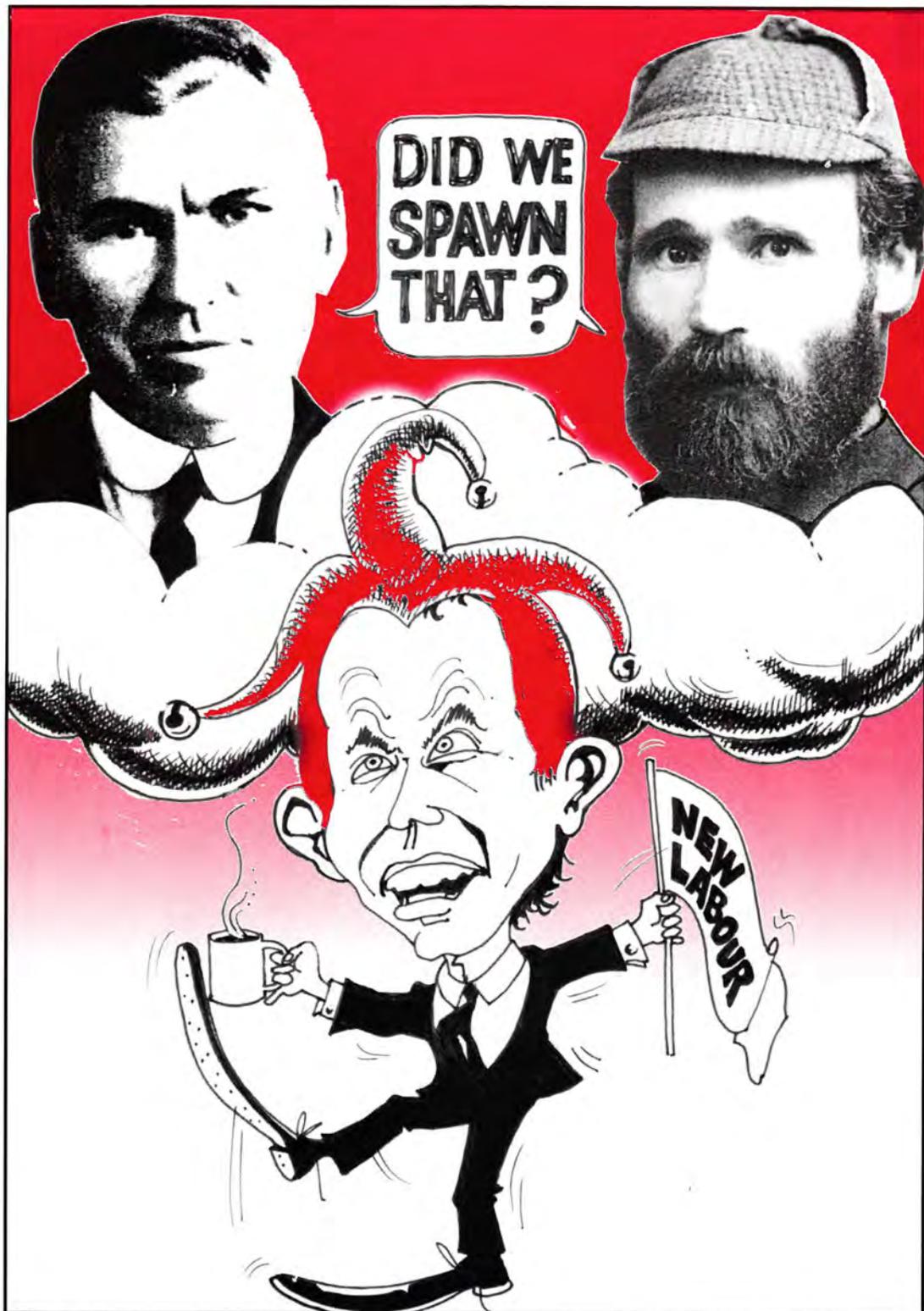


# Scottish Left Review



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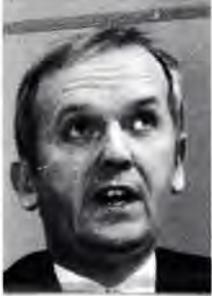
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# Scottish Left Review

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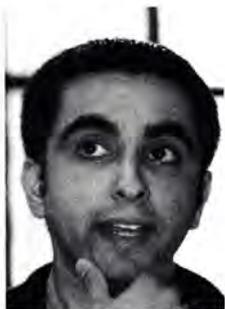
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# Social Democracy in A Scottish Context

Jimmy Reid

New Labour boasts that it has abandoned ideology. It hasn't. It abandoned socialism and social democracy and fell in love with free market capitalism. It embraced the ideology of right wing conservatism that in recent decades has been called Thatcherism. Every political party has an ideology which literally means a body of ideas that reflects the beliefs and interests of a nation, a political system, a political party, a social class. Ideology underlies and underpins political action. To say you have no ideology is as daft as saying you have no philosophy, which would mean you have no view of the world. Everyone has views about the world and voices them frequently; even those who claim they have no philosophy. Politicians who say they have no ideology are simply trying to conceal their abandonment of previously held beliefs.

That, I suggest, is a fairly good working definition of New Labour. The British Labour Party was founded to serve the interests of the British working class. Its very name made it clear that it was a party for those who have to sell their labour. In 1918, after the senseless slaughter of the First World War, the Labour movements of Europe swung to the left; the British Labour Movement was no exception. The Labour Party Conference of that year introduced a clause into its constitution that was of historic significance. It became known as Clause 4. It defined socialism as the strategic aspiration of the Party. To embrace free market capitalism, New Labour had to rid itself of this encumbrance. This is what the abandonment of Clause 4 was all about.

All the talk of updating the language was a load of tosh. Getting rid of the

clause was a necessary pre-condition for transforming the Labour Party into a party of the status quo; the capitalist status quo. New Labour is essentially a conservative party. It talks of modernity and the need for change but that, even conceptually, is confined to technology and its promotion. The ownership of technology, and every other resource that can generate wealth, will remain unchanged, in the hands of the few. What's new about that? Blair also tells us to forget about class. That class is a thing of the past; implying that Britain is a classless society. This in a society where the disparity between rich and poor has never been greater; where the actual concentration of wealth in the hands of the few has reached obscene proportions. The accumulation of wealth by the mega rich today is much greater than that of the kings and barons of feudal times. If class is a thing of the past then the Labour Party, whose *raison d'être* was to represent the working class, is historically redundant.

The reality is that many millions still sell their labour for wages or salaries and want to get as much as they can for it. Others, naturally fewer, buy their labour, and would like to do so for as little as possible. There is in this relationship a conflict of interests between employers and employees. The sellers and buyers of labour. It's an objective factor and cannot be wished away. In the political arena the Tories represented the bosses interests and Labour was supposed to represent the interests of the workers. All this is stating the obvious but New Labour now denies this reality. The Party that was founded and funded by the trade unions tells the unions to expect no favours from it. But it's worse than that. It woos the

mega rich like Rupert Murdoch and is so big business friendly that his newspapers and other media bastions of the Right like the Express newspapers and the Daily Mail are now supporting New Labour.

Blair's long term electoral strategy is to root himself in the territory that Thatcher carved out for herself. Middle England, as it's called. This required a lurch to the right greater than anything we've ever seen in the history of Britain's Labour Movement. It meant adopting the Thatcherite economic strategy, which Brown has so meticulously followed at the Treasury. Such a strategy is absolutely incompatible with progressive social policies. The mass privatisation, by the Tories, of public facilities will remain forever in private hands, if the Blairites have their way. Private Finance Initiatives will place the very structures of schools and hospitals in private hands. Some prisons have been privatised. They want to privatise Air Traffic Control and the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. It won't stop there. Far from promoting social ownership and the state regulation of market forces, even along Keynesian lines, to safeguard the wider public interest, Blair and Brown are enthusiastic advocates within the European Union of the same de-regulation of markets that Thatcher ruthlessly imposed in Britain during the 1980s. New Labour, in all fundamentals, is now a party of *laissez faire* capitalism. This was the socio-economic system that dominated the world from 1850-1950. It led to economic slumps of a severity never seen before. People starving in the midst of plenty. Crops rotting in fields as people rotted in villages, towns and cities. It was the century of two world wars where slaugh-

ter was maximised by the latest technology and sciences. In Scotland undernourished children died in disease-ridden slums, like flies. And Britain was arguably, at the time, the richest country in the world and the centre of an empire on which the sun never set.

We were supposed to have left this world behind in 1945, in a sense we had, with the advent of the welfare state, which in essence was a product of socialist thinking. But in the last twenty years we've been dragged back to the concepts of the 19th century. Through these years Scotland voted Labour so that this process might be reversed with the election of a Labour Government.. In 1997 New Labour was returned with a massive majority. We didn't expect miracles overnight but did anticipate a change; the beginning of the dismantling of Thatcherism; instead we got Son of Thatcher.

All of this has created a crisis of identity within the Scottish Labour Movement. The Scottish nation rejected Thatcherism as an alien ideology. This almost led to the disappearance of the Tory Party from the political landscape North of the Border. Thatcherite New Labour is unlikely, in the long run, to fare any better than Thatcherite Toryism. It too will alienate Scotland's political culture which would now seem to be significantly different from that which prevails in England. The advent of a Scottish Parliament can only accentuate this difference. The present government is different from any other Labour Government in the sense that it isn't really a Labour Government at all. The nearest comparison is with Ramsay MacDonald's government of 1929/32. But eventually MacDonald was told to get out by his colleagues and had to walk the floor and join the Tories.

Could anything remotely like this happen in New Labour? It's hard to envisage. Blair controls the Labour

Party machine as no party leader has ever done before. Inner party democracy has been seriously undermined, some would say destroyed. The annual party conference is now a rally/platform for the leader with disturbing Nuremberg rally overtones. The role of the party executive has been reduced to rubber stamping the flow of instructions that emanate from the leaders office. Selection procedures are designed to ensure a constant supply of house trained, super obedient MPs; enough to carry the day, any day, in the Parliamentary Party. The trade unions have been to some extent marginalised in terms of the party except when a block vote or two is needed to get selected a favoured son of the leadership, as it was deployed in Wales.. The trade unions have been mostly obsequious in a frantic search for a few crumbs of favourable legislation. We got a minimum wage that is a disgrace. If any employer is paying less than the rate set by the government he should be in prison. You could even argue that those that do pay this rate should be in the same place.

What we do know is that the government promotes campaigns for inward investment to Britain pointing out as one of the attractions, the low wages prevailing here. As a life long trade unionist I find that acutely embarrassing. We also know that the Prime Minister in the early days of this government assured businessmen that despite anything his government might do, that British trade unionists would still be the least free in Europe.

The fact is that the British Labour Party has been subverted by the Militant right, and not from the Militant left, as we had always been encouraged to fear. I don't think the present position can hold in Scotland. Labour party activists are leaving, others are hanging on, as they tell me, by their finger tips. Few are doing anything. Among

Labour's most committed supporters there is dismay and even despair and growing bitterness. Some are not voting. Others will vote SNP because it is to the left of new labour; no hard feat nowadays. Some will vote for the Scottish Socialist Party. But more important than all electoral considerations is a more profound question: What is to happen to the Scottish Labour Movement? It cannot for evermore be in thrall to a party that has abandoned everything it stands for. The present situation is therefore unsustainable and cannot last. If Scottish Labour can't be reclaimed by the membership for socialism and social democracy then a re-alignment of the Left in Scotland is inevitable. How or what form this will take is unclear. But any developments have to be thoroughly thought out in the Scottish context.. That is why we have launched Scottish Left Review. It is intended to be a forum of discussion. No voice of the left will be barred but political sectarianism will be frowned upon, putting it as delicately as I can. We want a broad kirk, chapel, synagogue, mosque, call it what you like. It will be composed of essays rather than articles for we want people to express themselves in depth and have the space to do so. We hope that discussion groups might meet in the various regions of Scotland to discuss some of the essays. Some consensus might emerge. It is my experience that when people begin to form collective judgements then one of their members will ask the pertinent question. Now that we have some agreement, what are we going to do? That's when the real fun starts.

# Post-Devolution Scotland – Where Now For The Left?

John McAllion

The Scottish Left has always been diverse, cross-party and non-party. Indeed, historically, the accusation against the Left has been that it lacked cohesion, preferring in-fighting amongst itself to uniting against its common enemies on the centre and right of politics.

The Monty Python satire in the film “Life of Brian”, that ridicules the hatred between the People’s Front of Judea and the Judean People’s Front, rings all too true for anyone with experience of Left politics in Scotland and the U.K. Scottish history is littered with examples of the Left turning in on itself.

These span from Communist attacks on ILP stalwarts like Jennie Lee, through the Labour Left organising against Militant and vice versa, to the divisions on the Left over the national question. There have even been splits within the nationalist Left, with the rump of Jim Sillars doomed SLP splitting evenly between those who joined the SNP and those who joined the Scottish Labour Party.

At the same time, increasing disillusionment with party politics has seen a haemorrhaging of Left activists out of party politics altogether and into non party single issue campaigns. CND, the grassroots anti-poverty campaign and the environmental movement are peopled by Lefts who scarcely disguise their contempt for official party politics.

Until now, I have viewed this splintering of the Left with regret, seeing it as disabling of any coherent opposition to the pro-market thinking on the centre and right that has come to dominate

mainstream party politics in Scotland and in the rest of the UK. A good illustration of this current weakness of the Left is the recent remarks made by Lord Owen, one of the key architects of the SDP breakaway from Labour in the early 1980’s.

Interviewed on a local website, the noble Lord admitted that the Gang of Four had themselves considered taking the name “New Labour” for their then new party. It was fear of alienating potential Liberal and Tory recruits that persuaded them to adopt the name of SDP instead. The SDP may have failed to break the mould of British politics in the 80’s but, according to Owen, it helped to create the centrist creation of New Labour under Tony Blair.

Owen claims that today’s New Labour was what the SDP came into existence to create. He also claims that there is hardly a single innovative New Labour policy that the SDP did not espouse between 1981 and 1990. If Owen is to be taken at all seriously in making these claims, and if a series of recent defections to New Labour by prominent Tory MP’s and activists are also to be given serious consideration, then very fundamental questions arise.

Where was the Labour Left when this appeasement of the centre and right was happening? How can the likes of Owen, a chief contributor to the collapse of the Left in the 80’s, and who helped pave the way for 18 Tory years in power, now claim to be vindicated by the changes that have swept over Labour at the turn of the new century?

Has New Labour really vindicated the

traitors who deserted Labour and left the working class exposed to Thatcher and Major? Has it really betrayed those of us who remained loyal to Labour through one of the darkest periods in the party’s history? Is it at all credible that the creation of New Labour has finally delivered Thatcher’s often stated goal of defeating British socialism?

Regardless of Owen’s monomania, these are questions that need to be examined and discussed openly and honestly by all of us who still claim to be socialists. This is so because the rapid and transforming revolution in communications that has fired the new global economy has changed everything, including the politics we all grew up with. At the dawn of the new millennium our political world really has been turned upside down.

The failed SDP and the successful New Labour projects were and are attempts to come to terms with this latest phase of capitalist development. However, in my view, they are coming to terms with it in entirely the wrong way. We are being told that there are no alternatives to market driven political and economic strategies. Citizens around the world must now learn to meekly acquiesce in more open markets, deregulation, privatisation, lower taxes, reduced government deficits and leaner and meaner welfare states.

Looked at from this standpoint, it is no real surprise to discover that there is now more that unites Scotland’s four “big” political parties than divides them. They all want to be the party of business and enterprise. They all

vie with each other to keep taxes low. They are all opposed to government intervening directly in the economy. None of them propose any significant extension of public ownership or control.

What is surprising is that this transformation of politics has occurred without any real opposition from the Left. The Left's inability to unite behind a coherent vision of a different kind of Scotland has simply allowed its enemies to ignore it and to establish without effective challenge their own vision of a free market Scotland operating comfortably within a free market global economy. The mainstream ideas of Left politics – public ownership, redistributive taxation, publicly funded services, state intervention in the economy - are everywhere in retreat.

For me, a root cause of these developments has been the effect of the majoritarian first past the post electoral system. It is quintessentially a two party system with the only real electoral contest between two broadly-based coalitions, one loosely on the centre-left and the other loosely on the centre-right.

Political perspectives outside of this spectrum are effectively marginalised. To have any real influence the Left had to organise within the centre-left coalition capable of winning power. This justified the argument of the Labour Left working inside the Party, and of the Scottish Communist Party working outside but with the Labour Left to influence the thinking inside that coalition.

Critically, this wider context began to change during the years of Tory hegemony after 1979. Four successive electoral defeats demoralised Labour, leading ultimately to the phenomenon of New Labour that has marginalised the Left and driven the Party firmly onto the centre ground of pro market politics.

Left policies and ideas were unfairly scapegoated for Labour's failure to win power. Lacking belief in itself the Labour Left did little or nothing to stop the New Labour revolution. The ideological revolution required to shift Labour's centre-left coalition onto pro-market territory was officially completed with the dumping of clause four, the true significance of which has only been fully grasped when it was too late.

The massive Labour victory of 1997, the arrival of the Scottish Parliament and, with it, a proportional electoral system further complicated and transformed this new political landscape. Suddenly, everything was different again. The whole basis upon which Scottish party politics had rested in the 20th century was shaken to the core.

The two big coalitions of Tory and Labour no longer had a monopoly on the levers of political power. Incredibly, the Liberals found themselves back in government. The SNP suddenly were the official opposition with 35 MSP's. The Scottish Socialists and the Greens, even socialist independents, were now elected to our national parliament.

These structural changes have occurred after just one Scottish general election and are likely to develop further in successive elections. They must alter the way in which the Scottish Left thinks about the political challenges of the new century.

The old thinking that viewed elections as essentially two-horse races between Labour and the Tories now no longer holds true. The SNP view that all they needed for independence was a majority of first past the post seats is no longer credible. The dismissal of Greens and Socialists as fringe groupings remote from power is simply wrong under the new prevailing political conditions.

As I see it, there are now all kinds of alternative political scenarios. One is to argue for a realignment of the Left into a single new party, either under the banner of the Scottish Socialist Party or of a newly created Red/Green alliance. This would free Left activists from the restraints imposed upon them within Labour and SNP parties that are committed to market policies and to integration with greater European capitalism.

While this has obvious attractions for individual Lefts struggling within both these parties, it also has obvious problems. It ignores the importance of the union link with the Labour Party. Any new political party of the Left that seeks to oppose a Labour Party backed by organised labour in Scotland is inevitably on weak ground. It also ignores the emotional appeal of both Labour and the SNP for activists and supporters who think of these parties as "theirs". Breaking with a cause they have backed all of their lives may be asking too much of too many.

Another alternative is to exploit the new political structures to create cross-party coalitions of the Left around individual political issues. Tommy Sheridan has already achieved this very successfully around the abolition of poindings and warrant sales. His success could be a prototype for future cross party coalitions of the political Left.

Equally, however, there are obvious problems with this approach. The disciplining of Margo McDonald by the SNP for mild criticism of the leadership, and the new Labour authoritarianism that has driven out Dennis Canavan and Alex Smith show that the respective leaderships of these parties share a determination not to allow cross party co-operation they have not sanctioned. Working across the party lines is likely to become more difficult as leaderships in all the main parties begin to reassert their authority in the

new parliament.

These, of course, are only two possible alternatives. There are as many other alternatives as there are people on the Left thinking about politics. Crucially, however, the Left must recognise that restructuring parties or creating new cross-party coalitions cannot of themselves provide a sufficient response to the challenges we now face. We still need to address the underlying problem of the absence of a coherent critique that makes sense of the changing world and offers a socialist response to it.

Scotland is in crying need of new socialist ideas more than it is of new socialist parties. What, for example, are the current arguments in favour of public ownership? The centre and right argue that ownership no longer matters so long as the quality of public services delivered is cost effective and provides value for money.

This thinking has led to the profit-driven delivery of public services across a range of enterprises that used to be the preserve of publicly owned and controlled bodies: electricity, gas, coal, railways and buses. Unless it is successfully challenged, it is likely to lead to further private encroachment into those services remaining under public control.

Public private partnerships are creating privately owned and managed schools and hospitals across Scotland. At the moment this is confined to facilities management. So far the work of doctors, nurses and teachers has been declared off limit for the private sector. But with the World Trade Organisation pressing for the opening up of public services to competition, how long can that line be held?

The current massive investment in our water and sewerage infrastructure is financed by schemes that allow the private sector to build, own, operate and

profit from an essential industry that is already beginning to slip out of public control. When, as is intended in the near future, the water and sewerage industry is opened up to full private competition, how long will our publicly owned water companies be able to resist the massive privatised water and utility companies currently waiting for the opportunity to move north of the border?

In the face of these threats, the Left must begin to develop the arguments in favour of public ownership. Moreover, these arguments must make sense in the face of the new realities. They must offer credible socialist alternatives to the current status quo.

For example, public investment in our infrastructure funded through taxation may be unfashionable but it is undeniably fairer and more progressive. The poor in the North of Scotland would not be facing 46% increases in their water charges if the investment there was publicly financed.

Again, a privatised railway has stopped electrification of the east coast main line short at Edinburgh because to extend it northwards is not profitable. A publicly owned railway would put services to all the people of Scotland before private gain. Let us remind people of that.

We are told that community based housing associations are the only realistic future for socially-owned housing. If that is so, why not let them borrow from the Public Works Loans Board? Forcing them to raise investment cash from private lenders at commercial rates ensures that rents will remain expensively high and will require to be subsidised through housing benefit. Are taxpayers content that they should be helping to boost the profits of private lenders through their hard-earned taxes?

These are just some of the arguments

the Left should be marshalling in support of public ownership. We should never tire of reminding everyone that public private partnerships are essentially a short-term fix for those who see the priority as limiting the levels of public spending and borrowing. In the longer term, they are much more expensive and provide far less value for money. They also siphon public expenditure off into private gain.

These are just some of the arguments against the current orthodoxy of the private delivery of public services. There are others, and many other areas of policy where prevailing market orthodoxy needs to be challenged by socialist alternatives. There is never enough space to cover them all.

Hopefully, those who either agree or disagree with me will now be motivated to argue for or against what I am saying and thereby open up a debate on the Left that is long overdue and very badly needed. President Clinton uses a phrase about the "brain-dead politics of the past". A politics in the 21st century that does not include arguments for socialist change is already brain-dead. But then the current contest for the presidency of the United States makes that point far better than I ever could.

# Holyrood must defend its power

Roseanna Cunningham

With the Scottish Parliament's first year under its belt, there have predictably been many commentators delivering their equivalent of Report Cards. What has been singularly absent is any serious look at the extent to which both Whitehall and Westminster has accepted, or otherwise, the existence of the Parliament and the difference between reserved and devolved powers.

The experience thus far would suggest that Westminster has every intention of continuing to legislate for Scotland in areas which are properly devolved. Well, they would, wouldn't they?

The other side of that coin however has been the extent to which the Scottish Parliament has simply accepted each fait accompli with no real protest.

There is a debate to be had here about the powers of the Executive vis-à-vis the Parliament, but with the inbuilt whipped majority that the Executive coalition has we can take it for granted that with very rare exceptions the view of the Executive will end up being ratified as the view of the Parliament. As a result of that, the Scottish Parliament has in its first year set some very dangerous precedents without much thought or debate.

For those of us who were in the House of Commons at the time of the debates over the then Scotland Bill one clause

in that Bill stood out as a matter of concern. To ensure that the upstart Parliament in Edinburgh didn't get carried away with its own power and just to remind everyone that the doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty wasn't going to be superseded by any little local difficulty 450 miles away, the Scotland Bill contained within it a catch-all power reserved to Westminster which allowed it to go on legislating even in devolved areas.

For those not already in the know, the power is contained within Section 28 of the Scotland Act which is the section conferring legislative power on the Parliament. But that legislative power is always going to be subject to 28 (7) which states unambiguously that: This section does not affect the power of the Parliament of the United Kingdom to make laws for Scotland. Of course, during those debates in 1998 we were continually reassured that this power was only intended to be used very rarely and would be unlikely to be relied upon on other than very occasionally.

Well, despite those reassurances by the then Ministers who are of course now included in the ranks of Scottish Executive Ministers, the reality has turned out to be rather different. And the fact that this has generally been allowed to happen unremarked upon is an indictment of the first year of the

Scottish Parliament.

What we have seen is Westminster routinely legislating in all sorts of areas notwithstanding the fact that power has been devolved.

And the response of the Parliament? Well, that is the problem because thus far and fairly routinely the Parliament simply responds by agreeing that Westminster should just go on and do whatever it wants to do.

It is certainly the case that many of these matters would be regarded by most commentators as relatively trivial. However that doesn't apply to all of the instances in which it has happened.

In the normal course of events, the matter is dealt with by way of what has become known as a 'Sewell Motion' in the Scottish Parliament. Invariably this is a Motion put down by the Executive to allow Westminster to go ahead and equally invariably it is passed by the Parliament after the simple expedient of the coalition parties in the Executive applying their respective Whips.

Certainly the SNP has on occasion allowed such a Motion to go unopposed. When it came to the equalisation of the age of consent, the fact that the Westminster legislation had commenced before devolution was viewed by the SNP as sufficient reason to dis-

tinguish it from the majority.

On other occasions there has not been the same compelling reason to agree and as a matter of principle it has to be argued that, without such a compelling reason at the very minimum, neither should the Executive. What is being built up is a catalogue of precedents which will be referred to in the future and will undoubtedly be used politically as an argument when the time finally comes, as it will, that the Parliament does want to make a stand.

No doubt it will be immediately assumed that any such clashes would only come about in the event of the SNP assuming power in Scotland. Certainly at that point it wouldn't just be the exercise of the existing devolved powers which would come into contention. However, before we even get to the argument about extending powers, it would be a welcome change if the Parliament would simply get on with exercising all of those it has at present.

Nor should it be assumed that all of the already substantial number of precedents encompass only non-controversial issues.

In truth, there has already been at least one instance where there should have been a stand taken by the Parliament and that is during the passage of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1999 at Westminster. The iniquities of this Act do not need to be rehearsed here. What does need to be emphasised is that the passage of that Act made

necessary a number of consequential changes to various other Acts which included those covering devolved matters. That was allowed to proceed notwithstanding the serious concern in Scotland, across a number of parties, as to the acceptability of the central proposition of the Bill.

It is also quite clearly true that in exercise of its devolved powers, the Scottish Parliament could in the future revisit those various statutes and amend them back again. But that would take an assertion of political will which is apparently absent from the governing coalition which has thus far shown itself only too willing to allow Whitehall and Westminster to go on behaving as if devolution was not going to mean any actual change in practice.

There is a certain irony in all of this.

First, that it goes generally unremarked upon by most observers, even those who whose jobs presumably involve reporting on the Parliament's business and progress, although credit where it is due, the Law Society of Scotland keeps a careful watching brief on this issue; secondly, that in all the debate about the likelihood of the extension of the Parliament's powers, no-one has seen fit to challenge the Parliament to start exercising all of the powers it currently actually has; and thirdly, that the Parliament may well be colluding in creating a rod with which it will be severely beaten in the future.

That third point is perhaps the most important. After all, the current arrangement is all very cosy between

an Executive in Scotland and a government in Westminster who between them, basically agree on most policy proposals which are liable to be put forward in either Parliament.

If the government at Westminster were to change hands, would even the current Executive be quite so sanguine about the continued use of the override power in the Scotland Act? The answer is obvious. That is why a stand should be taken now.

# Blair's Accomplices

## New Labour and the Trade Union Leadership

The trade unions founded the Labour Party – are they now overseeing its destruction?

One hundred years ago in 1900 the Labour Representative Committee was formed. The TUC played a major part before and after this to give birth to what is now the Labour Party. Its purpose was in the name – to represent labour – the working classes, the ideals in its first manifesto drawn up by its leaders including Kier Hardy – a socialist agenda for a socialist party. This was the bargain struck.

After three years in power with the largest ever majority and a favourable economy, what has the New Labour Government made of the bargain?

Public spending at its lowest in a decade. Even at the end of the comprehensive spending review in 2004 we will only be spending the same proportion of GDP as the Tories in the mid-90s. Meanwhile health, education, social and welfare services have experienced serious cutbacks causing hardship to users especially the most vulnerable.

Tax breaks for the rich while increasing indirect taxes that hurt the poorest. The super-rich are getting richer while the government figures show the numbers in poverty, especially children, have increased. The treatment of our pensioners is shameful – they are amongst the poorest in the European Union.

In Europe New Labour are opposing putting the proposed Charter of Fundamental Human Rights into legislation, their main ally – the conservative government of Spain.

In foreign and defence policy we are the lap dogs to American imperialism. Our ethical foreign policy appears to

depend on opportunities for British investment and contracts.

### Labour Party Democracy

It is now obvious that the New Labour Project planned behind John Smith's back was to turn the Party from a membership-lead activist organisation to cheer leading supporters at American style party conventions. This has been done with duplicity, lack of principles and a ruthlessness that cannot be forgiven.

Policy forums were introduced as a more considered intelligent way of making policy. This was a sham – the real intention was to neutralise the policy-making National Conference, which would have rebelled against New Labour's programme. The rules for minority reports from policy forums appearing on conference agendas mean that it is almost impossible for constituency representatives getting anything radical on the agenda. The subterfuge has worked, and the National Conference now resembles a convention. Last year over 200 constituency labour parties didn't bother to send delegates. Now local policy forums are being used as an excuse to abolish constituency general meetings.

The imposed centralised system of selection of candidates for the Scottish, Welsh and European elections resulted in blatant political cleansing. There is much more to come out about the Scottish Parliament selections. The absence of any real membership involvement in the European selections meant that few activists campaigned contributing to our worst showing since joining.

Since its creation there has always been a right and left in Labour living together in an uneasy consensus – New Labour has deliberately set out to

destroy the coalition that was Labour. Do they appreciate the consequences? I don't think they care – few of them have any loyalties or principles (witness the U turns from opposition to government) other than their careers.

The reality is that New Labour is a fraud. It's not New – it's right wing, it doesn't represent labour and it's certainly not socialist i.e. it has broken the bargain made with the trade unions when they helped to found the Labour Party.

New Labour has demoralised and demotivated its rank and file membership with 20 – 30% leaving in the last 2 years.

### Trade Union Representation

Public spending and social security cuts, privatisation of public services, pensioners and children deeper in poverty! – this is the opposite of the democratically decided policies of the great majority of trade unions. What have the trade union leaders and representatives on Labour National Executive Committee done about it?

The answer is that they have been collaborators in these anti-working class policies.

The trade union section has a majority on the NEC. The Party Treasurer, one of the office bearers, is from the trade unions. However they voted for the 1997 Manifesto which included sticking to the Tory public spending cuts, no tax increases and the continuance of privatisation – never approved by Labour's National Conference and against their own trade unions' policies.

They have acquiesced in the centralised undemocratic selection systems for the Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament. They approved the appall-

ing and disastrous closed list system for the European Parliament. Worse, they have participated in the actual selections that deliberately excluded left and trade union candidates. They rubberstamped the gerrymandered election systems for Leader in Wales and Mayoral candidate in London that cost us majority control in both.

In the policy forums where they comprise the biggest vote, they have not challenged New Labour policies that are contrary to their trade unions' policy. They could have determined the outcome of the forums' recommendations, or at the very least submitted minority reports, which would have had to be put to National Conference.

### **Why this subservience?**

So why this subservience to New Labour? Was there – is there a deal? If there is it has been pretty bad value for the trade unions.

True, we have the National Minimum Wage, and the Employment Relations Act 1998 that establishes ballots for trade union recognition at work. However these were longstanding policies which New Labour could not have ditched. What they have in fact produced is far less than that promised by John Smith in the 1993 General Election Manifesto. The minimum wage was to have been £4.00 per hour without the indefensible lower rate for young workers doing the same job. The actual rates now, seven years later, are £3.60 and £3.20.

On trade union recognition the imposition of a threshold that a majority of voters and more than 40% of the workforce must support is a disgrace and totally unjustifiable – only a handful of MPs would have been elected if similar rules had applied to Westminster elections.

The reality is that on employment rights, British workers are the worst off within the European Union – witness BMW deciding to close Rover without consulting their workers, something that would have been illegal in Ger-

many.

Privatisation continues at a furious pace in our hospitals, schools, public housing, air traffic control, prisons and the jobs of the public employees within these services. At the 1999 STUC Congress in Glasgow a few weeks prior to the Scottish Parliament elections, it appeared that the trade unions would throw down the gauntlet and outright oppose New Labour's privatisation policies. This, in the view of many experienced observers, could have forced a re-think at that crucial election period. Instead Gordon Brown had breakfast with the trade union leadership, and a deal was stitched up. Some deal! Scotland has now a higher proportion of private finance initiative (PFI) schemes than anywhere else in Britain.

Anything else from the "deal"? Some cynics may point out that Blair has created 8 new trade union barons and a substantial number of paid quango appointments have been handed out.

The reason given most often in private conversation is that "they" don't want to rock the boat and that they must ensure New Labour wins a second term of office.

### **More harm than good.**

This reason, whilst understandable, is short-sighted and will do the Labour Party more harm than good. The absence of opposition within the Party to New Labour's right-wing, pro-market policies is already costing votes amongst traditional supporters and threaten Labour's continuation as the major political party in the United Kingdom.

On any analysis the Tories will not prove a credible force at the next general election. The failure of many of our core voters to turn out in England and worse, many turning to the nationalist parties in Scotland and Wales, poses an immediate and long-term threat to future Labour success at the polls.

An examination of last year's Scottish, Welsh, European and English council

elections do not show an endorsement of New Labour. There was an underlying trend of decline within areas of traditional support. In Scotland the Labour vote was down 13% from the general election figure. In south Wales, seats in former mining areas were lost as were council seats in the north of England and the Midlands.

In Scotland New Labour policies are driving traditional Labour supporters to the Scottish National Party (SNP) whilst the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) is becoming a credible political force.

The loss of party activists, many of them trade unionists, will adversely affect Labour's ability to campaign on the doorstep.

### **Negotiating for Real Labour**

There is almost certainly going to be a general election next year. New Labour is expecting to obtain £8million plus from affiliated trade unions for the election campaign. The trade unions effectively have a majority on the party NEC and at National Conference. This is a prime opportunity for them to powerfully influence the content of the election manifesto. They must do this if they are to ensure their activists' involvement and the rank and file's support for Labour. The Manifesto must not be New Labour's "Third Way" policies but "Real Labour" progressive policies based on economic and social equality, social and common ownership, and justice at work.

Failure to do this will see an ever-growing number of trade union members ceasing to vote for Labour and challenging the distribution of their political levy monies to Labour for little or no return.

The trade unions have it within their power to save or destroy the "real" Labour Party.

**Bob Thomson was Associate Scottish Secretary of UNISON and Treasurer of the Scottish Labour Party 1993 – 1999.**

# RACE AND SCOTTISH JUSTICE?

Aamer Anwar

Having watched the media's response to the recent Notting Hill Carnival it amazes me how quickly sections of the media and the Police have moved to claim that in the 'Post Macpherson' society things have gone too far. Police Officers up and down the country claim they are demoralised and unable to do their job. Yet they have no problem with their most resented and discriminatory police practice-Stop and Search. Whether it be on the streets of London or Pollokshields in Glasgow, young Black and Asian men are six times more likely than their whites to be picked up.

To them the young Asian male is to be broken on the authoritarian premise that suspecting him beforehand is the best way of stopping him committing a crime. Asian people in Scotland still under-policed as victims of crime, are now being over policed as citizens. It was this logic, which led to the criminalisation of a generation culminating in the English inner city riots of the 80's.

The problem with the myth of a Post MacPherson Paradise is that in Scotland we were already twenty years behind on the issue of race before the Lawrence Inquiry even arrived. For years in 'lefty' Scotland, we had a tradition where Freedom Fighters against Apartheid were feted, whilst local blacks were expected to stand passively in line as they were patronised with we're "All Jock Tamsons Bairns".

Then we had a police service and legal establishment that played 'the numbers game' arguing a small black community meant there was no problem with racism. Their initial response to MacPherson was to declare that Scotland had got it right. Almost overnight they did a u-turn and stated we could not be complacent, as Stephen Lawrence could have happened in Scotland too. What they didn't realise was that it had happened many times over.

Despite Scotland having a proud tradition of welcoming immigrant cultures, we also have a hidden history of murders and attacks on black people, stretching back over a hundred years. The problem for activists has been to locate and identify racism because up until recently such murders or attacks would not be classified as racist. Recent figures have shown though that in parts of Scotland you are thirteen times more likely to be attacked for being black than in London.

The fact that a person can lose their life solely because of the colour of their skin is the ultimate expression of racism in this country, but where our system of 'justice' has failed the black community is recognising that racist violence, harassment and discrimination can destroy lives without taking lives. Convincing local police or prosecutors of a possible racial motivation for an attack, especially when families are fighting alone without much community support or the spotlight of the media, seems to be the order of the day.

Lord Kirkwood's charging of the Jury in the Trial for the murder of 15-year-old schoolboy Imran Khan in 1998, summed up the attitude of the legal establishment to racism- " Both defence and prosecution have said this was not a racially motivated attack. That is correct because there is no evidence to suggest that this was a racist attack. This case demonstrates the dangers inherent in young men going about with knives."

Nearly ten years before a similar attitude was expressed by in the trial over the murder of Somalian Refugee Ahmed Sheikh in Edinburgh, in an attack very similar to that of Stephen Lawrence's. Time and time again evidence of racist affiliations or racial abuse have been put aside in our courts. In Imran's case it was irrelevant to the prosecution, defence and presiding judge that the Gilmour twins who murdered Imran were expelled for

racist behaviour or had attacked him with knives a year earlier. These cases and others that followed, revealed what many in the black community already knew; the courts and police believed that racism did not exist in Scotland or simply did not care. They contributed to a loss of faith by ethnic minorities in the system's ability to seek out the truth, never mind deliver justice. But it never really mattered because the 'numbers game' meant there would be no repercussions.

When it comes to black deaths, the most obvious connections elude the police and prosecutors. Within hours of a death, the most pressing need for the authorities is not catching the murderers but to issue press statements denying racial motivation. There is no real speciality built up of study and identification of good and bad practice in the conduct of such cases. Despite the Lawrence Report's warning against plea bargaining, Scottish courts let racist attackers walk free.

Until all police forces and prosecutors take racial violence seriously, carry out the required level of investigation immediately after an attack, keeping families informed of developments - including setbacks, and allow ongoing investigations to be scrutinised by third parties, we will never know whether the guilty are walking free or the wrong suspects were picked up. The way to restore confidence in the prosecution of racial violence is not better public relations but a better response.

Asian parents and white parents fear the ghetto mentality that thrives on the streets of the Southside of Glasgow. Young Asian men remind me of second-generation blacks growing up on the streets of Brixton and Toxteth. For hundreds of years sectarianism divided the West of Scotland, but one only needs to take a walk down some of the streets of the Southside, to find a community segregated along race lines. We can see the present and our future when school gates open- Asian kids go

one way, and white kids the other.

The Labour Government talks of social inclusion yet provide no solution to bridging the gap that divided Imran Khan and the Gilmour twins who murdered him. Our so-called community leaders/Uncle Toms call for greater resources for the police, that have continually failed both the Asian and white community. More 'race relations experts' are appointed to sit on bodies to join hands in a 'get to know your community copper tea party'.

Within the Asian community there are no real models, there are no political leaders to aspire to, just corrupt rich politicians filling their back pockets. Their families are conveniently protected in leafy suburbs, with their children sent to the best schools. These parents rarely face the dread of ordinary black parents that when their son or daughter steps foot out of the front door they may be a target for brutal assault culminating in murder.

Imran's murder highlighted how the community leaders with help from the authorities, intended to keep the youth under control, keep them passive, peaceful and non-violent. As the elders arrived in their Mercedes, their talk was an age old one of acceptance of the status quo, to turn to prayers and to suffer peacefully allowing the legal process to follow its course. But many of Imran's young friends were justified when they argued we should never have waited for or trusted the courts to act.

Since then a Post Macpherson Paradise has been born in which is the Scottish Courts and the police operate a 'politically correct racism'. They now just put the boot in without the 'black bastard'. They justify refusing you a job with the words "we are an equal opportunities employer" printed at the bottom of all application forms. They put nice Black faces all over their glossy brochures. They appoint token blacks to speak on quangos. These blacks (with a few honourable exceptions) are called sell-outs or gullible but neither description is true. They are well aware of the role they play and of their own class interests.

The argument advanced by the left for years is true-There is more to unite Asian youth from Pollokshields with a white shipyard worker from Govan than there ever will be to unite them with an Asian cash and carry owner.

But much of the left has failed to capitalise on this, with little more than ancient mechanical arguments. Continuing to argue revolution to a bemused community. 'They turn up and then disappear,' 'they hijack our problems and then try to sell us a paper'- is an often heard criticism amongst the Asian community. The lessons the Lawrence family had to learn as they fought for justice are still to be heeded in Scotland. We do indeed have a proud history of socialist movements and thought in Scotland, but we must learn to give solidarity based on the needs of the oppressed rather than our own 'party line'.

#### **So what of those who fall foul of the law?**

Whether people are innocent or guilty, the question is one of whether the law provides any remedy. There is an acute widespread need for sympathetic skilled legal help. If lawyers are not available or if the law is felt to be a servant of the police, then bitterness, apathy and disrespect for the law will most definitely follow. The blue print was already mapped out in England and once more the authorities are contributing to a decimation of our youth.

A small study was done a couple of years ago which showed that a disproportionate amount of black people appear in the Scottish courts without representation. The quality of service offered by solicitors and barristers is of variable quality and leads to accusations that because the defendants or victims are black they have not been treated properly. There has been much talk of the need for black police officers, but no real concern expressed at the lack of black solicitors or barristers. Racism is rife throughout the whole legal establishment. Those blacks entering it do so on the basis that they must fit in and will need to be whiter than white.

If one adds to this the cuts in legal aid,

the reality is that it is already increasingly difficult to give poor people on legal aid the attention they deserve. From the Law Schools to the corridors of the High Courts, the legal establishment works like a gentleman's club that for hundreds of years has escaped criticism because nobody 'outside' understands their language, their peculiar rituals of robes, gowns and wigs and vanity. They occupy a prestigious status in our society that remains unchallenged. There is nothing revolutionary in the Lord Advocate, the Law Society and Faculty of Advocates condemning racism, after all even the most racist thug in The Met has learned to use the language of MacPherson. The real test of their conviction is what reforms have they introduced and the answer is none.

#### **So what is to be done?**

We require a complete shake-up of a system that on a regular basis appoints right wing, well to do, middle or upper middle class predominantly white men to the bench or chambers. Accountability should have been the basis of a new Parliament and of the Lawrence Report.

To continue to argue for reform can be an almost futile exercise in the present climate that is more intent on attacking Asylum Seekers. Every death in police custody, every failure to prosecute racists, every family grieving for the loss of the loved one, has been matched with thousands of words written and spoken, clamouring for reform. Yet in the end in Scotland just as in England there is a fear of demoralising those we rely on for law and order.

When the next big case hits the news, which it will soon, we will hear of how hard they tried and how sorry the authorities are. Once more they will try to fool us by sticking a plaster on a cancerous disease. The bringing in of race relation professionals in their Versace/pinstripe suits will follow the half apologies from the authorities. Having made a career out of fighting for a seat at the top table their contribution will be one of further betrayal and compromise.

This time round we have a responsibil-

ity to raise the wider issue of accountability and judicial impartiality, which should be the cornerstone of any new democratic Scotland we try to build. Of these fundamentals we have neither. We must ask ourselves how can we say to the Police or Crown Office, you are institutionalised racists but go away and sort the matter out yourselves? It is a strategy doomed to failure.

Thatcher gave huge amounts of power to the police and prosecution over the eighteen years to crush the trade unions and their class. We have got to return democratic control back to the people. By that I do not mean police boards. There is not one Scottish Police Board that distinguished itself prior

to the Inquiry by leading the fight against racism. They have colluded with the police, working with them to hide their racism. If you look to the Prosecution system then the situation is even worse. Open up all these bodies to real public examination and accountability. If they have nothing to hide then they have nothing to fear. All I know is that not a single police officer or judge has ever been sacked for racism, not one complaint of racism against an officer has ever been upheld, and not one prosecutor has ever said they got it wrong.

The only effective way of securing justice as a black person is to make sure that you fight the system at all levels-

that is what the Lawrence's and others before them had to do. For those who say be patient and wait. We must say we cannot be patient, we are tired of grieving at gravesides.

Many of us have a vision that we are determined to turn into reality. A society based on fundamental human rights, freedom, justice and equality I don't think this is a dream but a possibility. In the 21st Century we must fight for that possibility, if there is to be a legacy of Stephen Lawrence and all those who lost their lives to bigotry and racism in the last century.

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## Diary - Thomas A Bucket

We are - as the Sunday papers never seem to tire of reminding us - in a post-industrial age. Strikes and demonstrations are apparently old hat - as passÉ as last night's limp polenta-and-endive salad at Granita's. How, then, are we to develop new forms of protest to get our point across? It's just as well we have lorry drivers, isn't it? Not content with making our world a cheerier place with their pleasant demeanour, refined manners and considerate road sense, now they have come up with a whole new post-modern form of protest. What better way to get the subtleties of your argument across and the people on your side than to attempt to completely ruin their day? It was a brilliant wheeze: protest against fuel prices by blocking major roads first thing on a Monday morning. The technique? Drive at walking pace down commuter routes, choke motorways by trundling along three abreast in giant, smoke-belching twelve wheelers. That'll win hearts and minds! Or at least it would have if people had been able to tell the difference between the protest and the way truckers usually drive. Maybe it would have been more successful if more had turned up. But apparently several lorries pulled out suddenly without warning. So no change there either. It's just as well these protests involved such stalwarts of tolerance and liberal values as truck-

ers, taxi drivers and farmers. Obviously if the demonstrations had not been approved by the Daily Mail and were instead the work of such evil, subversive types as trade unionists, the full weight and majesty of the law would have been brought to bear on them in very short order indeed. Quicker than you could say "illegal secondary picket" a wall of blue serge would have appeared, only too happy to offer these enemies of freedom a kindly-but-firm word and a perhaps-slightly-less-kindly-but-a-heck-of-a-lot-firmer truncheon! And if that didn't work, a swift phone call to George "Bomber" Robertson in his deep, lead lined bunker very far indeed from any danger would produce that most feared of reprisals, the NATO air strike. Yes, freedom would be safe beneath the wings of George's magnificently expensive flying machines, many able to stay in the air for whole minutes at a time - and all able to draw on Nato's unparalleled experience of bombing the Bejasus out of passenger trains, tractors and television stations throughout Serbia. And a few neighbouring countries they didn't mean to hit but - hey - nobody's perfect, eh? So just count yourself lucky today's protestors want nothing more than the simple, God-given right to freely ply the outside lanes of our motorways at 45 mph, with a brick on the gas pedal, feet on the dashboard and Celine Dion's

greatest hits on the stereo. In my day, sonny, demonstrators tried to undermine the very foundations of civilisation by demanding such fripperies as a job or even a living wage. Thank goodness we have laws against such things now!

I say I say I say: what's the difference between the SQA and the IRA? Even the IRA admit responsibility sometimes. But at least we know whose responsibility it isn't: Sam Galbraith's. Sam insists - and we are happy to accept - that he doesn't have to resign because he was only the man in charge. And Dear Leader Tony says he is an outstanding minister. Out-twisting-in-the-wind minister, some might say, but they fail to appreciate the subtleties of the system. After all, the SQA's chief executive Ron Tuck had to resign because he didn't know what was going on. Whereas Sam doesn't have to resign because he... didn't know what was going on. Sorted! Even this cloud has a silver lining, though. Even as the SQA was shedding staff faster than the Scotsman, they did have time to hire another three press officers. That the SQA had no public image left to maintain appears to have escaped it, although we hear one of these new spin morticians has come up with a brilliant idea to restore the organisation's shattered public image: rename it Windscale.

# Scottish Left Review

www.scottishleftreview.com

A journal of the Left in Scotland reflecting the internal and external changes brought about since the formation of the Scottish Parliament in July 1999.

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# Scottish Left Review

The Scottish Left Review will be a bi-monthly website magazine that will seek to provide a focal point of thought and discussion for the Scottish Left. It will be non-party but will aim to provide a forum for those on the Left of all parties and none. Such a forum is urgently required at a time when the untrammelled play of market forces is not only tolerated but actively promoted as the only agency that can ensure economic prosperity. This is in sharp contrast to the first 75 years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when capitalism was widely believed to have ignominiously failed and was viewed by many as the harbinger of the two most destructive wars in human history, and slumps that paralysed economic activity; creating widespread misery in the midst of a human capacity to create an abundance.

When you look at the world today you might well ask: What has changed? Mass poverty and hunger stalks the planet in the midst of actual abundance. Even in the prosperous and developed parts of the planet a seriously underprivileged class exists, cheek by jowl with rampant consumerism. Alienation is rife. The greed, which is supposed to be the dynamic of the free market system, menaces the ecology, placing in jeopardy the very existence of our species. The promoted culture is nihilist. Drug addiction is rife. There were more wars in the last quarter of the last century than in the previous 75 years. The collapse of the Soviet Union and its geographically linked satellites was used to signal the end of socialism, though many socialists had denied that the Soviet model was in any fundamental sense socialist.

In Britain the Labour Party as New Labour, abandoned socialism, even as an aspiration for the long term, but also forsook social democracy, as a guide to formulating policies in the short term. New Labour has embraced free market capitalism with all the enthusiasm of the convert. The years of Thatcherism seem to have engendered different patterns of political thought in the Scottish nation as compared to England. From the very start Scotland rejected Thatcherism.

The Scottish Left has always been diverse, cross-party, and non-party. There is a strong left tradition in the SNP, and the Scottish Socialist Party is emerging as a credible electoral force.

The establishment of the Scottish Parliament is bound to render Scottish politics even more Scottish. It is inconceivable that the present constitutional arrangements are fixed forever. Events and the moving hand of political development will overhaul them. The SLR must take the view that the Scottish people has an inalienable right of self determination and this will find expression through elections and referenda. There will be different views as to how we proceed from here, but all that envisage change through the democratic process should be considered legitimate.

The SLR wants to stimulate debate. Each issue will have six or more essays dealing with a wide range of subjects, viewed from a Left Scottish perspective. We hope that this will stimulate discussions and forums in the various regions. For those who aren't on the Internet we will try to make some hard copies available. The range of support for this venture can be seen from those who sit on the editorial board. I believe and hope that this initiative will bear fruit in the regeneration of the Left in Scotland.