TWO CHEERS FOR AV

REFERENDUM – UK PARLIAMENT VOTING SYSTEM

Place in order of preference (1, 2, 3 etc) your choice of voting system for elections to the UK Parliament.

| ALTERNATIVE VOTE | 2 |
| FIRST PAST THE POST | 3 |
| PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION | 1 |

... well it’s better than the way we elect the UK Parliament at the moment!

PLUS REVIEWS AND THE LAND LAY STILL
THE MODERN SNP: FROM PROTEST TO POWER NEOLIBERAL SCOTLAND: CLASS AND SOCIETY IN A STATELESS NATION
EDITORIAL

FROM AV TO AYE WRITE!

One of the concessions the Liberal Democrats got from the Conservatives as part of the agreement to form a coalition government was a referendum to change the voting system for Westminster elections. However, the option for change will not include proportional representation (PR), the Lib Dems’ preferred method. Instead we will, depending on how the skirmishing between the House of Lords and the government develops, be offered the option of replacing the current first-past-the-post (FPTP) system with the alternative vote (AV). AV is better than FPTP, and should be supported, but falls far short of PR. To complicate the matter further there are other strings attached. All is explained on page 5.

Since the days of Thatcherism and the rise of neo-liberalism, the left in Scotland, Britain and indeed much of Europe has lost its balance. The question of how to arrest this decline in fortunes is controversial and reflected in contributions by Gerry Hassan, who believes that we need to move beyond the historical categories of left and right, and Doug Bain, who argues for the continuing relevance of left-wing thought and activity, and against notions of there being a “third way”.

The theme of neo-liberalism and the left response is also taken up by a new book, NeoLiberal Scotland, reviewed on page 22.

Continuing the look at books we have a historian’s view of James Robertson’s acclaimed And the Land Lay Still, and a review of a collection charting the SNP’s rise to power.

Aye Write!, running from 4th to 12th March, is Glasgow’s book festival, now in its sixth year. Democratic Left Scotland, with the invaluable assistance of Scottish Left Review and political commentator and writer, Gerry Hassan, has become an Event Partner, and has organised as a strand within the festival a series of discussions on the theme of Reimagining Scotland. Details of these events, how to get tickets and full information on the festival are on page 4 of this issue.

To coincide with Aye Write!, which includes a 30th anniversary exhibition dedicated to the publication of Alasdair Gray’s Lanark, the next issue of Perspectives will be published at the beginning of March. It will include material of relevance to the book festival and also the launch of a new series of six articles by writer and broadcaster Lesley Riddoch, on the people, places and politics of Scotland.

To ensure you get your copy of Perspectives, why not take out a subscription? See the back cover of this issue for details.

And, if you are within striking distance of Glasgow, why not join us at some of the Aye Write! events?

Sean Feeny
Editor

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I’m writing this immediately after the Westminster parliamentary vote on raising tuition fees in England, and the media coverage of the “violence”. I wasn’t in London for the protest (I was at the Edinburgh protest – no violence so very little media interest) so I only have the media to go on, but it is clear that coverage and comment is in danger of losing any sense of proportion.

Actually there seemed to be very little violence at the student demonstrations. There was some damage of property, some smashed windows at the treasury (a legitimate target by anybody’s calculus) and an attack on a royal car (opportunistic, and although not relevant to the student fees debate, at least a legitimate target in terms of gaining publicity). There were a fair number of protestors who were spoiling for a fight with police, and a lot of police inflaming the situation with their kettlings and cordons directly confronting marchers and using batons and horses as weapons, largely against sticks and paint bombs. There was one serious injury of a protestor, caused by a violent attack by police.

Violence is of course a traditional part of demonstrations – regrettable, but almost inevitable. A confrontation at this level will attract people on both sides who are looking for a fight. Despite violence being almost predictable, the media treat it as newsworthy so that violence guarantees news coverage where a peaceful demonstration usually gets none. The paint bomb attack on the car of Prince Charles and Camilla, who have nothing to do with vote on tuition fees and were merely going about their normal business of decadence at taxpayers’ expense, ensured that publicity reached the front page of most newspapers. The Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Paul Stephenson said armed police had shown “enormous restraint”, presumably because they didn’t gun down unarmed protestors.

The Metropolitan Police are clearly out of control and their political masters have lost any sense of their purpose. The point of police on demonstrations is to protect the right of citizens to protest. There is always a minority of people who attend protests in order to fight the police, so the job of the police should be to defuse the violence, not inflame it. There’s nothing professional about hitting out with a truncheon – most young men can do that without training. We should expect more from a trained, accountable and professional police force. To tackle undisciplined outbreaks of window smashing with systematic thuggery simply recruits more people to the ranks of those looking for a fight with the police. The next time the violent contingent on the demonstrators’ side will probably be better armed, and even worse, there may be many people put off from demonstrating.

Now that Cameron and Clegg have got into their stride of inflicting violence on the country surpassing what Thatcher achieved, I’ve been wondering what it would have taken for people of my generation to stop Thatcher in her tracks. Not more violence. There was plenty of fighting and police malpractice then, whether in the black youth ghettos of London or the coalfields throughout the country – although eventually “riots” did finish off the poll tax. Even the IRA bomb in Brighton didn’t succeed. Violence gets publicity but is unlikely to get results. But Cameron and Clegg need to be stopped before they do too much more damage. As Sir Hugh Orde, President of the Association of Chief Police Officers (not a known radical) has noted, just like in Thatcher’s time, we’re already seeing a politicisation of the police with the force being used to facilitate the imposition of government policy against those who will suffer from it.

The outcome of the climate talks in Cancun is disastrous again, just like Copenhagen. Unlike Copenhagen, which ended with no agreement, Cancun has ended with an agreement that greenhouse gases need to be reduced, but not by whom, by how much or when. The decision to transfer money to the global South to deal with the climate disaster which we seem to be unable to stop, is as likely to be fulfilled as the Global Climate Fund established with Kyoto, or the Global Environmental Fund set up at the Earth Summit in 1992 – none of which reached anywhere near their original targets. There is still no recognition that we – the rich countries – have already used up more than our share of the atmosphere. On the contrary, capitalists can keep making money from a wrecked climate, and it is the poor who will be the victims.

But one interesting development is that the talks were attended by the Jewish National Fund which is increasingly portraying itself in an environmental frame. Until very recently I knew nothing about the JNF and could have been fooled into believing that they were a legitimate environmental NGO. Having recently been to Palestine however and been well briefed by the Palestine...
Solidarity Campaign among others, the environmentalism of the JNF looks considerably more sinister. For readers who don’t know, the JNF is a Zionist organisation which, for 100 years has been acquiring land from which Palestinians have been driven out (militarily or by legal trickery), and making it available only to Jews. Since well before the state of Israel was established, the JNF has played a significant role in the colonial project of ethnic cleansing. Its environmental interest seems to have come from the fact that it has planted trees over the top of a number of destroyed Palestinian villages and turned them into nature parks – and of course as a veil to draw over its crimes. An alliance of Palestinian solidarity groups have launched a campaign against the JNF in the UK. See www.monabaker.com/documents/JNFeBookVol1ed2x.pdf.

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

**RE-IMAGINING SCOTLAND**

A series of discussions looking at issues and debates for Scotland’s future

Monday March 7 / 18.00-19.15 / £4

**Where is the Public in Public Health?**

Glasgow has the record as ‘the sick man of Europe’, but has a reputation for innovative thinking about public health alongside community-driven models for change. What is the overall picture of public health in the city, and how can we best aid and support long lasting and fundamental change both in individual attitudes and at the level of society? Speakers are: Professor Phil Hanlon, Dept of Public Health, University of Glasgow; Fiona Crawford, Glasgow Centre for Population Health; Dr Gerry McCartney, NHS Health Scotland; Isabella Goldie, Mental Health Foundation Scotland.

Tuesday March 8 / 18.00–19.15 / £4

**Radical Scotland No More: Beyond the Politics of Caution**

Devolution has been a disappointment to many – characterised by caution, conservatism and continuity. Join this high profile panel discussion to discuss and debate not what went wrong, but how a radical Scottish politics can address issues of power, voices and public conversation? Speakers include Gerry Hassan, writer and broadcaster; Andy Wightman, author, The Poor Had No Lawyers; Joan McAlpine, journalist and Scotsman columnist.

Wednesday March 9 / 18.00–19.15 / £4

**Bread and Roses**

What is the state of the arts and culture in Scotland today? Is it still relevant or meaningful to talk of an artistic renaissance, and if so, what does it mean culturally and politically? And what does it mean to be an artist in contemporary Scotland? How does one find ways, spaces and places to express oneself and gain support? Speakers include Neil Mulholland, Edinburgh College of Art; Nick Higgins, film maker; Sarah Munro, Tramway.

Thursday March 10 / 18.00–19.15 / £4

**False Economies: Restoration and Recovery**

What is the future of the economy in Scotland and wider afield? After the global crash and bankers’ crisis, what are the potential prospects for the economy? Do we still remain wedded to a politics of restoration and prioritising economic growth? And if we increasingly question the conventional truths of the last few decades, why is there no real sign or emergence of any coherent and radical alternative? Speakers include Alf Young, journalist and commentator; David Purdy, co-author; Feelbad Britain; Alisa McKay, Glasgow Caledonian University.

Friday March 11 / 18.00–19.15

**Whose Public Services?**

The public sector faces challenges and constraints unprecedented in modern times. What is the best way to respond – which protects the public and is in keeping with progressive values? How will the cuts impact on Scotland? How can the dominant model of public sector reform and modernisation – which is top down and centred on marketisation be challenged? Speakers include Professor Allyson Pollock, Edinburgh University Centre for International Public Health Policy and John McLaren, Centre for Public Policy for Regions, Glasgow University.

Saturday March 12 / 19.00–21.00 / £8/£6

**Jimmy Reid Tribute**

Jimmy Reid’s death in 2010 brought to an end a remarkable political life. His work for Glasgow and Scotland was remarkable as was his ability to move a crowd to tears and action. His famous alienation speech was rightly regarded as on a par with the Gettysburg address by the New York Times. Aye Write! pays tribute to Jimmy Reid with the reading of his classic speech by David Hayman. Then a panel, made up of Ruth Wishart, Professor Tom Devine, Gerry Hassan and others will discuss his work and impact the future of Scotland.

**Re-imagining Scotland** is a strand within this year’s Aye Write! Glasgow Book Festival, from 4–12 March 2011, organised by Glasgow Libraries. Democratic Left Scotland is an event partner. All events are held at the Mitchell Library, 201 North Street, Glasgow G3 7DN.

The full programme is available online at www.ayewrite.com, where tickets can be booked, or alternatively phone the booking hotline on 0141 353 8000.

Democratic Left Scotland
na Deamhartaich Chli an Alba
TWO CHEERS FOR AV

Stuart Fairweather, Peter McColl and David Purdy examine the merits of the coalition’s proposal for a change to the voting system for the Westminster Parliament.

In May Britain is almost certain to hold a referendum on the alternative vote (AV). No one loves AV. The Lib-Dems see it as a poor substitute for proportional representation. They prefer it to first past the post, but their hearts are not in it. At the last election, Labour promised a referendum on AV, hoping to do a deal with the Lib-Dems in the event of a hung parliament, but now they too have gone off the idea. Meanwhile, the Conservatives, who only conceded the referendum as the price for getting the Lib-Dems to join the coalition, are overwhelmingly hostile to AV and will campaign actively for a no vote.

Under the coalition agreement, the bill authorising a referendum on AV has been bundled together with Conservative-inspired proposals to reduce the size of the House of Commons from 650 to 600 and, except in Orkney and Shetland and the Western Isles, to redraw electoral boundaries. It is intended that by the time of the next general election, no constituency shall be more than five per cent larger or smaller than a norm of 76,000 voters. The coalition claims that what would amount to the biggest boundary review since the 1920s is necessary to correct the pro-Labour bias that has crept into the existing system owing to population movements. However, the proposed timetable means that the review will be based on the 2010 electoral register and the Electoral Commission estimates that across the UK as a whole there is a lost army of about 3.5 million people, mainly poor, who are entitled to vote, but are unregistered. More than half of 18-24 year olds are unregistered and the overall problem is greatest in inner city areas, which tend to vote Labour. In Glasgow, for example, some 100,000 voters are thought to be missing from the register, more than enough to justify retaining the city’s six seats rather than taking one away.

The case against partisan haste in redrawing the UK’s electoral map is sound, but it has no bearing on the case for AV. On the other hand, if AV is lost and the next election is fought under first past the post with fewer constituencies and revised boundaries, the legitimacy of our political system will be further damaged. Some Labour MPs fear that if AV is approved, it will strengthen the coalition and consign them to another term in opposition. A group of the party’s “big beasts”, consisting of Margaret Beckett and Lords Blunkett, Falconer, Prescott and Reid, have agreed to front the no campaign, alongside leading Tories such as Kenneth Clarke, William Hague and Lady Warsi. The Labour leadership, like the Lib-Dems, would prefer a yes to a no, but has indicated that the referendum is not a priority and that the party plans to concentrate on defeating the SNP in Scotland, strengthening Labour’s base in Wales and regaining seats in the English councils.

So at the moment, a no vote looks the most probable outcome. The turnout is likely to be low too. But defeat is not inevitable. Most people have not yet thought about the issue and public opinion is split rather than opposed. In August a Guardian/ICM poll found 45% would vote yes and 45% no. Public

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**REFERENDUM – UK PARLIAMENT VOTING SYSTEM**

Place in order of preference (1, 2, 3 etc) your choice of voting system for elections to the UK Parliament.

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Across the UK as a whole there is a lost army of about 3.5 million people, mainly poor, who are entitled to vote, but are unregistered.

Above: the referendum ballot paper we won’t be getting.
backing for AV has slipped since then, but if AV’s supporters make more of an effort, the battle can still be won.

THE CASE FOR AV
Why campaign for a second-best voting system? Because the first-best option is not available: the choice lies between AV and first-past-the-post. Would AV be an improvement? Certainly. AV retains single-member constituencies, but allows voters to rank candidates in order of preference. This gives people a chance to vote for the party that best represents their views, yet still have a say in deciding who gets elected. Under first past the post, supporters of parties that stand no chance of winning have to choose between wasting their vote, voting tactically and not voting at all.

AV requires every MP to win the support of at least half their constituents. Few MPs pass this test now and fewer still would win a majority of first-preference votes under AV. Parties would thus be forced to compete actively for second-preference votes, bringing a welcome revival of local campaigning. At the moment, general elections are fought largely on the airwaves, with the two big parties using hi-tech polling techniques, telephone canvassing and e-mail shots to target swing voters in marginal seats. The number of seats where the winner’s lead is less than ten per cent of the vote cast for the two front runners fell from around 160 in the 1950s and 1960s – a quarter of all seats in Great Britain – to 80 in 1983. Thereafter, there was a limited recovery, but in May this year the number fell back to 85.

The reason for this change is that compared with the 1950s, Labour’s vote is now much more concentrated in the northern half of the country, while the Conservatives have become a party of the south. The divergent swing to Labour in Scotland in May was only the latest manifestation of a long-term trend. And as Britain has pulled apart politically, so the number of constituencies where both Labour and the Conservatives do well has fallen. As a result, voters who live in safe seats – most of the electorate – rarely encounter political parties. Under AV provided they raise their local game, the two big parties stand to win seats in regions where they are currently under-represented – the Conservatives in Scotland, Labour in the south of England – while the Lib-Dems stand to win more seats overall, reducing the handicap they suffer under first past the post because, by comparison with the other two, their support is spread more evenly throughout the country.

AV is better suited to a democracy that is no longer dominated by two big parties. In 1951, only 3% of votes were cast for parties other than Labour and Conservative; in 2010, the figure was 35%, the highest since 1918. So first past the post no longer guarantees a two-horse race. It is also less effective at preventing third parties from converting votes into seats. In 1983, for example, the Liberal-SDP Alliance won 25% of the vote, but only 23 seats, whereas in 2010, the Lib-Dems won 23% of the votes, but 57 seats. This weakens one of the main arguments for first past the post: that it produces conclusive election results and stable, one-party governments. At the last election, the Conservative lead over Labour was 7 percentage points, exactly the same as in 1979. But whereas Mrs Thatcher won an overall majority of 44 seats, David Cameron fell 20 seats short, forcing him to choose between forming a minority government and doing a deal with the Lib-Dems.

PARTIAL REMEDY
For all these reasons – because it gives voters more choice, revitalises local campaigning and is more in tune with long-term electoral trends – AV offers at least a partial remedy for the ills that have overtaken our democracy under first past the post: public distrust of politicians, cynicism about politics, declining electoral turnout and a belief that government is the cause not the solution to the country’s problems: in short, a festering crisis of legitimacy. Barely coherent, but deeply felt antipathy to the tax-and-spend state aids the coalition in its drive to cut public spending, privatise public services and reduce social security to a safety net. Perverse as it may seem, Labour’s willingness to embrace deficit financing in order to counter recession and hasten recovery is widely blamed for the financial “disaster” that the coalition is now engaged in clearing up. As long as this view prevails, the new Labour leadership will struggle to put the New Labour era firmly behind it and to convince first itself and then the general public that we need a strong state to regulate markets, stabilise capitalism and protect society.

Though it has its drawbacks – what voting system does not? – AV is better than the system we have. And quite apart from its impact on the next general election, a victory for the yes campaign would bring immediate political gains. It would give a boost to the centre-left and get the Herculean task of repairing Britain’s democracy and restoring faith in government off to a good start, making it easier to challenge fiscal conservatism and put the case for recasting the welfare state rather than dismantling it. The “centre-left”, it should be stressed, extends well beyond the Labour Party, encompassing greens, Scottish and Welsh nationalists, dissident Liberal Democrats, social democrats and all who are happy to be known as the democratic left. Is it too much to hope that the experience of working together in the AV campaign might suggest the wisdom of joining forces on other fronts, where common goals can be agreed?

In 1951, only 3% of votes were cast for parties other than Labour and Conservative; in 2010, the figure was 35%, the highest since 1918.

This article is the product of a discussion between Stuart Fairweather, Peter McColl and David Purdy, who are all members of Democratic Left Scotland’s national council.
THE AGE OF RADICALISM AFTER “THE LEFT”

Scotland sees itself as a centre-left country. We haven’t voted for the Tories since the 1950s, didn’t like Mrs Thatcher and her ism, and are supposedly more comfortable with collectivism than individualism.

The Scottish left has a rich and proud history – standing against exploitation and discrimination, for social justice and democracy, and filled with struggles, battles and personalities. There have been negatives: the lack of original thinkers and ideas, alongside a profound insularity and conservatism (for all the professed internationalism).

Such negatives are often put down to the dominance of the Labour Party and a certain kind of labourism, but the wider trade union movement and numerous other centre-left institutions and parties have shown similar characteristics.

The only real exception to this was the Independent Labour Party which until the 1930s was a hot-house of ideas and activities – political and social. And the Communist Party at points provided political education and an emphasis on building broad campaigns which Labour didn’t. Both of these groups were small in number – but given the inert state of Labour for much of its history, had influence way beyond their size.

LACK OF EMPATHY

The left, whether in Scotland or the UK, has over time shown little real interest or understanding of how it appears outside the left. This is because left-wingers have always felt that their rationale and logic was so strong that no one who was open minded could resist. The left has always historically had a sense of denial and lack of empathy about how it is seen by the majority of humanity, who rightly or wrongly, remain immune to its charms.

The left saw the world in binary terms – “left” and “right”, “progressive” and “conservative”, “them” and “us”. This was a world shaped by deep class divisions, but in its retort, “which side are you on?”, there was impatience and intolerance. The left invoked the language of universal humanity but never really practised it, showing instead a deep, distorting tribalism.

For large parts of its history, most of the left never bothered to think seriously about its opponents. Tories or SNP “tartan Tories” were vilified or ignored, and were never deemed worthy of serious, considered debate.

CLASS ENEMY

Prior to Thatcher, the left never undertook a serious study of Conservative history or thought. They were “the class enemy” representing the forces of privilege and reaction. At the same time no considered Labour engagement has ever taken place with Scottish nationalism – with the exception of J.P. Macintosh and Stephen Maxwell over thirty years ago.

It took until relatively late in the day and the experience of...
Thatcherism before left-wingers studied the Tories, and by then it was all too little, too late. And even more strangely, while Labour has abandoned so much of what it stands for, on one traditional principle it has remained constant – its denigration of Scottish nationalism, to the point that it still continues to disable Labour thinking.

**MORAL ABSOLUTISM**

Some of this comes from characteristics which are ever more pronounced in the Scottish left than elsewhere, such as a sense of moral absolutism and certainty – which come over to many as unappealing, dogmatic and inflexible. This is linked to black and white thinking which has been prevalent in much of our culture, and which has been aided by elements of the Presbyterian tradition.

This tradition has produced many heroes and villains, some mixing both, such as Tommy Sheridan, George Galloway and the late Jimmy Reid; cultural figures such as William McIlvanney and James Kelman have spoken in similar voices of granite male certainty.

Thatcherism was both the making and breaking of this tradition. Writers like McIlvanney made a name for themselves by seeing Thatcher as a threat to the very existence of our nation, and claimed that she would eradicate Scottish values if she had a chance. It was over-exaggerated then, and embarrassing and ridiculous now.

At a debate last year on the impact of Thatcherism in Scotland between David MccLetchie and Malcolm Rifkind on the pro-side and Brian Wilson and Jim Sillars on the anti-side, the latter pair talked about Thatcherism as if it were in the here and now. In particular, they railed against council house sales as if they happened yesterday.

**FIGHTING LOST BATTLES**

This is another of the Scottish left’s characteristics: going over the past, fighting lost battles, attempting to rewrite history. The anger of Wilson and Sillars on council house sales camouflages their empty prospectuses, the fact that Thatcher changed hundreds of thousands of working class lives, claimed the cause of “freedom”, and that Labour and left-wingers had little positive to say then or now.

When did the left in Scotland last have an original, interesting idea? Wendy Alexander once famously said that Scottish Labour hadn’t had an original idea since 1906. This is a bit harsh; the party had some ideas in the 1920s, but Alexander is broadly right.

And this holds for the wider left. All of the revealing emotions around the death of Jimmy Reid, point not only to the Scots love of a dead hero, but the passing of an era. Upper Clyde Shipbuilders wasn’t just a false dawn of radicalism, but the last spasm of creative thinking by the left on economic democracy, the meaning of work and ideas around socially useful production. These issues still need to be addressed in a world of hyper-consumption and grotesque inequality, but the left in Scotland has said nothing on these for nearly forty years.

**WHAT DOES THE LEFT STAND FOR?**

For several decades it has become increasingly unclear what the left stands for – beyond the defence of public services, public spending, and the welfare state. This has its place, but what the left hasn’t done is develop a positive vision of what it supports – a different model of public services from the old paternalist style or new managerialism, different ways of organising the state, and how you challenge producer capture of institutions without being blind to the dangers of corporate capture and marketisation.

It is worse than that. The left once had big banners to fly at its marches. As the left slowly humanised capitalism, first, the vision of a socialist society – which was never sketched out – fell by the wayside, and then people began to talk about social democracy and even “market socialism”. Yet with the rise of Thatcherism and Reaganism and demise of the Soviet bloc, even this weakened, until after Blair and Clinton, people were left clinging to the wreckage of “progressivism”.

The journey from the glorious, admittedly over-confident days of the forward march of organised labour, to the slow, painful retreat of the left, has seen a shift from certainties to vague ideas. What on earth is “progressivism”, other than some ill-defined concept which everyone can lay claim to, including Cameron Tories and Lib Dems?

**ROOT AND BRANCH TRANSFORMATION**

It is no use hoping that an energised Miliband Labour Party will refund its purpose, and renew social democracy. The pattern we can predict, which Ralph Miliband analysed at length, is that Labour will swing to the rhetoric of a more bold social democracy in opposition, but the crisis created by New Labour is so profound and deep seated that it cannot be addressed without root and branch transformation. Things are not fundamentally different in Scottish Labour.

Scotland desperately needs radical ideas, pluralism and open minded imagination. It will not come from the mainstream of the Scottish left – who have long ago shifted from being forward thinking heretics to defending what exists and the status quo.

The story of the British left over the last century has been one of first hope, then the rise of Fabianism and the power of the expert, followed by the false promise of modernisation, which proved even more problematic than the old vision it replaced.

Even more profoundly both the old left and new revolutionaries are imbued with a belief in the modernist utopia – one of planning and the other of the market. Both see people as instrumental playthings. Neither has come to
terms with the crisis of modernism, or the limits to growth on our fragile earth.

What comes after the appeal, vision and hopes of the left is a fascinating question. The left offered a journey, a destination and an anchor – which gave generations a way of looking at the world. Modern Scotland could become the country which was one of the first to embrace socialist orthodoxy, and if not the first out, then perhaps the first to explicitly embrace the new post-socialist age and map out a new direction.

**RISING GENERATION**

That requires a rising generation to take up the challenge, not just burying what remains of the left, but the recent revolutionaries of the market, who have made much of the world in their image, and produced anxiety, insecurity and powerlessness.

I am optimistic for the long-term future of Scotland. This is for lots of reasons: the innate hope my parents gave me about the world, the fact that we finally got “our” Parliament, and because the long story of Britain is in decline and crisis north and south of the border.

A Scotland which has exhausted the old traditions of the left, and shown itself sceptical to the new orthodoxies of the Anglo-American model, could be ideally placed for the politics of the 21st century. This would entail embracing shared sovereignty, decentralism, a diplomacy of making alliances rather than “great British powerism”, and the ideas of genuine self-government and self-determination which go way beyond devolution.

This is a politics which transcends left and right, those old tribal distinctions which are the product of the 19th and 20th century. Let’s leave them where they belong in the past.

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**THE DANGERS OF THE THIRD WAY**

Doug Bain takes Gerry Hassan to task for his call for a politics which transcends left and right.

Read your article with interest. However I have to say I don’t really agree with its main thrust. You detail quite a long list of criticisms of the left – some justified and others not. You end by hailing a new politics which will transcend the old left-right dichotomy. Why then do you devote 99.9% of your article to the left with only a few throw-away lines at the very end about the post-left project? Why is your article not about the “new politics” at all?
Beyond Left and Right was written 16 years ago and has not, to put it mildly, inspired a new post-left vision. The terrain of third-way politics has remained pretty barren intellectually.

**Bankrupt of New Ideas**

So why go there? Your argument seems to be that the left is bankrupt of new ideas, locked into a black-and-white, modernist, determinist mode of thinking. I just don’t recognise that left. The critique of modernism is now close on 50 years old and the post-modernist thesis has been thoroughly debated and explored over several decades – for example Willie Thompson’s *Postmodernism and History*. I think there is now a consensus that while post-modernism provides valuable insights in the field of aesthetics, its contribution to social theory is much more limited and, as a philosophy to inform a post-left political project, it is a non-starter. If Jacques Derrida’s help was enlisted in campaigning for improved postal services, the opening paragraph of his campaigning leaflet would read: “Not that the letter never arrives at its destination, but it belongs to its structure that it is always possible for it not to arrive there … A letter does not always arrive at its desti-

Far from being moribund, the left continues to generate a rich and diverse intellectual output. nation and since that belongs to its structure, it can be said that it never arrives there truly, that when it arrives the fact that it is capable of not arriving afflicts it with the torment of an internal misdirection” (quote from Willie’s book).

I think it is becoming clearer now that, politically, post-modernism was a turn to the right and even people like Frederic Jameson are conceding that its days may be numbered and that the challenge is, in fact, to re-define modernism. As someone wrote somewhere, if you live in the slums of Mumbai, modernism probably sounds quite a good idea. Beyond post-modernism, the only other recent post-left articulation I can think of is Etzioni’s communitarianism – which Blair and Clinton briefly flirted with but which has run into the sand.

Far from being moribund, the left continues to generate a rich and diverse intellectual output sustaining influential journals such as *Soundings* and *New Left Review* (not to mention *Perspectives* and *Scottish Left Review*). Far from being stuck in the past, the centre of gravity of thinking is very much post-Marxist. The left has a long and rich history of theory and struggle and has continually adapted and changed to accommodate new circumstances. To argue that we should turn our backs on this tradition and attempt to invent a new discourse seems to me to be foolhardy in the extreme. And quite unnecessary.

The Scottish left is not going to dissolve and disappear. It finds expression in the Labour Party, the SNP, the Greens and in the left groupings such as Democratic Left Scotland and Scottish Left Review. It seems to me the prospects for bringing these elements together and beginning to articulate a common vision for the future of Scotland are very good.

I think you really need to consider carefully where this line of argument is taking you. Your reaction to this brief critique will probably be to counter with an even sharper criticism of the left. The danger with opting for a “third way” is that you could find yourself being drawn into an increasingly anti-left stance and I think that is beginning to find expression in your article.

Hope this is of some interest/value.

■ Doug Bain was a member of Democratic Left Scotland and a contributor to Perspectives. He wrote this piece not long before his sudden death last September.
O n 25 September 2010 a young man (at least younger than me) with a lap-top (no drink, no food) sits in the Ceilidh Place in Ullapool with a copy of the Locum Doctor’s Survival Guide to one side.

The next morning, around 7.30am, from a second floor window in Inchnadamph, a Scottish historian (41, female) looked out on sun-blushed mountains as the birch trees lining the drive-way to the old manse clenched the golden leaves that the early frost was seeking to claim. My sons slept.

I suggest no connection between these two scenes except the manner in which they both figure in the narrative of the life of this review. I offer no comfortable chronology – no consistency of tense. I offer no unitary narrator, except the me that was reading And the Land Lay Still in September in order to write what you are reading now, and the mother who was stealing time in Assynt in search of the view of Kirkaig Bay that enlivens my/her dining room wall in Glasgow. (Me, she, her, we ... it.)

Earlier reviews of this novel have typically moved from the obvious – its scale (674 pages), its ambition (“a searching journey into the heart of a country” according to the jacket blurb) – to the particular – the characters (Angus, Mike, Jean, Don, Jack, James Bond – yes, you read correctly – Ellen ...), the politics – with a clarity of direction not matched in the novel itself. Not matched, because, in a way, that is the point (well, at least one of them).

This review – if that is indeed what it is – foregoes the privilege of paraphrasing plot and essentialising narrative intent. The length and reach of this book would in any case make that an exercise in whimsical personal selection to such an extent that Robertson’s more profound achievements in this work would be lost. Instead, this is an attempt to offer one understanding (mine) of the ways in which this novel offers an important contribution to modern Scottish history by challenging as it does the singularity of national narratives and the impulses of conventional Scottish literary criticism. By problematising how we come to know the past, and placing the individual/individuals and the abstractions of identity to the fore in his treatment of the nation Robertson offers us a Scotland that is at once more and less than the sum of its parts and the power of its imaginings.

PREGNANT WITH POSSIBILITIES

Indeed, the decisions taken in shaping Robertson’s narrative are to the fore from the beginning: we are made aware of what Robertson might have written, as much as what he has. “What if, what if? If only, if only, if only”, Robertson writes. “Those phrases sit like crows on the passage of the years. They settle on politics, they settle on love, they settle on life.” Robertson’s text is as pregnant with the possibilities of other pasts as it is alive to the vitality of how it was. Each of the six parts of the novel, for example, begins with what appears to be a false start – an italicised sometimes breathless encounter with the land and the character closest to it – before turning to the narratives of the lives that contribute to the book’s central concerns. (Only much later is the defining purpose of these prologues apparent. Robertson here self-consciously plays with hindsight – ours and his, perhaps.)

We are also alert to the fact that this novel is the outcome of a series (no, maybe not that ordered) … of decisions – some taken with confidence, some only half-acknowledged risks. Yet, nothing appears to be left to chance. In a most fundamental sense, the writing process is the novel, and in its starkest manifestation, it is clearest at the level of genre itself. Read for the first time, you could be excused for wondering if this really is a novel. You might even get angry with a text that is not content to remain for long in any conventional literary tradition. History leaves an indelible mark on just about every page, and the level of detail at times points even further to chronicle, at worst to jobbing journalesque. Yet dramatic dialogues, extracts from fictitious newspapers, art and photography transposed and refracted into words, and song rhythms pulsing in the responses of characters indicate that this is a work of the imagination, call it what you will. Mike – the first protagonist to spin a narrative thread in Part One – would
understand. When attempting to write the introduction to an exhibition catalogue honouring his father’s work in the art of Photography, he “has another look at the introduction, essay, memoir, whatever it is he’s trying to write. That’s the problem, he doesn’t know.” In a recent Scotsman interview, Robertson said much the same of his own novel: “The difficulty was not knowing exactly what the story was.” (27 July 2010) It’s surely not coincidental.

MULTIPlicity OF VOICES
Indeed, there is a self-conscious attempt in the Land to reflect and examine the artifice and honesty inherent in story-making. Jean – Robertson’s most developed female character – exemplifies this tendency. It is at her hidden Edinburgh flat that the nationalist sympathisers congregate in the 1970s to story the nation, to sing the nation’s health by sacrificing their own. One wonders if Jean – a wise but barren Scotia – and her stories are to be read as allegory. Yet, while the hostess of the nationalists is in repose, it is obvious that Jean’s voice is but one of many in the movement. Robertson in this way rejects a singular national(ist) narrative, and the potential of any one narrative to accommodate the contradictions and paradoxes of the multiplicity of Scotland’s voices – unionist and nationalist, male and female, historic and contemporary. Jean’s stories seldom work towards resolution: “you just think what you like.”

By thus rejecting the impulse to essentialise a Scottish story, Robertson sets himself in opposition to the tendency in Scottish literary criticism to claim a novel (and novelists) as exemplars of the nation itself. (Recent reviews, regrettably, have often failed to grant him that liberty.) Nevertheless, as Robertson’s fictional MacDiarmid advises Bond: “The only thing you need to do … is to be yourself.” Given the wealth of historical detail in this work, Robertson on the surface gets closer than most to realising the beguiling promise of realism in unlocking the “truths” of the nation that those seeking a “Scottish voice”, a new Grassic Gibbon, or a herald for a new Scottish “school” identify as the litmus test of the arts in Scotland. Yet things are not that simple. Robertson’s characters live through the same historical period and experience it in different ways: contrasting generational, class, gender, sexual, geographic and political identities offer different lenses through which Scotland is observed, while character – in all its various manifestations – influences how Scotland is felt. No one voice is privileged, no collective is allowed to over-ride the personal, and Scotland itself is seen as something often only truly glimpsed in fleeting moments of realisation, or through chance photographs that resist narrativisation. The “decisive moment”, as Mike reflects, borrowing from Cartier Bresson.

AUTHORITY OF DETACHED HISTORIAN
Robertson also rejects a singular narrative voice. While, for the most part, the novel is written in the third-person, the prologues are addressed directly to Jack – Robertson’s everyman who is at once part of, at odds with, Scotland and itself is seen as something often only truly glimpsed in fleeting moments of realisation, or through chance photographs that resist narrativisation. The “decisive moment”, as Mike reflects, borrowing from Cartier Bresson.

Whilst Robertson’s treatment of time and history was profound, I found his treatment of historical detail at times clunking and intrusive. So what then of history if even novelists resist conventional story and claim the role of chronicler? As a historian whose recent monograph, Whurr Extremes Meet, covered much the same period as Robertson’s novel, his treatment of history is of particular interest. Indeed, it was uncanny (if, I suppose, predictable) the extent to which Robertson appears to have grappled with the same dilemmas as I did in that text. From the outset, I have to say that whilst his treatment of time and history was profound, I found his treatment of historical detail at times clunking and intrusive, and at others somewhat overdone. I am yet to be convinced that lives are generally lived in ways so rooted in their contemporary socio-political context as to be aligned so meticulously with the periodisation of the state. Would Mike really have remembered that he went to see Goldfinger with his father the day after the 1964 General Election? Is it entirely plausible that Angus just happened to be in Arbroath the day the Stone of Destiny was returned? I can also say with some authority that not even historians of the period would be able to offer with such ease the seat count of the Conservatives in 1966 as this all-knowing narrator. Regular leaps between the lives of characters and historical contextual detail were also jarring at times, and the narrative voice – the aspiring historian – often lapses in its pursuit of realism. I, for one, am yet to be convinced that from 1997, “Everything from then on is another story. The new parliament, the new country, the personal and the political.”

TESTAMENT TO QUALITY
In a way, such reservations are testament to the overall quality of the writing itself. I would not be terribly concerned about Mike’s memories, for example, if I was not convinced by him as a plausible character. I would have lost patience with the narrator, if I was not convinced that Robertson as novelist is equal to the task of
allowing his characterisation and craft to make the same points with greater conviction and more originality than he does as Robertson the historian.

Robertson’s greatest gift to Scottish history in this work, however, is not the detail. Rather, it is in his engagement with a temporal Scotland – a Scotland that is as much about time, memory, hindsight and history and how we approach these ways of knowing, as it is about a physical, political Scotland and our attempts to mould it. Robertson’s Scotland exists in “the lee of what was then the future” and his characters’ “ability to look back on the past, [their] need or desire to make sense of it, is both a blessing and a curse.” “We don’t know what the story is when we’re in it”, reflects Mike in the concluding pages of the novel, “and even after we tell it we’re not sure.” His conclusion? “Trust the story. That’s all. Trust the story.”

Robertson, in the very act of writing history – or at least in historicising the novel – exposes its contingencies, its limitations and its false promises. Ultimately, the written word is unequal to truth. Ellen – Jean’s antagonist, mother to a child conceived in an act of violent rape, and a Scotia befitting a new Scotland – affirms: “Don’t believe a word you read … All stories are lies … The secret is to work out how big the lie is. That’s why we keep believing in a thing called truth. It doesn’t exist but we can’t help looking for it. It’s one of the most enduring human failings.” Just as literature refuses to harness a singular Scotland, so history fails to deliver on its promise to offer a benchmark of authenticity. In this novel, Robertson points to the fact that by knowing more we need not necessarily understand more deeply; that the “tyranny of time” does not lead to a singular expression of the past, and that chronological order, while a “sensible” historical regime, is not necessarily the “natural way of releasing a narrative”. These are all lessons modern Scottish historiography would do well to take to heart. For what it’s worth, this historian agrees with him.

MULTIPlicity OF PERSPECTIVES

Where we depart is in the search for a conclusion. Robertson has suggested elsewhere that the epic proportions of the novel can in part be explained by the fact that “The story is still going on.” On that point we are in agreement. And yet, Robertson makes a very conscious effort in the novel to bring the narrative threads together. Mike’s final speech to the assembled guests at the Edinburgh exhibition uses as a motif David Octavius Hill’s painting of the Disruption of 1843. He reflects that while it was not a historically accurate picture it was “a representation of a moment”. The parallels between the Hill painting, his father’s photographs and the assembled cast of characters does not need spelling out. Yet the symbolism here does not have the lightness of touch that marks much of Robertson’s most successful passages: it is too deliberate, too contrived, and permissive of a polemical style that to that point has been largely successful in avoiding. There was something that irritated in the partial resolution and weaving together of story-lines that to that point had been most successful in highlighting the multiplicity of perspectives on Scotland’s past and their inherent discontinuities. The religious overtones of the painting were also strangely out of step with the rest of the novel: to that point religion had not been a major theme. Faith in whatever form we had encountered it had been shown to be false, and the most compelling religious motifs had been related to the agents of the state – Croik and Canterbury – who appeared to personify the secularising tendencies of an age marked by the increasing reach of central government. There is part of this reviewer that would have preferred Robertson to have been bolder: to have left the connections between characters unrealised in a physical sense in the pages of the novel; for the connections to be left at the level of the imagination. Is that not, after all, one of his central themes?

Robertson’s novel is, however, much much more than this. His depiction of what happens when the departure of industry cripples small communities and common appreciations of masculinity; when marriages become a force of habit, and then a force of mutual destruction; when sexuality is realised and released; when hopes in a new tomorrow reveal a future pretty much like yesterday, and when class and nationhood vie for the radical inheritance all stand in need of a critical assessment.

I finished reading the novel long after I had taken photographs of Kirkaig Bay and measured them against the abstractions of the watercolour in the dining room. Indeed, it was weeks after my son and I had walked to the falls, passing on the way a cairn to Norman MacCaig: a makar whose short poems are a useful counterpoint and complement to Robertson’s epic. It was as a historian that I sat down to write this in the middle of Glasgow as snow encrusted the tenement opposite. One book, one reviewer, but read across the contradictions of time and space in this still land. Robertson’s gift to Scotland’s literary tradition is to make the writer’s craft the story, to bring to life the contingencies of lives as they are lived, and to marry the big questions with the paradoxes of circumstance.
James Connolly, Colonialism, and “Celtic Communism”

James Connolly is, together with John Maclean, one of the most important Scottish radicals of the modern era, yet his brand of socialist republicanism is often overlooked in histories of Scotland, argues Willy Maley, who goes on to show that Scottish writers from Hugh MacDiarmid to James Kelman have admired Connolly’s radical thought.

On 5 June 2009 the Edinburgh Evening News reported a “controversial bid … to commemorate the Edinburgh-born Irish revolutionary James Connolly with a statue in the city centre … Sites under consideration include the Meadows, where Connolly gave some of his most famous speeches, the West Port, where he lived, and the Cowgate, his birthplace and home to the majority of Edinburgh’s Irish immigrant community until the mid-20th century”.

On the other side of the Irish Sea, on the 11th of October 2010, the Scotsman ran an item entitled “Scot in line for top Irish title”. The Scot was of course Connolly, the title that of Ireland’s greatest historical figure. Connolly came fourth of the five shortlisted candidates, but he did beat Bono. The winner, revealed on the 22nd of October, was not after all a Scotsman with an Irish name but an Irishman with a Scottish name, John Hume, not just a Scottish name but a great-grandfather, Willie Hume, from the lowlands of Scotland, who emigrated to Donegal during the reign of Victoria.

As Owen Dudley Edwards reminds us: “The first thing to remember about James Connolly and Irish tradition is that he was born outside it. He was Edinburgh born, his parents were Monaghan emigrants to Edinburgh … Looking up from the squalid and almost lightless depths of the Cowgate, the young Connolly could learn Marxism simply by seeing the stately folk walking far above him on the fashionable George IV Bridge which swept above the slums below. He could see he was a proletarian long before he could hear he was Irish.” Edwards makes fun of the Irish tendency to render invisible Connolly’s Scottish origins: “In Irish tradition, Connolly was born at the age of 28 in Dublin in 1896, in the manner of Mr. Furriskiey in At Swim-Two-Birds, when he was not born in Clones at the age of 0 in 1870. But in fact, he was of course born at the age of 0 in Edinburgh in 1868, and therefore his view of Irish tradition was never wholly Irish.” Edwards insists that Connolly’s “immediate heirs” are to be found “not among the Irish republicans but with such figures as John Maclean of Scotland.” Connolly wasn’t just born in Edinburgh – the youngest of three sons. He lived in Scotland till he was twenty-eight. Connolly supported Hibernian Football Club, founded in 1875 by Canon Edward Hannan, an Irish priest based in Edinburgh’s Cowgate, known as “Little Ireland”. Connolly didn’t just support Hibs; he carried the players’ kits and did other odd jobs at the ground. He also worked at the Edinburgh Evening News. His political influences, formation and connections were in Scotland. He left school at ten and worked in a printer’s, a bakery, and a tiling factory. As a radical republican opponent of physical force imperialism, Connolly stands in a long Scottish tradition stretching from Knox and Burns through to Maclean and MacDiarmid.

James Connolly’s Scottish connections go back to James’s colony, to the Ulster Plantation presided over by King James VI and I in 1609, an event that transformed Irish-Scottish relations to the benefit of England and the emerging British state. Connolly expressed his view on Ulster and the Scots in an essay written for Scottish socialist magazine Forward on 12 July 1913, where he sympathised with the presbyterian planters as victims of English colonial manipulation in a passage that anticipates the views of Alasdair Gray in his pamphlet on Scottish independence to the effect that the Ulster plantation was designed to divide and rule the Irish and Scottish: “A large body of English settlers might have held Ulster down, but very few English wanted to settle in a hostile and much poorer land … Jamie did what could only be done by a Scottish king ruling Ireland with an English army: he colonized Ulster.” As Jonathan Githens-Mazer puts it: “Sectarianism blinded Catholic and Protestant to common exploitation by English elites who introduced or settled outsiders in Ulster to exploit them for personal gain.”

Belfast-born Ulster Scot William Walker reminded Connolly in their exchange in Forward in 1911 that Scottish Presbyterianism and Protestantism more broadly had played a progressive part in modern Irish history, including labour history. According to James D. Young: “The role of Forward in providing Maclean, Connolly and Larkin with space to expound their views testified to the developing links between
the left of the Scottish and Irish workers’ movements.” Walker stood unsuccessfully as Labour candidate for Leith, close to where Connolly was born, in the general election of January 1910, so he had Scottish connections in the neighbourhood from which Connolly sprang. In fact, Connolly and Walker had both stood for office in Scotland, Connolly unsuccessfully contesting elections to Edinburgh Council in 1894 and 1895.

**RED CLYDE SIDE, GREEN CLYDE SIDE**

Many Irish and Scottish socialists had cross-cultural connections and cross-water connections. They included Willie Gallacher (1881–1965), born in the Irish ghetto of Sneddon, Paisley in 1881, who played a key role in founding the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1920–21; and Ulster Scots Socialists like William Walker (1871–1918), the Belfast Protestant who challenged Connolly, and David “Davy” Robb Campbell (1874/5–1934), the Belfast Protestant who supported Connolly. John Wheatley (1869–1930) is another key crossover figure. Born in Bonhamon, Co. Waterford, in 1869, his family moved to Bargeddie, near Glasgow, in 1876. Wheatley became a leading Scottish socialist, joining the Independent Labour Party in 1906, and founding the Catholic Socialist Society in the same year. The Dublin Lock-out of 1913 and the Glasgow Rent Strike of 1915 showed solidarity across the water. Speaking in March 1918, Cathal O’Shannon claimed that: “Glasgow and Dublin are the two cities in these countries that lead the van in the militant army of Labour, and from them, if from nowhere else, we may expect a bold lead.”

One of the most radical Scottish socialists of the time was John Maclean (1879–1923). According to James Hunter: “Both Connolly and MacLean – the two most outstanding Marxist revolutionaries so far produced in these islands – were born to Gaelic-speaking parents. And they devoted no small part of their considerable abilities to reconcile socialism with the nationalisms of their respective countries.” In the aftermath of Easter 1916, and after a spell in prison for breaching the Defence of the Realm Act, Maclean moved closer to Connolly’s views. According to Gavin Foster, when Maclean visited Dublin for the first time in July 1919, “he was exposed to the large British military build-up in Ireland and was forced to confront several of his ideological blind spots on the ‘Irish Question’”. As James D. Young remarks: “From 1 May, 1919, Maclean was committed to the Irish cause as a part of a worldwide anti-imperialist struggle. When he, John Wheatley, and Countess Markievicz spoke at the Glasgow May Day in the presence of 100,000 workers, Irish tricolours were openly carried among the crowd and the Soldiers’ Song was sung along with the Red Flag.”

In 1920, Maclean wrote one of the most forceful pamphlets on the Irish situation of the period, *The Irish Tragedy: Scotland’s Disgrace* (1920), which had a postscript that read: “Since writing this pamphlet the *Glasgow Herald* in a leader on Tuesday, June 8, 1920, entitled *The Army in Ireland*, gloats over the fact that Scots regiments are pouring into Ireland and others are held in readiness. It seems the Scots are being used to crush the Irish. Let Labour effectively reply.” In his General Election Address of 1922, standing in the Gorbals, Maclean declared: “When Jim Connolly saw how things were going in Edinburgh he resolved on the Easter Rebellion in Dublin, the beginning of Ireland’s new fight for freedom, a fight that can only end in an Irish workers’ republic based on communism.” Connolly had spoken in Glasgow on 15th October 1910, so he was certainly attuned to events there. Young confirms Maclean’s views on Connolly’s awareness of Scottish developments in the run-up to Easter 1916: “Connolly was aware of what was happening on Red Clydeside. In the 20 November, 1915 issue of the *Workers’ Republic*, he attacked the suppression of ‘Free Speech in Scotland’ … At much the same time, he published an article entitled ‘Glasgow Gaels Will Fight’ in which he reported on a meeting in the Sinn Fein Hall, London Street, Glasgow … In an article on ‘Scots Labour Men and Lloyd George’, Connolly published a report in the *Workers’ Republic* saying that the majority of Clydeside workers at the famous meeting in Glasgow were anti-war.” Connolly’s intimate knowledge of the Scottish scene was mirrored by the growing activism of other Irish-Scots increasingly exercised by events across the water.

**MARGARET SKINNIKER: FROM COATBRIDGE TO CONNOLLY’S SIDE**

Arguably the most interesting Scottish connection with Connolly and the Easter Rising is Margaret Skinnider (1893–1971). According to Iain D. Patterson, “British intelligence sources computed Irish Volunteer membership to be about 3,000 in Glasgow in 1914”. One member of the Irish Volunteers among the 200 women who joined the 1400 rebels was Margaret Skinnider, schoolteacher, suffragist and nationalist born in Coatbridge near Glasgow in 1893. Skinnider joined Cumann na mBan (League of Women) and the Irish Volunteers, while in Glasgow. In her account of the Easter Rising – published in New York in 1917 as *Doing My Bit For Ireland* – a title she never liked but picked by the publisher – Skinnider says: “I learned to shoot in one of the rifle practice clubs which the British organized so that women could help in the defense of the Empire. These clubs had sprung up like mushrooms and died as quickly, but I kept on till I was a good marksman. I believed the opportunity would soon come to defend my own country.” And Skinnider was clear as to which country she was talking about: “Scotland is my home, but Ireland my country.”

Skinnider was invited to Dublin at the end of 1915 to meet Constance Markievicz. She crossed the Irish Sea with detonators in her hat, and the wires wrapped
under her coat. She slept on the detonators and was later told the pressure could have set them off. She scouted out a barracks for bombing, and her map of the target was passed on to James Connolly, who she then got to meet. As a maths teacher she could draw a mean map. She travelled back to Glasgow on the understanding that she’d return for the Rising. “Fortunately”, she said, “Glasgow is two fifths Irish. Indeed, there are as many Irish there as in Dublin itself, and the spirit among the younger generation is perhaps more intense because we are a little to one side and thus afraid of becoming outsiders.”

Skinnider cross-dressed, passing as one of the Glasgow Fianna, claiming to be able to wrestle and whistle as well as any boy. She acted as a messenger and sniper in Easter week. She was wounded while fighting in the uniform of the Irish Volunteers and imprisoned, before going to America and writing her memoir. She certainly did her bit for Ireland: “Once, on my way back to Liberty Hall with some dynamite wrapped in a neat bundle on the seat beside me, I heard a queer, buzzing noise. It seemed to come from inside the bundle. ‘Is it going off?’ I asked myself, and sat tight, expecting every moment to be blown to bits. But nothing happened; it was only the cart-wheels complaining as we passed over an uneven bit of track.” Skinnider was paymaster of the IRA during the Irish Civil War, spent time in prison, during which Nora Connolly took her place, then taught in Dublin. She retired in 1961, and died ten years later, buried in the republican plot at Glasnevin cemetery.

**SCOTTISH WRITERS IN PRAISE OF CONNOLLY**

According to David Lloyd, one of a number of critics to revisit Connolly’s work in recent years: “There is no doubt that the concept of ‘Celtic communism’ lends itself potentially to an idealizing nationalism that seeks to trace in the past the contours of a benevolent and undegraded national spirit. But Connolly’s deployment of the concept in *Labour and Irish History, The Reconquest of Ireland* and elsewhere, though a consistent element of his socialist project, is if anything precisely opposed to such idealizing.”

Several Scottish writers have certainly drawn inspiration from Connolly as an activist rather than an idealist. According to Chris Harvie, Hugh MacDiarmid “had several streams running through him, one of them Ireland and the Easter Rising of 1916, where poets had apparently changed a nation.” Harvie points out that “to younger Scottish socialists like MacDiarmid, politicised by the war and the industrial struggles of the ‘Red Clyde’, Connolly became a hero.” Sorley MacLean was another great admirer. His poem on Connolly’s shirt in the National Museum of Ireland – “Ard-Mhusaeum na h-Eireann” (“The National Museum of Ireland”) – testify to his sense of Connolly as a bridging figure between an Ireland and Scotland divided by England.

The Scottish reclamation of Connolly can be seen in Hibernian FC supporter Irvine Welsh’s novel *Bedroom Secrets of the Master Chefs* (2006): “As they walked in the cold night he talked effusively, seeming fascinated by her green mane, and told her that this part of town used to be known as Little Ireland… He pointed over to St Mary’s Church, and told her that many years before Celtic in Glasgow, the Edinburgh Irishmen had formed the Hibernian Football Club in these very halls. He grew animated when he pointed up the street, and told her that Hibernian’s most famous supporter, James Connolly, was born up that road and had gone on to lead the Easter Rising in Dublin, which culminated in Ireland’s freedom from British imperialism. It seemed important to him that she knew that Connolly was a socialist, not an Irish nationalist. – In this city we know nothing about our real identity, he said passionately, – it’s all imposed on us.”

It wouldn’t be Irvine Welsh without some scatology, so later in the novel Skinnider, searching for his father among the cooks of the world, comes across one called Cunningham-Blyth with a story to tell and the scars to prove it. Cunningham-Blyth has literally lost his manhood for his country: “As a young man back in the sixties, I became interested in politics. Particularly the national question. I wondered how it was that most of Ireland was free, while Scotland was still in servitude under the English Crown. I looked around at the New Town, its streets named after English royalty due to that toady Scott, while a great, Edinburgh native son and socialist leader like James Connolly merited little more than a plaque on a wall under a shadowy bridge.” Cunningham-Blyth uses his cooking skills in order to hatch a plot: “I was always a recipe maker … a concocter, I suppose one might say. As a gesture, I resolved to fashion a home-made bomb and blow up one of the symbols of British imperialism that litter this city. I had my eye on the Duke of Wellington’s statue at the east end. So I made a pipe bomb. Unfortunately, I had the device between my thighs as I was packing it with explosive. It went off prematurely. I lost my penis and one of my testicles … It probably wouldn’t even have scratched the Iron Duke.” The following year, in the short story collection, *If You Liked School, You’ll Love Work* (2007), Welsh has another character say of a stirring speech that it was “Pure James Connolly or John McLean [sic]”, and he alludes to “Willie Gallagher [sic]” and the “Soviet Socialist People’s Republic” of Fife.

James Kelman is another Scottish writer who has acknowledged Connolly as a relatively unsuspecting Scottish socialist, and has pointed to the lost legacy of the left nationalism of the early twentieth-century, a nationalism that was thoroughly internationalist in outlook: “Now it’s just assumed that if you are not parliamentarian, then you have no politics, and that’s a really extraordinary reaction to what started happening about a hundred years ago when the debate was much more sophisticated politically, and there was such a great divergence amongst socialists. It was probably valid to have a belief in self-determination,
to have a position like James Connolly or John MacLean.” In this regard, Kelman has spoken of the way in which the Irish question has dropped out of sight in Scottish political culture: “Part of the extraordinary thing is the marginalisation of Irish politics in relation to Scottish radical history. I would say that you cannot get an understanding of radical politics, probably throughout the UK, but certainly in Scotland, without understanding the significance of Irish politics as well. Take James Connolly for example. About twenty years ago when a young refugee Ahmad Shaikh, a boy of twenty-one, was murdered in a racist attack and a protest march was organised, police said it couldn’t take place. The reason why was because one of the groups marching in solidarity was the EIS, the teachers’ union. It was the local branch, which carried on their banners a portrait of James Connolly, the Irish Republican martyr who was murdered by the British government in 1916. The extraordinary thing about all of this was that James Connolly was actually an Edinburgh man, he’s Scottish. He didn’t go to Ireland until his early twenties. His father was Irish, but he was born less than a mile from where we were about to march. You know there are a lot of ironies; a lot of Scottish-Irish people, because of the indoctrination and propaganda, don’t even know that James Connolly was Scottish. I’m talking about guys who are maybe seventy-five years of age who are Scottish Catholics. They’re not necessarily Republican because the whole thing’s a kind of mish-mash. But when I speak to them about James Connolly they will know that type of background – and until that kind of background is known by everyone, there will never be a real understanding of radical politics in this country. These areas are still marginalised or suppressed.”

**BROTHER-IN-ARMS**

One aspect of Connolly’s life that is often overlooked – an aspect that might shed an ironic sidelight on the recent protest over the wearing of poppies at Celtic Park – is his time in the British Army, which he joined under-age in 1882, and from which he deserted in 1889, subsequently joining the Scottish Socialist Federation in 1890. Many Irish and Irish-Scottish men and women passed through the ranks of the British Army. Thomas Maley, father of the Celtic manager Willie, was a sergeant in the Royal North British Fusiliers. Willie Maley himself was born in the barracks at Newry in 1868, the same year that James Connolly was born in Cowgate. But Connolly’s own military connections have a particularly bitter twist to them, as Easter 1916 had another poignant Scottish dimension. Connolly’s eldest brother, John, had joined the British army ahead of James, in 1877, aged fifteen, possibly serving in India. While James deserted to become a socialist and die fighting for Ireland, John stayed on. When James was speaking in Dundee in 1913, he didn’t appreciate John turning up to hear him in the uniform of Edinburgh City Artillery. Shortly after James’s execution in Dublin, John died in Glasgow, and was buried in Edinburgh with full military honours, as an honourably discharged veteran corporal. The two brothers who served in the British Army met very different ends, but their fates testify to the ways in which Irish-Scottish relations are skewed by empire and the legacy of plantation.

Willy Maley is Professor of English Literature at the University of Glasgow. This essay is an extract from a keynote address entitled “Edinburgh Go Bragh: Connolly’s Celtic Connections”, delivered at the Eighth Annual Irish Studies Conference organised by the North East Irish Culture Network (NEICN), University of Sunderland, 12 November 2010.

**NOTES**

18. Skinnider, Doing My Bit for Ireland, p. 3.
There’s more to politics than parties

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People and politics

In Scotland, as in the rest of Britain, there is widespread disillusionment with politics. The mainstream parties have lost touch with ordinary people and issues are trivialised and distorted by the media.

We are continually told that “there is no alternative” to global capitalism. Yet this is doing untold damage to our environment, our communities and the quality of our lives, while millions of people remain poor and powerless because the market dominates our society and we do too little to protect and empower them.

Democratic Left Scotland is a non-party political organisation that works for progressive social change through activity in civil society – in community groups, social movements and single-issue campaigns – seeking at all times to promote discussion and alliances across the lines of party, position and identity.

Political parties remain important, but they need to reconnect with the citizens they claim to represent, reject the copycat politics that stifles genuine debate and recognise that no single group or standpoint holds all the answers to the problems facing our society.

We are trying to develop a new kind of politics, one that starts from popular activity – in workplaces, localities and voluntary associations – and builds bridges to the world of parties and government, on the one hand, and the world of ideas and culture, on the other.

What does Democratic Left add?

Our approach to politics is radical, feminist and green.

Radical because we are concerned with the underlying, structural causes of problems such as poverty, inequality, violence and pollution and aspire towards an inclusive, more equal society in which everyone is supported and encouraged to play a full part, within a more just and sustainable world.

Feminist because we seek to abolish the unequal division of wealth, work and power between men and women and to promote a better understanding of the intimate connections between personal life and politics.

Green because we believe that our present system of economic organisation is socially and environmentally destructive, and that a more balanced relationship between human activity and nature will be better for us, for our descendants and for the other animal species with whom we share the planet.

Who can join Democratic Left Scotland?

Membership is open to anyone who shares our general outlook and commitments. Whilst many of our members are involved in a range of political parties, others are not.
Michael Gardiner is impressed by a collection of essays on the modern SNP, especially topical as the party approaches May’s Scottish Parliament elections after four years in government.

This collection is conceived in large part as a response to a perceived need to advance on the only major previous history of the Scottish National Party, Peter Lynch’s solo-written 2002 book. And although the comparison is made unfair by rapid advances in the field during devolution, this is an incomparably more comprehensive and sophisticated account. Somewhat interdisciplinary, it mixes Institute of Governance-style tabulated sociological breakdowns with the kind of critical analysis which Hassan rightly claims has been missing from accounts over-reliant on party sources. The ambition is bold, and, despite some contradiction between chapters and a slight absence of cultural-theoretical input, this ambition is fulfilled abundantly. The editor has long been at the forefront of this competitive field of commentary, and here has collected some of the most celebrated and interesting specialists in the field. Every contribution is erudite, some riveting; all are highly historically informed and politically subtle, and the whole points to a ground-breaking understanding of the implications of the SNP’s various phases of presence.

Coalition, and also shows a slight gap between chapters in terms of how much account they take of the 2008 financial crisis – though this is editorially well evened out by Hassan and the historical sophistication of the book is untainted. Avoiding becoming sucked into a British history in which Thatcherism is central, the collection is more even, eloquent for example on the party’s parliamentary golden era, the 1974–79 period – and James Mitchell in particular debunks the idea that this was primarily oil-driven. Rather, there is more of a sense of Labour’s mixed record on addressing (and managing) the urban Scottish working class, and the fading fortunes of the UK.

CRISIS OF BRITISH STATE
Hassan’s own introduction shows a strong sense of how the fortunes and stances of the SNP have been tied to the international standing of the UK, and sets up a historical framework for the book: “[t]he road from Wilson’s humiliation with the November 1967 devaluation, two weeks after Winnie Ewing’s victory, takes us directly to the 1976 IMF crisis, the final burial of Croslanite social democracy, the ascendancy of Thatcherism and the creation of Blair’s New Labour … The emergence of Scottish and Welsh nationalism were a product of the crisis of the British state and economy and the UK’s place in the global economy” (p2). Analysing the relationship between emotional and political nationalism, Hassan also persuasively describes how the Party have used the failures of New Labour as in a previous era they did with Thatcherism. He charts, as do others here, the movement from amateur group to pragmatic political party, and a rise to power despite the lack of a mass membership and a difficult relationship with its intellectual supporters such as Tom Nairn and Neal Ascherson. Indeed there is some debate here about how intellectual SNP supporters are – they tend to be highly educated, but as Stephen Maxwell and others point out, historically the party has had an aversion to debate. However, flagging up another general theme of the collection, Hassan shows how the effects of Party’s growth are linked to a rise in a culture of democracy in general. And as he has done elsewhere, he predicts the constitutional fallout accompanying the end of devolutionary “joined-upness”, in which a (New) Labour administration in Westminster deals with (New) Labour administration in Holyrood. From a civic-national stance that defines the collection, Hassan calls for a “national project” which reconstructs civic society from the ground up.

After this, the collection proper begins with straight political histo-
ry, Richard Finlay’s highly-informed chapter accounting for the period to Winnie Ewing’s 1967 Hamilton victory, an account which is inevitably stretched yet ultimately well-balanced in the context of the collection, given the democratic importance of more recent changes, and the need for space for other kinds of analysis. James Mitchell then takes up the political history from 1967 to the 2000s, and dates the rise of modern Scottish politics as such from this period, again setting a tone in which Nationalism’s constitutional challenge utterly reconfigures the nature of political representation. Like others here, Mitchell charts the SNP’s pragmatism as well as its ideology, as it moves from amateur organisation to political player, and historicises the problem of balancing the stress between the “national” angle versus the “left” angle – largely dismissing the radicalism of the leftist ’79 Group as a somewhat ineffectual exercise in student politics.

**GENDERING OF SNP**

Fiona Mackay and Meryl Kenny then present a complex picture of the gendering of the Party, beginning with a sociological breakdown of membership and support, with women often being prominent at the top but under-represented in the body of the Party, then persuasively criticise a candidate selection process which often fails to get women into winnable seats, and the favouring of “soft” measures such as managerial courses and rebranding over “hard” measures such as zipping candidate lists. In all, the Party presents a gender paradox, having “a long and impressive record of recruiting and promoting women, including Nordic-levels of female MSPs in the first Scottish Parliament, and women have held high-profile leadership positions in both opposition and government. However, the transition to a major party has, after the first elections, been accompanied by an overall decline in women’s representation. Furthermore, the party at grass-roots level is disproportionately male” (p51).

John Curtice, these days a UK-wide renowned political commentator, describes the SNP’s historical struggle with the first-past-the-post electoral system – showing how “devolution not only saw the advent of a new parliament but also a new electoral system … the introduction of the new electoral system is one key reason why the advent of devolution has provided an electoral lifeline to the SNP” (p59). Again, structural electoral changes can be linked to Party history – and the rise and fall of devolution movements within the Labour Party has, ironically, been instrumental. Like other contributors, Curtice shows how although voting in the Scottish Parliament is a way to concentrate on national issues, the SNP do not have a monopoly on “national” feeling. There is an increasing institutional split between Scottish and British identity – though Curtice’s casual use of “identity” here shows how some cultural theory might be needed to finesse the political situation to fulfil even further Hassan’s “analysis” promise. Colin Mackay also describes the complex link between desire for constitutional changes and SNP votes, and how devolution in a sense is the beginning of the SNP – as it moves towards stressing personalities, pragmatism and professionalism, and comes to control the terms of the devolution debate. Mitchell, Johns and Bennie look at the demography of SNP members, traditionally older and male but now less so, and including those born outside of Scotland, and shows how the SNP has also historically been highly socially liberal – the social analogue of the “Scandinavian economic model”.

**LEFT-LEANING**

One emerging critical theme of the book, stressed by many contributors, is how although the SNP have demonised Thatcherism and New Labour, they have also embraced many aspects of their neo-liberalist doctrine. Jim and Margaret Cuthbert provide an excellent description of this (though not fully accounting for the fall-out of the 2008 crash), while Stephen Maxwell, representing a left position for which he has been known since the 1970s, argues that nevertheless the actual performance of the SNP in government has typically been left-leaning. In particular, Maxwell historicises long-term SNP thinking on social policy; despite neo-liberal temptations and gender problems, the ethical contest with the big Westminster parties has crystallised a particular social policy position, albeit sometimes open to accusation of idealist populism. For Maxwell, the SNP’s attitude to inequality is “one of the most radical commitments to redistribution made by any UK political party since the founding of the welfare state … [and] in government the SNP has strengthened rather than diluted its commitment to social democracy” (p127). Maxwell’s is clearly a “Nordic” position – “early intervention to support and engage the most vulnerable from a baseline of high-quality universal services” (p129) rather than an “Irish” low-wage. Nevertheless, he provides a wonderfully concise statement of the SNP’s social-economic bind, which has not been properly acknowledged by the Party leadership: “Over the last decade as the SNP’s social heart has become more attached to social democracy, its economic head has inclined to neo-liberalism” (p131). Of course, the 2008 crisis goes a long way towards vindicating the Swedish social democratic model over the Irish neo-liberal one – and ironically the Edinburgh financial sector which has created problems for the SNP actually arose from a unionist cultural moment, and British imperial investment. Philip Schlesinger’s contribution is a very highly-informed description of public funding and the growth of the (actually anti-creative) idea of an entrepreneurial “creative economy”, another neo-liberal conception, filtered, again, largely
through New Labour. He also stresses that one result of devolution has been an “Englishing” of British TV, though the SNP have pledged to increase the proportion of UK-wide broadcasting – a particularly important issue since “broadcasting devolution” is closely tied to control of the news agenda. The merging of arts institutions into Creative Scotland, Schlesinger shows, is a bureaucratic attempt to kill this debate, and “[t]he neo-liberal assumptions embedded in the New Labour project live on in the SNP’s proposed cultural lead body, just as they have been challenged by our profound financial and economic crisis” (p144).

LABOUR INSECURITY

Hassan’s own chapter describes a battle for the heart of Scottish social democracy, drawing on wide and deep historical research, and showing how after 1968 onwards Labour attempted to smear the SNP as “Tartan Tories” – which often backfired in suggesting a degree of Labour insecurity – while the SNP learned to use fearful epithets like “London” and “British”. There has been a danger, as Hassan shows, especially during Winnie Ewing’s post-1967 era, of a clumsiness in addressing the Scottish working class and by extension the labour movement in general. Labour then blamed the SNP for its aid in the 1979 vote of no-confidence which it claimed led to Thatcherism, while the SNP never trusted Labour to deliver devolution. Hassan also makes the vital point that the New Left enabled nationalists, for example through CND and direct action, and arresting describes the intellectual weakness of a certain strain of anti-separatist thought: “[New Labour policy] stressed the supposed unique success story of the multi-cultural, multi-national nature of the Union that is the UK … There was an element of vague-ness in this, selective memory and a Whig-like sense of history as the forward March of British progress” (p158).

The desire for independence is actually quite unusual amongst nationalist movements. David Torrance accounts for the story of the leftist ’79 Group, of which Stephen Maxwell was a lynchpin, and which diagnosed the 1979 devolution referendum failure as a class problem, feeling vindicated with the UK electoral success of Thatcher two months later. Torrance describes the group’s vague but radical social and economic policy and traces a history which saw the group’s claiming victory in 1981 then seeing the resignation or expulsion of key members in 1982, adately handled by leader Gordon Wilson. Nevertheless, in many ways the Group did eventually force a cultural leftward shift within the Party, as well as a move towards gradualism rather than independence-fundamentalism. Isabel Lindsay tackles the question of negotiation with a Westminster Parliament that is by definition unwanted, a form of exertion of pressure, returning to the 1974–79 era, and describing tensions between party members in and out of power, as well as between Westminster MPs and the rest of the party, concluding that, despite and through the drift towards neoliberalism and professionalism, during devolution the Party has helped bring Westminster and Holyrood more in touch. This is a conclusion slightly at odds with Alex Wright here, who outlines the growing potential for conflict, misunderstanding and confidentiality issues between Westminster and Holyrood, detailing the changing and sometimes confusing shape of “autonomy” via shifting formal arrangements. Wright historicises the SNP’s sense of responsibility towards the UK and the empire, and examines current possibilities and desires for a “federal” United Kingdom, as well as other arrangements.

FROM FUNDAMENTALISM TO GRADUALISM

Eve Hepburn begins to focus the end of the collection on a theme of “negotiated sovereignty” by describing how the desire for independence is actually quite unusual amongst nationalist movements. In Scotland the desire to “detach” has got stronger but also more complicated, and she confirms the move from independence fundamentalism to gradualism. Hepburn discusses the possibility of a pooled sovereignty which nevertheless retains negotiated control (an impossibility in Anglo-British tradition), concretised in a certain understanding of the European Union, with which the SNP is usually keen to engage. This also raises the question of “how much” sovereignty is desired by the SNP; devolution has indeed in some senses acted as a palliative against independence, and strongly “negotiated sovereignty”, or “devolution max”, has commanded much public support in the context of globally weakening states.

NATIONALISM MADE RESPECTABLE

This has for years been the area of emphasis of the collection’s final contributor, Michael Keating, who here provides an extremely detailed and intelligent comparative study of the forms and desires of nationalisms (though since his comparison concentrates on Western and Central Europe and North America, it is slightly less global than he implies). Keating shows how anti-nationalism is often misguided since it fails to see how the national inevitably returns as a “continual argument over the locus and meaning of political authority that has no end as long as history itself has no end” (p204). Scotland is moreover now sometimes considered as having a “state” (for example by the second, 2001 edition of David McCrone’s celebrated 1992 account). Keating stresses how nations are historically and contextually constructed and reconstructed, as well as, like Hassan, grasping how the late 1960s, the New Left and decolonisation made nationalism respectable, and constituted a real ideological shift: “[from the 1960s, [fundamentalism and ethnocentrism] began to change under the ‘small is beauti-
Peripheral nationalism and regionalism moved to the left, incorporating new social movements, notably in environmentalism and pacifism” (p212). Nationalism also became bound up with “human rights” issues, leading to an anti-state undertone and the “negotiated sovereignty” which now prevails. Like Hepburn, Keating describes the EU in terms of both extending and limiting autonomy, though clearly sees the pro-EU negotiated model as the legitimate civic form of nationalism. And yet, he argues, the “post-sovereignty” model has yet to be publicly accepted as political realism – seen in a relative lack of public debate on this in Scotland. He ends optimistically by suggesting that the civic tends to win out – though the SNP has yet to take advantage of this new model, neglecting “nation building and fail[ing] to develop a narrative around identity, collective action, economic development and social solidarity” (p217). But the tone on which the collection ends is very like the one on which it opens – critical yet optimistic, subtly connecting SNP history and changes in democratic form, and working highly intelligently towards new, ground-up civic definitions.

This collection’s importance can hardly be overstated for these reasons, and for its consistent erudition and historical awareness. As a study of civic society’s relationship to the national, as well as an account of a political history, it should find a large readership both inside and outside of Scotland.

Michael Gardiner is Associate Professor in the Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies at the University of Warwick. As well as creative fiction and comparative criticism, he has published widely on culture and devolution, including The Cultural Roots of British Devolution (EUP, 2004) and Scottish Critical Theory Since 1960 (2006).

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**NEO-LIBERAL SCOTLAND**

Whether we like it or not, the neo-liberalism that began in the mid-1970s is now firmly entrenched in Scotland. **David Purdy** dissects a book that ably analyses the phenomenon but falls short in its approach to policy and strategy for the left.

This book combines an impressive account of the forces that have reshaped Scotland’s economy and society over the past thirty years, with a hopelessly narrow, class-based approach to the problems of strategy and policy facing the “vanquished left” – in Scotland, the UK and, indeed, the developed world as a whole. Its central claim, amply supported by argument and evidence, is that far from halting south of the Tweed, the neo-liberal policy revolution that began in the mid-1970s has been thoroughly assimilated by Scotland’s corporate and political elite and is now entrenched in its system of government.

The first part of the book details the resulting disparities of power and reward between an internationally networked ruling class and a post-industrial proletariat employed predominantly in public and private services. The second part explores the impact of the new regime on selected spheres of public policy: environmental planning, urban regeneration, inward labour migration, criminal justice and the efforts of the “happiness industry” to improve personal well-being by prescribing individualized remedies for the various psychological and social disorders which are, at root, the consequences of living and working under neo-liberal capitalism.

**WHAT WAS NEO-LIBERALISM?**

In a long opening chapter, Neil Davidson seeks to explain what neo-liberalism was. The use of the past tense is not intended to suggest that the neo-liberal era is over: simply that the crisis triggered by the financial crash of 2008 marks the end of one phase and the beginning of another. By and large, this is a good overview, marred only by some dodgy economics. In tracing the intellectual antecedents of neo-liberal ideology, Davidson conflates the neo-classical school of thought, which has dominated Anglo-American economics since the late nineteenth century, with the Austrian school represented by thinkers such as Joseph Schumpeter and Friedrich Hayek. Neo-classical economists depict the self-regulating market as a machine-like equilibrium system, whereas the Austrians extol the restless dynamism and adaptive flexibility of capitalism, eschew the concept of equilibrium and stress the powerful boost that competitive markets give to technological innovation and “creative destruction”. The two traditions thus make uneasy bedfellows, though both are precursors of neo-liberalism. A political project, as distinct from a scientific theory, need not be free from contradiction: witness the unresolved (though possibly creative) tension between
economic liberalism and social conservatism at the heart of Mrs Thatcher’s project.

Davidson likewise fails to distinguish the economics of Keynes from the bowdlerised version of “Keynesian” economics that was taught to students and employed by policy makers during the “golden age” of capitalism after the Second World War. And when we are trying to understand either the profitability crisis of the 1970s or the quite different demand-deficiency crisis in which we are now mired, Marx is not much help. His attempt, in Capital, to show that relative prices and the rate of profit are determined by values and surplus value (conceived as quantities of embodied labour time) is logically flawed. There is, therefore, no warrant for Marx’s belief that labour-displacing capital accumulation driven by competitive pressure to raise labour productivity will eventually undermine capitalism by driving down the average rate of profit. Nor is there any need to explain the long post-war boom by invoking “unproductive” state spending on armaments as a (temporary) countervailing force, though the wider role of the Keynesian-social democratic state in seeking to regulate markets, stabilise capitalism and protect society is, of course, integral to any satisfactory explanation.

More generally, it is impossible to understand successive phases of capitalist development by means of an abstract model of capitalist commodity production in which the state is merely a background presence, distinct from an active agency responding to problems as they arise and, at moments of crisis, wrestling with the tensions between restoring business confidence and maintaining popular legitimacy. At his best, when he does not feel the need to affirm the old religion, Davidson recognises this and treats neo-liberal capitalism, like every other variety of the beast, as an integrated complex in which economy, polity and culture are inextricably intertwined.

WHO RULES SCOTLAND?

Subsequent chapters focus on the specific case of neo-liberal Scotland. David Miller describes the corporate capture of Scottish governance by a ruling class network, whose activities and interests transcend national borders. To speak of a ruling class, as distinct from one that is effortlessly privileged or dominant, is to imply some degree of concerted organisation, backed up by the self-serving belief that what is good for the class is good for society. Accordingly, Miller marshals evidence on the close working relationships between Scottish business executives, political leaders, government officials and a penumbra of intellectuals and professionals variously located in think tanks, research institutes, the media, law firms and consultancies. What binds this class together, he argues, is a common allegiance to neo-liberal ideas and a common involvement on both sides of an increasingly blurred boundary between the public and private sectors.

Miller builds up a strong case, but to clinch it he needs to go beyond the institutions and procedures of the market state and focus on specific policy issues and outcomes. Only then can we gauge the influence, if any, of countervailing forces, weigh the importance of collective organisation against that of conventional wisdom, and find out what happens in cases when there is disagreement within the ruling bloc about what policy or course of action is best. The historic decline of organised labour and the withering away of the left suggest little need to qualify Miller’s general thesis on the first count. But on the role of ideas, a case study reported in a later chapter by Euirig Scandrett shows how a potentially radical version of the concept of environmental justice was initially embraced by the Labour-Lib Dem coalition government under Jack McConnell, only to be later rendered harmless to business interests, thanks not to overt business pressure, but to the power of an ideology that regards any hindrance to capitalist expansion and the commodification of the environment as unthinkable. Elsewhere in the book, the possibility of conflict within the ruling class is mentioned – for instance, about whether the UK should join the euro-zone – but is not taken up.

CLASS LOCATION AND CLASS FORMATION

Two chapters survey class division and conflict in contemporary Scotland. Alex Law and Gerry Mooney argue that de-industrialisation, the growth of the financial sector and the reconfiguration of the public sector have given rise to a simplified and polarised class hierarchy. At the top stand the super-rich corporate elite, the core of the larger ruling bloc. Below them are the post-industrial working class, comprising two unequal groups: the depleted workforce employed in manufacturing, construction, mining and quarrying, who between them accounted for 22 per cent of total employment in 2001, compared with 35 per cent in 1981; and an expanded white collar proletariat employed in public and private services, mostly in relatively large establishments. “Neither the small hive of digital creativity nor the casualised family business is typical”, while large corporate supermarkets have largely replaced independent shopkeepers and traders. (The class location of the long-term unemployed, the irregularly employed and those who make a living in the underground economy is not discussed.)

Patricia McCafferty and Gerry Mooney take this argument further, examining the ways in which neo-liberal policies of privatisation, outsourcing, PFI/PPP arrangements, the introduction of quasi-markets and other organisational changes pursued in the name of value for money, cost efficiency and “customer” service, have affected both the pay and conditions of
BOOK REVIEWS

public sector workers and the ethos of public service.

The economic and social trends invoked in these chapters are not in dispute. But as Law and Mooney remind us, citing Raymond Williams, in the context of social theory the word “class” is used in two distinct senses: as a descriptive economic category, commonly – if questionably – framed in accordance with occupational criteria and including all who meet the relevant criteria, regardless of which class they think they belong to; and to denote a socio-economic formation in which class consciousness and organisation have developed. But the relationship between class location on the one hand, and culture and politics on the other is notoriously problematic. This is partly because class is intersected by gender, race, nationality, religion and other lines of social division; and partly because social identities and interests are not inscribed in the social structure, like parts in a play-script, but are continually formed and reformed as people strive to make sense of their social experience, itself a communicative, social activity.

LIFE IN NEO-LIBERAL SCOTLAND

The experience of life in neo-liberal Scotland is examined in the second part of the book. Two contributions stand out: Kirsteen Paton’s case-study of gentrification in Partick and Colin Clark’s account of how migrants from Central and Eastern Europe living and working in Glasgow react to and cope with their new (temporary or permanent) home. Paton sees gentrification as a state-led policy aimed at attracting the middle class to working class neighbourhoods in the hope that established residents will come to emulate their devotion to owning, earning and shopping. Clark’s chapter sounds a more hopeful note than the others, suggesting that what he calls “inter-cultural dialogue”, rooted in the informal transactions of everyday life, can help migrants to resist the danger of social atomisation and to retain their cultural identities as Poles, Roma etc., while still acquiring some sense of belonging to Scottish society.

Any account of how people experience profound social change is bound to be selective. Nevertheless, it is disappointing that the book focuses entirely on the Central Belt and has nothing at all to say about gender relations. Moreover, if you always view the world through the lens of a one-dimensional, class-based model of society, your vision is liable to be distorted. A small, but telling example occurs on page 172 in a discussion of public sector “reform”, where we find the following statement: “With the sector representing around 25–30 per cent of the working population, it is difficult to conclude, as New Labour do, that there is a clear division between workers and customers [sic] since they and their families are also customers.”

Three comments are pertinent. First, if you must refer to patients, students, benefit claimants etc. as “customers”, then at least put the word in quotation marks. Second, when the interests of public service producers and users come into conflict, it is best to focus on the specific services and relationships concerned: between doctors and patients, teachers and students etc. Third, such conflicts are not inherent features of public provision and can be avoided or resolved without mimicking the market and turning public services into (quasi-) commodities. But it is absurd to dismiss or discount the possibility of conflict on the grounds that producers and users are overlapping groups. Car drivers and their passengers are (sometimes) also pedestrians or cyclists, but this hardly guarantees harmonious and equitable patterns of road use. Nor does the fact that we all need clean air insulate us against air pollution. In cases like these, what we have is not conflicts between the similar interests of different groups of people, on the class model, but conflicts between variously constituted aspects of the same body of people. The appropriate response to is to develop systems of democratic planning involving representatives of all the relevant stakeholders, who are tasked with managing public services, solving problems and resolving conflicts.

POLITICS IN POST-DEVOLUTION SCOTLAND

The final chapter is a long and closely reasoned, but original and thoughtful analysis of Scottish politics since devolution by Neil Davidson, whose two contributions fill 40 per cent of the book. Having noted that capitalism and nationhood developed in tandem, he poses two questions: What is the attitude of the representatives of neo-liberal capitalism to the break-up of Britain through Scottish independence? And has neo-liberalism politicised Scottish national consciousness sufficiently to create a mass movement that might lead to this outcome? Davidson argues that as long as a post-independence, SNP-led regime was suitably pliant, the (largely externally owned) Scottish corporate economy would have nothing to fear, while for British and international capital in general the question is a tactical one. In any case, there is no need to decide since, according to polling evidence, support for independence has not gained momentum since 1999, is not consistently expressed by those who sometimes flirt with it, and is generally accorded a low priority relative to other issues.

Thus, Davidson concludes, it is not true that stateless nations necessarily seek statehood: there have to be compelling reasons for statehood to become a goal. Such reasons have not existed for the majority of Scots and still do not. The SNP’s attitude to independence resembles that of the Second International to socialism: an ultimate aspiration rhetorically invoked in platform speeches, but otherwise subordinated to achievable reforms. The issue, therefore, is the future of devolution, the
SNP’s role within it and the scope for reforms that defy neo-liberal orthodoxy.

Hitherto, thanks to the exigencies of inter-party competition under a hybrid voting system that effectively prevents any party from winning an overall parliamentary majority, Scotland has escaped the more extreme neo-liberal policies introduced south of the border such as academy schools and foundation hospitals, while Scottish governments have enacted measures that improve on conditions in England – notably, land reform and the right to roam, free personal care for the elderly, the abolition of student tuition fees and (from next April) free medical prescriptions for all. But Scotland has not escaped the decline in electoral participation and the popular disaffection with mainstream politics found in all those countries where neo-liberalism has put down the deepest roots. This suggests that devolution has failed as a strategy of legitimation, even if it has had more success as a strategy of delegation.

From now on, moreover, fiscal austerity will reduce the headroom available to Scottish governments, of whatever hue, for tempering neo-liberal economic policies with social democratic social policies. (The possibility of building a broad coalition of resistance to fiscal conservatism based on an alternative, UK-wide programme for promoting economic recovery and reducing the budget deficit is not considered, though since any such coalition would bear a family resemblance to the popular fronts of the 1930s, which Davidson denounces, presumably he would be against it.)

At this point, Davidson gives vent to his own heartfelt aspirations, insisting that what is required to overcome neo-liberalism is a party which is fundamentally opposed to it, “regardless of whether Scotland becomes an independent state or not.” He warns, however, that: “… before any programmes or policies can even begin to be discussed … the social basis of any reconfiguration of the left needs to be established or rather re-established.” In other words, first rebuild the trade union movement, and then found a new workers’ party, as if you could solve the problems of the twenty-first century by re-running the history of the twentieth. Still, we all have our dreams and whistling in the dark is one way to keep one’s spirits up.

David Purdy is a regular contributor to Perspectives and a member of Democratic Left Scotland’s national council.

NOTES
1. It is also worth noting that for Hayek what ultimately justifies capitalism is not that it maximises aggregate happiness, but that it enlarges individual liberty. Neo-classical economics, by contrast, has always been wedded to utilitarian ethics and is thus more disconcerted by recent evidence emanating from the “happiness industry”, which raises serious doubts about the benefits of continuing economic growth in societies that have already passed the threshold of affluence.
2. This distinction is elaborated in David Purdy (2010) “Keywords: Keynesian”, Perspectives 26.
was due to submit this article just as I returned from hearing Sandra Steingraber address Members of the European Parliament in Brussels. I expected that listening to this remarkable woman would provide inspiration but, sadly, the Scottish weather ruined my plans. Instead, I spent a day in Edinburgh Airport absorbing an updated version of her book, *Living downstream, a personal investigation of cancer and the environment.*

Steingraber, a scientist and internationally acclaimed expert in environmental links to cancer and human health, also happens to be a cancer survivor. In many ways she has taken up the mantle from Rachel Carson. Unlike Carson, herself a cancer victim, Steingraber speaks from personal experiences to imbue her science with humanity. Carson feared that by speaking openly about her cancer, her detractors would discredit her science.

Carson’s legacy was to raise awareness of the harmful and long-term effects of pesticides on the environment, ultimately bringing about a ban on DDT. Her book, *Silent Spring*, was viciously attacked by the chemicals industry and those who accused her of being alarmist and unscientific.

Carson also documented what she believed to have been the start of a cancer epidemic. Steingraber takes this further. Both note our increased exposure to synthetic chemicals as being a contributor. The industrial revolution and its consequences in areas such as energy, transport, agriculture, food and health led to the production and introduction of millions of man-made chemicals into the environment: 100,000 chemicals are now registered for use in the EU. WHO’s International Agency for Research on Cancer have listed several hundred known, probable and possible carcinogens and a few hundred known or suspected endocrine disrupting substances (EDCs). They permeate every aspect of our lives – the air we breathe, our food and water, inside our homes and workplaces – down to our personal care products.

Synthetic chemicals have even been found in umbilical cords, placenta, blood, urine and breast milk. ¹

Those of most concern are persistent (they don’t break down in the environment); bio-accumulative (they build up in our bodies), endocrine disruptors – hormone disrupting chemicals, for example found in plastics and pts and vptvbs, (bio-accumulative and very persistent). Diseases which may be linked to chemical and radiation exposure include cancers, mental and physical birth defects and reproductive problems. Recent studies highlight that the timing of exposure is also vital; for example, the developing human foetus is uniquely at risk of harm from environmental toxicants, leading to babies being born toxic with heightened potential to develop serious diseases earlier in life.

Whilst improved treatment has reduced mortality, the increase in the prevalence of cancer and other illnesses has brought huge economic, social and psychological costs. Lifestyle choices are cited as playing a part, and whilst that may be true for adults, it is hard to blame children’s and animals’ cancers on this – they don’t smoke or drink, nor work in stressful environments – and they are generally more active. What children receive however are proportionally larger doses of those toxins, because pound for pound, they breathe, eat and drink more than adults do.

I work in the area of children’s rights and this is clearly a children’s rights issue. The Children’s Environmental Health Network underlines the dangers of the presence of chemical compounds in children’s bodies. Amongst their many studies, one stands out. This focused on the high levels of Bisphenol A in premature infants in an intensive care unit. BPA is found in baby bottles and food containers and many everyday products where it can leach into food, drink and dust. It is also used in medical tubing in hospitals. It has many hormonal effects and is associated with an increased risk to male reproduction, obesity and breast cancer as well as damage to developing brain tissue. ² The WHO notes that preventative interventions are needed to protect children from adverse exposures, i.e. removing cancer-causing substances so that the disease does not occur in the first place.

In April 2010, the groundbreaking US President’s Cancer Report claimed that the environmental causes of cancer are hugely underestimated and neglected. ³ It emphasised the need for precautionary action in the face of potential threats to public health and made an economic case for the development of alternatives, and a human rights case for focusing not just on reducing deaths but on improving the quality of life, particularly for those disproportionately affected by environmental contamination.

Readers may be aware of a Petition 1089 on behalf of the Women’s Environmental Movement (WEN), calling on the Scottish Parliament to investigate exposures to hazardous toxins in the environment and in the workplace. The petition ran for two years, closing in April 2010.
In the run up to next year’s elections, WEN will be reminding politicians of their commitment to the NHS and the treatment of ill health. We will argue for more attention to be given to preventing illnesses, not only those associated with personal life choices but from exposures over which we have little or no control. We will urge the Government to follow through the EU’s declaration to ban BPA and to start a Public Information and Right to Know Campaign in a similar vein to that used for alcohol and tobacco.

Treatments and survival times will continue to improve and numbers of people living with cancer will continue to rise, but we should not tolerate this tragic human and economic toll, made more intolerable because it is largely preventable. The readership of Perspectives includes those engaged in environmental justice, poverty, and human rights. This major human rights issue needs us all to collaborate to create a healthier society for our children.

Maire McCormack is a member of Democratic Left Scotland.

NOTES

1. One US study found the umbilical cord blood of 10 newborns to contain 287 industrial chemicals and pollutants, including brominated flame retardants and pesticides – a chemical inheritance from time spent in the womb.

2. In November the European Commission announced that it would ban BPA in baby bottles from 2011.

3. The panel was set up in the 70s to record and report on all matters concerning cancer in the US. It takes evidence from a range of people and organisations. For the first time this year, the report dealt with environmental and occupational factors affecting cancer and other serious health problems.

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