland 2005*, editor Vince Mills looks at the rightward drift of its author, Gordon Brown

To mark the 30th anniversary of the publication of the *Red Paper on Scotland* edited by Gordon Brown in 1975, a new version of the *Red Paper on Scotland* was produced at the end of last year. The original was written when Brown was a 24 year-old student Rector of Edinburgh University and exudes a confidence in the inevitability of socialism that is today almost shocking given the retreat that socialism has experienced and Brown's own determined role in forcing that retreat in the British Labour Party.

That is, of course, not to deny the importance of the publication in its day, in particular its role in establishing the centrality of devolution in Labour Movement thinking. Uniquely, the *Red Paper* also brought together a wide range of socialist activists and academics from different and sometimes contradictory positions, all committed to building a Scotland of social justice in the face of the ravages that 20th century capitalism was visiting on large tracts of Scotland then, just as its historical legacy and attendant neo-liberal ideology does now. Nor were all the original contributors as faithless as Brown when faced with challenges to socialist ideology. In the 1975 publication John Foster contributed a seminal essay on capitalism and its relationship with Scottish nationhood. He remains as committed today to the call he made then for democratic control of the Scottish economy by its people. It was John Foster who suggested the possibility of this anniversary publication and who therefore deserves the credit for its appearance.

The essays are divided into four sections: 'Our Politics', 'Our Economy', 'Our Public Services' and 'Our Society Past and Present'. It is perhaps appropriate to give some space here to the first essay of the first section, which I wrote, since it deals explicitly with Gordon Brown's role in the fundamental changes to the Labour Party that have taken place since 1975. The following is an excerpt from that essay, *New Labour, Nationalism and the Socialist Alternative*.

New Labour: Brown's Contribution

"The irresistible march of recent events places Scotland today at a turning – not of our own choosing but where a choice must sooner or later be made". This is the opening sentence of Gordon Brown contribution to the original *Red Paper*. And if that looks as if it could have been written yesterday, consider the sentence which follows soon after. Attacking the failure to address the real issues facing Scotland Brown describes these as "our unstable economy and unacceptable level of unemployment, chronic inequalities of wealth and power and inadequate social services." The following chapters chronicle precisely the same story.

In the thirty year gap, since Brown penned these words, the destruction of our manufacturing base, the attack on union rights, the withering of union membership, the undermining of the welfare state and the insistence of the primacy of private capital over public control has meant that the Scottish predicament is in many ways worse now than it was in 1975.

Ironically it is Brown himself who has been the ideological mainstay in New Labour's refurbishment of Thatcherite neo-liberalism. If you are looking for prescience in Brown's 1975 essay, you will not find it. There is no hint of his increasing obsession with electoralism, at the expense of his socialism and perhaps more worrying, for those who see him as Labour Leader with heavyweight intellectual pretensions, there is no insight into the economic and political forces that were about to wash over the British and world economy, destroying the prospects for the reformist programme outlined by Brown in his essay. In particular there is no awareness of the increasing US influence that undermined the Labour government's commitment to public services and led ultimately to the 'winter of discontent'. The historical paths of these two developments – Brown's abandoning of socialism and the rise of neo-liberal ideas in Britain and the New Labour project are intertwined.

Brown's Journey Right

Brown's journey to the right began at least in the early 1980s when he distanced himself from the left's opposition to Benn's exclusion from the shadow Cabinet. He was already won to the argument that Labour needed to be made more acceptable as an electoral force. This hardened into complete support for Kinnock and his revisionist project. By 1983 in Brown's and Cook's essay **Scotland: The Real Divide**, a powerful exposé of inequality in Scotland, there is not a single mention of socialism. By 1989, he was prefiguring the language of new Labour, arguing in **Where There is Greed** that "efficiency and fairness depend on each other". The essence of the new Labour strategy designed by Brown and Blair was to disguise Thatcher's ugly neo-liberal project with a coat of social intervention; for example, the New Deal and tax credits.

This intervention functioned in three ways. It allowed those genuinely concerned with the brutality of the Thatcher years to believe that the victims of capitalism were being helped. It is worth remembering that the adverts for the New Deal tended to go out when most of Middle Britain could see them, not on daytime TV or the wee, small-hour slots when many unemployed people were watching. More importantly, Brown's strategy was to shoehorn people into jobs that were low-paid, low-skilled, flexible and vulnerable, whether they liked it or not. Here is Brown in 1998, launching a New Deal scheme in Tayside, Scotland: "From now on in Britain, young people will have new opportunities and a new contribution they can make under the New Deal. "Rights go hand in hand with responsibilities and for young people offered new responsibilities from today there will be no option of simply staying at home on full benefit doing nothing." Thirdly, Brown wanted to attack universal benefits. The children's tax credit and the working family tax, hailed as progressive measures, are 'targeted'. They are part of a shift away from universal welfare towards an increase in means testing that includes incapacity and widow's benefits, pensions and legal aid. Furthermore, like the New Deal, they function as a way of supporting workers to take jobs with poor pay, helping the transition to the low-wage, flexible economy that is the reality of employment in Britain today.

Rights and Responsibilities

The rights and responsibilities mantra signifies a shift from the state as a provider to the state as an enabler for individuals to 'compete' in a global market place. The government will support workers in their task of getting skilled up – hence the massive emphasis on education and lifelong learning. The responsibility side of the equation means that no-one – not even the partners of carers it seems – is exempt from contributing to the economy, if deemed eligible to do so by the department of work and pensions. Indeed welfare itself has ceased to be universal and instead it is now used to help fit workers into the new economic environment driven by global capitalism.

This marketising of the individual in relation to employment opportunities was mirrored by the general marketisation of society that you might expect as part of neo liberalism. Here, New Labour tended to simply replicate Tory strategy, with the major departure of granting the Bank of England the freedom from democratic accountability that finance capital has used to fuel the credit-driven growth which threatens to drown a vast number of ordinary workers in debt. PFI was made-over as PPP, but it remained a way of leveraging the private sector into public projects. Much of the infrastructural improvements in education were achieved through PFI/PPP and growth in higher education by making students pay through top-up or deferred fees in Scotland and of course introducing a market in England and Wales as a consequence. Under Blair and Brown, even more explicitly than under Thatcher, we have been told that market mechanisms could deliver the public good and that we must be pragmatic about it: 'What works is what is right'. The evidence for this is hard to find. There is now universal disapproval of the privatised railways with no sign that New Labour intends to go to a publicly-owned solution that 'works'.

Of course an increased role for the state requires increased resources. Under Blair and Brown the UK has refused to increase taxation and its capacity, therefore, to make increased spending that matches its European partners, as opposed to its own historic low levels, is extremely limited. Instead, for example through foundation hospitals, the market mechanism is expected to drive inefficiencies out of the system, despite the demonstrable failure, indeed perverse consequences, of just that strategy in the railway industry.

The War

We could continue in much the same vein to explore the changes favouring capital, but presented as progress, in pensions, or union rights or the minimum wage, but it is to New Labour's biggest lie and biggest error that we must turn: war as an instrument of international policy. None of the domestic policies pursued by New Labour necessarily forced them into the close alliance with the US which has led Britain into supporting a string of interventions, the most disastrous of which is undoubtedly the invasion and occupation of Iraq. It has to be said here that at best Brown has been reluctantly complicit, but given his role as chief paymaster of the armed forces, the reluctance has been very hard to identify. As Alan Mackinnon points out in his pamphlet **Why Blair Supports Bush's War**, Blair's backing for Bush is almost certainly economic in origin and an integral part of his and New Labour's marriage to corporate capital; much of the banking and finance sector in the UK is now owned by US interests.

And then of course we have to consider the issue of oil. Britain can still boast of two of the world's largest transnational oil companies in BP-Amoco and Shell, but it no longer has the imperial armies and military might to defend their interests. That job has been undertaken by the US. It was clear before the war in Iraq that the US would only invite to the table of the victors, those who had taken part in bloodshed. Russia and France, for example, were not going to be welcome. But Britain, by dint of its enthusiastic support, without UN backing and of course with no consideration of the human cost at all, made sure of its place. And so it was the UK went to war again in the interests of global capital and greed. And now the Middle East is on fire. Thousands are dead and many more will die. Ironically the war against terrorism allegedly fought to make Britain safer has instead brought savage terrorist attacks to the streets of London.

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Vince Mills is Director of the Trade Union Research Unit at Glasgow Caledonian University and secretary of the Scottish Labour's Campaign for Socialism.

fighting for power

Mike Martin maps out the battlelines over future energy policy in Scotland

The question of the future direction of UK Energy Policy is a pressing issue which Government recognises as a matter which cannot be put off. People who work in energy-intensive industries such as paper are already being made redundant. In Ayrshire, for example, about 400 jobs were recently lost as a consequence of high energy costs. It appears that the Government has already made up its mind and is about to announce a significant nuclear power programme to address the UK's looming energy deficit. As far as the Government is concerned, the only remaining question is what to do with the copious radioactive waste. To this end the Government Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM) is about to publish a review and recommended options for the long-term management of radioactive wastes. It is probable that the Government will not allow the waste issue to derail their dash for a radioactive future. The arguments against nuclear power are well known – it is expensive, potentially extremely dangerous and creates a dependency on uranium which has to be imported and is a finite resource. It is notable that no-one among the myriad of atomic advocates in the media, academia, industry and Government mentions the hazards to which the miners in the uranium extraction industry are exposed and perhaps this is because these workers are not British but typically Australian, Canadian, Namibian, Uzbek, Russian and so on.

This article urges that the left support an energy policy based on power generation from renewable sources such as wind, wave and the tidal cycle. Hydroelectric plants have been working reliably in Scotland since the 1930s, and there remains further potential for new plants. Low-grade geothermal energy can also be extracted from the ground in all parts of the world using safe and inexpensive technology. The UK in general and Scotland in particular with its 3,700 km coastline and prevailing winds has one of the best wind and wave resources in Europe. This article calls for the Government to implement policies to proactively develop and exploit all these energy sources and to position Scotland as an exporter of energy to the rest of the UK as well as a research and manufacturing base for wave energy converters, tidal power generators, etc.. Although this article is opposed to nuclear power it does not take a view on nuclear power programmes in other countries such as Iran, North Korea, France etc. Trade unions also have policy on energy as summarised in table 3 below.

Some of Scotland's renewable energy potential has already been realised in the form of wind-farms with the assistance of the twin mechanisms of the Climate Change Levy and Renewables Obligation. This is despite the Ministry of Defence (MoD) having initially excluded vast areas of Scotland from being used for wind farm developments because they would create a nuisance for military aircraft practicing low flying. The MoD has also threatened to block future wind farm development in much of Dumfriesshire, the Borders, Cumbria and South Lanarkshire due to their concern that seismological testing equipment at its Eskdalemuir observation post could be affected by the 'air waves' released by some of the bigger wind turbines. There are two 'Tactical Training Areas' in Scotland where military aircraft are allowed to fly as low as 100 feet. These account for 2 per cent of the land area of Scotland, including 94 per cent of

Dumfries and Galloway and a high proportion of the Highlands. Both these areas have a low population density and are highly suited to wind farm development.

Further development is being stymied by an assortment of interest groups with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) in the vanguard. With an income of £65.5 million per year supporting a staff of over 1,300 people, a membership of over a million, including nearly 150,000 youth members and over 13,000 volunteers, the RSPB is a formidable pressure group. Recently the RSPB derailed a plan for a wind farm near Thurso which had been given planning permission by the Highland council on the basis that there was a danger of collision with migrating geese. Caithness is an area with a declining population which needs environmentally sustainable economic development so the disappointment expressed by Highland Councillor Alastair MacDonald was heartfelt and understandable. The RSPB is also looking to overturn permission for the world's largest wind farm on Lewis in the Western Isles, which is another area of declining population and high unemployment. The Lewis Wind Power project was launched in Stornoway in December 2001 by the then Minister of State for Industry and Energy, Brian Wilson MP. The Lewis development is predicted not only to help Scotland reach its CO₂ emissions goal under the Kyoto protocol, but also to generate £6 to £8 million of annual income for the Western Isles.

The detractors of wind power tend to be wealthy landowners and media personalities, such as David Bellamy, who put forward exaggerated and unscientific arguments which are easily refuted but given high profile media coverage. Anti wind farm campaigns have bitten hard in the form of job losses; for example, 40 staff were made redundant at the Arnish renewable energy manufacturing yard on Lewis at the end of November, leaving about 70 working on its sole contract. Sometimes their exaggerated claims go too far; for example, Renewable Energy Systems (RES) recently had complaints against campaigners trying to block a wind farm in the Highlands upheld by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA).

If the Highlands economy is to flourish as a supplier of sustainable energy the battle of the 180 mile Beaully-Denny power line upgrade has to be won in favour of Scottish and Southern Energy, which says the pylon line is necessary in order to transfer power from wind farm and hydro-electric schemes in the Highlands and Islands. Once again, the opposition is a coalition of Professor Bellamy and landowners such as rugby player Kenny Logan, although concerns about the health effects of long-term proximity to power lines have been raised by residents in Denny. The power line could also be used to transfer power from nuclear reactors, but without it the Highlands will be stuck on slow decline attenuated by EU and HIE subsidies

On 1 December 2005 Mohammed Sawar lead a debate in Westminster on Scotland's energy needs centred on a report 'Future Energy Needs (Scotland)' commissioned by the Scottish Affairs Committee. As Mark Lazarowicz (Lab, Edinburgh North) noted, the report would appear to point towards the Government's pro-nuclear intentions since it carried the views of just one 'independent' witness, Professor Lovelock, who is well

A summary of trade union policy on energy

GMB

Helen Vassie, GMB National Officer said "the GMB welcomes moves to commission a new generation of nuclear power stations if this is done on existing sites. This will improve the UK's security of energy supply and preserve our nuclear technology industry. It should also maintain existing jobs and in the longer term create new ones. However, GMB believes it is vital that expenditure on the new nuclear programme is not at the expense of investment in other equally important energy sources. The current level of investment in renewables, biofuels and microgeneration must be maintained" - 21 Nov 2005

UNISON

UNISON Labour Link supports 'green' energy production and welcomes the Labour Government's energy policy, which rules out future use of nuclear power once provision has been made to access Government funding to accommodate the retraining/redeployment of those Nuclear Energy jobs that will be lost. Thus safeguarding UNISON members and other workers in the Nuclear Energy industry. However, UNISON Labour Link believes that the energy policy cannot be left to market solutions and calls upon the UNISON Labour Link at UK level to campaign for public ownership of the British Energy sector, so that a planned approach to Britain's future energy needs can be democratically met. November 2005

T&G

"Despite some well meaning moves, neither Wales nor Whitehall has a serious energy policy. That must change to avoid a twin crisis in the next generation: of energy starvation for our homes and industries, and the disastrous consequences of global warming. Wales needs a balanced energy policy, making good uses of all sources of supply - Welsh coal, gas, and oil - and investment in the technologies of the future of wind, wave and nuclear energy. Together with energy conservation, disaster can be avoided." "The time has come to stop pitting wind and wave against nuclear. They are partners for the future. So too should Welsh coal, with three hundred years of reserves beneath the ground, become an industry of the future, not the Thatcherite past." - Jack Dromey, T&G Deputy General Secretary, Welsh TUC, 18th Oct 2004

Amicus

Amicus is campaigning for greater investment in a balanced energy policy with a diverse base of energy supplies including clean coal, nuclear, renewable fuels and gas to ensure security of supply and protection from price fluctuations. 1st March 2005

STUC

The STUC held an energy conference in Dec 2004 and affirmed a resolution "Balanced Energy Policy" at their 2005 Conference in February on the back of this. The salient points are:

- No more gas fired power stations due to insecurity of supplies.
- An early Government decision on extending the life of existing nuclear and coal fired power stations.
- The Government funding of a full sized clean coal combustion and carbon capture power plant.
- Economic incentives for R&D into non-wind renewable technologies such as tidal stream generation.
- Investment into the National Grid.

known for having a particular view in favour of nuclear power and is not an expert on the economics of the energy industry. Due to its low population density, Scotland would be an obvious place to site the new stations and whilst the Scottish Parliament and the Executive would be responsible for granting planning permission for the building of any new power stations such permission could not be assumed. However, it is probable that the Tories would support the McConnell wing of the Labour Party to carry the day at the expense of some damage to the coalition.

The Liberals and SNP raised crucial questions about the security of supply and cost of uranium as well as the total cost of generating electricity by nuclear power including decommissioning and dealing with the waste so that the cost is publicly known. It was pointed out that the report significantly underplays the prospects of renewable energy especially around the relative cost of nuclear energy and renewables by quoting from a single source that gives a favourable price for nuclear energy and an inaccurate one for wind power. The Inverness MP, Danny Alexander, outlined the opportunity for developing a

new industrial sector around wave and tidal power technology provided the UK Government takes a much more active role in pursuing and encouraging these technologies. He commended Frank Doran for noting that 20 years ago the UK was ahead in the field of wind power, but that lead was ceded to Germany and Denmark because investment was diverted into the nuclear industry. Those speaking in favour of nuclear power included John Robertson (Lab, Glasgow NW), Tom Harris (Lab, Cathcart), Eric Joyce (Lab, Falkirk) and David Mundell (Con, Dumfries).

The nuclear industry, the MOD and the RSPB are powerful forces in UK society whose lobbying pressure consciously or unwittingly, is pushing the UK Government down the nuclear road. There are sound economic, health and safety and environmental arguments against nuclear and in favour of sustainable energy technologies. The flourishing of such technologies could do much to stimulate industry and revitalise declining communities in Scotland. The Left cannot leave the field uncontested. ■

Mike Martin is an Information and Statistics Specialist and has been a member of the Labour Party since 1982

reviews

Gunner Palace, Dir. Michael Tucker and Petra Epperlein, USA & Germany: 85 mins, English, 2005 www.gunnerpalace.com

The 3 Rooms of Melancholia, Dir. Pirjo Honkasalo, Finland/Denmark/Germany/Sweden, 106 mins, Russian/Arabic/Chechen, 2005

The Devil's Miner, Dir. Richard Ladkani and Kief Davidson, USA & Bolivia, 82 mins, Spanish with English subtitles, 2005 www.thedevilsminer.com

Someone being sympathetic to this? I don't know if I'd be sympathetic if I wasn't in the army. After you watch this, you're gonna go get your popcorn out of the microwave and talk about what I said, and you'll forget me by the end of this...Only people who remember this is us.

Sgt Beatty, U.S.Army

Few of the Gunners in Michael Tucker and Petra Epperlein's documentary **Gunner Palace** are over 25. Most in fact, hover alarmingly near the 19 – 20 mark, which is why the film's handbill features a smooth-faced grunt in the vein of Haley Joel Osmont rather than Joe Kubert's **Sgt Rock**. The Vietnam movies of the late seventies cemented an enduring Hollywood myth of the undercooked boy-soldier sacrificed to the altar of war and Tucker's narrative would appear to confirm it. Whether it is a product of selective 'casting' of the younger army demographic or simply the raw truth as he found it, the 'gunners' of this film come across as a super-powered boy's brigade, tasked with controlling a situation that their officers, never mind they, barely understand.

Those looking for a wide perspective on the Iraq conflict 'ended' will be disappointed; those more interested in the psychology of war and the neurotics of conquest will find plenty to mull over (audiences can in any case, expect a plethora of Iraq documentaries in 2006). Ensnared in the titular palace, once the property of Uday Hussein, this film focuses on a set period (late 2003 and early 2004, long after the war was officially 'over') and the experiences of soldiers who truly live life where extremes meet. One minute they are battering down doors of suspected insurgents, the next they are relaxing by the pool at a 'post-raid' kegger.

Although these young soldiers have a certain youthful swagger and a conqueror's easy contempt for the culture they have vanquished, Tucker's probing reveals their nagging sense of disquiet, a routine cynicism and an at times, woeful unreadiness for their mission. Part of this is psychological – the 2/3 Gunners are a regiment their commander describes as 'trained to halt the Russian advance. They lived to blow things up.' – not, it is implied, to deal with distraught Iraqi civilians and glue-addicted street urchins. But in Baghdad their patrols are attacked by snipers, stone throwing, glue-sniffing teenagers and worst of all, IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices), secreted inside plastic bags, wastebins or even a gift offered by a seemingly friendly child.

Then there are the physical deficiencies in the US Army's once legendary logistics – 'thin skinned' humvees whose armour simply slows shrapnel down the better for it to lodge in flesh and bone, poor intelligence and no real sense of what they are doing there and why. Tucker clearly built up a great deal of trust and mutual respect with his subjects, who emerge as neither saints nor sinners, but sophomores embroiled in a Herculean labour. The 'gunners' are drawn mostly from the black urban poor or those dismissed as 'white trash' by metropolitan liberal, the detritus of the 'Bushbelt' for whom the army is one of few viable career options. Tucker is excellent at teasing out their hidden depths, in particular those of Private Wilf, blessed with a 'mouth-of-babes' instinct for bullshit, a droll delivery and an edgy sense of humour. The GIs draw upon pop-culture in making sense of their lives, such as the freestyle raps drummed out on the hood of a humvee, or more unpleasantly, Wilf's bedroom skit of a 'mad mullah'. The need to let off some steam is hardly surprising (expertly matched by Tucker's disorienting, semi-hallucinogenic cinematography), but coping mechanisms run the risk of mutating into a sour-spirited worldview.

The only locals we get to know are Iraqi interpreters, a mixed crew of idealists and borderline outcasts (one of whom, we learn, may have been a spy for 'insurgent' groups) given names by the soldiers in a strangely naïve slave-master dynamic;

'SpongeBob', 'Mike Tyson' and of course, 'Elvis'. A great deal seems to hinge on such relationships – they are literally life and death. When we learn that 'Tyson' is the alleged informer, whatever your view of the conflict, the signs aren't good.

While something of a 'boy's brigade', the residents of **Gunner Palace** are at most, occasionally childish; the protagonists of **The 3 Rooms of Melancholia**, Pirjo Honkasalo's tonal treatment of the Chechen Conflict, are literally babes in arms. Structured around the imaginary 'rooms' of the title (Longing, Breathing and Remembering – an abbreviated three ages of man) the film observes respectively, the residents of a Russian military orphanage, being drilled for their future on the Chechen front; the children struggling to survive in the ruins of Grozny; and the harsh frontier existence of young Chechen refugees in Ingushetia.

As with **Gunner Palace**, this film does not attempt the global perspective of a **World in Action** or **Panorama** report. It opts instead for extreme close-up, risking near-pornography in its portrayal of youth sacrificed for causes material of spiritual. Honkasalo has pared back the narrative elements to a minimum, with almost no dialogue or exposition, and the focus is literally, intimate. The camera closes in on the faces of the children as they learn how to salute, forage for food or listen to distant gunfire. We remain an external observer, with no

Although these young soldiers have a certain youthful swagger and a conqueror's easy contempt for the culture they have vanquished, Tucker's probing reveals their nagging sense of disquiet, a routine cynicism and an at times, woeful unreadiness for their mission

narrator to tell us how they are feeling, no interview to tease out their thoughts or opinions.

This approach can be contrasted with Richard Ladkani and Kief Davidson's **The Devil's Miner**, which avoids the obviously cloying or sentimental in portraying the hazardous existence of child-miners in Bolivia. Basilio, its twelve-year old protagonist is remarkable for both his fortitude and his capacities, being intelligent enough to appreciate just how bad a hand he has been dealt.

The Devil's Miner was shot over five years in the city of Potosi, where at least 800 children work in the mines. Shot in crisp, clear digibeta, the film offers a much more solidly investigative exposition of the material than either **Gunner Palace** or **3 Rooms**. As well as Basilio's confessions to camera there are supplementary interviews with adult miners (who were they not so blighted by disease, wracked with guilt and prematurely aged themselves, might come across as coca-chewing Fagins) and the local priest that fleshes out the history of 'the mountain that eats men'.

With blank stares and mouths stuffed with the coca leaves that sustain them over long shifts, men and boys risk death for the often-slim hope of a striking a vein of silver. Basilio's boss is already a dead man; he has swallowed so much mineral dust he has developed silicosis, a fatal disease that affects the lungs. 'Outside we believe in God' he explains 'but when we enter the mines things change – we enter the realm of Satan.' Sure enough, each mine has its Tio, a statue of Satan to which the miners offer coca leaves and occasionally, a freshly killed llama. Suppressing their own outrage and eschewing a narrative voice, the filmmakers expose scenes lifted directly from Blake that implicates market tyranny in the routine destruction of youth.

But with Honkasalo, we are offered no easy route to understanding the roots of the Chechen tragedy. With more of a leaning to philosophical rather than literal truth, she leaves us to wonder, with more than a shudder, just what these youngsters are thinking. Their silences, their muffled tears shed from glassy eyes are more terrifying than the sneers of a Gunner Wilf.

The film has drawn criticism over this confluence of poeticism and reportage, and some viewers may hanker for the comforts of the all-knowing narrator familiar to traditional documentary. But Honkasalo speaks the language of maverick documentarians such as Humphrey Jennings, or even writers such as James Kelman by working through elegantly deployed coincidences and placing us on a level with the protagonists knowing, if anything, less than they do about the situation. One such coincidence shows the Russian and Chechen orphans both watching the newscast of the Moscow theatre attacks, their eyes wide in shock. This is soon punctuated with the ominous rhythm of marching feet and the eerie tenor of a Chechen war chant, giving us cause to be more than a little afraid. ■

Mitchell Miller

The Mineworkers, Robert Duncan, Birlinn, 2005, ISBN 1841583650, £14.99

The Mineworkers is an invaluable and painstakingly researched social history of mine working in Scotland, stretching from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries and covering the extraction of not just coal but also lead and shale. It covers the employment and working lives of the miners and their families, rich in their own testimony and photographic images, and is thus an account of privation, capriciousness and heartache, interspersed with some shafts of resistance and progress.

Until the virtual extinction of coal mining in the recent years, the history of mining was a good way of shedding light on understanding the industrial development of capitalism in Scotland, its expansion, contraction, restructuring and death. Many of the first miners were legal serfs, working in investments often funded by slavery. Serfdom was ended not out of concern for the miners but because it had the effect of restricting the supply of labour to the mines. Despite abolition, de facto serfdom continued as a result of authoritarian discipline and control of miners' private lives through mining capitalists influencing the local law enforcement and using tied provision of housing and food supply. Prior to the permanent establishment of trade unionism after 1900, collective resistance was frequent but sporadic and unsuccessful. Thereafter, collective action

Until the virtual extinction of coal mining in the recent years, the history of mining was a good way of shedding light on understanding the industrial development of capitalism in Scotland

of both an industrial and political character became relatively more effective, particularly between 1950-1980. Of course, this was balanced by private mine owners flouting new health and safety legislation, nationalisation not being the panacea and the major battles of 1921, 1926 and 1984-5 being defeats.

One of the strengths of the book is its understanding of the miners' acquiescence and complicity in

their own conditions of exploitation, ranging from alcoholism, risk taking, 'making out' and economic penury. The strength lies in always locating this in its root cause of capitalist exploitation. Another is the coverage given over to the period 1700-1900, bringing into the public domain a singular account of family life and structures, communities and their politics. Less space is devoted to period since the 1970s for this is covered by other accounts.

What would have been useful is for the conditions and struggles of mineworkers in Scotland to have been set in the context of mineworkers elsewhere in Britain so that some comparative insight could have been generated. Nonetheless, what informs the analysis throughout is a twin focus on the political economy of mining and the exploitation of the miners, whether under private or state ownership. Put forward in a fast paced and readable way, this is just what one would rightly expect from a Marxist who is chair of the Scottish Labour History Society and Workers' Educational Association teacher. ■

Professor Gregor Gall

web review

Henry McCubbin

Our first edition of 2006 has commentaries by activists on the state of their parties. To facilitate further insight into the official position of these parties I have compiled a list of their official web sites. For the benefit of contradiction hunters I gave grouped them so that you can compare their Scottish branch with their UK headquarters except of course for those parties that don't have UK headquarters unless Alex Salmond counts as that in the SNP.

The Tories have a very professional looking site but close examination exposes weaknesses in regards to updating. Particularly for ongoing stories as news outlets will rip off web photos and quotes when needed but will bypass sites with 'old' news. www.scottishtories.org.uk/ www.conservatives.com.

A look at the Tories European partners, which David Cameron is threatening to ditch, can also help to position the Tories in the grander European political spectrum at www.epp-ed.org/home/en/default.asp?lg1=en

Labour's Scottish site is located at www.scottishlabour.org.uk and is colour-coordinated with Tony Blair's web site at www.labour.org.uk/home. However Iain Davidson will not enjoy a visit to the European site at www.socialistgroup.org where a comrade is explaining his joy at getting the Parliament to disinter their dead parrot of a constitution on the grounds that the ignorant European citizenry failed to understand the great benefits it would bring. Will they ever learn? For this less than uplifting tale try www.socialistgroup.org/gpes/servlet/Main/NewsDetail~2?_wcs=true&lg=en&id=6829

Now to the Lib Dems. Its Scottish branch is undoubtedly brighter than their national version but the crisis faced by them nationally may explain this. www.scotlibdems.org.uk, www.libdems.org.uk.

Their European partners are to be found at alde.euoparl.eu.int/Content/Default.asp. I would draw to readers' attention that European Liberals are dry as a stick, right wing, neo liberals which the new Westminster intake was and this is part of the battleground over which the leadership battle is being fought. Unfortunately the underlying politics has been clouded by Kennedy's alcoholism.

What a strange problem we have with the Greens. Plenty of information but taking the above problem of the EU constitution the Scottish Greens still post a policy of maybe if, the UK greens definitely not and the EU Greens and incidentally the SNP through the European Free Alliance definitely yes please. www.scottishgreens.org.uk/ www.greenparty.org.uk/news.

The Scottish National Party is to be found at www.snp.org and as mentioned above their EU wing is www.greens-efa.org.

And finally, the party every other party wants to be rude about, something to do with sharks circling round a wounded prey. Sad point is that the wounds have been self inflicted yet their web site is bright, full of campaigning issues and serious policy statements such as the ending of Council Tax and free school meals. They are also lined up with their EU party in that they have thought through alternatives to the EU constitution and the services directive. www.scottishsocialistparty.org.

www.guengl.org/showPage.jsp. Verdict; they should stick to what they are good at as a political party and remember that it's the running dogs of capitalism in the press that decide who is to be a celebrity and not the individual so chosen. They do this with the knowledge that setting you up sells papers but knocking you down in humiliation sells a lot more! ■

Available from www.redpaper.net

THE RED PAPER ON SCOTLAND

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Edited by Vince Mills

This year is the 30th anniversary of the publication of the Red Paper on Scotland, edited by Gordon Brown and published by Edinburgh University Student Press in 1979. This Red Paper mirrors the original in that it has assembled articles from across the spectrum of radical thought - Communist Party, Green Party, Labour Party, Socialist Party and those from no party at all. It is intended as a source of information that can be used to expose the lies of 21st century neo-liberalism with its policy of war against the poor at home and abroad, as well as a source of alternative ideas that will help us all build the better world envisioned in the Scottish socialist tradition embodied in the 1979 publication and the centuries of struggle that came before it.

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Kick Up The Tabloids

KENNEDY 'NOT ALCOHOLIC BY HIGHLANDS STANDARDS'

New Year is a time for a new start, a clean sweep and a resolve to do better. David Cameron has started 2006 by saying everything he stood for seven months ago when writing the Tories' 2005 Manifesto is really a load of bollocks. Meanwhile, the Lib Dems, having long been the party that stood against 'Yah-Boo Politics' have made the radical shift to the position where they not only embrace Yah-Boo Politics, but are now engaging in internal Yah-Boo-ing.

While not being the first Kennedy to be assassinated, Charles Kennedy is probably the first to have known his assassin, although his memories of his former PR may be as hazy as the rest of his memories. Indeed, Kennedy started off 2006 in much the same state as the rest of us, by forgetting that he had a drink problem. It's particularly ironic to lose one's job due to alcohol at New Year, as most of us tend to take a more open-minded attitude towards over-indulgence at that time. While most of us have probably been drunk at least once over December and January, not many of us ended up getting our jotters as a result, unless our behaviour at the office Christmas party was particularly high on the Richter scale of piss-artistry.

Having initially denying suffering a drink problem, Kennedy claimed rumours that he had were a slur on his good name. And if there was any slurring to be done, he was going to be doing it. He considered himself to be a moderate drinker and all his constituents agreed with him. Champagne Charlie suddenly remembered that his constituents all live in the Highlands, and that by the standards of the rest of the country he probably is an alcoholic. The serious point is that the Liberal Democrats have got rid of their most successful leader since the First World War (a time, ironically, when they numbered the notoriously alcoholic Winston Churchill amongst their number). Under Charles Kennedy, the party now has over sixty MPs and controls a majority of local authorities in England, including major cities such as Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Imagine what he could have achieved if he'd managed to sober up now and again!

Kennedy gained much public support with his stance on the Iraq War, where his views were a great deal more sober than those of teetotal George W. Bush. To his credit, 'Chatshow Charlie' is said to be undergoing a course of treatment. Whether this involves joining Alcoholics Anonymous, no-one can say. However, the mantra of AA members does seem particularly apt to any leader of the Liberal Democrats, namely:

"God give me the strength to endure the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can change, and the wisdom to tell between the two".

Over the years, most Liberal, Social Democrat, Alliance, and Lib-Dem leaders couldn't change the fact that they would never be the government, but could always change their name. The AA programme takes the form of a series of steps. Step One involves recognising you have a problem. In other words: "My name is Charles, and I work with a bunch of conniving, duplicitous bastards". Indeed, Ming Campbell may be leader for the moment, but is wisely taking it one day at a time. The Fifth Step involves confessing everything you have done that is wrong, hurtful or damaging. So, expect Charlie to come clean very soon about hosting Have I Got News For You, or worse still appearing in last year's Eastenders Christmas panto.

Charlie's addiction in that area is nothing when compared to that of 'Gorgeous' George Galloway, who has decided that the best way to be taken more seriously as a politician is from inside the Big Brother House. Which only goes to confirm what a lot of us had suspected all along; that the greatest principle in which Gorgeous George believes is the principle of self-publicity. Tony Blair has been quick to denounce Galloway as a 'C-list politician with an A-list ego' but as someone who lives in a glass house himself, should be careful about the direction in which he starts throwing stones. Blair seems to have forgotten his own cringingly-embarrassing showings on MTV, Richard and Judy and Football Focus. God almighty, he even made a cameo appearance on the Simpsons, although in fairness, he did think it was a documentary.

Galloway justifies his participation in Celebrity BB on the grounds that it is "good for politics". The more salient point is ... is this good for TV? We get the politicians we deserve, the saying goes. No-one deserves telly as bad as this. How ironic that someone who would willingly spend two weeks in a tawdry, voyeuristic farce in the company of D-list nobodies, should lead a political party called Respect. I may be wrong, it may encourage young people to engage in political debate. The danger, however, is that it will lead the people of Bethnal Green to wish that their MP was Jodie Marsh or Michael Barrymore.

Now surely that would never happen... or would it? ■

Kick Up the Tabloids is the Stand Comedy Club's monthly satirical comedy show. Totally live and interactive, it offers an irreverent take on who and what has been making the news in Scotland or beyond. The Kick Up the Tabloids team include regulars Bruce Devlin, Susan Morrison, Paul Sneddon, Frankie Boyle and Miles Jupp with surprise guest appearances. The show takes place on the third Wednesday each month at The Stand, Yorkhill Place, Edinburgh (Tel 0131 558 7373 or visit the website at www.thestand.co.uk). Doors open at 7.30pm, with the show kicking off at 9pm.

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