

Scottish **Left** Review

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On the Rocks



We return to the countries we profiled two years ago to see how they are surviving the Eurocrisis

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Comment

Can there be a time when writing about the world presents a picture very different according to which near-neighbour country you choose. A bit over two years ago for a year we asked a writer from a different small country (or region) something like Scotland to tell us about the state of radical politics at home (*SLR* 56 - 63). The picture then was one of trepidation but some hope of a new beginning.

We have gone back to the same writers a couple of years later to see what has happened. To say the picture is mixed is an understatement. Of our original countries (Ireland, Iceland, Catalonia, the Netherlands, Greece, Bulgaria, Wales) we have managed updates for just two - along with a look at events in Germany which impact so greatly on the rest.

So we look at Ireland where the picture is really pretty grim. There is little sense of optimism on the Irish left and other than Greece and Spain, which populations could suffer more? In fact, in some ways the Irish situation might seem even more dispiriting than the Greek one in that at least there has been a strong and spirited reaction in Greece that offers some hope for the future. (The writer of our original article on Greece, Giannis Baniias, sadly died since he wrote the original article for us.)

But we also look at Catalonia where optimism seems high despite the difficulties it is facing in the Spanish economic crisis. Here we get a sense of people believing that the future might be different and better than the present. This sense is not one we find generally across Europe just now.

And then there are the places we didn't get updates on. Perhaps most inspiring of all of these is Iceland. In fact, so inspiring is the Icelandic story that it seems a lot of people wish it wasn't true. In Iceland they have used the aftermath of the economic crisis to recast their society. They have rewritten their constitution in an open and democratic manner. They have undertaken a radical programme of government covering everything from women's place in politics to the limits of intellectual property rights. And perhaps not least of all, they seem to be the only people in Europe which have pursued those who caused the economic crisis with any seriousness, bankers and the former Prime Minister alike being currently in court answering

Going back to look at what has happened in the countries we profiled two years ago offers a promising starting-point for Scotland - no promises, no guarantees

for their actions.

But even in more typical European countries (it is worth remembering that Iceland has a population only about the size of Edinburgh) the picture is varied. There seems no likelihood of a major change in Germany with the main parties offering little by way of variation from the standard European Central Bank model of economic policy. But Die Linke (the Left Party) continues to demonstrate real support, even though it has been marginalised by the establishment and struggles for media coverage. The upcoming election could be an important consolidation of their place in German politics or a story of depressing decline - all for the want of a one-point move in opinion polls in one direction or the other.

Meanwhile, the story from the Netherlands is different again where the left is making serious in-roads in the election (the result of which may well be in by the time you read this). We will get an update in a future issue once we know what has happened.

OK, what does all this mean? Well, first of all it tells us that something significant has happened in Scotland since we first published these articles. Back then we were looking to see if there were radical policies and approaches taking place in countries like Scotland to see if there was anything that could be 'transplanted' over here. When we go back to look again, it is inevitable that we see the stories from the perspective of the approaching referendum on independence. Before the question was 'what are you up to?' and now the question has become a more fundamental 'who are you?'.

One way or another, this change is one to be celebrated. It marks some kind of shift from talking about Scotland as if it is an extended local authority seeking only 'best practice' in how it goes about its business to talking instead about the very nature of the place in which we live. Whether the answers we have heard from either side in this debate are anything to write home about (they're not) is not the most important thing. Much more important is that we are thinking about ourselves in this way.

Is there anything that can be concluded from all of this? Well, one of the most telling points in the whole issue comes from John Foster in the Constitutional Debate page - small

countries aren't good or bad, strong or weak. They are just countries, and what matters is what you do with them. He points out that there are two big case studies right on our doorstep which offer the different poles of possibility. To our south-west, Ireland, to our north Iceland. Both captured by corrupt financial elites, both turned into corporate enrichment vehicles in the height of the pre-crash madness, both the victims of the collapsing Ponzi-scheme that was financial capitalism. One responded by kicking back, by reshaping itself. The other seems almost to have rolled over and accepted defeat. Neither is inevitable, neither unavoidable.

Perhaps the number one lesson in seeking wisdom from our neighbours is that there is no lesson we didn't already know. What we do with sovereign powers (an independent Scotland or the UK) is a decision we can make if we are offered the choice and choose to make a choice (rather than the current Westminster 'two versions of the same thing' option). Anyone who tells us we can't make the choice needs to visit Iceland. Anyone who tells us we are guaranteed success should hop on a ferry to Ireland.

No promises, no guarantees. Might that be the most mature political debate we've had in Scotland for a generation? ■

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threaten a
lost decade

invest for
jobs and
growth

defend quality
public services

The Leadership Question

It is probably the political-pathology of a small nation that makes it sensitive to outside comment. Ironically, however, from the point of view of its citizens, it is the compliments that are paid that are more damaging than any criticism. Over the last two decades Ireland has repeatedly been referred to as a model economy even in wildly divergent circumstances.

First during the great ballooning of financial liquidity in the 1990s and 2000s, as the model of EU potential, when the term ‘Celtic Tiger’, originally coined as a catchy heading in an investment bank report on Irish bank shares, became short-hand for Ireland’s unbelievable exponential growth. Subsequently when the massively over-leveraged Irish banking system collapsed and Irish politicians moved swifter than any other nation to make all of the citizens responsible for levels of private debt considerably larger than the country’s GDP and initiated rounds of fiscal consolidation to try and pay for it all, Ireland became the “successful” model of the EU’s Austerity policy imposed on peripheral members.

During the good times they were praised for possessing such qualities as “intuition, the ability to make seemingly unrelated connections and tolerance of ambiguity” while during the bad times it was claimed that the Irish had an “extraordinary capacity to deal with the difficult circumstances of the economic crisis”. Surely the Irish are the most adaptable citizens on the planet!

Of course, such compliments suit a particular agenda.

A talk given by the ECB chief Jean-Claude Trichet in 2004 to celebrate the work of Irish civil servant TK Whitaker illustrates the usefulness of seeing Ireland as model for fiscal consolidation. In the talk Trichet praised Ireland’s transformation from crisis and debt to extraordinary growth as attributable to labour market reforms and fiscal consolidation. However, this was as an opener to Triche’s main point, how these principles, when applied to the EU as a whole illustrate how it would weather any economic storm.

“Finally much progress has been achieved in capital market

reforms, not least due to the introduction of the euro. But the further integration of national capital markets towards a truly European financial market could make an even more important contribution to safeguarding against country-specific shocks. (...) In this context, one has to consider the astonishing experience of Ireland, which recovered from poor economic and fiscal conditions in the mid-1980s to an impressive pace of economic activity and sound fiscal position in no more than a decade. In addition to a favourable macroeconomic environment and the benefits derived from participation in the European Union, the economic recovery was grounded on far-reaching home made structural reforms in the labour, capital and product markets.”

The date of the talk is significant as in that year it was impossible to ignore the fact that Ireland was in the middle of a massive property bubble funded by banks that were already significantly larger than a country of Ireland’s size could sustain with houses selling for many multiples of the average industrial wage. Fourteen per cent of the economy was dependent on construction, spurred on by tax breaks and incentives and while Ireland enjoyed a significant influx of Foreign Direct Investment it was clear that the majority of this was simply a tax avoidance exercise following the reduction of Ireland’s Corporate Tax rate to 12.5 per cent. Yet as many critics of the Euro and single currency have been pointing out from the mid-1990s on, the ECB and the European project failed to consider what to do in the event of bank failure. As L. Randall Wray argues, this was a design feature of the EMU and the EU more generally:

“free the banks so that they can blow up, then blow up the government budgets as they try to rescue their banks. In reality, of course, the Irish bail-out was really designed to save the banks of the centre nations — not the periphery. Ireland fell on the sword in perhaps the greatest act of charity ever seen

in the history of humanity as it protected German and French and English banks from losses on their lending to Irish banks. Unlike the potato famine, this catastrophe was entirely produced by the Irish Government’s policy of taking on the bank debt.”

A June 2012 IMF working paper indicated that the Irish banking crisis has been the “costliest banking crisis in advanced economies since at least the Great Depression”. But what has been the political reaction to this?

Now that Austerity is the main policy of almost all Western governments, Ireland is once again being held up as an example of how Austerity can work. Gillian Tett on a recent edition of Newsnight, when discussing the social explosion that the EU sovereign debt crisis is causing in Spain, on the cusp of their own bailout, suggested that in Ireland fiscal consolidation is starting to work, the economy is stabilizing and there has been social cohesion, for now.

First of all the economy is not stabilising, but what about social cohesion? On the surface the reaction to being impoverished to pay for the “costliest banking crisis since at least the Great Depression” has been relatively muted. It is true that it took such a massive crisis to ensure that Fine Gael, the centre-right party and Labour, their perpetual erstwhile side-kicks, a notionally social democratic party, re-entered government. It is only the outright rejection of Fianna Fail that allowed this to happen. This is because only about 38 per cent of the workforce is engaged in what are often referred to as middle-class professions, that is, managerial, administrative, professional or technical occupations. The remaining 62 per cent are engaged in skilled, semi-skilled and service-based occupations. According to the income distribution statistics produced by the Revenue Commissioners, the median PAYE wage in Ireland in 2008 was just under €27,000: that is, about half of all PAYE workers earned €27,000 or less that year, with almost 64 per cent earning less than €35,000. Fianna Fail despite its legacy of corruption and connections to property developers had managed through

Despite suffering the worst of the Eurocrisis the Irish left has not managed to connect the symptom with its cause. Until it does, argues Donagh Brennan, it will not be able to capture the public agenda

successive elections to retain a significant working class vote.

Since the general election and the continuing fallout from repeated cutbacks, tax increases on low and middle incomes, attacks on the public sector, recapitalisations, state bailouts and the propping up of the socially destructive banks, principally Anglo Irish Bank, it is this group that the left has sought to energise into resistance.

But the inability to do so is almost completely due to the failure of genuine leadership on the left.

The first resource in a crisis for the working class is the Trade Union movement. However, time and again it has failed to mobilise or support significantly the majority of members who would look to it for leadership.

The most recent example was during the Fiscal Compact Referendum when the executive of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions chose not to declare how its members should vote. Although David Begg referred to the Fiscal Compact Treaty as a loaded gun pointed to the heads of the Irish people, he said that there were trade unions that disagreed with this opinion so they were not saying *yea* or *nae*.

There has been a number of campaigns, coalitions and new political groups such as Claiming Our Future or Community Platform often rooted in the NGO sector, who, with the help of some of the Trade Unions have tried to highlight an alternative economic strategy referred to as 'Plan B'. These Keynesian counter-cyclical proposals, while worthwhile, are initiated by those disenchanted members of the Labour Party and although they expend great effort in trying to raise these issues 'within the debate' they are always completely ignored by Labour Party leadership.

Sinn Fein, the Republican Party led by Gerry Adams in the South has been the most successful in gaining popular support since the crisis began. They increased the number of Members of Parliament in the Dail, and have many

effective speakers and politicians who regularly make life uncomfortable for government ministers. Numerous polls since the election show them gaining an incredible amount of ground, by-passing their fellow opposition parties, most significantly Fianna Fail. While they have a now established social democratic platform that is the envy of many on the left of Labour, there are doubts that this



policy will be followed through should their current success translate into real political power in 2016. Sinn Fein are regularly criticised on the left in Ireland for how they conduct themselves in the Northern Ireland Executive, which often means that they follow existing conservative economic and fiscal policy. While some of this comment is sectarian in nature it remains true that rather than seeing themselves as a leftwing party Sinn Fein consider themselves in an all-Ireland context as the heirs of Fianna Fail, albeit based on the party that solidified its working class support in the 1930s. There is also a willingness to tolerate the bad behaviour of property developers, such as former IRA hunger-striker Tom McFeely or local cement magnate, Russian property developer and Anglo Irish Bank shares fiddler Sean Quinn. In addition there is a social conservatism that the party refuses to address to protect the personal views of key TDs.

The United Left Alliance (ULA) has been the hope of left unity, at least on the radical left. The ULA is mainly the Socialist Party and the SWP with a number of left members not affiliated with either party. It has provided the backbone of the Campaign Against the Household

and Water Tax. Of all the campaigns to date this has generated the most support, with only 62 per cent of households so far registering to pay the 100 euro a year flat-rate charge. Water Charges are also planned, along with the privatisation of the water supply. The popularity of the campaign however, is not entirely attributable to the hard work of the ULA, Sinn Fein (they support the campaign but do not endorse the call for people to boycott the charge), the SP or the SWP.

It is down, largely, to the inability of the government to force people to pay. Although the number of threats has increased, at present it is up to householder to register without any existing penalty for not doing so. A property tax is also planned although the means of collecting it have yet to be officially announced.

The danger for The Campaign Against the Household and Water Tax, and for the ULA is that they are forced to use significant resources to campaign on a platform that does not necessarily translate in to raising class consciousness or political dividend for the Left.

As I mentioned the reason for the muted response from the Irish people to the crisis is a failure of leadership. Like the crisis itself this is systemic and requires a deep leftwing analysis not only of Irish political life, but of our economic and political history.

One question, for example, which isn't being examined in any depth, is why Ireland had the "costliest banking crisis in advanced economies since at least the Great Depression". While superficial reasons abound the real reason is not understood or even examined. If we were able to provide an answer to this we would begin to understand exactly how Irish capitalism works, or rather fails, continually and how its failing Irish society. Unfortunately, at the moment it's a question no one really seems interested in examining. ■

Donagh Brennan is Editor of the Irish Left Review

Taking Catalonia Forward

Independence has meant for many years and for many Catalan citizens a standalone political objective. However, the grassroots process of the 'Referendum about the Independence of Catalonia', held in 554 municipalities of the Principality of Catalonia (2009-2011), brought a new and necessary dimension to the concept of Independence, evolving it from the 'political objective' to a 'social starting point'. Today, the great majority of Catalans understand 'Independence' not as an end goal but as a necessary socio-political step to take 'Catalonia forward'.

Prior to the actual vast and

successfully introduce the assurance amongst our fellow Catalan citizens that the Independence of a nation, from the state by which it is currently ruled, is not an isolated claim due to 'specific and out of ordinary' intrinsic conjunctures, but a normalised exercise in Europe that surpasses the description of independence as a 'dream'. A deep down damaging description, too often kindly accepted, may we add.

Independence is possible, as long as we democratically prove we want it, independence is a 'doable' reality just as it has been for all the new European independent states, including the Czech

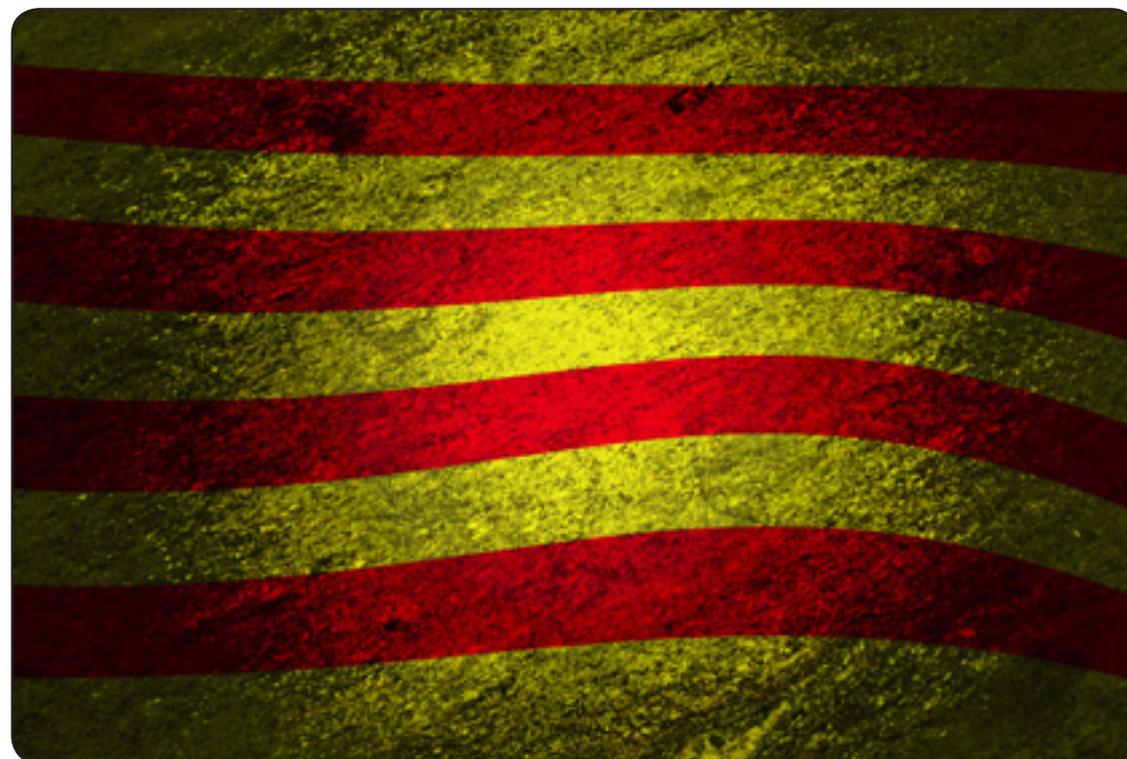
historical reasons to support their claim to independence but also hundreds of extraordinary and positive current arguments; talking to others about the restoration of an Independent Catalan state is a joyful and positive experience for the anonymous citizen.

Economic reasons have played an important roll when explaining day-to-day, down-to-earth benefits, we know now how many more schools or hospitals we could have if we were allowed to use 'in-house' the taxes we raise thanks to 'in-house' efforts. Thanks to all this given data we have awoken a genuine, street-level interest to learn more. Concepts

like fiscal plundering are not strange anymore for any ordinary Catalan citizen as is neither the economical grievance that Catalans suffer because of our attachment to the Spanish State and its defective democracy. Injustice, robbery, plundering... many socio-economical deficits have been uncovered to the general public.

But

Independence is not all, or only, about having more money and proving data. Independence is about deciding for our own what to do with it; it is not



outspoken acceptance among Catalans that a Catalan Independent State is key to protect and promote Catalan welfare, Catalans have had to go through a building process of awareness. Awareness of their own sovereignty or, better put... the modern lack of it, and awareness of the real possibility to be again an independent and sovereign state if they so want.

One of the great achievements during these years of international observers and international media attention on Catalonia while voting Yes to Independence, has been to

Rep. Latvia, Montenegro and all the dozens of independent states established since World War II.

We are not an exception of the already independent states' global acceptance: 'ruling one's own house for the best of one's own people's interests is the best deal'. We agree, totally.

Catalonia knows about the benefits of Independence: during the last three years there has been a prolific increase in civic self-funded groups using their area of expertise to explain the advantages of being an independent state. Catalans today not only have all the legitimate

only about collecting our own money but more importantly about deciding how we want to raise it and how we want to spend it for the best interests of our people. The real benefit of Independence is to build and live our own democratic system reflecting our national priorities while contributing directly on international affairs.

Catalonia suffers from an extremely hard fiscal deficit due to the eight per cent of the Catalan national GDP held yearly by the Spanish State, a sum of €16 Billion per year, not a small detail. Already since the 19th century

Anna Arque looks at the relationships between Catalonia and Spain, Catalonia and Scotland and the Catalonian and the Catalonian people. She finds a move towards seeing independence as the starting-point for real political progress.

determined complaints by Catalan intellectuals were raised. Catalans have been victims of an economical plundering like no other European nation. Worldwide recognised economists like Xavier Sala-Martín explain how an Independent Catalan State would meet Catalan Government debts only with its corresponding tax income.

Understanding this, it's fair to conclude that all the sacrifices endured all these months by the Catalan citizenship have been due to unnecessary measures provoked by the systematic leak of our GDP from our nation that could be stopped with the correct political will. And of course, these budget cuts on social policies put in place by the Government of Catalonia affect mainly the working class leaving a great number of families in a very fragile situation.

The recent rescue demanded by the Catalan Government to the Spanish State of €5 Billion will not amend the actual situation, accounted as a debt increase on the fiscal balances will only increase the hardship on the social, already weakened, policies. Just to highlight again the shocking situation, Catalan Government is demanding €5 Billion to a state that retains €16 Billion of Catalans taxes.

At this stage, and taking into account the automatic political interference that comes with the financial rescue by the Spanish State into Catalonia's decisions making, you would agree that it becomes reasonable to call the situation in Catalonia 'outrageous'.

On top of all this, Catalonia has the infrastructure ready to collect taxes from its citizens. Catalonia has a Catalan Tax Agency already working collecting the three per cent of the total tax paid by the Catalan citizenship. It's worth

mentioning that a group of owner-directors, under the name of 'DiemProu' (we say enough) has started to pay their periodical Value Added Tax (VAT) to this Catalan tax agency, just to prove that Catalonia can already collect all of its taxes if a determined political will was really there.

We Catalans, whether we like to admit it or not, need to accept that it will be impossible to take Catalonia forward without knowing and understanding the legacy of Franquism. Its tentacles were and still are long and for this we must review our own steps. We need to be prepared to assume that the Catalan politicians who have led us to this actual situation will themselves be placed under the

spotlight, with the aim to test the price they are willing to pay for Independence or, to the contrary, the price they are willing to pay to work against it. If ever confronted with the decision of choosing between oneself and the country, only the ones choosing the country will be saved.

Directly or indirectly, Catalan elite came to terms with a transition that has never ended, precisely, because it was flawed and insincere from the start. The false 'mutual forgiveness' settled at Franco's death never allowed Justice to establish the new and necessary democratic social role models. The total absence of judgements levied against those responsible for Franquism permitted their inheritants to enjoy an outrageous moral immunity that has resulted in an unchallenged abuse of power and subsequent corruption.

The Spanish dictator died, important to note, peacefully 'in his bed'. The new 'Spanish' conversion to democracy was only considered because of his death and the transition was faced

by a society that still had all the power structure of Franquism active and in place to tackle it. Catalan politicians accepted to establish a self-government for Catalonia that was simply a replica of all 'Spanish' territories; a governing system which, of course, has been proven to be an inefficient and an unfair model for all, rich and poor.

This strategy known as 'coffee for all' was designed to reduce the 'national subject' of the historical nations of Euskal Herria and Catalonia to mere Spanish regions. However, while almost succeeding to push Catalonia into an economical cul.de-sac it has, at the same time, unavoidably created for the real Spanish regions an unhealthy dependency on the richer region, a dependency that will only be remedied with the independence of Catalonia. And that is because with a strong independent Catalunya, Spain will gain an excellent partner to work out successful scenarios within this globalised and interdependent world. They just need to believe in our good will and promote their own.

To all this, after more than 30 years of collaboration, former President of Catalonia (from 1980 to 2003) Jordi Pujol, has recently and publically admitted his failure in attempting to insert Catalonia into Spain or, trying to 'Catalanise' Spain. Having worked against 'uncontrolled' independentist aspirations and having discouraged any increase of claims to political freedom from moderate nationalism, he has only recently confessed his non-independentist stand during all that time.

Catalan Nationalism accepted a powerless 'Generalitat', name given to the Catalan self government, based on Pujol's political talent to manage a rich nation as Catalunya while ensuring calm internal waters. Nowadays 'La Generalitat', far from being the original sovereign institution that it was before Spanish occupation (1365-1714), it has been exposed as a farce, simply a branch of the Spanish government, which is the one which ultimately accepts or refuses what the Catalan Parliament decides. This, obviously erases any sovereign meaning when talking about the Catalan Parliament.

The end of the impotent autonomist

The Independence of a European nation is not a bilateral struggle between the established State and the Nation wishing to become its own sovereign state, but an international event within an international framework

system installed in Catalonia has arrived and with it the acceptance that the only solution to take 'Catalonia Forward' is to gain Independence.

It has been openly pointed out many times by both Scottish and Catalan representatives how convenient it would have been to combine both the Catalans peoples' and the Scottish politicians' determinations to win independence. I recall myself, on a visit to Scotland as part of the Catalan people's group, having this very same conversation with First Minister Alex Salmond back in 2009.

Three years later, Scottish politicians have officially called for a Referendum about Scotland's Independence with the consequent responsibility to lead the change from being a dependant region to the independent state. And to the great interest of Catalans they have done so without any auto-reaffirming popular referenda, neither massive street demonstrations, nor favourable polls for independence. All three being real cases in Catalonia.

In Catalonia 51 per cent would vote Yes for independence, by latest official polls, in front of a 24 per cent against, however, this 'YES' majority has a Catalan nationalistic Government not willing to make it politically effective.

The Scottish Government has shown to the world that real political leadership is about leading one's people to what one believes is best for the collectiveness of the nation and creating the necessary scenarios to make it possible. Their determination does not follow polls, on the contrary, polls will be changed by their determination.

Despite the individual Scottish political party preferences and seeing the scenario from a Catalan independentists perspective, the SNP may in fairness be credited with already two key victories; the first one being the moment they decided, without a social majority for independence backing them up, to include the calling for a Referendum about the Independence of Scotland in

their electoral program; Second, was to place their centre of gravity in no other place than Scotland's national sovereignty while resisting UK's pressure.

The Government of a sovereign Parliament, because elected democratically, is sovereign to decide all matters concerning the future of their People. The Scottish Government established that the 'When, What and How' questions are to be addressed only by the sovereign Parliament of Scotland, and these are to be answered by the sovereign People of Scotland.

Catalans demand that the

The total absence of judgements levied against those responsible for Franquism permitted their inheritants to enjoy an outrageous moral immunity that has resulted in an unchallenged abuse of power and subsequent corruption

nationalist Catalan political class, again in Government since 2010, accept their duty to listen and execute the necessary manoeuvres to ensure that the will of the 51 per cent majority prevails over the 24 per cent minority. The next elections will give no room for electoral euphemism, it will be a 'For' or 'Against' Independence debate. The official calling for a referendum about

the independence of Catalonia will be in the electoral programs with a clear date and will become the centre of political party discussions.

Whenever millions of Europeans have to face political difficulties in order to exercise the Universal Right of Self-Determination in any European territory all European citizens should react accordingly, and in line with, a conscious understanding of fundamental European democratic standards. In all, an international understanding of the Universal Right of Self-determination does exist beyond national focus; it is not an issue to overcome alone and only by nations working to restore their full sovereignty.

The Independence of a European nation is not a bilateral struggle between the established State and the Nation wishing to become its own sovereign state, but an international event within an international framework full of treaties, resolutions and precedents to our

advantage. The outcome of the Scottish, Catalan, Flemish, Basque and South Tirolers processes will be an important litmus test for European democratic standards, either exposing them as flawed, or affording them opportunity to uphold their values.

The European Partnership for Independence (EPI) works to encourage fellow European citizens to understand the importance of supporting the rights held by historical nations (represented by millions of Europeans) to exercise their 'Universal Right of Self-determination' free of issues and threats.

This reflection is made from the deep conviction that Europe will only be what it deserves to be once it shows unequivocal support for the democratic socio/political majorities working to exercise democracy to its full extent and that this support is brought to bear irrespective of the democratic deficits that still exist in some European state's systems. These two coming years will show us if that is already the case.

The whole world has been testimony, this September 11, of one of the largest social demonstration ever: 1.500.000-2.000.000 Catalans marching for the Independence. One more impressive display organised by the people of Catalonia. Now, we all hope that all this effort won't end up being just a 'nice' photo finish but the prelude of an unavoidable and democrat political change through the official calling of a referendum for the Independence of Catalonia.

The Nationalist Catalan Government needs to offer an 'action agenda' free of euphemistic proclamations.

The will of the people for the Independence in Catalonia has once again been proved, there is, therefore, a demand for an independence' political calendar. Catalans will not settle with any other 'via', not interested in better fiscal treats, this demonstration has shout crystal clear to the world: we, Catalans, want the political independence.

As Goethe said: "If after 3000 years of history we have yet not learnt, we will always live in the darkness". Justice, Freedom, Equality and Peace for all! ■

Anna Arqué is Catalonia spokesperson for the European Partnership for Independence

The Needed Nail

Victor Grossman looks at the state of the German LEFT party and what its electoral fortunes might mean for both the future of European capitalism and the strength of left parties across the continent.

“For want of a nail the shoe was lost, for want of a shoe the horse was lost, for want of...“ In the end, the old rhyme tells us, the kingdom was lost, “all for the want of a horseshoe nail”.

In Germany, with national elections just a year away, the missing nail could be one tiny decimal point under the 5.0 per cent needed by the LEFT party to stay in the Bundestag. And three months ago the horseshoe looked very brittle!

Yet isn't this worry exaggerated,

premature - or fully irrelevant? The

German media treat LEFT party views commonly like a sort of unhealthy appendix, to be removed next year by a painless operation. TV – as obligated – does offer an occasional sound bite, most often a harmless, carefully-selected sentence or two.

Talk shows do invite its telegenic

leaders: quick, witty little Gregor Gysi, smilingly sovereign Oskar Lafontaine, the unorthodox new co-chairperson Katja Kipping with her striking red hair, the over-tall, highly intelligent Dietmar Bartsch or the brilliant, passionate new co-vice-president and theoretician Sahra Wagenknecht. But care is usually taken to have three or four loud, aggressive opponents to join in outshouting them. In rare interviews, as recently with Ms. Kipping on state-run TV, her interrogator threw one vicious cliché-punch after another, constantly interrupting her polite answers in a tone inconceivable towards leaders of other parties. Statistically, the legally-impartial public TV channels give the LEFT four percent of air time, the popular private channels, also required to be impartial, one or two percent, averaging one

appearance per month.

Like waiters who can pass by without noticing customers from whom they expect no good tip, the established parties ignore the LEFT when possible, treating it as an unimportant has-been to be barred from decision-making meetings like agreeing on a new president or determining European fiscal policy. But, as with the waiters, a wary eye is kept on it all the same! It represents the only genuine opposition within the

Bundestag.

With

Germany's vaunted prosperity crumbling, all the parties face earnest problems. Merkel and her Christian Democrats (CDU) prescribe stark austerity but hope to rescue a shaky euro and a European Union which a dominant Germany can use for never-ending expansion plans.

But this is threatened by xenophobic hatred, viciously fanned by the mass media, against 'lazy, spoiled Greeks' and, increasingly, Spanish, Italian or other 'southern weaklings'. Even her Bavarian sister party, the Christian Social Union (CSU), usually in step, now fears losing supremacy in state elections and is resorting to defiant harangues against saving 'debtor nations' while her coalition partners, the Free Democrats (FDP), fighting for survival, demand shamelessly that the Athenian Jonah be heaved overboard to the sea monsters. Merkel somehow remains cool, smiling and quite popular, but the weakness or virtual demise of the FDP in 2013, with 'Christians' lacking a majority – could well cost her the throne.

When out of power both Social Democrats (SPD) and Greens don shiny,

left-leaning armour – which proves stiff and uncomfortable if the soft, perk-lined armchairs of Cabinet positions are regained. Currently in opposition, they have purloined the very demands of the LEFT which they abandoned, opposed or thwarted when in power, like a minimum wage, fair, high taxes for the very wealthy and lower ones (if any) for the working poor, keeping the pension age down, humane support for the jobless, lower medical costs, no deploying of troops abroad. But their bad record in office is often forgotten, thanks to the media and short memories.

Nonetheless, polls indicate that the SPD and the Greens can hardly achieve a majority in September 2013. Barring unexpected strength by the hazy new Pirates Party, this would leave the SPD two alternatives; jilt the Greens, abandon remaining principles and join Merkel in a "Grand Coalition", or, with the Greens, accept the support of LEFT deputies. But nationally, and in all states but one (Brandenburg), SPD and Greens reject all ties with those political ragamuffins. Far more than Merkel they hope that the spoilsports, with their nerving appeal to their own bad consciences – and rival voter appeal - will disappear from the national scene.

In the 2009 elections the LEFT did indeed cut sharply into the ranks of the SPD and the Greens, gaining almost 12 per cent nationally (8.3 per cent in western Germany, 28.3 per cent in the smaller east). In six of the nine West German states it cleared the five per cent hurdle and entered legislatures while holding a healthy second place in four Eastern states – and the lead in a fifth one. Its strength forced opponents, fearful of losing more heavily, to move – hesitantly – toward some progressive positions and legislation. And its success served as incentive and encouragement to splintered leftwing groups in Western Europe and a link to tiny leftwing parties in the East.

Sadly (though happily for its

rivals), this picture soon darkened when the LEFT lost badly in a several state elections, was knocked out of the coalition in Berlin and now teeters shakily at about six percent nationally, with small changes both up and down. What drenching could cause this rapid shrinkage to half its one-time high?

A basic explanation, already discussed, is the silent media treatment of the LEFT except when it digs up something nasty. But this is neither unexpected nor easily remediable. Is the other main problem remediable? A long-lasting inner conflict virtually lamed the party, alienated sympathizers and eroded the self-confidence and resolve of many members, whose Eastern ranks are sadly thinning due to age, disability and death of faithful old GDR-members.

The conflict revolves around one basic question: how much should the party accommodate itself to Germany's basic economic and political system? The 'reformer' wing of the LEFT is strongest among political leaders in Eastern Germany, where its support from about a quarter of the voters (with choices among at least five or six parties) provides hopes and possibilities for participation in government on municipal, county and state levels. In some communities it wins the job of mayor or even county head; in Brandenburg it is in the state government (but lost its coalition position in Berlin and one other state). Such local victories are won by fighting for better conditions in local areas, from more street lights or improving schools to saving jobs while trying to balance the budget. Based on such a strategy, the reformers hope to become a more social component of a national government, left-leaning partners of the SPD and the Greens. Such an achievement might finally overcome its "bad boy" status as a Communist-tainted leftover from the terrible old "German Democratic Republic" and make it an established, respected competitor in the political chess game. It claims it can accomplish far more for working people from this position than from atop an agitator's soapbox.

Doubtters, often but not exclusively from western states with more militant histories of opposition, point out that leaders of the two desired partners, the larger SPD and the Greens, have repeatedly insisted that they will not ally with the LEFT; it is too – well, too left! Their hopes for regaining power in 2013 do not rest on assistance from the LEFT,

but on weakening or eliminating it from the decisive Bundestag. Especially the SPD competes with the LEFT, after all, in trying to win the same voter groups.

LEFT reformers, undismayed, hope that election results will make the SPD and Greens gnash their teeth but change their minds. But this leads them to avoid positions causing alienation. It means joining obediently in denigrating the GDR, bowing their heads in unison at every memorial to misdeeds and victims, of which there were certainly many, while blocking virtually all positive recollections: GDR achievements in child care, equal education, health care, full employment and a guaranteed home for everyone. More basically, overlooking the ousting of the corporations and banks which built up Hitler and were again planning expansion, and the considerable support for forces fighting to gain or keep their freedom, from Cuba, Nicaragua and Chile to South Africa, Angola, and Mozambique – and Vietnam. Most reformers are timid about rejecting the daily 'totalitarianism' clichés equating fascism with 'Stalinism', with the latter rather worse, and clearly meant to prejudice present and coming generations against any form of socialism.

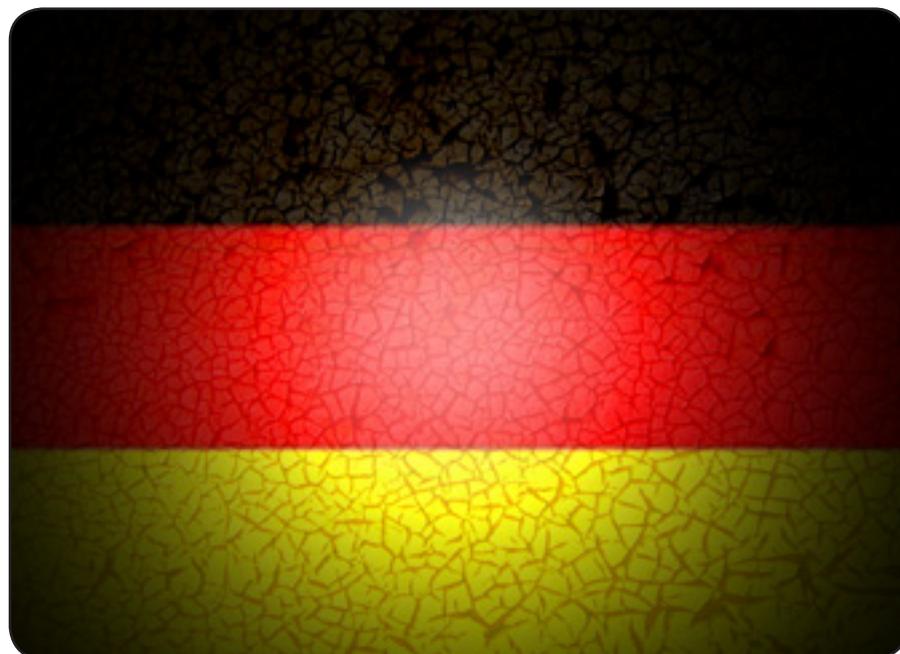
Another difference involves the privatising of state-owned housing estates and utilities. The reformers may permit exceptions and leave a few doors ajar; the others, the 'leftists', in line with the leading LEFT figure in West Germany, Oskar Lafontaine, oppose all compromises.

An extremely hot issue concerns German troops. The leftists say that in light of German history, including recent

history since 'unification', Germany's troops must never be deployed anywhere outside its boundaries, not with NATO in wars like Yugoslavia and Afghanistan, not in EU deployments like Kosovo, not even in UN peace-making or humanitarian missions. The reasoning is simple: troops or weapons of the current German state and system can never be beneficial, they are intrinsically expansionist.

Such a stand cannot and will not be tolerated by the SPD or the Greens. Undoubtedly with this in mind, the reformers try over and over to insist that while we indeed oppose sending troops abroad we must consider each case individually on its merits. Some humanitarian UN missions might well deserve support. The leftists warn about any crack in the dyke of a party distinguished from all others by its insistence on peace and peaceful methods. The reformers recall the past necessity of fighting Hitler with military means. But Germany is no anti-fascist or even progressive factor, the leftists reply. This is part of a basic debate: could or should the LEFT join any national government or rather base its policies on a slow but steady move away from increasingly discredited capitalism and toward democratic socialism.

Debates on basics have been rather rare. Instead, personality questions came to the fore. On one side was Oskar Lafontaine, now 70, once a leading Social Democrat, now a militant leftist, and in no small measure responsible for the big gains in western Germany in 2009, truly spectacular in his little home state of Saarland.



Leading those who distrust his uncompromising views is Dietmar Bartsch, tall, handsome, also well-spoken, from Mecklenburg-West Pomerania in the former GDR, who frankly wishes to work more closely with the SPD – and has not given up hopes of membership in a liberal-leftish coalition next year. The left wingers warned: joining the two ‘loyal opposition’ parties, SPD and Greens, is like a dog moving into a lion’s den in hopes of sharing power and booty; in the end it can expect only to gnaw the bony remains of any prey – and get thrown out again into the cold, skinnier than ever. This is exactly what happened both in northern Mecklenburg and in Berlin.

This conflict threatened to split and thus destroy the party at the congress in Göttingen in late May – to a degree, though by no means sharply, along east-west lines. There were emotional speeches, especially from the party’s traditional leader Gregor Gysi, now caucus chair in the Bundestag, and Lafontaine. Damocles’ threatening sword hung over the former railroad repair building where the congress was held, with lots of manoeuvring in its shadow. Then Lafontaine withdrew from any candidacy on a national level and a young eastern woman from Dresden, Katja Kipping, who belonged to no wing of the party except her own, was elected as co-chairperson (a woman is always chosen first). A widely accepted equation – one woman, one man, one easterner, one westerner – contributed to the narrow defeat of the eastern Bartsch as second co-chairperson by Bernd Riexinger, a West German trade union leader, a rather mild type closer to the leftist wing of the party.

Party officials from both sides were elected to the many other posts; the Göttingen congress was basically a compromise between the two main groups. Some reformers sulked, but nearly everyone breathed a sigh of collective relief, for the party had remained together. For a proclaimed period of 120 days Kipping and Riexinger set about mending fences, smoothing ruffled feelings, and trying to establish a base for a vigorous, forward-looking election campaign during the coming year, with Riexinger visiting East German centres to get acquainted – for he hardly knew the region. Thus far both of them seem to have had success.

The most pronounced group ‘on the left of the LEFT’, the Communist

Platform (organised quite legitimately, like about 25 other groups within the party) has long disputed with the Forum of Democratic Socialism, with Bartsch and his backers. But now it calls for what may be seen as a truce. Both wings of the party agree on fighting neo-Nazis, opposing the Afghanistan military adventure, a minimum wage, supporting women’s rights and equality in education, free college studies, lower costs and more service with health care and utilities, no more gentrification of the inner cities. Despite disagreements, even on some basics, the two wings of the party must now work and fight together or they will lose that necessary little nail – the five per cent of all voters required to stay in the Bundestag. A split would scuttle both sides, leaving Germany with only the established parties, a disastrous, indeed dangerous prospect if the recession, now rumbling so threateningly, further worsens.

Even on the divisive question of relations with the SPD, co-chair Katja Kipping has offered an original suggestion. She congratulated SPD-leader Sigmar Gabriel on his surprisingly sensible proposals regarding the European financial crisis (he is currently fighting tough rivalry in his party on his leadership position). When the Bundestag meets again, she pointed out, his advocacy of strict regulation of the banks would get further with LEFT support, and she offered such support. Indeed, she argued, a real political change could only succeed with the LEFT, and so she offered to join a coalition. But she stressed two LEFT conditions; courageous taxation of the wealthiest fortunes and no more German weapons exports. Gabriel was expectedly

dismissive; perhaps recalling his Biblical namesake, his only reply was arrogant horn-blowing.

Can the truce within the party hold – and bear fruit? Can the LEFT break out of its overly parliamentary bias and become more active in the streets, the workplaces, trade schools and universities? Can it more fully tap the potential of millions in Germany with immigrant backgrounds, especially the large Turkish group? How urgently such nails are needed!

And not only for Germany. As elsewhere, there are numerous small, more radical groups and parties: the anti-bank ATTAC, two separate Communist parties, Maoists, Stalinists, ‘autonomous’ anti-fascists, anarchists and somewhat

dubious ‘Marxist-Leninist’ groups. There is the young Pirates Party– now fading with no political program thus far, and the original media support now dwindling. But the LEFT party is by far the largest and most important. Just regaining the strength and influence of three years ago could help it, in the centre of the continent, to serve again as an inspiration to the splintered left in many countries of Europe, east and west, and help bring them together in concerted resistance to pressures, led by a powerful Germany, to force down living standards and squelch popular opposition from Athens to Lisbon. It must learn from the militancy displayed in many of those cities. Occasionally – but far too rarely – it has flared up, even in Germany, in recent years. With a well-nailed shoe what a kick would be possible! ■

Just regaining the strength and influence of three years ago could help the Left Party to serve again as an inspiration to the splintered left in many countries of Europe, east and west, and help bring them together in concerted resistance to pressures, led by a powerful Germany, to force down living standards and squelch popular opposition from Athens to Lisbon.

Victor Grossman is author of "Crossing the River: A Memoir of the American Left, the Cold War, and Life in East Germany"

The Constitutional Debate

In every SLR between now and the referendum we'll pick a policy issue and ask four writers from across the spectrum of constitutional opinion to argue the pros and cons of independence. In this issue we look at whether the size of a nation tells us anything about its likely radicalism

Even in the current era of global monopolisation, it would be wrong to argue that size alone stands in the way of a transformative independence, that is, a political independence that allows a country's people to exercise progressively greater economic control over their lives.

There are independent countries smaller than Scotland, such as Iceland, that have shown remarkable resilience during the present crisis. There are many others, considerably larger, that have not. The decisive factors are not economic in any narrow sense but jointly economic and political.

To take the cases of Iceland and Ireland.

Despite the strength of Ireland's radical traditions, its moneyed elite has over the past thirty years locked the country into politically and economic subservient relationships. On the one side, US monopolies control virtually its entire manufacturing sector. On the other, the EU has developed determining institutional influence. Worse still, social pacts deployed by populist but economically right-wing governments have largely succeeded in demobilising the trade union movement. When crisis struck, the government tamely accepted all demands from the ECB that the country's population take full responsibility for the crashed loans of external bondholders, that is, of the European and US banks. Despite some limited protests from the trade union movement, this disastrous course still persists. Ireland's publicly-owned infrastructure is being sold off to external monopolies. Its workforce is emigrating on a scale last seen in the 1960s.

Iceland had a moneyed elite if anything even more corrupt and piratical than Ireland's. At the same time it also possessed a tradition of socialist radicalism that was still relatively strong. It had also remained outside the European Union. When crisis struck the balance of popular mobilisation and institutional freedom was just enough to

force the government to impose capital controls, devalue the currency and refuse any immediate deal on external loans. Its volcanoes may also have helped.

In more general terms it might be argued that size *is* important. China was able to use its potentially vast market and labour reserves to oblige external monopolies to agree to technology transfer and intensive investment in what was originally a very poor and underdeveloped country. But it would not have been able to do so without a powerful state system with very clear governmental objectives. Similarly in Latin America, the successful implementation of developmental objectives have largely run in parallel to the level of socialist political mobilisation and the determination of governments.

What lessons does this hold for Scotland? In terms of independence as currently offered, Ireland seems to offer the closest analogy. At least up to a point. Institutionally the economy would be jointly controlled from London and Brussels – and in terms of ownership from the US, the EU and the City of London. The pro-independence moneyed elite, the bankers of Edinburgh and Aberdeen, would operate on terms set from outside Scotland, would rake in what they could from handling incoming mergers and acquisitions and would be unlikely agents for socially developmental policies.

At least up to a point. There would be two balancing factors. Compared to Ireland, Scotland has a somewhat better endowment of natural resources, particularly petrochemical and renewables, which, in some political circumstances, might enhance its developmental leverage. But the dynamic of Scotland's radical and socialist politics is also quite different. Ireland possesses an anti-imperialist tradition which might yet come to its rescue. Scotland's strong tradition of socialist and trade union organisation has historically been largely the product of

British-wide mobilisations targeting what was seen as the joint power of Scottish and English capital organised at the level of the British state.

The Scottish National Party, while recently adopting a social democratic patina, has always seen itself as a nationalist rather than a class party and its bid to secure majority support for independence is not being conducted on socially radical terms – largely the reverse. Moreover, the political form of this independence would ensure that its main components, the retention of Sterling, the monarchy and EU membership, would be written into any treaty of separation and a founding constitution. Going by experience elsewhere, this essentially neoliberal institutional orientation would be very difficult to shift.

So, to return to our starting point, size is not the only determinant. It helps. But it also requires a population mobilised for developmental goals that, at least to a degree, involve contesting the power of capital. In Scotland's case it is difficult to see how such developmental and socialist class politics would emerge from the current politics of independence.

On the other hand, the class politics that have in the past driven demands for economic democracy, particularly in terms of a Scottish Parliament with developmental powers of social ownership and control, emerged – as in the 1930s and 1970s and 80s – as essential parts of united struggles against capitalist state power at British level. And it is just such a struggle we face now. ■

John Foster

The SNP debate over NATO membership is an important debate for the Scottish left as a whole. It raises

as many (possibly even more) questions for those who favour continued union as it does for those of us who wish to see Scotland develop a progressive foreign and defence policies to sit along side progressive welfare, health, tax and education policies.

We start where we are – and we are in the UK where defence policy is riven by denial and dysfunction. UK defence policy has two pillars, a wish to retain nuclear weapons and a wish to be able to play a significant role in future expeditionary wars when called upon to do so by the United States. Robin Cook's ethical foreign policy was abandoned as soon as Blair crossed the Downing street threshold. Even Cameron, in the run up to the last General Election, had no difficulty in spinning to the left of Labour on issues of war and peace though the substance changed not at all when he entered office. To sum up, a dysfunctional UK defence policy promotes insecurity and division at home, distrust and outright hostility abroad.

On the other hand the referendum debate allows, for the first time in 50 years, all on the left to talk about what a progressive defence policy should look like. Moreover the referendum campaign allows the left that is aligned to the Yes Campaign an opportunity not only to discuss the issue but the opportunity to lay out in a practical step-by-step fashion how it can actually be achieved. All of this with, which is rare in British politics, with an attentive and engaged media looking on.

Interestingly the arguments of the pro-NATO camp within the SNP is very similar to that proposed by the unionist left. That is, there are, they claim, other, pragmatic priorities. Like the unionist left the pro-NATO nationalist case does not quite understand that there is no so-called pragmatic option, that the ridding of nuclear weapons cannot be parked. Independence will only be won with a positive vision of Scotland's future way in the world.

Developing a fearful vision of Scotland's place in world is part and parcel of the basic unionist case of 'Better Together'. It is a case that has relied on bogus polling usually paid for out of Atlanticist coffers rather than funds provided by the SNP Westminster Parliamentary Group! So let us spend a little time, possibly for the first time, quite literally considering Scotland's

place in the world.

Some people in life, or so it is perceived, have all the luck, whether in terms of work, long life and even romance. If it seems sometimes true in terms of life's journey it is certainly true in terms of the geopolitics of a country. Some countries, like Bangladesh in relation to flooding, seem perpetually cursed due to their climate and geography. Others, who share a common border with Russia, are on the edge of geopolitical tectonic plate that grinds bloodily and constantly almost without respite.

Some like Iceland find themselves in a geopolitical position where divergent interests converge. Yet Iceland confidently and skilfully plays one side off against the other. For instance Iceland is a member of NATO but has never been expected to pay the US military industrial complex the normal membership tithes.

Indeed when the UK threatened to use anti terror legislation to hunt Icelandic banks during the crisis, the then PM of Iceland went on Newsnight and mentioned, in passing of course, that the Russians were interested in leasing an old NATO airfield.

This quickly silenced a belligerent Brown and Darling. Having spotted this an apparently Trump-style Chinese initiative emerged. The Icelandic government politely noted the advance but did not bite.

This is a tactic the Prime Minister of Scotland will not need to employ because of where we actually are in the world rather than where some scaremongers pretend of imagine we are.

Scotland, like Ireland and like New Zealand, has all of the luck. Unlike in the 13th to 18th Centuries, we are in the back yard of no one very important. Twenty first century Spain and France have no designs on England so Ireland has retreated into the geopolitical background, we can happily join them.

This is not to say that Scotland will play an Albanian card, though the unionist media may try to present it as such. As I have said publicly a long time ago, I would be completely relaxed about CIA trainees overtaking internships in the Scottish Parliament. Scotland, outwith NATO will continue with its own special cultural relationship with the USA the way a non-NATO Ireland has.

Just as the resurgent Russian bear has no designs on Ireland neither will

it have designs on Scotland. If Russian has any territorial ambitions on the British Isles, they are entirely focused on expensive postcodes in London. And Scotland will continue with its own special cultural relationship with the USA the way a non-NATO Ireland has.

Even plucky Denmark, that seems to be able to pick a fight anywhere, anytime at the US request, does so not because of a threat from Russia. The basic driver of Danish geopolitics is its relationship with Germany. The Danes are NATO's most active ally, not because of any Russian threat to them, but rather because they perceive NATO membership as a US guarantee against any possible future German designs.

However as all NATO cheerleaders point a shaking finger at the resurgent Russian Bear the issue needs to be addressed and put in its real context. If the threat from the bear was real France would not have been allowed to bid and win contracts to build four Mistral Class assault ships for the Russian Navy.

No one seriously, not even the arms salesmen, expect top-of-the-range French-made mini carriers to tussle with top-of-the-range kit from the USA purchased by Norway. It really will take a good chunk of the Norwegian oil fund to pay for the 42 fifth generation fast jets they intend to purchase. What they will eventually cost no one yet quite know, but the current price tag is 200 million dollars, each!

There is also the new geopolitical hotspot with principally environmental dimensions that is wilfully being portrayed as a geopolitical hot spot with principally military dimensions, the so called High North. The name is a bit of a give away; it is in the high north and Scotland (in geopolitics positioning sometimes *is* everything) is not in the High North. Are we to invest large sums to be bystanders in a bun fight between Gazprom and Exxon Mobil?

As I hope I have shown, even when NATO membership is considered from the perspective of its cheerleaders, it is very expensive option that does nothing for Scottish national security and locks Scotland into acceptance of the Trident system, probably for its lifetime, and if the experience of Germany, Holland and Belgium is anything to go by, for much longer than that. ■

Bill Ramsay

Fear and Change in Scotland

“May no new things arise” – a Spanish blessing. “May you live in interesting times” – a Chinese curse. Notice something, something rather important? The Spanish blessing assumes that it is good to live in unchanging times, times of consistency. The Chinese curse actually assumes the same thing, or rather the obverse, that it is bad to live at a time when things are changing. Recent research reinforces ancient proverbs. People are nervous of change, they like stability and need a strong incentive to move them to support change. There is a similar effect in economics. People are more motivated by the thought of losing what they have than the thought of gaining something new. Does this matter? It does if you are campaigning to end the Treaty of Union and create an independent Scotland.

There are those of us who support independence, there are those of us who are firm admirers of the British Union, and there are those of us that have not quite decided yet. For the purpose of the independence campaign it is the latter group that matters. I will be voting independence. I will do so because I believe that that is the only way I can ever hope to see the kind of society I believe in exist in Scotland. But what of the undecided third, what will make them vote for independence? Well, given what I have written in the first paragraph, certain concepts can be excluded. Offering more of the same can be excluded. We are a safe pair of hands, we can run councils, we can run devolved Scottish Parliaments, this too can be excluded. The latter may encourage people to vote for the SNP in council and parliamentary elections, but not

to vote for independence. If people are more frightened by what they might lose than more of the same offers no incentive to overcome that fear. To overcome the fear of change (a fear that exists to a greater or lesser degree in us all) undecided voters must be offered a vision that excites, exalts and encourages dreams of all that should be. Is this how the SNP is running its campaign? Is it offering a campaign that encourages people to

But can the SNP survive a referendum defeat following an insipid campaign? If the referendum is lost and if a large section of the membership believe that we lost the referendum because we failed to push the policies of social change. what then for the SNP?

dream of the kind of Scotland that we might build after independence? Gaurdian, 24 May 2012: “It [support for the monarchy] is less marked in Scotland – where 36 per cent say the country would be better off without the Windsors – but even there a solid 50 per cent feel the opposite way. Support is stronger among the older, and especially among Conservative voters, in whose ranks it reaches 82 per cent.” Only 50 per cent support the monarchy, with

the greater proportion of that 50 per cent coming from the solid unionist camp (and that in a year of almost constant monarchist propaganda). That does not tell us that supporting a republic will damage an independence vote, though it might suggest that supporting a monarchy will do nothing to improve that vote. If fewer than 50 per cent of those who might support independence support a monarchy does it not make sense to debate the issue? The SNP leadership is distancing itself from the long-held policy to hold a referendum on the monarchy. By doing so they remove some incentive for any undecided republicans (no, not all republicans will vote for independence) to move to independence. More importantly, they also close down an avenue for debate.

An independent Scotland may be a monarchy, it may be a republic. Heat and interest can be generated in that debate. If we want to excite people about independence we need to excite them about the possibilities. If we avoid the challenging debates then we will not generate that interest.

Never mind the nukes, feel the civilian casualties. In 2009 Colonel McNally released details of Afghan civilian deaths. He was promptly arrested. NATO does not want people to know precisely how many innocent people have been killed in the conflict, and even less do they want known how many civilians have been killed by NATO and their rather brutal allies. Three years later, in 2012, The UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan reported the following “The ‘2012 Midyear Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict’ states that during the first half of the year, conflict-related violence led to 1,145 civilian deaths and 1,954 injuries... UNAMA documented that pro-government forces were responsible for ten percent of the civilian casualties, down 25 per cent on the previous year... Despite these reductions, the use of airstrikes continues to cause more civilian casualties, particularly women and children, than any other tactic used by international military forces”. NATO forces have a long tradition of spreading havoc in the civilian population via airstrikes. In Bosnia and Serbia the civilian population is still suffering illness and death as a result of NATO’s use of depleted uranium weapons. In Fallujah an entire city of women have been told not to become pregnant – a direct result of NATO members using radioactive weapons within the city. It is difficult to find out how many died when NATO members launched their attacks on Libya. And none of this – none of it – is done for democracy, decency or morality. When Saudi tanks rolled into Bahrain there were no airstrikes, there are no airstrikes against the Afghan warlord allies of NATO (every bit as brutal as the Taliban), no airstrikes when Tawargha was ethnically cleansed by the new powers in Libya. (As a small aside I do object to nuclear weapons, a good

Bill Wilson looks at how a Yes Campaign has to be fought if it is going to motivate the unmotivated. And he sees major problems ahead for an SNP that fails to fight that campaign...

reason to object to NATO membership, I simply do not think that it is the strongest reason to oppose membership.)

In the past the SNP opposed both the bombing in Bosnia and the Iraq war. The party has a strong record on opposing armed conflicts. Yet now, as we enter the independence referendum debate, the SNP appears to back off from its traditionally ethical view of armed intervention. What signal does this send potential independence supporters? Is joining NATO really the beacon of hope? The leadership argues that there are polls supporting NATO. There are no polls showing Scottish support for NATO in Afghanistan, there are no polls showing support for the (predominately NATO forces) war in Iraq, there are no polls showing support for nuclear weapons. Is not NATO the perfect ground on which to fight an independence campaign: "Do you like NATO? Do you like what they do?" Time to stop running scared of the debates and start fighting them.

Over the past thirty years the gap between the rich and the poor has grown. It did not matter whether there was a Labour government or a Tory government in Westminster, the gap grew. The effects of inequality (as against poverty) are well known and well researched. Oddly, I first came across material on the effects of inequality in *New Scientist* which has, over the years, reported a stream of research projects all showing the same results. A summary of the decades of research is brilliantly provided both in *The Spirit Level* and *The Globalization of Addiction*. There is no room for doubt; more equal societies are healthier (rich and poor), safer, and less stressful. There is equally no doubt that reducing inequality can only be done by tackling both ends of the spectrum, bringing up the bottom and bringing down the top. In the devolved parliament we lack many of the basic powers required to improve the conditions of those at the bottom, though the government's introduction of the living wage, free education and enhanced benefit advice all help to raise the standard of living at the lower end, all help to reduce inequality. However, to reduce the upper end requires control over tax levels – we need redistributive

taxation.

We also need to reverse the cuts to the HMRC brought in by Brown and Blair, and close the tax loopholes. Yet where is the independence debate on the £80-odd billion a year lost in tax evasion and tax avoidance? The UK is not poor. Scotland is not poor. It is not a question of poverty, it is a question of what we do with our wealth. Do we continue to allow it to be amassed by the few, or do we ensure a more even division? Is this question not fundamental to the kind of Scotland we want to see, does anybody really believe that fundamental reform will come through Westminster? Here is a central debate, here is the discussion to excite, to ignite. Will the CBI like it? Who cares – listen to Adam Smith (from *Wealth of Nations*): "but the mean rapacity, the monopolising spirit, of merchants and manufacturers, who neither are, nor ought to be, the rulers of mankind, though it cannot, perhaps, be corrected, may very easily be prevented from disturbing the tranquillity of anybody but themselves." Of course debating new tax laws will upset some, but the vision that can be offered in this debate is just that vision which will excite people to vote for independence.

What colour should be Scottish flag? I vote for not deciding. Let us be the only people on earth who do not quite get round to deciding the exact colour of their flag. As for the anthem – 'A man's a man'? The only problem is that we do appear to have settled on a flag colour (Pantone something or other), so how about the tax rates, and tax evasion?

There seems to be an idea going round that we should have a big tent campaign, nobody should be left outside. But how do we excite people if we risk offending nobody? How do we present a vision of Scotland if the vision has to suite both the CBI and those who believe in a fair and just society? How do we persuade people that Scotland might take a different path internationally than to stay in NATO? How do we convince people that we have the courage for constitutional change but cannot have a referendum on the monarchy?

I believe in independence because I believe in social change. After 300 years of Unionist conservatism I see

independence as the route to a radically restructured society. A society which does not engage in foreign oppression, which seeks to build equality, which protects public services, which realises that people do not serve economies but that economies serve people. This is a common theme for nationalist supporters of independence, be it Gandhi, Gervasio Artigas, or Rodriguez, the linking of social change to political change is a central theme of nationalist movements. There are great empires that no longer exist because the Gandhis and Bolivars dreamed of a better world. This theme is common among members of the SNP; independence frees the people of Scotland to build a better nation. In government, the SNP has shown itself to be committed to social reform, free prescriptions, free tertiary education, attempts to replace incarceration with more effective (and humane) punishments, ending PFI, keeping private money out the NHS. But what happens to the SNP if this social reform agenda is forgotten during the referendum campaign? Will there be a referendum on the monarchy? Inside or outside NATO? Will the railways be taken into full public ownership? Will there be redistributive taxation?

Following 1979 the party hit a low from which it took a long time to recover. But this is not 1979; devolution was not the *raison d'être* of the SNP. The stakes for the SNP are higher, far higher this time. If the referendum is won then all is rosy in the SNP garden. If the referendum is lost following a courageous campaign that excited talk in the cafes and bars about what Scotland might become then most activists will very likely be inspired to fight on. But can the SNP survive a referendum defeat following an insipid campaign? If the referendum is lost and if a large section of the membership believe that we lost the referendum because we failed to push the policies of social change, the policies that drew them to independence in the first place, what then for the SNP? ■

Bill Wilson is a former SNP MSP

Socialist. Daily.

These are hard times for the media. Newspaper circulations are dropping, advertising revenues falling and titles closing. Jobs have been lost across the industry. The BBC faces huge cuts and damaging reforms. Meanwhile the reputation of journalism has been further challenged by the revelations of the Leveson inquiry.

Yet the *Morning Star* - the only socialist daily newspaper in the English language anywhere - has been busy investing in print and journalism capacity and relaunching itself in Scotland.

Why is this necessary, how is it possible - and what can you do to support it?

Over the last few years, editor Richard Bagley admitted

to a meeting of *Morning Star* supporters and MSPs in the Scottish Parliament at the start of the new session on 4 September, the paper has not served its Scottish readers well enough. One main reason for this has been the difficulty in actually getting physical copies of the paper into the hands of readers on the day of publication. Another reason has been a lack of resources to actually cover Scotland.

Both of these issues are being addressed with the investment in capacity. A combination of issues including lack of access to the distribution networks for the so-called 'small titles' plus sheer geography and traffic meant that Scotland and parts of the North of England would only receive the paper the day after publication. And all too often, not at all.

The *Morning Star* has faced that problem in Scotland for a decade. But no more. With a new print deal secured from Trinity Mirror, the *Star* is now being printed in Oldham and Watford. The two site operation means the paper can be delivered into the distribution network for the north of England and for Scotland much earlier. In turn this means a *Morning Star*

is in a Scottish newsagent or Co-op store near you, right there with all the big daily papers - on the day, every day. Well, six days out of seven, as there is a bumper weekend edition covering Saturday and Sunday.

And the *Star* is increasing its journalistic resource devoted to Scottish coverage with a dedicated Scotland desk in the newsroom supported by increased reporting on the ground. The aim is to

develop this into a full-time Scottish operation.

Of course, all these developments need to be funded and depend crucially on building Scottish and other sales of the paper. And that's where you can help! For six quid a week - the price of a couple of pints or cappuccinos - you can buy, read and support the *Morning Star* on a daily basis.

This is an ideal moment to relaunch the *Morning Star* in Scotland. On the one hand we have a great debate going on about the future of the nation, with the election of a majority SNP government last year and the independence referendum in 2014. On the other hand capitalism is in a crisis with banks failing, currencies imploding and the whole financial system teetering all around us.

The rich lists show that the financial architects of the disaster are by and large doing very nicely out of it. The unemployment and poverty figures show that those least able to afford it are paying the price for the austerity measures imposed by right-wing treasuries around the world. Economic orthodoxy - tax cuts for the rich, public service cuts for the rest of us - is the order of the day. There is no money, we can't afford to spend our way out of recession... the right-wing slogans are boomed out by the mogul-owned media monopolies and are echoed by the increasingly craven BBC.

The *Morning Star* is the only daily newspaper on these shores which puts a clear left alternative. 'For peace and socialism' is the masthead slogan, which

That's where you can help! For six quid a week - the price of a couple of pints or cappuccinos - you can buy, read and support the *Morning Star* on a daily basis



Morning Star



There's no point complaining about the bias in the British media if you don't support the one socialist daily newspaper. Malcolm Burns explains the background to the launch of the Scottish edition of the Morning Star

gives a fairly clear idea of its political response to the warmongering financiers who currently grasp the levers of power.

And the *Morning Star* is the only daily newspaper where the left can debate the issues around what kind of Scotland we want and how we can get it - a debate which is also the substance of the *Scottish Left Review*.

You're a reader of the *Scottish Left Review*. Me too. Have you seen the *Morning Star* recently? What do you think of it? Do you buy, read and support the *Morning Star*? I'm thinking a fair number of *SLR* readers do.

But it could be you just haven't got round to buying it... whether occasionally or every day. If so I'd like to try and persuade you that you should. If it's the price - I can sympathise. £1 is pretty steep for most people to get just one paper a day.

If you want or need to read the paper for nothing then you can. The *Star* is available online, more or less in full at www.morningstaronline.co.uk. It's also available in public libraries - far fewer than it should be as a result of cutbacks, but you can always ask for it to be ordered.

But I believe the *Morning Star* is good value for readers of *SLR*.

One of the *Star's* aims is that if it was the only paper you read, you would get everything in it that you needed - news, features, comment and analysis, arts and culture, and a sports section at the back.

The first half of the paper is straightforward reporting of the news - Scottish, British and international - clearly from a left perspective which is different to the mainstream media, and covering many stories which other papers don't reach.

There is an editorial - like any other paper - which has the paper's line on the big stories of the day. But the features and comment pages include a range of voices from across the left, which present many viewpoints and challenge each other and the *Star* position.

The *Scottish Voices* column features a roster of different viewpoints around the left. These include Colin Fox and Patrick Harvie, leaders of the *Scottish Socialists* and the *Scottish Greens*

respectively, left Labour MSPs Elaine Smith and Neil Findlay and the SNP's Bill Kidd, and left trade unionists such as PCS Scottish Secretary Lynn Henderson and Richard Leonard of GMB Scotland.

There is my own regular *Around Scotland* column, which modestly forbids me from describing - but you can discover it for yourself.

The battle of ideas rages further on the letters pages. There's just been a barney over the *Star's* use of space for Welsh language articles, self organisation of sex workers has been a hot topic, and SSP press officer Ken Ferguson is rarely far away with a pointed comment about something which has appeared - maybe even something I've written!

On the features pages for example - as well as pieces by political and trade union figures - I can read one of my boyhood punk-poet heroes, Attila the Stockbroker - still going strong and witty and irreverent as ever. In the sport section I like Alex Scott's column - she's a star of the England women's football team.

Sport's not really my thing but the *Star's* coverage is excellent and wide-ranging. Similarly I'm not a jazz fan but I like reading Chris Searle's cool, syncopated reviews and features in the arts and culture pages - which cover other forms of music, theatre, film and books. The paper even publishes poetry. Well, why not?

The *Morning Star* is more than just a newspaper (and website). It is owned and funded by its readers and it engages in grassroots through this structure. The *Star* operates as a co-operative - the People's Press Printing Society. It's unique ownership by its readers and supporters is a model which could provide some solutions to the problems ownership and control in the rest of the media, not least here in Scotland.

In Scotland there are *Morning Star* Readers and Supporters groups in Aberdeen, Ayrshire, Dundee, Edinburgh, Fife, Glasgow, Lanarkshire, Stirlingshire, West Dunbartonshire - and I believe a

new group is imminent in West Lothian anytime now.

There is a *Scottish Morning Star* Campaign Committee made up of reps from the Readers and Supporters groups plus shareholders such as trade unions. This group organises *Morning Star* Scottish conferences every March and October, bringing together many of the people who contribute to the paper as speakers to debate key issues in Scottish politics and frame left responses to the many challenges we face.

It also runs a series of public events on "Our Class - Our Culture". The next *Morning Star* Scottish conference, on 7 October at STUC centre in Glasgow, is

entitled 'Winning Democracy for Scotland: The power to own, control, develop'.

You can find out more about the *Star* conferences, Our Class - Our Culture events and

Readers and Supporters groups at the www.scottishmorningstarcampaign.com

The *Morning Star's* finances are always on a knife-edge. It is not (yet!) the mass circulation paper it needs - and I believe deserves - to be. It needs you to buy it, read it and support it.

"Is that damned paper still coming out?" were the words of a detective involved in attempts to suppress publication of the *Daily Worker* for reporting and supporting the sailors in the Invergordon Mutiny in 1931.

Well, yes. And it's still coming out every day, on the day, as the *Morning Star* in Scotland - reporting and supporting workers as they fight to build a decent, fair and just society here and around the world. ■

Malcolm Burns is a columnist for the *Morning Star*

If you have any stories you think the *Morning Star* should cover, the Scotland desk line is (020) 8525-6988 and the email address is scotland@peoples-press.com

Why Things Get Stuck

It was partly nostalgia that made the last issue of the *Scottish Left Review* (“Who runs this place?”) so enjoyable for me. It was all there from my youth: who was stopping the country getting what, democratically, it wanted? Vested interests, capitalists (in their new avatars, the big four management consultants) or that old standby the civil service – all getting together in Edinburgh’s New Club – a trip down the 1970s byways of memory lane. Wasn’t that why I joined the civil service all those years ago? Someone had to sit at the centre of the web, and it might as well be me.

It’s easy now to poke fun – just as it was easy then to imagine conspiracies to explain our national cockups. Humans find non-existent patterns in noise, and ascribe personality and agency to the random. We are made that way. Hence the entertaining popularity of ludicrous conspiracy theories – Elvis living on – or the cynical use of poisonous ones too disagreeable to mention here.

And yet...

Why is devolved Scottish politics so stuck? Why 12 years after devolution is there so little policy divergence across the UK? Remember “Scottish solutions to Scottish problems”? Where are the policies that are innovative, ‘transformational’ as those management consultants say, or radical in the sense of getting to the roots of the problem? Why does all the evidence show the deep seated and persistent problems of Scottish society getting more embedded? If Scotland is indeed left-leaning, why can’t we seem to address the inequalities at their roots? And why indeed do we end up with policy changes that no-one really seems to want?

I want to offer three possible explanations, and one case study – and, sadly, nothing to incriminate the New Club.

Political parties, governments, civil servants, none has a strong command of the new Scottish policy process, and most policy changes tend to be made if and only if there is a window of opportunity

First, one thing needs saying – if we devoted half as much passion and political attention to improving public policy as to agonising about the constitution, maybe we’d make more of an impact. I’m as guilty as any: but the opportunity cost of obsessing about referendums and devolution is high. Constitutional change is not a substitute for public policy – and too much nationalist debate reduces on analysis to

a blunt assertion that things would be better simply by virtue of being Scottish. It would be good if life were that simple.

Second, we need to be honest about Scottish public opinion. For good or ill, many Scots are Thatcher’s children, even if they won’t vote for her party. The data are quite clear on this: Scots are

only a bit more likely to prefer more tax-and-spend than the English, and that view is declining in both countries. That Scotland, unlike the rest of the UK, is an egalitarian, mutually supportive society is mostly a comforting national myth. Myths are powerful, and often politically useful: but they are not evidence. This myth sustains such expensive egalitarian policies as lots of free stuff for the middle classes.

These two are challenges for nationalists and for the left: if you want to change things stop indulging in displacement activity, and start admitting how they really are. But they do not explain all of the problem: why is Scottish public policy unimaginative? My third explanation relies on an understanding of how policy is actually made. There’s an extensive, worldwide literature on this, going back many decades and consistently ignored by politicians and many civil servants too. The unexamined life may or may not be worth living, but be sure that the unexamined policy process will be repeated, and unsurprisingly will give you

what you got the last time you did it.

There are lots of models of policy process: here are three. First, rationality – public policy based on evidence, analysis and intervention to achieve agreed aims. “What matters is what works”: politics turned into a technical rather than an ideological process. (Left-leaning readers with long memories will remember “Marxism versus Sociology” of the 1970s.) Of course rationality is bounded, both by lack of knowledge, and by explicit and implicit value choices – who determines the question is often more important than ensuring the right answer is figured out. Nevertheless we had quite a lot of that during the first two Scottish Parliaments: a great deal of investment in social research, more government economists, lots of data collection through household surveys and so on. All very useful, but anything but agenda setting, and a handy reason for delay – paralysis by analysis, as we used to say.

Then there is policy-making by adjustment amongst interest groups. We’ve had plenty of that, and its hallmark, consultation. Scarcely a week has gone by since devolution without a further consultation paper of some sort. But consultation, typically, subtracts rather than adds: it tells you what you cannot do, and not what you should. Any radical policy is bound to offend some interest group – typically, in Scotland, I’m sorry to say, a left-leaning public sector sort of interest group – and there is a high probability of watering change down.

And then finally there is the straightforward political model of policy-making. Politicians have ideas, based on their principles, gain political power, and have the authority to put those ideas into practice. And we have seen some of that: some manifesto promises have been delivered – free personal care, proportional representation for local government, free university tuition. But we can get government by list – the list of promises which can be negotiated in a coalition agreement, in the first two Parliaments. (‘Here’s my bad idea. I’ll see your bad idea, and raise you two of mine.’) Minority government was different: the list got a great deal shorter. It’s interesting to speculate how are

The last issue of Scottish Left Review asked who really decides Scottish policy. Jim Gallacher responds that it's not conspiracy that's the problem, its bad policy-making processes repeating the same mistakes over and over.

majority government would feel, absent the constitutional question.

None of these models, of course, adequately describes the political process in the real world. Policy issues - ideas for change or problems that have to be fixed - move in and out of these three sorts of discourse. Each process has its veto points, and veto players. Any change risks being delayed by lack of evidence (and collecting it), blocked by an interest group, or stymied in the political process. It is exceptionally difficult to negotiate your way through all three. Political parties, governments, civil servants, none has a strong command of the new Scottish policy process, and most policy changes tend to be made if and only if there is a window of opportunity in at least two of the three channels through which they have to run.

Let's take a case study: the last

edition of *Scottish Left Review* asked how it was that we ended up with legislation to create a single police force (and might reasonably have asked the same question about a single fire service). This is a policy about which I myself have expressed some reservations, but let us just examine how it got through all the barriers.

We start with two real problems. First, there's very great pressure to save money on public services. Holyrood has to balance the books. So Ministers are desperate for ways to save money. Second, the inheritance of our public bodies is a mess: we have a kind of organisational spaghetti Junction, of 32 councils, goodness knows how many health boards (blink and the Minister might abolish another one), and a plethora of agencies, commissions, quangos and the like. Despite repeated bonfires, and

genuine, earnest efforts at 'joining up', the institutional landscape remains a very confused and messy one.

But previous efforts at 'public sector reform' ran into the ground. Whatever analysis was done, the potential costs of change, and the likely resistance from those affected, ruled out radical surgery. Before 2007, Labour Ministers had identified the oddity that police and fire services were based on the old regional boundaries, though the regions themselves were abolished in 1995. Police chiefs, determinedly independent, and not showing willing enough to make savings by sharing their back offices, were in bad odour with SNP ministers. So when Labour hinted

in 2010 at mergers of police forces, the SNP were happy to trump them. Some rough and ready analysis was done to demonstrate this would save money (despite the short-term costs); senior police officers suddenly found they had little leverage, and few friends; and apart from the Liberals, there was no political opposition. Suddenly, and surprisingly, an opportunity was taken.

Of itself, this doesn't show the police reform (and fire reform, carried along in its wake) is a good or a bad thing. But when you look at all the things the Scottish Parliament might have been doing, it's quite a surprising thing. But it was, unexpectedly, a possible thing.

What would we have to do to get radical, transformative, policy initiatives put into practice as this one was? First, we need to marshal our intellectual and analytical resources into not just data and understanding, but putting well worked-out, practicable proposals for change onto the agenda. He who decides the questions determines the answers. Second, those who want to promote change need to get very much better at the end-to-end management of policy change. Time scales are long, often longer than the political cycle: issues start life outside of government, move through it, and out of it again into implementation.

Devolution gave Scotland a new political system, but it did not - and probably could not - of itself create the institutions of a fully functioning polity. A small country can't afford a huge range of think tanks, lobbying bodies and so on. We have limited resources, and should focus them, perhaps through a new institutional mechanism, in asking the questions, in proposing solutions, and then managing them into reality. The resources we have in the academic sector, in the public services themselves, need to be brought together in a way that can support the political process, rather than merely be driven by it. Some people have suggested this could be done by a new Scottish Institute for Public Service. At the very least, the idea merits consideration. ■

Jim Gallagher is a Fellow at Nuffield College, Oxford and a former senior civil servant; he never did get round to joining the New Club.

Scottish Left Review

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A Comunique from New Scotland

“Those who manipulate the unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government, which is the true ruling power.” (Edward Bernays)

This month the International Socialist Group launched a new radical left wing media project *Communiqué*; a youth-led project based in Scotland that has been created by and for a generation failed by Capitalism, that consists of a monthly broadsheet, podcast, and a blog that is updated daily.

The project has been developed in reaction to the neoliberal consensus that dominates our society. The media is commonly known as the fourth pillar of democracy because of its ability to act as a bridge between the government and the population, but its intrinsic involvement with networks of power and influence – from corporate and financial to those of the state – has meant that the mainstream media has been allowed to proliferate ideas which ultimately benefit the elites. Rupert Murdoch’s media empire is a perfect example of this. As a result, only certain news stories and ideas are permitted to dominate in the public sphere – information involved in sustaining the power of both states and capital.

It is for this reason that *Communiqué* has been created; the general public is all too often unaware that the character of this infrastructure has a direct impact on the range of opportunities available to them. This problem is becoming even more acute in terms of the current economic crisis and the spread of austerity measures across Europe. We are being fed sensationalist stories of ‘welfare

scroungers’ and ‘feral youths’ and told of the harsh sentences they deserve and at the same time live in a society that allows the wealthy elite to dodge their taxes, often without so much as a whisper from the press.

Real news should come from grassroots movements; it should involve people from working class communities and be talking about issues that affect them: the NHS, austerity, education, their job, their benefits, and new forms of resistance. Today more than ever, what defines working class and youth resistance is its international dimension. People are inspired by the Arab revolutions, they take confidence from the resistance movements against austerity in Europe.

The messages that we receive and the medium in which we receive them are inextricably linked, anti-capitalist ideas that challenge neoliberal hegemony must too challenge their domination of our audiovisual world. *Communiqué* – through its blog, podcast and broadsheet – presents the idea that whether you live

in Drumchapel or Coatbridge, Detroit or Cairo, you are not alone in facing attacks from corporations and the state. We are all part of an international movement of resistance.

The next two years will decide the future of the British state – one of the most reactionary entities on the face of the planet. The positive associations that once existed – the NHS, social housing and other elements of a progressive welfare system – have been eroded by decades of neoliberal privatisation. We need to ask

ourselves an important question: what

does Britain represent for anyone under the age of thirty? What does it *mean*?

The answer is all too clear. Young people are angry – and its not hard to see why. The media rarely report (with any degree of accuracy) the real reasons for the proliferation of anger and alienation. But this is what *Communiqué* aims to do.

Let’s remember that a thirty-year-old would have been fifteen when New Labour came back to power in the 1997 general election after a long spell in the political wilderness. There is no need to spell out the level of decimation inflicted upon working class communities by the preceding Thatcher and Major governments. But 1997 represents the last clear point in which people felt a sense of hope about what the British state might be able to achieve. This was Britain’s Obama moment. Finally the Thatcherite nightmare was over. But reality proved to be far removed from the expectation held by so many – Blair was more of a let down than the Senator from Illinois proved to be more than a decade later. Communities around the country hoped for a return to the politics of social justice, but instead they were met with a neoliberal assault more extensive than that of the Conservatives. So what has Britain achieved internally since then? What have consecutive governments (of all three of the major political parties) delivered for ordinary people in the UK? Extreme austerity; rising social inequality; poverty on a greater scale than seen for generations; exacerbation of the social housing crisis; the privatisation of nearly every remaining publicly owned utility... the list is endless. Needless to say, there is little (if anything) to celebrate.

And that is not all. The very institutions of supposed democracy in this country have been hollowed out to the extent that they are almost meaningless. Westminster is a sham, stumbling from one crisis to the next. If the expenses scandal wasn’t enough, the interconnection between News International and every major political party exposed the level of corruption at the heart of the political establishment and the extent to which politicians will do anything to curry favour with corporate interests. It is little wonder that more than half the population have

The establishment discourse is as undiscerning as it is naive. The truth is that the vast majority of people in Scotland are fed up of the status quo. And how many people honestly believe that any form of serious challenge to the host of social ills previously mentioned will ever come from Westminster?

Jenna Gormal writes about the launch of *Comunique*, a new youth-led radical left media project, and explains how her generation of the left sees the independence referendum as our best chance to unite

very little or no confidence in parliament (British Social Attitudes Survey, 2009).

The crisis of 21st Century Britain is acute. And this is before we even mention Iraq. This month William Hague told the *London Evening Standard* that it is time for Britain to end its feelings of “post colonial guilt”. “I think we should relax” he said, “it was a long time ago”. Tell that to the people of India, of Ireland, of Iraq. The history of the empire was not written in ink – it was written in blood, and it is still being written today.

Iraq represents the pinnacle of modern Britain’s crisis. Not only is it the case that its unpopularity lead to the biggest social movement in British history, its that the British state, under the leadership of a Labour Prime Minister, was in the vanguard of orchestrating this imperial misadventure. It cost nearly £10 billion, the lives of 179 British troops and, most importantly, the lives of more than a million Iraqis. Add to this the ongoing débâcle that is Afghanistan, the intervention of Gordon Brown during the crash of 2008, and the stalwart defence of American interests around the globe and it is plain to see that this country plays no progressive role on the world stage.

From Thatchers championing of the neoliberal economic model back in the late seventies to imperial intervention and international austerity today, Britain has been at the heart of an Anglo-American project to alter the contours of global politics. For decades (if not centuries) the UK has played a vanguard role in advancing the most reactionary set of politics both at home and abroad. The real axis of evil runs from Washington to London.

So it is little wonder that frustration, anger and alienation are breaking out into riots on the streets of the British capitol. Yet the establishment discourse is as undiscerning as it is naïve. The truth is that the vast majority of people in Scotland are fed up of the status quo. And how many people honestly believe that any form of serious challenge to the host of social ills previously mentioned will ever come from Westminster? The

truth is it will not happen. And everyone knows it.

The 2014 referendum may have been triggered by an SNP electoral victory, but it provides massive opportunities for the left. The starting gun has fired, but the official Yes campaign is currently still stalling at the starting line. This is problematic, but it is also an opportunity – if the left choose to seize the moment. We could end the existence of one of the worlds most

who want to see a low-tax corporate haven, but that is not inevitable and is entirely dependent on the balance of forces in Scottish society.

It is no surprise that the people who are most likely to support Scottish independence are the youth and the working classes (Scottish Opinion Survey, Independence Poll, TNS, December 2010), the people most disenfranchised by the British establishment. These people are the true constituency of the left.

On an organisational and institutional level the left in Scotland is incredibly weak – fractured over the years by internal squabbling and splits. But the campaign for independence provides an opportunity to renew and unite. We need campaigns that articulate the transformative potential of independence, that put forward a vision of Scotland that workers and young people deserve, where social justice, environmentalism and opposition to nuclear weapons and militarism are placed firmly at the top of the agenda. It is young people from working class communities that will be the new left in years to come, that will have the biggest impact on the future, and they can be mobilised now, but only if we reach out to them.

As Scotland enters into the most important political period of its history, a break must be made with the past: empire, tradition and old methods of agitation. The days of the revolutionary paper are over. *Comunique* seizes new technologies to unleash radical left-wing ideas for the new left, delivering an analysis of capitalist society in Scotland and beyond which rejects the consensus that austerity at home and war abroad is the best our generation can expect. *Comunique* has been launched by the ISG, but it is a tool for everyone, for ordinary people affected by real issues to have a voice, and be heard. ■



reactionary bodies: the British State. Of course there are those who say that this will break up the British working class: “Nationalism is, at it [sic] core, a deeply negative and regressive politics,” asserts Labour MP Willie Bain. “I care just as much about a child growing up in poverty in my constituency in Glasgow as I do a child in poverty in Liverpool, Cardiff, London, Aberdeen, Dundee or Edinburgh.” But presumably, if Willie Bain is opposed to “nationalism”, he favours “internationalism” instead. In which case, it is a highly peculiar internationalism that includes Cardiff and Liverpool but not Dublin, Athens or Baghdad.

Of course it is not the case that an independent Scotland will be automatically more progressive than Britain. Far from it. With the existence of the Brian Souters of this world there are clearly some supporters of independence

Jenna Gormal is organiser for the International Socialist Group.

<http://internationalsocialist.org.uk>

<http://internationalsocialist.org.uk/index.php/communique/>

The 'Imperial burden' Hypocrisy

This is the fourth in a series of occasional articles looking at aspects of Irish history – and drawing out some implications for present day Scotland: (See *SLR* 35, 40 and 46 for previous articles). This note is prompted by a letter written on 10 November 1921 from the then UK Prime Minister, Lloyd George, to Sir James Craig, whom Lloyd George addressed as the “Prime Minister of Northern Ireland”. As will be shown here, this letter neatly illustrates the continuing hypocrisy of the UK establishment in relation to its colonial territories.

This letter was sent at a critical stage in the negotiations between the Westminster government and Southern Ireland, leading up to the Anglo Irish treaty. The treaty was, in the event, signed less than a month later, on 6 December. “The time has arrived”, the letter began, “when formal consultation between His Majesty’s Government and the Government of Northern Ireland is necessary for the further progress of the Irish negotiations.”

The letter then set out the outline of the settlement towards which the Westminster government was working. Ireland would become a self governing dominion within the British Empire. This new dominion would comprise the whole of Ireland, North and South, under an all-Ireland Parliament. Below this level, there would be separate governments of the North and South, each exercising the powers envisaged under the Government of Ireland Act 1920. So the North would have been responsible for its own domestic affairs: that is, for policies other than defence, foreign affairs, international trade and currency. But crucially, the North would no longer be part of the UK.

The letter then went on to the serious business of pressurising the North to accept these arrangements. Two main arguments were deployed. The first pointed out the impracticality of administering customs barriers over the jagged boundary between North and South, if the North remained part of the UK, and the South became independent.

The second argument was a financial carrot. If the South became a dominion, it would escape the necessity

of paying a share of the cost of defending the Empire. By contrast, if the North stayed with the UK it would be burdened with these costs. “..if ... Northern Ireland remained a part of the United Kingdom with the essential corollary of representation in the Imperial Parliament, it is clear that the people of Northern Ireland would have to bear their proportionate share of all Imperial burdens, such as the Army, Navy, and other Imperial services, in common with the taxpayers of the United Kingdom. The Members for Northern Ireland at Westminster would otherwise be voting for policies in Parliament, the expense of which they would not share. It would be inevitable, if Northern Ireland were to remain a part of the United Kingdom, for Belfast to bear the same burdens as Liverpool, Glasgow or London.”

Lloyd George’s letter is, naturally, marked ‘Secret’, though he later made public the text of his exchanges with Craig. (The full text of the 10 November letter can be accessed at www.cuthbert1.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk). One source of the letter is the Mulcahy papers in University College, Dublin. It would originally have been part of Michael Collins’ papers, as one of the key Southern negotiators in the treaty negotiations. Richard Mulcahy inherited Michael Collins’ papers when he took over as head of the Irish Army on Collins’ death.

Was this a serious attempt by Lloyd George to pressure Ulster to leave the UK and become part of an independent Ireland? Who knows. According to William O’Brien, Lloyd George had made a secret promise to the South that, if they signed the treaty, partition of Ireland would not happen (see *SLR*35). But whether this was a sincere promise to the South, or a cynical negotiating ploy, is unclear. Similarly, it is not clear if Lloyd George’s letter to Craig was merely an attempt to convince the Southern negotiators that he was going along with his side of the promise: or if the letter did indeed mean what it said. The likelihood is that Lloyd George was actually being pragmatic, by keeping the South in play, while indicating to the North that British patience was not inexhaustible. Given Lloyd George’s character, he would have

been prepared to react flexibly, whichever way the cards fell.

What is clear is that the letter was a supreme exercise in hypocrisy. Either it was an attempt to delude the South into believing that partition would not in fact happen. or it was a sell out of the North. Our primary interest, however, is what the letter tells us which might be of relevance to the present situation in Scotland: and the letter does indeed point up two very important implications.

First of all, the letter is a reminder of just how volatile UK government policy can actually be, even on matters which are presented as deep issues of principal. All governments, of course, have to present their current policies as if this is the only possible course of action, to which they are unalterably committed. As a rule of thumb, the shakier the basis of the policy, the firmer the statements of commitment: this is the well known football manager syndrome. This should not, however, blind us to the potential for sudden policy switches. And just as the UK policy on the partition of Ireland was swinging through 180 degrees in the early 1920s, it is also quite possible that a Westminster government’s rooted objection to Scottish independence could suddenly change. There are, in particular, two powerful forces which could lead important groups in England to see great attractions in Scottish independence.

First of all, it must already be becoming clear to the Conservative party that, while they are in many ways the natural party of government in England, they are by now so unpopular in the other countries of the UK that they may never again achieve a clear majority in a UK-wide election. Consider the results of the 2010 general election. In England, the Conservatives won 298 out of 533 seats: that is, 56 per cent of seats, and a clear majority. In the whole of the rest of the UK they only won nine seats (representing less than eight per cent of the seats being contested) so they ended up with 307 out of 650 overall, forcing them into the present unhappy coalition. And the critical single step which would ensure Conservative domination in a Rest of UK parliament would be taking Scotland out of the equation. In 2010,

Jim Cuthbert looks at one event in Irish history to show that the very same British argument for Scotland staying in the UK was once used for Ireland to leave it. Can we believe British policy is set in stone?

the UK minus Scotland would have returned 306 Conservatives out of 591 seats: a comfortable enough majority of 52 per cent.

Attempts at Westminster to address the West Lothian question are likely to increase, rather than decrease, the dissatisfaction of English Conservatives. The Commission whose formation was announced in January, to investigate whether Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish MPs should be barred from voting on laws affecting only England is likely to have precisely this effect. Apart from the difficulty of defining an "England only" law, English Conservatives will rapidly grasp that this will give them powers over domestic issues only – and not even all of these. The big decisions, like currency, tax, the budget, international affairs, and social security, will remain with the full UK parliament. So the really important levers of state are likely to remain permanently beyond the grasp of the Conservatives on their own.

The second important constituency

which could come to see substantial benefits from Scottish independence are the English eurosceptics. The debate on the EU implications of Scottish independence too often focuses on the position of Scotland after independence, and particularly on the legal question of whether Scotland would have automatic successor rights in the EU. But this particular debate misses another very important issue – namely, what would happen to the rest of the UK? Nor is this primarily a legal issue: despite the apparent legal formalism of so many EU issues, what really matters is the practical politics of the situation. And in this respect it is quite clear that, whatever the legal niceties, the rest of the UK would in effect have to re-negotiate its membership of the EU if the UK splits up.

It was essentially this latter point that was made by Patrick Layden, QC, when he gave evidence this May to the Commons Scottish Affairs select committee on Scottish separation. He pointed out that an independent

Scotland, together with the rest of the UK, would between them be entitled to more seats in the EU parliament than the number of seats presently held by the UK. This would mean other countries having to give up MEPs. These other countries would then insist on their own terms in the negotiation: the situation would, in practice, be rather like two new countries applying to join the EU.

From an English eurosceptic point of view, this would be a heaven-sent opportunity. In any negotiation, the terms imposed on the rest of the UK would almost certainly be stiff (loss of rebate?; forced membership of the Euro?; financial transaction tax?) and likely to be unacceptable in an inevitable referendum. So the effect of Scottish independence would be to give eurosceptics in the rest of the UK exactly what they want, namely rest of UK exit from the EU. When this penny drops, another important constituency is likely to be added to the list of those pushing for Scottish independence.



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SNP conference

Friday 19 October at 12.30pm in Salutation Hotel, Perth (with Scottish local government minister Derek Mackay)

UNISON Scotland
14 West Campbell Street
Glasgow G2 6RX

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So two important constituencies, Conservatives and euro sceptics, are likely to come to recognise that Scottish independence is in line with their own vital interests. The fact that these constituencies largely overlap will only strengthen the effect. Given this, it would be rash to bet that a radical change in Westminster policy on Scottish independence is impossible.

The other intriguing implication of the Lloyd George letter is what it tells us about one of the main arguments currently used by unionists against Scottish independence. As noted above, the second argument used by Lloyd George to pressurise the North to leave the UK was the “imperial burdens” argument. This argument is fascinating in the context of the present unionist stance on Scottish independence, which actually employs the diametric opposite of the Lloyd George argument.

For years, the standard unionist stance against Scottish independence has started with GERS (Government Expenditure and Revenues in Scotland) and has argued that the size of

Scotland’s non-oil GERS deficit means that Scotland could not afford to be independent. There are, of course, a number of well-known flaws with this simplistic argument: for example, it ignores oil, it ignores the adverse effects on Scotland’s present economy of membership of the UK currency union and it ignores the potential dynamic effects of independence on Scotland’s economy. But leaving these points aside, what the argument involves is calculating Scotland’s government deficit, where in the expenditure figures allocated to Scotland is a population share of UK expenditure on defence (and also international services). So the current unionist argument involves attributing to Scotland a share of ‘Imperial burdens’ – and argues that, partly because of this share, Scotland could not afford to be independent.

But these ‘Imperial burdens’ allocated to Scotland under the standard GERS approach are actually very significant. The unionists love quoting figures relative to Scotland’s non-oil GDP: so let’s join them in their own game.

According to the latest GERS publication, the defence spend allocated to Scotland in GERS amounts to 2.75 per cent of Scotland’s non-oil GDP: whereas defence expenditure for the UK as a whole is 2.6 per cent of GDP. (It is important to remember that this does not mean that what is spent in Scotland on UK defence is 2.75 per cent of Scotland’s GDP. The defence figure in GERS is arrived at by allocating to Scotland a population share of the UK defence spend: it doesn’t mean that the money

is actually spent here. This also explains why we are allocated 2.75 per cent, compared to the UK’s 2.6 per cent: our population share relative to the UK is slightly bigger than our non-oil GDP as a percent of UK GDP.)

So as far as the standard unionist argument goes, part of the reason we can’t afford to be independent is that we are assessed to be carrying a defence burden of 2.75 per cent of GDP. As we have seen, this is higher than the UK, (2.6 per cent): but it is also higher than France (2.3 per cent), Germany (1.4 per cent), Italy (1.8 per cent) and Canada (1.4 per cent). In fact, if we look at countries broadly comparable to a newly independent Scotland, we see that Ireland spends 0.6 per cent on defence, New Zealand 1.1 per cent, Denmark 1.4 per cent and Norway 1.6 per cent. (Figures from World Bank.)

And it is not just defence. GERS also assumes we carry our population share of international services (mainly international aid) of 0.6 per cent of GDP. Of course, an independent Scotland may well want to undertake foreign aid. But that would be a decision for the future, once we have our own house in order. It should not be swept up as part of the burden which proves we could not afford to be independent.

The implication is that, implicit in the standard unionist “GERS” argument against independence is the assumption that Scotland shoulders an “Imperial burden” of two per cent or more of GDP. Given that the standard Maastricht criterion for a sustainable deficit is three per cent of GDP, the unionist implicit imperial burden really does stack the cards against independence.

Overall, the Lloyd George letter provides a salutary reminder of the continuing hypocrisy of the UK establishment. The ‘Imperial burdens’ argument that was used to try to coerce the North out of the UK is now reversed, to try to ensure that Scotland stays in. But as the letter also reminds us, UK policy is never set in stone: and the pressures which could well lead important power groups in England to come to favour Scottish independence might bring about some surprising changes in UK policy in the foreseeable future. ■

Jim Cuthbert is an independent researcher

ASLEF CALLS FOR AN INTEGRATED, PUBLICLY OWNED, ACCOUNTABLE RAILWAY FOR SCOTLAND

(which used to be the SNP’s position – before they became the government!)



Mick Whelan
General Secretary

Alan Donnelly
President

Kevin Lindsay
Scottish Officer

ASLEF the train drivers union - www.aslef.org.uk

Reviews

Farewell to Growth

Latouche, Serge (2009), Malden MA & Cambridge: Polity Press.

Of the various criticisms of the excesses of capitalism, there is something particularly refreshing and cogent to be found in the ideas summarised by this short but highly engaging introduction to degrowth. Latouche is one of the key figures of the degrowth movement that has slowly been gaining momentum throughout

continental Europe, providing a framework for reconciling ecology and economics by ensuring the

limitations of the planet's ecosystems form an integral part of the logic of the economic models used to manage increasingly scarce resources.

Degrowth is fundamentally based around the eight Rs: re-evaluate, reconceptualise, restructure, redistribute, relocalise, reduce, reuse and recycle. Readers may by now be familiar with certain elements of this group of interdependent concepts that have already begun to percolate our everyday lives. Examples include a critique of 'travelitis' and the 'kilometric consumption' inherent to modern tourism, the concept of food miles, typified by shipping Scottish langoustines to Thailand for processing before they return to the British Isles for consumption, and the development of intelligent materials that can be reused in different contexts. Yet what is perhaps most engaging from a practical perspective is how the degrowth model links the eight Rs together to provide a pragmatic basis for improving the way we live.

In a nutshell, the wisdom of degrowth is the wisdom of the snail: an animal that grows its shell until the extra weight of a larger structure would result in an additional burden for the animal. At the heart of the concept lies the aim of applying this lesson to the logic that drives our political and economic systems to create more convivial societies that both work less and consume less, in turn allowing us to refocus our efforts on constructive leisure; it is, in Latouche's own words, a sort of 'concrete utopia.'

The book is highly critical on a number of levels. Degrowth calls out the West's anthropocentric and ethnocentric 'cult of growth' that has constituted our transcendental and unquestionable ideal for all too long, the limitations of which are now becoming all too clear. Hence, the reader meets the usual observations regarding the problems inherent in globalisation and the damage wrought by predatory, neoliberal capitalism. However on this occasion, and somewhat refreshingly, we see a response more motivated

Somewhat refreshingly, we see a response more motivated by a desire to transcend than reject modernity

by a desire to transcend than reject modernity, a discourse rooted less in engrained or embittered notions of class struggle and instead firmly grounded in a critique of the unsustainability of the West's current economic model and an awareness of the ecological limitations that are increasingly coming to mark the boundaries of the activities of the human species (Latouche cites an interesting statistic on the number of planets that would be required should we all aspire to the material standards of living enjoyed by the United States).

Attention is also paid to discontents with what Latouche describes as the 'suicidal logic of development' in the context of its application to third world countries. By way of reference to unsuccessful Western intervention in Africa, which he berates for having resulted in "corruption, incoherence and structural adjustment plans that have turned poverty into misery" we are introduced to the ideas of post-development, which have attempted to deal with the failings of the Western model of development and its successor, sustainable development.

However, if this is a book that is conscious of and attempts to deal with challenges that exist on a global scale, for Latouche, the problem and its solution lie squarely with the West. We have, he acknowledges, an outstanding debt to the developing world, and he goes on to place our ability to react to the difficulties we are now facing in doubt.

By and large, this is attributed to the rise of neoliberal capitalism and the concomitant transition from solidarity to individualism, fuelling the formation of "satisfied majorities" (Latouche borrows the term from John Kenneth Galbraith) and leaving us suffering from the sort of paralysis that now afflicts the political classes, their role gradually being reduced to mere politicking and technocratic management.

Finally, there is an acknowledgement of the limitations of Marx's theories insofar as they are applicable to the world at the outset of the twenty-first century. In this respect, Latouche sustains that to solve the problems we face and build better

and more equal societies, we must move beyond a mere critique of capitalism to a critique of the logic of growth itself.

To his credit, Latouche is very much a reformist, and provides a number of good reasons to justify his stance, not least the chaos and terror that would ensue from any kind of violent revolution (he cites Allende's Chile as a case in point). Moreover, he is all too quick to recognise the counterproductive nature of throwing the market baby out with the capitalist bathwater, acknowledging that the left is all too quick to identify mechanisms such as money, markets, profits and the wage system with the ills of capitalism since they can, if used correctly, be a force for good.

The ideas contained in this book offer great potential to reinvigorate stagnant political debate. In his closing remarks, Latouche credits the French writer, Thierry Paquot, as having identified the paradigm shift at play: a shift from right vs left to the ecological consciousness vs the predators. Just as the anthropocentrism of the Enlightenment and Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* captured a zeitgeist and embedded a certain logic in the core of economic and political systems that have perdured to this day, the ecocentrism of the ideas summarised in this book have a similar potential, offering history a plausible and refreshing alternative from the impending sense of catastrophe. ■

■ Christopher Sharpe

Web Review

Henry McCubbin

In Washington in 1999, when Yugoslavia was being bombed back to a pre-industrial age, we were all being lead to believe that NATO was the appropriate vehicle to deliver humanitarian intervention. It however came to my notice, for some reason, that every time NATO attempted this task the sky always darkened with B52s and bombs fell on the intended recipients of our benevolence before the aid trucks and ambulances arrived. At this point I'll reach for that useful aphorism by William Blum http://thinkexist.com/quotes/william_blum that describes a terrorist as someone who has a bomb but doesn't have an air force.

Handily at this point in time NATO was having a 50th birthday party. It could not believe its good luck. In 1989 the removal of the Berlin Wall had left the generals at NATO headquarters staring at their battlefield strategy table and the sharper of them quickly noticed that someone had stolen their ba'. The

half of their game board where the enemy was supposed to be was bare and had no military assets pointing at their half. Now, in 1999, they had something to celebrate. They had survived in their jobs for ten years when it had looked like P45 time and had moulded the "war on terrorism" into a useful policy that would see them through to retirement and may even provide their successors with an Orwellian threat of war without end.

Not only this, private corporations were funding the opulent weekend in Washington, a dozen of them paying \$250,000 each to sit on the NATO Summit host committee. Many of these same firms had just been lobbying for the enlargement to the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland where there would be fat pickings for military hardware. After all isn't that what NATO was for – making the world safe place for American capitalism to prosper and provide jobs for compliant politicians to see out their retirement in comfort? At what

opportunity cost I ask?

The above facts will not I fear be heard from Angus Robertson at the SNP Conference but let me give him a quote for his contribution which will raise the hair on back of the heads of those who hear it. It comes from President Eisenhower, NATO's first Supreme Allied Commander, Europe.

"Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its labourers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron."

I call on the SNP - just say no to NATO.

<http://www.coldtype.net/Assets.09/pdfs/0309.Herman.Nato.pdf> ■



Say NO to ConDem cuts
For all public transport in public hands
For offshore safety
For trade-union rights

Bob Crow, General Secretary Alex Gordon, President

Kick Up The Tabloids

JOHANN LAMONT CAGE FIGHT HORROR

So cabinets are re-shuffled on both sides of the border and the Scottish Government announces it is to proceed with the legislation for the Referendum. Is the phoney war finally over?

The "Yes" campaign, of course, launched earlier this year, with movie star supporters and showbiz razzamatuzz. Proud Scottish A-listers lending their support for independence included Brian Cox (a Scottish actor living in Los Angeles), Alan Cumming (a Scottish actor living in New York) and Midge Ure (a Scottish musician living in the 1980s).

The launch of the "No" campaign did not manage to attract any celebrities. Indeed, they could not even manage to organise an endorsement from John Leslie. However, this could be due to the fact that he did not understand the meaning of the word "No".

But, without doubt, what has most captured the imagination of the Scottish people has been the "Don't Know" campaign, slightly edging the "Don't Really Care" movement into second place in the approval ratings. The level of apathy on the subject of the referendum really does dismay and surprise me. This is the most important question we will have been asked in three-hundred years and some people aren't that bothered.

In other countries people have gone to extreme lengths to try to gain freedom. Only a few months back, two people in Tibet set fire to themselves as a protest against Chinese occupation of their country. Fair enough, plenty of people in Scotland set fire to themselves every year. However, it's not normally done to make a political statement, it's normally some poor guy trying to make chips after he's got home from a night in the pub. Furthermore, the last guy in Scotland who did try to make a political point by setting fire to himself got a

severe kicking from a baggage handler at Glasgow Airport.

Perhaps it has always been this way, perhaps people have always been apathetic throughout Scottish history. Who knows how many people sat on the fence at Bannockburn? Possibly some people hovered on about health and safety before deciding not to lend Flora McDonald their rowing boat. Who knows? Perhaps some people even changed channels half way through Archie Gemmill's goal at the 1978 World Cup in Argentina.

I think the current mood of disinterest can be partly attributed to the fact that most people are still a bit unclear about the pros and cons of Independence. On the upside, under independence, we will have politicians who are directly answerable to the people of Scotland. On the downside, nobody knows who any of these people are. The public recognition ratings of most Scottish politicians are very low. If you ask the average person in the street "Who's Johann Lamont?" they're likely to say they think it's one of those two brothers who play rugby for Scotland. This despite the fact that Johann Lamont has had several high-profile jobs outside politics, having been a professional cage-fighter, Chancellor of Germany, a Susan Boyle tribute act and Rab C. Nesbitt's wife. Ask what the name Willie Rennie conjures up, a large amount of people are likely to answer "Willie Rennie? Is that not a pill for penis indigestion?"

The public do respond to recognisable personalities in politics. Say what you like about Saddam Hussain, there were very few people in Iraq who did not know who the guy was, partly due to the fact that it was impossible to walk more than ten yards down the road without seeing a massive fifty-foot statue of the guy.

The charge is possibly true that current Scottish politics is a bit of a one-man band. In fact, the question is often asked: "What would happen if Alex Salmond fell under a bus tomorrow?" So, I contacted Lothian Buses, who issued the following statement: "We simply do not have any vehicles in our current fleet which could withstand that kind of impact". Perhaps more pertinently, one should ask "What would happen if Alex Salmond fell under a tram tomorrow?" Make up your own punchlines to that one.

Anyway, expect to see more celebrities coming out on both sides of the debate the nearer the referendum looms. Indeed, Alex Salmond has already been out to Hollywood to try to get support. He was on the red carpet for the premier of the Pixar movie "Brave", trying to sell Scotland to the World. He did seem genuinely surprised at how many Americans recognised him and wanted to shake him by the hand. What he didn't realise is that they thought they were meeting Shrek.

Salmond wants to use "Brave" as a tool to attract investment into Scotland, and also to encourage Americans to visit the country and for ex-pats to return home. It's a cartoon! How many people ever joined the Navy because they'd watched a couple of episodes of Popeye?

More ridiculous than that, however, was the claim made by a Tory MP that watching the Olympic opening ceremony on TV is likely to persuade Scots to vote "No" in the Referendum. Just how shallow does he think we are. Does he seriously think we'll be thinking: "You know what, I was right in favour of Scottish independence, then I changed my mind. Want to know why? I saw Mr Bean falling asleep at the piano, that fucking clinched it for me!" ■

The People's Charter

**1. A fair economy
for a fairer Britain.**

2. More and better jobs.

3. Decent homes for all.

**4. Protect and improve
our public services.
No cuts.**

5. Fairness and Justice.

**6. Build a secure and
sustainable future
for all.**



Sign the e-petition to the Scottish Parliament
supporting the Charter. Online from 17
September at

[www.scottish.parliament.uk/
gettinginvolved/petitions/index.aspx](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/gettinginvolved/petitions/index.aspx)

for a **Fairer
Scotland**

www.peoplescharterscotland.org

The FBU supports the People's Charter

The Fire Brigades Union views the continuing austerity policies of the UK Government as nothing short of a full scale ideological onslaught on the aspirations of the people of Scotland and on the fundamental principle of public service.

Policies that protect the wealthiest whilst hurting the poorest, that condemn the ill and disabled, which attack the pensions of ordinary workers, are despicable. We need an alternative that tackles the scourge of unemployment and all the social injustices that brings with it.

The FBU believes that government spending should be used to increase employment and the best way of doing so is through the development of quality public services. The six points set out in the People's Charter reflect the desire for a safe, secure, fair and peaceful society. We encourage all to sign the e-petition and to consider how best the People's Charter might be delivered.

**Fire Brigades Union Scotland
The Voice of Professional Firefighters
& Emergency Fire Control Operators**

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