radical feminist green

Perspectives

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INDEPENDENCE
YES
NO
UNION

MANIFESTO
FOR A CULTURE OF SELF-DETERMINATION


MAGAZINE OF SCOTLAND’S DEMOCRATIC LEFT
EDITORIAL

LESS HEAT, MORE LIGHT

The arrival of the new year has seen both the Yes and No campaigns step up their activities by several notches as we count down the twenty or so months to Scotland’s historic independence referendum.

This is, of course, only to be expected, but, as we have observed in the past, too much heat and not enough light in the debate does a disservice to the Scottish people and the seriousness of the issues at stake.

Gerry Hassan, in his article on page 5, sets out a list of principles that might govern how the pros and cons of independence should be discussed. These run from the very basic, “Personal abuse is out”; the problem of zealotry (the refusal to admit the other side has a legitimate argument); through to the recognition that Scotland has many deep-seated problems that will not simply be resolved by the demise of the union.

His twelve points lay down a basis for how the debate should be conducted. Time will tell whether they are made more in hope than expectation, but we can all take up Gerry’s call through our own interventions in the debate, whether at a personal level or as members of organisations.

Meanwhile Perspectives is planning to carry a substantial article in each issue up to the referendum, exploring some of the key areas of contention. At the moment we have pencilled in pieces on Scotland and the European Union, the question of currency union, and defence and foreign policy. Further suggestions are welcome; you can contact us at the address or e-mail noted in the box at the foot of the page.

More light on the independence question is shed in the fascinating discussion conducted by Catriona Macdonald with Scotland’s foremost environmental historian, Christopher Smout, who argues that history has much to contribute, but that the date that should most reverberate in the debate ought to be 1789 (enlightenment values) and not the more obvious 1707 (Act of Union).

It has long been a bone of contention among scientists that mention of the word culture evokes the arts for most people. Author Ken MacLeod helps redress the balance with his assessment of Thomas Kuhn’s seminal book, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, some 50 years after its first publication.

Willie Thompson looks at the work of historian Eric Hobsbawm, Ian Galloway referees a longstanding dispute between God and Caesar, Peter McColl writes on the role of Rector in Scottish universities, Morag Parnell applauds the work of El Sistema in Scotland and we have reviews of a book that examines the decline of Scottish Labour and two that question the obsession with economic growth, plus all our regular columns.

Sean Feeny
Editor
Another round of bloody conflict between Israel and Gaza. The BBC and many other news agencies seem to have reproduced the Israeli line that the recent outbreak of hostilities was started by the rockets fired from Hamas-controlled Gaza into southern Israel. In fact, if it is possible to identify a trigger, it was the Israeli shooting of a Palestinian on the Gazan side of the security fence, followed by an Israeli military incursion into Gaza, both of which led to rocket attacks into Israel. The ceasefire was being negotiated from the Hamas side by military commander Ahmad al-Jaabari when he was assassinated by Israel.

The periodic bombing of Gaza is part of Israel’s strategy to acquire the entire land of Palestine and ghettoising the Palestinian inhabitants into submissive enclaves. What is being conducted by blockade and firepower in Gaza is pursued through other tactics in the West Bank. In August I represented Friends of the Earth Scotland, along with Bobby Peek from Friends of the Earth South Africa, on an “observer mission” from Friends of the Earth International to witness the various ways in which the Israeli occupation of the West Bank is using environmental violations to achieve the eviction of Palestinians from their land. http://www.blog.foescotland.org.uk/index.php/2012/09/.

Denying access to water is possibly the best known of these. Israel controls water extraction from the Palestinian aquifers. Most extraction occurs from within Israel, which abstracts at a rate 50% higher than annual recharge. Within the West Bank, three quarters of water is derived from wells, springs and water harvesting. The development of wells and extraction apparatus is controlled (i.e. prevented) by the Israeli occupying power, and cisterns and irrigation equipment are regularly destroyed by the Israeli military or settlers. The “separation wall” is annexing a large proportion of wells from the western aquifer which could potentially reduce Palestinian production from this source by 75%. Palestinians increasingly rely on buying water from their own aquifers from the Israeli water company Mekarot. Furthermore, a 2012 report from the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (How Dispossession Happens, available from www.ochaopt.org/) has documented the growing phenomenon of settlers violently occupying Palestinian water sources. As a result of these activities, Palestinians in the West Bank consume on average 73 litres per capita per day, compared with the WHO minimum water standard of 100 litres. Israeli average per capita consumption is 300 litres and in the settlements is 369 (source: Isaacs and Hilal 2011).

Dispossession of land and water is not the only environmental weapon of ethnic cleansing used by Israel. The Friends of the Earth delegation also witnessed waste water from settlements being directed on to Palestinian agricultural land; uncontrolled solid waste dumping leading to local contamination; and the impact on Palestinian villages of pollution from industrial settlements. One example of the latter is the Nitzanee Shalom industrial estate in Tulkarem, built within the “seam zone” between the green line and the separation wall. The industrial estate started in 1984 when the Gishuri plastics recycling plant relocated from within Israel, where it was subject to legal action for pollution. There are now eleven chemical plants in the estate in the seam zone where no authority is responsible for licensing or monitoring emissions levels and Palestinian workers can only access employment with permission of the Israeli occupying military – political activists and trade union militants need not apply.

In September, two survivors of the Bhopal disaster toured England, Scotland and Ireland. Balkrishna Namdev was a trade union organiser prior to the 1984 gas leak who went on to organise the Gas Affected Pensioners’ Front, working with the most vulnerable economically dependent group of gas survivors. Nineteen year old Safreen Khan is from the second generation of survivors – she was born to gas-affected parents and has grown up drinking water contaminated by the factory site. Four years ago, she and her friends established Children Against Dow Carbide which mobilises the young generation to keep the campaign going. Namdev and Safreen met with environmental justice activists, trades unionists and elected representatives to talk about the ongoing campaign to blacklist Dow, especially with the company’s sponsorship of Olympic events. http://sfbhopal.org/?p=95. More Bhopal solidarity events will be staged over the next two years towards the 30th anniversary of the disaster in December 2014. ■

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People and politics

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

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

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

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

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

What does Democratic Left add?

Our approach to politics is radical, feminist and green.

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

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

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

Who can join Democratic Left Scotland?

Membership is open to anyone who shares our general outlook and commitments. Whilst many of our members are involved in a range of political parties, others are not.

Democratic Left Scotland

na Deamocrataich Chli an Alba
MANIFESTO
FOR A CULTURE OF SELF-DETERMINATION

As the campaigns for and against independence get into gear, Gerry Hassan argues that Scotland needs a framework for debating its future that reflects the historic choices faced and the seriousness of the issues at stake.

INTRODUCTION: SCOTTISH POLITICS AND LANGUAGE
People have become increasingly concerned about the rising prevalence of a culture of abuse, insult and invective in Scottish politics, particularly around the independence referendum. There is a longer story to this: of the failure and dogma of Labour unionism, of the SNP’s adoption of command and control politics, and of an embryonic self-government movement unable so far to find full form and voice.

At the same time, for all its ultra-left origins and “vanguardist” posturings, the Radical Independence Conference recently held in Glasgow caught something of a new energy and significant shift. It brought together over 900 people on a Saturday, from a range of backgrounds, places and politics, including a generation of politicised twenty-somethings for whom Blair and New Labour are as much history as Thatcherism.

This was the biggest political gathering in Scotland since the Scottish Parliament was set up, and most of those attending wanted to talk not in the old language of the left or traditional nationalism, but of hope, self-organisation and self-determination. Something is clearly stirring.

Yet parts of our political classes are stuck in a gridlock of despair. Alastair Darling talked recently of Scottish independence as “the road to serfdom”. Gordon Brown similarly declared that independence would turn Scotland into the equivalent of “a British colony”. These are serious interventions by senior Labour politicians and display a deliberate decision to caricature and misunderstand the issues and dynamics of Scottish independence and self-government.

The rhetoric of the pro-independence side has been less strident, but there are examples of unacceptable language. One prominent nationalist activist called the Guardian’s respected columnist Ian Jack an “Uncle Tom”, while a leading cultural nationalist maintained that Scotland has been regularly wronged by, “the repeated English invasions, the Act of Union, Highland Clearances and Thatcherism – all violations of Scotland”. This litany was meant to show the need for anger and indignation in Scotland, but just painted a sense of victimhood, along with inaccurate interpretations of history.

No one wants a “Kumbaya Scotland” where we all hold hands and are nice to each other. But we do need a genuine dialogue and exchange of ideas. As things stand, we have a non-debate dominated by two forces of nationalism, Scottish and British, the latter seemingly unaware that unionism is a form of nationalism. Mainstream Scottish nationalism years ago became moderate, reasonable and sensible – perhaps too much so, considering the challenges Scotland faces. British nationalism on the other hand seems to be reverting to a politics of despair, constantly going on about identity and disparaging Scotland’s capacity to govern itself.

And whereas Scottish nationalism is “out”, self-reflective and mostly self-aware, its British counterpart is in denial, completely lacking in self-knowledge and self-awareness.

Scotland needs a framework or set of principles for debating its future that reflect the historic choices we face and the seriousness of the issues at stake. These should command the support of those in favour of independence and self-government, but should be generous, pluralist and open enough, so that pro-union opinion, and most parts of Scotland’s political community, could sign up to as well. We need, in short, the protocols for a culture of self-determination. What follows is a first stab at formulating them. It is not an exhaustive or closed list, as that would be against the spirit it is presented in and hopes to encourage. The aim is rather to start an open and honest dialogue.

1. PERSONAL ABUSE IS OUT
There is a fundamental difference between disagreeing with someone’s actions or views and criticising them as a person. Too many people don’t seem to be able to tell the difference between the two.
2. NAME CALLING AND LABELLING ARE NOT HELPFUL
Just as some Labour politicians persistently use the term “separatism”, so some supporters of independence insist that all unionists are the same, trying to keep Scotland down and control us against our will, or maintain that the Scottish Labour Party either does not exist or does not contain different strands and is merely the puppet of “London Labour”.

The two totems of Scotland’s near past are Thatcher and Blair, but these names should not be used as political scarecrows or shibboleths with which to foreclose debate and enclose Scotland’s political community.

This happened with Johann Lamont’s recent “something for nothing” speech. It was a dreadful, revealing and counter-productive phrase for a Labour leader to use. But we don’t need to invoke Thatcher and Blair, or caricatures of them, to debate ideas. We should respond to Lamont with reasoned criticism, not dismiss her positions or her party as an extension of the “Tory-led coalition of cuts”.

3. GET AWAY FROM ABSTRACTIONS
Scots of a certain disposition have a propensity to invoke abstractions such as social justice, inequality and independence. Such talk means little or nothing to most people, who do not think of their lives in these terms at all and do not worry about the fact that the UK has become one of the most unequal, unfair societies anywhere in the rich world.

What people generally worry about and spend time contemplating and acting upon are their own lives and those of their families, friends and neighbours; and how they are going to get by, manage to bring up and support their children and grandchildren, care for elderly relatives, pay their bills and feel that they have some sort of choice, dignity and say in their own lives despite uncertainty surrounding our economic prospects and the state of the world.

4. LINKING UP INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE STORIES
A politics of self-determination has to reframe our collective ideas of equality, empowerment and democration to make them relevant to the individual lives of people who don’t automatically think of themselves as political animals. At the same time, the personal stories of hope and change that people inhabit and live by have to inform and shape our collective stories. One of the main disjunctions in Scottish society at the moment is that our collective stories lack the hope and belief in the capacity for change that characterise the stories we tell about our myriad individual lives.

5. THINKING ABOUT AND INHABITING THE FUTURE OF A DIFFERENT SCOTLAND
The self-government debate is implicitly about the future of a different Scotland. It has to become explicitly about that and how we create it. Pro-independence voices have to talk about the potential for change. They cannot leave it all as some undefined future offer or as some personalised vision that each voter can make up for themselves.

Similarly, pro-union forces have to address the reality of the UK and its likely future. Will the UK remain in the EU and if so, on what terms? What kind of geopolitical entity is the UK going to be? (A mid-Atlantic version of Switzerland or Hong Kong, say a significant section of the Tory Party.) And what is to be done about the endemic economic injustice and political impotence that have disfigured so many lives in the UK?

As I said in my recent conversation with Polly Toynbee of the Guardian, the UK has had 30 years of Labour Government since 1945 in four distinct phases.1 This is long enough for us to draw firm conclusions. Over those 30 years, only one Labour administration, that of 1945–51, has made any substantial impact on inequality and poverty. That tells us something about the nature of the UK and the systematic exclusion of millions. People need to hear how this might plausibly be addressed in the future.

6. EMPATHY AND THE PROBLEM WITH ZEALOTS
Engaging in genuine dialogue and exchange where you might have your opinion or beliefs changed or change others matters. In a real exchange of ideas, people on any side should be able to understand, recognise and empathise with opposing views. Robert McNamara made this point in the film The Fog of War when he stated the need to “empathise with your enemy” and not dehumanise them, as the Americans did in Vietnam or as many Israelis are doing with the Palestinians, because that corrupts and corrodes your judgement.

In this campaign, the zealots on both sides are a problem, to their own side as well as everyone else. There is, whether you agree with it or not, a legitimate argument for the union and independence.

7. THE PROBLEM WITH SOME MEN AND SCOTTISH MASCULINITIES
Many of the problems of Scottish society have a gendered dimension: domestic violence, crime, alcoholism and, at a less serious level, men’s obsession with football. Paradoxically, in a society where men dominate and colonise so many public spaces and institutions, men are strangely silent when it comes to reflecting on masculinity, power and responsibility.

Too much of our political life is about men just taking charge, brusquely dismissing, patronising and damaging others in the process. And we have a particular problem with men of a certain age, usually about 40 years and over. This was evident in the Radical Independence Conference, where a section of left men in this age group held forth, put forward predictable, clichéd positions, and aggressively dismissed anyone who dared to challenge them. Others – men, women and lots of young people – openly challenged these prejudiced remnants from a past Scotland we
need to call time on. This was a clash of cultures, generations and radical politics. We need more men to speak up and say to the misogynists and self-declared tribunes in our midst, “Cease your self-indulgent, destructive ways”.

8. SPACE IS THE PLACE
Scottish self-government calls for an ecology of self-determination: spaces, vessels and resources for developing voice and power.

There is a problem with institutional Scotland and its “official story”, a self-congratulatory account of how we are progressive, inclusive and modern. What we need are unofficial forums that challenge conventional wisdom through deliberation, inquiry, reflection, spontaneity and authenticity. There are already examples of this, though now nowhere near enough: the SOLAS Festival, now three years old; the impressive work of the Poverty Alliance’s Poverty Forums; and the Changin Scotland weekends at The Ceilidh Place, Ullapool (which I run with Jean Urquhart), soon to enter its eleventh year.

9. RESOURCES OF HOPE
Resources, institution building and agencies of change are critical, but they must be autonomous: neither owned nor incorporated by the system or corporate orthodoxies. Self-organisation and self-determination are the wellsprings of new activities and initiatives, but we have to develop these into a fully-fledged philosophy and practice.

We know, however, what does not work. Thinktanks and their wannabe praetorian guard offer an elitist paradigm of buzzwords, jargon and exclusionary expertise, assuring themselves that they are creating “the good society”, that they articulate and embody “enlightened Scotland”. They are not: they are part of the problem. People have to dare to be different and do things differently.

10. THE IMPORTANCE OF VOICE AND POWER
Voice and power are central to any practice of self-determination. Albert O. Hirschman in his influential Exit, Voice and Loyalty argued that the right championed “exit” (market solutions) and the left “loyalty” (solidarity), and for both “voice” took second place.

“Voice” here means the collective self-organisation of people, something fundamentally missing from the public life of Scotland, for all the talk of “civic Scotland” and “the new politics”.

Voice is about who has power, its use, expression and dynamics. In our society not only is power increasingly concentrated in a few economic, social and political elites, but countervailing forces are much weaker and more disparate than in the past. A Scottish self-determination movement would understand the importance of voice and power, and seek to change the way these are articulated and understood by supporting ideas and initiatives that encourage autonomy and empowerment.

11. IDEOLOGY MATTERS
According to the ideology of “civic Scotland” (in truth, only a subset of civil society), Scotland’s supposed social democracy is enough: our problems and challenges are external – in the British state and market fundamentalism.

Not all of them are: our own complacencies and silences are just as much a problem. Our nation and society are bitterly divided, with hundreds of thousands of Scots adults and children living in poverty and hardship. The cosseted life of Scotland’s super-rich and the widespread fawning in public bodies and the media after plutocrats and global tycoons such as Donald Trump and Rupert Murdoch, isn’t a product of external forces, but the “free” choice of our politicians, public bodies and business community.

This won’t be ended by the demise of the union. Scotland needs a new collective purpose if we are to mobilise our resources to tackle and heal the divided, fragmented society we have become. That is one of the first priorities in creating and acting upon a culture of self-determination.

12. HUMOUR AND PLAY ARE NOT OPTIONAL EXTRAS!
At the Radical Independence Conference, I echoed the point made by Anthony Barnett at the most recent Changin Scotland weekend, that the achievement of Scottish self-government would be “a revolution of the normal”, enabling Scotland to become a mainstream, progressive, European democracy (something that could not be said about the contemporary UK).

This, I argued, would be a massive advance, but it would not be enough. We have to remake the concept of “revolution”, erasing its associations with Leninism and violence. One participant said that we should aspire to a “revolution of love”. This is a point made by Stephen Duncombe, who cites the case of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, a powerful revolutionary movement which has a sense of play and fun and recognises the power of love. In much less challenging circumstances, Scotland needs to do the same.

THE FIRST STEP IN CREATING A DIFFERENT FUTURE
Creating a culture of political, social and cultural change means accepting the limits of politics and acknowledging that other forms of being, doing and bringing about that different Scotland are not just possible, but desirable and essential.

Developing a politics, philosophy and psychology of self-determination means being able to communicate to people both as individuals and as members of the many, diverse communities we all inhabit. It also means nurturing the autonomy and competence required to challenge received ideas and do things differently.

Scotland stands on the brink of far-reaching change. It behoves us to reflect on this historic moment and its potential. And in thinking about who we are and what we want to be, we should pay particular attention to the myths, folk tales and stories that shape us.
The myths of modern Scotland, our foundation stories, are the democratic intellect, egalitarian impulse and popular sovereignty. As I argue in the introduction to the newly published book, *The Seven Wonders of Scotland*, an account of seven imagined futures of Scotland, we do not often act on these.\(^5\)

It is as simple and fundamental as this. Let us decide if the myths are what we want to be defined by, and if they are, then genuinely act upon them in a way we do not at the moment – in education, social justice and democracy. And we should then live by them as a set of ethics for a modern, progressive, democratic Scotland: a country that realises that its past, present and future are all interwoven and interconnected; that knows that the first step in creating a different future is imagining it. That’s what being a culture of self-determination entails.

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**Gerry Hassan** writes extensively on Scottish politics

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**NOTES**

5. Gerry Hassan (ed.), *The Seven Wonders of Scotland*, Birlinn 2012, [http://www.amazon.co.uk/Seven-Wonders-Scotland-Gerry-Hassan/dp/178027100X/ref=sr_1_4?ie=UTF8&qid=1353950777&s=books&sr=1-4](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Seven-Wonders-Scotland-Gerry-Hassan/dp/178027100X/ref=sr_1_4?ie=UTF8&qid=1353950777&s=books&sr=1-4)
Half a century on and a million and a half copies sold since its publication, Thomas H. Kuhn’s seminal work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* changed people’s minds about how scientists change their minds. Ken MacLeod explains.

Scientists have changed their minds about many things over the past few centuries. Astronomers once thought the Earth was at the centre of the universe, and that the Sun, Moon, planets and stars revolved around it. Physicists believed that things couldn’t move without being pushed, and that they couldn’t go on moving unless they went on being pushed. Physicians thought that diseases were spread by bad air. Biologists believed that every kind of plant and animal had been separately created. Chemists thought fire was caused by the release of a substance called phlogiston. Little more than a hundred years ago, almost all physicists were firmly convinced that space was filled with an invisible material called ether, and that light consisted of waves in this mysterious substance.

Most of us are taught some of this in high school. We’re invited to pat ourselves on the back that we know so much better now. We may come away with the impression that the scientists who thought such things were silly, or superstitious, or clung with too much reverence to what they’d read in books written in ancient times, such as those of the Greek philosopher Aristotle, or the Bible.

Another, more subtle, impression that we may take home from school is that these older theories were overthrown because a decisive discovery showed them to be wrong: Galileo and his telescope, Darwin and his finches, Mendel and his peas, Michelson and Morley with their apparatus ... Surely only fanatics could have failed to change their minds at once!

We are now 50 years on from the publication of a book that challenged this simple view: Thomas H. Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. It changed people’s minds about how scientists changed their minds. Not many books on the history and philosophy of science have sold a million and a half copies, even in half a century. This one has.

Even more remarkably, it isn’t a popularisation, but an original

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The classic paradigm shift was the Copernican revolution, which demonstrated that the Earth was not at the centre of the universe, with the Sun, Moon, planets and stars mounted on crystal spheres revolving around it. The Flammarion engraving is a wood engraving by an unknown artist that first appeared in Camille Flammarion’s *L’atmosphère: météorologie populaire* (1888). The image depicts a man crawling under the edge of the sky, depicted as if it were a solid hemisphere, to look at the mysterious Empyrean beyond.
work, albeit a critical synthesis and development of many specialised historical studies. Nor is it written in a popular style: though brief and lucid, it sometimes reads like a translation from the French – the language in which, as it happens, many of the specialised studies it draws on were written. Finally, the widespread enthusiasm it met, well beyond academia, can’t be explained by its clearing up matters that most readers would already vaguely know. It takes for granted a detailed knowledge of the history of science. Indeed, it argues that readers who knew only the broad outline of its subject would already have been systematically if innocently misled by the kind of account they were most likely to have read: the potted history of any science that you’ll find in its standard textbooks.

Kuhn was trained as a physicist, and naively accepted what the textbooks of physics had told him about its history – until he started teaching that history to students. He tried reading what Aristotle had written about physics, and couldn’t make head nor tail of it. Most of it didn’t seem even to be about physics.

Then one day, as he looked up from an old book and gazed out of the library window, it all suddenly made sense. What dawned on Kuhn was that Aristotle’s physics, unlike Galileo’s, treated movement from one place to another as just one among many different changes that could happen to a thing, including its coming into existence, its growth, and its eventual passing away. These changes, unless interfered with from outside, took their own natural course to their inevitable end. In this view, it was perfectly reasonable to think that material objects naturally tended to move towards the centre of the Earth, and did so unless something got in their way. For Kuhn at that moment, you might say, everything in Aristotle’s physics fell into place.

What Kuhn felt he’d experienced, and thought he’d discovered, was the paradigm shift.

A paradigm is more than a theory. It’s a complex of theories, ways of thinking, and practical skills – some of which are learned by experience rather than explicitly taught – that work like a set of unstated rules about what questions scientists think it makes sense to ask, and what kind of experiments it makes sense to carry out. There can be sciences without a paradigm, with several different approaches kicking ideas about on the same level pitch. The studies of chemistry and electricity were in that state for a long time, and (Kuhn says) the social sciences are now. But usually, a moment arrives when one particular approach is proposed that convinces almost everyone.

COMMUNITY OF SPECIALISTS

One of the key things a paradigm does is crystallise around itself a community of specialists who acknowledge no authority in their field above themselves. New scientists are apprenticed to the community through listening to lectures, studying textbooks, working out examples, and practising experiments. Once they’ve learned the ropes, they too become competent to contribute to the community’s work, and to criticise or confirm the work of their peers. Only members of such a community can legitimately call themselves scientists.

Research carried out within a paradigm is what Kuhn called “normal science”. The founding of a paradigm leaves much to be discovered. No theory is able from the start to account for everything it’s concerned with. Much that is already known remains puzzling. Normal science consists of solving such problems, bringing more and more outlying cases inside the bounds of the paradigm. What normal science doesn’t do is test the paradigm itself. As time goes on, some unsolved problems – anomalies – remain intractable, and new ones are discovered.

However, paradigm shifts aren’t compelled or created by anomalies. Anomalies are always with us. Scientists working within a paradigm have no way of knowing in advance that the anomalies can’t be solved within it. They may well hope that eventually they’ll find a solution that preserves the paradigm. After all, they’ve always succeeded in the past.

A classic example of this is what astronomers did when they found that Newton’s laws didn’t seem to work for the orbit of Uranus. That planet kept moving a little faster or slower than predicted. Astronomers didn’t react to this anomaly by throwing out Newton’s theory. They postulated an unknown planet whose gravitational pull disturbed the orbit of Uranus. More than that, they worked out where the unknown planet had to be, and turned their telescopes there. In 1846, they found it. And Newton’s theory, of course, came out of this test with even more credit than it had already.

No amount of anomalies can call a paradigm into question, far less overthrow it, unless another paradigm is available that does a better job. Scientific revolutions involve a shift from one paradigm to another. After each revolution, normal science proceeds within the new paradigm, which in its turn ...

CLOSER TO THE TRUTH?

So every paradigm is provisional. We know, or should know by now, that it isn’t the complete or final truth. But if each is better than the one before, surely we’re at least getting closer to the truth?

According to Kuhn, no.

The most controversial points Kuhn made were that we have no way to compare paradigms “from the outside”, no way to argue across the gulf between paradigms, and no way to be sure that a new paradigm is any closer to the truth than its predecessor. Even the terms used change their meaning: for astronomers who held the Earth-centred view, it would have made no sense at all to say that “the Earth is a planet”. For them, planets were by definition things that moved around the Earth.
Einstein argued that Newton’s physics were a special case of Einstein’s physics – but in this, Kuhn argued, Einstein was wrong. Terms such as “space”, “time”, and “gravity” have different meanings in Newton’s and Einstein’s physics. Not only does Einstein’s physics not include Newton’s, it can’t be shown to be any closer to the truth. The same goes for all paradigm shifts. The new can be shown to be better than the old in that it makes more sense of more data, but that’s all. When first put forward, it might not do even that. Nor, for that matter, might it always at once give us better practical results.

Copernican astronomy, it turns out, wasn’t really any better than the old, Earth-centred astronomy for practical purposes like keeping the calendar in step with the heavens. The old astronomy had a centuries-long head start on Copernicus in getting the details right. Its calculations were horrendously more complicated and tedious to work out, but they did work. Likewise, the germ theory of disease wasn’t, to begin with, strikingly more successful than the miasma (“bad air”) theory in preventing epidemics – both, after all, recommended much the same public health measures: keep your water supply separate from your sewers, and wash things before they begin to stink. There are many other examples.

SOCIAL INTERACTION
The shift to a new paradigm is not, in Kuhn’s view, an entirely rational process. For each individual, it’s more like a conversion from one way of seeing the world to another. (Just as Kuhn experienced, at that moment in the library when he saw for himself how an ancient system of physics could make sense once you got your head inside it.) Within a community of scientists, their social interactions decide whether or not the new paradigm sweeps the board. Conflicts of prestige and authority will be rife. The whole upheaval may take a generation, as young upstart scientists – with fewer years of their lives and careers invested in the old paradigm – replace older, more conservative ones. As the great French scientist Poincaré memorably put it: “Science advances, funeral by funeral.” After such a revolution, any lone scientist who persists in working within the old paradigm may be in their own terms rational, but once they cease to work as part of a scientific community, they are (by Kuhn’s definition) no longer scientists.

FAR-REACHING EFFECT
Putting social relations at the centre of scientific discovery had a far-reaching effect on the way social scientists thought about science. Steve Yearley, Professor of the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge and Director of the ESRC Genomics Forum at the University of Edinburgh, writes:

“Kuhn’s book stood out as ‘granting permission’ for sociologists and anthropologists to think about studying the very contents of scientific knowledge. At the time, the philosophical and the sociological orthodoxy was that social factors were part of the explanation of scientific error but did not feature in the proper working of science. With his emphasis on paradigms as styles of thinking and with his ideas that successive paradigms were overthrown in intellectual ‘revolutions’, Kuhn highlighted the extent to which perfectly reputable science had an inerasable cultural dimension. That was all the encouragement the social sciences needed …”

Social scientists stopped taking at face value what natural scientists said they were doing, and started observing what they actually did. Sociologists took notes in the lab, eavesdropped on conversations in the hallway, and peered over shoulders at desks. An entire new field, Science and Technology Studies (STS), emerged as an academic speciality. By the 1990s, STS had become so radical in its questioning of science’s objectivity that some natural scientists took fright, as well as offence, and started watching the watchers right back. The issue became entangled with wider (usually, but by no means always, politically conservative) concerns about other critiques – left-wing, feminist, anti-racist, post-colonial, post-modernist – of established academic disciplines, and became known as the Science Wars. These died away with the Clinton presidency, leaving the social and the natural scientists with a new respect for each other’s boundaries and a lot of broken glass to clear up, and to look back on the whole affair as a paradigm case of a dispute that sheds more heat than light.

NO PROGRESS IN SCIENCE?
Philosophers of science, by contrast with its sociologists, have (by and large) not taken kindly to Kuhn. His historical claims they gladly leave to historians, but his wider conclusions have trodden on the territory, and the toes, of philosophers. They’re professionally fascinated with the conditions of rational argument, and with the nature of truth. They’ve taken issue with Kuhn’s claim that there’s no way to argue across paradigms and make a rational choice between them, and with his claim that one paradigm (usually but not always a later one) is no closer to the truth than another: that, in short, there is no progress in science. They argue that it makes perfect sense to admit that all our theories are false, but that some are more false than others – which implies that some are more true. They point to our increasing mastery of the material world as a clue that we’re getting closer to the truth about it, without ever quite getting there. Entirely respectable philosophers find themselves quoting Lenin, who made these points with great force.

“Paradigm” and “paradigm shift” have become part of the language and taken on a life of their own, in contexts far from their original application. If you Google “paradigm shift” you’ll find such usages outnumber and outrank by a long way any others. They’re
endemic in the PowerPoint presentations of management consultants, in the tracts of New Age gurus, and in the treatises of partisans of eccentric opinions. They provide the title of “Britain’s best loved spiritual magazine” and the signboard for a creationist bookshop in Edinburgh’s Leith Walk.

**PROGRESS AND TRUTH**

Kuhn bears no responsibility for that, though it does suggest that there’s more to his book’s reception than a widespread interest in the fine detail of how scientists come to change their minds. People now doubt the narrative of scientific progress, of an ever-closer approach to the truth, and of its vindication by technological and engineering success. Their doubt has grown despite the very evident fact that this practical success is greater than ever before. The increasing acceptance of a sociological explanation of science itself cries out for a sociological explanation, and you don’t have to be a Marxist to suspect what it is, and that it isn’t good.

2012 saw the half-century of Kuhn’s book, and two very public feats of Big Science that, to my mind, call his account of science into question. The first was the discovery of the Higgs boson – or to be more exact, the laborious accumulation of evidence that a particle exists whose mass and other characteristics match those predicted for the Higgs boson. This prediction was a linchpin of the current paradigm of physics, the Standard Model. No one who watched the tension in the room, as the protracted public announcement was streamed live across the internet, and the relief when the conclusion was reached, could doubt that what was at stake here was the paradigm itself. In the moments afterwards, one could see a lot of pairs of spectacles being given a sudden, surreptitious wipe on a hanky or a tie.

In August we saw a one-ton, car-sized robot make a terrifyingly complicated descent to the surface of Mars. No paradigm rode down with Curiosity. But its safe arrival depended on an immense and intricate sequence of applications of physics coming out right. This time, the tension and relief was even more intense than that at CERN.

With that in mind, let’s recall the classic instance of a paradigm shift: the Copernican revolution. The astronomy of Ptolemy placed the Earth at the centre of the universe, with the Sun, Moon, planets and stars mounted on crystal spheres revolving around it. The astronomy of Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler and Newton placed the Sun at the centre of the solar system, with the Moon revolving around the Earth, the Earth and the other planets revolving in empty space around the Sun, and the stars as bodies like the Sun but very far away.

Given that we can land machines on the surfaces of the actual planets, it seems perverse to claim that our astronomy isn’t closer to the truth than all that stuff about crystal spheres.

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Given that we can land machines on the surfaces of the actual planets, it seems perverse to claim that our astronomy isn’t closer to the truth than all that stuff about crystal spheres. We can never claim to have the final truth, but we can say with some confidence that we’re getting less wrong.

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*Ken MacLeod was born in Stornoway, Isle of Lewis, in 1954. He has Honours and Masters degrees in biological subjects and worked for some years in the IT industry. He has written thirteen novels, from The Star Fraction (1995) to Intrusion (2012), and many articles and short stories. In 2009 he was Writer in Residence at the ESRC Genomics Policy and Research Forum at the University of Edinburgh. He is now Writer in Residence at the MA Creative Writing course, Edinburgh Napier University. He blogs at http://kenmacleod.blogspot.com and tweets as @amendlocke*

**NOTE**

Special thanks to Steve Yearley for his kind contribution. He bears, of course, no responsibility for anything else in this essay.

**REFERENCES**


Godfrey-Smith’s book is a readable and authoritative introduction. His bibliography lists many important books and articles from the vast literature on sociology and philosophy of science. For a quick overview, start with the Wikipedia entry on (e.g.) Thomas Kuhn, and keep clicking …

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Eric Hobsbawm’s career as a historian encompassed the years between the mid-1940s and his death aged 95 at the beginning of October 2012. It was remarkable not only for its length, equalled by few great historians, scientists, writers or artists, but for the scope of the subjects which it covered. His Guardian obituary by Martin Kettle, notes that “In a profession notorious for microscopic preoccupations, few historians have ever commanded such a wide field in such detail or with such authority.” In his personal life he was the most approachable and engaging of great thinkers, ambitious certainly, but without any of the vanity or superior airs which often accompany that kind of attainment. His acceptance of a feudal honour (Companion of Honour) in 1998 was very much out of character, but nobody’s perfect.

Born in Alexandria, Egypt, in the year of the Russian Revolution, Hobsbawm was educated in Austria and Germany, where, as a schoolboy, he witnessed the Nazis’ rise and participated in the communist youth movement. Migrating to England with his adoptive parents (his own having died) he attended Cambridge University where by invitation he joined the famous academic semi-secret society the Apostles, as well as the Communist Party (CP), of which he remained a member until its disbandment in 1991.

At the end of the Second World War, during which he served in the ranks, he was instrumental in the establishment in 1946 of the CP Historians’ Group, which incorporated a galaxy of major historical talents; his Guardian obituary described it as “a glittering radical academy”. The highly regarded and now mainstream historical journal Past and Present was initiated by the group in 1952. Hobsbawm was to be the fore in this project, commencing as assistant editor and remaining always closely associated with it until his death, while some of his most important articles appeared in it, and later he was president of the Past and Present Society, the charity which publishes the journal. Most of the group’s leading members resigned from the Party in 1956–57 (though Hobsbawm was by no means the only one to remain). He continued during his lifetime as the honorary president of its eventual successor, the Socialist History Society. His last public appearance, in February 2011, was arranged by the society – and his Wikipedia entry shows him during that event.

HISTORIAN

In the course of his writing his published output in books, essays and articles in several languages was phenomenal. His first, Labour’s Turning Point, appearing in 1948, was an edited collection of late nineteenth-century documents; his last, in 2011, How to Change the World: Marx and Marxism 1840–2011, was a collection of his essays over more than fifty years, some published for the first time. His academic reputation was first made in the fifties with Primitive Rebels – a study of social bandits and pre-modern revolutionaries, which he later followed with Bandits. In 1969 he published Industry and Empire 1750 to the Present Day, a study of economic history since very widely adopted as a university and college textbook. He also wrote on the history of Marxism, the
invention of tradition, democracy, globalisation, terrorism, historiography, nationalism and identity politics (of which he was no great fan – likewise with postmodern styles, for, “... unless the facts themselves change, no amount of changing names changes them”).

In theoretical discussion he noted also that “Anachronism and provincialism are two of the deadly sins of history ... The past remains another country. Its borders can only be crossed by travellers”. Nor was he fond of speculative might-have-beens, remarking that, “The First World War was not avoided, so the question whether it could have been is academic”. Lastly, he was a renowned jazz critic, writing under the name of Francis Newton.

However his most esteemed work was his history of the modern world in four volumes covering the years from the French Revolution to the collapse in 1991 of the regime which emerged from the Russian one. That was a project which stretched over thirty years from 1962 to 1994 (though it may not have been initially intended as such). One commentator has suggested that his autobiography, Interesting Times: a Twentieth-Century Life, published in 2002, should be regarded as the fifth volume and epilogue of the series. This magnum opus tetralogy comprises The Age of Revolution 1789–1848, The Age of Capital 1848–1875, The Age of Empire 1875–1914, and Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991 (later editions of the last prefixed it with The). All are enormously informative and profoundly analytical. Comparisons are invidious, but probably the first and the final volumes would be reckoned as the best – though in respect of either of the others, what might be regarded as one of Hobsbawm’s less outstanding performances would be any other historian’s masterpiece.

In assessing these four volumes it has to be kept in mind that the political and historical scene changed dramatically during the time of their composition. When the first was published the labour movement globally was in the ascendant, the national liberation movement was liquidating the colonial empires and growing in strength, while the USSR and the Soviet bloc appeared well established, flourishing and embarked on a long-term project of reform. The text of The Age of Revolution, though not concerned with any of these themes, reflects the historical optimism associated with them.

When Hobsbawm came to write his concluding volume he had to interpret the collapse of the Soviet project and all the hopes associated with it, the prostration of labour in the First World and the mostly sour fruits of national liberation in the Third. The consensus among reviewers from a variety of political positions, including even some right wing ones, was that he succeeded splendidly.

It was in this volume that he opined that the economically flourishing and socially progressive social democratic or Keynesian “golden years” of the 1950s and 60s in the industrialised West were the nearest that reality ever came to embodying the original vision of the nineteenth century socialist pioneers.

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Kettle again, “The four volumes embodied all of Hobsbawm’s best qualities – the sweep combined with the telling anecdote and statistical grasp, the attention to the nuance and significance of events and words, and above all, perhaps, the unrivalled powers of synthesis.”

**POLITICS**

Though Eric Hobsbawm’s central legacy is unquestionably his historical works he was also a deeply political individual and his politics proved controversial in more than one dimension. The most featured one in the public eye was his unapologetic, though complex, attachment to the Communist Party which provoked at the time of his death some foaming diatribes from ultra-reactionary commentators unable to contain their bile that any communist should acquire such public fame and renown. The accusation, which crops up in more than one instance, namely that he was indifferent to the mass casualties of twentieth century revolutions and anti-fascist struggles, is a malicious distortion of his autobiography’s remark that, “... if you asked me to entertain the proposition that the defeat of National Socialism was not worth 50 million dead and the uncounted horrors of the Second World War, I simply could not”.

Certainly this communist loyalty impeded his early academic progress (I recall my thesis supervisor in the sixties telling me that he would never be a professor). Not that he was uncritical of the CP – in late 1956 he was censured by its leadership after being one of the signatories of a letter which the dissidents had published in Tribune and the New Statesman after the Daily Worker rejected it for its criticisms of the Party’s endorsement of Soviet invasion to suppress the Hungarian revolution (the letter is largely reproduced in the notes of his autobiography). After 1956–7, apart from quasi-academic articles and conferences, though retaining...
his CP membership he was never again engaged in Party activities. Recently a friend commented that, “My impression was always that Hobsbawm’s substitute ‘family’ was (and in spite of everything, remained) the Party, and that this was deeper than policy and other tactical questions” – which strikes me as a perceptive remark.

However he was also attacked from the left for what he wrote in the late seventies and the eighties, accused of being the intellectual godfather of New Labour. This is entirely mythical, as is the common presumption that the Party’s theoretical journal *Marxism Today*, which published his controversial articles, was the vehicle of an intellectual project to take the Labour Party in what would subsequently term a Blairite direction – a myth regrettably perpetuated in an article of 1990 by Hobsbawm’s former colleague in the Historians’ Group, John Saville, in other respects an admirable individual and historian.

What Hobsbawm did was to publish there in 1978 the article “The Forward March of Labour Halted?” which argued in essence that the apparent advances the left in the UK was making at that point were based on shaky foundations. It was an uncomfortable perception, but it turned out to be an accurate one. Hobsbawm’s subsequent comment was that, “It was not intended as a political intervention, but as a Marxist historian’s survey of what had happened to the British working class over the past century. … If my lecture had a political edge, it was turned against the Labour Party leadership under Harold Wilson …”

He did indeed go on to argue during the 1980s that the strongly left-wing stances the Labour Party had adopted during the left’s temporary ascendancy were unsustainable and that if it was to have any hope of stopping the Thatcher juggernaut it would have to amend them to take account of an unsympathetic electorate. In the run-up to the 1987 election he provoked indignation by proposing, again in *Marxism Today*, that to ensure a Conservative defeat an electoral pact with the Lib Dems was necessary as the least bad option.

Such suggestions may or may not have been the most appropriate, but they were made in good faith and there was no way of knowing at the time what the Labour Party would become under Blair and his confederates. The Labour Party leader, following the victory of 1997 – it shouldn’t be forgotten – briefly looked as though he walked on water and might be the answer to anti-Tory prayers. In earlier and even more serious circumstances many good Soviet communists who in the twenties supported Stalin for the best of apparent reasons later had cause to regret it bitterly. Another acquaintance, who was in a position to know, has recently noted that, “Eric never had any time for New Labour – or Blair.” This sentiment was apparent in 1998 during discussions round preparation for the one-off special number of *Marxism Today* where Hobsbawm was “clearly inimical” to New Labour.

His subsequent writings, such as *Globalisation, Democracy and Terrorism*, (2007) and *How to Change the World* make it plain that he hated and despised the entire neoliberal project and all that it implied nationally and internationally. This can be seen for example in Chapter 10 of *Globalisation, Democracy and Terrorism*, entitled significantly, “The Empire Expands Wider Still and Wider”, and which includes an observation about, “… the global danger of creating a world power that basically is not interested in a world it does not understand, but is capable of intervening by armed force decisively whenever anybody does anything Washington does not like” and a damning judgement, “Few things are more dangerous than empires pursuing their own interests in the belief that by doing so they are doing humanity a favour.”

Tony Blair, following the victory of 1997, briefly looked as though he walked on water and might be the answer to anti-Tory prayers.

**Assessment**

In the nineteenth century the most outstandingly and internationally famous historian was the German Leopold von Ranke. Though he is still renowned today for his insights into historical methodology, Ranke’s voluminous historical works are now entirely unread and forgotten. Any similar posthumous fate is unlikely to overtake Eric Hobsbawm, for his researches into the history of resistance by the dispossessed of society against the power of elites were groundbreaking, and the mirror he presented of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is incomparable. According to Robert Heilbroner, “I know of no other account that sheds as much light on what is now behind us, and thereby casts so much illumination on our possible futures”, or in the words of Sir Keith Thomas presenting him with the Woolfson Prize for History in 1997, Hobsbawm possessed “… a rare capacity to devise and disseminate new concepts which leave an enduring mark on subsequent historical writing …”

Willie Thompson is a historian and author of a number of books, most recently *Ideologies in the Age of Extremes: Liberalism, Conservatism, Communism, Fascism* 1914–1991.

**Notes**

2 *Interesting Times*, p415.
3 Ibid, p418.
5 *Interesting Times*, ibid.
6 Tom Nairn, personal communication.
8 *Interesting Times*, p264.
9 Martin Jacques – personal communication.
10 Globalisation, Democracy and Terrorism, p165.
11 Ibid, p158
Giving to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s has been used over the centuries to give authority to the state in ways never imagined by Jesus. But the Church of Scotland, argues Ian Galloway, fiercely maintains its independence from the state, taking action against poverty and injustice.

“When the king is concerned with justice, the nation will be strong, but when he is only concerned with money, he will ruin his country” (Proverbs 29:4)

The king, of course, was the government of the time. Replace “king” with “government” and the statement becomes utterly contemporary. It also demonstrates the non-biblical position of the statement that faith and politics don’t mix. As Desmond Tutu opined – I don’t know what Bible people have been reading when they say such a thing. The relationship between God and Caesar has never been about the encounter of separate spheres of responsibility. In mainstream Christian theology there is no false dualism between sacred and secular. Jesus taught and lived a way of suffering love in this world, and his followers at best emulate his stance.

The current preoccupation of the media’s interest in churches is the area of human sexuality. Within the Christian community – a broad spectrum – there are differences of opinion about Biblical and cultural positions on same sex relationships as they are now, however what few at any point on the theological spectrum would dispute is that Jesus said much more about money than he did about sex.

Few at any point on the theological spectrum would dispute that Jesus said much more about money than he did about sex. In the face of the overwhelming might of empire, the teaching of Jesus is greatly focussed on painting a picture of what God’s reign on earth, here and now, would look like if it replaced the priorities of the prevailing emperors and kings, and that remains the task of the community that exists in Jesus’ name. While it is always important to remember that God is not at all limited to working within the institutions set up to worship or articulate faith in God, how does the Church currently articulate the relationship between God and Caesar? To answer that question globally or even regionally would be a task for someone with more information and ability than I have, so what I want to describe now, based on work I am involved in and people I know, is one way in which the church is engaging in society now that might shed some light on the current state of God-Caesar relations.

FIERCE INDEPENDENCE

Today in my small corner of the “global-local” church, which is the Church of Scotland, independence from the state is fiercely maintained, as it has been since the time of the 16th century Reformation. The Church’s income, apart from fees from social services contracting, and a hefty inheritance (pre 2008) of investment income and legacies, comes from its membership and is by offerings – voluntary donation – only. Despite the oft rehearsed decline in numbers of registered members, that giving has steadily increased and some...
£50 million is currently raised in this way each year. On a recent visit to the Church of Norway I recognised a different model. There the state pays an amount per capita to all faith communities, and since more than 90% of the population is registered as Church of Norway, it is a wealthy institution. Its ministers are effectively employed by a government department, which would be unthinkable here. Church attendance in Norway is even lower than in Scotland, yet as an institution it continues to be funded as a national institution as well as being a faith community.

DISTANCING FROM ESTABLISHMENT

In Scotland the Church of Scotland in particular is no longer an institution central to society’s self-understanding. Some people are dismayed by this, looking back to the heady days of the early 1950s (when church attendances peaked) as a golden time, however others recognise that for greater integrity to be pursued, a distancing from a perceived role in the establishment may be essential. While it is true that some in pre-devolution days looked to the Church of Scotland as a context for issues to be debated, the Church itself was an active participant in campaigning for a Scottish Parliament, based on a strongly held belief in subsidiarity, argued at the General Assembly on theological principles by Professor Tom Torrance. On the occasion of Margaret Thatcher’s address to the General Assembly in 1988 (dubbed the Sermon on the Mound), the Moderator at the time, James Whyte, presented her with the Church’s reports on housing and poverty, which though understated and polite was tantamount to a rebuke. While the Church has said it won't take a view for or against independence, it continues to apply its principles to seeking the most effective and accountable government for Scotland’s people, and has strongly advocated the need for social justice to be central to the debate on what kind of society we want to develop. This can be seen in the report of the Commission on the Purposes of Economic Activity (2012) set up by the Church in 2010 in the light of the financial crisis. That report said in its introduction: “we bring ... a clear and urgent call for action to transform our social and economic life. There are four priorities which we urge upon the Kirk, on Scottish/British society and on our governments in Edinburgh and Westminster: reducing inequality; ending poverty; ensuring sustainability; promoting mutuality.”

The Church promotes its views and policies to both parliaments through the work of the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office (SCPO). While this is hosted and almost entirely paid for by the Church of Scotland, it is directed by a reference group with representatives of eleven churches, and will do its best to communicate both views held by all and different views when these need to be presented separately. It had been initially hoped that the Office would also hold the Parliamentary Officer of the Roman Catholic Church, however in the end they decided to operate separately. Currently, the stated first priority of the SCPO is to influence policy at Holyrood and Westminster in relation to social justice, backed by the agreed policies of the churches.

DISTINCT CHALLENGES

The Church, though, in relating to wider society and pursuing a political voice, has its own distinct challenges to face. Aside from continuing perception of denominational competitiveness, someone has said that the seven last words of the church are: “We have always done it this way”. There is a ferocious conservatism (small c) in church life. As perhaps nowhere else in society, referring back the way is the default position. Scripture, doctrine (which focuses on clarifying what has historically been problematic), tradition, practice, historic conflict resolution – all of these, in an institution that has been developing, forming and reforming over a two thousand year period thus far, form an intimidating backdrop to substantial change, very often for good reason. It is necessary to go deep in order to challenge something that has been deemed to be of worth through many generations. Just because we know a lot in our generation does not necessarily make us automatically wiser in how more fully to be human beings than our foremothers and fathers. So even when a significant need for change is discerned and given assent, the process of change itself makes turning a super tanker seem like a fast spin on a jet ski. This sits in stark contrast with the pace of change in our society as a whole, and in the globalising world order that we are caught in the midst of whether we like it or not.

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

On the other hand, when the Church does come to a firm mind after long impassioned debate over years, as it did on the issue of nuclear weapons, it becomes a leading advocate for its new view. It is now quite ordinary for ministers as well as other church members to be arrested for carrying out acts of civil disobedience at Faslane, for example, and the General Assembly has confirmed that such law-breaking is acceptable as long as those so engaged are willing to suffer the consequences.

Sometimes, though, the very nature of the institution of the Church makes it appear archaic. In May, during the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, I attended a formal dinner at Holyrood Palace, at which the Moderator (of said Assembly) and the Archbishop of Canterbury were guests along with a range of people from across Scottish society including some political party leaders. The hospitality was gracious and assured, and the evening most enjoyable. I did, however, have the sense of being out of time. The same was true in a recent
meeting (for research purposes) with representatives of the Orange Order – the cause they espouse might arguably have once had some relevance, but not now. Both God and Caesar, I suspect, have little if any continuing interest in what used to be. If there is a conflict of power, it is firmly in the present and with the future at stake.

**INTERESTS OF THE POOREST**

So, while it is easy and evidently fashionable to criticise, dismiss, ridicule, ignore, fume at, despair over or despise the church of one denomination or another or indeed all, I would want to argue that the Church does not seek in any way to have the voice in society, but to have a voice, and that that voice is not sought to promote itself but primarily to pursue the interests of the poorest and most marginalised of Scotland’s people. Here’s why I think that:

First I want to say that the Church has identified and committed to significant ways of acting in solidarity with the people who are the poorest and most marginalised in our society. The Church of Scotland has done this very specifically by identifying the most economically disadvantaged local communities in Scotland (by inviting the Urban Studies Department of Glasgow University to crunch the numbers of the Scottish Indices of Multiple Deprivation along with parish postcodes) and agreeing to double the resources it puts there. These additional resources are not to benefit directly the congregations of the church, but to support those local congregations in these places to help in tackling poverty. To make this happen, other local congregations across the country forego scarce resources in the interests of helping the poorest. This amounts to a strategic decision by the Church to put its money where its mouth is.

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**TACKLING POVERTY**

One of these is being willing to work with anyone who shares that priority of tackling poverty. The Church of Scotland is a founding member of the Scottish Living Wage Campaign, for example, and is campaigning for local government to make the payment of the living wage a condition of tendering for public contracts. The Church has also actively backed the STUC’s “There is a Better Way” campaign, and is seeking other ways to co-operate with the trade union movement. The Church of Scotland has also played a leading role in the formation of Faith in Community Scotland (FiCS), which is a coalition of faith communities including the Roman Catholic, Episcopal and Independent Christian traditions along with Jewish and Moslem colleagues, aiming to enlist the resources of faith communities to tackle poverty. One of its initiatives is the Poverty Truth Commission, which, with its originally South African strapline “nothing about us without us is for us”, aims to enable the voices of people with direct experience of poverty to help shape society’s decision making and response in this critical area of desperately needed change.

Where I work, in Gorbals, there is a small congregation with a big heart who have allowed me to take risks with their reputation and the little money in their charge. Along with the local Roman Catholic congregation we have worked tirelessly to combat exclusion, and because of our past have also taken seriously the need to rid our society of sectarianism. In the newly regenerated area we are trying to provide a meeting place for the different kinds of people who now find themselves as neighbours. We are there, paid for in large part by the wider Church of Scotland, to serve need by following Jesus’s way of self-giving, suffering love. We are not there to point the finger or claim a place above anyone else.

**STARK CONTRAST**

Famously in scripture, Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey surrounded by branch-waving peasants. At the same time, through a gate on the opposite side of the city, Pilate, the Roman Governor, entered in pomp at the head of the legions of Rome. The contrast is deliberately stark. As an image of a power struggle it is ridiculous and laughable. Yet the Roman Empire is history, as is the British Empire and the Soviet Empire, and the economic empire of the USA and Europe is shaking in its foundations. The Church is having to leave its notions of empire behind too as it faces the future. It is being humbled, but it is also being returned to its roots as a marginal community of hope in a suffering world. When Jesus avoided the trick question about paying taxes to the emperor, he had nothing but the clothes he stood up in. He was born poor and stayed poor. That remains the vocation of the church, and maybe in the next phase of its life it is about to rediscover that that is where its soul is too.

*From Edinburgh, Ian Galloway was ordained in 1976. He was warden of Iona Abbey from 1983–86. Since 1996 to the present day he has been Minister of Gorbals Parish Church in Glasgow. From 2008–2012 he was Convenor of the Kirk’s influential Church and Nation Committee.*
A FORD ANGLIA, FISH STOCKS AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION: READING THE FUTURE IN THE PAST

T. C. Smout, Scotland’s foremost environmental historian, talks to Catriona Macdonald.
Bashford said when I was at school, “it’s a real shame. It was not quite an accident. I decided that I wanted to do research, and it looked as if I was going to get a good enough degree, so I went to see Elton and he said: “Oh good. There’s a problem in the foreign policy of Henry VIII which I think would be very interesting to solve.” I immediately thought it would not be very interesting to solve, because I would end up as a footnote in one of his books, so I said “Well, actually, I’m really interested in economic history.”

That was not completely true, but it was something which Elton didn’t know anything about. He said “Well, what sort of economic history?”, and I said “Oh. The history of trade”, and he said “Trade with where?”, and I fell silent. He looked at me rather hard and said, “I think you’d better go away and think about it.”

So I went back. I shared a room with a sensible Yorkshire man, and he said, “It’s quite easy. What do you prefer, blondes or brunettes?”, and I said, “I prefer blondes”. He said, “Well, it’s trade with Scandinavia.” So, I went back to Elton and I said I would like to study trade with Scandinavia, and he didn’t say anything. He just looked at me. He was trying to look into my soul, and I was trying to draw the blinds so he couldn’t see in, and eventually he said, “I see. In that case, we’d better get advice”. So he sent me to see Astrid Friis who was a great Danish historian who was coming to London and she was having dinner with Ragnilda Hatton, who was a formidable Swedish historian, and T. S. Ashton, who was the greatest of the economic historians. So I went down there, and was invited in after dinner when they were having coffee – a little bit like the After Eights. Astrid Friis said that it would be rather boring to be studying English trade with Denmark, but very little was known about Scottish trade.

Chris Smout: My father was a businessman who worked at Kynocks munitions factory in Birmingham. His father had been a Black Country colliery clerk who moved into Birmingham to work at this factory – and my father made his way up through the ranks to become manager of the factory. He was put in charge of British small-arms ammunition production in the war. When I was a teenager he bought a farm in the countryside near Evesham. That was the most beautiful place. I think one of the reasons why I ultimately became an environmental historian was because the beauty and atmosphere and wild nature of that place got under my skin. My mother was a farmer’s daughter.

Catriona Macdonald: So, does an interest in history feature at that stage?

CS: When I was about 16 and at boarding school in Cambridge I had a very very good history teacher who later became a quite famous headmaster of a comprehensive, Humphrey Bashford. He was brilliant. I eventually went to Cambridge University, to Clare College, where Geoffrey Elton was my tutor. He was a very dominant character.

CM: In what way?

CS: He was quite clear that only his view was correct. That was one way. He was also quite clear that history was only about constitutional affairs. That was the other way. And he was quite clear that most of the other historians at Cambridge were rubbish, apart from himself (laughs).

CM: Was it an adversarial relationship, then? Is that where the inspiration came from?

CS: I found it a bit trying. Elton was a great man, there’s no doubt about that, but you felt that your individuality was at stake. There were other people, particularly Marjorie Chibnall my medieval history tutor, whom I found much more encouraging and more sympathetic. And I remember Humphrey Bashford said when I was at school, “it’s a real shame

that you can’t find something which would combine your love of birds with your love of history.” This was long before environmental historians were ever dreamt of, so it was very perceptive of him.

CM: So, were a bookish child? Did you love books?

CS: Yes, very much a bookish child. I wasn’t very well as a child … a lot of asthma, and spent a lot of time in bed which was very good for me.

CM: So, from Evesham to Cambridge. What were your first impressions?

CS: Of Cambridge University? It was a very very good place to be an undergraduate. It was not so good to be a postgraduate, because there was not the same degree of guidance and help and collegiality. Postgraduates were really left out on a limb and that was not such a good experience, but for undergraduates, it was absolutely brilliant.

CM: If I may, it seems an unusual nursery for a Scottish historian?

CS: It was not quite an accident. I decided that I wanted to do research, and it looked as if I was going to get a good enough degree, so I went to see Elton and he said: “Oh good. There’s a problem in the foreign policy of Henry VIII which I think would be very interesting to solve.” I immediately thought it would not be very interesting to solve, because I would end up as a footnote in one of his books, so I said “Well, actually, I’m really interested in economic history.”

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So I went up back and said, “I’ve been advised by Professor Friis to study Scottish trade”, and Elton gave up.

I was given Charles Wilson as a supervisor, but more importantly also Edgar Lythe in Dundee. Cambridge had the excellent notion that if they didn’t know anything about a subject, they would appoint someone from another University who did. Edgar was enormously knowledgeable and helpful and had written a very good book on Scottish Trade in the 16th and early 17th century. It seemed logical that I should go on after that. When I went to the Scottish Record Office, I discovered that there was the whole of the customs records of Scotland between 1660 and 1707 which were just waiting there unopened. But it was also necessary that I knew some Danish in order to carry out a comparison between Danish and Scottish sources, and I remember sitting in college and having supper and saying “I’m going to the Scandinavian Society’s party tonight to pick up a girl who’ll teach me Danish.”

CM: And you did!
CS: And I married her.

CM: There was a chaotic element of serendipity in all this!
CS: As in the best of life. But the study of Scottish history was very exciting and it remains very exciting. I think that is the first necessity for good historical research – to be really turned on by what you are doing. To open the exchequer records and see literally hundreds of customs books which nobody else had ever looked at – it was just amazing. You can’t do that now. Scottish economic and social history was very understudied then, especially before the Union of 1707.

CM: Can we take you back, then, to 1959 when you get your assistant lectureship at Edinburgh. First impressions of the country that you were going to make your home?
CS: I’d already been working for two years in the archives of Edinburgh, so I knew it and loved it already. My first impressions in 1959 were just excitement. Wonderful. To be starting one’s married life with a job and when my salary went up to £1,000 I thought it was incredible. A. J. Youngson was starting an Economic History Department there, though William Marwick had been teaching the subject already: a nice man but very dry. Michael Flinn was appointed at the same time as I. He was a wonderful scholar, with an enthusiasm for history which was inexhaustible. The next appointment after that was Alan Milward, and the three of us would sit in the bar at lunchtime and talk about what were then some of the big subjects in economic history. What happened to the standard of living? Was Hobsbawn right or was Hartwell right? What was the cause of the increase in population, birth rate growth or death rate fall? What part did religious belief play in the Industrial Revolution? I think in almost every respect the three or four years when we were together were the most intellectually stimulating ones that I ever had. Later on, when I became visiting fellow at Oxford and Cambridge, all they talked about there was home extensions and the football results.

CM: First you wrote Scottish Trade on the Eve of the Union then The History of the Scottish People. What was the relationship between them?
CS: Scottish Trade on the Eve of Union was essentially my PhD enlarged. It was read by Richard Ollard who worked for Collins, long before the days of Harper Collins and Rupert Murdoch, when Collins was still a really good publisher. He himself was a historian, and he especially liked the first chapter. I got a letter out of the blue saying they would like to commission a social history of Scotland along the lines of G. M. Trevelyan. Well, my first response to that of course was excitement, and my second thought (which I kept to myself) was that Elton hadn’t thought much of G. M. Trevelyan, who could easily be parodied as being about tea and biscuits, the history of the genteel and of a certain kind of Englishness. That was a bit unfair, but social history was rapidly moving on at this point in a very exciting way. So, I just said I’d like to write a social history of Scotland but I wasn’t sure that it would follow the Trevelyan model. I set out to do this, and after a sabbatical year and lots of effort, I wrote back to Richard and said I had written a big book, but had only got to 1800. What should I do? Oh, he said, “Just send it on and then we’ll see after that.” Right up to publication day, I thought nobody would have any interest in this book, The History of the Scottish People. Maybe it would be a nice book but not one which have any sort of great appeal. However, they had paid me a handsome advance which I think enabled me to buy my first car.

CM: What did you buy?
CS: One of these Ford Anglias which had a sort of cut away zigzag back. It was wonderful. It had some problems going uphill, but it was otherwise it was fine.

CM: Many consider that book a turning point in Scottish historical studies. It unlocked not just something that no one had heard about, but a possibility of taking discussion even further. You are very reluctant in many of the chapters to fall down heavily on one side or the other, so it opens up debate.
CS: If it didn’t draw many firm conclusions, that’s probably a reflection of the conversations in the bar in Edinburgh. You didn’t draw any firm conclusions about the British standard of living or the cause of population increase, because nobody knew the answers. That was the really interesting thing If there were so many unknowables, given the state of research in the British context, that was still more true in the Scottish one.
CM: Are we more reluctant about asking the big questions nowadays, when post graduates seem to burrow and burrow in just one area?
CS: Well, I recognise exactly what you say, but I think it has always been like that. It is the necessary nature of post-graduate training to be very specialist. And there is a pay-off between the two sorts of history, because it’s only those who burrow very carefully who get to the heart of the matter, whereas those who wander round pontificating do so in a very superficial way unless someone has been burrowing first.

CM: If we take the standard of living debate, you did a book in the 1970s with Ian Levitt, *The State of the Working Class in Scotland in 1842*. Is that another example of something that came out of these conversations in Edinburgh?
CS: Well, it certainly came out of the work that we were all doing there. The 1842 Poor Law Report contained an enormous number of statements on diet and wages and poor relief, which could be spatially analysed. But nobody ever reads that book now. It’s completely forgotten. Sometimes I look it up and I’m surprised by what’s inside. I think in all my history, I have tried to alternate between what you might call popular history, when I have in my mind’s eye a wide population of interested but not expert people, and specialist history, when I write for my fellow historians, and this book on the working class in 1842 was definitely the second type. But in writing environmental history in the last dozen years, I have always thought of the wider interested public as my main focus.

CM: To go back to *The History of the Scottish People*: where are its intellectual origins? Is it politically driven, as much social history was of that era? What other historians did you most admire?
CS: My political motivations have always been more or else unconscious. I have never consciously thought, “Well, I’m a Liberal or a Socialist, so I need to write a particular sort of history.” I suppose my main inspiration, apart from my colleagues, was the Annales school of French history, the notion of “L’histoire totale”, where there are no limits to what you might want to put into a history book. I thought it was very exciting and so different from Elton’s view that the only legitimate history was constitutional history. Their leader was Fernand Braudel, who was every bit as domineering a figure as Elton was in his circle. He ruled nothing out for history. Nothing at all. I thought that was great. The other big influence was of course E. P. Thompson, who was being published around the same time. He was just mindblowing.

CM: Did you meet him?
CS: I did meet him later on, but not at this stage. For me his work was pivotal. *The Making of the English Working Class* was an extraordinary book, but at the same time, I had some doubts. There was a tendency among Marxist historians to make workers heroic which didn’t seem to me to be necessarily true, and I was much criticised for going too far in the other direction and saying – well you know – Scottish workers were a bit supine. And of course, I went too far in that direction, but that was partly a sort of reaction to the heroic worker model.

CM: The other contrast between the Annales and E. P. Thompson’s work is Thompson’s reliance on class as a motor of history. Do you have a sympathy with that?
CS: Very much so. But the concentration has always been on the working class, and the expectation that the working class should be “made” and should become “conscious” and be a great actor in history. In fact, I think in some ways the concentration should be on the rich. I was quite struck in the sixties in my readings of Scottish history about how clear the upper classes were concerning the dangers to themselves from below. That clarity and action goes right through to today. The modern rise of neoliberalism is the triumph of the rich over social democracy and welfare liberalism. Today you can see in the most extraordinary way how the rich have managed to persuade society that the market is everything, but all the market does now is to deliver to them all the benefits of growth. Some of the work recently done in America on neoliberalism isn’t formally Marxist, but it amounts to impressive studies of elite class formation and class-conscious action, and the establishment of Gramscian hegemony through the media. These are very powerful and very important things, not yet clearly seen enough. There are great books to be written about all this.

CM: We’ve recently heard about the death of Eric Hobsbawn. Shall we see his like again?
CS: I can’t see anybody taking his place. However, just when you think nothing is happening, something usually is.

CM: Indeed. Gender history came, it is alleged, relatively late to Scotland. Do you agree with that, and what were the key dynamics that have changed over time?
CS: As late as the middle of the 1980s there was remarkably little sign of Scottish gender history as such, but then things changed very rapidly, so in the last twenty years there has been enormous progress. As long as you believed that history is a study of the constitution, you believed it was a history of a series of gentlemen in suits. When you begin to believe that history is “histoire totale” or the “history of class”, then even though you may not at first identify the women as actors you instantly bring them in. So, as soon as economic history and social history become of importance, they are actually there whether you see them or not. It’s only a matter of time before someone says “But you haven’t done justice to half of humanity.” And then somebody tries. And, of course, there’s a whole feminist movement which informs it as well.
CM: Talking about the feminist movement as opposed to gender history, one challenge to history in the last few years has been post modernism. As someone who has written quite widely on identity, what do you think?

CS: I am instinctively an empiricist, and to me much post modernism is obscure, masked in language which gets in the way of communication. But questions of identity are actually very intriguing and very important.

CM: Do they lead us up a blind alley, though?

CS: No, I don’t think so. I don’t think questions of identity lead us up a blind alley, and if that’s the central focus of post modernism, then I might be wrong about it. I think that who people think they are is actually the raw material from which political and social change emerges – the axis on which change turns. If people don’t identify themselves as one of the workers of the world, then it’s difficult for them to behave like one of the workers of the world. But the wealthy do tend to identify themselves as the international rich and they are quick to make common cause across nations. It quite astonishes me that you can’t tax the rich now, because the rich say, “Oh well we’ll go to China, or we’ll go somewhere else.” Their threats to go away (which you think might be welcome) make any politicians who propose more taxation for the well-off the laughing stock of the press. This is part of the hegemony that the rich now exercise over the media.

CM: With that in mind, can you explain the transition in your work from social and economic history to environmental history?

CS: In the 1980s I was asked to join the Scottish Advisory Committee of the Nature Conservancy Council. When I arrived I saw that a lot of the rural conflicts with which they were faced, and other problems too, were deeply rooted in history. And so I began to think about the history of the environment in relationship to the history of the Scots, and the more I thought about it, the more fascinating I found it to be – and the more widespread I found were the misconceptions about the past.

CM: An example?

CS: Take woodland history. There was a general view that the Highlands had been covered with woods until the seventeenth century and then things began to change when the English arrived and chopped down the woods to start an iron industry. It was part of the story of the woes of the Highlands under “internal colonialism” and it was complete nonsense. It still gets told on TV in nature programmes. But deforestation in fact was partly a result of climate change and partly one of the methods of local land use, and it stretched over thousands of years. It had nothing to do with the English or with iron manufacture.

CM: And what about the farming of the eighteenth century agricultural improvers?

CS: Modern farming is immensely destructive because of the use of chemicals and big machinery. But this was not at all the case with the improvers. They would have loved chemicals and drag-lines but they didn’t have them. So they devised long rotations and use of clover and other forms of manuring and nitrogen-fixing and they built up an extremely subtle and effective form of sustainable agriculture by the early nineteenth century admired throughout the world.

CM: Are you suggesting, then, that the past offers the Green Party any lessons?

CS: I think that every political party needs history. You just can’t really understand where you are going unless you know how you got where you are now. I don’t think that history has any particularly comforting message for any one party, least of all for the Greens. I’ve just been writing a book about the Firth of Forth and there are two contradictory things going on in the environmental history there since 1800. One is the enormous pollution of the rivers and the sea which occurred between about 1870 and 1970, which has now largely been overcome. What seemed to be a quite intractable environmental problem was overcome by determination, professional expertise and “Big Government”. The EC and the regulations from Brussels certainly helped.

But what is unnerving is the destruction of the fish stocks of the North Sea, which has taken place to a degree which people don’t realise even now. When you look at the North Sea it looks just the same as it did when you were a kid. But a catastrophe has taken place. It began in the Firth of Forth as early as the 1850s and 60s, when local summer herring breeding stocks were eliminated and then the local winter breeding stocks went between 1930 and 1950, before modern seine net fishing began. From 1960 the whole herring stock in the North Sea began to run out, then fish like cod and haddock came under threat.

The point about this is that the fishermen knew from quite an early date that things were going badly and they knew that they might get worse. They knew they were behaving in an unsustainable way. This didn’t deter them, and the scientists didn’t stop them, and eventually they ran out of fish. Now the harbours of the Forth are empty of fishing boats except for a few which catch prawns, which were barely regarded as edible in Victorian times. So even when fishermen knew the damage they were doing, they were quite incapable of stopping. We shouldn’t blame them too much, because every one of us is doing exactly the same thing to the entire planet now. So a history book about the Firth of Forth is relevant not only to the Green Party but for everybody.

CM: Is the solution, then, to place the green agenda at the centre of government policymaking. Is that the only way to rectify it?
CS: I am sufficiently pessimistic to think that it cannot be rectified. But I can see that attitude is a self-fulfilling prophecy. If you think that and do nothing, then of course we are doomed. I don’t know what the answer is. There are some Greens who say “Well, the only thing to do is to exercise self discipline and to persuade the entire society that you’ve got to exercise self discipline.” But society doesn’t work like that. There are others who say “Well, what you need is a technical fix, and if we put all our money into finding one we shall get out of this mess.” It’s just possible. Humanity is better at technical fixes than at self-sacrifice. But it would be incredibly expensive. There is no government on earth which shows any sign of going down that route. People make gestures saying how important green industry is going to be, but there is not very much sign of any action beyond a few windmills. This is very serious.

CM: Because obviously it means disinvesting in other areas?
CS: Yes it means disinvesting in other areas. People worry immensely about the political and economic consequences of the rise of China, but they will be as nothing compared to the collapse of the environment as China rises. That’s really scary.

CM: Let’s come closer to home, if I may. Many of the changes you noted in Scottish history coincided with the push towards devolution. Do you think the pursuit of that goal in any way impacted upon Scottish historical studies, and if so, how?
CS: In some ways the more significant impact might have been the other way round. I think Scottish history has been important since the 1960s in giving Scots a new sense of their past and what they have achieved. About the time the History of the Scottish People was written, William Ferguson produced his Scotland: 1689 to the Present. That was the first book ever on Scottish political or general history dealing with the last three hundred years. That is amazing. And about the same time Roy Campbell’s Scotland since 1707 did the same for economic history. These gave what had literally been a history-less people a sudden sense that they had had a very interesting history since the Union. It was one of which they could in many ways be extremely proud. So I think in that sense, the writing of Scottish history had an impact upon the devolution debate, but whether the devolution debate then had an impact back on Scottish history, I’m not quite so sure.

CM: Even in terms of a more receptive public?
CS: Yes, to some extent. There has been a rising market for and interest in Scottish history for many years and an enormous increase in the number of people studying it, including people outside Scotland. Some of the most interesting Scottish economic history at the moment is being written by scholars in England, especially on 17th and 18th century trade.

From Victorian times onwards many who were passionately Scottish were also convinced that the Union was a guarantor of their liberties.

CM: So, how might history contribute to the referendum debate?
CS: It is really pretty essential for voters in 2014 to have an idea about the real history of Scotland in the last 300 years. Of course the lessons are ambiguous. A nationalist might feel that such have been the extraordinary achievements that it shows that Scotland could go it alone as a naturally achieving people. But somebody who doesn’t much like the idea of independence might say, “Well we did all this within the Union. Why upset it?” One of the advances of the last twenty years has been the understanding of Unionist Nationalism. From Victorian times onwards many who were passionately Scottish were also convinced that the Union was a guarantor of their liberties. They saw the United Kingdom as having constructed democracy, freedom of speech and the rule of law, and brought a measure of universal education, which means the country that we live in today is “free”. That is surely why the debate about whether Scotland should become independent often just revolves around bean counting. There doesn’t seem to be anything else to talk about. I mean, if you were in a conventional European country in the nineteenth century, you’d want to throw off the yoke of Austria or wherever because you wanted free speech and the vote and the end to arbitrary imprisonment and all these other things which would come with “liberty”. But because Scotland has already got liberty in those senses, what is left tends to be a boring debate as to whether we’d be a little bit better off or a little bit worse off in economic terms.

CM: So, what do you think we should be asking in 2014?
CS: Hobshawn said in one of his last interviews, the important things are still the 18th century enlightenment values – liberty, equality and fraternity. I would like to know from each side how they would like to further these ideals, because you don’t hear very much about that at the moment. In what senses will Scotland be more free? Will it be more equal? Will it be more fraternal? These are very important questions. That’s what true liberty is about and I don’t see it being debated.

CM: So, we should be looking to 1789 rather than 1707?
CS: Yes, I think so. Yes definitely.

T. C. Smout CBE, FBA, FRSE, FSA Scot, is Professor Emeritus in History at the University of St Andrews, and Historiographer Royal for Scotland. His most recent book (co-authored with Mairi Stewart), The Firth of Forth: An Environmental History, was published in October 2012 by Birlinn. Catriona Macdonald is Reader in Late Modern Scottish History at the University of Glasgow, and author of Whaur Extremes Meet: Scotland’s Twentieth Century (John Donald, 2009). Thanks to Maire McCormack for transcribing the interview.
The role of rector and workers’ representation

The tradition at the older Scottish universities of having a Rector has its origins in the pre-modern era, yet the effective functioning of the post can bring many benefits to not just the students and staff, but also to the institutions themselves. Edinburgh University Rector Peter McColl makes the argument.

Edinburgh, along with the other Scottish Universities founded before the modern era, has a Rector. I happen to occupy that position at the University of Edinburgh, and think that it has broader implications for workers’ representation and industrial democracy. It has those implications because of two characteristics of the Rector’s position.

The first is that the Rector is directly elected by students (and, at Edinburgh, staff) and the second is that the Rector chairs the University’s governing body, the Court.

The principle of having someone elected by staff and students in the key role on the University Court puts staff and students’ interests at the heart of the institution. While the Rector may not be a member of staff or a student they do have staff and students as their constituency. This principle is important for universities, but also more broadly. It creates an expectation of involvement in institutional governance and democracy that can be carried through to other workplaces.

Industrial democracy is a longstanding demand of the labour movement. It ensures workers have control of their labour through collective control of the workplace by those who work in it. It addresses the problem of alienated labour by ensuring that the fruit of workers’ labour is distributed equally amongst the workers. Having directly-elected representatives of the workers on the governing body is one essential part of industrial democracy.

Industrial Democracy

While universities are far from being bastions of elite governance, having generally fairly representative governing bodies, this is still significant. The significance comes because the position of Rector is one of the few manifestations of industrial democracy in a non-mutual context. Outside of worker-owned businesses, cooperatives and other mutuals it is rare to find a governing body chaired by a person directly elected by workers, service users or a combination of both. The Rector sits in the Chair, and at all the universities with Rectors there are directly elected student representatives. In most cases there are staff representatives too, though these tend not to be directly elected from the staff body as a whole, often being representatives of the University Senate (the University’s senior academic body).

As with any notion of worker representation, there has been significant pressure from university managers and administrators to sideline the Rector. At Aberdeen the university have managed to remove the Rector from the Chair of the University Court. Thankfully at Edinburgh a string of strong Rectors have resisted this. The pressure on the position of Rectors, does, though, show just how much of a threat the role poses for university management.

Shaping the Agenda

The real power of the Rector as an independently elected chair of the governing body lies in the ability to shape the university’s agenda. Being elected means that Rectors are forced to meet with students and staff before assuming a position on the Court. This grounds a Rector in the everyday concerns of
THE ROLE OF RECTOR AND WORKERS’ REPRESENTATION

the institution and gives a counterpoint to the information available otherwise.

A good example of this was the concerted action taken by student representatives and the Rector over accommodation at Edinburgh. In 2005 the accommodation services at the university were proposing steep increases in rents. The accommodation at Edinburgh was already some of the most expensive outside London. The Rector was able to create the opportunity for Court members to hear about how concerned students were at the level of rents at Court meetings. When accommodation services then proposed near-double-figure rent increases Court members were incredulous.

Given the serious failures of governance in institutions as varied as the Edinburgh College of Art and our major banks, neither of which were afflicted with Rectors, this pressure seems rather misplaced. In fact, it is notable that the institutions with Rectors have avoided much of the mismanagement that has occurred elsewhere in society. And the stronger the position of Rector is, the less likely there is to have been serious mismanagement. That’s not to say that the institutions with Rectors have been managed perfectly, but exposure to more external scrutiny ensures better governance.

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTION

Part of the importance of the role of Rector lies in its symbolic value as a democratic institution at the heart of our learning institutions. University is a vital learning experience for many and we should make industrial democracy an important part of that learning. The Scottish Government review of Higher Education has proposed the extension of the Rector position to all Higher Education institutions. This is something that offers huge opportunities for the principle of workers being involved in the running of their workplace.

While we must go further in democratising university governance, through ensuring trade union representatives are on the Court and ensuring a better gender balance on governing bodies, higher education is in a better position than many other sectors.

We are at a time of fundamental change. There is a profound generational difference emerging in the expectations of those born after 1979. There is a huge opportunity to embed the importance of industrial democracy as part of the expectation of change. Having an effective Chair of Court at university is one way we can communicate the value of worker involvement.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE

So what can we learn from this? Firstly that there are real opportunities for change in existing governance structures. We must seize those opportunities. One of my lasting frustrations is that I was uncontested when running for Rector. We must ensure that there are strong candidates for these positions when they arise.

We must spread the idea to other institutions, so it will be important to support the Government’s review of university governance. This will allow much more opportunity to spread the concept of directly elected chairs.

And perhaps most importantly we must promote the idea of workers’ ownership and representation as an essential part of reconstructing our economy. With a very large number of people going to university the example of directly-elected members of governing bodies should be used to encourage more workers’ participation in the workplaces that graduates go on to work in.

The position of Rector is in some ways an anachronism. But in other ways it can pave the way for a new way of working – one that reduces alienation, that empowers workers and that tackles some of our serious problems of governance.

■ Peter McColl is Rector of the University of Edinburgh. He is a member of the Scottish Green Party and sits on Democratic Left Scotland’s national council.

Better thegither

Aye, dearie, listen tae yir auntie,
I’m tellin ye, it’s no a day fur gaein oot.
Owre mony rough weans hingin roun
Waitin tae gie ye a batterin.

Stick hame wi us, we’ll tak care uv ye,
See ye hiv aw ye need, wee bit pocket-money,
Rin aboot in yir ain wee gairden,
Read Oor Wullie in the Sunday Post.

I’ll mak some chips tae yir tea,
Furget thae furrin cairry-oots an cafes.
Hame’s best, yee’ll fin, stick tae whit ye ken.
Ye’re jist no up tae the big bad world.

Ye see, dearie, Auntie kens whit’s best fur ye,
Me an Uncle Davie. Aye, we’re better thegither, but.

Alan MacGillivray
The Raploch in Stirling once had a reputation for its levels of deprivation. But now the area is better known for its Big Noise, the product of an initiative – El Sistema – that teaches local children to play orchestral music. Morag Parnell applauds this scheme that promotes self-confidence in young people.

In the 1960s and 70s I worked in Stirling. A fair part of my work was in the Raploch, which then had a reputation across Scotland for its levels of deprivation. There I experienced some of the worst and some of the best encounters in my career.

Fast forward to August 2007, when the Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra from Venezuela played at the Proms and visited Edinburgh. Like many others I was bowled over by their musicianship and their sheer vitality.

Fast forward again to midsummer 2012 and a night to remember in the Raploch. Scarcely a dry eye – certainly not mine. A fully equipped outdoor stage, a backdrop of Stirling castle and familiar Raploch streets, the Simon Bolivar Orchestra and, wonderfully, the Raploch Big Noise. These were the children of the Raploch, with their musical instruments, playing along with the Simon Bolivar orchestra, under the baton of the acclaimed Gustavo Dudamel.

Emotional overload. A truly brave new world.

Before my critics (or some cynics?) accuse me: I am not suggesting that giving musical instruments to children and teaching them to play and enjoy, as they clearly do, the best of orchestral music, alone will solve the problem of youth unemployment, or any other of the many life-threatening problems that confront us. But there is no denying what it can do for the Happy Planet Index, or that it can give these young people a confidence in themselves that will help them to deal with adversity and find their solutions. Even from the brief interviews with some of the children, broadcast that night from the Raploch, that was clear.

HISTORY OF EL SISTEMA AND THE SIMON BOLIVAR ORCHESTRA
Dr Jose Antonio Abreu was an economist, a deputy in the Venezuelan Congress and a Minister of Culture. He was also a prize winning pianist.

In 1975 he founded El Sistema – The Foundation for the National
Network of Youth and Children’s Orchestras of Venezuela. In his own words, it was his eagerness to serve his country and his concerns and uneasiness about social inequality that encouraged him to develop this programme.

He said “Let us reveal to our children the beauty of music and music shall reveal to our children the beauty of life.”

El Sistema is a publicly financed programme, not only bringing music to children from the poorest and most disadvantaged communities, but using music as a tool for social and community development.

Gustavo Dudamel, born 1981, currently director of the Simon Bolivar Orchestra, is also director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic and honorary conductor of the Gottenberg Symphony Orchestra.

He became a pupil of Sistema when he was five years old, learning to play the violin. In his early teens he was conducting and he has been on a dizzying upward career ever since.

Not only are his musical skills captivating, so too are his enthusiasm, his personality and his smile.

Dudamel and the Simon Bolivar created a whirlwind of excitement and approval when they first visited the UK Proms and came to the Edinburgh Festival in 2007.

Following a visit by Dr Richard Holloway to Venezuela in 2006, sponsored by the Scottish Arts Council, a charity was set up with the aim of bringing the Sistema movement to Scotland. It drew together many supporters, including many from the world of music.

After what seems much hard work, and working with children from P1 upwards in all the Raploch primary schools, the first Big Noise Raploch was launched with a concert with members of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and the Scottish National Youth Orchestra in June 2008.

Gradually over the following years, more instruments and players were added to the Big Noise until, in 2010, they had a full orchestra. During that time they gave public performances including a concert in the Albert Halls in Stirling and at the Scottish Parliament.

Now over 80% of Raploch’s primary school children are involved in the project.

Meanwhile in England much had been going on since the visit of the Simon Bolivar orchestra in 2007, so that in 2011, “In Harmony Sistema England” was publicly and proudly presented in three cities: Liverpool, Lambeth and Norwich. Their report stated: “in two and a half years the projects have started to show the benefits of intensive music tuition as a method of narrowing the gap between children from deprived backgrounds and their peers, in terms of attitude, aspiration, attainment and behaviour.”

Sistema has been adopted in several other countries.

EL SISTEMA’S PHILOSOPHY

To explain the El Sistema philosophy, I can do no better than take some quotes from their website:

“In the past, art was a matter of minorities for minorities; then it became a matter of minorities for majorities. Nowadays it is a matter of majorities for majorities and a key element to educating and allowing people to integrate successfully into society.

“Due to its technical and artistic nature, the work of the orchestra necessarily implies the fostering in youngsters of qualities like self-esteem, a spirit of solidarity and fraternity, as well as ethical and aesthetic values. Hence its great significance regarding personality building and the development of mind, sensibility, and communication skills.

“The impact and social relevance of the orchestral and choral program is mainly seen in three spheres: the personal sphere, the family sphere and the community sphere, which reach beyond the sense of nationalism.

“The members of the youth and children’s orchestras acquire qualities like self-concept, self-esteem, self-confidence, discipline, patience, and commitment; and recognise individual contributions to achieving collective goals.

“Participating in the orchestral movement gives them a chance to fulfil new goals, plans, and dreams, thus giving a new sense to their lives. People learn to recognise art not just as something that can be seen in museums or listened to in concerts, but as something present in the places, the people, and the things around us in our quotidian existence.

“The most diverse music genres and styles, from classical to folk to avant-garde, are openly taken on and performed by El Sistema, without restrictions imposed by conventional paradigms.

“Art has ceased to be the preserve of the elite to become firmly established as a social right for our peoples. The artistic education of youngsters is an expression of an unparalleled social revolution. The democratisation of music, its conception as a fundamental social program for the education of the new generations, is imperative as a means of social organisation and development.”

OUTCOMES

The Stirling broadcast in June 2012 included interviews with parents, teachers, supporters, volunteers, musicians and children.

There was, as expected, universal adult approval of the personal and social benefits for the children, their families, their communities.
My heart was stolen by the interviews with children. There was in their responses, happiness, eagerness, confidence, and all the excitement and enjoyment of the evening’s event.

More formally, in 2011, the Scottish Government’s Social Research Department prepared a 148 page assessment of the Scottish Sistema project.

Here are their conclusions:

“Overall, there are four features of Big Noise that are fundamental to achieving the goal of social transformation:

- it works with children from an early age;
- it is totally inclusive so that it reaches and sustains the engagement of the hardest to reach families;
- it is a long term intervention, working with children from nursery to P7 and aims eventually to work with the children through to adulthood;
- it is delivered on a community wide scale so by achieving outcomes for individuals it will create wider spread change.

“Big Noise activities are achieving short and medium term outcomes and there is overall agreement that it will achieve and sustain longer term outcomes. If it is able to continue to work with children from an early age, to provide holistic support to take care of the whole child, sustain engagement over time and engage with the majority of children in Raploch, then it has the potential to achieve more than a series of positive outcomes. It may, as part of a programme of regeneration, achieve social transformation.”

A PERSONAL VIEW

My appreciation and admiration for this orchestra has no doubt been coloured by its history. Significant too must be my past experiences in Stirling and elsewhere, what I have said were of the best and worst.

From about 1950 I became familiar, in theory and in practice, with the idea of the Inverse Care Law, a phrase coined by Dr Julian Tudor Hart and the Socialist Medical Association. This says that those with the greatest need are the least provided for. We are all familiar with the worst features of this, the depressing physical surroundings, lack of amenity and resources, poor health outcomes and the constant day-to-day struggle to cope. Worst of all is the absence of hope of anything better. So the escape routes too often become fags and booze, drugs and criminality.

Yet that wasn’t all there was. There were strong family ties, much caring and support for neighbours and for those more needy than themselves. I recall many instances of that.

One cold raw winter morning I visited an elderly lone sick man in a house which was bleak and cold, except for his bedroom. There I found that the room had been cleaned and tidied, the bed had fresh linen, there was food and a hot drink on the bedside table and a bright cheerful fire blazing in the fireplace. A nearby neighbour, not a relative, a young woman with several children and with few resources herself, had made the call to the surgery and had then provided all the comforts she could.

There was the philosopher ex-miner with lungs damaged by years in the pits, and the former farm worker with her stories of life on the farm in previous times. Both were compelling listening.

And the young man just out of prison on a serious charge, whose circumstances from childhood had led him to that almost inevitable end, and who wanted desperately to change his life. Several years later I met him again in the town as I parked to visit a patient. A well turned out young man rushed over to me, smiling broadly and shaking my hand vigorously. He invited me into the nearby pub for a celebratory drink, which I had reluctantly to refuse. It appeared he had turned his life around.

There were the little gifts given out of kindness and generosity, so that they could not be refused. Women who could knit gave tea cosies – one of which I still use today, and woollen gloves for the winter.

There were many many more tales spanning numerous years that could be told, all a mix of the good and the bad and, like the little white rose of Scotland, are sharp and sweet and break the heart.

The problems have not gone away and we must take any opportunity to provide the needed alternatives. Sistema is clearly one to grasp through music, perhaps expanding into other activities, and providing a route to a better way of living, away from the negative and destructive ways induced by inequality and disadvantage.

It goes further. We must embrace primary prevention for both health and social problems. That means we have to identify the causes of the condition and remove them, so that the condition does not arise in the first place.

While waiting for that, let the bands play and the choirs sing.

Let us have more Sistema.

Morag Parnell is a retired GP and a member of Democratic Left Scotland.

NOTE

For pictures of the Raploch children in action go to http://makeabignoise.org.uk/photos/

There are also some wonderful photographs of the Venezuelan children on their website.
The Strange Death of Labour Scotland written by Eric Shaw and Gerry Hassan has provided a timely account of Labour in Scotland. Once you get over the odd and inaccurate title – only if taken literally – it’s quickly apparent Shaw and Hassan have written a well-researched book that’s filled a gap in the chronicles of modern Scottish Labour Party history. In particular, Labour’s recent past against the backdrop of devolution and the reformation of the Scottish Parliament, makes up the bulk of the book.

Undertaking a comprehensive and accurate study of any political party is no easy task. Shaw and Hassan manage it with an effective contrast of style, Eric Shaw providing an academic and conceptual framing of his chapters, an approach that complements the more commentarial approach of Hassan. The task they face is, arguably, multiplied when researching the Labour Party with its web of component parts, dynamics and tensions.

Labour is not one-dimensional in the way that lazy caricatures often seek to show, but rather is a complex animal with a multiplicity of layers, as Shaw and Hassan reveal when peeling many of those away. The diffusion of power within the Labour Party, its democracy and policy-making structures, the tensions between the currently dominant professionalised political class and the grass roots, left versus right, industrial and political and its cultures, traditions and conflicts, are all referred to here.

Most prominently the book deals with the journey to the Scottish Parliament; the consequent adjustment to the newly formed parliament by the Labour Party, north and south of the border; and the effect of this transition on the relationship between the Scottish Party and the wider UK Party. While not a huge tomb that delves into the vast tunnel of Labour politics and culture at local, regional and national levels, there is enough evidence here for lessons to be drawn in relation to the machinations of the contemporary Labour Party in Scotland. As such this should be a book that is of interest for scholars and, if they can get past the title, for the current Scottish Labour Party as it seeks redemption and attempts to claw back its lost support.

SERIOUS HEALTH WARNING

The clue to the book’s central thesis is in the title. No-one, least of all serious researchers like Shaw and Hassan, would suggest the Labour Party is currently lying on the mortuary slab. Yes, it has been issued a serious health warning, but to pronounce death would be premature. What Shaw and Hassan suggest is that Labour in Scotland has been seriously injured and, if it is to fully recuperate, drastic surgery will be required.

The title is, of course, in large part ironic; that Labour ever dominated Scotland is a myth in urgent need of demystification. Electoral Labour was never totally dominant and success was often derived from the distortions of First Past the Post. However, in reading the book it’s apparent that Shaw and Hassan distinguish between the notion of a Labour Scotland and Scottish Labour as an electoral force. The perception of Scottish Labour as an all-powerful political force was a phenomenon generated in the 1980s and 90s when Scots railed against Thatcherism and punished the Tories at the ballot box, a demise that saw Scottish Labour benefit as a result.

Nevertheless, to suggest that the political dominance of Labour was, to a large extent, a myth does not prevent one from arguing, as the authors do, that there was a sense of a “Labour Scotland”. Shaw and Hassan attempt to capture and to conceptualise what constituted this sense of a “Labour Scotland” that had an extended influence over Scottish political and public life. They hypothesise that there were three institutional pillars that provided the foundation for hegemony of a “Labour Scotland” to thrive and with it electoral success. Moreover, and importantly for the purposes of the book and the argument it asserts, Shaw and Hassan maintain that the weakening of these pillars explains why Labour in Scotland finished second to the SNP in 2007 and again in 2011.

The pillars the authors identify are council housing, domination of local government and the relationship with the trade unions. According to the authors, these pillars “were associated with a powerful idea of Labour Scotland … connected to a feeling of optimism, hope and a shared collective vision of the future”. However, they contend that, over time, the strength of these pillars has diminished and along with it the notion of a “Labour Scotland”.

Consider council housing. In 1981, Thatcher’s “right to buy” saw mortgages replace rent, and social houses became private. As a consequence, by 1991 only 14 out of 72 constituencies had a majority of council housing compared with 40 out of 71 in 1981. A commit-
ment to social housing inevitably created concentrations of Labour support. Providing decent homes with modern amenities was seen as a progressive change from landlordism and, in the minds of many, inextricably linked with Labour. They argue that this shift from council to private housing led to a simultaneous dilution in Labour support.

WEAKER TRADE UNIONS

Similarly, the trade unions provided bulwarks of electoral support at the ballot box and, as explained in other sections of the book, during elections in the form of organisation, finance, resources and manpower. With the decline in manufacturing came a decline in trade union membership. This, it is argued, resulted in a weaker trade union movement and again a weakened Labour Party.

Control of local government was critical to Labour’s supremacy. Shaw and Hassan suggest that Labour domination at local government level established a nexus of support and influence, both inside and outside the party. This domination has been challenged since 1995, most seriously, according to the authors, in 2007.

Local government electoral decline in 2007 could be explained by the introduction of the STV transferable vote system; however, the authors take a more nuanced view and suggest that 2007 was the culmination of progressive decline from previous elections. It is worth noting that these are not shared by many Labour insiders, most prominently local councilors, many of whom attribute Labour’s declining power base to what they regard as the malign influence of proportional representation (PR).

This diagnosis suggests that the wound from which Labour relinquished power was self-inflicted. However, this eliminates from the record the role of the Liberal Democrats, Labour’s coalition partner during the first two sessions of the Scottish Parliament. The Liberals made the introduction of PR a central part of the 2003 coalition agreement; showing how devolution itself, with its own more proportional electoral system, challenged the notion of “Labour Scotland” and led to a sharing of power with this hitherto benign force. Whichever explanation is most accurate, what is clear is that Labour hegemony at local authority level has been eroded and that Labour dominance suffered as a result.

The underlying thesis of a declining Labour Scotland has some merit. However, there is surely something to be said regarding Labour’s political direction, especially since the advent of New Labour. I would have thought a thorough examination of that would also have helped explain why popular support for Labour has declined, not least as the wider political and economic transformation, set in motion by Thatcher and the Tories, was to all intents and purposes accepted by New Labour.

The key pillar of housing is a policy area which highlights the New Labour acceptance of Thatcherism. From the Thatcher government’s housing policy we have observed the destruction of Bevan’s vision, and that of traditional Scottish Labour like Wheatley, that social housing is vital to the creation of the good and mixed society. Today instead, social housing still under municipal control is increasingly associated with high levels of deprivation and its manifestations, of somehow being a second class option and somewhere for the poor and dispossessed to live while those with the wherewithal buy themselves out. Housing policy, rather than living up to Bevan’s vision of the doctor residing next door to the labourer, has increasingly fostered division and Labour’s acceptance of this highlights the ideological vacuum in which the Party has increasingly inhabited under the recent tutelage of New Labour.

Echoing these concerns is the approach taken to trade unions by New Labour. The decline of the trade unions, described by Shaw and Hassan, was not helped by the Tory anti-trade union laws. Yet, New Labour when in power did not, in any substantive way, repeal those laws, with Blair even boasting how UK trade union law would still, even after some light reform (and I stress the word light) be as restrictive as any laws in the Western world. To housing and trade union law you could add an escalating illiberalism, an apparently relaxed approach to privatisation, to concentrations of gratuitous wealth in too few hands and of appalling inequality as they rode the globalised neoliberal wave.

FROM CRADLE TO GRAVE

Not considering, in any substantive way, philosophy and ideology as a key pillar is a weakness of the book. Whether Labour lived up to the perception or not, Labour’s character was allied with the building of the good society where citizens were cared for from cradle to grave, and its retreat from this philosophical starting point, accelerated under New Labour, has undoubtedly led to a simultaneous diminishing of the Party’s core support and merits further consideration.

That said the book, in fairness, does touch upon this. Whilst not providing a comprehensive extrapolation, there is mention of the increased tendency within Labour towards an excessively managerialist and pragmatic focus that is shorn of ideological clarity. Of course, it’s the case that governments must manage and govern effectively while facilitating stability, security and protection for the people they serve. However, how they achieve these objectives is crucial. They should be underpinned by principles, not clichés. It is not enough, in countless speeches and articles, to simply draw from the well of socialist rhetoric without policies that turn words into reality.

Political parties must be honest with their electorate and not seek
to be all things to all people. To the cost of all working people we all understand that the Tories know whose side they are on. Labour, or to be precise New Labour, as a consequence of their ideological abdication suffered from an identity crisis, apparently unsure about whose side they were on; according to the authors this was an image Scottish Labour could not shake: “[The] reluctance or inability to engage in any systematic and sustained way with New Labour advocates over the philosophical trajectory of the party deprived Scottish Labour of a clear and distinct profile. It exposed it to the criticism that it was ideologically barren and backward-looking ... the failure to chisel out a sharp sense of what it stood for, what it was trying to achieve and what values animated it was to render it electorally vulnerable to a party less inhibited about its social democratic credentials.”

Prior to discussing this vulnerability it is important to acknowledge that Shaw and Hassan illustrate that Labour in Scotland did not always accept the New Labour line. In education and health policy, for example, Scottish Labour, motivated by the perception of a more collectivist instinct in Scotland and a closer relationship with the trade unions, rejected the New Labour programme of ever increasing marketisation. However, the authors, nuanced throughout, also highlight how Labour in Scotland accepted and even embraced the now discredited PFI schemes.

Furthermore, although Labour in Scotland occasionally ploughed their own furrow, they suggest it was often on the basis of practicality not principle. Labour in Scotland shunned overt criticism of Westminster, New Labour policies, and refused to take a stance on contentious issues such as Iraq, dawn raids and Dungavel. Whilst this undoubtedly promoted good intra-party relations, it also left Labour in Scotland open to accusations of being the party of Blair not Benn, and Milburn not McDonnell — an accusation assisted by a falling Labour membership as a result of the Iraq adventure and its inexcusable immigration policies.

The failure to devolve party power along with political power is of great interest to Shaw and Hassan. They strongly imply that Labour, both in Scotland and south of the border, never fully got to grips with devolution. Scotland was not expected to radically differ from England, a tacit understanding encapsulated in the no surprises convention, though, as explained in the book, this convention was not adhered to by Henry McLeish when introducing his care for the elderly policy.

**CENTRAL CONTROL**

In general terms, however, they suggest Scottish Labour avoided “Scottish solutions to Scottish problems”. Central control, whether implicit or explicit, was a key dynamic affecting the development of policy in the devolved Scottish Parliament. And, as the book says, the space to challenge this only emerged after the catastrophic 2011 Scottish election when the Murphy and Boyack review recommended some radical structural change within the Party; including a distinct Scottish Leader. How devolved the Scottish Party is and how autonomous its new and first Scottish leader is from its parent party is something that still remains to be seen.

Providing validation for the thesis of the book is the rise and rise of the SNP. Their ascendance provides credence to the proposition suggesting a dilution of “Labour Scotland”. Hinted throughout is how the SNP prospered as a result of Labour neither making clear what it stood for nor establishing a distinct identity in Scotland. Hence, the SNP created a sense that they were now the social democratic option; a territory they allege was abandoned by Labour. Despite the problematic character of this SNP self-aggrandisement (which, incidentally, is increasingly being exposed), there is no doubt that the SNP created a perception of being more social democratic than Labour, assisted, as suggested in the book, by Labour’s ideological ambiguity.

So what must Labour do? The *Strange Death of Labour Scotland* does not prescribe a cure, but it does illustrate areas arguably in need of correction. Particularly, Labour might wish to set out a clear vision of what they stand for and how they intend to get there. It is all very well critiquing, as they do rightly, unfairness and inequality and other failings of capitalism (granted it’s not quite framed in that way) but if not accompanied by a firm direction of travel then such a critique is hollow.

A space for discussion has been created, by the bursting of the neoliberal bubble and the smashing of political and economic assumptions and orthodoxies. Labour has an opportunity to re-evaluate where it stands and develop a set of principles and policies that challenge austerity and seek a redistributive allocation of resources and projects.

Recent developments resonate with key themes in the book: namely how will Labour respond to the challenge laid down by the SNP. The recent intervention by Johann Lamont has initiated a debate over how we pay for public services; this in turn will inevitably stimulate discussion over what exactly Labour stands for. Unfortunately, that debate got off to an inauspicious start. Challenging the principle of universalism using phrases such as “something for nothing” and suggesting that existing universal policies are unsustainable did not signify a radical re-appraisal of policy underpinned by a belief in the need to radically re-allocate wealth.

Nonetheless, Johann Lamont was undoubtedly right to expose the SNP and their assertions that they will provide Scandinavian-style public services with US rates of taxation. But, therein lies the rub. The Scottish Labour leader could, for example, have raised the bar of political discourse by
reminding people how quality, universal, public services should and have to be paid for.

Whether we want quality public services, whether they are free at the point of delivery or not, whether taxation should be regressive or progressive: these are all fundamental questions which, when answered, denote the value system of any political party. If Labour adjusted its policies, it could block the SNP attack from the left flank and regroup in traditional territory, which would once again establish an ideological pillar to which people could coalesce around.

For instance, Labour could declare its value system by arguing austerity is not inevitable, that employment can be fostered by government and not just the market, that education is a fundamental component of individual and societal advance and that universal access to education, from nursery to university, should always be dependent on ability and not ability to pay, that the welfare state is something to be proud of not ashamed and that people on benefits are not undeserving scroungers, but, rather are recipients of our collective social insurance programme, the existence of which is a civilising force in our society. Moreover, and crucially, it could be made clear that all of these can be paid for through a progressive taxation system.

**AUSTERITY AND INDEPENDENCE**

Not dealt with in the book, for obvious temporal reasons, is how Labour in Scotland faces the challenge of destructive and demoralising austerity at the same time as it now faces the challenge of the impending independence referendum. These are issues that are not mutually exclusive. Labour must seriously ponder whether an enhancement of powers, perhaps in a federalist style system, could include a taxation system with a progressive element and thus help create a society that fits with their vision of the just and fair society. In short, Labour’s devolution com-

mission and the wider party would do well to develop a distinct position that’s separate from the questionable and extremely problematic Better Together campaign.

Overall, this is a book that effectively outlines Labour in Scotland’s recent history. However, it goes beyond a simple historiography. Shaw and Hassan realistically situate contemporary Scottish Labour, describing its current state but also, for those who are listening, navigating a path for the future. How that develops remains to be seen; what is not in doubt is that The Strange Death of Labour Scotland, despite the title, provides a useful contribution to debates considering the future direction and revitalisation of Labour in Scotland.

Tommy Kane is a member of the Red Paper Collective and a parliamentary researcher at Holyrood whilst also completing a PhD, researching governance of Scottish Water and Wastewater Services, at Strathclyde University.

**MONEY, MARKETS AND THE GOOD LIFE**

Capitalism has brought vast improvements in living standards but at the same time has exalted some of the most reviled human characteristics. David Purdy welcomes two books that question the obsession with economic growth.

**What Money Can’t Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets**

Michael Sandel (Allen Lane, 2012)

Critics of capitalism, particularly on the left, make two standard charges: that the system is inherently unstable and crisis-prone; and that it generates unacceptable inequalities in the distribution of income, wealth and social advantages generally. These two books offer a critique of a different kind, based on deeper ethical foundations. Without discounting either the gravity of the current slump or the chasm that divides rich and poor throughout much of the advanced capitalist world, both seek to stimulate public debate about what it means to live well and why contemporary capitalism puts the good life out of reach, even for the rich. Harvard philosopher Michael Sandel argues that the advance of markets and money into every aspect of social relations over the past thirty years obliges us to distinguish between a market economy and a market society. A market economy is a tool for organising productive activity. A market society is a way of life in which market values seep into every human activity and social relations are remade in the image of the market.

Focusing more specifically on capitalism with its inbuilt tendency to promote the accumulation of capital by expanding the production of commodities, Robert Skidelsky, acclaimed biographer of Keynes, and his son Edward, lecturer in philosophy at Exeter University, condemn the pursuit of “progress without purpose and riches without end”. Capitalism, they point out, is double-edged: it has brought about vast improvements in material living standards; but it has also exalted some of the most reviled human characteristics: greed, envy and avarice. The time is long overdue for us to rethink our obsession with economic growth in the light of what the greatest thinkers of all ages and
all civilisations have understood by the good life.

Both books highlight the moral and spiritual vacuity of contemporary public discourse, attributing it to two widely held, but deeply flawed precepts: that the state must remain strictly neutral as between competing conceptions of the human good; and that I and no one else am the best judge of my own interests – the former a central tenet of modern liberalism, the latter an axiom of orthodox economics. Taken together, these precepts establish a presumption in favour of making the widest possible use of markets to conduct social transactions, relying on the state only to define and enforce property rights, uphold the rule of law and maintain public order.

Markets pass no judgment on people’s wants and preferences. If consenting adults are willing to buy and sell guns, drugs, sex, kidneys or the capacity to bear children, the only question for libertarians and economists is not whether such exchanges are desirable, but what price should be charged. And where the economy is designed to stir and serve desire rather than meeting need, recognising merit, observing propriety or cultivating the common good, no limit can be set to the growth of GDP for human wants are infinitely expandable.

CREEPING MARKETISATION

Sandel describes the variety of ways in which, over the past thirty years, market norms and practices have spread to areas of life where they do not belong. Paying to jump the queue, for example, was once unheard of and is still taboo in many areas of life where it has spread to areas of life where it previously did not belong. Paying to jump the queue, for example, was once unheard of and is still taboo in many areas of life where it previously did not belong. With the arrival of fast-track services through airport check-in desks, security screening and passport control, you can always hire someone to stand in line on your behalf. Clearly, if money comes to buy more and more – political influence, good medical care, a home in a safe neighbourhood, access to elite schools – the distribution of income and wealth comes to matter more: inequalities carry a sharper sting. However, unfairness is not the sole or even the main problem with creeping marketisation.

Consider the growing use of cash incentives to induce behavioural change. In the West, we have long imposed fines for speeding or littering, while in China stiff financial penalties are visited on parents who breach the one-child policy. More recently, some US cities have introduced cash rewards to improve the attendance, conduct and performance of school students or to promote healthy lifestyles by getting people to lose weight or stop smoking. Questions of distribution arise in these cases too. Where fines are levied at a flat rate, varying only with the seriousness of the offence, not with the offender’s income, the rich may flout the law with impunity, effectively treating the fine as a fee. For this reason, in Finland penalties for speeding are proportional to the offender’s income. So far, the record for the most expensive speeding ticket stands at €170,000 (about £147,000).

MARKET NORMS AND NON-MARKET VALUES

The power of money to subvert the intended effects of the law points towards a more general problem with the use of cash incentives: the monetary motive tends to displace higher motives. Good health, for example, is not just a matter of achieving the right cholesterol level or body mass index; it also requires us to develop the right attitude to mental and physical well-being and to treat our minds and bodies with respect. Bribes are manipulative, even when the behaviour they seek to induce is in our own best interests: they bypass our critical faculties and substitute an extrinsic reward for an intrinsic reason. They induce us to do the right thing for the wrong reason. And on a practical level, if we fail to acquire the attitudes and habits that promote good health, the bad old habits may return when the financial incentives end.

Similar issues arise in connection with carbon offsets and tradable pollution permits. Such “sin taxes” are designed to put a price on the damage our energy use inflicts on the planet and to oblige us to pay the price, person by person (or firm by firm) of putting it right. A laudable aim, one might suppose. But as with the sale of papal indulgences in the middle ages, the danger is that we come to regard them as a painless device for buying ourselves out of the more fundamental changes in attitudes, habits and ways of life that are required to tackle the problem of climate change.

There are, of course, some goods that money can’t buy: the Nobel Prize, say. There are also goods that money could buy, but shouldn’t: human kidneys, for example. The reasons, in each case, are connected. To attempt to buy an honorific good is to undermine it. Once word gets out that a prize has been bought, it no longer conveys or expresses recognition of merit or achievement. At first sight, the kidney case looks different. After all, a kidney will still function (assuming a good match) even if it is sold for money rather than being freely donated. But this is to ignore the cultural consequences of commercialisation. Introducing markets for kidneys degrades the object exchanged, along with the social norms and relationships involved.

In his book The Gift Relationship, Richard Titmuss (1970) compared the systems of blood collection in the US and the UK. Then as now, the US com-
combined the commercial sale of blood with supplies donated by unpaid volunteers, while the UK relied exclusively on voluntary blood donation. The former system, Titmuss showed, is not only less efficient than the latter, with chronic shortages, higher costs, more waste and greater risks of contamination; it is also morally inferior because, besides exploiting the poor, it erodes people’s sense of obligation to donate blood, diminishes the spirit of altruism generally and undermines the gift relationship as an active force in social life.

**KEYNES’S PROPHECY**

The Skidelskys’ contribution to the project of reconstituting economics as a moral science begins with Keynes’s prophetic essay, *The Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren*, written in 1928, but not published until 1930 in the early stages of the Great Depression. Raising his sights above the immediate crisis, Keynes asks what wealth is for and, on the presumption that making money cannot be the permanent business of mankind, invites us to imagine life after capitalism. If, he argues, historical rates of capital accumulation and technical progress are maintained for the next 100 years, with no major wars and no significant increase in population, then by 2030 people in the West will be able to satisfy all their material needs at a fraction of existing work effort (3 hours a day or 15 hours a week). And having finally shaken off the “curse of Adam”, they will be free to devote their lives to leisure pursuits, understood not as passive, hedonistic consumption, but as spontaneous, purposive activity undertaken for intrinsic reasons rather than financial gain. At this point, there being no further need to develop the productive forces, capitalism can be put to rest, its historic work complete.

Keynes’s long-range prediction of output growth has proved roughly correct. But this was because, despite the destruction caused by the Second World War and a 30% rise in population, he underestimated the growth of productivity (output per worker or per hour worked). The two mistakes cancelled each other out. As a result, over the 70 years after 1930, per capita income in the West grew fourfold, enough to raise the average incomes of manual workers to the level enjoyed by the professional classes in Keynes’s day, his informal benchmark of material sufficiency.

Hours of work, however, did not fall as anticipated. In 1930 people in the industrial world worked, on average, a 50-hour week. Today they work a 40-hour week. Hours worked per year fell by more than hours worked per week thanks to a rise in statutory holidays from one week in 1930 to four weeks now, though offsetting this gain in free time is the increase in time spent on commuting and household work (about 30 minutes more per week than in 1961 because time spent on shopping and childcare has risen by more than time spent on cooking and cleaning has fallen).

Averages can be misleading. There are sizeable variations between countries: average annual working hours are around 1,800 in the US, 1,650 in the UK and 1,400 in Germany and the Netherlands. There are also divergences in hours worked by different groups within each country: some workers are wholly unemployed; some, mostly lower paid, work less than they want; and others, mostly higher paid, work more than they need. (The workaholic rich have replaced the idle rich: social status no longer confers immunity from labour.) And we spend more of our lives in education and retirement than our forebears did. But since education nowadays is mostly training for jobs, it should be counted as work. Retirement, that expanding gap between work and death, is more naturally thought of as leisure. But it seems perverse to pack so much leisure into the last years of life when we are less able to enjoy it.

**KEYNES’S MISTAKE**

Why was Keynes wrong about the fall in hours of work? One problem is conceptual: Keynes failed to distinguish between wants and needs, using the terms interchangeably. Given that hours of work had fallen substantially between 1870 and 1930, he simply assumed that the more income people had, the less they would want (and need) to work. Contemporary economists, by contrast, have no use for the concept of need and deal only in wants, which, as noted earlier, are infinitely elastic and therefore insatiable.

In fact, working hours continued to fall in the post-war years, albeit far more slowly than before, but the trend levelled out in the 1980s and has remained flat ever since. The Skidelskys explain this as follows. Over the past thirty years, as the balance of market power has swung in their favour, the rich have appropriated most of the gains from productivity growth. Hence, in most countries, median income – that is, the income of the person in the middle of the distribution – has risen more slowly than average income. Indeed, in the US it has not risen at all. This fact alone accounts for much of the failure of working hours to fall as Keynes expected.

At the same time, “capitalism has inflamed our innate tendency to insatiability by releasing it from the bounds of custom and religion within which it was previously confined” (p40). Four inflammatory forces are identified: advertising, “the organised creation of dissatisfaction”; the spread of competitive, status-driven consumption, with its bandwagon effects, snob goods and conspicuous display; the hostility of free-market ideology to the idea of “enough”, variously condemned as effete, patronising and contrary to our natural desire to “better ourselves”; and the monetisation of the economy, which in enlarging the sphere of monetary measurement, calculation and comparison
The Skidelskys conclude that the only way to escape from the treadmill of growth is to retrieve the idea of the good life from centuries of neglect and distortion, drawing on the rich storehouse of pre-modern wisdom bequeathed to us by the greatest minds of both West and East, from Aristotle and medieval Christianity to the Brahminic, Confucian and Taoist traditions. These philosophies differ on many points, but all agree that commerce and wealth should be subordinate to politics and the life of the mind, and all regard the love of money for its own sake as a mental aberration. “Such agreement between three great and largely independent cultures ought to give us pause. In matters concerning the human good, the opinion of the world cannot err entirely” (p86).

Other contemporary critics of the growth juggernaut argue: (1) that it fails to make us happier; or (2) that it is environmentally disastrous. These claims, the Skidelskys note, may be true, but they fail to capture the deeper objection to endless growth: that it is senseless. “To found the case against growth on allegations that it is damaging to happiness and the environment is to invite our opponents to show that it is not damaging in these respects – an invitation they have been quick to take up” (p7). The limits to growth lie neither in the nature of the human psyche nor in the nature of the physical world, but in our capacity to restrain our appetites, expand our minds and re-organise our social world in accordance with our best collective judgment of what is good for us, both each individually and all of us together.

In their penultimate chapter, the Skidelskys outline the elements of the good life, conceived as a life worthy of desire, not just one that is widely desired. Noting that there is a wide consensus across cultures and ages about the “basic goods” that constitute living well, while acknowledging that any list of such goods is open to debate, they specify four criteria of inclusion. Basic goods are universal in the sense that they belong to the good life as such and not just to some particular, local version of it; final, meaning that they are good in themselves, and not just as means to some other good; sui generis, i.e. not part of some other good; and indispensable, meaning that anyone who lacks them may be deemed to have suffered a serious loss or harm.

Seven goods meet these criteria: health, security, respect, personal autonomy (the ability to frame and execute a plan of life reflective of one’s conception of the good), harmony with nature, friendship and leisure (understood not just as time off work, but as a special kind of activity in its own right). Growth might be pursued as a means to one or more of these basic goods. Health requires decent food and medicine; leisure requires time away from toil; and so on. Or it might be pursued for short-term pragmatic reasons: during a recession, with high unemployment and public debt, growth is rightly a priority. But perpetual growth is not only unnecessary to achieving the basic goods: it may actually damage them. This is because the basic goods are essentially non-marketable; they cannot be bought and sold. An economy geared to unlimited commodity production will tend to crowd them out, replacing them with inferior marketed surrogates. The scale of what we might call social corruption in the UK and other rich countries is not something that can be precisely measured. But to judge by the various statistical proxies for the seven basic goods presented in Chapter 6, the general verdict is that while per capita income has more than doubled in Britain since 1974, the basic goods have either not grown at all or atrophied.

I find these arguments compelling. Of course, there is room for debate about what policies are required to provide basic goods for all and how such policies are to be enacted. The Skidelskys’ thoughts on these matters are little more than preliminary sketches. Nevertheless, the vision of the good life they offer is one that should appeal to anyone who is dismayed by the state of our society, rejects market individualism and aspires to raise the moral condition of the people. As they say (p218): “The greatest waste now confronting us is not one of money but of human possibilities. ‘Once we allow ourselves to be disobedient to the test of an accountant’s profit,’ declared Keynes in 1933, ‘we have begun to change our civilisation.’”

David Purdy is a regular contributor to Perspectives and a member of Democratic Left Scotland.

REFERENCE
It was good enough for Kingsley Amis, John Gardner and Sebastian Faulks. They all had a go at updating Ian Fleming’s immortal creation. Now David Cameron has spent the recent festive season scribbling a James Bond novel. But, as **Tim Haigh** reveals, the PM had a little trouble settling on a title …

Quantum of Competence

Decide Another Day

On Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs

Sterling is Forever

Licence to Quantitatively Ease

The Newspaper Editor Who Loved Me

But eventually he came up with …

SKYPLUMMET

Bond snapped awake, ready for action, and groaned out loud as he remembered that he was the British Prime Minister. Bond lay there considering the work to be done. Frankly, thinking about it was the part he liked. The best Parliamentary division of the day is the one you have in your mind before you actually go to the House of Commons. He remembered last night with Sam Gale, and how he had done to her what Angela Merkel was doing to the Greeks. He could still hear her moaning, “Oh heaven! Oh heaven!” That was him. Double oh heaven. “That reminds me”, thought Bond, “I haven’t fed the cat.”

Bond padded downstairs. “Omnishambles…” he called softly. “Here, boy. Here Omnishambles.”

The animal was nowhere to be seen. Bond descended the great staircase past the portraits of his predecessors, Connery, Moore, Holness. A crack of light showed around the green baize door of the cabinet room.

Bond drew his weapon and cautiously entered the room.

Osborne stabbed at a retro sixties control panel, cunningly concealed in the white cat’s bottom.

The PM’s chair was in shadow, and its occupant was obscured to him. Only the white cat he was stroking in his lap gave away his identity.

“Come in, Mr Bond. We’ve been expecting you.”

“Ernst Stavro Osborne”, muttered Bond. “I might have known.”

Bond was impressed. Around the cabinet table was the entire ruling cadre of the World Domination League, also known as … (three ominous chords descend a minor third) … The Bullingdon Club.

“We’ve come to talk to you about the election”, said Osborne

“The election? But that’s weeks away.”

“Years.”

“That’s what I meant.”

Osborne made an expansive gesture with his free hand. “You’re just in time, Mr Bond. We have arranged an entertainment for an old friend of yours.”

Osborne stabbed at a retro sixties control panel, cunningly concealed in the white cat’s bottom. A panel in the wall slid upwards to reveal a screen
showing a naked Liam Fox stumbling through a field somewhere in Oxfordshire. Bond glanced at the empty chair where Fox had used to sit in Cabinet until it was discovered that he was in fact two dwarves jobsharing by standing on one another’s shoulders. The baying of hounds echoed close by and spurred Fox to a clumsy run. He cast a terrified look behind him as the first of the dogs caught him.

Bond was unshaken. Stirred, but unshaken. “Fox on the run”, he said coolly. “He failed, Mr Bond. This is the Conservative Party. We do not tolerate failure.”

“What about your record, Mr Bond?” piped up Grant Shapps, “... if we didn’t tolerate failure, this room would be practically empty.”

Most of those present began to shuffle uncomfortably in their seats. “Thank you, Number Three.” “... I mean: capping tax relief on charity giving, failed electoral reform and constituency adjustments, badgergate, the West Coast Line railway franchise fiasco, forest sell-off U-turns, David Laws and the amazing 17-day ministerial career, wind farm U-turns, and don’t get me started on the economy...”

“I said thank you, Number Three.” “... not to mention aircraft carriers with no airplanes, Vince Cable’s war against Murdoch, NHS U-turns, awarding money to schools and then changing our minds, Welfare to Work, Group 4 and the Olympics...”

“Yes, alright, Number Three!” “And now the trees dying. Our arboreal policy is in tatters. The LibDems are calling for root and branch reform...”

The white cat yelped as Ernst Stavro Osborne stabbed another control, and Shapps’s chair tilted suddenly backwards, depositing him in a tankful of piranhas. “Snappy”, said Bond. “And now, Mr Bond”, said Osborne, “Let us discuss your replacement.”

“Listen”, said Bond, “I know my administration has been an eye-watering catalogue of disasters, cock-ups and U-turns, and in fact an object lesson in the law of unintended consequences, but I have a plan.” “Do tell.” “I’m going to blame Gordon Brown.” Osborne shook his head sadly. “I’m afraid that card has already been played”, he said. “Overplayed. Besides; we are rich. The country can go to hell in a handcart, for all we care. The only thing that matters is who is in the driving seat.”

Bond watched in horror as Osborne reached up to his neck and clawed at the skin. He dragged the lifelike latex mask up over his head revealing his true identity. Bond found himself face to face with his mortal enemy: Ernst Stavro Farrage.

“I like this chair”, said Farrage. “I think I will keep it.” “But I’m Prime Minister!”

“We have no confidence in your ability to win the election, Mr Bond.”

“Do you expect me to form another coalition?” “No, Mr Bond. I expect you to lose.”

Tim Haigh is a critic, reviewer and broadcaster. His podcasts on books and literature are available online at http://timhaighreadsbooks.com/
The Baltic is something I always visualised as a bodily parasite, but on this occasion it was the destination for my first holiday at sea. It was going to be in the footsteps, or should I say the wake, of a young naval officer from Inverkeithing, which is just across the Firth of Forth from where I stay and only two miles from where I embarked on the good ship Boudicca.

Early in the eighteenth century this young officer was seconded to the Russian Imperial Navy where his leading role in the defeat of the Turks at the battle of Chesma and later the Swedes at the battle of Hogland helped his meteoric rise through the ranks to Admiral Samuel Greig (father of the Russian Navy). While checking my Baltic itinerary I was delighted to discover I was due to visit Tallinn where his tomb occupies a spot in the cathedral, so as a fellow Scot I could pay my respects.

Leaving Edinburgh with its history, stunning town plan and internationally renowned cultural festival I was sceptical about what the Baltic ports had to offer, but how wrong could I be!

Our first port of call was the small Danish town of Aalborg, which had a Viking history of rape and pillage while we Scots were still knocking lumps out of each other in clan warfare. This Hanseatic port, with its fine old buildings and magnificent Lutheran church, probably traded with Leith at one time. In the past when sanitation was non-existent the water quality was poor so the locals drank only beer and were permanently intoxicated, hence the urge to sail off and find new places to settle. I noticed while strolling around that some road repairs had inadvertently uncovered a few graves with the skeletons on view. It was roped off until the authorities decided what to do with them. They had a large part of their town flattened by the RAF during the German occupation, however they do not hold a grudge against us for this!

Next was a visit to Stockholm, a beautiful city built on 14 islands. It is only possible in a day and a half to scratch the surface of this exciting capital. I first visited the oldest part which reminded me of Edinburgh’s old town with its narrow cobbled streets where all human waste was thrown from the tall buildings into these alleyways. From there I was bussed to the pretty little lakeside town of Sigtuna with its Viking boats and ancient churches. But of all the sites we saw that day, the stand-out attraction was the Vassar museum. This seventeenth century galleon has been raised from its watery grave in which it sank within a mile of its maiden voyage. It is in nearly perfectly preserved condition after 400 years under the water of Stockholm harbour.

Sailing from the Gulf of Finland into the port of Tallinn does not prepare you for the spectacle of this very picturesque town with its turreted town walls, narrow cobbled streets and myriad of churches serving every known religious faith except perhaps the Wee Frees. It was in one of their many merchant houses (the society of blackheads) that I was treated to an Estonian folk dance performed by enthusiastic youngster. And boy could they move it.

I woke up in St Petersburg next morning to the sight of rows of stereotypical soviet-style housing blocks as far as the eye could see. The initial disappointment did not last long for the city tour took me past these blocks to discover the truly amazing scale and beauty of this cosmopolitan cityscape, with wide boulevards, golden domes and spires, with the rivers and many canals and bridges separating the different quarters. The Russian Orthodox Church On The Spilled Blood, which resembles St Basil’s in Moscow’s Red Square, was designed by Scottish architect Alfred Parland. My visit to the Winter Palace, which was the home of the Russian royal family, especially the gold and diamond rooms, was without a doubt the highlight of my trip. I learned that, for instance, Catherine the Second had a thousand gowns bejeweled with precious stones. I found it equally as difficult to measure the wealth in the Hermitage as to understand why the revolution took so long to happen.

Copenhagen, my last port of call, did not disappoint. My shore-based tour was partly on a bus and then I boarded a barge which took me through the canals and onto the harbour. The city suffers from what most medieval towns do, that is traffic congestion, which made the waterbus tour so enjoyable. Ancient this city may be (they have just celebrated its 900th birthday), but while digging for a new underground system, they discovered wooden piles dating from the 6th century. It is an architectural delight with its beautiful £800 million waterside opera house, the Black Diamond library, the four royal palaces all facing each other around a statue of an early king which cost more than the four palaces in total, as well as various other exceptional buildings by world-renowned designers.

Having spent seven days in the delightful Baltic ports and five days cruising I can honestly say that I had a holiday filled with culture, entertainment, activity, amazing views, excellent food and new friends. However, unlike Admiral Samuel Greig who stayed on in Russia to marry, raise a family and die there, I have decided that “east, west, hame’s best”.

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**DIARY**

John Crichton dons The Hat and pays his respects to the Scots father of the Russian Navy.

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