

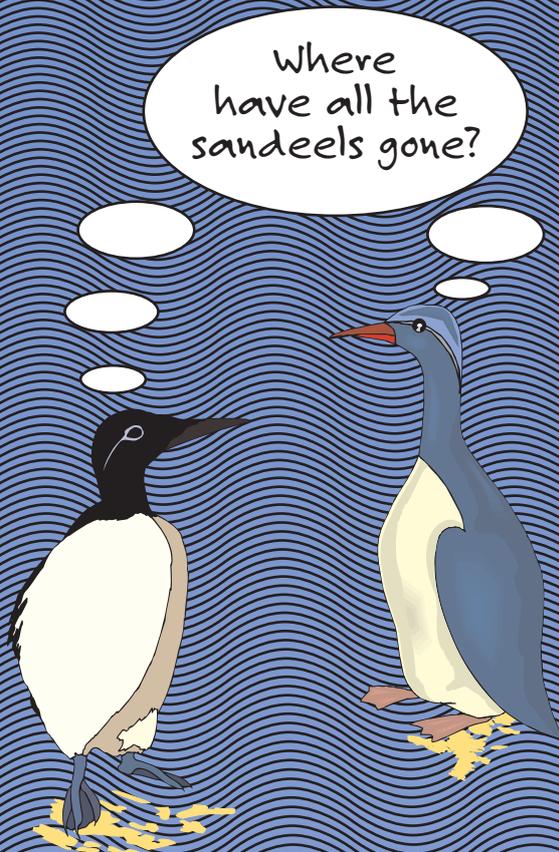
radical feminist green

# Perspectives

No 11 / SPRING 2006 / £2

## SCOTLAND AND THE WORLD ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

Christopher Smout writes on the  
immense magnitude of our impact on  
the planet in the last hundred years



Where  
have all the  
sandeels gone?

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No 11, spring 2006

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## EDITORIAL

# SUSTAINING SCOTLAND

The environmental crisis we face, acknowledged by some, contested by others and largely ignored by many more, is drawn in stark outline by historian Christopher Smout. And while the symptoms of this crisis may be less marked in Scotland than in other parts of the world, they are nonetheless beginning to manifest themselves, and very practically in the case of some of the birds that inhabit the islands of Scotland, whose staple diet (sandeels) has all but vanished in the last couple of years.

In a fascinating piece, Christopher puts in historical context the last century's unprecedented growth in the exploitation of natural resources. The statistics are, to say the least, sobering. For instance, while the world population has increased four-fold over the last hundred years, energy use has grown by a factor of sixteen ... reflected in the growth of consequent emissions!

While acknowledging that some progress has been made on environmental issues, Christopher's prognosis is not optimistic. There is of course much that individuals can do to help the situation – whether it's fitting energy-efficient light bulbs or by choosing a fuel-efficient vehicle as opposed to a four-wheel-drive. Nonetheless, it is governments that have real clout in this area, but they show little determination in grasping the nettle of concrete action to ameliorate environmental problems.

It is fitting that we also carry in this issue an article by Mark Ruskell MSP. Mark, who is Scottish Green Party speaker on the environment and Deputy Convener of the Parliament's Environment and Rural Development Committee, dissects the Scottish Executive's recent sustainable development strategy for Scotland.

Mark acknowledges the strategy's foreword admission that



**In a fascinating piece, Christopher [Smout] puts in historical context the last century's unprecedented growth in the exploitation of natural resources. The statistics are, to say the least, sobering.**

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

“Sustainable development is a concept easy to subscribe to, harder to put into practice.” But, he goes on to point out that many of the Executive's actions run counter to some of the most basic principles of sustainable development.

On the international front, Brian Pollitt examines the ongoing problems that Cuba has had to contend with since the 1959 revolution and the ensuing US economic sanctions. The island has made tremendous strides forward in many areas and has offered large-scale medical assistance to other countries in the form of supplying doctors and nurses for health campaigns.

But, paradoxically, Cuba finds itself lacking some of the most basic medical supplies for its own people – a consequence of US policy. This is where Scottish Medical Aid for Cuba comes in, with Brian outlining some of the very practical ways in which we can assist the people of Cuba.

Amnesty International is best-known for taking up the cause of political prisoners world-wide. An innovative conference to be held shortly in Scotland will examine the issue of involving men in the campaign against violence against women. Rosemary Burnett, AI's Programme Director, Scotland, sketches out the ground to be covered.

Lastly, the forthcoming action by council workers over pensions is but one issue of several currently coming to a head, outlined here by union activist Richard Whyte. The common thread running through much of this seems to lie with inadequate funding by the Scottish Executive.

Thanks as ever to all our contributors, and remember that letters and articles are always welcome, though please get in touch first if you would like to pen a substantial piece.

**Sean Feeny**  
*Editor*

# THERE IS MORE TO POLITICS THAN VOTING



**W**e are a long way out from polling day for next May's elections. When those of us that make the effort to vote turn up to do so, we will be confronted with a number of options. For the first time local councils will be elected by single transferable vote (STV). Multi-member constituencies will create new relationships between constituents and councillors. The outcome this has on the complexion of local authorities remains to be seen.

On the same day we will be asked to elect representatives to our (Scottish) parliament. We will decide on the constituency and list MSPs that will take their seats in Holyrood. Whilst the likelihood is that we will have a third Labour/LibDem coalition other configurations are at least a theoretical possibility. But whilst elections are of great importance there is more to politics than voting. So what should we do?

The construction of a red-green pact for elections will not move us very far forward. We need to engage many of those that remain loyal to Labour, follow the Scottish National Party, tactically support the Liberals or simply do not vote. Further, the Scottish Socialist Party and the Greens have contributed most when they have been part of wider movements. The Greens' audaciousness in looking at coalitions with the SNP or Labour is interesting but what will be gained other than a collection of disconnected reforms? The potential "accommodation" between the SSP and SNP, with the SSP only standing for list seats, may make electoral sense – if it happens. Supporting SNP candidates that see independence as a method of becoming a "Celtic tiger economy" seems less logical.

**We need to isolate those that would hold us back and celebrate the gains that contribute to a fairer, greener, happier Scotland.**

Temporary electoral advance should not be seen as the priority. Due to the absence of a broad agreement that sets out what the democratic left are trying to achieve in the short and medium term, it retains an allure. To overcome this campaigns cannot be the sole preserve of one or even a number of parties. Actions on prescription charges, identity cards, free school meals and a replacement for the council tax have been welcome developments but they have not been articulated as contributions to making another Scotland possible.

Looking at the response of people to Make Poverty History and Gleneagles it is possible to sense the opportunity for realigning the forces of civil society and the state. Thousands of young people, alongside seasoned campaigners, took action, debated, listened and learnt. This built on opposition to the war. Discussion has and continues to be inspired by the alternative globalisation movement. Lessons need to be learnt, approaches debated but we cannot be paralysed by this. The bigger issue is to illustrate where people, parties and organisations stand: for or against putting people before profit? For or against a democracy where people can fully participate? For or against violence and war? This is the test we should apply when building alliances for Scotland's future. We need to isolate those that would hold us back and celebrate the gains that contribute to a fairer, greener, happier Scotland – a Scotland that acts in solidarity with others throughout the world.

■ *Stuart Fairweather is convener of Democratic Left Scotland.*

## People and politics

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

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

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

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

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

### What does Democratic Left add?

Our approach to politics is radical, feminist and green.

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

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

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

There's  
more  
to politics  
than  
parties

✂

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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.



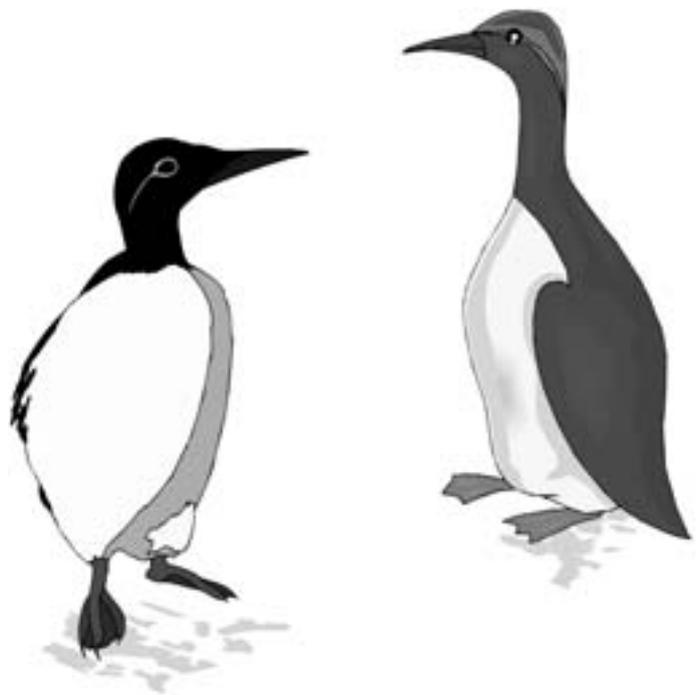
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**Democratic Left Scotland**  
na Deamocrataich Chli an Alba



# SCOTLAND AND THE WORLD ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

**Christopher Smout** argues that the immense magnitude of our impact on the planet in the last hundred years is not remotely paralleled by anything that has happened before in human history, and wonders whether we are capable, as a species, of doing anything about it.



**W**e are beset by environmental problems. Global warming tops the list, with its concomitants, the increasing frequency of extreme climatic events and sea level rise. The consequences, even in the short term, for humanity in hot areas of marginal agriculture, like the Saharan edge, or in low-lying coastal plains like Bangladesh, are dreadful and obvious. In Scotland the effects scarcely impinge on humanity yet, but they already seem to be seriously affecting other creatures and other things. In 2004, the great seabird colonies of the northern isles, and last year those of St Kilda, largely ceased to breed. The reason was the absence of sandeels, and the most probable

**In 2004, the great seabird colonies of the northern isles, and last year those of St Kilda, largely ceased to breed.**

explanation is warming seas. In a year when hurricanes caused death and destruction internationally, it scarcely seemed worth remarking that in Scotland in January 2005 winds of over 100 miles an hour in the Uists moved the beach in some places over 500 yards inland. The media reported how a family tragically drowned when their car was swept off a causeway, but not how that great storm erased or damaged, on the edge of the sea, hundreds of early archaeological sites.

#### **OVERUSE OF HYDROCARBONS**

Resource depletion is second in seriousness, especially the overuse of the hydrocarbons. In the 1960s the Club of Rome cried wolf about the world running out of resources:

the wolf never came, but they smelt it all right. Few now believe that a world economy can continue to rely on oil and gas at the present rate of depletion for more than a few more decades; with the rise of India and China the rate of depletion must increase. The expectation for Scottish hydrocarbons is inevitably shorter. War and resource depletion are joined at the hip. The genocide in Rwanda was linked in part to competition for diminishing and degraded farming land, and before the war in Iraq the American right had already written of the need for the USA to secure more of the oil of the Middle East by any means necessary.

Thirdly, we continue to be menaced with new forms of pollution;

## SCOTLAND AND THE WORLD ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

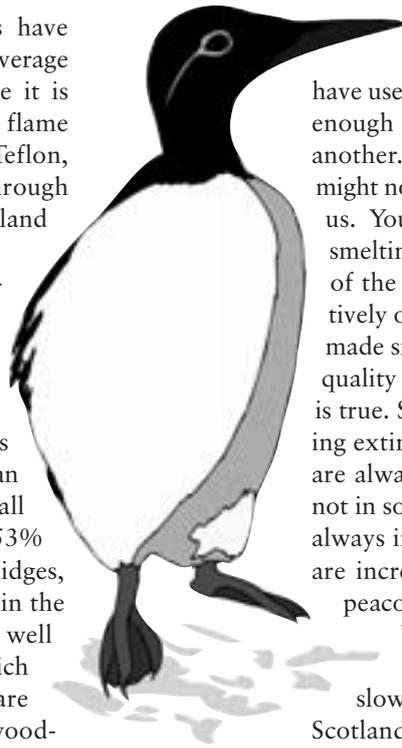
some 200 toxic chemicals have built up in the body of the average American baby even before it is born, including mercury, flame retardants, pesticides and Teflon, pumped into the foetus through the umbilical cord. Scotland cannot be very different.

Next, we create biodiversity loss, never caring that the one thing we cannot make is another species. In the UK the catastrophic decline of farmland birds is more evident in England than in Scotland, but with overall UK declines of between 53% and 95% for linnets, partridges, skylarks and corn buntings in the last 30 years. What is less well known is the way in which declines of this magnitude are now becoming evident in woodland birds, such as flycatchers, redstarts and tree pipits. And who has noticed the significance of the fact that the larger moths, a vital component of the food chain for birds and bats, have declined by a third in Britain in the last thirty years?

### POPULATION GROWTH

Finally, the time-bomb of human population growth across the world continues to tick, though we don't hear it in Scotland. With it comes the problem of poverty, particularly in Africa, and of soil erosion and deforestation across the globe reaching acute proportions.

To all this evidence, there is a sceptical reply, increasingly heard and listened to, because it is a comforting voice. The climate has changed many times in history without disaster to our species, and for entirely natural reasons connected with the behaviour of the sun. Yes, that is true, though this time it seems to be us and not the sun that is misbehaving. People are always complaining of resource depletion. In sixteenth-century Scotland, the Privy Council believed Scotland was running out of coal, as it more or less did four centuries later, but only after an industrial revolution built a new prosperity for us based on steam. True. Then we found



**You can trace Roman lead smelting residues in the ice cores of the Arctic.**

another source of power, and when we have used that we are surely bright enough to be able to find yet another. It might be true or it might not. Pollution is always with us. You can trace Roman lead smelting residues in the ice cores of the Arctic. Think more positively of the huge strides we have made since Victorian times in the quality of air and water. Yes, that is true. Species are always becoming extinct, and their populations are always fluctuating – nature is not in some kind of balance, but is always in a state of change. Some are increasing, like buzzards and peacock butterflies in Scotland.

Yes, that is true. Population growth is slowing now, and in places like Scotland has ceased. Poverty in Asia is being replaced by a prosperity considered unattainable twenty years ago. Frankly, what's the problem?

### VINEYARDS IN YORKSHIRE?

These arguments have been powerfully put by, among others, Bjørn Lomborg in his book *The Skeptical Environmentalist*, and they cannot be ignored. They are often reiterated, in this country for example by articles in the *Sunday Telegraph* praising the potential benefits of global warming through making it possible to grow new crops, and salivating at the thought of vineyards in Yorkshire, while rather overlooking what will happen to Africa or Bangladesh. The trouble is, if you deny the existence of a bolting horse, you won't grab it by the halter while it is still within

reach. You just say it is out for a little exercise and will return to the stable and bolt its own door behind it when it is ready.

But if you consider the historical dimension properly, things don't look so cosy. There occurred in the course of the twentieth century a change in human behaviour unprecedented in scale and in its potential for fatal environmental impact. Almost all the data that follows is drawn from the remarkable book by the American environmental historian John R. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun*.

### ABSOLUTELY UNPRECEDENTED

Let us begin with demography. In 1500, human population was about 500 million, having attained a doubling over the previous millennium and a half. It doubled again in little over 200 years, associated with the start of European imperial and industrial expansion. In less than 100 years after that it had doubled a third time, and it more than doubled again in the last 50 years. The total multiplication since 1500 is twelve-fold, but about three-quarters of the increase came in the twentieth century. This is absolutely unprecedented in human experience, and alone would make the twentieth century unique. There is no question that we could sustain the same rates in the future

Next, consider economic activity. The value of the world's output was low in 1500, but started to increase in the early industrial and Victorian periods, which make really impressive gains in their

**Table 1:**  
**World population and wealth since 1500**

	Population (billions)	Index of GDP	Index GDP per capita
1500	0.5	100	100
1820	1	290	117
1850	1.2	n/a	n/a
1900	1.6	832	224
1950	2.5	2,238	378
2000 (1992 for GDP indices)	6.0	11,664	942

own terms – eight-fold in 400 years. But it only really roars ahead in the twentieth century when it increases 14-fold from its 1900 base (note that the GDP figures are corrected for inflation).

### TWO DOLLARS A DAY

Measured in per capita terms, the achievement is much less, yet on average people across the world are still nine times as well off as they were in 1500 and four times as well off as in 1900. Of course this conceals not only a fundamental unsustainability (of which more in a moment) but monstrous inequalities. The average inhabitant of Mozambique still has an income well under half the global average of \$1500 and half the world lives on two dollars a day. The standard of living achieved in Scotland and other wealthy countries of the west would have astounded Adam Smith, but the inequitable distribution would surely have disturbed that great and compassionate moral philosopher.

Of course, all the growth rested on unrenovable, unsustainable fossil fuels. It is true that utilisation of biomass (wood and peat) has almost doubled in its extraction rate since 1800 – hence a 20% loss of the world's forests in the twentieth century. Coal's ten-fold growth in the nineteenth century explains Victorian economic growth, but the twentieth century saw a further five-fold growth, driven not least now by China. Oil otherwise dominates the twentieth century, fueling its wealth and now its wars.

The global commercial energy mix in 1994 was two-thirds oil and coal, 23% natural gas, which adds up to 90% dependence on fossil fuels. Of the remainder 7% was nuclear, 3% hydro. Geothermal, wind, solar and other sustainable energy sources were less than one percent. It is only a little better now. At the end of this fossil fuel bonanza, the world was still not taking the consequences of depletion very seriously. Even more to the point, it had failed to find a viable replacement for fossil fuels

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**Table 2: World fuel production and energy use since 1800**

	Fuel production (million metric tonnes)		
	1800	1900	1990
Biomass (wood etc)	1000	1400	1800
Coal	10	1000	5000
Oil		20	3000
Energy use index	100	500	7900

**Table 3: Measure of the twentieth century world**

	Multiplication factor, 1890s–1990s
Population	4
Urban population	13
GDP	14
Industrial output	40
Energy use	16
Coal output	7
Carbon dioxide emissions	17
Sulphur dioxide emissions	13
Lead emissions	ca. 8
Cropland	2
Water use	9
Cattle population	4
Pigs	9
Marine fish catch	35

in the second half of the twentieth century, especially once the challenge of overcoming the dangers of nuclear power proved too great.

### UNSEEN AIR CONTAMINANTS

Let us then take the measure of the twentieth century. The figures tell us again that population in that century grew four times (but urban population 13-fold), economy by 14 times (but industrial production 40-fold), energy use by 16 times. Energy use results in emissions, and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions multiplied by 17-fold, SO<sub>2</sub> by 13-fold and lead by eight-fold. Just think about that: an appalling increase in largely unseen air contaminants in the twentieth century. No wonder there are 200 chemicals in the unborn child.

Yet it is not all doom and gloom. At least in this country, we got over smoke pollution in its gross forms, the immediate trigger being the great fog in London in 1952, when 4000 people died, though a fog in Glasgow in 1909 killed over 1000, proportionately even more; newspaper editors in the city used to leave extra column inches for obituaries in foggy weather. As late as 1950, Glaswegians inhaled about two pounds of soot each year, but by 1990 this was entirely a thing of the past, and with the advent of lead-free petrol, lead in the atmosphere is also declining. This is cause for optimism, as it shows an unexpected ability on our part to be able to put at least some environmental wrongs to rights.

## SCOTLAND AND THE WORLD ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

Finally, consider some non-industrial measures of the twentieth century. Cropland on the earth doubled (which is part of the reason why one-fifth of the world's forests have disappeared). I cannot find world statistics of the chemicalisation of agriculture which has been such a feature of the second half of the twentieth century, but in Britain in the half-century to 1980 there was a twenty-fold increase in nitrogen on farms, as well as a two and a half times increase in phosphorus and a six-fold increase in potassium. Again, the news is not all bad, for in this country we overcame the damage to wildlife and to our own health from ill-considered use of DDT in the 1960s, though the same would not be true of Africa even today.

Water use went up nine-fold last century, including a five-fold increase in irrigation across the world, often bringing with it intractable problems of salination. Cattle increased at the same rate as humans, but pigs at more than twice the rate. Pollution from the waste of intensively-farmed pigs is a serious problem in some places, notably the Netherlands and North Carolina.

### EXTREME

Lastly, what have we done to the seas? This is extreme. World fish catch went up 35-fold in the twentieth century. In the seventeenth century, the Dutch "Great Fishery" in the North Sea was the envy of the world for the wealth it generated. It employed 7000–8000 people in 300–400 ships and caught 50,000 tons of fish a year. Today a single Danish trawler out of Esbjerg with a crew of eight will catch in a year the same quantity of fish as the whole Dutch fleet did in a year in the seventeenth century, and could catch much more if it was not restrained by the quota system.

Bad though the European fisheries policy is, the problem is not encapsulated by virtuous Scots fishermen versus wicked Spanish; the problem is runaway fish-catching technology compounded by a

**Today a single Danish trawler out of Esbjerg with a crew of eight will catch in a year the same quantity of fish as the whole Dutch fleet did in a year in the seventeenth century.**

"tragedy of the commons" where no individual or group is benefited by self-restraint unless all the other players are subject to the same restraint. The mirror of the immense fish catch is the decline in biodiversity. The great whales lost 98% of their population, and although this decline is now halted, it is at present being replicated in the worldwide decline of the great birds, the albatrosses, as a by-product of irresponsible fishing in the far east and the southern hemisphere.

### HISTORICAL TURNING POINTS

The point of these numbing statistics is to make one very simple point: the immense magnitude of our impact on the planet in the last hundred years is not remotely paralleled by anything that has happened before in human history. In John McNeill's phrase, this is "Something New Under the Sun". History does have turning points. In world terms, the invention of farming 10,000 years ago in Syria and Iraq was one. The changes in European thought-patterns between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries that we call the Reformation, the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment was another. This is a third, but we stand so close to it that we can hardly grasp what we have done.

Let me quote John McNeill – "The human race, without intending anything of the sort, has undertaken a gigantic uncontrolled experiment on the earth. In time, I think, this will appear as the most important aspect of twentieth-century history, more so than World War II, the communist enterprise, the rise of mass literacy, the spread of democracy or the growing emancipation of women." And he goes on to say that most of the processes are not new: we have felled forests, mined ores and fuels, grown crops and generated wastes for millennia. What are new are the incredible increases in quantity, creating novel problems because the local became global. True, you can trace Roman lead smelting in Arctic ice-cores, but

now polluted air is affecting the absolute fundamentals of global atmospheric chemistry. That is what's new under the sun.

The problem is global, but as we all know, the remedy, if there is one, is local. Does the human species have it within itself to take remedies? Or do we have just to hope that we can somehow ride out the hurricane we are creating? Let us look very quickly at how Scotland is responding. First, according to Key Scottish Environment Statistics in 2005, we were substantially less worried about environmental issues in 2002 (the last year of available statistics) than we were in 1991. We are most worried about raw sewage put into the sea, where half of those who responded in 2002 pronounced themselves "very worried". In fact this is not a problem any more. The percentage of people "very worried" about global warming fell from nearly half to only a quarter between 1991 and 2002. But that is the one most likely to undo us all.

### MARGINAL IMPROVEMENTS

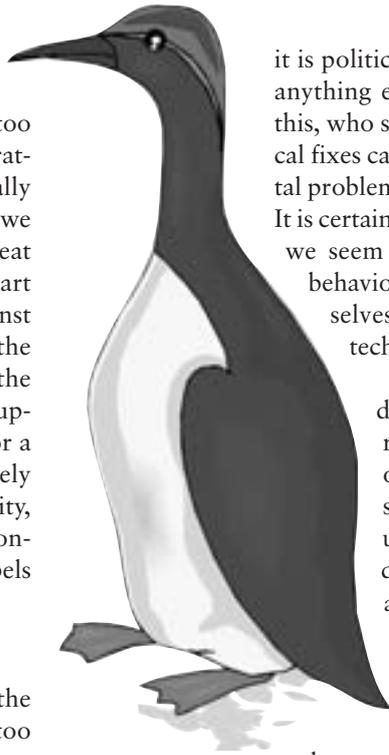
The government has more awareness and concern than the people, and in some respects – especially air and water quality and recycling – there have been significant improvements over the last decade. But in terms of the big picture, this is all rather marginal stuff. Our renewable energy policy concentrates on building big, spectacular windfarms in remote localities, often on peat which will add to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions as it is disturbed, and with huge transmission costs in financial and environmental terms, as we turn part of the Highlands and Islands into industrial landscapes. No-one seems to consider putting wind generators in and around towns, on houses and public buildings, or seriously to take on the challenge of improving energy conservation in the existing housing stock.

Can we stop the headlong rush to environmental catastrophe? Politics has become with the mainstream parties exactly what they

criticise the greens for – a single-issue affair. “It’s the economy, stupid” reveals only too clearly their fixation on accelerating economic growth at literally any cost. How completely have we forgotten the words of the great liberal economist, John Stuart Mill, when he warned against destroying what he called the pleasantness of the earth “for the mere purpose of enabling it to support a larger, but not a better or a happier population, I sincerely hope, for the sake of posterity, they will be content to be stationary, long before necessity compels them to it.”

#### UNACCEPTABLE CONCEPT

This is Victorian stuff, from the century of Marx and Darwin, too radical by far for us. The stationary state is probably an even more unacceptable concept to the twenty-first century than to the nineteenth or twentieth. Possibly we do indeed need to continue to strive incessantly for economic growth because in the materialist cultures of the democratic west and of the undemocratic Chinese,



it is politically unacceptable to do anything else. The apologists for this, who say that only technological fixes can cure our environmental problems anyway, may be right. It is certainly true that, as a species, we seem incapable of changing behaviour but have proved ourselves incredibly talented at technology.

But fixes of this sort demand resources and research on a scale that only government can supply – not just a few university physics departments looking at alternative energy supplies, but a huge and purposeful direction of research funding directed to this aim, perhaps an Environmental Problems Research Council, with a big budget paid for by 3p on the income tax. At present we are scarcely changing our behaviour nor purposefully pursuing the big fix. Like the Gadarine swine, filled with devils, or King Alexander of Scotland, riding in the dark, we dash for the headlong cliff.

■ *Chris Smout is a social, economic and environmental historian, now retired from the chair of Scottish History at St Andrews. He is also Historiographer Royal in Scotland. He is author of A History of the Scottish People, 1560–1830, A Century of the Scottish People, 1830–1950, and (for environmental history) Nature Contested, Environmental History in Scotland and Northern England since 1600.*

#### NOTE

Source for all tables: J.R. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun: an environmental history of the twentieth-century world*, Norton, New York and London, 2000.

■ *Scotland and the world environmental crisis* was first given as a talk in December last year to Glasgow West End discussion group, The Gas Board.

The group meets regularly, holds occasional social events and welcomes new members. For further information contact Davie Laing – [d.laing17@ntl-world.com](mailto:d.laing17@ntl-world.com)

## Democratic Left Scotland

# ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Saturday 13th May 2006, 11am–4pm, Cowane Centre, Stirling

Further details from  
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# CUBA'S REVOLUTION — THE PROCESS AND PROBLEMS OF SURVIVAL



Only a few years short of the 50th anniversary of its revolution, Cuba requires practical and moral support in the face of continuing US sanctions. **Brian Pollitt** makes the case, outlining the political background and how Scots can help.

The Cuban revolution of 1959 surprised the world both in its making and subsequent trajectory. Its survival after the 1991 implosion of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of COMECON was equally surprising, not least for successive administrations of the US Government. After all, the US had won the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet bloc had visited both economic disaster and apparent political isolation on Fidel Castro's Cuba. And despite the disappearance of the wider geo-political context in which Cuba had been presented as a "threat to US national security", Washington's efforts for "regime change" were now intensified, primarily by making yet more stringent – and, with its extra-territorial applications, more overtly illegal – its policy of economic sanctions.

## CATASTROPHIC EFFECT

Between 1990 and 1994, with the collapse of the favourable trading relations that Cuba had enjoyed with the USSR and Eastern Europe, the island's GNP fell by some 30 per cent. Imports and domestic investment each both fell by no less than 80 per cent. The catastrophic effect on productive employment and popular consumption was most clearly illustrated by a reported fall in per capita calorie consumption from 2,845 in 1989 to 1,863 in 1993. For Washington, such circumstances made the survival of Cuba's ruling regime seem impossible, especially when the island's already extreme economic difficulties could be exacerbated by a tightened trade embargo. Accordingly, a series of policy documents emerged from US official and academic institutions detailing how Cuba's "transition to democracy" and

**Hostile US sanctions meant that Cuba's new foreign partners could impose exacting terms for their investments.**

"the free market" was to be managed. But from the mid-1990s, it became increasingly clear that this seemingly inevitable US-sponsored "transition" was to be illusory. Cuba had by then successfully embarked on a painful, but more or less steady, process of economic recovery and, despite great hardships and considerable social tensions, the regime was evidently still sustained by a sufficient body of popular support.

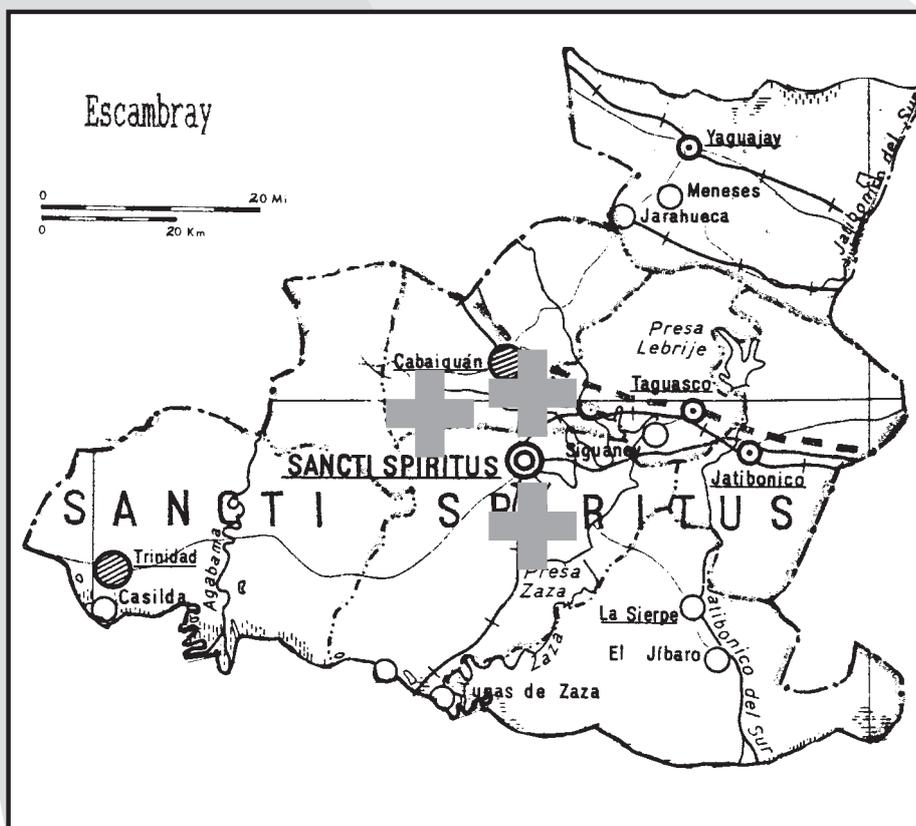
## REVOLUTION'S SURVIVAL

The revolution's survival required firstly a major restructuring of the economy, above all to compensate for the loss of large and profitable sugar markets in ex-Soviet bloc countries. These had both absorbed the bulk of Cuba's sugar, citric and mineral exports and supplied most of her imports, including oil, foodstuffs, and crucial raw materials and finished products for industry and agriculture. It was imperative now to develop alternative sources of foreign exchange so that established economic activities could be revived and new ones promoted. Joint ventures with foreign capital, notably to develop international tourism and to modernise and expand mining and extractive activities, were key sources of new investment, employment and income from the mid-1990s onwards. Their formation was dictated more by the basic needs of survival than by their political palatability. Hostile US sanctions meant that Cuba's new foreign partners could impose exacting terms for their investments. And tourist growth had not been encouraged prior to 1991 precisely because of its known potential to foment vice, inequality and corruption – a potential fully realised in Cuba during the most difficult years of



the 1990s. Even so, while tapping more deeply into the historical wellsprings of Cuban nationalism and less into the doctrines of Marxism-Leninism, the regime largely achieved its cardinal strategic objectives. These were to maintain the island's national independence and to preserve the principal social gains of the revolution.

Cuba's outstanding achievements in public health provision and in high-level education were internationally recognised. Over the period 1990–2005, however, many expert observers were astonished by the steady improvements in key public health indicators (such as infant mortality rates and general life expectancy) experienced by Cuba despite the acute shortages of essential medical supplies that had accompanied the catastrophic reduction in the island's import capacity. A growing understanding of two crucial Cuban State policies clarified the question. The first was the priority it continued to give to public health provision (and other social services) in State financial expenditures even during years of drastically falling total Government income. The second was an accelerated expansion in the number of trained medical personnel that enabled a mounting and increasingly effective emphasis to be placed on



The Sancti-Spiritus province of Cuba, showing where Scottish Medical Aid for Cuba is focussing its aid effort

## CUBA'S REVOLUTION – THE PROCESS AND PROBLEMS OF SURVIVAL

preventative health measures at urban and rural community level throughout the island.

### PUBLIC HEALTH PRIORITY

In 1997, the UN's Economic Commission on Latin America and the Caribbean stressed the Cuban government's priority on public health provision by reporting State expenditure on this to have risen from \$937.4 million in 1990 to \$1,210 million in 1996. In telling contrast, it noted Cuban expenditure on defence and public order over the same years to have been cut from \$1,149 million to \$725 million. And as regards medical personnel, between 1990 and 2002, the Cuban Ministry of Public Health reported the total number of doctors of all kinds to have grown from 38,700 to 67,100 and that of dentists from 7,000 to 10,000. (By comparison, by 2002 the UK had some three times the number of inhabitants per doctor as Cuba and UK GPs in particular had to attend to between four and five times as many patients as the "family doctors" that were their Cuban equivalents. In dentistry, on the other hand, there was an understated figure of at least 2.5 potential patients per UK dentist compared with each potential patient in Cuba.) Moreover, Cuba's burgeoning medical training facilities – strongly promoted over the pre-crisis decades – permitted a growing number of Cuban doctors to provide medical services in Third World countries. In the 1980s Cuba already supplied more doctors to poor countries than the World Health Organisation. And by 2005, in Venezuela alone no less than 10 thousand doctors and three thousand nurses were deployed to enable Hugo Chavez's government to make dramatic progress in one of the key social "missions" so vital to the expansion and consolidation of popular support for his regime.

By 2005, Venezuela had also become Cuba's most important trading partner by far and Cuba's massive contribution of medical personnel, willing and able to work in difficult physical and social conditions, was handsomely rewarded with both hard currency and crucial supplies of oil. Along with other trading agreements, this alleviated Cuba's acute balance of payments difficulties, encouraging significant increases in domestic investment, imports and the national rate of economic growth. But the mutually profitable exchange of dedicated medical professionals for a key material commodity that distinguished Cuban-Venezuelan relations was exceptional: it was obvious that immediate material interest had little to do with the massive training programmes for Latin American and other Third World medical students that were established within Cuba itself. Cuba thus matched its remarkable ability to provide immediate social assistance to other nations by the direct provision of Cuban medical personnel with its ability to provide low-cost medical training to equip foreign nationals to themselves tackle their own countries' pressing medium and long-term public health needs.



**Scottish Medical Aid has delivered regular consignments of key pharmaceutical and related supplies as requested by the hospital and municipal health authorities.**

### PERSISTENT SCARCITIES

It was recognised, however, that impressive achievements in medical education and the implementation of effective preventative health measures could not conceal persistent scarcities in pharmaceutical and other medical supplies to Cuba's own hospitals and clinics. These were most acute in the mid-1990s when increased mortality rates among older sections of the population reflected a reduced capacity to provide effective treatment for a range of coronary diseases and cancers. Diabetic and asthmatic children, too, were affected by shortfalls in the supply of imported drugs and inhalers. Scottish Medical Aid for Cuba was founded in 1995 precisely to alleviate, in an inevitably modest way, shortages of this kind.

Twinned with the provincial capital of Sancti-Spiritus in south-central Cuba and with hospitals and clinics in an adjacent mountainous region, Scottish Medical Aid, with charitable status, has, over the past decade, delivered regular consignments of key pharmaceutical and related supplies as requested by the hospital and municipal health authorities themselves. These initially reflected elemental needs for antibiotics, analgesics, bedding, soaps and detergents etc, but in more recent times the supplies donated by Scottish Medical Aid have become more comprehensive and sophisticated, embracing a range of surgical supplies and including an abdominal ultrasound scanner.

### UPGRADING IT SYSTEM

More hospitals have been supported as well, including, from 2002, the Provincial Paediatric Hospital of Sancti-Spiritus. This hospital also has an important teaching function and the assistance provided has included the upgrading of its failing IT system to facilitate its pedagogical and diagnostic work as well as the maintenance of comprehensive patient records. The province's Rehabilitation Hospital – the only one of its kind outside Havana and one which treats patients from a number of provinces in central Cuba – is the most recent recipient of support aimed at assisting both its medical and teaching functions. Finally, the proven expertise of Scottish Medical Aid in the purchase and secure delivery of medical products has been placed at the disposition of other charities, facilitating, for example, the delivery of 1,000 anti-asthmatic inhalers and other supplies urgently needed by the Special School for Asthmatic and Diabetic Children at Tarara, Havana Province. In such ways, Scottish Medical Aid's activities, although inevitably limited, alleviate difficulties in national health provision in a tangible and accountable form to identifiable communities with clear needs. In its own small way, it thus also contributes indirectly to Cuba's formidable programmes in public health provision in the wider world.

■ *Brian Pollitt is secretary of Scottish Medical Aid for Cuba – [www.Scottishmedaidcuba.org.uk](http://www.Scottishmedaidcuba.org.uk)*

# INVOLVING MEN IN CHALLENGING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Amnesty International is breaking new ground in a forthcoming conference it is organising. **Rosemary Burnett** charts the territory to be explored.

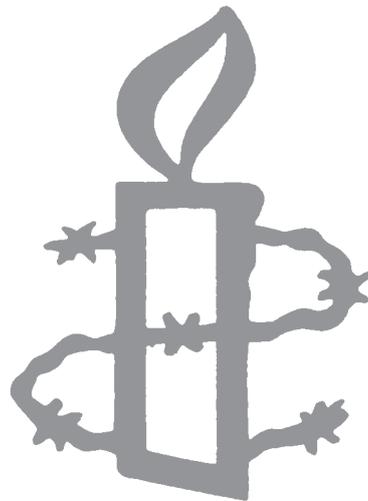
*"For it is clear – without engaging men as partners, without enabling both men and women to understand their roles and responsibilities in ending violence – we will be attempting to resolve this multi-dimensional problem from a vastly limited perspective."*<sup>1</sup>

*"... the issue is not so much how men oppress women, but how a system of gender asymmetric values and constraints is internalised by both, with their active participation, and as such becomes normalised, self-sustaining, and ... unself-consciously 'real'."*<sup>2</sup>

**V**iolence against women at the hands of men is endemic in our society and indeed in almost all societies around the world. Violence against men by women is also a fact of life, but the scale of the problem in terms of societal attitudes is somewhat different. Just 7% of domestic violence incidents involve women's violence against men.

Violence against women encompasses, but is not limited to,

**Surveys have shown that boys and girls as young as 13 are already accepting that violence against women is acceptable in some circumstances.**



domestic abuse, female genital mutilation, forced and child marriage, honour crimes, rape and sexual assault, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of girls, sexual harassment (in the workplace and in the public sphere), trafficking in women and exploitation in the sex industry. Women in particular groups may be additionally targeted for violence and abuse, have more limited resources to resist or find support and/or find themselves in contexts where there is a high incidence of assaults. It covers not only physical violence but also controlling behaviours such as iso-

lating a woman from her family or friends.

Surveys have shown that boys and girls as young as 13 are already accepting that violence against women is acceptable in some circumstances. An Irish study (Regan and Kelly, 2001) also found that young people had high levels of contact with harassment, abuse and violence:

- 23% of young women and 7% of young men knew someone who had been forced to have sex.
- 56% of young women and 31% of young men knew someone who had been hit by a partner.
- 65% of young women and 15% of young men had been told about an experience by a friend or relative.
- About a third of young women and young men also knew a perpetrator.

This leads to another question: who is the first to be told about violence against a woman? Not agencies, but friends, family and even neighbours and work colleagues. How informal networks

## INVOLVING MEN IN CHALLENGING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

respond can be critical in empowering victims to access support or further entrapping them in shame and self-blame. Equally, they may also communicate intolerance of actions to perpetrators or act in ways that suggest there will be no sanction or criticism.<sup>3</sup>

Factors which contribute to the widespread nature of violence against women are:

- Long-standing myths and stereotypes that have served to justify or excuse abuse and/or to blame victims, including macho perceptions of masculinity.
- The dynamics of power and control underlying abuse.
- The social organisation of gender, which produces the distribution of victimisation and perpetration.
- High levels of under-reporting across all forms of violence against women.
- The justice gap in relation to prosecutions and convictions.
- The long-term psychological, social and economic impacts and consequences.
- The extent of repeat victimisation by both the same and different perpetrators.
- A historic failure of state agencies to respond appropriately, promptly or pre-emptively.<sup>4</sup>

Tim Shand, in his study of the barriers to men's involvement in campaigning on violence against women,<sup>5</sup> reports that for a number of respondents, the reasons given for the lack of male involvement in addressing violence against women, and their apparent unwillingness to take responsibility for trying to change other men's behaviour, is a problem attributed both to the male psyche and to something that men themselves are failing to take responsibility for and to address. This was reflected in comments regarding male complacency, a lack of willingness to recognise their responsibilities in this regard<sup>6</sup>, that they had "not taken it upon themselves to address the problem, because they are ashamed and embarrassed by it."<sup>7</sup> Male disinterest was also

**... the reasons given for the lack of male involvement in addressing violence against women ... is a problem attributed both to the male psyche and to something that men themselves are failing to take responsibility for and to address.**



attributed to patriarchy, and the fact that if men started acknowledging the extent of the problem of male abuse of women and acting upon this knowledge, they would challenge the very basis on which the society privileges them (and other men), while oppressing women.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, such questioning would require a fundamental rethinking of gender relations, problematising the very institutions which often condone such violence and that don't hold men to account,<sup>9</sup> and necessitating a relinquishing of male power – something men are perceived as not willing to do.<sup>10</sup>

Amnesty International and the Men's Health Forum Scotland have joined forces to organise a conference aimed at men who are concerned about issues of violence against women and masculinities. They have invited four speakers from organisations that have pioneered ways of involving men in campaigning against violence against women. The Acid Survivors Foundation works with women who have been disfigured by acid thrown at them for so-called "honour" crimes. They have advocacy and public education programmes, and have organised a 5000 strong all-male march to highlight the issue on International Women's Day. Men Can Stop Rape in the USA seeks to train those who are already influencers in their field, such as peer educators and university personnel, and help build their capacity to engage men in efforts to prevent rape and other forms of men's violence. The White Ribbon Campaign, probably the best known of the four, is a Canadian NGO that encourages

personal and collective action among men to challenge violence against women. Men and boys wear a white ribbon as a personal pledge never to commit, condone or ignore violence against women. Masimanyane has a formal training programme in South Africa which has reached prisons, trade unions, local municipal councillors and schools.

In Scotland, as elsewhere in the world, attitudes to violence against women must change. This cannot be achieved by women working alone. Amnesty International and Men's Health Forum Scotland believe that the conference, being held on March 30th at the West Park Conference Centre in Dundee, will give Scottish men the opportunity to stand up and be counted in the struggle this form of violence.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Stop Violence Against Women: Involving Men, Thursday 30th March 2006, West Park Conference Centre, Dundee. Details from [sarah@mhfs.org.uk](mailto:sarah@mhfs.org.uk) or [Scotland@amnesty.org.uk](mailto:Scotland@amnesty.org.uk)

■ *Rosemary Burnett is Programme Director, Scotland, for Amnesty International.*

### NOTES

- 1 United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, 2004
- 2 Boddy, 1998: 97
- 3 & 4 *What a Waste*, Liz Kelly & Jo Lovett, Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit, London Metropolitan University, December 2004
- 5 *Envisioning Men as Part of the Solution* – an examination of the barriers to male involvement in work that seeks to address and prevent violence against women and children. Tim Shand, 2004
- 6 Female Support Worker
- 7 Female Rape Crisis Worker
- 8 Kelly, 1988: 20
- 9 Female Rape Crisis Worker
- 10 Female Support Worker

# A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR SCOTLAND?

**Mark Ruskell MSP** dissects the Scottish Executive's recent sustainable development strategy for Scotland.

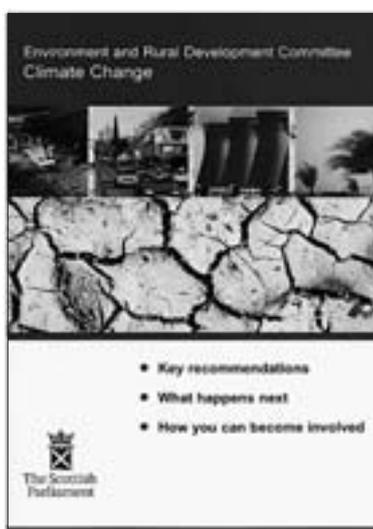
Nearly 20 years since the Brundtland Commission report first outlined the concept, and 13 years since the UN's Rio Earth Summit, the Executive has finally published a "sustainable development" strategy for Scotland. It has nice wholesome pictures, but will it secure a sustainable future for communities, business and the environment? The jury is still well out.

But it is the best rhetoric yet. It hits most of the right notes, covering economic and social as well as environmental issues. And in the words of First Minister Jack McConnell and his LibDem deputy Nicol Stephen in the foreword, it recognises that "Sustainable development is a concept easy to subscribe to, harder to put into practice."

## BACKWARD STEPS

That is especially true for Stephen, the Minister for Roads. Despite commitments to reduce traffic levels, he ignored the recommendations of an independent inquiry on the M74 motorway extension

**Whatever their portfolios, ministers cannot duck the tough decisions that sustainable development demands.**



**MSPs are discussing environmental issues, but is the Executive putting its money where its mouth is?**

and gave it the go ahead, and gladly opened the cheque book when it came to the controversial Aberdeen bypass. After those backward steps and expensive mistakes, he probably felt a lot better opening the UK's largest wind farm recently.

For the strategy to be meaningful, it must represent a step change in Government thinking, and the steps must be consistent, not contradictory. Whatever their portfolios, ministers cannot duck the tough decisions that sustainable development demands.

Transport is the classic example. Everyone agrees that we must reduce congestion, but some think the solution lies in upgrading or dualling various roads, building new ones, or constructing a second

Forth road bridge. Yet, new roads have always generated new traffic. Traffic levels continue to rise and it is alternatives and incentives we need first – not more lanes. Scotland does not have the public finances to build all those projects anyway. Hard choices will have to be made about whether we want to invest in public transport infrastructure or private transport infrastructure.

## SOCIALLY JUST

Moreover, prioritising public transport is the socially just option. In Glasgow, for instance, the majority of households do not own a car – yet the New Labour council is right behind the massive M74 project. We could have a second, a third and a fourth Forth road bridge without ever reducing congestion nor ensuring everyone has access to an effective and affordable means of transport. Just think what could be done with all that money instead. Some large deprived communities such as Methil in Fife are not even on the rail network yet. A thousand million pounds could easily be spent on a new Forth road bridge, when just tens of millions would be needed to reopen stations and new lines across Fife. On transport the Executive has the priorities upside down. It shores up the status quo and adds some trinkets to make itself appear to be at least trying.

Recently, we heard that the Executive's projected spending

## A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR SCOTLAND?

this year on rail services and the integrated transport fund is being revised dramatically downwards and some of the money that will be made available will instead be spent on roads. A £48m cut in Scottish rail services (now £212m) is proposed, as well as a £71m cut in the integrated transport fund (now £153m). Once again, there is a need for the Executive to translate rhetoric into reality.

### WELL-BEING INDEX

The strategy's rejection of economic growth at any cost is warmly welcomed, but maximising GDP remains the Executive's top priority. GDP growth is a measure only of cash flow in the economy – counting road accidents, cigarette sales, flood damage, anything in fact: hardly a good indicator of our well-being in Scotland. Leading economic think-tanks such as the New Economics Foundation have been arguing this for years. Greens propose a well-being index to tell us about real progress.

Sustainable development requires that society, the environment and the economy – the three pillars – be considered together. To put the economy first, as the Executive does, continues the neo-liberal dogma of cash first, clean up later. That approach is clearly taking us in the wrong direction.

The economic wealth and social benefits of a cleaner, healthier, sustainable Scotland is the real prize and a massive opportunity. Simply sacrificing social justice and the environment on the altar of business interests alone is self-defeating and makes us all the poorer. It ignores the long term costs to the economy of congestion, climate change and dependency on expensive energy and resources.

Of course, the biggest challenge of all is climate change. It is the environmental bottom line that will drag down global economic and social progress unless countries such as Scotland, with all its natural resource advantages, can blaze a trail for the rest of the world to follow. The long overdue

**Predictions from the Tyndall centre for climate change research warn that if we allow the aviation sector to continue at the current rate of growth, all other sectors of society will have to reduce their emissions to zero if we are to reduce emissions to safe global levels.**

Scottish climate change programme is eagerly awaited. We need a national greenhouse gas reduction target that binds ministers to taking tough decisions and real action in every sector. This is why I have a bill proposal "The Big Ask" to set targets and make Ministers accountable for their action, or lack of it. All sectors and all parts of our society must pull together and Scotland is capable of showing a fantastic example to the rest of the world of how we move towards a low-carbon economy.

However, if there is no national target, the danger is that sectors such as aviation will pull down our progress in other areas such as domestic energy use. Predictions from the Tyndall centre for climate change research warn that if we allow the aviation sector to continue at the current rate of growth, all other sectors of society will have to reduce their emissions to zero if we are to reduce emissions to safe global levels.

It is time for an energy strategy that allows renewables and energy efficiency to work together. That would also demonstrate that nuclear power remains a dead end. What is sustainable about chucking a waste problem onto future generations and relying on a finite resource, uranium, which is becoming increasingly difficult to source? The Executive strategy notably ducks the nuclear waste issue.

### VICIOUS, UNSUSTAINABLE CYCLE

Sustainable development is about quality of life. I was struck recently by how our town centres in Scotland are starting to degenerate, partly because of the rise of out-of-town shopping developments. Those developments are leading to increased car use – for those who can afford it – and are opening the gate to more housing developments in the green belt, which force people to travel even further. That makes it difficult for people to get back into the town centres, which leads to more economic degeneration. We are trapped in a vicious, unsustainable cycle that lowers well-being,

increases our resource use and ruins the economic growth of our small businesses. We need sustainable development to be a centrepiece of the planning system, and we need to make sure that communities' needs – and business is part of the community – are listened to. Our proposal for a land value taxation system to replace council tax and business rates could play a key role in regenerating our communities. It would ensure that urban brownfield sites and empty high street shops are not left vacant by their owners while development swells on the greenbelt.

### NOBODY'S RESPONSIBILITY

We also need to protect Scotland's natural heritage and resources, in particular to establish a single marine act to break through the guddle of legislation that currently exists. Perhaps there is no better example of why we need a marine act than the current regulatory fiasco over proposed ship-to-ship oil transfer in the Firth of Forth. Apparently, the Forth environment seems to be nobody's responsibility, with the buck being passed between the Executive and Westminster.

The recent parliamentary debate on the sustainable development strategy started with a shocking but bold admission from the Executive that if the rest of the world used the same amount of resources as we do in Scotland we would need another two planets. It is worth reflecting on what that means. In any meaningful therapy session it is important for people to admit that they have a problem and then work out what they will do to solve it. So well done to the Executive for admitting that we are living completely unsustainably in Scotland today – the question now is what will be done to turn that around and deliver real progress.

■ *Mark Ruskell MSP is Scottish Green Party speaker on the environment and Deputy Convener of the Parliament's Environment and Rural Development Committee.*

# A CRUNCH YEAR FOR SCOTTISH COUNCIL WORKERS

As council workers gear up for stoppages over proposals to change their pension scheme, **Richard Whyte** examines the background to this and other points of conflict between local authorities and their staff.

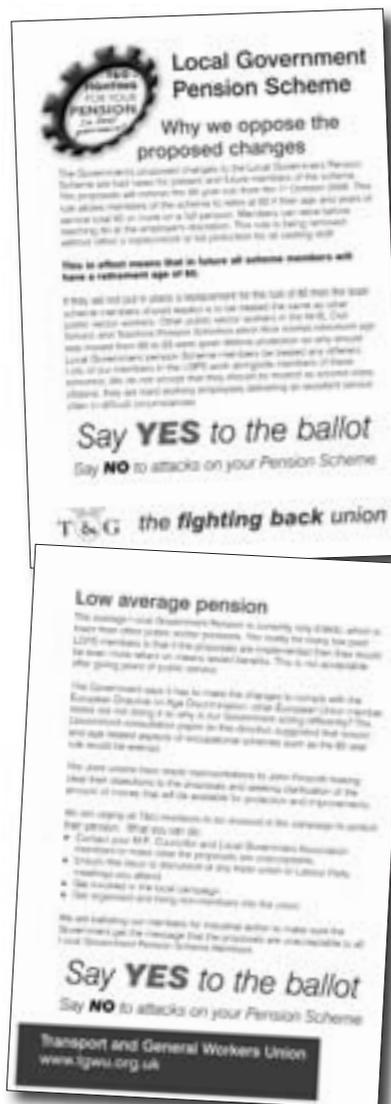
This year will be a watershed for Scottish local authorities and their workers.

A number of key issues that have built up over the past few years will come to a head and be subject to intense negotiations, tough bargaining and the possibility of wave after wave of industrial action. Either common sense will break out within the Scottish Executive who control the purse strings and the political policy agenda or council workers will be forced into action to defend jobs, services, pensions, pay, and terms and conditions.

The financial allocations to Scotland's 32 councils for 2006/7 and 2007/8 are dire and inadequate. The Scottish parliament's own finance committee unanimously called for the Executive to look again at the inequitable treatment of local government and the Executive's approach of imposing budget cuts which affect frontline services.

Again the Scottish parliament's finance committee has been proactive in carrying out a deprivation inquiry which has highlighted that only 1% of the financial allocations to councils as grant-aided expenditure took account of deprivation. The committee were due

... only 1% of the financial allocations to councils as grant-aided expenditure took account of deprivation.



to produce their draft report recently. Those councils whose communities suffer worst from deep-rooted poverty and deprivation, such as Glasgow, Dundee, West Dunbartonshire, Renfrewshire and Lanarkshire also continue to grapple with inadequate funding, greater community needs and additional costs.

With budgets now set for the next financial year, many communities that have already been reeling from cuts packages are braced for more to come.

## EQUAL PAY/SINGLE STATUS

This year also sees the long-drawn-out battle to redress gender-based pay inequality addressed in Scottish councils. Thousands of women council workers will receive settlement for retrospective pay inequality either through negotiation or union-initiated litigation. Whilst addressing historic pay inequality, 2006 will also see the implementation of single status for white collar and blue collar council workers. New pay and grading structures, based on a fair and equality-based evaluation of work content and duties of each post, will be put in place across all councils. The outcome from this will see some workers gain but

## A CRUNCH YEAR FOR SCOTTISH COUNCIL WORKERS

equally will see attempts by council management to rob Peter to pay Paula.

Under the guise of modernisation council management will attempt to impose detrimental terms and conditions on all council workers. This will achieve their twin goals of savings at workers' expense to help balance single status costs and forcing council workers towards the terms and conditions associated with the flexibility of global retail chains. Labour councillors need to ensure that the value base of the labour movement is reflected in the policy approaches, not the value base of new public management bureaucrats, MBA schooled in neo-liberalism.

Yet again the Scottish parliament's finance committee is alert and aware of the financial costs and impact on councils with a short inquiry beginning last month.

### PENSIONS

The decision of Scottish Executive minister Tom McCabe to refuse council workers the same pension protections as other public servants will see massive resistance from council workers. The angry reaction from council workers on this is stronger than on any issue since the 1970s. It is simply incredible to expect council workers to continue, up to the age of 65, to hump bins, slate roofs, clean corridors or provide essential stressful personal services to vulnerable clients. In the east end of Glasgow male life expectancy is 64 years. Eight of the worst ten council areas for low life expectancy in the UK are in Scotland, with Dundee second bottom to Glasgow. The average council worker's pension is around the princely sum of £3,800 a year.

So all the ingredients are in place for an explosion of industrial struggle across Scotland. As the firefighters dispute showed, there are elements in New Labour who will pursue an agenda which is based on defeating the public sector and breaking the Labour/trade union link.

**The average council worker's pension is around the princely sum of £3,800 a year.**

The Scottish Executive has the power to prevent the damaging scenarios from unfolding by resisting the prodding of Blairites whose influence is on the wane. The advice of civic bureaucrats schooled in neo-Thatcherism can be challenged.

There is an opportunity to grasp the nettle and demonstrate a distinctly Scottish approach to reform and progress in Scottish local government: one based on the movement's value base and a public sector ethos of democratic accountability and social justice.

Do we want to see well-trained, highly-motivated workers – delivering high-quality public services within their communities – rewarded with decent pay and conditions and a reasonable retirement age? Alternatively

2006 will be a year racked with strikes, struggles and high political stakes.

On the workers' side unity in thought, word and deed has been secured across all unions in local government. Over pensions this unity extends to other associated areas. Activists are prepared; members are angry. Our response will be determined because our futures at stake. We will defend our position on behalf of ourselves, our colleagues, our families and our communities.

■ *Richard Whyte is a Dundee council worker and a General Executive Member of the Transport & General Workers Union. He is trade union side Chair of the Scottish Joint Council for Local Government.*

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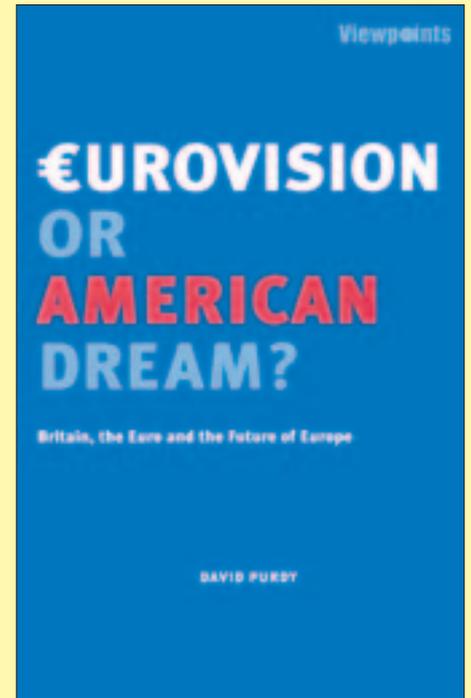
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