

radical feminist green

# Perspectives

No 13 / WINTER 2006-07 / £2

## NHS Treatment Room

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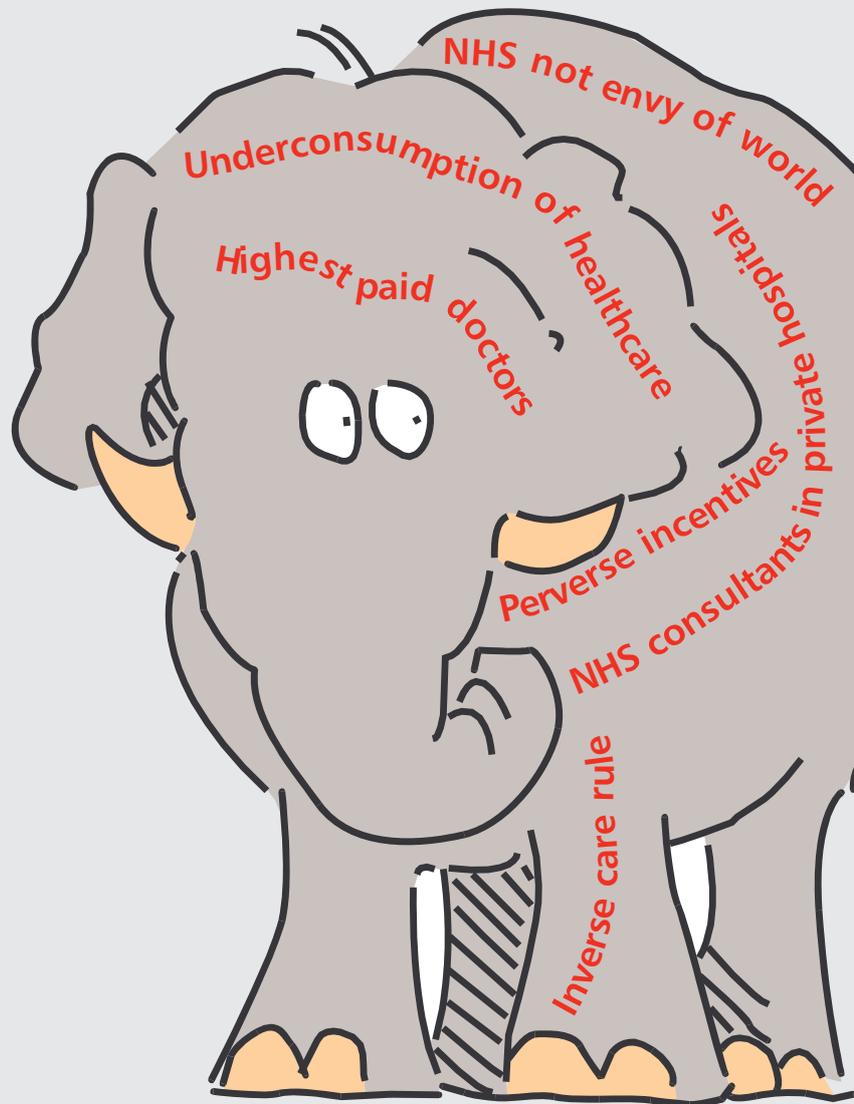
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T H E N A T I O N A L

H E A L T H S E R V I C E B E T T E R

CAN SEE  
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## EDITORIAL

# THE HEALTH OF THE NHS

Britain's National Health Service was one of the great achievements of the post-war Labour government: free health care for all, regardless of means, funded by the state. It still enjoys a huge swell of popular goodwill but, sixty years on, it is not apparent, with the massive funding increases on the one hand and the seemingly endless catalogue of problems on the other, how the NHS might develop to deliver the health care our politicians promise us.

What is clear, argues former NHS director Cameron Brown in an article that seeks to identify the real causes of the battles raging in the health service, is that the NHS is not the envy of the world and that "European social insurance based systems seem to provide more funding, better performance and more equity than the NHS."

The question of how the health service can generate the best outcomes for patients requires confronting many serious issues about interest groups within and outwith the NHS, funding and efficient use of resources.

From a different standpoint, former GP Morag Parnell reviews a fellow former GP's take on the NHS today, based on a lifetime's experience in general practice in South Wales.

Moving away from health, Democratic Left Scotland has been conducting a series of public discussions to inform an examination of its purpose and direction. The scene was set by David Purdy, whose opening talk, setting out the political context in Britain post-war to the present day, is printed in full with – an added bonus – a conceptual map showing how ideas and values linked with political forces throughout this period.

One of the positive features of recent issues of *Perspectives* has been the regular input of Green MSPs to debate in these columns. This time we welcome Chris



**The question of how the health service can generate the best outcomes for patients requires confronting many serious issues ...**

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

Ballance, who is the Scottish Greens' speaker on nuclear issues. Following on from the article on energy policy and nuclear power by Michael Prior in the last issue of *Perspectives*, Chris discusses the potential role of the Scottish Executive in any new-build nuclear future, as well as putting the case for developing low carbon energy generation technologies as a sustainable alternative: better for the environment, better for Scotland.

Again on the environmental issue, Eurig Scandrett looks at the recent government-commissioned Stern report and while he is critical of much of it, he is careful to remind us all, himself included, that we face personal dilemmas and difficult decisions on the road to a greener future.

Following on from the article in *Perspectives* No 12 by DLS member Liz Marshall on a recent visit to Palestine, Amanda Avison reviews a book written by the co-founder of Checkpoint Watch, an Israeli women's organisation which monitors the behaviour of soldiers and border policemen towards Palestinians trying to enter Israel or travelling within the West Bank.

Again, the depressing conclusion is that the Israeli state can only see its own security sustained by oppressing the Palestinians living under occupation. That these Israeli women are prepared to witness and challenge this assumption is, as Amanda concludes, "an outstandingly political act."

We hope to have the next issue of *Perspectives* out in good time for run-up to the Scottish Parliament and council elections in May: potentially a very interesting time as the potential balance of power, and thus the composition of any future governing coalition, at this stage is far from clear. Contributions on this, or any other subject, are as ever welcome.



**EURIG SCANDRETT'S**



**T**he Earth's climate is in crisis. It's official. The environment has moved to the political centre stage. Mainstream politicians are starting to use language which, only a few years ago, was the preserve of green radicals. The major parties, having depoliticised politics, are now competing to explain how they can conjure a management package to save the world. The right combination of revenue-neutral green taxes, investment in transferable technology and consumer encouragement will mend the world with no pain. It may cost a wee bit but not as much as doing nothing. Well at least they realise that government must take responsibility.

Mark Lazarowicz's climate change bill has been given a new breath of life. Government ministers patronise us by telling us with grave faces what we've been screaming at them when they caved in to the truckers on the fuel duty escalator, conceded exemptions to the business climate change levy, and buckled to industry pressure on new runways and motorway extensions.

The 60% reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions advocated by Stern only reiterates the figures quoted by the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution. This is based on a minimal escape from the worst, asserting our right to pollute more than our poorer neighbours. An equitable solution comes closer to an 80% reduction in much of Europe and 90% in the US. So far the UK has failed to achieve the unilateral target of a 20% reduction.

I encountered the media coverage of the stern report on returning from a cheap flight from Berlin – my first ever visit to the symbolic site of the end of the cold war, and celebration of the hegemony of neo-lib-

**If the price of cheap flights were tripled or quadrupled, then decisions would be made on a more sensible ecological basis.**

eral capitalism. I had been invited to speak at an Iona community plenary in Germany, and found thriving debate on how to challenge neo-liberal globalisation and develop alternatives. My friends were keen to learn about the campaigns around the Scottish G8 and how this might contribute to their own protests at G Germany in 2007. Whilst my trip has certainly added to my personal carbon credit, I refuse to feel especially guilty whilst demand-led government policy makes it economically sensible to invite a speaker to fly from Scotland (I reserve judgement on whether the speaker was worth the carbon). If the price of cheap flights were tripled or quadrupled, then decisions would be made on a more sensible ecological basis.

The other flaw in Stern's – and the government's – thinking, is the reliance on carbon trading. Even if the targets were set lower, constructing a trade in carbon leads to making the cheapest carbon savings – such as reducing energy wastage – and investing in cheap carbon credits to offset emissions – for example, forest planting and methane extraction from waste tips. These are often inappropriate in their own terms and fail to address the difficult social, political and technological changes needed to become an effectively carbon-free economy. To do so with any degree of justice requires a substantial drop in living standards of the rich – that means most of us who are reading this column. The politics lies in achieving the drop of living standards without a corresponding fall in quality of life, and ensuring the capacity for the poorest part of humanity to build a decent standard of living at the same time.

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

# There's more to politics than parties



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P/W/06-07

## People and politics

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

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

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

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

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

## What does Democratic Left add?

Our approach to politics is radical, feminist and green.

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

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

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

## Who can join Democratic Left Scotland?

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

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



# THE NHS: A SUITABLE CASE FOR TREATMENT?

Despite huge additional funding, the NHS seems to lurch from one crisis to another. **Cameron Brown** argues that though there is a consensus for improving the service, there is a reluctance to identify the causes of the very real problems.

## THE ELEPHANTS IN THE ROOM ...

It is a sad reflection on commentators' ability to shed light on the current battles raging in health services that it takes Banksy, the graffiti artist, to penetrate the gloom by painting the elephant in the room. Would-be angels rushing to "defend" the NHS are in mortal danger of being trampled to death by the elephants in the room ...

## THE ELEPHANTS ...

1. The NHS is not the envy of the world. It has not been copied by any nations in the world – and to many it is an example of the follies of socialised medicine. As a result the Democrats find it more difficult to introduce reform into the US system because of the NHS.<sup>1</sup>
2. There are plausible arguments that the structures of the NHS lead to underconsumption of healthcare,<sup>2</sup> underinvestment in the means of healthcare production<sup>3</sup> and delivery of healthcare riddled with "perverse incentives".<sup>4</sup>
3. The "inverse care rule" has applied in the NHS – those in most need often receive the least healthcare.<sup>5</sup>
4. Doctors are the highest paid in Europe<sup>6,7</sup> with many doubts about the productivity delivered.<sup>7,8</sup>
5. The huge additional investment in the NHS promoted by Gordon Brown has delivered few additional services. Headline reductions in waiting times have been partially manipulated by creating outpatient and diagnostic waiting lists and been achieved partially by funding NHS consultants to work in private hospitals at rates well over NHS costs.<sup>6,9</sup>

6. European social insurance based systems seem to provide more funding, better performance and more equity than the NHS.<sup>10</sup>

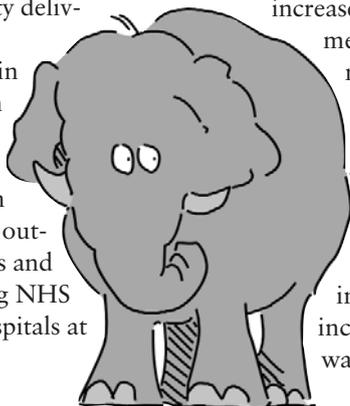
## WHAT HAS ALLOWED THE ELEPHANTS TO ROAM?

A "historic compromise" between the medical profession, the Treasury and politicians to maintain the current unsatisfactory system is due to the dominance of three major factors coming together: the monopolistic nature of the clinical input into the NHS, the monopoly of public funding and the relatively weak effective demand exerted by the consumer. (There are of course other factors at work but let's put those aside for now.) These are expanded upon below:

### 1. PROVISION IS DOMINATED BY LOCAL MONOPOLY PROVIDERS

Local healthcare has come to be dominated by small local monopolies operating a speciality-based geographical franchise based around the District General Hospital. Consultants treat the vast majority of the patients in their patch either as NHS or private patients. Because consultants earn much more by treating private patients there has been a tendency for waiting lists and long waiting times to persist (despite increased investment in the NHS) as an inducement for patients to opt for private treatment. This is manifested in poor productivity figures (see the work of John Yates<sup>11</sup>) and lower rates of clinical intervention than found in other advanced countries,<sup>2,10</sup> the classic example being the reference by Yates to the efforts made to lower waiting lists for orthopaedic operations by increasing numbers of doctors but which was nullified by reductions in productivity.

The NHS is not the envy of the world ... to many it is an example of the follies of socialised medicine.



## THE NHS: A SUITABLE CASE FOR TREATMENT?

The dead hand of the Treasury ensures that there are high-level restrictions on the capacity of the NHS.

This is a conflict of interest at the heart of the NHS which doesn't exist in other countries' systems (which rewards activity regardless of the payer). Its malign effects are that there is little pressure to increase consultant numbers (which would increase local competition) and unplanned expansionism as specialities develop in competition for the same patients. Thus the paradox of the overworked consultant ...

### 2. FUNDING IS PROVIDED ALMOST WHOLLY FROM THE TREASURY

The dead hand of the Treasury ensures that there are high-level restrictions on the capacity of the NHS exerted through control of doctor numbers, the building of new hospitals and cash limited budgets. Spending on health was seen as consumption rather than investment and national priorities had until very recently always been something else: housing, industry, defence or education. Since the mid seventies whatever flexibility there was in funding was reduced by cash limits and most recently by restrictions on transfers between capital and revenue expenditure (arguably the main reason for the embarrassing deficits in the last financial year). The Treasury has been relatively immune from the political pressure

exerted by the elderly, very young and the chronically ill – the predominant users of healthcare – but have been supported by the political classes: themselves too immune from the real problems and faced with more vigorous or sexy competing priorities.

The only alternative was to pay the full costs for healthcare privately on top of the general taxation levied – an option open to the minority only.

The UK has the highest level of state funding of its healthcare as a proportion of the total.

### 3. THERE IS A WEAK CONSUMER VOICE

Professor le Grand of the LSE has highlighted recently that there is little choice or voice available to the average patient, which affects disproportionately those that cannot buy themselves out.<sup>12</sup> There can thus be problems in securing access, proper diagnosis, adequate treatment and regular monitoring. The patient is treated like the parcel in the game “pass the parcel” where the minimum is done before the responsibility is passed on. Chronic disease management or long term conditions management has been revealed recently to be wholly inadequate.

The individual patient can exert little influence, has no redress (unless negligence is proven) and relations

## BOOK REVIEW

# HEALTH CARE – A CLINICIAN'S PERSPECTIVE

This book is written from the point of view of someone who has given a lifetime of service to his patients in general practice in South Wales, and who has adhered to and promoted the original principles on which the NHS was conceived. It is written with unique insights and a deeply held commitment. It is not a medical text. It is written for the widest possible readership.

It is a detailed account and analysis, meticulously researched, of the history, development and current state of the NHS, and draws out the possibilities for its future.

Starting with the vision of the NHS in 1948 as a universal, equitable, caring and comprehensive service providing the best possible health care, free at the point of need, he traces its changes over more than half a century. This reveals the creeping erosions of the original principles and the ever-increasing intrusion of the privatisation of services.

Tudor Hart sees the NHS, as originally intended, as a paradigm for the good society and what he call the “Gift Economy” – one that identifies and responds to needs, rather than what has become a “wealth creation” economy, where health has become just another marketable commodity,



### The political economy of health care, a clinical perspective

by Julian Tudor Hart  
(Policy Press, 2006)

subject to market forces.

He traces, from a clinician's point of view, how the changes in medical knowledge and technology have also changed attitudes, ethics and values in both professionals and patients.

He advocates a healthy partnership between patients, professionals and the state in order to produce the optimum health gain. The book shows clearly how the NHS and health and health care are deeply embedded in the politics, economics and social conditions in which they operate, and allows us to challenge the received wisdom about how the NHS should develop in the 21st century.

Julian Tudor Hart spent 30 years as a GP in mining communities in south Wales, where he also carried out epidemiological research and introduced new ideas in community care. He has also published many books and articles in medical journals, and is a former president of the Socialist Health Association. All this has gained for him international renown.

If you are concerned about the current problems in health care and in the future of the NHS – and who isn't? – then this is a book for you.

**Morag Parnell** (a former GP)

between patient and clinician are tinged with the residual influence of the Poor Law – where the patient is expected to be grateful for small mercies. This is becoming increasingly difficult for people to swallow.

### HOW DOES IT HELP TO FACE UP TO THIS?

Firstly it helps to explain New Labour policies whilst exposing some further paradoxes:

- It explains the aggressive managerialism introduced on day one of New Labour. It was an attempt to rectify the manifestations of poor performance, long waiting lists and poor international comparisons being made – without at that stage adding the money.
- It explains why this was resisted and subverted by clinicians: as it was a direct attack on their core financial interests. In fact managers and clinicians colluded to meet targets by a combination of “gaming” – using out-patient and diagnostic waiting as substitutes for in-patient waiting times – and by paying consultants to reduce waiting lists by transferring the work to local private hospitals!
- It explains the fury when this became apparent and the determination to introduce choice and competition – by inviting new entrants into the market place (ISTCs, new diagnostic services and initiatives in primary care) and by promoting more internal competition (payment by results, expansion of consultant numbers, shortened medical training, recruitment from abroad, more consultant-led provision).
- It explains why PFI has been expanded and the new entrant’s strategy developed to allow new sources of funding to support the expansion plans and the refurbishment plans of the NHS that would never have been wholly supported from Treasury funds.
- It explains why the attempts have been made to involve patients in local decision-making around healthcare to give more expression to the consumer voice. Overview and scrutiny committees have been introduced to ensure the voice is heard.

The paradoxes remain:

- Managerialism has been misunderstood and misdirected. It has alienated the mass of NHS workers who have been innocent bystanders in the conflicts described above. As a consequence they have allied themselves against the government and its policies rather than in supporting its positive features.
- Managerialism has been ineffective in achieving its aims but no one is admitting it yet.
- Extra money from within the public purse has had a more positive impact on the NHS than the additional funds to date from external sources. This is not predicted to continue.
- The battle has not yet been concluded regarding the effective introduction of choice and competition and the opening of avenues for new funding. For example the International Accounting Standards Board may put some off-balance-sheet

transactions back on the Treasury books and ISTCs are still being fiercely resisted. The result being the impact on the ground has so far has been marginal.

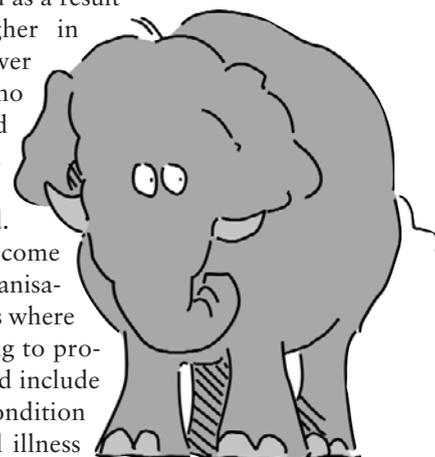
- Providing opportunities to local populations to influence health decisions provides more opportunities for Tories to lead marches against Labour cuts in Health services (as witnessed in Gloucester recently)!
- Patient services remain poor by international comparison and Gordon Brown has little to show for the huge investment in NHS services.

But more importantly the analysis points to future initiatives:

- Further radical de-monopolisation tactics would include a further massive increase of doctors in training. The increases to date are not really coping with the expected fall-out of the profession as more doctors take early retirement and more women doctors opt for part-time work than factored into plans so far and as it is realised that doctors are very effective providers of healthcare in a system that rewards and supports high productivity. It was actually a radical demand of the 1968 students in France to open up access to medical schools. This was successful and as a result numbers are very much higher in France than the UK, pay is lower and healthcare better. There is no shortage of students willing and able to complete the studies and increasing numbers of doctors should be a radical demand. Other opportunities would come from allowing independent organisations to provide services in areas where the NHS is demonstrably failing to provide good services. These would include many aspects of long term condition management, including mental illness and therapy services or where long waiting lists are persistent.

- Further radical patient empowerment could come from allowing more direct access to specialist services, although controls would need to be introduced to prevent abuse.
- In addition the ability for patients to achieve redress when harmed by the NHS should be improved. Although there has been recent comment on the iniquities of the compensation culture the reality is the NHS gets away with what may not be murder but routine systematic denial of healthcare and adequate care. A more rigorous mechanism for providing redress or no fault compensation should be a priority in a system that values the rights of the individual. There should be more explicit rights to healthcare and to redress for damages. The only argument against is that it would be expensive rather than it being wrong in principle.

**Patient services remain poor by international comparison and Gordon Brown has little to show for the huge investment in NHS services.**



## THE NHS: A SUITABLE CASE FOR TREATMENT?

**The Scottish paradox has been noted whereby Scotland spends more than England and Wales on health services but has far worse outcomes and services are no better.**

- On the question of funding it is becoming more obvious that the NHS will not be able to keep up with patient needs and opportunities to benefit from modern healthcare without further ways of introducing extra funding.<sup>13</sup> Other European social insurance funding systems lever more funds from patients and attract more private investment without affecting equity of access. Why is it beyond the UK or Scotland?
- Finally the Scottish paradox has been noted whereby Scotland spends more than England and Wales on health services but has far worse outcomes and services are no better. Part of the reason for that is far less is spent on private healthcare and so there is more call on state funds. Scotland needs to encourage more diversity of provision – it would relieve the public purses and provide better healthcare all round (and would provide more jobs). What will it choose? It has chosen to support care in nursing homes; can it choose to expand its medical schools, increase the numbers of doctors, offer opportunities to new providers of healthcare, provide rights for patients and consider European-style funding systems?

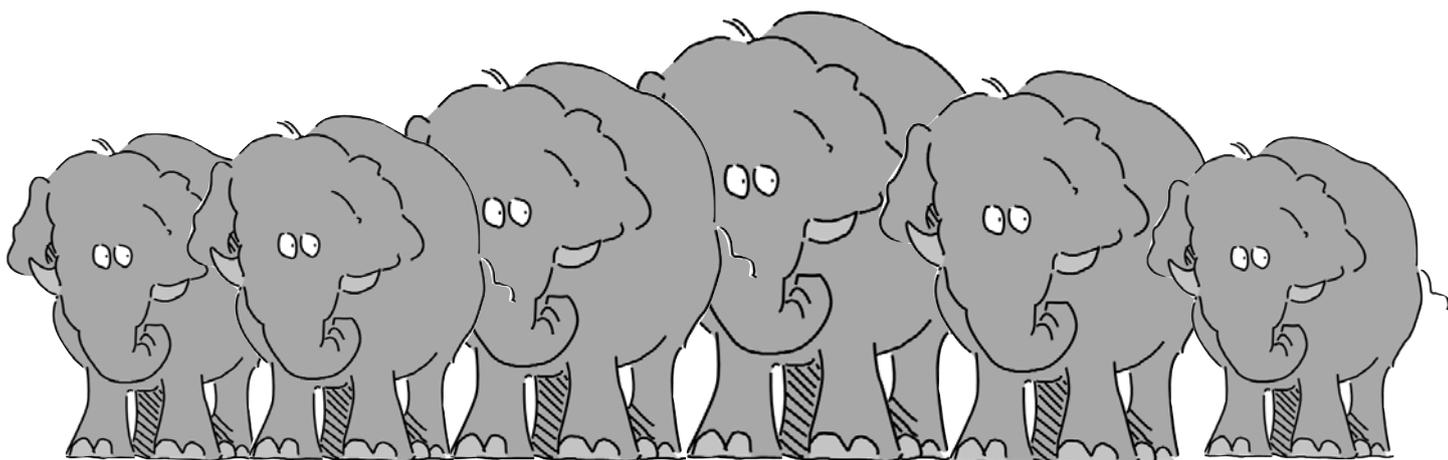
### CONCLUSION

Scotland has an opportunity to improve one of its core public services, attract new capital and jobs, and demonstrate it can think and act outside the rigid box within which the NHS debate has settled in the UK as a whole. On the other hand the elephants will continue to roam unhindered and unseen like always ...

■ *Cameron Brown is a former NHS director and management consultant with 20 years' experience of working with the health service.*

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# POLITICAL TRADITIONS AND POLICY PARADIGMS IN POST-WAR BRITAIN

As Democratic Left Scotland nears the conclusion of a discussion series reviewing its purpose and direction, **David Purdy**'s opening talk set the political context.

The accompanying map (overleaf) shows the relationship between social values, political traditions and policy paradigms in post-war Britain. Four values – freedom, order, equality and hierarchy serve as compass points. These are not the only possible goals of public policy – others are happiness or well-being, efficiency, cohesion, justice and solidarity – but they suffice to locate the three traditions that dominated British politics during the twentieth century: liberalism, conservatism and socialism. For the sake of completeness, the map also shows where anarchist and totalitarian ideologies fit into the scheme of things. A policy paradigm, it should be noted, is not a policy programme, but a set principles and guidelines for generating programmes. Since the Second World War, two such broad approaches have shaped the policies of British governments – Keynesian social democracy and neo-liberalism – the former prevailing during the “golden age” of post-war capitalism from 1945 to 1975, the latter gaining ascendancy thereafter.

The map is, of course, historically and culturally specific. For other countries in the same period or for Britain at different periods, a different map would be needed. In the US, for example, socialism never made much headway, while in continental Europe, liberalism was relatively weak, fascism still cast a long shadow and Christian

**Four values – freedom, order, equality and hierarchy serve as compass points.**

freedom

Democracy or, in France, Gaullism mobilised the centre-right. Similarly, in nineteenth-century Britain the religious divisions that emerged from the Reformation and the Civil War were still a potent political force. Today, I shall argue, the whole political spectrum has shifted so far to the right that the map is almost obsolete.

## SOCIAL VALUES

For every social value, four questions arise: What does it mean? Why does it matter? How much does it matter? And how is it to be realised? The last of these questions is considered later. For the moment, I want to focus on the first three. How are the concepts of equality and freedom understood in rival traditions? How are these ideals defended or criticised? How do they relate to other values? And which takes precedence when they come into conflict?

Conservatives have traditionally been hostile to egalitarianism. They may concede that we are all equal in the eyes of God, but in this world, they insist, social hierarchy is inevitable: some people just are more able, intelligent, forceful or wiser than others. Governments should avoid grandiose schemes for social levelling and human emancipation and concentrate on the more mundane, but essential task of protecting public order. Liberals and socialists both reject these views, but disagree about

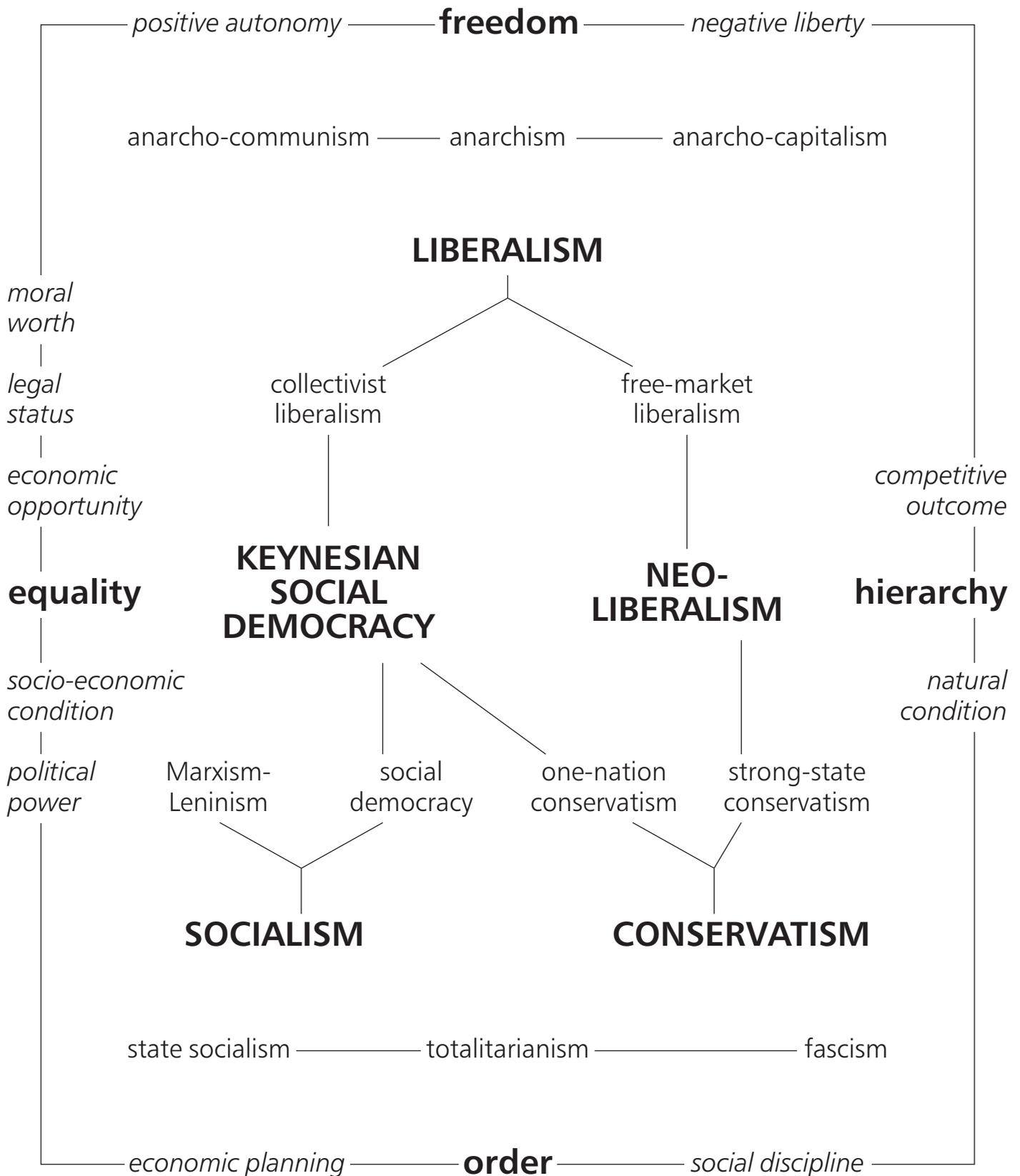
what equality entails. The liberal ideal is a society in which all members have equal moral standing (“each counts for one and none for more than one”) and everyone is assured the same basic liberties and opportunities, whereas socialists argue that this is not enough, for wide and persistent inequalities in the distribution of resources and power – notably, by class, gender and race – are both unjust and divisive, making it impossible to build a self-governing democracy in which people’s shared identity as citizens tempers the sectional interests that divide them.

The concept of freedom is similarly contested. For classical liberals, freedom is the supreme social value and is defined in terms of non-interference: I am free to the extent that others – whether individuals, private organisations or public agencies – leave me alone to work out my own salvation. Taken together with the liberal commitment to (limited) equality, this implies that the proper role of government is to secure the maximum liberty for each, compatible with equal liberty for all. Thus, the state must enforce the rule of law, establish and maintain a competitive market economy and protect legitimately acquired property rights. It must also guarantee basic civil liberties: of worship, conscience, thought, expression, movement, assembly and association.

Notice that nothing about this essentially negative conception entails a commitment to democra-

## POLITICAL TRADITIONS AND POLICY PARADIGMS IN POST-WAR BRITAIN

Social values, political traditions and policy paradigms in post-war Britain: a conceptual map



Main foci of political mobilisation 1900–1970: class and nation. Thereafter, new social movements form around gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity and Green values.

cy, representative or otherwise. It was not until the nineteenth century that liberal thinkers like Bentham and Mill began to advocate parliamentary reform. And by the mid-twentieth century, only thirty years after the achievement of universal adult suffrage, neo-liberals like Hayek and Friedman had become distinctly uneasy about democracy. They still preferred it to any form of authoritarian rule, but were alarmed by the tendency of elected governments to accede to popular pressure by usurping market forces and proposed various technical fixes to depoliticise certain issues or limit government discretion. Their advice has been widely heeded, particularly in matters of money and finance. National governments have surrendered control over currency exchange rates and cross-border capital flows; responsibility for setting interest rates has been transferred to “independent” committees of experts; and stringent rules have been imposed on public spending and borrowing.

Socialists favour a positive conception of freedom, arguing that people are free to the extent that they have the opportunities, resources, capabilities and time to think for themselves, make their own choices and shape their own lives in accordance with their most deeply cherished values and beliefs. Moreover, since human beings are not atomised individuals, but social animals who live together in political communities, the ideal of personal autonomy can only be realised in self-governing societies where democratic institutions extend to all collective activities, including – notably – the production of goods and services – and are not confined to voluntary associations and periodic elections to decide which party or coalition should form the government.

#### POLITICAL TRADITIONS

Political traditions are not the same as political parties. Consider the history of British liberalism. For forty years after the repeal of

**Social democrats disavowed the classical Marxist view that socialism could not be achieved without the hammer blow of revolution.**

equality



**The final talk in the series, Scotland: Nation, State and Self-Government, introduced by former MP and MSP John McAllion and Democratic Left Scotland convenor Stuart Fairweather, takes place on Saturday 17th March 2007 at 2pm, in the Quaker Meeting House, 7 Victoria Terrace, Edinburgh EH1 2JL. We hope to print other contributions to these discussions in future issues of Perspectives.**

the Corn Laws in 1846, the Liberal party was the natural party of government. It stood for political liberty, economic progress and social reform and was backed by a broad alliance stretching from Whig grandees and captains of industry to radical democrats and working men. The party suffered a heavy blow in 1886 when the Liberal Unionists defected to the Conservatives after Gladstone came out in support of Irish home rule: apart from a brief interlude from 1892 to 1895, it was out of office for the next twenty years. But it eventually recovered to win a landslide victory at the general election of 1906 and went on to lay the foundations of the welfare state and to curb the powers of the House of Lords, Britain’s chief remaining bastion of feudal privilege.

During the First World War, the Liberals suffered another split, between the followers of Asquith and the supporters of Lloyd George. This time the division proved fatal and by 1923 Labour had forged ahead as the main alternative to the Conservatives. Yet despite the eclipse of the party, liberal ideas remained enormously influential, hegemonic even. After all, twentieth-century British politics largely revolved around which version of the liberal creed offered the best basis for governing a capitalist democracy: the “revisionist” precepts proposed by collectivist liberals from Hobhouse and Hobson to Beveridge and Keynes, who rejected laissez-faire and urged a larger role for the state; or the free market doctrines espoused by Hayek and Friedman, for whom that government is best which governs least.

Collectivist liberalism evolved in response to the challenge of socialism and the emergence – notably in Germany – of conservative nationalist regimes, which combined social protection with military strength. The other major traditions underwent similar adaptations. From Peterloo to the General Strike, the right’s reflex

response to social unrest was to demand firm action to restore order. Gradually, however, conservatives came to realise that democracy and reform did not spell subversion and strife. Their traditional goals – to safeguard property, uphold order, unify the nation and confound its enemies – could be achieved within a democratic framework, provided they learned how to win and retain mass support. One-nation conservatives sought to heal the wounds caused by class division by appealing to the “higher reality” of the nation and pursuing a programme of cautious, piecemeal, pragmatic reform. Social democrats, for their part, disavowed the classical Marxist view that socialism could not be achieved without the hammer blow of revolution, and embraced a parliamentary strategy aimed at advancing distinctive working class interests, enacting other reforms with a popular appeal and disseminating socialist ideas.

#### KEYNESIAN SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

The dynamics of political competition and the interpenetration of rival ideologies help to explain the hybrid character of Keynesian social democracy, a marriage of Keynesian economics and social democratic politics, which for thirty years after the Second World War provided Britain’s political class with an unwritten guide to public policy. The main political parties continued to espouse divergent philosophies and to compete for power, but they shared certain ways of thinking and certain practical commitments in common. Thus, they all supported the welfare state as an embodiment of social citizenship, but for different and, indeed, incompatible reasons: collectivist liberals because it reconciled social protection with private enterprise; social democrats because it set limits to the market and gave them a tool for reducing social inequality; one-nation conservatives because it offered a salve for class conflict and a prophylactic against socialism.

## POLITICAL TRADITIONS AND POLICY PARADIGMS IN POST-WAR BRITAIN

The post-war settlement was a historic compromise in which the business class accepted radical reform, while workers settled for managed capitalism. It rested on three pillars: the maintenance of full employment by means of counter-cyclical demand management; a mixed economy involving a major role for public ownership, planning and regulation; and the provision of a wide range of tax-financed social services and cash benefits, the former provided mostly free of charge, the latter subject to various qualifying conditions. By historical standards, the performance of the British economy under the aegis of this model was impressive. Output and productivity grew faster and unemployment, cyclical fluctuations and income inequality were all lower than ever before or since. The model was, nevertheless, deeply flawed.

Policy-making was top-down and statist. Macroeconomic management was the province of mandarins and technocrats. So were the nationalised industries and welfare bureaucracies. The public realm, as distinct from the public sector, remained woefully underdeveloped as a forum for debating options, changing minds and legitimising decisions. The state was supposed to take care of everything. But this encouraged lobbying and pressure group activity by organised sectional interests eager to tap state power and funding, without providing any forum for interest groups in civil society to negotiate over questions of distribution – who gets what, who does what and who decides what – and engage in a collective process of puzzling, learning and problem-solving. Hence, people's notions about what government can achieve, at any rate through its own unaided efforts, were wildly exaggerated, leading to an equal and opposite loss of confidence in government after the crisis of the mid-1970s. Indeed, the view gained ground that the state itself was the source

**Nor was full employment an unqualified triumph.**

of Britain's problems and that the growth of public spending needed to be checked and reversed.

Whether or not government was in some sense "too big" or Britain "ungovernable", the state's reliance on strong and sustained economic growth to maintain full employment and provide "painless" public finance was a source of vulnerability, for when growth faltered and recessions became deeper and longer, governments struggled to close the gap between heightened popular expectations and dwindling tax revenues. In any case, perpetual growth was a mixed blessing: material living standards improved, but the quality of life deteriorated as environmental and social assets were destroyed or damaged. Nor was full employment an unqualified triumph, for in a society where men remained the primary breadwinners and women continued to bear the main responsibility for unpaid provisioning and caring work in the home, job market participation and rewards were heavily skewed by gender.

The Achilles heel of Keynesian social democracy was inflation. Historically, capitalism had relied on periodic mass unemployment to keep wages in check and maintain discipline at work. With wages

determined by free collective bargaining, the consequence of removing this built-in stabiliser was that across the economy as a whole the

growth of money wages persistently outstripped the growth of output per worker, pushing up labour costs per unit of output. In "hard" product markets, profit margins were squeezed, curtailing investment and hampering firms' ability to compete with overseas rivals. In "soft" product markets, firms sought to protect their profit margins by raising their selling prices. But this eroded real wages and provoked fresh demands for higher money wages. Thus, as long as fiscal and monetary policy was dedicated to maintaining full employment, wages and prices

went on chasing each other upwards in an endless spiral.

Inflation was little more than a minor irritant as long as the rate at which prices rose remained low, steady and tolerably predictable, but once it became high, variable and worryingly uncertain, distributional conflicts threatened to tear society apart. There were two, but only two policy options. One was to abandon the wages free-for-all and introduce some form of pay policy, not as a temporary expedient, but on a permanent basis; the other was to abandon the commitment to full employment and institute an old-fashioned deflationary purge, driving unemployment up to whatever level was required, in Marx's words, to "curb the pretensions of the working class".

In a democratic society, a durable incomes policy could not simply be imposed: pay norms, together with some mechanism for enforcing them, had to be agreed between government, trade unions and employers' organisations. And once the social partners crossed the threshold separating civil society from the state and assumed co-responsibility for managing the national economy, tripartite negotiation was bound to extend to wider issues. Thus, the unions were in a position to bargain over the terms on which they would be prepared to accept pay restraint. They could, of course, simply demand non-wage concessions for themselves or their members. But there was also the chance to build a hegemonic bloc by exchanging pay restraint for economic democracy: in company boardrooms, no less than in the corridors of power; and on strategic issues, not just day-to-day management. Since the 1960s, a veritable mutiny had swept the British Isles as feminists, students, environmentalists, shop stewards, black power militants and movements of submerged or oppressed national minorities challenged the status quo and groped towards a new kind of state. By advancing a programme of radical democracy, the labour movement could reach out to

hierarchy

these forces in a concerted bid to resolve the immediate crisis, while sowing the seeds of a new civilisation.

The chance was spurned. Beset by a dire combination of runaway inflation, falling profitability, rising unemployment and a sinking pound, the Wilson and Callaghan governments embarked on a prolonged holding operation designed to sideline the Labour left, placate big business and contain working class disaffection. But when the unions withdrew from the Social Contract in 1978 and reverted to “free collective bargaining”, the fate of the Labour government – and, indeed, of the labour movement – was sealed. Having won the general election of 1979, the Conservatives lost no time in dismantling the post-war settlement and establishing a new regime.

#### NEO-LIBERALISM

In Thatcherism, the old Tory penchant for a strong state was coupled with a radical programme for unleashing market forces. Repudiating incomes policy and corporatist policy bargaining, the new government instituted strict monetary rules in a bid to control inflation, while simultaneously reining back public spending to make room for tax cuts. It also set about emasculating the unions, deregulating the labour market, eradicating the labour movement and curtailing the powers of local authorities. In their second term, the Conservatives began “selling the family silver”. Initially this was a financial wheeze devised to deal with an outsize budget deficit that was the result of the government’s own policies. But it was soon realised that privatising state-owned industries and giving council tenants the right to buy their homes at knock-down prices was a golden opportunity to slim down the state, extend the sway of the market and build a “property-owning democracy” all at the same time. Mrs Thatcher’s third term is chiefly remembered for the poll

**First-wave neo-liberalism was a harsh and ruthless exercise in creative destruction.**

order

tax, which finally brought her down. But its lasting legacy was the invention of the “quasi-market”, an ingenious device that makes it possible to separate the finance of public services from their provision. Services continue to be paid for out of taxation and are still largely free at the point of use, but service-providers compete for public contracts and service-users can choose among alternative suppliers.

First-wave neo-liberalism was a harsh and ruthless exercise in creative destruction. The task of demolishing the old regime and laying the foundations of a new one called for a government with a strong sense of purpose, which was ready to confront the various vested interests that stood in its way. Once this heavy work was done, the neo-liberal revolution entered a second, gentler phase in which the tasks of government were to re-integrate the victims of economic restructuring into mainstream society, to equip and motivate people so that they could keep up with the high-speed world of turbo-capitalism – or at least avoid falling behind or dropping out – and to embed the ethos of *homo economicus* more firmly into everyday life. This was work for which messianic zeal and belligerence were ill suited.

The Major government made a start on developing a more inclusive and emollient approach to policy, but having unexpectedly won the 1992 election, the Conservatives were soon scuppered by the ejection of sterling from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism – another unforeseen event that stimulated recovery in the British economy, but ruined the Tories’ reputation for economic competence – and by their own internal divisions over Europe. However, Major’s misfortune was Labour’s opportunity and once Blair became leader and New Labour was launched, the party seized the ground that their opponents had failed to make their own.

In office, New Labour consolidated the monetary and fiscal

changes introduced by the Conservatives, but increased spending on education and health and switched the emphasis of social policy away from “passive” support for market casualties towards getting benefit claimants into “work” (i.e. paid employment). The aims of the various “New Deal” programmes are to reduce “welfare dependency” by enhancing employability, to combat social exclusion by increasing labour force participation, to furnish employers with a plentiful supply of adequately trained and motivated workers, and to reassure taxpayers that they are not being exploited by “scroungers”. Labour supply activation also reinforces the effects of deregulation, weak trade unions and inward migration in keeping labour markets slack, wage inflation at bay and workers on their toes.

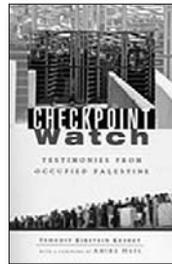
The other great theme of New Labour’s neo-liberalism is public service reform. The government’s enthusiasm for commercial contracts, competitive markets and cost efficiency knows no bounds. Convinced that “business knows best”, it has gone even further than its predecessors in outsourcing service provision to the private sector. Likewise, it has eschewed the issue of government bonds, the traditional method of raising money to finance public investment, in favour of private finance initiatives (PFI) – arrangements whereby private companies own the physical assets in which their money is invested and lease them back to the public sector, typically on lucrative terms – despite the paucity of evidence that PFI projects yield significant efficiency savings and despite the risk that if private companies fail, the cost will fall on the public purse. And in its unremitting efforts to extract “better value for taxpayers’ money”, it has imposed a welter of targets and performance standards on public agencies, relying on external audit rather than professional integrity as its preferred means of assuring service quality. Within this overall framework,

hospitals, schools and universities enjoy greater operational independence than in the past. The objectives they serve are still politically determined and are, to that extent, different from those of profit-seeking firms. Nevertheless, they increasingly behave like commercial companies, blurring the public-private boundary and encouraging service-users to think of themselves as customers rather than as citizens.

After thirty years of neo-liberal social engineering, the political landscape has changed out of all recognition. Just as Mrs Thatcher and the New Right, in presiding over the first wave of the market revolution, killed off one-nation conservatism, so Tony Blair and New Labour, in completing Mrs Thatcher's unfinished business, have put an end to labourism. And with the demise of the two political formations that dominated British politics for sixty years after the First World War, Britain has acquired, for the first time since the industrial revolution, a thoroughly bourgeois pattern of politics. Both old Tory and working class opposition to unfettered capitalism have been crushed, while the mainstream parties, jostling in the crowded centre-ground, offer minor variations on the theme of job-centred consumerism and boundless economic growth. Concerns about climate change, the "special relationship", the "war on terror" and the state of the Union – on both sides of the border – strike discordant notes. But as yet no party, movement, think-tank or network has developed a new policy paradigm capable of challenging neo-liberal hegemony. Or to put it another way, there is a large hole in British politics where the democratic left ought to be.

■ *David Purdy is a member of Democratic Left Scotland's national council. He is the organiser of a series of DLS-sponsored meetings on the theme What are we here for?, the above article forming the opening talk.*

# OBSERVATIONS OF THE OCCUPATION



**Checkpoint Watch: Testimonies from Occupied Palestine**  
by Yehudit Keshet  
Keshet  
(Zed Books,  
£14.99)

Completed in mid 2005, *Checkpoint Watch: Testimonies from Occupied Palestine* is a critical exploration of Israel's curfew-closure-checkpoint policy with particular emphasis on its system of military checkpoints and blockades in the West Bank. Keshet uses extracts from personal communications by members of Machsom Watch (Israeli for Checkpoint Watch) in addition to information about, and analysis of, the bureaucracy supporting the occupation to give an Israeli testimony to the experiences of the Palestinian people who live under occupation.

As a co-founding member of Checkpoint Watch, Keshet also critically examines the organisation's transformation from a feminist, radical protest movement to one being reclaimed by the consensus and highlights the tensions between Watchers with different motivations. Keshet contends that the dilemmas faced by these Israeli women mirror the political divisions within Israeli society – ethnic, religious and social divisions causing the country to be largely held together by the conflict.

Machsom Watch, or Checkpoint Watch, was established in February 2001 by Ronnee Jaeger, Adi Kuntsman and Yehudit Keshet. An all-women organisation from the outset, the founders felt that, as a result of the role played by military service in the identity of the Israeli male, men would be disadvantaged and possibly obstructive in dealing with the security forces. It was also felt that the presence of men would diminish women's role as bearers of knowledge.

The initial stated goals were to monitor the behaviour of soldiers and border policemen at checkpoints, to ensure the protection of the human and civil rights of Palestinians attempting to enter Israel and travelling within the West Bank and to bear witness and report their observations to the widest possible audience. 365 days a year three or four observations are carried out at checkpoints throughout the West Bank and around Jerusalem.

According to B'Tselem, the Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, figures updated on 25th September 2005 recorded 27 permanent staffed checkpoints inside the West Bank, 26 staffed checkpoints along the Green Line, 16 temporarily-staffed checkpoints some with watch towers and hundreds of erected barriers e.g. concrete blocks denying access in and out of Palestinian villages. In addition to this, on the Israeli Apartheid road system in the West Bank Palestinian travel is restricted or prohibited on 41 roads or sections of roads covering a

total of 700 km – roads on which Israelis can travel freely.

A report by the Palestinian Red Crescent Society stated that, at checkpoints between 28 September 2000 and October 2003, 991 cases were denied medical access, 25 medical personnel were killed and 425 injured, 83 patients died due to denial of access, 121 ambulances were damaged and 57 women were forced to give birth – 32 of these cases resulting in the death of the infant.<sup>1</sup>

Why checkpoints and not some other aspect of the occupation? “Both physically and symbolically they embody the Occupation.” (Keshet p4) It is here that the Palestinian civilians suffer constant humiliation and experience most disruption to their daily lives. They are said to prevent suicide bombings but the policy of passage permits began in 1991 long before the suicide bombings began. They are said to protect Israel from terrorist attacks but are merely a place for breeding violence and resentment. They are said to keep Palestinians out of Israel but in reality they divide Palestinian communities and keep families apart, separate children from their schools, people from health care provision and workers from their places of work. They are said to improve the security of Israelis but their actual function is to oppress Palestinians by the use of collective punishment with visible military control and disruption. “Your time, your space, your life are no longer yours to call your own.” (Keshet p75)

Keshet examines the different motivations that by December 2004 had resulted in 500 Watchers and the tensions between those who see their activism on a political level and those who wish to present it as purely humanitarian action. Many of the women have had to confront their own denial of the evils of the occupation. Keshet also explores some of the painful dilemmas in regard to identities as Zionists and as

**It challenges the absolute power of the checkpoints and speaks out about the devastating impact they have on the lives of Palestinians living under occupation.**

loyal Israeli citizens and hence the wish to depoliticise their actions and raises the issue of victimhood which haunts the Watcher-soldier relationship. There is also a discussion about how the Israeli media portrays Checkpoint Watch, other leftist organisations and human rights activism in general.

“Even on the left of the political map there seems to be a sense that while the Palestinians are entitled to their rights, their rights are less equal than those of Israelis.” (Keshet p122)

*Checkpoint Watch: Testimonies from Occupied Palestine* bears witness to the injustice of Israel’s mechanism of oppression and is an insightful guide to understanding the bureaucracy of the system which asserts Israel’s supremacy and control. Through the testimonies of the Watchers it challenges the absolute power of the checkpoints and speaks out about the devastating impact they have on the lives of Palestinians living under occupation.

The Israeli women of Checkpoint Watch are declaring the value of Palestinian life and dignity. Whatever the different motivations behind this humanitarian observation, in the Israeli context, this is an outstandingly political act.

**Amanda Avison**

## REFERENCES

All page references are quotes taken from Keshet, *Checkpoint Watch: Testimonies from Occupied Palestine*.

1. Ref quoted by Keshet as accessed on [www.palestinercs.org](http://www.palestinercs.org) on 26 March 2005.

Further information is available at:

[www.machsomwatch.org](http://www.machsomwatch.org)

[www.palestinercs.org](http://www.palestinercs.org)

[www.btselem.org](http://www.btselem.org)

[www.humanitarianinfo.org](http://www.humanitarianinfo.org)



[www.democricleftscotland.org.uk](http://www.democricleftscotland.org.uk)

# SCOTLAND AND NUCLEAR POWER

Scottish Executive ministers can refuse new-build nuclear ...  
but they also have the power to give the go-ahead with very  
little public scrutiny argues **Chris Ballance** MSP.

**W**ith the election for the Scottish Parliament looming, political parties are now in full campaigning mode. Perhaps no issue is quite as hotly debated as energy, and nuclear power in particular will be a key tug-of-war issue. The prospect of Westminster, in cahoots with energy companies, foisting new nuclear power stations on Scotland is one that Scottish Labour leader and First Minister Jack McConnell will be doing his utmost to dismiss for fear of losing ground to pro-independence parties.

So how much say will Scotland have in the final decision? Do Scottish ministers have the powers to reject new nuclear power stations? Of course, whether new build goes ahead or not depends largely on the make-up of the Executive post-election but, in terms of devolved and reserved powers, it's clear that Scottish ministers will have the final say: they can say no. Under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989, the permission of Scottish Ministers is required for all power stations with a capacity of over 50MW (whether nuclear or not). Alistair Darling recently confirmed this in the House of Commons by stating: "New power stations in Scotland require consent, under the Electricity Act 1989, from Scottish Executive Ministers ... At the end of the day, because the Scottish Executive would have to give planning permission, it is for them to decide whether a large nuclear

power station should be built. The matter rests with them."

## MINIMAL DEBATE

Another key factor is the new National Planning Framework (NPF), part of the Planning (Scotland) bill currently being scrutinised by Parliament. Greens have lobbied throughout the legislative process for the NPF to incorporate sustainability as a guiding principle, and for more robust parliamentary and public scrutiny of the Framework. The NPF will include key infrastructural developments, possibly nuclear power stations, and must be subject to close scrutiny. That Labour and LibDems have resisted the moves to improve scrutiny suggests they want at least to have the option of building new nuclear power stations with minimal political or public debate. As things stand, the NPF will get 60 days' parliamentary scrutiny (that's enough for a very short committee inquiry and one chamber debate), with no examination in public or public inquiry. The Minister – not Parliament – will have the power to give final approval. After that any specific development included in the document will be more or less a done deal.

So the Executive ministers can refuse new build if they are so minded, but they also have the power to give the go-ahead with very little public scrutiny. If ministers do give the go-ahead, there is little else in legislative terms that

**If ministers do give the go-ahead, there is little else in legislative terms that could be used to block new build.**

could be used to block new build. Even the much-vaunted "strategic environmental assessment" (SEA) legislation, the supposedly "groundbreaking" new law which the Executive parties – especially the LibDems – frequently pat themselves on the back for, is virtually toothless when it comes to nuclear power. In summer last year, Scottish Ministers made the astonishing admission, in response to questioning from the Greens, that it will be up to private companies to determine whether building new nuclear power stations would require an SEA. Somehow, I cannot see many plcs rushing to commission such a study.

## LIABILITIES PILE UP

Further, when it comes to extending the life of operating stations (for example, Torness in East Lothian), it is the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate, not Scottish ministers, that give the go-ahead. Greens will strongly oppose any such moves. The longer nuclear power stations operate the greater the risks posed by waste, faults and leaks, and the liabilities continue to pile up.

Aside from legislative concerns, where do the political parties stand on the issue? Greens have nailed their colours to the mast by stating unequivocally that they will not be part of, or support, a government that will give the go-ahead to new nuclear stations. Labour are sticking to their "maybe yes, maybe no" line that they have clung to since

2003. While Labour Party conference last year backed a pro-nuclear motion, Jack McConnell, mindful of the public opposition in an election year, has refused to endorse the position.

#### **NON-COMMITTAL SILENCE**

Tories will probably back new nuclear, and the SNP are anti. The Liberal Democrats oppose nuclear power in principle yet, when challenged by the Greens, they notably refuse to rule out new build in the next parliamentary session. The LibDems' record in government is one of broken promises, u-turns and environmentally-disastrous decisions (their ministers are responsible for two massive and unnecessary road-building projects, they opposed congestion charging in Edinburgh and are overseeing ongoing expansion of the aviation industry) so this non-committal silence is concerning, though perhaps not surprising.

The pro-nuclear lobby suffered a serious setback last October when cracks were discovered in two reactors at British Energy's Hunterston B station in Ayrshire, leading the company to announce the closure of the plant. The announcement, coupled with the admission that yet again they would not be able to generate as much this year as promised, led to a quarter of the company's share value being wiped out overnight, and has almost certainly scuppered government plans for its privatisation later this year. This was a timely reminder of the folly of nuclear power. It also heaped even more pressure onto the already shaky financial status of the company, casting further doubt on the viability of an industry already hugely subsidised by the taxpayer. This incident, the latest in a long string of problems, emphasises the cost and dangers of relying on nuclear power for electricity needs.

Energy Minister Malcolm Wicks claimed in the *Observer* that he is taking a "nuclear-neutral" approach to the current UK energy review: "I want to sweep away historic prejudice and put in its place evidence and science." Green MSPs couldn't agree more. We argue first and foremost that there must a full, open, evidence-based public debate on the issue of new nuclear power stations. That's why we recently launched a campaign aimed at exposing some of the myths peddled by the nuclear industry (for details see [www.scotishgreens.org.uk/](http://www.scotishgreens.org.uk/)). The long-term public interest must be considered alongside the facts on safety, economics and climate change. Timings of elections, pandering to business interests, and general political posturing should not cloud what is likely to be one of the most crucial government decisions of this century.

#### **DECOMMISSIONING COSTS**

As a start, leaders should heed the strongly-worded rejections of new nuclear, most notably from the Sustainable Development Commission and the House of Commons Environment Audit Committee. The cost of decommissioning existing stations (£70 billion upwards) is staggering, and the revelation that 11 potential sites in the UK identified by Nirex for new nuclear power stations are at threat from rising sea levels adds further weight to the argument against new nuclear power stations. Greens also highlight the issues of proliferation (particularly important in light of developments in North Korea) and risk of terrorism, plus

**The long-term public interest must be considered alongside the facts on safety, economics and climate change.**

declining finite sources of good grade uranium.

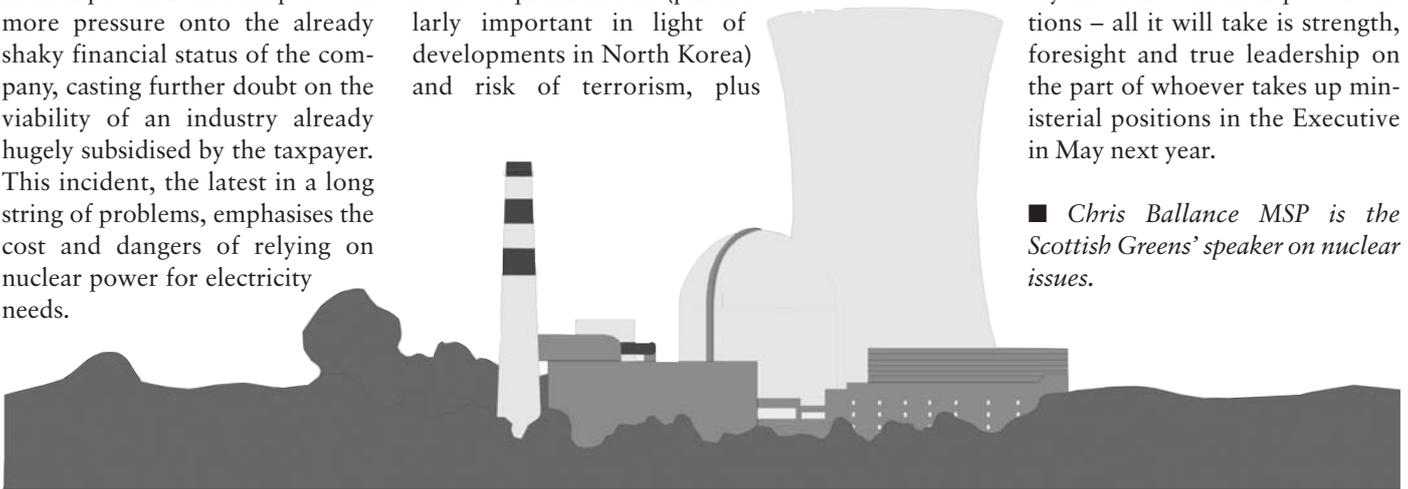
Nuclear power meets just 7% of Scottish total energy needs. So why support more nuclear power when we could easily go for the win-win option of energy efficiency and renewables?

Our renewable resources are infinite and free, yet could put Scotland firmly on the path to becoming a very prosperous and competitive low-carbon economy. The power of the waves, the tide and wind combined with biomass, geothermal and photovoltaics are all there for the taking, providing continuity of supply especially if hydrogen fuel cells also play a part. There are potentially 5000 jobs to be created in the marine power industry and the development of hydrogen fuel cells could net £500 million for the Scottish economy and sustain 10,000 jobs.

A report by ILEX energy consultants shows we could reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions through energy efficiency with a likely saving of £1 billion by 2020. Too often the debate is led by large energy companies and the politicians who like to fawn over the CEOs, with little thought for the thousands of households who live with the misery of fuel poverty.

Scotland needs to start planning now to deliver a non-nuclear, low carbon future. Adopting energy efficiency measures now, coupled with meaningful investment in renewables, will best prepare us for the real changes and challenges ahead. Scotland can, and should, say no to new nuclear power stations – all it will take is strength, foresight and true leadership on the part of whoever takes up ministerial positions in the Executive in May next year.

■ *Chris Ballance MSP is the Scottish Greens' speaker on nuclear issues.*



# BEYOND DISCOVERY – REAL LIFE AND THE CITY

**Stuart Fairweather** considers how cities in general – and Dundee in particular – have to re-invent themselves to survive and develop in a rapidly changing world.

The importance and place of cities in today's world is growing. An entire academic discipline is growing around the relationship between city-regions and the global economy. But is this the only way to see things? Whilst it would be wrong to dismiss the importance of the economics and pointless to ignore the impact of the global, other considerations should be taken into account. Discussions about the city's relationship to democracy, community, culture, and the environment are also important. Remembering cities are about people might assist us in thinking about real lives – the everyday – and not simply thinking about the city as being a small cog in a world-wide machine that's sole purpose is to make the rich richer.

In Scotland the Executive has produced plans for our six cities; they are seen as engines for growing the economy. Beyond this, thought is given to Edinburgh/Glasgow competing with other centres in Europe and on other continents. Whilst nobody would be against cities being the best environment they can be for their citizens, the endless emphasis on competition does not automatically ensure this.

All this may seem a long way away from a rainy afternoon in Dundee. The propaganda is that Dundee is Scotland's sunniest city, and it often is, but the conditions we face – like the weather – are contradictory. And like the weather, our actions have an impact on the conditions we face. So starting from where we are is not



**Discovery at dawn** (photo courtesy Barry Farquharson)

parochial, it's just playing with the hand we have been dealt.

Dundee has a strong sense of its past. However, any narrative that wishes to echo with relevance must address the changing times we live in. It must have a clear picture of the future it wishes to contribute to, articulate a method for getting there, and ensure continuity with those aspects of the past that assist forward momentum. In that respect Dundee is like no other place.

Like others also there is a danger of two histories and two futures. There is the danger of a history that will deny the radical and

ignore the struggles of Dundee's women and men. Today there is the dominance of an official glossed presentation of place that only emphasises the upside, ignores the blemishes and problems, and shuts out voices that do not repeat the "new truth". Pictures from the past that show another reality are regarded as relics of a different time. At best they are used to market difference: things that have been overcome. Yet in Dundee plays and exhibitions that draw on experience of the Timex and other struggles evoke different feelings than the more neutral reminiscence about the jute industry or the building of the Discovery. Responding to this situation is not simple.

## **NEW POLITICS OF THE CITY**

The role of the democratic left is to move beyond the oppositional. It is not enough to simply take solace in history or assert that everything associated with development is wrong. A new politics of the city is needed. Re-remembering what was done in London around the Greater London Council would be a good place to start. Advancing democratic control of England's capital was coupled with connecting major developments and events with the lives of real communities – communities that were provided with resources and support. The point is that the authentic voices of different geographic and non-geographic communities in London were heard and celebrated as part of the city, not in opposition to it. Many other examples from

around the world could be given. Building on these examples means compromise, but it begins to point in the direction of a picture that includes all citizens.

Dundee, like the other Scottish cities (and all Local Authorities), has been tasked with producing a community plan. The plan's function is to improve the service delivery of public services to all communities, all individuals in the City. In 2003 Scottish Executive legislation made community planning a statutory requirement. This legislation talked about people's involvement in the process. Whilst it contained a heavy emphasis on the citizen as a consumer there was also the language of participation and engagement. Civil society in the shape of the community and voluntary sectors were recognised. Community plans speak about active citizenship, social inclusion and environmental justice. The fear is that these are just bonnie words that sit alongside bonnie pictures.

### **ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP**

Dundee's community plan has grown out of the experience of the economic partnership that launched the City of Discovery campaign. The achievements of Dundee's Universities in relation to the biotech industry and computing are highlighted. Tourism is seen as having growing importance. Commerce, with the opening of the new Overgate Centre, is regarded as central. The city's cultural quarter with DCA – (Dundee Contemporary Arts) as the centrepiece is much heralded. But there is a danger that this masks plans to radically re-shape the nature of housing tenure and move to a wider range of employment in service industries.

All this has merit and it may go some way to hold onto the huge graduate population and stop young people leaving Dundee. It all however feels a short bus journey and a world away from the experience of many Dundonians. To be fair, it is not that the contradictions are not being discussed;

**Those that lead public sector bodies voice concern about "the tale of two cities" – one growing, one being left behind.**

there is an acute awareness that Dundee's statistics on health, educational attainment and household income would happily be swapped with any comparable city in western Europe. Those that lead public sector bodies voice concern about "the tale of two cities" – one growing, one being left behind. The problem is that the part of the city that is being left behind is not being listened to adequately. The elderly, women with children, the young, those in council housing, those out of or in poorly-paid work, the ill and those in poor health are all considered merely as recipients of service. The passive voice of the many is only heard when it can suggest changes that create efficiencies, or when they volunteer to take over services that were previously provided, as of right, by the state.

### **PRECARIOUS LIVES**

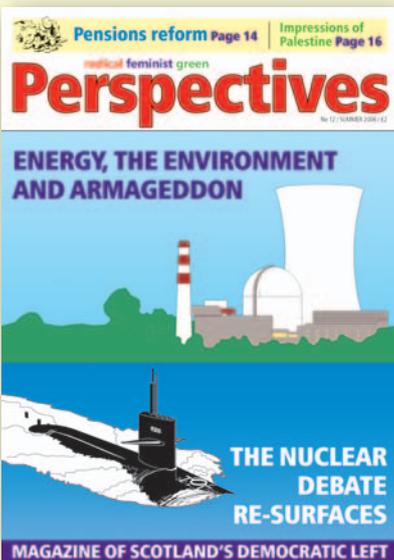
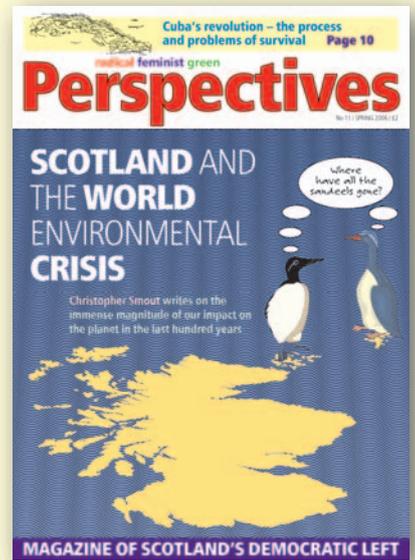
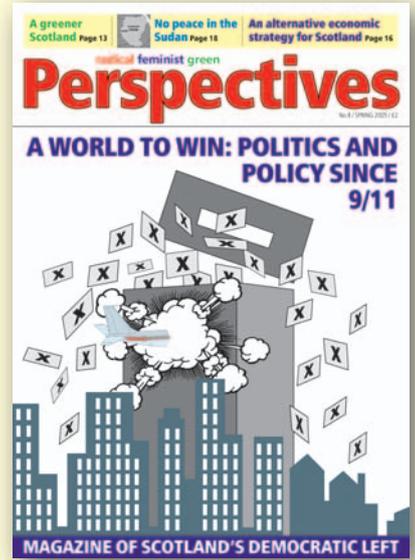
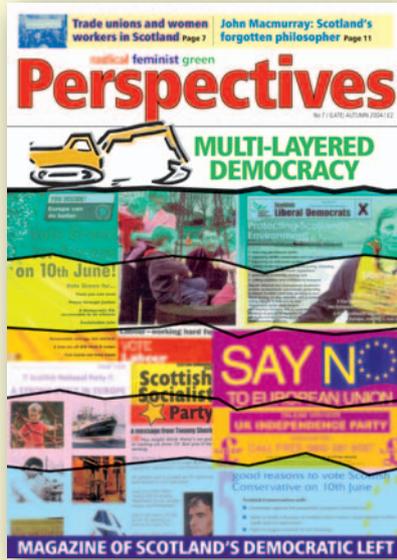
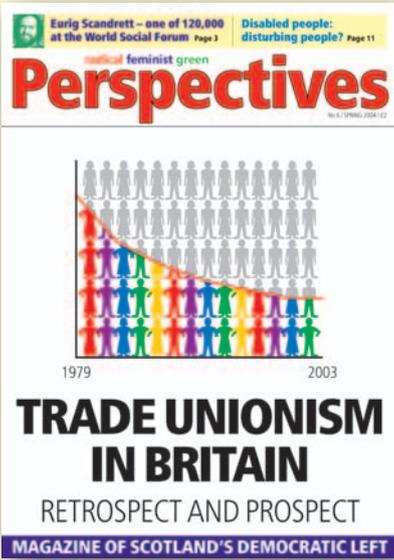
All this makes the infrastructure that supports the day-to-day lives of those with few sellable skills, minority ethnic communities, the cared-for and carers, very precarious. The official story of the city has no active part for them to play. The situation has been made worse by the abandonment of communities by the historic vehicle of political voice. The Labour Party is all but absent; in some areas it is long gone. Even if its past social democratic ambitions were limited, they have not been adequately replaced by new ones. The SNP with its continued focus on independence has yet to be seen as an automatic choice for many Dundonians. Liberal Democrats have a patchy and limited base. The Greens offer alternative ideas but are largely estranged from working class communities. The role the Communist Party once attempted to adopt at a local level, in conjunction with the trades unions, has not been replaced by the SSP or the advent of Solidarity. But interestingly our next local elections will be conducted by a system of proportional representation.

Dundee's Social Forum is more of a concept than an organisation.

It grew out of the Make Poverty History and G8 Alternative events of the summer of 2005. It brings together individuals and groups in a fragile coalition that asks what is happening locally and globally. What unites the Forum is a non-acceptance of the continually repeated anti-democratic slogan: there is no alternative. No alternative to nuclear weapons, no alternative to housing demolition, no alternative to school sell-offs, no alternative to cuts in public and voluntary sector provision. What perhaps limits the Social Forum is its capacity to create the conditions to move towards a "new" Dundee. But it wants to speak to others.

Beyond Discovery, a day conference that brought together over eighty people from a wide variety of backgrounds, was a start: the start of a conversation with Dundonians about Dundee – about our city. Its premise was that there are alternatives, or at least there might well be if we listened and included those that are at the sharp end. The organisations of the disorganised left, the green movement, trades unions, religious groups, and the voluntary sector have done what they can to address the impacts of privatisation, rationalisation, economic efficiency and cultural disregard. Publications produced by the Anti-Poverty Forum, the Trade Union Council, the Sustainability Forum and others have pointed in the direction of a different Dundee: one that builds on the alternatives that are being worked for now but includes all citizens. Dundee's future needs to draw on the talents of all her people. Only then can we move beyond the limitations of the market and marketing. Dundee Social Forum now wishes to move beyond simply being a concept. Its launch meeting – "A Date With Democracy" – takes place in February. *Perspectives* will keep you posted.

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



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