



## WELCOME TO RAINBOW SCOTLAND BUT WHAT NEXT FOR SCOTTISH POLITICS?

Analysis of the election • Where does this leave the parties? • Priorities for the next four years

# scottishleftreview

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# comment

Has a D Notice been served advising newspaper publishers to suppress facts for the sake of public order? Have Scotland's commentators been hypnotised? Are organised gangs intimidating newsagents to prevent them from selling any publication which might reveal the truth? Surely there must be some explanation? It is now almost a month since the Scottish election and enough newsprint has been dedicated to its analysis to wrap a decade's worth of fish suppers. And still no-one has thought it important enough to point out that the Scottish electorate has taken a seemingly conscious and informed decision to shift Scottish politics significantly to the left.

It seems that the only lazy minds left in Scotland are those which are paid to enlighten us. We have a Parliament which is filled with ideas, opinions and agendas which - whether you agree with them all or not - are undoubtedly a breath of fresh air and are set to invigorate the political debate. We have a public which, where it did bother to vote, chose to disregard established patterns and imagine a different kind of political future for Scotland. If the conversations which have cropped up in civic Scotland are anything to go by we now seem to have a Scottish society which has been alerted to the possibilities of a new direction for public life. For the first time in quite a long time we have a country which is scratching its head and trying to work out both the implications of what has happened and the possibilities it opens up. For the first time since 1997 we have a thinking Scotland. But you could only know that by living here and you would need to talk to people. If you were to get your info from the press you would assume that the set patterns of British politics had been given a bit of a row and told to get on with it. That is simply not what has happened. Frankly, given Scotland's economic performance over the last three decades you would think we would be able to tell the difference between a wake-up call and a P45. Scotland's one-opinion state did not get a wake-up call on the first of May.

As well as the straight numbers game there are many aspects of the election outcome which are enormously important. So far the interpretation of these has been characterised by lazy knee-jerk, confused myopia and wilful disregard and distortion. Before this third-rate punditry becomes the received 'wisdom', some important points need to be made and some important questions asked.

### Turnout

The first issue on which everyone can agree is that the turnout at the election was disappointing. Everyone can

also agree that it is primarily the responsibility of the political parties to address this problem and re-engage people. The point at which agreement breaks down and ideas fail to emerge is the dual questions: why is it happening and how do we reverse it? Why? We are told that people are disillusioned with politics, that negative campaigning puts people off, that the political process is too far away from them, that traditional political engagement no longer fits in with people's lifestyles, that it is an unavoidable international trend. To fix things we are told that we need to have more of the same politics but with better logos, that people should be allowed to vote by mobile phone, that we should hold our parliamentary sessions in the cheapest looking building possible. Frankly, the people saying these things don't even look convinced by them.

The truth that has to be faced up to is that low political turnouts are not a side-effect of the current international political project - they are one of its aims. Throughout the world the free-market based political aristocracy has done everything they could to turn politics into a system of micro management. The leaders of free-market-government have not failed to engage people in politics, they have succeeded in disengaging people from politics. Any sane person looking at the last six months in international politics could not draw any comforting conclusions. The crude manner in which America has just seized control of the world's second biggest oil field (is anyone still pretending it was about human rights or international security?), the way in which Israel has finally given up on any pretence of a semblance of law in it's mass execution programme (please sign here so we can kill you with impunity), Blair's blatant plans to prepare schools, hospitals and universities for eventual take-over by American corporations (section 15 of the foundation hospitals legislation allows for the sub-contraction of all aspects of running a hospital to the private sector), the 1930s Germany climate we have now adopted to asylum seekers (we're flying handcuffed people back to a country we bombed almost into extinction and where no more than a few percent of the land area is controlled by anyone other than vicious warlords). One of the key conditions for allowing rabid foaming at the mouth free-marketeers to take control of the entire world is that the rest of us avert our eyes (or never hear about it in the first place). And this applies particularly to the poor and dispossessed.

Blair does not attempt to engage in discussions with the electorate. The reason he has given for falling in behind him on foundation hospitals/dismantling the NHS is that if we don't it will be "the biggest mistake for

a generation". OK, that's fine then - the political social and economic concerns some of us had are assuaged now. It is with wonder that we await to find out how he is going to persuade us to back him on his next looting mission into British public life. "If this Parliament blocks this move to hand the running of the home civil service over to Microsoft it will be an affront to God." We have been explicitly told that government is now about doing less in the notional belief that this will therefore mean it is being done better. We are not supposed to question politics, the media/corporate/government agenda does not encourage us to think about politics, we are not educated to understand politics, we are supposed to vote primarily on personality, scare story and vague vision. We are supposed to vote for them once every four years but we are not supposed to hold them to account for any specific thing they did, only for their general 'niceness'.

## **The leaders of free-market-government have not failed to engage people in politics, they have succeeded in disengaging people from politics**

So what is the lesson from this election? Regardless of the Daily Mail's attempts to kid on that the turnout was under 50 per cent it wasn't (50.4 on the second vote, so they turned out even if they didn't vote on every ballot). But it isn't a problem with Scottish politics (although the relentless domestic media attacks haven't helped), it is a problem with world politics. Transforming the education system in Scotland to train future generations to understand the things governments decide on would be the biggest single step we could take. If people understood that there is more to running the world than micro-managing the finer points of penal policy they will realise the importance of voting. And the political parties also have to accept the difference between apathy and antipathy. Did people fail to vote because they don't care or because they don't feel that they can alter the things they care about? We need to look for evidence to answer these crucial questions. The answer seems to be that the only winners from this election were those who offered an alternative to the narrow free-market consensus. Don't blame Scotland, but that does not get Scottish politics off the hook.

### **Drift left**

So what do we learn from those that did turn up? That's an easy one to answer because everyone agrees - it was a protest vote against four years of underperformance by the Parliament. Nonsense. It is time to kick this lazy thinking into touch. There was one party which stood at the election which pitched all its activity to gather the protest vote of those disillusioned with devolution so far. It openly scorned the Parliament in campaigning and offered populist right-wing initiatives which by the standards of current politics did not look extremist. The

Scottish People's Alliance had a high profile campaign with two sitting MSPs defecting to their cause, activists put up a large number of posters and stuck a lot of leaflets through doors and their presentation was professional. And yet they polled like the Monster Raving Looney Party. If the election had been a protest - particularly if it had been a protest based on disillusionment with devolution - the SPA would have been a recipient of a part of that protest. It wasn't. Why this should be is a question which a lot of people don't seem to want to think about.

Here's another one. In 1999 these same sages nodded wisely and told us that the SNP had underperformed in the election because of its commitment to raise income tax by one pence. The SNP had failed to learn the big lesson of the last 15 years (we were told) and the lesson was that people will not vote for higher taxes because Thatcher had changed politics for ever. Redistribution was off the agenda. So if the 'logic' of these commentators is to be followed, the SNP crash at this election must be assessed in relation to the rightward drift of their policies. After all, if you can blame the '99 result on the tax agenda surely you have to judge the much worse '03 result on the same basis. If we are supposed to believe that '99 proved that Scotland had rejected the tax and spend agenda, surely '03 proved beyond any argument that Scotland has emphatically rejected the ever-freer-market agenda. Low taxes for business are now over. Of course, that isn't the conclusion which the pro-market commentators have drawn. That is because they don't draw conclusions, they have rigid political prejudices based on self interest and pounce on anything which they can twist to apparently prove their ideas. And it is the left which is supposed to be clinging to 'ideology' and dogma.

A few other quick facts. In 1999 the SNP - standing on a higher income tax agenda - polled its second best ever result. In 2003 people expected the SSP to take votes disproportionately from Labour but it looks like they actually took more votes from the SNP. Meanwhile the Labour Party polled its worst result since 1931 and is now actively supported by fewer than one in six Scots. The Scottish Tories did no more than hold their ground despite the traditionally disproportionate turnout rate of its voters in a low poll election - and did so by moving to the left of New Labour in England. There was no other progress on

the right. The independents were not a random selection politically - all stood on an explicit left wing agenda (assuming that we can still call pro-public service and pro-welfare left wing).

So here's what (probably) really happened. By 1999 the Scottish Labour party had moved way to the right of many of its voters. Being the first election for the new Parliament and with the hope that Scottish Labour might take a different path from London Labour many of these people turned out for Labour anyway. Many others, however, turned to the SNP which had offered them what they wanted - a headline commitment to proper investment in public life funded through progressive taxation. This gave the SNP its second best ever result. However, by 2003 people realised that Labour in Scotland was not offering the radical politics it wanted and the SNP had drifted to an almost identical position - the centre right. The electorate rejected the free-market policies of both. This caused a sharp fall in Labour vote. However, things were much worse for the SNP because it lost not only disillusioned left SNP voters but also lost all of the disaffected left Labour voters who turned to them in '99. These voters decided that the low-tax, business before people, illiberal social stance and minimalist approach shared by the four main parties was well to the right of where they were. So they voted left, not in protest but because this is what they wanted and because they had learned from '99 that Scotland's voting system meant that voters could actually get what they wanted.

This was not the protest election, this was the moment when the Scottish people forced the Scottish Parliament to swing back to the left, back toward the point at which it had earlier left them behind. This was the correction election, where the myth that the Scottish people were content to let politics drift further and further to the right was faced down.

#### **Media and establishment**

One of the biggest changes in this election was the first real challenge to the political establishment in Scotland for many generations. The Labour Party has been by far the dominant political force in Scotland since the 1960s, and it is the nature of the dominant political force to shape

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the rest of the nation in it image. The public appointments process is structurally designed to expand the political hegemony, and to refer to it as cronyism is actually to downplay its significance. There is nothing as blatant or visible as successive American administrations jostling to pack the Supreme Court with 'our people', but it is extensive nonetheless. And it is not just a formal process with places being handed out, it is also an informal process with people aligning themselves with the dominant political force either for cynical reasons or because their views have been shaped by that dominant culture in which they grew up. Most of you will have had some contact with a big organisation during the election campaign - be it public, private or voluntary sector. You may also be aware of the manner in which they were preparing their governmental relations strategy for after the election. If so you will be aware that they were almost all planning for a result which returned the status quo. Hell, there were no shortages of Chief Executives who were actually writing to Jack McConnell during the election trying to tie up deals about what he would do with his new administration. Organisations who communicated with the Greens and the SSP during the election campaign generally did so out of courtesy and not because they thought these parties could ever actually be important. The government of Scotland was viewed by far too many people in the way America views the government of Iraq - a process which follows a set pattern and which has little or nothing to do with the wishes of the electorate. Imagine how hard it is going to be for the British civil service to come to terms with this. In fact it will probably be the biggest shock to the British civil service since we lost the Indian colonies.

Meanwhile the media, whose principal players ought to have known better, behaved in almost exactly the same way. On the Saturday after the election the front pages of the newspapers were dominated by the 'story' that the Greens were going to form a 'traffic light' coalition with Labour and the Lib Dems. Which seemed odd, because anyone who knew Scottish politics ought to have known that the Greens had as a matter of policy ruled out any formal coalition. It also seemed odd that these professional political watchers would give any credence to the idea that the Greens - collectively or individually - would be even a little bit likely to supply the majority which would allow Jack to pass his 'lock up the parents for their child's crimes' legislation. Have they ever met

a Scottish Green? Do they understand the political position of the Green Party? Why would they believe such a story for a second? The surprising thing is that in almost none of these stories did the journalist involved actually manage (or bother) to get a comment, formal or informal, from the Green Party itself. Straight after the election which changed the narrow political consensus in Scotland journalists still thought they could report on Scottish politics by relying on 'leaks' from Labour. The Labour Party is now only one voice in a rainbow spectrum of political views and parties in Scotland. Journalists will quickly need to learn that their old one-page contact book will not get them through to the new Scotland.

The implications of the election do not stop at the doors of the Parliament. All of Scotland - including the chief executives and the hacks - had better get used to the idea that Scottish politics is no longer something which takes place in closed rooms. Dear Chief Executive, do you realise that all that legislation you wanted passed (be it the right to plant GM crops, the ability to impose pay settlements, reduced business rates) may now lie in the hands of the Scottish Socialist Party? Do you have their phone number yet?

### The future

How different does this make our Parliament for the next four years? Well, lets look backwards to find out. Imagine the last four years had taken place under this Parliament. Just two examples; we would now have free school meals for all Scottish school children and a firm resolution opposing the war in Iraq would have been passed putting ever more pressure on Tony Blair. And those are only

the different outcomes which would have emerged from a cautious and far from radical four years. It ought to alert people to what is possible over the next four years in which the Greens and the SSP have seats on the Business Bureau which decides the business of the Parliament and seats in every Parliamentary committee.

So we can expect a radical programme? Well, no, because there is a very solid coalition at the heart of the Scottish Parliament. It was not the Lib Dems who got Labour through the last Parliament, it was the Tories. On the contentious issues which Labour really had to win (such as the war votes) it was not the Lib Dems who delivered the results for Labour it was the Tories. In fact, the only two

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votes the Executive lost were the ones where the Tories deserted them. On the initial flashpoint issues for the new administration it is already clear that Labour needs the Tories - they are the only party which will support the jailing of parents for their children's crimes, for example. In fact, the Labour Party could probably just about get through the next four years by relying on the ad hoc votes of either the Lib Dems or the Tories on an issue by issue basis. The problem for Jack is that he simply cannot be seen to be closer to the Tories than to any other party in the Parliament. It is true, but it would be too much for his party. The coalition talks were as much about saving Jack from relying on the Tories as anything.

And what of the smaller parties? They can expect both taming and vilification. Within days of the election commentators were falling over themselves to argue that the Greens were much closer to the Labour Party than they were to the socialists. There has been a drip drip of stories claiming there have been bitter splits between the two parties. The media is desperately trying to de-radicalise the Greens. Once again, this can only lead to the conclusion that none of these commentators have actually met any of the Greens. Meanwhile the Record and the Scotsman have the SSP in their sights and will waste not a single opportunity to put the boot in. The wise men of Scotland (the gender assumption in this phrase is not accidental) are already saying that the small parties will be badly damaged if all they do is be 'obstructionist'. Translate that. The small parties will be harmed if they do not agree with and behave like the big parties. Have these 'wise men' learned nothing from this election? Can't they see that they put these people in the Parliament precisely because they didn't slavishly agree with the big parties? Scare stories of the process of government grinding to a halt are laughable - the vast majority of the core legislation which is required to keep a country running is consensual. The SSP and the Green simply couldn't drag the thing to a halt even if they wanted to (there are only 17 of them not from the main parties after all). What they will do it change the nature and tone of the debate. Words matter. Phrases such as 'the redistribution of wealth' do not bounce off the political debate, they change it. The Executive can no longer make itself feel safe just by doing what it needs to

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to stay on the right side of the CBI, it is going to have to do things to make sure that it keeps on the right side of the many SSP and Green voters (and the many other who are very sympathetic to what these parties have to say). The political pressure in Scotland is no longer from the right, it is very much from the left. Politics always moves towards areas of high pressure. The Parliament is heading left.

**So...**

Devolution is a process, and in Scotland it is only going in one direction. Some in the Labour Party are desperate to convince you (and themselves) that the message of this election is that Scotland has rejected independence. They

claim this even though more MSPs in this Parliament stood on an independence platform than did in the last. But this is not analysis, it is just a story people like Wendy Alexander tell themselves before going to bed to keep away the bad dreams. In this bad dream Labour has lost its core vote in its lurch to the right. People wake up to the fact that Scotland is being governed for corporations first and people second. The markets-at-all-costs philosophy is rejected. Wendy's training at the prestigious French business school INSEAD on the needs and whims of big business turn out not to make her the most important person in Scotland after all. Local authorities are elected proportionately to the political views of people and the feudalism of Labour local government goes. Scotland becomes a vibrant country in which political debate stems from the healthy opposition of ideas coming from a range of different

parties. Labour remains a very important part of Scottish politics, but only a part. And, worst of all, Labour has to start moving back to the left if it wants to survive the 2007 election. This is much worse than the worst ghouls and goblins thrown up by cheese before bed.

In a previous Scottish Left Review we wrote that although there are 129 MSPs they only have about ten opinions between them. That is something which no-one can say anymore. Irrespective of your political beliefs, surely that is something everyone can take pride in. Well done the Scottish electorate, good job. Welcome to Rainbow Scotland. ■

# what next for the parties?

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## Labour's Last Chance Saloon

*Bob Thomson is a former Chairman and Treasurer of the Scottish Labour Party*

Most political commentators don't seem to have appreciated the scale and significance of New Labour's losses on May Day. Labour received its lowest vote since 1931, with 400,000 less Scots voting for them than in 1997. New Labour's pro-war, pro-business agenda was rejected by a majority of Scottish voters. Scotland had moved substantially to the Left, and the seven Green, six SSP and four independent MSPs all stood on platforms significantly more progressive than that of New Labour.

There was a major movement of voters from traditional patterns. The scale of the rejection of New Labour by middle class voters in Strathkelvin Bearsden, Edinburgh Pentlands and Edinburgh South was breathtaking. Voters are learning how to use their two parliamentary votes. The implications for New Labour are profound. In June 2004 there will be elections to the European Parliament under the single transferable vote in a closed party list. Labour currently has three seats in Scotland. If the May Day trend continues, Labour could find itself with only two. Significantly the only part of the UK which performed relatively well was Wales where they are now able to govern without coalition. In Wales, Labour branded itself 'Classic Labour', clearly a pseudonym for 'Old Labour', and stood on a manifesto committed to abolishing prescription charges, free eye and dental checks and improving pensioners' concessionary travel. Unlike Jack McConnell, Rhodri Morgan made no public statements supporting the war in Iraq.

Why has Scottish Labour not emulated our comrades in Wales? This is in my view at least partly to do with the close connections of Scottish Ministers and leading MSPs to Cabinet Ministers and subsequent competition between Blairites and Brownites. Why else would the New Labour Leadership in Scotland continue to adhere to policies so obviously at odds with the majority of Labour's natural supporters?

Labour by its founding and constitution is a democratic socialist party. The New Labour entryists have severely damaged, possibly fatally, Labour's standing and organisation. Membership is down by over one third and more than half the activists have left the party. Many constituencies and branches are continuously inquorate. Many of those attending are of the 'got a job' or 'gie's a job' variety. New Labour is a party for careerists not those with passion and conviction. Unless this rot can be reversed many of the socialists still in the Labour Party will vote with their feet

The most urgent task is to establish a campaign with a detailed, practical, timetabled programme for winning

back Scottish Labour to socialist policies. This would give hope to those still with the Party, regain those who have left, and attract new members, especially those involved in campaigning on single issue matters, many of whom would previously have joined Labour. How can such a campaign be implemented and pursued? Fortunately in Scotland we already have such a pressure group. The Campaign for Socialism is relatively small but well organised with its own magazine, the Citizen. The Convener is John McAllion, and there are active members throughout Scotland. However it does not have the resources or clout to fight a successful campaign in the timescale we are likely to have. A partner is needed!

The trade unions formed the Labour Party but with a few exceptions have not seriously challenged New Labour's agenda of privatisation, PFI, destruction of manufacturing jobs and draconian employment laws. This is now changing and that change is being led by grass root members. At Labour's Scottish Conference in Dundee in February, trade unions and constituency parties combined to overwhelmingly defeat the platform and have a debate on the war in Iraq, though inexplicably they failed to carry it through and insist on a vote. UNISON Scotland has started a campaign to dump the contrived and manipulated policy forums and put decision-making back with members and affiliates. New general secretaries have been elected on commitments to progressive policies. On finance it has been made plain that there will no longer be a blank cheque and that unions will be looking for value for money.

Left trade unions must join with the Campaign for Socialism and others to harness the growing desire to challenge New Labour. There should be key demands on economic regeneration, fiscal autonomy, scrapping PFI, reviving public services and tackling poverty. Most importantly, party organisation and decision-making must be taken back into the control of members and affiliates

## Cooperation, Cohabitation, Conflict - the Choices Facing the SNP

*Bill Ramsay is Chair of the SNP Trade Union Group*

The loss of one quarter of its parliamentary strength and the emergence of not one but two pro-independence parties to its left presents the Scottish National Party with some interesting challenges. During the 1999-2003 term the SNP was able to focus its attention on the failings of the Labour-led Executive but we now need to look in two directions. On the right front we have the Labour-led Executive. This will remain the principal battleground. Significantly, for the first time in thirty years, inroads were made into urban Labour seats. Three were captured though one, Dundee East, was

with the unwitting help of the SSP whose decision to give John McAllion a free ride backfired. Of almost equal significance is that a number of other heretofore safe Labour seats are now Labour-SNP marginals. This will usefully help to shift the SNP's centre of gravity southwards, though further south still we managed to lose Galloway and Upper Nithsdale to the Tories again. On the left front the picture is quite different. The partial vacuum that emerged on the left during the election as the SNP battled with Labour in the centre ground over whose Scotland would be smarter, gave the SSP plenty of ideological room to maneuver. Moreover the media did not focus upon the SSP's more revolutionary policies, partly because the SSP leadership had no intention of promoting them.

Notwithstanding these favourable circumstances for the SSP it should be remembered that they were out-pollled by the Greens, a party that is virtually organisationally non-existent in many parts of Scotland. Many who voted Green on May 1 did so not because of who they were; rather they voted Green because of who they were not. To achieve what they did on May 1, the Greens needed one quality, or to be more accurate five qualities. They required not to be Pink, Heather, Blue, Yellow or, a point that is sometimes overlooked, they required not to be Red.

What then will be the SNP's relationship with the smaller parties in the Independence Movement? Will the relationship be characterised as one of co-operation, cohabitation or even outright conflict? The SNP must respond effectively to the intervention of these smaller parties in Parliament. The SNP must not allow these parties to raid its policy cupboard. Proper deployment of existing progressive SNP policies and further development of others can allow the SNP to regain the ideological initiative. The outcome of the 2003 General Election changed Scotland's political landscape. Whether it was for better or worse will depend as much on how those of us who believe in Independence treat each other as well as on those who would see independence killed stone dead.

#### **Lib Dems: Saving this Marriage of Convenience?**

*Denis Robertson Sullivan is the immediate past Treasurer of the Scottish Liberal Democrats*

Tradition will aid the modernisation of Scotland over the next four years of this new parliament. The Liberal Democrats traditions and values will strengthen the drive for inclusiveness and protect against the assault of neo-Thatcherism. New Labour, since it abandoned socialism, has had a problem of clearly identifying a new philosophy. The Third Way, which still has merit, is no longer vigorously advocated - has it too been abandoned even before it has been given a chance to prove itself? Islington New Labour is uncomfortable at the very least with its traditions. It therefore sometimes appears rudderless or simply opportunistic with its policies. When was Foundation Hospitals discussed by the Party?

The new Partnership Government might be seen as an uneasy marriage of convenience of a party that has lost

its tradition with one that is proud of its. The challenge to the new Government will be to live up to the tradition of liberalism. The challenge for the Liberal Democrats will be to protect and respect the individual. The last Government's Inclusiveness Agenda was the great unsung success absent from the election campaign.

Jack McConnell's instincts are good; however Islington New Labour's are much more worrying. The main drive of the new Government will be to strengthen the economy of Scotland and maintain the commitment to social inclusion. 'The disappointed, the disaffected and the disappeared' need to be brought into the mainstream of our society. Much has actually been achieved by the last Scottish Government and even more by the Westminster New Labour - such as the New Deal or the minimum wage. The promise and reality of enabling the excluded has reflected great credit on those who have developed and nurtured the New Deal. Scottish Enterprise and many of the quangoes have not only bought into inclusion but have genuinely taken ownership of it, personified by Sportscotland's recent review of Sport 21.

The hope is that vision and genuine commitment will shape the 'Reform of Public Services'. This appears to be the new plank in the domestic policy agenda but how will that play with the new Scottish government?

The Liberal Democrats will want very firm assurances that reformed public services mean better public services and not cheaper public services. Liberal Democrats want value for money - not cuts. Best value means something to Liberal Democrats since includes quality as a criteria. There must be a worry for all of us who have lived through the Thatcher years where reform always meant cuts. Efficiency meant savings - not reinvestment. Many public organisations were driven to new targets, often on reduced budgets, and the casualty was quality. There is sometimes an alarming similarity in the language or rhetoric when reform of public services has been discussed in recent times and it rings alarm bells with those of us who believe in public services. The Liberal Democrats contribution to the new Government will be to ensure that Jack's instincts and not Tony's prevail because of that Liberal tradition.

#### **Greens: a responsibility not to disappoint**

*Patrick Harvie is a Green MSP*

So what happened? This election was supposed to be dull. It was designed to be dull. Politics, we were told, is not about big ideas. Politics doesn't interest young people. Politics, in fact, should be left to politicians. But people didn't want it that way. The last few months have been an amazing rollercoaster ride for anyone interested in radical politics in Scotland. First there was the February 15 anti-war demo in Glasgow - the largest demonstration Scotland has ever seen. And then came the Schoolkids protestors. And then there was the election. Four weeks of

Labour and the SNP having the same old squabbles while the other political voices tried to get four or five seconds of coverage into a half-hour edition of Reporting Scotland. Four weeks during which it almost seemed like the anti-war protests hadn't happened. No one (especially not me) expected the election result we got on May the 2nd. What had been touted as the dullist election in living memory unexpectedly produced the most exciting result. One in seven of Scotland's MSPs are from outside the traditional political establishment. The new politics which we were promised with the new parliament have finally arrived.

So why did people vote for the Greens, Socialists and independents? The media's tame political pundits were wheeled out to say that the voters were 'punishing' the big parties. The line seemed to be that normal political service would be resumed shortly. Voters, it seemed, weren't making a positive choice for something different. In an election where politicians often seemed simply to be going through the motions Robin, Tommy, Margo and the others seemed like real people with real passion.

I think the big mistake many of this pundits were making was to confuse apathy with disappointment. It wasn't that people didn't care about politics – a lot of people just didn't care for the current crop of politicians. The Labour Party in government alone in London and in coalition with the Lib-Dems in Edinburgh has proved to be a huge disappointment. For some people David Blunkett's attacks on asylum seekers was the final straw. For other it was the Labour-Lib-Dem coalition in Scotland insisting on allowing the planting of potentially dangerous GM crops in the open environment of Scotland. For many people it was Tony Blair slavishly following George Bush's imperialist agenda. So how did Scotland's other political parties respond? Mesmerised by the success of the New Labour formula they sought to occupy the same political ground.

However thanks to the partial PR system of the Scottish Parliament people had a choice and many chose the Green Party's mix of social justice, environmental sustainability and respect for democracy and diversity. I met many people on the doorsteps who said they respected what Robin Harper, as a sole Green MSP, had done and, while they didn't necessarily agree 100 per cent with our policies they were prepared to give us a chance. The result was a raft of Green, Socialist and independent MSPs elected across Scotland. No-one expected this to happen. No-one quite knows what to expect of us. We've been given a huge responsibility not to disappoint people with politics again. I'm looking forward to it.

### **Transforming the SSP**

*William Bonner was an SSP candidate*

When the SSP was first formed the party was largely a collection of Left activists with sometimes long political pasts; the leadership consisting mainly of former

Labour, Militant, Communist and SNP members. Today the vast majority of members represent a new generation of Left activists without the experience or baggage of this earlier generation and for whom the sectarian battles which so dogged the Left have little or no place. The Scottish Socialist Party has become in practice what its founders always hoped it would become; a broad-based Party of the Left with a pragmatic programme of Left reform linked to the longer term aim of a Scottish Socialist Republic.

The coming period represents an enormous challenge to the party which needs to develop on a number of fronts and the election of six MSPs will give the party a much greater profile and end the 'one man band' label.

The party needs to keep recruiting and to reach out to those on the Left who are not already members, particularly in the Labour Party and SNP, and present itself as a more viable vehicle for their politics. It needs to transform its infrastructure with new offices, more full-time officials and new and better publications turning the party into a much more professional outfit. The party needs to develop its programme and policies. The manifesto presented at the election contained six key policies. These had been properly researched and costed, drawing on expert help in their drafting. It also contained around 200 policies which were no more than a wish list. A lot of work needs to be done to develop these into proper policies. The SSP needs to go into the next election with a manifesto of 20 or 30 key integrated policies which would, in effect, be a programme for government. In particular, more work needs to be done in terms of an Alternative Economic Strategy to counter the free market nonsense put out by all the other main parties.

The SSP also has to keep its eye on what is happening internationally. The party has come about as a result of a major realignment on the Left in Scotland over the past few years. Similar realignments have and are taking place across Europe. With the onset of globalisation the SSP needs to actively build links with others on the European Left as part of the process of building a cohesive European Left alternative to the free-market consensus. Much work has already been done and we are not too far away from a situation whereby the SSP becomes the autonomous Scottish wing of a European wide socialist movement with a presence everywhere from Lisbon to Leningrad.

The task of the Socialist Party, along with others, is to present the ideas of socialism in such a way that they become sensible and reasonable. This has much to do with credibility. When socialists are on the margins of politics it is easy for people to dismiss them as well-meaning but irrelevant. A vote for them is a wasted vote. With the recent electoral breakthrough this is no longer the case. Supporting or joining the Scottish Socialist Party is now a realistic option for thousands of socialists who want the transform their ideas into action. ■

# four years to choose a Scotland

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Robin McAlpine argues that the next four years will be crucial in determining whether the future of Scotland is shaped by the right or the left

The more thoughtful Scottish politicians always recognised that devolution wasn't an event, it was a process. If there was anyone left who doubted that, May 1 2003 should have put them straight. The establishment of the Scottish Parliament was often touted as a means of bringing politics closer to the people, but this view often contained the underlying assumption that it would somehow be the same politics which were closer. Well, it turns out that the fairer electoral system along with the closer public scrutiny led the Scottish public to choose a different kind of politics. The dominance of the political scene by a tiny collective of big parties was largely dismantled at this election and it seems perfectly likely that the old model will not return. In the first election people discovered - perhaps by chance - that they could elect politicians from parties which were previously considered fringe parties. This meant that Scotland gained the experience of four years of a Parliament with a Green, a Socialist and an independent. People learned that in Scotland, unlike in Westminster, this was possible. So, four years later they elected 17. This will change the Parliament again. There is little doubt that on environmental issues the last Parliament was basically well meaning but pretty inactive. The Parliament was also attacked over and over by the business lobby for not spending enough time addressing their concerns. That's fine, they're a lobby group and that is why they exist. But they put the parties on the defensive and were probably too effective in shifting the agenda away from social issues. It is difficult to imagine the big parties being allowed to let these things happen again with the Greens and the Socialists breathing down their necks. The same applies to John Swinburne and the plight of the forgotten pensioners and to Jean Turner and the health service. The nature of the Parliament has changed and everything it does it will now do differently.

The question for those on the left is what now? A collective pat on the back for shifting Scottish politics to the left? A season ticket to the public gallery to see what happens? A well earned holiday? To answer the question we need to think what the other side is doing. Will the voices which favour free markets over social welfare shrug, admit that their time has passed and move on? No, of course not. The right-leaning media in Scotland (i.e. most of it) will spend the next four years doing everything they can to destroy the SSP. Parts of the media spent much of the last four years doing this, but we can expect to see a frightening escalation. They will also try to hem in the Greens. Too

many people still don't understand that Green politics is about more than the environment. Patrick Harvey's attempts to raise the issue of recognition for non-marriage partnerships, including same sex relationships, was met with outrage. 'You were elected to save the whales Greenie, stop messing in politics' was the immediate response. In fact, one right-wing commentator recently complained that the Greens and the Socialists were disgracefully trying to hijack the agenda of the Parliament (hijack BACK the agenda of the Parliament would be a bit more accurate). This comment is astounding; what do they think the role of a politician is? There will be a concerted campaign to discredit the Socialists and force the Greens 'back into their box'. And it will be pursued with vigour and with massive resources behind it.

Devolution is a process and the next stage has not yet been decided. Things being equal the next four years would probably continue the process of resting the political agenda back from business and returning it to people. But things are not equal and it is perfectly possible that the concerted efforts of the right will stall that progress. People often pick a moment in time and ascribe to it the power to change things forever, and it is usually wrong to do so - nothing is irreversible and nothing is inevitable. But if the 2007 election continues the trend of the 2003 election it is likely that we will see a permanent transition in Scotland from the politics of a few parties and big majorities into the politics of many parties expressing many views - Scotland will drift away from London and towards Copenhagen, Stockholm and Oslo. This should be a welcome development for anyone interested in transparent, accountable government. Only those with a desire to control the agenda of the Parliament from outside and with no scrutiny have anything to fear from diversity in politics. And that is why they will be determined to make sure it doesn't happen.

So what does this mean for the left? Well, it means that we need to take the next four years very seriously indeed. The Parliament will start to shift the terms of the debate in Scotland. Everyone will need to get use to words such as poverty and equity being a central part of politics. But this shift in Parliament must be both supported and extended outside the Parliament. The media, civic Scotland, public sector Scotland, corporate Scotland; everyone must be made to feel the pressure of this new agenda. In 2002 every statement on public life was met with a reflexive 'what about productivity/economic growth/individual

freedom of choice/the sanctity of the family'. By 2007 those who would make Scotland their care must be made to answer 'what about poverty/environmental integrity/community/equality'. The language of public Scotland needs to alter. The self-image of public Scotland has to alter. The anger of public Scotland has to alter. People sent a clear message this May that they wanted the Parliament back for them and their communities. The left needs to deliver this.

How? By working together. The success of the free-marketeers has stemmed from their impressive level of organisation. They have worked collectively and taken a vice-like grip of global politics while the left has failed to organise. This is not about party politics - the right has learned that getting hold of Labour or the Democrats can be every bit as effective as getting hold of the Tories or the Republicans. There is every potential for the broad left in Scotland to be every bit as effective. Any two corporations can be in bitter commercial competition but can come together and recognise that lower tax on business helps both of them. In Scotland the left must realise that just because there are many things it disagrees on there are things that are in its collective self interest. For example, it has become clear that the proportional element of the electoral system in Scotland is too small. Too many parties are fighting over too few seats and it is preventing the electorate from expressing its wishes. Everyone on the left in Scotland ought to be able to find common cause in calling for the First Past the Post element to be reduced to the 52 Westminster seats and the proportional element be increased by the extra 21 seats. Even the left in the Labour Party ought to be able to recognise that in the long term this will be the best thing for their party too, in terms of quality if not quantity.

So what might the targets of an organised left be? Here are three broad areas:

### **Pressure on the parties**

All three of the left-leaning big parties in Scotland (Labour, SNP, Lib Dems) are in varying degrees of existential crisis. The Labour Party was in difficulty well before this election with issues such as public service reform and the war causing great discomfort for many members. The SNP shifted to the right over the last four years and would appear to have paid the price. The Lib Dems may be happy to have held their position, but the lack of progress will worry them and many still worry about how to differentiate the party from Labour. All three will be greatly worried by the drift of so much of the electorate away to the left. The

right-wing press has conned political parties into thinking that the only way to win is to move right and produce glossier leaflets. The left must consistently put pressure on the parties to force them to recognise that they are now on the right of the electorate.

### **Develop communication**

It is healthy to have diversity in policy and vision; it is not healthy if people who are close on specific policies and share similar visions don't talk (and work together where possible). Nor is it healthy if there is no engagement between those who are on the broad left but disagree on specific issues. This is not meant to mean political activists alone but also those involved in every aspect of Scottish life who have progressive political interests. The various networks which developed around the anti-war movement showed how groups such as the churches can make common ground with political activists on single issues. As well as increasing communication, increasing awareness and knowledge is also essential - this is how the Scottish Parliament and the political parties can be held to account. The interaction and engagement which brought about the Parliament in the first places needs to be recreated. Modern technology can make this relatively straightforward. The Scottish left must start talking across its barriers.

### **Change the debate**

As discussed above, the agenda has not been set by the left in Scotland, but there is now enormous scope to change that. Embedding ideas in the political process forces people to confront them. Altering the language of politics changes the content of discussion. Challenging free-market assumptions at every opportunity prevents them from becoming received wisdom quite so easily. A more open climate encourages others to come forward with their ideas and thoughts and relieves the pressure on others to keep quiet or toe the line. And there are loads of things which can be done which will make a difference; changing the debate in the political parties, focused campaigning, imaginative projects, encouraging and supporting thinking and writing.

And so Scotland is approaching a crossroads. The left can stay fragmented and allow others to choose the direction taken. Or it can find common cause for change. It is not a marginal decision. Either way, we have much less than four years to make the choice. ■

*Robin McAlpine is Deputy Editor of the Scottish Left Review*

# democracy now - for America

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## Margaret Lynch argues that if the world is to be spared being bullied into submission by America, we have to reach out to the people of America

Every now and then it is good to stand back and try to think outside your normal box. To explore an issue, to question and challenge from vantage points that are not normally your own. I went on the peace demo in Glasgow with everyone else. Had a great day - saw many old friends and we rounded it off with a visit to the fairground in George Square, a decent meal and a few bottles of wine in a local eatery. All very comfortable. On top of the battlebus in the carpark at the SECC were all the usual suspects, except this time they were surrounded by 100,000 Scots. All across Europe Joe Soap and the Pope (on this occasion quite literally) were raising their voices against the dogs of war. So why did I feel uneasy?

There were a number of things bothering me. First of all it was the idea that had the Americans been more succesful in purchasing the votes of Angola, Cameroon, several other desperate African nations and blackmailing Putin over Chechnya then this anti war coalition would have collapsed. Would a UN vote have made the war any more legitimate? If the US had demonstrated that it was able to bribe or bully the Security Council into submission - and get a result - then the integrity of the UN system would have suffered a terminal challenge. As it was they were not able to do this and the war went ahead anyway demonstrating that in a unipolar world only one vote counts. And the trump card is held by the US. The fact that George Robertson has more influence than Kofi Annan is something that should keep us all awake at night. But either way the UN was a busted flush.

Secondly, and more substantively, my conscience was bothering me. I knew that any chance of a Ceaucescu-like toppling of Saddam at the hands of his own people was not remotely likely, that a decade of economic sanctions had served only to weaken the people, not the regime. The Iraqi opposition was deeply divided and most of it was now operating outwith Iraq and to my knowledge no-one else had come up with a strategy for effecting Saddam's removal. If the Iraqi people were not able to get this dictator off their backs shouldn't we be intervening? How many of his own people does a dictator have to despatch before his removal by an external power becomes legitimate purely on the grounds of respect for human life, dignity and freedom? I don't pretend to know the exact size of the body count in Iraq but it had to be in the hundreds of thousands. If you take the conscript soldiers that he sent to war aged 13 and 14 during the Iran-Iraq war (estimated one million dead on both

sides), the Kurds, the Marsh Arabs who were ethnically cleansed, indiscriminate thousands of Iraqi's who were thought to be lying in mass graves littered throughout Iraq, the 8,000 or so old men, women and children gassed at Halabja - and not forgetting most of the Ba'ath party and some close personal friends and family members - it puts him in the same league as a Ceaucescu, a Suharto or a Pinochet.

So why was the British left getting squeamish about going in and toppling Saddam? The blanket opposition to the war derived not from what was being done but who was doing it and the fact that the reasons which were being put forward by the Bush/Blair governments in justification of the war just didn't stack up.

Why is it now that the Congo is on the brink of genocide and the UN is being asked to send in troops to protect the Pygmies who are being massacred that nobody gives a toss? There is not enough oil and no strategic advantage in the Congo for the US so they can't be arsed. And because the US doesn't give a damn the rest of the world is disinterested. Iraq has oil - and lots of it - and this fixated the US (who for the last 40 years has had as a core foreign policy objective the control of the Gulf's oil fields).

There was a lot of debate just before the war started about the war aims. Jack Straw said twice on television that regime change was not a war aim, the focus was on the removal of the weapons of mass destruction! The aptly named US Brigadier General William Looney knew better when he said "They know we own their country. We own their airspace.. we dictate the way they live and talk. And that's what's great about America right now. It's a good thing, especially when there's a lot of oil out there we need" (Quoted in Rouge State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower by William Blum).

I do not intend to dignify the 'we're going to war to get rid of the weapons of mass destruction' argument with a rebuttal. What everyone missed was the fact that the US has shown themselves only too willing to use chemical and biological weapons abroad. In the 1940s and 50s in Bahama Islands they released an unkown bacterium which killed thousands of animals (the incident is still classified, no-one knows how many people died); in China and Korea in the 1950s plague, anthrax and encephalitis not to mention naplam and Agent Orange; in Vietnam they used Dioxin - one of the most toxic substances in the world; in Laos they used Sarin nerve gas in 1970; they

tested mustard gas, VX, sarin, hydrogen cyanide and other nerve agents in Panama from the 1940s to the 1990s; in Cuba they deployed weather modification technology to destroy the sugar crop; in 1969 and 1970, the CIA provided a virus which causes swine fever to Cuban exiles - some weeks later 500,000 pigs had to be slaughtered to prevent a national epidemic; 10 years later the target may have been humans as an epidemic of dengue hemorrhagic fever (DHF) swept across the island - the US had bred *Aedes aegypti* mosquitos to carry DHF as agents of biological warfare; US crop dusters spread plant-eating insects never before seen in Cuba - Thrips palmi which then went onto destroy corn and bean crops. The US are the only state ever to have dropped atomic bombs on cities - Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

And if poisoning foreigners wasn't bad enough, the American military has experimented on its own people. "For decades after the end of World War II, the US Government conducted experiments with literally millions of human subjects, both civilian and military, for the purposes of measuring the effects upon them of a) sundry chemical and biological materials including nerve agents b) nuclear radiation, including injecting many with plutonium c) a host of mind control drugs : LSD and other hallucinogens as well as assorted other exotic chemical concoctions." (again, from Rouge State)

Most people knew that America and not Saddam posed the greatest threat to peace and security worldwide. Saddam may have been a huge problem for his own people but he was not threatening to invade, bomb or effect 'regime change' in any other country near or far. America, on the other hand, has an impressive record of bombing foreign countries - China, Korea, Guatemala, Indonesia, Cuba, Guatemala (again) Congo, Peru, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Guatemala (again), Grenada, Lebanon (twice), Libya, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Iran, Panama, Iraq, Kuwait, Somalia, Bosnia, Sudan, Afghanistan, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan (again) and Iraq. They also managed to bomb Bulgaria, Macedonia and Pakistan by mistake. People are already taking bets on which country is next - Iran, Syria and North Korea have all been shortlisted. It's unlikely to be North Korea because they don't have oil and they do have weapons of mass destruction.

The US drive for full spectrum dominance is widely acknowledged. What is not as well known is that they don't always get what they want. Take the recent attempt at 'regime change' in Venezuela. Hugo Chavez as well as being the President of Venezuela was also the President of OPEC. He fell foul of the oil companies when he doubled royalty taxes paid by ExxonMobil and others from 16 per cent to 30 per cent on all new finds and committed Venezuela to adhere to OPEC sales quotas thus doubling worldwide oil prices to \$20 a barrel. He then used the revenue gained from these two measures to provide

'bricks and milk' for the urban poor - many of whom left behind cardboard shacks in shanty towns for their first brick built homes as a result. Iraq and Libya were trying to organise an OPEC boycott on oil exports to the US to protest against Americas support for Israel. The US needed Venezuelan oil - badly. On April 12 a good old fashioned Chilean-type coup was launched (with the usual backing and support of the CIA and American Embassy) and Chavez was kidnapped - Pedro Carmona the chief of Fedecamaras, Venezuela's CBI, was installed as President. One million Venezuelans surrounded the Presidential palace and demanded Chavez' return to office. Chavez had been tipped off about the coup and installed loyal troops in the basement of the Palace. Faced with no alternative Carmona gave up the ghost. We should be grateful - we have been spared decades of standing outside Venezuelan Embassies in the pissing rain holding placards of *desparacidos* and searching for Venezuelan produce to boycott.

My point is, let's not then entertain the notion that the US adventure in Iraq was to make the country safe for democracy since spreading democracy is clearly not high on the agenda of the Bush Government. In fact quite the opposite - does anyone remember the farce that passed for the 'election' of President Bush? He won the Presidential election by taking the State of Florida by a margin of 537 votes after his brother Governor Jeb Bush ordered a purge of the Florida electoral register robbing 57,700 mainly Black and Hispanic Americans of their right to vote. Ninety per cent of them were Democrats. Added to this, voting machines which are programmed to reject ballot papers which are not properly filled in were either not available or not switched on in precincts with a high concentration of Black and Hispanic electors. The result was that in predominantly white (and republican) counties rejected ballot papers amounted to between one and two per cent of votes cast and in predominantly Black and Hispanic counties up to 12 per cent of ballot papers were not counted. If Gore had won Florida State (which he would have done - he got 93 per cent of the Black and Hispanic votes cast) he would automatically have won the Presidency. I find this strangely comforting.

Where is all this leading ?

In order to truly liberate the people of Iraq, Palestine, Burma, Congo, Sudan, Afghanistan and to protect the human rights and civil liberties of all of us elsewhere, we have to deal with the bully boys of the new world order first (and it goes without saying their bosom buddies in the British establishment and by that I mean the upper echelons of the Labour Party). The achilles heel of Pax Americana is the American people themselves. We should reach out to them. Demand that UN Peacekeeping budgets, the European Unions Democracy and Human Rights budget and every penny we can get our hands

on is spent on voter education and empowerment programmes.

Let's start with Florida - voter registration and education campaigns in Gadsen, Madison, Hamilton and Jackson counties. Anti racism campaigns in Citrus, Pasco, Sata Rosa and Sarasota. Let's fund delegations of single mothers who can't afford health insurance to fly to Venezuela and learn from the people's movement that got the government they wanted to deliver what they needed - bricks and milk. And lets not stop there - Enron pensioners and workers to meet with the trade unions and Catholic Church in Cochabamba in Bolivia where thousands mobilised when the Government was forced to privatise the water board and water was priced out of the pocket of the urban poor. Let's take some Americans from the Bible Belt who gave money to Pat Robertson's 'Operation Blessing' planespotting to see the flights they paid for bring diamond cutters not medical supplies to the Congo (the profits of the diamond operation helped pay for Bush's election campaign). Let's bring Palestinians, Latin Americans and Africans to teach-ins at American campuses. We can set up pro-democracy radio and cable stations, organise visitors programmes for black and Hispanic inner city youth taking the American soldiers of tomorrow to the bombed aspirin factory in Sudan, on

a tour of the Ibn Sina hospitals in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq - or better still on a walk through any African or American slum where large numbers of young boys have been christened Saddam or Osama. (They might begin to wonder why?)

OK - so I'm out of my box.

However there is a kernel of a truth here. Until the American people wake up and start to exercise some of their democratic rights, people everywhere will serve the market. The fight for justice and peace cannot be won unless we build social movements - robust peoples organisations who can force politicians to put people before profit. There is a worldwide majority for change but it is not organised. Sporadic protests lead nowhere. There are large institutions - the churches and trades unions - present in every country which need to start talking to each other and thinking strategically around how we go about achieving the liberation of the American people. And then the rest of us might have a look in. ■

*Margaret Lynch is Director of SCIAF. She is writing in a personal capacity.*

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# erm - automatic for the people?

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## Mike Small reviews Robin Ramsay's *The Rise of New Labour* (Pocket Essentials)

"I have taken from my party everything they thought they believed in. What keeps it together is success and power."

Tony Blair, as quoted by Andrew Rawnsley in **Servants of the People**

"The whole noble array of barristers, solicitors, accountants, surveyors, agents, and about ninety-nine hundredths of the present distributors would be wholly useless in a properly organised society. They live upon the existing bourgeois system... They will disappear with the huckster arrangements on which they thrive."

British socialist H.M. Hyndman

How did we get from Hyndman to Blair, from the Independent Labour Party to the New Labour Project? As Christopher Harvie said recently: "there is a history". In **The Rise of New Labour** (Pocket Essentials) Robin Ramsay contends that there is an economic history too.

This is a study in how a group, every bit as entryist as the Militant Tendency, took over the Labour Party. In the space of ten years (1987-1997) they transformed it from 'the People's Party' to a corporate cabal. Ramsay details the process, and its consequences: "central to the change was abandoning the belief that the government should, or could, take action to control the financial sector in the interests of the rest of the economy". For all the paternalistic tinkering of fresh-faced liberals, this is New Labour's legacy.

This book is a wonderful thing. It gently unveils the murky world of banking, corporate sleaze and the collapse of political opposition in Britain. It demystifies the ERM (Exchange Rate Mechanism) and throws light on the Iron Chancellor's relationship to the City (supine). It tracks the decline of Labour values from Gordon Brown's **Where There Is Greed** (1989), to Tony Blair's Road to Damascus volte face on nuclear weapons in 1987, and John Smith's prawn cocktail offensive on the City, through to today's wholesale capitulation to transnational capital. Ramsay pulls few punches arguing that, stripped of the spin and the corporate videos, New Labour amounts to little more than "the last dribble of Thatcherism running down the leg of British politics".

Ramsay systematically smashes the urban-myths that have somehow managed to lodge themselves in public

consciousness as historical fact. First of these myths is that they (Labour) were responsible for the economic mismanagement of the 1970s, which they in fact inherited from Edward Heath's misguided Euro-corporatism. Second is the idea that Labour, far from being unelectable in 1992 because they hadn't "gone far enough", got more votes, and lost, than they did in 2001, when they won with a landslide. In the bit in between Ramsay concentrates quite rightly on the bigger picture, namely the role of the SDP and the American tendency in Labour, the rise and rise of John Smith and Gordon Brown, and the changing attitudes to European finance.

If you think this sounds drier than a Treasury briefing, it's not. Whilst his speculation about John Smith's Bilderberg Group connections and SDP conspiracy theories are less than convincing, the central story of how core Tory economic values were absorbed by Labour's senior players is a great read. According to Ramsay, in 1988 Labour Leader Neil Kinnock, Gordon Brown and John Smith had concluded that Labour should embrace UK membership of the Exchange Rate Mechanism as the first step towards an eventual single European currency. This is really the nub of Ramsay's argument. Labour advocated ERM membership not for economic reasons, but because it would convince the City they were a trustworthy bunch. Ramsay again: "ERM membership would be a guarantee that there would be no more attempts to run an independent economic policy. By 1988 most of Labour's leaders had concluded that the City of London was too powerful to challenge. This is the origin of New Labour."

Indeed it is. Confirmation of this came when Bryan Gould got the bullet after his 1989 policy document **Meet the Challenge, Make the Change** outlined the essential conflict between the City and a manufacturing economy (the City serves transnational capital - manufacturing requires strategic planning, investment in people and a physical place). Gould rightly reckoned that joining the ERM would stymie any attempts to regulate the market, whilst John Smith and Gordon Brown sold it to the party on precisely the basis that it could do this.

Conventional wisdom has it that all of this was driven by a pragmatic "needs-must" agenda. Right-wingers harangued the Left for decades with the mantra "do you want to be out of power - forever marginalised - unable to affect change?" New Labour, according to the spin, is simply the inevitable outcome of modernisation. It isn't political, it's simply up to date. After ideology there is

only efficiency, technology and good management, with a liberal sprinkling of squishy feel-good stuff mixed in - Blunkett's dog, Mo's wig, Two Jags punching folk (but in a bluff-Northern sort of way). New Labour just had to happen. Under Ramsay's schema, little of this was necessary. Not only had Thatcher been the most unpopular Prime Minister in history in 1992, but the American model was an unlikely one to mimic.

But, in 1992 Labour lost (again) and the Clinton Democrats won with tactics of 'triangulation' (stealing all your oppositions policies). This, argues Ramsay, was the final impetus to push a beleaguered rightwards-moving social-democratic party towards being the neo-liberal free-market-oriented New Labour of Tony Blair. His argument has three strands, some more convincing than others. The first, unquestionable argument involves tracing the Atlanticist tradition in the Labour Party. Cold War US-UK relations (Ramsay's real area of speciality) was dominated by efforts by the Americans to woo the Labour right. What started as anti-communist propaganda ended up in the SDP and New Labour projects. Both were crucially for NATO, Europe, and big business. Secondly Ramsay talks us through the arguments that much of what has been done in the name of pragmatist politics, has been completely unnecessary. Thirdly, Ramsay dissects the roles of the key players in the creation of the New Labour Project and, rightly, identifies Kinnock, Smith and Brown as being of more central importance than Blair and Mandelson. Whilst Kinnock ousted Militant, Smith introduced one member one vote and Brown delivered economic control to the City, it has been Blair who has really cemented relations with the global business, and it has been Blair and George Robertson who have secured our allegiance to the military order.

While Ramsay is quite right to place Mandelson and Blair as relative late-comers in the NLP, to under-emphasise Blair's role is a mistake. Sure, Blair is the culmination of an Anglo-American tradition and the forces that have propelled him forward, but the corporate schmoozing that has reached Majorite proportions under Blair is worth examination. It's not that cash for questions has gone to cash for passports (Hinduja brothers) or that Labour has turned to less traditional sources of income, from the unions to the likes of Bernie Ecclestone. What is more worrying and politically noteworthy is the path that has been worn between Monsanto and key corporate policy lobbyists and No 10. This and the privatisation platform is Blair's real contribution to the new American agenda. Tom Nairn writes in **After Britain** "...the disposition of Margaret in 1990 consigned Britain to a sort of Hades, John Major's nether kingdom of dinge, sleaze, rigor

mortis constitutionalism, tread-water triumphalism and anti-European xenophobia". Now things are worst. With the shiny-happy people in charge, all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds. Fluidity and technological yes-yes and a sort of on-the-hoof constitutionalism have replaced Tory rigor mortis. But this can-do pragmatism is inspired by a belief in the global village that is cruelly naive and as facile as Cook's ethical foreign policy.

New Labour acolytes defend the regime arguing that others like Gordon Brown and formerly Clare Short were its conscience. Busying themselves to a sub-agenda understood by a select few with a knowing wink, they would have us believe that while the front-man Blair keeps the City on-side, others are free to do good-deeds elsewhere. So, whilst the world witnessed the largest scale of anti-capitalist protest in thirty-years, what was this dynamic duo's response? As Ramsay rightly points out, in "an absurd piece co-authored by Gordon Brown and Clare Short", "the IMF, the World Bank, the UN and the OECD have signed up to challenging 2015 targets: that poverty across the globe is cut by half; that every one of the 120 million children in the world currently denied primary education receive it; and that infant mortality is cut to one third of its present level." This global naivete abroad is backed up by monstrous gall at home:

"In the Spring of 1999 war conditions gave some renewed vitality to the Project, as they had done to Mrs Thatcher's in 1982. New Labour's election broadcast had been entirely focused on his function as Great Leader, with a vox pop gallery of adulation accompanied by scenes of cheering crowds and admiring foreign statesmen. Although her rapport with Ronald Reagan had in some way prefigured Blair's to Clinton, Mrs Thatcher never came near this level of straightforward star-worship. The suggestion was that Blair has become Leader of both the West and Europe, as well as reconciler of Ireland and liberator of Wales and Scotland."

"Capitalism functions best when there is a clear product to market, sold in the face of competition from rivals, and there reward from more investment is the inability to increase output thus boosting sales. Railtrack fits none of this model. Its raison d'être is to provide "train paths" for the operators but these are in limited supply since much of the network is full and the cost of investment prohibitive. I tried recently to explain this at great length to a highly intelligent senior Government minister but he utterly failed to understand that Railtrack is different from Coca-Cola."

## New Labour amounts to little more than "the last dribble of Thatcherism running down the leg of British politics".

With Consignia's (sic) imminent privatisation about to prove as popular (and successful) as the Millennium Dome, and air-traffic control, the NHS and the Railways all being run-away success stories, where next for New Labour's privatisation agenda? Who knows? Doubtless, still quivering from the folk-memory of Thatcherism everyone will rationalise it as "probably necessary" only to pretend they were totally against it when it turns out to be a complete disaster in a year's time. There's little to quibble with Ramsay's account of the Rise of New Labour. Anyone who's been paying attention will recollect his account as being on the button.

From Bernie Ecclestone, to the Hinduja brothers and Lakshmi Mittal, New Labour have perfected the art of corporate glad-handing. This institutionalised favouritism to the rich and powerful is only a glimpse of the new elite control that is the state and corporate sectors co-joined. There's more than a whiff of irony in the fact that the New Labour Project, hailed as a salve to the wound of neo-liberalism is being de-railed by the failure of the politics it was supposed to replace.

The gap between New Labour's evangelical image and its role as pimp to multi-national business will become an unbridgeable chasm. As the MMR debate has shown, the sheen of glossy Millbank PR has been dulled by the now weekly 'scandals'. And let's not delude ourselves that this process has been quick or recent. As Nick Cohen wrote four years ago, when Enron sponsored the Labour Party Conference: "Their protestations of injured innocence grew louder on Thursday when, as we predicted, Peter Mandelson allowed the multinational accused of

complicity with the beating and false imprisonment of Indian peasants to take over the Wessex Water monopoly in southern England." Four years on, to paraphrase Malcolm X, chickens are coming home to roost.

If there's a neat NLP symmetry that Enron owns Wessex Water while the Bank of America owns the Skye Bridge, it's ironic that, while in Scotland we might have been given an opportunity for an alternative politics when Bambi's Spin began running dry, we're instead faced with the parochial insult that is Union Jack McConnell. McConnell's involvement with Beattie Media seems to have been lost in the wind along with the idealism that formed the Labour Party in this same country 100 years ago. Ramsay's account of the Rise of New Labour represents the most astute account of the collapse of democratic process in the UK thus far, though it's only a pity it wasn't backed by a larger publisher. As Parliamentary authority has been undermined by the new Presidential style, we have moved increasingly to a state of permanent McGovernment. The only thing that is as sure as the dead hand of business on the government's policy agenda is the realisation that this cannot last. If Blair is right and "what keeps it together is success and power" then as soon as this success dissipates the whole facade of unity will come apart too, and "they will disappear with the huckster arrangements on which they thrive."

*Mike Small is a freelance journalist*



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

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

# web review

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Henry McCubbin

In this edition we review some of the information that has swerved round the official propagandist media and appeared on the net – sometimes for the first time and sometimes digging up the revolting backgrounds of Blair's new fundamentalist friends in the States. We also expose how in these times of digital imaging the camera can be made to lie.

Coldtype ([www.coldtype.net](http://www.coldtype.net)) was launched eight years ago to counter a belief that the best way for newspapers to solve the problem of declining readership is to tinker with the design without too much thought to the quality – or quantity – of content. Things haven't changed much over the past eight years; in fact the speed of redesigns has heated up while circulations fall at a concurrent rate. Coldtype, revived after a hiatus of five years, it says it will continue with its original mission: to reprint examples of excellent writing from around the world in a format that emphasises how a neat and unobtrusive design can enhance, without subsuming, the power of The Word. They believe that great writing should be available to as many people as possible and preferably free of charge, hence their PDF format and internet distribution. (Hey that sounds like SLR!) If you do (or if you don't), find this new issue interesting, informative and amusing contact the editor at [editor@coldtype.net](mailto:editor@coldtype.net).

This little gem came through **media-watch**. How many British papers discovered that whilst Prime Minister Poodle was telling us he had the Presidents ear and could still avoid a war the latter had pushed out the tenders for reconstruction. You couldn't make it up. **El Pais** (11 April) reports that on February 2, "two days before the inspectors requested more time for their work, and 36 days before the US began the war, the US government requested tenders from American firms to reconstruct (Iraq) after the devastation they were planning". The paper reprints a copy of the front page of the Solicitation, offer and award document issued by US-AID of the Ronald Reagan building in Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington. Tenders were due in by February 27. On the second of March, US firms began sounding out Spanish firms about possible sub-contracting arrangements.

The US firms approached included Halliburton, Louis Berger, Bechtel and Parsons. "On March 25 Andrew Natsios of US-AID said that the firms chosen to rebuild Iraq would be announced by the end of the month. He omitted to add that he had requested their tenders a month earlier. He also confirmed that such firms had to be American for legal reasons but that subcontracting would be open to everyone."

"The scope of the work was wide: reconstruction of ports, airports, electricity plants, bridges, railways, drinking water, schools and hospitals: The document would seem a work of

altruism were it not from the fact that the agency planned to reconstruct what its government had decided secretly to destroy." (Francisco Mercado, El concurso para reconstruir Iraq se hizo un mes antes la guerra, El Pais, 11/4/03.)

Indymedia ([nyc.indymedia.org](http://nyc.indymedia.org)) is a community based independent media centre in New York. . New Yorkers are kicking up a stink about Bush's homeland security nonsense which is just an attack on civil liberties yet amazingly we don't hear about this. Here Blunket would make the old Stasi jealous with his actions.

If you haven't already seen how the 'iconic' picture of cheering Iraqis pulling down the statue of Saddam is a con job look at [www.manchestertothewar.org/facts1.html](http://www.manchestertothewar.org/facts1.html). First there is a photo from the BBC website showing the Hussein statue toppling which we all saw on TV. Below that is a long-shot, which was not shown, in which you can see the whole of Fardus Square (conveniently located just opposite the Palestine Hotel where the international media are based), and the presence of at most around 200 people – most of them US troops (note the tanks and armoured vehicles) and assembled journalists, not the appearance of thousands as on edited western TV. Other sites have drawn attention to the fact that an armed gorilla-shaped character photographed at the side of Chalabi in southern Iraq was the same creature egging on the few dozen in the square to help the Americans topple the statue.

For the view from the Arab world there's [www.english.aljazeera.net](http://www.english.aljazeera.net). Try it, but it was hacked offline as soon as the invasion started. It's what Bush calls freedom of speech. There is a mirror site ([www.cursor.org/aljazeera.htm](http://www.cursor.org/aljazeera.htm)) that lets you see what your missing from the hacked off site. A report said that the Bush administration was so maddened by broadcasts and webcasts delivered by Al-Jazeera, that it has put aside \$30.5 million to finance an alternative aimed at the Middle East. So public ownership is an alternative.

Remember all pictures of George Galloway and Jacques Chirac with Saddam? Well here's the actual CNN clip of Tony's pal Donald Rumsfeld embracing the old tyrant ([www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB82](http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB82)). These are the pictures that for some reason our media were unable to show.

And a few more:

- Just to show that we're not all propagandists with cameras and typewriters [www.mwaw.org](http://www.mwaw.org) is a site run by Media Workers Against the War.
- What's a redneck? Push a stick in to this hive ([www.newamericancentury.org/iraq-022403.htm](http://www.newamericancentury.org/iraq-022403.htm)) and find out.

- For details of the Project for the New American Century and why the Iraq war was planned 'Long In Advance' check [www.rense.com/general37/adv.htm](http://www.rense.com/general37/adv.htm).
- Again from Rense, an article on whether the Americans did "win" the war – [www.rense.com/general37/howamericalost.htm](http://www.rense.com/general37/howamericalost.htm)
- An article from New Statesman which has formed the basis of Tam Dayel's critique on who's behind the warmongering – [www.rense.com/general37/theweirdmenbehind.htm](http://www.rense.com/general37/theweirdmenbehind.htm).
- Just as it says on the label, What Really Happened ([www.whatreallyhappened.com](http://www.whatreallyhappened.com)) is a site full of copious links to newspaper articles. Beware of its editorialising it can be a little but iffy.
- [www.irakwar.ru/iraq-read\\_article.php?articleId=3267&lang=en](http://www.irakwar.ru/iraq-read_article.php?articleId=3267&lang=en) – an English language site of Russian news service. It's good to know how others think.
- Contributions from the 90 per cent of Australians that opposed the invasion can be found at [www.smh.com.au](http://www.smh.com.au).

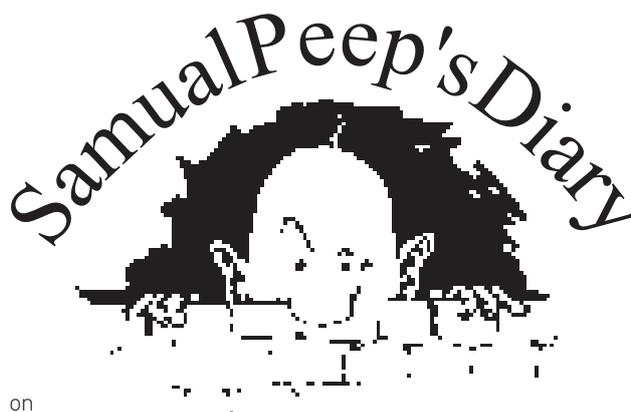
With deep shame we offer you the following two sites. They carry horrifying and harrowing photographs of the slaughter, maiming and suffering of the Iraqi people at the hands of our parliamentarians whose action through voting to support this war directly lead to their guilt as if they had squeezed the trigger on the machine gun that blew the heads off an Iraqi woman's two daughters in front of her eyes. They cannot wash the guilt from their hands.

[www.marchforjustice.com/id243.htm](http://www.marchforjustice.com/id243.htm)  
[www.robert-fisk.com](http://www.robert-fisk.com)

"I have squared my conscience with my intellect, and if everyone had done so this war would not have taken place. I act square and clean for my principles. I have nothing to retract. I have nothing to be ashamed of." John Maclean's speech from the dock spoken 85 years ago in which he condemns capitalist wars and refers to Britain's obsession with, of all places, Mesopotamia. ■

### Margo Goes to Holyrood

In politics it seems that hell hath no fury like a woman scorned. A revealing Scottish Television documentary to be screened this month follows Margo MacDonald on the campaign trail. The film shows Margo urging voters to cast their vote for just about anybody and any party. Except the SNP. Among the highlights in the highly entertaining programme is an eve of poll performance at The Stand comedy club in Edinburgh. "And what do you think of John Swinney?" asks the compere. "Well I just love his sparkling personality and rapier intellect", retorts Margo. It seems her SNP days are well and truly over.



May were refreshing for pluralist politics, it seems that pluralist attitudes are not universal. John Swinburne, who was elected for the Senior Citizens Unity Party, was heard to say that he did not want to sit near the Greens. Motherwell man

will have to learn to grow up. No such problems for the redoubtable Margaret Jamieson from Kilmarnock. She has had an entire Parliament to settle in. This time four years ago Alex Neil asked her "and how are you settling in Margaret?". "Settling in?" she roared "I haven't had time to scratch my arse".

### No Viva Espagna

First Minister Jack McConnell did a lot of sweating during the recent coalition negotiations. No, it was nothing to do with PR or youth crime policy. As the negotiations dragged on longer than he wanted, it became impossible for him to go to Seville for a certain football match. Now Celtic supporters have a reputation for paranoia so you can't blame the lad for thinking it was all deliberate on the part of the Lib Dems. We can reveal that Deputy FM Jim Wallace is a closet bluenose.

### Not so liberal

Our new intake of MSPs have been busy coming to terms with their new environment. Whilst the results on the 1

### Mission Impossible

The partnership agreement deal on PR must be sticking in the throats of quite a few on the Labour benches. None more so than former left-winger Cathy Jamieson who in the past has argued against proportional voting for Holyrood elections never mind local councils. It was left to Cathy and Tavish Scott to explain the deal to the Lawnmarket press pack. One hack asked a question about how Labour MSPs greeted the news that the manifesto commitment to first past the post had been dropped. Before she could answer a photographers mobile phone cut through the awkward silence. And the ring tone? Mission impossible. ■

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