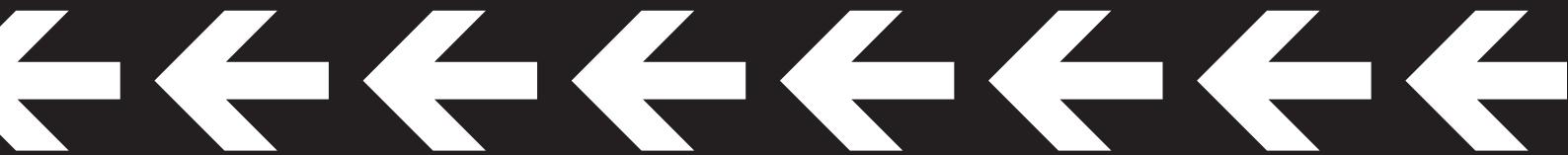


GUIDE TO VOTING ON THE LEFT



- ← choosing the party that's right for you
- ← using that tricky second vote
- ← your guide to the newcomers
- ← we road test over 100 MSPs



scottishleftreview

Issue 15 March/April 2003

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

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comment

It is one of those questions that the partial-democrats mock, but it has never been more crucial; what is your vote for? Too much of our political culture in Britain (although this is changing in Scotland) still sees a vote as a weapon of last resort. Democracy, for the partial-democrat, is about giving legitimacy to what was going to happen anyway. If what was going to happen anyway becomes just too much for the public to stomach (or if they just tire of the incumbents or, on a rare occasion, are actually enthusiastic about an alternative choice) then they can invoke their right of veto and bring in the next lot. And then it is back to business as before.

Blair is the partial-democrat par excellence. There are two ways in which this is easily recognisable. The first, and by far the most obvious, is the manner in which he views international democracy. In Blair's world view, the purpose of the United Nations is not to make a reasoned, debated, democratic decision but to give legitimacy to the actions of the powerful. A vote is a tribute, not a decision. The second example of Blair's partial-democratic credentials is the slippery approach to 'the issues'. Blair often claims that what he is really talking about is what people really care about (down with a ban on fox hunting which no-one cares about, up with refugee-bashing 'cos the people ain't keen on them foreigners). He would have us believe that this is the principled, issue-led politics which we elected him to deliver. But Blair does not actually fight on the issues. He has only two approaches; deference to values we can't disagree with and a simple "look, I'm a pretty straight sort of a guy so trust me". These have absolutely nothing to do with the issues, and if anyone attempts to pin him down on issues he instantly shuts up shop. "But surely foxhunting is simply wrong and a moral stance should be taken" will be met with either "what we want to do is improve schools and hospitals for the ordinary people of Britain" (nothing to do with the issue) or "no-one wants to see a fox hurt, so trust me and I'll make sure we get round to it" (again, nothing whatever to do with the issue). Whenever a matter needs to be debated, Blair makes out like an American General and fights the battle from such a height above the targets that you can't actually make them out one from another. And he expects us to act like American fighter pilots – just press the button and trust in those wiser than you.

Blair does not actually want you to vote on the issues. But, whether he likes it or not, that is what your vote is for. Almost no-one from any political persuasion would argue that we should have a public referendum before every major decision – John Reid's claim that this is what those trying to slow the rush to war are looking for is dishonest. We elect

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a government to make these decisions and we hold them to account for the decisions they make at the next election. But if we DON'T hold them to account, then the system is failing.

So what does this mean for May 1 in Scotland? Jack McConnell does not have the luxury of Westminster's elected dictatorship. Scotland's democracy actually requires that politicians continue to develop consensus, partly through arguing a case (as opposed to informing us of what the decision is). And yet, in his way, Jack also has partial-democratic tendencies. Those running the Scottish Labour Party's election campaign are desperately hoping that this will be a myopic election; that people will actually cast their vote on the basis of which party they believe will be most efficient at clearing up dog shite. Frankly, they aren't even going to want the public to debate the issues in the health service, only whether Jack can be trusted to run it.

But this is not what votes are for. If we accept that each decision is made by the politicians we elect, it is essential that we elect the politicians who are going to make the decisions we want. The manifestos only cover a smallish proportion of what an administration will actually do so the issues are only a guide to what we can expect from the politicians we are electing. They are a proxy for the ideological approach each party will take. So we should certainly vote on the basis of the differing attitudes between the parties to involving private finance in public delivery, but this should also tell us the way those

politicians will behave when a decision comes up that hasn't been foreseen. If they will put profit before people once, then they will do it again.

More than anything the Scottish Labour Party don't want people to have their vote influenced by the war. This is about choosing a set of policies on health and education, they argue, and nothing to do with Westminster or foreign policy. Wrong. This is about deciding whether we can trust a political party to do the thing we want them to do. There is no doubt that Scotland has grave concerns about following America as part of its global lynch mob, and no-one really thinks it is in our interest, so if our First Minister is willing to put the interests of Tony Blair and George W. before our own, then it is a reason to vote. Blair, as much as Jack, is desperately hoping that there is no electoral consequences of their actions, no 'blowback' as the CIA would call it. And that is why they are partial-democrats.

This is not to say that Labour are alone in this. You may have concerns about voting for the SNP and their business tax cuts? If they are willing to give this to business to keep them happy, then what else? What it is to say is that, all these pro-market, pro-war ideologues who try to tell us that ideology is dead want us to vote on anything other than ideological grounds. This issue of the SLR tries to show how to make sure that your vote does exactly that.

One way or another, blowback is coming, Jack. ■



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The Scottish Regional Council of the RMT continues to support the Scottish Left Review as a means of stimulating debate amongst the Scottish left. We call upon colleagues and Trade Union affiliates to promote the publication at every level in Scottish society ,and to campaign with the RMT for :-

- 1. The repeal of the Anti Trade Union Laws ,and to replace them with fairer laws which enshrine ILO conventions 87 & 98.**
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- 3. Opposition to PFI/PPP Projects and to Defend Public Services.**
- 4. Justice for our Fire-fighters and Control Staff over "Fair Pay"**
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vote for us

Five MSPs argue why someone from the left should vote for them

I believe that Labour in the Scottish Parliament has made real progress in the areas of everyday life which affect most directly working men and women. Aneurin Bevan in 'In Place of Fear' wrote that "There is no test for progress other than its impact on the individual. If...policies...do not have for their object the enlargement and cultivation of the individual life, they do not deserve to be called civilised." Bevan wrote these words in 1952; they were correct then and remain just as valid today. I believe that the consequences of policies enacted must lead to a more "civilised" life for the majority of citizens – if they do not then they are unworthy of support. Labour in the Scottish Parliament has begun the huge task of rebuilding a "civilised" society after decades of Tory destructiveness.

Jobs, their creation and retention, have been a key priority of Labour's programme. It is a fact that is worth emphasising that there are now a million more people in work since Labour came to power, and unemployment is at its lowest level for a quarter of a century. Labour in the Scottish Parliament would continue to build on that record. However, as a constituency MSP I am only too aware that a great deal more needs to be done if we are to enable those who are still unemployed to gain employment. Key to this is arming our people with the skills and training necessary to gain a meaningful and rewarding job. Scottish Labour has delivered 20,000 Modern Apprenticeships, doubling the number of young people in proper apprenticeships, during the Parliament's first term. It should be noted here that the SNP has pledged to cut by £120 million the skills and training budget of Scottish Enterprise – a move which is as economically myopic as it is mystifying. Labour in Scotland has pledged to create at least 5,000 more Modern Apprenticeships in the lifetime of the next parliament and to continue to invest in skills and training – I believe this to be the correct approach for democratic socialists.

As a former teacher I place a high value on the ability of education to provide people with the means to achieve what Bevan eloquently described as "the enlargement and cultivation of the individual life". I am proud that Scottish Labour has ensured that there is a nursery place for every three and four year old in Scotland, and that over 50 per cent of school students now continue their studies in further or higher education. I am also content that Labour has guaranteed classes of 30 or less for all five, six and seven year olds. These are solid achievements and, along with our school building programme, visible signs of real progress. Of course, I want to see more, and I wholeheartedly support Scottish Labour's pledge to increase education spending by over 40 per cent in real

terms over the next four years. This commitment will help achieve our policy objective of closing the gap between the poorest performing pupils and the performance of all pupils at standard grade.

In the areas of transport (with free off peak travel for elderly and disabled people to be extended to a Scotland wide scheme) and health (with an extra £3.2 billion worth of investment) I believe we are also making significant strides. Additionally, the prevention of crime and the creation of safer communities has been, and will remain, a key component of Scottish Labour's progressive programme: making communities safer, tackling crime, punishing drug dealers and protecting the victims of crime is a crucial part of any left-wing agenda, and of the creation of a "civilised" society.

I don't for a moment believe that Labour's task is finished; it has only begun. I hope that working men and women will vote for Scottish Labour on May 1st and allow us to continue the job.

Bill Butler MSP, Labour

In the first years of the millennium, what should Scotland be like as a nation, how should it be governed, and what should be its place in the international community? In truth, these are questions best addressed to the Scottish electorate and not to politicians. When democratic values are under attack, not least by those who claim to fight in their name, we owe it to the people of Scotland to ensure that their values, their ambitions for Scotland, and their priorities set the political agenda.

We have seen the incredible sight of a Labour government continue the dismantling of our National Health Service. That must be reversed; Scotland wants and demands that healthcare be delivered based on need, not ability to pay. That is why the SNP is committed to increase nurses' pay so that nurses can be recruited and retained in Scotland's health service. That is why we want to give patients a voice in the NHS, while empowering the healthcare staff to deliver the service. That is why we must have a beds audit and review, to end the disgrace of cancelled and delayed operations and patients sleeping on trolleys.

Education in Scotland must be of a standard that allows us to compete in the world, and it must deliver for each and all of our children. That is why the SNP is committed to reducing class sizes; because research shows that helps deliver results. That is why the SNP is committed to investing in our education infrastructure; our children must be allowed to grow both physically and intellectually in an environment that nurtures and develops their potential.

As if the devolution process itself was not a challenge, the past four years have seen major issues emerge nationally, at UK level, and internationally, over the governance and funding of public services. Arguing over the minutiae of particular services, we can lose sight of the need to set clear frameworks suited to today's conditions. The SNP, for example, not only opposes the use of PFI / PPP projects, but has developed Public Service Trusts as a mechanism to keep public services public. The benefit of these Trusts is that, used for some public services, they keep these in public control and public ownership while freeing up government borrowing for other services.

Despite the denials of the Scottish Executive, the World Trade Organisation's General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) threatens our public services. The recent Bettercare case, regarding personal care in Northern Ireland, shows the efforts being made to undermine all aspects of public service. Scotland needs its own voice in the GATS negotiations just as it needs one in the EU Fisheries debate.

The touchstones that drive the SNP, the cohesive enthusiasms of the party, dictate that we put people before profit; that the rights and benefits Scots derive from their country are not restricted to a vote every time an election comes around. We need to reach out to improve and enrich the lives of every single one of us and by so doing improve and enrich the society we live in.

Linda Fabiani MSP, Scottish National Party

The Liberal Democrats are one of the most radical parties in Scottish politics. Our policies clearly reflect the real needs of ordinary working people in Scotland. As a party, over the last four years we have achieved many things as part of the Partnership Executive - things which many voters on the left would see as reflecting their views.

We are passionate about human and civil rights, a core belief of our party since the very beginning. In government we have made huge steps towards the creation of a Scottish Human Rights Commission that will promote a culture of rights throughout Scotland. As a party we are dedicated to minority rights in all their forms. We were at the forefront of the fight to abolish the homophobic Tory Section 2A legislation and we have launched powerful anti-racism campaigns as part of a wider strategy of social inclusion.

We are committed to real investment in public services, particularly in our schools and places of further education and in our National Health Service and to the alleviation of poverty for all our people. We have already overseen unprecedented levels of investment in our schools and hospitals and Scottish Liberal Democrats will ensure that investment will continue in the future.

Our green credentials should not be underestimated. Throughout all our policy research, across all policy areas, we take into account the environmental impact.

In government our Environment and Rural Development minister Ross Finnie has set a challenging target for renewable energy in Scotland and impressive targets for recycling waste and reducing landfill.

In the current international situation we have led calls for the supremacy of the United Nations, international law and democracy - as opposed to unilateral action and the dangerous flouting of the democratic will of the people. Our stance over war on Iraq has been praised by many and opinion polls show it is supported by the majority of Scots. We are committed to the United Nations as we believe it is the best way of ensuring world peace and security. War should be a very last resort only after all other channels have been exhausted. Weapons Inspectors should be given more time and war should only be an option after a substantive vote in the House of Commons and comprehensive approval by the UN.

The Scottish Liberal Democrats have always been at the forefront of democratic reform and renewal and are committed to empowering our local communities. We fought for many years for devolution in Scotland, Wales and the English regions with proper proportional voting systems - putting more power in the hands of the voters. We are now taking this fight to Scotland's local authorities with a published draft bill on implementing PR and a reform agenda that includes giving Councillors a paid salary and our policy of introducing a fair local income tax to replace the discriminatory Council Tax.

With Jim Wallace as Justice Minister one of our major priorities has been to ensure the implementation of a Freedom of Information Act. This important measure will open up government and public bodies to the people for the first time. We have lived for too long under secretive and distant government and in a similar vein we are currently in the process of creating a Judicial Appointments Board. This will finally give transparency to the process and open up the system to a wider range of people - particularly under-represented women and ethnic minorities.

Unlike some of the other 'left-leaning' parties we are not only radical - with a wide range of fresh and imaginative policies - but we are the responsible and rational alternative. We are far more radical than Labour and far more realistic than the Nationalists. Neither party offers the best solutions to Scotland's social and economic challenges. The Tories remain reactionary and backward while the Scottish Socialists represent the extremist and dangerous opposite. Both would do profound damage to our country. The only realistic alternative for any progressive and radical voters is the Scottish Liberal Democrats.

Donald Gorrie MSP, Liberal Democrat

The crucial Scottish elections are just weeks away. Every socialist and progressive citizen in Scotland faces a stark choice - between conscience and misplaced loyalty. There are six credible parties standing in this

election. Four of these parties are to the left of Labour. Four oppose the bloodthirsty warmongers now in charge of the USA. Four have refused to pander to the naked racism of the Murdoch press. The other two are the Tory Party and the Labour Party. Labour may still have precarious links to the trade unions. It may still have some decent, genuine socialists within its ranks. But increasingly, these socialists and trade unionists are being used to prop up and lend respectability to a project which is anti-socialist and anti-trade union. They are like the black and Asian councillors which the Tories used to parade as a ploy to mask the party's racism.

From the party of the underdog, Labour has become the party of the rich and powerful. Last week, the moderate leader of the transport union, Bill Morris, attacked Labour for "surrendering to the CBI" over anti-trade union laws. Then Age Concern lambasted Labour for increasing pensioner poverty by two million. Then refugee charities attacked Labour for pledging to slash by half the number of asylum seekers entering Britain. But it is their support for the Washington warlords that really does put Labour beyond the pale. No matter the views of individual Labour politicians, every vote for Labour in the coming election will strengthen Blair and galvanise the warmongers. In contrast, every vote for anti-war parties will be a vote of no confidence in Blair and his buddies in Washington. That especially applies to the votes for the two parties which have been most robust and consistent in their opposition to war, the SSP and the Greens.

That places Labour activists and candidates in a difficult position. Do they encourage people to use their vote to endorse the massacre of innocents in Iraq? Or do they courageously break ranks and sabotage the Bush-Blair axis of mass destruction? Many Labour members oppose this war - though their ranks are dwindling by the day as the bonfire of party membership cards grows higher. Those who are now leaving Labour to fight for socialism and peace should be applauded for their principles. Those who remain now have to look at themselves in the mirror. They have to ask themselves whether they can square their socialist convictions with membership of a party which hammers the poor, privatises public services, locks out refugees fleeing tyranny, chains the trade unions, grovels before the rich and unleashes hell against innocent children. In Scotland, there can be no excuse that it's too cold outside. With threadbare resources, the Scottish Socialist Party has taken the campaign for socialism out of the smoke-filled back rooms to where it really counts - to the communities, the workplaces, the universities and colleges. I would issue this challenge to all socialists in Scotland and those still in the Labour Party, including MSPs and councillors. Stay with Labour and ask people to vote for a party that stands for everything you oppose. Or break with Labour and fight alongside Scotland's rising socialist party for policies and principles that you believe in.

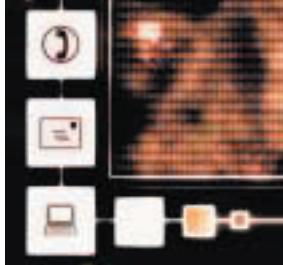
Tommy Sheridan MSP, Scottish Socialist Party

The latest opinion poll published in the Herald predicts that the Scottish Green Party will get four seats in the May 1st elections. We will be campaigning to make sure that we get at least five in order to register as an official party. It is interesting to note that we have progressed at the same rate as the SSP who are in an even better position according to the polls, polling the same percentage as the Conservatives in the second vote. The important thing which Tommy and I discussed on television last month is that so far we seem to appeal to different constituencies and are certainly not yet at the point where we will be treading on each other's toes in campaigning. In the last Westminster election in the constituencies where both SSP and Green Party candidates stood, both parties registered increases in their vote. If people want a real difference in Parliament, the message is clear - second vote Green or second vote SSP.

Bearing this in mind, it is as important at this juncture to reflect on the similarities between our manifestos at the last election. The Green Party manifesto was constructed around the issue of poverty, and how concepts of sustainability and environmental justice could be brought into play to address the worst problems of our poorest communities. If all the things that Greens stand for were brought into play there would be better pensions, no family or person would live in a poorly insulated and badly heated home. Planning regulations would make sure that children had play spaces, and all communities were properly designed or redesigned, with children, old people and disabled people particularly in mind. Public transport would be cheap, clean, and available to all. Small businesses and local shops would thrive. A host of initiatives would improve our diet, consumer education and the health of young children.

Tommy Sheridan and I have supported each other on countless occasions in the Parliament and I am certain that we will be doing so in the next Parliament. However, I feel it is important to state at this point that it is highly unlikely that we would form anything other than the loosest alliance with the SSP. World-wide, a very distinctive green political philosophy, perception and agenda is growing. It would be very unwise for us to risk the possibility of being swamped by the SSP at this early stage in our development. We are entirely confident that we will win enough support in the course of time to follow the example of the Green parties in Europe and become a powerful political influence on Scottish politics. We do, after all, seem to have made a very good start. The basis of our political message is that we are going to have to learn to live in a different way to become a conserver, rather than a consumer society. This is a difficult political message to get across, that we must satisfy need, not greed. But in terms of the world's limited resources this is indeed the most important political message of the century.

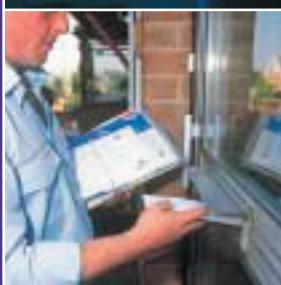
Robin Harper MSP, Green Party



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end of the affair

Tommy Sheppard and Dorothy Grace Elder explain why they can no longer bring themselves to vote for their old parties

I joined the Labour Party in 1979 just before my 21st birthday. Politically active for four or more years previously, the decision was a considered choice, eschewing the myriad of alternative left organisations on the political menu at that time. I wasn't born to the party, nor was I attracted by their policies. The Callaghan government, after all, had been less than a source of inspiration for a young radical, and I had spent much of the late 70s campaigning against their pro-nuclear energy policies.

The decision was really a straightforward realisation that to change the world - however incrementally - it was necessary to build a popular majority for change (well a majority at least of those that could be bothered) and to get elected to government. Having settled for a left social democracy as my political credo, it was transparent that the only political organisation capable of mobilising the great mass of the population and of achieving governmental power was Labour. So I joined, warts and all, and for more than 20 years I was a loyal member.

Now, 24 years later, I've finally got round to cancelling the direct debit, and I can no longer bring myself to vote Labour. My outlook has barely changed, but clearly the Labour Party has. I cannot believe any longer that the Labour Party is likely to change the world very much, or at least not in a direction I would like. Indeed, the argument that the Labour government, cemented as it now is into the archaic British political structure, is as likely to be an impediment as a catalyst to change, seems increasingly plausible.

It has been a while coming, and it is hard to say at exactly what moment Labour gave up its historic role. And anyway, this is not an exact science. It is a matter of judgement which each individual has to make for themselves: for some the end of Clause Four spelled the end of a socialist party, and there are many others for whom the end has not yet come and who long for a bright new tomorrow. But for me the party is over. Simply put I cannot see any way in which people who want socialist change are likely to achieve it within the Labour Party. The opportunity to influence policy is at an all time low, and there is simply no space left in which to operate. This too may pass, but for now socialists and social democrats can have at least as much influence in smaller parties, and if and when a fairer voting system is established, the prospect of considerably more.

This is a view of the changing strategic role of the Labour Party rather than an upset at any particular policy. I've often suppressed concern - even opposition - to individual policies, believing the overall effect of a Labour advance

would be to shift the balance of power in society towards those that lack it. That just doesn't hold true any more.

Policies aren't unimportant of course. And on every level the actions and expressed beliefs of the government create a range of negative emotions; sometimes merely irritation; more often disgust and contempt.

The world is changing dramatically. Capitalism continues its expansion into all corners of the globe, finding new markets and new labour forces. Invading countries so impoverished they can muster little in the way of government regulation to temper the worst excesses. Upheaval on a massive scale displaces millions and kills as many through war, starvation and disease. The military might of the US - now into gear for a truly awesome slaughter of innocents in Iraq - is actively deployed to ensure that the shake down results in regimes which defer to America.

The Labour government's continuing love affair with a right wing Republican administration in the White House is the most depressing and demeaning spectacle. That alone would be enough to make anyone think seriously about their membership. Never mind the fact the current US administration armed Baghdad; these people are the living embodiment of everything I was against twenty years ago. They sabotaged Allende, supported apartheid, funded Israeli aggression, brought terror to Central America, and on, and on, and on.

Blair's active support for American foreign policy is a terrible thing. It is sickening to behold the British prime minister play Robin to Bush's Batman, gallivanting throughout the world from one imperial crusade to the next. But it is the lost opportunity that is all the more heart rending. We could have spent these past years actively engaged in building a modern European politics, creating new progressive alliances with the peoples of Germany and France. We could be seriously thinking in ten to fifteen years of Europe as an aligned set of modern countries forming a bloc built on social democratic traditions, where the well being and happiness of the people take precedence over the drive for profit. Such a Europe could present an ideological, cultural, economic and military counterweight to the US on the world stage; engaging with Africa and Asia, respecting the Islamic world, supporting secular and progressive movements throughout the world.

Labour has also failed at home. It started well, but devolution quickly became an end in itself rather than a start of a process of democratisation and self-government. The Labour Party

seems quite content that the Scottish parliament should be a subservient tier of administration rather than an expression of the collective destiny of the Scottish people.

You'd have thought by now that the parliament might have been in a position to seek further powers and to institute changes in the relations with Westminster that would make it function even more effectively. It beggars belief that the Scotland Act got everything right and shouldn't be reviewed. I must conclude that the administration simply aren't that bothered.

The Labour Government has made too little of a benign economic situation which has provided more cash for public services. There has been growth - but little compared to what is needed to take our health spending to European levels. Particularly disappointing is that Labour has spent so much of our cash in funding partnerships with the private sector. The bottom line is that if someone is taking a profit out of an operation there'll be less to invest in the future. Why has it become an extremist position to argue that public services should not be run for profit?

I couldn't possibly vote SNP under the present leadership. There are some good individual SNP MSPs but, with a lack of behind the scenes justice or basic compassion, today's front bench are not people I would wish to get their hands on the justice system or the health service. After 26 years in a party this is a sad thing to have to say, but it is my experience of New SNP. What is upfront in the claimed left of centre SNP conceals a rigidly right wing aura behind the scenes. Right now, only the war situation is papering over the cracks for disillusioned activists who have lost all control over their party. It's not just that there is an obvious policy lurch to the right since John Swinney took over, it looks like the leadership is bedding down under the devolution duvet and sending independence to a landfill site.

The SNP MSPs who were targeted for harm in the Group were all left of centre, such as Margo MacDonald, Lloyd Quinan and myself. The in fighting levels are even worse than in Labour. So is the ludicrous, strutting arrogance. The left was cut out of everything possible. Over £354,000 of taxpayers money is spent by the SNP group. They double their Short Money of £179,000 a year – the official hand out for running an opposition – by demanding every SNP MSP signs over another £5,000 each from their constituency allowances for Group research and 'leadership help'. That money is meant to help the public, often the needy and the desperate, at the grassroots. Heisting it was condemned in the Senior Salaries Review Body, but the practice continues. Labour demands about £1,700 each. They use it to help their backbenchers only. Yet SNP backbenchers, who're mainly left wing, were deprived of Group research help but ordered to pay the same sum. And I mean ordered. I work

And again there's the question of paying for our public services. Labour has continued the shift from direct to indirect taxation and introduced tax cuts which mean the rich get richer and the poor get (relatively) poorer. This is absurd. Why are people who earn less than £150 a week required to pay tax? Why is it wrong to suggest that people who earn vast sums completely unrelated to any civilised notion of a reward system shouldn't pay a lot more for society's infrastructure? I can't just pretend that this is okay anymore, and I choose to withdraw my consent.

I'm not sure who I will vote for but it won't be Labour and it won't be Tory. I know that it's not just me. I know many, many people are moving through disillusion to concern. We may yet come to take action once again. With goodwill, tolerance and a quest for unity we may yet come to forge a political force comprised of people with the vision to see beyond their next expenses claim. ■

Tommy Sheppard was Assistant General Secretary of the Scottish Labour Party from 1995 to 1997

on things which often need heavy research; for example a Glasgow pollution case for which every point of European law had to be researched personally. I'm rather proud I finally won that case – the first to be won in Brussels by an MSP – in January this year, as an Independent.

While publicly being fervently pro-unions, the SNP Parliamentary officials haven't been hot over recognition of the union representing their staff. The National Union of Journalists is still working hard after two years to get full negotiating rights with the politburo running today's SNP despite signing up many of the MSPs' staff. The NUJ say things are very complicated as employment rests mainly with individual MSPs, but the same is true for Labour and the SSP and they have no recognition problems. There is no freedom of speech or writing in the SNP Group. Margo's columns were "monitored" and she had to be "careful".

Some of the worst elements of New Labour were copied instantly. Not just the over-schmoozing of business; New SNP lives by The McMandelson Dirty Tricks Brigade – vicious spinning against colleagues who'd struggled together through the bad days. For decades, the SNP condemned the 'unionist media', but from the moment power – even shadow power – went to some heads, the same unionist media was manipulated in whispering campaigns against the SNP Left. All were "mavericks" and "dissidents". If female, you were also "eccentric". The attitude to women made me uneasy. Tommy Sheridan once challenged an old hack who was pally with the SNP hierarchy to instance what proof the spinners spoon fed to him over my eccentricity. The hack told Tommy: "They say she wears bright coloured jackets".

What chilled me overall was the lack of a disciplined approach – the SNP Group became a playground for the nasty kids on the block. Cronies escaped discipline no matter what they did. In June 2000, Margo got two years discipline for missing a vote one day when she was ill. Contrastingly, when the volatile Kenny Gibson was plastered over the Sun after throwing a screaming tantrum at a young woman Parliament security officer, there was no discipline for him. So a missed vote by an SNP woman Lefty (Margo) counted for more than abusive verbal conduct against a woman Parliament worker. I was the only SNP MSP to ask for a Party investigation into that incident. “Oh dear, things will get worse for you, Dorothy” warned a friendly Group member. Things did. But you’ve got to eyeball that mirror in the mornings.

Let me give you an example of these issues coming together. In May 2, 2002, I resigned from the Party and became an Independent – that became the only way to protect a campaign I run for 550,000 pain patients (back pain, cancer pain and so on). Just as three years of work to hoist this neglected issue up from the bottom of the health agenda was gaining some success I was ordered to leave the Parliament’s health committee, a couple of weeks before a vote on my campaign was due to see if we could get more pain clinics for people suffering pure hell. The “instructions” – the term used – came second-hand from Whip Kay Ullrich. There was to be “no discussion”. I was told “the instructions” were from Swinney and SNP health spokeswoman Nicola Sturgeon. My work was praised, but the tale was that Swinney and Sturgeon “thought

Glasgow was over-represented on health”. Britain’s sickest city? Sturgeon wanted only one Glasgow SNP MSP on the committee. Herself. No-one would speak to me or discuss the fate of the pain campaign and the imminent vote. Because of the huge number of sufferers involved it had become the most popular campaign in the four years of the Parliament, backed by 130,000 Parliament web site hits from the public. Some 17 countries had praised the Parliament; even Prince Charles had sent an encouraging message to the pain patients. I’d had problems in the SNP group at every stage of the campaign. Sturgeon wouldn’t even sign my motion on “The Plight of Scotland’s Chronic Pain Patients”. The (then) business manager Tricia Marwick had offered me the worst debate date in three years: the night before the June 2001 General Election. The group officials had kept these poor patients waiting 18 months for that debate. Ahead of 550,000 in pain, they put up subjects like shiny! Oh, how sad and revolting it all was.

I appealed to be allowed to remain on the Committee for the vote on what was a heartfelt cause for me. No, I had to go immediately said Ullrich. “These are instructions – you can’t refuse” she stated. I did refuse. I wasn’t going to obey cowardly clones who wouldn’t even face me and had no thought for all those patients. Nor would I downgrade my city, Glasgow. The health committee backed me with member after member standing up to be counted (except of course Nicola and her deputy Shona Robison). Backing also came from the vast majority of the Parliament. People were sickened when the truth got out. It was Blairism at its most crude. Blair had tried to interfere in the non Party committee

system in Westminster to remove left wingers – and he was rebuffed. Swinney and Sturgeon got the same egg on their faces from our Parliament, and deserved to. A couple of weeks later, I was still on the Health Committee when the vote went through to ask for “funding for comprehensive chronic pain services throughout Scotland”. Labour, Lib Dem and Tory members hugged me. “We know how much this means after what you’ve been through” said the Tory health spokeswoman Mary Scanlon. There were tears in her eyes. Yes, a kindly Tory. If there’s no heart in politics, then there’s danger. ■

SCOLAG

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Dorothy-Grace Elder was an SNP MSP

three million uses for a second vote

David Miller explains how you can use your second vote to achieve change in Scotland

The second vote in the Scottish parliament elections is potentially a very significant tool for establishing the diverse Parliament that the rhetoric of devolution promised. Yet at the last election only two MSPs from smaller parties were elected to Holyrood. The evidence from voting patterns in 1999 is that very few of us were able to make a reasonable judgement on how to use our second vote. This perception is reinforced by the research carried out by the government. This showed that 'few' people 'had any idea' how the second vote worked. This was despite the Scottish Office planning and conducting a campaign to educate the voters. The planning for this campaign saw Donald Dewar stating publicly that 'if anyone can say' the campaign 'is biased, or there is any political prejudice, I will eat my ballot paper in public'. As it happens the campaign was fundamentally biased against an understanding of the system in the sense that it did not explain how the second vote would translate into seats in the Parliament . This approach was approved by Scottish Office ministers, who were aware that a lack of knowledge about the use of the second vote would benefit Labour above all. Donald never did eat his ballot paper.

The government's evaluation of the campaign showed that even modest information on how the second vote worked 'may have altered the pattern of voting by encouraging a wider choice of parties between the first and second vote'. The research found that 'some respondents felt that, with hindsight, they had not made the best use of their second vote because of a lack of understanding of the relationship between the two votes and the way in which seats would be allocated'.

The best place to see the second vote effect is in Glasgow, where Labour gained all the constituency seats with 46.5 per cent of the vote. This meant that there was no way that they could win any list seats. Yet 112,588 people voted Labour in the second vote. From the point of view of encouraging smaller parties, all of these votes were wasted. Even a modest redistribution of some of these votes could result in the election of a Green MSP in Glasgow or additional MSPs from the Lib Dems or SSP. The story in the Pollok constituency illustrates the problem well. Here Tommy Sheridan stood in the constituency vote and gained 5,611 votes. Although the SSP now believes that Sheridan might be able to take Pollok in the 2003 election in 1999 there was no chance. Sheridan was elected instead on the list vote. But in Pollok, even SSP voters were unclear about how the system worked. In the second vote Sheridan recorded a sharp drop to 3,374. Labour actually increased its number of votes in Pollok on the second vote by 836, many of which may have come from SSP voters. It may be the case the

second vote is seen by some voters as a chance to express a second preference. This is inaccurate, and may be harmful for the prospects of a diverse Parliament. If you vote for one of the big parties (especially Labour) and want to vote for a smaller party as a second preference, that is not a problem. But on no account should any supporter of a smaller party use their second vote for a big party. In fact, whatever, you vote in the first ballot, a vote for one of the bigger parties (especially Labour) in the second ballot is likely to be either a wasted vote or to let in a Tory.

The most significant point about the way the system works is that if large number of Labour voters vote Labour in the second vote this will have the effect of allowing Tories to gain seats on the list. In every single region in Scotland the Tories picked up list seats on around seven to eight per cent of the vote. In the South of Scotland they returned four list MSPs on a mere 21.6 per cent of the vote (i.e. 5.4 per cent per seat). A reallocation of second votes from Labour to **any other party** could mean that the Tories lose out significantly. And the reallocation would only have to be a small number of votes. The safest Tory list MSP in the country (in Central Scotland) picked up just 9.2 per cent of the vote. It would only take a moderate reallocation of labour second votes (33.4 per cent) to the next best placed candidate to remove the Tory.

You may wish to use your vote as a protest against the war. Check out the candidate in your own constituency. The only honourable places to vote Labour if you are against the war is by using your first vote for constituency candidates such as John McAllion in Dundee East who have publicly and consistently opposed war. But make sure that you **DO NOT** use your second vote for Labour. It is clear that Labour could be severely punished for their support for the war. This could have a significant impact on the number of first past the post seats that Labour win. If so, this would mean that the SNP/Lib Dems would be less dominant in the second vote allocation, potentially opening the field even further to smaller parties. The most recent Herald/System Three poll published on March 7 does seem to show a significant anti-war effect with Labour forecast to lose eight seats.

There is no 'correct answer' to what to do with your second vote. Perhaps you would rather stop SNP or Labour or the Tories. Perhaps you think an SSP MSP would shift Labour left. Perhaps you are a Labour voter but are sympathetic to independence. Perhaps you would like to see environmental policies have a higher priority. In the 1999 election the SSP were out-polled by Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party in six out of eight regions. This time the SLP are not likely

to field more than a handful of candidates and so the left vote will not be divided. Furthermore, if the polls are to be believed, the SSP has improved its showing quite markedly since the 1999 election. It seems likely then that the choices for many on the left about their second vote will be between the Greens and the SSP.

This analysis based the results of the 1999 election and will change according to changes in first vote. We have also drawn on the System Three polls for the Herald which do give some indication of how voting intentions have changed. In particular it can be noted that in the 1999 election the Greens out-polled the SSP in all regions except Glasgow. Opinion polls since then suggest that the SSP has overtaken the Greens. The most recent System Three polls put the SSP at 10 per cent and the Greens at six per cent. But this overall picture is complicated at the regional level. The only data we have on this are the System Three regional breakdowns. These are based on national samples and so do not give reliable results at the regional level. Nevertheless they do point up some regional trends. The figures we are using here are based on an average of the last three months polling (end of Dec to end of Feb). These will make the figures more reliable than just using one month, but will disguise the apparent swing to the smaller parties in February.

Remembering that to be reasonably sure of a list seat parties have to gain a shade over seven per cent, it looks as if there could be significant gains across Scotland for smaller parties, the prospects for which can only be improved by anti-war feeling. In Highlands and Islands (7.3 per cent), Lothian (7.3 per cent), Central (7.3 per cent) West (8 per cent) and South (11.3 per cent) the SSP look likely to take a seat and are in touching distance of two in Glasgow (13.6 per cent). They seem to be doing less well in North East (4.3 per cent). In South (8.6 per cent) and Lothians (10.6 per cent) the Greens look fairly sure of a seat and seem just short in North East (6 per cent) and Highlands and Islands (5.7 per cent). Both parties may find the going tough in Mid Scotland and Fife (4.3 per cent and 6 per cent respectively).

The crucial point is that second votes count. Make sure you use yours wisely. Below we present a guide to how to use your vote across Scotland. The key to this is to use the guide to cast your second vote in the most effective way in your own region.

Central Scotland

	1 st Vote	Con. seats	2 nd Vote	List seats
Lab	46.5%	9 (90%)	39.3%	0
SNP	29.8%	0	27.8%	5
Lib Dem	6.6%	0	6.2%	1
Con	9.6%	0	9.2%	1
Green	0.0%	0	1.8%	0
D Canavan	5.6%	1 (10%)	8.4%	0
SSP	0.3%	0	1.7%	0
SLP	1.4%	0	3.3%	0

With 90 per cent of the constituency seats on 46 per cent of the vote, there is no chance of Labour picking up list seats in Central Scotland. A Labour voter using a second vote to vote for anyone other than the Tories could remove a Tory MSP. Equally, there are easily enough second Labour votes to return a Socialist or a Green instead of a Tory (especially if the fairly large Socialist Labour Party vote shifted). Central Scotland of course returned Dennis Canavan, and would have done so in both the constituency and the list vote. Surely anyone from the left is going to want to keep an independent voice like Dennis's in the Parliament? In 2003 Canavan is standing only for the constituency in Falkirk West. The SSP are standing aside in the constituency, but will be on the list. System Three data suggest that the SSP are likely to be better placed than the Greens.

Recommendation: Vote Canavan first vote, SSP second

Glasgow

	1 st Vote	Con. seats	2 nd Vote	List seats
Lab	49.3%	10 (100%)	43.9%	0
SNP	27.9%	0	25.5%	4
Lib Dem	8.1%	0	7.2%	1
Con	7.7%	0	7.9%	1
Green	0.0%	0	4.0%	0
SSP	6.3%	0	7.2%	1
SLP	0.2%	0	1.7%	0

In Glasgow, more than anywhere else, a second vote for Labour is pointless. With all the constituency seats on half the vote, Labour would need to lose four or five first past the post seats before a second Labour vote would have any effect. Much better to decide who your second choice party is and see if the Tory seat can be taken. The SSP is more likely to gain seats in Glasgow than the Greens.

Recommendation: On the second vote, Vote SSP.

Highlands and Islands

	1 st Vote	Con. seats	2 nd Vote	List seats
Lab	27.4%	1 (13%)	25.5%	3
SNP	28.5%	2 (25%)	27.7%	2
Lib Dem	28.3%	5 (62%)	21.4%	0
Con	14.3%	0	14.9%	2
Green	0.0%	0	3.7%	0
H&I All.	0.0%	0	1.3%	0
SSP	0.0%	0	0.9%	0
SLP	0.0%	0	1.4%	0

The Highlands and Islands is a much more open area. Second votes for Labour actually delivered seats, being the only place in Scotland where the party got a bigger vote share than seat share on the first vote. The Highland and Island Alliance didn't make much impact, but this might change if people become more adventurous in using their second vote. However, there is scope to return a Green (5.7 per cent) or SSP (7.3 per cent) MSP at the expense of a Labour or Tory MSP.

Recommendation: On the second vote, SSP or Green.

Lothians

	1 st Vote	Con. seats	2 nd Vote	List seats
Lab	40.2%	8 (89%)	30.2%	0
SNP	26.9%	0	25.7%	3
Lib Dem	15.7%	1 (11%)	14.4%	1
Con	15.9%	0	15.8%	2
Green	0.0%	0	6.9%	1
SSP	0.7%	0	1.6%	0
SLP	0.0%	0	3.3%	0

This is where the Greens got their seat, and it seems that a lot of Labour voters may have used their second vote for the Greens. Given that it is unlikely that Labour will lose enough constituency seats to gain a list seat, an even greater swing to the Greens could remove a Tory (particularly if they managed to win a constituency seat). This seat is also likely to be complicated by Margo McDonald standing as an independent. This could put an extra Green or first SSP MSP at risk – depending on where Margo’s votes come from.

Recommendation: On the second vote, Green, SSP or
Margo McDonald,

Mid Scotland and Fife

	1 st Vote	Con. seats	2 nd Vote	List seats
Lab	36.4%	6 (67%)	33.4%	0
SNP	31.4%	2 (22%)	28.7%	3
Lib Dem	12.8%	1 (11%)	12.7%	1
Con	18.6%	0	18.6%	3
Green	0.0%	0	3.9%	0
SSP	0.0%	0	1.0%	0
SLP	0.0%	0	1.4%	0

Little shift from first to second votes in Mid Scotland and Fife, and with a fairly even spread of votes the Tories get three seats. It is much harder to alter the outcome using a second vote here, although the Labour second vote is wasted and could easily be spread across other parties to remove a Tory. The System Three data suggest a Green candidate is best placed here.

Recommendation: On the second vote, Green

North East Scotland

	1 st Vote	Con. seats	2 nd Vote	List seats
Lab	43.5%	4 (45%)	25.5%	0
SNP	26.9%	2 (22%)	32.3%	4
Lib Dem	11.3%	3 (33%)	17.5%	0
Con	16.4%	0	18.3%	3
Green	0.0%	0	2.8%	0
SSP	0.6%	0	1.1%	0
SLP	0.0%	0	1.2%	0

The North East may be complicated by the Fishing Party. There seems to have been a bit of a defection from Labour to SNP and the Lib Dems with the second vote, but shifting a Labour vote to the Lib Dems here has no effect other than to boost the Tory proportion of the second vote. A Labour voter (or indeed a Lib Dem) who wanted to keep a Tory out might be better voting SNP with a second vote.

Recommendation: On the second vote, SNP, Green

South of Scotland

	1 st Vote	Con. seats	2 nd Vote	List seats
Lab	26.2%	6 [67%]	31.0%	0
SNP	33.1%	1 [11%]	25.1%	3
Lib Dem	21.2%	2 [22%]	12.0%	0
Con	17.8%	0	21.6%	4
Green	0.0%	0	3.0%	0
SSP	0.7%	0	1.0%	0
SLP	0.0%	0	4.4%	0

Yet again, a Labour second vote is not a useful vote – particularly ironic in the one region which sees Labour increase its proportion in the second vote significantly (the West of Scotland sees a slight increase for Labour in the second vote). In South more than anywhere else, second votes for Labour are returning Tory seats. The SNP votes which are defecting to Labour would be much better to defect to the SSP or the Greens, possibly removing another Tory from the Parliament. System Three data suggest the SSP are showing well here, but that the Greens may also gain a seat.

Recommendation: On the second vote, SSP or Green

West of Scotland

	1 st Vote	Con. seats	2 nd Vote	List seats
Lab	37.0%	9 (100.0%)	38.5%	0
SNP	25.6%	0	25.9%	4
Lib Dem	14.6%	0	11.0%	1
Con	22.8%	0	15.7%	2
Green	0.0%	0	2.6%	0
SSP	0.0%	0	1.9%	0
SLP	0.0%	0	1.4%	0

The most unbalanced region in Scotland, Labour won every single constituency seat with only 37 per cent of the vote. What is even less helpful is that Lib Dems and possibly even Tories may have switched their second vote to Labour. Unless there is a seismic fall in Labour fortunes in the first vote they will never gain a list seat in the West. Labour voters really ought to look to the other parties to make a difference with their second vote.

Recommendation: On the second vote, SSP

Conclusions

Without a change in the constituency (first) vote, the list (second) vote can only change things at the margins. However, half a dozen less Tories and half a dozen more SSP or Green MSPs really can make a difference. But if there is a falling away of Labour support over either their record or the war in Iraq, the second vote could be even more decisive in affecting the make up of the government in May.

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more parties, more choice?

Isobel Lindsay asks what the impact and the implications of the new political parties emerging in Scotland might be?

What should be the response of the left to the emergence of single-issue candidates, new parties and independents who have signalled their intention of standing in the May elections? Some may drop out but the fact that this is seen as a route to change has to be addressed seriously.

Who are likely to be the new names on the ballot papers? We are not referring to the established small parties, the Scottish Socialist Party and the Greens. They have a track record, a clear identity and a position on a full range of policies. From recent announcements we can expect to have the Scottish Senior Citizens' Unity Party, the Pensioners' Party, the Fishing Party, probably the Pro-life Alliance who have stood previously and the right-wing New Party. It is likely that there will be one or more anti-hospital closure candidates. There may be fire-fighter candidates and possible anti-school closure candidates at local elections. In addition Margo Macdonald will join Dennis Canavan as high profile independents and there may still be others. These are not equivalents of the Monster Raving Looney or Natural Law parties. They are people with a serious case to make.

The Scottish Senior Citizens' Unity Party (SSCUP) hopes to put up candidates on four regional lists and also contest one constituency, Motherwell and Wishaw. They have reached an agreement with the Pensioners' Party who will contest the other regional lists on an East/West split. Both recognise that their principal demands involve powers reserved to Westminster but want to see these powers devolved to Holyrood. The Fishing Party has emerged as a reaction to the EU's recent restrictions on catches to conserve cod stocks. It was initially suggested that their intention was to stand in three constituencies - Banff and Buchan, Shetland and Aberdeen North. However at their formal launch, they announced that they would contest only the North East list. The 'New Party' is still something of a mystery and it may end up still-born. This is intended to be a UK party but a spokesman declared that they planned to contest the Scottish elections. It is anti-EU, anti-taxation and one of the reputed main financial backers is a Lanark-based businessman.

The proposed closure of Glasgow hospitals is very likely to produce a candidate in Strathkelvin and Bearsden and possibly Glasgow Cathcart. There are several firefighters in the Strathclyde service who have indicated their intention to stand in the seats of councillors on the Joint Fire Board. Also at local government level anti-school closure candidates may stand in Hamilton and East Kilbride and there may be others.

Before considering whether these are positive developments in the political system and what impact they may have on the outcome, there is the question of why we are seeing these initiatives. Part of the reason may be that the regional lists appear to hold out better prospects for success for new groups or well-known individuals. With around seven per cent of the regional vote, it is possible to get an MSP elected. So more proportionate voting is part of the answer. But some of those standing are doing so at constituency level or in local government seats and overall this may be more accurately interpreted as further evidence of the decline in trust in the mainstream party system. Groups with a grievance do not appear to have confidence in the larger parties to respond to their concerns. This is not a matter of expecting parties to endorse every pressure group but there is often a perception, with justification, of the system as increasingly highly centralised and intolerant of any deviance from the leadership line. In most local authorities there is a culture of control that ensures that decisions are made by majority group leader and a few close colleagues. Backbench members and other conveners have to accept the line or face disciplinary action. Even on issues like individual planning decisions where there is not supposed to be a whip, in practice there is. The powers of patronage to dispense Special Responsibility Allowances and other advantages are stronger than ever and there is increased control through central vetting of candidates. This has restricted the potential responsiveness of councillors to local concerns and although in the past this characterised most of the larger councils, there are now many fewer councils and the tight central control has spread. This pattern has been replicated at the Scottish Parliament level. The hope was that giving backbench MSPs a more important role than in the House of Commons would increase their confidence to act with greater independence from leadership control. But the rank and file conformity has been greater than at Westminster. If you are a group with a cause that does not have the approval of party leaders, don't hold your breath waiting for sympathetic noises to be turned into hard votes.

So we should not be surprised when people find the prospect of having a dedicated voice, understanding and promoting their views, an appealing one. But are they likely to have any success even with a more proportionate system? The experience of 1999 was mixed. The Highland Alliance candidates and the Pro-life Alliance candidates made no impact. However a well-known independent,

Dennis Canavan, showed it was possible to win and he would have won on the list even if he had failed in the constituency contest. The SSP had only been recently established in 1999 but demonstrated that they could gain a seat although with a well-known candidate.

Of the new contestants, the ones that may have some serious potential are the two 'grey power' parties. They have an identity that is grounded in a large and increasing section of the electorate. They have an organisational network that is quite extensive in the elderly forums although separate from them. They have a good range of able people, including some who have previous experience in trade unions, tenants associations, etc. The two things that may handicap them are that they have left it rather late to launch and, to date, they have not projected leaders who might help to give their parties a credible face. The fact that most of their key policy areas are reserved powers should be a disadvantage but may not register clearly with the voters.

The Fishing Party has a theoretical potential in its regional base but it has the problem of having a mainstream party, the SNP, that has given vociferous support to the fishing industry. It is difficult to find any policy differences between them on fishing. So a central factor that should drive a single-issue party - that they do not have an informed and enthusiastic voice to speak for them - is missing in this case. The only rationale that one could identify would be

to provide a vehicle for people in the industry who did not want to vote SNP because they were unionist or further right politically. ? As we have seen in England at the Westminster elections, it is possible for a strong anti hospital closure candidate to win at constituency level. We have also seen that providing an individual is very well known, it is possible to win as an independent. Margo Macdonald should have a chance, but the question will be whether the support comes from Labour voters using their second vote or SNP voters.

How should the left respond to these single-issue or new parties or independents? There is not a simple answer since we can look at them from different perspectives. There is a general plus factor in having more people engage actively with the political system. Even if you don't agree with them, they set a precedent, a mood of democratic activism that is likely to encourage others. The message is that you do not have to be limited in choice to the long-established parties. If you feel strongly about an issue, you can express it and mobilise support. There might be an outside chance of winning but even if you don't win, you may have succeeded in putting pressure on the system. This has to be a better scene than fatalism or apathy. It has the potential of developing a dynamic that makes Scottish politics less predictable and more accessible.

From another perspective, however, there is a risk that a number of single-issue or independent candidates could fragment the forces for change. Instead of producing an outcome that could deliver reform, it might simply redistribute votes among the challengers to the benefit of the status-quo. This is always a dilemma. Who will vote for a better deal for the elderly, against hospital closures, to support the fire-fighters and for a 'stirrer' of an independent? Will it be the same people who would otherwise have voted for the Greens, the SSP or for left SNP or Labour candidates? We don't know but it may be that it will be more likely to be voters who have a less clear ideological position or who want to make a protest against their traditional party without voting for a rival mainstream party.

There is yet another problem with single-issue or independent candidates. Do we know what their positions will be on the full range of policy areas? If elected, will they be good on justice for the elderly but less than supportive on penal reform? Will they support the health service but be unconcerned about the arts? This probably does not matter when we are talking about two or three candidates with a chance of success. On the plus side, having some MSPs uncommitted on issues in advance can open up debate, make it less predictable. Letting a thousand flowers bloom is rather an exotic metaphor for the current Scottish political scene but it is on balance preferable to rigid two flower borders.

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if voting changed anything...

Robin McAlpine explores what policy issues are up for grabs

It is one of the disingenuous chants of the political classes - "disgrace, disgrace, stick to the issues!" This is what they shout when it is their turn in the cycle of electioneering to be on the receiving end of negative campaigning rather than when they are dishing it out. But hell, let's take them at their word and stick to the issues. An election is fought partly on the ground of who is most competent to govern, but even in the dumbed-down media campaigns of the last decade or so it is still fought partly on a manifesto, a portfolio of policies and promises. In Scotland we are blessed (at least in UK terms) with real choice and genuine diversity. One can, if one wants, vote for the nutty right-wing platform of the New Party and, if a reasonable number of cranks follow, actually elect someone. And yet, and yet...

Perhaps it should be considered a success of political discourse (although I have my doubts) but on the substantive business of what is to be done the main parties really aren't that far apart. If one filters out promises and focuses on policies, the truth is that there isn't all that much which separates the main parties in Scotland. By promises I mean "more police on the beat", "reducing bureaucracy" etc.; perfectly admirable aims but not, I'm afraid, a programme for government. These issues of micro-management may make a difference to people's lives but they do not fundamentally change our lives. Surely that is what we are looking for on the second of May, the beginning of a change which will really end the failures of our society? In case we have become immune to the importance of the task, remind yourself what poverty and despair actually mean for people. And in case we have really come to believe that nothing can change, ask yourself how we can have hand-held video phones like something out of **StarTrek** but a transport system like something out of **Indiana Jones**?

So what is really up for grabs, policy-wise, at this election? There is depressingly little in the policies of the main parties which hinges on your vote, so perhaps that places even more weight on those that do. The first, and by far the most obvious, is the constitutional arrangements. I'm very interested in Scottish politics, but even I glaze over now when the 'structural deficit' ping-pong gets going. What is offensive is the idea that Scotland couldn't survive on its own even if it wanted to. To their credit, there are few Labour politicians in Scotland who will argue this case now. The question is, as it should be, do we want independence (or another step along the way in greater powers for the Parliament), or do we not? The split on this one is straightforward - if your answer is not, Labour,

the Tories and (basically) the Lib Dems will give you that (although they are more comfortable with the idea of an increasingly federal structure in the UK). If your answer is yes, any other party will give you that.

The SSP has some interesting ideas - its approach to the drugs issue, for example, or using the Scottish Enterprise budget to improve public sector pay and conditions. However, without some seismic shift in voting patterns, the SSP is unlikely to have an opportunity to implement this agenda (although anything is possible if there are complex coalition negotiations). Likewise the Greens who, naturally, have policies (as opposed to fig leaves) on issues of sustainability and social equity.

This leaves four main battle grounds; general economic policy, the funding of public capital programmes and the reforms of local government elections and finance. Perhaps the least interesting of these is economic policy, not least because it is really a debate over the future of Scottish Enterprise. Labour favours a 'steady as she goes' policy, continuing down the path we have been following, while the SNP - despite the general discrediting of 'trickle-down' theory - would use the enterprise budget to reduce business tax. It is a sign of our confused political times that the Tory policy of scrapping Scottish Enterprise and using the money to invest in infrastructure - particularly transport - may be the most popular option for many on the left.

The situation on voting reform in local government is more complex. The Lib Dems are of course entirely committed, as are the SNP. With the Labour Party it is difficult to tell. They are nominally committed, but this puts them at odds with those in the party who hate the idea of losing their local hegemony. It seems inconceivable that strengthened Lib Dems (a likely outcome of the election) will fail to force Labour's hand this time, but many would have said the same thing last time. The question of local government finance is one where it seems inexplicable more parties are not proposing reform. The SSP position of introducing a much more progressive Service Tax and the similar Lib Dem local income tax policy seem to make good sense, but even a more cautious approach could bring in new resources and make the system fairer by adding a couple of extra bands at the top end of the Council Tax scale.

What is in fact one of the biggest battlegrounds is the funding of public services where, with none of the main parties showing a taste for raising tax and with borrowing prohibited, the battle is between PFI (I can't bring myself to call it PPP) and the SNP's Public Service Trusts. The trusts may fall short of the sensible option - low interest

public borrowing to pay for public ambitions - but in the current constitutional position it is at least an attempt to keep private profit out of our schools and hospitals.

So what is the conclusion? Ahhh, but this is a democracy and there isn't any conclusion. Perhaps you hate PFI but strongly oppose independence. Perhaps you want greater powers for the Parliament but not if they are used to subsidise business. Perhaps you just don't trust the leadership of the party whose policy priorities most

closely match yours. This has of course been written before we see the party manifestoes, and maybe we will be surprised. But the quip that if voting changed anything they'd abolish it isn't quite true. In at least some areas, your vote will play a part in deciding how Scotland will change over the next four years. It may not be fashionable but, when you're in the polling booth, at least try to stick to the issues. ■

Robin McAlpine is Deputy Editor of the Scottish Left Review

credit and criticism

Matt Smith of UNISON challenges parties to revitalise public services

UNISON, the largest Scottish union, is to mount an £80,000 campaign to challenge all the political parties to deliver in the crucial area of Scotland's public services. Recently the union, which represents 150,000 Scottish public service workers, issued its manifesto for the election. Entitled **Revitalise our Public Services**, it sets out a series of principles that need to be adopted, before public services can be delivered successfully. The £80,000 campaign will also involve newspaper adverts, direct mailing to Prospective Parliamentary Candidates and other organisations, and a magazine to all 150,000 UNISON members calling on them to challenge their candidates to adopt the union's principles.

The manifesto sets out eight principles that need to be adopted to successfully revitalise our public services. It is the most comprehensive and innovative look at public service renewal Scotland has seen. It is based on a public service ethos; on the principles of selflessness, integrity, objectivity, openness, accountability, competence and equality. It also deals with specific areas of Scotland's public services outlining the issues and the union's solutions.

The union rejects the artificial 'produce/consumer' divide, argues for planned development that involves new methods of monitoring and collaboration between services. It rejects funding public services from the private sector and calls for resources to be made available to attract necessary staff and to allow broader service delivery. Particularly innovative is UNISON's call for public service networks to pool the expertise from across Scotland without wasteful and disruptive reorganisations and restructurings. This idea has had some trial in the Health Service with clinical service networks, but the union is suggesting that it could be more widely applied in other areas of public service.

Additionally UNISON is calling for performance measurement to include measuring resources available, service delivery, the benefit of that service and the way it is delivered. This is a new concept in performance measuring, which has before always simply viewed the outputs as measurable.

The manifesto is a mixture of credit and criticism in its treatment of the Scottish Government's track record. It welcomes the substantial additional resources now going into Scottish public services. It also welcomes the ground-breaking Staffing Protocol, addressing the two-tier workforce created by PPP schemes, whilst maintaining its opposition to PPP as an expensive, wasteful way of funding public service renewal which fragments the public service team.

Other areas of credit include the Parliament's serious moves on equality, the establishment of free personal care to Scotland's elderly and the recent abolition of constraints on councils' ability to borrow. But the union is clear on what is needed in our public services. And it is an area that no party is tackling adequately. That is the area of resources or capacity. It is clear that no advance will be made in the maintenance let alone the expansion of public services unless resources are made available to tackle staff shortages increase training, and address areas of priority.

For example the current staffing crisis in Social Work, is not merely a problem of low salaries, although that is important. It is also a problem of the level of support and understanding given to people who choose the difficult job of social work. Offering 'golden hellos' as some local councils are doing merely shifts the problem around the country. Similarly, health care professional vacancies need a short/medium and long term strategy. Expensive 'quick fixes' using private agency staff cannot solve the

long-term problem. We must both offer incentives, and remove barriers to attract both new and returning health care staff.

Low pay across all the public services cannot continue, and UNISON welcomes the recent deals that we have negotiated and fought for in both local government and health that bring the lowest paid above the £5 per hour figure for the first time. Now we and Scotland's political parties need to broaden this fight to include in particular, higher and further education and our community and voluntary sector, where low pay continues to be prevalent - affecting a disproportionately high number of women. Nursery workers too are badly paid for the importance of the service they deliver. It is ironic that the people who are in the frontline at the start of the education of our future generation are not recognised for the contribution they make. It has to be changed if the welcome commitments to nursery education are to be delivered successfully.

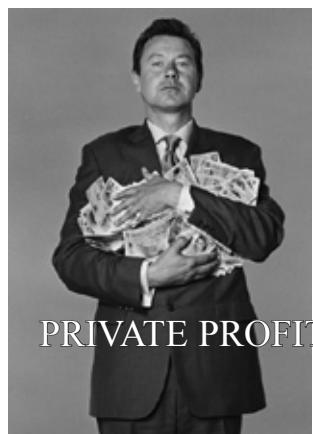
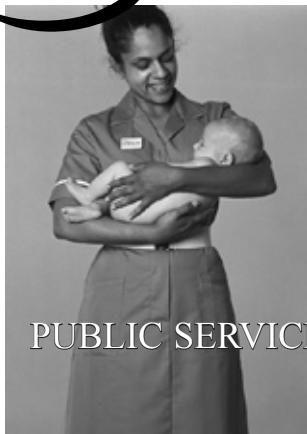
UNISON welcomes the recognition of the community and voluntary sector as an important deliverer of public

services, but failure to properly resource this sector, and indeed many organisations who fund this sector, must be tackled. We cannot successfully deliver joined up services involving different public sectors if some are being under resourced. In Water and Energy, we need in Scotland to step back from the failed ethos of competition and to develop a strategy that builds on our strengths. Co-ordination and retention of skills and expertise are more important than short-term competition and pared safety margins.

These points and many others will be being made to parties and candidates direct, and publicly through newspaper advertising and by direct mailing of UNISON's large membership. Parties need to be aware that UNISON members have a vote and are likely to use it. They must address the concerns of those who provide and use our public services if they are to deserve those votes and, more importantly, if we are to successfully deliver revitalised public services.

Matt Smith is UNISON's Scottish Secretary.

positively
public



revitalise our
public
services

In the run up to the Scottish Election, we have a chance to influence the way our candidates promise to run our public services.

When private companies run public services, cash can become more important than care.

For all our sakes keep public services out of private hands.

Our manifesto outlines the way to revitalise our public services.

Read our Manifesto - Quiz your candidates

UNISON is the voice of people who deliver the services - and stands up for those who depend on them.

UNISON - all together a better union

To join phone Freephone UNISONdirect **0845 355 0845**

For more information on our campaign contact Matt Smith at UNISON, 14 West Campbell Street, Glasgow G2 6RX. Tel 0870 7777 006
Check out our website for the latest updates. www.unison-scotland.org.uk



the rough guide to MSPs

Henry McCubbin looks at how MSPs voted over the last four years on the crucial issues and asks "who's worth re-electing"?

When in that House M.S.P.'s divide,
If they've a brain and cerebellum, too,
They've got to leave that brain outside,
And vote just as their leaders tell 'em to.

But then the prospect of a lot
Of dull M.S.P.'s in close proximity,
All thinking for themselves, is what
No man can face with equanimity.

Then let's rejoice with loud Fal la--Fal la la!
That Nature always does contrive--Fal la la!
That every boy and every gal
That's born into the world alive
Is either New Labour, Liberal
Or else a little Conservative!
Fal la la!
(Thanks to G&S)

When I set out on this search for voting patterns in our brand new 21st Century Scottish Parliament I had no idea what my search would throw up apart from the occasional rebellion by the usual suspects. To try and search and process the actual voting behaviour of MSPs is not aided by the otherwise excellent Scottish Parliament's web site. As always the way that information systems for an institution such as this are constructed reflects not only the nature of the information handled but also the needs of those inside the system. In fact these systems can even reflect the administrative culture of the organisation. The questions asked during the design usually follow the lines of the needs of the MPs and the civil service but more subtly what they don't want ready open access to can be barred by making it nigh on impossible to manipulate data in a meaningful way. In the case of computerised

data the non-separation of data capable of statistical and mathematical manipulation and descriptive text is a giant hurdle.

My excuses aside I decided to extract data from votes that I saw as significant in that they have been recognised as touchstone moments for defining the political culture of our new parliament. The four votes I chose were the School Meals (Scotland) proposal from the SSP; the Debt Arrangement and Attachment Bill proposed by the Executive after they were forced to by a previous rebellion; the vote on Iraq as this was not to do with legislation within the Parliament's powers but the expression of the opinion of Scotland's new political elite on a pressing topic of the day; and the strange affair of a late amendment to the Local Government (Scotland) Bill.

The Debt Arrangement and Attachment Bill was brought forward after the Parliament had decided that the peculiarly Scottish punishment of Warrant Sales, which had devastating effects on the poorer members of society, should be eliminated as a method debt collection. I need not go to far into the nature of this sometimes cruel and intimidating form of debt recovery but the class nature of this system is laid bare by the fact that companies can be limited in their liability but by exercising poinding, bailiffs can undervalue the goods to be sold and to all intents and purposes look on individuals as having unlimited liabilities.

Labour, through the years, at annual conference after annual conference, has expressed its disgust at this system yet in power found it extremely difficult to separate itself from it. The vote at the end was on an Executive

Bill	For	Against	Abstentions
School Meals (Scotland) Bill	37 (SNP, Grn, SSP, 2 Lab, 2LD, Ind)	74 (Lab, Con, LD)	0
Debt Arrangement and Attachment	80 (Lab, Con, LD)	4 (2 Ind, Grn, SSP)	29 (SNP)
Amendment Local Government Bill (to remove the present appeals procedure on the closure of fire stations.)	56 (Lab, LD)	56 (SNP, Con, Grn, 4 LD, 3 Lab, SSP)	2 (2 Lab)
Iraq	66 (Lab, Con)	51 (SNP, LD, Grn, SSP, 1 Lab, 2 Ind)	3 (Lab)

motion that still had the sale of goods as an allowable method of recovery. All that had happened was that some other steps had been put in the procedures to reach this situation. The outturn, as you can see, sets the pattern for other key votes in the parliament. Here is a radical proposal, eviscerated by the executive, but with support from what I will call, not without some irony with reference to Tony Blair's CBI speech, the 'forces of conservatism' or FOC Party. Stand up and be counted and there you have the Conservatives taking the Labour whip! The vote itself was atypical in that the SNP did not oppose but abstained. They may have sounded as though they opposed but at the end of the day it is their voting record that counts.

Next we go to the School Meals (Scotland) Bill proposed By Tommy Sheridan of the SSP. Initiative after initiative, report after report to solve the dietary problems of Scotland and here was a chance to put substance behind the task forces and working groups. The proposal was supported by several NGOs and the Scottish Trades Union Congress, but alas all to no avail. Since this vote we have had an endless stream of photo opportunities by ministers all chomping away in school canteens. In this vote the SNP did deliver but so too did John McAllion and Elaine Smith (Labour), and Donald Gorrie and John Farquhar Munro (LD); the independent was Dorothy Grace Elder. But once more the solid phalanx of the FOC Party stood firm to their slogan of the week 'Let them eat sound bites'.

My next choice is Amendment Local Government Bill (to remove the present appeals procedure on the closure of fire stations). I have to admit that serendipity as much as science has been applied to this choice for reasons alluded to above but serendipity can sometimes be kind. This vote should have carried banner headlines 'RULING FOC PARTY SPLIT'. For, believe it or not, our forces of conservatism found themselves in different camps. How could this possibly have happened when they were getting on so well together?

It all came about from the decision of these nice LibDems to allow New Labour to sneak in an amendment to the Local Government Bill in order to ingratiate the Scottish First Minister with the leader of the British New Labour Party by stuffing the firemen when no one was looking. Unfortunately he also stuffed one of the forces of conservatism and offended their collective ego by not telling them. Bad enough stealing their ideology

but not giving them credit is another magnitude of felony altogether. As appears to be the way of things today the Tories did the right thing by voting against this sordid little act but for entirely the wrong reasons. Robert Brown, Donald Gorrie, Margaret Smith, John Farquhar Munro (LD) deserve mention in dispatches for standing firm and John McAllion, Elaine Smith and Kate Maclean for Labour. Kate Maclean must have sussed that the headquarters of Tayside Fire Brigade are in Dundee West and that there are many more people work there than she has as a majority over the SNP. The two Labour abstentions, and these are new to the charts of the free thinkers, were Bill Butler, (rush of conscience, almost) and Cathy Peattie (finger trouble) who couldn't even think up a good reason. As it was, the whole vote rested on the casting vote of the Deputy Presiding Officer who restored dignity to the Parliament by voting down the amendment.

And so to Iraq. Well, not physically. You don't expect politicians to vote for war and then actually go to the war zone do you? The real surprise this time was that the FOCs were again split with the Liberal Democrats, whose members were suffering severe nose bleeds from having to hold them so tight, as Jim Wallace made them swallow obnoxious smelling compromise after compromise, broke out in to the fresh air of independent thought. For in this one momentous vote we saw a frightening glimpse of a 'falange' with its cross class support in which the religious and national identities are claimed to be vastly more important than mere economic status differences. Once again John McAllion voted with his conscience an act historically condoned by the Labour Party since Keir Hardie. Hence the reason why one should never whip a decision to go to war.

The three Labour members who abstained and therefore were willing to let the others make up their minds for them were Gordon Jackson, Pauline McNeill and Elaine Smith. I merely observe that the two Glasgow members have an interesting ethnic mixture in their constituencies. Not so much a case of giving the inspectors time as giving themselves cover.

Scotland's 19th Century novelist John Galt wrote a book titled The Member in which he quotes Mr Jobbry the eponymous member in question as saying, on being told that the Tories are likely to rule the roost for some years, "I daresay they are but between the Whigs and the Tories

**In the 19th
century
novelist John
Galt wrote
“between the
Whigs and
the Tories I
can make no
distinction – a
Tory is but a
Whig in office,
and Whig is
but a Tory in
opposition,
which
makes it not
difficult for a
conscientious
man like me
to support the
Government”
*plus ça
change!***

I can make no distinction - a Tory is but a Whig in office, and Whig is but a Tory in opposition, which makes it not difficult for a conscientious man like me to support the Government". Plus ça change!

I look down the list of the Mr and Ms Jobbrys that vote with the governing coalition in the Scottish Parliament and I think of how many of them I can personally identify as having attended peace rallies, pickets and marches supporting the causes of the powerless and impoverished. Yet here, and at last, they sit with the precious right to cast their vote on behalf of those disenfranchised from daily participation in democracy, because they have surrendered their vote through our representative democratic system and they do not have the economic clout of a Mittal, Murdoch or Ecclestone to name but three.

It is time to sum up and as with that other chart pop pickers let's look and see whose Top of the Holyrood Pops. Tommy (SSP) and Robin (Greens) have not hidden behind the cover of their size to avoid votes. They stayed on the radical side of the line, as has latterly Dorothy Grace-Elder when set free. Denis Canavan also has a high radical count. The Labour loyalists (that are loyal to socialism not social-ism) that deserve a gong are

John McAllion and latterly Elaine Smith who is moving up through the charts with School Meals and Support the FBU. The SNP's behaviour has been akin to that of a Boys' or Girls' Band in that they occasionally indulge in laddish behaviour such as their revolutionary abstention on debt collection. I hope Sir Sean doesn't bring his furniture back to Scotland with him. So no meteoric rise up the charts for them but I have to say that some of their band have done well by going solo.

How can I rate the FOC Party people? I have thought hard about this and I have concluded that it would be unfair to leave any of the culpable out, as the excuse that some were only carrying out orders is not an acceptable alibi. To the leaders of the FOCs I have to say, in the non-threatening manner of Peter Mandelson, "WE KNOW WHERE YOU ARE STANDING". So here's SLR's List of dishonour, complete with the constituencies whose MSPs gave succour to Bush and Blair's warmongering amongst other things. ■

Henry McCubbin is a former Labour MEP

The following FOCs (Forces of Conservatism) gained entry into this roll of dishonour by supporting the Executive motion on Iraq

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander,Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran,Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson,David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Fitzpatrick, Brian (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
 Harding,Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson,John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson,Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock,Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kerr,Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)

Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh,Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety,Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe,Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McGrigor,Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McIntosh,Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 McMahon,Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil,Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Monteith,Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morrison,Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan,Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Murray,Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson,Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Tosh,Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

class war

James Higney argues the case for democratic governance of further education in Scotland

Cronyism, nepotism, lack of probity, impropriety, fiscal mismanagement, unaccountability, undemocratic decision making, accusations of corruption, threats of widespread industrial action, allegations of union busting, bullying, harassment, threats of violence, gagging clauses, a substantial increase in industrial tribunals, management imposed disciplinary and grievance procedures, derecognition of the major union for negotiating rights, casualisation of the workforce, staff appraisal, performance related pay, compulsory redundancies, massive cross sector wage disparities, removal of national bargaining forum, loss of promotion structure. Is this the Tory years? Trans-global major private business? Totalitarian government? No. These are all accusations lodged at the governance of Further Education in Scotland in 2003. It is the present day battleground of Scottish further education plagued by deteriorating industrial relations. The above list highlights a sample of attacks and issues that have engulfed academic staff across the further education sector since the Conservative government passed the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992.

The Tory government of 1991/1992 imposed on the people of Scotland a legislative act based on right-wing ideology, and the dogma of the 'rolling back of the state', in the governance of Scottish Further Education Colleges. The Act removed colleges from local authority control, and as incorporated bodies left them in a semi-privatised limbo to be run on a 'business'-like basis and delivering results using business principles. This destructive competition between further education colleges whilst increasing student numbers has led to a reduction in the quality of the service provided to the communities that the various colleges serve. The competition between colleges in their quest for more government funding has also led to Boards of Management looking to reduce academic staffing costs, either through redundancies or an increase in the staff working week, which in turn decreases the amount of part time and temporary staff. Boards are also reluctant to offer permanent contracts to new employees resulting in a casualisation of the workforce, and also a lack of continuity in the students unitised learning experience.

It is now generally accepted by communities and in trade union circles that the experiment in self-governance introduced by the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) act 1992 has failed. A number of colleges have found themselves in extreme financial difficulties, and poor

management, far from being a rarity, appears to be the norm. This is borne out by HMI reports and the most recent scathing audit report for Audit Scotland. Auditor General Robert Black stated in a National Audit Report in October 2001 that a total of 34 further education colleges in Scotland reported deficits totalling £18 million. He said that nine had deficits of more than £1 million and of these, five were in dangerous territory. He further commented the five "only remained going concerns on the understanding that financial support from the Scottish Further Education Funding Council or the colleges' bankers would continue". Mr. Black said colleges "are experiencing severe financial difficulties" and warned that students may suffer because of the colleges' money problems. He said: "Continuing deficits may eventually pose a threat to the range and quality of courses in Scotland's colleges". Revealing that Scottish colleges have been in the red for six consecutive years, Mr. Black said that apart from a small improvement in 1999/2000 the financial straits in the Further Education sector has worsened since colleges were removed from local authorities in 1992.

Why are most further education colleges in difficulty? It is due to insufficient funding, a poor funding mechanism based on quantity rather than quality, poor governance, mismanagement by Boards leading to industrial relations in most colleges being at breaking point. Witness the number of college workers who have taken part in industrial action including strike action and, the massive increase in ACAS involvement in further education since incorporation. Industrial tribunal cases have also dramatically increased as have the amount of votes of no confidence in college Principals and Boards of Management. Incorporation and the loss of national collective bargaining on pay and conditions of service has brought about an unprecedented level of attack on the wages, jobs and conditions of Further Education workers. Taxpayers, students and local communities are all being short-changed as a result.

The arrangements whereby college boards appoint their own members and self regulate their own activities is one that encourages cronyism, nepotism, subjective appointment of people with questionable skills etc. As the Act stands, College boards of Management are bound to have a majority of members drawn from business backgrounds, usually from the private sector. The only members of Boards who are democratically elected and are therefore answerable to a constituency are the academic staff, support staff and student representatives.

This makes further education Boards less accountable than most of the other Boards in the public sector, and much less so than those in the private sector that the Conservative government, and now New Labour, so admired.

One of the major current issues is the apparent victimisation of elected trade union officials and negotiators in colleges. The victimisation is mainly on local officials of the Educational Institute of Scotland - College Lecturers Association, Scotland's largest teaching union. As early as 1994 trade union activists were targeted and sacked at Borders College, to be followed over the years by the same manner of sackings at Jewel and Esk, Reid Kerr, Langside, Motherwell, Clydebank, and most recently West Lothian College. The culmination of victimisation disputes centres on the recent sacking of Jim O'Donovan, president of the EIS-CLA by the Board of Management of Glasgow's Central College of Commerce on fabricated grounds. The EIS are balloting Mr. O'Donovan's colleagues at central College on industrial action, including all out strike action, followed by a national demonstration and rally in Glasgow in defence of Mr. O'Donovan, and against victimisation of further education trade unionists in general.

What is to be done? Boards of Management are in disrepute. With the majority on Boards drawn from business concerns and backgrounds, financial considerations have taken precedence over educational interests and colleges have been used for the short-term training needs of employers, and have failed to respond to the long-term educational and training needs of the economy and the communities they serve. Funding through grant in aid to colleges is delivered from the public purse and therefore the Scottish Parliament through the Scottish

Executive should be closely monitoring the activities of Boards of Management. The Parliament has a fiscal obligation to ensure that taxpayer money is used properly and fully accounted for. The Scottish Executive must face the issues. They must not duck their political and moral duty to investigate the numerous allegations that are currently surfacing. Through their reluctance to intervene in the governance of FE, the Lib/Lab pact at Holyrood is tacitly accepting the current mismanagement of Further Education Colleges in Scotland. Their exculpation of further education Boards does not augur well for a further majoritarian term in government. Paradoxically, while in opposition part of New Labour's electioneering campaign was put by shadow minister George Robertson that if New Labour were voted into Government there would be a "bonfire of the quangos". Each of the 42 further education colleges in Scotland is governed by a quango, the Scottish Further Education Funding Council, and New Labour has not fulfilled their pre-government pledge.

There is strong argument that the Tory Act of 1992 should be revoked or substantially overhauled. If the Scottish Parliament has teeth it has to 'bite the bullet' and introduce new legislation to pave the way to nationalisation of further education in Scotland, with a return to pre-incorporation local authority regulation with the educational needs and concerns of communities being paramount. Open and transparent governance of Scottish further education is urgent and necessary. Under the current hegemony of New Labour in the Scottish Parliament this would appear unlikely. ■

James Higney is a College Lecturer, National Vice President of the EIS-CLA and a member of the Scottish Federation of Socialist Teachers



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

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

blood brothers

Andrew Noble charts the rise of American imperialism through the words of the great American writers

Despite the ringing cheers for his Iraq policy from the Tory Party (the best Prime Minister they never had?), Tony Blair is under increasing pressure from both his own backbenchers and the Labour Party countrywide to explain his commitment to Bush's America. Falling calamitously short, as George W., of Churchillian resonance (presumably the later Churchill and not the aerial gas bomber of Iraq in the 1920s), Blair recently announced that it was because America had stood beside us during the Blitz. It should come as no surprise that Blair was ignorant of the actual entry of America into World War II. Perhaps the single most disturbing thing about New Labour, bringing increasing chaos at home and abroad, is its wilful historical ignorance. Hence the list of redundant words such as class conflict, boom and bust, and now with increasing regularity, anti-Americanism. The Project has always existed in a Mandelson-inspired hothouse cocoon where the only law that operates is that of the current Anglo-American economic practices allegedly derived from the British fiscal libertarianism of the eighteenth century. It gives the relationship, as Blair recently noticed, a near exclusive ownership of "tolerance, democracy and liberty". It may be some consolation to our manufacturers that we still have something to export, if only at gunpoint.

Not that history is entirely disregarded in the Blair world-view. Two Nazi-derived analogies are obsessively promoted. First, shades of Suez, that Iraq presents us with the threat of Hitlerian proportions; it is time the fascist monster has to be strangled at birth. Ruined by the 1991 Gulf War and twelve years of economic attrition and Allied overflying, Iraq presents no such threat. Second, the success of the Anglo-Americans (Russia's bloody sacrifice being largely ignored) is that we won the war against fascism which provides a guarantee of our eternal righteousness and a template for our future conduct. Leaving aside the fact that in the early part of the war Joe Kennedy told Washington that the smart money was on Hitler, America's relationship to its British ally was profoundly ambivalent, given that one of its central war aims was the dismemberment of the British Empire. Even more covert was its intention, albeit in mufti, to replace the ornamental British Empire with its own equally rapacious one. An abiding American illusion is the wilfully innocent belief that imperialism is a traditional European vice.

The current near absolute historical ignorance in London aped Washington is enforced by a cultural and literary vacuity. Only the Bible seems (mis)read. Blair did once confess to toying with Scott's *Ivanhoe* but this seems to

have been a spun response to its then TV serialisation. Of classic American literature he knows as much as Bush. Unlike the personal and national certitude they derive from their biblical exegesis of what seems to be increasingly the image of a vengeful, monotheistic Old Testament God, the great writings of the American tradition lead us into anxiety and doubt derived from their analytic condemnation of the economic, psychological and spiritual roots of that nation's corruptly disguised imperial will.

The root and primary cause of American imperialism is, in fact, English. Fleeing westwards from the lost cause of the Civil War, they, as persecuted people do, sought vengeful compensation in America. Here was to be, utopianly, the New Jerusalem with its City on the Hill despite the harsh rigours of the New England climate and terrain. The initial insecurity of the whole enterprise was so overwhelming that they dreamt of achieving total security from the inner and outer devils who haunted them. Ironically for Christians, violence was the only means to such an unachievable end. As Robert Lowell, their after-clay ambivalent successor, wrote:

...if I have an image of America, it would be one taken from Melville's *Moby Dick*: the fanatical idealist who brings the world down in ruins through some sort of simplicity of mind. I reflect that it's a danger for us.

Lowell's ancestral progenitor, Hawthorne, profoundly understood an America self-destructively obsessed with its purity and perfectibility. Superficially a reclusive daydreamer, Hawthorne shielded himself from the radioactive intensity of his livid dreams of American-provoked catastrophe by the cooling aesthetic means of tone, symbol and distancing allegory. Hawthorne saw America in the grip of a monotheistic, Old Testament intolerance of anything endearingly alien to its own purity. From the outset this intolerance was directly related to race. Hawthorne despaired of the fate of the native Indians at the mercy of his Bible and sword-bearing ancestors:

Their weapons were always at hand, to shoot down the struggling savage. When they met in conclave, it was never to keep up the old English mirth, but to hear sermons three hours long, or to proclaim the bounties on the heads of wolves and the scalps of Indians.

From the beginning, then, coloured lives were as marketable as beasts. Astonishingly, Hawthorne tells us that *The Mayflower's* second coming to the American shore was as a slave ship. Nor for Hawthorne did the Civil

War solve the problem of slavery. It was not only followed by the decimation of the Plains Indians but it irreversibly militarised American society and, the first modern war, it created a new technology of industrialised mass slaughter. It also gave America a soon-to-be realised capacity to turn these new forms of imperial violence outwards.

Mark Twain also regarded the Civil War as pregnant with global harm. Racialism unsolved at home, America, Twain noted with Swiftian horror, that utterly against its self-proclaimed democratic doctrines, was an equal partner with the ravages of nineteenth-century European imperialism. Like Lincoln, he saw disaster in the manner in which the insatiable greed of corporate America was calling the tune in both American domestic and foreign policy. He also acutely saw that much of America's behaviour was modelled on that of its British parent, rival, and, indeed, enemy. British atrocities in the megalomaniac Rhodes seizure of South African goldfields was, for Twain, matched by American's genocidal conduct in the Philippines as it overthrew the Spaniards only to slaughter the independence-seeking natives. This is his assembly of headlines from the American press in 1900:

"ADMINISTRATION WEARY OF PROTRACTED HOSTILITIES!"
"REAL WAR AHEAD FOR FILIPINO REBELS!" "WILL SHOW NO MERCY!"
"KITCHENER'S PLAN ADOPTED!"

Kitchener, Twain noted, "knows how to handle disagreeable people who are fighting for their homes and their liberties". In terms of pursuit of a fast buck and hence committed to hypocritical savagery, Twain believed the Anglo-Saxon race was peculiarly vicious. "There must be two Americas, one that sets the captive free, and one that takes a once-captive's new freedom away from him, and picks a quarrel with nothing to found it on, then kills him to get his land."

The complex way in which America's growing imperialism resented, envied, imitated and, indeed, colluded with its British parent was brilliantly illustrated by Christopher Hitchens in his **Blood, Class, Nostalgia**, a book written before he signed up as Bushite warrior in the fatwah against Muslim fundamentalism. The point of transition where British dominance gave way to that of America occurred in the 1920s in the oil-bearing Middle East. The Americans watched and then surpassed British methods:

The American prophet of terror bombing was William "Billy" Mitchell. He had gained his military experience in the bloody anti-guerrilla war in the Philippines and believed that flight had created a new age in which the fate of all peoples would be determined from the air. Great Britain leads the world in **Winged Defense** (1925), and referred to the example of Iraq, where the British Air Force replaced military occupation forces and "put down uprisings quickly".

Given America's industrial technology, it could make of air power a far more effective weapon than anybody else. The most acute creative testimony to this comes from the agonised poetic witness of Robert Lowell. He refused the draft in 1944 because he believed that allied bombing of Germany was increasingly defeating German fascism with fascist methods. A nuclear American state preoccupied and terrified him with its secretive manipulation of public opinion. For example, the truth of the missile deficit with Russia on which Kennedy ran for the presidency was that it was 10 to one in America's favour. All this came to a personal and political head for Lowell in Vietnam with millions of Asian dead from airborne napalm and toxins and America on the brink of civil dissolution. Worse, he saw that war where David beats Goliath as not teaching America anything but, unable to face the defeat of its 'innocent' soldiers, psychologically and militarily increasingly bent on revenging the hurt. The planet Lowell's poetry describes in the late '60s is remarkably our own:

Now on the radio the wars
Blare on, earth licks its open sores,
Fresh breakage, fresh promotions, chance
Assassinations, no advance!
Only man thinning out his kind
Sounds through the Sunday noon, the blind
Swipe of the pruner and his knife
Busy stripping the tree of life.

For the American right and its global allies, such as Rupert Murdoch, Vietnam is the dog that does not bark. The catastrophe is unmentioned. Yet it is probably the biggest factor in everything imperial America has subsequently done, especially the Gulf War of 1991. Thus Lynda Boose brilliantly connects the two incidents:

With Soviet power in collapse, a war in Iraq allowed America to demonstrate that it was the only big man around. There was now no one to impede American military muscle, block American control of the United Nations or provide an alternative power base around which to rally opposition. But simultaneously, through round the clock saturation bombing, subnuclear weaponry, tactics that flouted the Geneva conventions, overt censorship of media information, intransigence in all negotiations, and the rejection of all third-party ceasefire proposals - in short, through the repeated choice of highviolence options gratuitously disproportionate to the level of threat, an unfettered U.S. militarism was internally staging its own rebirth. Freed by history from internal check, it was simultaneously demonstrating its freedom from and throwing off the inhibitions that had been imposed by antiwar sentiment residual from Vietnam. When in January 1991 the United States turned the full power of its conventional arsenal on several hundred thousand Iraqi soldiers trapped underground, George Bush did

have a domestic priority: **to bury in the desert the antiwar discourse signified by Vietnam.**

Now we have a generation in power that wants to take this further. A 'chickenhawk' generation who, from the President down, successfully evaded service in Vietnam, but are now hell-bent on flexing their muscle in the cause of killing at a safe distance. This assertion of American omnipotence is, however, subconsciously a response to gross anxiety about an America deeply enervated not least by its leadership's criminal economic behaviour. As another great poet, the Irishman Derek Mahon wrote:

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

Clinton was understandably Tony's pal but George W. and the evangelical Texas oil mafia? As Tom Nairn has pertinently

recently written in **Pariah**, central to the accelerating dissolution of British government under Blair is his compulsion, as Thatcher's, to hang on to America's coat tails so that he can strut the world as an emissary of British power which, without this sycophantic relationship has no substance. Imperial toxins stay in the bloodstream. The impact of this on 'old' Europe is immeasurably bad. Blair is under pressure but, given the catastrophe in which, for all the wrong reasons, he has made himself a key player, the possibilities his policy has wrought are more terrifying than we have yet comprehended. What will be the number of Iraqi casualties? UN figures in 1992 postulated the deaths of 170,000 Iraqi **infants**. How is the country to be 'pacified'? What is the cost for a 20,000 British Army of occupation to be there for three years? What if we destabilize the whole Middle East and increase internal racial tensions and disorder here? Ramsay MacDonald and Anthony Eden's sins will count as little in terms of what our present Prime Minister stands on the very brink of committing.

Dr Andrew Noble is a lecturer in English Literature at Strathclyde University

web review

Much has been written on bias in the media. But, at a time when the reactionary and conservative leaders of Britain and the US are pushing for war under the Orwellian slogan "the push for peace", it is time to expose that the leap has been made from bias to lying. Bias is straightforwardly the use of arguments and facts selectively to back a position. It is omissions that students of the media usually focus on to counter bias. This can be a stimulating exercise under normal times. It is a form of intellectual jousting in which only egos can be injured. But today we have the possibility of thousands of innocents being maimed or slaughtered for the extraordinary justification that many of them have already suffered that fate and that more suffering would bring relief. "Things can only get better." Indeed.

The WWII editor of the Daily Express, Arthur Christiansen, wrote in 1961 "I remember feeling sick when Neville Chamberlain over the radio described Czechoslovakia as a 'faraway Country' and I remember expressing my revulsion to Lord Beaverbrook over the telephone. But when he said in a harsh voice 'Well isn't Czechoslovakia a faraway country?' I agreed that it was and got on with my job of producing an exciting paper." Self-censorship is the most invidious variety but in the UK today it is rife and requires groups like Media Watch to keep hammering on about the lack of balance with regards to possible conflict in Iraq. As for the rest of us, not buying the offensive titles is one way to exercise our opinion. However with BBC and ITV a constant stream of complaints might encourage them in challenging Peter Mandelson's threatening behaviour and that of the New Labour media mafia.

Henry McCubbin

For your help in how to search and challenge the media here is a list of links, mainly US, that may help. Thanks to Media Watch for their help in compiling this list.

How to Detect Bias in the News

www.media-awareness.ca/eng/med/class/teamedia/peace/bias7.htm

Detecting Bias in the News

faculty.washington.edu/~jalbano/bias.html

Recognising bias and distortion in television news programs
hsc.csu.edu.au/pta/scansw/bias.htm

The Media Bias Detector

www.adamranson.freeserve.co.uk/fair media bias detector%20.PDF

FAIR's Media Activism Kit

www.fair.org/activism/activismkit.html

Citizens and the Media: Fact, Opinion, Bias

www.parl.gc.ca/information/about/education/teachers/strategies/1998/Plan33e.htm

September 11, 2001: Deconstructing Images From the Media

www.mit.edu/cms/reconstructions/education/audiofoot.html

The Gulf War A Lesson in Media Literacy

www.newsworld.cbc.ca/flashback/1991/gulfclass.html ■

Fresh breath, Govan-style

Top QC and Govan MSP Gordon Jackson is one of our better politicians in the humour stakes. Unlike a lot of them you don't have to surgically extract his sense of fun. This was very much in evidence recently. Whacko was watching a football match on the telly and enjoying a couple of pints in the legendary Brechin's Bar at Govan Cross. He then headed for his public meeting at the Pearce Institute. The Chairman rather mischievously asked, "Is that mints I smell?" Jacko replied "Naw. Lager. Does anyone in Govan have a problem with that?"

Spam welcome

"Don't Vote for an idiot Vote for a clown" is a recently published piss take from Andy Bain. The book records details of e-mail correspondence with MSPs. Bain writes on a whole host of issues under the names of Asinder Khan, Dr Rosemary Hannay, Rupert Clubbs and Archie Beatty. It takes some of the great and good an unconscionably long time to get the message that they are being wound up. One of Dr Hannay's correspondences with Dorothy-Grace Elder bordered on the ridiculous. Rather than bin the ever increasingly ludicrous rantings, Dorothy wrote back to say she would very much like to meet Dr Hannay. Some people will do anything for a vote.



200 quid well spent?

The culmination of the SNP's charm offensive of the business community came at their Campaign conference last weekend, held at Drumkinnon Tower at Loch Lomond. The Nats tell us that for £200 a head you can sit at a table hosted by an MSP. Wow. Of more appeal is the promise that the "bar will stay open until 1am followed by a late night casino". Clearly the ticket sales did not go well. Journalists were sent a letter advising them to contact the event organiser. It continued "tell them you are a journalist and you will get the ticket for £100".

Not so Wyllie

The Tories have been struggling to find candidates for every seat for the Scottish elections. Almost a dozen adopted candidates have quit, including the hopeful in the once rock solid Eastwood constituency. Last week former car tycoon and party Deputy Chairman Jackson Carlaw stepped forward to fill the void. The former man at Wyllies has some spare time on his hands with his business having gone into receivership. However a spy tells us that the pugnacious Carlaw is having trouble finding an agent. A sign of the time for the Tories. All of which is good news for the sitting MSP, Blairite clone Ken MacIntosh. ■

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