

HOW DO YOU FEEL?

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Comment

You give them the Enlightenment – rational thought, modernity, the seeds of tolerance – and they throw it back in your face like an unwanted present. Scotland has reason to take the result of the US elections personally. For the first time since the fall of the Ottoman Empire we face the serious prospect of a globally-significant faith-based Empire, and the people of America can reasonably expect to drift rapidly towards a fundamentalist Old Testament version of Shiara law. The people of Europe were worried about a prolonged period of belligerent geopolitics driven by libertarian free-market economic interests. It is frankly bemused to see this emerge hand in hand with religious fundamentalism which is little different from the Islamist movements which emerged in parts of the developing world. Europe is simply unable to understand it. Our understanding was that in a desperately poor and under-educated region religious fundamentalism was an understandable response. But in a country which put a man on the moon? Europe is bewildered, and none more so than a small, secular northern country like Scotland – precisely because a shared language and extensive cultural assimilation led us to believe that we were like them. The sensation for those European nations which felt close to America is akin to that felt when a loved relative descends into dementia: it looks like the thing we used to know, but suddenly its actions are unrecognisable to us, and worse still don't make any sense. But what does it all mean for Scotland?

Firstly, let us deal with the orthodoxy; America is so big and so powerful and so important that anything that affects it affects us all. There is of course a large element of truth to this, but it is not as true as you are led to believe. The US is a big economy, but not that big. In fact, the EU is a bigger economy and will be a significantly bigger economy if the new members draw closer to the rest of Europe in terms of wealth. And if Britain joined the Euro the Euro zone would be bigger than the Dollar zone. America is a comparatively small trading partner for Europe; the vast majority of European trade takes place within our own continent. And the US is a powerful economy, but it is surprisingly precarious. America has a notoriously high budget deficit, but the real risk to America is that more than any other economy in the world its wellbeing is at the mercy of the international financial markets. The American economy is propped up by the fact that the rest of the

world's governments hold their cash reserves in Dollars, primarily because oil is still traded in Dollars. Were this situation to change (for example, were oil to be traded in Euros) then America could quickly make Argentina look like a stable economy. (In fact, one of the most telling answers to the questions "why Iraq? Why now" is that in 2000 Saddam Hussein started trading his oil in Euros. It was an act of political spite, but as the Euro grew stronger and stronger against the Dollar is actually made Iraq a lot of money. This was, for America, a petrifying precedent.) No, stop believing the business commentator classes which are perpetually aroused by American capitalism; if you want to find an economy which has the underlying characteristics to dominate start looking to China.

And don't get too hung up on America's military might either. Yes, America has the power to flatten any nation in the world, but this is a surprisingly useless power. America's nuclear arsenal is not actually of much use to it – what could it realistically be used for? But America does not have the capacity to invade countries which people think it has. Iraq was the weakest country in the region not least because all of its self-defence infrastructure had been bombed into dust by America and Britain between about 1998 and 2001. And yet America seems unable to control even this weakened country. America cannot mount military action which involves its troops dying in any large numbers, and that is what is needed if you are going to invade other countries. No, one of the reasons that America is so hell-bent on missile defence is to give it an offensive capacity. If America was in a serious conflict with a serious enemy it would need to rig the odds, for example by taking out all of the communications satellites which the opponent relied on. America has less weight to throw around than those 'military analysts' who are perpetually aroused by American military hardware would have you believe.

Tony Blair has unwittingly revealed the limitations of American power in his patronising call for Europe to 'admit the reality' that Bush is back. In fact, it is Blair who is in denial. France and Germany know perfectly well that Bush is back; what they also know that Blair seems not to is that this need change their approach not one little bit. Europe has much less need for America than Blair thinks. Europe is not going to help Bush with Iraq. It is not going to let Bush neuter the United Nations. It will not allow America to dominate global decision-making on issues such as international law or environmental protection. Blair believes that it will be a European mistake to opt out of this American Decade. That it could ever possibly be the other way

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round has very possibly never occurred to him. What exactly is it that Blair thinks America might do to Europe if Europe doesn't comply to America's wishes? A trade embargo? Severing of diplomatic ties? Military action? America has made its choice and we have to recognise that. But Europe has made its own choices and Blair and Bush are going to have to recognise that.

In fact, this is at the crux of the matter. Blair demands that Europe recognises that America has spoken and that we respect its choice. It is, of course, right that we do – well, at least to the extent that the Blair administration recognised and respected the choice of Venezuela as it gave tacit support to a military coup against a democratically elected government. But what we have to respect is that the Bush administration now has the right to impose its will on America. What it does not have any right to do is impose its will on anyone else. Our hearts go out to the half of America which Blair seems unwilling to respect but which now finds itself trapped in a political state in which it never wanted to be. But that is not our problem to solve. Bush has no mandate outside his own continent, and that is the foundation on which the next four years must be built.

Much as it is difficult to suffer the crowing of the American right and its supporters in Britain, try hard not to be down-hearted. There are benefits of the result. Kerry, a weak and unappealing candidate for the left as much as for the right, had adopted so much of the Neo-Conservative rhetoric on geopolitics that it was unlikely that he would have been able to change direction significantly. He had trapped himself inside the 'logic' of the phantom 'war on terror' and had nowhere else to go. The price Europe would have paid for a Kerry win was to be co-opted into American foreign policy, starting with Iraq where it would have been difficult to say no to Kerry in the first half of 2005. Now Europe is free to say no; this is not a small matter. It also strengthens the hand of those who are willing to say no because the world's sympathies lie with them. November 2004 may be the point at which geopolitics reached a tipping point. The time is ripe for an alternative world-view.

And this is where the implications of American theocracy start to ripple through Scotland. The Scottish left is now faced with two unavoidable questions; what practical response do we make and what philosophical response do we make? The first contains a straightforward element and a more complicated element. The straightforward part is that we must do what we have been doing but do it better. We have to campaign, to protest, to raise awareness, to set a better example, to create

alternatives and – now in particular – we have to reach out to our allies in the dark continent of North America. (Remember the feeling in 1992 and multiply by 100 and you are close to how it must feel to be a progressive America. They need to know that they are not alone.) The less straightforward part is that the left is going to have to face the question of what an alternative power structure is going to look like. The left is split between those who believe that much of the European project is simply Neo-Conservatism with a different accent and those who believe that it is the imperfect but only alternative to letting America do as it pleases. Those opposed to the direction of Europe need to come up with a convincing and achievable alternative response to American hegemony. And they better do it fast. Those who think the European route is the least worst chance need to come up with a convincing means of achieving the geopolitical aims without signing up to the neo-liberal economic aims. It would be nice to believe that this debate was talking place among the left in Scotland, but that would be excessively optimistic.

The second issue is that of philosophy. The American election has brought a hint of an epistemological shift in the west. The ideologues – from Cardinal O'Brien to Gerald Warner – sniff the possibility of a faith-based revolution in Scotland. They are amusingly self-deluded in this – America is so very different that there is little of the Karl Rove strategy which would survive any attempt to transplant it over here – but that does not mean complacency is a sensible response. The co-opting of the concept of morality by the religious right is dangerous. The left must reinvigorate itself with a clearly moral stance – one of tolerance and caring. And this must reach every part of public life; rather than shying away from the fight, it must be taken head on. We are getting the moral case against a ban on smoking in public places (liberty, freedom, personal choice), so lets here the moral case against (not killing your friends in an act of outright selfishness, for example). And get the pressure on others to do the same. The Church of Scotland is admirably progressive, but the responsibility on it to lead the moral debate among its congregation is stronger than ever. It must categorically refute the fundamentalism that passes for morality. And the Catholic Church in Scotland must be reclaimed from the right or it must be faced down.

This brings us back to where we started. Scotland gave the world enlightenment once; now is the time to play a part in doing the same thing again. Perhaps we could start by providing guaranteed asylum to any liberal Americans who wish refuge. ■

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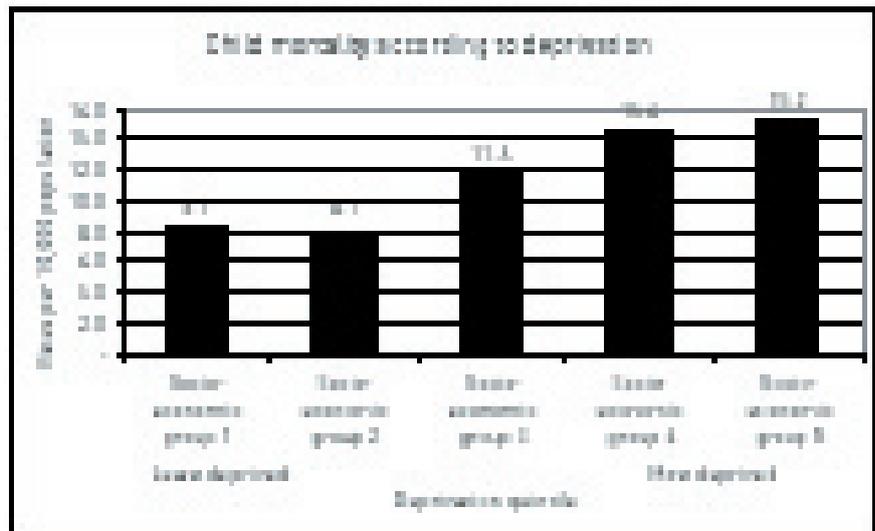
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briefing: state of health

"Studies of primates show that subordinate animals are more likely than socially dominant animals to suffer from clogged blood vessels and other changes in their metabolism. In humans, such changes are linked to a higher risk of cardiovascular disease. Therefore, people low in the social hierarchy of industrial countries, like many women, have health problems because."

'Social Determinants of Health - The Solid Facts' World Health Organization 1998



Lowest Life Expectancy in the UK	
Local Authority & area	Male Life Expectancy (years)
Glasgow City	72.1
Lower Clyde	72.2
West Dundee council area	72.8
Coventry and Leamington	72.8
Manchester	72.8
Redditch area	72.9
Dumfries City	73.0
Blackpool	73.0
East Ayrshire	73.5

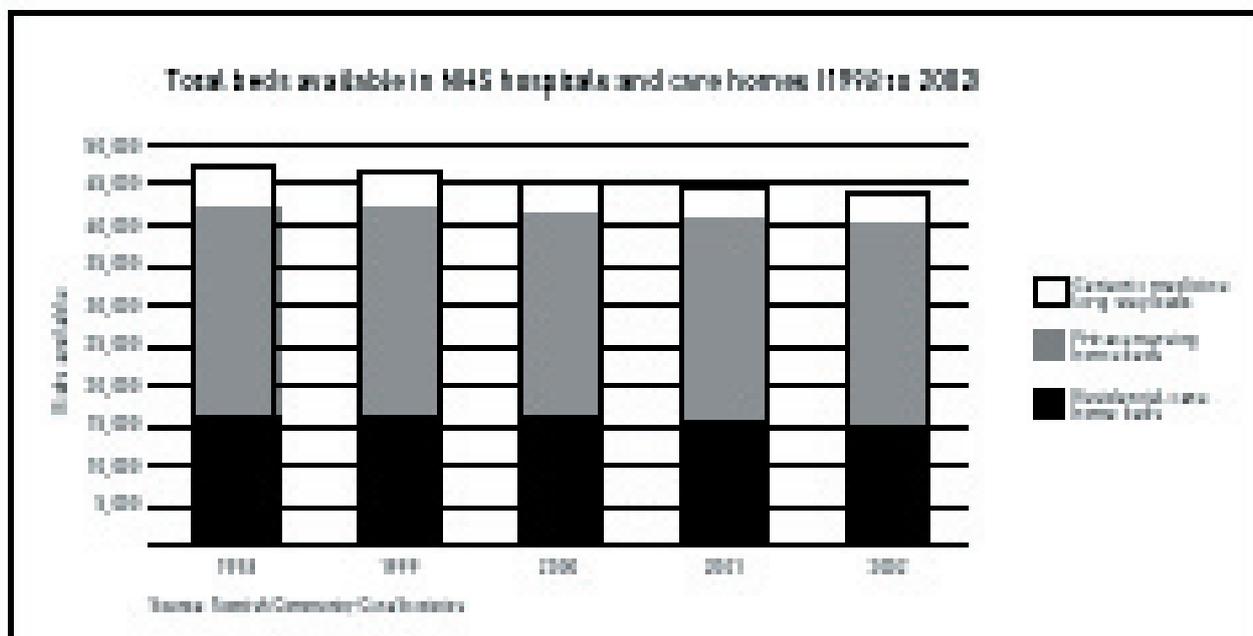
Source: Office of National Statistics 2008 - Glasgow City was the only area in the UK where life expectancy of the 65+ was less than 70 years in 2007-2009. The local authority with the highest life expectancy for men was Red. Barnet, 80.1 years, 11 years more than Glasgow City.

"When individuals are habitually confronted with situations too high their resources are ineffective, they experience a feeling of powerlessness, associated with depression."

It. M. M. in relation to large loss of job of civil servants. The Lancet, 1997

An assessment of the impact of the loss of job of male jobs in Luton's health board as part of the PFI plan for the replacement of the hospital at Luton concluded that the effect on mental health has been a major decline in the number of male jobs and rates of admission to Luton's hospital compared to the rest of health and beds over 1990-4 and 2000-4.

Alison Patten and Matthew Curran, British Medical Journal 24 April 2002



the first ills to cure

Dr Jean Turner outlines some of the first steps needed to restore the NHS – but argues that progress is only possible with the help of more honesty

Who would have thought that nearly 40 years after qualifying in Medicine I would see communities in Scotland losing health services, especially under a Labour/Liberal Democratic Scottish Executive?

I thought Devolution would enable us to customise health services to meet the special needs of five million people. How wrong I was! What we have is an NHS, which is becoming more specialised and centralised, shrinking towards the five largest cities in Scotland – Inverness, Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow. I, along with others, agree with the need for some specialism but not to the exclusion of generalism, which I consider is a speciality in its own right. We urgently need people trained as generalists to fill the posts of those who retire, especially for posts in remote and rural areas as well as in district general hospitals. It would make sense to keep the latter to prevent congestion in the more specialist hospitals, with the bonus that we would be treating patients nearer to their homes thus allowing families to visit more easily.

I cannot believe that caring doctors and nurses, who are involved in the decision making of the training of our future NHS staff, believe that our population is better served by having to travel increased distances for every consultant service. It would not be worth living, working, and going to school in a community if you always had to travel the minute consultant health services were required. One of the worst examples of this is pregnant women having to travel over 100 miles on bad roads, in all kinds of severe weather, to Inverness from Wick or Thurso. You have

to ask yourself why this is happening in the 21st century when we are the fourth richest country in the world!

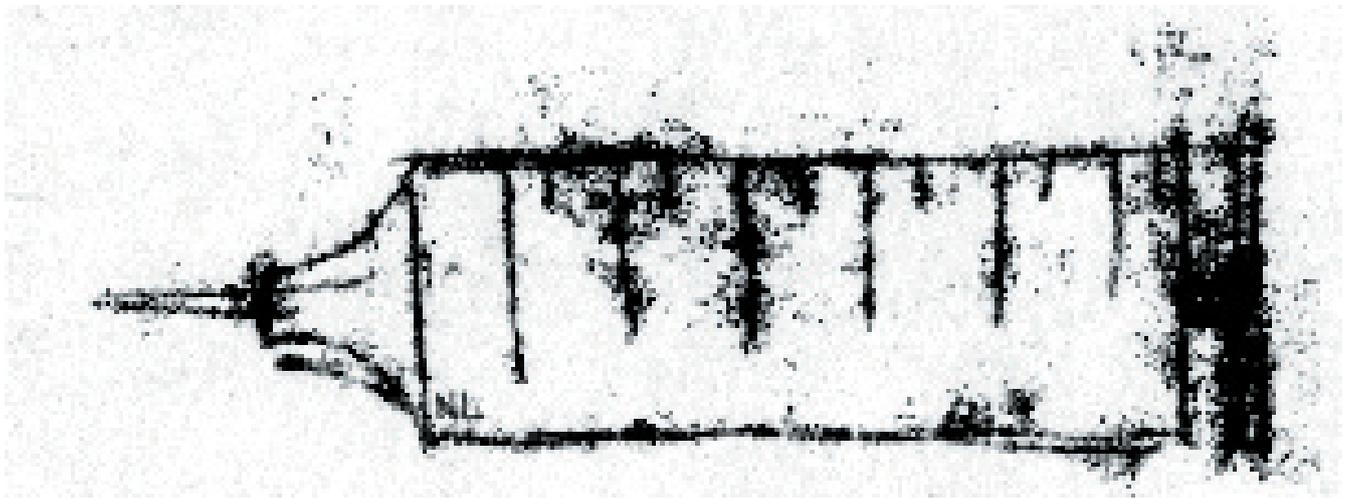
We know that if we stopped everyone smoking and over-eating today, we would still have their resulting diseases to treat such as respiratory, ophthalmic problems, heart and cardiovascular disease, Type Two diabetes and kidney disease. We know that we have 148,000 people with diabetes in Scotland as well as thousands within our communities as yet undiagnosed and therefore still need to be treated. We know that early diagnosis offers better outcomes for patients. If we could achieve this then we could prevent misery and preserve quality of life for people. Osteoporosis is a case in point, because if we screened people likely to suffer from this condition it would reduce subsequent fractures, which add to our orthopaedic emergency work. In turn this would free up operating theatre time and save money.

We also know that there is a great deal of unmet need in our communities, which the NHS is not addressing. Why has it been the policy in Scotland for many years to **reduce** bed numbers? We have about half the number of beds we had in the 1970s! With every ward upgrade, beds are reduced, as is the case with every new PPP/PFI hospital. It seems strange to reduce bed numbers in the face of an ageing population with multi system problems who are likely to be on multiple drug treatments. General Practitioners need to be able to admit these patients to hospitals for management and Consultant advice for stabilisation from time to time. It is not always possible to do this in the community.

GPs are aware that care in the community, with little or no family support, causes great difficulty for all concerned. Therefore, it is essential to improve all aspects of hospital discharge, especially for the frail and elderly, to prevent hospital readmission. For example, how responsible is it to discharge a patient, who needs integrated health care, late on a Friday afternoon? GPs also know that to keep patients fit and well with quality of life, you need to be kept mobile. How can this happen when you have to wait **two years** for an orthopaedic appointment with a consultant and then perhaps another two years to have a hip replacement? Immobility causes other systems to deteriorate and weight gain is inevitable. It is a form of cruelty to have to suffer pain and with such waiting times it is inevitable that many patients will suffer. Glasgow has 10,000 people currently waiting for orthopaedic appointments. We do not have enough orthopaedic surgeons or theatres. We need more rheumatologists and specialist physiotherapists to screen the long waiting lists (in some cases as long as 72 weeks) in order to reduce waiting times for patients.

Not all patients can afford to have private surgery. Those who can often feel cheated and resentful if it is the **same** NHS surgeon performing a hip replacement or cataract surgery in weeks rather than having to wait months or years in the NHS. Patients, as well as staff, become depressed and despondent because the system is not coping with the workload. The fact





is that year on year we have people applying to be doctors and nurses and allied professionals but they are turned away from our universities and colleges because we do not have the capacity to train them despite knowing we need them so badly. We need to address this urgently if we ever hope to rise above the present situation.

It astonished me that in the early 1990s we trained nurses but we did not employ all of them so they sought employment elsewhere. We have had constant change within the NHS since 1990, which is perhaps a contributory factor to the continuing low morale within the NHS today. This constant change may, in great part, contribute to the problems in retention and recruitment of staff. We need more staff to do the job to the standard to which they have been trained. Loss of flexibility within rotas, regrading and transferring of units and staff to other hospitals disrupts work routines, travel arrangements and family schedules contributing to staff pressure to the point where staff consider leaving the NHS. Large hospitals can be very impersonal. Frequently staff only know colleagues on the same shift, preventing the advantage of mixing with people from other disciplines. They may not even socialise by going to the canteen since it may be too far for them to get to and return in time for duty. If people are upgraded, well paid and work in a pleasant environment with more than adequate staff, morale can be high and they will stay. People are achieving this by working in NHS24, becoming Nurse Practitioners and Nurse Consultants. Sadly, they usually have left departments depleted because they are not being replaced with equally experienced staff.

Since we have never had any slack in the system, it would be helpful to those who toil in the NHS to free up appointments for GPs and Consultants thus allowing them to spend more time with other patients. We **could** achieve this by providing chronic pain clinics. In Glasgow we have the building, the people but lack the money. Patients would be better served and their pain control improved with the added bonus of reducing appointments and medication. The same is true of the Homeopathic Hospital in-patient beds. Patients are best served there with their integrated treatment approach. Loss of in-patient beds would leave patients with nowhere to go other than back from whence they came - to their GPs and other Specialists.

It is puzzling to think that the management of the NHS knew about the European Working Time Directive yet seemed quite unprepared for its implementation. Many Health Boards are

already in debt and yet have to clear their debt and pay out more for the wages bill to meet the new contracts and increases in payments for shorter hours worked. Greater Glasgow Health Board is an example. They are in debt to the tune of £58 million, which has to be cleared by 2005, before they can pay for the intended building program to be completed by 2012. GGHB will then have to pay £70 million for the next 25 to 30 years for **that** building program which will cost about £700 million plus. This is not Treasury money but money from PPP/PFI; the private sector. If the Scottish Executive expects Health Boards, such as Glasgow, to clear their debts first and then pay out all that money for buildings, there will inevitably be more cuts in services for patients and communities will not be best served.

There is a need for some specialism but not to the exclusion of generalism – which is a specialty in its own right

I feel that the Scottish Executive should not financially penalise health boards because they have to meet the increased wages bills. The Scottish Executive should pay for that. Health boards, which require services of other boards, should be made to pay their debts to each other. So much is ailing with our beloved NHS that it cannot be cured over night. We do not have the staff and it will take time to recruit and train the required numbers to get the NHS back on its feet. We cannot afford to have our well-trained staff demoralised and leave because they are tired and weary of coping. There are too few to help in the struggle to maintain standards. We must stop downgrading hospitals and units until we have

at least the same quality of service to put in its place. Change must **always** lead to **better** outcomes for patients and staff! We must not lose any more beds until we are sure as to the numbers we need. We should also make accessing the NHS easy for everyone by providing appropriate public transport for patients and relatives, including kerb to front door service. The cost of car parking and frequent journeys to visit seriously ill patients must also be addressed. Lack of public transport, for example, could result in taxi fares of £25 per day.

The public will, I am sure, endure the difficulties which lie ahead – providing the Scottish Executive is honest and transparent with the public. We need a cross party partnership with the public, the electorate, and the Scottish Executive to find solutions to restore an NHS appropriate for Scotland's health needs. To fail in this task may well cause a change in government but more importantly we will have lost something we hold precious - our NHS. ■

Dr Jean Turner, a GP for more than 25 years, was elected MSP for Strathkelvin and Bearsden on a Save Stobhill Hospital campaign

extinguishing a beacon

Dr George Venters examines the political decisions which are forcing the closure of a popular local hospital

On Sunday 9 November last year I went to the Leith Hospital Service of Remembrance. The message of the service was 'Love One Another' which was right for the day and the hospital. This hospital has been one place in Leith where demonstrations of love for your neighbour were the norm in the everyday care given to the sick by friends and relatives and the staff working there. So much so that one of the cleaners there captured what we all felt about our hospital by calling it "a beacon in our town". It also was part of the fabric of the hospital itself. There is no cenotaph or statue to commemorate the people of Leith who died in the Great War. Reflecting the values of the people whose bones are scattered through the soil of Flanders, the paediatric wing of Leith hospital was built in their memory. Because of this, the Leith Service of Remembrance used to be held in the hospital – but no longer and never more.

In the nineteen eighties part of the acute services strategy in the Health Board was to restrict acute care in Edinburgh to a few large hospitals. It was clear that small general hospitals in the city were under threat. Some needed to close to finance the rebuilding of Edinburgh Royal Infirmary. I was one of the advocates of this strategy and helped persuade the people of Leith of the need for a change in function for their hospital. Recognising the strong local commitment to the hospital, a group was set up by the Board to develop appropriate proposals to redevelop the hospital site to meet the changing needs of Leith people. This group comprised Leith community representatives, politicians, local clinical and administrative staff, Board officers, the local authority and representatives of voluntary organisations. It produced a set of proposals for a 'mixed economy' development which would provide a community hospital with continuing care beds, a day care centre, polyclinic facilities and sheltered and low cost housing for rent. This package was accepted by the Board more than a decade ago and since then changes in local social and health services have confirmed the rightness of the proposal. But it was never implemented.

Over the years successive managers reneged on their own slice of the promise made to the people they were appointed to serve. What is left is some of the social housing built in the nurses' home and they have now built a community treatment centre on a brown field site a short distance from the hospital (which is still standing). On the previous Thursday 6 November, the world had looked in on Leith. An estimated one billion people watched the MTV Music Awards being presented in a tent – in Leith – seating six thousand people. The First Minister was there looking comfortably flash, as were the local glitterati and assorted other politicians and pop stars. Not many Leith people were inside the tent.

Similarly few attended the Remembrance Service. Including the piper, the bugler, the Salvation Army Band, the priest and

two church ministers, we would be lucky if fifty people were there. Since the service moved from the hospital to a local church, numbers coming to it have fallen markedly. No matter how welcoming the church, it can never compete with the easy accessibility of a hospital with open doors to people for whom it is part of their personal history. The simple-minded wee man in the grubby navy anorak has not been there since the venue changed. He had been there ever since I first went. The local MSP – formerly the Minister for Health – was missing. He used to come.

If they can afford it, the people of Leith can have a substantial memento of Leith Hospital. It has been converted into forty two flats

When the MTV circus folded its tent and moved on, it promised the City of Edinburgh a special award to mark the success of the event. If they can afford it, the people of Leith can have a more substantial memento of Leith Hospital. It has been converted into forty two flats. They seem to be selling well but the price is likely to be beyond most Leithers. This is what is happening to our Health service throughout the country. Health boards are becoming bargain basement estate agencies selling off assets paid for by the public to the private sector. The sites of the old Royal Infirmary, the Princess Margaret Rose and the City Hospitals were sold to developers for a small fraction of their estimated £200 million value. The New Labour Grand Plan for

the NHS is now materialising. Privatisation is the name of its game. Foolishly, we thought that this Thatcherite agenda would be abandoned following the 1997 election. We were wrong. The new Labour health minister upheld the Private Finance procurement of the New Edinburgh Royal Infirmary despite the demonstrated folly of the case. He accepted the mantra of 'the only game in town' source of funding for capital projects from civil servants whose loyalties and career opportunities lay with Westminster en route to the City.

In Lothian they have done it in style. The managers had to work hard and imaginatively to construct a case which would show that the private finance option was as cheap as the public sector one. They had no clash of loyalties. Now we have the most expensive hospital ever built in Scotland. It casts a dark financial shadow. Over the thirty years of the contract we will pay around one billion pounds for a hospital it cost £200 million to build. Costs for leasing and some hotel services are running at around £36 million a year for a hospital we will not own. And this does not include the 'invisible' on-costs of employing an NHS management team to ensure that the Health Service gets what it has paid for from the contractors and to try to minimise the costs of inevitable service changes which will become necessary, but lie outwith the original contract specification. Nor does it include the sacrifice of the most modest of freedoms of staff to adapt the fabric and physical environment to suit their or the patients' interests. And it is too small.



when it gets to the – often remote – mega-hospital. Local access and knowledge make it easier for the patient and their visitor to minimise the anxiety and distress of going to hospital. Similarly for staff, the accessibility of their work is important and also good working relationships are often easier to establish and sustain when hospitals are not too big.

NHS Lothian is now 'consulting' on the latest set of proposals for "Improving care, Investing in change 2004". An essential component of these proposals is to remove acute services from acute hospitals other than the new Royal Infirmary and progressively transfer emergency in-patient services to this site. The ultimate preferred aim is to transfer all emergency care there. They also propose, yet again, to provide more resources in the community for services for older people and patients with mental illness though they have failed on such promises

This is having a substantial impact on the planning and provision of the Health Service for the South East of Scotland and Lothian in particular. The need to ensure maximum use of these expensive facilities demands the direction of patients into it from wherever they can be moved. However, the more patients it seeks to treat the more staff and supporting services it will require. These can be transferred from sites in process of being progressively closed off to patients. This enforced relocation of staff also has the advantage of helping reduce the staffing deficits which have led to the hospital having Scotland's highest rate of employment of nursing agency staff. This centralisation process enjoys the support of a variety of establishments. Siphoning resources from effective units in publicly owned, i.e. NHS hospitals, starts a process of insidious malnutrition which will lead to their decay and death. Comparison with a cosseted PFI hospital might then give the kind of answers the privatisers are looking for.

Clinicians who advocate the advantages of large departments in large hospitals, and Medical Faculties, which find teaching and research more convenient on large campuses, will promote centralising of services. Managers, who believe that economies of scale can be achieved by centralisation of services and that larger numbers of staff on one site simplifies provision of cover, will welcome the process. The people who might have reservations are the staff and the public. The public worries that it might not be able to get to services or find what it needs

before. In-patient accommodation for each of these categories is to be reduced. This should enable the selling off of yet more valuable real estate. A comparatively modern and innovative geriatric hospital, the Royal Victoria, has been declared as unsuitable for current service standards and its site is worth round thirty million pounds. The Board is proposing to sell it and yet again to reduce the number of beds available for older patients – despite the continuing shortage of such beds and its knock-on effects on acute hospitals.

This hospital enjoys strong local support and a campaign is under way to save it. However its site's value means that the public interest is likely to be sacrificed to bail out the Board's financial problems resulting from the Royal Infirmary PFI. This represents the latest example of the progressive betrayal of the public interest by health service managers appointed, and politicians elected, to protect it. If they succeed, we will have yet another beacon to the abandoning of principled commitment to the best interests of local communities. It's up to us all to stop this happening. ■

George Venters is a recently retired consultant in Public Health Medicine who worked in Lothian for nearly twenty years and latterly in Lanarkshire for eleven years where he had major responsibilities for information services in both Boards and for developing services for heart disease, cancer and stroke in Lanarkshire

a pound of health

Robert McMaster shows how turning a persons health into a commodity exacerbates health differences

Authorities, from the World Health Organization (WHO) to the Scottish Executive, laudably advocate an end to, and endeavour to tailor policy to ending, health inequalities; yet the underlying analytical frame that partly influences policy approaches presumes health and health care are commodities; thereby, perhaps inadvertently, providing the basis for a justification for the penetration of market-oriented reform policies in health care. Arguably, this is inimical with the view that reasonable health is a basic human right. The challenge is to offer an alternative economics and mode of thought that endorses health and (non-frivolous) healthcare in this way. This short piece does not profess to offer this: the function being to highlight the nature of the inconsistency between the aims of health care provision and the economics of health and health policy.

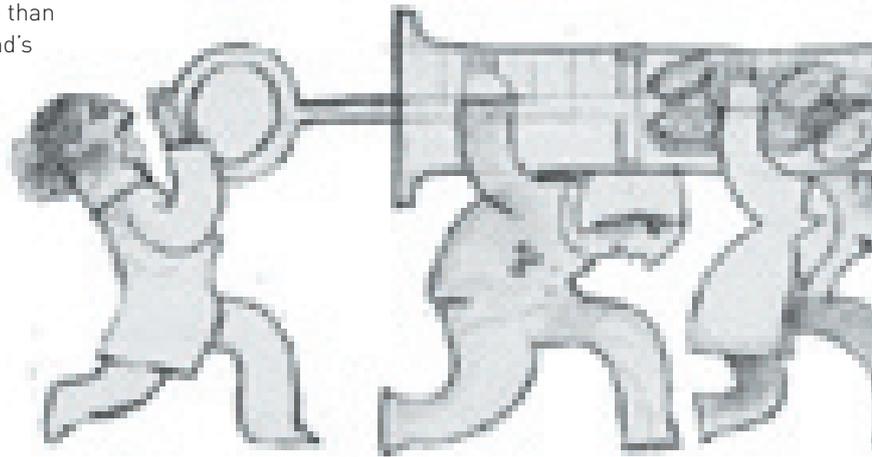
The recent publication of two reports – the 2002 World Health Report and the Health in Scotland 2003 Report – highlight an abysmal state of affairs globally, where the problems of less developed regions are obviously on a much greater scale than those in industrialised regions, but also stress Scotland's relatively poor condition as a developed country. Taking life expectancies as rough indicators of health status reveals the extent of health inequality:

“Most of all [the findings of the World Health Report] emphasize the global gap between the haves and the have-nots by showing just how much of the world's burden is the result of undernutrition among the poor and overnutrition among those who are better off, wherever they live. The contrast is shocking ... [A]t the same time that there are 170 million children in poor countries who are underweight – and over three million die each year as a result – there are more than one billion adults worldwide who are overweight ...” (WHO, 2002, p. 8).

These inequalities are not simply between developed and less developed regions; Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen's reference to males in China and the southern Indian state of Kerala outliving African-American males crystallises both the complexities of health inequalities and the appalling extent of inequality. In some parts of Scotland life expectancy, especially among males, is falling, which the Health in Scotland 2003 Report attributes to, “...the very high mortality among adults of working age”. It is, by any measure, an abysmal state of affairs. The two reports highlight the dependence of individuals' state of health upon poverty, behavioural patterns, culture, and wider social policies. Consequently, there are increasing calls for global health policy to demonstrate a more holistic orientation to reflect the underlying determinants of health. In Scotland various initiatives, such as enhancing the nutritional quality of school meals, information campaigns on diet and alcohol consumption, and potential legislation, most notably prohibiting smoking in public places, all echo a more holistic orientation. Also recognised is the association between poor health and

poverty, and there is a strong advocacy that wider health policy ****should**** be tailored to the amelioration of poverty. Of course this is a reflection of an underlying emphasis on the eradication of health inequalities, and the notion that reasonable health is a basic human right.

Despite the prominence of this advocacy, health policy, globally and in the UK, by and large is mainly confined to the provision of health care, and in particular the provision of curative services. Here the principal policy metric over the last decade or so has been in reforming the structure and to a lesser extent the finance of curative health care provision. This stems from concerns over the growth in health care expenditure as a proportion of gross domestic product in industrialised countries. This is not new; Powell (1997) reports how the growth of health care expenditures in the UK since the inception in 1948 of the NHS prompted immediate disquiet. Although recent UK policy has attempted to emulate average EU expenditure levels,

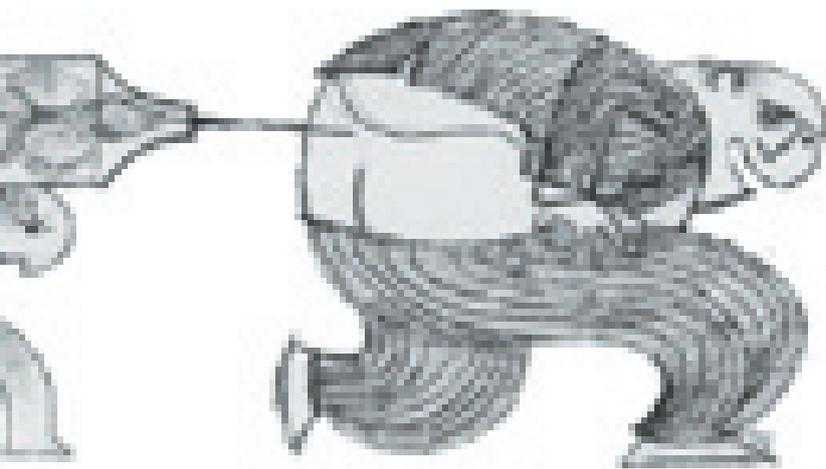


there remains a democratic deficit in health care provision. The perception of fiscal stress is attributed to the growth in demand for (and expectations of) medical services, partly reflected by the ageing population of developed countries; the adoption of new technologies that are not necessarily 'cost effective', and the relatively high rates of medical inflation, prompting calls for greater efficiency in the provision of health care especially from the nascent literature in mainstream health economics.

Mainstream health economics treats health and healthcare as commodities, frequently either defining what a commodity is, or analysing the ramifications of this presumption. Markets presume commodities and vice versa: it is a short step to reach the position that if healthcare can be conceived as a commodity then market-oriented reform would appear to be apposite, especially if 'efficient' solutions are sought. Such a position has influenced global health policy, as espoused by bodies such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation, as well as by governments such as the UK. Market-oriented reform attempts to introduce a so-called mixed provision in health care, and patterns vary, but

may be typified by: greater reliance on contractual relationships between parties, whether they are clinicians and patients, or different health authorities, or between health authorities and private contractors (as in public private partnerships). This is accompanied by increased recourse to financial incentives, such as in the establishment of foundation hospitals in England; greater use of the pricing of activities, as a means of establishing and measuring their 'value', and following this, a more extensive employment of outcome measures, as in the NHS's performance assessment framework. This is hardly surprising, as the mainstream view of efficiency requires quantitative measures to establish value.

Following Karl Marx and Karl Polanyi, a commodity may be defined as entities that are sold for money, are produced for sale in a market, where property rights to them can be defined and transferred. Property rights establish the grounds for exclusion from accessing a commodity: hardly the basis for establishing non-frivolous health care as a basic human right. Yet there are further ramifications from considering health care to be a commodity: specifically the process of commodification engenders a particular pattern of social relations broadly, but not exclusively, encapsulated in markets. It potentially inculcates the notion of patient as consumer, as opposed to a member of a mutualised body. This acts to



further prolong the democratic deficit in health care provision, and lend itself to a more litigious environment. Taking the trans-national corporation as a loose analogy, consumers do not possess the same 'stakeholder' status as shareholders or corporate executives. The myth of consumer sovereignty is perpetuated: institutions of all sorts, from corporations to educational establishments, influence our preferences, values, obligations, and hence behaviour. Mainstream health economics is predicated on a model of the individual being generally impervious to outside influences: this is a deeply flawed assumption.

The inculcation of patient as consumer also encourages the error of conflating the meaning of wants and needs. There is, of course, a hierarchy of needs, ranging from the basic needs of food and shelter to higher order social needs. Wants may be contrived, and may, following Galbraith, be moulded by corporations for profit, as well as other institutions. The US health service provides a salutary lesson here: much effort and resources are devoted to maintaining the lives and comfort of the wealthy elderly as opposed to addressing the

appalling inequities that account for the US having the highest infant mortality rate of any developed state. Indeed, following this line of argument, pharmaceutical companies have an interest in creating new markets to perpetuate and expand demand; perhaps it is overly cynical to suggest that there is an incentive to create new illnesses! Nonetheless, Reinhardt reports that pharmaceutical corporations' outlays on marketing activities are approximately double research and development expenditure. Moreover, pharmaceutical and other medical supplies companies may be unintentional beneficiaries of the marketing activities of corporations in the alcohol, food, and tobacco industries, which aims to increase consumption in those industries, but has a deleterious impact on health.

A further concern relates to the need for quantified measures of 'value' alluded to earlier. A number of authors have argued that the concentration on outcomes, at the expense of process, entails a narrowing of the focus on financial incentives. Accompanying the more contractual basis of service provision is the importation of commercial accounting practices and mainstream health economic evaluation techniques. This furnishes the aura of scientific objectivity; yet quantification requires certainty, and confidence in the process of measurement, criteria that many medical activities do not meet. Instead, many medical procedures are profoundly uncertain and heterogeneous. An emphasis on measurable outcomes has the potential to distort activities in unintentional ways, and may relegate the 'process' of health care. Indeed, recent anthropological studies have revealed some causes for concern in this respect. For instance, a study of health care reform in New Zealand suggested that the concepts of care varied markedly between managers and clinicians: with the latter tending to focus on the person, although consultants had the potential to view the patient as a scientific object. By contrast managers tended to view care in the abstract and as a homogenous entity that could be delivered routine. It is possible that clinical staff, tied to time-constrained routines, have little time to 'care'. In effect, a manifestation of pursuing what is taken to be an efficiency rubric through mechanisms of market-oriented reform effectively crowds out the of caring and dehumanises health care provision.

Market-oriented reforms have a plethora of manifestations, the contractarian delivery of health care and commodification of health and health care being especially prominent. Underpinning these manifestations is a value frame that is not necessarily commensurate with the laudable aim of employing health policy as a key element in anti-poverty and developmental strategies. The lamentable state of health inequities both globally and within many countries, such as Scotland, calls for a modification in valuing human rights and dignity. It is far from convincing whether the recent reforms to health care provision fostered and encouraged by supra-national bodies, such as the World Bank and the economics it rests upon, are appropriate bases for the advocacy of human rights in this manner, and are more likely to rest influence of healthcare policy away from communities and increase the democratic deficit in health care provision. The initial challenge is in presenting an economics that is more apposite. ■

Robert McMaster is an academic at Aberdeen University

grand scale medicine

Peter Murray argues that only a bold and wide ranging programme of anti-poverty measures can resolve Scotland's health crisis

It was Rudolf Virchow (a famous German Physician of Social medicine at the turn of the last century) who said "medicine is a social science and politics nothing but medicine on a grand scale". It is precisely the application of Socialist policies on a grand scale that could begin to turn around Scotland's health crisis of high mortality rates, cardiovascular disease, Low birth weight babies, alcoholism, young male suicides, and obesity. The National Health Service is incapable on its own of resolving these issues, indeed its formation at a time of post war optimism was virtually based on a presumption of consistent social progress for working people and of generally improving health, a presumption which has been confounded by the rise of Thatcherism and Blairism.

We need to reaffirm even in the midst of key struggles around the NHS (the fight against hospital closures for example) that the most effective way to promote good health is to promote good politics, the kind of politics that sees the connections between abolition of poverty wages, world class primary, secondary and tertiary education for all, better and affordable social housing, good and secure pensions, access to affordable and wholesome food, and free school meals for every child. This is not a call for a return for a post war socialist utopia which never existed. It is a call to reclaim the sense of vision and ambition that led the 1945 Labour government to found the NHS and the welfare state even whilst the country was exhausted, bombed out and bankrupt. By contrast, Blair's Britain and McConnell's Scotland are rich beyond the dreams of avarice yet their commitments to increasing equality and reducing poverty are literally paper-thin. **The Herald** newspaper recently exposed that 138 of the Executives targets across all policy areas had been quietly reduced, postponed, rescheduled or dropped.

The foundation of the NHS and other measures of the 1945 Labour Government have been seen as highways to the promotion of greater social and class equalities, yet fifty six years after the creation of the NHS, health inequalities between the poorest and richest members of the community remain stark. We know that the life expectancy of a man in Glasgow (at 69 years of age) has not improved in twenty years. A man living in Shettleston can expect to live till sixty three, whilst men in more affluent areas can reasonably expect to live into their mid seventies. At the root cause of this tragedy is poverty and inequality. Nick Davies, an investigative journalist for the **Guardian**, put the matter starkly in his book 'The Dark Heart of Britain'. "Each year in Britain more than 47,000 people die from causes directly related to poverty, which is the equivalent of a plane with 113 people on board crashing every day of the year". A recent report 'Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion in Scotland' states "Scotland enjoys the dubious distinction of having the second worst mortality rate in the European Union, better only than Portugal, the EU's poorest member, and worse than Northern Ireland by 10 per cent and England and Wales by almost 20 per cent". The same

report highlights other indicators of deprivation and inequality. "A quarter of both men and women aged 45 to 64 report a limiting long standing illness or disability... The breakdown by tenure shows that the proportions reporting this condition are significantly higher among those in the social rented sector: 47 per cent of those aged 45 to 59 in that sector compared with 28 per cent among those in private rented accommodation and 18 per cent among owner occupiers."

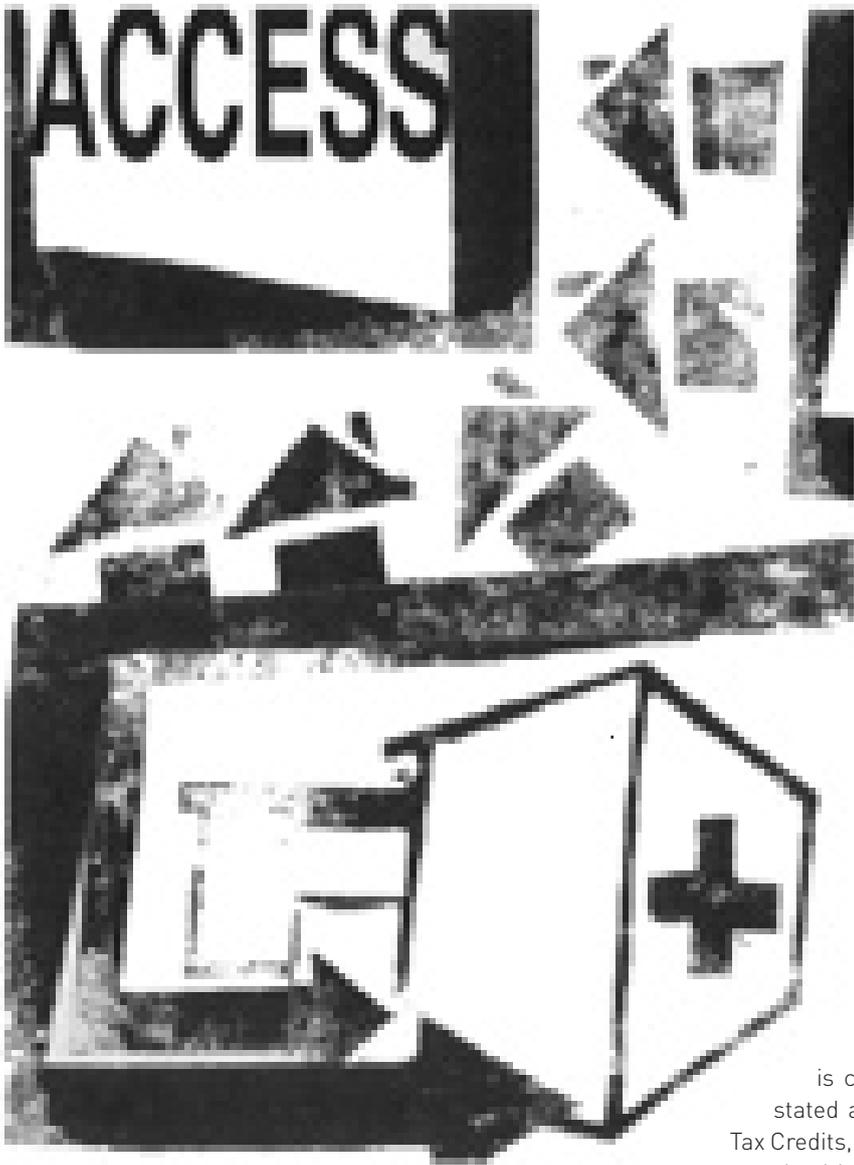
Tony Blair's New Labour government has little problem in recognising the link between inequalities of income and inequalities of health. Its central problem lies in the contradiction between a stated commitment to narrowing health inequalities and taking children and families out of poverty and its desire to expand the role of the market, and of encouraging the growth of income and profits amongst the 'entrepreneurial class'. The result of such a policy is inevitably going to be a widening of income inequality which will further impact on health inequalities. We need both a vision for future action and an understanding of what our past tells us.

The socialist campaigners of the early to mid twentieth century clearly saw the connection between improving health and improving nutrition, especially for children, they were committed to sweeping changes in housing conditions (witness the work by Wheatley to establish good quality council houses in Glasgow and the fact that Scotland's first post-1945 health minister, combined his duties with that of housing) and retained connections with the trade union movement and the general campaign to improve living standards.

Unfortunately we face a real disconnect in current government policy-making in which 'holistic approaches' and 'joined up thinking' are lauded on the one hand whilst Government action or inaction around issues such as Formula One racing and tobacco promotion, purely voluntary food manufacturing guidelines, the European Working Hours directive, support for 24-hour opening of licensed premises, not to mention the new Gambling Bill, systematically unpick the drive for healthier living. This disconnect or contradiction in Blairite thinking actually opens up a real space for radical and creative policy making and campaigning which the left in Scotland must colonise and exploit.

The basis of a good Socialist public health and poverty reduction strategy has been developed over many years. What has been lacking has been the political climate and appropriate legislative avenues to apply it. This has changed with the advent of the Scottish Parliament and of a more pluralistic chamber including independents, Greens and Scottish Socialists. Now the Scottish Socialist MSPs in the Parliament are promoting (with cross party support) a raft of progressive anti poverty measures that could make a real contribution to reducing poverty and improving health. The programme of Bills includes:

Careless politics costs lives; let us apply socialist medicine on the grand scale



- Proposals to scrap the council tax and replace it with a Scottish Service tax which would exempt all people earning under £10,000 per annum.
- The Free School Meals Scotland Bill.
- Proposals to scrap Prescription Charges

This Free School Meals Bill would require that all children in state schools receive a wholesome, nutritionally balanced free school meal, available with milk and water.

Such a measure would remove stigma, and bring great benefit to tens of thousands of children whose parents are low paid but currently ineligible for free school meals.

The Bill would strike a blow for children's rights since the child would benefit directly. It is also a good example of how universally available benefits eliminate costly and inefficient means testing. With the growing resistance to means tested pensions for our old people this is a measure which catches the spirit of our times. Just as important, implementation of such a Bill could play a vital role in re-educating the palates of young people, helping them to eat more healthily at both home and school. Extensive research conducted in Sweden (Nordlung and Jacobsen) has shown that 62 per cent of Children who had a free school meal maintained healthy eating habits in the home with a balanced evening meal eaten at the table accompanied by milk rather than fizzy drinks. This Bill, sponsored by Frances Curran MSP, has attracted broad

support from across civic Scotland including from the STUC womens' committee. It would be tragic if such a measure were to be voted down by narrow sectarian considerations. Readers and supporters of Scottish Left Review who are committed to constructive left unity should mobilise support for this measure.

The proposal to scrap prescription charges, sponsored by Colin Fox MSP, represents a return to the vision of Nye Bevan but is more importantly a sound anti-poverty and pro-health measure. The evidence to support such a measure is compelling; some 75,000 prescriptions are not presented at Scottish Chemists each year, often because patients cannot afford to pay for them. If a GP deems it necessary for two or three items to be prescribed then patients face a bill of almost twenty pounds, a small fortune for a low paid worker. Colin Fox will be supported in his campaign by Welsh Assembly members (who will give evidence in support of the bill); they are already committed to the phasing out of prescription charges. This is a good example of how even the limited scope of devolution, and the development of political relationships between Wales and Scotland can be used to advance a poverty reduction agenda.

Professor John Veit Wilson wrote "If poverty was caused by old age, infirmity and unemployment, the Queen Mother would be living in poverty. Poverty is caused by low income." Despite the Governments stated ambition to reduce poverty, and initiatives such as Tax Credits, low income remains a key indicator and predictor of poor health. The Labour movement needs a wake up call about the need to raise the incomes of our low paid workers. We need to see the dangers of the failure to organise workers, especially young workers, in non-union and anti-union workplaces. The refusal of the Blair government to remove anti-union legislation and the relative weakness of some sections of the trade union movement will have real consequences for low paid families and their long term health. In this context the SSP's demands for a minimum wage of £7.50 per hour (the European Decency threshold) is highly pertinent.

The money we spend on improved housing, better education, school meals, better public transport and environments could make a significant contribution to the long-term health of our nation. Alongside the commitment to measures of wealth redistribution must come the more complex task of achieving a real and permanent shift in power. For behind Scotland's stark income and health inequalities, the disempowerment of local patients (and the unaccountability of unelected health boards) there lies a profound imbalance in favour of the rich, fast food corporations, and multi-national drug companies and Private Finance Initiative outfits. We need to create a kind of democratic hell for such forces and present our people with a bold socialist vision for health improvements. Careless politics costs lives; let us apply socialist medicine on the grand scale. ■

Peter Murray is a spokesperson on Transport for the SSP and a member of its National Council and has written extensively on public health and health inequalities.

choosing who decides

Bill Butler outlines the case for his Bill to ensure that health boards are democratically elected

The commitment to consult on the introduction of direct elections to National Health Service Boards was part of the Scottish Labour Party's manifesto for the 2003 Scottish Parliament election. However, when no party won an overall majority of seats at that election and coalition government became imminent, this commitment was one of only two contained within Labour's manifesto to be dropped from the eventual Partnership Agreement. Whilst the scrapping of Labour's pledge to maintain the first-past-the-post electoral system for Scottish local government elections, made in order to secure stable coalition government with the Liberals, has been rightly the subject of great controversy and anger within Labour's ranks, the omission of consultation on direct elections to NHS Boards largely went without comment. Within a few days of the Scottish Parliament's return after the 2003 election I lodged a proposal for a Private Members' Bill which would remedy this situation. This proposal received strong support from Labour MSPs, as well as from a number of SSP, Green and SNP members.

The case for introducing a greater level of democracy, accountability and transparency into the decision-making

process for local health services is long overdue. Evidence to support such a move is seen on a regular basis in the media as local communities throughout Scotland challenge the decisions of NHS boards over proposed changes to local health services. Over recent years, across the UK, we have seen candidates elected on issues surrounding local health services. Local campaigners are becoming increasingly active in organising campaigns around health board decisions to close or reorganise the provision of health services. This mobilisation tends to develop in response to unpopular health board actions, rather than in advocacy of new initiatives.

I do not necessarily believe that all of the decisions made by boards are wrong and detrimental to local health services; the problem lies as much in perception as in the nature of some decisions. The anger felt by people against certain decisions is to a degree generated, I believe, by the manner in which the decisions are seen to have been made – in secret with little or no explanation, often predetermined and ignoring the views of the community and the responses to the boards' own consultation processes. Since I was first elected to the Scottish Parliament I have been contacted by constituents who

have expressed to me their concerns about changes made to the provision of local health services. Time and again, I have heard from people who feel frustrated and angry about decisions made by NHS boards which they perceive to be completely against the views of the local community. I know that these feelings are felt in communities across Scotland.

In my view, there is a growing sense of public disillusionment with a system where NHS boards can act freely in direct opposition to the wishes of the public. This has resulted in a public increasingly inclined to mobilise and organise around health issues, as witnessed by the increase in such local campaigns across Scotland. In Greater Glasgow a "Save Stobhill Hospital" candidate was elected at the Scottish Parliament elections in



May 2003. At Westminster, the election of Dr Richard Taylor, for the Wyre Forest constituency, was on the back of a campaign to restore emergency health care facilities at Kidderminster Hospital. I don't believe that such candidates are healthy for parliamentary democracy – they are elected purely on a single local issue and people and while votes may feel strongly about this issue, are unlikely to know about the candidate's views on a whole range of other issues. It is also very unlikely that the successful candidates who campaigned on such local health issues will be able to deliver on the promises upon which they were elected. As an individual MSP, MP or councillor, elected without the support of a national political party, such representatives are isolated and largely impotent. Electing a local health service candidate does register a protest, but does not actually help the campaigners achieve their goal.

Notwithstanding the above, it is, in my view, important that local communities have a greater say in decisions relating to local NHS services. I believe that there is a better and more effective way for people to have a say in how their local health services are run, which also ensures that the decisions made reflect the views of the local community. It was with that end in mind that I submitted my proposal for the Direct Elections to National Health Service Boards (Scotland) Bill which seeks to introduce direct public elections for members of NHS boards. Currently, members of health boards are appointed by Ministers or represent local authorities. I have yet to hear a convincing argument as to why the make-up of regional NHS boards should not contain a strong directly elected element democratically accountable to the people they represent. Introducing greater democracy would mean more than just structural change; electoral accountability would have the effect of involving patients and communities, providing an opportunity for public debate and greater access to information.

I would like to see 50 per cent plus one of the members on each health board directly elected to represent the local communities affected by its decisions. Boards must have a proper balance between those who have expertise, knowledge and experience from working in the health service and those most directly affected by change – the public within that health board area. People are aggrieved that there is no direct accountability between the public and the health board members who decide on local policy. I believe this Bill will address that credibility gap and reignite the public's faith in the legitimacy of the decisions taken by health boards. Accepting decisions as legitimate is at the heart of representative democracy – democracy isn't always about getting our own way, but it is a way of making decisions that takes serious account of people's opinions. Currently, this isn't happening in respect of NHS boards. Direct public elections would allow the public a mechanism to influence service delivery in their area. If we are to address public suspicions, there must be greater openness, transparency, and direct accountability. I believe my Bill, if enacted, would allow such an approach to thrive and prosper. Health authorities are not accountable to their local communities. The current position does provide indirect representation through the appointment of local councillors to positions on NHS boards, but this is far short of the direct accountability that is necessary.

Democracy isn't always about getting our own way, but it is a way of making decisions that takes serious account of people's opinions

The case for an elected element within NHS boards is, in my view, a thoroughly convincing one.

Over the summer I have conducted a widespread consultation exercise to gauge opinion on the principle of the proposed Bill and on the possible details of implementation. This finished at the beginning of October and I am currently collating and analysing the responses which have been submitted by politicians, trade unions, local authorities, community organisations and individuals. Having carried out an initial review of the responses there is strong support; just over 75 per cent of those that made submissions are in favour of direct elections to NHS boards. I intend to publish a detailed summary and analysis of these responses before beginning work on the drafting of the Bill which I intend to present to the Scottish Parliament at the earliest possible opportunity.

The consultation document contained a range of questions on which respondents could express an opinion: which electoral system should be used to elect board members and should there be restrictions on those who are eligible to stand as candidates; how often should members be elected and how should these elections be carried out; should the number of terms which a member can serve be limited; should there be restrictions on the campaigning candidates for the board can undertake and the amount of money they can spend on their election campaigns; and, possibly most important of all, what proportion of boards should be directly elected? In the spirit of the proposed Bill, the questions put forward in the consultation exercise were not circulated with my mind already made up. As I have stated, it is my feeling at this time that 50 per cent plus one of the members of each board should be elected, but I am willing to reconsider this in the light of the final analysis of the consultation responses.

I should also state that so far I have had a rather lukewarm response from the Scottish Executive, but I would be delighted if the Health Minister were to take a more supportive position. I do welcome the recent announcement by Andy Kerr regarding the decision to make the annual performance meetings for NHS boards open to the public but this is only a first step. I hope the Minister sees the advantages which directly elected, accountable health board members would bring to the NHS in Scotland.

All the evidence I have read and heard, from individuals and organisations I have spoken to about my proposed Bill, has strengthened my view that the vast majority of the Scottish public support it. There are those with concerns about how the elections would operate in practice and I understand these and want to ensure that, when I submit a Bill to the Scottish Parliament, these concerns are addressed. However, I am determined to push ahead with this Bill as I firmly believe it will prove to be of value in the creation of a Scottish Health Service accountable to the people of Scotland. ■

Bill Butler is Labour MSP for Glasgow Anniesland

spinning off track

Kevin Lindsay on the New Labour spin around investment in public transport, and the potential of a Scottish economy supported by a strong infrastructure.

A SLEF was formed in 1880 based on the ideal of creating a transport union specifically intended to deal with the railways. It was felt then that the railway network would be of major importance to the economy and industrial infrastructure in Scotland. Of course, those were the haylcon days of shipbuilding, heavy industry and mining. The rail industry was therefore developed as an integral part of the Scottish economy.

Anything that was built that would eventually need moving was moved by rail. Back in 1880 there were numerous different private rail companies providing services on what was a Victorian rail network, little different from what we have today. The communities that surrounded those industries flourished on grew on that basis.

Unfortunately today we have seen industries in Scotland drain away to nothing, the North Sea oil boom, once seen as the answer to the ills of the Scottish Economy, is over and we are left with an economy based around the low paid, low skilled jobs in the service sector. While once we were well known for the craftsmanship of the highest standard, today we are known in Scotland for that fact that companies get away with paying some of the lowest wages and provide some of the poorest conditions in Western Europe.

Scotland, like the rest of the UK, needs well paid jobs not just in Edinburgh or Glasgow, but needs work for the all of the skilled people that we have in Scotland if the economy is going to expand, develop and ensure the future prosperity of Scotland. But any investment in the Scottish Economy has to be met

by development in the transport infrastructure in Scotland or economic development will be strangled at birth by the lack of capacity in our transport system.

The transport system in Scotland today is in a mess; a factor that is having a direct impact on the Scottish Economy. Overly-congested roads with too many cars and lorries pouring onto the roads is causing gridlock and polluting our atmosphere. And we have a public transport system which has been starved of investment and then sold off to the profiteers of private finance to be run for a profit and not for the needs of Scottish Society.

And that's just for starters. We have large rural population who have been socially excluded as bus and rail companies threaten to cut services for not being profitable enough regardless of whether services were providing a public good for the benefit of society rather than for the benefits of German banks, their shareholders and their accounts in the Cayman islands.

Transport is at the heart of the economy; it's the transport system be it public or private that gets the workers to work in the morning and home in the evening. Transport supplies the goods and services that are vital to the economy. I don't have to remind you that during industrial action on Scotrail several years ago myself and my union were being accused of putting the Scottish Economy at risk and that millions if not billions of pounds would be lost by our actions.

What about the billions of pounds that are lost every year in the Scottish economy due poor transport systems on which you



can't travel in rural areas after 4 or 5 o'clock in the afternoon as there are no bus services, or because rural rail lines are constantly under threat as they are not economic viable so serve no use apart from to the people who see them as vital service.

My belief in the need for publicly accountable, publicly owned railway system is not one simply based on principle - it's based on sound economics too. The recent vote at the Labour Party Conference on public ownership sees the depth of the feeling there is about the need for a public transport system that is run for the people. At the conference minister after minister and sycophant and sycophant turned up on stage to claim that we could not afford to re-nationalise the railways.

Delegates at the Labour Party Conference were told on Sunday that the cost would be £15 bn, but by Monday Gordon Brown and a practically begging Alistair Darling were telling us it would cost £22b and asking where we suggest they take the money from to (they of course claimed it was have to come from hospitals and schools rather than the cost of invading another country on very dubious grounds). However, as the recent catalyst document on the railways produced for ASLEF and its Sister Rail Unions the TSSA and the RMT states, re-nationalisation does not have to cost a penny. In fact we will be saving plenty of pennies as the subsidies will not be going into the black hole.

Last year Connex, which has received over half a billion pounds in public subsidy since 1996, was taken off the South Eastern franchise and the operation reverted back to the public sector in the form of the SRA-owned subsidiary South Eastern Trains. The latest figures show that it became the only railway company to see its performance levels increase. Not only has the performance improved by retaining the service in the public sector, it has avoided the problems that occur in the franchising process itself. There is no need for huge legal bills that occur during the process.

The reality is simple. There is no need to continue with the franchising of train operators to private providers. Practical experience has shown with South Eastern Trains that the services can be provided just as well by the public sector without the extra costs and disruption of privatising them. The Government should see South Eastern Trains as the benchmark for the public sector and take the other services back in house as their franchise expire. No cost to government, no damage to the company and finally we could have a publicly owned and publicly accountable railway system - just take the keys back at the end of the franchise with no fuss, no problems and no Tory press screaming about the rights of the shareholders.

With First Group now having franchises for both the bus and train services in Scotland (perhaps the monopoly commission should get involved), it's time that the Scottish Executive stepped in and stopped paying lip service on the question of integrated transport and the use the powers that it has to ensure that Scotland is able to develop an integrated transport system that is flexible for both urban and rural areas. A system should be put in place so that trains and buses connect to ensure that using your car in Scotland is no longer a necessity. The Scottish Executive can't sit idly by if First Group fails to meet the needs of the Scottish Economy and the travelling public then they must take action and take back the franchises from First Group

Rather than questioning whether we can afford to re-nationalise the railways and have an integrated transport system, we should be asking whether we can afford not to. After all, New Labour spin-doctors are renowned for telling us 'wreckers' that 'it's the economy, stupid'. But maybe we need to tell them 'nut that needs transport, stupid'. Without a decent transport system, an investment in the Scottish economy will fizzle out and be wasted. ■

Kevin Lindsay is ASLEF District Secretary for Scotland

ASLEF welcomes the opening of the Scottish Parliament

- Good for the Economy
- Good for the people of Scotland
- Bring the Rail Industry back into the Public Ownership with Public Accountability

Keith Norman
Acting General Secretary



Andy Reed
National Organiser

ASLEF, 9 Arkwright Road, Hampstead, LONDON NW3 6AB.

irresponsible government

“The Frazer Report illuminated a sign that Scottish citizens seldom see. It says ‘You Mugs!’”. Scott Vietch takes a look at Scottish government.

How should we understand the Fraser Report? Not through its technical content alone – although it is a detailed and accessible account of the genesis of a major financial scandal – but rather in its exposure of the underlying assumptions of devolved government in Scotland and, therefore, in its potential. It is said that succour often comes from unexpected sources, and in this instance a report by a Conservative Unionist peer has offered just a glimpse of what a different kind of democratic government might look like for Scotland.

Of course, the Report does not do this in a straightforward way. Instead it provides a conventional chronology of decisions taken – many good, many incompetent and some breaking the bounds of legality. In the end though, it is lenient. That is not to say that it is a whitewash along the lines of the Hutton Report. In one sense the Fraser report is quite the opposite. For its key achievement is this: to expose through a sustained forensic dissection of structures, systems and decision-making processes how the normal expectations of government may operate – and operate well – to dissipate responsibility for major harms suffered. The Report is testimony in its small but significant way, to the fact that our political structures form channels along which massive amnesias of responsibility can run. In this case, from a final cost of £431m (ten times the original estimate), £170m of which was unnecessarily overspent, Lord Fraser shows how it is plausible to end up with culpability simply vanishing and how, instead, those with least input into the whole process – the people of Scotland – are left to pick up the bill. This, unwittingly perhaps, is the Report’s most telling insight into how devolved government in Scotland was set up to work. And in this it could trace its genetic make-up directly to its Westminster parentage.

Underlying the Report’s conclusions are three questions that go to the heart of democratic government: what are the structures of accountability we would wish to have in place?; how should we define responsibility in the context of government generally and in the variety of its hierarchical structures in particular?; and what consequences would we want to attach to findings of irresponsibility?

Too often, and for too long now, organisational elites have mistaken the issue of accountability for matters of managerialist tactics. This triumph of form over content has been immensely corrosive of (particularly public) institutions and practices which turn able, spirited workers into inane box-tickers reduced to the lowest common denominators of mechanised quality assurance processes. It is to be hoped that the response to the Fraser Report will not stride further down that mindless path (though having witnessed the Parliamentary debate on the Report that hope may yet be in vain). In order to achieve this, consideration of what broader perspective to take on these matters must be treated as being of the utmost significance. And these three questions cannot be answered properly without giving due attention to a prior issue, so elemental that it barely surfaces in public political discussion, so basic as to seem naive: what is government for?

Any answer to this which involves representative democracy needs to begin by accepting that government concerns the

organisation of a reciprocal relationship among people. But what are the terms of this relationship? It was the English philosopher John Locke, despite all the problems one might have with his analysis (and there are many), who identified two key factors in answering this question that still resonate through the centuries. Unlike his near contemporary Thomas Hobbes, Locke argued that a government’s power was not the result of its having been **alienated** by the people; rather its power existed because it had been **delegated** by the people. Alienation differed from delegation in one crucial respect; while the former amounted to a complete and one-off transfer of power to a sovereign who could henceforth do no wrong, the latter set up what could only exist as an ongoing relationship, one in which power was exercised conditionally. The crucial corollary of this, Locke’s second point, was that delegation resulted in a relationship of **trust**: the government’s power continued only in so far as it sustained the trust of the people.

Now a genuine relationship of trust amongst equals depends itself on one further combination of virtues: openness; honesty; and truthfulness. One cannot truly be in a trusting relationship where one party does not treat that relationship as having a prime commitment to be honest, to avoid deception (or at least the tricks of non-telling and selective silence), or where one party must rely on external sources to find out what’s really going on. The point here is that it is not enough simply to be trusted, but to be trustworthy. In the context of the relationship between the people and the government the central concern in this respect is therefore with **publicity**, not in the jaded personality-driven tabloid sense it has acquired, but rather in the sense of being committed to the sharing of information, to the exposure of dealings and decisions to the public gaze and to the welcoming of public scrutiny. The perspective from which any investigation of what government is for must focus on the principles of delegation, trust, and publicity. Before we begin to address questions of policy – what government should be doing – these principles establish a base-line, a default position, derogation from which must be treated as a *prima facie* breach of trust. Once we begin from this perspective, the questions about accountability and responsibility necessarily become framed within a set of commitments whose pre-eminent feature is the ability to establish genuine relationships of reciprocity. And all this is something to be worked at, to be demonstrated in practice and in attitude, continuously.

At this point we should return to the Fraser Report. What is immediately clear is that these principles, these ideals about how those entrusted with governmental power should act, were consistently dishonoured. But what is telling about this scenario is not simply that it happened, but that this was seen by major actors as a legitimate way of organising their activities. These actors, and the culture which supported them, saw the matter of dealing with the public exactly the other way around from the ideal I have just described: ‘how little can we get away with telling people?’ was the question that guided their mode of action. If we assume, plausibly enough given the high profile and symbolic importance of the Parliament project, that this attitude was indeed the prevalent one, then these were the

terms on which the people of Scotland were to be treated from the outset. From within the keep of the party political mentality, the people themselves were to be immediately alienated rather than understood as the source of delegation. In a structured, though largely unarticulated way (this is the point), the people themselves were not to be trusted. This – sadly and wrongly – was the default position adopted.

To make this clear it was not enough just to draw attention, as Lord Fraser did, to the woefully misconceived and underdeveloped scheme dreamt up in a wealthy labour leader's feverish imagination to create another Edinburgh monument, one through which he would be triumphantly seen as "the most important patron of the architecture of government for the last 300 years". Nor was it enough to remind ourselves that Donald Dewar was told at the outset, rationally and patiently and from a diverse range of political and non-political sources, that this was a plan not even half-baked but uncooked; a financial disaster waiting to happen – as of course it duly did. Lord Fraser makes it clear that, according to the constitutional structures in play at the time, Donald Dewar was perfectly within his rights to make exactly these monumental errors of judgement with barrowloads of taxpayers' money.

The real problems emerge through Fraser's analysis of the culture of 'closedness', and the way in which this allowed incompetence to proliferate in the proceedings. Evidence of this opens with the failure of senior civil servants to keep their political masters properly informed of what was going on, particularly with regard to true cost figures and the nature of the risk regime agreed by them in the construction arrangements. The justifications for these failures, as Fraser again points out, come across as implausible at best, and incompetent at worst. Errors of judgement were made in terms of the personnel put in place and with apparently scant regard for a public interest. Not here, then, the spirit of openness and publicity – far from it, says Lord Fraser. Besides, had it not been for his investigations, government and civil service discussions would have remained legally out of the public domain for at least the standard 30 years.

But the civil service did not have a monopoly on all this. The culture of incompetence spread through the political realm too and further exemplified the nature of the dominant party political expectations. Nowhere is this more evident than with regard to legal matters. We often hear that the law is colonising the domain of public and private engagement; and yet what the Fraser Report unambiguously demonstrates is that in the Holyrood story legal considerations were often entirely absent. Consider two examples. First, and perhaps the most jaw-dropping was a decision taken by Dewar and his Finance Minister (and now First Minister) Jack McConnell to agree to increase the budget for the project by £10m on 2 June 1999. This, says Lord Fraser, was a decision "which had no legal basis". The reason, straightforward enough, was that 'all rights and interests in relation to the Parliament had passed to the Scottish Parliament Corporate Body (SPCB) on 1 June 1999.'(8.58). Neither Dewar nor Lord David Steel (who chaired the SPCB) realised this and so 'Ministers were purporting to take significant decisions in relation to a Project no longer within their remit'.

Not to be outdone, the SPCB in its turn, with Lord Steel still at the helm, then proceeded to breach the Scotland Act by delegating their powers to another more specialist body, the Holyrood Project Group. While this may be explained by the

fact that the SPCB, according to Lord Fraser, had by then exhibited "a fundamental failure [...] to understand the nature of construction management" (10.15) it is perfectly clear that section 21 of the Act gave them no entitlement to delegate their legal powers and responsibilities. In addition, Lord Steel – like Dewar, a lawyer by education and a law-maker by profession – had by then, to Lord Fraser's stated surprise, "decided to make available to MSPs and the public only a heavily edited version of [the SPCB's] minutes", and, it turned out, had never once asked to see the contract which had begun the whole project.

Yet these matters of blatant illegalities and practices of dubious legality – also particularly prominent with regard to EU procurement law – are not simply the issue here; it is, more significantly, that at the highest levels of the political and civil service establishment **in the law-making body** legal requirements were treated as optional. This is emblematic of the whole tenor of the Holyrood saga. But the real scandal in all this is that it was not, and is still not, treated as a scandal in any way that can call people meaningfully to account. For all we are told that our culture has become increasingly individualised, where individual choice has become the touchstone of political ideology, of economic policy, and of social reality – from designer genetics and consumer goods to health-care and education – for all that preaching, those at the top are still able to rely on structures which can operate as much to divert responsibility as they do to instantiate it. The cry of 'It wisnae me', said Lord Fraser, rang around the streets of the Old Town of Edinburgh.

We are indebted to the Fraser Report for giving us an insight into how those expectations and rationalisations constituted – constitute – government as usual for party elites. It is now perfectly clear that what the architects of devolution in fact had in store for the people of Scotland was more of what we have become accustomed to from Westminster: distrust; alienation; and secrecy. Put less prosaically, Lord Fraser's Report has illuminated a sign whose light is seen only occasionally, and whose glow shines on the faces of all the citizens of Scotland. It says, 'You mugs'. While our jails keep filling with young men and women whose property offences amount to nothing like the extent of something such as this, when our schools and hospitals on their impoverished budgets have to account for every single penny spent in their desperate attempt to hold together the fabric of a decent society, those in high offices of government act with impunity.

If the Fraser Report is to mean anything then it must be seen as an opportunity to re-excavate the cultural and political foundations on which the devolution settlement was based. Of course, we couldn't expect this from a figure such as Lord Fraser himself, nor might we realistically expect it from the dominant party machines. It awaits other, bolder, more independent-minded imaginations, to deliver something different. Yet to the extent that nothing changes, then there is little hope for anything other than lip-service democracy. That is not, I suspect, how the people of Scotland want their government to work. The potential of the Fraser Report is that it shows more or less exactly where the trouble is. And there **are** ways – already existing in other areas of law and government – of holding to account public servants for incompetencies, irresponsibilities, and breaches of trust on a scale such as this. It is time they were explored. It doesn't have to be like this. ■

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whose hills?

Absentee landlords obstructed access for a century, but will the Land Reform Act make any difference to the public enjoyment of loch Morar asks Iain Fraser Grigor.

To many observers, the Scottish Parliament's Land Reform Act is its flagship legislation, for it will help shatter the long reign of recreational colonialism in the Highlands by the landlord class. But how will these landlords respond to the Act? And in particular, how will they respond to the Act's access provisions as they relate to land and inland waters? The record of landlordism with regard to the shores and waters of loch Morar in the 'rough bounds' of western Lochaber is, in this respect, highly instructive. That record should also serve as a warning to those who suppose that the absentee - and largely English - landlords who own much of the Highlands will meekly do what the Scottish parliament tells them to do.....

The Morar area is no stranger to direct-action conflict between English landlord and native Highlander. Knoydart, just to the north of Morar, was in the 1940s in the ownership of the Nazi brewer Lord Brocket, who endeavoured to 'improve' his estate by evicting its remaining native people (for most of the natives had been burned out in the mid-19th century). It was here - and in full knowledge of these brutal clearances a century earlier - that the famous Knoydart land-raid (a cruel betrayal by the Labour government of the day) took place.

Nor is the adjacent peninsula of north Morar - and the waters of its loch - any stranger to landlord 'improvement'. In the 1880s, the lairds tried to close the loch to public use. The issue went to court, and the public right to use boats on the loch was in effect admitted. A public right was also admitted to use specified places on the shore of the loch for launching and beaching boats. For nearly a century that remained the case. But in the late 1970s and 1980s the local landlords were emboldened by the opportunities of a Thatcherite ascendancy in the London parliament. They returned to the fray, and attempted to close

public access to the loch forever. By then, the south-western shore of the loch was (and still is) in the ownership of Malcolm Spence, of Ennerdale Road, Kew, in Surrey. The 'deer-forest' on the north shore was (and still is) in the ownership of Ian Bond, an absentee sportsman domiciled at Upton Wold, Moreton-In-Marsh, Gloucestershire. Most of the western end was still owned by Lord Lovat, with the rest of it in the ownership of Lovat's Aunt Margaret Stirling along with her sons Archie and the proto-fascist adventurist David.

A number of concerned locals formed an Action Group to fight the landlords. The group sought and won the support of the Scottish Rights of Way Society. Three times in a row, the Society asserted the public right to use boats on loch Morar, with landing and mooring rights at seven specified places, as per the settlement of the loch Morar case back in 1889. But the landlords had another card to play, in the shape of a local District Salmon Fishery Board - a bright idea brought to perfection by new fisheries legislation in the House of Lords a few years earlier. Under cover of this Board (Clerk: Malcolm Spence, QC), the landlords slowly strangled access to loch Morar throughout the 1980s, by the stratagem of allowing boats on the loch - but on a discretionary basis only, and only in terms of those boats which they had permitted to fish in its waters. This was probably illegal: but the landlords had very deep pockets, and their stratagem was not challenged in any civil court in an action which might have cost large sums of money and might have gone all the way to the House of Lords: that same House which had so joyously brought the legislation into being in the first place.

But slow strangulation of access, under the cover of fisheries legislation, wasn't enough for the landlords. There was still the vexed question of absolute denial of access to people who did not want to fish, and towards the end of the 1980s, the



landlords saw another chance. After all, a common crofter - or God Forbid, a common Glaswegian - might still have the right to sail a boat on the loch between specified points. But whose land did he have to cross to get onto the loch in the first place? In March, 1989, a civil action was brought in Fort William Sheriff Court against one Pat Sweeney, of Airdrie. The action was engineered from Surrey by Spence, who also represented the other landlords. As a result, Sweeney was interdicted, "from unlawfully entering and trespassing upon the Pursuers land and estates". Or, in other words, that very narrow strip of land between the public road which runs along the side of the loch, and the waters of the loch itself. All costs were awarded against Sweeney. The landlords were not slow to ram home their advantage - and they didn't let the facts get in the way. Archie Stirling wrote to one member of the Action Group:

There is no Right of Way of Loch Morar... The legal situation is that the loch itself is privately owned by the six proprietors who own the surrounding land. To put a boat on the loch, you are obliged, for your convenience, to cross our ground. Anyone who seeks to claim a "right" to a boat upon the loch and who refuses to buy, at a small charge, a permit to do so, lays himself open to being sued for an interdict to restrain him from crossing our ground, just as Mr Sweeney was sued... I know Mr Malcolm Spence has written an excellent letter setting out the position quite clearly.

And Spence himself wrote to another Action Group member:

I think I should explain that the whole purpose of the proprietors is to preserve the loch for the benefit of the people of Morar and to prevent people from Glasgow and the Central Belt from turning our loch into a Loch Lomond.

I wonder if Charles Gordon of Glasgow will now order his lawyers to investigate an action for punitive damages against Spence, on behalf of the people whom he represents. But bluff, bluster, money and sheer legal impudence had won the day for the landlord class, who quickly began to import a succession of special-forces drop-outs ('I am ex-SAS, you know!') to enforce their will.

And there, for the next decade, the matter rested. With the exception of a handful of boats permitted on the waters of the loch for the purpose of fishing, Loch Morar was effectively closed to all but the absentee landlords whose estates surrounded it. But then came the Scottish Parliament (to the supreme displeasure, one must suppose, of the landlord class) and that parliament's Land Reform Act. That Act's access provisions have very significant implications for public enjoyment of the shores and waters of Loch Morar (and, of course, all other stretches of inland water throughout Scotland). The Act gives

everybody, whatever their age or ability, statutory access rights to most land and inland water in Scotland. These access rights can be exercised at any time of the day or the night while existing rights, including public rights of way and navigation, continue. And landlords' servants must not interfere unreasonably with the public exercise of these new rights.

But how the absentee landlords interpret 'unreasonable interference' remains to be seen. No doubt their responses will be subject to the closest possible scrutiny by the Scottish parliament and other agencies of the Scottish popular will.

In the 1980s the landlords were emboldened by the opportunities of a Thatcherite ascendancy in the London parliament and attempted to close public access to the loch forever

Certainly, there are already two questions deserving of very close scrutiny indeed. The first of these concerns the relationship between a private association of landlords and a local District Salmon Fishery Board. The landlords whose estates surround the loch are, exclusively, members of the Loch Morar Association. This formally-constituted Association enables these landlords to engage and pay on a shared basis the wages of employees. But these employees in turn are bailiffs of the local fishery board and thereby blessed with the extraordinary search and enter and other powers of such bailiffs. What is such an arrangement if not by sleight of legal hand the provision of a private police force to a cabal of absentee English landlords - a private police force whose business is to deny the people of Scotland access to their own country?

The second is the question as to whether the powers of fishery boards and their bailiffs extend only to policing fishery matters or whether they also extend to policing the access provisions of the Land Reform Act. After all, Morar's cabal of absentee English landlords has recently announced that it will obstruct public rights on the loch and its shores in terms of the use of powered craft and the pursuit of wild camping. These landlords will, in other words, deliberately obstruct the settled will of the Scottish people as expressed in the legislative will of their parliament.

How our Scottish parliament and courts respond to such matters remains to be seen. But if the response is not rapid and appropriate, the teeth will be drawn from the access rights for which the people of Scotland have waited so long. And the landlords of the Highlands will be able to raise an exultant hosanna of triumph and joy, with the words of the great Hamish Henderson ballad commemorating the Knoydart land raid:

You Highland swine
These hills are mine
This is all Lord Brocket's land

Iain Fraser Grigor was brought-up on a croft in Morar, and is author of "Highland Resistance - the radical tradition in the Scottish north" (Mainstream, 2000)

setting the tone

Gill Hubbard reports from the 2004 European Social Forum in London

Reporting on the London ESF, Gill Hubbard examines the alternatives to an EU constitution, the G8 and Acceptance of war in Iraq

For a third year in a row, people from across the length and breadth of Europe have come together at the European Social Forum (ESF). Twenty thousand people attended over 500 meetings and numerous cultural events in London during the weekend of 15-17 October. The main site, at Alexandra Palace, was teeming with folk representing a range of organisations and viewpoints and the issues discussed ranged from global poverty, climate change, third world debt, women's liberation, imperialism, war, racism, the EU constitution and so much more.

The vitality and vividness of participants was expressed in so many different ways. I could see it on the faces of those who listened avidly to speakers in meetings, I could hear it as I walked past groups of people sitting on the floor chatting over coffee, and I could feel it as I rubbed shoulders with those who were also standing at the back of an already jam-packed meeting. The smell of resistance and the taste of a better world was definitely in the air.

The first ESF was held in Florence, Italy in November 2002. The fact it came just over a year after our movement had taken to the streets in Genoa when the eight richest countries in the world met at their summit and 9/11 gave Florence a sense of purpose. There was a real sense of relief that our movement was putting differences to one side and uniting in opposition to the rulers of world. I also attended the ESF in Paris in November 2003 after the world's biggest demonstration in living history on 15 February when over 30 million people marched against the then impending war on Iraq. The call for this demonstration came from the Assembly of Social Movements at the ESF in Florence, which was then endorsed at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre.

Neo-liberalism and war

The ESF in London took place in the context of a world increasingly polarised between rich and poor and between those campaigning for peace and those waging war. This is why the issues of neo-liberalism and war dominated this year's ESF. These two themes ran throughout the whole event, which culminated in a magnificent demonstration of over 100,000 people against the occupation of Iraq through the centre of London. Rose Gentle, the mother of Gordon Gentle who was killed in Iraq, addressed the final rally. Thunderous applause echoed around Trafalgar Square when she called for all foreign troops to get out of Iraq. The Assembly of Social Movements, which was attended by over 1,000 people representing organisations from different European countries on the last day of the ESF, agreed to unite around plans for a Europe-wide demonstration against the war. This is set to take place on the

anniversary of the start of the bombing of Iraq on 19 and 20 March. People are clearly angry at being ignored and they are preparing to take to the streets once more.

The fact that the question of the occupation of Iraq was at the forefront of the majority of participant's minds is not surprising. The relationship between neo-liberalism and war has never been starker than in the war against Iraq. This war, which was led by the United States with Britain faithfully following in its footsteps, has deepened the crisis of legitimacy of global capitalism in at least two ways. It shows what the Project for a New American Century actually means – control of oil supplies and it means profits for United States corporations. Nowhere has this been more blatant than in awarding the main business contracts for the so-called 'rebuilding' of Iraq to United States corporations such as Bechtel and Halliburton.

Secondly, it has led millions of people around the world to question the type of democracy that the likes of Bush and Blair believe in. Bush and Blair alleged that this war was about

This year's ESF, compared to previous years, was also more serious. By that I mean that people were questioning what our movement should do next

bringing democracy to the people of Iraq. But what it has done is to drive the quest for democracy even further away from the hands of the Iraqi people. The idea of free and fair elections seems like a far off dream. And the whole economy of Iraq is still owned by a foreign power – the United States. But this war has also led millions to question the type of democracy that

is much closer to home. The British democracy, which is one of the oldest in the world, is now increasingly in the spotlight. The overwhelming majority of people the length and breadth of Britain are against the war. Yet, Blair and his cabinet have continued to refuse to abide by the will of the people. And it is obvious to all but those politicians who are either too gullible or too spineless to challenge the lies of Tony Blair that this is an illegal war.

Radical ESF

This crisis at the heart of a Labour government, which has deepened as a result of the war and occupation of Iraq, is symptomatic of a general crisis for social democratic governments across Europe. These governments - for example Labour in Britain and Schroeder in Germany - have not only accepted the logic of neo-liberal economics but are its most vociferous advocates. Public utilities are being privatised, flexible working practices are being embraced, and corporations are being given increasing powers to exploit the planet's natural resources and human labour. This is one of the reasons why London was also, like Florence in so many respects, shaped by the politics of the radical left. This was reflected in the size and nature of a range of meetings including the one on 'political parties, social movements and war'. For instance, contributors from the floor criticised Diane Abbott MP, who was one of the speakers, for remaining inside the Labour Party.



This year's ESF, compared to previous years, was also more serious. By that I mean that people were questioning what our movement should do next. Although it was not always phrased as a question of 'reform or revolution?' this is what speakers and members of the audience in some of the meetings debated. People were questioning whether or not it is possible to win reforms without confronting head-on the power of nation-states and of 'global governance' institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and World Trade Organisation. Take the meeting titled 'Life after capitalism: What world do we want?'. At this meeting, Susan George, Vice-President of Association for Taxation of Financial Transaction to Aid Citizens (ATTAC) France said that we should use our time together at these social forums to decide what we are going to do. She argued that as a movement we should fight to defend our public services and that we should take to the streets in opposition to the European Union Constitution because it will enshrine in law the right of trans-national corporations to own and control our schools, hospitals and transport networks irrespective of the consequences that this might have on these services and on the people that depend on them. She dismissed the possibility of revolution as being 'utopian.' In contrast, others pointed out that fighting for basic reforms has meant that people have been forced to confront the power of the state. In Bolivia each time that workers have resisted privatisation of their public utilities it has led to virtual civil war with presidents toppled and others quickly brought in to fill the void. The fact that this kind of debate took place at this year's ESF is an expression of the maturity of a movement that is both willing and capable of debating alternative strategies.

A massive mobilisation against the G8

Numerous meetings drew attention to the fact that the next summit of the eight richest nations is to take place on the soil of Europe – at Gleneagles, Scotland in July 2005. The meeting about next year's G8, which was co-hosted by the Scottish Mobilising Committee for the ESF, attracted several hundred people. The Assembly of the Social Movements agreed to 'mobilise massively' for the protests. Thus the ESF marked an important step on the road to Gleneagles.

If our movement is serious about showing there is an alternative to neo-liberalism and war, then we have to suggest and provide an alternative. The world will be watching what we do. This is why in Scotland many of us are coming together to prepare for peaceful protests and cultural events throughout the duration of the summit. For example, the G8 Alternatives, is planning to host an alternative summit. Whatever is on the agenda of the G8 will be on the agenda of our summit. People across the world will be able to choose who they really think has the answers to issues like climate change, HIV/AIDS or war. International NGOs and supporters are also planning a Make Poverty History march through Edinburgh, focusing on trade, aid and debt and there are also likely to be other activities organised by different groups. In these ways and more, we can make another world possible.

The ESF this year will help to develop a movement that is capable of challenging the rulers of the world. To do otherwise is suicide. ■

Gill Hibbard is convener of Globalise Resistance Scotland

reviews

Thomas Frank: What's the Matter With America? The Resistible Rise of the American Right, Secker & Warburg, 2004, £12.00

In 2001 Thomas Frank published **One Market Under God**, the most persuasive and disturbing analysis of the fundamental damage done to us, economically, politically, culturally, by the unleashing of the promiscuous fantasies of the techno-bubbling 'free' market of the '90s. This book, more personal because located in his home state, Kansas, is equally disturbing. It is the terrible vision of the Neo-Con morning after the '90s binge with its implicit belief that the new technology had transcended all previous economic and political constraints and that history for Americans was to be a wealth saturated end-game.

What Frank demographically reveals from his Kansas study is that there is hyper-wealth but it exists in increasingly defended enclaves of a tiny minority. The IT driven 'democratic' populism of the legion of business school false prophets of the previous decade has led to what was feared from the beginning of the Republic, a **plutocracy**. Elsewhere, unfettered corporations turn Kansas into a site of dereliction. Prosperous blue-collar life is no more as work is either outsourced or done in the hellish abattoirs by a new slave caste of emigrant workers:

Driving back from Garden City, after taking in its brooding slaughter houses and its unearthly feeder lots that sprawl over the landscape like some post-Apocalyptic suburb of death, I was reminded of another parable, one that the Kansas Populists used to talk about: the frontier as site of ghastly, spectacular plunder. Buffalo carcasses littering the ground, cattle ranchers shooting down the Indians, corporations moving whole populations round the globe, farmers exhausting the land, railroads taking the farmers for all they're worth – free market economics in full and unrestrained effect.

Unlike today, however, nineteenth-century Kansas created socialist, populist class strategies to defend itself against cannibal capitalism. What drives the Swiftian, savage indignation of Frank's book is the fact that contemporary Kansans have implicit faith in the very capitalist elite who are destroying them. In increasing numbers they have fallen back with barely repressed hysteria on a religious fundamentalism perfectly represented by their divinely wired, politically autistic president. As Frank notes:

Let us pause for a moment to ponder this all-American dysfunction. A state is spectacularly ill-served by the Reagan-Bush stampede of deregulation, privatisation and laissez-faire. It sees its countryside depopulated, its towns disintegrate, its cities stagnate – and its wealthy enclaves sparkle, behind their remote-controlled security gates. The state erupts in revolt-making headlines round the world with its bold defiance of convention. But what do the rebels demand? More of the very measures that have brought ruination on them and their neighbours in the first place.

This is not just the mystery of Kansas; this is the mystery of America, the historical shift that has made all possible.

In Kansas the shift is more staggering than elsewhere, simply because it has been more decisive, so extreme. The people who were once radical are now reactionary. Though they speak today in the same aggrieved language of victimization and face the same array of economic forces as their hard-bitten ancestors, today's populists make demands that are precisely the opposite. Tear down the federal farm programmes, they cry. Privatise the utilities. Repeal the progressive taxes. All that Kansas asks today is a little help in nailing itself to that cross of gold.

Frank gives an incisive, reasoned, detailed account of the, at best, irrational state of affairs whereby, undreamt of in radical left-wing theory, men act against their own economic interests. Of course, the Neo-Con propaganda machine (e.g. **Fox News**) has enormous wealth at its disposal. It has managed to insinuate into the popular mind, partly by resurrecting the mind-set of Cold War paranoia, that liberalism in America is everywhere omnipotent and, irrespective of wealth, all God-fearing, right-wing Americans are at its Stalinist mercy. Thus the frenzied rows about the menacing tide (cultural, scientific, medical) of secular liberalism. In reality these are brilliantly propagandist diversionary tactics. From Reagan onwards, Neo-Con America has given no real priority to the restoration of traditional values. Its intention and, worse, achievement has been, disastrously, to revert to the pre-New Deal unregulated capitalism of the 20s.

As in J.K. Galbraith's new book, **The Economics of Innocent Fraud**, Frank is horrified that a toxic mixture of working-class fanaticism and sheer apathy among millions of non-voters will atavistically throw away all the vital restraints the twentieth-century created to control plutocratic capitalism. Frank also perceives that this right-wing domination has not been achieved without collusion from its alleged enemy:

Among the nation's pundit corps "triangulation" has always been considered a stroke of genius, signalling the end of liberalism's old-fashioned "class warfare" and also the Democrat's faith in "big government". Clinton's New Democrats, it was thought, had brought the dawn of an era in which all parties agreed on the sanctity of the free market. As a political strategy, though, Clinton's move to accommodate the right was the purest folly. It simply pulled the rug from any possible organising effort on the left. While the Cons were busily polarizing the electorate, the Dems were meekly seeking the centre.

The military consequences of Blair's obsession with America lie catastrophically all around us. As yet more covert but equally sinister are the economic ones. Frank's impassioned book should be compulsory reading for the Cabinet and the Party. ■

Andrew Noble

Pirates and Emperors: Bushwhacked! at resfest 2004

Animator Eric Henry's **Pirates and Emperors** looks, sounds and runs like one of the **Sesame Street** cartoons that

come in-between Mr Hooper's attempts to educate The Count (bloodsucking yet numerate vampire) and Oscar (genetically pre-disposed Grouch) in the values of cooperation, and a domestic involving Burt and Ernie. It may sport a jaunty tune, yet America's role in Nicaragua is something you'd hardly see the Muppets deal with...not directly, at any rate.

This simple yet clever short cartoon formed part of **Bushwhacked!**, a programme of digital shorts by activists, 'media-jammers' and political filmmakers shown as part of Glasgow's first ever **resfest**, the only international digital film festival. Cheap digital cameras have opened up filmmaking to an unprecedented degree and opportunity seized upon by political activists. Rather than gripe at the biases of mainstream media and its suppression of what John Pilger termed 'slow news', alternative views can be presented with all the power and impact of a Fox or BBC news broadcast for double-figure budgets.

Bushwhacked! proved this by bringing together celebrity leftists like Michael Moore together with artful pranksters such as 'The Yes Men' and clever editors such as Johan Söderberg. Moore's **Boom!** is in fact one of the weakest contributions; sentimental, manipulative and crass, a skilful filmmaker beached by his own (gargantuan) self-regard. Others targeted Bush's 2003 State of the Nation address, re-editing it to damn him with his own words. Aaron Valdez's **State of the Nation** boils down a Clinton and a Bush address to the essentials; Clinton is obsessed with numbers, Bush frowns, apeline and says – nothing. Valdez has edited a string of pauses to reveal Bush as an inarticulate brute. Funny. True; but it feels like a cheap shot. The other 'State of the Nation' edits are largely forgettable, with the exception of Mike Nourse's **Terror, Iraq, Weapons**. Through only including Dubya's three favourite words, Nourse effectively conveys his simplistic world-view and monomania. However, many of the other speech-edits could have been trimmed for a tighter 60-minute programme.

There are also much more thoughtful pieces that explore the wider socio-political context with brevity and insight. Bryan Boyce's **30 Seconds of Hate** targets neo-con Grand-pappy Henry Kissinger, while Simon Robson's **What Barry Says** and Stephen Marshall's **Closer** deliver hard, chilling facts about the neo-conservative agenda. And then we come to the Yes Men's **The Horribly Stupid Stunt**. This team of wily American pranksters impersonate the World Trade Organisation at Conferences, where Andreas Bichlbauer eats free(market) lunches and talks provocative rubbish on the conference floor. Their pranks, while slightly puerile, serve to illustrate the innate horrors of the system; Bichlbauer suggests 'vote auctions' as a market solution to 'democratic inefficiencies', prompting no objections from the audience. Their perplexity at getting away with this provides both the joke and the tragedy.

The question remains (at the time of writing...) whether a **Bushwhacked!** will still be necessary when **resfest** returns to Glasgow in 2005. Or will we be talking about a **Kerry-Oot?**

■
Mitchell Miller

Mark Curtis: **Unpeople – Britain's Secret Human Rights**

Abuses, Vintage, 2004, £7.99.

Mark Curtis has provided an excellent companion volume to his highly acclaimed *The Web of Deceit: Britain's Real Role in the World* (Vintage, 2003). The thesis of his latest book is that those who determine and implement Britain's foreign policy hold the view that there are vast numbers of people in the world who are worthless and expendable. Worthless and expendable when set against pursuing Britain's geo-political strategic interests, these are the Unpeople. They are not sub-human. Rather, they are not people at all, if what constitutes being human and being people have any decency, fairness and respect to them. The state of being Unpeople most obviously applies to those multitudes in poverty-stricken parts of the world overseas but it can also be applied to how ordinary citizens within Britain are treated too. The research for much of **Unpeople** has resulted from examining hitherto unavailable government documents.

Somewhere in the order of 10 million overseas people, Curtis contends, have been killed directly and indirectly by the British state since 1945. Millions of others have been abused and maltreated. The locations range from Iraq, to Indonesia to Guyana taking in 16 other countries along the way in terms of 'direct responsibility' and 19 other countries through 'indirect responsibility'. Much of the British state's activities can be seen in Orwellian terms, whether through 'doublethink' and 'newspeak'. Prior to the Iraq war, Britain led the charge in creating the offence of 'the unreasonable use' of the veto in the UN Security Council even though it and the US had used the veto far more than any other member state. The 'handover' of power was, in fact, a consolidation of imperial power. The management of the media by the state has not extended to dominance over the production and dissemination of information per se. Curtis convincingly argues that Britain going to war in Iraq was not about a failure of the intelligence services, nor about the good faith interpretation of the intelligence. He rightly savages the unwillingness and inability of the media to act as an independent scrutineer of the case for war.

One of Curtis' central themes concerns how liberal democracy, or what passes for it, operates under our rulers. They are obliged to pay lip service to it and go through the democratic motions while at the same time systemically abusing and undermining it. Our rulers profess adherence to long-standing laudable aims (human rights, democracy, peace and overseas development) but use these to cloak their murderous activities that support state and the profit-seeking activities of private companies. Intervention has proved as deadly as non-intervention, or as it is usually termed (wilfully) 'turning a blind eye'. The UN has been used to pursue war not peace, autocracy not democracy despite all the warm words.

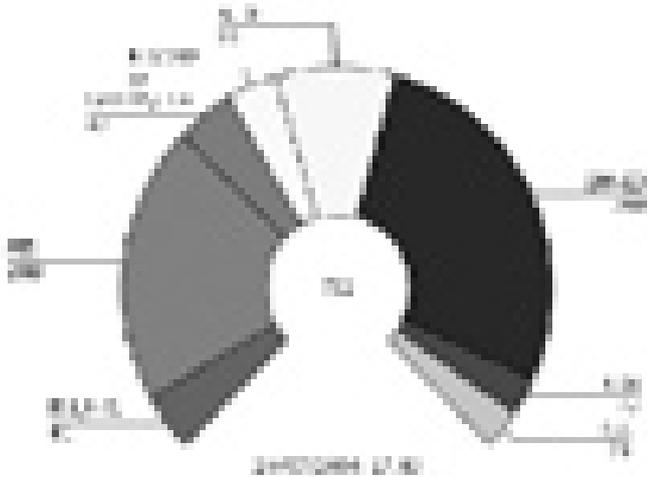
What is particularly welcome about **Unpeople** is that Curtis sketches out a political manifesto and strategy at the end. He has the courage of his convictions to say what the practical implications of his analysis and what should be done about this. Hopefully as a leading voice in the global justice movement, his ideas will be debated widely and seriously.

■
Dr Gregor Gall,

web review

Henry McCubbin

Some may recall that in June this year we had an election for the European Parliament which dealt Labour a heavy blow by reducing its representation further from a high in 1994 when it had 63 MEPs until this year when it was reduced to 19! Oh, what fate awaits them all at next years UK General Election. But who's focussed on that when we have that great political soap opera from across the Atlantic to divert us. Perhaps we should be watchful of what other parties are doing at this time and it is our good fortune to have a ready means of doing this, even in monoglot Scotland.



It used to be easy; we, the political activists, all had internationals we were associated with and these organisations in turn discussed, as delegates at conferences, documents produced by the various national parties' international secretariats. But in Britain in particular Labour's affiliation to the Socialist International has been severely weakened to the point of being ignored by the Blair leadership. In its place is a pro-privatisation, pro-free market organisation called the Policy Network run by Peter Mandelson and free from vulgar party members not able to understand the high politics he indulges himself in and graced by that great socialist figure Bill Clinton!

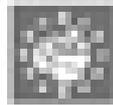
But what we can do is to use the facilities of the European Parliament to check on the activities of various parties within the European Union. This I could have limited to parties of the left but to keep track on the march of neo-liberalism it is better to have the official opposition in sight as well as our internal enemies.

The Election left the left in a sorry state. The Socialists went from being the largest party in 1989/1994 to having less than a third of the seats today, but what I have done is to provide the URLs for the Parliamentary Political Groups and the URLs which link to the national affiliates many of whom have multi lingual pages.

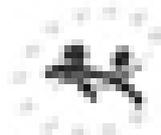


The largest in the parliament is the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats in the European Parliament. This includes the UK Tories. Their home page is

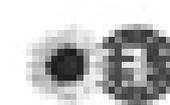
www.epp-ed.org/home/en/aboutus.asp and their national parties page is www.humbleopinion.net/europeanparties/index.asp.



The Socialist Group home page is at www.socialistgroup.org and the links to national parties is at www.socialistgroup.org/gpes/servlet/Main/EventDetail~1?_wcs=true&lg=en.



Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe has its home page at eld.europarl.eu.int/content/default.asp and the national parties at eld.europarl.eu.int/content/default.asp?PageID=3.



Greens/European Free Alliance in the European Parliament. Currently they have 42 MEPs from thirteen countries - Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the UK including the SNP. Go to www.greens-efa.org/en/ and click on links.



The website of the Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left is at www2.europarl.eu.int/gue/showPage.jsp?ID=1. The GUE/NGL Group has 16 member parties, drawn from 14 Member States. The Group has four Associate Member Parties, three of whom are not, at present, represented in the EP. You can find them at www2.europarl.eu.int/gue/showPage.jsp?ID=327.



Independence/Democracy Group; yes we've found the UKIP. Just a home page which links to the Parliament's own website list of the names of the individuals in the group. No fear of them being criticised for any policies. They have none. And what's more no need to manage an expensive web site. What do they do with their expenses? You won't find the answer to this or any other questions at www.europarl.eu.int/ind_dem/default.html or when you jump to the Parliament site wwwdb.europarl.eu.int/ep6/owa/p_meps.short_list?ilg=EN&ictry=&ipolgrp=IND/DEM&iorig=.



European Union of the Nations; www.europarl.eu.int/uen/. Now who are they? Italian Neo Fascists? Surely not. ■

Kick Up The Tabloids

‘DON’T SHOOT STRACHAN’ PLEA

The next few weeks may well see the removal from office of a man who has brought despair to many in his own nation, made powerful and unassailable opponents out of previously un-feared nations, demonstrated a bewildering array of tactical blunders and who is famous for his lack of command of the English language. But enough of Berti Voghts. Rather, let us move on to military matters, where the fate of our Scottish regiments has finally been decided: they are to be amalgamated with the US Army. It remains to be seen if the merger will allow the individual Scottish regiments to keep their own proud traditions (promoting dialogue with local leaders, not bombing market squares, giving the benefit of doubt to women and children), and whether the kilt will be replaced with the wrap around shades and half chewed cigars.

As the Bush (plus earpiece messages) versus Kerry debates unfolded, Tony Blair turned down requests for similar events here, stating that the role of the US President was very different to being the Prime Minister of the UK. Fill in your own punch lines here. Jack McConnell was also against the idea, stating that the prices Scottish Power and Scottish Gas charge for electricity these days, there was no way he could afford to have a cable going up his back for an hour.

Which leads us to press reports that the individual who stole plants from Mr McConnell’s £200,000 home in Wishaw was sentenced to 150 hours community service. Many public figures expressed their disbelief that any house in Wishaw was worth £200,000. The man admitted stealing the lilac plants from the First Minister’s garden. If only he had been quick enough to say he had removed the plants because their colour clashed with the rhododendrons he would have been given his own garden makeover show on Channel Four. He did at least avoid the new ‘punishment’ wheeze of weekend prisons. The aim of this new policy is to deny offenders the pleasure of their usual social life. It does seem to us that these (mostly) young men’s chances of getting drink, drugs and sex in Barlinnie on a Saturday night are far higher than if they were sweating it out in a Glasgow nightclub. Instead make them watch Scotland’s next World Cup (not) qualifier.

Debate has raged over the Scottish Executive’s reorganisation of health services which aims to replace local community hospitals with old ice cream vans staffed by St Johns ambulance men. Malcolm Chisholm argued that in the 21st century if patients wish to access centralised care facilities offering a standard of clinical excellence simply unavailable locally, they would have to travel further a field (for example, to Germany). The row was stoked by claims that a woman in a West Lothian hospital had been left for several hours on a trolley that nurses were unable to move. It turned out no one had the £1 coin to release

it – that’s what happens when PFI leads to Sainsburys trolleys in our wards. Ministers thankfully turned down an approach from Reliance to run our ambulance service.

Prince Harry was accused of cheating in his art exams. To be fair, he is in a strong position given the paintings he can bring in from home and pretend to be his own work. He is always going to do better with the Constable original than the rest of us sneaking in the Jack Vettriano print from Habitat. Harry is now enrolled at Sandhurst and is looking forward to his first training course: How to Say Yes to Americans.

A ‘tartan’ terrorist plot against the opening of the Scottish Parliament was foiled. In a separate incident, terrorism fears were further raised when a male foreign national with a strange accent managed to infiltrate the opening ceremony. Nicola Sturgeon pointed out to security that it was Sean Connery. She was rebutted by a Tory MSP yelling “You’re wrong- its one of these Fathers for Justice blokes dressed up as James Bond!”

Talking of which, the purple condom throwing, Batman on Buckingham Place and fox hunters storming of the Commons may well have made us all safer, as Osama Bin Laden is reported to have responded to a question about his intention to attack the UK by saying “Oh, where’s the challenge in that?”. Fancy dress shops have been asked to remain on the lookout for fanatical young men trying to hire Elvis costumes.

The fox hunting demonstrations led to scenes on our television screens which many urbanites found impossible to understand or forgive: 16 year olds wearing Barbour jackets. The Countryside Alliance has pledged that fox hunting will ‘carry on illicitly’ even if the ban goes through. It is not clear how this will work in reality: “Morning officer, just taking my 350 beagles for a morning stroll”. David Blunkett has suggested that if weekend prisons fail, then two birds could be killed by one stone if young offenders could spend their Sundays dressed in ginger fur suits being chased across the downs. The fancy dress shops may well need the business once Special Branch closes them. As long as the upper class numpties don’t hunt down Gordon Strachan by mistake. We need him... ■

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 and beyond. The Kick Up the Tabloids team includes Frankie Boyle, Bruce Devlin, John Flint, Susan Morrison and Paul Sneddon. 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). The doors open at 7.30pm, with the shows kicking off at 9pm.



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equal innovative resourced
networking participatory
visionary measured integrity
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