THE RISE AND RISE OF THE NATIONALIST AGENDA

DAVID McCrone
ON THE WRITING ON THE WALL

PLUS GERRY HASSAN ON RADICAL SCOTLAND AND THE POLITICS OF THE FUTURE WORKING CLASS HEROES: THE MARYHILL PANELS THE ARAB SPRING THE POLITICS OF PUBLIC HEALTH REVIEWS

MAGAZINE OF SCOTLAND’S DEMOCRATIC LEFT
SCOTLAND: THE NEW AGENDA

May’s elections to the Scottish parliament brought an outcome that few, and not even the victors themselves, had predicted. It was even the more surprising given that the voting system adopted for the Holyrood election had (allegedly) been designed to prevent any one party gaining an absolute majority. Up until May we had had either coalition (Labour/Liberal) or minority (SNP) administrations.

We are truly in a new era with the SNP now having an absolute majority. But why did no-one see the writing on the wall?

David McCrone’s piece argues that this victory was a long time coming – some thirty years – but that the trends were clear to see, if only we had cared to look for them. The story is inevitably not just about the road to the SNP’s success, but also of the failure, particularly Labour’s, of the other major parties.

Of course the big question now is what will the nationalist government do over its next term and how can Scotland re-shape itself in this new era. Gerry Hassan argues that “Scotland stands at a defining point in its political history”, which opens up opportunities not just for the Scottish Government but for all of us to help shape the Scotland we want to see.

Gerry’s latest book (co-edited with Rosie Ilett), Radical Scotland: Arguments for Self-Determination, is reviewed in this issue by David Purdy, and we also have copies available on special offer (see page 19).

Lesley Riddoch continues her six-part series on Scotland with a sharp piece on Scotland’s largest city, Glasgow, which “is in Scotland but somehow still not of it.”

Gilbert Ramsay looks at the Arab Spring and ask why, when it was so obvious that these undemocratic states were vulnerable to popular uprising, no-one saw it coming.

Lynne Friedli writes on public health, arguing that a current initiative designed to tackle Scotland’s “intractable problems” will not succeed if it does not take on board wider questions of social deprivation and equality.

Elsewhere, Alex Law examines the work of Patrick Geddes, who had a stab at creating the Big Society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – not a good precedent for David Cameron’s “Big Idea”.

Ian R Mitchell writes on the unique Maryhill stained glass panels, and Paul Henderson Scott asks why Scotland does not control its own broadcasting institutions.

Thanks as ever to all our contributors and, if you are reading Perspectives for the first time, please consider subscribing. There’s a form on the back cover.

Sean Feeny
Editor
The campaign against the Jewish National Fund (JNF) has seriously taken off this year with the call of Palestinian civil society to stop the JNF, and the decision by David Cameron to withdraw as a patron of the organisation. If you’ve never heard of the JNF, you soon will. I had never heard of them a year ago, even though they have been in existence since 1901, registered in the UK soon after and have been significant players in the Israeli settlement of Palestine ever since. The JNF was established by the World Zionist Organisation to obtain land in Palestine for the sole use by Jews “in perpetuity”. It has been therefore used as a tool in the irreversible expansion of Jewish – and from 1948, Israeli – land in Palestine, and thus of the dispossession of Palestinians’ land. Following the ethnic cleansing of Palestinian Arabs by Zionist militia in the 1948 Naqba, land was handed over to the JNF to ensure that the ethnically cleansed villages became “Judaised” – i.e. to prevent the return of the refugees. The same thing happened in the 1967 war of Israeli expansion, and is continuing today in the Negev desert, as Bedouin villages are destroyed to make way for Jewish Israeli settlement.

The call to stop the JNF was launched on “Land Day” 2011, by an international coalition of the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment & Sanctions National Committee (an alliance of Palestinian NGOs), with the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network and the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign. Land Day, 30th March, is a commemoration of the six unarmed Palestinians who were killed in 1976 by Israeli troops during a general strike and non-violent demonstrations against confiscation and expropriation of land. Lobbying against the JNF had been going on before the official launch: when Ed Miliband was elected to the Labour party leadership, he declined the invitation to become a JNF patron, unlike his predecessors (Tony Blair remains a JNF patron despite his status as “peace envoy” to Israel and Palestine). When David Cameron quietly dropped his patronage of the JNF, he became (according to the Zionist Jewish Chronicle) the first British Prime Minister in its 110 years not to be a patron. The worm is turning. Civil Society organisations from the Iona Community to Friends of the Earth Scotland have been endorsing the call to stop the JNF. A Westminster Early Day Motion (1677) promoted by Jeremy Corbyn and Gerald Kaufman calls on the JNF UK’s charitable status to be revoked (get your MP to sign it!).

I’m writing this on return from a stop the JNF workshop in London at which I was a speaker. If I hadn’t heard of the JNF a year ago, how come I got involved in the campaign and was invited to speak? The JNF has recently been promoting itself as an “ecological agency” which is “turning the desert green”, is the “environmental arm of the Jewish people”, which “introduces [Jewish students] to the natural wonders of their homeland (sic).” It attended the Johannesburg Earth Summit as an environmental NGO and ran a fringe meeting at the Cancun Conference of Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change. It plants trees in Israel and creates forest parks (on the destroyed villages from which Palestinians had been expelled).

Last year I was preparing to go to Palestine for the World Education Forum and to make contact with Friends of the Earth Palestine. I spoke to Palestine solidarity activists in Scotland who asked whether, as an environmentalist, I had come across the JNF. I hadn’t, and the more I found out about it confirmed its role as a perpetrator of environmental injustice. If you want an example of the greenwashing of colonialism and ethnic cleansing, JNF is it. I participated in a study tour of JNF sites in Israel at the end of last year, witnessed the aftermath of ethnic cleansing from 1948, 1967 and 2010, and met with refugees. I contributed to Greenwashing Apartheid: The Jewish National Fund’s Environmental Cover Up (see http://www.stopthejnf.org/) part of a series of eBooks on the JNF.

In fact, the JNF’s environmental credentials are a recent and shallow phenomenon. Initially, purely a land acquisition agency, it discovered tree planting had many benefits: wind breaks for kibbutzim; clearing swamps; demarcating boundaries with Arab neighbourhoods; hiding places for militia; commercial forestry (largely unsuccessful); covering up destroyed Palestinian villages; propaganda for Zionism and fundraising across the world. For these purposes it largely planted Eucalyptus – an Australian species which drives out native species – and Aleppo Pine – a species occurring naturally at low density on thin soil in high lands, which the Israelis renamed “Jerusalem pine” and planted at high density on all soils. Only when it came into conflict with Israeli environmentalists
A rab land. European environment supplanting an “oriental” Israeli citizens: the creation of a “Judaised” non-Jewish inhabitants or else their subservience as predicated on the expulsion or eradication of the Palestine, on which current Zionism is based, is remain. The idea of a “Jewish, democratic state” in settler colonialism accompanied by ethnic cleansing Israeli-Palestinian problem – a project of Zionist justice struggle. It also goes to the heart of the climate change.

The campaign against the JNF is an environmental justice struggle. It also goes to the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian problem – a project of Zionist settler colonialism accompanied by ethnic cleansing and Apartheid regime for those Palestinians who remain. The idea of a “Jewish, democratic state” in Palestine, on which current Zionism is based, is predicated on the expulsion or eradication of the non-Jewish inhabitants or else their subservience as Israeli citizens: the creation of a “Judaised” European environment supplanting an “oriental” Arab land.

The recent rejection of the JNF by politicians and civil society has much to do with the beginnings of the “Arab Spring” – the ejection of Ben Ali of Tunisia, Mubarak of Egypt, Saleh of Yemen it seems and who knows who else by the time this goes to press. The partial liberation of these countries (watch and see how the West will attempt new ways to colonise the Arabic speaking world) marred by civil war in Libya and savage repression in Bahrain and Syria. And Palestine – where the Israeli occupiers are showing how brutal they can be to the people they are colonising as the Arab despots can be to their own people.

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

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.

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na Deamordataich Chli an Alba

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SUMMER 2011 / PERSPECTIVES 30
The SNP’s victory in May confounded the pundits (and even took the party itself by surprise) but, argues David McCrone, the writing has long been on the wall.

If agitated articles in the English/British press are anything to go by, the result of the 2011 Scottish parliament election has set the cat among the pigeons. We seem to have moved seamlessly from an assumption that independence would “never happen” to one in which it is “virtually inevitable”. There is an elegiac quality to some journalistic musings about grandfathers (who came from the likes of Auchtermuchty) to many a happy holiday spent in the Highlands. Wake up and smell the malt. All seems changed utterly as a result of the May 2011 election.

We should of course be much more circumspect in our assessments. How to explain the outcome, predicted by no commentator I can think of, until after the event? Instant journalistic comment coalesces around three related explanations. First, there is the Eck Factor; it was Alex Salmond wot won it, in that he rang rings round the hapless Ian Gray, and the other opposition leaders. This factor was reinforced by the mutual admiration society which was the BBC TV programme by Michael Portillo on May 15th. Secondly, there was the dire Labour campaign, which started off attacking the Tories in Westminster – the auld enemy – and then screeched to a halt in the last week and ended up attacking the new enemy – separatism: no way to run an election. Finally, there is the assertion that the SNP switched holus-bolus to them. After all, said some, Labour’s vote only went down less than 1 per cent: a classic case of whistling in the dark.

In the aftermath, siren voices in Labour’s ranks call for “London” to assert control of the party in Scotland whom they blame for the dire campaign. Arise, the famed forty Labour MPs, who, as Lord McConnell of Whatstit pointed out, now have more say in electing Ian Gray’s successor than the 37 MSPs themselves. Metropolitan commentators chip in that Labour has little chance of getting back into government (they mean at Westminster) unless they “sort out” Scotland, and Wales (the Tafts apparently need less sorting out than the Jocks).

Be all that as it may: it misses the point. Put simply, it fails to understand politics in these islands. The default seems to assume that there is a uniform system around which, now and then, Scotland and Wales, deviate, but not much. The point which is missed is that there is no such thing as uniformity. Scotland and England began to diverge in terms of British general election voting patterns as early as 1955 (leaving the 19th century aside), and has gone on diverging ever since. The cosy assumption was that once Thatcher was out of the road, and the Tories were defeated, Scotland would simply revert back to “British” patterns. Not at all so. The gap between England and Scotland in terms of Labour-Tory differences has actually grown since 1997, and remember we are talking about British elections which tend to minimise Scottish-English differences. When it comes to devolved elections, then Labour does worse because the SNP does much better. I recall attending a meeting of the Tory shadow cabinet (puzzling as to why the Tories in Scotland were toxic) at which the current Secretary of State for Defence wanted to know when “real” (class) politics would assert themselves; let’s get back to Labour versus Tories, from which we have been sidetracked by all this “nationalism” rubbish. One almost expected him to say it was “epiphenomenal”, but he hadn’t read his Marxist theory.

PROFOUND MISUNDERSTANDING

So what’s wrong with that? Just like those Labour politicians who yearn for something similar, it shows a profound misunderstanding of politics in these islands. We should in any case remind ourselves that there was no “golden age” of class politics. Remember Disraeli’s portrayal of the 19th century English working class as “angels in marble”? Or the fact that until the 1960s in Scotland large sections of the working class voted Tory (the Orange legacy)? True, there has been a process of “de-alignment” whereby voters are less thirled to a party for life, but the key to explaining Scottish (and for that matter, British) politics lies in what is taken as the frame of reference. Put simply, Scottish voters have been forefronting what they see as the Scottish interest for at least three decades now.
True, when asked, they claim that “British” issues are not the focus at UK elections, and “Scottish” at devolved elections, but in truth, the Scottish frame of reference has mattered for longer than that, even when seemingly the same political parties, notably Labour, are beneficiaries north and south of the border. One cannot safely assume that the same issues are in play, if only because since the mid-1970s, the SNP has to be factored into party competition in Scotland. In truth, we had multi-party politics before these were formalised by proportional representation (via the Additional Member System) in elections for the Scottish parliament (as well as the Single Transferable Vote system for local government since 2007).

The point is that even as far back as the Union of 1707, Scottish politicians had to dance to a different tune. Why? Because control of “low politics” – of welfare, schooling, parish boards and the rest, lay in the hands of Scottish politicians, institutionalised around the Scottish Office since 1886. Gradually, and more and more powers accreted to St Andrews House, notably during the war years in the middle of the 20th century under Tom Johnston, and thereafter as Scotland tried to play catch-up with England in terms of economic development. Sometimes referred to as the Scottish growth project, it fell to civil servants and politicians to try and revive the Scottish economy, and in so doing, giving added meaning and impetus to the Scottish frame of reference. This helped to create and expand what Philip Schlesinger has called a “deliberative space” for Scottish issues, a set of concerns and debates about Scotland’s future, mainly in economic and social terms, but inevitably involving cultural ones – debates about the national “we”.

**SCOTTISH IDENTITY AHEAD OF BRITISHNESS**

As far as we can gather from survey work, people in Scotland have been putting Scottish identity ahead of Britishness for thirty years now, and if anything, the trend has grown. Oddly enough, since 1999 and devolution, the rate prioritising being Scottish has stayed about the same – roughly two-thirds. The point is not that having a parliament in Edinburgh has not made people feel more Scottish; they were already Scottish when the process began. They were not making a political statement either by saying they were Scottish. While it is true that supporters of the SNP are more likely to say they are Scottish, the reverse is not true: that is, that people who say they are Scottish (and not British) are not translating that into SNP support.

What undoubtedly has happened is that the Scottish frame of reference has been institutionalised, what we might call the Scottish semi-state, not that devolution made people feel more Scottish. Here is the premier debating space for Scottish politics. It is the latest and, until now, the most important brick in the wall of Scottish autonomy. It helps to refract debates and arguments about social, economic and cultural issues in Scotland. It also structures policy differences in a different way north and south of the border. Think of a whole raft of Scottish policies: on health, education, nuclear power, crime, care for elderly, and so on. Scots do things differently not because they are somehow more innately “left-wing” (they’re not, in attitudinal terms), but because the main political battle is between two left of centre parties – Labour and the SNP. Think how weak the Tories are in Scotland, a measly 13.9% of the constituency vote in May; this, from a party which got 50% of the popular vote back in 1955, the only one to do so up to now. South of the border, of course, it’s mainly Conservative (with added Lib-Dem help) versus Labour, so the political agenda tends to be fought on centre, or centre-right issues, thus magnifying Scottish-English policy differences, and implying that Scots are more “left-wing” even although, compared with English public opinion, they’re not much more.

There is also a demographic factor at work here. Being British is in many ways an age thing. This is because older people, at least those over 70, are more likely to remember the war, reinforcing as it did the sense of being British; and of course older people die. The historian Linda Colley once pointed out that being British was “forged” (nice double edge to that) on the twin anvils of war (with France in the 18th/19th centuries) and religion (being Protestant, and hence supposedly more enlightened than Continentals). To this we might add the welfare state, as delivered in the 1940s and 1950s as the tariff for being British. Manifestly, the more the welfare state is eroded by privatisation, the more religion turns into a minority pursuit, and world war, thankfully, hasn’t happened in 70 years, the underpinnings of being British are systematically removed. What has amplified is the sense of being Scottish, because discussions about society and economy have increasingly taken place at the “national” rather than the state level. In other words, “Scotland” has re-emerged as the premier frame of reference.

What has this to do with the 2011 election result? It is important to take both the 2007 and 2011 elections together, because they tell a more complete story. We know a lot more about 2007 than 2011, because we have fuller analysis (see Revolution or Evolution? The 2007 Scottish Elections, by John Curtice et al., 2009). Why did the SNP succeed in 2007 (albeit by a whisker)? Two factors are important: firstly that they took a far higher percentage of those claiming to be in favour of independence than ever before (still only around 25% of public opinion, however); and they captured a higher percentage of those in favour of greater powers devolved to the parliament (the so-called devolution-max opinion), these coupled with a belief that the SNP would form a more competent government in administrative terms, reinforced by the added value of the Salmond leadership factor. In our analysis we identified a “deeper sense of restlessness among the Scottish public” (p.183), which resulted in the SNP winning one more seat than Labour in 2007,
though in truth the balance of constituencies (73) to regional list seats (56) gave Labour a structural advantage given its hold on the former (proportionately, a 6 seat difference would have resulted otherwise). In 2007, the Scottish electorate had also been softened up by opposition to Blair’s war in Iraq which helped to detach voters, though in truth one could not claim that the SNP won because of the Iraq war; it is not that simple. Neither did the SNP win because people thought it had done a great job on the policy front. If anything, voters were more gloomy about achievements on the economy, education, health, crime and transport since the SNP came to power in 2007. However, the party had a huge lead over its Labour rival (as many as 30 percentage points) as regards perceived competence in government.

**SNP WRITTEN OFF**

In hindsight, the 2007 election represented, ironically, “politics as usual, a seemingly natural evolution of the devolution settlement” (p.121). The stage was set for a new, more intense battle in 2011, one in which, earlier in the year, the Labour party looked like winning, given the return of a Tory plus government at Westminster in 2010, and one in which Labour took 40 seats with 42% of the vote in Scotland. So far, so complacent. Salmond’s SNP were behind the pace, and written off in some quarters, now that the auld Tory enemy were back in power in London. Labour also had a seeming in-built advantage with a much higher percentage of Scots who vote nothing else – as many as 30%. Labour also supplemented that with a higher share of vote across social classes in 2003, the last time it formed a government in Scotland. Then, the SNP looked marginalised, relying more on what Lindsay Paterson described as “the resort of the disgruntled, the downwardly mobile” (Has Devolution Delivered?, 2006, p.63) in contrast with previous elections, especially in the 1970s, when it was the “vehicle by which the aspirational sought to modernise Scottish society”.

The boot, in 2007 and 2011, was on the other foot. Learning its lessons, and led by Salmond, the SNP set out to exploit what it called “the perfect storm” – post Iraq war, but before Brown became leader. It did again with a vengeance in 2011. This time, it came from the pack, having got only 20% in 2010 British general election. Back in March, the SNP were behind Labour in the polls, but the campaign had hardly begun. Once it did, and the terms of the political debate became obvious, the SNP was able to position itself back in the aspirational frame, while Labour fought a trench war against the Tories who were also-rans in Scotland; classically fighting yesterday’s war.

It wasn’t the case that an SNP victory, especially one on such a stunning scale, was inevitable. Labour misread the runes; found itself in the wrong election; failed to tune in to the mood music which required defensive and offensive declarations of Scottish interest, the better to take on Westminster. The SNP were much better suited to the task, and have now set a hurdle which they were not meant to vault. After all, the AMS system was attractive to Labour in 1999 because it seemed to prevent the SNP getting to overall power. However, if you set the high hurdle, and your opponent vaults it, they’re off and running, and you’ll never catch them. Momentum is all.

So is the march of Scottish nationalism inevitable? Not so. It would have been quite possible for Labour to craft a Scottish narrative, but it would have meant letting go of London coat-tails for good. After all, if you ask Labour politicians who the leader of the Scottish Labour party is, they reply Ed Miliband, just as they used to say Gordon Brown (he at least had a Scottish constituency), and previous to that, Tony Blair. That, in a nutshell, is the problem. Scottish Labour belongs to London; the SNP is maître chez nous. Already battle has been renewed in Labour’s ranks between Home Rulers and Neo-Unionists, a battle many thought had ended in 1999. It turned out that it was not dead, merely resting, like Monty Python’s Norwegian blue.

Elections are a bit like diagnostic fluid. You don’t really notice the change until you get the results. But once you know them, there is no going back. In the words of the old joke: ye ken noo. Whatever, the result of the next Scottish election – in 2016 having been bumped by Westminster to accommodate their own election – the battle over austerity and aspiration will be fought by the Nationalists whose ultimate aim is to leave the Union, at least as presently constituted. Changed, changed utterly? Probably so, but then the story is much older than we give it credit for. The writing has long been on the wall, if only we had cared to raise our heads above the daily stramash of politics.

David McCrone is professor of sociology, and co-director of the Institute of Governance at Edinburgh University. He has been writing about Scottish politics and society for longer than he cares to remember. He is an associate editor of Scottish Affairs (http://www.scottishaffairs.org/) which hopes to carry an article later in the year by John Curtice analysing the 2011 Scottish election. Apart from those mentioned above, McCrone’s main books are: Understanding Scotland: the sociology of a nation (Routledge, 1998); The Sociology of Nationalism: tomorrow’s ancestors, (Routledge, 1998); National Identity, Nationalism and Constitutional Change (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) (with Frank Bebbiofer).

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A NEW NORTHERN SONG?
RADICAL SCOTLAND AND
THE POLITICS OF THE FUTURE

A new Scotland is coming into being, says Gerry Hassan, and with it the prospect of creating a different, dynamic nation.

"We'll govern our country fairly and wisely, with an eye to the future but a heart to forgive." Alex Salmond, victory speech at Prestonfield House, May 6th 2011.

Scotland finds itself, its possibilities and future suddenly exciting, challenging and in uncharted waters. We cannot over-state the scale of change and transformation Scottish voters have embarked upon: an SNP landslide and majority government, a Labour Party in crisis and denial, and Conservatives and Lib Dems, even further driven to the margins. Scottish politics and society have been fundamentally altered, and with it the possible contours and dynamics of the United Kingdom and British state.

A TARTAN TSUNAMI: HOW THE SNP WON IN 2011

Why the SNP won, where Scotland is, and what our future might look like, are part of a short story, but more crucially, part of a much longer, deeper story.

There is the tone and style of the SNP campaign; the emotional resonance that the Nationalists captured and personified; the potent sense that for many Scots voting SNP plays into a narrative of how they feel distinct, special and even unique – something which is a universal human trait. If anyone still thinks that is an over-statement just imagine the paucity of Scottish politics without the Nationalists; it would have been a rather different for the last 40 years and Scots would have been reduced to expressing their dislike of Westminster rule and Tories (and often the two together), by more often than not voting Labour and having few options when they wanted to protest against Labour.

We know how the Nationalists won in 2007. The comprehensive Scottish Election Survey of James Mitchell et al published in Voting for a Scottish Government is the most detailed analysis we have of a Scottish election.1 The SNP had a number of factors going for it in the 2007 election: a professionalised campaign, a focused set of messages, a culture of hope, a popular leader, and a main opponent, Labour, who had grown complacent and thought they could still win by reprising its old hits.

We will have a Scottish Election Survey by Mitchell and company for 2011, but we can already identify what some of its broad outlines will be. The SNP’s credibility and competence as an administration was agenda-shaping. As was the lack of distinctiveness between SNP and Labour aided by Labour trying to pinch some of the SNP’s most popular policies (council tax freeze, no tuition fees) at the last minute. Then there was leadership projection and perceptions. Alex Salmond versus Iain Gray was an uneven contest, but it also played into a wider set of interpretations about the SNP and Scottish Labour. And then there was even more pronounced than 2007 the politics of hope versus the politics of fear.

In 2011 the SNP stressed the politics of hope, optimism and positivity. Labour for the fourth consecutive election embraced a politics of negativity and fear. Remember “Divorce is an Expensive Business” in 1999 and how its abrasive, aggressive unionist message worked then? Political parties cannot keep running the same election campaign and theme, but by 2007 Labour had little less to offer.

In 2007 the Nationalist campaign was distinctive, challenging and offering a Scotland of potential. The party drew from a rich range of sources to do this, and changed its campaigning, message and style of politics. Alex Salmond dramatically altered how he did politics. Out went going on about what was lacking in a Scotland which didn’t have the powers to become all that it wanted to be. In came an emphasis on what we could do as a self-governing nation. And voters recognised the change with the Scottish Election Survey finding that 51% of voters thought the SNP campaign positive versus 29% negative; the Lib Dems and Conservatives had small leads for positive campaigns, whereas a mere 20% thought Labour ran a positive campaign and an emphatic 59% negative.

We can hazard that it is a safe guess that voters will have had a similar impression of the parties in the
2011 election: a positive, expansive SNP and three unionist parties which are seen as significantly less positive. And that again Labour will easily win the contest of the most negative.

THE QUIET REVOLUTION OF SCOTLAND
There is a long story of how we got to this situation. There is the changing nature of post-war Scotland, of a society which became more socially liberal, mobile and open. This can be seen in the 1960s onward march of Scottish nationalism, particularly amongst younger voters, parts of the working class, and in New Towns. This was evident in studies of Scottish voters in the 1960s and 1970s, and part of this was a Scottish expression of changing class patterns and individual attitudes and aspirations which were present across the UK. In Scotland, this led to the decline of the Scots Tories evident from the late 1950s, slow weakening of Labour loyalty, and emergence of the SNP as a permanent force.

Thatcherism is part of the story, but only part. There is a powerful Scottish sentiment which wants to blame all our ills on Mrs Thatcher and her ism; to see her and her ideology as potently anti-Scottish and shutting down industry after industry. Its abrasive, uncompromising unionism accelerated trends which were already at work. These included the long-term crisis of Scottish unionism including of a Tory persuasion and also Labour variant, and Scotland seeing itself more as a distinctive centre-left political community where the key political contest became between Labour and SNP.

Many Scots see Scotland as pre and after Thatcherism, and this can be evidenced in the voting intentions in YouGov’s in-depth study on May 5th. This found that amongst voters aged 18–24 and 25–39 years the SNP had a 13% lead over Labour, whereas in the 40–59 and 60 plus age groups the SNP had a 4% lead. Clearly for some voters between about 40 and their mid 40s how they interpret the world is through perceptions of that decade.

However, at the same time we need to be careful to not fall into the myths and folklore of “the official story” of Scotland. We know that while Scotland prides itself on its difference it is not that different from the rest of the UK in attitudes and values. And we should also reflect that while most of us have grown up articulating and buying into the account of Scotland as a nation with a social democratic culture, we don’t actually have a Scottish social democratic politics and nation, given the scale of inequality, poverty and exclusion. The countries which call themselves social democratic in the world, Norway, Sweden, Canada, don’t have these disabling, demeaning features.

We need to pause and reflect on the complexities, unpleasant facts and realities of the Scotland we live in and not the fantasy Scotland of our dreams. Our social democratic sentiment in attitudes and values seem to work best for the professional vested interest groups of public Scotland, and in particular in education, health and local government. We have to ask whether we should stop taking their accounts of their progressiveness at face value?

SCOTLANDS OF THE FUTURE
The future of Scotland is going to involve many similarities and constants compared to the present. And yet we are also embarked on something different. Many of my friends down south have in the last few years recognised something profoundly different about Scotland. They comment that in Scotland there is a definite feeling that we can still make and shape our collective future, whereas they feel that this element is missing from most of British politics.

This future Scotland will see the politics of nationalism have significant influence. But there are at least three distinct nationalisms at play. There is the SNP as a party, then there is the wider political nationalism which also influences parts of the other parties and public life. And finally, there is cultural nationalism as witnessed in authors, artists and cultural figures.

Scottish nationalism and the existence of the SNP has altered Scotland dramatically. There is an open, generous, pluralist aspect to the mainstream nationalism of the leadership, an approach which is inclined to be much less tribal and condemning than its opponents, and particularly the hard anti-nationalist Labour unionism. This side of Scottish nationalism was evident in the manner the SNP governed for most of its first term, and the tone and words Alex Salmond employed in his acceptance speech the day after the election when he used the words quoted at the start of this article which are taken from a song by the Corries, Scotland Will Flourish, which goes on to say, “And Scotland will flourish, secure in the knowledge. That we reap our own harvest, and ring our own till.”

Ian Jack in a beautifully written post-election piece noted the “new dignity” in Salmond’s words and poise, and compared it to David Cameron’s recent use of such “tawdry” cultural references as “Michael Winner, Benny Hill and Eddie the Eagle”.

The SNP has other tendencies in it like any political philosophy, and sometimes its approach can jar with its want to get its own way, or belief in its monopoly of the branding of “Scotland’s party”. Many have fears that, because of the scale of the SNP’s mandate, its “big tent” victory, like Tony Blair before in 1997, may go to Alex Salmond and the leadership’s head. There has been in the weeks following the election a rather narrow concentration on the constitution, the Scotland Bill and the Supreme Court spat, whereas such issues were barely touched upon in the election.

Then there is the continued attempt to diminish England into being just “another country” in Salmond’s words, emphasising our differences and attempting to make them an “other”.

It is unquestionable that the SNP have been a force for good in Scottish politics. The SNP leadership is broadly post-nationalist in that it is comfortable with
the politics of shared sovereignty, flexibility, fluidity and some element of continued union with the rest of the UK. This after all is the philosophy of the SNP Government White Paper, “Your Scotland, Your Voice: A National Conversation”, which seems to have escaped most unionists.

Any self-governing Scotland of the future is going to have some kind of institutional co-operation and shared responsibilities with the rest of the UK. There will be a “social union”, but there will also be some kind of political union, and therefore, a role for the politics of unionism.

What this illustrates is that nationalism and unionism are not two separate, opposing camps as is often imagined and as existed in the troubles of Northern Ireland. The two shape, influence and cross-fertilise each other to the extent that it is possible to be a nationalist in some aspects and a political unionist, and it is feasible in the future that you could be both a unionist and a political nationalist.

The evolving direction of Scottish politics and society will necessitate the development of new stories and narratives about what we want to be, what kind of society, state and public realm. This has already begun in the recent election campaign, and the future direction of travel is already evident.

Scotland is exploring the potential of wider self-government politically connecting to the radical idea of self-determination both in society, communities and individuals. This is something I explored in the recent Radial Scotland: Arguments for Self-Determination book and what I mean here is self-determination at the level of politics and psychology and the inter-relationship between the two. The latter draws on a rich evidence base to look at the best circumstances in which individuals and communities thrive, and found three factors: autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and across large swathes of Scotland that this is missing from the lives of too many Scots.

This entails articulating new collective stories for Scotland, ones which draw from the best of the social- and social democratic traditions, but which acknowledge the fundamental crisis of these ideals in the face of the challenge of neo-liberalism and the ecological crisis.

This brings us to the challenge of how we engage people in a set of conversations about the future of Scotland. We have already seen how it shouldn’t be done. Both Calman and “the national conversation” were closed, top down, prescriptive processes shaped and driven by the needs of elites. Both engaged in narrow exercises about the constitutional question which is only ever on its own going to attract expert and institutional opinion. Neither ventured onto the rich terrain of what kind of Scotland do we want, what inspires our imagination, hopes and dreams, and what kind of choices and difficult priorities are we prepared to make to aid this?

There is now a solid body of work that one of the best ways to engage the public and avoid such issues as consultation fatigue and cynicism, is to embrace imagination and emotions. This entails using techniques which encourage government and public agencies to commission public engagement exercises which they have the confidence to let go of; sitting engaged with the system, but not sitting in the system is a careful balancing act which can change the feel of everything.

Then there is the substance of what is done. The power of storytelling and story is increasingly recognised the world over. Writers such as Robert McKee in his seminal study of scriptwriting, Story, and Christopher Booker’s The Seven Basic Plots have made the case that story is a fundamental part of what it is to be human. The “Scotland 2020” and “Glasgow 2020” projects and books which I undertook with the UK think tank Demos showed the appetite people have for creating collective stories, seeing themselves in them, and in so doing challenging the prescriptions and limitations of “the official future”. 4

We also know about the power of deliberative processes and inquiry, and the rich stream of engagement, involvement and materials which can come from such an approach. There is a burgeoning worldwide literature on how such approaches can be genuine, far-reaching and aid change, while reaching out to “uncivil society”.

THE CHALLENGE TO THE FORCES OF CONSERVATISM

The emerging Scottish political landscape is a challenge to many of the vested interests of institutional, establishment Scotland and further afield. The emerging direction of Scottish politics and society is a challenge to many of the vested interests of institutional, establishment Scotland and further afield, in the British political classes, state and establishment.

If we look at Scotland there is the gatekeeping and turf wars of large parts of public Scotland. There are the silences and evasions in too many of our public discussions. There is “the forgotten Scotland” excluded, marginalised and labelled “the underclass”; how we address, understand and tackle inequality and poverty in a way which makes clear that every Scot matters and has a right to a stake in society; the blight of sectarianism, bigotry and men behaving badly in public places; and then there is a wider prevalence of prejudice and lack of liberalism. In many places in Scottish society not only is there a profound intolerance of diversity and pluralism, but a deeply entrenched, institutional mono-culture and monocromatic mindset which has to be challenged.

There is the problem of the entitlement culture in parts of our public life seen in the attitudes of the business community and its membership organisations, who are gatekeepers and self-appointed representatives. There is a plethora of them who believe it is their right to make representations on every issue under the sun, but a special mention should go to CBI Scotland for their constant carping, complaining and clichéd take on what’s wrong with Scotland. Nearly everything about their style, tone and content is grating and they along with other business organisations could do with learning from the potential of hope and
Scotland stands at a defining point in its political history.

ideas of positive psychology. Stop gurning and telling us your predictable diet of deregulation, cutting taxes and the race to the bottom, a mantra which seems to have become even more zealous since the banker crash and crisis of neo-liberalism. And start addressing the complexities of our economy and society.

Then there is the challenge of where and how we nurture ideas, research and develop new thinking. That entails academia, media and research centres looking at how they can become more engaged in the priorities and challenges of our public life. There are already several interesting multi-agency partnerships of academia with others such as the Glasgow Centre for Population Health who pioneered the path-breaking international work on “the Glasgow effect”. But more much more is needed. Indeed, we need to nurture a wider ecology of self-government and self-determination to further change.

None of this is going to happen in isolation. Wider British, European and international developments will matter. One area is worth exploring further: the nature of the British dimension.

The British state will not be a neutral observer in the Scots journey to self-government. Instead, it will be an active participant in the conversation, making the case for the union. This will not, despite David Cameron’s protestations, be just making “the positive case for the union” as he claimed, but engaging in dis-information and dissembling. Already this has been seen in the way so-called neutral “experts” – Robert Hazell of the think tank the Constitution Unit and Vernon Bogdanor of Oxford University – have tried to insist and make incontrovertible that Scotland needs to have two independence referendums rather than just one. No real evidence is put forward beyond that the first would be “advisory” if undertaken by the Scottish Parliament and the second legally binding if held by Westminster.

What Hazell and Bogdanor ignore is the inconvenient facts. Not one nation in the world has held two independence referendums. Not one of the two dozen nations which emerged from the Soviet bloc. Not Eritrea, East Timor or Southern Sudan. Not one anywhere. And what they choose to miss is the politics of the situation. A decade ago the argument was that the Scottish Parliament did not have the powers to hold an independence referendum because the constitution was a “reserved matter”; now no one disputes that the Scottish Parliament has the right to hold such a vote.

This brings us to the politics of the possible future. A “Yes” Scottish independence referendum vote would change everything. The politics, attitudes and negotiating positions of the Scottish and UK Governments. There would be no way back.

We are rather jumping the gun here. What is illuminating is what the views of Hazell and Bogdanor represent for they give voice to the time-old arrogance and over-reach of the British state and establishment. This is another reason why Scotland is developing its own distinct politics, space and identity: how the British state sees itself, the nature of the union, and Scotland within it is a part of the dynamic and a major part of the problem.

The British state has remained, despite devolution, an entrenched, fossilised ancient regime, a political order and mentality which is obsessed by tradition, precedence and flunkery, and which misunderstands the nature of the UK as a unitary state, when we are a “union state” or “state of unions”. This political class forgets all the time that the United Kingdom is a union, and fetishises parliamentary sovereignty and the supposed encroachments into it by European integration. They have been called “unionist fundamentalists” and they are also, in a way the SNP no longer are, old-fashioned, archaic nationalists out of time with the age of interdependence. British nationalism has become the romantic, sentimentalised, stuck in the past ideology, rather than the more European, outward looking, pluralist Scottish nationalism.

Scotland stands at a defining point in its political history. What we decide to do in the next few years will have major impact down the generations for our nation and society, and for the future direction and survival of the UK. This puts a deep burden of responsibility on all of us to rise to this challenge, to transcend petty divisions, tribalness and the love of the good old stramash.

A new Scotland is coming into being, and we have to rise to the demands of the occasion. It truly is going to be challenging and unpredictable in the next few years. There is the prospect of creating a very different, dynamic Scotland, a nation where we can dare to dream, imagine, be serious, funny and make mistakes, and learn and grow together. A Scotland where we have it in our reach to shape our own future.

Gerry Hassan is a writer and commentator on Scottish and UK politics. His latest books are Radical Scotland: Arguments for Self-Determination and the forthcoming The Strange Death of Labour Scotland. His writing can be found at: www.gerryhassan.com

NOTES
THE GREAT CULTURAL DISASTER

Paul Henderson Scott makes the case for repatriating the one cultural function not transferred to the Scottish parliament under the Devolution Act – broadcasting.

J M Reid, who was the editor of the Glasgow newspaper, the Bulletin, for twelve years, published an important book in 1959, Scotland Past and Present. It dealt with the measures which he thought had to be taken if Scotland was to survive. In the fifty years since then we have taken many of the necessary steps, such as the recovery of the Scottish Parliament, even if its powers are still very limited. So far we have failed to deal with one of the issues he thought most important, the control of broadcasting. He said this about it:

“When regular broadcasting began in 1922, Scottish self-confidence was at its lowest ebb. It is impossible to believe that, at any other time, a people who had long had most other cultural media in their own hands – church, schools, newspapers – would accept a monopoly in a new form of communication over which Scots had no sort of control.”

Over the years many other people have protested about the external control of broadcasting. Geoffrey Barrow, for instance, in his inaugural lecture as Professor of Scottish History at the University of Edinburgh in 1979:

“The failure of Scotland to establish its own organisation for public service broadcasting was the greatest cultural disaster which Scotland suffered in the 20th century.”

Campaigns on this issue have included one by the Advisory Council for the Arts in Scotland (AdCAS) which was established in 1981 as the result of an initiative of the Saltire Society. It brought together almost all organisations concerned with the arts in Scotland, governmental, professional and voluntary, to make recommendations on cultural policy. As Murray Pittock has in his book, The Road to Independence, several of their recommendations “were subsequently implemented, including a fully devolved Scottish Arts Council, a separate Scottish Education Funding Council and a National Theatre. Two of these were put in place under a Conservative government before devolution.”

HIGHLY INCONSISTENT

Another of their recommendations that “funds raised in Scotland in broadcasting fees should be used to finance a broadcasting service under Scottish control” has so far been ignored. Under the terms of the Devolution Act this now requires a decision by the Westminster parliament. Since all other cultural functions were transferred under the same Act to the Scottish parliament this was highly inconsistent. Presumably the British Labour government at the time wanted to keep control of such a powerful means of influencing Scottish opinion. So we are still left with the “cultural disaster”.

Scotland and England have very different histories and both have strong, but different, cultural identities, tastes and habits. Although the English language is predominant in both countries, Scotland also has Gaelic and Scots. A Gaelic television service has recently been established, but there is no provision for Scots. This is a richly expressive language which is still spoken and understood by many people. It is the language of much of our best poetry, plays and dialogue in novels. One consequence of the English control of the BBC and of broadcasting generally has been a clear decline in the use of Scots in conversation since broadcasting began.

Many of the nations in Europe, including those which have recently recovered their independence, are smaller than Scotland, but all have their own broadcasting service. The BBC provides Scottish programmes on both radio and television, but the overwhelming tone is predominantly English. This is appropriate since they are the great majority of the audience, but it means that most of the BBC programmes on cultural, political and economic matters, history, adaptations of novels and plays are English. The major part of the news programmes are from London, including coverage of events in other countries. Some years ago there was a proposal for a Scottish six o’clock news service, but it was rejected. We do need to express our own view of the world and not be restricted to local events.

These views, which are widely held in Scotland, are not anti-English. We naturally need to have friendly relations with our nearest neighbour, but they are at present not promoted, but discouraged, by the present English domination of the air-waves. It would assist good relations between us, as well as the adequate expression of our concerns and interests, if broadcasting ceased to be a subject reserved to the Westminster parliament and we established a Scottish service financed by fees collected in Scotland.

Paul Henderson Scott is a former diplomat and long-standing Scottish nationalist. He has written a number of books including an auto-biography, A Twentieth Century Life.
In the second of her six-part series on Scotland, Lesley Riddoch muses on the mass of contradictions that characterise Glasgow: “… in Scotland but somehow still not of it.”

n 1935 A Scottish Journey by Edwin Muir was published – 250 pages packed with the Orcadian’s trenchant observations of life in small town, urban and rural Scotland.

Muir’s account of post-war Glasgow pulled no punches:
“Glasgow is not Scotland at all … it is merely an expression of Industrialism, a process [which has] devastated whole tracts of countryside and sucked the life and youth out of the rest, which has set its mark on several generations in shrunken bodies and trivial or embittered minds.”

And yet Muir concludes, “A description of Scotland which does not put Glasgow at the centre would not be a description of Scotland at all.”

Almost eighty years later, the Celtic Capital is no easier to understand. Hopeless and vibrant; exceptional and typical, Glasgow is in Scotland but somehow still not of it.

Its problems, prejudices and predilections are out of proportion and out of kilter – not just with the modest and obedient Scots of the East Coast but also with Glasgow’s own middle classes.

Perhaps it is just a question of scale. No Mean City still has peripheral housing estates the size of small towns and large inner city slums openly patrolled by drug dealers and loan-sharks. The old coal, steel and mining communities arranged around Glasgow are not in much better shape.

The radial layout of motorways and arterial routes means respectable burghers need not encounter the no-go zones, blighted landscapes, ubiquitous suspicion and automatic hostility en route to the city centre. Would it make any difference if they did?

Glasgow contains Britain’s worst and biggest pockets of multiple deprivation. It’s also one of Mercer’s top 50 safest cities, one of Lonely Planet’s top 10 tourist cities and one of Times Life’s World Cities. It is about to host the Commonwealth Games, and World Gymnastics Championships, and already houses most major arts companies, broadcasting HQs and Europe’s largest public reference library. Glasgow has what it’s always had – wealth and poverty.

The great Scots writer Hugh MacDiarmid said, “I’d aye be whaur extremes meet.”

Strange that he moved to classless Shetland not endlessly dialectical Glasgow.

But I had a happy, privileged life at secondary school and later at the BBC in Glasgow. Why won’t my mind fix on those long years of security and employment, friendship and comfort?

Somehow only the most shocking images of Glasgow remain.

I can still see a skip at Paddy’s Market. It’s on fire. People are trying to drag clothes and blankets from the flames. No-one’s stopping them. I see a friend holding a bullet she found on her way home after a gun battle between drug barons in Easterhouse. The police tell me nothing untoward has taken place. I hear a lad in Cadder insist four murders in one month is nothing special. I hear locals after Firsat Dag’s murder say the asylum seeker paid the price for skipping the housing queue. I watch a community worker demonstrate how crates of whisky were used by children to reach bottles of Buckfast in an off-licence raid. The valuable malt whisky wasn’t sweet enough to steal.

Perhaps these images endure because of guilt – the guilt that comes from being an observer who didn’t manage to change a thing. And finally walked away.

Meanwhile, the “Other Glasgow” has been dealt with. Locked out, walled in and packaged up for occasional viewing on The Scheme, modern Scotland has decided its most embarrassing family members will not be allowed to spoil the party.

What has changed?

Way back in 1973 when I told school friends in Belfast we were leaving, they gasped with awe, “Glasgow – you’re not going there?”

We weren’t exactly dodging the bullets, but understood the ground rules of violence around us.
GLASGOW: WHERE EXTREMES MEET

No-one understood Glasgow. It was large without ending, territorial without meaning (or helpful clues) violent without reason and angry without a cause … or at least without “The Cause” which fuelled Ireland’s well rehearsed and institutionalised divides.

Blackened tenements loomed high like cliff faces — somehow oppressive after the low rise “Coronation Street” style terraced housing of Belfast. There was litter and dog’s dirt everywhere.

It was a puzzle. Rich people in Ireland built distinctive designer homes down by the sea.

Rich people in Glasgow drove Rolls Royces and lived in average homes with ugly conservatories.

Glasgow didn’t seem concerned with the quality of life – just the appearance of wealth.

The city’s ethic was flash and grab.

As a heavily accented 13 year-old Irish incomer, I was quick to conform.

At school, any evidence of academic ability was carefully concealed. My colleagues were street-wise, rebellious and funny. Lads who failed almost every exam could speak backwards fluently. The school excelled at volleyball because we played it every time teachers left the room. We sat on chairs stacked three high to see if they’d notice the height difference. We spoke sloppy Shakespeare to force the English teacher to read the roles himself. We spoke Glaswegian in French and French in English and played AC/DC albums on a smuggled-in record player.

We were contrary and uncaring. What of it?

“There may be intelligent and humane men and women in these classes but somewhere or other they are blunted or dead; they have blind spots as big as a door; the door of their office or house. Personal greed has been turned into the very quintessence of altruism.”

My first real boyfriend was an artist. Or to re-attach him to the dead weight of his origins, he was a Catholic, working class lad from Springburn who left school without qualifications, ran with a Tongs gang, worked on a City Bakeries van and then muscled his way into Glasgow School of Art after picking up Highers at night school. We met at a Stirlingshire hotel working for the summer, both clutching Colin Wilson’s existentialist primer, The Outsider.

His copy was “borrowed” from Townhead Library. My un-opened copy had been a prize for getting into Oxord.

Same book, different worlds.

I toughened up over a decade living uneasily on both sides of the track.

Edwin Muir’s Glasgow had changed almost overnight.

In 1901 his family moved from their struggling farm on Wyre in Orkney to a flat on the south side of Glasgow. Within three years Edwin’s mother, father and two of his three brothers were dead.

Muir’s own family experienced Glasgow’s ultimate culture shock. Their surviving son described it.

Glasgow didn’t seem concerned with the quality of life — just the appearance of wealth.

And now — a century later — a non-Glaswegian leading a nationalist government thinks he can fix it.

Alex Salmond’s inaugural speech as leader of Scotland’s first majority SNP government named the fight against booze and bigotry as his top priorities. He was careful not to single out the Dear Green Place.

The Office for National Statistics cannot be so choosy.

Facts are chieft that winna ding. And whilst the SNP leader has every reason not to confront a former Labour stronghold entering a dalliance with nationalism, the facts do not lie.

Glaswegian men are dying from the effects of drink at twice the rate of everyone else. And I mean every one. Not just suburbia.

Twice the death rate of North Belfast – which has the highest rate of violent death per square mile of any city in Europe.

Twice the rate of West Belfast where every other family has an unemployable ex prisoner in their midst.

Twice the rate of North Lanarkshire, where Ravenscraig’s closure demolished jobs, self esteem and working-class identity.

And twice the rate of women — whose bingeing behaviour is at danger level.

We need to ask what’s so different about Glasgow’s drinking culture — because it’s time to call a spade a spade.

The rest of Scotland is more like the rest of the UK. But Glasgow is on a different level altogether — it’s drinking to exist.

I almost wrote Glasgow is in a different league — and that’s half the trouble. In Glasgow, a willingness to embrace excess still brings status — even if it also brings broken health and eventually jail. Those downsides are regarded as a small price to pay for a moment of action — away from the dreary, passivity of everyday experience.

Politicians and civic leaders are too scared to confront the lionisation of excess — and the fate they narrowly escaped themselves (the largest single group of Labour MSPs were Labour Councillors in the poorest Glasgow wards.) This creates a Labour deprivation strategy long on slogans and short on problem solving.

Glasgow is in a state of denial. It insists on remaining “workers city” with a “work hard, play very hard” culture. “More is more” might be Glasgow’s slogan with a “grab life while you can” outlook developed over centuries by manual labourers working in factories and shipyards. That framework of working class life has largely been destroyed — but the outlook has been adopted by a demoralised underclass and an affluent middle class. Both still behave like powerless wage slaves for whom tomorrow may never come.

How hard is it for the sons and daughters of shipyard workers to finally admit they’ve made it? Despite house prices, student debt and rising levels of personal bankruptcy, most young Glaswegians will never
know the poverty of their grandparents. A steady income means they can try to direct their own lives instead of tolerating it with witty stoicism or escape with explosive, drunken outbursts every Thursday/Friday/Saturday night.

Loyalty to roots is stopping reasonably affluent West Enders from tackling misplaced pessimism about their own life chances. That helps Glasgow continue to be Scotland’s “drink and be merry for tomorrow we may die” party city. But Glasgow is also Scotland’s heart. And like any good heart, Glasgow is pumping its own formula for life, love and happiness to every part of the Scottish body politic. Including its drug fuelled hedonism.

All of this matters.

Much crap is tolerated in the name of the gallusness for which Glasgow is famed. It’s as if Scots fear that curbing the Glaswegian tendency to excess will turn the bold Weegies into suburban bores, the English or folk from Edinburgh. And that will hopelessly weaken the heady mix that is Scotland’s mongrel nation.

As a result the massive problems of Glasgow’s underclass are tolerated and swept under the carpet.

What use is that?

There is a list of Glasgow postcodes where almost every health outcome is sub East European. But Scots bureaucrats insist on treating everyone not someone (in the name of equality) – so our Health Service cannot pinpoint the heart of the problem. This is worse than killing with kindness. This is suffocating with civility.

Violence, deprivation, bad health, dependency, grief – these terrible conditions have been laced with drink and lionised in books by those who love but don’t live in No Mean City.

It’s time for middle class Glaswegians to face up to a difficult truth – most have lives worth leading, income they can direct and self esteem that is not based on the capacity to withstand damage. Their parents and grandparents succeeded in handing on more than the bare minimum in life. That makes the challenges facing the middle class quite different than the challenges that faced their forebears. The really frightening truth is that most lives are OK. And middle-income Glaswegians have to face that awful reality every single day. No matter how much time they spend trying to alter reality with drugs, booze or shopping – the terrible truth is still there the next morning.

Life should be OK.

That is plainly unacceptable.

If the self destruct button doesn’t seem to work, you hit it over and over and over again.

Or you call some friends, have a few (super) beers and head out to the football.

It’s easy to picture what happens next.

Two sets of Scottish football fans hurl insults at one another and sing the Famine Song and IRA songs at one another across the terracing at Ibrox – Rangers’ Glasgow stadium.

Chants of “orange bastard” and “fenian scum” fly backwards and forwards and large numbers of police enforce a strict segregation of fans, reinforcing the idea that nuclear meltdown must occur if the two sides should ever meet.

A man beamed down from another planet is reading a Catholic player being cautioned for crossing himself on the pitch. He watches the venomous snarl on “supporters” faces as they start singing and chanting, and concludes Scotland must be emerging from some kind of violent faith-based civil war. His colleague – a man from UEFA – corrects him. It’s not about faith, mate – it’s just us v. them.

And of course the man from UEFA is right.

As researchers from Edinburgh’s Queen Margaret University College can testify, fans on both sides can chant “fenian” and “hun” all match long, and yet feel completely protected from allegations of sectarianism because they know there is absolutely no religious component to their behaviour.

There is hardly a single regular church-goer in the seats on either side. Most genuinely religious adherents have long since been deterred by the amount of swearing they have to endure to watch the Beautiful Game. Only a tiny minority of “Fenians” or “Huns” have any interest in European history or knowledge of Ireland. Even fewer want to acknowledge that the Ulster “sides” they will “support forevemore” are doing their utmost to become part of Ireland’s past.

Nope – too complicated for the average chanting Glaswegian. Because he’s not chanting about Irish-based religious divides. Or even Scottish ones. He’s chanting about belonging to a particular Scottish clan. His one. Part of whose raison d’etre is to neighbour and antagonise another clan. Their one. It may get tarted up with symbolism because even redundant religious distinctions are less shameful to own than the real reason for the screaming, violence and hatred. Nothing.

Except us and them.

Picture another scene.

Two sets of Free Church believers are gathered in Church Halls a few hundred yards from one other. One is gathered in a fairly draughty room because the last schism in the Free Church left them without premises. With the number of celebrants now in single figures they can’t afford to switch on the heating. Down the road, in the leaking church hall, the story is much the same.

Hardly anyone in either congregation can explain the important point of theology that led to the division. They only know the Edinburgh-based clerics that lead each faction cannot abide one another. So now, the only time they meet socially is at funerals.

And what real point of distinction is being reinforced every Sunday – none
And finally, two sets of Scottish socialists. Each believes property is a form of theft. But each is ready to tear one another’s eyes out for the right to use existing party offices. Both have been hurt and angered by personal behaviour – and both are prepared to plunge themselves, their beliefs, their followers and the electorate into ill-funded election campaigns for as long as the money or energy lasts.

What real point of distinction was decided at the ballot box as rival Scottish socialists competed one another out of existence – none.

Does Scotland have problems of sectarianism – yes.

But the disagreements over religion, background, race, and even socialist credentials are purely symbolic.

The underlying problem is more basic. You aren’t one of us.

What great point of principle or practice divides Dundee and Dundee United fans? Both appear to share a commercial death wish by playing not very good football in ramshackle grounds only yards apart. AC and Inter Milan are able to ground share. But not the warring clans of Scottish football.

Sectarianism is essentially a desire to create lofty isolation from people who are exactly the same as you in every meaningful way. And therefore sectarianism requires you to magnify points of utter insignificance to justify that important feeling of being different.

So ironically, sectarianism actually gets worse as the reality of religious difference recedes.

Sectarianism is simply the modern face of clan warfare.

And until fans, clubs, politicians and punters want to question their own clannish impulses – worthy campaigns and even tough new laws will be ignored.

The man from UEFA shrugs.

The last time Rangers were banned from playing European games in public fans claimed their sectarian song followed a violent confrontation with heavy handed Spanish police determined to provoke them and was led by a group of English fans not Scots. So in fact there had been a Spanish taunt to English fans supporting a Scottish football team insulting Irish Republicans who were mercifully absent. A veritable Rainbow Coalition of buck-passing and blame.

Earlier Rangers fans explained their “one-armed” Nazi style salutes in Israel were really Red Hand salutes. Ah, of course. A gesture used by gun-toting Loyalist paramilitaries.

And here we get to the nub of things.

The only point of substance in Glasgow’s sectarian story has nothing to do with religion and everything to with the Irish Independence struggle.

Listen to the songs and read the slogans. Whether it’s the Billy Boys, Fenian B******s, No Surrender, Tricolours, 1690, Union Jacks or Red Hand Salutes – Irish history is re-enacted in Glasgow every weekend without a Scottish symbolic reference in sight.

Why can’t Glasgow leave Irish history alone? Or find symbols of Scottish history to fight over?

Simply put – because the Irish won. And the Scots guilty fear is that we didn’t even try.

This is the love that dare not speak its name.

Celtic supporters identify with the cousins who sent the British Empire packing. Rangers fans identify with the colonising power who made everyone else pay.

Interviewing punters about sectarianism for a Radio Scotland series in Glasgow’s East End some years back (neutrally dressed in purple), I visited a Celtic bar in the East End where the owner had to tolerate fans singing Republican songs whilst Scottish army friends were being killed in Northern Ireland.

“Where was their loyalty to their ain folk?”

In another Celtic bar I asked if punters could tell Protestants from Catholics on sight. Of course they could …

“Prods are right wing – Tories, fascist even.”

“Catholics are socialist – there’s Che Guevara tattooed on my arm.”

“Prods are just bad craic – they must have rubbish parties cos they’ve no decent songs, no tradition.”

Since this was all very good-natured I invited the assembled drinkers to guess my religion.

“Well, you’re a big woman – well fed. I’d say you’re a Prod.”

“C’m on now, she’s been game enough to wander in here talking about sectarianism. I’d say she’s a Tim.”

When my name didn’t offer any clues, there was one final assessment;

“Make-up, dyed hair and a phoney Coney (mock fur jacket) – you’re a Prod.”

Correct on the upbringing. Hilarious banter. And dangerously rigid stereotypes.

Both “sides” in Glasgow have carved out entire personalities for the “other”. And although Jack McConnell had summits and Alex Salmond will soon have tougher jail terms, the Scottish state hesitates to tackle what it cannot control nor entirely comprehend.

The rest of Scotland looks on. A few cup finals ago, jubilant Hibs fans sang the entire repertoire of the Proclaimers. This is also Scotland. Joyful, exuberant, funny.

This is the Scotland most Scots want to belong to – not to the 33rd county of Ireland that’s been allowed to developed in the west of Scotland.

In Glasgow drink and sectarian culture walk hand in hand.

Neither is the biggest problem in anyone’s life, but each conveniently drains the attention and energy needed to tackle bigger issues.

Let Glasgow partly flourish?

It’s a half-hearted motto not worth coining or keeping.

But at this rate, it’s Glasgow’s future.

Lesley Riddoch is a writer and broadcaster.
ON NOT EXPECTING THE SPRING

As the Arab Spring runs through the summer, Gilbert Ramsay explains how the expected can become unexpected.

I
s there anything left to write about the Arab Spring? That might sound like an odd question. After all, the increasingly inaccurately named Arab Spring isn’t even over yet. With revolts in Syria, Yemen and Libya still going strong and Egypt and Tunisia charting noisy and contentious paths towards (we hope) democracy, there is clearly still everything to play for.

That, however, is exactly the point. Since a critical mass of unrest forced Tunisia’s Zine el-Abidine ben Ali to flee into exile, just about everyone who knows anything about Middle East politics (and quite a few who probably wouldn’t know Middle East politics if it held an intifada in their back gardens) have been wheeled out to offer their opinion on the significance of what is happening and what we ought to expect to happen next. How, the policymakers and the general public have asked, could you not have seen this coming?

One answer to this question is that the experts did see it coming. That was precisely the problem. They saw it coming for such a long time that, when it kept on not coming, they gave up talking about how it was on the way and instead started to theorise about why it hadn’t happened yet. To paraphrase Frederic Volpi, a senior lecturer at the department where I work, the question moved away from asking how democracy emerges towards asking how autocracy persists. In democratisation studies, a lively debate emerged on Middle Eastern “exceptionalism”, scholars of which became at times unhelpfully defensive as this problem became conflated with claims about the supposedly inherently undemocratic nature of Islam itself: an ironic thesis when we consider the extent to which its proponents framed their arguments around a concern with those Islamic parties which sought to contend democratically for power against the unelected secular regimes which governed them.

NOTHING SURPRISING

In a way, then, there is nothing surprising or exceptional about the Arab Spring other than our insistence that the Middle East is a surprising and exceptional place. After all, we have it from no less an authority than Samuel Huntington (that great proponent of a war-mongering, anti-democratic view of Islam), that democratisations of countries customarily come in waves. If the “Arab spring” proves to be so, it may simply be the fourth iteration of this phenomenon.

But as ever, once one moves beyond such sweeping generalisations (countries democratise. Sometimes when one country democratises, others follow), making specific enough predictions to be actually helpful turns out to be a lot harder. We can see this to be the case if we appreciate just how bad experts seem to have turned out to be at doing this even after the “Arab Spring” got started. Many may recall how, when the dust started settling on the Tunisian revolution, the BBC ran an analysis piece on the possibility of a regional “domino effect”. It examined countries one by one and concluded that, while the most likely next in line would be Egypt (where, to my recollection unrest had already started), that this was still pretty unlikely. Egypt, it was pointed out, was not a middle class country like Tunisia (of course, that didn’t stop Lenin, but let’s not be unfair).

Just after Mubarak went, the International Relations department at my university (St Andrews) hastily organised a round table event. Everyone with some kind of expertise on the Middle East spoke. Everyone had something interesting to say, but the comment that really stuck with me for its succinctness, boldness and clarity was that of Professor Raymond Hinnebusch, who made the argument that we could expect revolutions in Arabic countries
which fulfilled two particular criteria: first, republics, rather than monarchies. Second, republics founded on principles of popular nationalism which had squandered both popular and nationalist credentials. He pointed out that this applied to both Egypt and Tunisia which had at once adopted pro-Western political principles (costing them the support of the political elite), and pro-globalisation economic principles (costing them the support of the masses). This prediction spelled out two further likely candidates for unrest: Yemen, a corrupt, desperately poor country in which the president had recently given the United States his specific permission to bomb his people; and Libya, whose Muammar Gaddafi had come in from the cold and now counted among his chums the likes of Silvio Berlusconi, Tony Blair and Anthony Giddens. So far so good. However, the prediction also seemed explicitly to rule out another country: Syria, a place on whose politics Hinnebusch happens to be a leading world expert. Syria was, of course, a repressive dictatorship. But it was a dictatorship which proudly cleaved to Arab nationalist values. It was also a middle income state which, shielded by socialist economic policies from the tyrannical law of comparative advantage, had managed to maintain a significantly better level of income equality to other states in the region.

Well, Hinnebusch may not yet be wrong. But from where I write this in Jordan, everyone seems to agree that its president, Bashar al-Assad, is hanging by a thread. This may be wishful thinking of course, or bravado. When I ask people here if Gaddafi will go, the usual answer is that he will ghasban ‘ano, which basically means “he’d damn well better”.

But the point is that, at this stage, we don’t know anymore. Maybe al-Assad will somehow ride it out. Maybe he won’t. And this isn’t to knock Professor Hinnebusch’s predictive capacities either way. Nor indeed is it to knock those of the BBC. Because both of these predictions have turned out to be accurate in a manner of speaking. They didn’t tell us (necessarily) which countries would have successful revolutions. They did, however, tell us how roughly tough their regimes would be to crack, what constraints would have to be overcome for a revolution to become possible.

For those “structural strain” theorists who believe that revolutions happen because people are pissed off with their lot in life, there were plenty of countries a whole lot more “structurally strained”.

FEW SMALL DEMONSTRATIONS
What’s important, though, is that this doesn’t foreclose things. Before the incident in Deraa which lit the Syrian touchpaper, that country’s revolution looked like a damp squib. They had already had a few small demonstrations earlier which had amounted to nothing much. It seemed a safe bet at that point that that would be it.

By contrast, Saudi Arabia’s proposed “day of rage” essentially didn’t happen. But by that stage I would suggest that all bets were off as to whether it would – even from the same people who had confidently asserted that monarchies were in the best position to avoid the unrest. Here in Jordan, it looks like the regime has ridden out its waves of big demonstrations more or less unscathed (firing most of the government and changing the electoral law in this country is about as momentous an event as the other Jordan having her boobs done again). And yet people have been expecting the kingdom to collapse basically for as long as it has existed.

Then again, who would have expected that Tunisia, of all countries, would kick everything off? Quiet, sleepy Tunisia. The kind of place where you go on holiday this year because a strong euro has put you off Lanzarote? The kind of place where French internet companies outsource their help lines. The kind of place where they knock down the wall of the capital’s medieval old town because it was getting in the way of the tourists? (Well, that’s what they told me anyway when I went there.) On the plus side of the balance sheet, Tunisia had economic growth, industrialisation, women’s rights, a growing middle class. For those “structural strain” theorists who believe that revolutions happen because people are pissed off with their lot in life, there were plenty of countries a whole lot more “structurally strained”. On the minus side, its regime was arguably the most totalitarian in the whole of the Middle East: an obstacle for “resource mobilisation” theories of revolution, for whom there is a sweet spot for contention at the point where a regime is just liberal enough to allow some kind of political sphere to develop, while remaining far too repressive for anyone to actually like it. For what it’s worth (of course, we’re still trying to work out what exactly it’s worth), the regime was also an assiduous censor of Facebook.

CRITICAL MASS OF PROTEST
Of course, once the revolution did happen in Tunisia, people came up with intelligent reasons for why it had worked. Frederic Volpi, who I mentioned above, made the point at the St Andrews round table that the regime’s strength had been its weakness: as a totalitarian police state it was great at controlling things from day to day. But once a critical mass of protest got going, it had no more resources to call on: rather like Ceaucescu’s Romania.

But here again, we are talking about the wisdom of hindsight: which is not to deny that it was a wise comment, mind. At the time, when Ben Ali called on the army to back him up, I wonder just how many people really could confidently make the call that they weren’t going to? I wonder how many people could have made that call in the Tunisian army itself? Likewise Libya. It’s easy to say now that Gaddafi had set things up to ensure that any attempted revolt would end in the quagmire we see today. But clearly no one told that to the rebels themselves when they started out. Or what about Syria, where the regime had a pretty good hold on the army, but we
now hear more and more about defections from its ranks?

Which takes us to the future: or rather, doesn’t. Will Al-Salih finally go? Will al-Asad? Will an Apache helicopter or a Libyan rebel or a disaffected loyalist or SEAL team 6 take out Gaddafi? Will Egypt and Tunisia end up more like Turkey, like Kyrgyzstan, like Indonesia, like Slovenia, like (one shudders to think) Switzerland? Could we imagine a massacre of Syria’s ruling Alawite minority – one that pulls in Iran and Turkey and ignites a regional war? Will the Gulf Co-operation Council launch a successful currency that challenges the dollar? Will Qatar win the World Cup? It’s not idle to speculate. Of course there are better and worse answers to these questions. Of course it’s worth researching and theorising and re-researching and theorising again. But it’s also important not to forget that none of these outcomes is inevitable, and none is impossible.

In his book After Virtue, the philosopher Alasdair Macintyre makes a shrewd point about the predictive power of social science. If a social entity were genuinely so rigid, so simple as to be predictable, then that entity would simply not survive for very long. This itself, he argues, is what makes totalitarianism in the complete, 1984 sense, an impossibility. And this leads, I hope, to the optimistic (if hardly original) conclusion that no matter how good we get at understanding human societies, it will always be possible for them to prove us wrong. Which is another way of saying: there is always hope. Downtrodden of the world unite: you have nothing to lose but your predictability.

No matter how good we get at understanding human societies, it will always be possible for them to prove us wrong.

I

G ilbert Ramsay is a teaching assistant at the School of International Relations, University of St Andrews.

The era of devolution as we have known it is over. Radical Scotland challenges conventional wisdoms, and poses solutions which encourage us to become more active agents of our own destiny.

The editors Gerry Hassan and Rosie Ilett have brought together in one volume some of the most original thinkers in our nation making the case for a very different politics and society. This book is a must read for all those interested in Scotland at this crucial time, for its future, the Parliament, and for those who want our politics and public policy to be more effective, imaginative and bold.

Reviewed on page 23 of this issue of Perspectives, we have copies of this timely and important book at a special discount price of £10 post free (RRP £12.99).
Images of the industrial working class in representational art (painting and sculpture) during the classic industrial era are notably absent. Labour, where it was depicted by bourgeois art, showed largely that of the peasantry and, to a lesser extent, of fishermen – groups who were both picturesque (and thus marketable to the art buying public), and also visible to the middle class artist, in that their labour was a public affair.

To an extent this invisibility of working class toil was the result of the fact that most industrial labour took place outside of the confines of the experience of the artist (i.e. it was down the mines, or behind factory walls, places not of immediate access). To a further extent though, such invisibility was a result of the fact that, for the bourgeois public, working class labour and its context was not seen as a field of aesthetic value. In addition at a time when the working class was suspected of posing a threat to the social order, the last thing the bourgeois art buyer wanted to see was a representation of the enemy at the gates above his fireplace in the evening.

That there were exceptions to this, both in Britain and on the continent, proves the point: they were exceptions, notable for that very fact. In so far as there were such exceptions to the rule of the invisibility of industrial labour, Glasgow, as the paradigmatic industrial city of the nineteenth century, is quite favoured.1 There is a higher (than the generally low) average of images of manual labour, and of working men (and women), in the city in the form of statues and paintings. And Glasgow also possesses what is probably both the least known, and the best example on a world scale, of an artistic imaging of manual labour in the nineteenth century, the Maryhill stained-glass panels.

Maryhill grew from a few scattered farms and settlements around 1800 to a fully-developed industrial town by the time it was absorbed into Glasgow in 1881. Its industry grew up initially around the river Kelvin and then along the littoral of the Forth and Clyde canal which wound through the burgh and into Glasgow. Space around the Kelvin and the canal was limited, and as a result Maryhill never developed the huge industrial concerns seen in the Govan, Springburn and Bridgeton districts of the Second City of the Empire. But in compensation for the smallness of Maryhill’s factories was their enormous variety. From textiles to paper, from iron founding to sawmilling, from glass manufacture to chemical works, Maryhill had a widely varied industrial base. This is the key to the Maryhill Panels.

Maryhill became a burgh in the 1850s and in the 1870s the burgh council decided to build a spanking new Burgh Hall. The building was designed by the architect Duncan Macnaughtan in a French revivalist style and constructed from 1875–8, when it was formally opened. Like many such at the time this complex was a catch-all construction, including a police and fire station as well as the halls. Now the Maryhill bourgeois was not a plutocrat; most of them were small scale capitalists of modest wealth. One would not have imagined them to be given over to imaginative artistic schemes. Yet for some reason they decided to decorate the interior of the Burgh Halls with a unique and amazingly imaginative art-form. Twenty stained glass panels were commissioned for the interior of the halls, and these would represent the trades of Maryhill. Could the panels have been seen by the local capitalists as a form of advertisement of their products?

In seeking an artist to carry out this work, the burghers went for Stephen Adam.

Adam was an Edinburgh man, who moved to Glasgow to attend the then Haldane (later Glasgow) School of Art in order to study stained glass production, which was undergoing a massive revival.

For some reason they decided to decorate the interior of the Burgh Halls with a unique and amazingly imaginative art-form.

All pictures courtesy and © Glasgow Museums

An unparalleled series of panels representing working lives – commissioned for a new burgh hall some 130 years ago – form a world-class heritage asset says Ian R Mitchell.
at the time. After centuries of Presbyterian disapproval, churches were reinstating stained glass windows and private individuals were decorating their homes with the art-form. By the later nineteenth century there were over 20 stained glass firms in Glasgow, with about 2,000 people in total working in the form. Adam’s studio was undoubtedly the best. What makes his contribution to the Maryhill Burgh Halls unique is its marked contrast to the two dominant expressions of stained glass production at this time. On the one hand there were the Biblical insets into religious buildings, and on the other allegorical images, usually of a classical nature, which found their way into the homes of the bourgeoisie. Stained glass was not a realist art form when Adam approached the question of the Maryhill Panels. Indeed, there are other occasions when Adam represented Labour in stained glass where he took an allegorical approach. The Trades Hall in Aberdeen has some of his work, but the trades are represented biblically or classically. Not, however, in Maryhill.

Records are lacking, but it is impossible not to infer that Adam did not spend a long time in the factories of Maryhill, making drawings of his working men (and women), upon which he based his later artistic efforts. There is no way a man of his background would have had the knowledge to accomplish such a task without detailed observation. It is clear from the individual panels that those represented are real working men and women, not stylised iconic representations of idealised workers. Some are old, some boys, many middle aged. Their facial features, including hair and beards, are different. These people existed. Adam not only delineated their features but also their clothing, down to the detail on one panel of a patch on a worker’s trousers and in another an unfastened braces button. Their working tools – woodworking planes, glass blowing equipment – are minutely observed.

In an era when photography was in its infancy, and when few photographed working men, especially industrial working men, Adam’s panels are a good record of working class industrial clothing. We can see that in the later 1870s, the classic image of the working man with cloth cap and dungarees was far from the reality. Headwear took a variety of forms, with the Tam o’ Shanter bunnet being popular, and corduroy trousers were common (always with braces, not a belt), with open-neck shirts standard. What we can also see from the panels is how primitive and dangerous working conditions were; not one of the workers is sporting any kind of eye protection, even when working with chemicals, and the iron moulders have no protective aprons or other clothing. The machinery, often belt driven, is accurately observed in Adam’s panels, but not one of the machines is guarded, even in the sawmills.

Adam’s twenty stained glass panels reflected Maryhill’s rise to industrial prosperity. Their fate mirrors its decline. The last works to be depicted in one of the panels, an iron foundry, closed a decade ago, completing Maryhill’s de-industrialisation. The panels, in a varied state of damage and decay, were removed from the halls possibly in the 1960s, and the halls themselves declined and were closed in the 1990s. Maryhill is one of the 10 poorest areas in the UK with high levels of social malaise: unemployment, drug addiction, depopulation. But it is also an area, as I have found out working in the last five years with the Burgh Halls restoration project, with a still strong sense of local identity and residual community. Building on this sense it has been possible for the Maryhill Burgh Halls Trust to develop a successful project, with wide community involvement, for the restoration of the Burgh Halls, and their re-use in a wide variety of social and economic activities. A combined investment of almost £20 million in the Halls themselves and the adjacent sports centre constructed in the former Maryhill baths has been the biggest seen in the area for decades. The sports centre is already open; the Burgh Halls will re-open later this year.

Such a restoration cannot of course solve the deeper underlying problems of an area like Maryhill, which are rooted in a national and global economic context. But it can help to give a focus to community activity in the area and to this the panels can also contribute. Using the panels as educational tools with schools and as the basis of a Heritage Project/Walk in the area can help to contribute to local awareness and pride. And it is undoubtedly the case that, once they are again in the public domain, the panels will establish a trail to Maryhill for those wanting to study and view them: art historians, social historians and others who will realise that this is a world class heritage asset comparable, it can be said without hesitation, to anything else possessed by Glasgow. It is the biggest gallery of working class heroes the city possesses and I defy anyone to produce a greater collection from anywhere.

Formerly a history lecturer, Ian R Mitchell lives in Glasgow and is a writer (and mountaineer).

NOTE
It has been said that some great historians are the marathon runners of the intellect, continuing to produce outstanding work into advanced age – more so than scientists or literary achievers. Notable examples are Leopold von Ranke in the nineteenth century and Fernand Braudel in the twentieth. Eric Hobsbawm, who, in the words of Gregory Elliott, is “one of the world’s most famous living historians, if not simply the most famous”, certainly fits into this category, as historically perceptive and productive as ever into his nineties, this volume being his latest example – in some senses a summing-up of his life’s writing so far. His major achievements are too numerous to mention, the most renowned probably being his tetralogy covering the era from the French Revolution to 1911, beginning with *The Age of Revolution* (1962) and ending with *Age of Extremes* (1994).

*How to Change the World* (the subtitle is slightly different on the dust jacket and the title page) is a collection of pieces written over the years, the earliest published as long ago as 1957, the latest two prepared specially for this occasion. A remarkable feature however is that they do not read at all like a miscellaneous collection but instead form a connected discussion and examination of the impact of Marx and of Marxism in its different varieties from the earliest days until the present. Hobsbawm being multilingual among his other accomplishments, a number of these pieces are appearing in English for the first time, having been published initially in Italian or German; most have been updated and revised for *How to Change the World*.

**CENTRALITY OF MARXISM**

The principal theme taken up following a discussion of Marx and Engels’s own politics and some key writings (such as the *Communist Manifesto* and the *Grundrisse*, though not *Capital*) is the centrality of Marxism and Marx-inspired movements to world history from even before Marx’s death until the last decades of the twentieth century. This covers Marxist-inspired parties (principally the German SPD) prior to 1914; the great division between Communists and Social Democrats after 1919 (previously the latter name had covered even the most revolutionary of Marxists); the Communist parties and the anti-fascist struggles of the thirties and forties; the importance of Gramsci; the rise of academic Marxism in the sixties; the decline of the Communist movement (including the weirdo “Marxisms” of the 1970s); and finally a historical summary and summing-up of the history of labour and Marxism. He notes that “The claim that socialism was superior to capitalism as a way to ensure the most rapid development of the forces of production could hardly have been made by Marx. It belongs to the era when inter-war capitalist crisis confronted the USSR.” (p.7).

Most commentators, including critical ones, have acknowledged the impressive character of this work. Even right-wing reviewers have with a few exceptions recognised its merits, however grudgingly. The journal *History Today*, which nowadays takes a rather right-wing slant, nevertheless has a review by Sheila Rowbotham describing it as “This exhilarating study”, with “over 400 fascinating pages”, altogether very positive despite criticising some lack of attention to feminism and the non-communist left.

The merit and the fascination is found not only in the content but also in Hobsbawm’s great stylistic abilities. Many of his acerbic comments are delightful to read, such as his reference to “ideologies of radical economic liberalism which had by then infested the economic faculty in Chicago”, or that “… with the fall of the Berlin Wall capitalism could forget how to be frightened, and therefore lost interest in people unlikely to own shares.” (p.413)

**REFUSAL TO DISOWN PAST**

Among Hobsbawm’s critics – both friendly commentators such as Elliot or Rowbotham and hostile ones like the out-to-lunch John Gray – he tends to be censured for his stubborn refusal to disown his Communist Party past and his attachment to its achievements and positive values. Hobsbawm is of course fully conscious, as *How to Change the World* makes clear, of the Communist movement’s shortcomings, flaws, stupidities and crimes – and most acutely how later attempts at reform ran into the sand and the regimes established in its name failed utterly or, in the Chinese case, morphed into something completely different. The very title of the book raises the question of whether consciously changing the world as a project of emancipation is feasible at all – but if it is, he is in no doubt that Marxism and significant elements of the Communist heritage still have a great deal to contribute.

Willie Thompson is a historian. His most recent books are *Ideologies in the Age of Extremes* and (with Sandy Hobs) *Out of the Burning House: Political Socialization in the Age of Affluence*. 

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**CHANGING THE WORLD: MARXISM AND EMANCIPATION**

Willie Thompson admires Eric Hobsbawm’s re-assertion of the value of Marxism.
David Purdy welcomes a book of essays on the economic and social challenges facing Scotland.

This is a timely and important book. In a bid to shift the focus of political debate in Scotland away from constitutional issues towards the substantive (and substantial) economic and social challenges faced by a small nation in a turbulent world, the editors have invited a talented array of academics, researchers, journalists, policy analysts and public service professionals to tackle two questions which have hitherto received scant attention on either side of the Unionist-Nationalist divide: What are the problems to which an “ever looser Union” is – or might be – the solution? And how should Scotland’s government, citizens, business community and civil society set about dealing with them? The SNP’s resounding election victory on 5th May creates the opportunity for a genuine national conversation around these questions. Whether our political parties and mass media will rise to the occasion is another matter.

Besides an editorial introduction, the book contains twelve 5,000-word essays, all but one single-authored, and seven informal conversations, which extend the range of contributors and offer a welcome contrast of format and style. The concept of self-determination provides an overarching ethical ideal. Contributions fall into four groups, each devoted to a different dimension of this concept. (1) What principles should inform the political economy of a self-governing Scotland? (2) What does commitment to personal autonomy imply for public policy in the fields of health, schooling, early years provision, criminal justice and the distribution of income, jobs and unpaid work? (3) What does the ideal of an educated and participating democracy imply for housing policy, land reform and the protection of the environment? And (4) how should cultural vitality be nurtured and protected against both commercial exploitation and political domination?

The book concludes with a trio of “celebrity” conversations. Anthony Barnett interviews Will Hutton about the power of global finance capital and its grip on the British state. Gerry Hassan quizzes Zygmunt Bauman about the disappearance of the left as an intellectual and political force and the pre-emption of the future by a neo-liberal juggernaut which has, to be sure, been damaged by financial crisis, economic recession and fiscal retrenchment, but which retains its hold over conventional wisdom. And Richard Wyn Jones talks to Tom Nairn about the condition of Ukania and the “deep state” of Great Britain in the age of post-devolution politics.

LAND, POWER, COMMUNITY AND CULTURE

Taken together, these diverse contributions vindicate the editors’ central claims. The era of devolution as we have known it is over and the time has come to acknowledge that self-determination is not just a matter of deciding what constitutional arrangements Scotland should adopt (a choice which, in any case, is not reducible to the polar options of separating from the UK or maintaining the Union in its current form); it also obliges us to ask what kinds of political, economic and cultural arrangements will equip and motivate us to take responsibility both for our own personal destinies and for our shared destinies as citizens and social beings. This latter question is most fully and satisfactorily explored in the first two, longest parts of the book dealing, respectively, with political economy and social policy.

By comparison, the essays by Douglas Robertson on housing and by Andy Wightman on land reform are disappointingly thin. In each case, the relevant problems – the poor quality of Scotland’s housing stock and the failure of what has hitherto passed for land reform to challenge the power of an entrenched elite – are clearly and forcefully described. But the explanations offered are unconvincing and the remedies prescribed sketchy. Housing policy, like any other public policy, will always have to balance competing objectives. Likewise, the ownership of land, however concentrated, is only one source of power, and once land comes to be routinely bought and sold, it is trumped – or even Trumped – by the power of capital. And in both cases, success in mobilising countervailing power demands not just localised activism and community self-help, but support from other sections and levels of society, including central government.

This last point is well brought out by Eurig Scandrett’s reflections on the lessons of trade union and grassroots campaigns to counter the harmful environmental and social effects of capitalist development. Community, he concludes, needs to be conceptualised not as a predetermined body of people who already know what they want and how to get it, but as an expansive and open-ended social learning process in which people deliberate and decide what is to be done through the interplay of diverse and frequently conflicting stakeholder interests, including those of future generations and non-human species.
The problems of articulating bottom-up energy flows with top-down steering are squarely faced by Neil Mulholland and Pat Kane, whose essays on culture and creativity are original, incisive, eloquent and suggestive. Both writers are sceptical about the role of public agencies such as Creative Scotland, arguing that since we cannot hope to resolve the tensions between market forces, public subsidy, artistic freedom and cultural capital (as distinct from culture as capital), we must find ways of living with them. Indeed, Pat Kane is driven to wonder whether the best cultural policy may not reside in housing, social security, taxation and employment policy. He has a point. In my experience, practising or aspiring artists, musicians, writers and performers are keen supporters of proposals for a Citizen’s Basic Income, a tax-transfer system which, if it were feasible, would enable anyone who so wished to devote all the time and energy they have left over after doing the housework and caring for others, to working in the gift economy, without having to worry about keeping the wolf from the door.

**THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SELF-DETERMINATION**

With political economy, we are on firmer ground. James Mitchell sets the scene by explaining why devolution has failed to deliver self-government. There is, he argues, a contradiction in fiscal arrangements that permit Scotland to pursue divergent social policies, but can only be financed by securing more resources from Westminster. If we want better public services, we should be prepared to pay for them. But this requires fiscal powers that are not available to the Scottish Parliament and go well beyond what is on offer in the Scotland Bill currently before the Westminster Parliament. Evidently, we need to return to first principles. The purpose of fiscal policy is not just to raise revenue to pay for public goods, but to redistribute income (in kind as well as money) and to deal with acknowledged forms of market failure: notably, cases in which the social costs and benefits of production and consumption diverge from their private costs and benefits. (Mitchell forgets to add that at the macro-economic level – currently the preserve of Westminster – fiscal policy is or should be co-ordinated with monetary policy so as to counteract destabilising upward or downward movements in prices, output and employment).

Of course, what counts as market failure, how we measure economic performance and what value should be assigned to those aspects of our lives that lie wholly or partially outside the cash nexus are all open to question. For contrary to the discourse of mainstream economics, ably criticised in this volume by David Donald and Alan Hutton, we are not just owners, earners and spenders: we are also members of households and families; neighbours, colleagues and associates; and above all, citizens with the various rights and responsibilities that this status entails. And as John McClaren notes writing about public sector reform, in any democratic society worthy of the name, the system of social accounting that frames public debate and policy-making should itself be up for discussion and, from time to time, revised. It is perverse and misleading to treat non-marketed goods and services or the assets used to produce them, whether these derive from human activity in the public, household and voluntary sectors of the economy or are provided free by nature, as if they were no different from marketed products and profit-seeking capital. We cannot govern ourselves if we are ruled by the market.

Though not expressed in quite these terms, this general approach informs all the essays on political economy. In a spirited critique of the SNP’s “voodoo economics”, Michael Keating points out that the party will eventually have to decide which social model it wishes to follow: the low-tax variety favoured by countries such as Ireland and Estonia or the high public spending regimes developed by the Nordic states. And in making the case for fiscal autonomy and points beyond, the SNP needs to recognise that modern governments cannot solve problems or settle conflicts by fiscal manipulation alone, even if they have a full tool-kit of fiscal instruments at their disposal: in a world of interdependent and self-determining societies, they have to come to terms with the views and interests both of other states and of their own domestic stakeholders. The SNP and Scottish Labour both claim to be parties of the centre-left, but neither appears to appreciate the need for social partnership, a mode of governance which our European neighbours take for granted, but which in Britain is at best a distant memory, having been razed to the ground by Mrs Thatcher, like Carthage after its sack by Rome.

**CRITICAL SOCIAL POLICY**

The search for antidotes to consumerism and the rebuilding of social partnership are no less relevant to the concerns of social policy. The contributions to this section of the book are outstanding. Keir Bloomer argues that if, in the words of “A Curriculum for Excellence” issued by the Scottish Minister for Education in 2004, our children are to become “successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens”, we need to overhaul the way our school system is governed. He goes on to outline proposals for replacing the current system of local authority control by one in which the three functions traditionally subsumed under the heading of “governance” – funding, support and accountability – are separated out. Funded by a Scottish Funding Council similar to the bodies that already dispense block grants to universities and FE colleges, schools would acquire greater operational autonomy, while at the
same time becoming more strongly accountable to their most important stakeholders: young people themselves, teachers, parents, local communities and society as a whole.

In a complementary conversation about why the early years matter, Sue Palmer and Alan Sinclair discuss the adverse impact of the technological and consumerist revolutions driving economic growth in the later twentieth century on parent-child, face-to-face communication. All the evidence suggests that these experiences are essential for children’s social, emotional and cognitive development, and that early years deficits impair children’s educational progress and handicap them for life, just as junk food and lack of exercise harm their physical development. And the costs of damaged childhoods for society as a whole are heavy, a point underscored by Fergus McNeill’s clear-eyed and inspiring account of the children’s social, emotional and cognitive development.

MODELS OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Can the perspectives and insights of radical political economy and critical social policy form the basis for political renewal and social transformation? Here the sense of optimism prompted by the Scottish Spring needs to be tempered by a sober appreciation that global capitalism, predatory finance, possessive individualism, self-indulgence, environmental vandalism, educational philistinism and penal populism are formidable foes, especially in a culture which has lost faith in the power of government or collective agency of any kind to change the world for the better. One key difference between the Great Depression of the 1930s and the crisis in which we are now enmeshed is that then, despite the rise of fascism and the defeats suffered by the left, there remained a general sense that the left’s day was yet to come, as indeed proved to be the case, whereas now communism, socialism, social democracy and even “progressive politics” resemble exhibits in a museum.

In this situation, it may be helpful to review the three models of social transformation we have inherited from the past two centuries of efforts to build a better world. Under what might be called the interstitial or molecular model, small bands of dedicated pioneers fashion practical alternatives to capitalism, sowing the seeds of a new order in the nooks and crannies of this one. The Owenite and co-operative movements in the first half of the nineteenth century are the best-known historical examples.

The second, revolutionary model insists on the need for a decisive break with capitalism, to be achieved through the winning of state power: by electoral means in democracies, and elsewhere by means of a popular uprising, in which the critical factor is the stance of the armed forces. A central tenet of the socialist worldview in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the vestige of this model survives in the Gramscian idea that all regimes are prone to organic crises, when received ideas and established institutions no longer suffice to solve pressing economic and social problems. At such times, innovative political and intellectual leadership aimed at winning popular support for a new regime has a decisive role to play, though as the case of Mrs Thatcher shows, there is no presumption that the left is better placed to perform this role than the right or centre.

Finally, there is the symbiotic model of social transformation associated with the tradition of social democracy. Here revolution is foresworn in favour of electoral-legislative politics aimed at using the regulatory, fiscal and reforming powers of the state to tame market forces, check the power of capital and build a mixed economy. In some versions of the model, the resultant historic compromise is conceived, somewhat naively, as a permanent state of affairs. In more dynamic versions – notably, that pioneered by the Swedish social democrats and pursued with great success for almost sixty years after the party’s electoral breakthrough in 1932 – conscious efforts are made to shift the balance of the mixed economy progressively towards socialist goals. In Britain, the main historic achievement and surviving remnant of symbiosis is the NHS.

None of these models in its classic form will serve our purposes today. In some sense, we need to combine the core elements of all three: molecular change, crisis resolution and social construction. But exactly how they fit together and who is going to do the fitting remains unclear. In that sense, Radical Scotland offers a socio-cultural project in search of a socio-political formation. Nevertheless, I urge all readers of Perspectives to buy a copy, though they should be warned that at times the standard of copy-editing is poor. The introduction, for example, is replete with errors of spelling, grammar, punctuation and syntax, while the transcript of Anthony Barnett’s interview with Will Hutton has “dessert” for “desert” and “credit gold stocks” for “credit default swaps”. If there is a Radical Scotland 2, I hereby offer to do the copy-editing free of charge as a small contribution to raising literary standards, expanding the gift economy and weakening the capitalist ethos.

David Purdy is a regular contributor to Perspectives and a member of Democratic Left Scotland.
I’d like to thank the Perspectives editor for giving me the opportunity to respond to Mike Gonzalez’s review of my book, *Ideologies in the Age of Extremes*. Discussion on these matters is always welcome, for if Mike’s hopes that a socialism appropriate to the twenty-first century is to be realised, it’s important that we have a realistic perspective on the way things developed in the past one. He is correct that I interpret the twentieth century as one of triumphant liberalism in the end “riding roughshod over the world”, for in my view that is exactly what occurred.

However some factual errors and misrepresentations contained in the review deserve to be mentioned. In relation to the dissident versions of communism not discussed in *Ideologies*, my remark that “space does not permit” was seriously meant – so much for the “nifty sleight of hand” which Mike identifies in my neglect of them. Mike has also written books – presumably he knows about word limits. Similarly, it’s true that I don’t discuss Stalin’s role in Hitler’s ascent to power (I’ve done that elsewhere) – my concern here was to discuss forces and individuals whose contribution was far greater. Regarding the term “franchise” attached to the parties which were accepted by Moscow, and which he criticises as a commercial metaphor, the word does not necessarily relate to the marketplace, in fact it has only acquired that meaning in recent decades. Unsubstantiated attribution of discreditable motive is, regrettably, a recurrent tendency in the political outlook to which Mike is committed.

**FASCISM AND THE RIGHT**

My discussion of fascism is badly misrepresented, I might almost say caricatured. A serious example is contained in the suggestion that I overlook the contradictions and tensions in fascist ideology or try to assimilate it to a single dominant mystique. Fascism’s relation to the class structures of the countries where it was strong, and dealings with conservatism and conservatives, are explicitly discussed at some length – one subheading is “Class and fascism”. His reference to Roger Griffin is also seriously misleading, giving the impression that I depend on that author for my understanding of fascism’s driving force. While I have a lot of respect for Griffin’s work I also categorically disagree with some of his central propositions, especially the argument that fascism represented some kind of revolutionary movement – and I make this explicit. Most of my quotes from him, contrary to the impression that Mike gives, are actually quotes of fascist writings that are cited by Griffin.

Mike asks, “who picked up these ideas (of Mises, Hayek et al) and what political form did they take?” with the implication that the volume neglects such aspects, whereas in reality very considerable space is devoted in Part 3 to answering precisely that question.

**REALITY OF STALINISM**

It was not necessary to wait until 1989 to be disappointed by “the reality of Stalinism”, which had been pretty effectively exposed thirty-three years beforehand, and the reason why the book ends in 1991 is simply because that was the year in which the USSR was dissolved. The fact that the predatory instincts of capital were restrained by the fear that otherwise large numbers might be attracted to communism scarcely makes the latter a “handmaiden” of social democracy. To claim that I dismiss social democracy as “just a version of liberalism” may be true in essence, if oversimplified, but to present it in quote marks as though being my own words is sloppy; the book does not use such a phrase. I’m also rebuked for suggesting that “the resurgence of the orthodox communist parties in the east is a hopeful sign”. I’ve checked the
relevant text, and there is no such suggestion. In addition What Was Communism? is not the volume suggested by Mike’s italics but the title of a short editorial in the journal Socialist History 2.

I think I detect a hint – though I may be over-suspicious on this occasion – that I’m indulging in some nostalgia for Stalinism (if not Stalin personally). I’ve made clear in other contexts that I regard Stalinism was one of the worst disasters to afflict the socialist movement, which does not alter the fact that the Soviet bloc and the movement it inspired was nevertheless, however uncomfortable this fact may be, the only serious obstacle to the global dominion of capital. The two things are not necessarily incompatible.

CONCLUSION
The essence of Mike’s critique, it seems to me, is that I did not write the volume according to the historical perspective of the SWP. I did not write it in that manner because, though the SWP is not without its merits and the arguments of its theorists are often perceptive, I do not find that perspective in the least convincing. According to it – and this comes through in the review as with many other authors of Mike’s persuasion – the masses are constantly hungering for socialism and as constantly betrayed by leaders incompetent at best, but most often pernicious. History suggests otherwise, and if the socialist project is to have any future it is important that its past is understood through the optic of reality rather than fantasy. “Class struggle is endemic in capitalism”, Mike accurately notes, but someone who esteems Gramsci’s work should surely not be surprised that class struggle seldom has the far-reaching outcomes which we would both like to see. Ideologies is an attempt to examine one dimension of that reality in the twentieth century.

Willie Thompson

OPINION MAY BE MISTAKEN, BUT GRACE AND LOVE NEVER ARE

Erik Cramb observes the Church of Scotland as it wrestles with its attitude towards homosexuality.

“B an on gay revs ditched”. “Church lifts its ban on gay ministers”.

These are just two of many similar headlines in Scottish newspapers on May 24th, the morning after the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland had its long-anticipated debate on the suitability or otherwise of candidates for the ministry living in same-sex relationships.

In fact, the Assembly did two things. First of all, by a narrow majority of 393 to 252 it voted to allow ministers and deacons in committed same-sex relationships ordained before 2009 to keep their jobs and be free to take up new parish appointments. Secondly, in a move towards the acceptance for training and ordination of those in a same-sex relationship, by an even narrower majority of 351 to 294, it set up a theological commission to consider how this may be done in a way consistent with the Church’s understanding of “the will of God”. Currently the Church does not allow the blessing of Civil Partnerships and this commission is also to look at how the Church might address the matter of blessing civil partnerships.

In a society more concerned with sectarianism than sexual orientation, a person might wonder why there was such media interest in this debate. Was it in the hope that there might be a right old rammy and a walk out by numbers of ministers and members on the “losing” side? I suspect it was, and unless there is some significant breakaway still to ensue, I imagine media interest in the matter will be all but non-existent until the Assembly of 2013 approaches and the theological commission’s report is unveiled.

So, what was it all about and does it really matter to anyone outside of the Church?

INSIDE OUTSIDER
Maybe I’m not the one to say since I’m a kind of “inside outsider”. I’m retired and no longer hold any office in the Kirk. More than half my nearly 40 years of ministry was outside of the Kirk in the workplaces of Scotland with folk of all faiths and none.

To begin to see a point to what for many is an esoteric debate already largely overtaken by history there is a need to understand that both sides of the debate (described in the Assembly report as traditionalists and revisionists) come from the same starting point. That is, for the Christian believer, what we understand about the “will of God” is to be discerned from the study of the Bible and in particular how we interpret the words and actions of Jesus for our
day. This debate is about the Church struggling to be faithful to the word of God.

Christian understanding of the Word of God has never been static. Sometimes it takes long years, sometimes centuries to move, as poor old Galileo learned to his cost when he asserted that the Earth was not the centre of the universe.

In the Old Testament book of Leviticus where ancient laws and practices were laid out, it says about priesthood, “No man with any physical defect may make the offering: no one who is blind, lame, disfigured or deformed; no one with a crippled hand or foot” and various other categories of physical imperfection. Well, you’d think that’s me barred (I had polio as a child), but after 40 years of ministry the only difficulty the Kirk had with me was my occasional motor-mouth tendency!

CHURCH DOES CHANGE
Someone with a disability is not excluded from ordination. So the Church does change. It is only within my lifetime that women have been allowed to be ordained to the ministry. The “Authority of Scripture” has been used within living memory to support slavery, justify apartheid and subjugate women, yet these stances are now openly recognised to be “in error”.

One wise old minister observed during the debate at the General Assembly, “Opinion may be mistaken, but grace and love never are.”

The report brought to the General Assembly this year recognised that in 1959, “the Church for good pastoral reasons saw fit to depart from Gospel teaching that re-marriage after divorce was adultery” and went on to comment “the 1959 Act [about the re-marriage of divorced persons] is relevant to these [2011] deliberations as it may provide a model by which the Church, if so minded, can agree to disagree on an issue of theology and morals, and protect the views of each side of the debate through a freedom of conscience provision which is not merely a temporary expedient.”

In our ordination vows we promise to seek “the peace and unity of the Church”. The report was clearly striving to preserve that peace and unity. Others, from both sides of the argument, wanted the General Assembly to make a decision. On the one hand, there were those who argued that another fudge would just prolong the offence to, and exclusion of, those in committed same-sex relationships who wanted a full part in the life of the Church. On the other hand, it was argued that another fudge would prolong the offence caused to those who wanted the Kirk to be faithful to traditional teaching.

So the scene was set to have it out! But, the Assembly was reminded by the Moderator that it should not be seeking a vote for one bona fide view to triumph over another by a narrow vote. The Church is divided and will continue to be so for the foreseeable future.

The debate began with gracious comments about the things that both sides held in common. The Kirk has taken cognisance of modern science in that there is a large measure of agreement that our sexual orientation is a biological given, but morality and other factors can influence how we behave. It is generally accepted that, for many, a homosexual orientation carries a heavy burden in both church and society.

In 2007 the Kirk’s Working Group on Human Sexuality reached “a strong measure of agreement that homosexual orientation was not a matter of censure and did not bar the service of Christ in the Church and the world.”

So far so good. But, the traditionalists argued, the 2007 report implied, homosexual practice might be. For the traditionalists the dichotomy between orientation and practice is crucial. Against that well-known background, the view of the current report was that “the dispute about the ordination of ministers in same-sex relationships is essentially a theological dispute about whether same-sex activity in a committed relationship is contrary to the will of God.”

THEOLOGICAL ISSUE
For the Church this issue is not a matter of civil rights or other rights conferred by civil law. It is essentially a theological issue. That is the question that the newly appointed theological commission is being asked to address and report in 2013.

The report was asking the General Assembly to give the new Commission a steer, either in the direction of accommodating people in committed same-sex relationships or in the direction of underpinning a ban on their eligibility for ordination. It was in being asked to give a steer that the General Assembly of 2011 was to create the “winners” and “losers” that the media thirsted after. In the end it was like a two legged European cup tie in which one side has gained a 1–0 or 2–1 lead and there seems all to play for in the second leg. But ... and I suspect that this is what will so depress the traditionalist side ... neither history nor opinion stands still and they will feel their best opportunity to close the door on our gay sisters and brothers has gone. I hope that will prove to be the case.

But I also hope the traditionalists do not leave the Church. The history of breakaways is not good. As the Moderator said, the Church of Scotland is a Church, not a sect. It still has the breadth and strength to take stands against prevailing fashion, to be counter-cultural. It still leads the campaign for the removal of nuclear weapons; is prominent in the struggle against poverty; stands against rampant materialism, and for all of that, and much more, Scotland is the better.

Erik Cramb is a retired Church of Scotland minister and former co-ordinator of the Scottish Churches Industrial Mission.
REASONS TO BE CHEERFUL: THE “COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS” APPROACH TO PUBLIC HEALTH

Debate on public health might be better occupied insisting on fairer distribution of Scotland’s more material assets, argues Lynne Friedli.

Living on nothing is trying not to hear the intellectual arguments and lofty ideals about living on nothing put forward by those who are not living on nothing. Living on nothing is dying. Out of the Shadows, Liz Prest (ed)

At the close of 2010, Harry Burns, the Chief Medical Officer (CMO), launched an Assets Alliance for Scotland. Designed to tackle Scotland’s “intractable problems”, the report on the event makes some powerful assertions, both about the role of the public sector “what we have tried to date (although well meaning) has not worked” and about the nature of the problem in poor communities. In a significant sleight of hand, Scotland’s health problems are now said to be “exacerbated by” poverty, unemployment and poor physical and social environments. In other words, the root causes lie elsewhere. These are described as a combination of the culture of dependency engendered by public services (which also stimulate unaffordable demand) and “something within the spirit of individuals living within deprived communities that needs healed.” As one of the participants at the event said: “the issue is one of spiritual disease – people are buying out of life.”

ASSETS AGENDA
This move to cultural and psychological explanations for inequalities in health and other outcomes in Scotland is not new. It serves to disguise the link between health and living conditions and has been seen by anti-poverty campaigners as part of a wider process of “othering” the poor (McKendrick et al, 2011). As “assets-based approaches” look set to become a central driver, reshaping the direction of public health in Scotland, it’s worth reflecting on what’s at stake. What lies behind the assets agenda – “supporting the inner and innate assets in these individuals and communities” – and what does it mean for the politics of public health?

Interest in assets was a strong feature of the CMO’s latest annual report, which rehearsed the now familiar argument that deprivation cannot explain Scotland’s poor health. Other European regions, (notably Eastern European), appear to have a resilience which has allowed them to benefit from changed socio-political circumstances. As has been widely commented upon, the rise in mortality from 1980 in Glasgow is greater than in Manchester and Liverpool, the other most deprived cities in the UK.

CLASS CONFLICT
It’s not clear what explains Glasgow’s recent “excess” mortality from drugs, alcohol, suicide and violence, largely among working age adults. In a systematic assessment of seventeen hypotheses, Gerry McCartney and colleagues argue that the health and social patterns that emerged during the 1980s and 1990s were strongly shaped by the abruptly changed political and economic policies of the UK. The political attack on the organised working class during these years had a distinctive impact on Scotland, triggering many other factors. Scotland was particularly targeted and particularly vulnerable, with a high dependence on industrial jobs and social housing (McCartney et al, 2011). These are important issues, still influencing the political and emotional landscape in Scotland, and a reminder that an analysis of class conflict can (still) contribute centrally to understanding health.

At the same time, the Glasgow effect has also become a distraction. Chronic diseases (coronary heart disease, cancer, respiratory) continue to contribute to excess mortality and even if life expectancy in Glasgow was on a par with Liverpool and Manchester, it would still be among the worst in the UK (and Europe). Public health could focus on addressing the 50% or so of the West of Scotland’s health deficit that is explained by deprivation, just to be going on with. The Report of the Commission on the Social Determinants of Health is a powerful statement of where attention should be concentrated:

An analysis of class conflict can (still) contribute centrally to understanding health.
Chronic stress is strongly correlated with lack of control and low social status, which in turn are directly influenced by levels of material wealth.

CHRONIC STRESS

So where does an assets approach fit in? Drawing on Antonovsky, Burns proposes a shift in focus from the determinants of illness to the determinants of health (salutogenesis) and to a “sense of coherence” as the key resource that enables individuals to manage difficult or stressful environments successfully. It’s now well understood that chronic stress contributes centrally to poor physical health, notably through its impact on neuro-endocrine, cardiovascular and immune systems, influencing risk factors for heart disease, diabetes and liver disease. There’s also a familiar social gradient in levels of stress. Chronic stress is strongly correlated with lack of control and low social status, which in turn are directly influenced by levels of material wealth. It’s an ironic, as well as opportunistic twist, that Burns uses a quote from Jimmy Reid on alienation – “the cry of men who find themselves the victim of blind economic forces beyond their control” – to support his focus on psychological resources.

No doubt a sense of coherence is some people’s birthright. Viewing the external world as meaningful, understandable and manageable may be entirely rational, or, from the perspective of a number of streets in Glasgow or Motherwell, entirely delusional. Either way, are we now to promote a uniformly upbeat way of interpreting the world? Unfortunately, sound Scottish traditions of negative thinking have become taboo in public health circles: it’s more important to be positive than to have an accurate perception of reality.

RESISTANCE OF DEPRIVED COMMUNITIES

And yet. By their nature, assets based approaches are about strengths and, in particular, resilience or what enables individuals and communities to survive, adapt and/or flourish, notwithstanding adversity. They speak to the resistance of deprived communities to being pathologised, criminalised, ostracised; to being described in public health reports in terms of multiple deficits and disorders: “chaotic, unengaged, and disaffected”. Concepts like co-production challenge the “professional gift model”, empower citizens and involve recognition and respect for their knowledge, skills, preferences and potential. These themes are familiar in the policy literature on personalisation, expert patients, self management and anticipatory care but have their (more radical) roots in disability rights and the early recovery movement.

The importance of psycho-social assets is also central to critiques of consumerism, materialism and “economic growth at the cost of social recession”. These come together in calls to value the contribution of those outside the money economy: the core economy of friends, family, neighbours and civil society.

What’s at stake here is a discourse about what hasn’t been valued and the view that “wellbeing does not depend solely upon economic assets” (Sen, 2010). The Stiglitz Report, commissioned by President Sarkozy, calls for measures of social progress that include non-market activities, sustainability and quality of life, as does the OECD Global Project on Measuring the Progress of Societies. In the UK, the Office for National Statistics has just completed a public consultation on “what influences wellbeing?”

Just as there is a need for measures that go beyond economic performance, that provide a more complete picture of “how society is doing”, there is a need for a more complete picture of health, one that includes the determinants of both illness and health. Deficits and Assets.

INEQUALITIES EXACERBATE STRESS

Both assets approaches and the wider wellbeing debates are strongly associated with a non-materialist position – money doesn’t matter as much as relationships, sense of meaning and purpose, opportunities to contribute and autonomy: there’s a difference between starving and fasting.

Recent years have seen significant efforts to acknowledge and measure the non-material dimensions of poverty – perhaps most famously in Amartya Sen’s call for “the ability to go about without shame” to be recognised as a basic human freedom. People living in poverty, as well as other vulnerable or excluded groups, consistently describe the pain of being made to feel of no account, which is often experienced as more damaging than material hardship. From this perspective, inequalities greatly exacerbate the stress of coping with material deprivation.

The social gradient in both mental illness and levels of mental wellbeing shows the clear relationship between psychological distress and the material circumstances of people’s lives. Of course communities with high levels of poverty are also rich in friendships, mutual support and social networks. However at a population level, which is what should inform public health policy, loneliness, isolation, lack of support and feelings of anxiety and depression are much more common among those in the poorest deciles (Taulbut et al, 2009). The mental wellbeing of children is particularly strongly influenced by household income (Green et al, 2004).

The problem then is not that the Assets Alliance addresses psychological and cultural issues, but that it does so without acknowledging the material basis of inequalities in life chances, health, opportunities and everyday experience in Scotland today. Without acknowledging that for the poorest, the material benefits of solidarity – real power to effect change – have been ripped away. Collective traditions of making meaning out of adversity have built strength through a shared analysis of inequalities in privilege, power and resources. Feminism, civil rights, trades unions, gay liberation, disability rights and the survivor move-
ment have all understood psychological distress as a symptom of oppression. Respect for people’s strengths, endurance and resistance should enhance, rather than distract from, the struggle for social justice.

In the CMO’s annual report, somewhat selective quotes from “assets based” programmes down South imply that supporting people to work together and take control can be abstracted from the material realities of their lives. In fact, nothing in the case study of Beacon and Old Hill Estate suggests causal factors other than the social determinants of health:

“These meetings led the community to conclude that the main problems affecting their health were crime, poor housing, and unemployment, together with the historical failure of the statutory agencies to address these issues.” (Durie et al, undated)

The annual report reinforces the view that the primary determinants of health in Scotland these days are moral and psychological – dependency and spiritual malaise. But success stories of community activism and empowerment involve resources to address structural issues – for example the central heating installation in the Beacon Project:

“Among the outcomes initially achieved by the Partnership was a successful bid led by Penwerris Residents Association for £1.2 million of Capital Challenge funding, matched with a further £1 million funding from Carrick District Council. This money was used to fund the central heating and energy efficiency measures, and led to the installation of central heating in 300 properties, with a further 900 properties being reclad.” (Durie et al)

ACCESS TO VALUED RESOURCES

Perhaps a more central question is why the assets based approach in Scotland is so narrowly focussed on inner and innate assets. More comprehensive asset mapping provides a framework for increasing equitable access to a wide range of valued resources. These might include green space, blue space (canals, rivers and lochs), land for growing, public squares and buildings, cultural treasures, a bus or taxi service, fresh food, affordable credit, a well loved pub, library, corner shop, hairdresser or pharmacy. They might of course also include public services and the values of pooled risk, safety nets, and collective responsibility for need. This wider approach can link asset mapping with action to gain or preserve resources for disadvantaged communities: access to public sector buildings, evening use of school facilities, restoring footpaths, transport to the nearest loch or beach, clearing waterways, planting an orchard, recycling electrical appliances. The dismal state of many of Scotland’s railway stations – bleak, identikit zones, policed by CCTV and tannoy, devoid of staff, comfort or charm – is a potent example of an eroded asset with potential for transformation.

What’s tragic about all this is that the wider Scottish policy environment for reducing poverty and inequality is favourable, but sustaining progressive elements in the current climate will depend on support, not least from public health. Positive trends in poverty rates in Scotland are stalling but the improvements made in the decade 1996/7 to 2005/6 (a marked decline in the proportion of people living in absolute and relative poverty; a reduction in child poverty rates from 33% to 24%) show what can be achieved (McKendrick et al, 2011). The fact that this still leaves child poverty far higher than in the late 1970s/early 1980s shows the extent of the challenge and is one of the contexts for assessing what has worked to improve health.

HUGELY IMPORTANT ASPIRATION

Public health also needs to be a strong and consistent voice on income. The Scottish government’s commitment to reducing income inequality (the solidarity target) has some limitations – what is happening to the poorest is hidden by targets that focus on the bottom 30% – but it’s a hugely important aspiration. Public health could provide crucial leadership and evidence here, pointing out that the extreme widening of the gap in income growth between the poorest 10% (growth of 2%) and the top 10% (growth of 48%) has profound consequences. It’s perhaps a cheap point to note that income in the higher echelons of public health situates these professionals well within the top decile, where the feeling that life is meaningful is daily reinforced by material reward. And the social and emotional distance between those who design interventions and those who experience them widens.

The Assets Alliance gestures towards social justice and compassion, but it doesn’t throw its weight behind well established networks in Scotland dedicated to just such goals e.g. the Poverty Alliance. Perhaps because the assets alliance also seems to function as a professional support group, uncritically “spreading and promoting the value of assets approaches”:

“We need to ensure that those existing organisations and individuals who are currently working on assets based approaches and whose survival is under threat are protected.”

It’s no surprise that a wide range of projects have put themselves forward …

“GLASS HALF FULL” VISION

Beyond this special pleading, the Alliance situates itself as part of the solution in achieving public spending cuts, promoting a DIY response to loss of services and loss of benefits. It has nothing to say in its “glass half full” vision about the true causes of disempowerment: “a man goes to work full time and still has to get the social because wages is so low; he needed that money to keep his kids”. Nothing to say about the lived experience of “incentivised employment”, the impact of restricted eligibility (unaffordable demand) and cuts in social care. Instead of pointing out that the current welfare system erodes the foundations of community health, it rehearses slurs about dependency.
These weaknesses ... show just how detached public health is from ethical questions at the top of the agenda in disability rights and human rights.

DETACHED FROM ETHICAL QUESTIONS

These weaknesses in the discourse around assets in Scotland show just how detached public health is from ethical questions at the top of the agenda in disability rights and human rights, where crucial issues around vulnerability, autonomy and control are being explored. Crucial, because economic and environmental disadvantage structure the relationship between deprived populations and services. Cultural change in professional practice cannot be separated from the impact of steep income and status hierarchies within the public sector. Or from wider debates that should inform public health advocacy: on rights, on redistribution, on minimum incomes, on policy shifts that have diminished social housing stock and its status and have privileged home ownership. Without these debates, assets approaches serve to encourage the fantasy that Scotland’s problems can be tackled without the awkward task of addressing power and the reality of competing interests.

Even so. Even so. Can anything be retrieved? Can something be salvaged? The truth is, working in the field of mental health improvement, in Scotland and across the UK, I’m also implicated. I’ve fought for recognition that mental health matters, that wellbeing “predicts outcomes” and that psychological assets are a “precious resource”. The recent launch of Action for Happiness shows exactly the direction we’re moving in England.” It’s true that a key strength of assets based approaches can be to insist on the power of the human spirit: in any circumstances, “the air I breathe is mine” as Micheal O’Siadhail notes. But would public health be better occupied insisting on a fairer distribution of Scotland’s more material assets?

Lynne Friedli is a freelance mental health researcher currently working with the Equally Well test site in Stobswell, Dundee. With thanks to Margaret Carlin.

NOTES

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Patrick Geddes and the Small World of the Big Society

David Cameron’s idea of the Big Society has been tried (and failed) before. Alex Law looks at the work of Patrick Geddes.

Sometimes the most up-to-date ideas sound like the distorted echo of social religions from a bygone age. Over the past few years the “Big Society” has been touted as the answer to “Broken Britain”. In February 2011 the Prime Minister, David Cameron, defended the idea of the “Big Society” on ameliorative grounds: “We do need a social recovery to mend the broken society and to me, that’s what the big society is all about.”

As the big idea behind Conservative plans for shrunken public services, the main thrust of the Big Society glee club appears to be that good people will spontaneously get together to “do good things”. As The Big Society Network puts it, a pent-up excitement to get things done will be unleashed from the depths of civil society as public services are progressively withdrawn: Britain, we are told, will become “a bigger, better and happier country”.

Widely ridiculed as vacuous, insipid and incoherent, the Big Society has become a wish-image for Small Worlds. Its vision is communitarian not egalitarian. It stands closer to the League of Gentleman than the League of the Just, to the suffocating village mentality than the lost dream of a social republic founded on civic virtue.

Some of this resonates with the attempt made a century ago by Patrick Geddes to establish civic voluntarism as a social religion. It is worth recalling the efforts of Geddes at this juncture, though his conception of civic virtue was underpinned with the semblance of a practical and sociological rationale far beyond the Big Society wish image. Without the benefit of a state-sponsored marketing effort, the mercurial figure of Geddes tried to simply by-pass class divisions, politics and the state through local activism and progressive education.

The civilising process in reverse

Far removed from the world that Geddes tried so valiantly to change, in today’s conditions it is hard not to think that the exact opposite process will occur, a de-civilising not a re-civilising process. It is no rash prediction to suggest that volunteering will not fill the vacuum represented by the dual threat posed by state disinvestment in jobs and services.

In exposing society to an ideological experiment in state disenagement under the cover of creative national accounting, de-civilising processes will be unleashed. Social conditions and civic life are set to deteriorate, from an already low baseline of social existence in some cases. As resources become scarce, lookouts will be posted to identify and blame scapegoats for the mess: immigrants, Muslims, the disabled, substance misusers, young people, the unemployed. Populist demagoguery about the usual suspects will form highly combustible material in conditions wherever the basic supports of public service and employment are lost.

The most graphic example of the de-civilising effects of state withdrawal has been the United States, a model which the Tories look to emulate. There the result has been what the sociologist Loic Wacquant calls “advanced marginality”. In the US the destructive social implosion of extreme poverty, personal distress, collective suffering and urban degradation among huge reservoirs of surplus populations is especially acute. Wacquant names the new forms of marginalisation “advanced” to signify that social extremities increasingly lie ahead of society not behind it. Structural marginality and de-proletarianisation is a permanent and spreading condition. Neighbourhoods of relegation are no longer temporarily redundant residues to be re-absorbed when production picks up again during the next upswing of the economic cycle.

Scotland’s urban housing schemes may represent degraded vistas but they bear little comparison to the abandoned racialised urban ghettos of the US. Persistently high levels of urban poverty are experienced in cities like Glasgow and Dundee. But in Britain the collective consumption of public services, even at recent parsimonious levels, prevented the neo-liberal experiment from exerting anything like the same levels of absolute social degradation. Alongside this function, large sections of society were integrated into a labour force stabilised by public sector employment, somewhat tempering the trend towards precarious forms of labour. Since devolution direct public sector employment grew until it covered around one in four of all jobs in Scotland by 2010. A decline of income inequality, (though not unearned wealth inequality), saw parallel improvements in crime, health and wellbeing in Scotland, in defiance of the siren calls about the Broken Society.

This is not to say that there are not deep-seated structural problems. Evidence from Scotland marshalled by Morelli and Seaman suggests that the more affluent an area is then the more unequal it is also likely to be, a flow in the...
opposite direction from that predicted by neo-liberal “trickle down” apologists. Inequality across urban space is aggravated by the suburbanisation of middle class professionals. They escape to semi-rural private housing at the same time as benefiting from publicly-financed transport infrastructure to commute to work and relax in the managed zones of urban consumption. This “fiscal flight” puts wealthier households beyond the tax boundary of the city even as they intensively use urban services for the consumption of cultural and lifestyle goods.

While state bureaucracies and public service provision should not be identified uncritically with the claims for social solidarity, without them life would be intolerable in many parts of the country. In Scotland, the argument is generally, if not universally, accepted that private interest should not take priority over public virtue. This has not extended far enough to more fully account for the costs of social suffering, limited as it is to concentrating on secondary effects rather than the logic of structural causes.

If affluent voters in Scotland embrace more humane social democratic values, as we are constantly told, then government action ought to take steps to impose a more equitable redistribution of socially-produced goods. After all, the state in Scotland, as much or more so than “the market”, actively shapes the preconditions, through housing, education, health, capital subsidies, spatial policies, the legal bureaucracy, and so on, that in large part determine the position of individuals within collective life.

**STATE AND “CIVILISATION”**

Notwithstanding the civilising effects of the state as the underwriter of social solidarity, there has been a long tradition of distrust of the state among various shades of left wing thought and activism. Marx generally saw the state as the servant of capital. As private interests won historical independence from state tutelage, the abstract rights of individuals obliterated the possibilities for self-conscious collective, rational agency. This lost moral community is what Aristotle long ago identified as a zoon politikon, and which Marx glimpsed very briefly in the heroic democracy of the Paris Commune.

Above all the state aims to stabilise the conditions for accumulation. Once this function was overcome Marx and others believed that it would of necessity wither away. Yet even as private ownership was curtailed or abolished in the twentieth century the range and extent of state power did not decline but became more pronounced. Of course, the function and content of the state changed. Alongside its capacity for total warfare, welfare functions were imposed on the state, above all by lengthy struggles of the labour movement. But on all sides the civilising effect of state power was paid for by the surrender of the original ideals that animated political change in the first place. Bureaucracy usurped democracy; hierarchy dominated equality.

Against the vacuity of the “Big Society” as the solution for “Broken Britain” there cannot therefore be an uncritical defence of the state. But neither can things stand still. With the progressive withdrawal of the state the de-civilising mission of advanced marginality represents an objective presentiment of what’s in front of us.

**PATRICK GEDDES**

From a long way behind us, before the formation of the welfare state, Geddes tried to galvanise civic life as the highest cultural ideal. Geddes led the charge to fill in the social space vacated by the state through an idiosyncratic vision of personal, social, urban and environmental improvement. Today this is often tinged with a romantic nostalgia, a longing for a lost world of pure community before contamination by organisational bureaucracies and technical expertise.

Despite the failure of Geddes’s civic project, his practical and ethical example continues to prove an attractive one for a wide range of political and cultural movements, including environmentalism, anarcho-capitalists like the green anarchist and housing campaigner Colin Ward.

A myth has grown up that Geddes was an unsung prophet in his own land. In fact he ended his life with a knighthood and in his own lifetime was revered by a circle of committed disciples. One of these, Lewis Mumford compared Geddes’s unpublished papers to those left by Leonardo da Vinci, his knowledge of civics to Aristotle, his thought to Leibniz, and his sociology as analogous to pre-Columbian map-making. Mumford speculated that Geddes might become more influential in the century ahead than Rousseau or Marx had been in earlier centuries.

Yet Geddes left little in the way of a scientific or organisational legacy. His vision of civic sociology ended up being seen as something of an embarrassment by professional social scientists. Some even argue that Geddes and his circle shared an unhealthy interest with Nazi ideology in regional movements, cultural naturalism, and bio-diversity (notwithstanding the reality of the technocratic, centralised Nazi state). Neither the calumny nor the praise heaped on Geddes are of much use for critically assessing his contemporary relevance for a revitalised civic life.

Despite being identified with large-scale public planning schemes, Geddes opposed the neat orderliness of anti-urban Town Planning. He urged an active, reciprocal interaction with the natural and built environment. Practical intervention should be modest, small-scale, and localised, a process he called “conservative surgery”. Urban improvement ought to develop along with the grain of local traditions. Only careful study, sensitive to the environmental distinctiveness of city-
regions, would reveal which evolutionary “buds” could be self-consciously nurtured for the Eutopian future.

GEDDES THE INTELLECTUAL ACTIVIST

Geddes settled in Edinburgh’s Old Town in 1886 and helped renovate the tenements of the Ramsay Garden set of buildings and Short’s Observatory on Edinburgh’s Royal Mile, which became the renowned Outlook Tower. Geddes converted the Observatory into an educational museum designed to provide a visual commentary on the evolution of the city in its regional, national and global context.

Geddes was in no way a conventional academic. He never completed a formal degree and failed to be appointed to a number of academic positions, until the Dundee textile magnate James Martin White founded the Dundee College post especially for Geddes. He absorbed intellectual influences from around the world, and was active at different times in Paris, Montpellier, Mexico, Palestine and Bombay, as well as in Dublin, Edinburgh, London and Dundee. He studied Darwinian evolution under Thomas Huxley in the mid-1870s and attended the Positivist Church in London, where he embraced the teachings of Spencer and Comte before warming to Ruskin’s social and aesthetic critique of contemporary social conditions.

Such varied interests and social and physical mobility directly exposed Geddes to the virtues of generalism and a suspicion of over-specialisation in any one field. His idea of civic sociology placed great stress on developing a national and regional environmental consciousness within an internationalist ethics and placed a special emphasis on respecting the cultural and historical evolution of cities as unique places.

CIVIC VOLUNTARIISM

Geddes focussed on the city since it alone has potential for individuals to collectively and freely develop cultural and intellectual values through their own civic activism. In 1904 he published one of the seminal documents in civic sociology, City Development: A Study of Parks, Gardens and Culture Institutes. This represented a full-scale plan for the civic restoration of the ancient Scottish capital of Dunfermline. City Development can be viewed retrospectively as a bridging document between twentieth century civic modernism and nineteenth century Garden City planning. Despite its later global fame Geddes failed to convince the small world of provincial Dunfermline that they could become a beacon for the civilised cultivation of urban life against the depredations of industrial capitalism.

At the same time Geddes tried to stimulate interest in applied sociology by advocating the value of Civic Exhibitions as instructive tools for engendering civic action. Later city-regional studies were carried out under Geddes’s supervision in India and Palestine. In India, Geddes looked to preserve the historic traces of the thirty or so towns he surveyed even as rapid urbanisation began to take hold. Geddes’s reverence towards indigenous culture informed his plans for civic reconstruction of urban India. He did not share the Eurocentric contempt for the temple cities of South India but viewed them as the most complete integration of culture, history and urban form.

His only authored book, Cities in Evolution (1915), was an attempt to summarise his brand of evolutionary urbanism in a popular and accessible style. It must be judged an unsatisfactory statement of Geddes’s intellectual ambition for the study of the city. Along the way, Geddes minted a confusing number of specialised terms like conurbation, megalopolis, geotechnic, paleotechnic, neotechnic, Kakotopia, and Eutopia.

CITY AND REGION

Influenced by the anarchist geographer Elisee Reclus, Geddes came to favour “regionalism” as a way to extend the heterogeneity of cities to a broader, more diverse and self-regulating unit. His favourite example of the civilising possibilities of the city-region model was Glasgow, with its concentrated industrial and social organisation which other cities like London dispersed into specialised quarters of the city. This is why Glasgow was also pre-eminent intellectually in the applied sciences and political economy.

Unlike some contemporary environmentalists, Geddes’s civic sociology was far from hostile to urban life and technological innovation. For Geddes the early modern centralisation of industry and government represented a “Paleotechnic age” while the modern evolution towards more decentralised economy and government could evolve into the “Neotechnic age”. In its blind drive toward industrialisation and accumulation for its own sake, the Paleotechnic age wasted natural resources, material and energy on a huge scale only to create mass levels of misery and impoverishment and a catastrophic relationship to the environment.

Geddes called this situation a “Kakotopia”, in contrast to the emerging “Eutopia”, made possible by electric energy. Geddes positioned his image of the Eutopian city at a point “like the mathematician’s zero”, somewhere between the grim reality of the industrial city as Dante’s “Inferno” and the wholly abstract conception of the Utopian city. The civic modernism of Eutopian cities like Glasgow was rooted in social, technological and natural conditions but its realisation was dependent on the many-sided flourishing of environmentally-sensitised social action.

GEDDES AND THE BIG SOCIETY

From behind the semi-urban barri- cades of minority affluence the Big Society is projected at us as the wish-image of Small Worlds. Precisely because it is a wish-image the Big Society cannot become a genuine social religion, stimulating...
mass enthusiasm for good works from the bowels of society. Many others like Patrick Geddes have tried, and failed, to convert local works into mass enthusiasm. Geddes had some successes, notably in preserving the Indian temple cities and the Edinburgh renovations.

But his larger ambitions for civic renewal, an active society and enlarged cultural regeneration foundered. His distrust of politics and state reform and a voluntarist faith in small worlds meant that Geddes was unable to overcome the implacable local and national obstacles to his vision of a rejuvenated civics being taken up on a mass basis as a social religion. There is little chance that the Big Society will succeed where Geddes failed.

■ Professor Alex Law holds a Chair in Sociology at the University of Abertay Dundee. His most recent book is Key Concepts in Classical Social Theory (Sage, 2011) and is co-author of Understanding Social Welfare Movements (Policy Press, 2009).

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NOTES
1. The idea of the civilising process was classically stated in 1939 by Norbert Elias in his seminal study of the rise of European “civilisation”, The Civilising Process (New York: Pantheon, 1978, 2 volumes).

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A certain banker – well, we can’t call them bankers any more, can we? They are “persons of a nunnismatical persuasion” – anyway, this fellow has been so discomfited by the opprobrium which has descended upon him for his share in the banking collapse that he has obtained a court injunction preventing any association of his name with his former profession.

Nonetheless he finds that his fame and reputation surround him like a poisonous fog. I have no reason to suppose that Sir Fred has taken up a new charitable role as an international prison visitor, but that doesn’t prevent me from speculating on his experiences as he makes a mercy dash to a troubled inmate.

We find him in a taxi on the way to the airport.

Taxi Driver: ’ere. Ain’t you that banker?
Sir Fred: You mean Fiduciary Technician.
Taxi Driver: Do what?
Sir Fred: We prefer the term Fiduciary Technician these days.
Taxi Driver: We?
Sir Fred: I mean “they”.
Taxi Driver: But that’s you, ain’tcha?
Sir Fred: Uh … no. Not me. My name is Ripper. Uh, Jack Ripper. I’m an estate agent.
Taxi Driver: You look like ’im!
Sir Fred: Not so much an estate agent, really. More a slum landlord.
Taxi Driver: Uncanny resemblance.
Sir Fred: A spider atop a mountain of lucrative squalor, if truth be told.
Taxi Driver: You got a twin brother by any chance?
Sir Fred: Just drop me anywhere, will you.

At the check-in desk, one is obliged to show one’s passport and cannot hide behind an assumed name.

Check-in crew: Ah, Sir Fred. Not the Fred Goodwin. Fred the Shred. The banker?
Sir Fred: We call them Chrysological Servants these days. But, no. That was a different Sir Fred Goodwin. I’m a, uh, pornographer. I operate a successful stable of hard-core internet sites. You may have seen them? Pregnant Asian Grannies. No? It’s very good.

Settled into his seat, Sir Fred breathes a sigh of relief and orders a glass of champagne.

Stewardess: Here you are, sir. I say, you look familiar to me. Aren’t you …?
Sir Fred: … Father Seamus O’Riley, unfrocked child-molesting priest. That’s me. Well spotted. Leave the bottle, will you.

Passenger sitting next to Sir Fred: Are you sure you’re Irish?
Sir Fred: You don’t believe me?
Passenger: You don’t have an Irish accent.
Sir Fred: Is that a deal-breaker?
Passenger: You’re not really a priest, are you?
Sir Fred: You’re right. You’ve seen through me.

Actually, I’m a doctor.

Passenger: A medical man. I knew it. (He holds out his hand for shaking) Shlomo Goldstein. Nice to meet you.
Sir Fred: Josef Menchele. Likewise.
Stewardess: (She returns) Father O’Riley. Your bottle, sir. Only you’re not a priest, are you? I recognise you from the papers. You’re one of those MPs who fiddled their expenses with a second home and a duck house, aren’t you?
Sir Fred: How dare you! No, madam, I am not a bent MP. I am in fact Sir Fr… oh, all right. Yes, that’s me.

Stewardess: You should be ashamed of yourself.

In due course our Crumenal Quaestor (look it up) arrives at his destination, which is after all a noble purpose. He is shown into a prison visiting room, having flown half way across the world to offer his comfort to a miscreant more unfortunate than he. The guard brings in the prisoner.

Guard: Well, dirtbag, you finally got yourself a visitor. After … what is it? A year since your last one? Make the most of it.

Bernie Madof: Whoever you are, thank you for coming. You have no idea how lonely I’ve been. I have prayed, yes, prayed for a friendly face. God bless you for this kindness … oi! It’s you!
Sir Fred: Hi, Bernie!

Madof: Guard! Let me out! This is America. We have laws against cruel and unusual punishment. I may have perpetrated the most spectacular fraud in history. I may not deserve forgiveness. I may be the devil incarnate, but I do not have to keep company with bankers.
Sir Fred: (With a weary air) Pecuniary Agents, if you don’t mind …

But he is talking to himself, because The Great Ponzi has left the cell in high dudgeon*.

NOTE
* High Dudgeon is a low penitentiary in Upstate New York.
In this city which could accommodate half a dozen Scotslands, these blocks could rehouse the entire population of Glasgow and Edinburgh combined.
their ease munching reflectively on the day’s ration of bamboo twigs and shoots.

But there is more to Chongqing than pandas. Chongqing (pronounced Chong-Ching) is the Chungking of Second World War fame, to which Chiang Kai Shek retreated in the face of Japanese advances. It was remote, more than half way to Tibet and the Himalayas. Now it is anything but. What we find in our brief coach-trip from boat to zoo is arguably the biggest city in the world. Within the Municipality of Chongqing (Greater Chongqing) there is a population that now stands at 34 million. Our coach driver makes a diversion to escape the madness of the morning rush hour and takes us through a building site. We pass a forest of half-completed skyscraper apartment blocks, of which we rapidly lose count. In this city which could accommodate half a dozen Scotlands, these blocks could rehouse the entire population of Glasgow and Edinburgh combined. It is clear that they will not stand empty for long. Is this China’s fate, and the fate of all developing nations? As the flight from the countryside intensifies, and cities grow exponentially, perhaps Chongqing gives us a disturbing image of humanity’s future. China is traditionally represented by a Dragon. Is this dragon of the future a beast that can be controlled, even by the most autocratic of governments?

Alan MacGillivray is a retired teacher and lecturer who lives just outside Glasgow. He has been a Principal Teacher of English, a Senior Lecturer in Jordanhill College of Education and a lecturer in Scottish Literature at the University of Strathclyde. He is a Past President of the Association for Scottish Literary Studies and has written and edited books and articles on Scottish literature and culture in education. Recently he has been writing and publishing collections of poetry.

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