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radical feminist green

Perspectives

AUTUMN 2003 / £2

SCOTLAND'S GENDER DEFICIT



PLUS
**Ireland and
the euro** –
the new
currency from
the inside

MAGAZINE OF SCOTLAND'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

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Perspectives is published four times a year by Democratic Left Scotland, 1A Leopold Place, Edinburgh EH7 5JW. Tel: 0131 477 2997
E-mail: dls@newpolitics.org.uk
Web: www.newpolitics.org.uk

Editor: Sean Feeny

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Copy deadline for the next issue is Monday 1st December 2003.

For further information on *Perspectives* (including advertising rates), or to submit articles or letters, please contact:

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Perspectives
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Edinburgh EH7 5JW
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Printed by
Hampden Advertising Ltd
73 Robertson Street
Glasgow G2 8QD

CONVENER'S COLUMN

CIVIL SOCIETY: RESERVED

What is Scottish politics for? Every time the McConnell-led Executive do nothing and defer to Westminster they further alienate the Scottish people. Their inaction runs the danger of dismantling the hopes that people had when they voted Yes, Yes. Scottish democracy is about much more than simply delivering. Some people seem to have missed the point.

Civil society – the unions, religious, cultural and campaigning organisations – need to take responsibility. During the first term of the Scottish Parliament we, expecting the Executive would do the business, slowed down. Dead chuffed with ourselves we collectively stood back.

Fortunately, moving away a little from your achievements allows you to survey what you have done. It lets you make changes. The results of the second election illustrated this. The established political parties, Labour and the Scottish Nationalists (SNP), in particular took a knock. The full importance of the election of the new parties is yet to be seen. What is clear is that in this changed situation civil society needs to ensure it does not repeat the error of the first parliamentary term.

It is early days but the signals are positive. The STUC's support for the campaign around Dungavel is very welcome. Increased union action on wages and conditions is taking place at the same time as discussions on the relationship with Labour. Whilst the SNP try to focus on internal matters, a wider debate is beginning about inde-



During the first term of the Scottish Parliament we, expecting the Executive would do the business, slowed down. Dead chuffed with ourselves we collectively stood back.

pendence and fiscal autonomy. Added to this the continued opposition to the illegal occupation of Iraq continues.

Perspectives will develop these discussions and others. In this issue Sue Innes of Engender explores the gender deficit and goes beyond simply counting the number of women MSPs. Alan Murdoch continues our discussion on Europe, examining Ireland's engagement with the European Union and the euro.

In, arguably, two connected articles, Willie Thompson discusses the historical position that Labourism now finds itself whilst Andrew Burns illustrates the importance and urgency of taking action to further democratise our local government. Elsewhere we look at the role of the symbolic in developing people's identity and ideas. We also highlight one practical example of engaging with people – asking their opinion.

Scottish civil society cannot let professional politicians off the hook. Can the Scottish Executive deliver improvements to the real lives of our people? Possibly, with a push!

Can the established political parties provide us with a vision of how our part of the world exists sustainably in this century? Unlikely!

We need to continue to discuss the political realities we face, but we also need to win back the hope that established our new Parliament. We will not do this by being reserved.

Stuart Fairweather
Convener, Democratic Left Scotland



EURIG SCANDRETT'S



It has become something of a tradition for me to use this column to write about what I did on my holidays. Having recently returned from the Basque country, a semi-autonomous nation with a powerful co-operative movement and tremendously rich source of political and cultural interest, I am tempted to do just that. However, the politics is complex, not least because of an unofficial referendum on independence, so further research is needed to do justice to the piece and the Basque story will be in a future diary. Watch this space.

What is occupying much of my concentration just now is Friends of the Earth's conference, which by the time *Perspectives* comes out, will have happened. It is two and a half years since FoE had an environmental justice activists' conference. The last one, in Dundee, was successful at bringing together three kinds of activists – the communities fighting against local pollution, the community development activists trying to improve their environments and the more traditional FoE environmentalists campaigning for the global environment. As was noted in the editorial of *Catalyst*, FoE's environmental justice newsletter (now incorporated into *What on Earth*), there is significant political value in such different groups forming a coalition for environmental justice.

The conference this year, in Edinburgh, has aimed to strengthen this coalition. The structure of the conference has been interesting to pull together. Since it marks the end of the studies of the Agents for Environmental Justice, we have attempted to honour the popular education approach on the day. In Freire's words we are "naming the world" in order to change it. The Agents themselves, from many parts of Scotland, are celebrating the completion of the UK's first Higher Education Certificate in Environmental Justice.

Speakers this year have involved FoE staff in logistical challenges. As I write, Jose Luis Guevara and Fidel Aguinda have already arrived from Ecuador where they have been campaigning against the oil industry. Jose Luis lives in Esmeraldas, a small town beside a large oil refinery which, following an oil spill and sub-

**We are
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change it.**

sequent fire, suffered significant damage. After years of campaigning, the community finally received compensation. Fidel Aguinda belongs to a tribe in the Amazon forest, which has been threatened by the activities of Texaco. During their stay they will be discussing their campaigns with oil and other environmental justice campaigners throughout Scotland. Their visit to Scotland has been a collaboration between FoE and Scottish Education and Action for Development, an organisation with a long history of successfully building mutual solidarity between Scotland and other parts of the world.

Whilst Jose Luis and Fidel are here two weeks before the conference, Denny Larson, from California, is here for two weeks after. Denny has worked with communities on the fenceline of petrochemical plants, and has developed a piece of kit which enables lay activists to take air samples which will be recognised by regulators in disputes with the oil and chemical companies. The US's Environmental Protection Agency has authorised these sampling devices ("buckets") and we are hoping that the Scottish Environment Protection Agency will, after Denny trains the first cohort of UK "Bucket Brigades".

The lead speaker of the day is Joan Martinez-Alier, an early advocate of ecological economics and author of the recent *Environmentalism of the poor*. From Barcelona's Autonomous University, Martinez-Alier has done more than anybody to analyse the movements of grassroots resistance to environmental degradation amongst the poor, peasantry and proletariat throughout the world. His analysis links political ecology (which applies an ecological critique to Marxist political economy) with ecological economics (which sets the economy in its ecological place).

The name of the conference – "A Roch Wind Blowin" – is of course taken from Hamish Henderson's powerful Scottish internationalist anthem "the Freedom Come All Ye".

■ *Eurig Scandrett is an environmental activist and a member of Democratic Left Scotland's national council.*

People and politics

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

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

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

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

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

What does Democratic Left add?

Our approach to politics is radical, feminist and green.

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

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

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

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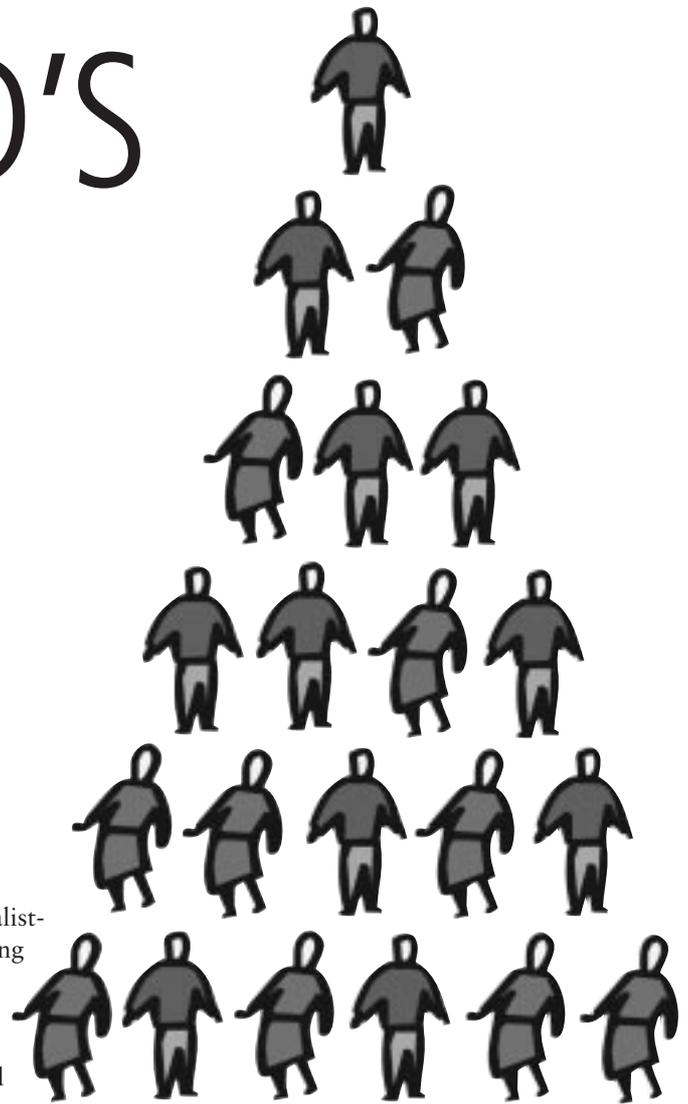
SCOTLAND'S GENDER DEFICIT

The first term of the Scottish Parliament was a missed opportunity for the women's movement. **Sue Innes** suggests ways of making up lost ground.

The other week I sat in Glasgow Women's Library, leafing through feminist samizdat from the 1970s: duplicated, smudgy newsletters like *Hens Own*, *Nessie* and the less smudged, more theoretical *MsPrint*. I was researching an article on recent feminist history and found myself, perhaps unavoidably, musing on the differences between then and now. The newsletters demonstrate the ambition, energy and commitment of the movement then, although also its diverging emphases and analyses, as radical and socialist feminisms vied for possession of feminist truth. At the Glasgow Women's Centre, which opened in 1975 up a close in Miller Street, you could do feminism every night of the week. As the writer Ellen Galford remembers, "politics ... was about your whole life changing." She recalls "workshops, campaigns and parties" and cooking for 400 women at the Scottish women's liberation movement (WLM) conference in "a freezing cold church hall" in Partick.¹ On Tuesdays it was lesbian line, Wednesdays anti-pornography, Thursdays women for peace and Fridays the lesbian mothers support group. Weekends were open days. A women and

health group and the socialist-feminist group "Flaming Women" also met regularly and the organisations that would become Strathclyde Rape Crisis Centre and Glasgow Women's Aid were being built.

Reading those fading records I felt regret – for lost clarity, energy and sheer forward movement. Some of that clarity was about false certainties and some of that energy turned inwards. But the erosion of radical vision, the defusing of the urgency and passion of those times is to be regretted – particularly the conviction of how much it mattered. Particularly, perhaps, the belief in the possibility of real, lasting change. *Grit and Diamonds*, a collection of articles on feminism in Scotland 1980–1990,² documents continuing creativity and activism: in trade unions, black and ethnic minority women's groups and churches; in theatre, poetry, visual art; on childcare, rape, incest, homelessness and nuclear power. Scottish feminism survived the Thatcher years as an eroded but identifiable movement in a way that was not true in the South, part of Scotland's oppositional culture. Municipal feminism was signifi-



The campaign for equal representation in the proposed parliament was remarkable in bringing together women from most political parties and from a wide range of women's groups.

cant with women's and equality committees supporting initiatives such as the Zero Tolerance campaign, and instituting international women's day on March 8th as an annual celebration. The women's movement began to engage with the state. In the early 1990s new national groups, Engender and the Scottish Women's Forum, were founded and a new magazine *Harpies & Quines*, with a similar agenda but better print quality. The campaign for equal representation in the proposed parliament was remarkable in bringing together women from most political parties and from a wide range of women's groups. It was part of a convergence towards a middle ground and more focussed, short-term goals – deradicalisation but, as Esther Breitenbach argues, the women's movement also radicalised ideas and practice in some areas of public policy.³

Some of that early energy was from a particular historical moment and demographic. And

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feminist progress has been met by, and undermined by, resistance – covert and overt. Perhaps most effective in dulling its radical edge was the pervasive myth of “post-feminism”: that women were taking over in schools and professions, demonstrating their power in consumer spending and the choice to work in the sex industry. It was only a residue of unreconstructed feminists who couldn't smell the coffee. It is an ironic problem of progress that partially achieving aims risks loss of direction and decreasing support.

SECOND WAVE UNORGANISED

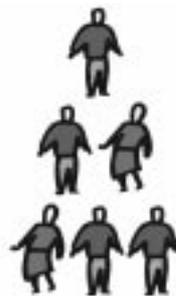
Feminism is a movement of ideas as much as of campaigns and organisations. The “second-wave” was essentially un-organised, a generation of groups and alliances according to need and energy. It was flexible but defied institutionalisation and was ill-designed for continuity. Groups continue to be formed around interests and new approaches: the Scottish Women's Budget Group for example, set up in 2000 and the Cailleach Collective in 2002, with the laudable aim of “making feminism cool again”. The extent of continuing activity throughout the country is demonstrated in the many and diverse applications for support made to the new Women's Fund. But mapping the movement must include how feminist ideas and activists moved into other arenas: the peace and environment movements, anti-globalisation, community work, the social sciences ... The WLM emphasised “consciousness-raising” and feminist ideas have changed consciousness about what it is to be a woman or man, about power, about the reach of the political into the personal, and about the multiple nature of identity.

Many of the aims articulated in the “feminist seventies” have been partly met. Contraception is available no matter your marital status and abortion has remained legal, although not always locally accessible. Childcare is now firmly on the government's agenda and

women with dependent children are more likely to be in paid employment than not. Even the needs of “working fathers” are acknowledged – if not often met. Legal and financial independence is taken for granted by young, well-educated women. Violence against women is a continuing, serious social problem, but it is recognised as crime, not “just a domestic”. Lesbianism is visible and no longer grounds for refusing child custody.

But of course the availability of contraception and abortion does not mean there are no unwanted pregnancies – or teenage girls demonised for them. Elaborate childcare partnerships have been set up but if you can't pay for it, it can still be very difficult to get childcare. Men's role in families has a new visibility, but women still do almost all of the housework and caring, with consequences that last a lifetime. Women are much more likely than men to work in jobs and for hours that fit around childcare; three-quarters of women work in the five lowest paid sectors. The pay gap is stuck at around 19%, comparing hourly earnings of women and men working full-time, with a much wider gap of 41% between full-time male workers and part-time female workers.⁴ Analysis of income from all sources, thus including those on the lowest incomes, shows that women's median weekly income is under half of men's.⁵ The increase in women entering the professions and better-paid employment has yet to make real inroads on the pyramid shape of most organisational hierarchies: the nearer the top, the fewer the women (and vice-versa). The worlds of work and public life are still mainly run by workaholic men, even if they do sometimes mutter “I need to get a life”, in passing.

There is a widening gap between the opportunities, income and access to resources of different groups of women, a division marked out by class and education, maternity, age and ethnicity. Gendered poverty is perhaps the



Feminist progress has been met by, and undermined by, resistance – covert and overt. Perhaps most effective in dulling its radical edge was the pervasive myth of “post-feminism”.

most embedded problem; the poorest groups in society, single pensioners and single parents, are woman-dominated (93% of single parents in Scotland are female, 64% of women over 75 widowed). Not only are women at greater risk of poverty than men but likely to remain in poverty for longer periods. Women are significantly more likely to depend on state benefits, and on income support rather than JSA. Where the highest income householder is female, the household is more likely to be renting from a social landlord and less likely to have a bank account, savings or home contents insurance.⁶ Almost half of women (45%) in the UK have a gross individual income of less than £100 per week, compared to just over a fifth of men.⁷ Rural poverty and limited services and opportunities are also gender differentiated.

SAME ARGUMENTS

Old issues, but we know more about them now. You can't keep making the same arguments – yet you need to. Changing political circumstances present new openings but new organisational problems. To fight against a clear and obvious injustice seems, in retrospect, straightforward – such as, for example, paying women and men different rates for the same job, male quotas in medical education, or telling girls that their brains were not designed to do science and their short skirts meant they were “asking for it”. Easier to go out to “reclaim the night” than to stay in considering the meaning of mainstreaming. Simpler to argue for more women politicians than to figure out how to work with them on developing policy.

There are problems of focus. When you (still) need to change the world it is hard to know where to start. There is no road map because no society on earth is as yet characterised by equality between women and men. We have learnt to be wary of totalising theories and gave up waiting for the revolution. Most developed countries have legal equality, but

that on its own does not deliver real equality. It was not, perhaps, until the major, obvious barriers to women's equality were pushed aside (although not demolished) that it was possible to see the half-buried obstacles, the structural inequalities and taken-for-granted forms of discrimination that still trip women up. We need to understand how inequality re-invents itself, like some noxious weed. We need to better understand the intersection of different inequalities; too often gender is treated as a separate category alongside "race", disability, age and sexuality, whereas all social groups are made up of women and men, just as all women and men have an ethnic background and sexuality. We need sustained energy, for the long haul.

In Scotland now we have an almost unprecedented moment of political opportunity, if we only can grasp it and hold on to it. We have a parliament for which many women campaigned, with a high proportion of women members, some of whom are prepared to champion equality issues, as are some male MSPs, and a commitment to a more participative process. We have the Equal Opportunities Committee and Equality Unit that we asked for,⁸ and the Executive has put money behind its fine words. "Equal opportunity" is one of the founding and recently reaffirmed principles of the Parliament, alongside sharing of power, accountability, access and participation – all of which are also relevant to women's participation. Although a number of crucial areas are reserved, the Parliament has within its powers most areas of social, economic, health and education policy and these are all gender-differentiated in impact and of great importance to most women's lives. Commitments to mainstreaming equalities in policy and to gender-proofing legislation demonstrate recognition, in principle if not yet in practice, that there is likely to be a gender equality dimension to most policy-making. And princi-

ples should not be dismissed as only "paper commitments". Statements of principle and support are only the start – but at least they are a start and you need all the footholds you can get.

REORIENTATION

It all leaves us in the welcome but complicated position of asking, so how exactly do we move on from here? We need to be both clever and canny if opportunity is to be realised. What is possible within current frameworks? What is most likely to be effective? What should be done first? And how do we measure success? For the women's movement it is a process of reorientation. We need, if we are to be really effective, to be outside, inside and somewhere in between – working with political institutions but keeping a critical edge. There is a parallel with the Green Party's moving from protest and broad aims to figuring out what legislative and policy processes will achieve its ends – though we have neither its resources nor international support. Experience shows that advances for women happen when different dimensions of women's politics are marching, if not strictly in step, then at least in the same direction: when there are shared priorities between parliamentarians as insiders, an organised women's movement as pressure point, and grass-roots opinion and less formal, community-based activism. The campaign for gender balance in the Parliament showed the value of alliances between women working inside and outside of formal political structures.

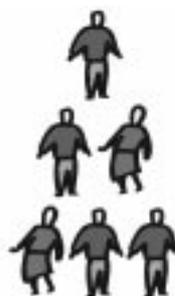
Some steps were taken in the Parliament's first term. Ground-breaking commitments were made on domestic abuse; the first members bill to be passed by the Parliament closed a dangerous loophole in legal protection for women. Public transport – used more by women than men – was given greater priority. There was increased provision for carers and for the regulation of formal care. Several bills had equality provi-

When you (still) need to change the world it is hard to know where to start. There is no road map because no society on earth is as yet characterised by equality between women and men.

sions built in. Tackling poverty and social exclusion is important for women, as is free personal care for the elderly. Research suggests that the higher proportion of women MSPs is making a difference: women politicians say that they have been able to put items on the agenda and ensure that they stay there; women and men say that more women has an impact on both the experience and style of political life and policy priorities.⁹

OVERLOOKED

Nevertheless, discontent has been fairly widely expressed that the "women's agenda" is being overlooked. Politicians, in turn, have commented that their doors are open but women aren't knocking – but few have made an effort to find out why. It's unclear if extra support for carers is actually reaching them. Better public transport has yet to leave the garage. Despite good intentions on gender-proofing, no or very limited gendered analysis has been applied to legislative processes: debate on the housing bill, for example, scarcely registered the considerably different issues for women and men in relation to social housing; discussion of improving schools left aside gender segregation in subject choice. Although the housing and education acts both have equal opportunities requirements, it is unclear how adherence will be monitored. Other problems in advancing equality include the resistance to change in the Scottish civil service and that with most policy actors and the majority of MSPs are not engaged with the equality debate, leaving it mainly to a small group of women. There seems little apparent will to remedy the absence of women and men from ethnic minority groups in political life. On gender equality the Equal Opportunities Committee has lacked direction and seemed complacent. The increased proportion of women in the parliament is not replicated in other areas of public life. The proportion of women councillors is less than a quarter over the past



SCOTLAND'S GENDER DEFICIT

two elections and little effort is being made to change that. Despite earlier commitments, the partnership document for the new session is, in general, gender-blind and confines its concern for equal opportunities to racism, refugees, sectarianism and disability.

The first term was a missed opportunity for the women's movement, primarily because, mainly voluntary and perennially under-funded, it did not have the resources to lobby or build its knowledge base. The momentum and alliances built around the common goal of gender balance in representation dissipated. They could be reinvigorated, given the right focus. A closer involvement by politicians with women's organisations would help, as would better communication and a conscious strategy of capacity building and strategic working by the women's movement and the resources to support it. It is worth remembering – and repeating – that gender balance in representation was less an end than a means.

The first term [of the Scottish Parliament] was a missed opportunity for the women's movement.

As Maidie Hart of the Scottish Convention of Women (one of the first organisations to recognise the potential of the Parliament for women) expressed it, we wanted not just a slice of the cake but to change the recipe. To swap similes – we are realising that it isn't easy to play the game and learn the rules and change the rules all at the same time. But it is what we must do.

■ Sue Innes is a writer and researcher, and development officer with Engender, which is an information, research and networking organisation for women and women's organisations in Scotland. It can be contacted at: 18 York Place, EH1 3EP. Tel: 0131 558 9596. www.engender.org.uk

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P/AU/03

IRELAND AND THE EURO

A small country on the western fringe of the European Union – **Alan Murdoch** examines the impact of the euro on the economy of Ireland.

Three years ago the largest branch of Tesco in central Dublin was close to empty. At previously busy checkouts there were no queues, just a trickle of customers. The shoppers had not emigrated or left on an extended spring holiday. Instead, they could be found barely 100 yards away in a new German-owned supermarket, one of dozens opened since Ireland moved to join the single currency.

The new competition arrived selling staple foods from pasta to butter, milk, flour, porridge and olive oil for between 30 and 50 per cent less than the previous cheapest prices, marking perhaps the biggest improvement in years in low-income Irish households' spending power, though on some items prices still have some way to fall to match UK levels.

Shoppers can now feel the benefits of the euro in their pockets. But the once-implausible story of Ireland's transition into a euro-zone economy, meeting strict entry requirements from inflation to debt control, is really the story of its recovery from near melt-down 15 years earlier. Facing that challenge created momentum for reform and laid foundations for its remarkable performance in the 1990s.

CONVERGENCE AND CONSENSUS

Ireland joined the single currency, initially for electronic transfers, in January 1999, (joining the Exchange Rate Mechanism of the European Monetary System since 1979, when the fixed exchange rate with sterling ended). In January 2002 new euro notes and coins replaced Irish punts. But in 1987 the idea that Ireland Inc. could keep its head above water in a market of more than 300 million souls would have seemed a bad joke.

Charles Haughey's Fianna Fail Government returned to power that year to preside over a shambles. A decade of mismanagement had left the country on the edge of bankruptcy. In 1981 Dublin's exchequer



borrowing requirement reached a surreal 15.7 per cent of GNP, fuelling high inflation, hyper-taxation, unemployment and emigration.

The key to the recovery, and hence Ireland's early readiness to join the single currency, was the accord by which unions, employers, the state and other "social partners" in the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) sought to restore state finances. It meant painful medicine with deep cuts in public spending to the point of closing hospital wards. This was grudgingly endured (though savings were crudely implemented) by unions as vital to easing the debt mountain and domestic recession. By 1997 the crucial debt-to-GNP ratio, which stood at 125 per cent in 1987, was down to 69 per cent, greatly reducing interest payments.¹

In return the state promised gradual income tax cuts and social provisions while employers' groups pledged jobs – at a time of 18 per cent unemployment – though these came slowly until 1994. The agreement, the Programme for National Recovery (1988–90), was succeeded by further deals (now with a local bargaining component) up to the present.

This tripartite arrangement was possible because Haughey and his labour minister Bertie Ahern, (now premier) were largely free of the confrontational baggage of the Anglo-American Right of the time. With its radical past as a national movement appealing to urban workers and rural small farmers, the populist Fianna Fail, (founded in 1926 from the rump of anti-Treaty republicans defeated in the 1922–23 Civil War), had no hang-ups about cutting a deal with organised labour, even if party paymasters since the Sixties were primarily mohair-suited property developers. Ahern himself had been a union activist before entering the Dail.

Involving organised labour in policy-making on tax, public spending, and infrastructural spending would be anathema to some European neo-liberal premiers. Yet it is integral to the economic success in Ireland.

The once-implausible story of Ireland's transition into a euro-zone economy, meeting strict entry requirements from inflation to debt control, is really the story of its recovery from near melt-down 15 years earlier.

IRELAND AND THE EURO



The benefits of the 1994 and 1997 ceasefires have sparked a feel-good factor encouraging numerous British and other overseas firms to begin operations in Ireland and encouraged a major tourism expansion.

The consensus has ensured industrial peace, helped lower interest rates, control inflation and ultimately attract foreign investment.

A valid criticism is that these trade-offs by-passed those in non-unionised small firms, on short-term contracts, or casual labour. But they created a stable base on which to fuel expansion so today hundreds of thousands more are working. Experience of widespread poverty until the Sixties (it was still glaring into the Eighties in some inner-city and rural black-spots) helped rein in expectations, knowing the fiscal ship had first to be made seaworthy before it could sail anywhere.

Along with finance minister Ray MacSharry, a key influence in helping persuade then-Taoiseach Charlie Haughey to slash public spending (but not his own regal IR£300,000-a-year domestic outgoings – the figure was uncovered later by judicial inquiries into corruption) was his benefactor Dermot Desmond, now of Celtic FC, then heading NCB, a Dublin stock-brokers regularly favoured with Irish Government business.

To appreciate the transformation after a 10-year boom it is worth considering what went before. The Irish Republic now has 1.85 million at work, against just 1.1 million in 1993. From 1910 to 1985 Ireland's growth rate was below that of every other European country except Britain. Ireland's recent upward surge seemed bigger because of the low pre-1960s base level in an introverted agri-food dominated economy. The long-drawn out protectionist "Economic War" Eamon de Valera waged with Britain from assuming power in 1932 until the 1950s brought only decline, unemployment and mass emigration.

The new open trade policy of his successor Sean Lemass, who pioneered the Programme for Economic Expansion of 1959–63, brought long-overdue recovery. As Ireland lacked domestic capital reserves to fund development or business leadership to create it, the only option was to use every available lure from minimal corporation tax for export firms, ready-built factories, job subsidies and lower wages to persuade overseas companies to come in and do it instead.

The Lemass legacy meant dependence on farming was declining long before Ireland joined the EEC. Between 1960 and 1973 agriculture's share of total employment fell, amid a shift towards industry and services, from 38 to 24 per cent.² By 2000 it was a mere 7.8 per cent.³ Then and now the "selling" of Ireland as the highest-profit location for multinationals setting up in the EU has assumed the foremost economic priority.

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The European example, especially for a country with historic reasons to be sceptical of English economic dogma, has had a galvanising effect on Irish attitudes. Former Irish Labour Party general secretary Brendan Halligan observed in 1993 "social change has mainly coincided with our membership of the EC ...

Continuous exposure to the politics and economics of other Europeans has had a beneficial effect not only on our self-image but also on our self-development. ... In terms of self-image we have come to realise that we can be as good as the best ... All this has had a purgative effect on the fatalism which had robbed us of initiative, energy and ambition."⁴

He could also have reflected how European membership has helped dispel the local gloom widespread during the Troubles that Irish nationalism and national identity had become tainted with violence, intolerance and sectarianism. Since then, the benefits of the 1994 and 1997 ceasefires have sparked a feel-good factor encouraging numerous British and other overseas firms to begin operations in Ireland and encouraged a major tourism expansion.

Foreign investment has grown steadily since Irish moves to join the ERM (exchange rate mechanism) then the euro. The strategy devised by the Industrial Development Authority after 1987 promoted niche sectors suitable for Irish skills, with electronics, pharmaceuticals, financial services and tourism to the fore. Computer giants with major European centres in Ireland now include Dell, IBM and Intel alongside software firms Microsoft, Oracle and Sun Microsystems. By 2000 Ireland had become the world's second largest exporter of software with annual outflow worth IR£18.7 bn. Specialist Dublin banking and insurance ventures now employ several thousand. High-profit drug manufacturing plants, many around Cork, include Pfizer, making Viagra.

The targeted state-assisted approach, with expert civil servants facilitating training, university research and graduate output, has been vindicated by results. The strategy also worked in less high-tech sectors, as in new groupings of poultry producers and large-scale export mushroom growers in Monaghan.

At a social level the boom has also affected women's economic status. Until the 1990s Ireland had an unusually low female participation in the workforce. With labour shortages between 1995 and 2000 the proportion of women (over 15) in paid employment rose from 40 to 47 per cent. Tens of thousands of migrant workers have also been absorbed with less difficulty than might have been expected, with Polish and Latvian students filling seasonal farm labour gaps and Eastern European workers drafted in to building sites.

At its simplest, the euro-zone single currency means a country with a population of under four million now has a home market of several hundred million. It means tourists can fly on a whim for a weekend to Dublin or Cork using ATMs to provide the same currency they use at home. It is not a general upheaval – we do not call in a plumber from Seville to mend a boiler in Kerry. But Ireland is opening up to a wider choice of suppliers, be it in Government goods procurement or hospital labour.

EU enlargement will see a community of 15 states with 370 million people become 28 countries and 550

million citizens. When this happens countries who have geared up early in research, marketing, training and investment will be at an advantage.

There has been pain along the way, notably after sterling quit the European Exchange Rate Mechanism in September 1992. Sterling's fall and the Irish punt's subsequent appreciation by 16 per cent in five weeks against the UK currency forced Dublin to devalue in January 1993. Earnings collapsed for those in sterling-linked enterprises.

This year Irish manufacturers believe the euro's steady rise on currency markets, along with global recession and new Chinese competition, have helped pushed exports down 20 per cent between January and June, though there are hopes of a recovery in the US market in the second half.

It is pointless to try and separate the boom from the euro entry process. Arguably, much of the fiscal stability that made the country a solid investment base was achieved because a set timetable was already in place, first for the 1992 lifting of customs barriers with the single market, and then the single currency itself.

A MODEL FOR OTHERS?

In the late 1980s as a National Plan was formulated to maximise benefits from EU Structural Funds, a dynamic corps of senior civil servants charted how the country could be revitalised to encourage certain industries of the future, drawing on graduates from an expanding university sector. (Ireland has Europe's highest rate of "third-level" qualifications among under-35s).

Historically one of the most centralised of west-European states, with little power or funding vested in local government (rates were abolished as a vote-winning gimmick in 1977), national planning was already inbred in Department of Finance officials. Without a strong entrepreneurial class after Independence, it fell to such radical brains to initiate hydro-electric power, rural electrification, mechanised peat cutting and launching a national airline.

Ireland approached the euro keenly as one of western Europe's most open trading economies. But its experience of having to recruit multinationals to fill a void in manufacturing and commerce is less relevant for countries with large established industries and developed infrastructure. As elsewhere, job losses are occurring as manufacturing moves to the Far East.

Ireland's euro adventure has not been all plain sailing. Domestically, the rapid growth seen in Ireland, alongside rigid spending controls, has exposed cracks, notably an under-funded health sector.

The Euro-zone has also left other anachronistic political and economic arrangements untouched. A major obstacle to the development of indigenous business is the uncompetitive banking structure, with two monopolistic groups (Allied Irish Banks and Bank of Ireland) dominating the market. Per customer, the two are among the most profitable in the EU. Irish small business bodies see their role as parasitic, with an

unhealthy concentration on providing expensive short-term debt rather than taking long-term equity stakes.

Ireland's experience is atypical as its euro entry followed extreme fiscal reform measures in response to an extreme domestic crisis. While meeting the single currency convergence criteria, reliance on multinationals means billions in repatriated profits go to overseas shareholders.

This "leakage" has created social difficulties best summed up by the complaint "we have an economy but no infrastructure." This means a funding shortfall

IRELAND AND THE EURO – FROM BUST TO BOOM.

- Ireland's economy grew by 40% from 1994 to 1997. GNP growth averaged 8% 1994–99, reaching 9.8% in 2000, then 1.3% in 2002. 2003 growth of 2.5% is predicted; inflation stands at 3.5%.
- The 1999 census put its population at 3.7 million and Northern Ireland's at 1.7 million. The pre-Famine population on the island (1841 census) was 8.2 million.
- Unemployment is now 4.7%, against 18% in the mid 1980s.
- The boom has coincided with sharpening competitiveness. Unit labour costs fell 19% in Ireland 1980–1995, against a 2.4% fall in the UK.
- Since current tri-partite "partnership" agreements began between the state unions and employers in 1988, Irish labour's share of national income has declined by over 13% while capital's share has risen 46%, albeit in a more capital-intensive economy.
- Between 1973 and 2001 EU cash transfers to Ireland were worth euro 45.6 bn.
- In 2001 42% of Irish exports went to the EU, against 21% in 1973. Two thirds of Irish merchandise exports go to the EU, 25% to the UK. In the 1930s 90% of Irish exports went to the UK. Farming now accounts for just 4% of Irish GDP.
- Interest rates are now at their lowest for more than fifty years, with interbank rates at 2.13% Mortgage rates range from 3.4 to 3.7%.
- Today one in six Irish jobs depends on foreign firms. By 2000 Ireland (with just one per cent of the population) was attracting 10% of all US foreign direct investment into the EU. From 1998–2001 Ireland secured euro 62 billion in foreign investment, half from the EU, the rest mainly US. Foreign-owned ventures account for 35% of Irish GDP and over 80% of manufactured exports.

so big that many services seen as basic in Europe are absent. Ireland lacks a comprehensive national health service or genuinely free secondary education. Last year it was calculated 6,000 beds had been lost since the 1980s, while 3,000 promised new beds were slow to appear. Cash-strapped Dublin hospitals are now refusing referrals from rural areas. Newly-diagnosed diabetes patients must wait 14 months to see a consultant in major hospital in the capital, and there are many similar crises.

Public transport network (stretched by low-density of suburban housing) is very limited. Spiralling house prices, which more than doubled between 1994 and 1999,³ are creating shortages of nurses, teachers, and other public servants priced out of the market.

To date Europe has not helped counter Ireland's narrow income and wealth distribution, which, by

IRELAND AND THE EURO

Low Irish corporation tax has drawn intense criticism from outside the country, notably from Germany, alarmed at business shifting to Ireland.

limiting the consumer base, hinders the emergence of a stronger indigenous services sector. Many of the new super-rich are taking their assets abroad, buying Marbella villas and golfing retreats on the Algarve. Regressive flat-rate indirect taxes ensure wealth is effectively transferred from the less well-off to the already-affluent.

It emerged in 2001 that the Revenue Commissioners (tax authorities) found those on IR£100,000 or more were paying 18 per cent tax on average, barely half that paid by medium PAYE earners, who in Ireland enter the higher rate bracket at a relatively low income. This stems from Ireland's generous capital tax climate, with a plethora of incentives for urban developers, holiday home owners, and investors.

With the two main political parties firmly on the economic right, this will only change if Labour makes a breakthrough (summer opinion polls are pointing in this direction). In the 1980s the main party of the Left never won more than 10 per cent of the vote, and reached 19 per cent of the poll only in its peak in 1992.⁵

By contrast, low Irish corporation tax has drawn intense criticism from outside the country, notably from Germany, alarmed at business shifting to Ireland, notably into Dublin's International Financial Services Centre. The drive by more powerful nations for tax harmonisation was one of the toughest battles Ireland

faced during European convergence. Ireland held out while raising the bar slightly. Manufacturing firms now pay 12.5 per cent corporation tax; a rate that still irks European competitors charging more.

In practice Ireland's resistance was vital for all small countries. Without tax compensation for their location, countries on the EU's periphery would lose out as business would otherwise gravitate towards markets at the core of the euro-zone between Paris and Frankfurt. For Europe to work, those dealt a poor initial hand of cards have to be given a chance of winning.

■ Alan Murdoch is a freelance journalist based in Dublin.

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BOOK EVENTS



GLASGOW

Thursday 30th October at 6.30pm
at Ottakar's bookshop

(Buchanan Galleries, beside main entrance to Concert Hall)

Discussion of the newly-published **Scotlands of the Future** (Democratic Left Scotland in association with Luath Press) with contributors **Mark Ballard** (Scottish Green Party MSP), **Barbara MacLennan** (feminist economist) and **Richard**

Leonard (GMB official and former Chair of the Scottish Labour Party). The chair will be **Rob Edwards** (Environment Editor of the Sunday Herald). Free tickets from Ottakar's.

ULLAPOOL – Saturday 1st November (afternoon) with Eurig Scandrett and Osbert Lancaster

ABERDEEN – Monday 3rd November (evening) with Eurig Scandrett and Barbara MacLennan

INVERNESS – Tuesday 4th November (evening) with Eurig Scandrett and Stuart Duffin

For details of venues and times phone Democratic Left Scotland on 0131 477 2997.

NEW LABOUR, LABOURISM AND THE LEFT

The traditions of the left, despite shortcomings, offer the best resources for addressing the urgent life-and-death questions of the contemporary world, argues **Willie Thompson**.

When I wrote *The Long Death of British Labourism* at the beginning of the nineties the labour movement was reaching a turning point. Following three general election defeats and struggling in a social and economic universe which Thatcherism had transformed, it appeared that the only prospect of Labour ever again exercising government office was to discard much of what had distinguished it politically since 1918 and the adoption of the famous Clause IV. I therefore predicted that the Labour Party would, with increasing speed, repudiate the social democrat elements of its heritage while rediscovering its roots in the Liberal Party of the late nineteenth century.

As many a commentator has discovered, prediction is a dangerous game and has a habit of coming unstuck, but in this case the outcome was paradoxical. In one sense I was more than vindicated, in another I could not have been more wrong. The rightward progress continued as forecast, but what could not have been imagined then was that Labour in office, when it got there at last, would not be absorbed into the Liberal heritage, but would move instead into the political space vacated by the shattered Tory Party. The Blair government has confounded the worst fears of leftists and liberals, not by refuting them, but by overfulfilling them to an absurd degree. There were signs

The Blair government has confounded the worst fears of leftists and liberals, not by refuting them, but by overfulfilling them to an absurd degree.

even before 1997. I recall prior to that election, when a small majority was expected, remarking that it would be no bad thing to form a coalition with the Lib Dems, as that would imply a more left-wing agenda. At the time it was meant as a joke.

At first though, the outlook seemed more promising. With such a colossal majority and unprecedented popular enthusiasm behind it, surely Labour could at last afford to throw away the labourist constraints which had bound it so tightly through out its previous career – an outlook rooted in the manual workforce but subject to the worship and awe of mouldy traditionalist authoritarian structures and institutions in state and society. And indeed, devolution with proportional representation was promptly instituted, an encouraging start. But it became clear soon enough that the fulfilment of that commitment depended only on the fact that to renege would have been electorally disastrous in Scotland.

It became evident soon enough that devolution was the exception, and that for the most part the traditional structures Blair was interested in attacking were the same ones Thatcher had targeted – the public services and the public service ethic, in short the perception which regards the public as citizens rather than customers. Marketisation everywhere and for everything (blagged up as “modernisation” and “freedom of

choice”) has been the government’s theme and public service employees driven with punitive threats to adapt to commercial values as far as possible. Increases in welfare funding (much overhyped in any case) have been attended invariably with patterns of stiffer coercion for both providers and recipients. The English public is afflicted with a Home Secretary who makes even his Tory predecessor appear liberal by comparison.

LOST ILLUSIONS

However there is no need to go on rehearsing the catalogue of iniquities – they are sufficiently known. The present administration has deliberately and definitely rejected any element of traditional labourism (which in retrospect is starting to have some nostalgic attractions). An even more significant question is the likely future development of the labour movement, which still after all continues to have an extensive support base and very considerable material resources. Although it has remained largely quiescent since 1997 – kept in check by the memory of Labours (and labour’s) weakness during the eighteen Thatcher years, Blair’s stunning electoral achievement and some minimal concessions to its trade union wing – matters may well change now that the government’s follies, especially its insistence on following Bush into the Iraq war, are coming home to roost. The degree of public alienation then was unprecedented, and Donald Rumsfelt even offered Blair a get-out from military participation. A strong case can be made that the Prime Minister is now irretrievably damaged goods and that the New Labour project is unravelling. The Iraq enterprise, despite military victory, far from strengthening his position has undermined it yet further in the aftermath. It is less Thatcher after the Falklands than Eden after Suez.

Nonetheless it is important not to fool ourselves; Humpty Dumpty cannot simply be recon-

stituted. Much of the Thatcher settlement really is irreversible, at least in the short term. The indictment of New Labour is not that it failed to attempt the impossible and overturn everything done between 1979 and 1997. Rather it is that far from working to ameliorate the Thatcherite impact on society and – learning the lessons of labourism’s errors – to modify it in socially progressive directions; instead it embraced and intensified it. It was a perceptive *Guardian* reader who, in a letter written shortly after Blair’s elevation to the party leadership in 1994, predicted that if he ever became prime minister he would prove much worse than Thatcher.

My own view, reached with regret, is that the Labour Party is a lost cause so far as the left is concerned – in abandoning labourism it has also destroyed the essence of what it used to stand for. Ross McKibben has argued that because the New Labour leaders had no coherent perspective on where they wanted to take Britain, a lightly resprayed Thatcherism was adopted to fill the vacuum, “a degraded system of management and clientage which exists primarily to defend itself, political cynicism and opportunism unanchored to any achievable social goal, and adventurism abroad – a junior partner to the United States.” (*London Review of Books*, August 7th, 2003.) Labourism, now best represented by Roy Hattersley, still has a constituency albeit a shrinking one, but the Labour Party will never return to it, let alone anything further to the left.

Even so, it is unlikely that Labour is going to lose the next election, whoever is leading it, though it is safe to predict that in any event the majority will be much reduced. However the options open to any imaginable prime minister – even in the most improbable event that it should be Robin Cook – will be very tightly constrained. Perhaps the railways could be returned to public ownership (which would be a very popular measure indeed) and some of

One of my reviewers once remarked that if anyone was depressed by something I wrote they could always cheer themselves up by reading Kafka. My reply would be that if the situation warrants pessimism it is best to recognise that.

the worst Blairite excesses trimmed back, but really dramatic economic and social reversals are out of the question. The economic stability of the country and the livelihood of its working (and pensionable) population depend upon continued observance of the parameters established by international and especially American capital. (If Tommy Sheridan were to find himself in charge of an independent Scotland he would be in no different situation.)

PROSPECTS AND POTENTIALS

If that were the end of the story however then the labour movement might as well hitch its political fortunes to the Lib Dems (or the nationalist parties), and leave the Blairites as an irrelevant rump contemplating the vacuity of the Third Way and chasing whatever sources of power and office they might scent. But it is more promising and attractive from a left standpoint to nurture any socialist phoenix which might be hatching in the ashes of labourism.

At first sight the Scottish Socialist Party might appear to be the most likely candidate. Certainly, with the aid of proportional representation it has established the sort of presence in Scotland which has eluded its nearest English counterpart, the Socialist Alliance. The commitment and dedication of its representatives is impressive and much of what they do is admirable. Unfortunately it also incorporates many of the shortcomings of labourism as a political culture.

Admittedly the SSP does not worship archaic state forms and symbols, but its focus is narrow and traditionalist in left wing terms. (This too was partly anticipated in *The Long Death*.) The joke that “I have no objection to culture so long as it doesn’t interfere with the class struggle” could almost be said to be made for the SSP. The Gramscian lessons of the past four decades have largely passed it by. Amalgamation with the Greens would surely be a sensible and salutary move – the fact

that it is unthinkable is indicative of the weakness. A further major weakness is that it is a party built for opposition or achieving very specific and particular measures. Its problems will really begin if it wins enough support to be in a position to exert broad influence on government or to lead it (see above). Then it would be compelled either to attempt an impossible agenda or to disappoint its constituency. For all that the SSP remains the most hopeful development on the left not only in Scotland, but the UK as a whole.

Outside Scotland the British left remains in a state of extreme fragmentation. Apart from the considerable section of it still inside the Labour Party (applicable to Scotland as well) there is a plethora of splinter groups from the tiny to the minuscule: the somewhat larger SWP, which has come nearest to taking on the role the Communist Party used to fill, and the Socialist Alliance (of which the SWP is also the main component). Affecting the calculations of all these elements is the matter of how far and for how much longer trade unions will continue to support the Labour Party – the very fact that this has become an issue is in itself indicative of how far times have changed. If a substantial section of the trade union movement were to repudiate New Labour then most probably the Labour left would begin to consider its position.

The Socialist Alliance, which hoped to replicate the successes of the SSP has got nowhere electorally and itself had been plagued with splits and resignations. (The fascist right has been much more successful.) The scattered and divided far left is in no better shape. The left in general has not succeeded in capitalising upon the surge of dissent reflected in the huge anti-war demonstrations of early 2003. Nevertheless the political order is in flux in a way which has not been true since 1945.

MOVING ON?

It presents an opportunity which certainly ought not to be missed,

COALITIONS FOR ELECTORAL CHANGE **DO** WORK

for if the left does not rise to the challenge the far right will certainly lurk in the background to take advantage. It would of course be ridiculously futile as well as insufferably arrogant for any individual to try to specify or prescribe what form the response should take; it is legitimate however to point out some of the lessons of the past and the constraints which limit freedom of action in the present.

In the first place, nothing will be achieved without some kind of unity – although the Socialist Alliance in the form it took may have marked a false start, that does not mean that the principle is not sound and could not be expanded to draw in the British part of the anti-globalisation movement, a form and forum of protest developing on a world scale. Secondly it is important to be realistic about objectives and potentials. A social formation comparable to the Scandinavian countries is the furthest horizon of practical politics in Britain right now, and even that looks pretty ambitious. Horizons however have other things beyond them, and beyond this one is the looming global environmental catastrophe and the question of how that should be addressed.

I am frequently accused of pessimism. One of my reviewers once remarked that if anyone was depressed by something I wrote they could always cheer themselves up by reading Kafka. My reply would be that if the situation warrants pessimism it is best to recognise that. But, whatever our perspectives, the urgent life-and-death questions of the contemporary world don't go away, and it is pressing on everyone who realises what is involved to address them as far as they're able to. For all their shortcomings, the left traditions are still the best resource for that project.

■ *Willie Thompson is author of a number of books on the history of the left and the labour movement. His Post-Modernism and History will be published by Palgrave in February 2004.*

Against all the odds, **Andrew Burns** reports, it looks as though proportional representation will be in place for the next Scottish local government elections. Next stop Westminster!

On Thursday 1st May 2003 we witnessed the last ever first-past-the-post (FPTP) local government elections in Scotland. This might sound like wishful thinking from a long-time electoral reform campaigner but actually it's fact. The new "Partnership Agreement" signed on Thursday 15th May 2003 by the incoming Scottish Executive (Labour and Liberal-Democrat) states that "we will renew local democracy by introducing for the next local government elections the proportional single transferable vote system of election. The multi-member wards would have either three or four members, depending on local circumstances."

SIGNIFICANT BREAKTHROUGH

This is wonderful news for all electoral reformers. This very significant breakthrough has been achieved through long, patient campaigning led by the all-party/non-party "Fairshare" group (see www.fairsharevoting.org) greatly assisted by many Democratic Left Scotland supporters. Fairshare has always believed that modernising local government was central to modernising the government of Scotland.

The very first ministerial statement to the Scottish Parliament after it had attained its full powers in July 1999 was the Executive's response to the McIntosh Report. The McIntosh Commission clearly recognised there was a democratic deficit at the heart of Scotland's local government and made recommendations to eliminate it. McIntosh did not actually recommend a specific system of PR, although they said particular consideration should be given to AMS (Additional Member System, used to elect the Scottish Parliament), STV (Single Transferable Vote, used for local government elections in Northern Ireland) and AV+ (Alternative Vote plus, recommended by the Jenkins' Commission to elect Westminster MPs). Instead, they set out five criteria that should be used to determine the system of PR to be adopted for Scottish local government. These were: proportionality, the councillor-ward link, fair provision for independents, allowance for geographical diversity, and a close fit between council wards and natural communities.

To take these recommendations forward, the Scottish Executive set up the Renewing Local Democracy Working Group, chaired by

COALITIONS FOR ELECTORAL CHANGE DO WORK

Richard Kerley. The Working Group took the view that the first two criteria – proportionality and the councillor-ward link – were the most critical of the five set out by McIntosh and accepted by the Executive. They pointed out that, with any voting system, there has to be a trade-off between these two criteria. The highest degree of proportionality can be achieved only at the expense of the councillor-ward link. The question they addressed was where to strike the balance.

SIX SYSTEMS ASSESSED

They assessed six different voting systems against these two criteria. Two fell at the first hurdle: FPTP and AV (Alternative Vote) both failed to meet the proportionality test. One more fell at the second: list systems can be highly proportionate, at least in party terms, but failed completely on the councillor-ward link criterion. That left them with the three systems suggested by McIntosh. AV+, recommended by the Jenkins' Commission for elections to Westminster, appeared to be little more than a variant of the AMS system used to elect the Scottish Parliament and so they did not give it further consideration.

Their choice came down to AMS or STV. Both systems could give proportional results and both would maintain the councillor-ward link, though in very different ways. AMS would retain some single-member wards, but would elect two quite different types of councillor, those from the single-member wards and those elected on an area (top-up) basis. With STV all the councillors would be elected on the same basis, but there would be several in each ward. The Working Group then evaluated these two systems against the remaining three criteria. In their report they concluded that STV would best meet the requirements of their remit. And now, the Government of Scotland has at last



By 2007 only a few bits of English local government and Westminster itself will remain elected by a majoritarian system. With ongoing effort from us all that won't last for long.

agreed to implement that recommendation.

The Scottish Executive has finally been consulting on the detail (and not the principle!) of a draft "Local Governance (Scotland) Bill" which is due to be enacted sometime next year (2004) – well in time for implementation in 2007. The Bill will change the way local councillors are elected from the current First Past the Post system to STV-PR. In essence this will mean:

- No more single-party dominance
- Real competition for seats – councillors will have to work hard to maintain support
- Choice for voters. Voters will be able to choose from a list of candidates, from all parties, so the voters will decide openly who represents them – not small unseen party cliques
- Many less wasted votes. Who you vote for will make a difference and most voters will get representation from someone they voted for
- All leading to much more responsive and democratic local government

Doom-laden headlines that STV-PR will never be allowed

ignore the fact that one fundamental difference exists between Blair's promises of a referendum on the Westminster electoral system and McConnell's promise of STV-PR: Blair was elected by FPTP and has a rather large majority whereas McConnell was elected by proportional representation, has no majority and is in a coalition government. More heartening still for reformers is the unavoidable fact that the majority of the 129 MSPs (Labour has only 50 member) support STV-PR.

It all proves that methodical, careful, coalitions for electoral change can work – we should all take heart from that and re-invigorate our efforts through organisations such as Fairshare and Make Votes Count.

By 2007 only a few bits of English local government (Regional Assemblies under AMS may be in place?) and Westminster itself will remain elected by a majoritarian system. With ongoing effort from us all that won't last for long.

■ *Andrew Burns is a Labour Edinburgh City councillor, Chair of Fairshare and a member of Democratic Left Scotland.*

MAKING THE POINT FOR STV

Some final points of detail were emphasised to the Scottish Executive during the recent consultation. Fairshare sought to ensure as many submissions as possible making the following points:

- Multi-member wards are a positive development allowing real choice for electors and ensuring local people and organisations have a team of representatives working for them. We feel local councillors will work hard to ensure they are well respected part of that team.
- The bill should be enacted before the end of the first year of this parliament to ensure plenty of time for civic education on the changes and training for the appropriate officials.
- Concerns about the erosion of the link between councillor and voter are overplayed. The direct connection between voter and "voted for" will be greatly increased as most people will have at least one representative they voted for.
- Multi-member wards can very effectively be constructed by combining existing council wards, at least for 2007 elections. Any attempt to completely redraw existing boundaries would complicate and prolong the process of reform unnecessarily.

NO ROOM FOR DREAMS

Scotland's fourth city – 51.7% of its wards are in the worst 10% of deprived electoral wards in Scotland. 31% are in the worst 5.2%

Earlier this year Dundee Anti-Poverty Forum launched a major piece of research – *No Room for Dreams*. The launch received considerable media attention but the nature of the work and its aims require this study to have greater longevity.

The report was carried out over 18 months by six volunteers supported by Professor Paul Spicker of Robert Gordon's University (Aberdeen). In all, 329 individuals were asked their view in one-to-one and group interviews using techniques and approaches that the volunteer had gained through training.

Intriguingly, the Anti-Poverty Forum, with its history of campaigning as well as direct service delivery, borrowed a methodological starting point from the World Bank. The Work Bank guidance on consultation with the poor talks about the following:

- Enabling local people to serve as partners in data collection and analysis
- Linking fieldwork to ongoing policy analysis
- Sampling to represent the diversity of the population studies
- Emphasising dissemination both to the communities who participate in the study and to policy makers
- Using local networks for research
- Linking the work, where possible, to quantitative poverty assessments

To differing degrees, all these undertakings were addressed, ensuring that, whilst emotive, the work had a clear scientific underpinning.

All this reinforces its integrity and assists in contributing to its dual purpose:

- One, “to give people living in the city and who experience poverty the opportunity to have their voice heard” and,
- Two, “to develop an agenda of issues that requires to be tackled” through engaging with policy makers at a local and national level.

DAMNING INDICTMENT

Whilst praise needs to be given for the skill and care taken in producing this report, the fact that it requires to happen at all is a damning indictment on our society. Dundee is changing. Importantly, Dundonians are generally proud of their city and as the document states “Dundee City Council, the other statutory agencies, voluntary and community organisations are committed to turning the situation around” but there is still a long way to go. “Too many employment opportunities can be considered marginal and low paid. Teenage pregnancy levels are the highest in Europe. People in the twenty-five to forty age group continue to migrate from Dundee and the pockets of deprivation that existed in the 90s have now spread city-wide.”

So, against this lamentable backdrop, does *No Room for Dreams* contribute anything? Does it provide lessons for others elsewhere? Does it address its own aims?

What is important about this study? Is it real? It uses a very simple technique of capturing people's opinions and presents them in a readable fashion. It gives us many of the answers to the questions it asked. Given the enormity of the task it was taking on, there is a lot of material. It addresses material need, economic circumstances and social relation-



No Room for Dreams – Poverty in Dundee: An Account of People's Views and Experiences

by Dundee Anti-Poverty Forum with Paul Spicker (Dundee Anti-Poverty Forum, £10.00)

ships. Undertaking the study, the volunteers agreed that the situation of three groups required to be highlighted – homeless people, carers and Gypsy travellers.

It is difficult to capture here the study's main contribution, the voices of Dundonians describing dealing with constant economic emergency and systematic exclusion. Indeed, it would seem a voyeuristic act to lift the quotes out of the context. But, approximately 100 pages are given over to the often one-line responses of those who participated – older people, unemployed folk, lone parents, people from minority ethnic backgrounds, individuals with special needs – different Dundonians with something to say, often very powerful: the very people who are too frequently labelled apathetic by those too lazy or too indifferent to speak to them.

So, does it address its first aim of giving people a voice? The answer needs to be an overwhelming Yes, and in doing so it can encourage others to operate in similar ways and share stories of reality.

The second aim is to provide an agenda to engage with policy makers. It ensures that those campaigns are doing it in conjunction with others. They are listening to the people. This however, is not a one-off activity and ensuring those who have power trust the people and change is a hard task. But, if we want a society where people can dream, this study and the resultant publication are an important start.

Stuart Fairweather

■ Dundee Anti-Poverty Forum can be contacted on dundeeanti-poverty@hotmail.com. Electronic copies of *No Room for Dreams* are available free of charge.

POLITICS AND THE ANGEL

Jane Corrie argues that the Angel of the North demonstrates that culture can generate political meaning in ways that politicians can't even get close to.

So what do you think of the Angel of the North – the colossal statue with its strangely long horizontal wings that has become an icon for North East England? There is a strong likelihood that you may have seen it, situated as it is very close to two major routes to and from Scotland – the A1(M) motorway and the East Coast railway line. I had the chance to stand at its feet a few weeks ago – and found the experience both moving and thought provoking.

The story of how the Angel came to be there and of what has happened on that spot since is as remarkable as the statue itself. It was commissioned from the sculptor Anthony Gormley by Gateshead Council in 1994 and put up in 1998. During the four years of its creation there was little local enthusiasm for the project. Much local press coverage was vitriolic in its criticism and despite attempts to involve local communities the people of Gateshead remained sceptical. This seems to have changed since the Angel's arrival. As well as being a place, a statue situated in a particular landscape, the Angel has a biography – it is becoming a story.

I will list three episodes that I know. In the late summer of 2000 the Angel was used as the starting point for one of the first and

Overnight it had been draped in an enormous version of the Newcastle United back and white strip – the clearest possible indication that its score with those living near it had shot up.

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

largest of the fuel protest gatherings. Buses, lorries and tractors gathered on the motorway at its feet to begin the slow crawl to London. Secondly – and unsurprisingly – the Campaign for a North East Assembly (see *Perspectives*, autumn 2002) has had occasion to gather there too. Thirdly – and this most famously – there was the day (maybe a couple of years ago?) when the Angel became a Magpie. Overnight it had been draped in an enormous version of the Newcastle United back and white strip – the clearest possible indication that its score with those living near it had shot up. Unfortunately having held their nerve through all the furore of its construction Gateshead Council on this occasion lost it very quickly – and the strip was swiftly removed.

ANGEL HAS MEANING

It is clear from these three snippets early on in its anticipated 100 year life that the Angel has meaning for people – and for a wide diversity of people at that. And then I came across an essay by Bea Campbell (in fact spotting the essay made me buy the book.*) in which she writes “Tyneside is one of the poorest places in Britain, where the grandeur of its industries has ebbed, for many of its people, into economic, and emotional anxiety.

Feelings that in the middle of the century would have been expressed in the language of politics were by the end of the century hardly expressible at all.”

Here she is writing about the powerful and positive response of the people of Gateshead to Anthony Gormley's *The Field* (a vast army of small hand made terracotta figures) which happened at the same time as the very negative debate about the Angel stirred up by the press.

So what exactly does the Angel express? And how does this relate – or not relate – to “the language of politics”?

First of all there is the significance of its situation. Not just beside one motorway – but between two motorways. It is a landscape marked by mining and industry, post industrial dereliction and the very ordinary development of more recent years: tower blocks, football pitches, pylons. It is very close to the Metro Centre – a shopping centre mostly famous for being very large. It is a monumental sculpture in a non-monumental place, situated close to the lives people actually live, and through the road and rail proximity touching the lives of millions of others.

ROOTED IN THE PAST

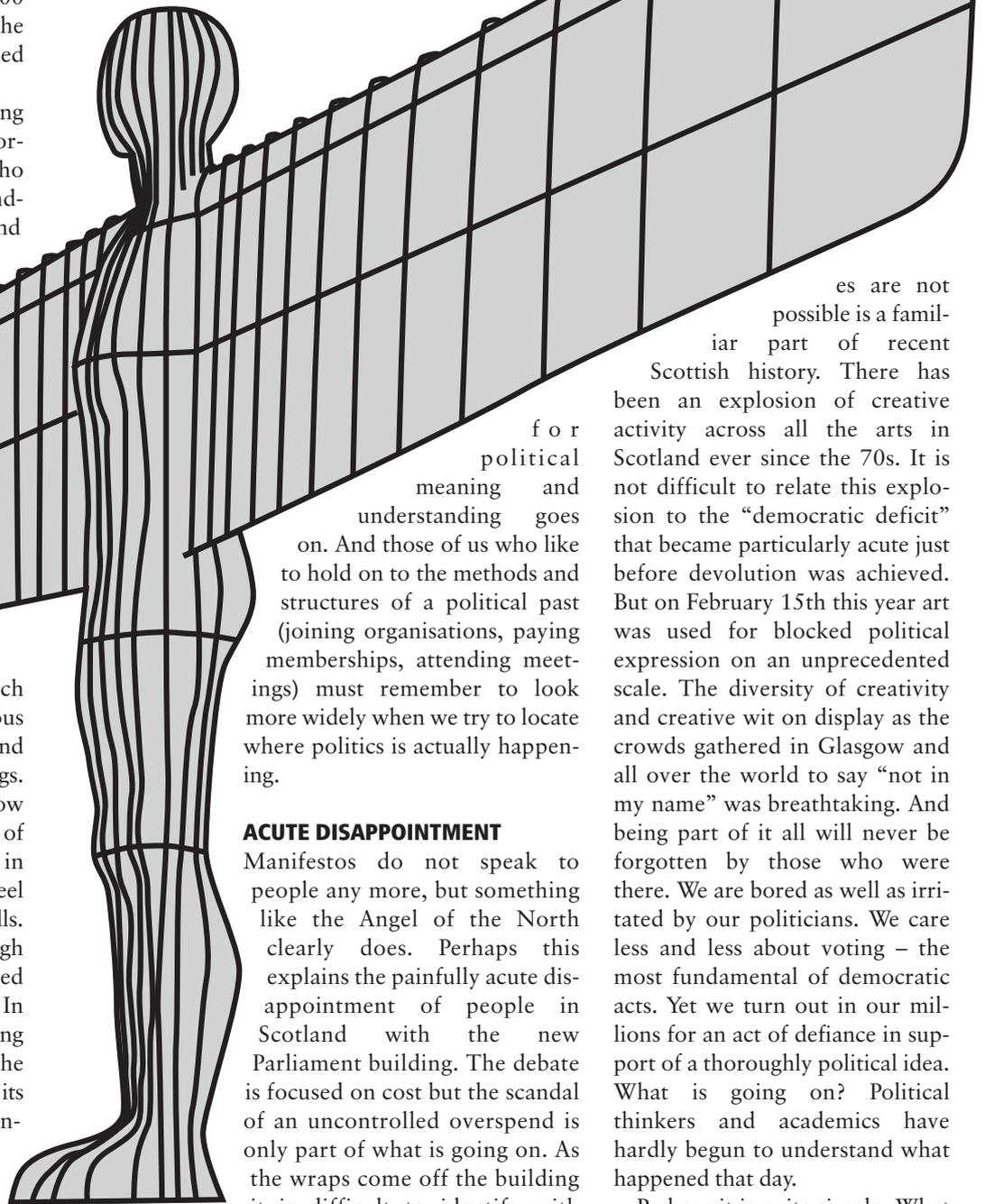
It is also rooted in the past: literally rooted as the wind pressure on

those huge wings is counterbalanced by a steel pin deep into the earth below. Before the pin was put in place the tunnels of the 200 year old coal mines beneath the statue had to be blocked and filled with cement.

Seen from a distance the long wings, which appear disproportionate only in photographs, echo the surrounding lines of the landscape which is high, windy and horizontal and characterised by massive skies. Seen close to, the

Angel seems much bigger. It is made from enormous steel plates, curvy for the body and straight and sail-like for the wings. In its size, construction and now rusting colour the statue speaks of the building of great ships and in fact was constructed in a local steel yard using local steel riveting skills. The curves were achieved through state of the art computer aided design and cutting techniques. In fact there is absolutely nothing “heritage” about the Angel. The absence of retail opportunities at its feet is remarkable (and intentional). But because of what it is and where it is, a place that appeared disregarded has become a place of significance and meaning, both for the people who live there and the people who rush past.

And this sounds to me like a political achievement as well as a cultural and maybe a spiritual one. The days of mass party support, lasting political allegiances and large voter turn-out are over. Our sense of being part of a real community, of being citizens rather than itemised, targeted consumers, is hard to maintain. Yet the search



Almost all large and potentially symbolic public projects of this kind are massively unpopular at their birth.

for political meaning and understanding goes on. And those of us who like to hold on to the methods and structures of a political past (joining organisations, paying memberships, attending meetings) must remember to look more widely when we try to locate where politics is actually happening.

ACUTE DISAPPOINTMENT

Manifestos do not speak to people any more, but something like the Angel of the North clearly does. Perhaps this explains the painfully acute disappointment of people in Scotland with the new Parliament building. The debate is focused on cost but the scandal of an uncontrolled overspend is only part of what is going on. As the wraps come off the building it is difficult to identify with what is emerging or to see the building as expressive of the aspirations it embodies. As yet. This may change. Almost all large and potentially symbolic public projects of this kind are massively unpopular at their birth. The Angel is a good example. This is to state a fact – not to apologise for the bungled financial control or to side with Sir Sean’s recent (rather incoherent) approval.

Art as a locus for political meaning where actual political process-

es are not possible is a familiar part of recent Scottish history. There has been an explosion of creative activity across all the arts in Scotland ever since the 70s. It is not difficult to relate this explosion to the “democratic deficit” that became particularly acute just before devolution was achieved. But on February 15th this year art was used for blocked political expression on an unprecedented scale. The diversity of creativity and creative wit on display as the crowds gathered in Glasgow and all over the world to say “not in my name” was breathtaking. And being part of it all will never be forgotten by those who were there. We are bored as well as irritated by our politicians. We care less and less about voting – the most fundamental of democratic acts. Yet we turn out in our millions for an act of defiance in support of a thoroughly political idea. What is going on? Political thinkers and academics have hardly begun to understand what happened that day.

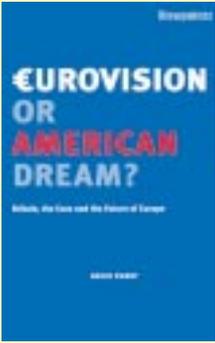
Perhaps it is quite simple: What do we want – Meaning! When do we want it – Now! I think this is the message the poignantly flightless angel signals as we whiz past.

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

NOTE

* From *Making an Angel*, a celebration of the project in words and photographs, published by Booth Cibbon Editions, 1998

Books from Democratic Left Scotland and Luath Press



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

By David Purdy, £3.99

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

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

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

Scotlands of the Future: Sustainability in a Small Nation

Edited by Eurig Scandrett, £7.99

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

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

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

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

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



Scotland: Land and Power

By Andy Wightman, £5.00

The book that informed much of the debate on the recent Scottish Parliament land reform legislation, Andy Wightman's book is required reading, raising many long-term issues that still await resolution.

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