THE SNP AND A LEFT AGENDA

PLUS
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ON PLANE STUPID
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WHAT’S LEFT IN SCOTLAND?

With the Westminster election looming, it is timely to examine the record of the Scottish National Party minority Government at Holyrood and understand how political developments in Scotland might reverberate across the whole of the United Kingdom.

Isobel Lindsay, in her assessment of the SNP in office, is keen to argue that change is possible, and indeed has happened under the SNP, but follows this with the question “has the content of that change been more or less helpful to a left agenda?” Her analysis is pinned on her view that the SNP sits comfortably within the social democratic tradition. No more do we hear the epithet, once popular amongst Labour supporters, that the SNP are no more than “Tartan Tories”. Indeed, Isobel locates the SNP as being well to the left of both New Labour and Labour in Scotland.

This means, she argues, that the SNP Government is both sympathetic to a left agenda and thus also susceptible to pressure from the left. Isobel is particularly interesting on how future political developments here in Scotland might play out at the UK level, with the Trident nuclear weapons programme being one tantalising example.

Making things happen depends on the left being able to enter into dialogue with, and being willing to offer support to the SNP when the Scottish Government promotes sympathetic policies. But this begs another question, namely what state is the left in, both in Britain and in Scotland, and how can it most effectively enter into that dialogue with the SNP Government?

There is no doubt that the left, as traditionally viewed, is in a weak position both here and in much of Europe. But problems can also present opportunities, and Perspectives has played its part (and will continue to do so) in trying to provide a forum where those interested in fighting for a more egalitarian society, whether from a radical/socialist, green or feminist position, can argue out their point in the sympathetic forum that is this magazine.

Indeed, this issue of Perspectives presents an embarrassment of riches. It is by far our largest ever issue and, as you will see from the contents list alongside, features a wide array of articles and writers that carry this magazine well beyond the narrowly political in its coverage.

The next issue of Perspectives will be available in the spring, when we hope to carry a number of contributions previewing the forthcoming general election.

Until then, thanks for reading and heart-felt thanks to all our contributors. And if you don’t already subscribe, see the back cover for details!

Sean Feeny
Editor
Was Copenhagen a flop? Was it a partial success? A major step forward? A fiasco? Greenwash for business as usual? I am writing this as the summit is going on whereas you are reading it after it is done and dusted and probably after reading many other commentaries. Even though we have been reading about climate change now for decades, reading it again now, and for me, from India, is a reminder of how far we are from addressing the problem. Martin Khor of the South Centre in Geneva writes in the Indian Economic and Political Weekly just how the conditions are stacked.

As he puts it, the world has a maximum budget of 600 billion tonnes of carbon to use in the fossil fuel era, from 1800 to 2050. Exceeding this is the danger point of unpredictable and runaway reactions and a severely and, for many, fatally disrupted climate. The share of this budget allocated to the developed countries on the basis of accumulated population size is 125 billion tonnes, around 20%. By 2008 we had already emitted (“spent”) 240 billion tonnes, 40% of the total and we will emit another 85 billion tonnes by 2050 if we successfully cut emissions by 85%. This ambitious target still leaves the developed countries with a carbon debt amounting to one third of the total budget. For developing countries even to maintain their current per capita emission levels, “Developed countries would need to reduce their emissions by 213% by 2050” (Economic and Political Weekly Vol. XLIV No. 48 p. 29).

What kind of development is possible with zero increase in per capita carbon emissions? What kind of development produces a 213% cut? How can these be done in the interests of the poorest, not the rich? These are the real questions for the world after Copenhagen. I am in India for the 25th anniversary of the gas disaster. The Union Carbide (now Dow) pesticide factory was the wrong kind of development, but a kind that has continued apace in those 25 years. Leading up to 3rd December there were marches, candle-lit vigils, poetry readings, rallies of people’s movements, seminars of chemical affected communities, conferences of trades unions, prizes for women fighting corporate crime, torch-light processions, blockades, effigy burnings, messages of support, televised debates and last, and probably least, launches of the book which I have been working on with an Indian research team on the Bhopal survivors’ movement.

Some of the English language newspaper articles here are promoting the government line, which goes down well with the Indian middle class, that it is time for the survivors to “move on”, accept the compensation they have received, use the hospitals that have been provided and stop going on about justice. A few journalists are arguing that the campaigns are purely orchestrated by outsiders with a political or financial interest in stirring up discontent and fighting amongst one another.

That there are divisions in the movement will come as no surprise to anyone who has been involved in, or observed, any social movement anywhere. In our book we have attempted to reflect this as diversity and a potential source of strength as well as weakness. Part of the division comes from genuine differences of opinion over strategies for development: how much to compromise with the state in order to obtain concessions; how much effort to put into international solidarity against Dow versus local support for survivors; whether India should pursue large scale industrialisation or village level microdevelopment; how to make economic activity accountable to the people.

These will be familiar debates. All groups are united against the current, neoliberal, unconstrained, multinational-capital-fuelled development strategy which the middle class readers of English language newspapers benefit from. This is an important debate for all of us and a reflection of what Paul Kingsnorth has called One No, Many Yeses. And of course part of the debate about the world after Copenhagen. This is the stuff of democracy: not a ballot-box selection amongst neoliberal managers, nor the paternal will of an elected central committee, but the diversity of incommutable experiments and contingent opportunities. Democracy requires both collectively articulated grievances and also the humility to learn from others, dialogue within and between interest groups and with what we know of the earth, pushing and pulling the state and the economy until they meet the needs of the most vulnerable citizens and not the most successful.
How do we do this in Scotland? We have a case of what we need to work through in Grangemouth, Scotland’s largest chemical industrial estate. Dow has just taken over Rohm and Haas and therefore acquired a plant in Grangemouth. In anticipation of the anniversary of Bhopal, a group of us held a ceremony of remembrance of the victims of Dow (from napalm and agent orange to Dursban and Nemagon, in addition to Bhopal) outside the plant, laying wreaths on the newly erected sign. We then met to discuss the way forward. We were environmentalists, Indians, trades unionists, community activists and local citizens. The way forward is complex. By taking over the plant, Dow has saved jobs and, although the company has an exceptionally bad record, it is not so much worse than Bayer, Syngenta, Monsanto, Kemfite and so on which have been in Grangemouth for decades – not to mention Inneos and BP whose raison d’être is continuing carbon emissions. How do we build a future for Grangemouth with safe and decent jobs, in a world in which Bhopal gets justice, agricultural workers stop being poisoned, and the developed world cuts emissions by 213%? There’s a task for democracy.

Eurig Scandrett is a Green activist and member of Democratic Left Scotland.

Bhopal Survivors Speak: Emergent Voices from a People’s Movement Study is published by Word Power Books, Edinburgh (www.word-power.co.uk).
THE SNP AND A LEFT AGENDA

Isobel Lindsay examines the record of the unprecedented SNP Government in Scotland and what it might mean for a left agenda both nationally and at the wider UK level.

What has been the significance of the SNP Government for the left, both in Scotland and the rest of the UK? Believing another world is possible requires a belief that change is possible and that it won’t necessarily be worse. So, at that most elementary level, Scotland has been an encouraging example of substantial constitutional change as the outcome of a long campaign and, since the 2007 Holyrood elections, of an unprecedented change of government with the SNP gaining legislative power for the first time in its history. While it was disappointing that there was a reduction in Green and Socialist MSPs at that election, the main message was that a party regarded as on the political fringes a few decades ago is now in power in Scotland. Change is possible but has the content of that change been more or less helpful to a left agenda?

The SNP, certainly since the 1960s, has been in the social democratic tradition as one would expect of any party seeking to gain support in Scotland. How do we assess the record in government? There are a range of issues around which there would be general agreement that they signify a left rather than right perspective. Among the more important of these is an egalitarian ethos, commitment to public services and universal benefits, opposition to militarism and nuclear weapons, anti-racism and international justice, support for civil liberties and a more reformist than punitive approach to deviant behaviour and support for restraints on private business to ensure the public good.

Overall the SNP would be placed as a centre-left party and is substantially to the left of New Labour both at the British level and to the left of Labour in Scotland. This, it could be argued, would not be difficult since the Labour Government at Westminster would now be placed as a right-wing party in the European context.

POLICY IN PRACTICE
Gaining control of the Scottish Government in 2007 gave us the opportunity to judge the SNP’s policy decisions in practice. There is the major caveat that since it has been a minority government, it has not been free to implement all of its own programme and has had to make concessions to other parties, particularly in relation to the budget. Also most of the important economic powers are reserved to Westminster so we cannot tell what their tax and benefit choices would have been had they possessed these powers. But there is sufficient evidence from the record to date at Holyrood to place the SNP.

A traditional public services commitment has been among the clearest link to the social democratic tradition. There has been no fragmentation of school education to an ill-assorted range of providers as in England and the support for comprehensive education has been consistent. The remaining payments for higher education have been removed in contrast to the high fees (and probably about to get higher) in England. There has been a free primary school meals pilot and a decision to extend this. In the health service there has been no support for private providers unlike in England and the largest new hospital project will not use PPP. Prescription charges have been reduced and there is the intention to follow Wales and abolish them. There has been encouragement (but only modest resources) for local authorities to develop council housing projects.

There has been strong opposition to nuclear weapons and to the Iraq war although the position on Afghanistan has been ambivalent and there is a rather sentimental approach to the Scottish regiments. The SNP Government wrote to all signatories to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty due for renewal in 2010 expressing Scottish opposition to Trident and established the Working Group on Scotland Without Nuclear Weapons to consider what might be done within the limitations of devolved powers. This report was made available in November on the Scottish Government website. What can be done is fairly limited especially with opposition parties ready to jump on any expenditure as illegal but, while there could have been a more enthusiastic response, there has been a commitment to pursue some of the recommendations. On racism, it is notable that the first and only ethnic minority MSP, the late Bashir Ahmad, was SNP and considerable effort has been made over years to develop good relationships with minority cultures. The SNP has also been active in support of asylum seekers and with a generally positive approach to immigration. The accusation of prejudice against the English in Scotland doesn’t have substance among the SNP mainstream although possibly on the fringes.
The principal weakness in the SNP’s profile on a left spectrum has been in its largely uncritical and deferential approach to business. It has, unlike Labour, opposed PFI and the private sector role in health, education and prisons. It has been prepared to take on business interests on the issue of alcohol pricing and control. However, it was completely uncritical of the banks and even after the collapse, there has been no critique of financial services in Scotland or engagement in the debates on regulation and remuneration. The main business policy advocated by the SNP was to reduce corporate taxation. This is a reserved power so hasn’t been tested but local business taxes have been cut at considerable expense and this policy has had no rigorous assessment of effectiveness in job creation. Had the SNP taken a more detached and critical look at what was happening in the Scottish-based banks and the huge debt liabilities being built up by some of our celebrity entrepreneurs, it would have been in a much stronger position today.

**PROGRESSIVE GROUND**

On other areas they have been on more progressive ground. Justice policy has been admirably brave and enlightened in contrast to Labour’s abysmal tabloid opportunism. Sticking to the principles of Scottish justice in the Megrahi case and refusing to be pressurised by the US was a good example for environmentalists. Sticking to the principles of Scottish justice in the Megrahi case and refusing to be pressurised by the US was a good example for environmentalists.

**LEFT IN ENGLAND**

What are the implications of developments at Holyrood (and Cardiff and Stormont) for the left in England? There is a division of opinion. The metropolitan media – whether centre-left or right – is hostile to independence and indifferent to any increase in powers. They were never enthusiastic about devolution in the first place and went along with it when Scotland had made it inevitable. Rarely are developments in Scotland discussed or used as an example to create a wedge for reform in England despite the fact that it should have interested those on the left that Scotland was maintaining a fairly strong commitment to social democratic values. There was, of course, also little enthusiasm for serious devolution within England. A significant part of the explanation for these attitudes is the predictable metro-centricity. The explicit reason usually given is that without Scottish or Welsh votes, England would rarely deliver anything other than a Tory Government, the Celtic voting fodder argument. Apart from the fact that this has not always been the case, one is tempted to say – “you live in England, it’s up to you to change it”.

But we have other important arguments to make with which some on the left in England will sympathise. There has been a very right-wing government in place at Westminster for twelve years. It just happens to be called Labour. It took us into disastrous wars and not only maintained the Trident nuclear weapons system but has initiated a new generation of weapons. It has enthusiastically continued the privatisation of public assets, accelerated the rip-off that was PFI, allowed economic policy to be driven by the City of London, has presided over an increase in inequality and a decline in social mobility, has had a shameful record on civil liberties and penal policy. The list is a long one. Why should Scotland sacrifice the prospects of independence for this? Jackie Ashley (Guardian 30.11.09) said that the prospect of Scottish independence was making her feel “queasy”. Well many of us feel queasy about the British Governments we have had and together with some on the English left (especially those with strong peace and environmental movement connections) see the potential for change on both sides of the border arising from Scottish self-government. If Scotland had the constitutional power to reject Trident, there would be no viable alternative base in England without massive expenditure and years of work so this would be a major contribution to disarmament. If Scotland continues to prioritise renewable energy and reject nuclear, this will be an important example for environmentalists. Since the current Scottish Government has opposed PPP/PFI, supported free higher education and comprehensive schools, rejected outsourcing to private companies in the Health Service and new private prisons, why are the left in England not using the Scottish examples more effectively to exert pressure on a Westminster Labour Government. Given that the Welsh Assembly led the way in abolishing prescription charges, why no campaign in England to do the same?

**WHY SO FAR TO RIGHT?**

More fundamentally, after twelve years of a Labour Government that got into power with large majorities and for most of that time had a weak and demoralised opposition, why has it been so far to the right? Until recently it has had the most favourable conditions that could be expected so
there are no simple excuses. Does it never cross the minds of the metropolitan left that there are structural issues about the British state that predispose against a left agenda even more than in most other European countries? Apart from a few examples like devolution and the minimum wage (both of which Labour was firmly tied into for years before 1997), most of what they have done could be a continuation of Tory Government. Even Tax Credits can be seen as a substantial subsidy to low-paying employers. The British state is still locked into an imperial mindset and it is this that has driven the UK into seeking a “mini-me” relationship with the US and as a result into the Iraq and Afghan wars. It is for these reasons of status, not for any defence rationale, that Britain has continued to cling to its nuclear role. The British state is also still driven by the City of London and we see this even after the banking crash in the active Government lobbying in the EU to prevent stronger controls on the financial services. The one section of what little is left of manufacturing that the Government can always be depended on to support to the point of corruption is the arms trade. On the evidence of the last decade, is there not much to be said for dismantling this British state that has shown itself so driven by right-wing ideology and interests? Scotland and Wales could look after themselves and this would challenge the people of England to re-invent a new democracy. The changes in Scotland and Wales have so far made no difference in England but Scottish independence would require a fundamental debate about the profoundly flawed structure and culture of what would then be the English state and this would present an opportunity for English radicals to help make it a change for the better.

Isobel Lindsay is a lecturer in sociology at Strathclyde University and a member of the editorial board of Scottish Left Review.
Mike Arnott looks at the background to the Royal Mail dispute, put on hold just before Christmas.

As the dust temporarily settled over the industrial battle ground that is the Royal Mail, a period of phoney war has seen us past Christmas and in to the new year.

For those searching for reasons behind the strike, much of what was in the national press did little by way of illumination. What certainly did not come across, but is known to those who keep tabs on the industry and know the workers within it, is that management bullying was widespread, negotiated agreements were unilaterally ignored and that workloads were constantly increasing. Perhaps the only real surprise is that a national dispute had taken so long to come to a head.

The main issue is still focused around the introduction of new technology. The Communication Workers Union accept it is coming but accuse Royal Mail management of ignoring negotiated steps in the introduction process. But this disagreement simply built on mounting unrest within the workforce about their treatment by management. Royal Mail’s response was to try to deceive the public as to the union’s motives. The repeated canard of Royal Mail management – that the workload is decreasing – does not bear scrutiny when compared to the experiences of posties on the ground. Routes are constantly being enlarged, particularly strenuous when we consider the large areas of tenement blocks which still predominate in Scotland’s cities and towns. Of course, management’s timing of delivery routes always seems to miss this detail. Occasionally, in TV dramas or films, we get a snippet view of similar blocks in US or European cities: neat ranks of post boxes in the entrance lobby – a pipe dream for Dundee posties delivering in areas like Stobswell. Claims about the impact of the digital age – e-mail replacing letters – sound persuasive until we build in the extra workload created by Amazon and other on-line retailers whose wares end up in the mail bag, along with the ever-present mountains of door-to-door junk mail which must be delivered.

Very enlightening in the lead up to, and during, the dispute was a regular column in, of all places, the London Review of Books by a working, and striking, postie under the alias Roy Mayall. Here is his account of just one way management cheat their workers, by way of mail delivered to the sorting offices.

“There is an estimate for the number of letters that each box contains, decided on by national agreement between the management and the union. That number is 208. This is how the volume of mail passing through each office is worked out: 208 letters per box times the number of boxes. However, within the last year Royal Mail has arbitrarily, and without consultation, reduced the estimate for the number of letters in each box. It was 208: now they say it is 150. Doubting the accuracy of these numbers, the union ordered a random manual count to be undertaken over a two-week period in a number of offices across the region. Our office was one of them. On average, those boxes which the Royal Mail claims contain only 150 letters, actually carry 267 items of mail. This, then, explains how the Royal Mail can say that the figures are down, although every postman knows that volume is up. The figures are down all right, but only because they have been manipulated.”

Posties in offices in every part of the country can tell similar tales.

We probably all know posties on the ground, possibly a majority, who were enraged at the temporary stand-off agreement between the union and Royal Mail, feeling that relinquishing the Christmas bargaining chip was reprehensible. Others were thankful that management were at least talking to their union and that a line in the sand had apparently been drawn to prevent further excesses.

One of the reasons I doubt the current calm will last is that local managements have already been playing fast and loose with that agreement. Historically there have been regular spates of unofficial action at certain Royal Mail offices, due to rogue managers pushing their workforce to, and often over, the brink. Events in the weeks before Christmas have thrown a spotlight on the national management’s inability, or more ominously unwillingness, to rein in these elements.

In the longer term, and this is the real background to the dispute, the future of a public Royal Mail is far from guaranteed.

Mike Arnott is Secretary of Dundee Trades Union Council and a member of Democratic Left Scotland.
The last decade has marked a turning point for the people of Latin America as mass movements have taken the centre of the historical stage. Mike Gonzalez maps the developments that offer a challenge to US domination and ambitions in Central and South America.

1999: THE TURNING POINT
It is generally recognised that the Teamsters and Turtles demonstration outside the World Trade Organisation meeting in Seattle was a turning point; the anti-capitalist movement was born, or at least baptised, in the capital of Washington state. But just a few weeks later, and at the other end of the world, an equally important protest was taking place in the city of Cochabamba, Bolivia.

According to the neo-liberal economic guru Jeffrey Sachs, Bolivia had been a highly successful laboratory for neo-liberalism throughout the 1990s. Of course, success for the champions of globalisation meant savage reductions in public spending, an open door policy towards marauding corporate capital, and the integration of developing economies into a permanently unequal relationship with the global market. In that respect, Bolivia was highly representative. The government of Lozada (1993–97) sold off the state assets, including the national oil company, to private capital. Mining, which had been Bolivia’s main asset, was in steep decline and the miners moved to the Cochabamba valley to grow coca (a legal crop) or to the swelling city of El Alto, 1000 feet above La Paz. Over 60% of the country’s population lived in poverty, while the new wealth in industry, oil and agro-exports was concentrated in the wealthy eastern provinces known as the Media Luna (the Half Moon).

The decision to privatise water in late 1999 was the final straw. For the communities and small farmers in and around Cochabamba the proposed price increases would have made survival virtually impossible. A mass movement representing every sector occupied the city square and refused to move until the decision was reversed. Three weeks later, water was restored to public control. It was a highly significant victory, not only because a government decision had been reversed but because the movement that had arisen during the “water wars” was diverse and rooted in the communities and grass roots organisations. It was highly democratic and informed by a broader demand – community control of resources. It was just one step from water to oil and gas, which at that point were under the control of foreign corporations who paid absurdly low taxes to the Bolivian state. In 2003, El Alto rose up against a second attempt to privatise water supplies, and sustained a general strike that paralysed the capital for three weeks. The demands of the movement had also extended to public ownership of Bolivia’s immense recently discovered gas reserves. As the campaign intensified two more presidents attempted small piecemeal reforms while leaving the country’s mineral wealth in foreign hands; both failed and were forced to resign. In December 2005, Evo Morales the leader of the organisation of coca farmers (many of them ex-miners) was elected to the presidency, carried to power by the mass movement that had taken the struggle for change into the streets, and won.

Similar developments were occurring elsewhere in the continent. In Ecuador, the foundation of CONAIE (the Confederation of Indian Organizations of Ecuador) in 1987 marked an important advance. The organisation would lead a series of actions and activities through the 1990s before it too participated in key events towards the end of 1999. The attempt to dollarise the economy – in other words to integrate it
LATIN AMERICA

directly into the global market – met the solid resistance of a national movement which drew together Indian and trade union organisation. The policy was shelved and the president removed. In 2003 Lucio Gutierrez, who had reached the presidency as a spokesperson of the movement was brought down in his turn when he attempted to impose neoliberal strategies.

THE BOLIVARIAN REPUBLIC

The election of Hugo Chavez to the presidency of Venezuela, in late 1998, was a milestone. The comfortable sharing of power between the two main parties, COPEI and the Acción Democrática, had held Venezuelan society in thrall for nearly forty years. The oil driven prosperity of the sixties and seventies had benefitted a narrow middle class but had also brought tens of thousands of rural migrants to the precarious barrios perched on the hills around Caracas. By the mid-eighties, however, the whole of Latin America found itself increasingly subjected to the “structural adjustment” programmes whose neutral name veiled an attack on the living standards of the poorest people in society. The promise of newly elected president Carlos Andrés Pérez in 1989 to resist the pressures of the IMF melted away in days; his televised announcement of emergency economic measures at the expense of the majority provoked an explosion of popular rage – the Caracazo. For three days the capital and other cities were occupied by enraged crowds. The subsequent repression left 2–3000 dead and many wounded. In some real sense the Bolivarian Revolution began in February 1989.

Three years later a brief attempt at a military coup failed within a day, but its leader, a young paratroop officer called Hugo Chavez, announced that it was only over “for now” (por ahora). Six years later he was elected to the presidential office with a promise to end Venezuela’s corrupt political system and nationalise the oil industry. (In fact it was formally nationalised already, but operated like any other transnational corporation and was beyond the control of the state.) Chavez’s promise was that oil revenues would be used for the benefit of the mass of Venezuelans who had suffered a dramatic decline in their living standards through the previous decade.

In 1999, a referendum approved a Constituent Assembly to draw up a new, Bolivarian, constitution. It was a reforming document which guaranteed rights and laid the groundwork for the distribution of idle land, the nationalisation of oil and other key measures. But the Venezuelan opposition continued to be actively hostile to Chavez, its mass media attacking him relentlessly and its ruling class using its economic power to sabotage the reform programme. In late 2001, an attempted bosses’ strike in the oil industry – by the beneficiaries of the golden goose that was the oil corporation under previous regimes – failed. But they had other more drastic plans.

On April 11th 2002, in a well orchestrated coup, Chavez was arrested and a new government, headed by the president of the employers’ organisation, Pedro Carmona, was proclaimed. It lasted exactly two days. As soon as news of Chavez’s arrest was known, tens of thousands of people came down from the hills and massed around the presidential palace demanding his return. The crowds swelled, and the right-wing TV commentators reading out lists of radicals to be arrested and possibly killed fell quickly silent. Within 48 hours Chavez had returned – and the Bolivarian Revolution had begun.

The right did not rest, however, and in December of that same year they launched a second lockout, beginning with a walkout by 18,000 employees of PDVSA, the oil corporation. Their purpose was clear; those who walked out took with them computer passwords and key equipment, as well as cutting electric cables and disrupting production wherever possible. Oil production plummeted; the opposition clearly had no qualms about destroying Venezuela’s economy to get rid of Chavez. But this also failed, as the masses converged on the oil installation to block any attempt at sabotage and keep production going.

THE CHANGING FACE OF A CONTINENT

Ten years after the Zapatista rising in Chiapas, Mexico, which had inspired and encouraged the developing anti-capitalist resistance across the world, Latin America
presented a very different face. The Zapatistas had taken the state capital of San Cristobal de las Casas on January 1st 1994, on the very day that the presidents of Mexico, Canada and the US were announcing the creation of the North American Free Trade Association, NAFTA, the first stage in the incorporation of Latin America into the global market. The Zapatistas, although they remained isolated at the time, represented a sign of things to come. As the 21st century began, the devastating effects of the rampant globalisation strategies that NAFTA (and its intended successor, the Free Trade Area of the Americas, FTAA) had provoked a mounting resistance to neo-liberalism across the continent.

Events in Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela, and the subsequent popular rising in Oaxaca, Mexico, announced a new actor on the political stage – the mass movements. The movements were not only significant acts of resistance to specific measures or assaults; they were beginning to raise bigger questions of power and control. To reverse the impoverishment, the loss of social services, the rising unemployment levels and the growing inequality of the final decade of the 20th century required something more than protest. The water wars in Bolivia, and the successful movement in Ecuador, together with the impact of the Landless Workers Movement (MST) in Brazil as well as the increasing political influence of Venezuela, posed key questions.

This was dramatised, for example, when the Lozada regime proposed that Bolivia’s newly discovered massive reserves of natural gas should be piped to California – depriving the poorest country in the region to supply the wealthiest! Lozada fell from power soon after.

The issue of control over national resources became the central demand, spurred by the post-coup reform of PDVSA in Venezuela, and the creation there of a series of social programmes (the so-called Missions) financed by oil revenues. Social justice, control of natural resources and the redistribution of land became the central demands of the movements across Latin America. And this was expressed in the election of a series of new, left governments, carried to power by mass movements. In Brazil, the veteran Lula, leader of the Workers Party (PT) was elected in 2003. As a trade union official he led the great metalworkers strikes of 1979 and was a founder of the PT a year later. His election was celebrated in Brazil’s poor quarters, but it very quickly became clear that Lula’s ambitions, despite his working class background, were to make Brazil a global player rather than redistribute wealth for the benefit of the majority. The election of Tabaré Vazquez and the Broad Front in Uruguay and of Evo Morales in Brazil, in 2005, of Rafael Correa in Ecuador and Michelle Bachelet in Chile suggested a major political shift to the left.

At the World Social Forum in 2005, it became clear that the election of left presidents was certainly a sign of change, but that there were different currents and political strategies contained within that left. In Chile, Bachelet’s Socialist Party took radical positions on human rights and impunity, but in economic terms it was closer to Lula. Lula’s opening speech at the Forum had met with scepticism and disappointment; the closing address by Hugo Chavez was greeted with an enthusiastic response when he announced that Venezuela was now taking the road of 21st century socialism. It seemed that the new Latin American left had reached an important crossroads.

FUTURES

The most important feature of Latin America’s new decade has been the entry of mass movements on to the centre of the historical stage. The new presidencies – from Lula to Lugo of Paraguay and Mujica in Uruguay – have been carried to power in the wake of mass mobilisations and of popular expectations that the new regimes will take control of the nation’s wealth for the benefit of the majorities, that they will challenge the domination of the US and counter and contain the governments of Colombia and Mexico which represent US ambitions in the area. In the course of their struggles these movements have thrown up new, radical forms of organisation – popular assemblies, the mingas or indigenous gatherings, the embryonic communal councils of Venezuela and the extraordinary people’s movement which held the Mexican city of Oaxaca for nearly a year in the face of constant repression.

The alternatives that present themselves today in Latin America are defined by the relationship to the imperialist power to the north. On the one hand the experience of Chile and Brazil, and to some extent of Argentina, suggests a strategy of renegotiation with the world market, allowing it to determine internal economic strategies. On the other, the regional solidarity which is expressed in the ALBA project is not just as a series of intergovernmental agreements but as something more. It allows the possibility of an alternative built on a genuine democratic control, a devolution of power towards the grass roots, and economic and political programmes which acknowledge that constitutions and governments are necessary but not sufficient instruments for the achievement of a new democracy. The final step will be to create a new kind of power, a people’s power – which will have to tackle old and new bureaucracies, of left and right, in the struggle for an authentic 21st century socialism.

Mike Gonzalez is Emeritus Professor of Latin American Studies, Glasgow University, on the editorial board of International Socialism and author of Che Guevara and the Cuban Revolution (2005).
Tilly Gifford outlines the work of the Plane Stupid campaign … and how the police tried to recruit her as a spy.

Yes, sometimes we have to break the law to disrupt “lawful activities” that are harming the prospects of future generations.

AVIATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE
“I take action as a member of Plane Stupid because aviation – both concretely and symbolically – is a prime area in which to be tackling climate change and the social injustice it perpetuates. The prospect of passing CO2 tipping points and being landed with the legacy of a condemned world is what propels me to take action”, said Mark, when I asked him to summarise why he first got involved.

HOW WE FOUND OURSELVES HERE
Plane Stupid Scotland has been taking direct action against aviation’s contribution to climate change since 2007. The stories of how different members found their way to Plane Stupid differ. However, one recurring theme is that of being deeply disturbed by the discrepancy between common knowledge about what needs to be done to avert climate change tipping points – the point when the global warming becomes irreversible – and on the other hand the complete and utter lack of practical action in our everyday lives.

Mainstream media headlines read:
“Rising concentrations of greenhouse gases may have more serious impacts than previously believed”, says major scientific report.
“Toon legend’s home destroyed in floods”
“Climate Change Causes 300,000 Deaths a Year”, says Kofi Annan
“We Have Until 2014 To Stop Global Warming”
“Global Warming Kicks Off A Migration: Plants And Animals Are Moving Northward”
“Clydebank Residents slap the Airport an ASBO”
And yet, in Scotland, 74 planes fly every day to and from Glasgow to London. 100 fly every day to and from Edinburgh to London. There’s 14 to and from Birmingham and Manchester. Edinburgh has four to and from Norwich every day.

TWICE AS MUCH AS AMERICANS
Aviation is one of the fastest growing sources of carbon emissions globally. In Britain we fly more than anyone else in the world – twice as much as Americans. The single biggest thing one can do, as an individual, to reduce our carbon footprint is to cut out on flying.

We demand clean, sustainable and affordable travel infrastructure – a travel industry which doesn’t plague communities with noise pollution or air quality impacts. And we’re not talking some revolutionarily ambitious technologies. This is not a case of the as-yet-unproven controversial carbon capture and storage coal technology. We’re talking trains, for example. Most of the flights leaving the Scotland are easily replaceable: 60% are internal to the UK. The top destination from Heathrow is not New York, Tokyo, or New Delhi – it’s Paris.

ARCHITECTS, SAXOPHONISTS, SECRETARIES, COOKS AND HAIRDRESSERS
The scenario is so clear cut. This is why Plane Stupid Scotland is not composed of activists. Nor experts. Not criminals or heroes either. It is composed of normal citizens, residents of Scotland who demand self-determination when it comes to what their future will look like. They stop short-haul flights, create obstacles to airport expansion and generate heated mainstream debate on these issues. In view of the Government’s continued airport expansion plans and perverse subsidy of the aviation industry, taking direct action seems like the most sensible, proportionate and responsible action in the face of runaway climate change.

An open, non-hierarchical network, we are composed of architects, saxophonists, secretaries, cooks, hairdressers, academics, parents, conservationists and community organisers. Yes, sometimes we have to break the law to disrupt “lawful activities” that are harming the prospects of future generations. We do not hide our faces. We are ready and willing to argue our case in the courts, and to suffer the consequences of criminal convictions and sentencing.

I believe the negative consequences of our actions are far better than the consequences of continued inaction.
**SCOTTISH CLIMATE CHANGE ACT: “PIE IN THE SKY”?**

BBC Radio Scotland’s Big Debate lined up Plane Stupid Scotland with four major Scottish politicians in September 2009.

To the panel, a question from Plane Stupid: “Current airport expansion plans render the Climate Change Bill entirely meaningless. How does the government want to put its climate bill into practice given that it intends to massively increase airport capacity?”

Response Number One: “Well, aviation is only 2% of Scotland’s CO₂ emissions, and is this thus a red herring in the climate change debate.”

This 2% is a false figure perpetuated by the aviation industry. According to the Department for Transport’s own figures aviation is already responsible for 13% of the UK’s climate impact.

Response Number Two: “The Climate Change Bill is entirely incompatible with government policy. Pie in the sky. It will not work in any way, shape or form. It will not be put into practice.

“Airport expansion will be good for business, good for Scotland. We need proper travel for business men to carry out their work.”

Response Number Three: “Actually, I part company with the panel. Serious measures need to be taken. … The best way to reduce the impact of aviation is to make sure we have a clean green way to travel to the airport: by rail.”

From the small white men running the country, three fine samples of responses. All of them which justify and galvanise direct action. This is what the spineless suit-clad men running our country have to say about the most defining issue of our generation – for Scotland and beyond.

Even though hearing it may make some red-faced, stutter and seething, it is good to hear it from the horse’s mouth: direct action never seemed more justified and necessary.

It’s established and public: leaving it up to politicians will not avert global warming.

I demand to have a role in determining my future. Scotland currently has the most ambitious Climate Change Act in the world – in the world. In a reality close to this one, Scotland could set the pace, show the way and raise the bar and support other countries with ambitious targets and practical cuts in emissions. Scotland is a pivotal place from which to be making these demands, but we need to implement these changes immediately, not in thirty years, not in ten years.

**PLANE STUPID ACTIONS**

In 2007, Plane Stupid Scotland shut down Greyer airport expansion plans, let alone of the public consultation. The public consultation was a sham.

In April 2008, two of us occupied the roof of Scottish parliament. The 14th of April was the last day of a “public consultation” about airport expansion proposals. Airport expansion was agreed and put through parliament. The public consultation was a sham: ask the people living under the flightpaths, the people dealing with the noise impacts of planes flying low over their houses from 5am to midnight. Distraught and concerned residents from Whitecrook, Crammond, Linvale, Dyce – they hadn’t heard of the airport expansion plans, let alone of the public consultation.

The public consultation was a sham.

It was a beautiful April morning. Calm and smiling folk in suits. Calm and smiling men in uniforms. Calm and waving tourists from buses. It generated much needed media debate on the topic of airport expansion. After six hours, the two of us put down our airstrip landing gear, descended and were duly arrested for breach of the peace. It was my first time in a prison cell – a demystifying experience in itself. Charges were later dropped.

Plane Stupid as a wider network have shut down airports: once with a Baptist minister conducting a funeral for the victims of climate change – a pulpit was contructed on the taxiway of East Midlands airport. Stansted airport was held closed in the early morning of December 2008. The taxiway was occupied by 57 people who had decided to take action together. We have climbed on top of the House of Commons. In Scotland we have dropped a 20 metre long banner from the epic Scott monument and off Edinburgh air.
port. We have super-glued ourselves to Gordon Brown at 10 Downing street.

**ABERDEEN AIRPORT**

Time has passed and the climate science depicts a scenario more extreme and urgent than initially predicted. Simultaneously, new high-emission industry and airport expansions are being planned all across the country. International policy, Copenhagen or Kyoto, is not going to be sufficient.

Constructing images and narratives that speak to the popular imagination and further the debate are vital – however, so is cutting carbon emissions at their sources. In March 2009 Plane Stupid Scotland shut down Aberdeen airport by setting up a golf-course on the taxiway. Both Donald Trump’s golf course development and the aviation industry are ignoring science: the Site of Special Scientific Interest and CO2 impacts respectively. They also can get this far ignoring public consultations and demanding compulsory purchase of families’ homes because they have big money propping them up.

On that cold and exhilarating morning we stopped flights scheduled for Heathrow, Manchester and Newcastle among others. Nine of us cut through the perimeter fence whilst the airport was closed. We spoke to the general public from the media phone, from the taxiway. We apologised for the disruption. We also situated the inconvenience we were causing as a regrettable effect of needing to avert the greater inconvenience of climate change.

We are facing a jury trial in Aberdeen in May 2010, and welcome the opportunity to be publicly accountable for our actions.

**WHO ARE THE CRIMINALS?**

The world’s top climate scientists state that airports cannot expand and coal fired power stations cannot be built if we are ever to meet the CO2 reduction targets necessary to preserve our future. Today carbon heavy industries can pollute relentlessly with barely a legal challenge and when ordinary citizens challenge this, they are criminalised. If climate change is indeed the main concern of our courts and government, then this logic must be challenged and the question must be asked, “who are the real criminals?”

**STRATHCLYDE POLICE SPY TACTICS**

In April 2009, I was arrested for exploring derelict industrial building in north Glasgow. The charges were later dropped. I was held for two days, and released with my keys missing from my property. The day after my release, still keyless, the police invited me from the taxiway. We apologised for the disruption. They threateningly depicted the implications of having a criminal record for future employment. They then whispered about the “dangerous elements” within the group who were manipulating me to unleash untold violence and mayhem. Then they assured me that other members of the group were also “having coffee” with them, implying that once one person cracks to their pressure we should all dump our morals, take the money and run.

These “business arrangements” were not a matter of giving one-off information. They were out to build an on-going relationship. We’re talking infiltration and espionage – all to spy on a group of protesters unflinchingly committed to peaceful protest.

Along with a few fellow members of Plane Stupid, we arranged to record these conversations. We bought voice recorders, set up Skype equipment, worked out how to use pin-hole spy equipment and stitched a neat pocket inside my waistcoat to hold the camera. And off we went to document the process of police infiltration into Plane Stupid. This material was released to the *Guardian* newspaper in April 2009.

Our civil liberties were invaded and our right to peaceful protest called into question simply to defend the interests of big business. It so happens that I knew that airport expansion is incompatible with climate change, that I had lost trust in a government failing to preserve my future and I am honestly and unapologetically prepared to take the necessary action with a group I trust. Yet, had they picked someone less experienced and who had yet to develop their trust in the organisation, their intimidating tactics may well have worked.

**SINISTER DYNAMICS BETWEEN BIG BUSINESS AND STATE APPARATUS**

Plane Stupid Scotland represents no threat to human welfare. Security is paramount to any action we plan. However, we are a very real economic threat to business as usual; to the airport expansion plans as they stand currently; to the new coal-fired plants as they are in the NPF. The sinister dynamics between government and big business were brought to light when Strathclyde Police attempted to recruit me as a spy.

It is time to drop the pretence of preventing violence against people, and start an honest conversation about all of this. It is time to ask what constitutes appropriate policing of peaceful protest, whether lawful or otherwise, and to question whether it is not the interests of precisely those companies, whose core activities are driving us ever closer to the precipice of catastrophic, runaway global warming, that are being served by the deployment of such extravagant police resources?

Tilly Gifford lives and works in Glasgow. She works on a farm, as well as being a community organiser alongside her artistic practice. She will be presenting and held accountable for her work at the Aberdeen Nine jury trial in Aberdeen in May 2010, open to the general public. Please visit www.planestupid.com or e-mail scotland@planestupid.com to find out more or get involved.
WHY WOMEN’S HISTORY?

Women’s history suffers from misunderstandings and misinterpretations, yet, argues Eleanor Gordon, the analysis of gender in history entails the rewriting of the past.

Historians frequently complain that they, or more accurately their particular specialism, are misunderstood. One would hear much grinding of social historians’ teeth if they heard a common, although misinformed interpretation of their discipline as economic history with the “hard bits” left out. It is probably true to say that women’s history suffers more than most approaches to history from misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Indeed those who research and write on the subject are partly to blame for we cannot even agree on what we should call it: Women’s History, Feminist History or Gender History? Can we dispense with any angst about terminology by alluding to Shakespeare’s aphorism, “What’s in a name …” or is it the case that the different terminologies reflect radically different approaches? I am with Shakespeare on this one. Each term can encompass a variety of approaches, just as economic history, social history or military history do. Therefore the key question is not one of terminology but rather what is women’s history about and why do we need it?

RECLAIMING WOMEN’S PAST

It is often claimed that “in the beginning” women’s history was about reclaiming women’s past and putting them back in the historical record. Indeed many of the book titles of the early stages of women’s history reflect the concern with retrieving and celebrating a lost past: We Were There; Hidden Lives; Becoming Visible; The Rise of the Women. There was certainly a great need to reinsert women into the historical landscape given the omission of women from most types of traditional history. The fact that most historians were male and that they wrote about masculine-orientated activities such as high politics, the state and war, meant that women had been largely excluded. Even the newer branches of history such as economic history, labour history and social history which emerged because of criticisms of the narrow and limited focus of traditional history, continued to omit women from their accounts. Economic history was written as if there was only one sex with economic developments, labour markets, industrialisation and economic crises rarely referring to the role of women. Labour history was similarly myopic and when referring to working class invariably meant working men, just as its definition of work usually accorded with full-time employment outside the home for a wage. Work which did not fit into these categories, such as part-time work, casual work, home work or domestic unwaged labour was usually ignored or dismissed as irrelevant.

Yet attempts to write about women’s past have a long pedigree. While there have been a fair number of studies of women’s lives written since at least the medieval period, admittedly many of these early histories concerned the lives of “exceptional” or famous women. The women’s history which has developed since the 1970s is different from this “women worthies” approach because its central concern is to demonstrate how the inclusion of the category “woman” into the historical account can transform our understanding of the past. No one would dispute that there is a continued need to include women in the historical record and that this is an ongoing process. For the exclusion of women from accounts of the past creates more than mere omissions. How many history texts have referred to societies as “democratic” when at least half of the population did not
have the vote or have talked about "universal suffrage" when they were referring to manhood suffrage? In the United States the period 1824–1854 is often referred to as the "golden age of participatory democracy" because the suffrage was extended to all adult white males. These exclusions are more than mere omissions, they actually distort the past and blind us to the partial and ideological definition of "democracy" being employed.

**GENDER DIVISIONS AND ROLES**

However, reclaiming women’s past is only part of the aim of the project. What is distinctive about current women’s history is that it is defined not by its subject matter but by its approach and that approach involves placing assumptions about gender divisions and gender roles at the centre of historical investigation. The aim of women’s history is to question the many taken for granted assumptions about gender and gender divisions, to highlight its historical construction and to view it as a historical fact which requires historical analysis. It is fairly uncontroversial to state that one’s class, colour or ethnicity is a powerful factor in shaping one’s experience. Similarly, the starting premise of women’s history is that the organisation of sexual difference is central to the social world. Gender is integral to our understanding of the ways in which societies in the past were organised. Social, political, cultural and economic processes are all gendered. Distinctions between men and women are ever present: shaping experience, influencing behaviour and structuring explanations.

Sexual identity is a historical construction for both sexes and therefore women’s history is also about men and the relations between men and women. It may seem paradoxical, but women’s history can be done when women are absent from the historical stage.

This is not to suggest that the gender system is the primary category of analysis. Women’s histori-Explanations of the nature and experience of the industrial revolution, the rise of the Labour Party and secularisation have all benefited from a gender perspective.

ans have been to the forefront in exploring the inter-relationship between gender and other forms of social relationship, particularly class. It is also acknowledged that in different contexts class, ethnicity, race etc can be the primary divisions between people and that other factors might have greater primacy in shaping experience and identity than one’s gender. Whilst women’s historians would argue that women, and men, have common interests as a sex, and that there are universals in female (and male) experience, they are also interested in exploring the differences in female and male experience across time and place as well as the varieties and range of gender systems.

**NEW ASPECTS REVEALED**

So what difference has women’s history made to the historical record? The work of Mary Ryan in the United States and Leonora Davidoff and Catherine Hall in Britain has transformed our understandings of the rise of class society and the making of the middle classes by focusing on gender and family relations. In traditional accounts the unifying factors in the creation of a middle-class previously divided by religious and political affiliation have usually been located in the economic and political spheres. However, these women’s historians have revealed new aspects of the formation of a middle-class identity by exploring its conceptions of gender relations and the meanings of femininity and masculinity. They have demonstrated that class and gender were mutually constitutive and that the familial ideology of domesticity was a powerful factor in shaping and unifying the middle classes. Explanations of the nature and experience of the industrial revolution, the rise of the Labour Party and secularisation have all benefited from a gender perspective. The history of the almost exclusively male world of trade unions cannot be fully understood without reference to the ways in which its forms of collective organisation and association were structured by gender, whilst the history of the French Revolution and its significance is incomplete and misunderstood without exploring the different ways in which it was experienced by men and women.

**ENRICH OUR UNDERSTANDING**

Expanding our understanding of standard events or issues in traditional history is only one way in which women’s history can enrich our understanding of the past. The value and novelty of women’s history also rests in the fact that its very rationale involves exploring institutions, social formations and sources which have not been previously included the purview of history. This has involved historicising behaviour and activities often deemed to be “natural” and expanding the range of topics considered historically important ranging from the sexual division of labour to domestic labour and wife-beating. This approach not only tells us about aspects of human activity that have been hidden from history, but also sheds light on other historical processes.

Judith Walkowitz’s study of Victorian prostitution in late nineteenth-century London tells us not only about the regulation of prostitution but also about the complex dynamics of power, politics and sexuality of the period.

Frustration at the continued marginalisation of women’s history led a number of historians, initially in the United States, to adopt an approach which was influenced by post-structuralism. One of the distinctive features of this kind of women’s history was to explore the ways in which language, discourses and the non-material shaped the meanings of femininity and masculinity. Gender was re-defined in more abstract terms to mean representations of the social organisation of sexual difference.

The argument was that powerful groups formulated ways of thinking and talking about the world (discourses) and this shaped and limited people’s experience.
Historians such as Joan Scott argued that since gender was a primary way of signifying relationships of power it was a concept that was integral and important to all areas of history. One rich strand of historical inquiry, which emerged from this, illustrated the pervasiveness of gender discourses, or definitions of what it is to be a “woman” or a “man”, in state policies, the military and many other areas of human activity where gender had seemed an irrelevant category of analysis.

REWRITING THE PAST

Women’s history is therefore a rich and varied field of historical inquiry which draws on a number of different approaches. Sheila Rowbotham, who pioneered women’s history in Britain with her Hidden from History, published in 1973, expressed dismay and some bewilderment in the early 1990s when she observed that “women’s history” seemed to have morphed into a new branch of history. She contended that this had never been the intention of those who began the enterprise of reclaiming women’s past, but observed that it was probably easier to build a new wing of a house rather than change the entire architecture. However elusive the goal of a transformative history, the common aim of all women’s history must be to explore the fundamental nature of the process of historical change, expand our understanding of what is historically important and to show how the inclusion of the analysis of gender involves rewriting the past.

Eleanor Gordon is Professor of Gender and Social History at the University of Glasgow. She has published widely on family, gender and labour history. Her latest book (co-written with Dr Gwyneth Nair) is Murder and Morality in Victorian Scotland: The Story of Madeleine Smith (Manchester University Press, 2009) which has been described by reviewers as “a gripping read” and “a page turner”.

A GUDE CAUSE MAKES A STRONG ARM 1909–2009

On October 10th 2009 around 4,000 women, men and children processed from Bruntsfield Links to Calton Hill to commemorate the 1909 Women’s Suffrage procession in Edinburgh. The procession was organised as a timeline representing past, present and future and was a great occasion with many women dressing up as suffragettes. Academic women from Edinburgh University in black gowns drew attention to Chrystal McMillan, a Scottish suffragist who also worked for peace. The Auld Reekie Roller Girls were amongst those representing the future. Many groups made banners ranging from “Still a Gude Way To Go”, “Use Your Vote Your Ancestors Are Watching”, and some raising issues which may not have been raised in 1909 such as “Violence Against Women is Evidence that Women Don’t Have Equality” and “Emancipation Not Emaciation”. We were loud as well as colourfull! A woman piper led the procession and there were four samba bands, around 150 singers, an accordion band and a jazz band.

More than a year before, a committee of women formed to organise the procession and a range of other events. This came about because in the Scottish election in 2007 fewer women were using their vote. The time seemed right to raise awareness of the struggles and campaigns of suffragists and suffragettes in the 19th and early 20th centuries. But we also felt it was important to remind people that the struggle for gender equality is far from over.

What now? Hundreds of photos and a lot of film footage were taken on and before the procession. Interviews were done and the songs sung on the procession were recorded at a rehearsal of Protest in Harmony. This gives us a huge archive which will be gathered together to produce a New Media Record. NMR is a computer-accessed interactive medium which anyone will be able to access. The story will include the history lesson on the streets of Edinburgh and issues about women and democracy – historical and present day.

A quilt to commemorate Gude Cause was be displayed in the Scottish parliament in the middle of January of this year.

– To see pictures of the Gude Cause 2009 procession look on Flikr Gude Cause. Resources available from Edinburgh Peace and Justice Centre – a free toolkit Gude Cause Gude Ideas and a songbook The Right to Vote And A’ That at £5.00. Email contact@peaceandjustice.org.uk Tel. 0131 229 0993
The black cop takes his seat in the muster hall, as a sea of blue uniforms and white faces turn to look. It is his first day; the silence is intense, until one old-timer leans forwards and, in a death-quiet room, says, sotto voice:

“Tell me this, son. Are you a Proddy or a Tim?”

The black cop folds his arms and smiles.

“D’you no think I’ve enough problems already?”

Is this sectarianism? Racism? A portrayal of one man forced to subjuga te and ingratiate himself, in order to fit in with the dominant society? Or is it an acknowledge ment of change amidst prejudices old and new – delivered with tongue firmly in cheek?

Whatever it is, it’s a true story, and it happened twenty years ago, in the Glasgow police office where I worked. Of course, a huge amount has changed since the late 1980s, when minority ethnic office rs represented less than 0.2% of police officers in Scotland and all female officers were issued with three pairs of tights, a pencil skirt and a handbag – complete with dinky “girl-sized” baton to fit therein!

**DOUR MAVERICKS**

I’m a writer now, but much of what I write is informed by my time as a police officer, and I still have strong family links with the job. I was intrigued when Perspectives asked me to look at culture wars within the police, as, to be honest, the idea of exploring stereotypes was one of the main reasons I started writing about policing in the first place. Too often, I feel, cops are portrayed in literature, film and TV as nothing more than dour mavericks, wresting huge personal problems along with an almost messianic desire to hunt down some elusive criminal. Oh, and they’re all racist, sexist, fascists to boot.

Well, I can only speak for myself, but I joined Strathclyde Police in 1987 as an ex-punk vegetarian former arts student who protested about everything from nuclear bombs to fox hunting. I genuinely felt that, as someone who wanted to “change the world”, the police offered an opportunity to make a grassroots, practical, hands-on difference to the community I lived in: to literally become where the buck stops and the “sorting out” of society’s problems and injustices begins. As a female, I also felt empowered by the knowledge that every aspect of policing would be open to me, in whatever sphere I chose.

**RESPECT AND EGALITARIANISM**

Of course, the reality was a little different. But, I have to say, my change in perspective and the tempering of my lofty ideals didn’t arise because of the emotional battering I took from those closed ranks of aggressive white male cops that popular culture loves to embellish and perpetuate. In that sense, as a young female, I experienced very little in the way of restriction or limitation because of my gender – it truthfully never seemed to be an issue within the force, where I was mostly treated with respect and egalitarianism by...
like-minded individuals (although I accept this is only my personal experience). No, the gradual, growing sense of disillusionment, “hardening” if you like, came from the reaction from those outside the police – the very community I was part of, and was seeking to help.

THE UNIFORM

In truth, I think reality bites hardest for a cop the moment you first stick on that most unattractive uniform and venture out into the public glare. Because it’s then you realise that very few people out there actually see your face at all – all they see is the uniform and every manifest assumption, response – and, yes – prejudice, that that uniform evokes. As one of the characters in my first novel remarks:

“Like most cops she knew, she joined because she wanted to ‘do some good’. The cynicism and smart-arsed swagger come later. If enough people fear and despise you, you feed on that, digesting the hard bits to form a shell.”

Please don’t read this as an appeal to “adopt a pet polis”, because they’re all poor, misunderstood souls! That’s absolutely not what I’m suggesting – simply that barriers are entities that have two sides to them. And, whilst never excusing the gallus, gum-chewing hardman who sneers as he pulls you over for speeding, perhaps, considering the reasons why he’s the way he is may go some way towards tempering your understanding of him.

Wearing a uniform – becoming a literal symbol of authority undoubtedly changes your character. The uniform has the dual effect of visibly distancing you from the rest of your community, and providing you with a shield behind which you can conceal yourself. It can amalgamate you into a sea of identical dark-blue marching ranks, or it can single you out in the middle of Sauchiehall Street, glowing like a beacon above your head, when all you want to do is run away! Believe me, as a twenty year old “wee lassie” fresh out of uni, standing alone in the midst of a pub riot, I know that feeling. And I also know the bottom line is – you can’t run away. Once you’re in that uniform, you can’t turn around, you can’t hide in a doorway, close your eyes or leave it up to “someone else”. So, gradually, your uniform begins to switch from shield to armour, covering you so that you’re both protected and desensitised. You begin to make assumptions, based on people’s manner, their dress, their status, the situation you find yourself in. You begin to stand a little differently, anticipating trouble before it starts, closing off your expression, becoming the stereotype you didn’t want to be. But the best cops recognise this, and still temper their newfound cynicism with the empathy and vision they joined with.

VISIBLE AND ACCOUNTABLE

Yet, while wearing a uniform can conceal the “real you”, like I say, it can also make you extremely visible and accountable, and carries an enormous amount of baggage with it too. People expect, depending on their own experiences of the police, (or what they last experienced via the media) you to be, in no particular order: aggressive, unhelpful, a hero, disinterested, the only person they can trust, scornful or kind. And all that presupposition is understandable, and, in a way, deserved.

So what of the individuals behind the uniform? Does one size fit all, and is it all a happy band of mutually tolerant and respectful polis versus the ungrateful and demanding public?

Aye, right.

With that hardening cynicism, of course a closed-shop mentality can arise, when you and your colleagues meld to become a tight-knit gang. And, like any gang, newcomers have to “prove” themselves before they’re truly part of the team. In my experience, proving yourself is far more about your capabilities that your background, but, of course it can entail dodgy banter, practical jokes, sly digs, cold shoulders – and worse. What I would stress though, is that there is a huge gulf between individual initiation and institutionalised discrimination, and that is simply not a reality that I experienced or witnessed.

MORE AGGRESSIVE

I also think that one of the reasons I encountered little discrimination in terms of my gender is because my natural inclination is to display what might be viewed as traditionally “male” characteristics anyway. Who knows – maybe that’s part of the reason I was attracted to the job? By nature, I’m quite an assertive person, and the role of policing is such, that, however kindly or cerebral you are, you must be able to instantly take control and command of any situation you encounter, however dangerous, aggressive or daunting that may be. Consequently, I do believe there can be a tendency for some people, when placed in what’s considered a “macho world”, to feel they have to “overcompensate” in order to achieve parity. For me, as a female officer, this originated as a defence mechanism, and there’s no doubt that, without even realising it, you can become more aggressive, more quick to confront than some of the men you work with, because you’re concerned that you might otherwise be perceived as weak. Indeed, if you look hard enough, you can find examples of this across the spectrum of traditionally male professions – from Margaret Thatcher’s ruthless drive in politics to Private Lynndie England’s implications in brutality scandals in Iraq. But where does the culpability for this lie – with the institution or the individual? In my case there was nothing forcing me to be first to wade into a rammy – just my own insecurities and my desire to “fit in” with what I perceived was the norm. As time went on though, I realised there was no “norm”, and that you can’t ascribe specific qualities to specific genders or types. In my experience, the women and men I’ve worked with have been pretty diverse; some with nurturing qualities, some who operate instinc-
Right up until my mother served as a police officer in Glasgow in the late 1960s, the Police-women’s Department was wholly separate from mainstream policing.

From its earliest inception in 1779, the police in Glasgow were staffed by the healthiest, toughest specimens that the force could find – often burly Highlanders, whose height, strength and fitness exceeded that of their ill-nourished, industrialised Glaswegian counterparts. Right away, you had selection and differentiation, dictated by the need to create a robust body of men who would combat the city’s “thieves, cut-throats and vagabonds”. The force continued to grow in this manner, and it wasn’t until the advent of the First World War, and the drain on male resources, that the appointment of policewomen was considered, with Emily Miller being appointed as Glasgow’s first policewoman on 6 September 1915.

SEPARATE DEPARTMENT

Right up until my mother served as a police officer in Glasgow in the late 1960s, the Police-women’s Department was wholly separate from mainstream policing, with women predominantly used to deal with shoplifting, parking offences and “women’s and children’s issues.” Oh, and in a final indignity, should they become married, they were required to resign from the service altogether (male officers, however, were considered perfectly able to multi-task and deal with both spouse and job at the same time!).

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, while equal opportunities legislation had ensured that you couldn’t be sacked just because of your sex, and attitudes toward women officers had changed hugely – with women being in all branches of the service from CID to firearms – the practical realities of maintaining home and work life were still apparent. I left the police in 1992 after the birth of my first daughter. With no provision for part-time or job-sharing work whatsoever, and a husband who also worked shifts, childcare options were very limited – and expensive. And so I decided it was my career that had to take a back seat. This was the dilemma for every woman officer – full time, shift-working career, or full time mum? – and pretty much continued until the Employment Act of 2002 decreed that working parents had the right to request a flex-
Scotland, recorded just over a decade ago.

But to be in the minority is, by definition, to be marginalised, and, in the last decade, there have also been several high profile cases of racism and discrimination connected with the police, including the Stephen Lawrence case, the tribunal of Commander Ali Dizaei in London and, closer to home, of Constable Lawrence Ramadas. Indeed, the UK’s first black Chief Constable, Mike Fuller of Kent, acknowledged in a recent Panorama interview that minority ethnic officers still feel they “have to work twice as hard to compete” and “don’t feel that there is a level playing field”.

**SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS**

As with female officers, change at the top, which brings changes in procedures, practices and culture, will only take place when sustained change at the bottom feeds through. That is, when female and minority ethnic officers are recruited and, crucially, retained in significant numbers. Until that happens, there will always be an imbalance between genders, creeds, colours and sexualities in our police forces.

And what about other under-represented communities? There are no official figures for the recruitment and retention of gay and lesbian officers, as sexuality is deemed to be a private matter. However, Strathclyde Police has its own Diversity Recruitment Team, which works across all strands of diversity – race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, religion and belief – to raise awareness of employment opportunities in minority communities. An event was held this August in Glasgow to encourage members from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) communities to find out more about careers in Scotland’s largest force, and was supported by the Gay Police Association, which is also actively involved within the Force. Other recent diversity recruitment events include an “Eastern Eye Jobs Fair” and attendance at “Ability Fest”, and the recruiting team’s efforts have been recognised by various awards, including a Remploy award for disability awareness, and the National Scottish Business Diversity Award for Recruitment.

**DIVERSE RECRUITMENT**

So, work is definitely ongoing behind the scenes to encourage diverse recruitment in the police, and, with Equality and Diversity Monitoring and various support forums, increased efforts are also underway to maintain, support and develop under-represented personnel once they are recruited. What we also have to accept though, is that the police is not a job for everyone. It can be thrilling, scary, dirty, thankless, heartbreaking, dull and draining. It invests you with immense power – and is also an immense responsibility. Absolutely, we must tear down the barricades in the culture war, whether that’s by looking at increased childcare provision, challenging cultural assumptions, providing confidential support systems and so on. But, I also feel we should never compromise the safety, both physical and emotional, of individuals and the safety and protection of society at large by turning those barriers into an equally unfair “ladder”. As someone who was once the “token female” on the shift, I feel strongly that tokenism does neither the police, nor the individual, any favours.

A former colleague of mine, when I told her I was writing this piece said: “Yeah, I am a female, I am a lesbian, and I am a cop. Each of these labels identifies me, and sets me apart as ‘different’. But if you ask me who I am – I’m me. And it’s me that does this job – it’s my resourcefulness that gets me through each day. Not my gender or my sexuality.”

The worst kind of cop, to me, is the kind who is on a power trip, who wants to prove something, who aims to make themselves seem greater by demeaning their fellow citizen – or indeed their fellow police officer. We’ve all seen guys (and girls) high on power and privilege, who wield that power aggressively, subjectively, discriminatorily. I’ve worked with some of them. Yet I’ve worked with many more honest, decent, funny, committed individuals who truly care about, and strive, as much as they can, to eradicate man’s (and woman’s) inhumanity to man. So it’s even more crucial that those who seek to enter and progress through the police service do so because, yes, let’s be schmaltzy about this – they do want to “change the world”. Because they are a person who, gay, straight, black, white, male or female, possesses integrity, compassion, courage and the drive to make society a more just and equitable place – both within and outside the uniform.

**NOTES**

2. Editorial note: Since this article was written, Ali Dizaei was convicted (on 8th February 2010) at Southwark Crown Court on charges of perverting the course of justice and of misconduct in a public office, and jailed for four years.
Women and girls participate in sport and physical recreation significantly less than men and boys. Irene A Reid examines why this is the case and argues that sport should be viewed as a gendered cultural practice.

In 2009 much attention was focused on matters of serious economic, political and social importance. A variety of issues were prominent and many remain on the public agenda in 2010; the global economic crisis, military engagement in specific regional conflicts, international development, climate change and the environment, the extension of political and fiscal autonomy for Scotland, the health of Scotland’s population, levels of social deprivation and educational attainment are just some of the issues that have and will continue to exercise public debate. Sport too has provided much food for thought in Scotland.

Sport for many people is “just a game”; it is the apolitical toy-shop of life that offers an escape from more serious matters. Some other popular ideas about sport – and more broadly exercise – focus on the ways in which participation in sport contributes to physical health and psychological well-being. It is also common currency, particularly to justify public investment in sport, to argue that sport can enhance spirit, promote community regeneration and contribute to national pride. These popular arguments serve a purpose, but we should be cautious about the claims that are made about what sport can deliver.

For some scholars however, sport is not just a game. Sociologists (and some historians and political theorists) have undertaken research into the social and cultural space occupied by sport. Sport is not simply a set of physical activities to be encouraged because it may improve individual and social health. Sport is a cultural practice that carries a system of ideas, values, meanings and moral codes that are reciprocally confirming of the society in which it exists. In this respect the sociological analysis of sport interrogates the ways in which sport is part of the cultural terrain where dominant ideologies and power relationships are learned, reproduced and sustained.

In broader international scholarship the sociology of sport has examined the ways in which sport is implicated in the construction of deeply embedded hegemonic notions of gender. For women, and for men, sport is a gendering cultural practice. More specifically the organisation, culture and practice of sport is identified as one social activity that contributes to the social construction and reproduction of dominant ideas about femininity and masculinity; sport also reinforces practices and behaviours that tend to value more highly the social, economic and political status and power of men in society. But we should remember also that sport has the potential to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about gender.

In Scotland, as in other countries, the dominant discourses about sport are largely concerned with male sporting practices. In the media, in everyday conversation, in aspects of organisation and administration, when we get passionate about our nation’s representatives, and on occasion when political agents talk about sport, most of the time it is men’s sport and the male experience of sport that is to the fore. One consequence of this is that, although females – girls and women – may be interested in sport, it can be experienced as a marginalising cultural practice.

LOCATING WOMEN IN SPORT
At the time of writing sportscotland, the national agency for sport, is consulting on its draft Single Equity Scheme.1 Addressing inequality and promoting equity in and through sport is not a new issue. Indeed it has been the focus of a number of public-funded initiatives since the 1970s. Such initiatives have targeted increasing levels of public and commercial funding for women’s sport, greater media attention, raising levels of participation in sport and physical activity amongst women and girls; they have also worked to increase the number of women in senior leadership roles in sport such as coaching, management and senior administration. It would be inaccurate to argue that over the last thirty-years there have been no improvements in the numbers of women involved in all of these dimensions of sport in Scotland, but evidence suggests that many females do not participate in sport and physical activity.

According to sportscotland’s draft Single Equity Scheme consultation paper, 34% of adults in Scotland participate in sport and physical recreation at least once a week but women and girls participate significantly less. Evidence collated for the Scottish Household Survey 2007 suggested
43% of women do little or no physical activity and only 23% of girls meet current guidelines of physical activity. Much of the sports coaching that in Scotland occurs through community-based clubs or local development initiatives and is largely carried out by volunteers. In 2002 the Scottish Executive reported that approximately 62% of those who volunteer in society are women, but sport was identified as one of the few community activities in which more men are volunteers. It is therefore unsurprising to note that Sports Coach UK (2004) reported that in Scotland only 34% of coaches are women.

There are therefore clearly limitations with the work that has been done to redress the distributive aspects of inequality in sport. The current objective of equity is a valuable one but it does necessarily address the common-sense ideas, values, beliefs and practices that reinforce assumptions sport – or at least certain sports – are the natural domain for displaying masculinity, but unnatural territory for femininity. These ideas are deeply embedded in Scottish society, and they may explain, at least in part, the reasons why many girls and women still do not consider sport as a meaningful social practice.

THE GENDERING LANGUAGE AND STRUCTURE OF SPORT

Research about sport as a gendered practice in Scotland has been limited. Nevertheless the established body of international scholarship has examined the ways in which the development of modern sport socially constructed sport as male terrain. Drawing on this broader scholarship some general points can be made which underpin the assertion that sport in Scotland is gendered cultural practice. First in Scotland, as in other cultures, sport is often depicted in a taken-for-granted way as an essentially male activity. It is common parlance for those in the Scottish media to speak and write of “the national team” when it is specifically the men’s national team – football or rugby – that is referred to. Any references to female sporting practices in public discourses are prefixed either by “women” or “ladies”. The gendered marking of sport for females, but not for males, reinforces an assumption that male sport is real sport. In contrast women’s sport is almost always labelled, and in doing so it is an unspoken reminder that women doing sport is perhaps not the norm.

There is another dimension to this gendered marking of sport. The term “women” is often used when referring to females’ sport practice in Scotland, and it often identifies the continued organisational separation of some national sports associations (Scottish Women’s Bowling Association, Scottish Women’s Indoor Bowling, Scottish Women’s Football and Scottish Women’s Rugby Union). However the persistence of the Scottish Ladies’ Golfing Association – by prefix, rather than the presence of a separate agency – is interesting. The prefix “ladies” is arguably a more laden term; some feminist sport sociologists and practitioners have argued that this term is imbued with connotations of womanhood, modesty and femininity that were associated with and rooted in Victorian and Edwardian middle-class society.

This of course is not a matter of coincidence. It reflects the social background of many of the female pioneers who established sports associations for women in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the twenty-first century when used in the context of sport “ladies” still resonates with meanings that are rooted in a hegemonic middle-class definition of the codes of behaviour and accepted but contained physicality of women. These may be outdated for the modern sporting female in the twenty-first century therefore it is surprising that the terms “ladies” is still frequently used by women, as well as by men – when they mark their sport. Golf is not the only sport where “ladies” was the preferred prefix, but it is interesting in this sport its use has persisted.

CATRIONA MATTHEW: SUPER SCOT AND SUPERMUM?

Most of my own research has concentrated on the media discourses of nationhood associated with sport, particularly in Scotland. Since most of the media’s attention is focused on male sporting practices it is refreshing when an opportunity arises to consider how female sporting success is incorporated into the national narrative. One memorable moment from Scotland’s sporting almanac of 2009 helps to illustrate one of powerful ways in which dominant gender ideology is manifest in relation to sport in Scotland.

In August golfer Catriona Matthew won the Ricoh Women’s British Open. The prize money for her victory was just over £197,000; in contrast Stewart Cink, winner of the Open Championship, returned Stateside with £750,000. Setting aside legitimate questions about the financial rewards for playing sport, there is a marked contrast between the prize funds and more broadly the sponsorship invested in men’s and women’s sport. The implicit message is that women’s sport is of lesser value than men’s sporting practice.

As expected much was said about Matthew in the days immediately after her maiden victory in a major. Matthew was the first player from Scotland to win one of the women’s majors. It was unsurprising that she was labelled a “Super Scot” in press reports during early August. However rather than concentrating on her status as a national sporting hero (or heroine) the media narratives
emphasised the fact that Matthew’s British Open victory came eleven weeks after she had given birth to her second daughter. It seems that it was more important to define Matthew as “Supermum”, rather than (or at least as well as) a Super Scot.

The gendered media discourse that surrounded Catriona Matthew is not unusual. Indeed there are similarities with social and cultural ideas embedded in media coverage of the five Scottish women who secured a gold medal in curling at the 2002 Winter Olympic Games.\(^4\) A plethora of research has highlighted how “motherhood” is used as a confirming marker of preferred femininity in relation to women’s involvement in sport. The public acknowledgement of Rhona Martin’s and Catriona Matthew’s respective achievements is consistent with the social ideal of femininity. Moreover it is resonant of the ways in which the contributions of other women to Scottish public life have been contained within a framework of nurturing and caring femininity.\(^5\)

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

There are many other ways in which sport in Scotland reproduces and sustains the dominant discourse of sport as a gendered practice. In terms of media coverage it is clear that women’s sport receives much less coverage than male sporting practices. Attention might also focus on the ways in which women’s sport and women’s knowledge of sport can be trivialised by mainstream sports broadcasting in Scotland, including some of the regular radio output. It is worth noting here however that many elements of the media’s narratives about sport in Scotland are both limited and limiting not only for women, but also for many men. International scholarship has examined how ideas and values of hegemonic masculinity are closely aligned to particular sports that traditionally understood as male terrain.

In Scotland, although there is some recognition that many females experience sport in ways that reinforce gender ideology, less attention has been given to the ways in which sport, including mediated sport, construct and valorises particular forms of masculinity. If sport in Scotland is to be relevant to all of the nation’s people then official discourses must begin to challenge some of the embedded ideas, practices and beliefs that reinforce and sustain its place as a gendered, and gendering the cultural practice.

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**NOTES**

3. Currently ranked 16 in the world in women’s golf (at 30 November 2009). She plays most of her golf on the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) tour in the USA.
KEYWORDS:

JUSTICE

David Purdy examines another keyword in the lexicon of contemporary political life.

What would a just society look like? What does justice demand of us as individuals? These questions have preoccupied philosophers since ancient times. (A third question, How can we reduce injustice in the world? did not gain traction until modern times). Plato’s Republic, written around 380 BC, is one long discussion of justice. Challenged to show that morality is more than enlightened self-interest, Socrates invites his interlocutors to visualise a just city-state (polis). Once we have formed some idea of justice writ large, he assures them, it will be easier to see what is required in everyday life and why someone who habitually tries to do the right thing will have a better and happier life than people who chase after pleasure, fame, riches, status or power.

The scope of justice is not confined to political arrangements and personal conduct. In thinking about the ethics of commerce, for example, medieval theologians invoked the concept of the just price. Modern economists have tried to divorce the study of market forces from arguments about social justice, but the general public insists on putting them together. Surveys suggest that 83 per cent of Americans think it is wrong for hardware stores to raise the price of shovels after a heavy fall of snow. And recent revelations of bankers’ bonuses have provoked outrage at greed – pleasure, fame, riches, status or power.

The ideas about justice even extend to international relations. From St Augustine onwards, the concept of the just war provided a framework for thinking about the rights and wrongs of military conflict. Bismarck’s “blood and soil” view that states always have the right to wage war on other states has never seized the popular imagination. Nor, for that matter, has the contrary, pacifist view that states are never justified in going to war, even in self-defence. Most of us still try to distinguish between just and unjust wars, as regards the ends pursued, and to discriminate between morally acceptable and morally unacceptable methods of warfare.

THEORIES OF JUSTICE FROM PLATO TO NATO

Modern ideas about justice emerged from the European Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. Plato and Aristotle thought of society in holistic terms and derived the qualities of the good citizen from the needs of the political community: for order, harmony, security and independence. Locke, Rousseau and Kant reasoned the other way round: starting from a conception of the individual as an autonomous being, with no social or political attachments, but endowed by God with reason, they invoked the idea of a voluntary pact or contract to explain how it comes about: (a) that human beings live together in society; and (b) that they submit to a ruler or ruling agency. The illustration on the title page of Thomas Hobbes’s Leviathan (1651) depicts the sovereign as a giant – sword in one hand, sceptre in the other – emerging from andtowering over the land he rules. On close inspection, we see that the sovereign’s body is entirely composed of tiny human figures. This image neatly combines the old, organic conception of the body politic with the new, contractual model of society and state.

Enlightenment thinkers held that political authority and social arrangements generally could only be justified by demonstrating the advantages they confer on the members of the political community. What counts as an advantage? This is for individuals themselves to decide, using their powers of reasoning. And who belongs to the political community? This proved contentious, but as Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) insisted, commenting on revolutionary proclamations of the “rights of men”, there is no good reason for excluding any section of the adult population: citizenship is a right, not a privilege.

Modern theories of justice inherited this democratic ethos. Classical and medieval thinkers saw hierarchy and stratification as part of the natural order of things and had little interest in the distribution of resources or the division of labour. What they wanted to know was what system of government is best and who is best fitted to govern. Modern theories, by contrast, are egalitarian: all demand equality of something. The question is: equality of what and on what basis?

Libertarians favour the maximum freedom for each compatible with equal freedom for all. Of course, since “freedom for the pike is tyranny for the minnows”, a society organised exclusively on this principle is likely to exhibit wide disparities of income, wealth and power, drawing criticism from resource-focused egalitarians, who urge the maximum social equality compatible with avoiding a communism of poverty. Utilitarians, for their part, support whatever arrangements produce the greatest happiness of the greatest number. But they too are egalitarians to the extent that in measuring aggregate happiness, they assign everyone equal weight: “each counts for one and none for more than one.”

In short, as Sandel (op. cit., p.19) puts it, “to ask whether a society is just is to ask how it distributes the things that we prize: income and wealth, duties and
rights, powers and opportunities, offices and honours. A just society distributes these things in the right way: it gives each person his or her due.” Notice that there are two questions here: What things are worth having, doing or being? And how should good things (or the means of attaining them) be distributed? Modern theories of justice deal solely with the latter. On questions of value, they contend, the state should remain strictly neutral, leaving individuals free to pursue their own good in their own way.

The doctrine of liberal neutrality would have shocked and appalled Aristotle, who thought that the purpose of the polis was to form good citizens and cultivate good character. By participating in politics, he argued, citizens would learn to deliberate about the common good, to acquire practical wisdom, to share in self-government and to care for the fate of the community.

**JUSTICE AS FAIRNESS**

The most influential liberal political philosopher of the past half-century was John Rawls, whose theory of justice as fairness revives the idea of a social contract in an attempt to build a grand synthesis of libertarian, egalitarian and utilitarian views. A system of arrangements is fair, Rawls (1971) suggests, if people could agree to it without knowing how it will affect them personally. Accordingly, he conducts the following thought experiment. Imagine that the citizens of some well-ordered state are placed behind a veil of ignorance in what Rawls calls the “original position” where each person’s knowledge of his or her natural endowments, social identity, moral values and personal preferences is obliterated. At a stroke, the existing social order is deconstructed and people are invited to endorse general principles for reconstructing it. Supplied with a shortlist reflecting all the various comprehensive ethical and religious outlooks that have gained a following in their society, they are required to choose the one(s) they wish to see embodied in their future social arrangements, knowing that they will have to live with the consequences, but without knowing what the consequences will be for them personally.

Being committed to no particular vision of the human good, Rawls’s imaginary citizen-legislators readily agree to the principle of liberal neutrality and decide that the “currency” of distributive justice shall consist of background social conditions and all-purpose general means known as “primary goods”. These are the prerequisites for becoming a moral agent with the capacity to form and pursue one’s own life-projects. Primary goods fall into five categories: (1) basic liberties (freedom of thought, conscience, expression and association); (2) freedom of movement and choice against a background of diverse opportunities; (3) powers and prerogatives of offices and positions of responsibility; (4) income and wealth; and (5) the social bases of self-respect (such as emotional security in childhood, ongoing intimacy with others and participation in valued social activities).

The effort to achieve impartiality is essential not only to counter the influence of vested interests and personal prejudice within a given culture, but also to transcend parochial norms which are not universally shared.

The legislators’ next step is to decide the general rules which are to govern the distribution of primary goods and which will determine the basic structure of their society. From the shortlist before them, they settle on an ordered sequence of three. The first, which takes precedence over the other two, is the principle of maximum equal liberty. This accords each person the most extensive scheme of liberties compatible with the same liberties for everyone else. The second, which takes precedence over the third, is the principle of fair equality of opportunity. This is taken to mean that it should be equally possible for all equally talented persons to achieve any given office or position. The third is the so-called difference principle. This allows for the remaining primary goods (categories 3–5) to be unequally distributed so long as the inequality works to the advantage of the least favoured group. For example, unequal rewards may provide incentives to work and enterprise, which enhance overall economic performance, making it possible to raise the incomes of the poor by means of redistributive taxation.

**MORAL OBLIGATIONS OF THE THIRD KIND**

Rawls’s theory has its merits. Whatever one thinks of the “original position”, the idea of fairness is central to justice and is shared by other, non-contractarian writers: notably, Adam Smith (1759) who invokes the idea of the “impartial spectator” as a way of viewing our moral sentiments “from a distance”. The effort to achieve impartiality is essential not only to counter the influence of vested interests and personal prejudice within a given culture, but also to transcend parochial norms which are not universally shared. (The Chinese, Smith notes, see nothing wrong with the practice of infanticide). Similarly, Rawls’s focus on the situation of the worst-off group in society signals a recognition of the need to limit the operation of market forces by guaranteeing certain minimum social standards, though it is not clear why pragmatic concessions to those who “need” incentives to contribute their skills and resources to social production should be dignified as a principle of social justice. What people need by way of incentives depends on the prevailing culture.

But does Rawls’s concept of the unencumbered self, deliberating behind a veil of ignorance, make sense of our moral experience? Sandel (op. cit.) points out that a whole range of our moral sentiments – solidarity, loyalty, historic memory and religious faith – arise from the communities and traditions that shape our identities. On the liberal account, obligations arise in only two ways: as natural duties we owe to other human beings as such, and as voluntary commitments we incur by consent. But there is a third category of obligations – of belonging or affinity – that cannot be explained in contractual terms. Unlike natural duties, they are particular, not universal; yet unlike voluntary commitments, they do not require consent. Standard examples are the obligations that parents owe to their
children (or vice versa) and the bonds of fellowship among members of the same community—a nation, religion, profession or whatever—who feel they owe more to each other than to outsiders. Sometimes the claims of loyalty or solidarity may come into conflict with natural duties: for instance, the duty to bring criminals to justice. And with belonging comes responsibility: I cannot take pride in my culture or tradition if I disown its past or refuse to participate in shaping its future.

But if I cannot deliberate about my good without reflecting on the good of the communities with which my identity is bound, then the aspiration to liberal neutrality may be mistaken. Many of the most hotly contested issues of justice and rights cannot be debated without taking up controversial moral and religious questions. For instance, the pro-choice position in the abortion debate is not really neutral on the religious questions. For instance, the pro-choice position in the abortion debate is not really neutral on the underlying moral and theological question: it implicitly rests on the assumption that the Catholic Church's teaching on the moral status of the foetus—that it is a person from the moment of conception—is false. Of course, it is harder to argue this case than to fall back on the right to choose, which is readily accepted in our culture. But it would be more honest and might, in the long run, be more fruitful. The same goes for controversies about surrogate motherhood, prostitution and the selling of body parts. More generally, we urgently need to debate the proper scope of the market, from the provision of public goods to the protection of the environment. As Sandel (p. 261) concludes: "Justice is not only about the right way to distribute things. It is also about the right way to value things."

Reducing Injustice in the World

Amartya Sen (2009) offers a separate, but complementary critique of Rawls. He notes that two divergent ways of reasoning about justice emerged from the Enlightenment. Social contract theorists asked what a just society would look like (regardless of whether it could exist or is attainable) and focused on the institutional designs to secure it rather than on actual social conditions and lived experience. Sen calls this approach "transcendental institutionalism". The second approach, associated with a variety of thinkers from Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham to Karl Marx and John Stuart Mill, is non-contractarian and comparative. Though otherwise diverse, these thinkers shared certain features in common: all sought to compare societies that already existed or could feasibly emerge; all focused on what happens to people and the lives they actually lead; and all sought to remove manifest injustice rather than frame principles for an ideally just society.

Like the Holy Grail, the principles of perfect justice must be unique. But competing principles may survive critical scrutiny and open impartiality. Sen recounts the following parable. Suppose you have to decide which of three children—Anna, Bob and Carla—should get a flute about which they are quarrelling. Anna’s claim is that she is the only one of the three who knows how to play it. (The others do not deny this). However, Bob points out that that he is the only one of the three who has no toys of his own. (The others concede that they are better off in this respect). Yet Carla insists that the flute belongs to her because she made it with her own labour. (The others confirm this). None of these claims can be dismissed as baseless. There are serious arguments for pursuing human excellence, combating poverty and entitling workers to keep the fruits of their labour, and there may be no non-arbitrary way of deciding which principle should prevail. (We might give the story a hopeful Aristotelian ending in which the children are encouraged to take charge of their own affairs and eventually, through repeated experience of open inquiry and interactive debate, manage to arrive at practical solutions to their various collective problems.)

In any case, transcendental theory offers no guide to reasoned choice among non-ideal options, (the only kind we ever encounter in the tumult of the city, as distinct from the haven of the study). The fact that someone regards the Mona Lisa as the best picture in the world does not reveal how he would rank a Picasso against a Van Gogh. Conversely, in comparing a Van Gogh with a Picasso, I needn’t worry about the best picture in the world or wonder whether there is some other picture that would beat both of them. Rawls’s “original position” is just too far removed from the concerns that engage us when we seek to reduce injustice in the world: malnutrition, poverty, illiteracy, medical neglect, the exploitation of workers, the subjection of women, racism, torture, arbitrary imprisonment and so on.

As these examples show, some manifestations of injustice transcend national borders. But global justice is hard to square with Rawlsian theory. Transporting everyone in the world into the “original position” is tantamount to assuming a world government. Bowing to the facts of political geography, in his later work Rawls enacts a two-stage social contract, dealing first with justice within each “people”, and second with what he calls “the law of peoples”. But the world is diversely divided. The partitioning of the global population into distinct “nations” or “peoples” is neither the sole nor always the most important line of division. In some cases, identities based on class, gender, religion or language may outweigh the claims of nationality. Indeed, it is hard to engage with the problems of global warming and environmental justice, involving the interests of future generations, the gulf between rich and poor—people and “peoples” – the unfinished story of our species and our relationship with the natural world, without embracing the identity of being human.

David Purdy is a regular contributor to Perspectives and a member of Democratic Left Scotland.
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NAMING BRITAIN by Alasdair Gray

In three hundred and thirty B.C., when ships always tried to sail within sight of land, at the west exit from earth’s middle sea DON’T GO THROUGH was carved. That small strait led to the ocean that keeps moving its bed, drowning beaches twice between noon and noon and twice uncovering them, pulled by the moon.

It was hard to sail by such coasts without splitting keel on reef or running aground, but possible, as traders from Carthage found who sailed out with bolts of cloth, returned with tin, carved DON’T GO THROUGH to keep competitors in and stationed warships to make their command obeyed. The galley of Pytheas slipped through that blockade.

He was a Greek when Greece had markets on every Mediterranean shore, and learned from neighbour nations more techniques than discussed in one language before. Greeks thought all knowledge theirs to explore, enlarge, for record for their extrovert civilisation, a thought driving Pytheas to Atlantic navigation.

His boat, pulled by oars and one square sail like those in which Vikings cruised to America, found an archipelago. From a tribe there he took a name for it used in a Greek geography book a name that Romans spelled BRITANIA, but during and after the Roman occupation Britain was never the name of a single nation.

Only Wales could claim the old British name when Angles, Saxons, Danes and Norman French conquered South Britain, fighting till they became one kingdom, England, which then fought to subjugate every adjacent state. Ireland was first colony of her empire overseas. She conquered Wales. France and Scotland won free.

Scotland was free till King James got news that he could inherit England’s crown too if he lived there, an offer he did not refuse and like many Scots went down to London where now, Britain’s chief landlord, he signed parliamentary acts to make these islands one kingdom despite contradictory facts.

England and Scotland’s clergy held different kinds of Protestant creed – hating Papists was the main point on which they agreed, while Catholic Ireland constantly rebelled against English landlords who bloodily quelled these attempts to reject the South British yoke. How could a Scottish king unite such folk?

King James, with the force of English arms, evicted most owners of Ulster farms, gave their land to Protestant Scots whose immigration diluted the native Catholic population who never again (thought James) could trouble his nation. Such overseas meddling brought again and again more and worse centuries of political pain.

To gain an empire on which the sun would not set, the English explored, traded, fought and won mastery of the seas and vast sub-continents, helped by Scots and Irish whose parliaments were both in the past, but left such outsiders a say in the Empire of Britain, though the USA, hating taxation by London, had broken away.

Britain’s Post Master General, to make folk see these islands were one, called Scotland N.B. – North Britain – and Ireland W.B., but West British rebels one Easter Day seized Dublin Post Office, raised a tricolour flag, made England’s first colony follow the USA when all but six Irish counties broke away.

National empires end. Britain’s did – Russia’s too. Commercial empire remains promoting war with drug and weapon sales while parliaments in Ulster, Scotland, Wales do not prevent the English government sending their troops to fight in distant lands when America’s chief war-businessman commands.

Ulster Protestants may be the last to gladly claim the British name. Britain is still an irregular archipelago to which Pytheas came.

Alasdair Gray is an artist and writer, probably best known for his modern classic, Lanark.
A BIZARRE, OUT-DATED, PORNOGRAPHIC INDULGENCE?

“P”eople who talk give themselves away all the time. I don’t talk. I stand listening until their voices become a cheerful noise and then I want privacy. I want my bed, and Janine.” (AG, 1982, Janine, p. 3)

It’s hard to be sure of anything in the fiction of Alasdair Gray, and especially in the book he has routinely referred to as his best novel for a quarter of a century. Gray often makes this claim in a deliberately offhand way, as if the fact cannot be questioned by any reasonable person, delivering his point with a grin, knowing perfectly well how few people agree. His semi-autobiographical debut Lanark is held up by most critics as his finest achievement; by comparison, 1982, Janine, the tale of an alcoholic and his violent sexual fantasies (also, in places, autobiographical), is seen as a bizarre, out-dated, pornographic indulgence. Or at least that’s the received wisdom – Lanark: instantly loved modern Scottish classic, required reading for all. 1982, Janine: scraps from the bottom drawer of the mind, which probably prove the author is a pervert. These two novels have, apparently, little in common except their author. But that couldn’t be further from the truth. I’d like to argue that 1982, Janine can be seen as a partner piece to Lanark, dealing with similar landscapes of the mind, body and nation. It is also one of the most radical feminist texts in 20th century Scottish fiction, and has been a key influence on a whole generation of younger Scottish writers like Irvine Welsh (especially in his novel Marabou Stork Nightmares, whose structure and protagonist are inspired by Gray’s book) and the likes of Janice Galloway, who credited Gray with providing her the courage to write early on in her career. 1982, Janine was published in 1984, The following year she wrote:

“Gray’s writing not only knows that women experience, feel, and often think differently, it seems to be filled with a regret for that fact, and in this way, Woman – the female principal – exists in Gray’s writing the way she exists in no other current male writer’s work.”

This acknowledgement that perhaps men cannot understand women’s experience, and that this lack of understanding has disastrous consequences in a patriarchal society, goes to the very core of what this novel is all about. But I’m getting ahead of myself. First of all, what is 1982, Janine and where does it come from?

It appears to be quite a simple narrative. Middle-aged, divorced Jock McLeish sits drinking himself to death in a hotel room somewhere in Scotland. Eventually he has a mental breakdown, makes a botched suicide attempt and is forced to re-examine the relationships with the women in his life: his ex-wife Helen, past lovers Sontag and the Edotir, and vulnerable first girlfriend Denny. These examinations increasingly interrupt the fantasies he is trying to carefully construct in order to distract himself from his depressingly ordinary real life. In a 1986 public interview discussing this book with the experimental feminist writer Kathy Acker, Gray claimed the character of McLeish was “a negative self-portrait” – containing elements of his personality, but sometimes in reverse. Small, neat and not the slightest bit artistic, Gray made McLeish a technician with only practical skills, whose youth promised much but whose adulthood was one long disappointment. (At this time, Gray believed his own experience had been the other way around, with a long period of frustration eventually followed by public acclaim.)

TYPOGRAPHERICAL PLAY

Part of the reason Alasdair was so fond of his creation was because this protagonist was different to his past ones: so he enjoyed making McLeish a deluded, self-satisfied Tory at a time when so few in Scotland supported Thatcher’s Conservative government. As he told Acker, “I imagined a man with a smug sense of being potentially greater than everybody, a sense he maintained by being nobody, by being alcoholic and REFUSING TO THINK ABOUT HIS LIFE.” When McLeish finally has to give in to thinking about it, and to admit the truth, his entire reason for being implodes. As does the text, which divides in different directions, with the voice of God competing with several other, louder ones who won’t leave our man in peace. This typographical play, and the surface differences between Gray and McLeish, handily disguise the fact that many of the realistic sections, including the story of McLeish’s first marriage, are heavily based on Gray’s own. Because of the more shocking elements, few noticed that these parts have much in common with the tone, delivery and content of the Glasgow-based Unthank sections of Lanark.

Overall, 1982, Janine is certainly more difficult reading than Lanark or Gray’s other major literary success, Poor Things, and it causes blushes in the few classrooms where it is studied. But easier novels are not necessarily better ones. 1982, Janine unflinchingly analyses the angry, defensive condition of the post-referendum Scotland of the early 1980s in a way that illuminates the (possibly) pre-referendum Scotland of 2010. (Crucially, Gray’s novel-in-progress became more overtly political after the narrowly “lost” independence vote of 1979, which he believed was an injustice.) So the novel is unashamedly political, but also incredibly personal. It argues, without ever saying

Received wisdom has it that Scottish writer Alasdair Gray’s Lanark is his finest work. Gray’s biographer Rodge Glass begs to differ.
A BIZARRE INDULGENCE?

directly, that repressed Scottish men like Jock feel so alienated that they will go to any lengths to hide from real life. So, the novel suggests, they make up another instead, in their imaginations. One where they have power – over their finances, their work, their nation, and crucially, over the women who (damn them!) won’t do as they’re told. Who have different wants and needs, and will not succumb to their demands.

WHAT IS ACCEPTABLE IN FICTION?

So, no light holiday reading, this. The reader is forced to question whether it is morally excusable for Gray to torture Jock’s highly sexualised versions of these women in the book, as long as that torture is only imagined. As his inventions Superb (short for Superbitch), Big Momma (an obese, sadistic lesbian) and Janine herself (based on Jane Russell’s character in The Outlaw) suffer at the hands of Jock’s imaginary oppressors, the novel asks us to examine what is acceptable in fiction, while providing a clear distinction between the outrageous, unlikely behaviours of the “imagined” women and the often resistant, believable behaviours of the “real” ones. Gray uses the tropes of pornography to reveal what lies behind these fantasies and the abuses within them. How fantasies reveal insecurities. How the smallest details within these can make sense of behaviour. In the following example, Jock’s fantasy is interrupted by an unhappy realisation:

“But Janine is not happy about the white silk blouse shaped by the way it hangs from her I must not think about clothes before I’ve imagined Janine herself. But clothes keep trying to come first. Do I like women’s clothes more than their bodies? Oh no, but I prefer their clothes to their minds. Their minds keep telling clothes keep trying to come first. Do I like women’s clothes more than their bodies? Oh no, but I prefer their clothes to their minds. Their minds keep telling me, no thank you, don’t touch, go away. Their clothes say, look at me, want me, I am exciting. It would be perverse not to prefer their clothes to their minds.”

This exploration of what is truly “perverse” goes further, eventually slipping into a bald explanation of exactly why Jock has constructed this pretend world:

“Some men, the unsuccessful lecherous kind (but we’re all that kind) get angry with women who dress excitingly and say they deserve whatever happens to them. Meaning rape, of course. I don’t agree though I know why they feel that way. They hate being excited by women they can’t possess. But real women don’t frustrate me because I have this dirty imagination.”

And then he slips back into that pretend world again. All this in the novel’s first few pages, showing that what we are about to read is not supposed to be sexy. It’s not supposed to be celebrated. It’s supposed to be understood as a sad consequence of a life gone horribly wrong, in a society of the trapped and the powerless.

Some critics believe that 1982, Janine is somehow anti-women or misogynistic. Certainly there were some bad reviews upon publication. But many of those initial critiques were barely noticed or were fast forgotten. So why has this negative view persisted all these years later? Partly because of the oft-quoted opinion of Anthony Burgess, who famously hailed Gray as the finest Scottish novelist since Sir Walter Scott on the appearance of Lanark, then publicly attacked 1982, Janine a few years later, referring to the novel as “the same huge talent deployed to a somewhat juvenile end.” That line has been used repeatedly since to describe the difference between the worth of the two books, and Gray himself insisted his biggest detractors be quoted on subsequent editions of Janine, while also writing an anonymous diatribe of his own for the original hardback cover. (He believed this would make him appear more like a rejected outsider, and a rebel: and it worked.) But there was no huge uproar. No revolution or march on bookshops of the nation. The less controversial truth is that many reviews were positive and the book built steadily on Gray’s international reputation – a few people were offended, and the author was delighted to look dangerous, but that was all. The novel was uncontentious enough to satisfy its Russian publishers (who replaced Gray’s jacket design with a man in a leather face mask), and has since become a Canongate Classic, being reprinted in paperback with an effusive introduction by another writer whose work has been influenced by this book, Will Self. He argued readers should not “slurp fictional mush and be spoon-fed undemanding narratives”, believing instead that “if literature doesn’t have the capacity for awkwardness, then it cannot convey anything of the unreality of this world.” And 1982, Janine is nothing if not awkward reading.

NEVER SIMPLE PORNOGRAPHY

This book did not directly follow Lanark: it followed Unlikely Stories, Mostly. Gray’s hugely well-received collection of fantastical, playful stories brought many new admirers inside and outside Scotland, won him the Cheltenham Literary Prize, and was even more visually ambitious that its predecessor. This was the first Gray book to include the motto “Work As If You Live in the Early Days of a Better Nation” on the hardback boards, and also featured the now infamous Erratum Slip reading “This Erratum Slip has been inserted by mistake”. So by the time 1982, Janine was published the following year it was praised highly by many who noticed echoes of the textual play, the darkly sexual overtones and political undertones found in the author’s previous two books. One of
those who saw the connection was the novelist Jonathan Baumbach in the New York Times. Reviewing Unlikely Stories, Mostly and Janine together, Baumbach’s insightful assessment identified that “the impulse to outrage is the transforming element of his [Gray’s] work,” and explained why Janine could never be simple pornography. He wrote:

“The various intrusions keep the reader from getting caught up in the pornographic fantasies, which are never really erotic in any event, but only deformed versions of Jock’s life. That his characters enact cautionary tales and are punished for presumption and desire is indicative of Jock’s engrained puritanism. Misbehaviour earns punishment, grandiosity engenders debasement. The punishment his characters receive for transgression is a way of justifying for Jock his own timid behaviour in events past. It is the punishment, not the transgression, that fills Jock with desire.”

These deformed versions of Jock’s life, inspired by the excitement of that punishment, are eventually too much to bear, bringing the mental implosion mentioned earlier.

**PROCESS OF IMPLOSION**

That process of implosion actually starts very early on in the book. In fact, much of the evidence of what is to come is contained within the first chapter. In the first scene Jock imagines, where Janine is about to be the victim of sexual blackmail, readers encounter a hint of what is coming. There is a clear slippage of tone here, from fantasy into boring old ugly reality:

“She is triumphant, this bad wee girl who certainly deserves a spanking. So does the agent, but he doesn’t interest me. He’s only there to make Janine believable. I was wrong when I said I needed justice on my side, all I need is revenge. On a woman. Revenge for what? The answer to that question has nothing to do with the pleasurable expansion of the penis. I refuse to remember my marriage. I will pour into the mouth of this head another dram of stupidity. The questioning part of this brain is too active tonight.”

The only victim here is the protagonist, who notices his mistakes and motivations, but chooses not to acknowledge either, instead preferring to slip back into exciting pretence and yet more whisky. Jock’s life is not one of life of violence or power or sexual satisfaction, but a life Alasdair referred to in one interview as one of “quiet desperation”. Jock continues:

“My problem is sex, or if it isn’t, sex hides the problem so completely that I don’t know what it is. I want revenge on a woman who is not real. I know several real women and if they got near my lovely punishable Janine they would shame me into rescuing her.”

In asides like this Jock shows his intelligence by acknowledging the lies he repeats to himself, but he chooses to stupefy that intelligence rather than engage with it and change his behaviour. He is not to be applauded, he is to be pitied. We are not invited to enjoy his abusive sexual fantasies, we are invited to notice that his reason for imagining these abuses is because he does not have the power, confidence or inclination to do them in real life. If anywhere, that confidence resides with the real women in this story that Jock has been unable to control or understand. And as for the women in the fantasies, they are just that: fantasies. They’re not supposed to be real, or taken literally. Janine is Jane Russell, playing a part in a film where Jock is the director, and the audience is him alone.

All the abuse in 1982, Janine is part of Jock McLeish’s internal world. If you saw him walking down the street, you wouldn’t suspect him of his imagination. You probably wouldn’t notice him at all. And he certainly wouldn’t ever do anything dangerous. Which is part of what makes this such a successful novel; it asks, where is the line between the real and the unreal? Is a crime of the imagination still a crime? And if it is, how many of us are guilty of it? I hate to agree with him – it’s very suspicious when a biographer agrees with his subject – but I think Alasdair Gray is right when he identifies 1982, Janine as his best work. Maybe one day others will agree too.

**NOTES**

3. ibid.
8. Ibid.
LESS PITIED DESTRUCTION

Chris Harvie MSP reflects on two takes on Britain, the Union and devolution.

Analysing the mechanics of UK financial-political collapse has eliminated most of my newspaper reading, but not the Financial Times. The FT is like that blunt old Tory, “military history”. It gives things to you straight. If you don’t find out why you were whacked last time, you are going to be whacked even harder. I have been able to set the detailed diagnoses of FT commentators against the cumulative analysis of banking witnesses appearing before Holyrood’s Economics Committee. This autopsy on New Labour finance I thought might have been of some interest to the witnesses appearing before Holyrood’s Economics Committee, presenting one or another party line and aiming to ingratiate … with whom? Even Gerry Adams and co, once figures of fear, seem surrounded these days by smart Spads and gofers, squirting the usual squid-ink. Has this got through to the Reverend Ian Paisley, to whose bosom that nice young Mr Blair had been clasped? “More tea, Antichrist?” The whore that dwelleth on the Seven Hills does daytime TV for Signor Berlusconi. Meantime graduate yoof is as deeply involved as Anglo-Saxon yoof in general in hiding out from sordid economic reality in the media thickets of video-games, celebs, footie, “Guardian soulmates”, etc. Look closely at the “constitutional alternative” in Ukrainian politics represented by David Cameron and his closest associates – Michael Ashcroft, Michael Spencer, Stanley Fink and Alan Howard – and be very afraid. Never has a new order appeared less prepossessing than that represented by Belize Man. For the lost boys and girls of the media, politics is going to be “an awfully great adventure”, and so adrift are they intellects that they won’t even get that blackest of jokes.

Relation of Economics

Perryman’s contributors tend to emphasise society and culture to the exclusion of economics, even though the elephant in the room has been the corpse of the service-based economy. The decline of manufacturing has accelerated so much that it will die, taking with it the remaining organs of the British state. In particular the “housing driver” with its concentration on the failing structure of the family and the rise of a “hotel city” ambience, rarely digresses from London, parallelling Isherwood’s
Berlin though without the culture. Ukianian politics-sport-media-finance is a drama essentially based on male if not gay paradigms, co-opting New British elites (usually male-dominated), circumscribing female alternatives, ignoring the province.

This comes when women have been steadily colonising the constitutional-patriotic world, with a discourse which seems, if unorthodox, more comprehensive, allusive and original. Apart from old-timers like Lessing, Toynbee and Weldon, Sue Townsend’s Adrian Mole saga, Posy Simmonds’s Tamara Drewe, Gillian Tett’s Fool’s Gold, and Carol Ann Duffy’s sharply political poetry – in contrast to the vacuity of her predecessor Sir Andrew Motion, the Alfred Austin de nos jours – have carried out root canal work, without anaesthetic, on literary and commercial Britain. Welsh women’s parliamentary politics didn’t exist before 1999: only six women were elected to Westminster, 1918–97. On my patch Wendy Alexander, a flop as Labour opposition leader in Holyrood, has been giving the bankers a very difficult time. With good reason. They have wrecked her devolutionary world.

Segue to Professor Albert Venn Dicey, the “hero in disguise” of James Mitchell’s readable and largely convincing study of devolution in the British islands. With his doppelganger “parliamentary sovereignty” Dicey bestrode constitutional theory in Britain from the well-timed publication of The Law of the Constitution in 1885, on the eve of Gladstone’s Government of Ireland Bill, for a full century, long after his death in 1922. Perhaps he only really quit the field in 1987 when it looked as if the Scots would finally evict the Conservatives in favour of a “genuine” constitutional patriotism – which would be demonstrated in the Scottish Convention of the following year. A charming, shambling eccentric, who almost gave away in marriage (to the commit-ted Fabian Leonard Woolf) Virginia Stephen, daughter of his friend and cousin Sir Leslie Stephen, Dicey was liberal in everything but the Constitution, where he became its ju-ju man, in his own words “the prophet of the obvious”, “the aged and impenitent Benthamite”.

The roots of Dicey lay not just in Jeremy Bentham but further back in Thomas Hobbes, but his “charm” (in Richard Crossman’s constitutional-hypnotic sense) lay in the adaptivity of his notions to the industrial England of his day, and its limited but energetic state intervention, outlined – if also deprecated – in his lucid and systematic Law and Opinion (1904). That these works were still kept in print by Harold Macmillan when Prime Minister, 1956–63 – perhaps the high point both of “British homogeneity” and of the “statesmen in disguise” of Whitehall – emphasised how durable was Dicey’s empiricism, and the strength of its cultural derivations.

**POLITICAL HISTORIAN**

Mitchell is essentially a political historian, just as Adam Smith was a historical economist far more than a laissez-faire mathematician: concerned about how politicians/businessmen actually behaved and how this was recorded, and not about its utility to some fancy intellectual framework operating as a barrier mechanism round a hermetic academic belief system. Contrast Mitchell with Prof Iain McLean, also a product of Nuffield College, Oxford, in whose oeuvre complex mathematical analysis coexists – but doesn’t seem to communicate – with a wickedly expert command of the archives, first shown in his revisionist The Myth of the Red Clyde (1983), and to deadly effect (as various established figures discovered) in his Aberfan: Government and Disasters which he wrote with Martin Johnes in 2000. Professedly a unionist, McLean has undermined the mystique of the Union, removing it from his Nuffield predecessor David Butler’s benign oligarchy of “British homogeneity” and displaying a corruption akin to the Viennese Karl Kraus’s dystopic “Kakania”.

There are some archival nuggets in Mitchell’s Devolution, such as Lord Home’s despairing 1972 plea for the Irish to get on with it and unite. So much for the roots of the Unionist party! There was, however, no such caesura in Dicey’s career. A member of George Eliot’s circle, from the “Middlemarch” of Northampton, where his family built up a great provincial weekly, the Northampton Mercury, promoted the Midland Counties Railway from Rugby to Derby and were diddled out of it in 1842 by George Hudson, Railway King and Ponzi-style fraudster. His brother Edward edited the Observer, and Dicey was always alert to culture: Carlyle, George Eliot, Dickens and Trollope have their place in Law and Opinion. This catholicity, combined with the simplicity of his “flexible constitution” – parliamentary absolutism – made his ideas difficult to dislodge, particularly given the purposive centralism of two world wars.

Mitchell’s notion of a “union of unions” in the present book – meaning the “confederal” antithesis of capital-U Unionism – oddly recalled to this reader’s mind not just Dicey’s own rather weird physical presence, but Anthony Powell’s Doctor Trelawney in his High Tory chronicle of Ukianian decay A Dance to the Music of Time. Lord of misrule, mage and reprobate, with his daft apothegms “the essence of all is the godhead of the true” or “the vision of visions heals the blindness of sight”, the spirit of Trelawney, in the form of Scorpio Murtlock, will in the last volume run away with the bulky (and Scots) Whitehall fixer Widmerpool. Dicey’s “prophet of the obvious” unionism could – and he realised this – promote its opposite, by recognising and ignoring partial sovereignties or informally federalised structures. As he himself had forecast it
would. He wrote to his friend James Bryce in 1886: “If I were an Irishman, I would be an out-and-out nationalist.” An American called Trowbridge H Ford actually tried in the 1970s to prove in a couple of articles that the Vinerian Professor was an undercover member of the Fenian Clann na Gael by misattributing to him a series of pieces in the New York Nation by a Quaker Parnellite Alfred Webb. But the nationalist premise was there.

**UNWRITTEN CONSTITUTION**

Thomas Carlyle – a vast and very Scottish influence on this generation – had carried out a similarly provocative function in his Latter-Day Pamphlets (1850) in the England of Dicey’s youth. In “Downing Street” he anticipated Walter Bagehot’s “efficient part of government” in his reverence for Sir Robert Peel. The Scotsman Bryce actually gave Dicey his central idea in an 1881 essay on “Flexible and Rigid Constitutions” which stressed the compactness and malleability of the unwritten British constitution. Bryce believed in Irish home rule as devolution, and thought the “flexibility of Westminster” could be preserved by conventions, which he regarded as performing a similar role across the pond when he wrote The American Commonwealth in 1888.

In Dicey’s view, effective juridical union was both enhanced and qualified by convention and a range of central powers limited only by physical force but practically by convention. What Mitchell doesn’t explore is the sociological working-out of Dicey’s partial sovereignties – local government, railways, dock and harbour authorities, non-conformist chapels, even some joint-stock companies. One might obviously extend this to trade unions, constitutional clubs and bodies like Orange Lodges. Yet Dicey didn’t dwell on the dynamics of this semi-constitutional role. Ultimately, his breaking-point was the security of the Empire and the efficiency of Free Trade, something to which he supposed the Irish to be intestinally opposed. Once independent, as Joseph Lee showed in his magisterial Ireland, 1912–1985, they would become clones of the Whitehall Treasury.

Diceyism began to break up with the closure or sell-off of the British manufacturing economy. Its “financialised” successor subordinated industrial and local development to the pursuit of profit by privileged metropolitan groups, in alliance with disaggregated, cash-hungry elements of the political class. Its last true believers were nonconformist centralists of the Tony Benn sort, seeking the “magic lever” in Whitehall which would usher in the rule of the saints. This, as much as the thuggish Thatcherite counter-revolution, stretched the conventions beyond breaking-point, and conjured up a coherent and vindictive Scottish opposition.

**DEMOCRATIC INTELLECT**

The Scots “democratic intellect” in its classic form was never participative; it was elite recruitment from a broad base; but that base depended on a highly skilled middlestand of what Mitchell calls the “autarchic authorities”: kirk, law, etc. Corporatised in this way into what Ernest Gellner called a “strong” civil society, Scotland’s bureaucracy functioned quite satisfactorily from 1707 to about 1950, showing remarkable wartime adaptivity in 1915 and 1941. Intriguingly, its set-up came close to one Benthamite paradigm: John Stuart Mill’s Parliamentary Reform (1859) in which he envisaged instead of a Cabinet an autonomous board of civil servants who would draft legislation and submit it to parliament for sanction: not unlike Scotland’s supervisory “Boards” and the Scottish Office after the 1920s.

This was an expression of Dicey’s ambiguous “spirit of Benthamism or individualism”: meaning a highly-professionalised administrative elite which shared power with the independent

burghs – from New Galloway to Glasgow – which were in many ways the country’s glory, through them had informal links to manufacturing, agriculture and fisheries, transport, which had their own corporate institutions. The problem is that at all levels this commercial civil society has failed, along with the state-corporatist values that have replaced it. This shadow lies long over the SNP’s 2007 “historic concordat” with the local authorities. Irrationally structured by Ian Lang’s 1996 “reform”, these have incubated an overpaid and often irresponsible administrative oligarchy, replicated in ineffective quangos like Scottish Enterprise. The populism of the “autarchic” bosses (almost wholly male) tends to be limited to paying lip-service to the national disaster of Scottish football, and fixing deals on the golf course. Financial services – after a spectacular success with North Sea oil – have turned out greedy and incompetent, undertaking speculation on a suicidal scale, possibly corrupted by their commercial relations to a dysfunctional post-industrial Scots society with a record-breaking addiction to drink and drugs which now affects about 160,000 “problem users” and thus arguably half-a-million, or 10%, of the population.

Dicey’s central concern was the common civic liability to the law, expressed in a non-specialised court system. So concerned was he to preserve Parliament’s prerogative that he was – paradoxically – prepared to subject it to the referendum. What he couldn’t realise was how toxic to this system the complex assault of Eurolaw, the corporate law of internationalised business – and ultimately the law-free zone (or universe?) of computer-based “securitisation” – would become. Here came another challenge from Scotland: John A Mack and Hans-Juergen Kerner’s The Crime Industry, commissioned in 1975 by the Scottish Home Department. The authors, respectively from sociology and criminology, argued (with the likes
of Robert Maxwell in mind) that the shadow-line between “robust business practice” and outright crime would be fatally blurred by the impact of tax havens, globalisation and computers. The outcome was in 1975 unclear, and in our days would probably be presented in terms of the EU as – Mitchell-style – the ultimate Union of Unions. The difference is that the free-floating wealth that has colonised Ukania has been either straightforwardly “illegalist”, or content to live with, or succeed through, a degree of crime-tolerance unheard of in Dicey’s day.

This is less tolerated in the EU, which is certainly confederal, though it looks as if it will increasingly answer the helm of the Franco-Germans. Paradoxically, the UK’s incorporation into a core federal structure might have enabled it to survive, by injecting pragmatism into an otherwise palsied Bruxellois discourse. This won’t now happen: so severe is the UK’s deficit in the qualities that once made it prevail. Industrial and then financial collapse, educational and transportation dysfunction, cultural decadence. In *The Stones of Venice* (1851) John Ruskin prophesied:

“Since first the dominion of men was asserted over the ocean, three thrones, of mark beyond all others, have been set upon its sands: the thrones of Tyre, Venice and England. Of the First of these great powers only the memory remains; of the Second, the ruins; the Third, which inherits their greatness, if it forget their example, may be led through prouder eminence to less pitied destruction.”

That’s where we are.

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### The Future is Chinese

The period of ascendancy of the West is over: Brian Pollitt is impressed by a book that analyses China’s rapid climb to becoming a dominant global power.

Martin Jacques has given us an illuminating, scholarly and provocative account of China’s past, present and likely future. His title is hyperbolic: China will not “rule” the world and neither will the Western world “end”. What is forcefully and plausibly argued is that China will become a dominant global power in “a quite new world in which no hemisphere or country will have the same kind of prestige, legitimacy or overwhelming force that the West has enjoyed over the last two centuries. Instead, different countries and cultures will compete for legitimacy and influence. The Western world is over; the new world, at least for the next century, will not be Chinese in the way that the previous one was Western. We are entering an era of competing modernity, albeit one in which China will increasingly be in the ascendant and eventually dominant.” (p. 433).

The world has seen the rise and fall of many empires – and China, through its intra-continental expansion, is itself already an empire – and the ambitions and weaknesses accounting for their rise and decline have been analysed by many scholars. It was Adam Smith who instructively contrasted “wealth” as perceived respectively by the Mongols (or Tartars) and the Spanish during their periods of territorial conquest (*The Wealth of Nations*, Routledge, London 1890, p. 324). An ambassador sent by France to one of the sons of Ghengis Khan was frequently asked if his own country had “plenty of sheep and oxen”. The primary concern of the Spaniards in their conquest of the Americas, on the other hand, was the search for silver or gold. For Smith, the Mongols’ view of wealth was the more astute. Moreover, Spain squandered its treasures on wars and politics while French, Dutch, English and German capitalists acquiring Spanish bullion deployed it to develop industry and commerce. And the rise of subsequent empires – and of “modernized nation-states” – was equated with industrialisation.

**Spectacular Example**

The British Empire was the first and most spectacular example. At its zenith its power rested on a formidable tripod. Firstly, its industrial revolution and an accompanying sequence of technological innovations rapidly expanded its capacity to export manufactures. Secondly, extensive colonial conquests secured important overseas markets while accumulated profits were converted into the export of physical and financial capital to develop and acquire raw materials and foodstuffs for a burgeoning national industry and a growing urban pop-

**When China Rules the World – The Rise of the Middle Kingdom and the End of the Western World**

by Martin Jacques

(Allen Lane, £30.00)
ulation. Thirdly, Britain’s global political and economic interests were protected by her overwhelming naval power.

Britain’s imperial might was eroded as European rivals – notably France and Germany – and the United States embarked on comparable and competitive processes of industrialisation. And Britain’s ability to export capital and control its colonial territories was undone by the material costs of World Wars I and II, the geopolitical impact of the latter accelerating the growth of the so-called “Third World”. Only the United States emerged strengthened from World War II, its power resting on its own tripod of a dynamic and expanded domestic economy, major overseas capital investments, and globally projected military strength.

Until recently – and most evidently with the implosion of the Soviet bloc from 1989 – the US plausibly presented itself as the world’s sole super-power. But this rested increasingly on its military might and progressively less on its economic strength both at home and abroad. The overseas markets it had dominated were increasingly penetrated by manufactures exported from East Asia. The US domestic consumer goods market was progressively penetrated by cheaper imports. And ever-growing deficits in US government finance and in the nation’s balance of payments, drastically accelerated by the current global crisis of capitalism, required to be offset by massive loans and investments from overseas, most notably from China. Even its ostensibly overwhelming military strength, designed for conflict with a once-impressive Soviet military power, was poorly suited for the “asymmetric” warfare in which it found itself engaged in Iraq and Afghanistan. And an obsessive concern with these conflicts masked a palpable loss of US political and economic influence in the Far East, Africa and Latin America.

In this context, what particular features of China’s past and present encourage Jacques to predict with such confidence China’s future world dominance? The most obvious one, of course, is its great size in area and population. This gives it both potential geopolitical weight and an enormous internal market for both production and consumption. Jacques also stresses the nature and age of its civilisation. In modern times, China has adopted the form of a “nation-state” but Jacques argues that it is really to be considered a “civilization-state”, and one profoundly influenced, even in the most recent turbulent periods of its history, by the arguments and moral precepts of Confucian thought. For Jacques, Confucius’s “emphasis on moral virtue, on the supreme importance of government in human affairs, and on the overriding priority of stability and unity … have informed the values of Chinese civilization” for some 2,000 years (Jacques, p.198).

Unlike the nation-states of the West, moreover, government in China “has no boundaries; rather like a parent, with which it is often compared, there are no limits to its authority.” (ibid, p.199). Hence it rules unchecked by powerful competing sources of authority such as the Church, the nobility and rising commercial interests. For the past millennium at least, only two institutions were formally acknowledged and really mattered: the government and the family.

**National Humiliation**

China’s “unity” has, of course, often been disrupted by foreign invasions, notably by the Mongols and the Manchu, but the dynasties they imposed did not so much shape Chinese civilisation as become assimilated by it. More modern invasions, notably by the Japanese and the more restricted incursions of European powers, inflicted national humiliation and accentuated fears of instability but never caused the Chinese to question their identity, still less the pervasive sense of superiority of the civilisation of the “Middle Kingdom”.

Chinese “unity” is itself a somewhat ambiguous concept. Jacques suggests China should be thought of “as a continental system containing many semi-autonomous provinces with distinctive political, economic and social systems” (p. 203), and with an unexpected diversity in the cultures and governance of provinces. An important feature of “unity” was the racial dominance of the Han, reported to comprise 91 per cent of the total population. By comparison with the proportional weight of ethnic minorities in many other countries – notably the United States – China’s Tibetans, Uighurs, etc. were relatively insignificant and officially encouraged migration of the Han into minority regions made them even less so. But the notion of the Han as a homogeneous ethnic group was itself a myth – a late 19th century invention that encompassed many races devised to define the Chinese against both the Manchus and the Europeans who came to control most of the treaty ports (ibid, p. 244). The racial superiority of the Han was rooted not only in the perceived superiority of its civilisation but in its colour. At the end of the first millennium, the Chinese elite considered itself to be white, with black representing the negative pole of humanity. The rude shock of confrontation with Europeans in the 19th century forced the revision of this view with the Han now seen to be of yellow skin – but one eventually to be regarded as both the equal of white and superior to the darker skinned races of India and Africa (ibid, pp. 246–8).

But geographical and demographic size, combined with specific attributes of her civilisation, entirely failed to offset China’s weakness in the face of the modernised nation-states of the West and of their Eastern equivalent, Japan. Japan had not been colonised and, from the late 19th century, had recognised its need to emulate Western industrial development if it was to survive (and later expand) as an independent
power. It had done so carefully, according to a strategic plan, and its emergence as an industrial nation – its “take-off” – was encompassed in a shorter period than that of its British, European or North American rivals. From the 1950s, Japan was joined by (and powerfully influenced) the yet more rapid growth of the so-called “Asian Tigers”, with the industrialisation of South Korea and Taiwan both stimulated by Cold War infusions of US capital and easy access to US markets for their expanding export sectors. The “take-off” of Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia was to follow.

INDUSTRIALISATION
The nature and context of the “take-off” of its smaller Asian neighbours ensured that “modernisation” would become China’s over-riding priority. The Revolution of 1949 had established the Communist Party as a highly effective mechanism for governing (as compared to preceding regimes), with Mao Zedong a “charismatic founder-emperor” in what has been described as “a replacement for the old emperor-state” (p. 97). But it was Deng Xiaoping in 1978 who set China upon its single-minded pursuit of industrialisation, led by the Party and calculated to improve popular living standards and preserve national stability. For Deng, famously what mattered was not the “colour of the cat” but whether “it catches mice” and, with scant regard for ideology, special economic zones were created along the south-eastern seaboard, with rural communes dismantled and peasants, granted long-leases on their holdings, encouraged to market their produce.

While State-sponsored reforms were initially cautious and experimental, in the 1990s China’s tariff barriers were dismantled. This “shock” encouraged huge inflows of foreign direct investment (with prominent contributors having already been found in the large overseas Chinese diaspora) that were encouraged to create “a brutal competitive environment” in which domestic companies, in order to survive, were forced to learn from their more advanced Western and Japanese rivals (p. 157). Since 1978, China received $500 billion in foreign direct investment – ten times the total accumulated by Japan between 1945 and 2000 – and in 2003 China overtook the United States to become the world’s largest recipient of such investment (pp. 158–9). In a decade, China doubled its per capita output, with high levels of investment supported by high rates of domestic savings – the latter in sharp and crucial contrast to major developed countries such as the United States.

GROWING ECONOMIC POWER
The impact of China’s growing economic power was most obvious in East Asia where intra-regional trade increased by over 300 per cent between 1991 and 2001. Chinese exports to and imports from South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand all grew swiftly, with the most important category of ASEAN exports to China being intermediate goods. China was where the final assembly of many products of foreign-owned multinationals took place before their export to their final destination and China’s huge exposure to foreign trade accounted for some 75 per cent of GDP as contrasted to the 30 per cent or less of economies such as the United States, India, Japan and Brazil (p.159). Moreover, China’s high growth rates – some 9.5 per cent per annum over the past three decades – required huge quantities of raw materials such as oil, copper, iron ore, alumina and diverse foodstuffs. China’s enormous financial surpluses enabled it to support ambitious overseas investment projects to increase the provision of raw materials from actual or prospective suppliers, in the process extending the geographical arena in which it exercised its economic influence from Asia and Australia to Africa and Latin America.

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In all this, and in a context in which US power and influence in Asia, Africa and Latin America declined as that of China rose, the astute care with which China sought to manage this potentially conflictive situation was illustrated with remarkable clarity by Deng Xiaoping: “Observe developments soberly, maintain our position, meet challenges calmly, hide our capacities and bide our time, remain free of ambition, never claim leadership.” (p. 348). The contrast with bellicose US claims to global hegemony over the past 20 years could not be more marked. And while China maintained an intransigent posture in the face of any perceived threat to what it claimed as its national territory – notably Tibet and Taiwan – it generally pursued its overseas ambitions via the exercise of “soft” non-military power. For the US, on the other hand, the use of “hard” power was relatively commonplace. This won it few friends in the developing world of which China, of course, itself formed an integral and increasingly influential part. Moreover, China imposed no criteria as to the nature of governance within the developing nations to which it granted loans and other assistance, and the terms on which it offered aid tended to be easier than those of the IMF. Such an approach could only strengthen the cordiality of China’s relations with a growing number of nations in Africa and Latin America, and in East Asia itself there was a notable diminishing in both Japanese and US influence.

LARGEST ECONOMY
The power-shift between China and the US was highlighted during the current global recession which demonstrated that “China is such a huge creditor, based on its propensity to save and export, and the United States such a colossal debtor, based on its addiction to spend and import ...” (p. 359). As to the future, it has been projected that by 2030 the Chinese economy will be the largest in the world, fol-
lowed by the US, India and Japan. By 2050, the same ranking is projected but with India closing the gap with the US while Japan lags far behind (p. 366).

As is to be expected Jacques attaches important caveats as to the inevitability of China’s rise to global dominance. For the sake of stability and further growth, the structure of Chinese production must change, shifting from low-to-high tech goods, much as occurred in Japan, Taiwan and South Korea. A rising share of national output must be redirected from exports towards domestic consumption if living standards are to be increased. The State must substantially increase its social expenditure to alleviate poverty and offset growing inequalities. Increased investment in research and development must reduce Chinese dependence on foreign technological expertise. And major national and international conflicts must be avoided.

Even assuming that these and other conditions for sustainability are met, some of the projections of China’s economic future do not seem feasible. The country needs high annual growth rates if it is to create 8 million new jobs each year for its expanding urban population, plus another 15 million for its annual influx of rural migrants. In a densely populated country with scarce natural resources, it is difficult to see how this is to be squared with growing global strains upon the earth’s environment and upon its potential to supply virtually unlimited raw materials. The global resource constraint seems particularly intractable in the sphere of food production. Jacques offers little in the way of description or analysis of China’s agriculture either in the present or future but he does note the already palpable impact of natural and man-made environmental deterioration with accelerating desertification, flooding and declining agricultural yields. Nonetheless he accepts that the share of China’s rural in total population will fall from some 50 per cent to 20 per cent within the next 20 years. In the context of even modest annual rates of population growth, this implies an enormous increase in the total number of urban mouths to be fed. He predicts that if the Chinese economy continued to expand at 8 per cent a year into the future – a target, incidentally, shared by India – then by 2031 it would be likely to consume two-thirds of the current world grain harvest. Is this realistic? After all, China is not the only nation where food demand is expected to increase dramatically. According to a recent report of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN and the International Water Management Institute of the World Bank, Asia as a whole is expected to see its population grow by an extra 1.5 billion people by 2050, with a doubling of the continent’s demand for food. There will also be major increases in food demand in other important developing nations such as Brazil and Mexico. In such a context will China really be able to consume (but not produce) the bulk of global cereal production while also making major encroachments upon other world food supplies?

NEW KIND OF CAPITALISM

One can readily concur with Jacques’s prediction of China’s growing importance in international financial and other institutions and agree that the world outside China will become far more familiar than it now is with Chinese language and with its culture both ancient and modern. This writer is much less sure, however, about the significance of China’s ancient civilisation in general and of the moral precepts of Confucius in particular in explanations of China’s current growth as a global power. Jacques describes “a new kind of capitalism where the state is hyperactive and omnipresent … above all (as) the architect of an economic strategy which has driven China’s economic transformation” (p. 185). Quite so, but how convincingly can one establish compelling causal links between such modern dynamism and the 2000 years of history that have preceded it? In the 1960s, a common exercise for students of economic development in underdeveloped countries was to compare and contrast the experience of India and Japan. A cursory study of the history and culture of both nations clearly revealed why the conditions for rapid economic growth in Japan were propitious while those in India were clearly not. Yet but a few decades later, despite the potent historical and cultural “obstacles to growth” previously identified for India, it is apparently India that will accompany China as a growing economic and global power while the comparative significance of Japan diminishes.

EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

Since 1949, the Chinese Communist Party has been the “omnipresent” political organisation that controls the Chinese state. Is it not reasonable to propose that by 1978, the leadership of that party had appraised its earlier development strategies and found them demonstrably unfit to match the modernisation processes then proceeding apace in the country’s immediate Asian neighbours? Having arrived at such a conclusion, did not that same leadership then devise, develop and implement what it deemed to be the most effective strategies to both emulate and surpass them? We may accept that the nature and values of its ancient civilisation may have impinged upon the ways and means by which China sought to achieve its contemporary goals but this writer would be reluctant to attach to them any decisive causal weight.

While there may be disagreement with the emphases Jacques places upon particular historical and cultural factors, there can be none about the importance and educational value of his ambitious forays into China’s social, economic and political history, intermeshed as these are with cogent reviews of the politics and eco-
nomic of its past, present and future neighbours and rivals. Indeed, if one is to understand key features of the modern world, this is a book that must be read.

**The Miners, The Market and A Modern Clearance**

Neglect of the Scottish dimension is a major weakness of an otherwise welcome account of the 1984 miners’ strike, argues Solly Darity.

The publication of Beckett and Hencke’s readable and sympathetic account of the historic contest between Britain’s miners and the concerted forces of the state and media was timed to coincide with the strike’s 25th anniversary in 2009. But the book is more than a ritual observance of a birthday in the political calendar. It forms a useful contribution to an improved understanding of the reasons why the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) along with Britain’s labour movement was dislodged from its position of national influence and consigned to political irrelevance.

The book also seeks to shed light on the crisis of UK social democracy and how the miners’ comprehensive defeat marked the major line of division between the world made by Clement Attlee and that of Margaret Thatcher. In doing so it identifies the main factors that conspired in the collapse of the strike in March 1985. These were the deep divisions between striking and working miners and the related issue that bedevilled the strike from beginning to end, the failure to hold a national ballot. Combined with media manipulation of bloody confrontations between mass pickets and police these factors were enough to ensure that the greater part of the British public never identified with the miners’ cause.

To these factors we must add the disastrous inadequacies of Arthur Scargill’s version of “class politics” which meant that the 12-month long strike was never conducted or brought to a timely end by a detailed, explicit strategy. Nor was much attention devoted at national level (Scotland provided a major exception to this) to influencing public opinion. Instead the NUM leadership put its money on mass picketing (often in a counter-productive bid to coerce working miners) and its power to inflict hurt in an inversion of the old Chartist slogan, “By moral force if we may. By physical force if we must.” Such tactics proved overly symmetrical and were successfully countered by superior force in the shape of mass policing.

In stark contrast to this was the detailed strategy “for endurance” formulated in the shadowy Cabinet committee MISC 57 and in preparation since 1981 when, in contrast to Arthur, the government had had the good sense to retreat.

Our authors also lay claim to originality in that “Much of what is in this book has never before been made public.”

The most hotly disputed of their revelations is that, known only to Norman Willis and John Monks at the TUC and Margaret at No 10, Bill Keys, the respected leader of the print workers and member of the TUC’s General Council, was working behind the scenes with the government’s Lord Whitelaw and the NUM’s communist Vice-President Michael McGahey, to devise a compromise formula that might end the strike with a measure of honour on both sides.

It might be as well at this point to clear the waters muddied by Arthur Scargill in a querulous letter to the Guardian (1.3.09) in which he demanded to be told the time and place of a non-existent meeting. Beckett and Hencke could not be more clear on that score: no meeting ever took place between McGahey and Whitelaw.

**Clackmannan, May 2009**

All of these issues were aired at a meeting convened by Perspectives in May 2009 (CM 2009). To your reviewer’s knowledge, all those present were communists who were involved in the strike in one form or another. None of the activists present, including George Bolton, Vice-President of the Scottish miners at the time of the strike and close confidant and friend of McGahey, lent much credence to Beckett and Hencke’s claims (based on Bill Keys’s diary of the strike). However, the contents of the diary have the imprimatur of John Monks, Willis’s successor at the TUC. More to the point, circumventing Scargill’s impossibilist intransigence in a bid to end the increasingly pointless suffering in the coalfields called for desperate, unorthodox and...
secret measures. That George Bolton got no wind of the conspiracy is typical of the self-denying discipline of McGahey’s generation of communists and it seems (to your reviewer at least) entirely to McGahey’s credit that he was willing to take risks with his reputation for plain-dealing.

The conspiracy foundered on the rocks of Scargillism.

**COMMUNISTS AND THE LEFT**

In a recent article in the *London Review of Books* (8.10.09), Tom Nairn makes the startling claim that British communists opposed the strike. This claim is in need of some nuance, to say the least.

From the start leading communists, some of them miners, had serious misgivings as to the wisdom of the strike, misgivings that were shared on the left. Their misgivings later extended to the manner in which the strike was conducted. It is not with the wisdom of hindsight that the Fife pit delegate, Willie Clarke, (CM 2009) bemoaned the absence of a strategy and thought mass picketing no substitute for democratic decisions taken at mass meetings of miners. And Jackie Allan (CM 2009) spoke for others present when he regretted the failure to hold a national ballot.

The very wisdom of the strike was questioned as the threat to Cortonwood (March 1984) which sparked off the strike had all the marks of a Coal Board provocation designed to influence the timing of the strike. To respond to the provocation with a national strike at a time of high coal stocks with six months at least of milder weather ahead seemed an act of unwisdom to many on the left including communists. On the other hand, ten years on Alex Maxwell, in his *Chicago Tumbles* (1994), is in no doubt that the miners were left with no choice but to pick up the Coal Board’s gauntlet.

Doubts were further reinforced by worsening economic conditions and the emergence of a radical right Tory leadership very different from the one-nation Heathite version of the heady days of the 1972 and 1974 strikes.

None of this seemed to faze the extra-terrestrial Scargill and his unheeding voluntarism. His sense of history was a self-serving and hagiographic one (Beckett and Hencke make no bones about this) and he seemed intent on repeating it with an action replay of his starring role at Saltley Gates (1972) when mass picketing (and solidarity action) had seemed to win the day.

Lest we be accused of exaggerating the role of any particular individual, it ought to be stressed that “Scargillism” was very far from being an isolated or unrepresentative phenomenon. His highly developed class-consciousness (“a good chest protector but a poor bicycle” as Joyce Cary has Gulley Jinson comment in another connection) resonated throughout the coalfields, not least in his native Yorkshire. There an idolatrous personality cult flourished (“Arthur walks on water,” they said). When allied to an astonishing fighting spirit and the well-founded belief that they were defending the very existence of their communities a highly potent brew resulted which Scargill was able to enlist behind his banner.

Its strengths and its weaknesses were never better illustrated than at the Battle of Orgreave (April to June 1984).

**ORGREAVE**

As the Coal Board supremo, Ian MacGregor, makes plain in his ghosted memoir, Orgreave was both a lure and a carefully prepared trap. Clear in his mind that Nottinghamshire held the key to victory, he chose Orgreave to distract the attention of Scargill and his myrmidons away from the area to Orgreave, a very different setting from the urban Saltley gates. Its open terrain might have been made for mass policing and rampaging mounted policemen with breaking bones and bleeding heads in mind. What ensued was a series of set-piece skirmishes whose deliberate aim was to inflict crushing defeat and it worked a treat. The limitations of mass picketing were exposed and the miners had the stuffing knocked out of them. They were never quite the same again.

**SOLIDARITY**

Despite their misgivings Britain’s communists threw themselves into the heart of the fray with an elan that gives the lie to Tom Nairn’s claim that they opposed the strike. Nor does the trades union movement as a whole merit the accusations of betrayal levelled at it by the ultramontane SWP (their favourite word was “if”) and Scargill. With a rank and file “impressed” by the lack of sacrifice of half the NUM’s membership and the absence of a ballot, trades union leaders faced an uphill struggle in persuading them to identify with the striking miners. The secular economic downturn (predicted by Eric Hobsbawm in his 1968 *Industry and Empire*), resultant unfavourable labour market conditions and prowling sequestrators acted as further deterrents.

In the circumstances the assistance given to the NUM was credible, a notable example in Scotland being John Walker of the railwaymen. Scottish miners never had a more loyal friend, John Kay has reported in a conversation. But also worthy of inclusion in any roll of honour is the Wildcat theatre group whose *Dead Liberty*, written by Dave Anderson and David Maclemen, toured Scotland for weeks raising money, morale and public awareness, a “unique contribution” according to Alex Maxwell (CT 1994).

Millions of pounds in cash and groceries poured in from all over the world. In Britain Bill Keys’s SOGAT was notably generous and hundreds of thousands pounds were secretly loaned by Ken Cameron of the firemen and Rodney Bickerstaffe of the public services union. In the presence of the unsleeping sequestrator, strict financial propriety was not the order of the day.
WOMEN AGAINST PIT CLOSURES

An exception to “Scargillism” was the innovative Women Against Pit Closures; it awaits its Scottish historian though Alex Maxwell has made a splendid start in his report from one of Scotland’s “Little Moscows” in West Fife (CT 1994). There is no sign in their bibliography that Beckett and Hencke have consulted the book. Unsurprisingly their claim that the movement originated in Yorkshire does not match the Scottish experience. Nor does their account capture the sheer panache of a movement unimpeded by “Scargill’s law”, whose writ did not run in Scotland.

Their contribution extended far beyond the customary “private sphere”. Not only did they create and run soup kitchens but they raised food and cash donations, they spoke at meetings, held their own meetings, they shared the rigours of the picket line and the none too gentle treatment of the police. They were even known to coerce reluctant pickets (“nae picketin’, nae food”) though whether they followed the example of Aristophanes’s Lysistrata is naturally unrecorded.

Had the Scottish women’s example been followed more widely, their rather different style of approach might have been decisive in winning over the third or so (according to one poll) of the public who remained undecided about the strike.

But it has to be stressed that any limitations imposed on their activities cannot be explained by Scargillite control freakery. Those in attendance at the Clackmannan meeting reported rumblings of dissent from the Miners Welfares of this overwhelmingly male and masculinist occupation.

Can Women Against Pit Closures claim any part in the astonishing and unique feature of the strike in Fife that 90% of Fife’s miners remained on strike to the end? To my knowledge the matter has still to be investigated. Was Women Against Pit Closures in any sense a by-product of the feminist revolution? Alex Maxwell’s answer to this question, which unlike Beckett and Hencke he at least raises, is an emphatic no. Your reviewer suspects the matter would bear further investigation.

CONCLUSION: THE WORLD WE HAVE LOST

Its neglect of the Scottish dimension is a major weakness of Beckett and Hencke’s otherwise useful account of the great strike. It is little consolation that the Scots have come to expect this from one-eyed southerners. Nor is it very helpful in getting us “inside the head” of the miner, his way of life and distinctive ethos. On both counts Alex Maxwell is their superior, in the latter respect with the aid of Jayne Petney (14) from Notts who wrote:

Here lies the body of Billy Dab
Pitty it was, he was a Scab
The pickets stood and called his name
And finally he died of shame.

Miners and their families could conceive of no lower form of life than the scab. Yet Jackie Allan (CM 2009), with a grace in defeat unmatched by Ian MacGregor in victory, declined to apply this badge of shame to those few miners trickling back to work from November 1985. “They had been magnificent,” he said.

On reflection, it may be that the miners would have required some deus ex machina to rescue it from tragedy. Or at the very least an exit strategy designed to avoid a rout. Incredibly, Arthur Scargill abstained on the vote whether or not to return to work. The South Wales leader, Emlyn Williams, called him a coward to his face.

Their trade union in ruins, miners ended the strike in March 1985. They returned to regimes of pitless victimisation and quasi-totalitarian conditions of employment, their portion in MacGregor’s chilling words “for their insurrectionary insubordination.” Within a few years their communities had been reduced to workless deserts.

It is time to view the fate of the miners in a more long-term perspective. It occurs to your reviewer that their fate deserves to be added to the list of uncaring social extinctions that litter the history of British capitalism. It was nothing less than a clearance that should added to the list that begins in the highlands of Scotland, extends to the clearance of the Scottish and English victims of enclosure and the erasure of the hand-loom weaver. Those with a longer historical range may wish to extend the list of holocausts to the New World.

Underlying the surface of the great strike was a powerful ideological sub-text of resistance to the application of market principles without regard to their social consequences or, to put it another way, it implied a defence of the moral economy against the amoral logic of the dismal science. These twin principles were among the casualties of the miners’ defeat. With the removal of these roadblocks the way was eased for the triumph of the neo-liberal theolo- gy of business supremacism.

Inevitably any conclusion to this review must strike an elegiac note for the world we have lost. And here I have in mind not only the miners’ brass, silver and pipe bands, their gala days and, in Scotland, their love of Burns. These village-dwelling proletarians added qualities to British society which will not be easily replaced: a ferocious solidarity bred of shared hardship and danger and a sense of mutual reliance that together won them a place of affection and respect in the hearts of the British people.

They were the bravest of the brave and we will not see their like again.

Solly Darity is a member of the Democratic Left Scotland. He would like to acknowledge a debt to those who attended the Clackmannan meeting: Jackie Allan, Mary Maxwell, Barbara Bolton, John Kay, Willie Clarke, Alex Maxwell and George Bolton. Solly takes full responsibility for the views expressed here and any errors of fact.
DIARY

In which Zoë Strachan dons The Hat and reflects on the hazards of being a writer and homecoming.

The worst thing that can happen to me as a writer is that I get a bad review. I might take to the bottle – hell, I might even take to my bed – but, the next day, I’ll be back in my little cupboard office, fizzy vitamin C drink by my side, rolling up my sleeves and trying to write something else, something better. Many authors are familiar with the hangover; I know some who are extremely badly-behaved. I also know some whose work is, quite frankly, criminal. But each and every one of them is flexing their human right to freedom of opinion and expression, their right to “to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers” (Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights). In our line of business we can’t afford to get complacent about freedom of expression in this country, but very often I feel lucky. Over the past year, thirty five print and online journalists have been murdered elsewhere in the world because of their work. PEN, the international organisation of writers, monitors around 1000 cases per year of attacks on writers, journalists and publishers. Of these around 200 are in prison, some serving sentences of over twenty years. I’ve been involved with Scottish PEN since my first novel was published in 2002. This year marks the 50th anniversary of our Writers in Prison Committee. We aren’t exactly celebrating, but we will be redoubling our efforts to defend freedom of expression and campaign on behalf of our colleagues for whom the simple act of writing or printing a diary column such as this one can result in imprisonment, exile, or worse. On a cheerier note, another part of PEN’s work is to promote literature across frontiers. To mark the Year of Homecoming, Scottish PEN released a CD featuring readings by a selection of Scottish writers, as well as a previously unpublished short story by the vice-president of International PEN, Margaret Atwood. As 2009 seemed to bring a kind of psychological homecoming for me I wrote this piece, which appears here in print for the first time, under the cosy auspices of The Hat.

Coming home

A treasure hunt one rainy Glasgow afternoon throws up souvenirs, each one small enough to clasp in the palm of my hand: a reader’s ticket for the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, now expired; a small wooden Fernsehturm that buckles when you press its base; a Freifahrkarte for Nuremberg, no longer valid for travel; a chubby leg, the Bamberg Beinchen, cast in solid silver. A Valentine’s minding, a lucky charm, I rub it with my thumb until the tarnish disappears, tickle its smooth sole with my middle finger as if it will conjure up memory. The clouds shift and sunshine showers our windowboxes, where spring flowers bob in the breeze, blue and yellow and red. The Pfahlplatz was decorated for Easter when we arrived in Bamberg, with pots of daffs by the benches and bright plastic eggs strung between the trio of well-behaved rowans. Three years ago to the day, though it feels longer. And then a year later – two years ago now – we ploughed through blizzards in a hired van, until at midnight we reached the graffiti spattered doorway of the only shabby building in a primped and painted street. Another Easter, and the windows of the ground floor flat were decked out with bunnies in straw hats and garlanded chicks. Our footsteps boomed as we climbed the wooden stairs to our new home, two more ausländers arriving in time for summer in the city that’s arm, aber sexy, Poor, but sexy, according to the mayor. Something the Lord Provost has never, to my knowledge, said about Glasgow. When we left Germany we didn’t bring much back, or so it seems as I tack my dog-eared travel pass onto the pinboard by my desk. Both it and the library card state that they are nicht übertragbar, non-transferable. That’s the worry, sometimes: that when you leave a place you leave parts of yourself as well. But perhaps these remnants and traces are what we reach towards, when we close our eyes and remember. It’s five pm and the thunder breeze is tingling the leaves of the trees outside the Sophienkirche. Clever whirligigs tumble and dance from the branches of the lime. So hot that we write in our vests and pants and splay our bare, blistered feet out on the floorboards, toes questing for cool. Across the street a boy pulls back his curtains, opens the window and sticks his hand out to test the temperature. Not convinced, he withdraws, waits. The man with the barrel organ trundles along, cranking up to his turn outside the cafés where preppy Americans stroke their
platinum cards and ponder the value of art.

It’ll go with your sofa, one says.

Yeah, but if it’s more than a few hundred dollars to ship it isn’t worth it, his friend replies.

Gallerists smoke in doorways, their fingers crossed, trying to ignore the reek that creeps from the drains. Scotties and Dachshunds strain at the lead while lapdogs cower and insist on a carry.

The air pressure keeps building and the woman through the wall plays Rufus Wainwright loud and on repeat, as if willing the weather to break.

Skinny girls weighted down by huge handbags and oversized shades clip clop a little faster. Their heels skite on the brass Stolpersteine which glow a low mantra amid the grey cobbles – ermordert Riga – but they don’t stumble and then stoop to read the names of the dead. Most of the bullet holes in the buildings have been rendered over, and this season Hugo Boss isn’t doing uniforms.

Trying to catch the through draught we converge in the kitchen, spend a moment listening to the conversation we ignore the reek that creeps from the drains. Scotties and Dachshunds strain at the lead while lapdogs cower and insist on a carry.

The sky goes dark and the choir in the Kirche begins its teatime drift and distort in the wind. Leaves and twigs join the seeding whirligigs and a pot smashes off a sill.

Bicycle wheels whirr and the grille slams over the front of the baker’s, ready to tempt spray cans and stencils. Below us Frau Blumenschein snaps her windows closed just as the first fat drops of rain cut through the layers of dust on the road.

Poor, but sexy, according to the mayor.

Something the Lord Provost has never, to my knowledge, said about Glasgow.

Pigeons hunch on lintels and soon the squeals of passers-by match the size of the hailstones. Trolleycases slpouch through swirling puddles, wheels rattling to keep up with their drenched masters.

Auf geht’s!

Scheisse!

Macht schon!

Lightning glazes the sky and the thunder cracks as if it’s heralding the apocalypse. Taller than the trees, higher than the houses, elegantly dwarfing the Siegesaule and the Deutsche Bahn tower, the Fernsehturm blinks steadily in the gloom.

In twenty minutes it’s over. The rain slows to a drip, and the sky relaxes. The drains and the dog shit have cleared. It’s Wednesday, after all, the weekend starts here. People slip on their flipflops and slide into pavement bars and beer bars, squat bars and cocktail bars, letting a late burst of sunshine lead them to somewhere to drink and laugh and talk about the future as history forms eddies in the gutters around them.

Coming home is a slow process. Not the journey itself – the world gets smaller every day – but the calculation of what is transferable und was ist nicht. I could taste my accent returning, aye, reach family and friends and try to inhabit the city like we inhabited Berlin, but still it felt like coming back. Even now I catch myself tracing mundane routes on Google Earth: to the baker’s, the discount supermarket, the post office. Following walks through parks and up hills, along rivers, to churches and galleries. I’ve sat with the U-Bahn map in front of me, planning the changes required to visit friends who’ve now moved on as well. I lived in Germany, I tell people sometimes, if the subject comes up. For a while.

It wasn’t until my first trip back to Bamberg that I remembered how much I’d missed the sea. We went back as tourists, allowed ourselves one stroll past the graffitied doorway that used to mean we’d reached home, one glass of wine in our favourite local over which to conspire about the future.

I’ve waited until now for the corda, departure and arrival both at once. It’s Easter again, 2009, and cunning marram grass whips our ankles and wrists as we slither down hollows in the dunes to the wide empty beach. Razor clam shells are scattered on the sand and a joyful wind howls in from the Minch and beyond. Barnacle clad rocks coax us to climb, revealing tender crevices ripe with sea anemones and clamours of mussels. Clouds glow over the mountains behind us as we walk to the shifting spume where the shore meets the sea. Our ears are numb but we take off our shoes and socks and paddle in the icy salt water. Still barefoot, toes pressing into the moist silver sand, we hunker down to pick up smooth pebbles, shells, a whorl of driftwood. Souvenirs of home.

Zoë Strachan lives in Glasgow. Her first novel, Negative Space, was published in 2002 and was followed by Spin Cycle in 2004. She is currently working on a third novel, Play Dead. She has also published various short stories in magazines and anthologies, articles and reviews in newspapers, and written for BBC Radio 4.

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