

SCOTLAND v BRITAIN

Should socialists support more constitutional change?

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Comment

During the years in which Scottish nationalism really started to take some hold on mainstream politics in Scotland, it was fairly straightforward to know what nationalism meant. The sixties were a period of relative stability in Europe. One of the reactions to the Second World War was to seek to prevent conflict of that sort again by strengthening the territorial nature of the nation state. The United Nations charter, the Nuremberg trials, the Geneva Conventions and the other emerging elements that we would now consider to form the basis of international law (unless, of course, we were Tony Blair) were all based around the concept of territorial sovereignty. In geopolitical terms this was a period in which fences were erected between neighbours not to keep them apart but to prevent the little niggles over who had responsibility for what (a disputed piece of land and the laws which go with it) from emerging in the first place. Much of it may have been arbitrary but the outcome was easy to understand and therefore easy to police. And for decades it was a largely successful approach. During this time it was straightforward to grasp what Scottish nationalism meant. It meant 'this is our land, these are our resources, we are a people and we'll make our own decisions'.

But that war ended almost 60 years ago now. Too many things have changed for the post-war response to abide without stresses and strains. The first is the inherent problem of the arbitrariness; twenty years before the First World War neither Germany nor Italy existed as countries. We are less than a hundred years away from the fall of the Ottoman and Austro Hungarian Empires and still the general public can get to terms with the idea that large proportions of the world were not part of any 'country' in the modern sense. And so it is that some of the fabricated nations

were destined to fall apart by nature of their arbitrary creation - Yugoslavia with its historically antagonistic ethnic subdivisions being the most obvious. This has reached a point where, if only to justify his reign of terror, Tony Blair has openly asked if the sanctity of the nation state can still be taken as a starting point for global order.

Other factors are as important, the two most significant being the migration of power and cultural cloning. The international treaties which were designed to prevent war have become something else. Now they are centres of power in themselves. The United Nations may have been envisaged as a centre of global political power but the European Union wasn't, and the economic agreements of Bretton Woods which aimed to remove trade as a cause of war were not supposed to turn into a global High Court for Businessmen which supersedes democratic decision-making around the world (the WTO, the IMF). Power has migrated from the nation state to supra-national organisations and, more insidiously because they face no democratic control, to a network of corporations and their dependents. Like some global King Lear post-war nation states are becoming old and frail and their children - neo-Empires and Trans National Corporations - are assuming control.

At the same time the development of technology has torn a great hole in the other leg upon which nation states stood. What we would consider culture in the broadest sense - food, art, history, custom - provided the other thing the nation state needed to survive; identity. By nature these identities were localised and therefore by nature kept nations together in ways power couldn't. But now localism is in terminal decline. The people who invented George Bush will decide what we eat, watch,

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Scottish Left Review, 741 Shields Road, Pollokshields, Glasgow G41 4PL

Printed by Clydeside Press (TU)

listen to, do. They will decide what we have in common and it will not stand in the way of their sales pitch. Thus it is that, in politics, the nation changed from the thing to a thing.

And thus it is that nationalism changed from being an ideology into a number of different ideologies. Greatly simplified, in 2004 it is possible to identify two distinct strands. Nationalism in Europe has in fact become a remarkably apolitical movement. This does not mean that European nationalist movements cannot be

political, but it is certainly not necessary. Some are distinctly right-wing (the Balkans, much of the former Soviet Union, Italy), some are of the left or moderate left (the Basque and Catalan movements in Spain, Scotland). But they can change at will without becoming any less nationalist; in 1999 we'll increase tax to invest in a more equal society, in 2003 we'll cut business tax to feed the fat cats. The state is the thing, not what you do with it. So this sort of nationalism may be used by the left to achieve certain goals but it is a vehicle, not a destination.

In Latin America, on the other hand, we can see a different kind of nationalism. It is less concerned with dividing existing nation states but preserving in them something 'national'. This is the heart of nationalistic anti-globalisation, and it is heartening. This is a nationalism which is more interested in richness and diversity, to maintain tradition not to save the state but to use the state to safeguard tradition. Cuba is an obvious example, but the way in which Brazil, Venezuela and others defeated the American Neo Cons over intellectual property rights at the recent WTO round is a nationalism which once again is about

protecting and strengthening people against amorphous global powers. It is a Lear trying to regain the power to protect his people from the wrongs perpetrated by his children.

This is where this issue of the Scottish Left Review is starting from. We are very well aware that you would envy Lear his missing eyes if you had to read another statistical exchange between political opponents on whether Scotland could survive as an independent country. For better or worse it could of

course survive. But why should we want it to? The writers in this issue who are sceptical worry in different ways that the apolitical European nationalism will distract politics in Scotland from the goal of creating a fairer society. Those optimistic about the possibilities reflect the international nationalism of diversity as a way to create fairness. Either way, as the issue of constitutional change in Scotland once again looks like moving towards the centre of the stage, it is something the left will need to think carefully about in the coming years. ■

a union against the union

Alex Neil outlines the proposal for a convention to take the independence movement forward

The political dynamic in the Scottish independence movement was radically altered at the Scottish Parliament election this year. We are now in the situation where there are more members of the Parliament who support the idea of independence for Scotland than previously, and not only that they represent a more diverse swathe of political opinion than previously.

After the first parliamentary election in 1999 there were returned 35 Scottish National Party MSPs, one Scottish Socialist Party MSP and one Green MSP, a total of 37 MSPs in parties officially committed to independence. In 2003 though there were returned 27 SNP MSPs, six SSP MSPs and seven Green MSPs. Add Margo Macdonald to the equation and there are 41 MSPs in the official pro-independence camp.

Therefore, whilst the reduction in the number of SNP MSPs was personally disappointing it was of some comfort that the overall number of pro-independence MSPs is greater now than it was in the last parliament. Although its reduced numbers weakened the SNP the core objective of the party, independence, has been potentially strengthened by this political development. However this will remain merely a potential opportunity unless there is action to realise this potential. Whilst it is indeed pleasing that the numbers of pro-independence MSPs has increased there must be some form of mechanism by which this tangible increase in pro-independence sentiment can be harnessed in a co-ordinated and organised fashion.

It was in light of this that I came to the conclusion that the only way by which this would be possible would be through some form of convention, similar to that which worked towards the establishment of devolution throughout the 1990s. I first raised the idea in the public domain at the meeting of the SNP National Council held in Perth in June of this year. It soon became clear that a number of other people within the SNP felt similarly and a fringe meeting to discuss the possibility of a convention was organised for the party conference in Inverness, held in September.

Myself; David Berry, an SNP councillor in East Lothian; former SNP leader Billy Wolfe; and Tommy Sheridan addressed the fringe meeting. The turnout at the meeting was phenomenal. There were around a hundred individuals crammed into a room designed to hold around half that many, with many others unable to attend. Indeed, so large was the turnout that some had to stand outside the building and listen into the proceedings through an open window. I can safely say this was the first meeting I have attended where those addressing it faced questions from outside the building in which the meeting was held.

The turnout and the enthusiasm with which those in attendance participated in the question and answer session at the end of the meeting offered me great hope that the convention idea was

one that could capture the imagination of the SNP membership. Indeed, at the end of the meeting we asked for an indication of who thought the idea of an independence convention was a positive step for the independence movement and all present indicated that they believed it to be so. I therefore left the SNP conference in good heart, convinced that the establishment of a convention was a real possibility.

Events since then have moved the process on further. I have been in contact with a number of other figures from various groups and there have been a few tentative meetings to explore the possibility of establishing a convention. These involved

representatives from the SNP, including myself and other MSPs such as Campbell Martin and Sandra White, as well other SNP members such as David Berry and John Drummond, chair of Ochil SNP; figures from the SSP have also been involved, such as Tommy Sheridan and Alan McCombes. There have also been involved a number of individuals who believe in independence but for one reason or another do not feel able to commit themselves to joining any particular political party. At the first such meeting an 'exploratory committee' was established to further this and its work

continues. The prospects for a convention have been further aided by the decision of the SSP and the SNP to formally back its creation.

This has moved the campaign to create a convention on and furthered the prospects of it happening. The idea seems to have caught the imagination of a great deal of people within the independence movement. Grass-roots opinion inside the SNP in particular seems to favour such a move and it has been gratifying to hear the countless messages of support. Of course there has been some opposition to the idea within the party but by in large the message has been a highly positive one, exemplified by the substantial majority by which the resolution favouring the establishment of a convention was passed at the recent meeting of the SNP National Council.

The idea to establish a convention seems to have provided a dynamic of its own making and as people have come to support the idea after having considered it the campaign to establish such grew out of the idea itself. People from different parties and none have been in contact to pledge their support in various ways and this will be the convention's very strength, the bringing together the diverse elements of the independence movement to campaign for the attainment of the one goal that unites them, independence for their country.

This is in fact the main aim of the convention, to provide some unity of purpose in terms of campaigning for independence. Of course, the parties who favour independence will rightly want to maintain their distinctive profile in the body politic and will not want these compromised in any way. I do not believe though



that involvement in an independence convention will contravene that principle in any way as it will be dealing with independence in its broadest terms and not tying individual parties to support initiatives or policies that are not theirs or they believe go against the grain of their party's agenda.

Rather than seeking to do this the convention should be the means by which the forces in favour of independence can rally together and reinvigorate the stale debate about Scotland's future constitutional status. It should be the means by which a concerted and united effort can be made to put the independence case in the intellectual ascendancy over the unionist one. We must accept the reality that at present a majority of Scots remain unconvinced of the case for independence, but I believe the convention represents the best opportunity to change this reality so that the majority of popular Scottish opinion is actually in favour of independence. Scotland loves it when her politicians work together in the common interest of the entire country, and indeed deserves such. The convention represents an opportunity for such co-operation.

To ensure that the convention works and does not falter, the principles guiding it must be tightly defined. As I have stated, those parties involved will want to maintain their own identities and avoid commitment to policy specific pledges that they cannot agree with. Any attempt to coerce parties along such a line would be disastrous for the prospects of a successful convention and I believe would result in its failure. Rather the convention should remain as broad as it possibly can be to capture the support of all those in favour of independence for Scotland. The overriding principle and aims of the convention should be simple, to advance Scotland to independence. The task of the convention is to provide unity for the independence movement. As we, as a country, move closer to independence

we can expect total unity of opposition from the forces of unionism in Scotland. If those in favour of independence do not unify to a similar degree we can expect to fail. The convention's greatest success would be ensuring that would not happen.

I believe that this is the right way for the Scottish independence movement to go as we require independence in Scotland now. It is clear by now that devolution is not going to meet the hopes and aspirations of the country. We will only be able to tackle the social injustices that are all too prevalent in Scotland - child poverty, substandard housing, years of economic underperformance, ill health and so on - once we have independence. This is the rationale for national freedom and why it is such a pressing urgency today. It should be the task, and role of any independence convention to ensure that Scotland moves to independence as quickly as is humanly possible.

I believe the proposal to establish an independence convention is an exciting one for those of us in the independence movement. To me it represents the best hopes for a nation to move towards reclaiming its independence. The defining goal of the convention should be the attainment of independence in our lifetime. I believe there is a real opportunity to achieve such, the political climate is ripe for a unified movement offering a change of political direction for the Scottish people, and that the convention is this opportunity personified. If we in the movement pass up such an opportunity we will be left kicking ourselves later and playing into the hands of the unionists for whom the political status quo suits. Matters are in hand though. The first tentative steps towards the creation of the convention have been taken and I remain confident that it can and will succeed. ■

Alex Neil is the SNP MSP for Central Scotland

choosing to make a start

Alan McCombes argues that independence would not provide a simple route to socialism, but that it would be a valuable starting point

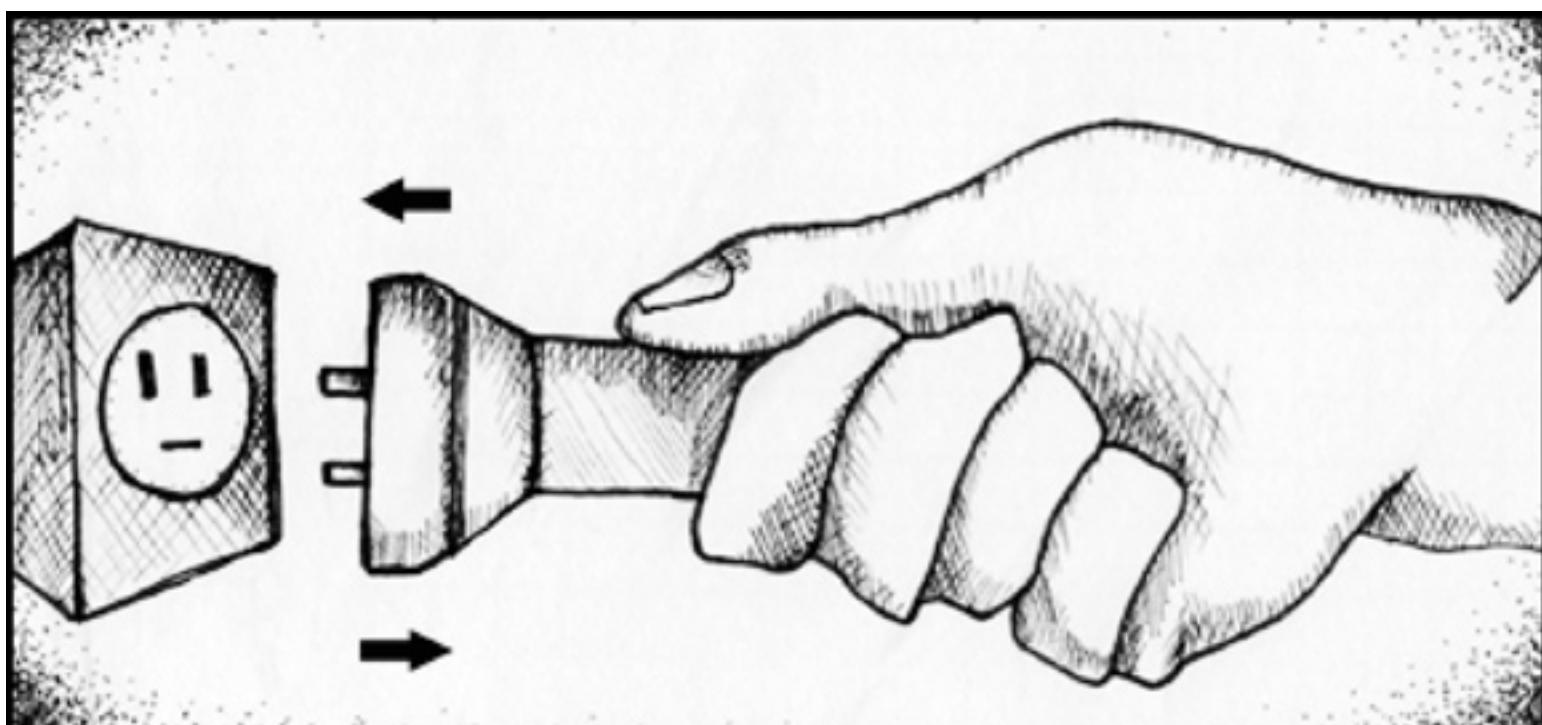
Over 150 years ago, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels called on the working class of all countries to unite and fight for a socialist world. At a time when there were no telephones, no cars, no aeroplanes, no TV and no radio, their internationalist vision represented an extraordinary feat of historical imagination. In today's world of the internet, satellite TV, high speed air travel, global capitalism and the World Social Forum, the philosophy of socialist internationalism no longer looks like a utopian flight of fantasy. But what does socialist internationalism mean in practice? "Imagine there's no countries, I wonder if you can; nothing to kill or die for, a brotherhood of man," sang John Lennon in his celebrated radical anthem. Such a world may well be built sometime in the distant future by generations who are not yet born. But how do we begin to move from here to there? And how do we apply the principles of socialist internationalism to the 21st century world that we live in?

There are three key questions the Left has to address. We may not reach agreement on the answers, but even to ask the questions would at least be a step forward. First, does socialist internationalism mean that we are striving to replace capitalist globalisation with socialist globalisation? Are we aiming to build gigantic socialist mega-states? Or should our more immediate goal be to build socialism from below - a socialism that is based on decentralisation, diversity and voluntary co-operation? Linked to that is a second question. Should socialists be in favour of larger, broader states under capitalism? Is bigger always better? Do large-scale multinational states unify and strengthen the working class or can forced unity from above sometimes aggravate national conflict and resentment? The third question revolves around the process of change. Will socialism be achieved as the product of a single big bang, a simultaneous, world-wide revolt of the working class and the oppressed? Or, because of differing national conditions

and traditions, will social change be more fragmented and disjointed? Will it tend to develop at local and national level first, before spreading outwards?

For those who subscribe to the 'bigger is better' theory of internationalism, multinational states such as the United Kingdom represent historical progress. Whatever the social costs, the Act of Union and the destruction of the Scottish Gaedlacht after Culloden paved the way for the rise of large-scale capitalism and the emergence of a powerful British working class. Any attempt by Scotland or Wales to break free of the United Kingdom today would be regressive step. Logically the same arguments should be applied to the development of the European Union. Those trying to push forward towards a European superstate represent historical progress; while those Swedish and Danish trade unionists and women's organisations who successfully campaigned against the euro were putting their own narrow interests above the greater historical project of internationalism. Moreover, socialists in Canada and Mexico - and the rest of Latin America too, for that matter - should be advocating union with the United States of America on the grounds that such a continental state would unite hundreds of millions of working people from the Amazonian jungle to the Arctic Circle. After all, a manual worker in Toronto or Guadalajara has more in common with a worker in a Detroit car factory than with a Canadian banker or a Mexican landowner

Unfortunately, all historical evidence illustrates that forced unity from above tends to inflame national division rather than eradicate it. The European Union, for example, rather than cementing international harmony has become a breeding ground for suspicion and division between nations. The tides of anti-European resentment now surging through Scottish fishing communities are likely to foreshadow more widespread discontent as industrial communities in 'Old Europe' become



increasingly pitted against the sweatshop economies of 'New Europe' after enlargement.

Swapping the Union Jack for the Saltire would not rid Scotland of inequality, low pay, pensioner poverty and the other problems inherent in any capitalist economic system. But it would allow normal class politics to develop more naturally than ever before. Especially since the 1960s nationalism - in its broadest sense - has permeated every pore of Scottish political life. There are times when it has played a progressive role, for example magnifying the intensity of the campaign against the Poll Tax. More frequently it has acted to deflect attention away from the real source of Scotland's problems. Independence in and of itself won't rid Scotland of these problems, but it would at least clear the way for politics to be fought out on the basis of ideology and class rather than on the basis of nation.

An independent Scotland would also mark an important democratic advance. From the 1980s onward, the Scottish labour and trade union movement spearheaded the battle for devolution. Whatever the shortcomings of the Scottish Parliament, it **has** marked an important democratic advance, opening areas such as health, education, transport and the environment to public scrutiny and democratic accountability for the first time ever. Yet there remains a democratic black hole at the heart of Scottish society. On the big decisions that really matter power is retained at Westminster, an institution which now has a virtually built-in, centre-right majority. It is Westminster which will decide whether nuclear weapons remain on the Clyde, whether Scottish soldiers are sent to kill and die on behalf of George Bush, whether Thatcher's anti-trade union laws remain on the statute books, whether pensioners should continue to be paid a pittance, whether the rich should continue to pay some of the lowest rates of taxation in the world, whether the minimum wage should be raised from its existing pitifully low level, whether asylum seekers should continue to be locked out of our empty, depopulated land.

A further reason why the Left should back independence is that the break-up of the United Kingdom would weaken capitalism and imperialism internationally. In Scotland, support for the union has always gone hand in hand with support for imperialism. Even today, the official title of the Tory Party in Scotland is the 'Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party'. The old British Empire has long gone but Britain continues to play a key role on the world stage as the staunchest ally of the US in its drive to conquer the resources of the planet for multinational capitalism. The departure of Scotland from the United Kingdom would mean more than just the loss of a big chunk of territory. Scotland is a vital cog in the western military machine, with vital nuclear submarine and air bases. More than 80 per cent of all European Union oil reserves are in Scottish waters, while Edinburgh is the fourth finance centre in Europe. The tearing of the blue out of the Union Jack and the dismantling of the 300 year-old British state would also be a traumatic psychological blow for the forces of capitalism and conservatism in Britain, Europe and the USA. It would be almost as potent in its symbolism as the unravelling of the Soviet Union at the start of the 1990s.

Might not social change tend to develop at local and national level first, before spreading outwards?

It is no accident that big business and the conservative right in Scotland are fanatically pro-union. The break-up of the United Kingdom might not mean instant socialism, but it would mean a decisive shift in the balance of ideological and class forces. Political attitudes in Scotland are not necessarily any more left wing than in some of those regions of England which have huge working class concentrations, such as Tyneside, Merseyside or South Yorkshire. But on a national scale, for close on half a century, the political centre of gravity in Scotland has been more heavily tilted to the Left than in England. That is reflected, for example, in the fact that the Tories have never won an election in Scotland since the 1950s. Media pundits down south may have proclaimed Old Labour unelectable in the 1980s, but Old Labour beat Thatcher hands down every single time in Scotland. Today in Westminster, Michael Howard might be breathing down Tony Blair's neck. But in Holyrood, opposition to New Labour tends to come from the opposite direction; almost 40 per cent of MSPs oppose the war in Iraq, oppose nuclear weapons, oppose anti-trade union laws and oppose privatisation and PFI.

The one legitimate fear expressed by left wing opponents of independence is that the unity of the trade union movement could be torn asunder. But that fear is groundless. Generations after Ireland won partial independence, a number of British and Irish trade unions continue to organise on both sides of the border. There are many US-based trade unions organised in Canada. There is also close collaboration between the trade union movement across Scandinavia. In today's world of global corporations, trade union organisation will tend to transcend international borders, though that may well be accompanied by greater decentralisation within trade unions.

Independence is not a synonym for isolationism. In today's globalised economy, it would be no more possible erect a new Hadrian's Wall today than it would have been possible for Robert Burns to hop on board a transatlantic flight at Prestwick Airport. Nor would anyone claim that it's possible build a fully-fledged socialist society in a small country on the edge of Europe. But what we can do is push forward in a socialist direction, blazing a trail which others will then follow. As a general rule, social and scientific progress is not achieved by waiting until all conditions have ripened to fruition. The Wright brothers didn't wait until the jumbo jet had been invented before flying across the Atlantic. Nor did Fidel Castro and Che Guevara wait until the USA was ready to break with capitalism before leading a revolution in Cuba.

The next Scottish Parliament elections take place just five days after the 300th anniversary of signing of Treaty of Union. That will be preceded with at least a year of wide-ranging constitutional debate on the history of the UK and its relevance today. For the Left, there will be no hiding place. Silence will not be an option. We will have to spell out where we stand. Do we stand with the forces of conservatism on the side of the Union? Or do we strike out courageously on the side of change by joining and helping shape a Scottish Independence Convention that could eventually pave the way to a new, socialist Scotland? ■

Alan McCombes is the National Policy Co-ordinator of the Scottish Socialist Party



fairness first, separation second

John Foster argues against the proposal that independence should be a prime and immediate objective for socialists in Scotland

It is often claimed that as internationalists Marx and Engels saw national and working class politics as incompatible. This is not so. Actually they talked of the working class rising to be the “leading class of the nation”, constituting “itself the nation” and being “national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word”. By this they did not mean that the working class should adopt any form of national chauvinism. But they did argue that, as a condition for the advance to socialism, the working class had to universalise its internationalist world view **in national terms** so that it became the view of the nation.

This perspective derived from their view of nationality as a product of history - history which was itself the history of class struggles. They saw class, in terms of how modes of production were controlled, as central to the process of social change including the development of nations. Classes overthrew obsolete modes of production such as feudalism - and established new ones such as capitalism. Each new revolutionary class had to transform the social system and its political economy and forge state power anew. In doing so it had to create a wider coalition and universalise its own objectives as those of the nation. In some cases, such as the United States, they had to form a new nation. Always national identity would be transformed - not **de novo** but on the basis of cultures of resistance and progress already emerging in opposition to an existing (and increasingly oppressive) national identity.

Accordingly, Marx and Engels opposed any attempt to argue that the national question was irrelevant to socialists. Whether they were dealing with imperialist nations, such as France or Britain, or oppressed nations such as the Irish or the Poles, they were insistent that the working class had to develop a progressive class critique of its own nation and relate it to its central political objective of overthrowing capitalist state power. For Marx and

Engels the formation of a new socialist system of state power was inseparably linked to addressing all issues of oppression. So, on these terms, the question for socialists today in Scotland is precisely **how** the ending of capitalist state power can be combined with the fulfilment of progressive national aspirations at Scottish level. Until recently this link was generally seen in terms of first overcoming capitalist state power at British level with a devolved Scottish parliament contributing to the process by mobilising forces in Scotland. Now Scottish independence is being proposed as an alternative.

There are generally four strands to this argument. The first is that it is futile to believe that the Labour Party or the British trade union movement could ever again become a force for socialist change at British level. The second is that Scottish independence would itself mean the break-up of the British state. The third is that globalisation means that state power at British level is no longer relevant. Finally, it is argued that there are quite a number of countries smaller than Scotland that manage to combine political independence with a reasonable level of economic prosperity.

The main problem with this argument is that it confuses what is feasible within capitalism with the much more difficult task of moving forward to socialism. There can be little doubt that the SNP's Scotland in Europe would be moderately viable. Fiscal independence would enable business-friendly tax policies to attract more transnational investment and better retain what exists. It would, on the other hand, not easily address the grave structural problems of the Scottish economy. Nor would it resolve the gross levels of inequality, poverty and oppression. On the contrary, governing on the terms set by big business would tend to intensify them. Nonetheless, such independence would be feasible.

Socialism, however, would be another matter and have much more demanding requirements. In Marxist terms it involves the working class itself replacing capitalist state power. The working class has both to remove the nexus of control by which big business rules and constitute itself as the new (and liberating) ruling class. In this sense ending capitalist state power is not just a matter of simply changing territorial boundaries so that an entity called Britain no longer exists. It requires a process of political mobilisation by which a majority of employees, manual and non-manual, become collectively conscious of the need to replace capitalism as such - and this class power, once assembled, being used to dismantle and replace the capitalist state. Now it could be argued that such mobilisation is precisely what would occur in a big business-dominated Scotland. A pro-business Scottish government would soon find itself up against a mass movement that demanded change. But there are a number of obstacles that make any such outcome extremely problematic. The first is the location of state power. An independent but non-socialist Scotland would certainly experience a reconstitution of capitalist state power at Scottish level. Big business would construct its own mechanisms for carrying its requirements into government and a non-socialist administration could rely on an array of Scottish institutions to provide it with ideological support. But this would not be the biggest problem facing any move towards socialism.

The main challenge would be the state power enforcement of capitalist interests from outside. Partly this would be via the EU. But overwhelmingly it would derive from the still intact capitalist state representing the interests of capital at British level. This would exploit the extreme externalisation of the Scottish economy. Only seven per cent of Scotland's manufactured output is directly consumed in Scotland. The biggest part goes south of the border and most of the rest to Europe. Almost half is made up of computing and IT hardware - itself dependent on the import into Scotland of its high technology components. Services are even more vulnerable. The finance sector now supplies 100,000 jobs and provides over seven per cent of national income. It is closely interlocked with the City of London and could be switched there overnight with minimum loss. At its core is what remains of Scotland's very rich capitalist class - seamlessly merging with the City of London on the one side, and, on the other, controlling what is still notionally 'Scottish' business through their trust holdings. This rentier class would have little difficulty with an SNP Scotland in Europe. Some already support it. But any move to socialism would invoke implacable opposition. 'National leaders' would immediately point to the disastrous consequences. The removal of banking and computers alone would cut Scotland's external income by over half and produce acute economic distress.

Supporters of a socialist Scotland might answer: so what! Cuba manages fine. But this ignores both current reality and past experience. Cuba survived economically on the basis of decades of Soviet assistance. Today it can bargain successfully with external capital because it has socialised its economy and created a socialist state system. Scotland would have none of

this. Even its oil output will be down by 50 per cent by 2010. Mass movements for socialist change grow because they are grounded in economic reality - not pious aspiration. The grave danger of the independence route is that it would trap Scotland at this non-socialist stage - a vassal state, governed on behalf of big business with its working population politically mobilised around nationalistic rather than class objectives. The very process of securing formal independence would provide ample opportunity for presenting Scotland's economic difficulties in purely capitalist national terms. It is naïve to believe that this would not be a major objective of Scotland's media - all under external big business control. Examples abound elsewhere. What kind of programme could socialists offer as a practical alternative? This is not to say it is impossible. But as an apparent 'short-cut to socialism' the attractiveness of the independence route tends to disappear once it is subject to scrutiny. Class mobilisation at British level may be difficult, but it is not half so difficult as generating and sustaining the necessary level of class mobilisation through and after the establishment of a formally independent Scotland.

The grave danger of the independence route is that it would trap Scotland at a non-socialist stage, governed on behalf of big business with its working population politically mobilised around nationalistic rather than class objectives

class forces within existing political structures. Simply reversing the legislation of the Thatcher years - in terms of privatisation, trade union rights, state companies and public sector provision - would drastically shift the balance of power. It would then be a matter of maintaining the momentum. This brings us to the second reason: the question of class and nation.

Britain today is a multinational state in a much more profound sense than it was fifty years ago. In order to secure class mobilisation at British level the trade union and labour movement would have to take up all issues of national and ethnic oppression. A mass movement would be impossible without it. This is why a movement at this level would also tend to be stronger and more cohesive in class terms. The working class would have to become 'national, though not in the bourgeois sense'. By contrast, the ideological thrust of a separatist Scotland would tend in the other direction; towards a nationalist identity. This is why it remains relevant to argue for the defeat of capitalist state power at British level **first**. This would then genuinely free all the people of our nations to decide their own future for themselves. ■

John Foster is Scottish Chairman, Communist Party of Britain

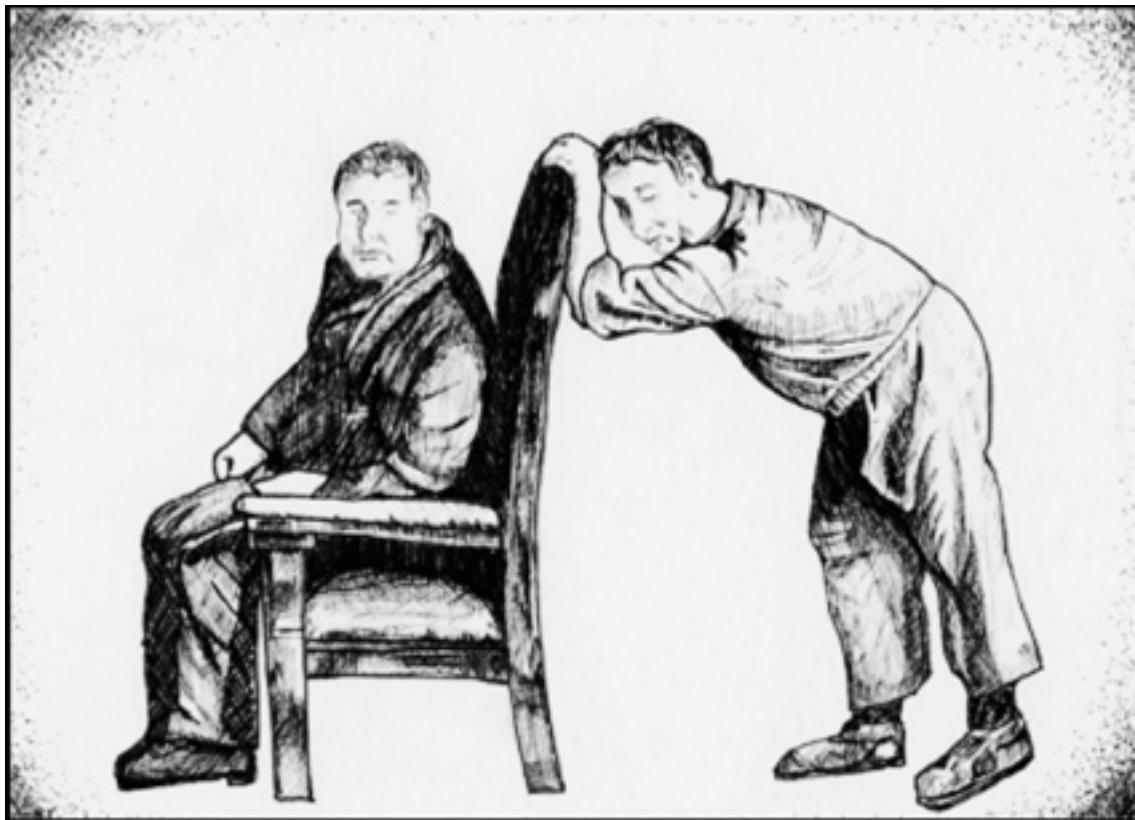
no time for diversions

Socialists should see the independence movement as a distraction, argues Vince Mills

My comments here are mainly, but not only, directed at those on the Labour Left who may be persuaded that there is something to be gained in participating in the independence convention currently being mooted by a range of leading socialists of varying hues of red. I suspect that something of the same sources that gave life to the Campaign for a Scottish Assembly in the eighties and Scotland United in the nineties are at work again. This time it is the belief that Blairism, like its mother Thatcherism, is impervious to attack from the now depleted ranks of the trade unions and the perfidious Labour Party constituency membership. I think this position fails to

second lowest with 27 per cent. The lowest level of support, 22 per cent, is to be found among the intermediate strata of workers, immediately 'beneath' professionals but non-manual. Note that there is no majority in any group for independence. Generally that support is given at around 30 per cent of the population as a whole by academic studies. This means that support for independence cannot be assumed. It has to be won. This presents some serious difficulties in terms of mobilisation I will return to later.

In and of itself lack of support for a political direction may not be enough to warrant its dismissal - what hope for socialism on



read the signs of New Labour's demise and that as the move against New Labour inside the Labour movement itself gains momentum, the difficulties in persuading the Scottish Left to ignore the opportunities that this presents in favour of a fruitless push for independence will constitute a major hurdle for the Convention idea.

Regardless of its prospects of success, there are four reasons of escalating importance for socialists to avoid another trip down this particular political blind alley. The first is simply that there is no evidence that the Scottish population or the Scottish working class want independence. McCrone and Patterson's survey of support for independence by class, gender and age shows that in 2000, the highest support for independence was among the professional class at 43 per cent, skilled manual second with 39 per cent, unskilled manual workers

that basis? But it is precisely because I believe that the pursuit of nationalism will damage the building of socialist ideas that I oppose socialist participation in such a convention. The second reason that I would offer is that there is a diversionary effect of such activity. In a 1981 pamphlet published by the Labour Campaign for a Scottish Assembly, George Foulkes MP confidently pronounced "...there is an inherent socialist bias in devolution - favouring high taxation, public spending and public intervention in the economy ..."

What was problematic then and now about Foulkes's arguments is that throughout the eighties as the left in the Labour Party fought hard for a local government counter-attack on Tory cuts, against the Poll Tax, and so on the twin promise of a Labour victory and a Scottish Assembly were offered as an alternative project to class politics. The SSP and some on the Labour Left

argue that their left wing campaigns will go on unabated despite participation in the convention. Even if this is the case, the left is only one part of the proposed convention. If an independence convention is to work it has to offer a political space amenable to all participants, not just to its socialist minority. The position argued by others like the SNP's Alex Neil has as much chance as becoming dominant as that argued by the left. Neil's take on the purpose of that body is that "the challenge for nationalists isn't just to persuade many more people of the case for Independence but to get them to realise that it should be their number one priority. We must get them to realise that without Independence Scotland will not be able to fully realise her potential. But to achieve Independence they have to vote for it!"

Once again the necessity of electoral politics and the insistence on the primacy of nation over class are being set as priorities. And this leads to a third and fundamental concern about the emergence of a nationalist coalition. What would be the basis of mobilising a majority of Scots for independence? Eric Hobsbawm, if I can put his ideas somewhat crudely, identifies three categories of nationalism: the nation building of the western bourgeoisies in the 18th and 19th centuries; the anti colonial national liberation struggles of the early to mid twentieth century and finally, what he describes as the separatist nationalism of the late 20th century. When you consider the character of mobilisation required for national separatist movements, it involves, of necessity, a sense of coherence or identity which distinguishes it from the larger unit. In Quebec, Catalonia and the Basque country it is largely but not solely based on language. What would it be in Scotland? Well there is no-one now on the left who would accept that Scotland was oppressed by England. But if it is accepted that creation of a national identity is a **sine qua non** of a nationalist movement, and given the complexities and contradictions of the Scottish Peoples then the definition of what it is to be Scottish has to come in contradistinction to what we are not - English.

Of course it will be argued that a movement which is dominated by progressive forces would never allow such regressive politics to emerge. This argument, which in any case overstates the progressive content of the independence movement in Scotland, ignores the very obvious point that once a movement based on nationalist aspiration gets going its progressive elements can easily be dispensed with [what was the role of the Irish Citizen Army in the Free state?] and that even progressive leaderships are not free of their own cultural bias. Myrna Cunningham - a Miskito Indian and once a member of the Nicaraguan government, herself a Sandinista revolutionary - said of her Party when still in power: "The pacific coast culture dominated Nicaragua and they [the Sandinistas] tried to assimilate us into the Pacific people. The Contras used this as a strategy to recruit Creoles and Indians..."

The emergence of chauvinism and worse still racism are real risks that accompany any nationalist movement. I do not doubt for a moment that the left of the proposed convention will do all in its power to resist that, but in certain conditions - economic

down-turn, tabloid inspired asylum phobia, and with the weak social base of the left - that power is limited indeed. I fear then, that whatever the internationalist aspirations injected by its left wing adherents in building for a national movement, the proposed convention for independence will be in serious danger of exaggerating the differences we have with the English working class. And this at a time when Britain's Globalist alliance with the US is under real threat from a UK-wide anti-war movement.

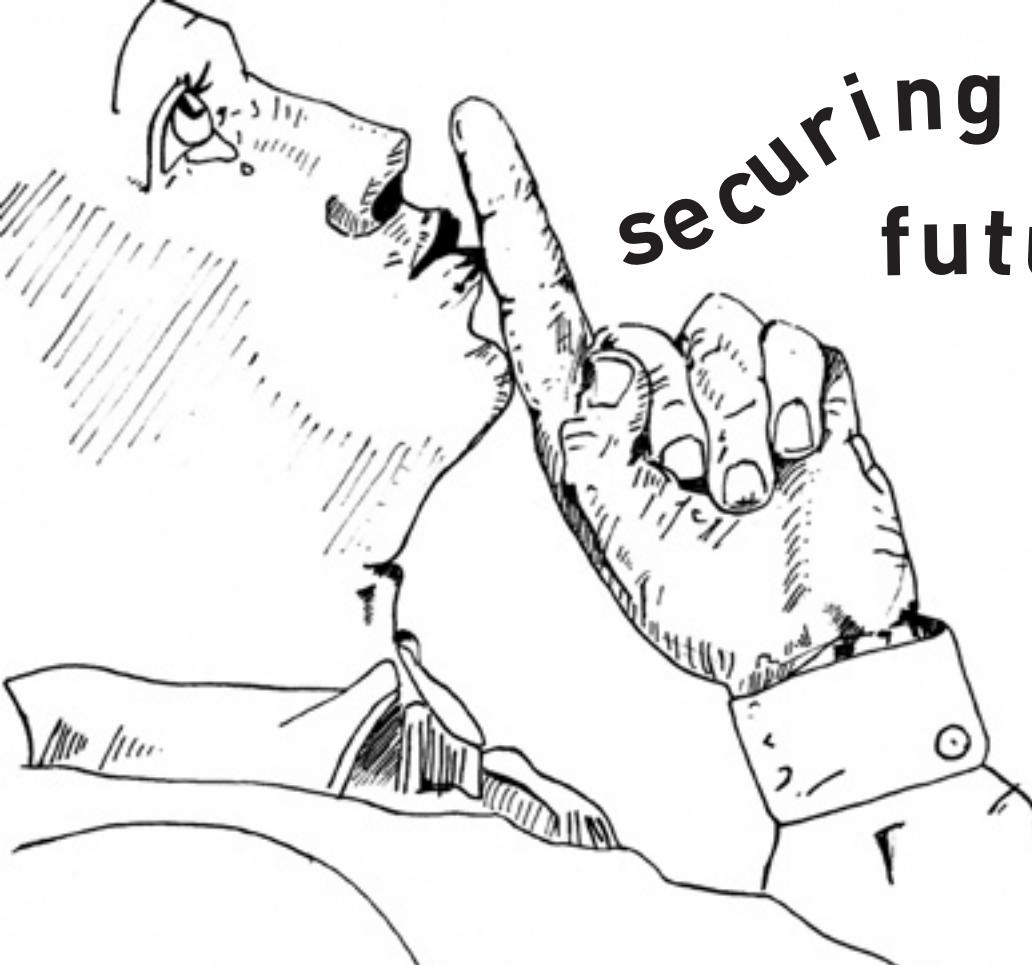
In conclusion I want to raise an irony of the emergence of this debate at this juncture

and my fourth reason for rejecting the convention as the route to progress. Those on the soft left arguing for a convention like Alex Neil talk of the necessity of Independence so that Scotland can "fully realise her potential". Alan McCombes of the SSP sees the achievement of the aims of a Independence Convention as a "huge advance for democracy and a devastating defeat not just for the British ruling establishment, but also for American imperialism..." John McAllion echoes these sentiments: "...the time has come to break up one of the biggest obstacles preventing socialist change on this island - the modern British state itself."

Beneath this heady rhetoric there is no specific definition of what the immediate benefits of independence are for working people and why, therefore, they might be won to support such a position. Yet we have had our own parliament in Scotland since 1999. Two years after its inception Elaine Smith MSP speaking at the Scottish Left Review rally at the STUC said "...this Parliament and Executive will not be judged on the quantity of legislation passed. Neither will it be judged on its commitment to openness and transparency. It will be judged by delivery on social justice; encompassing the eradication of poverty, the right to a good affordable rented home, the quality of the state educational provision, the performance of the NHS, and in the way we treat our older citizens. The Parliament will begin to prove it's worth when we see the shrinking of the gap between rich and poor. When we no longer see an underclass, forced to sleep on the streets with their begging bowls in front of them. When we no longer see women serving prison sentences for the non-payment of TV licences. When people are no longer suffering on Hospital waiting lists. When we no longer see crimes of poverty because poverty has indeed been eradicated."

So here is the obvious question: if we have been unable to achieve the changes outlined by Elaine Smith through a Scottish Parliament why should we risk the dangers posed by an independence campaign when we cannot even exploit the opportunities for social progress already available? Could it be that posing the abstraction of an Independent Scotland obscures our failures in winning people to concrete socialist ideas and solutions in the here and now through institutions already within our grasp? In any case, I for one choose to focus on achieving socialist progress through working with the existing Labour movement and existing institutions, warts and all, and I hope that many more on the left join me in that task. ■

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securing the future of gaelic

**Wilson McLeod
argues that the
draft Gaelic
Bill is too weak
to safeguard
Scotland's second
language**

Sometime next year the Scottish Executive will introduce legislation to 'secure the status' of Gaelic in Scotland. In a sense, this will represent a sea change in government policy after centuries of benign neglect, malign neglect and even direct attack (an earlier enactment, in 1616, proclaimed that Gaelic was a cause of 'barbaritie and incivilitie' that should be 'abolisheit and removit'). Nevertheless, the draft Gaelic Bill recently published by the Executive falls very short of the Gaelic community's expectations and suggests that a historic opportunity may be missed.

Scotland's oldest language continues to decline and is now seriously endangered. Every year fewer and fewer people speak the language (some 58,650 at the 2001 census), and its place in community life, even in its former strongholds, is steadily weakening. The situation of Gaelic in Scotland is a microcosm of language loss around the world. Some experts calculate that as many as 90 per cent of the world's languages may die out over the course of the 21st century, taking irreplaceable knowledge and cultural wealth with them. This loss of linguistic and cultural diversity may be the most costly downside of globalisation; 'Disneyfication' in its ultimate form. Yet ensuring the survival of Gaelic rarely receives serious attention from policy-makers, from the mainstream media or from the wider Scottish public. Efforts to revitalise Gaelic have generally been half-hearted, lacking any real urgency. As is the case with Gaelic affairs in general, the debate about the draft Gaelic Bill - often heated, and almost universally critical - has been conducted nearly entirely within the Gaelic community and the Gaelic media, out of sight to the general population. For even though Scotland has always been a multilingual place, the prevailing ethos today is one of relentless monolingualism, with Scotland serving as an outpost of the Anglo-American linguistic imperium. English is the only language taken seriously; using

any other language is considered an inconvenience and an aberration. From this hegemonic monoglot standpoint, Gaelic is just a waste of time and money.

This monoglot ethos is equally pervasive among those on the left in Scotland; the marginalisation of Gaelic has never attracted much attention or energy. For some, spending money on Gaelic development (expenditure totalling around 0.06 per cent of the Scottish Executive budget) is an expensive distraction from 'real' priorities like health, education and welfare. For others, suspicious of nationalism in all forms, Gaelic is redolent of a dreary and embarrassing nativism. Indeed, the ultimate vision of socialist internationalism may imply a single universal language. This was Stalin's dream at any rate. Writing in the SUNDAY MAIL recently, defrocked Labour MP George Galloway attacked the Executive's draft Gaelic bill along these lines. "The singing shortbread tins on the Mound", Galloway proclaimed, "are to give the country a new coat of paint". Not "a badly needed lick or two to the tenements of Pollok or pensioners' damp walls in Airdrie or Coatbridge", but "bilingual road signs from John O' Groats to the Border" as "a language understood by less than two per cent of Scots" is "rammed down the throats" of the other 98 per cent. "Our language is English", declares Galloway with a flourish of linguistic imperialism, "and we should thank our lucky stars for that".

Suspicious and ill-informed attacks of this kind remain an unappetising staple of the media in Scotland. Gaelic and other marginalised languages are despised languages, the linguist Ralph Grillo once observed, and contempt for Gaelic often shades into contempt for its speakers. Writing in the GUARDIAN recently, the Scottish novelist Jenny Colgan claimed that "Gaelic sounds more like somebody chewing a cushion than actual human speech". It's difficult to imagine the Guardian publishing an article expressing the same opinion

about Hebrew or Urdu, but the prevailing rules of public discourse deem certain kinds of vulgar prejudice out of bounds, while allowing free rein to attacks on other minorities.

A key problem here is education and public awareness. A recent poll conducted for the BBC found that 66 per cent of Scots agreed that 'Gaelic is an important part of Scottish life and needs to be promoted' (with only 13 per cent disagreeing), but that 87 per cent had no knowledge of the language at all. The overwhelming majority of Scots learn no Gaelic and almost nothing about Gaelic in school; more than 90 per cent of secondary schools do not even offer Gaelic to those who might wish to study it. As always, poor education leads to the perpetuation of myths and misunderstandings, most obviously the fallacious belief that Gaelic was never spoken outside the Highlands and Islands. Securing and revitalising Gaelic is not really about history lessons, however, but recognising and respecting a living community. Because minority languages around the world are experiencing similar pressures, their speakers are becoming ever more aware of what can and should be done to maintain them. The Gaelic community has an increasingly clear understanding of what steps it needs to take.

Like other social processes, language shift is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon, and reversing language shift requires close analysis and systematic action. Just as problems like drug addiction or domestic violence do not get 'solved' in a couple of years with a few well-publicised initiatives and flashy advertising campaigns, so too does Gaelic revitalisation require ongoing attention and cumulative work. Those who suggest that the continuing decline in the number of Gaelic speakers demonstrates the failure of development policies, as if revitalising Gaelic were like selling some brand of washing powder, simply misunderstand how social change occurs. The decline is slowing; what Gaelic needs is stronger, more effective policies, as have been successfully applied in Wales, where numbers of Welsh speakers are increasing again.

The Executive's draft Gaelic Bill is a belated response to a grass-roots campaign that has been building since the mid-1990s. A key driving force has been parents of children receiving Gaelic-medium education (GME). It is a cliché to say that children are the future, but ensuring that coming generations acquire the language has to be a key priority for any language movement. The growth of GME has been a real success story in recent years, with almost 2,000 primary pupils (and a further 400 secondary pupils) receiving their education through the medium of Gaelic. GME has taken root across Scotland, in Kilmarnock and Forfar and many other Lowland towns as well as the Highlands and Islands, and the most exciting developments are taking place in Glasgow, home to Scotland's only dedicated Gaelic school. Most parents choosing GME do not speak Gaelic themselves, but recognise the value of GME for their children, including the precious gift of early bilingualism. But growth in the Gaelic sector has been slowed by a persistent shortage of teachers, and some local education authorities have been suspicious and begrudging rather than proactive and positive. As such, the key demand underpinning the campaign for 'secure status' for Gaelic has been to ensure that parents and children have a right to GME and that local education authorities have an obligation to provide it, whenever reasonable numbers of children are involved.

But the Executive's draft Gaelic Bill makes no mention of education at all, an omission that has provoked widespread

frustration in the Gaelic community. During the last Parliament, the Executive rejected an amendment that would have created a right to GME, in favour of including Gaelic among one of the 'national priorities' in the Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000. This designation is widely perceived as being toothless, and it seems to have brought about very little change for the better. Many councils seem distinctly hostile to any binding legal obligations with regard to Gaelic, and their views appear to be determining the Executive's course at the moment. So too with regard to the key section in the draft Gaelic Bill as presented. Gaelic speakers look with envy to Wales where a range of proactive language policies have been adopted in connection with education, broadcasting and public services. Crucially, the Welsh Language Act 1993 requires all public bodies in Wales to implement language policies to ensure that Welsh and English are treated on 'a basis of equality'. Such policies can make a real difference in giving people opportunities to use their language in their daily lives, making sure that prestigious public organisations do not force English monolingualism on people, as they did for centuries. No one is interested in forcing Gaelic on those who don't want it - the point is to make Gaelic available to those who do want it.

Wales differs from Scotland in many respects, most crucially in that Welsh is spoken by some 20 per cent of the population while only 1.3 per cent of Scots speak Gaelic. (There are, however, many parts of Wales, especially in the urban south-east, where the proportion of Welsh speakers is very low and has been so for generations). Recognising this difference, Gaelic organisations have suggested that varying levels of provision would be appropriate for different parts of Scotland, and that some public bodies need make only modest provision, driven by actual demonstrated demand for Gaelic services. The Executive's draft Gaelic Bill waters these recommendations down almost beyond recognition. Where the Welsh Language Act requires all public bodies in Wales to develop Welsh language policies, the draft Gaelic Bill merely asks public bodies to consider whether it would be appropriate to develop a Gaelic policy. Of course, public bodies already have the power to devise Gaelic policies if they choose, but very few have done so, and it's likely that many would simply make their excuses and decline this new invitation. The draft Bill fails to give any real powers to the newly created Bòrd na Gàidhlig (Gaelic Language Board) to compel recalcitrant public bodies to take any action with regard to Gaelic.

Unlike the Welsh Language Act, the draft Gaelic Bill says nothing about 'equal validity' between English and Gaelic, and the crucial words 'official status' are carefully left out of the text. Welsh speakers have a right to use their language in court; Gaelic speakers are still forced to use English.

The final Gaelic Bill will be introduced into Parliament sometime in 2004. The sharply negative consensus view on the draft bill from Gaelic organisations and the wider Gaelic community should certainly give the Executive pause. Yet the forces opposed to a meaningful Gaelic Language Act, from tabloid columnists to civil service mandarins, are powerful and influential. The shape of the final Bill will show whether the Executive is really serious about maintaining Gaelic as a living language in Scotland. ■

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a strategy for winning

Gill Hubbard reports on November's European Social Forum in Paris

There are two mighty powers in the world. One power is composed of a tiny elite whose members are exceedingly rich. They own and control the majority of the world's resources; sit on numerous boards of directors for large corporations and hold positions on global governing bodies such as the IMF, World Bank and WTO. Their main motivation in life is the accumulation of wealth. When members of this elite compete with one another for control of the world's resources and for geo-political dominance it comes at a terrible price. War is the way in which they viciously resolve their differences. The people who are currently paying that price are the people of Iraq. Ordinary people are unlikely to ever personally meet members of this ruling class since they are protected by armed guards and shielded behind walls of concrete and wire fences.

There is a second power in the world and this is composed of ordinary people. This group includes workers, peasants, students and pensioners and they represent the vast majority. Although they make all the goods and provide all the services that we all need they do not have any control over the world's resources. They have no say in how the enormous wealth that they produce is utilised.

The most radical members of this second powerful group have organised to challenge the system. They are international and are commonly known as the anti capitalist movement. They have already overturned governments in Latin America, and in Britain they made sure that President George Bush - the biggest terrorist threat to world peace - was kept bunkered down in Buckingham Palace on his recent visit to London. The European Social Forum is a huge gathering of this anti capitalist movement representing all European countries. They met together for the second time in Paris this year.

The European Social Forum was a great success. It equalled the huge numbers who attended the first ESF in Florence last year. Over 50,000 people came to this year's European Social Forum in Paris and around 150,000 marched on the demonstration that was held on the last day. They were there to participate in the 55 enormous plenary sessions, 250 seminars and hundreds of workshops. They crammed into meetings to talk about genetically modified crops, women's rights, the European Union and so on, which were being translated into seven different languages. Although people spoke in different tongues the language was the same - it was a language that spoke clearly against war and against neo-liberalism. They were there to fight for a 'different Europe' and a 'different world.'

The ESF saw the coming together of the anti-capitalist and anti-war movement, striking workers and radical political parties.

It took place against a backdrop of huge protests against the war and occupation of Iraq; massive strikes against cuts in education and welfare spending in France and the emergence of a radical left capable of providing political representation for this movement. In France for example, the two biggest revolutionary parties have agreed a unity campaign for the forthcoming elections, which could poll them 31 per cent of the vote. It was the emergence of a fusion of social, economic and political struggles that made this year's ESF so significant.

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A Women's Assembly was organised the day before the ESF opened. It surpassed the expectations of the French organisers since over 3,000 women attended it. A wide range of issues were discussed including prostitution, low pay, abortion, women and power, childcare, violence, immigration and war. On many occasions the audience was far more radical than the speakers on the platform. For instance, when one of the speakers repeated the tired old feminist mantra that 'all men are the enemy' she was loudly heckled. Several women in the audience were frustrated by the lack of debate during the Women's Assembly. In France the government is set to pass a law banning the right of Muslim women to wear the headscarf in schools yet this was hardly touched upon throughout the day. Some people in France are against the right of women to wear the headscarf because they perceive it as a symbol of women's oppression. They make the mistake of categorising all Muslims as Islamic Fundamentalists and assume that the Koran

is more sexist than the Bible. Others quite rightly claim that our movement should defend Muslim women's right to wear the headscarf just as we would defend their right not to wear it. Imagine if we had not welcomed Muslim women who wore the headscarf into our anti war movement in Britain. We would not have had a united movement and we would have failed a generation of British Muslims.

The global day of action on February 15th against the then impending war on Iraq was decided at the previous ESF in Florence in November 2002. It was no surprise therefore that the ESF in Paris smelled of the anti-war movement. Meetings on the war and occupation of Iraq were jammed packed. Lindsey German, convenor of the British Stop the War Coalition received loud applause when she demanded that the troops get out of Iraq. She said that the troops could leave now or they could be forced out like Vietnam. In another meeting there was a debate over whether the United Nations should step in and take control of Iraq. Some people called for a UN peacekeeping force in Iraq. George Galloway was cheered when he said that the people of Iraq would never accept the UN. He said that Iraqis detested

the UN because it had imposed sanctions for 12 years that had killed up to a million people. He reminded everyone that the US controlled the UN. At the Assembly of the Social Movements, which was held the day after the ESF 2000 people agreed a date for an international day of action against war. The date is March 20th, which is the first anniversary of when the US started its war on Iraq.

This year's ESF was also significant because the working class had shown its actual and potential power. France had witnessed mass strikes in the public sector; Germany had recently seen a huge demonstration led by rank-and-file trades unionists and Greece had also seen massive strikes. One of the most electric debates at the ESF was a meeting between Toni Negri co-author of **Empire** and Alex Callinicos author of **An Anti-Capitalist Manifesto** and leading member of the Socialist Workers Party in Britain. Globalise Resistance, the hosts of the meeting, held it outside because the more than 1,200 people who turned up could not get into the room. People stood on the metal bridge, sat on the concrete floor and perched in trees to engage in a very passionate debate. Toni Negri argued that the nature of production had changed so that the working class no longer played a central role in challenging the system. He suggested that this meant that the 'multitude' comprising a range of different movements with their own agendas and logic would bring down capitalism. Alex Callinicos on the other hand, argued that the working class was still central to bringing down capitalism and pointed to the way in which the Bolivian miners had drawn the rest of the oppressed in Bolivian society behind them in the recent rising. The meeting was successful because it showed how our movement could engage in hard debate within the spirit of a common struggle against a common enemy.

Meetings where speaker after speaker echoed each other were flat compared to those where speakers seriously debated what next for our movement. People were thirsty for genuine debate about what our movement should do in order to stop war and stop the imposition of neo-liberalism. Bernard Cassen from France, who is a leading figure in the ATTAC organisation (Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens - a radical economic think-tank) for example, suggested that our movement should try to influence existing governments. Similarly, others wanted to see more political lobbying and fewer meetings of the ESF. Fortunately this did not strike a chord with the majority of people. Maria Styllou from Greece argued that now was not the time to slow the movement down. She said "look how far we have come in one year. February 15 was bigger than anything that happened during the Vietnam War. It's had such an impact. In Greece it means that during the big strikes at the moment one slogan is 'Money for salaries, not for war'." The fact that there was general consensus that our movement should continue to organise is a reflection of the success of revolutionary socialists in the movement who had won others to a strategy that places mass

demonstrations and mass strikes at the heart of any challenge to capitalism.

The task for our movement is to consolidate the emergence of a fusion between the social, economic and political battles that lie ahead. The ESF in Paris hardened our resolve to fight for a better world but it gave us much more than that. It gave us a strategy for winning. We will continue to build the anti war movement against US imperialism. We will build the trades union movement to strike against a European Constitution, which is a charter for attacks on workers rights and welfare, and we will unite radical parties so that we are given political representation. We are the power and we are the future. ■

Gill Hubbard is Convenor of Globalise Resistance Scotland. She was in Genoa protesting against the G8 and attended the first European Social Forum in Florence and the second in Paris

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beware the corporate raiders

Gregor Gall examines four cases in which big business has interfered with workers' rights to trade union recognition

There is a spectre haunting many workers and unions in Scotland today. That spectre is of large and powerful anti-union employers deploying their resources to successfully resist union recognition where the majority of their workforces want it. This is despite the centrepiece of 'new' Labour's employment legislation programme, the **Employment Relations Act (ERA) 1999**, seemingly providing a means by which unions can gain statutory recognition. In legal terms, these employers have not erred. But in moral and political terms, they have stopped the creation of an elementary form of industrial democracy and staunchly upheld their managerial prerogative. Since coming into force on 6 June 2000, large employers in Scotland like BSkyB, GE Caledonia, Inverness Medical, and Wood Group Engineering (WGE), as well as many smaller ones too, have managed to legally evade their workforces' majority desire for union recognition. In the cases of BSkyB and GE Caledonian, the employers beat the unions in a statutory ballot while in the cases of Inverness Medical and WGE, the unions were unable to use the statutory means because of the employers' pre-emptive actions.

These examples are not cases of mistaken or ill-judged recognition campaigns where the unions had no realistic hope of success and were spurned by workers. Rather they are longstanding ones where the unions have achieved significant union membership and support and have ploughed in considerable resources. The fact of unions attempting to use or using the statutory mechanisms is an indication of the rejection by employers of signing recognition agreements voluntary. Indeed, a requirement of the statutory mechanism is that unions have tried and failed to gain voluntary recognition. Moreover, the extent of the employer campaigns and the resources deployed indicate these employers have realised the strength of the union presence and support. For these employers, desperate times have required desperate measures. They have had no compulsion in maintaining their managerial prerogative.

Case 1: BSkyB

Stimulated by the ERA, leafleting of the Livingston and Dunfermline call centres took place in late June 2000. During this initial period the trade union BECTU called for proper consultation on job cuts and better severance. It supported this by carrying out assistance work in individual grievance and disciplinary cases. The autumn saw further leafleting and meetings. Relative recruitment success led to the raising

openly of a statutory recognition application, the training of some shop stewards, the formation of a branch committee in Dunfermline, and the organising of a petition/pledges for the statutory application. In early 2002, BECTU campaigned against a controversial new bonus scheme which was introduced unilaterally and had a dramatic negative effect on sales staff's earnings. Alongside this, deleterious changes were also made to bank holidays and the sick pay scheme.

By mid-2002, BECTU had obtained a sufficient membership base, despite high staff turnover, that allowed a statutory application

to be made. To counter BECTU's petition and BECTU itself, BSkyB managers organised a petition calling for a union-free workplace and made verbal threats to move operations abroad if recognition was won, claiming 53 per cent of staff signed its petition. BECTU's application was accepted, prompting BSkyB to suggest a voluntary ballot in Livingston and a 'no negative campaigning' agreement. BECTU rejected this so the statutory ballot proceeded. During the ballot, BSkyB issued a 'Say No to BECTU' leaflet. BECTU members reported being told by managers that arrangements had already been made to move the centre abroad within weeks if recognition was won and a key BECTU activist was paid off. BSkyB stated: "The introduction of a union into the employment relationship will give the company an uncompetitive business which cannot react to change" (Financial Times 8 February 2003). The ballot in early 2003 resulted in a 17 per cent vote for recognition on 70 per cent turnout of 466 call centre workers in Livingston. BECTU gained less votes than it had members, with the wider support, exemplified by the petition, evaporating. Management celebrated by drinking champagne. Not only did BECTU lose but there is now a three-year bar on it applying again for statutory recognition.

Despite the setback, BECTU continues to campaign for recognition at Dunfermline site and here has faced the employer putting an electronic block on workers accessing the BECTU website from their work stations.

Case 2: GE Caledonian (part of General Electrics)

Since 1997, when it acquired the business, GE has refused to recognise the AEEU. The union plugged away, building up a membership of 450 out of the 1,100 staff by 2001. With the arrival of ERA, the AEEU applied for statutory recognition in early 2001 but was forced to withdraw its application when the company began to query the status of union members. The application was resubmitted later in 2001, when the company's

The extent of the employer campaigns against union recognition and the resources deployed indicate these employers have realised the strength of the union presence and support. For these employers, desperate times have required desperate measures

human resources director stated: "GE is not against unions ... But in businesses that are not unionised, it is our preference to deal individually with the employees" (Sunday Herald 9 September 2001). The application was accepted, leading to a statutory union recognition ballot in May 2002, with Amicus-AEEU stating "We are confident of victory" (Evening Times 23 May 2002). Prior to the ballot, Amicus-AEEU reported on the employer distributing anti-union written materials, operating a non-union works council, holding captive meetings with staff on the 'union threat' and using CCTV to monitor union activities. The ballot of 730 workers resulted in a 95 per cent turnout with only 35 per cent of workers voting for recognition. An Amicus-AEEU official commented "We have been blown out of the water. ... We had flooded the place with literature. ... We can't explain why our arguments have been rejected" (Evening Times 4 June 2002). Despite having 223 members and the support of 98 workers (through a petition supporting union recognition) representing 44 per cent of the workforce overall, the company appears to have traded profitability on its earlier threats of closure and an investment strike if it was forced to grant recognition for in the following year 170 redundancies were made. Again a three-year bar on reapplying came into effect with the defeat.

Case 3: Inverness Medical (part of Ethicon)

The GMB began recruiting and organising shortly after the company opened its premises in 1998 following the employment of a few GMB members. Grievances became more widespread and deep-seated as the company expanded production to meet market demand. This involved changing the shift system. Membership rose from 80 to 125 while the GMB alleged that their shop steward was sacked for union activities. However, subsequent appeals at company, Employment Tribunal and EAT levels were unsuccessful. The GMB sought to use local politicians, local authorities and ACAS in 2002 to apply pressure on Inverness Medical to agree a voluntary recognition agreement or voluntary ballot on recognition. The company conceded to having talks but insisted the GMB apply to the statutory for recognition, stating: "It is our view that recognition ... is simply not necessary... the overwhelming majority of our employees prefer direct communication without the need for third party involvement" (Press and Journal 20 July 2002). Following this, the GMB organised a petition in support of collective bargaining for both a statutory application and to show support to help gain a voluntary agreement or voluntary ballot. While many signatures were gained over a year-long period despite the employer denying access to the workforce, the GMB believed that a company-orchestrated 'fear factor' campaign was preventing sufficient workers from signing which would allow a successful statutory application to be

made. Alongside this, the company, in its own words, operates "wide-ranging consultation and communication with all staff members [to create] mutual co-operation" (Press and Journal 10 April 2002).

Case 4: Wood Group Engineering

Since its inception as an independent union in 1992, the OILC union has been campaigning for union recognition for its members in WGE. In WGE, it has had the largest number of members of any of the offshore unions and in 2000 a majority of the workforce in a ballot supported recognition of the OILC. WGE has steadfastly ignored this democratic will and later in 2000 signed, as part of the Offshore Contractors' Association, what has been referred to as a 'sweetheart' or 'partnership' deal with the AEEU and GMB unions. The deal excluded the OILC and was designed to prevent the development of robust offshore trade unionism. Representatives of the WGE workforce wrote an open letter to WGE, saying "once again the company appears to be of the view that changes can be made without the need for consultation with, or the agreement of, those whom the changes will affect. We have indicated in the past that this approach was unacceptable and it remains so" (Press and Journal 7 September 2000). When OILC's application for statutory recognition was heard in early 2003, it was rejected (correctly in law) because there was already an existing recognition in place. Thus, the pre-emptive move against the OILC had worked in the OILC's strongest heartland. Another three-year bar was set in train.

Conclusion

Rather than just rail against these blatant injustices or throw our hands up in collective despair, what can be done to combat this corporate power? Three key lessons emerge. First, there is the need for the creation of an 'unfair labour practice' based in law and with sufficient penalties as to be a credible deterrent. This would go some way to close the loopholes in the ERA. Second, that employers took the 'union threat' so seriously should be recognised as sign of **relative** union strength. This can be used to solidify worker resistance. Third, unions need to inoculate workers against management tactics as well as scrutinise threats of closure and disinvestment to more effectively counter them. Given the sizes of employer investments and the disruption to business that moving would have, such threats should not be taken at face value. ■

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the definition of success

Bill Wilson argues that political parties must recognise that success may not mean a simple victory

The SNP today has arrived at a crossroads. It is not the only party which hesitates there, but it happens to be the party of which, internally, I have the best knowledge. It is clear that the New Labour party has reached and passed this crossroad and is now the present standard bearer of the move to US style political campaigns. Campaigns based on the deployment of wealth rather than the motivation of popular enthusiasm. It can hardly be of surprise that others wish to follow the New Labour road; 'success' is always imitated. However it is not entirely clear how to measure the success of a political party and it is on this issue that those who wish to take a different turning at the crossroads will fundamentally disagree with me.

They will insist that it is remarkably easy to estimate the success of a political party; if the party achieves power it is successful, if it does not, it is not. This is pretty much the standard interpretation in the Scottish media, unsubtle and lazy thinking though it undoubtedly is. This is not, however, a definition of success that I personally can accept. Ultimately such a measure of success is Orwellian, it defines the holding of power not as a means to an end, but as an end in itself. This view is frequently advanced in the form of the question "If you do not compromise you will never achieve power. Are you really prepared to remain in permanent opposition simply because you will not compromise on your principles?"

However, if party exists first and foremost for power, and that is implicit in the above argument, then policies are secondary. Any policy can be diluted or abandoned in order to gain power. This is normally done in the name of **Real Politik**, or political maturity, or the even more beguiling but ultimately dishonest 'if we do not have power we cannot deliver changes, the other side will always determine the agenda'. Superficially this is convincing. However, it is not difficult to imagine that the initial compromise to gain power eventually transforms into 'we determine our policies in order to gain power'. The means becomes the end. If a policy is not popular then it must go, we must only have those policies which we can easily sell.

This is what New Labour did, and this is the New Labour that introduced a minimum wage, but set it well below the European Decency Threshold. The New Labour that has failed to reduce child poverty in Scotland. But, the flip-side to the coin is that New Labour holds power, they have won two elections, New Labour are 'successful'. Where the 'successful' go, others will follow. The same processes of

comprise can be seen today in the SNP. Now the emphasis is increasingly on expanding the present devolution settlement, rather than argue for independence **per se**. Recently extra powers for the Scottish Parliament were simply not enough; now it passes for an independence argument. The admirers of New Labour, those that believe the measure of success of a political party is the achievement of power, are gaining ground within the SNP.

There is an alternate view of political success. Political success is not the achievement of power, it is the shaping of society in the form which matches your political vision. Within this definition of political success a party may never hold power, but may be far more successful than one which has. Scottish devolution was a Labour party policy for over 100 years, yet only twice did Labour attempt to deliver. On both occasions the SNP were doing well in the polls and growing in strength (and still campaigning for independence). This was the success of the SNP; devolution quite simply would not have occurred without that pressure.

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The massive increase in environmental issues is not a success of the established parties. It was not so long ago that Margaret Thatcher could remark that it was nice to be dealing with important issues, rather than distractions such as the environment. This sea change in opinion has not occurred because mainstream political parties changed their thinking on the environment, but because environmental groups pushed the environment up the agenda. Society has altered its relationship with its environment; it is now a significant political issue. By the second, but not the first definition of political success, environmental organisations and political parties pushing the environmental agenda have enjoyed considerable success.

The conflict on how to judge political success exists within political parties. When power is but a distant dream its corrupting influence is limited. Similarly, when you cannot be held to account for policy delivery there is little fear regarding said delivery. At this stage in a party's development radicalism is inexpensive, if not mandatory. However, when power genuinely appears to be within the grasp of a party, then the situation changes. Not indeed for all the members of the party, but for some the change will be substantial. For the volunteers little will change. For the grassroots holding power has but a single meaning, the opportunity to reshape. However, for professional politicians

there are other issues. Wealth, power, reputation, celebrity may act to seduce. Another major factor is fear. Clausewitz noted that generals must be possessed of indefatigable confidence and courage; a general must be convinced that he can win regardless of the circumstance, regardless of setbacks. There is little or no room for self-doubt.

However, as parties approach power they will be questioned more closely by the press, the vested interests will launch ever more vigorous attacks against their 'radical' policies. The politicians themselves will examine their policies more closely. They will begin to find flaws, real or imaginary. They will start to worry as to how a particular case may be argued. Pressure will grow, the press will insist that the public dislikes this or that policy (public dislike having, of course, little or nothing to do with press opinions). It will be tempting for the politicians to step back a little. Less talented leaders, those with less commitment, those with less self-confidence, those with less courage, will take a half-step back, then another half-step, then it becomes a rout. Suddenly power is prized above principle - 'we must have power before we can make changes'. Betrayal of principle becomes a necessary evil - 'we would like to emphasise this policy, but it is too difficult to explain'. Of course the retreat will always be matched with the reassurance that there is no need to fear, the leadership will be more radical once they are in power. Can anybody show me a party which became more radical on taking power?

If the SNP is at a crossroads then that implies a choice. There is the 'immature' decision to stand by principles, to fight for them, and to judge success by your contribution to the shaping of society. Or the decision generally preferred by the patrician class, to drop unpopular or difficult principles, to make that which was once the means into the end.

Is it the case then that political parties will always betray their principles in the end? I do not believe it so. This may be merely wishful thinking but I am convinced that the solution to the conundrum exists in the dichotomous nature of political parties. There are two basic forms of party member. First there is the unpaid volunteer, the grassroots member; secondly there are the full time professionals, those who make a living from politics. From the very nature of my argument it must be clear that it is the professionals who are most likely to abandon or dilute principle for power. It is not of course quite as black and white. There is, for instance, a difference between active and non-active members. Non-active members are rarely as well informed of the political situation as the active members,

are not going out in the wind and rain to push the arguments on the doorstep, and generally are a little less concerned with the fine detail of policy. Likewise there are clearly passionately committed profession politicians to whom the sell-out is anathema. Nonetheless, I hold that the broad division is fair.

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For a political party to maintain its integrity the balance of power must be in the favour of the grassroots members. A simple sentence to write, but a balance which is difficult to deliver in reality. Nonetheless, in spite of the advantages possessed by the professional political class the balance of power can and must be maintained. If this balance is allowed to swing too far from the grassroots then betrayal becomes, if not inevitable, at least rather more probable. The critical issue for democracy not only in parties but ultimately in the country as a whole is how to maintain that balance of power.

Machiavelli in his early democratic work 'Discourses on Livy' clearly identifies struggle between the classes as an essential part of a working republic. In effect he indicates that a republic cannot survive without this element of balanced conflict. I would argue that this conflict and balance is equally essential within democracies, whether at nation state level, or indeed, within political parties. Modern politics is increasingly losing that balance, and again the balance is being lost at all levels. Globalisation ensure that trade unions are progressively weakened, workers rights reduced, press owned by ever fewer people - in short the balances in democracy are dying. Even more fundamental, at least within party political nations, is the progressive loss of democracy within political parties. I say more fundamental for once these parties reside wholly in the pockets of the vested interest, then democracy is dead. We are at a crossroads. Which route will the SNP take? ■

Bill Wilson is an SNP activist who stood against John Swinney for the SNP leadership in 2003

the leader who just wants to be loved

Following interest in his look at the personality type of the late Dr David Kelly, Derrick Whyte looks at the personality type of Tony Blair

In a previous issue of the Scottish Left Review ("Finding the Missing Pieces", Issue 18) I looked at one of C.G. Jung's four primary types, the Introvert Sensing Thinker (IST). It focused on Dr David Kelly and the inconsistency of a man of such cool, analytical, composure appearing to take his own life. The diametric opposite of the IST is the Extrovert Intuitive Feeler (ENF - 'N' is used to avoid confusion with Introvert).

Jung gave us the three dichotomies of Extrovert/Introvert, Thinking/Feeling, Sensing/Intuitive. Intuitives tend to make judgments more from gut feeling than the Sensing type who needs evidence from as many of the five senses as possible. Feelers are more tactile while Thinkers are more reflective. The ENF is outgoing, talkative, buoyant, optimistic, sociable, demonstrative and inspirational. ENFs need recognition and want to be liked. Their strengths are positivity, persuasiveness, sociability and a sense of fun. Their weaknesses are a tendency to be flamboyant and indiscreet. They can be too keen to be liked and in their endeavour to gain recognition and affection they may seem insincere or shallow.

Without a detailed psychometric test there is always a margin of error; however when an individual displays a very clear relationship with one of the four psychometric types it is normally safe to deduce that that is the quadrant in which they belong. Such a person is Tony Blair. His displays of earnestness are characteristic of an ENF who seeks approval. Blair's early and repeated exhortations to 'trust' him were very much the make-up of the ENF. Neither Churchill nor Thatcher (both from the 'forceful' quadrant) would have considered such appeals. At the time of the 1997 election, the media frequently alluded to Mr Blair as 'Bambi'. It didn't take long for the spinmasters of Millbank to pressure the media into cleansing this term from their lexicon of soubriquets. However, the term is interesting in that it does encapsulate a certain please-love-me imagery which is very much the nature of the ENF. When Mr Blair was given a slow-handclap by the Women's Institute the expression on his face was a mixture of surprise and hurt. ENFs expect to be liked because they work quite hard at winning hearts and minds. Apart from Blair's natural persuasiveness and articulacy, he has good looks, charm and a winning smile. The mistake at the WI was not personality related, it was an intellectual error. Like many men Blair no doubt had a hazy misconception of WI activists and what their work involved. If he could woo the nation on the TV or the hustings, then this hall full of middle-aged matrons would be a cakewalk. Alas, when they said they did not want a

litany of political goals or achievements, they meant it. As any presenter will confirm, never underestimate your audience and never assume your gut instincts for a winning speech will take precedence over the expectations of those addressed.

An interesting comparison with the WI speech was Mr Blair's address to both houses of Congress in the US. To be given such recognition for anyone would be a great achievement, but for a pronounced ENF such as Mr Blair there could be no greater ego trip. His performance was a masterpiece of statesmanlike theatricality; his face the picture of a concerned world figure simultaneously radiating burning sincerity. A tour de force of recognition-seeking verbiage, carefully structured to flatter and please his American hosts while appearing to be unintentional and simply an expression of his sincerely held beliefs. As

each neatly spaced heart-winner was delivered, generous and often unsophisticated Congressmen and Senators rose to their feet to afford Mr Blair a standing ovation. As each successive wave of clapping rolled over him, Mr Blair will have experienced the aural equivalent of a multiple orgasm. Only when he was finished and Congress rose for the last time did Mr Blair allow his radiant smile full rein and full beam, giving us an insight into his state of near-ecstasy. It is part of the human condition for all of us to enjoy recognition, but for the ENF it is more of a craving.

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Another aspect of the ENF's wish to win hearts and minds is the constant use of adverbs and adjectives. Mr Blair seems incapable of leaving a noun or a verb unqualified. He is never 'convinced' be is 'absolutely convinced'; he doesn't 'believe' be 'genuinely' believes; nor does he 'feel', he 'truly' feels. It is more common in speech but Mr Blair also displays this characteristic in the written word. Writing in **The Herald** on November 20th 2003, he qualifies every noun and every verb but one. Though the intention is to acquire greater conviction it often has the reverse effect. 'I believe' is not strengthened by 'I genuinely believe'. 'This is false' carries as much impact as 'this is completely and utterly false'. 'To tell you the truth' or 'to tell you the God's honest truth' are often the shibboleths of the dishonest. Shakespeare classified it as protesting too much. There is also a touch of naivety in over-emphasis or over-denunciation. The Turkish bombings of the British Consulate and the HSBC bank were denounced with a colourful set of adjectives including 'depraved, evil and cowardly'. Cowardice is a word specially chosen for western ears. It is part of the syndrome where our boys are brave and the enemy is cowardly. To classify a suicide bomber who blows him or her self to smithereens as a coward

is either intellectually lazy or shows a profound ignorance of the Islamic mind and Arab pride. Similarly, rousing condemnation such as 'this is an attack on civilisation' does little towards a peace process. Denunciation should reflect more the gravity of the act and less the populist impact upon the audience.

Other manifestations of the ENF character are found in hand-pumping exercises and over-demonstrative hellos. Also the need to be liked can affect the way we speak and dress. Tony Blair though privately educated and a competent lawyer, sometimes uses the more proletarian glottal stop in his casual speech along with 'well hey' and 'look'. 'Look' in that context is a plea to be reasonable and listen to his explanation. Margaret Thatcher on the other hand used 'look' in a much more autocratic and imperious way as in 'sit up straight and pay attention'.

The other main quality of the ENF is optimism. A casual reference to Mr Blair's speeches will show a distinct tendency that whenever questioned about present or past actions, such as the legality of invading Iraq, he invariably sidesteps the past and says we must look to the future, we must put that behind

us, we must make the world a better/safer place. In his Nov 20 Herald article he makes no fewer than five allusions to moving forward or looking to the future. Compare this with the Churchill personality type (ENT). No rosy pictures here. He promised us blood, sweat and tears. When WWII took a turn for

the better, no one could accuse Churchill of over optimism when he said it was not the end, not even the beginning of the end but it might be the end of the beginning.

The cumulative effect of many of the ENF mannerisms attracted the rather unpleasant journalistic term 'Phoney Tony'. The forces of Millbank spin soon managed to consign this phrase to Room 101 along with Bambi but it is interesting to note that we are all interpreters of body language and human behaviour and the conclusions journalists reach, however unscientific, are their perceptions. And your perceptions are your reality. ■

Derrick White is a psychometrician and training consultant. He is an erstwhile parliamentary candidate for both the SNP and the SSP



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.

Shaun Brady, General Secretary. ASLEF, 9 Arkwright Road, Hampstead, LONDON NW3 6AB.

will he no come back again?

Andrew Noble argues that more than 200 years of depoliticisation have presented Robert Burns, a radical political poet, as a writer of the safe and pastoral

In times so critical as to threaten their national survival, nations resurrect their ancestral heroes. Since the eighteenth-century, Wallace and Bruce have been our two dominant mytho-heroes. Thus it was that in his great battle-hymn for the intended Scottish republic, **Scots Wha Hae**, Burns integrated the contemporary events of the French Revolution with the Scottish striving for independence in the fourteenth-century. The last, triple exclamatory line of that poem "Let US DO - or DIE!!!" is a deliberate echo of the Tennis Court Oath taken by the French Revolutionaries. Though this poem was published anonymously in London's Morning Chronicle, it was quickly apparent to government intelligence censors who the author was and what he was up to:

"So complete and deplorable was his delusion, that he thought he was doing honour to the ancient heroes of his native land, when he confounded them with the slaves of Robespierre, whom he thought the soldiers of liberty! and on whose arms he implored the benediction of God."

It could be argued that the alarmed denunciation of these censors has, partly covertly, been for two centuries the controlling voice in our critical and, worse, editorial response to Burns's poetry. For the vast socially conservative audience that has accreted round its simulacrum of the Bard and, sometimes, his poetry, radical intelligence is, at best, an example of oxymoron.

In actual fact Burns's imagination was essentially energised by both the American and French Revolutions. To understand him without these radical commitments would be akin to writing about Yeats and leaving Irish nationalism out of the equation. For him freedom and Scotland were to be brought together. Thus **The Ghost of Bruce**, discovered by Patrick Scott Hogg from the Edinburgh Gazetteer, 24th September, 1793:

"I who erewhile the Ghost of far fam'd Bruce
Bade aft the dread and eke the joy to see,
Alone went wandering through his laurel'd field
The other night, revolving all the ills,
Our Country has endur'd from Pitt, Dundas,
And all their Pension'd Slaves - Curse of our Isle.
...But still it much imports each Patriot Scot
To act with prudence keen and still reserve.
Our foes are wringing out their dying pangs
On Virtue - but the strife will soon be o'er -
Bid all my Sons be firm; and when the storm
Shall gather thickest, boldly show their front,
United as in One. The work is done."

Not altogether happily influenced by Miltonic blank verse, this poem was to prove tragically wrong in its anticipations. When Burns died a mere three years later, Pitt's "Pension'd Slaves" were in almost complete control of Scotland and the nation's radical elite were prematurely dead, forcibly exiled to Australia, self-exiled in North America, institutionally purged from the universities and reduced to either dissembling or

silence. Scottish pro-consuls ruled the country on behalf of the Hanoverian Anglo-British empire.

Henry MacKenzie, that archetypal, betartaned Tory Unionist, was chief among the pensioned governmental slaves. His creative talent was in inverse proportion to his institutional clout with the Pitt government. Dundas's acolyte, he also had direct, sycophantic access to Pitt himself. The damage MacKenzie wrought on Burns in life and death is incalculable. Worse, it has been proved the foundation for what is still arguably the dominant response to Burns's reputation and work.

MacKenzie, outrageously, defined Burns's poetry as essentially non-vernacular, unallusive and apolitical restricting him to a pastoral cottage garden and not a major landowner in the great estate of poetry. He tied him up with Creech, the bookseller, and that Ultra-Tory bled him and his descendants white. On Burns's death MacKenzie published anonymously at least three character-assassinating obituaries. He was the paymaster for his creature, Robert Heron, whose memoir was a template for a multitude of politically motivated studies of the Bard. Burns, of course, was not unique in this. Exactly similar governmental hatchet jobs were done on such as Tom Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft in order to completely associate alcohol-induced promiscuity with radical politics. Perhaps worst of all MacKenzie gave his imprimatur to politically motivated censorship being imposed on Burns's widely dispersed textual legacy. As he wrote in Cromek in 1808:

Burns, I have reason to believe, has to the last, religion and moral Principle inherent in his Mind, tho' he often lent his Company, and sometimes his Mind, to gratify profligate Companions, whose Mirth he shared and whose Applause he courted. If you suppressed such effusions, you have much merit in their suppression.

Hence rather than true scholarship, with the notable exception of America's Professor De Lancey Ferguson, we have had the long 'scholarly' tradition of saving the Bard from himself by a series of editors, some with the acumen of costive stamp-collectors, but almost all, to varying degrees, prejudiced perhaps subconsciously, by an innate political conservatism. Further, it was not in the commercial interests of such scholars to upset the burgeoning, conservative Burns movement.

Between the wars, the Scottish Modernists did try to retrieve a historically and poetically accurate Bard. Thus Mrs Carswell's biography. Thus MacDiarmid's protracted, rhetorical war with the Burns Federation because he believed that the "star of Rabbie Burns" it had created was a black hole into which Scottish political and poetic energy was being sucked. Edwin Muir, though he has no extensive empathy for Burns as poet, wrote a quite brilliant little account of Ramsay MacDonald flatulently unveiling yet another monument to the Bard which perfectly encapsulates this seeming terminal situation:

I think I have said enough to show that Burns has been most ostentatiously but securely swallowed and digested by Holy

Willie during the century and a bit since his death. Burns was not the revolutionist whom Mr MacDonald makes him out to be, but he was an honest writer. And though he was revolutionist, he showed his sympathy with the French Revolution in a quite practical way without stopping to consider whether it was a mere revolution in circumstance or a revolution in soul. We cannot imagine the Burns whose statue Mr MacDonald unveiled sending arms even to the constitutional government of Spain against the expressed wishes of the established order, as the living Burns did to the leaders of the French Revolution against a similar prohibition. Something had happened to him since his death, and it is what happens to all writers after their death, no matter what they have written. It may not be true that all writers reflect the economic ideology of the society in which they live - I do not think it is - but it does seem to be true that their writings are finally and in the long run made to reflect that ideology, by a process of elimination and transformation, until the most influential classes in society can finally put a seal on the result.

Should Muir's terminal account still prevail? Stands Scotland where it did? Certainly, writing in 1959, Karl Miller, a huge Muir enthusiast, wrote in his essay, *The Burns Game*, that:

It is perfectly clear that Burns has often been used as a sort of vaccine which germinates the players against all other literary infections or as a place to hide them from the new world in which Scotch people live.

If Miller is right, what we have created in Burns, whom we massively recall on an annual basis, is a national icon which is really a kind of zombie almost totally bereft of the political values in which he believed. What we need to do is poetically and politically put him back by means of a new literary, social and intellectual history into his true 1790s context. He is the key figure in understanding the carefully disguised death of the reformist side of the Scottish Enlightenment which sought economic and social justice through democratisation and anti-imperialism and believed that this could not be created within the parameters of the Hanoverian Anglo-British empire.

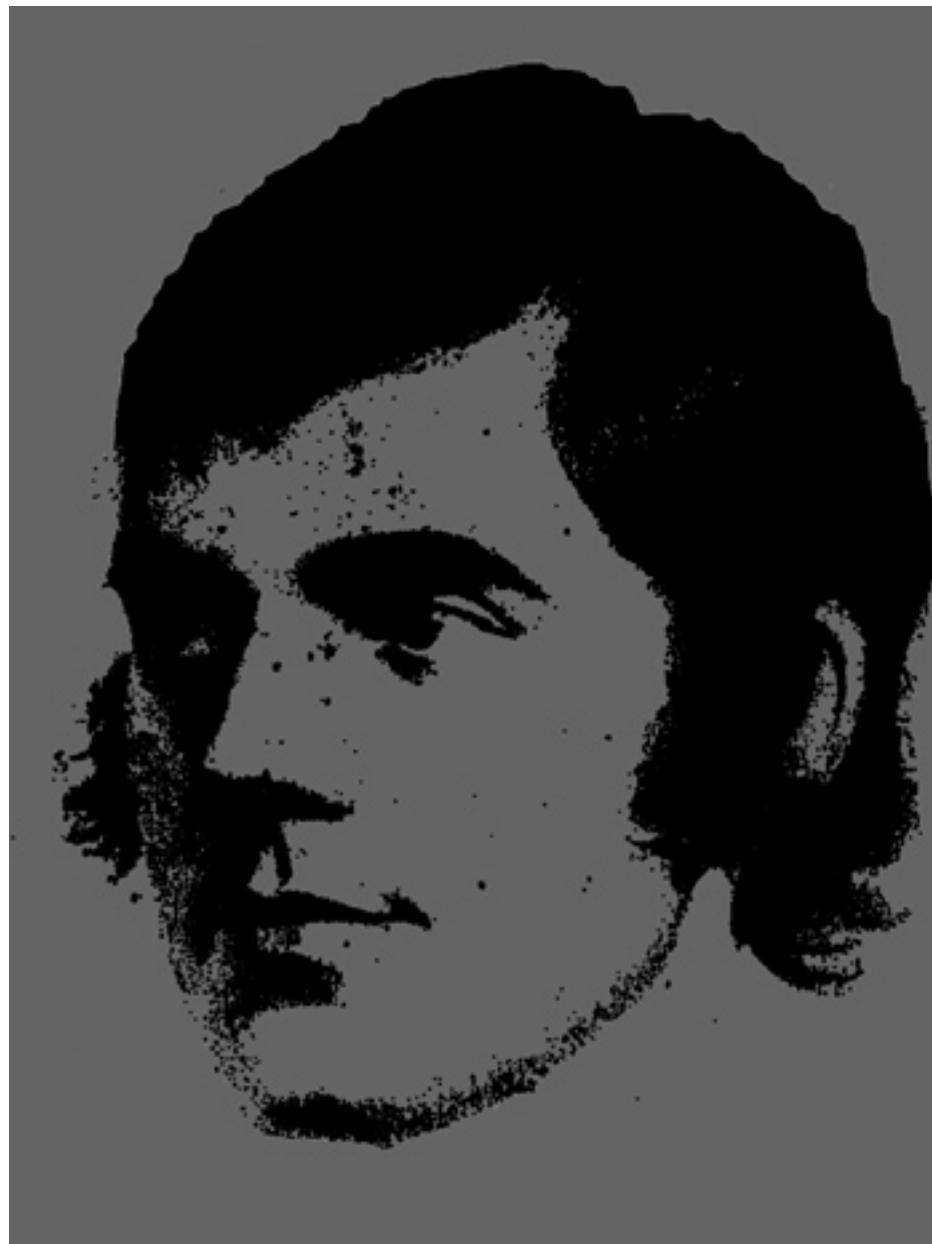
This is not so much a matter of academic scholarship which, happily, is showing some significant signs of growth in dealing with the wilful amnesia regarding the 1790s as a critical juncture in Scottish life. What went so wrong in that decade is the source of so much of our consequent national troubles. The real Scottish catastrophe is, however, not the now redundant, pro-consular apostasy of our Anglicised elite, but the later perversion of our radical impulses when played out in

the then British and now American imperial context. The denial of Burns as man and poet is wholly exemplary of this situation. Thus, as noted, we have had Ramsay MacDonald's Burnsian maulderings. However, Tony Blair, the ultimate moderniser,

outdid him in a 1993 Edinburgh Immortal Memory speech in which he contrived not to mention Robert Burns once. Rootless,

'fetishist' Tony is hardly in any meaningful sense Scottish. So many, however, of New Labour's Praetorian guard are. To a man they seem to have wholly abandoned their radical values to careerist advancement within the economic and military 'neo-con' values of the American empire. Brown, for example, seems as besotted by 'free-market' values as he once was of the 'socialist' command economy. Seemingly without shame, the singing of **The Red Flag** has been resurrected at the New Labour Party Conference. If a personal appearance of the ghost of Robert Burns cannot be contrived at its next gathering, might there be instead a singing of **What a Parcel of Rogues in a Nation?** Or would anything shame them about what they have perpetrated? ■

Dr Andrew Noble is Co-Editor of the Cannongate Complete Burns



George O'Shanter

As Uncle Tony's heart beats quick,
And brother Gordon's gripes fall thick,
As IDS bemoans his fate,
An' 'jovial' Charlie sups 'till late,
Whilst we sit watchin' TV soaps,
Or dream away our foolish hopes,
The poor wee weans we failed to teach,
Are sittin' on a foreign beach,
Alas the strand is in Iraq,
And some'll no' be comin' back -
They're over there and oft they find,
A soft-nosed bullet blows the mind.

This truth was lost on Georgie boy,
As he was TOLD his latest ploy',
(Young George whom many people claim,
Is no' jist daft, he's quite insane)
Lost too, it was on brother Gordon,
Uncle Tony and his boardroom,
(except for Robin - he wis fiery,
An' sashayed oot tae sell his diary
A little late though, some have claimed,
Since many had been bombed and maimed).

O, George had thou but been half wise,
We'd know yer ma' wis tellin' lies,
Your faither, him, big Ronnie's lackey,
Had scarce a thought that wisnae wacky,
A blethem' blusterin' nutty-sire,
He thought to set the world on fire,
An' though he didnae quite achieve it,
He couldnae bring himself to leave it,
He helped to engineer a scam
Where his wee boy became the man,
So now he's done it, there you sit,
Listenin' to big Donald's wit,
You have the boon o' sage advice,
From a half-crazed loon, the sweet Ms Rice,
An' should you have to use the bomb,
You'll get the nod frae Uncle Tom,
Or if your logic needs mair flair,
Just ring your poppet, Tony Blair:
Ali trust me George, you're doin' well,
At turnin' this world into hell.

But to our tale; Bold Georgie's quest,
To pacify a hornet's nest,
He sent his boys wi' hi-tech kit,
An' told them that they'd no' get hit,
That half-wit Arabs (they're almost black)
Are no' inclined to fightin' back,
But that's no' how Iraqis feel,
They think they're fechtin' wi' the Deil,
Wi' home-made bombs and ancient knives,
They're snuffin' oot yer weans' lives:
Hearts and lungs, a leg a liver,

Are floatin' in a famous river,
The great Euphrates, known to Christ,
Is flowin' through your modern heist,
Behind your troops, ten thousand miles,
Rumsfelt and Rice had pooled their wiles,
They had to sell your folk a notion,
That meant the endin' of a nation,
They blamed it on a mad dictator,
And told the world, that soon or later,
They'd had to lance this Arab boil,
(they never mentioned Saddam's oil)
And all the while you spout their hate,
You never think o' Watergate,
Or that someday before it's through,
The facts'll turn their face to you,
You'd rather sport wi' Nazi Arnie,
And talk like you've been in the army,
The fact is you were never there,
(That didnae bother Tony Blair)
When you were called by Uncle Sam,
You were off, and on the lam,
You skipped and ran at every chance,
An' led the brass a merry dance,
But little did you need tae fret,
YOUR mama wisnae in a sweat,
You were assured, through your old man,
You'd never set a foot in 'Nam
You never donned your army duds,
But spent your youth on drink an' drugs,
Your missus too enjoyed a jar,
An' often after drove the car,
A nasty habit one mother feels,
Her wean was squished 'neath your wife's wheels.

Ah, George, Ah, George it spins ma brains,
To think how many bonnie weans,
Were ripped untimely by the knife,
When you'n your ilk were granted life,
It gars me greet tae sit an' think,
You'd start a war wi' scarce a wink,
Or watch your puppet, Tony Blair,
Excuse your war as "just" an' "fair",
You said it would be but a breeze!
You'd-shock your foe 'na mighty breeze,
We heard it tae, from Uncle Tam,
An' noo Iraq's the new Vietnam.

There's no' a day your boys don't dwell,
On whit it's like tae be in hell,
An' every time they're in a chopper,
They worry that they'll come a cropper,
They know that group that's walkin' by,
At every lane and farm and sty,
Are keen for them to go back home,
An' think to help them with a bomb.
Their very presence in the locus,

Presents your foe a single focus,
Where ance big Saddam ranted barmy,
They now can target your ain army,
An' to their task they turn wi' pleasure,
Of your green lads they've got the measure,
An' every wan they blow to bits,
They celebrate and laugh in fits,
They don't consider western squaddies,
As someone else's dear wee ladies,
They think them simply foreign lice,
To be sent home all packed in ice.

Now, George I know one cannot send,
To find out how it all will end,
But forward though I cannot see,
It disnae look to good for thee,
(Better, 'though, it must be said,
Than being crippled, blind or dead)
An' even though it started brightly,
Wi' Baghdad bombed and flattened nightly,
An' looked as though your massive power,
Wid win the war in scarce an hour,
Alas it didnae quite work out,
It seems that some survived the rout,
An' that too bad, it bodes no good,
Just look at Tony's present mood,
He knows full well but's loath to say,
That all your plans have gone astray,
Just like, of course, your many bombs,
That landed on suburban homes,
Ane landed on young Ali's pad,
An' left the boy a woefu' lad,
Where ance he felt his little legs,
He now makes do wi' plastic pegs,
Alas they couldnae fix his brothers,
As they, like many thousand others,
Found their brains and legs and hearts,
Located miles from other parts,
His mother and his father too,
Evaporated, thanks tae you.

Ah, George, ah, George the day maun dawn,
When you'll be made to understaun,
You'll never win agin a foe,
Who has no other place to go,
Bin Laden's crew are endless triers,
An' they'll have seen your west-coast fires,
Next time they'll no een get a scratch,
An' cost you billions wi' jist a match,
But I'm no sure they'll leave it there,
Ah think they're after you an' Blair.

Now that might cause you little fright,
'Cause you're no' blessed wi' much insight,
(Care mad tae see a man sae nuts,
Who bonds tae naught, nae ifs nor buts,

A man who sleeps his days away,
Whilst in Baghdad, his GI's Pay)
But over here it's no sae calm
We ken that you're a crazy man -
Surrounded by a bunch o' jesters,
United by your Kraut ancestors,
The high hopes here are growin' wan,
An' Blair too's seen as bare a man,
People now know the whole story,
Tony Blair's a crackpot Tory:
They didnae like the way he sent,
Young boys frae Perth and Leeds and Kent
To face the wrath of swarthy ruddies,
Whilst his ain wean began his studies -
Ah' his young Euan's got it made,
(With a little help from Adelaide)
Hi ma, the one-time Cherrie Booth,
(Now widely known as megamooth)
Got him student accommodation
That is the envy of the nation,
Quarter a million quid she blew,
Whilst Tony claimed "Ah niver Knew",
Which wis an insult aye too many
From this androgynous little fairy -
Noo when he's on television,
People watch wi' pure derision,
He's now seen as a snake-oil seller,
A snivlin, snortin' fruity blether,
Who'd let your son die like a rat,
Whilst buyin' his ain a mega flat!

So if in future, you're inclined,
To vote TB, bear this in mind,
That here's a man who claims he prays,
For peaceful times an' better days,
He claims he hates the thought o' pain,
An' cares for each an' every wean,
That conflict is the last resort,
His word's his bond he can't be bought,
But cast your mind back just a while,
An' you'll recall the Bernie file,
A million quid got Ecclestone,
The ban on fag ads quick withdrawn,
How much more pull, you might consider,
Would have an even higher bidder -
Could we be certain and quite sure,
He widnae join another war?

Derek McPherson.

feedback

Comments and letters for publication should be emailed to
feedback@scottishleftreview.org

Closing What Gap?

Communities Scotland - the Scottish Executive agency responsible for regeneration - has just issued long-awaited guidance on integrating Community Planning and Social Inclusion Partnerships (SIPs). 'Community planning' is the Scottish Executive's big idea for regenerating Scotland's poorest communities. The stated aim is to 'break the cycle of deprivation, raise personal and community ambitions and lift children out of poverty'. The approach - outlined in last year's regeneration statement, 'Better Communities in Scotland: Closing the Gap' - is to make core public services as effective as possible in deprived areas and to raise the 'social capital' of local communities. Social capital is defined as the 'skills, confidence, support networks and resources' needed for effective individual and community participation. Once their social capital has been raised, local people will then be able to work more effectively together with agencies to deliver better services.

The guidance sets out a process for integrating the 48 SIPs with new Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs). SIPs, which are based in local communities, involve local people, councils, business and other agencies, in tackling regeneration issues. Although they are far from perfect and have been criticised for creating another layer of bureaucracy and paying lip service to the idea of community involvement, some communities feel a degree of ownership over SIPs. The worry with community planning is that the small measure of autonomy associated with SIPs will be lost and councils will be back in control. Although the rhetoric is about putting the community 'at the heart of the process' the experience in some pilots has been quite the opposite. The process outlined includes the preparation of a Regeneration

Outcome Agreement by CPPs setting out how local and national priorities will be addressed and what they hope to achieve. The agreement then needs to be approved by the Scottish Executive and needs to include proposals for housing stock transfer. As one community activist put it, 'we're at the heart of the process so long as we do what we're told!'

The central question of just exactly what gap it is that community planning is supposed to be closing has still to be answered. The guidance outlines plans to measure outcomes

around improving health, raising educational attainment, getting people back into work and so on. There doesn't seem to be any plan to measure the income gap - not surprising perhaps given this Summer's figures from the Low Pay Unit which show that the incomes of the top 10 per cent are continuing to grow much faster than those of the bottom 10 per cent (by £30.90 per week from 2000-2001 for those at the top; by £9.40 for those at the bottom). It's as if the symptoms of poverty and inequality can be treated without touching any of the causes.

Community planning may offer some opportunities for working class communities. The rhetoric of 'community empowerment', which is present throughout the document, could well be stretched by activists to wrest a measure of local control over some decisions and some budgets in some areas. However, in a Scotland where 52 per cent of households live on less than £15,000 per year, community planning represents a stunningly inadequate response to the national disgrace of poverty. ■

David McGuire

Workplace Environmental Justice

Friends of the Earth Scotland (FoES) recently won a Guardian Charity Award, for their contribution to social welfare in the community. A substantial element of this contribution was made through innovative collaboration with Queen Margaret University College to present a course in Environmental Justice for community activists. A diverse range of activists, drawn from a range of communities which were experiencing environmental injustice, participated in an 18 month long course. Twelve activists, over half of whom had not experienced higher education before, graduated in November with the equivalent of the first year of a degree. The content of the

course is innovative and participative and is based upon real life campaigns for Environmental Justice.

Environmental Justice is defined as:

- no less than a decent environment for all,
- no more than our fair share of the Earth's resources.

The principles of Environmental Justice originate in anti-racist campaigns in the United States. They grew out of recognition that toxic waste was disproportionately dumped close to

The worry with community planning is that the small measure of autonomy associated with SIPs will be lost and councils will be back in control

marginalised communities. The same patterns are visible in Scotland. The poorer you are the more likely you are to live or work in or near a dangerous, toxic environment. An important aspect of the principles of Environmental justice is that raising awareness is meaningless without turning this knowledge into action in our everyday lives.

Demonstrating that the spectrum of issues spans urban and rural Scotland the 'agents for environmental justice' organised around topics such as a community waste minimisation network in Mull and Iona, a women's health and housing group, the largest community sustainability audit (Midlothian) and a campaign which halted the development of a damaging quarry. With these successes in mind the next presentation of the course will be specifically aimed at developing activists and campaigns in the workplace. Recognising that the only authentic form of workplace activism comes through collective organisation and the trade union movement, FoES is currently recruiting trade unionists to participate.

This approach can be seen as refreshing in a number of ways, not least in its potential to challenge stereotypes. The examples from the previous participants challenge the 'middle-class tree-hugger' stereotype many associate with environmentalism. Developing the relevance of Environmental Justice to the trade union movement has the potential to engage with a whole new range of activists who may be left cold by what they see as 'stale, male and pale' organisations. Many trade unionists, particularly Health and Safety Representatives, are already campaigning on 'environmental' issues but do not see them as such. Adopting the perspective and methods of participatory community activism can bring fresh impetus to such activities.

Campaigning on Environmental Justice issues has a great deal to offer the trade union movement. A deeper understanding of the effect of unsustainable production has the potential to create new and powerful alliances between organised workers and communities. The effect of the workplace does not begin and end at the entrances to offices/factories/hospitals/bus or train depots/power plants/oil rigs etc. Environmental Justice campaigns are about the pursuit of a 'just transition' from toxic industries that damage our planet to sustainable, clean forms of production. Environmental Justice is about sustainable job creation. As FoES Chief Executive Duncan McLaren has said, "empowering communities with the knowledge and skills to tackle environmental problems themselves will, in the long run, benefit us all".

Environmental Justice in your Workplace and your Community
is an accredited way to develop knowledge and skills. It aims to not only equip activists with the organising skills essential for effective activism but also to gain a recognised certificate that can count towards further higher education qualification. Successful completion of the course qualifies participants for a

Higher Education Certificate in Environmental Justice, awarded by Queen Margaret University College. This can also count as 120 credits towards a 360 point degree qualification.

Environmental Justice in Your Workplace and Your Community is a part-time, distance learning course, with modules on the following topics:

- health, safety & environmental justice
- environmental justice & sustainable development
- planning & environmental law
- sustainability auditing in the workplace & community
- community development
- the social economy
- using the media

A number of funded places are available to for trade unionists to participate in Environmental Justice in Your Workplace & Your Community. The course begins in April 2004 and lasts for 18 months. For more information and to request an application form contact:

Friends of the Earth Scotland,
72 Newhaven Road,
Edinburgh EH6 5QG

Telephone: 0131 554 9977

Email: agents@foe-scotland.org.uk

Further information can be found online at:
www.foe-scotland.org.uk

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