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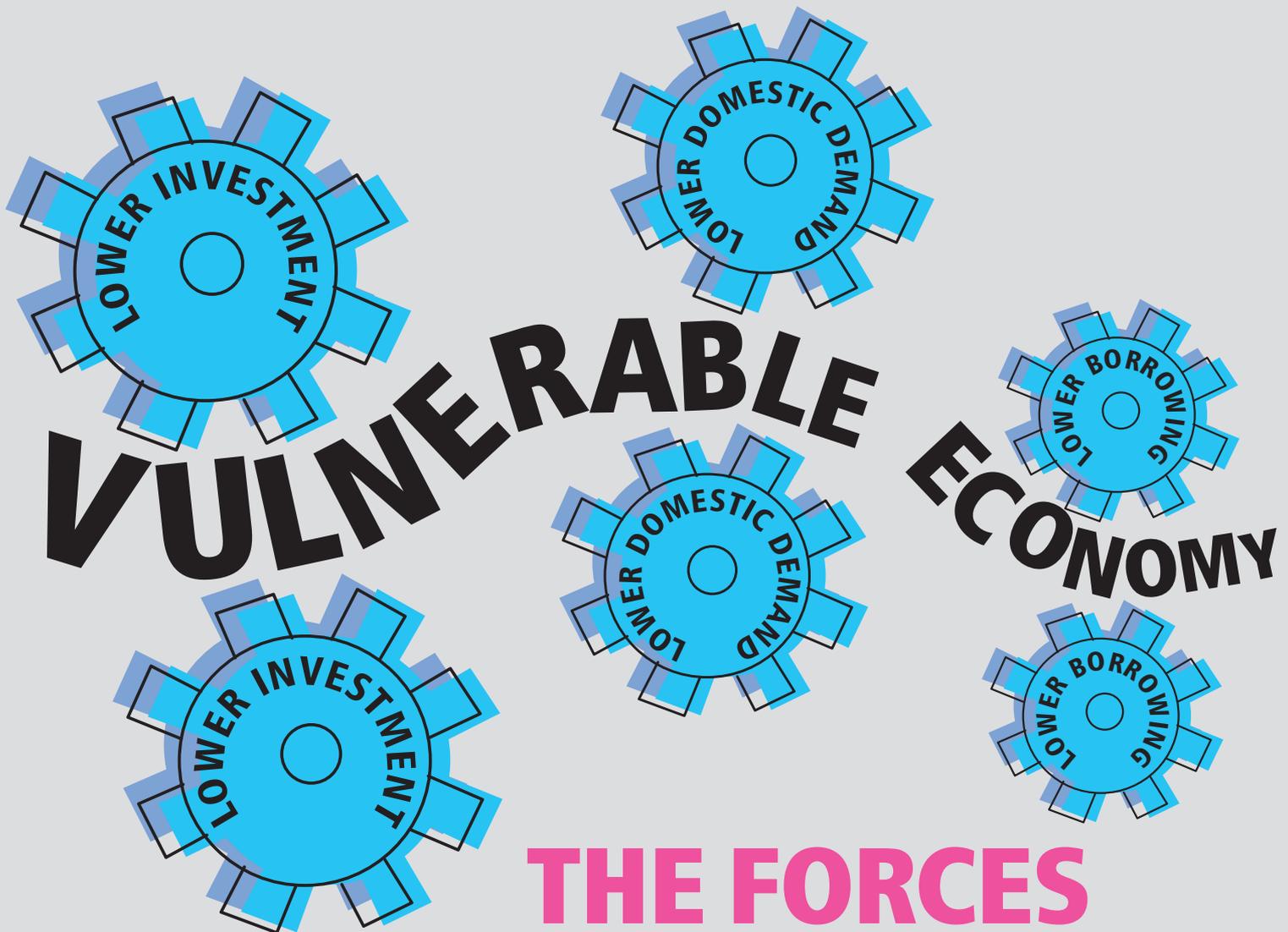
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radical feminist green

# Perspectives

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## THE FORCES DRIVING SCOTLAND'S ECONOMY

**Plus** – Bringing policy making closer to the people of Scotland – a progress report

MAGAZINE OF SCOTLAND'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

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## CONVENER'S COLUMN

# OVER THE RAINBOW

As the results came in the celebrations started. Those that had grown tired of the grey politics of the first Scottish Parliament were enthused by the glimmers of green and red that were beginning to appear and grow. If the Scottish Parliament is to be about a "new politics" then it will require new faces and new parties. A start has been made.

Our politics, it should be remembered, are ever increasingly complex. Our votes are shared between the town hall, Holyrood, Westminster and Europe. Given recent events we cannot ignore the international context. Despite all this democracy only half of those registered to vote on May 1st did so.

Those of us that wish to progress a radical agenda may have some cause for cheer, but changing the politics within the Scottish Parliament and (arguably more importantly) without will still require effort on a number of fronts. The parties promoting variations on the Blairite agenda – Tory, Labour, Liberal Democrat and the SNP – retain a massive majority. The similarities on economic and social policy suggested a continuation of a political orthodoxy that produces an increasingly impoverished and alienated society – an increasingly unsustainable environment.

But the cohesion of this alliance needs to be tested. The SNP may now turn on Swinney, focusing on his limitations as leader. But what will be more important is a discussion that looks at where a "national" party should position itself in relation to independence. A politics of gradualism that embraces the spectrum of increasing fiscal powers to "technical independence" could shift the centre of Scottish politics. At least of equal importance is the SNP's relationship to social democracy. Under Salmond the connection was posi-



Those of us that wish to progress a radical agenda may have some cause for cheer

tive; Swinney moved quickly to a more Blairite agenda.

The other serious dilemma relates to Labour, or at least to McConnell – it is yet to be seen what discipline and differences will emerge amongst the new 50. As the key party of the coalition it appears its wish is to continue with, at best, a social policy that is superficially progressive and an economic policy that is largely regressive. We await the development of a distinctly Scottish Labour approach to Scottish politics.

The relationship that develops between the Greens and the SSP is one that will be watched with interest. Whether these parties to the left of Labour can form alliances with those inside it remains to be seen. What challenge they can provide to the approach of the Executive, when required, is a question that some have already begun to ask. But they will need others.

Comparable importance should be given to the relationship that civil society could have with the different competing and coalescing groups in Holyrood. The potential for this has now positively grown. But more important still will be the ability of any emerging "rainbow

*Continued on page 15*

## Developing Perspectives

This issue of **Perspectives** was due out at the beginning of the year, but, for a number of reasons, has been held up. Apologies to writers, readers and subscribers for the delay. We hope to reach our target of regular quarterly publication with forthcoming issues.

One area we are particularly keen to improve on is reader contributions, in the form of both letters and longer responses to articles in **Perspectives**. Please write to the editor at the address listed in the panel on this page.

Lastly, if you haven't already done so, please take out a subscription to the magazine. It means you get your copy as soon as it is produced and it also provides a source of income to help cover production costs. There's a form elsewhere in this issue, so, please, sign on the dotted line. Thanks!



## EURIG SCANDRETT'S



**T**here's a battle going on over resources. Just as I put the final touches to DLS's publication on sustainable economics for Scotland (just published), the significance of an ecological understanding of economics is evident.

The conflict over Gulf oil took the form of full-scale warfare. That the conflict between the USA and Saddam Hussain concerned access to oil is now widely suspected. It was only a few months ago that CND was reluctant to draw attention to the oil connection because the public wouldn't accept it. I have recently been reading the ecological Marxist James O'Connor, who highlighted that "oil and energy capital ... enjoy a privileged place in the political economy. The 'energy question' is not seen as an issue in international trade but rather as a question of 'national security' in the United States and Europe."

He went on to say "The United States consumes over 25% of world oil production. The country imports almost 50% of its supplies, over half from the Middle East ... which contains over two thirds of the globe's known oil reserves ... It is thus no exaggeration to say that the prosperity of the North depends more on Persian Gulf crude oil than on any other single economic factor. This was particularly true when the Bush administration decided to continue to neglect energy conservation and the development of alternative energy sources in favour of 'free market solutions'."

O'Connor wrote this in 1991, when the first Bush administration was at war with Iraq over Kuwaiti oil supplies. Since then USA oil imports have increased to 60% of consumption. At production rates of a million barrels per day, Iraq's supplies would last for more than 500 years, longer than any other country's reserves. Even without Saddam Hussain, you could predict who the USA would want to invade, whether through military or diplomatic means. Venezuela, another significant oil exporter, is in chaos, with the oil rich sectors of society defending their privilege against the poor. The poor never benefited from the

**At production rates of a million barrels per day, Iraq's supplies would last for more than 500 years, longer than any other country's reserves.**

oil wealth and it was they who put Chavez in power, and returned him to power after the coup. Meanwhile, Venezuelan oil output has dropped to 10% of what it was before the crisis.

Closer to home, and a very different resource conflict. Scotland's land is being redistributed – but just a wee bit. The battle over land in Scotland is being portrayed in some media as land grabbing, echoing Mugabe's belated and populist attempt to redistribute land in Zimbabwe. This is interesting since land grabbing has a fine popular tradition in Scotland. The land raids on Lewis, for example, by demobilised servicemen (veterans?) left with no means of subsistence after the first world war, was an example of popular resistance to Lord Leverhulme's plans for commercial industrialisation of Stornoway. Moreover, in several of the press's current supposed "land grabs" in the Highlands, negotiations over potential community buy-outs has been initiated by the laird.

For those who haven't seen it, Andy Wightman, author of DLS commissioned book *Scotland Land and Power*, has been making the case for extending the right to buy, which rural communities have won in the land reform bill, to urban areas. Current proposals permit the community first right of refusal when land comes on the market, in settlements of fewer than 3000 people. As Andy argues, "there is no logic in this arbitrary threshold that will exclude more than 82% of Scotland's population."

Richard Leonard, recent Chairperson of the Scottish Labour Party, has also argued that community right to buy should also be extended to industry, whereby workers should have first refusal on a company which comes up for sale.

Following this year's elections, we might remind ourselves – what was it that we wanted this parliament for again? Abolition of feudalism and community right to buy are good reasons for having a parliament, though there is still a long way to go. Let's encourage our representatives to be bolder in democratising resources.

# THE FORCES DRIVING SCOTLAND'S ECONOMY

**Sheila Dow** examines the factors which might explain why economic growth in Scotland has been lower and more volatile than that of the United Kingdom as a whole.

The purpose here is to consider the forces at work in the Scottish economy. Understanding these forces not only helps us to understand the problems facing the economy, but also to consider how policy might modify these forces in order to improve economic conditions. In particular, an analysis is offered as an alternative to the dominant view that Scotland's economic problems can be understood as supply-side problems. The focus is put on the interplay between financial and real forces in all sectors of the economy.

The Scottish economy has in the past displayed many of the characteristics of a dependent peripheral economy, with a strong reliance on a few sectors supported by external demand, and on inward investment. These forces have become stronger with the build-up of globalisation in the sense of the increasing centralisation of decision-making within multinational business. Centre-periphery analysis tends to emphasise specialisation in raw material production, where dependence on external demand is often associated with high variability in export earnings. While this is not generally the case for developed economies, it became the case for Scotland with the build-up of oil production from the 1970s. As a result there has been a tendency for economic growth in Scotland to be more

volatile, and on average at a lower rate, than for the UK as a whole.

## **POOR PERFORMANCE**

This account of the Scottish economy incorporates both demand and supply factors. Earnings are dependent on export demand, while inward investment is drawn, not only to sectors which supply an international market but also where production costs are favourable relative to productivity. But it is common now to identify supply-side factors as the primary source of Scotland's relatively poor economic performance. Thus for example the Treasury paper, *Productivity in the UK, 3 – The Regional Dimension*, which accompanied the 2001 *Pre-Budget Statement*, concentrated on productivity as the primary source of regional differentials. (Although the report included a Chart 1.3 which showed that unemployment explained as much of the per capita GDP differential between Scotland and the UK average as did low productivity.) More recently, the edited collection *Scotland in a Global Economy: The 2020 Vision*, published by Palgrave, focuses on supply-side issues, based on the argument that demand issues are subsumed in supply issues.

But this kind of framework (focusing on the supply-demand dual) distracts from the more central aspects of centre-periphery

**It is an important issue with globalisation that decision-making occurs increasingly remotely from the location of production.**

analysis, which refer to power relations. Pricing of raw materials in particular reflects market power; in the case of oil, unusually, much of the power is held by the producers but is exercised mainly by producers elsewhere. Inward investment too is a matter of power relations. It is a commonplace argument that branch plant closures cannot be fully explained by productivity differentials.

## **VOLATILE CAPITAL FLOWS**

Knowledge is a central feature of power relations, since knowledge of the future is inevitably held with uncertainty, and different knowledge is held by different parties. It is an important issue with globalisation that decision-making occurs increasingly remotely from the location of production, so that knowledge of local conditions is inevitably more limited. This is a particular issue for provision of finance; indeed globalisation of production is reinforced by the superior knowledge held by international banks about multinational corporations (compared to national corporations). It is not that limited local knowledge inevitably keeps capital inflows at a low level. Overblown expectations based on limited knowledge can encourage capital inflows which are excessive in the light of real economic conditions (as in the cases of build-up to the debt crisis, and the South-East Asia crisis). But

the limited knowledge base means that expectations of returns are particularly vulnerable to sharp reversals when confronted by something which throws them into doubt (like Mexico's default). So capital flows to peripheral economies tend to be very volatile.

While centre-periphery analysis focuses mainly on inward investment, the framework can be extended to include availability of financial capital more generally. Indeed in this important respect Scotland does not fit the standard centre-periphery framework, given the strength of the Scottish financial sector. The presence of the Scottish financial sector could be said to have limited Scotland's dependence on external financing. The Scottish banks' superior local knowledge is likely to have meant more stable provision of finance within Scotland, based on more reliable expectations of returns.

In order to understand financial relations within a peripheral economy setting, however, we need to go beyond the supply-demand dual whereby we think in terms of a real economy fuelled by the supply of finance by the banks. Instead we need to think in terms of financial relations in all sectors of the economy and how they interact with production, employment and expenditure, against a background history of peripherality and all that entails.

#### **LOW WEALTH BASE**

Scotland's experience, at least over the last century, of relatively volatile economic growth (averaging at a relatively low level) on a relatively low wealth base, has been one of vulnerability. Cycles in export earnings and in inward investment have meant periodic episodes of high unemployment, reduced earnings and falling asset values. A larger cushion of wealth allows an economy to ride out such episodes without forcing asset sales and without significant reductions in standard of living. But experience of hardship remains in the collective memory even when conditions improve

again. The natural response is to be cautious, about expenditure, about financial investment, and about taking on debt. Put another way, a peripheral economy is likely to have a relatively high liquidity preference, not just in times of particular uncertainty in the cycle, but as a general rule. Here liquidity preference is being used in its broadest sense, applying to willingness to go illiquid by increasing physical investment, and by taking on debt, as well as the disposition of saving. In other words, a vulnerable economy is characterised by lower investment, lower domestic demand and lower borrowing to finance these activities, as well as the more conventional expression of liquidity preference in holding assets more liquid. Taken together these factors lead to lower economic growth.

#### **LOWER RATES OF GROWTH**

What evidence we have about Scotland is compatible with this thesis of conservative financial behaviour on the part of households, businesses and financial institutions, relative to the UK average. This conservative behaviour defends the Scottish economy up to a point from dramatic downturns – having inflated less, the Scottish housing market has less far to fall than the market in the South-East for example. But this comes at the cost of lower average rates of growth. The Scottish economy does not reap the benefits from the excesses of booms; it is only where there is a significant cushion of wealth that the greater risks tend to be taken, by both borrowers and lenders, which hold out promise of higher returns. And in any case, conservative financial behaviour does not protect the Scottish economy from loss of markets or sources of inward investment, in a general downturn brought about by excessive growth elsewhere having reached its peak. Indeed the increased liquidity preference which accompanies downturns is likely to lead to an increased reluctance to lend in peripheral economies, further

**A vulnerable economy is characterised by lower investment, lower domestic demand and lower borrowing.**

exacerbating the situation there.

The Scottish financial sector not only contributes significantly to Scottish GDP but also reduces the degree of peripherality as far as bank finance is concerned. But the more tied are Scottish banks to the local economy, the less liquid they are, and therefore the more cautious they need to be in their lending behaviour. The fact that the Scottish banks are extending their markets further afield reduces their exposure to the local economy, making their portfolios more liquid, but at the same time increasing the peripherality of the Scottish borrower.

In conclusion, what has been attempted here is a brief account of the forces driving the Scottish economy understood as an intertwining of borrowing, lending, spending and investing decisions against a backdrop of a relatively low cushion of wealth and long experience of economic vulnerability. Low wealth and vulnerability themselves cannot explain low growth. Indeed it would be instructive to reflect further on the experience in Scotland in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which was a period of high growth relative to a low wealth base. The supply-side literature is addressing the issue of how to encourage entrepreneurship and innovativeness, which characterised that period. It would be useful further to consider the role of the education system and the banking system at that time. All of these thoughts are addressed to the need for a fuller understanding of the driving forces of the economy in the twenty-first century, incorporating both real and financial behaviour, and the institutional structure in which they are embedded.

■ *Sheila Dow is a Professor in the Department of Economics at Stirling University and has published extensively on monetary theory, regional and international finance, the methodology of economics and the history of economic thought.*

# PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM AND THE RELENTLESS MARCH OF THE MARKET

This pamphlet seeks to explain the government's approach to public service reform. Its publication is welcome, if overdue. Hitherto New Labour has notably failed to provide any broad political rationale for its obsession with performance targets and public-private partnerships (PPPs). Whether the Prime Minister's case carries conviction is another matter.

Tony Blair argues that active government and collective provision remain just as important now as they were for the Attlee government of 1945. But the post-war welfare settlement was designed for an age of mass production, when centralised, state-controlled bureaucracies provided standardised, basic services in the name of "Fair Shares for All". Modern public services, by contrast, must match modern expectations of quality, choice and responsiveness to individual and local needs. The task of reform, therefore, is twofold: to devise new ways of pursuing Labour's traditional commitment to social justice; and to "affirm our status as citizens, while meeting our demands as consumers."

## USER-CENTRED REFORM

The reason Britain's public services fall short of the best international standards, according to Blair, is not just that they were starved of resources under the Conservatives and suffer from chronic undercapacity, staff shortages, low pay and flagging morale, but that they have not been reformed "to deliver in a modern, consumer-focused fashion." Thus, the government's commitment to unprecedented increases in public expenditure on

## The Courage of Our Convictions: Why Reform of the Public Services is the Route to Social Justice

by Tony Blair  
(Fabian Society, £6.95)

health, education and social services needs to be matched by equally radical changes in the way services are provided if they are to offer the flexibility, choice and responsiveness that people have come to expect in other parts of their lives. Bold, user-centred reform is also likely to yield political dividends, for history suggests that Labour governments succeed best when they do not flinch from tackling acknowledged institutional shortcomings. In any case, the alternative to reform is a neo-liberal programme of privatisation and retrenchment, encouraging the minority who can afford it to opt out of collective provision, leaving a cheap safety-net for everyone else and demoralising the public-sector workforce.

## PROCESS OF REFORM

Four interconnected principles are enunciated to guide the process of reform:

- a) Guaranteed national standards of service;
- b) Devolution of power and innovation to the front-line;
- c) A new deal for public service staff, offering better rewards in return for changes in working practices;
- d) Greater choice for the consumer.

Blair goes on to cite various instances of how these principles are being implemented. These include the use of PPPs to help tackle the backlog of public investment, transfer the risk of project delays and budget over-runs from taxpayers to private companies and enhance operational efficiency; the impending award of "foundation" status to top-performing hospitals, which will operate as

"not-for-profit" trusts, free from intrusive central regulation and with local community representation on their governing boards; and the plan to double the number of post-comprehensive, "specialist schools" in England Wales.

There are three main objections to this case. First, it involves a conceptual sleight-of-hand. In general, Blair is right to distinguish between abiding values and adaptive policies. But in this case, the contrast is disingenuous, for on his own account what Blair means by a "just society" is one in which all citizens enjoy equal opportunities to compete for unequal rewards and are expected, in turn, to shoulder corresponding social responsibilities, not one in which the state seeks to overcome or mitigate social divisions by countervailing the logic of the market. Thus he is not simply charting a new route for new times but also commending a new destination which, being less distant from the state we are in, is correspondingly less charged with transforming potential.

## NOTHING LEARNED

Second, it is doubtful whether the government's reform programme will produce the major improvements that it is hoping for. Consider the PPP for the London Underground, which involves contracts worth £20 billion, equal in value to all other PPP projects put together. When several of the companies belonging to the two private consortia waiting to sign these contracts recently came near to collapse, the government stepped in to bail them out, thereby nullifying the alleged advantages of PPPs over traditional methods of public sector finance and management. Nothing, it seems, has been learned from the collapse of Railtrack, which demonstrated, for anyone who had forgotten, that industries requiring large government subsidies should not be privatised: otherwise, money is simply transferred from taxpayers to shareholders.

The government's faith in performance targets as the cure for the ills of the NHS is also question-

able. While most performance indicators are sensible, there are too many of them, and time spent by doctors and nurses reporting information is time diverted from more pressing clinical tasks. Nor do the indicators always discriminate between variations in the performance of individual hospitals and variations in local patient populations. Deprived areas, for example, have a higher incidence of poverty- and drug-related illness, which inevitably raises their mortality rates. One internal obstacle to change is staff scepticism. There have been eighteen NHS reorganisations in the past twenty years. Recurrent upheaval, some observers suggest, has engendered a “shanty-town culture”: people do not expect new structures to last long and lack the enthusiasm and commitment needed to make reforms work.

#### **ETHOS OF CITIZENSHIP**

Finally, even if the reforms confound the sceptics and bring gains for individual service-users, they are likely to damage the ethos of citizenship. For example, to qualify for “specialist” status and the extra funding that goes with it, schools must first raise private sponsorship worth £50,000 and involve sponsors in their government. This reflects a credulous belief in the wisdom of business; it also brings business values into the classroom, celebrating individualism, competition and hierarchy rather than encouraging young people to see themselves as junior members of the wider citizen body. Permitting specialist schools to select up to ten per cent of their intake by ability or aptitude compounds their divisiveness. A central part of the case for comprehensive schools was that they provided a commonality of social experience, forcing those who would otherwise have no social contact to get to know each other. In this sense, despite the PM’s rhetoric, the reform programme marks a further stage in the relentless march of the market.  
**David Purdy**

# POSITIVE CONNECTIONS FOR A POSITIVE FUTURE

The vision for the setting up of the Scottish Parliament was one where politics would be done differently. **Debbie Wilkie** presents a progress report on the “new partnership between politicians, policy makers and people.”

**B**ringing policy making closer to the people of Scotland was the Government’s slogan in the run up to the Scottish Parliament referendum. Some people clearly thought that the act of establishing the Scottish Parliament, following the “yes, yes” vote, finally completed the “unfinished business” famously articulated by the late John Smith MP, former leader of the Labour Party. I prefer to see it as the “beginning of a new sang” as Winnie Ewing MSP put it, because it was not just the creation of the new devolved institutions that people voted for – what *really* fired their imagination was the possibility of a new political environment in Scotland, an opportunity to create rather than just react to the policy agendas that affect them. The vision they articulated, through processes such as the People and Parliament Trust project which gathered the views of hundreds of Scottish people, was one where politics would be done differently in Scotland. A vision of a new partnership between politicians, policy makers and people and a genuine opportunity for people to shape their own and Scotland’s future. It was the promise of the Scottish Parliament being able to deliver this that secured the

overwhelming support for its establishment.

#### **DISENGAGEMENT**

The backdrop to all of this was concern in Scotland, particularly during the 1980s and early 1990s, about the degree of disengagement of civic society from traditional democratic processes. Electoral turnout was poor and, in Scotland, there was dissatisfaction because electors had consistently voted for a different political party to the one that was elected to power in Westminster. It was therefore difficult for a large number of people to feel that their voices were being heard through the existing political settlement and this reinvigorated the campaign for a devolved parliament in Scotland.

The campaign for the Scottish Parliament was spearheaded by a range of civic groups in Scotland, some of which had been set up specifically for that purpose. It was a demonstration of the strength of feeling amongst Scottish people that there needed to be change. So, now that the Scottish Parliament has been established, civic society has a real stake in making sure that change happens and that the vision does not simply lodge in the rhetoric that was the vehicle for generating support for the Parliament.

## POSITIVE CONNECTIONS

Building links, building participation, building partnership – essential parts of a modern living democracy. Six words that make it all sound so easy – after all, surely it is just good common sense to work together for the greater good? Unfortunately it isn't that easy. How often have we agreed with others that it makes good sense to work together to solve problems and to avoid the polemic that our media so often seems to thrive on, only to find that having left that discussion people appear to desert that agreed principle? It is easy to condemn this, but it is also unfair to do so. People elected or appointed to represent a particular range of views have to remain visible to their client groups in doing so and for them it is often a balancing act between doing this and continuing to seek to work constructively with others in way that might achieve real, if what some might view more incremental and less speedy, change.

### SCOPE FOR CHANGE

So, with the Scottish Parliament starting its second term, how is the new system working? Of course there remain the critics who say they are disappointed that the Scottish Parliament has not lived up to expectations. However, it was almost inevitable that this would be the case. The scope for change that could be led by the Scottish Parliament was strongly talked up during the referendum campaign to encourage people to go out and vote. However, large areas of devolved policy, such as education, had already developed a distinctively Scottish character, often leading the way for the UK. There was also always going to be a need for a reasonable lead-in time for policy development in newly-devolved areas. So, it was almost inevitable that it would take time for change to be evident, but it is essential that we make sure that this does not become an excuse for lack of imaginative new ideas. We have begun to see some proof of Scottish solutions to Scottish issues, but there needs to

**The Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament have taken significant steps to break from the old Westminster and Scottish Office mould of policy making.**

be more. Whatever the critics say, however, evidence cited in the recent Scottish Social Attitudes Survey suggests that people in Scotland think that the Scottish Parliament should have more powers than it does and be prepared to take courageous fiscal decisions in relation to its tax-raising powers.

### DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION

The Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament have taken significant steps to break from the old Westminster and Scottish Office mould of policy making. The Scottish Civic Forum recently published its Report of the Audit of Democratic Participation<sup>1</sup>. It concluded that the Parliament had made some good progress towards promoting democratic participation, for example, through making information available through its website and through the Enquiry Service and Partner Libraries across Scotland. The Public Petitions Committee has helped individuals and community groups from all over Scotland raise issues in Parliament with many successful cases, sometimes leading to changes in the law. However, the overall conclusion was that the Parliament still relies too much on people coming to it rather than the Parliament reaching out to local communities around Scotland.

The Scottish Executive now carries out far more consultations than the Scottish Office used to and many civil servants are committed to greater public participation. The Executive has made formal agreements on working with the voluntary sector and civic society and it funds the Scottish Civic Forum. Some Civic Forum members say that they have seen changes to policy and legislation as a result of their responses to consultations; but many more say that they do not know what happens to their responses or how they did or did not affect the developing policy. The report therefore concludes that while some positive steps have been taken, there needs

to be greater clarity about how the civil service uses consultation responses from wider society to shape legislation, policy change and implementation.

The Civic Forum would be the first to recognise that participation done well is not easy. It means setting up processes that are accessible and enabling those who are not “professionally or technically” experienced (in the sense that it is not their paid profession) to be able to get involved. It means recognising that day-to-day life experience is equally as valid as professional expertise. It means giving a commitment to feedback and continuing involvement so that people know that their views have been valued and taken into account and understand why particular decisions have been made.

There remain a number of challenges in promoting democratic participation.

### NEED FOR FEEDBACK

Policy makers in many cases remain to be convinced that working participatively provides a real opportunity that can be turned to their advantage rather than seeing it simply as a hindrance to clarifying “the way” forward that they have already defined. If the need for feedback on how decisions have been reached and views taken into account (or not) is one of the key issues that people in civic society want action on, another is early involvement in policy development.

People want to have a say in identifying the issues that *they* think need to be tackled and the possible options for tackling them, rather than finding out that someone else has decided that a particular issue is the one that needs to be addressed. But this is something that could make life easier for policy makers because it would allow a fuller picture of the relevant issues to emerge and also would allow people to be involved in identifying possible solutions or changes. McCalman and Paton<sup>2</sup>, in the field of employee relations,

argue that “active involvement allows people to be part of the change rather than just being aware of it. Passive involvement in change is unlikely to overcome people’s resistance.” This argument can be applied more widely to change affecting our communities. People want to feel that they have been involved in deciding what the change should be rather than having policies imposed upon them – and unfortunately, that is something that, rightly or wrongly, people still feel happens.

**JOINT WORKING**

If these are issues that need to be taken on board by policy makers, there is also a responsibility on civic groups to rethink their own strategies. Many groups have embraced new ways of working that move away from the mud-slinging polemic that the political environment of the 1980s tended to engender. There is greater joint working and more emphasis on solution seeking proposals. There

**There is still a tendency amongst some, however, to see policy makers as conspirators in keeping people out of policy development processes.**

is still a tendency amongst some, however, to see policy makers as conspirators in keeping people out of policy development processes – a classic, often used, example is when consultation documents are issued just before a holiday period. In reality, this is far more likely to be when Ministers have committed to consult on an issue, say in the autumn, the consultation document taking longer than expected to develop and a pressure that “we must get something out before Christmas.” But people often only find out other people’s perspectives through dialogue which provides some opportunity for stepping into their shoes.

There is too much of a tendency to see dialogic models as being just “talking shops” as if this somehow prevents any positive steps being taken and gets in the way of real progress. Good dialogic models, however, underpin action taken, inform decisions and help to anticipate and iron out potential problems. They provide a more open

and transparent way of working and they promise actions that are the better for wider input and information that is teased out in the process.

In the aftermath of a war that was questioned by many people across the globe, and with unclear connections between these types of momentous decisions being taken and the views of people living in our democracy, it seems all the more important to be pressing the need for making sure that dialogic process is valued as an essential tool to promote democracy.

■ *Debbie Wilkie is Deputy Director of the Scottish Civic Forum.*

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# NETTING CITIZENS

A report on “electronic democracy” in Scotland suggests that provision far exceeds public uptake. **Jane Corrie** was at the launch.



A recent conference in Edinburgh, “Netting Citizens”, saw the public launch of a fascinating piece of research. The paper, *Designing Virtual Citizens – Some Scottish Experiments with Electronic Democracy*, was introduced by its author, Neal Ascherson. Ascherson is a “well kent” figure: a journalist and commentator on Scottish affairs with a staggeringly broad range of geographical and cultural reference. However it is in the less familiar guise as a Research Fellow with the Centre for Theology and Public Issues that he has produced this paper.

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

The broad coalition of civic organisations and political parties that made up the Scottish Constitutional Convention (Democratic Left Scotland was one such organisation) repeatedly articulated a wish to see a different style of governance in Scotland: one that was more open, inclusive and accountable. This wish was encoded in the report of the Consultative Steering Group, which also recommended ways in which the emerging information technology could be used to deepen and broaden public participation in democratic processes. This paper reveals that in its very first term the Parliament’s actual use of information technology has been more imaginative and varied than either the CSG could have predicted or practised Parliament watchers know.

The Parliamentary web-site has proved the “main channel of direct communication with the public” (N.A.). This may seem so obvious we lose sight of how remarkable

this is – for an elected body in the United Kingdom of all places. Despite the fact that so many of us use the web-site we have been far slower to notice two other connected developments. The first is the streaming of live Parliamentary events through web-casting. This began with main chamber business but now all Parliamentary committees are also broadcast live. Hands up who knows that?

## **VOTE ON-LINE**

The second and politically more significant is the development of interactive discussion boards and “forum” features. In October 2002 there were eight such discussions open on the web-site. Their titles ranged from the future of local post offices or the choice of an appropriate memorial to the poet Hamish Henderson to the Middle East crisis. These were all matters recently or currently discussed in the Parliament, sometimes introduced under “Members’ Business”. There is an even more significant move afoot to let the public voice be heard during mainstream Parliament legislation through the use of bulletin boards and chat-rooms, where citizens could discuss issues directly with individual MSPs and even vote on these issues on-line.

Do we know we are heading in this direction? And is this where we want our more participative democracy to go? Ascherson has some trenchant comments and observations.

## **LACK OF STRATEGY**

First of all on our not knowing: “Members of the Parliamentary staff have noticed occasions on

**The Parliamentary web-site has proved the main channel of direct communication with the public.**

which people in the ‘real’ public gallery outnumbered those following a committee session by web-cast – a virtual attendance often in single figures. One member of the Parliament’s staff complained privately of our ‘complete lack of a communications strategy’.

And more generally: “It can be well argued that a new, choosing, e-proficient society cannot be confined in a political system which gives voters only a single chance to influence it every four years. A democracy of continuous choice must be the future. Possibly so; there are many such voices around Holyrood. On the other hand there is also the voice of Professor Klaus Lenk, with his warning that a new technology goes round looking for a problem which it can solve. The fact that ICTs are the perfect toolbox for constructing direct democracy does not by itself mean that direct democracy is urgently needed.” (K. Lenk, *Electronic Government: a Co-operative Perspective*; lecture at University of Edinburgh, 27th February 2002.)

## **LACK OF UPTAKE**

And this is not all. As well as developing its web-site, web-casting and developing interactive on-line discussion the Parliament has also been strikingly innovative in its development of e-petitioning and the “partner library” scheme. Once again actual uptake of these facilities has disappointed the innovators and once again this lack of uptake has not been surprising given the fact that they have not been widely advertised.

The Parliamentary Petitions Committee (PPC) has enjoyed

modest success (498 petitions by the end of last year) and is moderately well known to lobbying organisations and groups. As early as late 1999 however it was decided to open the PPC to on-line petitioning. This is not just a facility to e-mail petitions to the Parliament but an elaborate “e-petitioning” tool which allows the sponsor to add background information and encourages others to express opinions about the petition on an integrated discussion forum. Most importantly, signatures can be added on-line, a step that the European Parliament, using similar technology, has been reluctant to take. By November 2002 however only nine issues had been raised on the e-petition site – seven of them from established interest groups and one each from a community group and an individual.

The partner library scheme has involved 80 libraries throughout Scotland and as well as archiving “hard copy” of the Parliament’s proceedings each library has a publicly accessible computer connection to the Parliament’s IT facilities.

Despite incredibly low levels of apparent public interest librarians themselves remain enthusiastic and committed, commenting that the tide would eventually turn when there were more computers available (under Tony Blair’s “People’s Networks” plans!).

#### **SMALL NATIONAL TRIUMPH**

Ascherson concludes that this variety of innovation represents “a small national triumph unknown to most Scots, and probably to many MSPs. No other legislature, it would appear, has such an extensive and varied panoply of digital communications available to its citizens.” He quotes a senior member of the Scottish Parliamentary staff returning from a visit to the United States. “I thought they would be light years ahead of us. But I found we were light years ahead of them.”

The source of this quote is significant. The new ideas and commitment to using IT in this way has

**This variety of innovation represents a small national triumph unknown to most Scots, and probably to many MSPs. No other legislature, it would appear, has such an extensive and varied panoply of digital communications available to its citizens.**

come not from the Parliament itself but from a handful of MSPs and from the Parliamentary staff. This includes the “Corporate Body” responsible for managing and running the Parliament, and its employees, including Research and Information Services, the Participation Services, the Education Service and the Clerks of the Parliamentary Committees. Members of the staff are not civil servants, although many used to work in the old Scottish Office. They are free from the intrigues and constraints of a large bureaucracy, and from its career pressures to conform. They answer only to the Presiding Officer and the Corporate Body.

#### **ENGINE OF I.T. REVOLUTION**

One particular figure deserves further mention. Jim Wallace, leader of the Scottish Liberal Democrats, voiced the ambitions of the innovators when he spoke at a conference in 1997 of a coming Parliament which should be “the engine of an IT revolution and the blueprint for a new style of computerised democracy, by harnessing digital power and the Internet to put voters and MSPs in permanent instant contact.” It is perhaps significant that he was at the time also MP for Orkney and Shetland – communities very distant from centres of power.

As well as giving the origin and detail of the Scottish Parliament’s technical innovations Ascherson’s paper sets these innovations in the broader political context. He addresses common concerns about the apparent decline in public participation in social and political affairs and takes a measured look at the sometimes millennial claims for the potential of new media to change our lives. Citing an “optimistic” and a “pessimistic” scenario he concludes that “the Scottish Parliament is clearly in the ‘moderate optimism’ category. Its vision for the future is not direct democracy, but the use of a panoply of ICT techniques to render existing representative democracy more popular, more

comprehensible and far more accessible to citizen participation.”

He also offers as part of his argument a summary of the achievements of the Parliament so far – not in terms of policies pursued and legislation passed but in terms of its evolving relationship with the Scottish people – the “power sharing” described in the CSG principles. This includes a look at the work of the Scottish Civic Forum. This body in some ways represents the institutional corollary to the more exciting technical adventures in participative democracy. As an institution it has fallen foul of MSPs’ impatience with consultation processes that engage “the usual suspects”, or “aggregated opinion” to use the cutting term of one particular MSP. However after seeming to dismiss the Civic Forum he goes on to comment “for many years those associations (the discredited ‘usual suspects’) from trade unions to community health projects – were almost the only channels through which public demands could reach government in the form of the old Scottish Office. They have their own roots and legitimacy, and they cannot be evicted from the consultation process altogether.”

#### **DIGITAL EXCLUSION**

Finally there is the issue of major concern to many who read this journal – what about “digital exclusion” – what about the many who have no access to a computer? Is this not just another dimension to social exclusion? Ascherson comments “the general empowerment of those online will increase much faster than that of the digitally excluded. But the rate of household internet penetration is so fast that within a few years the percentage of the digitally excluded will be a mere fraction of what it is today. None the less, this penetration can be expected to slow up dramatically as it reaches the boundaries of chronically disadvantaged social groups. The danger is that a small minority, perhaps less than ten per cent, will come to be abandoned as an

## NETTING CITIZENS

impenetrable, unreachable ‘under-class’.”

The task of the next Scottish Parliament must surely be to avoid this danger. As a price for a more participative democracy it is one that is not worth paying.

■ *Jane Corrie is the Project Development Worker for Democratic Left Scotland.*

Neal Ascherson is the author of *Designing Virtual Citizens – Some Scottish Experiments with Electronic Democracy*. His research was for the Centre for Theology and Public Issues, University of Edinburgh. It was sponsored by the Baird Trust and first published in November 2002.

The paper is published in full in the May edition of the quarterly “Scottish Affairs”. Enquiries to Lindsay Adams on 0131 651 6380 or see [www.scottishaffairs.org](http://www.scottishaffairs.org)

We are grateful to Neal Ascherson for permission to print this article.

## Book launches at the Edinburgh Radical Book Fair

### ■ Eurovision or American Dream?

Friday 30 May at 5pm, Edinburgh Radical Book Fair, Assembly Rooms, George Street, Edinburgh

Should Britain join the euro? Where is the EU going? Must America rule the world? David Purdy, social economist, launches his new book, “Eurovision or American Dream? Britain, The Euro, and the Future of Europe”.

### ■ Scotlands of the Future

Sat 31 May at 10.30am, Edinburgh Radical Book Fair, Assembly Rooms, George Street, Edinburgh

Now the election is over, what sorts of future are possible for Scotland. *Scotlands of the Future*, edited by Eurig Scandrett, and with contributions from, amongst others, MSPs Sarah Boyack (Labour, former Transport & Environment Minister) and Mark Balland (Green), is about to be published by Luath. Speakers at this event will include contributors to “*Scotlands of the Future*”, Barbara MacLennan (Institute of Feminist Economics) and Richard Leonard (former Chairperson of the Scottish Labour Party).

## Announcing two new publications from Democratic Left Scotland and Luath Press

### Eurovision or American Dream? Britain, the Euro and the Future of Europe

By David Purdy

(Democratic Left Scotland and Luath Press, £3.99)

- Should Britain join the euro?
- Where is the European Union going?
- Must America rule the world?

*Eurovision or American Dream?* assesses New Labour’s prevarications over the euro and the EU’s deliberations about its future against the background of transatlantic discord.

Highlighting the contrasts between European social capitalism and American free market individualism, David Purdy shows how old Europe’s welfare states can be renewed in the age of the global market. This, he argues, is essential if European governments are to reconnect with their citizens and revive enthusiasm for the European project. It would also enable the EU to challenge US hegemony, not by transforming itself into a rival superpower, but by championing an alternative model of social development and changing the rules of the global game.

### Scotlands of the Future: Sustainability in a Small Nation

Edited by Eurig Scandrett

(Democratic Left Scotland and Luath Press, £7.99)

- Is Scotland’s economy sustainable?
- What kind of economy would be good for people and the environment?
- How can we develop a sustainable economy without damaging people’s livelihoods?
- What role can the Scottish Parliament play?
- What difference can we make in our organisations, trade unions and businesses?

Devolution has given Scotland a growing confidence. With our educated population and natural resources, we are a wealthy nation. Our parliament has high ideals and strong aspirations, our civil society is robust and people are keen to improve their quality of life.

Yet Scotland is unsustainable. We continue to generate inequality and environmental damage: at home, abroad and across generations. In Scotland, as in other countries, the poorest people live in the most degraded environments. Yet collectively we are rich and our way of life impacts unjustly both on poor people in other parts of the world and on future generations.

This book is a contribution to building a sustainable economy in Scotland, a change that requires action at all levels of society. The authors are all working for a sustainable economy at the front line: within trade unions, business organisations, the women’s movement and environmental groups, as well as in Scotland’s parliament. They bring their experiences of transforming the real world to their vision of a transformed Scotland.

### Contributors:

Mark Ballard, Council Convener, Scottish Green Party; Sarah Boyack, MSP for Edinburgh Central; Stuart Duffin, Chief Executive, West Lothian Chamber of Commerce; Osbert Lancaster, Executive Director, Centre for Human Ecology; Richard Leonard, Industrial Organiser GMB and former Chair, Scottish Labour Party; Barbara MacLennan, International Association for Feminist Economics; Eurig Scandrett, Friends of the Earth Scotland; Mary Spowart, Independent and Parliamentary Researcher

■ Both publications can be obtained from bookshops or from Democratic Left Scotland, 0131 477 2997, e-mail: [dls@newpolitics.org.uk](mailto:dls@newpolitics.org.uk)

# YOUR LIFE IN WHOSE HANDS?

The overall estimated lifetime chance of anyone getting cancer is now one in three. Reducing the risk for future generations depends on a radical change of our view of modern technologies argues **Morag Parnell**.

During the second half of the twentieth century concerned scientists and citizens were issuing increasingly dire warnings about the way we were fouling up our earthly home, disrupting and destroying the very fabric and basic ecological functions which sustain life on this earth. Increasingly we have become aware of the effects of that pollution, yet, less exposed to the public eye and for the same reasons, there were steady increases in the incidences of a range of diseases, particularly of cancers that were rising at a rate of about 1%–2% per year. While immediate political issues, like the Iraq war, must be our primary concern, this problem will not go away. Indeed it will become much worse, and impossible for the world's health services to cope with.

Each age, each culture, each set of conditions produces its own patterns of ill health. In a study of many research papers and reports of the 19th and early 20th century into the prevalence of cancer, Zac Goldsmith found fairly consistent results which can be summed up in a statement made by Swedish scientist Steffanson in 1960 that “from East to West the medical missionaries all looked for cancer and they never found it among the primitive, although they found it among the modernised.”<sup>1</sup>

## CANCER AND INDUSTRIALISATION

This rise in the incidence of almost all cancers has paralleled the spread of industrialisation, with the most advanced countries – the United States, followed by northern Europe – having the highest rates and the least – the African countries – the lowest. Several studies have shown that women emigrating from countries with a low incidence to those with a high incidence – for example from Japan to the USA – match the rates for the host populations within two generations. This has also recently been shown for men with prostatic cancer.<sup>2</sup>

During the twelve months 2000 to 2001, there were one million new cases of cancer reported worldwide, a global increase of 22% since 1990, and the trends indicated that there would be a further rise of 50% over the next two decades.<sup>3</sup>

On September 26th last year the Scotsman headlined the projected increased incidence of breast cancer in Scotland in the next decade of 28%.

In the 1960s, the lifetime risk for a woman in this country getting breast cancer was estimated to be one in twenty. You may well say that was unacceptable. Five years ago, when the Women's Environmental Network campaign for primary prevention of breast cancer started, the rate was one in twelve. It is now one in nine. In the US it is one in eight.

The overall estimated lifetime risk for anyone getting cancer is one in three. Noting that published figures are often calculated on a five or ten years average, and are retrospective, we could reasonably assume that the current rates are even higher.

## PREVENTABLE DISEASE

These cold statistics conceal a mass of suffering, loss of capacity and premature deaths from what is essentially a preventable disease.

Cancer is not randomly distributed. There are patterns of incidence, and of type, which vary with time and place, and between countries and within countries. There are excesses of particular types of cancer in certain types of occupations.<sup>4</sup>

This should suggest, then, that our environment plays a major part in whether or not we get cancer, and this is confirmed by a mass of evidence. It is not new. It was recognised in the 18th century that chimney sweeps were at risk from skin, nasal and scrotal cancer. The connection between asbestos and lung disease was known at the end of the 19th century, yet although we now know so much more about it, we have not yet dealt with the problems of burning carbon-based fuels, and asbestos will continue to pose an enormous problem for many years to come.

## BLAME THE VICTIM CULTURE

So what is it in our environment that has produced this epidemic? The view projected by establishment sources is that the fault lies in ourselves, for example women get breast cancer because we eat the wrong foods, we don't take enough exercise, we don't have children or we have them at the wrong time or we have too few, we don't breast feed, we drink too much, we smoke too much and too early, we take prescribed drugs like HRT, or it is in our genes. It is a view in keeping with the “blame the victim culture”.



The rise in the incidence of almost all cancers has paralleled the spread of industrialisation.

## YOUR LIFE IN WHOSE HANDS?



The twentieth century saw an explosion in the manufacture and use of synthetic chemicals.

Up to a point it is true that all of these factors in our world as it may predispose to breast and other cancers. Yet most of them are beyond our individual control, and are the result of a complex web of social and cultural “norms” and pressures. It needs effective public policy decisions to bring about the changes needed. Even so, when these things are assessed they are estimated to account for about 30% of the risk. “What about the 70%” became the slogan of women here and in the US campaigning for prevention. Apart from smoking and HRT, I consider that these factors would have less, if any, significance, if we lived in a clean environment free from cancer-causing and hormone-altering agents.

The twentieth century, particularly the second half, saw the expansion of nuclear technology and an explosion in the manufacture and use of synthetic chemicals – 500-fold in the US. There are now about 80,000 to 100,000 of these chemicals in regular commercial use. More than 1000 new ones are introduced every year. Full toxicity profiles, however, are only available for 7%.<sup>5</sup> This includes Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals (EDCs). Concern about this group of substances has grown over the last few decades. It is only in the last few years that it has been possible to measure the exceedingly low concentrations at which they can affect us – parts per million or parts per billion. EDCs are at their most sinister when they strike the foetus at a sensitive moment in its development causing errors in development and growth, in the anatomy and function of the reproductive system, in the development of the brain resulting in impairment of behaviour and intelligence, and can cause cancers, mainly of the reproductive system, to develop later on in life. Both males and females are affected.<sup>6</sup>

### VULNERABLE TO DAMAGE

Most are fat-soluble and so accumulate in fatty tissues. They are found in all species, and become more concentrated as they ascend the food chains, up to millions- or billions-fold. Humans are at the top of a long food chain and so we are the most contaminated species. More than 300 such chemicals have been isolated in human body tissues and fluids, including in breast milk. The immature and rapidly dividing cells of the foetus and the infant are most vulnerable to damage. This raises serious concerns about breastfeeding. Some authorities advise against breastfeeding, but the consensus is that it is still preferable because of the protective factors present in breast milk and absent from still, even if less, contaminated substitutes.<sup>7</sup>

The other very vulnerable group are girls from puberty until first pregnancy.<sup>8</sup>

No woman should ever have had to face such a dilemma, and it is imperative that this threat is removed from our environment.

Where do we find these toxins? Obviously in the workplace, but also in the products that are made there and which are in daily use and in the emissions

into the air, soil and water. They contaminate our food and drink, including alcoholic drinks. We meet them in homes, parks, gardens, streets, sitting in our cars, in the personal care products we use – soaps, shampoos, talc, cosmetics; in household products – polishes, paints, cleaners, and a variety of sprays; in pesticides and pharmaceuticals, solvents, detergents and surfactants, plastics, fabrics and wood finishes.

There are strict health and safety regulations and guidelines for the handling of known or potential carcinogens in the workplace. But however low the permitted exposures are, it is accepted by almost everyone working in the field that there is no known threshold level below which a carcinogen has no effect. They also leave out of the account the cumulative effects of repeated low level exposure and the effects of the array of mixtures to which we are exposed.

### EIGHT TIMES AVERAGE

This also applies to ionising radiation. Space does not allow me to explore this further, only to say that many of the most notable authorities in the field of radiation-induced cancers cite exposure to radiation as responsible for a majority of cancers. Elevated rates of childhood leukaemias have been noted in the vicinity of all nuclear installations studied. For example at Dounreay it was eight times the national average, at Sellafield ten times and at Cap-le-Hague in France fifteen times.<sup>9</sup>

Because of the many years latency period before a cancer appears, because of the mobility of populations and changing work patterns, including women now doing what were traditionally male jobs, all leading to multiple exposures, it becomes more difficult to identify the offending agents and we become more dependent on recognising unusual concentrated clusters and unusual outcomes, as in the case of thalidomide or diethylstilboestrol (DES).<sup>10</sup>

Considering the extent of this onslaught on all of us, what is remarkable is the capacity of the human body for repair and renewal. From the evidence now emerging from increasing cancer incidence rates, such capacity is in danger of being seriously challenged.

Most importantly, we should remember that the damage done to the foetus is irreparable. It is permanent.

### PROBLEMS IMPLICIT IN TECHNOLOGIES

What does this mean for our politics? Certainly that it is about more than parties. For me it means that old approaches are no longer adequate. Socialists have been rightly concerned with relationships – personal, social, economic and international. At the core of these relationships is a set of principles of equity, justice and peace, of co-operation, caring, compassion and sharing. Good as that is, it has left out an understanding of the most fundamental relationship of all, the ecological relationship that exists between all living and non-living systems on earth – the intercon-

nections, the interactions and the interdependencies that are essential for the healthy existence and reproduction of all species. We have to question seriously those features of our modern industrial technological societies that damage this relationship. It is not as simple as to whether it is capitalist or socialist management of them. Automobile dependency, use of toxic chemicals, nuclear technology, computers and television, guns or genetic engineering do not become benign under socialism. The purpose and the problems are implicit in the technologies themselves. They are the offspring of the patriarchal, hierarchal, endlessly acquisitive and ruthlessly competitive relationships that characterise capitalism, and are fiercely anti-ecological. They are well supported and served by corporate power and by power politicians with short-term and one-dimensional world-views. Technologies are not neutral either in the way they evolve or in their effects. They change our social, economic, political and ecological relationships. We cannot make a socialist purse out of a capitalist sow's ear.

None of us is entirely blameless, even if we are hopelessly and helplessly entangled in this mesh. All too often we accept short-term fixes and perceived benefits at face value. Perhaps it is time to ask the seven "whys" or try to assess possible outcomes for seven future generations.

Meanwhile, as corporate capitalism is promoted and served, our planet is devastated and our bodies and our lives destroyed. That is the real and palpable message of the breast cancer epidemic, and why it is aptly named "the symbolic disease of our time".

■ *Morag Parnell is a retired doctor and recently wrote a report on the environmental factors in breast cancer, available from the Scottish Breast Cancer Campaign.*

#### NOTES

1. Z. Goldsmith, *The Ecologist*, Vol 28 No2, 1998.
2. Information and Statistics Division, NHS.
3. International Agency for Research on Cancer.
4. Trades Union Hazards Campaign, Sheffield Occupational Health Service.
5. FoE Safer Chemicals.
6. Colborn, Dumanoski, Myers, *Our Stolen Future*, 1996, and website of same name, for best information.
7. See Prof. Sandra Steingraber, *Having Faith*, for a beautiful account of pregnancy and lactation, its joys and hazards.
8. Breast Cancer Research Files, Cornell University.
9. Many sources, including Prof. J. Gardner, Dr C. Busby, Dr Rosalie Bertell and Dr Alice Stewart.
10. Colborn et al, and Rachel's Environmental Research Foundation.

## OVER THE RAINBOW

*Continued from page 2*

left" – greens, socialists, dissenting Labour MSPs, the SNP and radical civil society to act and think in a way that presents the Scottish people with an alternative. An alternative that includes them.

It is unlikely that this alternative will act in a uniform way. But the creation and recreation of alliances on a number of issues could gain reforms. It could go beyond opposition and begin to draw a picture of a different kind of Scotland, providing a politics that is transformative.

Practical gains could be made. Bringing together those that support PR for local government would be an important start and obviously involve the Liberals.

Opposition to PFI and privatisation could include Labour MSPs, the STUC and trades union activists. Discussion on the renewal of our public and social sectors could begin from perspectives other than that of New Labour.

If gaining representation for two parties to the left of Labour in the parliament is a victory, and it is, then it needs to be consolidated and built on. In elections moves need to be made to continue to improve gender balance. We need to ensure that the voices of Black and Asian Scots are heard in the parliament. The independents require to be respected and engaged with in ways that encourage their positive participation in progressive alliances. All the talk

of open committees and the petitioning the parliament needs to be tested further. Can we win votes at sixteen during this parliament?

And we cannot forget the other seats of power. Local government needs strengthening and greater democratisation. Europe can no longer be ignored. Blair needs challenged at Westminster and from both within and outwith the Labour Party. And then there is hearts and minds.

All this suggests we are a long way from victory, a long way from our view of society being the "common sense". But May 1st's results can be a start. Things are looking just a wee bit brighter.

**Stuart Fairweather**  
*Convener, Democratic Left Scotland*

■ **Letters and contributions (which we may edit) are welcome and should be sent to the editor – contact details on page 2.**

## 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.

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### 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.



**For copies of the DLS pamphlet, "There's more to politics than parties" or to get membership information, please complete the form.**

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