

The Best of 25 Years of the Scottish Review

Issue 4

Lockerbie
Politics
Religion
Greatest Scots

Edited by Islay McLeod

ICS Books

Kenneth Roy, founder of the Scottish Review, mentor and friend, and to all the other contributors who are no longer with us.

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^{*} Not one, but two Bill Patersons contribute to this issue of The Best of 25 Years of the Scottish Review. To avoid confusion we have distinguished between them as the (renowned and much loved) actor who lives in London; the other as a Glasgow-based writer.

LOCKERBIE

Silence and fear at the barber's

Kenneth Roy 2008

On the day that the Lockerbie bomber, as he is usually described, was refused bail pending his long-delayed appeal, I happened to be visiting a barber's shop near the office. Two members of the staff were discussing the judicial decision and his terminal illness. There was unanimous support for the former, no sympathy for the latter.

'If it was left to me,' said one of the hairdressers, a woman in her 20s, 'I'd...'

The rest was crude; vicious. She was, however, exercising her right to freedom of speech. The customers – the shop was fairly busy – were either blank and uncomprehending or silently acquiescent; it was difficult to tell which. But clearly no dissent was expected, otherwise why would the staff have been so relaxed about sharing their views with the rest of the room? Perhaps they were arrogant enough to assume a consensus. If they did, they assumed wrongly about at least one of their punters.

I sat frozen to the spot. For a few seconds, I could scarcely believe the evidence of my own ears. Had she really said that? In front of customers? When I'd recovered my composure – although I was still trembling with anger – I stood up and addressed the shop. I said that I strongly objected to the sentiments expressed, and added that Megrahi might well be completely innocent, that there was more than enough doubt to justify the appeal, and that the Scottish judicial system had behaved with shaming inhumanity in continuing to detain him in prison.

Of course, I knew I was wasting my breath. The prejudice in the backstreet of this small Scottish town was too deep to be softened. But at least I had spoken up; I too had exercised my right to freedom of speech.

There is a flaw in the last two paragraphs: more than a flaw: there is a lie. It is true that I was trembling with anger. True that the views I have just stated are the views I genuinely hold. But the rest is fabrication. I did not stand up and address the shop. I stayed where I was until it was my turn. 'Next please' – the curt imperative of a woman at the back of the shop who had not taken part in the original exchange. I went over and had my hair cut. She did not speak to me and I did not speak to her. I looked in the mirror and stared reproachfully at my own reflection.

Why had I not challenged this affront?

Was it apathy? Surely not. I feel strongly about the case. Three of the most outstanding people I have ever met – Robert Black (emeritus professor of Scots law at Edinburgh University), Jim Swire (father of one of the victims) and Tam Dalyell (the most tenacious parliamentarian of the modern era) – have all studied the evidence,

Bob Black in the most scrupulous and sustained detail, and are either emphatic in declaring Megrahi innocent or have serious doubt about his guilt. We are almost certainly witnessing a tragic miscarriage of justice.

If not apathy, then what? Why did I not speak out, if only to satisfy my own conscience? Why did I let these people away with it? There is a psychological theory that individuals, confronted with the apparent integrity of a group, in this case of seven or eight people, will conform rather than take a stand. There is a simple word to describe this theory and the word is fear. I was afraid of what might happen to me if I uttered the words in my heart; afraid of being ridiculed or humiliated; afraid of the wrath of the group. It was so much easier to say nothing, to leave without confrontation or nastiness. I must go on being a part of this community, after all.

Then I thought of other barber's shops in other places, at other times. I thought of barber's shops in pre-war Germany, thought of myself in the backstreet of a small town just like this one, and of the anti-Semitism in the air, and wondered what I would have done in those extreme circumstances. I didn't like the answer I was getting from the reflection of myself in the mirror. If I could not find a word to say in support of a dying man in a Scottish prison cell, when there was no obvious risk to my physical well-being or livelihood, what were the chances that I would have defended my Jewish friends in pre-war Germany?

'In 1942,' wrote Anne-Marie Bunting, 'a unit of ordinary, middle-aged German reserve policemen were ordered to kill all the inhabitants of a Polish village. Most of these men had never fired a shot at a human being, yet they killed with little hesitation and would go on to slaughter thousands more in cold blood... Although subject to anti-Semitic propaganda, these men were not ideologically indoctrinated to kill Jews, nor were they career Nazis, nor had they become brutalised by combat'.

Anne-Marie Bunting discussed the case of Reserve Police Battalion 107, and its abrupt descent into barbarism, in her winning paper in the 2005 Young UK and Ireland Programme. She went on: 'I could not be certain that I would have taken a stand. I did not know whether I had instincts similar to the men of Battalion 107, nor whether I would have had the clarity of thought or strength of character to resist those instincts had I been in Germany in 1942... What were my morals? What did I value and what would I fight for?'

It would be foolish to imagine that, in minor ways, these questions do not press down on us in the daily routine of our relatively unthreatened, relatively peaceful, democratic society. They pressed down on me in that barber's shop. I went in for a haircut. I left doubting my own moral character.

To echo Anne-Marie Bunting: 'What do I value and what would I fight for?' Free speech, perhaps? Liberty of thought and expression? Would I value those enough to fight for them? Yes, above all things. But if I value them so much, why did I remain silent?

I made a small protest. I did not leave a tip. How absurd. How utterly abject.

I realise now that I am capable of self-censorship, that I am willing quite voluntarily to submit to the unarticulated will of a group of seven or eight people. Am I also weak enough to submit to self-censorship forced upon me by exhortation or threat? The night before my visit to the barber's, I found an email waiting for me from a person who clearly considers himself to be of some importance and influence. He wished to advise me what I should – or rather should not – write. He left what he called a 'brief marker', a slightly chilling admonition. His desire to impede my intellectual liberty, my independence of thought, would be almost flattering were it not so profoundly depressing.

It appears that the hairdresser who would do unspeakable things to a dying prisoner has complete freedom of speech while this person would deprive me of mine. Orwell, thou shouldst be alive at this hour.

Pariahs in America

Alan McIntyre 2009

It's certainly been an interesting few weeks to be a Scot living in the US. From Obama's 'a mistake' to the FBI director Mueller's 'outraged', official reaction to the Megrahi release has ranged from mild disappointment to righteous indignation. Less visible from Scotland has been the bilious reaction of US right-wing talk radio and cable news channels, who in their need to fill their 24-hour-news cycle, made Scotland the 'pariah de jour' for the best part of a week. The hysteria hasn't quite plumbed the depths of the 'cheese-eating surrender monkeys' taunting of the French prior to the Iraq invasion, but it has certainly been strange to find myself an unappointed representative of a country that provides 'comfort to terrorists'.

It has been unusual, but not entirely unpleasant. Like most *Scottish Review* contributors (and either a large or small minority of Scots depending on what poll you believe) I've taken Kenny MacAskill's decision at face value and applauded it as an act of genuine compassion. A position made somewhat easier to adopt by the mounting evidence of an unsound conviction. Having lived through a couple of decades of reflexive British toadying to US foreign policy, it has been liberating to defend an independent Scottish decision from what has felt, for the most part, like the moral high ground.

As the media circus has continued to unfold and I've received calls and emails from both confused and outraged American friends, two questions have been percolating in my mind. First, what is the pathology of the US indignation, and second, how much does it matter in the bigger scheme of things that the Scottish Government has tweaked the nose of both the US administration and US public opinion?

On the first question, US indignation seems to have arisen from the conflation of two distinct strands of rebuke, both of which have the unfortunate stench of hypocrisy to them. On one hand, you have the conspiracy theorists who see in the Megrahi release realpolitik in action. For all the protestations to the contrary, it is clear to someone like John Bolton 'that the decision to release was almost certainly taken at the behest of Gordon Brown'. For Mike Mullen, the chairman of the joint chiefs and America's most senior military officer, it was 'obviously a political decision'. For them, Megrahi's release is clearly quid pro quo for better bilateral trade relations between the UK and Libya.

I won't rehash arguments of the last few weeks about prisoner transfer arrangements, Gordon Brown's views on the release, Alex Salmond's huffiness, the

role of Peter Mandelson, and the important philosophical distinction between causation and correlation. For argument's sake, let's just accept that there may be some truth to the proposition that the timing of the release benefits UK commercial interests and may have played some role in the decision. If that is the truth, then it's not as if compromising justice for some larger political end is exactly un-American.

The self-righteous elevation of justice over politics is especially galling and hypocritical in the wake of Ted Kennedy's death. For all the hagiography that has attended his death (and some of it was warranted), there has been scant comment that dear old Teddy, 'the liberal lion' of the Democratic Party, was a leading light in the Irish-American community that blocked the extradition of IRA terrorists for over 30 years and treated St Patrick's Day as one big IRA fundraising effort, even after 9/11.

With a long history of buying-off friendly dictators around the world for larger political ends, it can't be that the US objects in principle to these types of deals being done, even under the current more enlightened administration. Far more likely is anger arising from impotence because they a) weren't directly in control of the situation, b) couldn't get the UK or Scottish governments to bend the knee despite vigorous arm twisting, and c) won't benefit as much as the UK from any explicit or implicit deals that were done. Let's face it, whether the release was commercially influenced or not, it will only be a matter of time before the hubbub dies down and Prince Andrew quietly pitches his tent up a wadi somewhere outside Tripoli to fly the British trade flag, and he is sure to get a warm welcome when he does.

The nuance that hasn't made the transatlantic crossing is that there may indeed be a conspiracy to unmask, but it's not an overtly commercial one. If MacAskill did have a motivation beyond compassion, then the politics suggest that it is far more likely to be the protection of the Scottish legal system and the UK Government from the embarrassment that a second appeal may have caused. The American reaction to the mutual back-scratching of a trade deal has been bad enough; God know how they would have reacted to hard evidence that the original conviction was unsound and that Megrahi was nothing but a convenient scapegoat to divert US attention from the failure to catch the real culprits.

Talking about God, He has been at the centre of the second strand of US criticism over the last couple of weeks. Intermingled with the conspiracy theories has been the moral argument that compassionate release is simply wrong, and that by extension forgiveness and mercy have no place in a sound judicial system. This is where there has been a stark divide between the attitudes of the US victims' families and those in the UK; a contrast which highlights a broader cultural division between the countries. Despite the constitutional separation of church and state, the US is an overtly Christian country with church attendance rates that dwarf the rest of the Western world. However, in this case, as in many other moral situations, they appear to have

forgotten that the central text of Christianity is the New Testament, which has a lot to say about compassion, forgiveness and mercy. Instead, both US morality and political dialogue are staunchly Old Testament in character, with an unreconstructed vengeful God taking centre stage. With its eye-for-an-eye justification of the death penalty, public opinion in the US often doesn't even pay lip service to 'Sermon on the Mount' Christian values.

In the eyes of the righteous in the US, not only were we wrong to release Megrahi, we were clearly remiss in not executing him as a mass murderer. If his conviction turned out to be unsound, then he would simply join the long list of victims of US judicial killing, where subsequent evidence has shown an innocent man or woman to have been wrongly executed. The reality is that even if all the conspiracy theories were stripped away and MacAskill's decision was shown to be nothing more than what he claims it to be – an act of compassion for a dying man broadly in line with Scottish judicial precedent – this is not a position that many Americans would recognise as a Christian act. Indeed they would see it as a 'mockery of justice' in the words of Robert Mueller. Let's remember that this is a judicial system that needed a recent Supreme Court decision to establish that executing minors between the ages of 16 and 18 was illegal and which in some states still demands life imprisonment for relatively minor offences under their 'three strikes' laws. On the issues of justice and morality, I am afraid American concepts of judicial mercy and asymmetrical compassion are not ones that we share.

Whatever the sources and merits of the US indignation, does it matter that Scotland is now seen at best as 'soft on terror' and at worst as collaborators by our American cousins? My answer is no. In terms of geopolitics, this is no Suez. What we have here is disappointment from the Obama administration that we have edged out a little from under the American thumb and an almost complete lack of understanding of the devolved nature of the Scottish Government. But to suggest that this will undermine intelligence-sharing arrangements or broader strategic cooperation is a fantasy of those on the right who want punishment for our disloyalty to the US and of those on the left who have craved such disengagement since the start of the Cold War. On an official level, this is a marital tiff that will pass quite quickly, not something that threatens the relationship, even it that relationship isn't quite as special as it used to be.

On a more prosaic level, will we see the American tourist dollar dry up in response to our lily-livered weakness? Again, I think not. 'Freedom Fries' rather than French Fries didn't persist on American menus for long, even in the congressional canteen in Washington. Unfortunately, most Americans don't view Scotland as a small, generally left-leaning modern country on the edge of Europe struggling to make devolved government work. Rather, Scotland is heather and tartan, pipes and cabertossing, Muirfield and 18-year-old Glenmorangie.

In the world of US cable news, the huffing and puffing over the release of Megrahi may continue for a while, but your average middle-aged American, whatever his political views, isn't going to sacrifice his round of golf on the Old Course at St Andrews to protest the decision. From my own personal perspective, I hope things don't calm down too quickly. It turns out that missionary work in the Americas can be quite invigorating.

The Megrahi Scandal

Robert Black QC 2010

At the end of June 2007, the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission (SCCRC) referred Abdelbaset Ali Mohmed al-Megrahi's conviction of the Lockerbie bombing back to the High Court of Justiciary for a further appeal. The case had been under consideration by the SCCRC since September 2003 and its statement of reasons (available only to Megrahi, the Crown and the High Court) extends to more than 800 pages, accompanied by 13 volumes of appendices.

The commission, in the published summary of its findings, indicated there were six grounds on which it had concluded a miscarriage of justice might have occurred. Strangely, only four of these grounds are enumerated in the summary. They are:

- 1. That there was no reasonable basis for the trial court's conclusion that the date of purchase of the clothes which surrounded the bomb was 7 December 1988, the only date on which Megrahi was proved to have been on Malta and so could have purchased them. The finding that he was the purchaser was 'important to the verdict against him'.
- **2.** That evidence not heard at the trial about the date on which Christmas lights were switched on in Malta further undermined the trial court's conclusion that the date of purchase was as late as 7 December.
- **3.** That evidence was not made available to the defence that four days before the shopkeeper made a tentative identification of Megrahi at an ID parade he had seen a magazine article containing a photograph of Megrahi, linking him to the bombing.
- **4.** That other evidence which undermined the shopkeeper's identification of Megrahi and the finding as to the date of purchase was not made available to the defence.

I have always contended that no reasonable tribunal could have convicted Megrahi on the evidence led.

The reasons given by the commission for finding that a miscarriage of justice may have occurred in this case are not limited to the effect of new evidence (such as the payment to a key prosecution witness of \$2m) which has become available since the date of the original trial and the non-disclosure by the police and prosecution of evidence helpful to the defence.

The prima facie miscarriage of justice identified by the commission includes the

trial court's finding in fact on the evidence heard at the trial that the clothes which surrounded the bomb were purchased in Malta on 7 December 1988 and that Megrahi was the purchaser. This was the cornerstone of the Crown's case against him. If, as suggested, that finding had no reasonable basis in the evidence, then there is no legal justification for his conviction.

I have always contended that no reasonable tribunal could have convicted Megrahi on the evidence led. Here is one example of the trial court's idiosyncratic approach to the evidence. Many more could be provided.

A vitally important issue was the date on which the goods that surrounded the bomb were purchased in Malta. There were only two live possibilities: 7 December 1988, a date when Megrahi was proved to be on Malta, and 23 November 1988, when he was not. In an attempt to establish just which of these dates was correct, the weather conditions in Sliema on those two days were explored.

Shopkeeper Tony Gauci's evidence was that when the purchaser left his shop it was beginning to rain heavily enough for his customer to think it advisable to buy an umbrella to protect himself while he went in search of a taxi. The unchallenged meteorological evidence led by the defence established that, while it had rained on 23 November at the relevant time, it was unlikely to have rained at all on 7 December and, if there had been any rain, it would have been at most a few drops, insufficient to wet the ground. On this material, the judges found in fact that the clothes were purchased on 7 December.

On evidence as weak as this, how was it possible for the trial court to find him guilty? And how was it possible for the appeal court in 2002 to fail to overturn the conviction? The Criminal Appeal Court dismissed Megrahi's first appeal on the most technical of technical legal grounds: it did not consider the justifiability of the trial court's factual findings at all. Indeed, it is clear from their interventions during the Crown submissions in the appeal that at least some of the judges were only too well aware of how shaky certain crucial findings were and how contrary to the weight of the evidence they were.

The judges were reluctant to reach a verdict acquitting both accused because of the humiliation that this would entail for the office of the Lord Advocate.

I contend that at least part of the answer lies in the history of the Scottish legal and judicial system. For centuries, courts have accorded a specially privileged status to the Lord Advocate. It has been unquestioningly accepted that, though a political appointee and the UK Government's (now the Scottish Executive's) chief Scots law adviser, he (now she) would at all times, in his capacity as head of the prosecution system, act independently, without concern for political considerations, and would always place the public interest in a fair trial above the narrow interest of the prosecution in gaining a conviction.

This vision of the role of the Lord Advocate was reinforced by the fact that, until

the Scottish Judicial Appointments Board commenced operations in 2002, all Scottish High Court judges (and lower court judges) were nominated for appointment to the Bench by the Lord Advocate of the day. This meant that, in all criminal proceedings, the presiding judge owed his position to the person (or one of his predecessors in office) who was ultimately responsible for bringing the case before him, and for its conduct while in his court.

I believe that, subconsciously at least, the judges were reluctant to reach a verdict acquitting both accused because of the humiliation that this would entail for the office of the Lord Advocate in the most high-profile prosecution ever brought in the Scottish courts.

Megrahi launched an appeal based on the SCCRC findings, but abandoned it in 2009 in order to maximise his prospects of repatriation to Libya when terminal metastatic prostate cancer was diagnosed. But the concerns regarding the propriety of his conviction raised by the SCCRC and others have not disappeared.

Unanswered questions

Kenneth Roy 2013

Two of the leading figures in the Lockerbie scandal have fallen off their perches within 13 months of each other. Abdelbaset al-Megrahi, the only man to have been convicted of the bombing, died on 20 May 2012, aged 60, and Lord Fraser of Carmyllie, the Lord Advocate who drew up the indictment against al-Megrahi and his co-accused, died on 23 June 2013, aged 68.

Few tears were shed for al-Megrahi, except by those – a small minority, though a significant one – who believed him to be innocent. In remarkable contrast, the tributes to his accuser, in the few days since his sudden death at the weekend, have been fulsome. Leaders of most parties, including Scotland's ruling one, have been at pains to assure us that he will be keenly missed from Scotland's public life.

Perhaps he will. He was certainly an ornament of it for long enough; and he had an enviable capacity for bouncing back from life's adversities. Just before Christmas 2006, he was charged with disorderly conduct on board an aircraft; two months later, the Crown Office dropped the charge 'due to insufficient evidence that an offence had been committed'; and by August of the following year, he was back in business as a member of the government-appointed Scottish Broadcasting Commission. This swift rehabilitation said much for his essential geniality and popularity with the political and media classes.

In the General Election campaign of 1979, which brought Margaret Thatcher to power and Peter Fraser into parliament as the member for South Angus, the young advocate (as he then was) took part in a BBC outside broadcast of the *Any Questions* type. I was in the chair that night and remember him as pleasant but unremarkable. Three years later, he became Solicitor-General for Scotland and in 1989, at the age of 44, he was promoted to Lord Advocate. Not bad going, all things considered.

But the fulsome tributes should not be allowed to obscure important questions of continuing public interest about his record as Scotland's chief law officer (1989-92).

It was Fraser who was responsible for the investigation into the bombing of Pan Am flight 103; Fraser who issued warrants for the arrest of the two Libyans; Fraser who initiated the prosecution which led to the trial at Camp Zeist. And it was Fraser's opinion that Tony Gauci could be depended upon as the chief prosecution witness – relied upon to the extent that, without Gauci's testimony, the case against al-Megrahi effectively collapsed.

Did Fraser really think that Gauci could be trusted? Or was the Lord Advocate bounced into the prosecution of al-Megrahi and his co-accused by the US justice

department? The architect of the Camp Zeist trial, Professor Robert Black QC, believes that improper influence was exerted on Fraser and that he bowed to it. We shall probably never know.

It was five years after the trial that Fraser, long out of major public office by then, gave an unguarded interview to the *Sunday Times* in which he cast doubt on Gauci for the first and only time. This is what he said (and never denied saying): 'Gauci was not quite the full shilling. I think even his family would say he was an apple short of a picnic. He was quite a tricky guy. I don't think he was deliberately lying, but if you asked him the same question three times he would just get irritated and refuse to answer'.

These comments scandalised the legal establishment. The Lord Advocate at the time, Colin Boyd, said that at no stage had Fraser 'conveyed any reservation about any aspect of the prosecution to those who worked on the case, or to anyone in the prosecution service'. Colin Boyd challenged Fraser to clarify his apparent repudiation of Gauci. Fraser declined to rise to the challenge: there was no clarification.

William Taylor, the QC who defended al-Megrahi at his trial, went further: 'A man who has a public office, who is prosecuting in the criminal courts in Scotland, has a duty to put forward evidence based upon people he considers to be reliable. He [Fraser] was prepared to advance Gauci as a witness of truth in terms of identification and, if he had these misgivings about him, they should have surfaced at the time. The fact that he is coming out with this many years later, after my former client has been in prison for four and a half years, is nothing short of disgraceful. Gauci's evidence was absolutely central to the conviction and for Peter Fraser not to realise that is scandalous'.

Lord Fraser had nothing to say publicly about these serious allegations. But in August 2009, long after the fuss had died down, he gave a little-noticed television interview which was concerned mainly with al-Megrahi's release and the Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill's handling of it. In the course of the interview, he again referred to Tony Gauci but in rather different terms. I was so struck by what he said that I played it back and took a note of it: 'I have always been of the view and I remain of the view that both children and others who are not trying to rationalise their evidence are probably the most reliable witnesses and for these reasons I think that Tony Gauci was an extremely good witness'.

How could Gauci be 'not quite the full shilling' according to Lord Fraser in 2005, yet 'an extremely good witness' according to the same Lord Fraser four years later? Is there any way of reconciling these conflicting assessments of the chief prosecution witness?

After the death of al-Megrahi, and the Justice for Megrahi committee's clumsy attempts to revive interest in the scandal, it seemed unlikely that the truth about Lockerbie would ever be established. But I suppose some of us were clinging to a faint

hope that, in his old age, in some distant memoir serialised by the *Sunday Times*, Lord Fraser of Carmyllie would reveal all about his pivotal role in the affair. Since, like al-Megrahi, he has failed to reach old age, that hope has now gone. The unanswered questions seem destined to remain just that: unanswered.

A good man, a smear, and the Crown Office

Kenneth Roy 2014

Ι

There are many reasons to be pessimistic about the outcome of the appeal lodged by the family of the late Abdelbaset al-Megrahi, the man convicted of the Lockerbie bombing. I have just finished reading one of those reasons.

There has been one, only one, public hearing in Scotland of the facts about Lockerbie. (I disregard the unsatisfactory criminal trial of Megrahi and one other, which took place in the Netherlands, though under Scottish jurisdiction.) This was the fatal accident inquiry heard by Sheriff John Mowat in 1990, two years after the disaster.

The choice of location seems, in retrospect, grimly appropriate: the recreation hall of a psychiatric hospital, converted into a courtroom with seating for 400. When I turned up one morning and reported to the media centre, I found it deserted. There were dozens of desks and cubicles for the international press, but only a handful of them had ever been occupied and there was no need to connect the telephones. Visiting this ghostly place was a strange experience.

In the courtroom itself, the anticipated throng of relatives and interested parties had never materialised: the public benches were deserted. Heavy, dark green curtains, tightly drawn, enabled the proceedings to be conducted in an atmosphere of Stygian gloom.

The symbolism was thus complete: in a room shedding no natural light, witnesses presented their testimony to an empty auditorium and, beyond, to a world that had seemingly lost interest. But it is instructive to look back at that under-reported inquiry from the distance of almost quarter of a century – if only for proof that the truth about Lockerbie will probably never be known.

II

The part of the transcript I had been reading, just before the announcement of the Megrahi appeal, was the evidence of a policeman, a member of the now disbanded Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary, concerning the activities of Dr David Fieldhouse.

The name David Fieldhouse may mean nothing to you, yet he is a figure of some importance in the saga. He was sitting in front of the television in his home in Yorkshire on the evening of 21 December 1988 when the first news of the disaster flashed on the screen. His reaction was impulsive. He got into his car and drove all the way from Bradford to Lockerbie, arriving at around 10.50pm.

He immediately contacted the authorities, explained that he was a police surgeon, and offered to help with the search for bodies (there was never any hope of finding survivors). The police accepted his offer and, bearing in mind the Scottish requirement for corroboration, assigned an officer to accompany him. Over the course of the next 24 hours, more than one police officer accompanied him.

Dr Fieldhouse worked through the night and all of the following day; he did so without pausing for sleep and with nothing to eat except a biscuit. It was a heroic one-man undertaking. By the time darkness fell on 22 December, he had found and labelled 59 bodies.

On the morning of the 23rd, he was due to meet a senior police officer at a prearranged rendezvous (Tundergarth Church). He waited two hours. When it became clear that the detective chief inspector was not going to show up, Dr Fieldhouse drove back to Yorkshire and compiled a report on his work – an account that he had already given in detail, verbally, on the spot. He was then surprised to learn that his 59 tags had been replaced by 58 'official' ones. There was one missing. It remains a mystery.

David Fieldhouse received no thanks from the police for his act of selfless dedication. He went back to work and, so far as possible, put Lockerbie behind him. Two years later, he was shocked to learn that there had been an attempt by the Crown Office and the police to call his integrity into question.

A police witness at the fatal accident inquiry in Dumfries was asked by the Crown about one of the bodies found and labelled by Dr Fieldhouse.

- Q. Would that be another example of Dr or Mr Fieldhouse carrying out a search on his own?
 - A. It would, my Lord.
 - Q. And marking the body of the person who is dead without notifying the police?
 - A. That is correct.

The content of that brief extract is utterly disgraceful on two counts. First there is the innuendo that Dr Fieldhouse was not a doctor at all – that some medically unqualified individual, a mere 'Mr', an imposter in effect, took it upon himself to go looking for bodies. Second there is the specific allegation that he did so without the authority of the police.

Neither the innuendo nor the allegation was true. The police officers who accompanied Dr Fieldhouse confirmed that they were present in every case when he pronounced life extinct, and that the procedures he followed were scrupulous.

Why, then, did the Crown Office, assisted by the Dumfries and Galloway police, spread untruths about him in this way? The only alternative explanation – that it was all the result of some unfortunate misunderstanding – is hard to swallow. The Crown Office had had the best part of two years to assemble the facts; and there were few more central to the purpose of the fatal accident inquiry than the facts about the

recovery and identification of bodies. Yet not only did the Crown Office misrepresent what happened on the night of 21-22 December 1988; for no apparent reason they decided to smear David Fieldhouse.

It was left to Dr Fieldhouse to request an opportunity to clear his name. As a late witness, he duly did. But from the Crown Office there was no explanation and no apology. The only person who ever had the decency to apologise was the blameless Sheriff Mowat in his written determination.

III

The experience of David Fieldhouse is one of the reasons why the truth about Lockerbie will probably never be known. It is a vignette that, like so many vignettes, illuminates a larger canvas.

Put it this way: if the Crown Office was prepared to rubbish the reputation of a completely innocent man, who had acted in the public service for no personal gain whatever, we can expect it to have little difficulty in confirming the guilt of someone over whom a considerable doubt continues to linger – the late Abdelbaset al-Megrahi.

Lockerbie: innuendo, myth, half-truths and rumour

Magnus Linklater 2014

Lockerbie, it seems, will be with us forever. The 25th anniversary of that terrible event last December not only rekindled difficult memories amongst those who lost friends, relatives and loved ones, but provoked a flurry of counter-theories about what 'really' happened, who planned the bombing, who carried it out, and why the only man convicted of the crime may not, after all, have been guilty as charged.

Within the past few months, at least two more books have been published¹, disinterring previous evidence, adding new claims, and alleging that successive Scottish judges, lord advocates and senior counsel have turned a blind eye to injustice and persisted in ignoring inconvenient evidence in order to uphold the conviction of the Libyan bomber.

I find myself in the Lockerbie firing line because I happen to believe that the evidence which convicted Abdelbaset al-Megrahi, and implicated Libya, is more convincing than the counter-theories which point the finger at Iran or Syria. I also find myself in what feels like a minority. My position is now considered so risible that I ought, in the words of one of my critics, to 'go back to journalism college'.

To those for whom Lockerbie has not been an obsessive subject over the past two decades, a bit of background may be necessary. Al-Megrahi, a Libyan intelligence officer and head of security at Libyan Arab Airlines, was convicted of mass murder in January 2001, and sentenced to life imprisonment, with a minimum term of 27 years. His co-accused, Lamin Fhimah, was found not guilty. An appeal against conviction was heard in March 2002 and turned down.

In September 2003, the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission (SCCRC) was asked to investigate the conviction, and began a four-year inquiry. It found there were six grounds suggesting a possible miscarriage of justice. Before a new appeal could come to court, however, al-Megrahi was diagnosed with prostate cancer, and, in August 2008, was released by the Scottish Government to return home. The appeal was dropped.

Suspicions about the basis on which al-Megrahi was convicted had taken shape almost immediately after the original trial. Led by Dr Jim Swire, whose daughter Flora died in the attack, a group, which came to be known as the Justice for Megrahi Committee, argued that not only was the evidence which convicted him flawed, but successive judges and lord advocates had ignored vital information that cast doubt on

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¹ Scotland's Shame: Why Lockerbie Still Matters by John Ashton (Birlinn) Adequately Explained by Stupidity? Lockerbie, Luggage and Lies by Dr Morag Kerr (Troubador Publishing)

the original verdict. It pointed towards the involvement of Iran rather than Libya as the instigators of the plot. Most recently, al-Megrahi's family has announced its intention in launching a new appeal.

Over the years, a succession of conspiracy theories has arisen pointing to others who may have been responsible for ordering and carrying out the bombing. These, far from being dismissed, have almost become received wisdom, and many people in Scotland now assume that al-Megrahi was unjustly convicted; that view, however, is fiercely rejected by the American families of those who died.

Conspiracy theories, of course, are more often preferred to humdrum facts, and amongst al-Megrahi's defenders nothing, I suspect, will ever shift their view.

John Ashton, author of a lengthy book that proclaimed the Libyan's innocence, dislikes the term 'conspiracy theory'. It is not, he says, a conspiracy theory to state 'that the trial court judgement was unreasonable and that the Crown withheld numerous items of important exculpatory evidence'.

Indeed, it is not – it is simply a point of view. But it does require a conspiracy for a collective decision to be taken to shift blame from Iran to Libya by deliberately excluding certain pieces of evidence, and falsifying others. If, for instance, the original forensic evidence (a fragment of bomb timer found at the site) was tampered with, swapped, or never reached Libya, as many media stories have claimed, then that would require a conspiracy; if CIA agents combed the crash site collecting evidence to protect the agency, that would require a conspiracy; if the Crown deliberately headed off inquiries into how the bomb was put aboard the plane at Heathrow rather than Malta, that would be conspiracy; if, at every stage of the inquiry, the Scottish judicial system turned a blind eye to anything that might upset the required outcome of the trial, then that, to my mind, would constitute a conspiracy.

Over the years, many different theories about Lockerbie have been aired, some blaming South Africa or Israel, others implicating the CIA itself, or the Palestinian terrorist, Abu Nidal, working at the behest of the Iranian Government. But the most pervasive one centres on the involvement of the sometime PFLP-GC organisation, a terrorist organisation which planned bombings in the 1980s using equipment remarkably similar to that identified as causing the explosion on Pan Am 103.

I remember that line of inquiry well, because at *The Scotsman*, where I was editor at the time of bombing in 1988, we not only pursued it, but broke a series of exclusive stories pointing in the same direction. Only when Scottish police discovered the forensic evidence that led to Libya did those inquiries shift focus.

That change of direction arouses deep suspicions amongst those who believe that Libya was deliberately targeted to suit Western interests at the time. It happened, suggests Mr Ashton, because of decisions taken at the very highest political level. He terms it thus:

'We may never know what influence [Prime Minister] Thatcher and [President]

Bush brought to bear on the Lockerbie investigation, but over the course of three years its focus shifted away from the PFLP-GC, Iran and Syria, and towards Libya. It is also clear that, *from the night of the bombing*, [my italics] successive governments have denied some inconvenient truths.'

I have always distrusted that phrase 'we may never know' – it is a means of dropping a hint without ever revealing whether there is any truth in it; and to suggest that, from the night of the bombing, governments were at work suppressing inconvenient evidence is a remarkable, and, thus far, unsubstantiated claim.

For all the detailed work that has gone into undermining the prosecution case, there has been a marked lack of proven evidence to support an alternative explanation. The implication that Iranian-sponsored terrorists smuggled the bomb aboard at either Frankfurt or Heathrow rather than Malta, has been strongly asserted. But the evidence falls well short of anything that would stand up in court. It rests more on suggestions that Scottish lawyers – both prosecution and defence – have, throughout the process, failed to investigate alternative theories.

I am not a Lockerbie specialist, but on any examination of the case, that simply flies in the face of the facts. The trial evidence, the lengthy appeal, and, finally, the report from the SCCRC amount to many hundreds of pages of closely argued evidence. Every aspect of the process has been examined in detail. Whatever else this case is, it is very far from being a stitch-up.

Both Mr Ashton, author of two books claiming to absolve al-Megrahi, and a more recent convert to the cause, Dr Morag Kerr, who has investigated the Heathrow end of the story, remain, however, scathing about the way the Lockerbie case was investigated by the police and conducted by lawyers.

In an 'open letter' to me, Mr Ashton offers this characterisation of the Lockerbie inquiry:

The police cannot be blamed for following leads that fell into their laps. Together with the Crown, they stitched together a flimsy case based around a mercenary double agent, a highly unreliable identification, a hopeless CIA informant, some highly equivocal documents and overstated forensic conclusions, but, again, they were only doing their jobs.'

For what is claimed to be a serious challenge to the prosecution case, this amounts to little more than a caricature – strongly rejected by Dumfries and Galloway Police, together with other agencies who spent years on the investigation.

Dr Kerr is equally cavalier when she writes that 'police seemed uninterested in following up [the Heathrow claim]'. They ignored, she said, 'a shed-load of evidence'. Meanwhile, the prosecutors 'chose to conceal so much important information from the court' that the case itself was little more than 'a contrived scenario'.

In support of their Heathrow claim, Dr Kerr – and, I believe, Mr Ashton – argue that the bomb, contained in a brown, Samsonite case, was loaded into a container at

Heathrow, where it was seen by a baggage handler, John Bedford, who gave evidence at the trial. Dr Kerr has looked at all the documentation surrounding these events, and says it is quite clear that this is where the bomb went on board. A padlock had been forced, leaving access open to the baggage-handling area; the Crown evidence that it went on board in Malta, and was then transferred from Frankfurt has, she maintains, no basis in fact; and she is incredulous that the link between that and the loading of the bomb was never examined.

But the alternative airport theories were precisely what the appeal court did examine. Presided over by five judges in 2002, it subjected the evidence to prolonged scrutiny. The report on Frankfurt runs to 37 pages. The section on Heathrow is 20 pages long. It is highly detailed on the sequence of events, pin-pointing the time the padlock was broken. It shows that this happened 15 hours before the bomb was allegedly placed, raising the question of how a perpetrator could have remained concealed for so long. It questioned why, if this happened, the bomb was placed in the 'interline' area, where it would have had to be X-rayed, rather than in the baggage-handling area, just beyond the broken door, from where it would have been loaded directly onto the plane.

All this was examined by the appeal court, with both sides – prosecution and defence – arguing their case. In the end, the judges concluded that evidence for the bomb being loaded onto Pan Am 103 at Heathrow Airport, simply did not stand up. In fact, so unlikely was the notion that a bomber would break into the baggage-handling area, wait for 15 hours, then load the bomb into a place where it stood a greater chance of being detected, that they treated it, not surprisingly, with scepticism.

'[The new evidence] does not transform a mere possibility into anything more substantial,' concluded the judges. 'It merely confirms that that which was regarded as a possibility was indeed a possibility.' And a possibility, however attractive, does not amount to proof.

Added to that was the presence in the suspect suitcase of clothes bought in a Malta shop. The implication that the bomber had been to Malta to buy clothing, with all the risks of detection that involved, then travelled to London to pack it into a suitcase containing explosives, requires a heavy suspension of disbelief. Even the defence team seem to have accepted that that scenario was, at best, improbable.

When it came to the review by the SCCRC, the case for Heathrow was deemed so thin that it was not even examined.

The attitude taken by al-Megrahi's defenders towards the SCCRC varies according to the direction it takes. On the one hand, they hail some of its conclusions as a vindication of their position. But in those frequent sections where it does not support their case, they dismiss its findings as 'poor'.

They are nothing of the sort. This is a serious and sustained investigation, of the kind

that proper, well-funded newspapers with an objective and inquiring bent, were once able to mount. And its forensic dismissal of the wilder conspiracy theories is impressive.

The commission went back to original witnesses, including some that had never previously been heard in court, examined them, recalled them, and submitted their evidence to detailed scrutiny. Its report was to have been used by al-Megrahi's defence team to challenge, for the last time, his conviction. But the Libyan never took advantage of its conclusions. Returning home, having been released by the Scottish Government on compassionate grounds, he decided not to pursue an appeal. The SCCRC report may never, therefore, be tested in court.

It is, however, a remarkable piece of work. Conducted over a period of four years, it runs to 800 pages. When it was finally published (in a leaked report by the *Sunday Herald* newspaper), it was seized on by al-Megrahi's defenders as vindicating their position. They pointed to the six grounds on which it decided that there was the basis for an appeal, and described it, variously, as 'a devastating indictment of the Scottish judicial system', a 'body-blow' to the prosecution case, or, as Mr Ashton has been pleased to entitle his latest book: 'Scotland's shame'.

That is one way of looking at it. What it ignores, however, is the way that the SCCRC, in the course of its detailed scrutiny, effectively disposes of most of the al-Megrahi defenders' cherished theories. Out goes the PFLP-GC connection – after exhaustive analysis, it simply fails the evidence test. Out goes the elusive Abu Talb, a known terrorist now residing in Sweden, and the favoured suspect of many Lockerbie specialists – there was no direct evidence to link him with the bombing. Out too go the shadowy agents who have been quoted down the years as revealing the real truth about the Lockerbie plot – they are unreliable witnesses.

One striking section involves the clinical demolition of the evidence provided by 'the Golfer'. Over the years, Scottish newspapers have paraded a series of colourful leaks from the evidence of this 'former police officer' with links to the Lockerbie investigation, who remains anonymous, yet whose testimony seemed likely to blow holes in the prosecution case. He said that the original evidence of Anthony Gauci, the Maltese shopkeeper who identified al-Megrahi, had been replaced by a different version when presented to the court; that Gauci had failed to identify al-Megrahi from photographs shown to him; that police evidence, including a passport and an instruction manual linked to the cassette recorder holding the bomb, had been interfered with or removed in order to help the prosecution case; CIA agents had combed the crash site to recover weapons carried by colleagues on board the doomed plane; the bomb had been smuggled aboard at Frankfurt Airport; the PFLP-GC link had been established, but deliberately bypassed by investigators; officers on the case were deeply unhappy that Libya was being blamed.

The SCCRC tracked down the Golfer and tested his evidence with the robustness that he would have expected had he ever appeared before a court of law.

He did not emerge well. Indeed, he seems to have been a nightmare witness, changing his story, backtracking on allegations, denying statements attributed to him, making drunken calls, evading answers. At one stage, SCCRC investigators advised the Golfer that he should seek legal advice for his own good. Their dry conclusion is contained in a single paragraph: 'The commission has serious misgivings as to the Golfer's credibility and reliability as a witness...in assessing credibility and reliability the commission generally applies a low standard and may hold that a witness is credible merely where it considers the witness capable of being believed by a reasonable jury. In the Golfer's case, however, the commission is not persuaded that his accounts satisfy even this standard'.

They are not much kinder to one of Mr Ashton's principal informants, Robert Baer, a former case officer with the CIA. He had come up with evidence which appeared to demonstrate a direct link between Iran, the PFLP-GC and the Lockerbie bombing; he had seen telephone intercepts involving Palestinian terrorists, including Abu Talb; he named a shadowy figure called Abu Elias as the manufacturer of the Pan Am bomb; he claimed that, after the bombing, reward money amounting to many millions of dollars was paid to Talb and the PFLP, and Talb had appeared on a 'roll of honour' for 'great service' to the Iranian revolution in 1990.

Baer was interviewed three times by the commission. Each time, the truth ebbed a little further away. The information he provided was not first-hand, but gathered from CIA telexes which may or may not have been reliable. He could not testify to anything directly. His evidence was, at best, hearsay. There was no proof that reward money had been paid to Talb or that his name was on a roll of honour. The PFLP may have been paid for something, but neither the figures nor the dates added up.

The commission was polite about Baer, saying they had no reason to doubt his credibility.

However: '... as he himself acknowledged, he has no direct knowledge of any of the information in his possession, which came largely from CIA telexes. As with all intelligence, the validity of that information was very much dependent upon the reliability of its source, which in many cases Mr Baer was unable to vouch'.

The commission went on to examine other allegations which have surfaced from time to time in the media, apparently undermining the prosecution of al-Megrahi and the indictment of Libya.

Amongst them:

The unreliability of two forensic experts, Allen Feraday and Thomas Hayes, whose credentials and trustworthiness have often been questioned. Both were reinterviewed, their backgrounds examined, their consistency tested. The commission concluded there was 'nothing to support the allegations against them'.

Forensic evidence from blast-damaged clothing was said to be tainted because it had been tampered with. The commission tracked down every last detail and said there was nothing to support the claims.

Notes from Dr Hayes' evidence were altered, page numbers changed, the description of certain items of clothing described in different ways. The commission found nothing to indicate deliberate falsification.

The fragment of bomb timer, crucial to the prosecution case, was not passed to the Libyans, may have been planted, altered, or fabricated. The commission devoted 56 pages to this most crucial of claims, concluding: 'the commission does not believe that a miscarriage of justice may have occurred in this connection'.

At the end, however, when it considered two principal issues – the reliability of Tony Gauci, the shopkeeper who identified al-Megrahi, and the withholding of certain evidence by the prosecution – the SCCRC did conclude that there were grounds for appeal.

These concerned doubts about the date on which Gauci claimed the purchases were made; whether he had been shown a magazine article containing a photograph of al-Megrahi before identifying him; undisclosed evidence about reward money that may have been offered to Gauci; redacted CIA documents which were never shown to the defence.

Had there been an appeal, these matters would have been debated in court, with witnesses cross-examined, and the significance of new evidence subjected to scrutiny. Whether they would have been sufficient to overturn the verdict will probably never be known. But to suggest, as Mr Ashton and others do, that the SCCRC's recommendations are 'an indictment of the Scottish judicial system' is to ignore the weight and thrust of a report which is a central plank of that system.

What emerges from it is a process working in the interests of justice, rather than undermining it. The claims of those who believe there has been a miscarriage have been examined and tested. With the exceptions named above, they have been rejected. There is no provable evidence to back the Iranian or Palestine connection, or to say that Libya was not involved. Al-Megrahi remains the principal suspect. Nevertheless, because of doubts about identification, there should be a further appeal.

I find that a healthy outcome. It shows that the commission has been even-handed as it was required to be. It certainly does not justify the approach of those who pick out bits of the report which suit them, and reject with disdain the remainder, describing it as 'poor' and 'unreliable'.

Selectivity runs through the evidence of the counter-theorists. For instance, Mr Ashton spends many pages drawing out the parallels between the Pan Am bombing and the activities of the Palestinian terrorists whom he holds responsible. Yet he pays little heed to the more striking similarities between the Pan Am attack and the 1989 bombing by Libyans of a French airliner, UTA Flight 772, brought down over Niger, killing 170 people. Like the Lockerbie event, explosives were packed into a Samsonite suitcase and detonated by a timing device. Six Libyan nationals were convicted by a

French court. Ashton gives this a dozen lines, concluding: 'As with Lockerbie... Libya was eventually blamed'.

That is the way with conspiracy theories. Logic has no deterrent effect. Once seized with the virus of suspicion, nothing in the way of fact or reason will deter those who are determined to prove their case. But to dismiss hard evidence in favour of speculation is a disservice to justice.

So what is the evidence on which al-Megrahi was convicted? It was, all parties accept, circumstantial throughout, but powerful enough to have convinced eight judges in the course of two trials, as well as being subject to the scrutiny of successive lord advocates. It placed al-Megrahi in Malta on the relevant date, travelling in the company of another intelligence operative, holding a false passport, and identified as the purchaser of clothing, later found in the case which held the explosives. Forensic evidence, in the form of a fragment of timer used to detonate the bomb, had been supplied to the Libyans by its Swiss manufacturer. Subsequent evidence also turned up some \$1.8 million in al-Megrahi's personal bank account, calling into question the Libyan Government's description of him as a low-ranking airline worker.

The SCCRC raised questions about the identification, which, it determined, were grounds for appeal. Whether that would have overturned the verdict we may never know. The court might have concluded, on the evidence, that al-Megrahi had not been correctly identified as the purchaser of the clothing, but was nevertheless involved in the plot. It would not have had before it any new information solid enough to divert attention from Libya to some other Middle Eastern state. Even the Libyan Government appears to accept that the origins of the plot lie in their country – it has appointed prosecutors to liaise with Scottish investigators in their search for further proof.

There is a yawning gap between the nature of the judicial evidence heard against al-Megrahi and that put forward by his defenders. The former has been tested and retested under the strict conditions imposed by a court of law. The latter is speculation. Those who dispute the prosecution case have never had to subject their countertheories to full legal scrutiny. Had they done so, they would have encountered precisely the same legal process that upheld the conviction; and, as we have seen, little of what they contend would have survived cross-examination.

In the end, I agree with my critics on one thing: we need certainty on Lockerbie; we need something approaching the truth for all those relatives still tormented by not knowing, who find the accumulation of counter-evidence distressing, and who desperately seek answers. We need, in the current jargon, closure.

I hope that if and when that happens, we will have – in the place of innuendo, myth, half-truths and rumour – straight evidence and independent judgement. That and that alone will lay the Lockerbie ghost.

Lockerbie and the mangled logic of Magnus Linklater John Ashton 2014

Earlier this month, together with other supporters of the 'Lockerbie bomber', Abdelbaset al-Megrahi, I found myself accused in the *Scottish Review* of being an obsessive conspiracy theorist, impervious to fact or reason. The article's author, *The Times*' columnist Magnus Linklater, believes that, far from being a stain on Scottish justice, Mr Megrahi's case 'triumphantly vindicates' it.

He argues that we prefer innuendo, myth and half-truths to straight evidence and independent judgement, yet he displays exactly that preference. For good measure, he misrepresents his opponents, mangles logic and contradicts himself.

He ascribes to us two related conspiracy theories: firstly that the bombing was commissioned by Iran and carried out by the Syrian-based anti-PLO, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command (PFLP-GC); and, secondly, that there was a grand conspiracy to shift blame to Megrahi and Libya, to which the police, the Crown Office, witnesses, judges, senior politicians and the intelligence services were all willing parties.

A word about that term 'conspiracy theory'. It's a cheap and nasty little put-down that herds honest truth-seekers into the same pen as the Elvis-was-abducted-by-aliens crowd, while relieving the user of the obligation to properly address the facts.

If the Iran/PFLP-GC scenario is a conspiracy theory, then so too is what the Crown posited at Megrahi's trial. That theory went as follows. On 21 December 1988, he placed a suitcase on board Air Malta flight KM180 from Malta to Frankfurt. It contained a bomb concealed within a Toshiba BomBeat radio-cassette player and was labelled for New York on PA103. From Frankfurt, it was transferred to Heathrow then loaded onto PA103.

The suitcase was packed with clothes that Megrahi had bought in Malta on 7 December, from a shopkeeper called Tony Gauci. He took the case to Malta on 20 December and the following morning flew home on a flight whose check-in time overlapped with KM180's. Before leaving, he managed to place the suitcase on KM180 with the help of his former Libyan Arab Airlines (LAA) colleague Lamin Fhimah, with whom he stood trial.

The two men fronted companies for the Libyan intelligence service, the Jamahiriya Security Organisation (JSO). One of them, ABH, co-owned by Megrahi, shared Zurich offices with electronics company Mebo, which, three years before Lockerbie, had supplied 20 unique electronic timers to Libya, one of which was used in the bomb.

As conspiracy theories go, it was pretty lousy. Mr Linklater acknowledges that the

case was entirely circumstantial. What he ignores is that, towards the end of the trial, the Crown amended the indictment, quietly dropping many of the conspiracy claims, a tacit admission that much of its theory was unsupported.

What of the evidence? Mr Linklater's summary thoroughly exaggerates its strength: 'It placed al-Megrahi in Malta on the relevant date, travelling in the company of another intelligence operative, holding a false passport, and identified as the purchaser of clothing, later found in the case which held the explosives. Forensic evidence, in the form of a fragment of timer used to detonate the bomb, had been supplied to the Libyans by its Swiss manufacturer. Subsequent evidence also turned up some \$1.8 million in al-Megrahi's personal bank account, calling into question the Libyan government's description of him as a low-ranking airline worker'.

To summarise more accurately: the evidence suggested that Megrahi was not in Malta on the clothes purchase date; there is no evidence that his travel companion was an intelligence operative and the evidence suggests that he only worked for the service in 1986 (the claim that he was a senior intelligence agent was made by discredited Libyan CIA informant Magid Giaka, who also alleged that Colonel Gaddafi was a freemason); he kept the false passport and handed it over at trial – hardly the actions of a terrorist; forensic evidence proves that the timer fragment was not from one of the 20 Libyan timers; Megrahi never described himself as a low-ranking airline worker, rather he admitted that he used his connections to senior Libyan officials to make a nice living importing goods through ABH; had he testified at trial, the court would have been shown bank and company records that support his claim that all the bank transactions were legitimate.

Many aspects of the Crown's theory were incredible. For example, Megrahi chose to buy clothes in a small shop and did so in a random manner, which seemed designed to bring attention to himself. Rather than compartmentalising the operation, as any sensible terrorist would, he returned to the island a fortnight later to plant the bomb. Furthermore, he chose to launch it on a three-stage journey from Malta's Luqa Airport, where Mr Fhimah was well known, and which had unusually strict baggage procedures.

Libya's supposed motive was revenge for the US air raids of 1986. This element of the theory was contradicted by none other than Margaret Thatcher, who wrote in her autobiography that the 'Libyan counter attack did not and could not take place... There was a marked decline in Libyan-sponsored terrorism in succeeding years'.

Since the fall of Gaddafi in 2011, no evidence has emerged publicly to suggest that Libya was involved in the bombing – this despite the fact that the opposition leader Mustafa Abdel Jalil claimed to have proof of Gaddafi's involvement. (When pressed on the claim by the BBC, the best he could offer was that the government had paid for Megrahi's legal case.) Inconveniently for the Crown, some senior anti-Gaddafi figures have challenged claims of Libyan involvement.

In defending the official narrative, Mr Linklater offers the following king-sized non-sequitur: 'Even the Libyan Government appears to accept that the origins of the plot lie in their country – it has appointed prosecutors to liaise with Scottish investigators in their search for further proof. The appointment of prosecutors does not connote an acceptance of Libyan involvement.

Mr Linklater points out that my books barely touch upon another alleged case of Libyan aviation terrorism, the bombing of UTA flight 772 in 1989. The reason is simple: I am not an expert on it and am therefore happy to accept that Libya might have been to blame. (French journalist Pierre Péan, who is an expert, has, I am told, destroyed the official case.) The UTA bombers' use of a Samsonite suitcase and a timer, according to Mr Linklater, makes the attack 'strikingly similar' to Lockerbie, yet the extremists who blew up Air India flight 182 in 1985 also used a Samsonite case and a timer.

A more startling parallel, in my view, is the fact that the forensic cases both rested on tiny fragments of the alleged timers recovered from a vast crash site, which were analysed by the same discredited FBI expert, and traced to a shady European supplier. And, as with Lockerbie, the prosecution rested upon the erratic testimony of a single witness.

What, then, of the Iran/PFLP-GC conspiracy theory? Mr Linklater ascribes it to Megrahi's supporters, yet the Justice for Megrahi campaign, to which most of the supporters are signatories, is deliberately neutral on the matter. For reasons I am about to explain, I am not. However, as I cautioned in my book *Megrahi: You Are My Jury*, the case against these alternative suspects may turn out to be as flawed as the one against Megrahi – a statement that undermines Mr Linklater's characterisation of me as wholly wedded to this counter theory.

Iran had a powerful motive: revenge for the US Navy's shoot-down of Iran Air flight 655, which killed 290 six months before Lockerbie. Declassified US intelligence documents state as fact that Iran hired the PFLP-GC. Another, written months after the investigation had switched to Libya, stated that Iran's interior minister had paid the bombers \$10 million. In October 1988, a PFLP-GC cell in West Germany was caught by the police planning an attack on western airlines. Its bomb-maker, Marwan Khreesat, confessed that he had made five barometrically triggered bombs, two of which he had concealed within mono Toshiba BomBeat radio cassette players. The Lockerbie Toshiba BomBeat was stereo.

According to Khreesat, a senior group member and airline security expert known as Abu Elias evaded arrest. Less than three weeks before the bombing, without naming the PFLP-GC, a US State Department security bulletin warned of an imminent attack by anti-PLO Palestinian terrorists based in Europe. It added: '[Targets] specified are Pan Am airlines and US mil[itary] bases'.

Apologists for the official line have claimed that the intelligence documents merely

recycled old and unreliable intelligence, yet a deep-cover CIA asset called Richard Fuisz was told by numerous high-ranking Syrian officials as late as 1995 (four years after the two Libyans were indicted) that the PFLP-GC's leader, Ahmed Jibril, was taking credit for the bombing. These sources, said Fuisz in a 2001 court hearing, the scope of which was severely limited by the CIA, interacted with Jibril on a constant basis.

Mr Linklater wrote in an email to me: 'I am amazed that you should be touting shadowy CIA agents like Fuisz... whose evidence would never stand up in court'. He stopped short of calling Fuisz a liar, because there is nothing to suggest that he is, but the pejorative verb and adjective carried the innuendo that neither of us were to be trusted. How does Mr Linklater know that Fuisz's evidence would not stand up? If the CIA had loosened its leash on Fuisz, he could have named names, and provide leads and evidence that would have been accepted in court.

On to that second conspiracy theory. According to Mr Linklater's *Times* column of 13 August 2012, we allege a huge plot to shift the blame from Iran and the PFLP-GC to Libya, which involved: 'the planting or suppression of forensic evidence, the control of witnesses by intelligence services, the approval of senior politicians, the complicity of police officers, a prosecution team prepared to bend every rule to secure a conviction, and a set of senior Scottish judges willing to go along with that'.

The last sentence is key. It suggests that we claim that everyone from the police to the judges plotted with government and intelligence services to protect the likely bombers and convict those whom they knew to be innocent. The trouble is neither I, nor the great majority of Megrahi's supporters, have ever made such a claim.

To be clear, I believe that two different things happened: firstly, the US Government ensured that blame was shifted from Iran and the PFLP-GC to Libya; secondly, the Scottish criminal justice system screwed up massively. The first I consider likely, but unproven, the second I consider a cert. Both are based upon a rational evaluation of the available facts. I do not believe that the second occurred because the Americans told the Scots to exonerate the real culprits and frame innocents. Indeed, I find such suggestions fanciful.

In an email to me, Mr Linklater wrote: 'I've been in the [journalism] business for more than 40 years, and have learned over that time a simple principle of reporting: that good investigation requires sound proof. Yet he has failed to produce any evidence that the majority of Megrahi's supporters have posited a grand conspiracy. The Justice for Megrahi campaign committee has formally alleged that some of the failures might have involved criminal conduct by certain Crown servants. They do not, however, claim that it happened at the behest of governments and intelligence services.

The US Government was motivated to exonerate Iran, I believe, because the Iranians knew where the Iran-Contra skeletons lay and also held sway over the US hostages held in Lebanon – whose safe return was an obsession of the Reagan-Bush

White House. Another obsession was Libya. As Watergate journalist Bob Woodward revealed, CIA director William Casey launched one of the biggest covert programmes in the agency's history, with the clear aim of toppling Gaddafi. Disinformation – that is, lying and fakery – was at its core.

The Lockerbie investigation was supposedly driven by old-fashioned detective work, but, as we have learned over the years, behind the scenes the CIA played a key role. We now know that the timer fragment was not from one of the 20 timers supplied to Libya. Is it really far-fetched to suggest that the CIA planted it in order to conclusively link Libya to the bombing?

I have done many months of my own old-fashioned detective work among the hundreds of people who searched the crash site. They witnessed American officials in Lockerbie within two hours of the crash, CIA agents searching the site without police supervision, and substantial drug and cash finds – all things that have been officially denied. There may well be innocent explanations for these events, in which case the authorities should reveal them. And, instead of writing me off as a conspiracy theorist, perhaps Mr Linklater should do some door-knocking of his own.

The core of his argument is that we have dismissed hard evidence in favour of speculation, yet our chief concern is not the suspicion that blame was shifted. Rather, it is that the evidence that convicted Megrahi was anything but hard, and that the hard evidence that should have acquitted him was withheld. Our case is built on facts, not speculation – these facts in particular:

- 1. The trial court judgement, delivered by three of Scotland's most senior judges, was deemed unreasonable by the SCCRC. Indeed the commission came as close as it legally could to saying that the guilty verdict itself was unreasonable.
- 2. The SCCRC discovered that the Crown had withheld numerous items of evidence that, in its view, would have been important to Megrahi's defence. No fewer than four of the SCCRC's six appeal referral grounds concerned such undisclosed evidence.
- 3. During the trial, two senior prosecutors viewed the previously redacted extracts of CIA cables concerning the key Crown witness and CIA informant Magid Giaka. They reported back to their boss, the Lord Advocate Colin Boyd QC, that there was nothing within them that might assist the defence, and he relayed the assurance to the court. However, when that material was later disclosed to the defence, it was found to contain numerous damaging details, including the fact that his CIA handlers had grown so dissatisfied with him that they had been on the verge of sacking him. The revelations prompted Fhimah's leading counsel, Richard Keen QC, to comment that he found it 'inconceivable' that the Crown could have considered the material had no bearing on the case. The SCCRC noted that Mr Boyd's assurance to the court was 'difficult to understand'.

- **4.** The Crown Office allowed the police to obtain a \$2m reward for the most important prosecution witness, Tony Gauci, despite the payment of such rewards being against its own rules (a subject on which I have also written for the *Scottish Review*). The Crown withheld the results of forensic tests, which had been supervised by the chief prosecution forensic scientist, that directly contradicted his crucial assertion that the timer fragment was 'similar in all respects' to the boards used in the timers supplied to Libya.
- 5. Despite being under a legal obligation to investigate all leads, not only those that point to Libya, the police and Crown Office have failed to interview witnesses who can attest to the fact that the fragment could not have originated from the Libyan timers.
- 6. When, in 2012, the committee of Justice for Megrahi submitted a summary of their allegations of criminal misconduct in confidence to the Justice Secretary, Kenny MacAskill, and invited him to appoint an independent investigator to consider them, MacAskill instead passed them to the Crown Office and told them to take the allegations to the police, even though Crown Office officials and police officers were named in the allegations. Despite having seen neither the detailed allegations, nor the supporting evidence, the Crown Office immediately declared publicly that they were 'without exception, defamatory and entirely unfounded', and that the committee had been 'deliberately misleading', i.e. were liars.

These are all facts, not opinions or theories. Mr Linklater fails to acknowledge most of them and the rest he brushes over lightly. It isn't as if there are no precedents for the criminal justice system behaving extremely badly. The 15-year debacle of the Shirley McKie case tells us all we need to know about its capacity for denial and distortion of the truth. I believe that they add up to the greatest scandal in Scotland's post-devolution era. The Crown Office's response to the Justice for Megrahi committee's allegations is especially disturbing. The allegations remain unproven and their subjects are entitled to the presumption of innocence, but they were made in good faith by people of intelligence and integrity, among them a former police superintendent, the former parish priest of Lockerbie and the father of one of the Lockerbie victims. However, the Crown Office's petulant and partisan response excluded from the outset any prospect of prosecutions.

Rather than engaging with the SCCRC report's awkward contents, Mr Linklater has used it to mow down his straw men of conspiracy nuts. In a *Times* article, he claimed that the report 'triumphantly vindicates' the justice system. This is like suggesting that the emergency services who save lives at a train crash are a triumphant vindication of rail safety.

He asserts that the SCCRC disposes of most of our 'cherished theories', in particular claims that evidence had been manipulated by the police. These allegations

emanated not from Megrahi's supporters, but from a former police officer known as the Golfer. I have also been critical of the Golfer. Strange, then, that Mr Linklater should have inferred that I cherish the Golfer's claims.

He accuses us of rejecting parts of the report that don't suit us, when we in fact accept most of them. But if, as we believe, the report is a curate's egg, are we not entitled to say so? Parts of it are demonstrably poor; for example, the commission conducted a lengthy review of the evidence concerning the timer fragment, yet failed to uncover the crucially important fact – based upon the evidence of Crown witnesses – that it could not have originated from one of the Libyan timers. Its investigation of events at the crash site was very limited and it failed to interview any of the civilian and military witnesses who attest to the events and finds that I have described above.

It is not only Mr Linklater's conspiracy theorists who don't accept all the SCCRC's findings: neither did the lawyers who led Megrahi's second appeal (which, sadly, he felt compelled to abandon in order to secure compassionate release). They also contended that there were serious failings in the conduct of his defence and that the defence team was mistaken in not leading certain evidence in relation to, inter alia, the PFLP-GC, Heathrow Airport and Tony Gauci.

I am not a lawyer and therefore make no judgement on the defence team, who have vigourously contested these claims. But to imply, as Mr Linklater does, that it is a matter of uncontested fact that they properly evaluated all the evidence is simply misleading.

Mr Linklater is apparently oblivious to the contradictions in his own arguments, with occasionally hilarious consequences. For example, having dismissed my summary of the police investigation as 'little more than a caricature', he delivers this cartoon-like portrait of his antagonists: 'Once seized with the virus of suspicion, nothing in the way of fact or reason will deter those who are determined to prove their case'.

He berates me for using the phrase 'we may never know', declaring that he has always distrusted it as 'it is a means of dropping a hint without ever revealing whether there is any truth in it'. How marvellous that he later writes: 'The SCCRC raised questions about the identification, which, it determined, were grounds for appeal. Whether that would have overturned the verdict we may never know'.

The hint dropped by this particular 'we may never' is that the verdict would have stood. To drive home the point, he claims that Megrahi might have been convicted, even if he had not been correctly identified as the clothes purchaser. If he has properly read the court's judgement, he should know that the 'identification' – not an identification at all, of course – was central to the conviction. But maybe he hasn't properly read it, because, as he acknowledges, he is not a Lockerbie specialist. This is especially apparent in his account of the Heathrow evidence, which has come under fresh scrutiny thanks to the publication of the book, *Adequately Explained by Stupidity?*, by another of his targets, Dr Morag Kerr.

Mr Linklater's Times article of 21 December highlighted an assertion by Mr Megrahi's

trial counsel, Bill Taylor QC, that the Heathrow evidence was 'tested to destruction'. An unnamed member of the defence team added the suggestion that the bomber had bought clothes in Malta then planted the bomb at Heathrow: 'just doesn't stack up'. Again, this was odd, because during his final submissions to the court Mr Taylor argued, quite rightly, that Maltese clothing did not prove the bomb's origin. Clothes bought weeks earlier had plenty of time to leave the island prior to the bombing.

Mr Linklater says that the implication that the bomber bought clothes in Malta and planted the bomb at Heathrow 'requires a heavy suspension of disbelief'. The idea that the same person bought the clothes and planted the bomb is, I agree, farfetched (although this is what the Crown posited at trial), but not the suggestion that the bombers used the clothes to lay a false trail to Malta. As Mr Taylor asked during his final submissions: 'If the clothes buyer had intended to place the bomb bag onto a plane at Luqa, having regard to the high level of risk of detection, wouldn't one have expected him to remove the clothing labels?'.

Mr Linklater claims that the SCCRC found the evidence of a Heathrow bomb 'so thin' that it did not bother to examine it. What the SCCRC actually said was that it did not examine the Heathrow evidence because it received no submissions on the matter, and because it received substantial attention at trial. The evidence we found when preparing Megrahi's second appeal was, in the view of senior counsel, significant and should have been before the trial court. It is clear, both from Dr Kerr's analysis and the second appeal team's, that the trial court was not given a clear view of the Heathrow evidence. (I wrote more about this in an open letter to Mr Linklater, to which he has so far failed to respond.)

Mr Linklater's biggest howler is his assertion that Dr Kerr and I claim that the bombing was linked to a break-in that occurred at Heathrow 15 hours earlier. We do no such thing, indeed we both accept that the break-in may well be wholly irrelevant. Mr Linklater points out, as I have previously, that the matter was considered and rejected at Mr Megrahi's first appeal, but this does not excuse the Crown's failure to disclose it.

For all that he insults me as an irrational conspiracy theorist, we should be grateful to Mr Linklater for his contributions. The Megrahi case deserves public debate and, until he emerged as the voice of the 'it-couldn't-happen-here' tendency, that debate was very one-sided. When boiled down, his defence of the conviction is that the Crown case 'has been tested and re-tested under the strict conditions imposed by a court of law', whereas the counter evidence has not. Yet he knows that court scrutiny is no guarantee of a conviction's safety.

The most notorious miscarriage of justice cases, like the Birmingham Six and the Guildford Four, were only resolved when the courts accepted the evidence and arguments of the victims' supporters. Which begs a big question: when those convictions still stood, but their weakness were widely known, would Mr Linklater have defended them with the equivalent vigour? As he might say, we may never know.

A manufactured case

Dr Morag Kerr 2014

Magnus Linklater tells me he has read my book (*Adequately Explained by Stupidity? – Lockerbie, Luggage and Lies*, Troubador), but you really wouldn't know from his treatment of it in his article for the *Scottish Review*. He quotes a couple of ambiguous passages that might have been taken from the publicity material, and then proceeds to criticise what seems to be an entirely different volume.

Surely the very title might suggest to him that his favourite pejorative, 'conspiracy theorist', might be misapplied, but not a bit of it. This is a contemptuous dismissal, nothing more than a lazy slur, used to avoid a proper examination of challenging facts and evidence. It is a put-down, intended to insult, discredit, belittle and embarrass. And Mr Linklater pulls it out repeatedly.

I'll say it one more time. I do not allege any conspiracy. I see an investigation that went off the rails at an early stage for reasons that are unclear, which pursued a red herring down a blind alley, which refused to backtrack when it could find no evidence of the obvious suspects in that cul-de-sac, and in the end found some poor person called Abdelbaset al-Megrahi who happened to be in the right place at the right time with just enough nebulous suspicion surrounding him for a case to be manufactured.

The eventual conclusion of the investigation was politically convenient, to put it mildly, but that tells us nothing about the sincerity of those who arrived at that conclusion. As I said in my book, there is nothing quite so lethal as a policeman, or a prosecutor, or indeed a forensic scientist, who is absolutely and sincerely convinced of a suspect's guilt.

Mr Linklater admits that he is not a Lockerbie expert, seeming to base his position mainly on a blind trust in the court and the judicial processes, plus a few talking points gleaned from insiders with an axe to grind. Those of us who have become convinced of Megrahi's innocence, however, have based this conviction on the facts of the matter. The case against Megrahi (and his associate Fhimah) was founded on a few crucial points, and if these are disproved the entire house of cards falls to pieces. These points have indeed been thoroughly disproved, and it is this that Mr Linklater must confront, rather than taking refuge in insults and unsubstantiated assertion.

The investigators were convinced that the bomb had been introduced into the baggage system at Luqa Airport, Malta, as illegitimate unaccompanied luggage. It was then, they proposed, transferred to the Pan Am 103 feeder flight at Frankfurt, then again to Maid of the Seas waiting at Heathrow. There were two reasons for this belief.

First, because some of the clothes which appeared to have been packed in the suitcase with the bomb were traced to a small shop only three miles from Luqa Airport, and second, because analysis of the confused and partial baggage records recovered at Frankfurt seemed to show an item of luggage being transferred from a flight from Malta, although there was no passenger booked to make such a transfer.

The provenance of the clothes appears to be quite genuine, however, the proposition that clothes bought on Malta weeks before the disaster prove that the bomb began its journey that day from the island is clearly nonsense. Whatever he may say about it now, Megrahi's advocate Bill Taylor understood this perfectly well at the time of the trial, pointing out quite rightly that clothes may be transported anywhere at all in the time available, and that such a conspicuous purchase of easily-traceable items in a small shop might well have been intended as a deliberate red herring pointing away from the real scene of the crime.

The baggage records are another matter. The security system at Luqa in 1988 was extremely stringent. Years of investigation on Malta failed to find any evidence that an illegitimate suitcase had been smuggled onto the plane in question, and indeed the evidence that this had not happened was extremely strong. The judges at Camp Zeist acknowledged this, but sailed right on past the 'major difficulty' without further comment.

The evidence relied on to assert the Malta origin lay not at Luqa but at Frankfurt, in a single page of luggage listing which was all that was recovered after the computer record for the day was accidentally wiped a week after the disaster. Lacking the full dataset, its interpretation was problematic. Twenty-five items were recorded as being transferred to the PA103 feeder from incoming flights, but only 10 of these could be matched to legitimate transfer luggage by the method prescribed for interpreting the listing. Eight or nine additional items were discovered which must also have been transferred in this way, but these could only be matched to the written records by guesswork. This left not just one but six or seven of the recorded transfer items unidentified, and there were no further known items of luggage to fill these slots. These mystery items seemed to come from four airports – Bombay, Berlin, Warsaw, and Malta. The investigators were so enchanted by the match to the Maltese clothes that they didn't even visit the other three airports.

Tray 8,849, the listing apparently connecting to the Malta flight, is far from an isolated anomaly screaming 'bomb here!'. We have no idea what was in any of these unidentified trays, but they certainly weren't all carrying the bomb. The fact is, the surviving records are simply too incomplete to support the interpretation being placed on them. The reason the judges were prepared to trust these confused and confusing records over the complete and perfectly clear Luqa records was not simply that the clothes had been purchased on Malta. They came to their conclusion because it was alleged that Megrahi, who was present at Luqa Airport when the flight to

Frankfurt departed, was the man who made that purchase. The so-called eyewitness identification that supported this allegation has, however, been the subject of detailed and damning criticism, not least by the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission itself.

The SCCRC in effect declared the Camp Zeist verdict to be unreasonable, when it noted that 'there is no reasonable basis in the trial court's judgement for its conclusion that the purchase of the items took place on 7 December 1988'. Make no mistake about it, this one statement destroys the entire judgement, because the date of 7 December for the clothes purchase was the hook on which the whole daisy-chain of inference and supposition was hung. If the clothes weren't bought on 7 December, Megrahi wasn't the man who bought them. And if the man who bought the clothes wasn't at Luqa Airport when the flight for Frankfurt departed, then the justification for the finding that the bomb suitcase must have been in the mysterious tray 8,849 vanishes.

Of course, there was more to it than that, which Mr Linklater must be aware of as he claims to be familiar with the SCCRC report, and indeed to admire it. Tony Gauci, the shopkeeper, originally described his customer as a burly, dark-skinned man, about 50 years old and over six feet tall. Megrahi was of slight to medium build, light-skinned, five feet eight inches tall, and in 1988 he was only 36 years of age. Gauci first picked out a very poor-quality passport photo of Megrahi well over two years after the clothes purchase, and it was a mind-boggling 11 years after the encounter before he picked Megrahi out of a live identity parade.

Even the judges acknowledged that the composition of the line-up meant that Megrahi was 'comparatively easy' to pick out as the suspect, and by 1999 he was nearing the age the customer was said to have been in 1988. Gauci never made a confident identification, merely testifying to a resemblance, and indeed his first words following the 1999 identity parade were, 'not the man I saw in the shop, but...'

The other points relating to police pressure on Gauci to make an identification, his familiarity with photographs clearly identifying Megrahi as the Lockerbie accused before his attendance at the identity parade, his awareness of the eye-watering reward being offered by the US Department of Justice, and the eventual payment to him of at least \$2m after Megrahi's conviction had been secured, will also be familiar to anyone who is a fan of the SCCRC report.

A quite separate piece of evidence apparently linking Megrahi to the bombing was the tiny fragment of printed circuit board said to have been part of the timer which had detonated the bomb. This was said to have been one of only 20 such items to have been manufactured, all of which had been supplied to the Libyan military. Megrahi was the co-owner of a company which rented office space in the same building in Zurich as the manufacturer, and had done business with that company – though not in relation to the timers.

The identification of the small shard of PCB as apparently originating from a type of timer supplied exclusively to Libya was a major breakthrough in the investigation. However, as has been ably demonstrated by John Ashton, this identification was fatally flawed. A crucial metallurgical peculiarity of the fragment, known about from an early stage in the investigation, was not present in the timers supplied to Libya. The simple fact is that we do not know what this PCB fragment is or where it came from, but one thing we do know is that it is not what the prosecution said it was.

Despite having read my book, Mr Linklater failed to make any reference to its central revelation, the whole point of the narrative. He continues to assert that the trial court, the first appeal and indeed Megrahi's defence 'tested to destruction' the theory that the bomb suitcase was introduced not on Malta but at Heathrow Airport. This was never the case. The defence made a spirited and rational case for a Heathrow introduction, however the judges, while acknowledging this as a possibility, chose to prefer the fragmented and inferential case for the Malta-Frankfurt routing. The court, however, was not shown the full story.

A careful and detailed analysis of the totality of the evidence from Heathrow, something which was never undertaken either by the original forensic investigation, the prosecution team or the defence experts, shows quite conclusively that the bomb was indeed in a suitcase that was seen in the baggage container while it was still in the interline shed at Heathrow, an hour before the feeder flight landed.

The court judgement depended on the assumption that a blue American Tourister suitcase was underneath the bomb suitcase. The forensic evidence clearly shows it was on top. The judgement depended on the assumption that the bomb suitcase had not been the one on the bottom of the stack. The forensic evidence clearly shows that is exactly where it was. The judgement depended on the assumption that the Heathrow interline luggage was rearranged when the feeder flight luggage was added to the container. The baggage handler who carried out that task (who was not called as a witness) was insistent that he did no such thing.

Mr Linklater notes that Megrahi was in Malta on the day of the bombing, and presents this as a major point for the prosecution. However, if the scene of the crime was Heathrow, then far from Megrahi's location that day being incriminating, it provides him with an unbreakable alibi. At the time the bomb suitcase appeared in that baggage container, Abdelbaset al-Megrahi was in fact in Tripoli, having travelled there from Luqa on a morning flight.

I realise it can be hard to take on board the fact that something this simple and this obvious has only emerged 25 years down the line, but that's how it is. This is a big deal, Mr Linklater, and it deserves a more honest response than misdirection and point-scoring. Something which an astute journalist might want to investigate is why the Scottish police and the Crown Office have failed even to interview the metallurgist who demonstrated the discrepancy between the PCB fragment found at

Lockerbie and the timers supplied to Libya, nearly two years after the discrepancy was first made public.

Similarly, it is nearly a year since the detailed analysis showing the bomb to have been introduced at Heathrow was made available to the police, but they have still not commissioned an independent forensic evaluation to test and verify the findings presented. Instead, they continue chasing off to Libya, where the much-trailed evidence pointing to Megrahi's so-called accomplices has so far proved as elusive as Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction.

Something else a journalist with a real nose for a story might find interesting is the sheer amount of exculpatory evidence that was not disclosed to the defence at Megrahi's original trial or indeed later. The documents that led to the discovery of the metallurgical discrepancy relating to the PCB fragment were not disclosed until July 2009, six weeks before Megrahi returned to Libya. The unedifying saga of the non-disclosure of the unredacted CIA cables, which revealed the Crown's original 'star witness' Majid Giaka to be a money-grabbing fantasist, is there to be read in the court transcripts themselves. And these are only two examples.

Mr Linklater seizes on this aspect to bolster his favourite allegation. This is a conspiracy you're alleging. Therefore you are a conspiracy theorist. And so the uncomfortable facts are given a body-swerve. Whether or not the non-disclosure may be described as a conspiracy is a subjective matter, but the non-disclosure itself is a matter of simple fact which doesn't go away simply because the c-word is used.

A final matter Mr Linklater takes issue with is the suggestion that the real bombers might have been a Palestinian terrorist group known as the PFLP-GC. This group had extensive experience in bringing down airliners in flight dating back to the 1960s, and they were known to have re-formed in Germany in October 1988. This time, they were said to be in the pay of the Iranian Government, who had commissioned them to exact revenge for the accidental shooting down of an Iranian passenger plane by a US warship a few months previously. The PFLP-GC were the original suspects for Lockerbie, and remained such until 1990 when the PCB fragment was linked to the timers supplied to Libya.

Mr Linklater insists that the involvement of this group was thoroughly disproved by the original inquiry, and that neither the defence nor the SCCRC were able to find anything to substantiate their involvement. I've got one thing to say about this. If investigators are looking in the wrong place, at a false modus operandi, they are not going to solve the case, even if they are looking for the right suspects. These are the people who failed to carry out the extremely simple analysis of the blast-damaged suitcases that shows quite clearly that the explosion happened in the bottom suitcase in the stack, the one loaded at Heathrow.

Forgive me if I don't immediately assume that their failure to close the deal on the PFLP-GC means that that group, which we know was making bombs designed to

bring down a plane in just the way Maid of the Seas was brought down, may be assumed to be innocent.

Lastly, though, I will concede that the title of my book includes a question mark. Can this atrocious debacle really be completely explained by tunnel vision and confirmation bias? While I don't allege a conspiracy, it would be naive to assume that a conspiracy can be categorically ruled out. Just as irrational as the propensity to see nefarious conspiracies in every major public event is the blind refusal to admit that anything could ever be a conspiracy. From Iran Contra to Watergate to Hillsborough, we know that conspiracies happen. The Lockerbie investigation may yet prove to be one of them.

However, at this stage, that isn't the point. The point is that Megrahi was not the 'Lockerbie bomber'. The evidence against him falls apart under even moderately close scrutiny, and worse than that, he was provably more than 1,000 miles away when the bomb was introduced into the baggage container. This is what those Mr Linklater dismisses as 'Megrahi's supporters' are seeking to highlight. Wild accusations of 'conspiracy theorist' are a distraction to avoid reasoned argument, and unworthy of anyone making a serious contribution to the debate.

In January 2021, a Scottish court rejected a posthumous (third) appeal against conviction by the family of Abdelbaset al-Megrahi. The family say they intend to take the case to the UK Supreme Court.

POLITICS

A question of trust

Nicholas Jones 2003

It is rather a tall order to imagine that a former BBC political correspondent might be able to offer a critique – and some constructive thoughts – on the erosion in trust between government and the public. We have it on no lesser authority than Alastair Campbell that the UK's news media is the least trusted in Europe; and Campbell has told me to my face, on more than one occasion, that my own reporting certainly cannot be trusted. That criticism notwithstanding, I would like to address an issue which is troubling democratically-elected governments not just here in Britain but around the world.

In recent years, there has been what government now accepts is a meltdown in the level of trust for what officialdom is saying. We have also seen further evidence of the disengagement between politicians and the public. Just look at the downward spiral in voter participation: a 59% turnout in the 2001 General Election, slipping to 50% in the elections last May for the Scottish Parliament, and plunging to a mere 36% for the London by-election in late September. Let me say from the outset that I accept that journalists are part of the problem. Much of the cynicism about politicians is fuelled by the way politics are reported by the media. We can't dodge our own responsibility; more later on my own *mea culpa*.

But first, let me explain why I have taken such an interest in the relationship between the news media and the state, between politicians and journalists. I first became really aware of media manipulation 20 years ago – during the trauma of the 1984-5 miners' strike when I was a labour and industrial correspondent. I saw at first hand how journalists could be used in pursuit of a political objective. I have no intention of debating the rights and wrongs of the pit dispute: suffice to say that, in the end, when Margaret Thatcher decreed there would be no settlement, reporters like myself became in effect the cheerleaders for the return to work.

With our television cameras and microphones, we finished up behind police lines reporting on the National Coal Board's efforts to break the strike. Each Monday morning, the headlines would be dominated by the number of 'new faces' going through the picket lines. For newspapers like *The Sun*, they were the 'heroes', the men who had given up the struggle, who were defying their union and had gone back to work. It was only after the strike that I began to understand how it was that a news organisation like the BBC had been manoeuvred into a position where it was in effect promoting the return to work.

Looking back on the mid-1980s and Lady Thatcher's second term, no-one can

deny that she achieved her goals: she did smash the industrial strength of the trade unions; she did begin the wholesale privatisation of the nationalised industries; and in so doing she encouraged a period of profound change not only in Britain but across Europe. What was so significant about Thatcher's second term was that she had the full backing of almost all the newspaper proprietors. That loyalty was crucial and it was only when it began to dissipate in her later years, and then during the premiership of John Major, that the Labour Party began to develop – and succeed – with its own techniques for influencing the media.

I was fascinated by what was taking place; how under Neil Kinnock – with the help of Peter Mandelson – the Labour Party started to understand the media mindset. That was when I became something of an obsessive myself, an anorak on spin. I had already written extensively in the 1980s on how management and the unions tried to exploit the media; now I began chronicling the transformation that was under way in the Labour Party.

The first innovation for the leadership was to recognise the importance of communicating what the party wanted to do: it was no good deciding on a policy if no-one had thought through whether it could be sold to the public. Political conviction wasn't enough; presentation had to take priority over policy: next day's headlines were paramount. Mandelson had learned another lesson: he understood how to exploit the media by trading information. In the research I'm doing for my next book – *The Information Traders* – I've talked to one of the public relations consultants who says he advised the newly-appointed Mandelson. He explained to him that information is like a currency – it can be traded for favours with compliant journalists. The first manifestation of that was Mandelson's success in the late 1980s in planting stories in the Sunday newspapers about changes which were afoot in the Labour Party. His aim was to encourage a process of modernisation.

By the way, Labour's director of communications was no slouch. When I was the weekend duty political correspondent, he would ring me up each Saturday evening to run through those stories which he knew would be appearing in the Sunday papers and which he deemed were 'accurate' – ie which he had briefed on in advance – and which he wanted the BBC to follow up in its Sunday morning news bulletins. In my view, it was the willingness to trade information in that way that became one of the root causes of the troubles which currently beset Tony Blair, who is finding that the word 'spin' is being hung round his neck in the same way that 'sleaze' was pinned so effectively on John Major.

What went wrong was that practices which might well be considered legitimate in the face of a hostile media, especially when an opposition party is fighting a General Election, were carried on into government. They ended up corrupting what is an essential foundation stone for democratic government – a free and fair flow of information from the state to the public. We saw with the Hutton inquiry how

corrosive Labour's behaviour has become. Can there be any possible justification for what happened at the height of the row between Alastair Campbell and the BBC, when Campbell suggested to the Defence Secretary, Geoff Hoon, that he should reveal to one of the newspapers that Andrew Gilligan's source had come forward? Campbell described in his diary his frustration: 'GH [that's Geoff Hoon] like me, wanted to get it out that the source had broken cover... GH said he was almost as steamed up as I was'.

Even when I suggested in one of my books – well before the 1997 election victory – that Labour had become addicted to media manipulation, I never envisaged that Campbell & Co would go to the kind of lengths exposed by Lord Hutton.

If you had asked me a year ago, immediately after the publication of the September dossier on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, about Campbell's role, I would have said it would have been his responsibility – once the intelligence services had handed over their assessment – to advise how this information should be presented to the public. I didn't know – and I am sure this goes for every other political commentator – that Campbell had chaired meetings with the heads of the intelligence services to discuss the structure and contents of the dossier. Indeed, we know what an outcry this has caused among those concerned with standards in public life: the discovery that a political appointee had so much covert power.

Few, if any, of us would have guessed that Campbell had the authority to suggest to John Scarlett, chairman of the joint intelligence committee, how the wording should be changed and strengthened. Whether or not there was any justification for Gilligan's claim that the dossier had actually been 'sexed up', there seems no doubt that it was the propagandists – and not the intelligence services – who were driving the preparation of the dossier.

For the moment, let's leave aside the arguments over who said what and to whom in the days before Dr Kelly's apparent suicide. Instead, I would like to examine the impact of the Hutton inquiry on the government's credibility and on Blair himself.

An NOP opinion poll in September produced some startling statistics. People were asked: given what you know now, do you think Tony Blair lied to the nation over the threat posed by Iraq? No fewer than 59% said 'yes' – a majority believed the Prime Minister had lied over the war. The conclusion of John Curtice, professor of politics at Strathclyde University, was that the evidence presented to Hutton seemed to have given credence – at least in the public's mind – to the very charge that Downing Street had been so keen to deny. So we need look no further for an illustration of the breakdown in trust between government and public.

The purpose of the September dossier was to provide justification for the use of British troops. Never before, in modern times, had the British people been asked to go to war on the basis of intelligence rather than an act of aggression. As Campbell explained, the publication of the dossier broke new ground for the government: it

was the first time that intelligence material of this kind had been presented in this way to the public. What was particularly striking was that ministers saw nothing dubious about what had been done in their name. They seemed content that the dossier should be seen for what it was: in effect, propaganda to justify an Americanled war against Iraq.

Back in mid-July, at the height of the dispute between Campbell and the BBC – just after David Kelly's name had been given to newspapers but before he had been forced to give evidence to the foreign affairs committee – there was a very revealing exchange on the *Today* programme. One of the government supporters wheeled out to defend the dossier was Dr Lewis Moonie, who had been parliamentary undersecretary at the Ministry of Defence until being dropped in the cabinet reshuffle the previous month. He, of course, had been a defence minister when the dossier was first published. Dr Moonie explained that the job of ministers at the time was to look at the intelligence information and decide whether or not to believe it. He went on: 'Once we believe it, our duty is to sell it to the public... No-one is talking about lying... What we are talking about is putting the best possible gloss on something to ensure that people accept it... People require certainty from the government, reassurance from the government, that is something which is the government's duty'.

Did you pick that up: '... the best possible gloss... to ensure that people accept it'? Now, that is exactly what was done by the accountants for Enron and WorldCom. They put the best possible gloss on their clients' accounts. Were those accountancy practices permissible? Most people would consider them fraudulent in intent – that certainly seems likely to be the verdict of the US courts.

I am quite prepared to accept that Blair acted out of conviction; that he believed – or perhaps was determined to believe – the warnings he had been given about Saddam Hussein and the threat posed by Iraq. But we can all see the risks in what has happened. Should an assessment from the intelligence services – or any other factual information from the state – be treated in this way? Yes, we expect governments to present a reasonable case but once the propagandists get to work – once they begin to drive the process and start calling the shots – we now know they will stop at nothing to achieve the best possible outcome and therein lies the danger.

The general conclusion already being drawn from the Kelly affair is that there must be new safeguards: that agencies like the intelligence services should be required to serve the nation and not just the politicians who happen to be in power; the information they present to the public should not be influenced – or tampered with – by political propagandists.

Earlier, I claimed that it was New Labour's addiction to media manipulation that was one of the root causes of the abuses which have been revealed. Let me try to justify that assertion.

It has been confirmed by Sir Robin Butler, formerly cabinet secretary and head of

the civil service, that prior to the 1997 General Election, the British establishment went out of its way to be as accommodating as possible to the incoming Labour Government led by Tony Blair. Robin Butler agreed that if Blair became Prime Minister, he would consent to the arrangement – through an order in council – that gave Alastair Campbell and Blair's chief of staff, Jonathan Powell, unprecedented powers to issue instructions to civil servants. It was that power which Campbell and Powell were exercising on behalf of the Prime Minister when they drove through the preparation of the Iraq weapons dossier.

Of course, Robin Butler has long gone; he retired early in Blair's first term and justified the concessions which had been made – such as the order in council – on the belief that, in time, the civil service would regain any ground which had been lost. That complacency was not shared by Sir Robin's successor, Sir Richard Wilson, who, on his retirement, made it clear he believed there should be curbs on political appointees like Campbell, Powell and all the rest of the 70 or so special advisers who work for ministers. I don't need to remind you of the long list of their misdemeanours. To know who I am talking about, you only have to hear names like Charlie Whelan or Jo Moore – the latter having issued the infamous instruction to civil service press officers to 'bury bad news' after the attack on the World Trade Centre.

Their power and authority was enhanced by another key episode in the early days of the Blair administration. Within months of being installed as the Prime Minister's press secretary, Campbell succeeded in persuading Sir Robin Mountfield to rewrite the rule book for civil service information officers, requiring them to 'grab the agenda' by trailing in the news media forthcoming government decisions before they had been announced to Parliament. For the first time, civil servants were authorised to back up the special advisers – the Charlie Whelans and Jo Moores – in passing on confidential information to favoured news outlets on a selective and off-the-record basis. It's my belief that this one change was a pivotal moment in the transplantation of the New Labour culture of spin, from opposition government; it was that shift which helped consolidate the power of Campbell and his network of ministerial spin doctors.

Let me sketch out the damage which has been done. First the headlines: the undermining of Parliament, the unacceptable interference in the work of civil servants, and the growth of exaggerated and unsourced political stories. First: why has the journalism gone wrong?

The frequent absence of any direct attribution for facts or quotations has spread like a cancer through our news output, eating away at the probity of political reporting, undermining the trust of readers, listeners and viewers, and adding to the general distrust of politicians. My complaint against Blair and Campbell is that by increasing so significantly the number of ministerial spin doctors – whose job it is to

supply information to journalists on a non-attributable basis – they have taken advantage of competitive pressures within the media; they have exploited the constant demands which journalists now face for 'exclusive' stories; and, in the process, they have hastened a decline in editorial standards.

Since I began work at the House of Commons as a parliamentary correspondent for *The Times* in 1968, that has been the greatest change for the worse: the failure to provide sources for stories. Campbell became an all-powerful information trader; in practice he saw himself as the editor-in-chief of an alternative news service, always determined to influence the next day's headlines and to prevent newspapers, television and radio from setting their own agenda. Hutton has revealed how, despite his exalted strategic role, Campbell remained addicted, trading information to the very last moment. The currency for that final deal was the name David Kelly.

Of course, the media isn't blameless in all of this. I accept we should be scrutinised just as harshly as the politicians. Instead of reporting or assessing what has happened, we devote more space and airtime to speculation, interviews and comment. The political correspondent of today tends to be rated much more on his or her ability to deliver exclusive stories than on news judgement or a reputation for reliability. So intense is the demand for scoops that we are usually only too eager to co-operate with government spin doctors and accept information on an off-the-record basis. Our consumers aren't fooled: they are rightly suspicious when they read the tag line 'exclusive' across several pages of the same day's newspaper.

Broadcasters tend to hide their refusal to name names behind a rather grander form of words, usually along the lines 'the BBC has learned...' or even that 'the BBC has learned exclusively...'. Once journalists agree not to identify their sources as a matter of course, as though this were nothing more than a commonplace routine in a day-to-day trade in information, there can be far-reaching consequences. The recipients of these favours are often tempted to exaggerate, no doubt anxious to prove the strength of their exclusives. Correspondents regularly left out of the loop can find ways to retaliate. They can either manufacture their own story or write a report knocking their rival's exclusive: the kind of cynical reporting that politicians despair of.

Most such stories seem to contain remarks from at least one unnamed individual, be they a 'senior backbencher', 'top ministerial aide', 'cabinet minister' or 'close friend'. Again, the temptation to fabricate is hard to resist: if there is no identification, there can be no comeback. In cataloguing the current deficiencies of political reporting, I do not seek to enter plea of 'not guilty' for myself. I acknowledge that my own reporting might have added to that sense of cynicism. I admit it: I have fallen into the very traps I have outlined.

In my final years as a BBC correspondent, most of my reporting was for the rolling news programmes, in conversation with radio and television presenters. By its very nature, conversational reporting is less precise; providing detailed attribution is time-consuming and cumbersome and, as a result, it is easy to exaggerate, dare I say, even to boast about one's knowledge and contacts. So, a telephone call to one dissident MP can become 'the rebels are saying', or a snatched word with a minister or an aide in the lobby corridor might be given added weight by the phraseology 'cabinet ministers are worried'. I am not suggesting I told an untruth, but on occasion I was unable to resist a little journalistic licence. Each day at the Hutton inquiry, as I listened to the inner workings of *Today* being laid bare, I realised I could just as easily have ended up being the journalist under scrutiny.

In some respects the row over Andrew Gilligan's reporting was an accident waiting to happen. For me, it illustrated all too clearly some of the pitfalls of the changing nature of BBC journalism. Gilligan's appointment underlined the extent of the shift which has taken place. He was encouraged to report in a way far removed from the objectives which I was set on joining the BBC 30 years ago. In the words of Richard Sambrook, the director of news, Gilligan had become 'a particular sort of journalist' who uncovered 'stories that cause the government discomfort'. The BBC chairman, Gavyn Davies, concurred: Gilligan's style was to report in 'primary colours or bold colours rather than shades of grey'.

Of all the rebukes I received, the one I treasure most was 18 months into the Blair Government when I was criticised for giving Roy Hattersley a quote about Alastair Campbell's black arts. The instruction relayed to me from the controller of editorial policy was to the point: 'Nick, you have been told before. Your job as a BBC correspondent isn't to antagonise Alastair Campbell'. But enough reminiscing. I am afraid journalists left to their own devices – given the intense competition in the media – are unlikely to take the initiative and clean up their own act. Therefore it is incumbent on the government of the day, and on all those involved in public affairs, to make the first move, to set an example.

That is happening already in Downing Street and I welcome it. Alastair Campbell does deserve to be congratulated on the tentative steps he took: a summary of the twice-daily Number 10 lobby briefings is published on the Downing Street website, and Campbell did open up the lobby system, ensuring access to briefings for specialist correspondents as well as overseas journalists. But it wasn't until after Campbell's swift resignation, within days of his own initial appearance before Lord Hutton, that Blair finally acted and made the first move towards honouring his much trumpeted undertaking to turn his back on spin.

Earlier this year, I was one of the journalists invited to give evidence to a review group considering how to improve the government's communications service; how to repair the damage done by the culture of spin. The review is being conducted by Bob Phillis, chief executive of the Guardian Media Group. I thought Blair and Campbell would simply find ways to sidestep any recommendations that were made. But, of

course, that was before the government was blown off course by David Kelly's death and the Hutton inquiry. In the event, the Phillis review group has thrown a lifeline to the Prime Minister as he struggles to stop the free fall in his own personal ratings for trust and credibility.

To his credit, Blair acted immediately on the group's interim report: David Hill, the new Downing Street director of communications, has been stripped of the unprecedented powers given to Campbell; much of that authority will be exercised in future by a senior civil servant in the Cabinet Office who will be appointed to 'focus on a strategic approach to communications across government'. That move is designed to halt the politicisation of the work being done by the 1,000 civil service information officers. David Hill's job will be to concentrate on promoting Blair in a political context – thus re-establishing the previous dividing line between political promotion and information being issued on behalf of the state.

While this new structure appears to bode well for the future, there is no guarantee that it will deliver a mechanism that will put a stop to the aggressive, manipulative techniques which have so marred Labour's relationship with the media. One innovation that is being considered is a requirement that all future Downing Street briefings should be held on camera. I have been a long-standing advocate of televising the proceedings of the lobby. But it would only be a starting point for a new era of openness. Unless the Prime Minister ensures there is free and fair access for all news outlets – a cornerstone of a free press – many journalists will remain aggrieved and the issue of spin will continue to dog his administration.

Blair could do no better than to take a leaf out of the Hutton inquiry, which has set a new benchmark for forcing the release – and the publication – of official information. During its hearings over the summer, hundreds of hitherto secret documents were published on the inquiry's website, providing instant access not just for journalists but also for the public. That is the sort of quantum leap I would like to see taken by the government. All departments and state agencies should provide all news outlets with that kind of level playing field – so that everyone has simultaneous access to announcements and so that there can't be another all-powerful information trader like Campbell, able to do deals with papers like *The Sun*. The massive expansion in websites, and the explosion in the use of the internet, has provided that opportunity.

I have never understood why government doesn't see the value of treating journalists equally. Don't minsters realise it would make it so much harder for us to exaggerate or mislead? In that way, reporters inside the magic circle – as well as those outside it – would be really tested; the more official sources there are, releasing information on an on-the-record basis, the harder it would be to defend sloppy, cynical journalism. I am convinced that editorial standards would improve.

Another important test of this communications revamp will be whether Blair has the courage to require all ministerial spin doctors to speak on the record. That's precisely what the civil service wants; I am sure the same goes for most MPs. Why shouldn't there be greater accountability? After all, it is the taxpayer who pays the wages of the special advisers, not the Labour Party.

No previous public inquiry has ever attracted more media attention than Hutton. The proof of this is that since mid-August the Hutton website has been averaging 10,000 hits a day. Tragic though it has been for the Kelly family, it seems this whole episode has had a cathartic effect on the democratic process. It has certainly stopped the Blair Government in its tracks. Indeed, there are lessons in what has happened not just for ministers, but for their spin doctors and civil servants and for the media. For example, we have yet to hear what the BBC intends to do, but there's already been a curb in the use of unscripted conversation, on television and radio, when reporting allegations of the kind Andrew Gilligan made on the *Today* programme.

I hope it does induce greater self-discipline and a realisation on the part of journalists that we shouldn't devalue our own reporting by giving our sources anonymity for no good reason. Yes, everything should be done to encourage investigative journalism and the cultivation of contacts who will give information on an off-the-record basis. But we mustn't allow ourselves to be exploited by agreeing to a trade-off with spin doctors and party propagandists; the reward for the unidentified source is a favourable planted story. Already we are seeing newspaper journalists make a stand on this. I hope more are ready to blow the whistle on political appointees abusing their position.

Finally, I would like to float the idea that perhaps parliamentarians, councillors and other elected representatives should examine how they can make a contribution towards curbing the culture of spin and restoring the credibility of the political process. As I have explained, the information being released by a government department or public authority is a precious commodity. If we are to have faith in our democratic system, there has to be a free and fair flow of that information and we have to have trust in what we are being told. Therefore, we have to defend not only the systems through which information is released but also our parliamentary institutions and local forums.

For my last book, *The Control Freaks*, I researched the six instances when the former House of Commons Speaker, Betty Boothroyd, rebuked ministers for disclosing information to the news media before delivering a statement to MPs. There is no doubt this constant trailing of government announcements before a ministerial statement has done lasting damage to parliamentary accountability. In the six cases I examined, the trail of responsibility led back directly to Downing Street's strategic communications unit and Alastair Campbell.

The clearest example involved the former sports minister, Kate Hoey, who had to publicise the news that Labour were going to spend £150m on improving school sports

facilities. She was ordered to take part in a photo opportunity and other publicity stunts. When MPs complained that a financial statement like this should have been given first to the Commons, Miss Boothroyd called Miss Hoey to account and she apologised for having treated MPs so discourteously. Some weeks later, Miss Hoey told me she was required to take the blame but it was Downing Street which had briefed the media. That happened three years ago. I spoke to her about it again in the summer. She said Alastair Campbell had in fact ruined the job for her: Downing Street was always taking control of announcements and telling her what to say. What was black and white one moment would then be changed because Number 10 wanted it put differently.

I have been researching this again because it seems the Speaker can impose no sanction on a minister who trails an announcement in the media before giving the information to the Commons. The responsibility for policing this rests with the Prime Minister who has control of the ministerial code. This lays down that when the House is sitting 'announcements of government policy should be made, in the first instance, to Parliament'. But ministers admit this isn't a hard and fast rule: it would be respected 'wherever practical and possible' and Downing Street has said there would be times when it it 'might not be appropriate to make a parliamentary statement'.

The only time Campbell was questioned on this, he just grinned when challenged at a lobby briefing. When he insisted he had 'never, ever trailed things which should be relayed to Parliament first', his words were lost in laughter. I was there. He just shrugged it off by asking the hacks, 'Tell me the last time I did'.

According to Erskine May, the only existing parliamentary offence for divulging information to the media affects the reports of the select committees. There have indeed been several instances since Tony Blair was elected where MPs have been suspended for leaking committee reports.

My suggestion is that MPs call for a revision of the parliamentary rules so that the penal powers of the House of Commons can be used against ministers who are implicated in trailing announcements in the media before making a statement. That would certainly put ministers on their guard and they would have to take responsibility for the spinning that was being done in their name by their special advisers and by anyone else caught trading government information. I don't expect I shall get the support of many journalists for my proposal, but I believe my stand has been vindicated by recent events.

It is important that the relationship between politicians and the media should be as open as possible. There is no doubt that Tony Blair and his government do want to dissociate themselves from the worst excesses of the Campbell regime. I would not go so far as to suggest that this could herald the death of spin, but I think the culture of spin is in retreat. That must be good for the health of our democracy and I do think we have an opportunity to help restore trust in the political process. It is an opportunity we shouldn't let slip.

The day Britain went mad

Kenneth Roy 2010

A neighbour found herself on the edge of a crowd surrounding Gordon and Sarah Brown in Glasgow city centre a few days ago. She could just see the tops of their heads. The man standing next to her, too shy to go up himself, urged my neighbour to push herself forward and ask Mr Brown a question about youth unemployment in the city – essentially, what Labour intended to do about it. But she didn't, and he didn't, and the question was never asked. A pity. It is a question that needs to be considered.

But the answer, if there is one, is more complex than it seems. It is many years since Charlie Gordon, leader of Glasgow City Council as he then was, told me in conversation that the city, in order to go on functioning, depended on the daily influx of workers from adjacent counties such as Ayrshire and Renfrewshire; that, were it not for the willingness of people living outside the city to travel to work in it, the basic services of Glasgow would not be long sustained.

How so? I asked.

Mr Gordon was disarmingly candid. He explained that a high proportion of the indigenous population of working age was 'economically inactive' – that was the phrase he used – and I understood from his remarks that it was now a generational phenomenon. There is no evidence that much has changed since my long-ago talk with Charlie Gordon on the 'economic inactivity' of so many Glaswegians, including the young, except this – the pressure on the good people of adjacent counties is no longer so intense. The arrival of hard-working East Europeans has filled many of the lower-paid vacancies.

They are to be seen in other parts of Scotland, too, of course. Last weekend, in a Galloway hotel, dinner was served by a gentle, conscientious, eager-to-please young woman from somewhere in Eastern Europe. Early the next morning, she returned to serve breakfast.

Mrs Duffy asked Mr Brown: 'All these Eastern Europeans that are coming in – where are they flocking from?' In the case of the waitress in the Galloway hotel, I would not be able to give Mrs Duffy a country of origin. But I felt for her last night. Not for Mrs Duffy, who now has a public relations consultancy to represent her interests, and from whom we can expect to hear again, but for the young waitress in Kirkcudbright, and for the many others who do work beneath or beyond the native Brit. How must it feel to be described in this way – to be told by Mrs Duffy that you have 'flocked' to this country?

Gordon Brown made a mistake. He failed to detach a microphone – supplied, I understand, by Rupert Murdoch's Sky TV – which for some reason, no doubt innocent, had not been removed by the television company before the Prime Minister entered his car. Thus his ordeal began.

It is the stuff of nightmare – for broadcasters and public figures alike – to find some unguarded remark has been picked up by a mic which, in the tiredness or distraction of the moment, you had forgotten was still pinned to your lapel and still live. 'Jesus wept,' muttered a dying Richard Dimbleby during some ceremonial occasion, thinking he was off-mike. The media were outraged on that occasion too – not that we had invented the media as a term – although weeping Jesus is one thing, a Rochdale elector quite another. A pensioner, too, as we are constantly reminded, making the offence so much worse from the media's perspective that Mrs Duffy might have been a gift from heaven.

The common factor between the Dimbleby and Brown experiences was a moment of human vulnerability. In that moment, the Prime Minister uttered something disobliging about Mrs Duffy. Had he not, just a few minutes before, been perfectly civil to her? This is the crime of which he stands accused, which this morning's newspapers assure us will 'seal' the outcome of the election and ensure the 'meltdown' of the Labour vote: the Prime Minister has been hypocritical, pleasant to someone in public yet unpleasant about her in private.

So universal is the condemnation of Gordon Brown, it seems almost unpatriotic to issue a caveat here, but don't we all do that quite routinely? Is it not, to a large extent, what makes the everyday business of humanity possible and tolerable? Our inner perceptions of other people are often too cruel to be admitted. It is a kindness to keep our feelings to ourselves. Mr Brown was being courteous.

There is a larger hypocrisy in pretending that this is not how humanity works. But it is more serious than hypocrisy. It is a form of madness. In the hysterical over-reaction to Mr Brown's minor transgression, Britain went a little mad yesterday. Or, rather, the media did. It is possible that most people are more mature in their thinking, and more forgiving in their nature, than their tribunes give them credit for.

The madness continues. Early this morning, a BBC interviewer demanded to know of the Home Secretary, the likeable Alan Johnson, whether Mrs Duffy's concerns about immigration would be raised in the last of the television debates tonight. Not unreasonably, Mr Johnson replied that the BBC, as the organiser, might be in a better position to answer this question. The prospect of immigration being discussed for a third week in succession, in such an inflammatory atmosphere, is unspeakable, even by the debased standards of this campaign. The 'flock' of East Europeans, as Mrs Duffy so uncharitably calls them, are entitled to feel afraid.

Exile

David Torrance 2011

In late 1978, the young Alex Salmond – not long graduated from the University of St Andrews – was struggling to find gainful employment. More in sorrow than anger, he wrote in the *Linlithgowshire Journal and Gazette* that he would soon, in all likelihood, be joining what he called a 'sorry procession' of Scots heading south to find employment in London.

The future First Minister was saved from that fate, aptly enough, by a job at the Scottish Office, but I've not been so lucky. Having freelanced as a journalist, writer and broadcaster since Salmond took charge of Scotland in 2007, lack of work has finally compelled me to head south. Unlike Eck, however, I'm not sorry about it. I like London, and hopefully London will like me.

As a unionist (or, as I like to call myself, a constructive unionist), I have no problem with heading to different parts of the country (by which I mean the United Kingdom) to find education or work. I have studied in Aberdeen, trained as a journalist in Cardiff, spent two years working for an MP in London, and been resident in Edinburgh for my freelance career to date. My feeling of national identity is secure: Scottish and British, or perhaps British and Scottish. I don't think it matters much which way round it goes.

In all honesty, I leave Scotland rather gloomy about the world of Scottish politics, a domain I've inhabited as an activist, journalist and historian for the past decade. Always prone to tribalism, black and white thinking and, on occasion, sheer unpleasantness, these traits now dominate to – at least in my relatively short memory – a hitherto unknown degree. Harold Macmillan once said that if a man couldn't have religion, he should at least possess decency. I can't help feeling that the decency has gone out of Scottish politics.

Perhaps I'm being naïve, but there now exists little genuine political discourse in this country. I was in Ullapool earlier this month for one of the 'Changin Scotland' weekends arranged by Gerry Hassan. The opening event was a 'debate' on independence between the actress Elaine C Smith and the *Daily Telegraph* journalist Alan Cochrane. I put debate in inverted commas because it was nothing of the sort; Smith treated us to a lucid monologue about why she'd become disillusioned with the Labour Party while Cochrane rattled off a list of supposed SNP crimes. Not once did they posit a case either for or against the union – a deficiency, I would contend, that reflects that debate as a whole.

Since this May's election – perhaps the most exciting evening of my career so far –

barely a week has gone by without *The Scotsman* or *Herald* bulging with claim and counter-claim about the efficacy of the UK vis-à-vis an independent Scotland. By its very nature, this endless ding-dong can have no end, for either side will always be able to summon up an academic, businessman or celebrity to parrot their point of view. More statistics are produced, more commentary written, and so it goes on.

And so it has gone on, to varying degrees, since Winifred Margaret Ewing won the Hamilton by-election in 1968. The unionist parties panicked and began to placate the Scots with various devolutionary schemes, while the nationalist vote ebbed and flowed, largely oblivious to the national movement's often woolly, à la carte ideology which has always – to some extent – promised all things to all men.

Before I'm accused of all the usual crimes, 'talking Scotland down', being 'negative', and so on, I happen to believe that the constitutional debate is important, important because the framework under which we are governed is the means by which policies are enacted to improve the lot of the greatest number of people. If this makes me unimaginatively utilitarian, then so be it. What appalls me is the extent to which the constitution now dominates everything.

Both sides have fallen into the same trap. During the 1980s and 90s, the prodevolution parties got so carried away with promoting various schemes for a Scottish Assembly or Parliament that they lost sight of what it was actually for (presumably a more socially just Scotland); similarly, nationalists (within and without the SNP) have become so focused on the ultimate prize, that it no longer seems to matter what kind of Scotland it is meant to achieve. It has become an end in itself.

How Scotland is governed can only ever be a means to an end. Those with long memories may reflect that the mere existence of a Scottish Parliament has not tangibly improved any aspect of Scottish life, and it doesn't take Gypsy Amalia to predict that if 'independence' – whatever that means – eventually comes, it too shall fail to have the radical transformative effect, politically or economically, its proponents frequently assert. What matters are political ideas and, crucially, political will. On both counts, Scotland as it stands is bereft.

The last time I checked, the constitution did not get someone a job, improve their health or make them more intelligent. Of course it has a place, but in modern Scotland it is all-pervasive. Is England any better? In one respect, I have no doubt that it is. Although there is arguably too little constitutional naval-gazing south of the border rather than too much, the English are at least discussing stuff that matters: education, health and the economy. We – many Scots – may not like what they decide, but no-one can deny the absence of a mature political debate.

Holyrood drift

John Forsyth 2011

Another formulation of the cliché that a week is a long time in politics is that memories are often distressingly short. Watching the fresh-faced young things lining up for their party photocalls at the new session of Holyrood last week, I wondered how many of them might even have heard of the Scottish Constitutional Convention, far less silently acknowledge the debt they owe to it.

The convention that was established in 1989 worried away at the practicalities of establishing a parliament in Scotland that would not only satisfy the appetite for some form of devolution of power but, more importantly in my view, also tried to think of ways that would make it different. Different, not just from the over-ritualised, under-responsive herd mentality of Westminster, but also edgy, innovative, accessible and, they argued, Scottish.

The SNP didn't fancy the convention. Neither did the Scottish Conservatives but its membership had reason to describe itself as representative of civic Scotland. The STUC, churches, small business organisations and a variety of campaigns sat alongside the remaining mainstream political parties. Many of the ideas this unpaid, albeit self-appointed, group developed were incorporated into the scheme that was adopted by the Blair Government in 1997 and that became the Scottish Parliament in 1999. The convention came up with the proportional voting, additional member scheme that was intended to ensure no party would ever achieve an overall majority. Ach well. But it was an interesting try.

They dreamed up the public petitions committee that remains unique among legislatures as an avenue for ordinary citizens to raise ideas for legislation or hold the Scottish Government or parliament to account. The very idea still gives Westminster the heebie-jeebies. The convention's premise was that it will be our parliament and the parliament should trust in the intelligence and good faith of its citizens. It came up with the four-year fixed-term parliament so cavalierly given away in the last session on the entirely nonsensical basis that, just because the Lib Dems and Conservatives at Westminster signed an agreement in May 2010 to hold the next UK General Election in 2015, they wouldn't want to clash. Hands up anyone who thinks the ConDems will survive to that date? And even if they do, so what?

These were just some of the mechanisms by which the convention wanted Holyrood (as it became) to do things differently. They assumed a spirit of challenging self-criticism would be tempered into the steel of the parliament. Unfortunately, signs of corrosion appeared disappointingly early. The MSPs and their advisers began

to pay more attention to the jostling and gossip inside the building. The dominant Labour Party started very early to look down their noses at the additional members that bulked up the representation of Lib Dems, SNP and Conservatives. They called it 'the assisted places scheme'. Not so second class now.

The SSP committed hara-kiri and the independents disappeared leaving only Margo MacDonald as the standard bearer for piercing insight, independence of thought, and love of the awkward question.

It has been a slow and sometimes imperceptible drift to cosiness, complacency and conformity. Last week's election for the post of presiding officer was a disappointing example. It is a significant job in any parliament but in the circumstances of the recent election result will be more important than ever. Last Wednesday, the members signed in and gave their oath. Then they were straight into a vote for presiding officer. Where was the chance or indeed the requirement for the candidates to put their pitch to the 129-person electorate? Had the MSPs forgotten the purpose of an election so completely so soon?

There had been no effort to allow candidates to apply for the job – to explain their approach to it and fitness for it – in previous parliaments. In the first session, it was because Lord Steel was identified as the member with sufficient stature to take on the job. In the next two parliaments, the explanation was that the candidates were well known to the majority of members. That was a poor excuse that ought to have been challenged then.

Even that political sophistry was not credible last week with 49 members completely new to Holyrood including several who hadn't in their wildest dreams imagined they would ever get there unless on a day trip. Instead, the word went out through the party managers. In the absence of any other basis for their choice, the new members did as bid. Watching live on Holyrood TV, it was an inglorious moment for the new parliament. It should not be allowed to happen again.

While the major focus of the coming months inside Holyrood will be scrutiny of the Scotland Bill and evaluation of its implications for refreshing the powers of the parliament, perhaps it is time for civic Scotland to have another look from the outside and remind the elected members and officials alike of the Constitutional Convention's aspiration for a parliament that is edgy, innovative, accessible and, for goodness sake, Scottish.

The lost spirit of 1945

David Donnison 2013

Each generation has its never-to-be forgotten memories that mark its people's lives. I cannot recall where I was when I heard of John Kennedy's assassination, but I shall always remember the moment when I heard the results of the 1945 election.

I was on the bridge of a cruiser steaming through a pitch-black night across the Indian Ocean. At 1am, the unexpected news was whispered to us from the radio cabin at the back of the bridge. By dawn, it was all round the ship. There was alarm among some officers in the wardroom; triumph on the lower decks.

Ten days later, we were in Portsmouth, loading up the ship to head back to the war against Japan, when all hands were given 48 hours leave – our first for many long months. A couple of hours later, I was standing in the corridor of a train packed with soldiers and sailors bound for London, and stuck at Reading Station.

Two men in bowler hats came hurrying across the platform, clutching briefcases and hoping to get aboard. One look into our packed corridor made it clear there was no hope here. 'Let's try a first class carriage' said one of them to his colleague. The sailor beside me leaned out of the window and shouted 'First class! First class! There'll be no more bloody classes when this war is over!' – his voice echoing through the cavernous station. You could feel the unspoken but passionate support he was getting all along the train. A pre-revolutionary moment.

These men had not read Marx or the *Communist Manifesto*. But they understood equality, comradeship, security and respect – the things they and their parents had so often been denied through two world wars and a depression that had inflicted poverty, suffering and fear on so many of them.

Through the next quarter century, with the help of full employment and a slowly growing welfare state, Britain made stumbling progress towards fulfilling their hopes. By 1970, the country was as equal as it had ever been. But since then we have seen a massive reversal of those trends. Britain is now the most unequal country in the western world apart from the United States.

Although surveys show that our people now have less compassion for fellow citizens who are down on their luck than the previous generation had, there are still many of us who share the hopes of the men who stood alongside me in that train. Many, I guess, are readers of the *Scottish Review*. What can any of us do in these bleak times to rebuild the radical, egalitarian tradition that has never been altogether driven out of our culture?

First, some broad, strategic thoughts. Do not believe those who tell us that current

trends towards increasingly gross inequality are irresistible – a product of the global economic weather. There are other advanced economies – mostly doing better than our own – which have not gone down this road. When men (it's nearly always men) in the boardrooms of companies that are plainly doing badly reward themselves with huge increases in their already high pay while reducing the numbers and holding down the wages of their workers, their decisions are choices – an exercise of power and of morality – by men who could have decided differently. Men whose counterparts in other countries would have decided differently because public opinion in those countries – and the choices made by their customers and investors – would not have accepted the morality that rules here.

When it comes to practical action, we should build on developments already to be seen in our country – ideas which have already gained some traction. We should particularly look for those that citizens can act on without waiting for parliaments and states to give them permission.

Let's start by publishing and publicly discussing information about income and wealth. Civil service pay scales have always been published – without the heavens falling. There are Scandinavian countries where everyone's tax return is publicly available so that anyone who wants to know these things can readily find them out. The British have long been secretive about money; a 20th-century version of Victorian prudery about sex. But now that every newspaper and news programme discusses pay inequalities, bonuses, tax evasion and the expense claims of the powerful, those taboos are dwindling.

Next, we should talk about inequalities in pay and other rewards. What is an acceptable ratio between the average rewards of the top tenth and the bottom tenth of the people working for a firm? A hospital? A university? (That was a question we used to discuss in my student days.) More for those at the top means less for those at the bottom: it all comes out of the same kitty.

Are all grades of an organisation's workers represented on their governing bodies and remuneration committees? If workers believe it's worth paying over the odds for an occasional star performer whose contribution will benefit them all, that provides some justification for high pay. But if not...

Encouraged by the research findings of people like Richard Wilkinson and Sir Michael Marmot, who have shown that gross inequality damages most people in the society concerned – damage plainly visible in reduced life expectations and more destructive social problems – some local authorities in Britain have set up commissions to measure and report how unequal their city or county is, and how those patterns change year by year. If COSLA, our local authorities' 'trade union', were to encourage all its members to do this, the reports regularly published and their policy implications would be seriously discussed by local media. We could do the same for Scotland as a whole. Our executive repeatedly says they aim to make Scotland a fairer society.

Already, the idea of a 'living wage', somewhat higher than the legal minimum, to which every employee should be entitled, has been adopted by Scottish local authorities and some private sector employers. Next, we need to ask about the maximum rewards they offer and the ratios between top and bottom figures. Employers who keep those ratios within an agreed range should be entitled to place an appropriate plaque on their doors to show they are 'fair wage employers'. Then their customers could reflect on these patterns when deciding which coffee bar – or which university – to patronise.

Scotland has taken a world lead (through the Mental Health Act of 2003 and later legislation) by giving everyone who has a mental disorder (illness or learning disability) a legal right to the help of a free and independent advocate. This service helps vulnerable and inarticulate people to explain their needs and wishes to doctors, nurses, social workers – and their own relatives, employers, landlords and others. It has been extended in a patchy way to other groups – frail elderly people, people who have had strokes, and so on. It was a historical accident that this service began with mental disorders. We should give similar rights to every citizen dealing with any public service.

Our deputy First Minister has just announced £5.4m of extra money for agencies offering advice and advocacy to help people get social security benefits they are entitled to. A good move; but it should not stop with social security – the service whose failings can be blamed on Westminster. And advocacy agencies should be required to give priority to their most frail and vulnerable clients in order to reduce the impact of 'inverse care laws'. This phrase was invented by public health researchers to describe the tendency for richer and healthier communities to get the best medical services. But every public service tends to have its 'inverse care laws'. (Take a careful look at schools, town planning, libraries, parks...)

There are other initiatives of an equalising kind to be seen in our society once we start looking for them. But I should not try my readers' stamina too severely. Before concluding, I offer a final, broader thought.

Just as we need better figures to inform our discussion of social justice and inequality, we also need better words. The Westminster Government and its supporters in the media have done their best to eliminate the phrase 'social security' from our vocabulary. (It was Beveridge's term, suggesting human rights to freedom from fear.) They have substituted the crude Americanism 'welfare', which is humiliating to those who depend on these benefits and to the staff who serve them. They have constantly used words and phrases like 'strivers' and 'hard-working families' to gain support from low-paid workers for cuts in the services that give most help to those they describe as 'shirkers'. The fact that most of the cuts will fall on low-paid workers may prompt people to think more carefully about this language.

We must all be careful that we do not unthinkingly adopt the cynically divisive and

cruelly humiliating words offered to us by those who regard inequality not as a problem but as a solution. I still think of my comrades and shipmates of 1945 when I reflect on these things.

Let's hear it for unions

Anthony Seaton 2013

In 1982, I sat in a bar in Luxembourg over a glass of beer with Joe Gormley, who was about to retire as president of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). We were discussing the role of trade unions and specifically the possibility of another strike under the leadership of his successor, Arthur Scargill.

"The business of a union is to look after the interests of its members, not to change the government,' he said. 'To do that, you have to know the men. Arthur has another agenda.' Although during Joe Gormley's presidency the NUM struck, in 1972 and 1974, he personally had advised against the latter at least until after the General Election. Nevertheless, its effect had probably contributed to the fall of the Heath Government and a subsequent rise in the pay and conditions of his men.

For men they all were; another part of our conversation related to women in mines, as this was by then happening in USA and I had female employees whom we occasionally needed to send down mines to study the ergonomics of the work (we agreed that they would be temporarily honorary men, an example of Joe Gormley's pragmatism). 'We fought for decades to spare women this terrible work; they'll never go down mines so long as the union has a say,' he said.

In my role as an NHS chest physician over four decades, I would not infrequently see patients who had developed illness as a result of their work. The easier ones to manage were those who were members of a union and I think it is not well appreciated by the general public how much support a worker receives from that membership, be it in arguing for safe conditions, ensuring that hazards are reduced and, in the event of injury, in rehabilitation, enforced retirement and compensation.

Especially nowadays, no individual is likely to have the strength of will and the financial muscle to take on the exploiters who try to enforce zero-hour contracts, reductions in pay and less safe conditions through cutting corners and 'red tape'. The injured worker without union-backing is in a very weak position. Joe Gormley's remarks to me on that evening proved prophetic: 'That man is a disaster,' he said. 'He wants to change the government.' But instead, the disastrous strike of 1984 led to the virtual end of the deep coal industry in Britain and a split in the NUM from which it never recovered.

I recalled these far-off events while reading of the industrial dispute at Grangemouth and the shenanigans surrounding the Falkirk constituency. Whatever the truth behind reports in newspapers (most owned by very rich expatriates), the sight of a highly skilled industrial workforce and industry being at the mercy of an exceedingly rich expatriate frightens me. This is increasingly the case.

In England, the NHS is progressively being taken into the private sector and whole GP practices and specialist services are being swallowed up by large multinational companies beholden to their shareholders, often sovereign wealth funds and private equity, such owners not being notably interested in the health of those for whom they are responsible. The sinister but subtle opening up of these deals to EU competition law has meant that local efforts to provide non-profit control are usually doomed to failure against the power of the commercial barons.

In times such as these, when the rich are getting richer at the expense of the very large majority of the population, the ordinary wage earner needs the protection of a strong union. So indeed does the ordinary unemployed person. Directors have their CBI, the rich have their very direct route to politicians or often enough to the House of Lords. Ironically, the late Joe Gormley ended up a baron. If we have to have a House of Lords, let's have a few more like him in it – people who understand the working man. Let's hear it for unions.

It seems I am a nationalist historian

Kenneth Roy 2014

Ι

Something extraordinary happened to me while I was on holiday, but it was only when I got back that I became aware of it. In my short absence I had been rebranded as Scotland's nationalist historian. I feel like a changed man. But is the new me really – well, me?

This question has to be faced in the light of a thorough and extremely long (thousands of words long) deconstruction of my work and alleged political sympathies by Gregg McClymont in the journal *Renewal*. I was no more than generally aware of Mr McClymont's existence before his extended article, with its headline suggestion that I had written a 'nationalist interpretation' of Scottish history, accompanied by a tweet to his followers that I was guilty of a 'surfeit of nationalism'.

In view of these surprising notions, I have had to find out a little more about Mr McClymont. He is the Labour MP for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East, 38 years old, a distinguished scholar, a rising star of his party. 'One of the brighter ones,' as a watcher of Scottish politics put it to me. He is, then, a person to be taken seriously, someone who may come into his own if Scotland rejects independence, perhaps even future cabinet material. It seems I have been stereotyped by that rare beast, a politician with a brain.

All the same, I'm confused. In recent times, I have been denounced in *The Observer* as an arid liberal – bit of a compliment, that – and on the nationalist website Newsnet as an Old Labour hack. Somehow, I am now also Scotland's nationalist historian. It only remains for me to be revealed as a long-time closet adviser to Michael Gove.

II

Mr McClymont's conclusions are based on his reading of *The Invisible Spirit*, a defiantly non-award-winning chronicle of Scottish life from VE night in May 1945 to the coming onstream of North Sea oil in the autumn of 1975, the period I chose to define as the post-war era.

It is not his fault that I was around for all of this period, though at the age of six weeks oblivious to VE night, and that the manager of Grangemouth refinery gave me a phial of the first North Sea oil – 'Scotland's oil' according to the SNP, long before it became the invisible spirit of the title – while young Gregg was around for none of it. He was born in June 1976, and so missed all of the preceding excitement. The fact

that I reported some of the events recalled in the book, and knew and interviewed many of the figures mentioned in it, does not necessarily make this ageing baby boomer any more reliable in his judgements than that clever child of the modern era, Gregg McClymont.

Nevertheless, I'm baffled. None of the prominent critics who wrote favourably of the book – the novelist Candia McWilliam, the social historian David Kynaston, the journalist Ian Jack, the advocate Ian Hamilton, the politician George Robertson – appeared to view it as a nationalist tract. *The Guardian* said that it was a social rather than a political history. Likewise, none of the Scottish actors with whom I spent the day in London earlier this week discussed the book in political terms; they were more fascinated by such matters as the Manuel trial.

So it is possible that Gregg McClymont is on his own here. Yet he and the journal *Renewal* are so assiduously reinventing me as a nationalist historian that I must enter the witness box in my own defence.

What does this misunderstood book actually say? It is rather glacial about the postwar SNP, exposing the blatant racism of some of its leading members, including the revered Robert McIntyre, whose slogan for the 1945 election was 'Scotland for the Scots', and its chairman at a much later stage (1970), Arthur Donaldson, who proposed a new slogan based on a Bannockburn battle cry: 'On them! They fail!' It deals frankly with the party's embarrassing manifesto for the 1970 General Election, which bore disturbing similarities to the right-wing populism of Teddy Taylor, and is unimpressed by the performance of its MPs in the House of Commons post-1974.

It is true that the book is sympathetic to the covenant movement launched by John MacCormick for a Scottish Parliament within the union, a cause belatedly espoused by Mr McClymont's party. It is also true that the book is severely critical of the Scottish judicial establishment, of the acquiescent Scottish media, of the lamentable course of industrial policy, and of the failure by successive governments to foster such native ingenuity as we still possessed.

It never occurred to me as I wrote it down that this anatomy of Scotland's post-war life made me a nationalist historian. Indeed, the book is even-handed in its disdain for the record of all Scottish political institutions, including the xenophobic SNP. But there is one glowing exception that ought to please Mr McClymont: Labour's Tom Johnston, wartime Secretary of State, who quit parliament to perform meaningful public service of long-term benefit, bringing electricity to remote parts of the Highlands and pioneering the growth of tourism, an industry of increasing importance as manufacturing collapsed. Oh for a Johnston now – an inspirational public servant operating outside party politics for the good of Scotland.

Does my deep respect for Tom Johnston make me an Old Labour hack? It wouldn't be much less plausible than my elevation to the role of nationalist historian, on which I intend to dine out for the foreseeable future.

Ш

My own experience is a warning that, in pre-referendum Scotland, no-one who writes or thinks about this country can expect to be free of the taint of bias. More often than not, it is expressed in vile outbursts on social media. I should be grateful that, although Mr McClymont's conclusions are perverse, they are reached with a flattering attention to detail and free of personal insult. Others have not been so fortunate.

I have begun to doubt that there is still room left in Scotland, and in its feverish media, for scepticism. It's a fine old Scottish tradition, scepticism. But with every passing hour, there is less scepticism and more certainty. As I have just discovered, if you're not totally *for* them, you are totally *against* them. We're all partisan now.

No laughing matter? The funny guys in politics

Walter Humes 2014

In his 2013 diary (extracts from which appear in the current issue of the *London Review of Books*), the writer Alan Bennett offers an observation prompted by the funeral of Lady Thatcher. He castigates Tory MPs for suggesting that 'her lack of a sense of humour was just a minor failing, of no more significance than being colour blind, say, or mildly short-sighted'. On the contrary, he argues, 'to have no sense of humour is to be seriously flawed as a human being. It's not a minor shortcoming: it shuts you off from humanity'.

When she was Prime Minister, Mrs Thatcher's addresses to the Conservative Party conference did occasionally contain an element of wit, almost certainly suggested by her speech writers rather than her own contribution. It is said that the comment for which she is best known – a rejection of the idea that she should make a U-turn on economic policy ('You turn if you want to. The lady's not for turning') – needed several rehearsals as she kept getting the timing and emphasis wrong. As for the literary reference to Christopher Fry's play, *The Lady's not for Burning*, that remained unappreciated by the PM.

The present generation of politicians is not noted for humour. When the late Sir Cyril Smith, Liberal MP for Rochdale from 1972 to 1992, remarked that 'the House of Commons is the longest running farce in the West End,' he was not referring to the ability of MPs to entertain, but to their seemingly unerring capacity to make a mess of things. It is true that front bench exchanges between cabinet ministers and their opposition counterparts sometimes contain shafts of irony, but too often they come across as staged sound bites rather than spontaneous wit.

Occupying a high office of state does impose limitations on what can be said. A flippant remark that might be acceptable from the backbenches of the government or from the opposition could be considered ill-judged or insensitive from a minister. For example, William Hague used to be quite waggish in opposition but now that he is Foreign Secretary, dealing with difficult international situations, he has to proceed more circumspectly. Delicate negotiations could be put at risk by a careless aside, however witty, subsequently reported in the press.

MPs who do acquire a reputation for humour rarely go far up the promotion ladder. For many years my favourite Tory MP (it was a very short list of candidates) was the late Sir Julian Critchley, member for Aldershot from 1970 to 1997, whose contributions to Commons debates were a delight. He was on the liberal wing of the party and a severe critic of Mrs Thatcher, referring to her in one article as 'didactic,

tart and obstinate'. He is also credited with describing her as 'the great she-elephant' and for saying that 'She cannot see an institution without hitting it with her handbag'. Thereafter 'handbagging' became a recognised feature of Mrs Thatcher's confrontational style.

Another Tory with a good sense of humour was the writer and entertainer Gyles Brandreth, MP for Chester from 1992 to 1997, and now a regular guest on radio and television programmes. He did achieve a junior ministerial position but was never comfortable in office, finding it hard to take many of the conventions of the political establishment seriously. Having seen the way the honours system works, he is on record as saying he would never accept an award. He also has a welcome capacity to make fun of himself, something few politicians can manage. On losing his seat at the 1997 election, he said 'the one thing I hated about being a politician was my constituents'.

It is harder to find good examples of humour among Labour politicians, partly I suspect because of their default preference for moral earnestness (in its theoretical form, if not its practical application). It was not always the case. The best Labour Government ever – that which held office immediately after the Second World War – contained several ministers capable of trenchant wit.

Aneurin Bevan, in a comment that is still relevant today, once remarked, 'I read the newspapers avidly. It is my one form of continuous fiction'. And, in a reference to Harold Macmillan in 1959, he offered an observation that could equally apply to the modern tendency to rebrand old policies: 'The Prime Minister has an absolute genius for putting flamboyant labels on empty luggage'.

Two other members of the post-war Labour Government, Herbert Morrison and Ernest Bevin, featured in an exchange that reinforces the point that it is not always the opposition who are targets of political humour. Someone had remarked that Morrison was his own worst enemy. Bevin is reputed to have replied, 'Not while I'm alive, 'e ain't'. Morrison's grandson, Peter Mandelson, now graces the benches of the House of Lords.

What about Alan Bennett's claim that the lack of a sense of humour is indicative of a deficiency in human feeling and understanding? I find his argument appealing but I think it requires qualification. People who are unable to see the absurdities of events and situations tend to have a one-dimensional perspective on life and cannot grasp that, viewed from a different angle, those same events and situations invite an alternative interpretation. Similarly, those who are unable to appreciate the fun that can be extracted from language in its many forms are cut off from the rich potential of verbal humour.

For those of us who enjoy the comic aspects of life, these are definite limitations: however, it does not necessarily follow that the possession of a good sense of humour guarantees admirable human qualities. I can think of several people I have

encountered who come across as charming and funny, but who are also unprincipled and ruthless in relation to the pursuit of their own interests. Equally, I can think of people whom I find dull and humourless who are nonetheless deserving of respect for what they do and for the consideration they show to others. So, my conclusion is that, while a sense of humour is a highly desirable quality, it is not in itself a sufficient test of human worth.

Scotland's authoritarian drift

Walter Humes 2014

Imagine this scenario. Public disenchantment with conventional politicians and traditional parties reaches the point where large numbers of people indicate that they are not prepared to vote for any candidates nominated through the usual processes. At the same time, a campaign begins to urge new people, uncontaminated by association with the old order, to stand as independent candidates. (There is already an internet website with the stated aim of encouraging more independent MPs and offering guidance on policy options.)

Let us further assume that enough people put themselves forward to create a degree of anxiety among the established parties. The new candidates would inevitably be a mixed bag, ranging from the sincere and credible to the obsessive and cranky. First time round, most would not be elected and the majority would lose their deposits. But even if a few were successful – perhaps those who already had some local or national profile – it might be enough to start a process that could lead to significant change. Suppose, for example, at a future election, independent candidates held the balance of power and were able to play a role in determining the shape of the government. That would represent a notable shift in the political landscape.

But, it may be objected, isn't all this wildly speculative in the context of the current political scene in Scotland? Well, not entirely, when we consider the tributes that have been paid to Margo MacDonald, who died last week. After famously falling out with the SNP, she was elected three times as an independent MSP by the voters in Lothian. Although some of the policies which she espoused have not been introduced (such as her proposals on assisted dying for the terminally ill), her contribution to public debate has been seen as much more impressive than that of many party politicians.

The regard in which she was held depended too on her personal qualities. She was viewed as a woman of courage and integrity, who was not prepared to sell her soul for some titbit of political preferment. Contrast that with the careerists who would perform any contortion if it secured a minor ministerial or shadow cabinet post.

Another respected Scottish figure who was elected as an independent MSP was Dennis Canavan, the member for Falkirk West from 1999 to 2007 (following a long career as a Westminster MP). When New Labour rejected him as a Holyrood candidate, despite overwhelming support from his local party, Canavan stood as an independent, securing the highest majority of any MSP in the 1999 election, a feat he repeated in 2003.

The achievements of MacDonald and Canavan show that there is a public appetite for politicians of principle who are prepared to reject the groupthink of party machines and appeal directly to the electorate on the basis of their track record. It would certainly be harder for complete newcomers to attract that kind of support but it would only take a few successes for the traditional pattern, controlled by party apparatchiks, to be rendered unstable.

There is another reason why an increase in the number of independent MPs and MSPs would be desirable. It would be healthy for democracy and a focus for resistance to authoritarianism. One of Margo MacDonald's complaints about the direction in which the SNP was heading was that it was showing signs of 'control-freakery'. The leadership was, in her view, increasingly intolerant of anyone who dared to question the official party line. Her dissent perhaps explains why she was pushed down the SNP candidates' list, a move that led her to part company with the nationalists and stand as an independent.

In the run-up to the referendum in September, the dangers of authoritarianism have received less attention than they deserve. It is not difficult to construct a narrative of recent political developments which suggest an alarming centralist drift in a number of policy areas.

First, we have had the restructuring of important organisations (Police Scotland, Creative Scotland, Education Scotland), all with a similar 'brand' which seems to imply that 'Scottishness' in itself is a guarantee of quality. Then we have had the emasculation of local government, recently reflected in the internal disputes within the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. Add to that the abolition of the Administrative Justice and Tribunals Council in August 2013 and its replacement by a powerless interim advisory committee. This demonstrates the unwillingness of the Scottish Government to address the high levels of public dissatisfaction with regulatory bodies such as the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

The enfeebled state of the Scottish press and BBC Scotland means that these trends are not sufficiently investigated or reported. That leaves the way open for government spokespersons to issue unchallenged press releases that often bear the hallmark of Orwellian 'Newspeak'. All that is missing is a sinister leadership cult, a danger that is not mitigated by the failure of the opposition parties to put up much of a show in challenging the First Minister's confident assertions.

If Scotland votes in favour of independence, how can we ensure that the risks of authoritarianism are avoided? Some more MSPs of the calibre of Margo MacDonald and Dennis Canavan would certainly help, but it would not be sufficient on its own. Our key institutions, including the universities and the law, would have to show much more intellectual courage in questioning the soft consensus and lazy rhetoric which characterises so much of public discourse in Scotland. The various professional establishments, which routinely invoke concepts such as participation

and partnership, but which pursue policies driven by self-interest, would need to be subjected to sustained, critical interrogation. For that to happen will require new people, new voices, new arenas of debate.

One of the lessons of history is that movements which advance under the banner of freedom often soon reveal an oppressive agenda of control. An independent Scotland will not flourish unless there are sufficient individuals (supported by openminded organisations) who dare to challenge the authoritarian drift of existing political institutions.

The rapt followers of Scotland's new establishment

Walter Humes 2014

Some years ago, a friend of mine boasted that he had once kissed Margaret Thatcher.

'Where?', asked a woman in the company, keen to establish the precise degree of intimacy involved in the encounter.

'In Downing Street,' was the disappointing reply.

By some curious quirk of mental association, this exchange came to mind as I witnessed the embrace of Alex Salmond and Nicola Sturgeon on the platform of the SNP conference in Perth, marking the passing on of the leadership baton. It was a carefully choreographed occasion, as party conferences have regrettably become, with each step under the control of event managers who find their job satisfaction in presentation rather than substance, in image projection rather than encounters with reality.

Mr Salmond is always a good turn and his Perth speech was no exception, with a finely crafted mixture of well-aimed shafts of wit, optimistic predictions and an interpretation of the referendum result that appealed to his followers. His reference to 'the Westminster gang' was delivered in a tone (and with a facial expression) that revealed the depths of his continuing anger against the UK political establishment. If he does decide to stand as an MP, as has been suggested, we can look forward to some forthright contributions in the House of Commons.

His own party has, of course, become the new political establishment in Scotland, without showing much awareness that it displays many of the same tendencies as the old guard in London (arrogance, misrepresentation, cronyism). The exercise of power tends to eliminate any pre-existing facility for self-criticism.

All political conferences have become predictable affairs, with most of the decisions being stitched up by the executive in advance. I remember when speakers on the left-wing of the Labour Party and the right-wing of the Tory Party could inject life into debates, even if they were advancing arguments that had little chance of becoming official policy. They forced the leaders to defend the motions that were being recommended and encouraged a level of intellectual engagement that is rarely seen today. Tight control of proceedings by party officials has ensured that anyone who might go 'off message' gets very little opportunity to present an alternative viewpoint. This may be partly why sections within the Tory Party are finding the dubious allure of UKIP rather appealing.

It is sometimes more interesting to observe the audience at party conferences than to attend to the speakers. Those delegates who begin to nod off have often drifted

into the most sensible option by default. Senior party figures sitting in the front rows cannot be seen to do this, but just occasionally they are caught off-guard making an aside to a neighbour, accompanied by a look which suggests less than wholehearted approval for the person on the platform. They may try to compensate for their indiscretion by cheering enthusiastically when their colleague reaches the end of his or her address.

But it is the general audience of party supporters that deserves most attention – those enthusiasts who listen with devoted attention and applaud at all the right places with the predictability of Pavlov's dogs. Their expressions are similar to those seen at revivalist meetings, where the faithful gaze in rapt wonder at the preacher, believing without question the version of the gospel that is being propounded. Perhaps the recent rise in SNP membership could be compared to the effects of the Billy Graham crusade of the 1950s. Each age has its own illusions.

The behaviour of political audiences has attracted the interest of psychologists. It is a complex field and there are competing theories which seek to explain different types of crowd behaviour. Totalitarian regimes have often used massed rallies as a means of instilling conformity and fear into the population, promoting an ideology which subjugates individuals and appealing to some perverse notion of 'higher' collective identity. In less controlled contexts, crowds can provide cover for behaviour that individuals might be disinclined to engage in without the anonymity provided by large numbers (the looting of shops during riots springs to mind).

Sometimes crowds can behave in ways that seem to be beyond rational explanation. One of the strangest examples was the public reaction to the death of Princess Diana in 1997, which some observers described as a form of mass hysteria. There was a critical point when the nation seemed to be on the edge of turning against the Queen and the royal family, who were perceived as having shown a lack of humanity following the tragedy.

Less dramatic events are also revealing in relation to crowd behaviour. On the few occasions when I have attended professional football matches, I have usually found the conduct of supporters more interesting than the spectacle on the pitch. Before play begins, there is a fair amount of good-natured banter and some entertaining comments by those aspiring to a career as a stand-up comic. But when the whistle goes, it all becomes deadly serious. Unwelcome refereeing decisions may provoke remarks which call into question the parentage or sexuality of the match officials.

Crude partisanship is the order of the day. 'Professional' fouls committed by one's own team are considered entirely justifiable, while the same behaviour by the opposition is roundly condemned. This blatant display of double standards perhaps explains why so many politicians proclaim allegiance to a favoured team. Their unethical behaviour in the political domain is somehow validated by gamesmanship on the sporting field.

Regular readers of my articles will have rightly concluded that I am not the greatest admirer of our political classes, whether UK or Scottish. However, when watching reports of the mid-term election results in the United States a couple of weeks ago, I had an unsettling moment which made me wonder if our lot were not so bad after all. It was really rather scary seeing a succession of right-wing Republican zealots mouthing triumphalist slogans and being cheered on by hyperventilating crowds, some of whom bore expressions that suggested the need for psychiatric intervention. As for the politicians, their impeccable grooming and the perfection of their overwhitened teeth made me reflect on what their pictures in the attic must look like.

The image of my friend kissing Mrs Thatcher has kept re-surfacing as I have been writing this piece. I have never visited 10 Downing Street but I have met a number of politicians over the years and have been a guest at Bute House, the official residence of Scotland's First Minister (albeit before the current administration assumed office). Although the meeting I attended took place under Chatham House rules, which commit participants to confidentiality, I think I can reveal one feature of the occasion without attracting the attention of the intelligence services. No kissing took place.

What does the SNP stand for?

Gerry Hassan 2016

One party stands head and shoulders above all others in Scotland – the Scottish National Party. It has got there through its own efforts, hard work and virtues, along with the numerous mistakes and weaknesses of its opponents. Scottish Labour's long car crash was part tragedy, part comedy, but mostly of its own making. If it ever has an obituary, it will say: 'died at its own hands'. The Scottish Tories have been toxic for a generation, even seen as un-Scottish and 'alien', a phenomenon only slowly beginning to change.

This then begs the question: nine years into office, what do the SNP and Nicola Sturgeon stand for? What kind of Scotland do they wish to bring about, bar one that is independent and self-governing? For some, these latter qualities are enough, based for them on principle, but for many, they are abstracts which need further detail and should be the means to an end of wider economic and social change, not an end in itself.

In many respects, the last nine years of the SNP in office have been the years of light lifting, considering the disarray and weaknesses of their opponents. It has been easy to point the fingers at 'London Labour', even worse 'Red Tories', and the grip of Westminster. Things aren't always going to be so easy: opponents will be less incompetent, incumbents make mistakes, more powers are coming to the parliament, and a decade of public spending cuts will take their toll.

Now, the conventional answer to this question is that the SNP is a modern, centreleft, social democratic party. Whenever one writes of the crisis of social democracy across Europe and the entire developed world, some in the SNP reply that you haven't factored in the success and achievements of the nationalists.

Social democracy everywhere is in a terrible state: battered by three decades of economic deregulation, social change and the weakening of working-class collectivism and solidarity, and unable to deal with the pressures of globalisation, instability and immigration, which has seen a new wave of ugly populism and xenophobia. Not one traditional social democratic party in Europe has been able to ride these tigers and remain popular and true to a centre-left politics – not the French, the Germans, or even the Swedes or Norwegians. The emergence of a populist new left such as Syriza in Greece has confronted the realities of what has been seen in Athens as the fiscal fascism of Berlin and Brussels.

We are meant to believe that Scotland, in the form of the SNP, has bucked these trends and provided a solitary oasis in this desert of the left. Apart from its smugness and insularity, it isn't completely true. The SNP has much to be proud of in its history and office, but it hasn't managed to yet buck global realities.

The SNP is not in its heart a social democratic party. The clue is in the name: Scottish National Party. It is a party whose first and foremost aim is Scottish self-government, sometimes expressed as independence; at other points, as statehood, the latter of which can at times be expressed more flexibly.

Social democracy has become a secondary set of ideas to the SNP – which the party came somewhat late to in both its history and that of the centre-left – first beginning in the 1970s, and more convincingly in the 1980s. This has had a number of consequences rarely reflected upon: one of which is that this late conversion meant the SNP has always had a superficial and deeply unphilosophical relationship with this tradition. And this has mattered more and more, as social democracy since the early 1980s has been in retreat.

All across Europe and the developed world for the last three decades debates have raged about how the centre-left should adapt and respond to the great changes in our societies. How does social democracy respond to an age of greater individualism, choice and aspiration? What is the most relevant response to greater inequality, the super-rich and left behind? How can public services meet increased demand, both in terms of expectations and demographics, and allow people to have more say? And how does the centre-left make a politics of collective identities once class and worker identities have weakened, and that of consumer and numerous hybrid-identities emerged?

In none of these debates and many more has the centre-left anywhere found convincing answers. This is not to argue that the right has had all the answers. Indeed, it hasn't, but it has, unlike the left, been able to posit a vision of the economy and the future based on going with the grain of mega-change (deindustrialisation, service economy, deregulation, financialisation). That this worldview is now falling apart, and in places is in tatters, shows the paucity and crises of the centre-left.

Scotland and the SNP aren't immune to all of the above. Nor have we somehow, unlike elsewhere, stumbled upon the answers. To be fair, much of this isn't just the responsibility of the nationalists. Scottish Labour dominated our country for 50 years and while it did many big things, it didn't exactly prosper in the realm of ideas. Former Labour minister Wendy Alexander once said that Scottish Labour hadn't had an idea since 1906; I always thought that was a bit hard, and it had a few in the 1920s, but you get the point. Scottish mainstream social democracy just hasn't done ideas and intellectualism: instead, its dominant strand has been deeply pragmatic.

Wait you might say, isn't this just a 'bash the SNP' argument? What about the list: free care for the elderly, no tuition fees, the council tax freeze and such like? First, all of these big ticket items are redistributive, not to those poorer or on below-average incomes, but those on above-average incomes. Second, the case is often put that

Scotland stands proudly for universalism, unlike England. But this ignores that universalism per se involves choices and selectivity. Scotland isn't a land of milk and honey, and we cannot afford to have universal universalism, so arguing for the above policies means putting them above others. In short, it means putting middle-class and affluent interests ahead of those who are poorer and on lower incomes, and in typical Scottish traditions, dressing it up as 'progressive'.

The incantation of free care for the elderly and no tuition fees has become almost the holy grail of Scottish politics. Just as at the last UK election, Ed Miliband decided for posterity to engrave his six-point plan into granite, in what became known as the 'Ed Stone', maybe the SNP could do the same. Why stop at Alex Salmond's self-congratulation stone about no tuition fees: 'the rocks will melt with the sun before I allow tuition fees'? Why not raise your aspiration and reach for your very own 'Ed Stone'; indeed it could be our own 'Eck Stone', praising the achievements of our own dear former leader? That is the logical conclusion of a politics of past achievements, if you are not thinking about future choices.

To be more serious, the SNP has to come up with some answers for what kind of Scotland it wants – beyond independence and the very short mantra of achievements. Apparently, there is to be a summer of independence, with SNP and Yes voters touring the nation (minus its former leader, Stewart Hosie), reigniting the cause of independence. Two wee problems with this are that there is no independence offer on the table, the 2014 one being dead in the water; and with that being the case, what sort of future is Scotland being offered, beyond the principle of independence?

A final thought. Scotland is centre-left and the SNP centre-leftish. This being the case, is it not possible to start thinking, pushing and creating an actual detailed politics of the centre-left? At the moment, a whole swathe of Scottish respectable society, from the commentariat, to academia, professional bodies and the voluntary sector, have provided a 'left cover' for the SNP's centrish-soft-leftish politics.

That was fine and understandable in the early days of the SNP in office, when everything was fresh and exciting, but nine years in it isn't good enough. What chance that the Scotland which prides itself on being centre-left, radical, curious, and interested in ideas and debate, could actually contribute in some small way to the reinvention of social democracy? It is worth asking and even trying, and who knows might actually assist the SNP in answering some of the big questions.

What should I do about Jeremy?

Bill Paterson (Actor, London) 2016

I've always liked Jeremy Corbyn. He's been my MP for the 32 years I've lived in Islington North. For 10 of those years he lived just a few doors away in a Victorian street on the very northern edge of his constituency. On many a morning we chatted on the pavement as I came back from taking the kids to school and he headed down to the tube and to Westminster.

I occasionally marched behind him on local campaigns against cuts at the Whittington Hospital and transport issues, and I was a minor supporting act in events for CND and against the Iraq war, sometimes marching as far as the plinth beneath Nelson's Column.

Not once have I ever considered voting for anyone other than this conscientious and dedicated MP, and our pavement chats were all about fighting the Tory Government's assaults on everything that the Labour Party had put in place since our childhoods. I claimed to be better qualified in this field as I was seven weeks old when Clem Attlee came to power in 1945, whereas Jeremy had missed the first four years.

We talked of the unbridled power of capital then running amok through the City of London just a few tube stops away. We talked of the poll tax and the struggle against the privatisation of public services that was then in full swing under John Major. On every subject I tended to agree with him. Especially that the radical gains of the Attlee Government that had given us both so much were being dismantled ruthlessly on a daily basis. He saw it in the Commons at horrifyingly close range, even if always from the very back of the backbenches. Nevertheless, there was one issue we tended to skip over. It was the then vexed issue of residents parking in our own streets.

I would apologise for bringing up the subject and say that, whilst it wasn't as important as the plight of the Sandinistas or support for the PLO, it mattered a great deal locally. At this, Jeremy tended to glaze over. He was not a car person. He rode a bike, he used public transport and he walked. I too did all of these things, but I also drove a car and that, I think, made me suspect in Jeremy's eyes. He seemed to regard residents parking as a bourgeois issue far removed from the concerns of working people. In this, of course, he was wrong.

At that time our streets were almost the last available free parking in Islington for commuters to leave cars for days, sometimes weeks, at a stretch, and head to the tube or the hospital. We were clogged with double parking and cars parked across corners and junctions. There was even a local Arthur Daley who used the streets as free storage space for his wrecks.

Far from it being purely a car owners' problem, the issue of residents' parking had a direct bearing on the wellbeing of everyone who stepped over their front doorstep. From toddlers in their buggies to the elderly, it blighted lives and it took years of divisive campaigning to eventually clear the streets of unrestricted commuter parking. We even improved life for shift workers at the hospital by fighting for sympathetic controlled hours. However, as it didn't tick one of his boxes, I don't recall our MP taking any part in the campaign. It was a small thing but it gave the first niggling indication that while Jeremy was very good at being a thorn in the flesh, he tended to avoid being the actual flesh.

He had strong principles and favoured a seamless set of received positions unchanged by time and the compromise of office, but what did it matter? He was a much admired campaigning MP. He was never going to be invited into office. He was certainly never going to be leader of the Labour Party.

He would never need to ponder what Clem Attlee would have done, whereas I got the chance to do just that in 2009 when I played the great man alongside Brendan Gleeson's Churchill in *Into The Storm* on ITV. Then, last year, it happened. Suddenly Jeremy Corbyn's name was on the ballot paper for Labour Party leader. I was stunned, and at the same time, delighted. I found myself encouraging my sceptical friends to support this breath of fresh air from the left, though deep down I wondered if Jeremy really wanted the job. After all, as far as I knew, he had studiously avoided any position in government during all of his 30-odd years in parliament.

So when the chips were down, could he be like my hero Clem? Could he be a man, bold enough to nationalise the coal, steel and rail industries, yet willing to deal evenhandedly with a local issue that didn't interest him? Could he, like Major Attlee, see no contradiction in serving with distinction throughout the First World War, secretly setting up Britain's nuclear arsenal in the 1940s, yet confronting the private ownership of major industries and setting up the NHS?

Could he sing the words of the national anthem as gustily as he sang *The Red Flag* and *The Internationale*? Clem Attlee did all these contradictory things. He was a man for all seasons but in this social media driven age, contradictions are no longer permitted.

So far, the signs haven't been encouraging. Locally, Jeremy fell at the first hurdle when he slept his way through the consultation for a major road upheaval likely to marinate our area in extra pollution and rat-runs simply because the buzzwords 'cycle lanes' and 'affordable housing' allowed him to overlook the scheme's glaring faults. The consultation for this scheme, which led all the way to the courts, has made Jeremy's phrase 'democratic deficit' echo emptily round our streets.

We gave him the benefit of the doubt that understandably his attention was elsewhere, but that wee niggle resurfaced and came back with a vengeance over the EU referendum campaign. Nothing in Jeremy's history would have made you expect

him to support Britain remaining in the EU and the Remain campaign must have been miserable for him. It certainly looked that way.

The 75% Remain vote in Islington was one of the highest in the UK but you wouldn't have guessed that from Jeremy's reaction on the 24 June when he called for Article 50 to be immediately invoked. On that memorable Friday, he managed to look much more at ease than his Islington neighbour Boris (Johnson). Jeremy was now speaking to a constituency far away from north London and today the burning question is whether that constituency is big enough to put a Labour Government back into power.

So this week I have my £25 vote for the leader. Do I give it to my long-term diligent MP, whose aims I admire but whose delivery sometimes disappoints, or do I vote for an even more untested apparatchik simply because his colleagues think he might save their necks, along with the Labour Party's? It's a dilemma that might even have taxed Clem Attlee.

Jeremy Corbyn was re-elected, with or without the support of Bill Paterson

After truth

Eileen Reid 2016

Every party fighting the 2016 Scottish election had at least one policy I supported. Even the Tories had one. I would have loved to have been able to select a la carte from the smorgasbord of different political views from income tax increases to the legalisation of medicinal cannabis. Alas, our party political system does not allow this.

Just as perturbing was the realisation that it's best to keep politically ecumenical attitudes to yourself: don't for god's sake even think about expressing them on social media lest the accusation of treachery be dumped on your disloyal noggin. No-one trusts those who are neither fish nor fowl.

There is something fundamentally amiss with the idea that one political party can contain your emotional, doctrinal and intellectual accretions developed and honed over a lifetime. And, I'd wager, if we were honest, many would confess to having doubts about at least some aspects of our party's policies. Such doubts – in our own political judgement and in others – are partly assuaged by employing circumstantial ad hominems. Arguing ad hominem is always logically fallacious, but its psychological and rhetorical effectiveness is undeniable and often satisfying.

Ad hominem arguments come in two forms: the more famous abusive ad hominem, and the less well known but more subtle circumstantial ad hominem. In both cases, attention is distracted from the truth or falsity of a proposition, or from the merits or demerits of a particular policy, and redirected onto features of those proposing it. Put simply, ad hominem argues not about the merits of the case, but about the merits of the person or party making the case, which leads to all kinds of bizarre hypocrisies.

For example, if I say that 'so-and-so' is a shifty, scurrilous wag and should not be believed or his advice followed, then I have offered up an abusive ad hominem; this is a fallacious argument because the character of, let's call him 'Donald', is logically unrelated to the truth or falsity of his pronouncements. If what he says is false, it is not because Donald is shifty, but because reality is not as he describes it, and the world is not organised in a way that his advice is likely to lead to effective action.

The circumstantial ad hominem is more subtle than the abusive version, but more pernicious. Say in the course of a discussion I claim that renewing Trident is wrong. You then say you aren't so sure. If I respond by claiming that you ought to believe that renewing Trident is a mistake because that is SNP policy and you are a member of the SNP, then I have offered up a circumstantial ad hominem. This is a fallacious

argument because the wisdom or folly of the policy is logically unrelated to your political persuasion. Presumably, the prudence or folly of the policy depends on geopolitical states of affairs which having nothing to do with a person's political affiliations. But since it is always embarrassing to be accused of not supporting party policy, you are likely to back down.

That ad hominem arguments are fallacious is well known. 'Don't play the man' is a common refrain or admonition. Why, then, do they pervade political commentary, amplified perfectly by social media? Perhaps this is because political discussions in this so-called 'post-truth' era are rarely about establishing the truth of a belief or even the wisdom of a policy. Political claims, discussions and 'debates' are about getting someone to behave as though a belief were true or a policy prudent, and that means convincing people by whatever means available. And, in this context, actual truth or prudence is only tendentiously related to the arguments employed. Boris Johnson's claim that £350m per week would be allocated to the NHS following Brexit is an egregious recent example: a downright lie, but rhetorical dynamite.

In a conspiratorial and suspicious age, we know only too well that arguments are usually tools of rhetorical manipulation. Strong arguments rarely change minds these days because no-one wants to be 'duped'. In fact, things have gone so far that we no longer expect our politicians to say things they actually believe to be true. But, because of the suspicion that speakers have ulterior motives and hidden agendas, there is every reason to believe that the character of a speaker may well be more important that what they actually say.

In such cases, we can avoid being duped if we are careful enough to identify the source of the belief or policy recommendation. If the belief comes from a reliable source, namely one whose interests align with mine, then I can safely consider it. If the source lies in someone whose interests are not aligned with mine, then I consider his proposals at my peril. Let's assume 'Donald' is Donald Trump. I loathe this politician to the point that I cannot bear to listen to him talk at all. I know this refusal to believe a single word that emanates from his tiny, huge mouth is a failing – in me. This is an extreme example, but it is of the essence of so-called 'post-truth' politics.

In the context of post-truth politics – and, really, we've been here since Thucydides – ad hominem arguments make perfect sense. When trust has broken down and interests are in play, ad hominem arguments are particularly effective. It was only a few years ago that Onora O'Neil was insisting on the importance of trust in the political life of a nation (*A Question of Trust*, 2002 Reith Lectures). The current season of post-truth politics and the prevalence of ad hominem arguments only underline how right she was. Expect more of the same until some measure of trust is restored in political discourse.

Pessimistically, I don't see that happening any time soon, so I'll need to keep my ecumenical views to myself and try harder, much harder, to avoid the ad hominem.

Scotland the bold or Scotland the timid?

Gerry Hassan 2016

Is Scotland really special? Are we a land that has bucked the retreat of the centre-left and social democracy, and proven itself immune to the right-wing populism sweeping the west from Brexit to Trump?

Significant parts of Scottish opinion are always looking for any reason to jump on a wha's like us exceptionalism: one which invokes our morality, values and commitment to social justice, alongside our collective opposition to all things evil, from Thatcherism and Blairism to neo-liberalism.

The truth is rather different. Scotland is both different and not that different, in comparison to the rest of the UK. Our social democracy isn't immune from the dynamics that have weakened it elsewhere, and should not be confused with the electoral strength of the SNP – just as before it shouldn't be equated with the oncedominance of the Scottish Labour Party.

Last week, BBC Scotland ran a series called *Unequal Scotland*. In places it was good and more substantive and serious than most of BBC Scotland's recent output. It itemised the scandalous state of much of the country in terms of education, health, income, wealth and land. It pictured a country where little real progress has been made on reducing inequalities or widening opportunities since the advent of the Scottish Parliament – coming up for nearly two decades ago.

Many of these dynamics – the 24-year health gap between rich and poor, the educational apartheid, the fact that the 10% wealthiest households have 44% of the nation's wealth while the poorest 10% of households have a mere 9%, the grotesque patterns of private land ownership – have built up over decades (and in the latter over centuries) and take time to change. But they cannot all be blamed on Westminster, while the Scottish Government is allowed to take no responsibility.

At the end of last week, Angela Constance, Scottish communities minister, was interviewed on *Good Morning Scotland* and *Reporting Scotland* in response to the series. She spoke the language of good intentions, eager to show how she wanted to do things. But, overall, what came over was the caution and timidity, and sadly, the hollowness of much of what she said. SNP proposals were thus presented as 'bold and radical' – such as the 'Fairer Scotland Action Plan' and minor changes to the council tax.

This jarred with reality so much on *Reporting Scotland* that even the usually mild-mannered Sally Magnusson challenged her, observing that continuing to blame Westminster was 'the old game', before making the point that 'What is required of the Scottish Government now, according to our experts, is bold, imaginative moves of

the sort that the cautious, incremental steps that the Scottish Government takes is not meeting in any way at all'.

Two days later, on the BBC programme *Sunday Politics Scotland*, Scottish transport minister Humza Yousaf had to explain the shambles of the ScotRail franchise award to Abellio. Yousaf, once seen as an SNP highflyer and potential future leader, struggled to find a coherent line under scrutiny or suggest any substantive plan. Indeed, he even refused to indicate his support for nationalising the railways; something Corbyn's Labour are now committed to.

Two examples. What they indicate is that the SNP is beginning to struggle to find a language to explain the Scotland it governs and is responsible for. It has taken nine and a half years for this situation to slowly emerge, and I predict that we will see more of this, and that this is the future face of Scottish politics.

Over the course of this near-decade, the SNP has been given a blank cheque by a large part of society. This is with the qualification that part of the country's press – the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Telegraph* and *Daily Express* – have waged constant war on the Nats. This, however has been part of the overall dynamic, because it has allowed SNP loyalists to say that we cannot engage in any proper debate or criticism, because our enemies are at the gates.

One area where the SNP has been most trusted is social justice. The appeal of Yes and the left have been seen as synonymous by the likes of Tommy Sheppard and Jeane Freeman. Yet, this is a mixture of aspiration and default: the latter assuming that the Yes argument trumps the No in the indyref and since then, given the conspicuous problems of the UK and absence of social justice.

Writing and researching my new book, *Scotland the Bold* I asked more than 80 people from all walks of life for policy suggestions for a more equal, fairer country. From a variety of informed and passionate suggestions, I developed a top list of 64 to include in the book. What was very striking was the tone of the contributions, for running through many of them was a mild but discernible disappointment with the SNP in office.

This shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone: a sense of disappointment after nine and a half years in office. This period has been marked by three distinct periods. First, the SNP won its first national election and minority government, followed by majority government and the high drama of the indyref, and finally, the wide appeal and reach (beyond just SNP supporters) of Nicola Sturgeon. All of these periods have kept the momentum going, combined with major ineptness from opposition parties.

But the laws of political gravity are never suspended forever. The SNP has changed the face of Scotland and Scottish politics. But somehow the party, which by its efforts and opposition incompetence has got itself into a period of dominance and superiority, has to learn a different kind of politics – one less imperial and condescending and much more interested in detail and results.

The limits of the SNP in office are now becoming more clear. Apart from Nicola Sturgeon and John Swinney, the talent in government isn't that deep or impressive. A generation of ministers such as Angela Constance, Humza Yousaf and Derek Mackay have only known the SNP on the rise as elected politicians, and are likely to struggle to adapt to a world of more scrutiny and turbulence.

There is even a wider, longer story about the shortcomings of the Scottish Parliament and experience of devolution. By next year, Holyrood will have been in existence for 18 years: eight years of Labour (with the Lib Dems) and 10 years of the SNP in office. That's a respectable enough period to be able to make an assessment.

Over that period, no real substantive change has taken place on social justice which has addressed poverty and inequality and improved the lives of those most disadvantaged in our country. Neither Labour nor the SNP in substantial periods in office has done anything much to redistribute income or wealth. Instead, both have been informed by the conceit that they embody 'social justice': an attitude which built up problems for Labour, and will do so again for the SNP.

Whatever their differences on the constitution, Scottish Labour and the SNP have always been more similar than they like to pretend. They have both represented and given voice to an insider, managerial, technocratic vision of Scotland, while wrapping it with a social democratic sentiment. Neither has shown any desire to shake up this state of affairs and to give voice to outsiders or those who don't fit into professional, institutional Scotland.

The assumptions of insider Scotland are that their good intentions, eagerness to launch initiatives, alongside their opposition to Westminster-imposed neo-liberalism and austerity, is enough. And that somehow all this adds up, almost as an article of faith, to making progress towards a fairer, more equal, and better Scotland, even if its final destination is a little hazy and light on detail.

Nearly all of Scotland's political parties, professions and interest groups buy into this. For many in mainstream Scotland – such as the political commentator Iain Macwhirter writing in this weekend's *Sunday Herald* – the fact, as he observed, that 'the political parties in Scotland are all pretty much on the same political page' is cause for celebration. He goes on to say that 'Labour, SNP, Lib Dems, Greens and even many Tories are broadly internationalist, support EU membership and... are committed to an active, interventionist state, social housing, economic equality, comprehensive education, a state-provided national health service, as well as a host of things which are rarely discussed because there is no dispute...'.

Much of the above is to be applauded. Scotland has chosen not to go down the route of the Brexit vandals and market determinists who have caused such mayhem turning large parts of English society upside down. But while we can rejoice at this, does this state really mean we close our eyes to our own inadequacies and pretend that everything is fine?

Are we really content to portray our timid, defensive social democracy as being up to the challenges of our age? Do we really want to tell ourselves selective and comforting stories that are clearly at variance with the truth? When, for example, was the last time any serious Scottish politician showed the slightest interest or support for economic equality? Maybe around about 1975 and Gordon Brown's *The Red Paper* would be an answer.

There are many things to be proud of in Scotland in recent decades, but it doesn't help us to invoke a dreamland and land of care, compassion and equality, which clearly does not exist. Who, we have to ask, gains from this? The true believers of the SNP and independence for one, but also the numerous elites and vested interest groups, from the corporates to land owners and the public sector, who see only rhetoric and micro-initiatives but little proposed substantive change.

This status quo Scotland has been the way that things have been done for years in this land. But change is coming, aided by public spending pressures, demographics, and the decline of deference. Yes, we should pride ourselves on the smaller appeal of Brexit Euroscepticism, xenophobia or Trump-like populism, but the mild-mannered, unadventurous spirit of first Labour, and now the SNP, doesn't capture the spirit of our times. On top of this is what Andrew Tickell has rightly called in *The Times* a sort of 'zombie politics' of the kind present in the indyref and still in existence – particularly in SNP-Tory competition – which is all about positioning and partisanship and little else.

The SNP is caught continually trying to prove its respectability and not frighten the horses in order, it says, to create the conditions to win a second indyref. But in fact, this timorous social democracy is its true character, as it was of Labour. It is time to stop talking about a politics of 'the left' or any genuine, radical social democracy. Instead, this is a centrist politics of, at best, the near-left, more in common with Hillary Clinton and François Hollande than we would like to imagine, minus the scandals and scale.

Politicians such as Clinton and Hollande have bent and compromised to the winds of globalisation and today's world, and ended up standing for very little than the dominant order. We are kidding ourselves if we think our politicians are really that different and removed from such concerns. We are, it seems, different. But not *that* different. We need to ask ourselves if this is who we are happy to be. Being honest about this state of affairs would be a start. Do we really want to be Scotland the Bold or are we content to kid ourselves and continue to be Scotland the Timid?

At the Turkish barber's

Kenneth Roy 2016

Sunday 11am, and the crowds are flocking into the West Kirk for morning service in the parish of Wetherspoons. From the look of it, the rest of the town centre could be suffering the effects of a controlled nuclear explosion, or just years of the council tax freeze.

Amidst the desolation of Scotland on Sunday (honestly, what a name for a newspaper) there is a light – or rather a rotating blood-red pole. The Turkish barber's is open and cutting.

Progress is slow. The occupant of the first chair, having recently been doused by a water dispenser, has his face covered in a blue towel. The occupant of the second, who has had prongs inserted in each of his nostrils, seems to be undergoing a minor surgical procedure.

I think of fleeing. I do flee briefly – across the street to the aromatic pleasure zone known as the Marks and Spencer food hall. But something draws me back to the Turkish barber's; a kind of horrid fascination perhaps. That, and the urgent need for a haircut.

The shop exudes a brooding male atmosphere. It would take Donald J Trump, proprietor of the posh hotel down the coast from here, to lighten the Sabbath mood with his jolly locker-room talk of waterboarding and women, not necessarily in that order.

Instead, it falls to Gordon Brewer to break the silence. I remember being interviewed by Mr Brewer once or twice when he did the graveyard shift on *Newsnight Scotland*. His laidback style at that late hour was engaging, even infectious. But today, in the space above my head, he sounds relatively animated.

I have been summoned to chair 1, vacated during my absence by the man in the blue towel.

'Cut it fairly short,' I advise with as much assurance as it is possible to muster in an environment where nasal incisions go with the territory.

The barber nods. We exchange scarcely a word for the next 20 minutes, but no worries: I have Gordon Brewer for company. He is fronting a programme about Scottish politics. The SNP conference has just ended and the talk is all about 'hard Brexit' and 'indyref2', terms which make me run to the hills. I'm doing a lot of running to the hills these days.

The scene cuts from the studio to a river bank on Tayside. The new deputy leader of Scotland's ruling party, Angus Robertson, is standing there, quite close to water's

edge, looking a little cold, his scarf tied in a fetching Hoxton knot. I hadn't come across Mr Robertson before. He affects an air of sweet reasonableness, slightly reminiscent of early Eck before the messianic certainty became all-consuming.

He is telling Gordon Brewer that he 'genuinely' hopes – yes, I'm sure I heard the word 'genuinely' – that his party's demands on 'Brexit' will be met, in this way avoiding the need for 'indyref2'. His undertaking – given in the serene knowledge that the more extreme demands will never be met, thus clearing the way for 'indyref2' – is received at the Turkish barber's without comment, indeed with every indication of mute apathy.

I wonder how many of the punters – the patient with the prongs up his nostrils, the narcissist who's just been released into the community with a blue towel over his head, the economic migrants running the joint, to say nothing of the sad anoraks who are addicted to BBC Scotland's weekly exhibition of human vanity – find Angus Robertson as agreeably anaesthetic as I do myself.

But then a diversion occurs: a relief from the monotony of Mr Robertson's self-confessed genuineness. The line cracks up. It cracks up so badly that we might as well rename it the UK Independence Party. Mr Brewer can hear every word that Mr Robertson utters, but Mr Robertson, alone on his river bank, is picking up only the occasional word or phrase in his earpiece.

For a politician, this is as close to perfection as it gets. The deputy leader is free to ramble at will, answering what he imagines to have been Mr Brewer's questions, which invariably turn out to be his own preferred questions. This is anyway what you do if you're a politician, but to be given carte-blanche by a technical hitch may be a sign from the heavens that God is a closet Yes voter.

He is followed by Ian Murray, who is introduced as Scotland's only Labour MP, a stunning statement if you pause to think about it. Mr Brewer wants to know why he (Ian Murray) isn't in the shadow cabinet. (Apparently, the non-job of shadow secretary of state for Scotland has been allotted to someone called Dave from down south.) It is a reasonable enough question, but I have forgotten Mr Murray's reply. Scotland's only Labour MP says nothing memorable or even mildly remarkable, and says it at length.

When he is asked repeatedly if Jeremy Corbyn will win the next General Election, he is at his most prolix.

'Is that a roundabout way of saying No?', interjects Mr Brewer, in his sharpest jab of the encounter. At that moment, the hairdryer at the adjoining chair begins to blow and Mr Murray's response is lost to history. History may not have missed much.

It appears that waxing the nostrils with the use of prongs facilitates the removal of much nasty, unwanted hair. As I sit here, a helpless captive of Mr Brewer's guests, it occurs to me that there might be a case for sticking prongs in the brains of politicians in the hope of extracting all that nasty, unwanted platitude. It could be worth a medical experiment, especially if it carried a high degree of risk.

It is over. The Turkish barber is done with me. There is just time to catch the next of Mr Brewer's subjects, a young woman brightly anticipating 'indyref2' and a venerable gent by the name of Campbell Gunn, who looks unexpectedly human considering that he spent so much of his career in the service of DC Thomson. He too is preoccupied by 'indyref2'. He is convinced it is going to happen. He just doesn't know when. Nor does 'Nicola', as he describes her with easy familiarity. How cosy and knowing it all is.

I look at myself in the mirror. In addition to all the familiar problems, I have acquired a quiff which confers an unnerving resemblance to a distant, long-dead relative, Dodie Sprunt, whose surname was of an obscure Dutch origin. Suddenly, I am back in the Bonnybridge of the 1950s, when life felt settled, authority figures were respected, the barbers were Scottish (a Mr Hall in our village, stick-thin, a severe figure in a white coat) and people went to church on a Sunday morning, long before most of the churches were turned into pubs.

Am I feeling nostalgic? Just a bit, maybe.

Whatever happened to springtime for democracy?

Gerry Hassan 2018

Three decades ago, democracy was the future and carrying all before it. The Soviet bloc was collapsing, the South African apartheid regime was crumbling – and all across South America brutal dictatorships were being replaced by democracies (however imperfect) symbolised by the fall of the Pinochet junta.

Today, the state of the world could not look more different and feel less optimistic. There are still many more democracies than there were even a decade ago, but somehow the springtime for people-power promised three decades ago has got lost, and the promise of democracy seems to be in retreat, with authoritarian leaders and the appeal of populism on the rise.

The reasons for this are many and oft-cited: the failure to reform capitalism after the banking crash, the decade-long stagnation in living standards across the West, the retreat of welfare states and idea of social solidarity, the inability of centre-left parties to tame turbo capitalism (or, in many cases, even try) and the lack of imagination in the political classes in dealing with these and other problems. All of this and more has led to Trump, Erdogan and Orban – and Brexit.

What is less examined is what is meant by the word and idea of democracy, and what 'we' – the people, voters and collective commons – want from it. This is the timely subject of a new film by documentary filmmaker Astra Taylor – What is Democracy? – which recently premiered at the Take One Action! film festival in Edinburgh. There are many positives in Taylor's film. It could have come over as a dry, academic set of well-meaning liberal lectures, but is animated, reflective and filled with warmth. It has a long historical lens from ancient times to now, while understanding the many challenges of what passes for modern democracy, as although it seems everywhere in some form, many of us feel our lack of collective power.

The film starts with the well-worn trope that the Greeks invented democracy. We now know they didn't – they gave us the word from which democracy originates, but just like philosophy, they did not invent the idea. Humanity invented the idea of democracy, just as football was not created by the English and Scots, but belongs to all mankind. Theorists have now found evidence of democratic practices in traditional Chinese villages, African tribal roots, ancient Indian republics, and native American society. Some of these are contested but it is widely accepted that Europeans did not exclusively create democracy.

With that caveat, What is Democracy? takes us on a tour de force exploration of

democracy's progress and non-progress. It focuses on the scholarly debates of Ancient Greece, and then transposes them to modern Greece and its humiliation by the European Union and Germany. Many in Scotland have become passionate about Catalonia's independence referendum in October 2017 and the repression by Spanish authorities, but much more serious, as an affront to democracy, was what happened to Greece. Faced with brutal EU-imposed austerity, the left-wing Syriza government went to the country in a July 2015 referendum, which emphatically rejected the EU terms by 61% to 39%. Within days, the Greeks were told by the EU they had no option but to accept Berlin-Brussels austerity, and their government crumbled.

As moving is the story of what happened to the hope of the US civil rights movement, and how Martin Luther King's work to educate, agitate, organise – and to encourage voter registration and to use that vote – has been blocked. Fifty years ago, American blacks were disenfranchised by Jim Crow laws which tripped people up on literacy tests or identification. Today's Republicans use a host of more subtle, but equally racist-inspired practices to drive black voters and other ethnic minorities off the register.

Tactics used today include any kind of felony, no matter how small, being used to disqualify the right to voting. In some states, traffic offences have been used to strike off Democratic voting groups. Many of these activities are based on flawed information. Arkansas, for example, bars felons serving their sentences from voting, but a list of voters purged in June 2016 included more than 4,000 people who had merely come into contact with the court system because of divorces and minor misdemeanours. This is now so widespread that civil rights activists are beginning to realise that they never really won.

One of many moving moments in the film comes when a young black woman who had been involved in the civil rights campaign reflects from today that mass incarceration and voter suppression have changed the terms. 'They have locked the door 50 times over. We thought the vote was the key,' she says. It turned out not to be so.

Another poignant scene is when Taylor asks groups of Americans on park benches four key questions – 'Do you live in a democracy?', 'Do you trust the government?', 'Do you vote?', and, 'If there is one issue which undermines our democracy, what is it?' The answers are fascinating and shocking, with one young white woman (who is clearly from an affluent family) happy to pontificate on how wrong it is for government to give more support to those who have less, and that this is discriminatory against people like her, and that helping those who are poor is 'bullcrap'.

One refreshing aspect of the film is that the spectre of Donald Trump is rarely mentioned, with instead the perilous state of democracy in the US and elsewhere seen as much more deep-rooted and alarming. Cornel West, the eminent philosopher,

offers the radical view that we are not free and that, even more fundamentally, 'most people fear being free'. Angela Davis, the civil rights campaigner, goes further, stating that the US 'never abolished slavery'.

An uplifting strand in Taylor's film is that nearly all the examples used have both a particular location and an universal relevance. The undertone of the film, never said with too much polemical preaching, is that this is the US or Greece, or the fate of Syrian refugees trying to enter the EU today. And that this could be you and your country tomorrow if we don't do something.

Nowhere in the Western world is democracy in great health. That is clearly true of the UK and a contributory factor in Brexit. It is also true of Scotland, which is not immune from these global trends of discontent and disillusion in mainstream politics, or the decline in trust and deference.

All of this is a live issue for how we govern ourselves, make collective decisions, and shape the future direction of our societies. Democracy is constantly moving and at the moment is in retreat, being daily humiliated and trashed by the likes of Trump, Putin and Erdogan.

The weakest aspect of the film, and this is understandable, is where after nearly two hours of a powerful rollercoaster ride, it reaches its conclusion. Its resting place is in the time-honoured socialist and feminist battle cry to democratise democracy and expand it out from the public sphere into the private home, and the personal relationships between the sexes and of reproduction.

For many of us this is a worthwhile and noble politics, but one which seems at odds and not up to the task of the challenges we have just seen. If we take a longer historical frame, which the film invites, humanity has barely got started with democracy and the democratic process: the experience of one person, one vote, being of recent experience in most societies. The first examples of women gaining the vote are the province of Friesland in the Netherlands in 1689 and some Swedish women in 1718, but it took until the start of the 20th century to really catch on, while Switzerland only enfranchised women in 1971.

The UK, which does love telling everyone that it is the home of democracy and liberty, only introduced one person one vote in 1948 when the Attlee Government abolished the business vote and university constituencies. This had meant some middle-class people had three votes: the practice being known by the euphemism 'plural voting'.

Political democracy, despite having ancient and universal roots, has only in recent times become something which involves most of society. And even then, we still practise rigid restraints keeping to the political realm, having only barely begun to explore ideas of economic democracy.

If that were not enough, there are even bigger issues coming down the line. Crony capitalism, the rise of technocratic elites, and the self-interest and arrogance of the

new tech and social media companies, pose a huge challenge to how we conduct and think of democracy. Beyond this sits the disruptive power of immense data harvesting technology and information systems, and the prospect they have for an algorithm authoritarianism where the machines take over from humans on how we decide to organise our societies.

Democracy is, at its very roots, about who we are as a 'we' and 'us', about how we define part of our very humanity by coming together collectively. And this fundamental right is being undermined by the so-called new populists using very old tricks, by elites, and the march of technology.

We need to wake up and recognise that a power which until now we have only imperfectly exercised, is being stripped of its power and meaning, and in some cases, taken away from us. Democracy has to be remade and re-won every day, both here and across the world.

There are four nations in the UK - not just England John Lloyd 2018

I used to correct English people and foreigners who used 'England' when they meant 'Britain'. They would usually be apologetic, occasionally puzzled. Most take the view of the constitutional historian Vernon Bogdanor: that the formation of the United Kingdom came about largely as the result of 'the expansion of England through a process of conquest, treaty and negotiation'. Since that is the case, they might reason, why not call it *all* England? What's the fuss?

I worked in Moscow at the period before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In that time, a British merchant banker would visit me to pick my brain on the state of the Russian economy, about which, as FT bureau chief, I was paid to try to understand – gleaning what I could from the improvisations which the new government of Yegor Gaidar was struggling to make in the chaos of a collapsed order.

In one such conversation, he used 'England' of the UK and – humorously – I corrected him: 'You mean the UK, I think'. He looked at me quizzically, and said, also humorously – 'Now, now, none of your Scots nationalism!' Yet what I had said was the exact opposite of his playful accusation. I was making – aware of its futility – a unionist remark. I have wished since that I had asked him to explain what he meant. I don't think he was being ironic: he said it thoughtlessly, a little tease. But thoughtlessness has its basis in a prior thought, or mindset – in this case, that my objection to the linguistic absorption of the UK into England could only stem from a disapproval of a union dominated by England, which was likely to have its origin in an attachment to Scots independence.

That mindset now seems to me so natural as to be unavoidable, at home and abroad (though I still try to correct people). Englishmen, and women, with such a mindset will reasonably say (if they don't lose themselves in apologies) that there is, of course, a Scotland, a Wales, and a Northern Ireland, and of course they are different from England. But, they might say (or at any rate think) that England has, over time, taken them in, treated them badly at times to be sure in the past, but ultimately addressed their grievances and come to a civilised union among them.

Yet – the mindset would reasonably continue – a country which is so much England must express English priorities, and these will tend to be more important. English customs, turns of speech, views of the world will be more powerfully present for most British and for most foreigners than any other. This is more the case since the historic and contemporary symbols and institutions of British power and reach –

the Westminster parliament, the government departments, Westminster Abbey, the Tower of London, the monarchy's main site at Buckingham Palace, the great national galleries, the City, the BBC – are in London, both Britain and England's capital. Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland all market themselves to tourists energetically and with some success – but largely for scenery, for adventures by land and sea, and for hospitality and distinctive culture. London is the state's executive power.

The three surrounding nations, the mindset might go on, now have large opportunities to give voice to their needs and complaints, and have all, recently if at different times and to different degrees, been granted substantial self-government. Northern Ireland has had a separate parliament for close on a century. Scotland and Wales have had referenda on devolved government, and Scotland on independence – a manoeuvre not recently granted in other European states such as Spain. There, separatist politicians have been jailed for flouting a constitution which proclaims the indivisibility of Spain, and in Article 155 enjoins a government, if empowered by a majority of the Senate, to force an errant regional authority to desist from, for example, claiming independence.

In the UK, a sovereign parliament is, de facto, the constitution: and at least until the last few decades of the 20th century, that was in the main accepted throughout the state. But within it, Scots, Welsh and Northern Irish are represented, even (the Scots) over-represented: their MPs ascend to the cabinet, and to the premiership. Government has not been wholly dominated by the English, and those at its apex have often reflected the multi-nationality of the UK. Since the Second World War, however, this has been true only of the Scots: the Welsh and especially the Northern Irish have strong grounds for complaint of very minor representation in the cabinet and in many other power centres, and a complete absence of tenure of 10 Downing Street.

Where it would be unthinkable to have a Secretary of State for Scotland who was not Scottish, it's quite common for the Secretary of State for Wales not to be Welsh – as in Labour's South African-born Peter Hain, and the Conservative South Yorkshireborn William Hague. Where some redress has been made and continues to be made for the past lack of women and both women and men from ethnic minorities in high positions of power, little has been done for the Welsh and the Northern Irish.

Of the 14 Prime Ministers since the Second World War, seven (Clement Attlee, Anthony Eden, Edward Heath, Harold Wilson, Margaret Thatcher, John Major and Theresa May) are 'pure' English – with no near-ancestor being other than English. Four (Harold Macmillan, Alec Douglas-Home, Tony Blair and David Cameron) have strong Scots connections: Macmillan, whose mother was American, was descended from a crofter (great grandfather) on the Isle of Arran: he and Blair, who had a Scots father and a Northern Irish mother, both at times called themselves Scots.

Douglas-Home and Cameron were scions of the Anglo-Scots aristocracy-cum-

upper middle class and the former's main home, when he inherited his full title, was in the Scottish Borders. James Callaghan was English with Irish and Jewish forebears; Winston Churchill was English with, like Macmillan, an American mother; and Gordon Brown is 'pure' Scots – indeed, as one of the three sons of a Presbyterian minister, he is from the old religious heart of Scotland.

A close Welsh connection is wholly absent, and Northern Ireland peeps in only through Blair. But Scotland is strongly present: a reflection of its quite different status within the union from those of Wales and Northern Ireland. It was a nation state: and by emphasising, especially in the past half-century, that the 1707 union with England was one of formal equals which reserved for Scotland education, worship and culture, England has been made to feel it owes, not owns it. And England, till now, has usually acquiesced.

Calling the UK 'England' is, for most English, no slight: it is an implicit folding of the 'Celts' into 'Anglo Saxonia' (a distinction with little meaning now: we are quite mixed up). To be reminded that there is another way of expressing that, a 'political correctness' which – unlike other such common references which have been erected into taboos – few mind ignoring. To be corrected just seems a little aggravating. None of your Scots nationalism!

Yet in this apparently trivial misnaming lies one of the largest issues now facing the UK. How is it to continue as a union, when devolution, especially to Scotland, has so strained its no-constitution constitution to the point where much academic and political commentary believes it to be no longer functional. In the early decades of the 21st century, a nation state regarded as among the most successful and liberal of the past two centuries faces a disintegration, and thus a sharp diminution of its power – just at the time when it faces a transition from being a member of the European Union to not being one, a transition which is a major aggravating factor in the union's integrity.

The easy, even affectionate, assumption by many English people that the surrounding nations are, albeit with some resentment, loyal to a union which (with the constant exception of the nationalist minority in Northern Ireland) still benefits them, appears to be passing. For unionists, the most pressing issue is how to revive a union they feel – and the majority in all of the small nations feel – should be retained and even strengthened.

How does the First Minister plan to manage globalisation?

Bill Paterson (Writer, Glasgow)
2019

'Independence,' quothed Nicola sturgeon recently, 'is the best way for Scotland to make a positive contribution to the world'. She may be correct, although when Scotland did make its massive contribution and, almost single-handedly, brought into being the modern world through its philosophers and scientists, it was in the 18th century and the Scottish Enlightenment was fuelled by the wealth of England and its colonies.

However, it is Sturgeon's worldview that concerns: quite properly she stressed the importance of the caveat that globalisation had to be managed properly to succeed but, unfortunately, she did not describe what proper management would consist of or how it could be carried out.

'Globalisation' has several definitions, not necessarily conflicting, but the simplest is the *Financial Times*' description of globalisation being a process whereby national and regional economies, societies and cultures become integrated through a network of trade, communication, immigration and transportation. The *FT* also extends this definition beyond economic matters and brings in a broader range of activities including cultural, technical and sociological factors – and not excluding communal problems such as climate change.

As a definition it is completely neutral but Noam Chomsky, the American philosopher and sociologist, is probably more accurate when he defines the term as meaning as a 'specific form of investor's rights integration designed by wealth and power for their own interests'. Even with Nicola Sturgeon's reservations, the SNP's support for the process underscores how right-wing the SNP have become; a process that started when Alex Salmond cuddled up to business interests (and was eventually snubbed by Donald Trump).

Most SNP voters still believe they are voting for a left-of-centre party – a people's party that has replaced the ailing Labour Party in that role – but that is not so: the SNP have swung to the right as they centralise more and more control around themselves (an example is that we now have a state police force). All parties have a tendency to move to the right when they take office (witness Tony Blair's Labour Party) but, in her support of globalisation, Sturgeon misses the actuality of what is happening.

But let's get one canard out of the way first. It is claimed by the supporters of globalisation that the process has helped stabilise the world and is a factor of weight in keeping the peace; you do not go to war with someone you are trading with. That

last statement is not quite true as Britain and Germany were trading prior to the Second World War (as was America with Germany): but the general point is taken.

It is, however, common sense that has stopped wars between the major powers. And common sense is what the peoples of the democratic powers have mostly displayed over the past 60 years or so. We know we would all be losers in another major war. And trade has developed between nations as a *result* of that peace, not as a *cause* of that peace.

In truth, globalisation is about the spread of huge multi-national corporations and the increasing and undemocratic power they assert upon local and international affairs. The spread has been insidious. Look around Scotland and ask how many businesses are locally-owned and how many are the long fingers of international companies. When we purchase from these companies, even something as simple as a cup of coffee, we have little idea of how much of our money is going abroad and being recorded in tax-free havens. The economic benefits of these businesses are being leeched from us. And us Scots once complained of English-based companies taking over Scottish ones.

Globalisation has both allowed those international companies in to own our resources and permitted our companies to slide off to where labour is cheaper and where a compliant government will tax them little in return for the jobs they bring. This is good for developing countries as what used to be termed 'third world' countries take up the manufacturing processes via their cheap labour: China and India have been the big gainers but also Pakistan, Bangladesh, Vietnam and some of the Eastern European countries like Romania, Bulgaria, Latvia and, oh, Russia have also gained.

No-one can begrudge them this improvement little though it be; but it is not at the expense of the Western owner class that these nations have picked up: it is at the expense of the poorest working (or non-working) classes in the West. Thus, real earnings have hardly moved from the 1970s (in fact, have gone back) whilst benefit payments of one description or another have mushroomed, as has the growth of charities, homelessness and food banks. A short time ago, there was even a serious proposal for Britain to re-establish national kitchens. That latter actually makes economic sense but is it a world we want to live in? I would love to learn how Nicola Sturgeon believes we can control globalisation.

Here's to the doubters – they make the world a better place Gerry Hassan 2019

The world at the moment is in a state of flux. Yet everywhere there is assertion and statements that imply certainty and do not allow for any doubt. Doubt is central to being human. Galileo once said: 'Doubt is the father of invention'. There is the personal doubt many of us experience – the inner voice that measures yourself by impossible standards. And there is the wider collective, societal and social doubt, which poses that true faith and blind belief might not be the best way to think about things or organise societies.

I have always had doubt. My inner doubt comes in two forms: the emotional and intellectual, with the former in part originating from my experience of the Scottish state education system that never – in the past – focused on building confidence and social skills. That system for much of its history did not really know how to positively nurture bright working-class children. It knew negatively what to do for too long; to prepare them as gently as possible for a life of disappointment, defeat and dashed dreams. And if that didn't work, it could always engage in punishment.

As a counterbalance to all this, the element of intellectual doubt and my own sense of curiosity, desire to know about the world and to question things, originated in my parents encouragement of these qualities, and their belief in challenging authority.

I still have this doubt, and my inner, questioning voices frequently speak to me, although, by now, I have got used to them. I have learned through experience to talk back and engage in a rational conversation that draws from experience, and doesn't give myself a hard time. I know that it is easy to be your own harshest critic and that it is self-defeating – and ultimately pointless – to embark on such a course.

The class dimension in inner doubt is a powerful one. Scotland, as I was growing up, was a society defined by needing permission and by punitive authority, albeit weakening and hollowing out. This was a culture which stigmatised non-conformity and heresy, and where, if you stuck your neck out too far, you were chastised or told off.

Many of us remember watershed moments when this became apparent and one was told to know one's place and not question authority. I can distinctly remember one such episode in the mid-1970s in Ardler Primary School, Dundee, when I dared to correct a teacher who said something inaccurate about the then Labour Government – which she clearly disapproved of and was happy for it to be known.

After I challenged the teacher, she asked me, clearly in total frustration at this young Smart Alec: 'Which communist country do you like then?' After she had run

through five or six of them (including the Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary and Yugoslavia), when she got to 'East Germany', I replied 'yes' – thinking it sounded tolerable and attractive compared to the others. She then turned to the whole class and said, triumphantly and with such scorn, the words I still remember today: 'Well, if you like it so much, why don't you go and live there?' I was only about 11 at the time and was made to feel about as small as possible. Admittedly, the teacher in question, Mrs McLaren, had a complex relationship with me and recognised my talent, awarding me the pupil of the year award the following year, as if to try to make up for it.

Doubt also has a gendered dimension. Men are by and large more likely to pontificate and argue on any subject under the sun, even when they don't know anything about the subject or have any facts to hand. Women are more likely to qualify, contextualise, and take a step back in arguments. The difference in personal behaviour of football players between the women's football World Cup and the men's is stark – the women's game being mostly free of play-acting, diving and arguing with the referee.

Fear of failure, of being seen as a lesser person, is wrapped up in how we navigate an increasingly bitter and divided country and world. It is not an accident that the top of the Tory Party is dominated by not very bright or impressive men, who happen to be mostly privately educated and have often known one other for years, and that the current battle for the Tory leadership has come down to Eton (Boris Johnson) versus Charterhouse (Jeremy Hunt).

This takes us to the notion of collective and societal doubt. We are living in an age in which much of the developed world is in the midst of a colossal crisis of confidence – of progress, economics, politics, the planet and its environment, authority and expertise. In many respects, much of the West is transfixed and stuck by these multiple and inter-connected crises. All of them are underpinned by the deceptions and transparent bankruptcy of the economic model of capitalism of the past 40 years, which cannot just be answered and transcended by the old conventional palliatives of the left.

Yet, this state of affairs has spiraled into the mess of disinformation, deception and straight-out lies – Brexit, Trump, and the onward march of Boris Johnson to the Tory leadership. Pseudo-facts and assertions are just shamelessly made up ('We send the EU £350 million a week'), with lies peddled in the cases of Brexit and Trump, and even the law broken and bent out of shape.

Across the West, a secular-based faith politics has emerged which believes that the challenges of the age can be overcome if only people embrace their certainty and simplicity. Elements of this evangelicalism can be identified in the dogmatic fanaticism of no-deal Brexit, but is also evident in the true believers in the Corbynista coalition and pro-independence campaigners in Scotland. At a time of such upheaval

and uncertainty, the psychological attractions of having such lack of doubt and instead believing in the righteousness of your cause is obvious, although it doesn't get very far when it encounters faint hearts and reality.

What is alarming is where this is all going to end. Not only is the law being broken in the cases of Brexit and Trump, but the normative rules and values which informally bind societies and which make them manageable and work, are being dramatically eroded. There are serious questions being asked in the US of how the country, its democracy and public standards, could survive the wreckage and damage of a second-term Trump presidency, or whether the harm being caused – if that happened – could become irrevocable.

This unsatisfactory situation makes a case and place for doubt: both personal and societal. But it has to be the form of doubt, not used to undermine individuals and collectively societies, but as doubt – and challenge – for creative and constructive purposes.

The early 21st century does feel like the end of an era, or more accurately, of several eras. These range from modernity to the free market freeloading capitalism of recent decades, social democracy, and the European project as we have know it. The assumptions that have underpinned endless economic growth, rising living standards, individual consumption, and treating the planet and its rich but fragile ecology as something to exploit, have increasingly come at huge costs. If that were not enough, how we think of and imagine what it is to be human will be transformed in the next couple of decades by the march of AI and robots.

Galileo understood that doubt was central to the human imagination and invention. The physicist Richard Feynman wrote the following in an essay called The Meaning of It All: 'I feel a responsibility to proclaim the value of freedom and to teach that doubt is not to be feared, but that it is to be welcomed as the possibility of a new potential for human beings. If you know that you are not sure, you have a chance to improve the situation. I want to demand this freedom for future generations'.

So here's to the doubters. If not the negative, diminishing voices that undermine us, but the ones questioning, scrutinising and provoking the way the world works. A world of more doubt and ambiguity would be a better, more human, and more considerate place for all of us to live in.

Bearing with Boris: our new PM is an unavoidable error R D Kernohan

2019

He sometimes seems to want to play Churchill. His tangled personal life evokes more affinity with Lloyd George. But Boris Johnson is really the new Disraeli. He does not, unfortunately, resemble the mature and serene elder statesman canonised by late Victorian Tories, but the brash and gifted opportunist who rent his party asunder and lent his talents to a faction reluctant to face reality and consumed by hatred for a decent Prime Minister who did.

It took Disraeli more than 20 years to emerge as patriarch of a broader Tory Church. Boris Johnson needs to do that in a few weeks as part of a much wider stabilisation of Britain's frenzied and frustrated politics. We all need to wish him a better fate than he presently deserves.

He has a record, especially on Europe, which shows him uncertain whether to be a floating voter or a conviction politician. His 'pragmatism' (or opportunism) could make him a force for good in these bad times. That depends very much on the sense and sensibility of European Union leaders, though such qualities were sorely lacking in the trivial concessions offered to David Cameron before the 2016 referendum and the stubborn refusal to help Theresa May once it was clear that the 'withdrawal agreement' would stumble in the face of the Irish backstop. But it is more realistic to see Boris Johnson's election by the Conservative Party not as a new opportunity, but as an unavoidable error.

Two things had made it unavoidable even before the remnant of the once vast Conservative membership – so foolishly allowed to shrink by indifference and high subscriptions – had their ballot papers, a third of which were still cast for what we knew was a lost cause. It should normally be all but unthinkable for venerable Tories like me (whose campaign ribbons go back to the 1950s) to dissent from the preference, however unfortunate, of a majority of Tory MPs. Theresa May discovered how much goes wrong once MPs' confidence is shaken. Whether Johnson will long retain that confidence after his ruthless Cabinet-making is another matter, for dissident and disappointed Tories are now potentially the most destructive force he faces in opposition.

The other occasion for the unavoidable error is that many of those who voted for him without trusting him reckon him an election winner, at least in large parts of England where the Farageists of the Brexit Party are a serious if temporary threat. (And even in Scotland he need go down no worse than Theresa May, provided he works hard to keep Ruth Davidson on-side. He is not necessarily at a disadvantage in face of Nicola Sturgeon's soor-ploom dissatisfaction with everything done at Westminster.) For Boris Johnson, whether you abhor or admire him, is an outstanding personality of British politics – in a rather limited field – and allegedly a 'charismatic' one, the current journalese term for never being dull. That in itself is no claim to office or trust, for some very unpleasant dictators and demagogues have come to power elsewhere on such credentials. But Johnson is a highly intelligent and educated politician who has opted into demagoguery even though he had the talents, but perhaps not the dedication and discipline, to seek the highest office in a more conventional style.

I imagine many Tories who voted for him hope that the premiership will change or at least restrain him. It will save himself and the country a lot of trouble if they are right. I hope they are, but I have my doubts, scarcely dispelled by his treatment of Jeremy Hunt and the contrast between the make-up of his government and his claim to be restoring Tory unity. Margaret Thatcher never mangled her 'wets' so harshly; and a true Churchillian might have remembered that victory is a time for magnanimity.

Johnson might improve with age and experience but it is very uncertain how much time he can have as Prime Minister and what his experience will be. Many things depend on a mixture of luck and judgement, good or bad, which lies ahead of him. The likeliest challenges include a fairly early, very turbulent General Election, and a damaging no-deal Brexit mitigated by last-minute ad hoc arrangements and not quite as catastrophic as most people outside the European Research Group probably fear. But it is unlikely that Johnson himself knows what he will do come September and October, and it is uncertain what the role of his Cabinet will be. It includes several people whose eagerness to take the plunge with Johnson goes with readiness to take over the Tory leadership if he should be washed up.

For the moment, however, the new Prime Minister will seem to be recreating the Conservative Party in his own image, a process which some critics see as an incitement to collective suicide. But neither he, nor Tories who regret his election, nor opponents eager to exterminate us, should presume too much.

For better or worse, he is only an interlude performer in a long history and a tradition whose continuity, despite occasional diversions and obsessions such as the present one with a 'hard Brexit', have made political Conservatism the great force for stability and evolution in British politics, sometimes by consolidating the innovations of its opponents. And if a Conservative Party did not exist it would be necessary to invent one, using an even odder mixture of elements than compose the one which Mr Johnson now holds captive through fascination and Brexit frustration.

Events, with accidents as well as calculations and miscalculation, will settle how Britain resolves for this generation and its immediate successor the two great problems that Johnson might partly ease or make worse. One is that Britain is deeply and increasingly divided on how to express a truth that should be universally acknowledged.

For political, geographical, cultural and commercial reasons, we need a close and happy relationship with the EU, but we have neither the inclination nor the national consensus to join the movement towards a federal super-state. Many of us who voted Remain see that as clearly as the new Prime Minister and feel as strongly about it. The problem could be tackled either by Britain becoming a vigorous restraining influence within the EU or (as the referendum seemed to have settled by a fairly narrow majority) by becoming a friendly neighbour and external partner of some sort.

The best hope now is for Johnson to divert some his alleged charisma to convincing the surlier of the EU policy-makers that it is in no-one's interest for Britain to be left as divided and fractious as it has become since the 2016 referendum.

The other great problem, which really ought to be separate from the dilemma over Europe, is whether Britain can make devolution work. Until now, that has not seemed greatly to concern Mr Johnson, and some of his English support is suspect of more enthusiasm to break the recent link with Europe than sustain the more venerable and fundamental unity of Britain. But in fairness, it should be recognised that the London mayoralty (in which Mr Johnson did rather better than at the Foreign Office) is a form of devolution and that London, like Wales, has made a more sincerely earnest bid to decentralise British Government than Northern Ireland, held back by its old quarrels, and Scotland, with its SNP fixation on secession.

Now Mr Johnson has learned the language of unionism. He is probably also sincere enough in wanting to give Scotland a good share of rather risky additional government spending, for prudence was never his favourite virtue. But he will be judged neither by what he has done or left undone in the past, nor what he says now in the aftermath of a flawed victory and volatile opinion-poll ratings, but on what he can do. That may be far less than he hopes, for his options are limited and unpleasant. Disraeli had a lot longer to redeem himself.

The death of British conservatism as we have known it Gerry Hassan

2019

1.

British conservatism has been one of the most successful political philosophies and political parties the world has ever known. As we speak, it is engaged in the latter stages of its 30-year civil war on Europe, which has convulsed the party, bringing it to a state of near self-destruction, abandoning its traditional tenets and debasing constitutional norms that for most of its history have been its raison d'être.

Whatever happens on Brexit in the next few months and years, much will have long-term and irreversible consequences not just for the Tories, but for the rest of us. Michael Heseltine, former deputy Prime Minister, said this week: 'We are literally fighting for the soul of the Conservative Party' – which is true, but the reality is actually much more serious than that.

British conservatism used to stand for, or more accurately, *claimed* it stood for, parliamentary sovereignty, the rule of law, being pro-business, the integrity of the UK, and protecting and projecting Britain's geo-political interests globally. This is how it has presented and understood itself, although what it has actually done and stood for has long been more complex.

Each of the above tenets, has resulted in the increasing abandonment and violation of what has traditionally been understood as Toryism. A vote that was about 'taking back control' has seen Tory ministers talk about ignoring parliamentary votes and suspending parliament. Iain Duncan Smith, a former Tory leader, showed his contempt for parliament, saying last week: 'The government has the right to demand that we do not hand over power to Parliament to tie the Prime Minister's hands'.

Worse than this, the current government has publicly contemplated ignoring a parliamentary act which has gone through all its processes and gained Royal Assent. Senior Tories have been at least floating ways of evading the instructions of the just passed Hilary Benn act, which aims to avoid a no-deal Brexit on 31 October – a move into dangerous constitutional waters.

As profoundly, the Tory pretence of being pro-business has in recent decades meant slavishly advancing the self-interest of finance capitalism and the City of London. This has increasingly overshadowed and crowded out the rest of the real, productive economy, becoming more disconnected from genuine investment and enterprise decisions, holding back UK economic growth, prosperity and social justice. Yet, in the midst of the Brexit tumult, the Tory veneer of being pro-business has completely broken down, with Boris Johnson, before he became

PM, talking of concerns over a no-deal Brexit, responding: 'I say fuck business'.

Then there is the supposed integrity of the UK, for this is still notionally, the Conservative and Unionist Party. Yet, the slow attrition of unionism has been a long time coming, magnified but not originally caused by Brexit. This is a party presiding over nearly three years of a suspended Stormont, contemplating the imposition of direct rule in Northern Ireland, and the dilution of the Good Friday Agreement and peace process, to remain in office. This is a unionism which has been incapable of respecting and understanding Northern Irish (56%) and Scottish (62%) majority support for remaining in the EU, which an adept, more subtle Tory unionism would have worked with.

Finally, all of this is a body blow to the British triumphalism of 'punching above our weight' which has been the post-1945 mindset of UK Prime Ministers, running from Churchill to Macmillan to Blair. William Waldegrave, a minister under Thatcher and Major, has just penned a major critique of this worldview: *Three Circles into One: Brexit Britain: How did we get here and what happens next?* In it, he argues that the self-delusion of Britain's elites about our international standing and influence, the seat at the UN, the pretence of the 'independent' nuclear weapons, the belief that we are still a 'bridge' between the US and Europe, is an out-of-date illusion. 'Why can't we be a middle-ranking, proud country?' asks Waldegrave, continuing, 'I think we can live inside or outside Europe perfectly well. We've got to decide which one we want to do'. Brexit has brought this to boiling point: the dominant Tory die-hard perspective centred on a version of the UK unsustainable economically and diplomatically.

Adding to all this, Brexit has become a catalyst for political dogmatism, ideological purity and an absolutist interpretation of sovereignty last seen when the British authorities 'lost' the American colonies in 1775-76 and Ireland in 1921-22. Over the last three years of Brexit obsession, what has started in many places as a thoughtful, measured argument and version of leaving the EU, has become something intransigent and refusing any compromise on the way to a no-deal Brexit.

Brexit isn't just about how we arrived at this sorry state of affairs. Instead, it links into long-running Tory and national concerns which go much deeper than Brexit, Johnson and May, and even Farage and his populist opportunism. It even goes further than the experience of Thatcherism and command and control 'spin' and manipulation by New Labour. It goes back to the nature of the British state and serial failure of the British political classes across the entire post-war era to reform, modernise and democratise not just politics, but economy and society.

2.

What comes after modern conservatism as we have known it, and how will it affect the Tories and our wider politics? Toryism, as it has been traditionally understood, looks to be on its last legs and in irreversible decline. Related to this, the all-British unionist dimension of Toryism has collapsed, with an English right-wing nationalism taking its place.

A party which once championed the uniqueness and intricacies of the British constitution has now become a party prepared to tear up conventions, consider overriding parliamentary votes and decisions, and even to trash the rule of law.

In many respects, Conservative constitutionalism has often been nothing but a smoke screen for Toryism and its pursuit of naked power and its socio-economic and class interests. Tories have played fast and loose with the constitution before when it suited them. Bonar Law as Tory leader in the Irish home rule crisis of 1911-14 invoked the spectre of a 'civil war', while future Tory Chancellor F E Smith suggested that Liberal ministers should be 'swinging from the lamp posts of London'. That previous crisis was only diminished by the advent of the First World War, but the point remains that Tory constitutional vandalism has arisen before when its self-interests and power base have been previously threatened.

The trajectory this presents for the UK, for Scotland, England and the union, has been clear for several decades. Ian Gilmour, a senior Cabinet minister in the Thatcher Government, wrote in the aftermath of the 1992 Tory victory, of the congruence between those Tories who were Eurosceptics and those who opposed Scottish self-government, posing an inflexible UK union. Gilmour did not think this would end well for the Tories or the union: 'Thus, if they had their way, Scotland would become a Belgium to England's Holland, though with Scotland in the EC and England out of it. That surely would be the ultimate in "little Englandism".

The forces of British conservatism were once one of the defining stories of what Britain stood for and what it was meant to be. This was a ruling-class account of power and privilege that also successfully included and incorporated middle-class and working-class interests, providing at times prosperity, progress and even greater social rights. This version of British conservatism and the Tory Party is dead. There is next to no chance in the foreseeable future post-Boris Johnson and post-Brexit of it rejuvenating and renewing itself in a form which is recognisable with the past.

A much more reactionary, populist, xenophobic, nasty and opportunist right-wing politics is already defining much of Tory and English politics. The only real uncertainty in the next few years is whether this political mindset inhabits and colonises the Tory Party making it into something different from how it has traditionally been, or whether it destroys the Tory Party and finds a new form in a Farage-like right-wing vehicle. And this poses huge strategic questions for Scotland and Northern Ireland, about the long-term nature and character of the union we live in which will be difficult for many people.

Democracy isn't working. Can it be fixed?

Gerry Hassan 2019

Britain likes to claim to be the inventor of democracy, and England to assume the mantle of being 'the mother of parliaments'. These are national myths – leaving aside that the oldest national legislature in the world is the Icelandic Parliament.

The Whig story of democracy has been one of the most prominent interpretations of British and English public life and traditions. It is one which has been told and retold by enlightened and less enlightened sections of the British establishment. It has also been uncritically championed by large elements of the British left, in Labour, the Liberals and then Lib Dems, and wider intellectual circles. They, as much as Tory and right-wing circles, have felt drawn to the story of British continuity and exceptionalism – and putting Britain at the heart of a global story for good which reflects well on life and institutions here.

This story of Britain has been a powerful and at times popular one, but it has been and become an even more self-immolating version of this country, cloaking tradition, privilege and the way things are done from a sceptical eye, let alone a radical, democratising view. It has prevented us from seeing what the UK is like, shorn of mystique and mythology.

The UK is not, and never has been, a political democracy. This is a basic fact, with fundamental and far-reaching consequences. Yet, many people want to hide from this inconvenient truth, including for obvious reasons most politicians, the political parties and the insider world which surrounds them.

The UK only elects one half of its national legislature: the Commons, the more powerful of the two chambers. The other, the Lords, is the second largest legislature in the entire world, with only the National Assembly of Communist China, the most populous country anywhere, being bigger in number.

The Lords is a mix of hereditary right (with 92 hereditary peers remaining members) and prime ministerial patronage that has grown exponentially since the introduction of life peers in 1958. It includes many experts and people who have given selflessly to public life, but it is also home to numerous discredited party politicians.

In the UK, it is somehow seen as normal practice for voters to turf out a politician in a constituency only for such failure to be rewarded with a seat for life in the Lords, and hence the ability to legislate on national affairs, despite being rejected at the ballot box. Previously elected politicians, such as Michael Forsyth, Nicol Stephen and Jack McConnell, are thereby reinvented in the twilight world of the House of Lords as

people who make decisions which affect our life and who are accountable to no-one.

There is the existence of the Royal Family – a constitutional monarchy, not a decoration. There is the scandal of Prince Charles, actively lobbying ministers over his many pet causes. This is a set of interventions which, when they came to light, saw the Freedom of Information Act amended to draw a future veil of secrecy over the continued lobbying of ministers by Charles.

There are the Crown powers – once held by the monarch, but now exercised by the executive and invoked without parliamentary scrutiny and approval. These include the most far-reaching actions that can be made by a government and state, namely, the right to declare and go to war, as well as a host of other actions from appointing ministers and judges to granting honours.

If anyone thinks that this does not really impact on everyday lives, think again. To take just two examples: on the two occasions the UK entered the two world wars, it did so without the Prime Ministers of the day – Henry Asquith and Neville Chamberlain – feeling they had any need to seek parliamentary approval for such fundamental actions. There were on both occasions, August 1914 and September 1939, widespread parliamentary and public support that going to war was the right thing to do. But this is exactly the point at which proper parliamentary forensic debate and approval is most needed.

There is the right of governments to call national emergencies in times of what they believe are serious crisis. They were given this power under the Emergency Powers Act 1920 passed by the Lloyd George Coalition Government which was influenced by the rising troubles in Ireland. This act has allowed governments of all political persuasions to declare a national emergency, curtail civil liberties, and if necessary use the military, and it has been used on a dozen occasions. These include a 1921 TUC-backed strike, 1926 General Strike; 1948 and 1949 strikes during the Attlee Labour Government; 1966 seamen's strike in under Harold Wilson; and five times under Ted Health, including the 1972 miners' strike. A fairly obvious pattern is discernible in the above and runs through all 12: each national emergency was declared in response to strikes and the power of organised labour.

This act was superseded by the Blair Government's Civil Contingencies Act 2004 which was introduced in the aftermath of 9/11, the invasion of Iraq, and concerns over Islamist terrorism. It was presented to the Commons by Douglas Alexander and was a typically opportunist, shoddy and draconian piece of New Labour legislation at its worst, not concerning itself with human rights or longer-term consequences.

Fast forward to the Brexit impasse and the arrival of Boris Johnson as Prime Minister. Pre-election, one of the avenues Downing Street seriously explored in resolving Brexit was by declaring a national emergency, drafting in the military, and suspending local government. Initial steps were even taken to put preliminary plans in place, to be able to initiate action, which with the legislation on the statute book

would only require 'a senior minister for the Crown' (meaning the PM) to declare a 30-day national emergency. Fortunately, so far this has not happened.

None of this is widely debated or gains much comment or traction in public or media. The 1920 act is barely remembered or referenced now, nor how it was the antecedent of the authoritarian impulses of New Labour, which needed no real encouragement.

This is the backdrop to the UK December election – a contest which seems surreal and disconnected from the real concerns of voters. This is aided by the erosion of previously unwritten conventions and codes about what was and wasn't responsible, ethical behaviour.

For example, Boris Johnson has proven himself to be a serial liar, having been publicly sacked from two jobs for lying. Previously, such actions would have been a bar on high office and certainly on becoming UK PM. Indeed, they were still considered so as recently as the turn of this year by the vast majority of Tory MPs, and then desperation took over as Tory popularity crashed. It doesn't look like a script that is going to end well for the main protagonists, leaving aside that Johnson is now well placed to win an overall majority.

The problem with British political life goes deeper than individuals. It is institutional. UK general elections used to be conducted within a legal and regulatory framework which attempted to establish a level playing field between the main parties. There were restrictions on political advertising, limits to political spending and donations, and tight constraints on what local candidates could spend in their constituencies. However, this latter set of rules was regarded by all parties as a complete farce, with all of them in their target and battlefield seats outspending legal limits and getting away with it.

Today with Facebook, Twitter and other social media, political parties are issuing adverts in a completely unregulated marketplace. Facebook is the critical platform, with a global reach of billions. Utilised by the Leave campaign in 2016, and with the same people running the current Tory campaign, they continue to be hyperactive on Facebook and remain unaccountable to any proper framework.

This is not an accident or oversight. Parliamentarians have been advised and warned that they needed to undertake legislation to bring social media platforms under the law, but they have prevaricated. That is because this unregulated Wild West of political advertising works in favour of one party – the Conservatives – who have been in office since 2010.

This climate is changing political culture and normative values: with 'attack' ads going after the character of opponents getting more common, while all this aids a world where serial lying is something which isn't career-ending.

Similarly, there has been no comprehensive inquiry into the illegal activities of the Leave campaign in 2016 because politicians fear the consequences. One of which is

that it would open a hornet's nest about other activities, while another is that it could lead to a widespread disputation of the result. Worse than that, it might lead to serious calls for reform of Britain's inadequate election laws.

A Prime Minister playing fast and loose with national security after the tragedy of the London Bridge attack is not prepared to release the House of Commons intelligence and security committee report into Russian interference in British politics, assuring voters 'there is no Russian interference in politics'. This is deception, ignoring the Salisbury murders and, closer to home for Boris Johnson, the industrial scale funding of the Tory Party by Russian oligarchs and dark money, some of which would be revealed by the suppressed report.

If that were not enough, there is the dilution of the universal right to vote. Inexorably, over the past five decades, the number of voters not registered to vote has been rising – a trend aided by the recent Tory decision to change the registration system from household to individual basis. Despite the last minute surge in voter registration which seems to have become a feature of UK election, we are left with nearly seven million people who should be on voter rolls missing and not registered. This amounts to 13% of the potential size of the electorate, and they are disproportionately younger, poorer, in social housing, and from black and ethnic minorities.

This shameful picture has been getting worse at election after election, and has until recently been uncommented upon. We are not yet in as appalling a place as the US, where voter suppression has become an active part of Republican dirty tricks: a new form of an old story whereas, until the Civil Rights Act, they just used to shamelessly exclude black voters by various Jim Crow laws.

In the UK, the exclusion of nearly seven million people means they are doubly disenfranchised: they don't count politically in any sense. Their non-voting is just not counted or registered in the election; they are literally the missing millions in every sense. Seven million voters is a huge section of people and voices in the UK – and a larger group than the winning margin in every one of the 20 General Elections held in the UK since 1945.

The state of democratic atrophy and decay, mixed with complacency and an air of self-congratulation, might not serve most citizens well. But it works for the insider groups who gain most in the way that things are: corporates, corporate advocates such as the big accountancy firms, business lawyers, and right-wing think tanks. It isn't some accident that the latter – groups such as the secretively-funded IEA or Taxpayers' Alliance – never produce any plans for the democratisation of Britain. They not only believe that no change is needed, but they are prepared to openly campaign and oppose any far-reaching change which might threaten the cosy state of affairs that exists. This is the backdrop to an election which is posing a crossroads in the future direction of the UK and Scotland.

This is a rotten, undemocratic, obsolete political system, long past its sell-by-date, which should be comprehensively challenged and overthrown. It is a 19th-century set of institutions and rules which have been used to the advantage of 21st-century robber baron capitalism.

The inadequacies of our political system and democracy are directly linked to the most offensive characteristics of society: the widespread poverty, hardship, insecurity and blighted lives alongside unparalleled wealth and consumption in one of the richest economies and societies human civilisation has ever known. However you vote on 12 December – if you are registered – don't believe for one minute that this economic and social order, and this flawed democracy is the best we can do. If you think that, you are colluding in this state of affairs.

Many benefits, some doubts: a bitter-sweet victory

R D Kernohan 2019

As a British Tory I ought to rejoice, and am not at all displeased. As a Scottish unionist I ought to worry, but need not despair. As a Conservative, I reluctantly give Boris Johnson the benefit of considerable doubt.

There is much to be pleased about, though mainly in what has been avoided. We are only committed to some risky budgetary policies and not to a manifesto of ludicrous ones. We have broken the parliamentary deadlock in which those who could not undo the Brexit vote were able indefinitely to obstruct it. We are not to have a new dose of old nationalisation with novel ways to enhance State involvement in the economy. We are not to have a Prime Minister embarrassingly ill at ease with so much that is good in British history and even with the best traditions of his own Labour Party.

Yet do we have in Boris Johnson a Prime Minister at ease with his Conservative (and unionist) inheritance? He has justified the hopes of those who ushered him into office, even if he has not quite secured even their trust and confidence. But he must realise that a substantial proportion of those who voted Conservative – old Tories, new Tories, and perhaps very temporary Tories – did so *in spite* of his alleged 'charisma' and not *because* of it. Many of us had once voted, however reluctantly, not to leave the European Union.

A Conservative Government has to be led with dignity as well as personality and should provide stability. Theresa May retained her dignity, but was denied stability, partly through mistakes, partly through malice (both in Brussels and on the backbenches), but even more through unreasonable expectations. That should be a warning both to the Prime Minister himself and to those who talk glibly (in hope or fear) of 'five years of Boris Johnson'.

There are three main worries for those of us satisfied with the overall outcome of the election. They are Mr Johnson's personality, Britain's relation to the EU after the formal Brexit, and the separatist tendencies within the United Kingdom. Every politician can learn from mistakes, improve with age, and adjust old behaviour to new responsibility, and Mr Johnson earned some sighs of relief during his torrid preelection time as Prime Minister. If he settled for a withdrawal agreement inferior to Ms May's, he could plead that politics is the art of the possible and that the 'backstop' had become politically impossible. He also kept himself in hand during an election campaign with a sound strategy and few tactical blunders, though these (at a late stage) were blown out of proportion in a frenzied media atmosphere in which the Labour and Liberal leaders gasped and floundered.

But five years is a long, long time in politics. Even for a less flamboyant Prime Minister it must be marked by Cabinet crises and personality clashes as well as unpredictable events. A Prime Minister who lasts the course needs patience with sensitive, vain, and ambitious colleagues as well as self-discipline and readiness for advice from elder statespersons. These are not qualities that come naturally to a Prime Minister who has embittered people who could help him in the long haul and who has happily shed many of those to whom he ought to have been reconciled. You cannot preach one-nation conservatism and eagerly excommunicate the dissenters in your own party.

The Prime Minister will need all the cohesion he can get from the different elements of conservatism in the Conservative Party when, a few months after the formality of Brexit, he needs to make and sustain difficult decisions about the give and take required for a trading agreement with the EU. Ursula von der Leyen will be pleasanter to deal with than the unlamented Luxembourger, but the Brussels mind-set, strongly influenced by resentment that anyone should dare interfere with the 'Project', is one which seeks to demand a lot and give very little, as both David Cameron and Theresa May found at such cost. But Boris Johnson's unusual capacity for ruthlessness, realism, effrontery, and flexibility should not be underestimated.

That capacity will also be explored and tested as the unity of the United Kingdom is under unprecedented strain. He has already shown over Northern Ireland a distressing capacity to be flexible at the expense of people who wanted to be his allies and has weakened the unionist position there. His defence must be the Cromwellian one of 'cruel necessity'.

On Scotland, he has so far said and done most of the right things from the unionist point of view. He struck the right balance between presence and absence in the election campaign and he has ensured in practice (despite much sound and fury from the SNP) that even the possibility of another 'once in a generation' independence referendum is deferred at the very least until after the next Holyrood elections. He will not be the soft touch that the complacent David Cameron was in allowing Alex Salmond to plan the question, the timing, and the electoral roll of a referendum intended to subvert the devolution settlement worked out by Tony Blair and Donald Dewar.

But the scale of the Tory success in the English and Welsh regions of the United Kingdom creates problems for Scotland, especially in the absence of such forceful unionist personalities as Ruth Davidson and Jo Swinson. The Prime Minister must convince Scots that when he says 'British' he does not unconsciously mean 'English'. He will often need to display a hitherto unsuspected talent for tact.

Conservatives who gained so much benefit from our Westminster electoral system cannot complain that it gave even more benefit to the SNP in Scotland, where unionist parties have less than 20% of seats for nearly 54% of the votes. There is,

however, a real problem when Scottish representation in the Commons is so disproportionately weighted in favour of destructive criticism and sense of grievance.

From the unionist point of view, the disaster of the Labour Party in Scotland is far more serious than the slicing of the relatively vigorous rump of Scottish Conservatism, distressingly tiny proportion of the government majority though it now is. It may be some slight help that this majority is now so rich in Northumbrians, other Northerners, and Mercians, and less dominated by those who rarely venture north of the Cotswolds. The risk remains that some of the English will tire of grumbling kinsfolk, as the Czechs did with the ever-discontented Slovaks.

But British politics cannot be healthy until the Labour Party either recovers its balance or sees something take its place. The evidence of events, testified by the secessions in the days of Michael Foot as well as of Jeremy Corbyn, is that a restoration of reality has to come from within. Scotland is a special case, for the SNP has managed a difficult balancing act, helped by funds from the Barnett Formula. It has appeared 'social democratic' enough to gather in much of the old urban Labour vote without sufficiently frightening the suburban, small-town, and country voters who were never socialist-inclined but never quite trusted the Tories.

As a unionist, even before I am Tory, I am forced to the reluctant conclusion that the revival of a temperate, balanced Labour Party, with a leadership showing some of the qualities of Gordon Brown and Donald Dewar, even of Tony Blair's better side, is needed for the health of British politics and the constitutional security of the United Kingdom. I don't yet see where that leadership is to come from, especially in Scotland. But I wish the Labour Party almost as well in their search as I wish that Boris Johnson can continue to grow into his awesome responsibilities.

It is these doubts, even more than the loss of Scottish Tory MPs, which make it a bitter-sweet victory.

RELIGION

The lost Sabbath

R D Kernohan 2004

There used to be a joke about us which, if only it were still applicable, would keep the racial discrimination agencies busy. 'The Scots keep the Sabbath,' said the English, 'and everything else they lay their hands on'.

Political correctness today teaches us to resent any notion that we are unco careful with our money. Tomorrow David Blunkett will give us laws to secure hyper-Calvinism as well as Islam from ridicule. Be careful then if you speak disrespectfully of opposition to Sunday sailings to Stornaway, where I enjoyed the only Sabbath I spent in the Outer Hebrides.

But the joke is out of date. We long since ceased to keep that Sabbath, except in parts of the Highlands and Islands, and no longer even take much notice of its close relative, the Christian Sunday. The change has gone so far in contemporary Scotland, and is so much taken from granted, that it attracts relatively little attention from most of our historians who breathlessly summarise the social history of the past century or two. They argue whether the Clyde was ever really red. They generate moral indignation over sectarianism, meaning mainly its ultra-Protestant forms. But they largely ignore the decline and apparent demise of customs and attitudes which were once characteristic of both Scottish life and Scotland's reputation and often created Scotland's stereotype. Even that dubious Scots worthy, the 'bona fide traveller' who slaked his itinerant Sabbath thirst with the additional cost of a stale statutory sandwich, is lucky to get a passing mention.

I don't blame the historians. Much of their 20th-century material would be dull stuff, far less lively than older records from days when kirk sessions enforced discipline not only over Sabbath-breaking but sex, being both the Sunday regulators and the Child Support Agency. Even the 19th-century encroachments on the Sabbath had some liveliness left. Piers were defended against Sunday excursionists from Clyde steamers and the Free General Assembly famously debated an appeal by a Glasgow printer excommunicated for setting a Monday *Herald* before midnight.

But it would be a dreary business to base a thesis on hundreds of forgotten 20th-century local wrangles about Sunday play on golf-courses or the availability of petrol pumps. Some of the forms of the Scottish Sabbath survived well into the century, and a kind of residual respect for it lingered in Lowland as well as Highland Scotland even among people who had lost formal touch with the Church.

I had aunts who didn't go to any kirk but had determinedly strong views. They ranged from not hanging out washing on Sundays to enforcement of strict decibel

levels and absolute prohibition of ball-games. I never remember my grandfather going to church, but on Sundays he still put on his best suit and retreated for some serious, even Socialist reading in the front room beside the print of Claverhouse's dragoons committing human rights abuses against Covenanters.

I mix the memory of the old cause with the incongruous jargon of the new age to remind myself, as well as to admit to the sceptical reader, that I know the times have changed, many former things have passed away, and that I see no prospect for bringing back anything remotely like the old Sabbath serenity. Jesus assures us that things which seem impossible to man are possible to God; but I confess, in all reverence, that I do not see how God might restore the old Sabbath in Scotland or even whether that is how He wants His fourth commandment applied today.

I also reminisce to emphasise the extent to which, even when the heart had gone out of it, the Scottish Sabbath still reflected the power it had once exerted in both Scotland's social life and its predominant style of religion. But like all religious and social ordinances, its power rested ultimately on a mixture of intense conviction and, among those of less intensity, a substantial degree of consent and concurrence.

The intensity of that conviction, often more Calvinist than Calvin, is hard for many Christians and most others to appreciate now. I don't think I ever fully appreciated until I read the family letters of Dr Thomas Guthrie, who organised the finances of the Disruption and became a notable social reformer in the Free Kirk. He is best remembered now for his pioneer work in care and education for destitute children, but I was researching one of his other enthusiasms, shared with many Great Victorians – the encouragement of Italian Protestants and liberal causes in Italy.

I was prepared for the lamentations from Florence in 1869 about Sunday 'recreations', the opening of shops and cafes, and the laxity of Continental Protestants as well as Catholics, but not for his attribution of blame. 'Calvin's and especially Luther's views, of the Sabbath day... have wrought much evil. Let us speak tenderly of the faults of these great and good men.' The breathtaking presumption testifies to the intensity of a conviction, characteristic of most Presbyterians and Evangelical Anglicans of the time, and also to the dangers of forgetting that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

How Scottish attitudes and customs have changed! But I am also struck by the contrast between the fate of Sabbatarianism and the outlook for some other strands in the Scottish Puritan and Evangelical traditions.

I don't only mean theological ones or those clearly or exclusively linked to Protestant religious beliefs. For example the temperance movement of Presbyterianism of a century or so ago, though supported by much of the Evangelical wing of Presbyterianism, was also closely linked to secular as well as Christian Socialism. The 'Red Clydesiders' were mainly teetotalers. It also had a parallel tendency, albeit in Scotland a minority view in a minority, in the Irish Catholic temperance tradition of Father Theobald Mathew.

Superficial observation, whether of supermarket wine-shelves, crowded pubs, or banks turned into bars might suggest that this tradition has decayed as much as the Sabbatarian one but the truth is less simple. Both the benevolent and the intolerant strains of the Victorian temperance tradition are reasserting themselves today over a range of dangerous habits and pleasant vices. I hear echoes of them in the fashionable alarms of obesity, the demonisation of McDonald's, and especially in the denial of a workplace refuge for smokers and the passions over 'passive smoking' in public places. I have never myself understood why people waste a pleasantly fragrant plant by setting fire to it, and wonder now how I ever endured the old-smoke levels of newspapers offices and National Service, but I dislike the hectoring and intolerant tone in which people are told what is good for them.

The same moods are also already evident in the campaign against 'binge drinking' which may be the first outward and visible symbol of a reaction against the wider social and personal damage done, even in smoke-free bars, by alcohol consumption. And, of course, there are strains of the old temperance and even prohibitionist spirit in the much wider coalition of opinion which rightly resists legalisation of 'recreational drugs' and would gladly squeeze more drinking drivers into our overcrowded prisons. Maybe the time is not too far off when one of Jack McConnell's successors will deplore the damage done by '1960's liberalism' over the licensing laws.

On the face of things, it may seem harder to argue that the puritanical reaction is also under way in attitudes to sex, marriage and the family. That may seem far-fetched in a contemporary Scotland where even the registers of church marriages show a high proportion of couples already living at the same address, when politicians worry about the single-parent vote, slot-machines are more easily found serving condoms than chocolate, and homosexual blessings are bestowed in Edinburgh pubs. But at the very least it is clear that there is a strong and tenacious sector of Scottish opinion, always theologically diverse and now ethically diverse as well, which distrusts that '1960s liberalism' in sexual matters.

It gave the Holyrood parliamentarians a rough time over their gesture politics with whatever Clause 28 was called in Scotland. It adds to the practical difficulties of regulating prostitution and is a factor in that justified detestation of paedophilia which helps to sell tabloid newspapers and arouses such fears about the internet. It also remains a significant factor (and sensible restraining influence) affecting the way Scottish schools and education authorities approach sex education and 'sexual health' promotion, an expression now used to cover a multitude of sins.

I don't want to exaggerate the residual strength of Scottish Puritanism, which will also trouble casino promoters more than they expect. Nor do I exaggerate the ability of the religious tendencies within it to form effective alliances with others alarmed at the impact, especially in Scotland's poorest or most dispirited areas, of drink, smoking, gambling and reckless sex. I merely contrast the survival of many socially-

conservative and cautionary attitudes, even in an unfavourable media and intellectual climate, with the condition of the Sabbath and the mood of many of those who might be expected to defend it.

For example, the alliance of religious and social conservatism with the trade union ethos and workers' interests ought to have been able to put up far more effective resistance to dramatic expansion of Sunday shop-opening. In England (where the law had to change) it fought a long but eventually half-hearted rearguard action. In Scotland, where the national consensus had once made more restrictive laws unnecessary, it was hardly evident at all.

The ineffectiveness of union resistance partly reflects changing work and shift patterns, for example in the eager availability of part-time workers, but it also surely displays the way in which the very idea of days of rest has given way to a claim for more leisure, which is a different concept. But the religious part of the alliance was also ineffective. Superficially that might seem to reflect in just one more way the decline in the political standing and social influence of the churches, but there was more to it than that. Nor was it merely their liberal wing's usual reluctance to take a stand against fashionable secular and social trends.

Defence of Sunday observance in the old style which is still the style of the Free Kirk and the Free Presbyterians, and even of the Church of Scotland in parts of the Highlands and Islands, does not now seem a high priority for the substantial modern Evangelical elements in the Churches of Scotland and England, in both of which their proportion is likely to increase as total numbers diminish.

These groups, often ultra-conservative in their definition of biblical authority and frequently at odds with the media and educational consensus on 'sex and relationships', no longer seem to give a high priority to the defence of the Sabbath, though they certainly love, honour and enjoy Sunday as the high point of the week. One reason in Scotland is probably a reluctance, whether conscious or not, to become identified with a rather different strain of social and religious conservatism, admirable in many ways but often seeming to belong in a Highland ghetto. Another and more important one may be genuine difficulty for these 'Bible Christians' in drawing the same Sabbath implications from scripture as those of the Westminster Confession and Larger Catechism. But there may also simply be a reasonable sense of evangelical priorities, proportion and practicality. The market forces and commercial interests now involved in Sunday shopping did not destroy Sunday as a 'special day'. They took advantage of the fact that for very many people it was not a very special day and even a dull one.

But I suspect the main reason for this low-key Evangelical approach is probably that in modern Scotland and England the mere facts of meaningful adherence to a religious community and shaping a Sunday lifestyle around regular church attendance increasingly mark us off from the rest of the population. They also serve one of the roles of Sabbaths or defined holy days in any religion, which is to emphasise and reinforce the identity and sense of community in this household of God. However lax our behaviour may seem, after probably attending only one Sunday service, the way we shape our day around that experience and weekly festival is beginning to mark us off from much of the surrounding community as clearly as if we were religious Jews keeping the older Sabbath or Muslims with their special discipline of prayer and their Friday obligations.

I first felt this some years ago when a prominent Scottish nationalist wanted a token Tory for some earnest inquiry into the state of the nation and suggested I might like to speak at 11 on a Sunday morning. I now feel it acutely when occasionally I visit a city centre on a Sunday afternoon and go on the old and now false assumption that there will be no trouble finding a place to park. I look at Princes Street and feel a little like Dr Guthrie in Florence, but more in sorrow than in anger.

This is partly a tendency to grieve, as Wordsworth did over the glory of Venice, when 'even the shade of that which once was great is passed away'. For the Scottish Sabbath was great for those who had the faith and temperament to make the most of it, which they did in ways which seemed to drive them forward rather than hold them back in making full use of the other six days. It is also partly a milder and more detached surprise that, at a time when many Scots claim their country has recovered its identity, something which contributed so much to Scottish identity and was especially identified with Scotland should, at least to outward appearance, have so largely passed away.

But it is also a perplexed reaction to the ways of the modern world. We have largely abandoned the idea of a day of rest (and therefore recreation). Yet all around us secular pontiffs complain in the media of increasing stress at work and destructive new stresses in individual and family life. There is a thriving business in marketing physical and psychological aids to relaxation at the same time as we have abandoned, even more than the Continental Europeans and much more than the Americans, the traditional attempt to build one form of rest and relaxation into our social and economic life.

The Old Testament Sabbath and the Christian Sunday, for all the restrictions and irritations they imposed on those who could not enjoy them, and despite the narrowness with which theologians often interpreted permitted 'works of necessity and mercy', were significant instruments of social justice and protection as well as patterns for individual lifestyles which brought personal fulfilment. They eased the lot of ancient slaves and Victorian servants. They were a civilising and restraining factor in the headlong and often headstrong advance of industrialisation. They recharged batteries which ran effectively in the week ahead.

I wish I could conclude by suggesting ways in which the best of the Sabbath might be revived and a change in public preferences might reverse the trends which demand more and more Sunday work in the service industries. The only one I can think of, far from welcome in other ways, is that European bureaucrats anxious to enforce union by creeping regulation, impose Sunday closures or alternative compulsory rest days on commercial life. That seems far from desirable and, in the present climate, probably politically impracticable.

Instead, I end with a paradox. The liberal and 'progressive' tendencies which still dominate Protestant Church structures and theological faculties, and which even under an ultra-conservative Pope shape political theology, like to deplore what they call the 'privatisation' of religion. There have been a succession of initiatives, from the Iona Community onwards and from worker-priests to Presbyterian arts centres, as well as involvement with political lobbies, to emphasise (in the most favoured cliché) that 'the Church is where the people are'.

Most of this has been worth doing, but it has gone along with social trends which have increasingly made all Christians seem, in the phrase once mainly applied to the Jews, a 'peculiar people'. Congregations, and especially middle-class congregations, have been taught to feel guilty if their Sunday gatherings seem to be the heart of the matter, but the changed face of the public Sunday has much more than before made them feel a people apart.

Six days a week we probably manage to blend in with our neighbours reasonably well, but the peculiarity becomes evident on the other one, which according to taste may be seen as marking the pause after the labours of Creation or as the first day of the week, when the women told the strange story about the empty tomb. We cannot be 'where the people are' on Sundays even if we do sometimes nip into the supermarket for a pint of milk on the way home from church.

The Rennie case

Alex Wood 2009

There's a Presbyterian streak in many Scots, including those without denominational affiliation or even religion, but that serious concern about ethical issues is insufficient to explain the interest in the Scott Rennie case at the General Assembly. It is almost unbelievable, as we approach the second decade of the 21st century, that sexual orientation should be the centre of national debate.

The fundamentalist view, however, is clear and unambiguous. The Bible is the literal word of God. 'Thou shalt not lie with mankind as with womankind; it is an abomination.' (Leviticus 18). A homosexual lifestyle is incompatible with biblical teaching. The Bible says it is an abomination: end of debate, despite the fact that the Bible contains serious contradictions (examine the contradictory promises to the poor in the two versions of the sermon on the mount) and injunctions which few contemporary Christians would uphold – husbands separating from their menstruating wives or the incestuous seduction of their father by Lot's daughters.

Nonetheless the strength of the fundamentalist position should never be doubted. I'm reminded of the daughter of a Free Presbyterian manse who gave her parents a *Scotsman* calendar, one of the illustrations of which noted mountains which were several millions of years old. When next she visited her parents, the calendar was on the wall but 'several million' had been deleted and replaced by '6,000' because the literal interpretation of Genesis is inconsistent with scientific views of the earth's evolutionary timescale.

The opponents of homosexual practice frequently revert to the argument of its being unnatural. The now common placard, 'God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve,' sums up a view of the issue otherwise expressed as, 'It's just not right, it's not natural,' a highly dangerous argument in the context of sexuality. The common acts of homosexual sex are all practised in heterosexual sex. A few of the puritanical brethren and elders might seek to proscribe explicitly and exactly which sexual behaviours are acceptable and which unacceptable but Iranian style moral control is unimaginable.

A more telling argument is that if Scott Rennie were heterosexual he would not be permitted by the church to live in an active sexual relationship with a partner to whom he is not married and maintain his ministry. There can't be a more lax rule for the homosexual ministry than for the heterosexual ministry.

The impact of accepting Scott Rennie as a minister is that the Kirk must now consider same sex marriage. At one level, that should offer few intellectual problems

since marriage in Scotland has been viewed since the Reformation, by the Kirk as well as the law, as a civil contract but such a sea-change will not occur quickly.

Perhaps most worrying for the Kirk's liberals is that to legitimise same-sex unions undermines the very institution of the family. Marriage may not in reformed tradition be a sacrament, and for the irreligious marriage may merely be a social construct, but many agree that it is the best vehicle to raise children. To state that marriage is the best place within which to raise children does not assume that the procreation of children is its primary purpose. No Protestant church starts today from the expectation that all who marry will wish to have children, nor would any such church refuse, say, to marry a couple one or both of whom were infertile. The family is evolving from what it was and same-sex marriage is not what threatens the family as an institution.

Scott Rennie's call to Queen's Cross has whipped up a storm in the Presbyterian tea-cup. The narrowness of the victory of the liberals is indicative of the strength of social conservatism in the Church of Scotland. Perhaps it has grabbed attention because it exposes the narrowness of the liberal consensus; perhaps because it signals another step towards the gradual demise of the Kirk; perhaps because it plays to Scotland's prurient side; perhaps because it facilitated cheap headlines.

The issue will likely be forgotten in a few months but for this writer it had a personal significance. Rennie is presently minister at Brechin Cathedral, where I was baptised and my parents married. Brechin was the birthplace of Thomas Guthrie, founder of the ragged schools movement, campaigner for temperance, a prime mover in the disruption of 1843, leader of a stern, unbending and fundamentalist evangelism. Brechin was, and I thought is, a quiet backwater of social conservatism which I still visit regularly, whose football team I support but which I had never considered as an exemplar of tolerance. Yet Scott Rennie asserts that Brechin has lived amicably with its divorced, gay minister and his partner for several years. If Brechin can rise to that, perhaps this atheist can believe there's some hope for a more tolerant and humane Scotland in the years ahead.

Never ordinary

Christine Martin 2010

I'm an ordinary middle-class 'girl', daughter of the manse and, as such, appreciate entirely what Kenneth Roy wrote in the *Scottish Review* about the Prime Minister's claim that he came from an 'ordinary middle-class family'.

It is impossible to be a child of the manse and be 'ordinary' (I do take exception to the use of that word... everyone in this world is extraordinary in one way or another). My father was a contemporary of Rev John Brown. I am a contemporary of Gordon Brown. He grew up in an urban environment. I grew up in both urban and rural environments. He had brothers. I had neither brother nor sister.

We always lived apart from the community. The house was invariably the biggest house in the village, or neighbourhood. Apart from visits from family and friends, people only dared come up that drive to get married (yes, many couples married in the manse when I was a wee girl. I was always desperate to see the bride, but never allowed) or because they had 'problems'. Dad had to be left in peace and silence. Then there were those other visitors – always men and invariably men in black. Kirk Session meetings and the monthly round of 'Fraternals'. These were meetings between neighbouring ministers – always held on Monday mornings – the minister's 'day off'. For as long as memory permits, on Saturdays I helped mum fill the tins with baking. There were no allowance claims in those days. Everything came from the stipend and hard work.

The house itself was intimidating. We lived in the kitchen, huddled around the Rayburn. In winter, the prospect of leaving the kitchen was a nightmare. A visit to the loo saw your breath frost in the air. I wore more clothes going to bed than I did going to school, including a knitted hat. I recall winter mornings when Jack Frost had paid an overnight call and patterned my window with exquisitely delicate motifs. We had maids' quarters with no maids. We had a coach house with no coachman. We had stables with no horses. We had land – a glebe – which was used by the local farmer. A huge garden kept the minister, his wife and daughter fully employed. In two parishes we lived next door to cemeteries. We were all right, however: the yew trees in the garden saw to that.

To be a child of the manse in the Scotland of those years was to be probably the most prominent person in the parish, and beyond. I think we were more marked than the minister and his wife. The congregation knew, or hoped, what to expect from them, but from their offspring, only the worst – or best – could be expected. Annually, we were invited to afternoon tea in the 'Big House' – the laird. Frequently

tramps called at the door. Mum always brought them in, made something to eat and handed out some clothing – socks, shirts. Dad did without in order to let someone else, even worse off, have.

A kind of mythology accreted around us. There was the constant reminder of that well known ditty – *The Ball of Kirriemuir* – which features the exploits of the minister's daughter in one of its verses. This was usually sung on a bus going anywhere – school, Sunday school trips, swimming on Saturdays, etc. It was hell. In some instances, we were treated with a kind of reverence. In others, it was nothing short of suspicion. 'Little Miss Goody Two Shoes' – how often have I heard that one?

However proud I am now of my father and mother's achievements, theirs was a 'double-act' devoted to the life of their church: each was outstanding and totally committed in their complementary roles, but I hated being the 'minister's daughter'.

I went to local schools. Everybody knew who I was, part of that society, but set apart. When I misbehaved, which was frequently, it always got back to my parents. The threat was to 'send you to Easdale (boarding school for ministers' daughters in Edinburgh) next term'. By jove, did that make me behave, for a while.

John, Gordon and Andrew Brown were no more ordinary members of the community than I was. To have been a run-of-the-mill pupil at Eton would have been less conspicuous, unless either Princes William or Harry. One thing, I must flag up. We were 'poor'. At least that's how I perceived it. Because I got biscuits at friends houses which were wrapped in foil while biscuits and cake in my house came out of tins and were home-baked. Because I never wore bought clothes, everything was handmade by my mother. Because we never went on holidays, only pulpit exchanges. I really believed we were poor. I look back and now I know how rich we really were.

The young and their beliefs

Elena Dugan 2014

In Israel, thousands of Hasidic Jews are about to be thrown in jail. And they're happy about it. Hasidic Judaism, also known as ultra-Orthodox Judaism, is a sect that is intensely proud of its social distinctiveness and its total dedication to Jewish law and daily practice, down to the minutae.

A recently passed law will mandate that Hasidic Jews join the Israel Defense Force (IDF), thus ending the exemption they previously possessed to opt-out of military service for as long as they study at yeshiva, which for the highly-studious ultra-Orthodox men for whom the greatest mitsvot, or commandment, is to study Talmud or Torah, amounts to a lifelong exemption.

The Hasids, tightly organised around their rebbes, or religious leaders, take great pride in the way they opt out of the strictures and temptations of secular society, and have already announced their intention to be jailed before they serve in the military. Recently, Jerusalem's throughways were shut down by protests 100,000 strong, as was downtown Manhattan by American Hasids protesting in solidarity, to the tune of 50,000. In fact, the hard-liner Hasidic explanation for the Holocaust is that the Jewish people assimilated too much to secular society, and God sent Ha-Shoah, the Holocaust, as punishment. They are proud to be distinctive and this distinctiveness has serious political implications.

The fundamental, pun intended, truth is that our generation is becoming more religious than our parents. In my first year of Arabic, I befriended a particularly bubbly young woman in hijab. She was far more religious than her family, none of whom asked or mandated that she wear a hijab, and she wore the niqab (face covering) on occasion, to see if she was truly modest enough, and to test her own vanity and limitations. I asked her if I was going to hell, as a non-Muslim. She smiled and asked what I believed. I hedged, and so did she.

My friend is not alone in adopting her newly radical faith. Converts to radical Islam are growing faster per capita in the UK than in any other nation on earth. One might also look to the enormous market in Christian music and merchandise: there are teen bibles for young girls with teddy bears on the pages of Isaiah, and Christian death metal groups (a huge scene, actually). Our peers are learning to subsume all parts of our experience, hobbies, ideas, and identity under religious headings.

And you may not know about these developments, because they do not happen in the so-called mainstream, and certainly not in the sporadic public forums for religious dialogue. The internet silently facilitates these sort of self-regulating and self-organising systems. Reddit, a social media news site, has a subreddit with two million subscribers which celebrates atheism as the truest expression of free intellect. They collect Neil DeGrasse Tyson stories, 'barbaric' Bible verses, and share high-resolution shots from the Hubble Telescope with watermarked quotes celebrating just how beautiful and delicate a godless cosmos can be.

There are Hasidic blogs advising people on minutae of practice, as well as blogs where youth who secretly have their doubts but are too afraid to say so in public share and develop dissident views, guides to exorcisms for Pentecostalists in dozens of languages, guides for evangelical Christians to help them win debates with those pesky atheists, and fashion blogs teaching young women who wear hijab how to wear their covering to the prom.

The internet, however, also facilitates insular discussion and small-scale organisation, and enclaves of particularity are forming and formative. Any scholar of 'New Religious Movements', aka cults, will tell you that the internet is the single greatest contributing factor in the organisation and radicalisation of so-called mainstream and international sects – Scientology, Satanism, and Raelism – and also more loosely organised movements like Wicca and Theosophy.

Even mainstream movements, like American evangelicalism or neo-atheism, are exhibiting sectarian sociological and psychological characteristics. Whether it is a Baptist youth refusing to listen to impure secular music, or a die-hard Richard Dawkins aficionado heckling the Westboro Baptist Church, we are becoming used to forming our identities in opposition to others. We look for a 'them', the boundaries of which instruct what makes 'us'.

Our generation cannot be lied to any more and convinced that we are all truly the same. The information is at our fingertips and we know better: we are really and truly different, with absolutely contradictory views on the world, and moral and ethical codes that can be as different as night and day. The key is not to deny people this difference, not to deny them their identity and offer them nothing in return but meaningless platitudes about love and understanding. A community built on denying everyone their beliefs in the name of community, is not really a community at all.

What we are seeing is a mainstream secular humanism that all find palatable, but none find appealing – who would want to trade in the religious beliefs and narratives that come to life in their heart and home for the blandness of a homogenous and quiet society?

We are no longer apathetic, and we are no longer content to assimilate. Our beliefs are fast becoming our most important markers of identity. Old models of acceptance that emphasise commonality and elide over difference are no longer tenable, especially when it is uniqueness and dissimilarity that bestow youth today with truth and identity. Thus, acceptance is impossible, in the way we have learned it from previous generations, because there is no absolute common ground – it will always,

one way or another, run out, and in that moment of schism, the fantasy of unity is lost.

What we can look for is tolerance, born out of honest assessment of difference, and transparent dialogue in which all are seen as they themselves believe they are. The fear of cultural warfare would seem to eliminate this sort of honesty from contention, but my experience with religious dialogue implies that the battle is already upon us. As the writer George MacDonald says, there are some victories worse than defeats. The imaginary victory of a loving and accepting global community would come at the cost of individual beliefs and conceptions of identity. But, in the defeat of utopianism, I believe we might find a way forward.

Is Scotland a post-Christian country?

Alasdair McKillop 2014

David Cameron provoked an intriguingly widespread debate over Easter by writing an article for the *Church Times* about Christianity. In what read like a relatively diplomatic intervention, he was careful to point out that Christian values were shared by members of other faiths and none.

Speaking about his own relationship with Christianity he noted, in rather undogmatic terms, 'I am a member of the Church of England, and, I suspect, a rather classic one: not that regular in attendance, and a bit vague on some of the more difficult parts of the faith'.

His comments were endorsed by former Foreign Secretary Jack Straw but condemned by others, notably a group of 55 public figures who signed a letter to the *Daily Telegraph* describing the comments as contributing towards 'alienation and division'. They rightly talked about the myriad of influences that had shaped British society but their fear that such talk 'needlessly fuels enervating sectarian debates' seemed disproportionate and lacking in perspective.

Earlier in the month, the Prime Minister had offered well wishes to Jewish people in Britain as they celebrated Passover and Sikhs as they celebrated Vaisakhi, the occasion which he said offered the chance to mark the 'immense contribution' Sikhs had made to British society.

The letter to the *Telegraph* prompted right-wing commentators such as Charles Moore and Stephen Glover to preach about the baleful influence exercised by militant atheists. I would tend to consider signing one's name only as an act of militancy if it was being done by a revolutionary signing the death warrant of a member of the recently disposed regime. Nonetheless, they were voicing concern about the decades-long drift into secularism which, to them, had resulted in a more notable tendency to disparage public pronouncements influenced by a faith-based understanding of the proper functioning of society.

Evidence from the 2011 census is hard to use decisively to shed light on this debate, although the trend is for the number of self-identified Christians to decline. It recorded that 59% of people in England and Wales described themselves as Christian, down from 72% in 2001, while in Northern Ireland it was 83% and in Scotland 54% (1.7m Church of Scotland, 841,053 Catholic and 291,275 other Christian). In Scotland, 1.9m had no religion.

Those with no religion had increased from 7.7m to 14.1 m, or 25% of the population and the number of Muslims increased to 2.7m from 1.5m. The Church of

England's own figures found 800,000 people attended Sunday service in 2012, a figure that had halved since 1968. In Scotland, we know that both Protestant and Catholic religious observance has been on a downward trend for decades. The question of what religion means short of attendance at faith services lurks in the pews up the back of such debates.

There are certainly reminders of the national importance that used to be attached to Christianity. The Church of England is the established church, with bishops in the House of Lords and the Queen is supreme governor. Nick Clegg is among those publicly supportive of disestablishment. Historically speaking, the case for Christianity seems indisputable and in terms of simple longevity and centrality of influence, the UK is more of a Christian country than anything else.

Some might clarify that still further and say it is a Protestant country if we refer to the institutional framework of high political and public life. The ban on Catholics ascending to the throne is considered by some to symbolise a historic hostility towards Catholicism in the highest echelons of British life: it is a shiny reminder of a grubby hostility and challenges easy use of the wider term Christian.

Britain once defined itself in Protestant terms against Catholic continental powers, notably France and academics such as Linda Colley have argued that it was an important bonding agent following the 1707 Act of Union. It was a slight oversight in her recent book that she didn't analyse the parallels between an increase in secularism and nationalism.

We should be wary of blithely assuming that Scotland has elevated itself to some sort of post-Christian state in which morality is derived from social democratic politics as opposed to notions inherited from Christian teaching. Evidence can be cited to prove the lingering hold of religious concerns over the public imagination, even if it takes the less than agreeable forms of sectarianism or abuses of power by the Catholic Church.

It was not so long ago that the General Assembly was referred to as the surrogate Scottish Parliament and meetings were held in the Assembly Hall on the Mound until the opening of the Scottish Parliament building in 2004. More recently, the minister for community safety and legal affairs, Roseanna Cunningham, was the keynote speaker when the Evangelical Alliance launched its referendum manifesto *What Kind of a Nation?* at the Scottish Parliament on Wednesday 23 April. Furthermore, it was recently announced that Christians for Independence has raised £100,000 for campaigning purposes after being launched two months ago at a meeting addressed by Dennis Canavan.

Earlier in the year, following an inter-faith meeting chaired by the moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the Right Reverend Lorna Hood, there was a call for the place of religion to be recognised in any written constitution. A further meeting in July was announced so that those groups involved can formulate their response to any consultation.

A spokesperson for the Scottish Government sought to placate fears by saying that there were no plans to change the legal status of any of Scotland's religious groups, adding that any constitution would be compliant with the European Convention on Human Rights. This inter-faith approach might be considered a sign of weakness, with the Christian churches seeking to gain momentum by allying with faiths that have not experienced the same decline, albeit that they occupy a position of less numerical significance than either the Church of Scotland or the Catholic Church. Alternatively, it could be taken as evidence of the ability of Christian denominations to respect and co-exist in a productive manner with those of other faiths.

The root of this dispute is, I believe, questions about values. Do we share a system of values that underpin assumptions about common citizenship? If so, where do they derive from and have they changed over time? Political ideologies are often suffused with their own systems of moral values, many of which have arguably been historically shaped by Christian influences or overlap.

The religious influences on the beliefs of the early Labour pioneers is oft-cited. John Wheatley famously made the case for the relationship between socialism and Christian moral teachings in a famous debate with the Anglo-French Catholic writer Hilaire Belloc, although it was work he had been engaged with since forming the Catholic Socialist Society in 1906.

The decline in political party affiliation might suggest that we are growing weary of all bodies that seek to posit seamless, universal understandings of society. Although not immediately obvious, lessons for both sides in the independence campaign lie in the debate generated by David Cameron.

God's marginal people

R D Kernohan 2018

I thought the nurse was commendably diligent in recording information about me before a fairly minor 'procedure', even though I was assured that I would be let loose after a couple of hours. But I wasn't prepared for either the substance or the style of the last question: 'Is there any particular religion you would like to have noted?'

Perhaps I should be grateful that the NHS is prepared, even with outpatients, for all eventualities. But the tone reminded me of the way that in an earlier overnight stay in a private hospital the extravagant price included such benefits as asking me whether I wanted porridge or a favourite cereal and how I liked my eggs done: marginal extras.

More important, nothing could have brought out more clearly the unsettled condition of religious faith in contemporary Britain than this throwaway line from a script of the NHS, the nearest thing our secularised society has to an established creed. Religion has still to be allowed a place but almost as an afterthought and with a marginal rather than a central role in society. It commands some public recognition but is treated increasingly as a private matter and even a private eccentricity.

It isn't a distinctively British condition. Over almost all Western Europe religion has seemed in retreat, both in public recognition and private adherence, whether real, nominal, or in-between. Not since the anti-clerical zealotry of the Third Republic has France (reacting now against 'Islamicisation') put such emphasis on the laïcité whose nuances are so readily lost in translation. In Germany, where church allegiance often meant no more than paying a modest extra tax, statistics of adherence have plummeted. In The Netherlands, where society and politics once seemed to revel in shades of denominational differences, the 'confessional' Christian parties used to command more than half the vote. Last year it was 18%. Even in Catholic Ireland secular fashions now seem to count for more than papal morals.

They order things differently in Russia, where reviving Orthodoxy has found a new context for its tradition of contemplating the eternal and fawning before the ephemeral; and in the United States the effect of confusion in the main Protestant denominations and costly scandal in some Roman Catholic dioceses is still offset by the traditional diversity of religious expression and the vigour of the evangelicals whom liberal politicians and media people dislike so much. There are also large areas of the world where Christianity and Islam are thriving, even expanding. There are some (notably Latin America) where the decline of mainstream Protestantism in its old heartlands can be set against a surge in the number and influence of new evangelical and Pentecostal Christians.

But these worldwide signs of religious vigour and commitment, some of them also evident in immigrant communities in Europe, only sharpen the contrast between Western Europe and the rest. They also make it easier to see how, in striving to keep a place for themselves near the centre of things, the trend-setters of institutional religion often contribute to the marginalisation of what makes their institutions distinctive and is essential to their survival and eventual revival.

This is not to suggest that the church should be unconcerned about the environment or poverty or women's rights or sexual equality or ethnic tensions, far less than it can avoid soul-searching over its response to the disestablishment of Christian marriage and other strands of the sexual revolutions of recent times. All Christians, especially in the Reformed faith and tradition, should know that there are no clearly fixed frontiers between the sacred and the secular or the spiritual and temporal. They must respond to the biblical warning that faith without works is dead.

Nor is it to deny that some of the Christians most associated with social and even political campaigning in alliance with unbelievers display an enviable personal spirituality and power of leadership within their local communities of worship and prayer. The traditions of the frustrated conservative Thomas Chalmers and the evangelical radical George MacLeod are not dead, even in a largely apostate Scotland.

But the ways in which many religious people work with others in 'secular' contemporary Britain do not prevent their ways of life and thought becoming as marginalised as those of the various fellow-Christians roughly bundled together in popular and media opinion as conservatives or even 'fundamentalists'.

It is tempting to blame this process on the intellectual arrogance of intolerant liberalism, some of it infecting even the 'mainstream' Christian denominations, as in the Kirk's reluctance to accommodate ministers and congregations actively dissenting from its equivocations over marriage and sexuality. But the process is also driven by market forces, some of them very evident in media coverage of religion.

The BBC for years has downgraded and partially dechristianised religious broadcasting without much protest, even from the churches. But when it recently changed tack slightly and professed eagerness to counter widespread ignorance of the values, practices, cultural significance, and influence of religion, it wasn't responding to consumer demand. It was reverting to an almost Reithian determination to give people not what they want but what they ought to have.

The market-driven commercial sector behaves very differently, its older channels having virtually abandoned specialised coverage of religion and the main satellite and cable channels hardly giving a thought to it. Religious people may be allowed into soap operas but can expect to be caricatured, as in *Coronation Street* – which until recently had a homosexual majority among its tiny group of practising Christians. (The situation has since been complicated by a murderer who occasionally crosses himself and may have been absolved in confession.)

A similar but more complicated marginalisation of religion is evident in the print media. Local papers still reflect the vigour or torpor of local congregations and religious groups in their communities, but the regional and national press, probably reflecting reader interest as well as editorial inclination, give scant coverage to religious life except when it involves the terrorist fringe of Islam, quarrelsome tendencies within Christian denominations, historic allegations of abuse – anything from the vilest rape to a cuff on the ear – and financial or sexual delinquencies of senior and junior officers of the church militant.

I sometimes grumble inwardly but feel no great right to protest. It is newsworthy when those popularly presumed to be holier than other sinners turn out to be molesters or embezzlers. It's inevitable, though sometimes cruel, that cardinals, priests, imams, ministers, Kirk elders, or nuns should be named and shamed as such when they fall short of standards they have set or accepted. But I find a bit too much gusto in some of the coverage of ancient offences. I also flicker an eyebrow at a recent tendency in news reports from the courts to identify some offender as a 'churchgoer'. All of us who fit that description know that it covers a multitude of sins and perhaps we should be flattered that a reporter still thinks it remarkable that one of us should be into brawling or shoplifting or dangerous driving.

But we should also worry about yet another hint that we are a rather peculiar people; perhaps ourselves uncertain whether we are creatures of a dying habit or cheerful prisoners of grace – and possibly as estranged from the consensus of British society as immigrants whose dress, diet, and appearance, as well as their social and religious customs, impose a kind of voluntary apartheid.

Maybe it will never be as bad as that, for a writer's pursuit of epigram can be a formula for exaggeration. Jewish faith and life have long been constructively integrated into British society. Mainstream Islam, despite complications of international politics and cultural traditions, might follow the same route. And the residual Christians, confirmed in a faith no longer fashionable in Western Europe, can reflect that a peculiar people may feel themselves chosen people – and ponder what they have been chosen for.

They may even see the priesthood of all believers, an idea that once emphasised Christian divisions, in a new light. They may seek pardon as well as reconciliation for the world. Among the sacrifices they offer may be their own loss of public standing and esteem, while cherishing parts of an inheritance in danger (as with the King James Bible) of being lost. Unlike the priest in the parable they need not pass by on the other side, but serve the world for which they also pray. And the church may increasingly come to be represented to the world not by its dignitaries but by the ordinary people believing and sometimes doing extraordinary things.

Perhaps if we are humbled enough we might even be exalted again.

Losing my religion: far from being bitter, I am grateful John McGrath 2019

1.

It was disorientating to hear Jacob Rees-Mogg say in a spurt of *reductio ad absurdum*: 'I am not looking for a leader of the party and of the country who is a practicing Catholic who could alternatively be in holy orders,' thinking this would reassure the viewer that they could not be dealing with a more practical or honest man. The interviewer, Cathy Newman, repeatedly referring to Jacob as a 'man of faith', asked some good questions but none answered the one in my head. His choice of comparison '... who could alternatively be in holy orders,' seemed more revealing than absurd.

Everyone brought up in a religious environment will have their roots entangled in it for life. It might sound a bit wacky but I was brought up with the idea that I was miraculously cured of terminal cancer because my father, a devout Catholic, prayed to a Scottish almost saint called Margaret Sinclair – an Edinburgh nun who died of tuberculosis aged 25 in 1925. In my heart, Margaret Sinclair still feels like an old much-loved friend. The miraculous nature of my recovery seemed not in any way diminished by the fact that I also received a hefty dose of radiotherapy, a then more or less experimental procedure which, aside from almost killing me, left me disabled for life.

One of a number of difficulties that grow from having any ancient religious conviction in this new age is the suspension of disbelief required to think it true in the light of the science we now know. Suspension of disbelief, the thing movie directors rely upon to keep you watching through an unconvincing plot, is fine when it comes to movies, but the suspension of disbelief required to live with a religious conviction reaches deeply into the practitioner and, by osmosis, spreads out to other, non-religious judgements we make from day to day. This was made obvious when this leading politician, pressed about the character of the man he supported to be next Prime Minister said: 'Judgement will come from a higher authority in due course'.

Every age is new but this is a different kind of new age. All over the globe, millions of security cameras, dashboard cams and phones record the world, collecting in just one year some *millions* of years of human existence. Billions of humans view them and filter the images and we all get to see the best footage. We see things our ancestors had to imagine from stories told by the few who survived. We have all seen a tsunami washing over the land and carrying people and houses away; we have all

seen the fireball fall from the sky and explode blowing in the windows; earthquakes and hurricanes. Some of us have seen a fertilised human egg cell divide and become a person and in doing so glimpsed the origin of ourselves, the instant where we all had our own personal big bang. We see wonders and terrible suffering, but in the millions of years of recorded images we collect every year, nothing supernatural is seen to happen. The higher authority is never seen to act.

2.

At age nine, in 1969, I spent a little short of a year in the Princess Margaret Rose Orthopaedic Hospital in Edinburgh having an even then primitive leg-lengthening operation that got complicated. We lived in Galashiels some 35 miles away by car but as my parents could not drive I often had no visitors. Occasionally, a Mr Gimson would appear and stand and chat to me for a while. I had no idea who he was but he was amusing and friendly and it was a relief not to be the only child in the ward without a visitor. Gimson was on the hospital board of management. He wandered the wards after meetings, visiting the unvisited and I suppose inspecting the conditions. When I showed Mr Gimson a toy slide projector given to me by my aunt, he promised to bring in a real one and show some slides.

'Akela' Margaret, a woman who might have been a nearly saint herself, in a sad attempt to pretend we were at a boy scout meeting, set-up a campfire with a red light bulb and some sticks. We watched slides of here and there, including Nepal, where Mr Gimson had been walking, but he finished with slides of sketches he made when he was held in a Japanese prisoner of war camp in Burma. A camp where the prisoners were used as slaves to build a railway. We saw his pencil drawings of emaciated soldiers standing hopelessly around and sketches of improvised medical equipment. It sounds like a grim thing to show in a boys ward, but we were enthralled. He was an instant hero. He had been imprisoned and tortured just like us.

Shortly before I was due to go home, Mr Gimson drove me in his vintage Alvis car to the artificial ski slope on the Pentland Hills which I could see from my hospital bed. He had the operators stop the ski lift so I could be loaded on in my waist-high iron calliper. We got off at the top to sit and look at the view.

Years later, I learned that had he been found with his drawings he would have been executed on the spot, without the use of a bullet, so he sealed them in a jar which he buried with the dead. In 1945, the graves were disinterred, the pictures found and returned to him. Some are on the Imperial War Museum website. It's worth looking at them if only to think of the journey the image made from its origin to your eye. There is a reason I am bringing him into this chain of thought.

Hearing Jacob Rees-Mogg decline to judge the personal attributes of the now Prime Minister left me wondering what other things he declined to judge. Did he decline to judge seeing the European Union as anything other than a financial enterprise for the benefit of traders? Did he decline to judge seeing it as the fantastic construction it is, disproving the Tower of Babel, where people of many languages do work together to build great things, the greatest thing being that the ordinary work they do, they do in peace.

Mr Gimson, I never called him anything else, had a great sense of humour, rarely replying without inserting a subtle joke. Years later he told me when climbing into my Nissan Bluebird, that he was thinking of buying a Japanese car. He wondered if I thought them reliable. His delivery was so dry it took days to sink in. He actually drove the same green Alvis classic car till he could not drive and one day I saw it broken down at Leith Links. I had to stop and wait with him, surprised to find myself sitting in that old cracked leather front seat. He told me he was taking the car to the nursing home, cutting the story short as if to imply that the car itself was to be admitted. In fact, he was going to visit someone because, like me, they needed company.

Somehow we got talking about religion. His parents were Christian Scientists, I think he said, but he did not have time for it himself. 'Are you an atheist then?' I asked. As verbatim as I remember, he replied: 'Yes... well I might say agnostic so as not to offend some'. Looking with watery eyes through the windscreen of this car going nowhere, he went on: 'Certainly, I do not think there can be a loving God. No. Not in the Christian sense. No loving God would allow that. All those young men?' He never said what 'that' was and I'm sure he said something funny afterwards to cheer me up, but I can't remember what. My mind was occupied with the thought that he was undoubtably correct.

3.

People, yes those guys, don't like being told their religion is not true. They are often offended by just the suggestion, becoming irritated as children do when interrupted in the middle of a great game with friends. Suddenly they see that their bed is not really a ship sailing the sea, it's just a bed, while the religious person sees that their life is not some great game they are playing with God, but is just a life. I was not in the least offended by what Mr Gimson said that day. If anything, I felt a slight sense of relief. A return to reality.

This was not a scientist telling me there was no evidence for the existence of God – an explanation I was never satisfied with – this was a judge, for that was Mr Gimson's day job, sheriff principal of Grampian Highland and Islands from 1972 to 1982. He was a man I knew to be as good a man as a man can be, who risked execution to smuggle out the truth for no reason other than that people should know it. This man was telling me he had seen positive evidence that a loving God does not exist.

This meant accepting my miraculous cure was no miracle and the truth about that is a whole other story. What is important here is that as I let my religion go, aged 30-

something, the suspension of disbelief it required lifted like a veil and I found myself questioning everything – science included – in a new way. In a way Jacob Rees-Mogg is currently unable to.

I have no objection to the idea of God. In fact I love it. The God's Eye View of ourselves, imagining that somehow every thing, every thought, every act in the universe is being observed by some universal consciousness is empowering and exciting and inspiring. Like imagining an aerial photograph of life. We could probably do with more people thinking about things, philosophically, from God's point of view, but following a religion is another thing altogether.

Religion provides a formula for right and wrong and a whole lot more. Religion, when evoked by politicians, is the use or rather *abuse* of God to enforce a desired order on society and justify action. Dismissing Cathy Newman's question with 'judgement will come from a higher authority in due course,' is a blatant example of using religion to do just that.

Bob Dylan's Nobel Prize quote: 'Some men who receive injuries are led to God, others are led to bitterness,' was ridiculed for being plagiarised, but really it should be ridiculed for being nothing other than a shallow disgraceful piece of prejudice. Far from being bitter I am grateful, not to the almighty but to circumstances. Grateful that I have managed to grasp a decent understanding of what is going on in the world around me without a supernatural belief fogging my view. When Louis Armstrong comes on the radio singing *What a Wonderful World*, I get that same rush from the truth of it. There might not be a loving God, but there are loving people. The beauty is just as intense while the horror makes much more sense.

4.

Returning from holiday in France this summer, driving to reduce our carbon footprint, we stopped at the 'Mémorial de Caen' in Normandy − 'commemorating World War II and the Battle for Caen'. World leaders, including our own defeated one, gathered there a month or so before for the 75th anniversary of D-Day. The €20 per person to get in the door seemed tastelessly expensive and in the gift shop it seemed more celebration than commemoration.

As we went around, I found myself doing that thing of starting to read ahead as parents do when they begin to wonder if an exhibit is age appropriate. While my daughter looked at a rusty gun, I looked over her head at the next item which was an almost life-sized photograph of a girl not much older than her standing oddly with her head tilted to one side, like in a contemporary dance pose. It took me a while to see she was being hanged by a uniformed man who seemed to be pulling on a rope. My voice cracked as I struggled to explain to my daughter what it was we were looking at.

I thought at first about the girl being hanged. Her name was Volodia Shcherbatsevich.

She was 16. Only recently have I started to try to think about that man pulling on the rope. What was he thinking? Did he ever imagine some years before he would one day be hanging a 16-year-old girl in public in order to impress upon the local population who governed the country? It seems unlikely. He might have had a daughter himself. I don't know.

We do know he grew up in a time of great austerity, a time when many people had lost faith in traditional political leaders spawning new parties left and right. Ever so gradually, decent politicians vanished from the scene, giving up or bullied out. A time when tolerance and intolerance grew weirdly side by side until intolerance burst into action as an alliance of oddball, arrogant and contemptuous politicians with peculiar beliefs grabbed the reins and refused to let go. His moral compass moved more like the hour hand of a clock, imperceptibly so he was unable to see it was moving in the wrong direction. Perhaps he thought there was a formula for right and wrong and by that formula this was right. It would never happen in this new age.

It is the job of every politician to judge their leader as fully as they can in every dimension. Big decisions that politicians make are often a reflection of their personality and declining to judge the personality of the Prime Minister is an act of wilful blindness, in this case justified by a religious conviction. While Jacob Rees-Mogg might think that his religious view does not impact on his judgement in other areas of life, from my experience I am quite sure that it does. This is perhaps one reason that he has failed to judge the EU, riddled with all the imperfections of its builders, as one of the greatest peace agreements of all time.

GREATEST SCOTS

Personal choices of the greatest Scot in history and the greatest Scot of the 20th century

Professor Geoffrey Barrow (1924-2013), historian, nominated:

James Clerk Maxwell (1831-79) Sir James Black (1924-2010)

The field of choice [for greatest Scot in history] is large and choice is difficult. Two Scots who for different reasons may be called 'Scots by adoption', namely Saint Columba and Saint Margaret, had to be rejected for various reasons. William Wallace and Robert the Bruce both have strong claims, the former perhaps rather stronger than the latter. I reject them because what they are both most famous for is the establishment and confirmation of Scottish nationality and Scottish political independence, so that they can be compared only with other national heroes of the same type – William the Silent or George Washington, for example.

In intellectual and creative spheres, John 'Duns' Scotus, David Hume, Robert Burns and Walter Scott were all giants. Certainly any one of the last three could well qualify as the greatest Scot in history. My choice has fallen on James Clerk Maxwell because by translating the observations of Michael Faraday on electricity and magnetism into a mathematical theory of electro-magnetism and of electro-magnetic waves he provided the theoretical basis for a significant area of modern physics, influencing such leading figures in this field as Hertz, Michelson, Morley and Einstein. If mathematics and physics are the supreme sciences, it is hard to think of any Scot who has been more influential in either of them than James Clerk Maxwell.

If Scots who lived into the present are allowed [in greatest Scot of the 20th century], Andrew Carnegie must rank very high indeed, while Alexander Graham Bell would have some claims. John Logie Baird, as the inventor of the first practical television, must find a place among the great in world terms, even though his particular system has not been generally adopted. Higher than these, I would rank Sir Alexander Fleming, Nobel Prize-winner in 1945, for first pointing the way to the use of penicillin in the treatment of wounds.

Among those who belong to the 20th century by birth, I put James Black first because of the outstanding contribution he has made to medical science, especially for his development of 'beta blockers'. Black won the Nobel Prize in 1988.

Rt Rev Mark Dilworth (1924-2004), priest, nominated:

James IV (1473-1513) Hugh MacDiarmid (1892-1978)

Nominating the greatest Scot in history was not easy. So many were outstanding in some facet of Scotland's story, but were they the greatest in the history of the nation as a whole? James IV, who ruled from 1488 to 1513, at least stimulated the life of Scotland from the centre.

The Spanish ambassador at the time considered that Scotland had made enormous advances and he implied that James was largely responsible. James personally was intelligent and well educated, with a lively mind. As well as Lowland Scots, Gaelic and Latin (the language of education), he was said to be competent in French, Flemish, German and Spanish. Certainly he took a keen interest in the affairs of Western Europe and played a part in them. His efforts to set up a new Crusade against the power of Islam revealed his view of Europe as a whole, with Scotland playing an important role.

At home he aimed at having a renaissance court like other rulers on the continent. This had to be cultured but also lively. Court life under James was colourful and marked by pageantry, with scholars and entertainers alike at home in it. But he was no stay-at-home. He travelled over much of Scotland, including the Western Isles. Two favourite destinations were St Ninian's shrine at Whithorn on the Galloway coast and St Duthac's shrine at Tain in the north-east Highlands. Devout pilgrim though he was, James expected to be entertained wherever he went and was generous with alms and rewards for his entertainment.

James knew his kingdom and clearly took an interest in its welfare. During his reign the processes of justice were improved, the fishing industry was stimulated, there was solid development in the economy and the organisation of burghs. His building up of a Navy not only helped Scotland by reducing piracy, but his great ship *Michael* earned admiration abroad.

What specially marks out James's reign, however, was the flourishing of literacy and the arts, including literature and music. Visitors from the continent praised Scotland's notable churches; James added Holyroodhouse and the great hall of Stirling Castle. Craftsmen of various kinds were brought to Scotland, from France and Flanders particularly. Liturgical furnishings and artefacts were imported for the major churches. As for music, it clearly played a part in the life of the nation: song schools flourished, new musical works were composed, organs were imported and professional organists appointed. James on his travels gave drink-silver to many a clarsair [harper] and minstrel – and incidentally also to masons working on notable buildings.

James IV's reign was the golden age of Scottish literature, and literature cannot flourish without a foundation of literacy and education. Scotland's third university was founded at Aberdeen in 1495. Literacy among lay people made great strides and was greatly encouraged by legislation in 1496 obliging barons and lairds to have their sons educated. Scots seeking an academic career went to continental universities and took up academic posts either abroad or back at home. There was a thirst for learning, and, what was new, among lay people as well as clerics. As printing became more common, Scots scholars sent their works abroad to be printed for an international readership; then in 1507-08, a printing press was set up in Scotland.

The most important feature of this Scottish renaissance was the growing use and prestige of the Scottish tongue, though Gaelic bards were also prolific. Scots became the language of the court and of the nobles among themselves. Literary works from abroad were translated into Scots and printed, enhancing Scots vocabulary. Well-known scholars began to publish in Scots as well as Latin. The crowning glory was the output in Scots of three of Scotland's most celebrated poets: Robert Henryson, William Dunbar and Gavin Douglas. The continued publications of the Scottish Text Society in our day are proof of the quality and quantity of this literary renaissance.

Although much of the foregoing is the story of a reign rather than an individual, so much of what was achieved in James IV's reign was stimulated by him, made possible by him, given prestige by him. Faults he undoubtedly had, and his reign ended with Flodden, one of the greatest disasters in Scottish history. Nevertheless the cultural achievements lived on. It has been said too often that Mary Queen of Scots, brought up in sunny, cultured France, returned in 1561 to a cold and rude Scotland. The Edinburgh weather may not have been to her liking, but in so much else Scotland was akin to France and in music and zeal for education could even out-rival France.

It was even more difficult to choose the greatest Scot of the 20th century. There has been immense development of Scottish self-confidence over the last few decades, culminating in the massive vote in favour of a Scottish parliament. Hugh MacDiarmid's literary productions have, in my opinion, been a considerable factor in stimulating this self-confidence. He is therefore significant in the story of the nation as a whole and not merely in literature.

Margaret Dobie, social worker, nominated:

David Hume (1711-76)

John Poith: Lord Poith (188)

John Reith: Lord Reith (1889-1971)

David Hume is the greatest Scot in history because more than any other he personifies the best in the Scottish character. He was intellectual, virtuous,

industrious, sceptical, humorous, ambitious and very sociable. He represents the dignity of Scots and hence of Scotland. He was a thinker who thought himself out of the narrow perspective of Calvinism, suggesting that morality existed independently of religion, 'godless morality'. It was in Professor John Macmurray's moral philosophy class at Edinburgh University in the middle of this century that I first heard of him. I was pleased to find a Scotsman up there with the great philosophers of Western civilisation.

We Scots have an unenviable heritage of Calvinism, poverty, and a cold climate, a combination not suffered by any other nation that I can think of. David Hume was fortunate; he was born into a comfortable affectionate middle-class home, threatened by neither starvation nor hell-fire. He must have been blessed with a good circulation too because it is recorded that:

'Hume experienced no serious discomfort in the cold of an Edinburgh winter and spring. He could even write to a friend who was to occupy his house, that one of the rooms in it was so comfortable that there was no need for a fire there, even on a cold night.'

Hume's philosophy was based in human nature, not in metaphysics or theology. He believed our understanding of the world should come from ourselves, our own natures, especially that quality unique to us, our imagination. His ideas laid down the foundations of modern psychology, sociology and economics. He was considered by many to be an atheist, a brave thing to be in 18th-century Scotland. But he was a virtuous, popular man whom the French affectionately named 'le bon George'. They also called him 'le gros George': he was inclined to be stout.

He loved France and lived there for three years, mainly in Rheims. He adored French food and did his best to introduce it to Edinburgh society when he returned there, complaining that his house in St James' Court was too small 'to display my great talent for cookery, the science to which I intend to addict the remaining years of my life – for beef and cabbage (a charming dish) and old mutton and old claret nobody excels me'.

He was a very sociable man, was loved by many friends, and always enjoyed a joke at his own expense. The only flaw in this admirable man seems to have been a dislike of the English, especially Londoners. But I think we can forgive this weakness in one who seems to have been a splendid Scot in every other way, an intellectual giant and a good party man.

Hugh MacDiarmid, in a lecture at Edinburgh University in 1961, referred to David Hume as '... the greatest Scotsman who ever lived'. In the same lecture, he referred to Lord Reith as a 'notorious Scottish bigot'.

Nevertheless, my choice for the greatest Scot of the century is John Reith and my reason for choosing him is simple. He made the BBC. He made the corporation in his own image and put on it the stamp of his own integrity. It is impossible to speak of

Reith without using that word. He created a broadcasting service which was independent of government or commerce and which worked to the highest standards, standards by which other systems are judged.

Reith believed in authority but he wanted his creation to be, like himself, responsible to a higher authority than earthly government. Its trustworthy news provision is recognised in trouble spots all over the world, and the ethos which was the expression of this man's pragmatic Calvinism still exists, even if modern pressures put a strain on it at times. His brooding portrait, flanked by the lesser DGs who have followed him, scowls down at assemblies in the dining room at Broadcasting House. I hope that when the BBC move to their new quarters, they will remember to take him with them. Broadcasting is a mercurial substance; perhaps it needed a Scots Presbyterian to lay the foundations of its House.

Professor Gordon Donaldson (1941-2012), physicist, nominated:

James Clerk Maxwell (1831-79) Tom Johnston (1881-1965)

In choosing my nominees, I asked which Scot had given the most to the world and which most to the Scots. The first had to be James Clerk Maxwell, a scion of the undistinguished Clerks of Penicuik, who is among the greatest scientists ever, up there with Newton and Einstein. His theories unified the sciences of light and electromagnetism and laid the entire ground for radio, television, the computer, and fibre optics. They prepared science for the communication and information explosion that has revolutionised this century, tied the peoples of this planet together and enabled us to take steps towards others.

Even today, the first tools a communications engineer will turn to in designing a television antenna or a radio telescope are Maxwell's equations, four elegant expressions containing the totality of the properties of electromagnetic waves. Add to this his invention of statistical methods in thermodynamics, ideas that allow us to understand the properties of gases and liquids, enabling us to design plastics and petrol, refrigerators and rockets. Throw in his production of the world's first colour photograph, of a tartan ribbon, at his Dumfriesshire house, and one has to conclude that his work still influences every aspect of our millennium world. Hardly a person on the planet does not benefit daily from his work.

Richard Feynman has said: 'From the long view of the history of mankind – seen from say ten thousand years from now – there can be little doubt that the most significant event of the 19th century will be judged to be Maxwell's discovery of the laws of electrodynamics.'

Yet for now he is his own country's forgotten genius and when the roll of the Enlightenment is given out, he rarely figures. I believe that he belongs not just in the roll call, but at its head.

In choosing Tom Johnston as my Scot of the century, I was carried back initially to 1947 and my first visit to the West Highlands. I well remember the trip back from Kilchoan, in desolate Ardnamurchan, the silencer torn from the family Ford by the vegetation in the middle of the single track road – the 'Old Road' of our youth, still to be glimpsed, if hardly believed, in places like Glencoe. In 1997, I returned to Kilchoan along an upgraded road, and called at the Visitor Centre, where there was a list of tourist activities to sample and restaurants to eat at. Ardnamurchan can now welcome its visitors with world-standard businesses. 'What difference do you see from 1947?' I was asked. 'Well, you've got mains electricity for one thing,' I replied.

Tom Johnston brought that about, in his role as chairman of the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board. But he did much more, and essentially paved the way for the re-emergence of Scottish self-governance and for Scotland's determination of its own priorities. He entered parliament in 1922, and but for the vicissitudes of election, might have become Labour Party leader in 1935. Eschewing the international statesmanship which still beckoned, he chose instead to focus on Scotland and on making the Scottish Office responsive to the needs of Scotland rather than to the whims of Whitehall.

Johnston accepted office as Secretary of State in 1941 on the remarkable terms (his) that he should have a Council of State consisting of all living ex-Secretaries. He used his consensus approach to drive the Scottish departments, only recently repatriated from Whitehall to St Andrew's House, into radical programmes for the upgrading of social standards throughout Scotland, especially in rural areas. The Scottish Council for Industry (1942) and the Scottish Tourist Board are his. He instigated distinctive health and welfare programmes. His greatest achievement, however, was the Hydro Board (1943). So committed to the Board's mission was he that when its programme ran into difficulties after 1945, he assumed chairmanship and pushed through its controversial programme to the ultimate immense benefit of domestic, agricultural and industrial Scots everywhere.

The results of Johnston's work in wartime and later on in forestry, broadcasting, tourism and of course hydroelectricity are everywhere to be seen, and nowhere more clearly than in the transformation of Kilchoan during my 50-year absence. But his achievements go deeper still. As the first practitioner of devolution, he can be credited with the sowing that has blossomed into 1999's new parliament. Yet he too is largely forgotten, and since he is less likely to be mentioned 10,000 years from now than Maxwell, it is perhaps even more important to record his achievements now.

Professor Robin Downie (b 1933), philosopher, nominated:

Adam Smith (1723-90) Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868-1928)

Scots have made outstanding contributions in the intellectual field, in practical matters including business, and in the arts. I was not allowed three choices, so I chose Adam Smith who was not only pre-eminent as an intellectual but also made a huge contribution to the justification of free trade, which is one foundation of business. Likewise, I chose Charles Rennie Mackintosh because he was not only an innovative genius in art but also through his architecture influenced our conception of design and building. Let me develop this theme in more detail.

There are perhaps two connected criteria of greatness in the field of creative genius. The first is that the creative genius should take what has gone before in the activity – science, music, philosophy, literature – and transform it, give it a new twist, so that we can both recognise it as familiar and also through its impact be given a totally new vision. The second, which follows from the first, is that successors in the field should be enormously influenced. For example, in the music of Beethoven we can recognise the insights of his predecessors – Haydn or Mozart – but also the distinctive twist which Beethoven gives to that tradition, a twist which transformed the development of the symphony or sonata. Again James Clerk Maxwell, who was a Scot of outstanding genius, took the experimental work of Michael Faraday on electromagnetism and transformed it in a set of partial differential equations which all electromagnetic fields obey. The validity of the Maxwell equations is accepted worldwide to this day.

Adam Smith was Professor of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow University from 1752 until 1764, but he generously and rightly acknowledges his debt to his predecessor and teacher, Francis Hutcheson, who was in the Chair from 1730 until 1746. Smith drew heavily from the ideas of Hutcheson, and from some French philosophers, but the outcomes in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) and *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) show how these ideas can be developed in rich detail and transformed in the process. The influence of Smith, on the theory and practice of the free market, is felt worldwide to this day. It should also be noted that Smith was aware of the likely excesses of the free market and its destructive effect on those whose lives are dominated by it. In a very Scottish way, he tried to suggest ways of mitigating these bad effects through a system of universal education. He was also Scottish in his insistence on the importance of examinations!

A rather similar story can be told about Mackintosh – he draws from a tradition, but transforms that tradition in a striking way. Mackintosh's architecture was firmly rooted in the Scottish baronial style and influenced by his near contemporaries

Rowand Anderson and Robert Lorimer. But this traditionalism was transformed into the strikingly original 'Glasgow style' and as such has exerted world-wide influence. When Scots turn in on their own traditions, the result is anything on the spectrum from complacency to self-pity, but when they look outward, these traditions can flourish.

Eileen Dunlop (b 1938), writer, nominated:

Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) John Logie Baird (1888-1946)

In many ways, Thomas Carlyle represents a noble Scots way of life which is rapidly passing into history. Born in 1795 to humble Calvinist parents, he learned early the virtues of education and self-reliance; on the eve of his 14th birthday, he walked from Ecclefechan to Edinburgh University, to embark on a lifelong quest for learning and enlightenment. Through years of penury and uncongenial work as teacher and journalist, he wrestled with the great questions of faith, doubt, and morality; his loss of Christian belief was no mere shrugging off of an inconvenient restraint, but the beginning of a struggle to formulate a compensatory moral structure for a world which he and many contemporaries already regarded as post-Christian. Throughout his life, Carlyle was a student of literature, history, and philosophy. With a formidable intellect and great literary gifts, he became a prophetic and fearless critic of political systems and social ills.

Carlyle was proud of his Scottish roots and drew strength from them, but narrow nationalism would have been incomprehensible to him. He considered himself no less a Scot for spending 47 of his 86 years in London. He drew his greatest inspiration from European writers, but he wrote on Burns, Scott, and Edward Irving. In his highly individual, rhetorical style, we hear echoes of his plain Scottish voice.

George Eliot wrote famously that if all Carlyle's books were burned, it would be like cutting down an oak after its acorns had sown a forest. Carlyle's ideas stimulated the best minds among his contemporaries, and he was universally admired. Yet posterity has been unkind to him; his wife's highly personal account of their unhappy marriage has aroused feminist ire, and his reputation has suffered from the gross misappropriation by fascists of his insight that, in a godless world, people would worship a human hero-figure. Happily, scholarly appraisal of Carlyle is even now rehabilitating him. The next century must surely see this great Scot restored to his rightful place among the most passionate writers and most influential critics of all time.

John Logie Baird, inventor, was born in Helensburgh in 1888. At 13, with no

formal scientific education, he had made a private telephone exchange for himself and his friends, and installed power-generated electric light in his parents' house. He began working on television when he was 15, and there is evidence that he experimented with a complete system while a student at technical college.

If Baird did not also invent television, then who did? Certainly he invented and demonstrated in January 1926 to members of the Royal Institution the first system that worked. He made video recordings, and took television pictures by infrared light, in the 1920s. He was the first to demonstrate colour television and stereoscopic television, and, in 1941, high-definition 3D television in colour. In 1928 he beamed the first television pictures across the Atlantic, and then transmitted them to the ship bringing back the equipment. His televising of the Derby in 1931 was the first outside broadcast; the following year he showed the race on closed-circuit television. Large-screen colour television was shown to a theatre audience in 1938. Though in 1937 the BBC chose the electronic system of Marconi-EMI over his mechanical version, Baird had used electronic methods for his colour experiments, which were consistently far ahead of their time: he successfully demonstrated in 1944 the first fully electronic colour tube.

Baird was experimenting with radar in 1923, and patented his methods in 1926, nine years before Robert Watson-Watt's proposals for spotting enemy aircraft with radio beams. He made, and in 1926 patented, significant developments in fibre optics. In May 1939, he fitted out a French bomber to send pictures of the ground back to base, while video recording items of particular interest – the first live TV transmission from an aeroplane. Details of his secret war-time work on high-speed colour signalling and fax transmission by cable and radio waves are only now emerging.

Dogged by chronic ill health, Baird had largely to finance his own researches, in the face of opposition from the BBC, and of government gagging of technical details of his developments, which prevented his acceptance by the scientific establishment. At the outbreak of World War II, the television industry shut down and Baird's company went into liquidation. Throughout the blitz, he kept up his experiments at his own expense. Virtually bed-ridden, he organised by phone his new company's large-screen live presentation of the Victory Parade at three centres in June 1946. He died a week later.

At 43, this son of the manse, who claimed to be so tone-deaf that he only recognised the tune of *God Save the King* with difficulty, had wooed, and in a lightning courtship won, the beautiful, half-Jewish, half-Anglican 24-year-old concert pianist from South Africa, Margaret Albu. She survived him by 50 years.

Written with Anthony Kamm (1931-2011)

Maria Fyfe (1938-2020), politician, nominated:

James Watt (1736-1819) Keir Hardie (1856-1915)

Considering how famous a figure he is, it is surprising that so many of us were taught in childhood a mistaken version of the reason for James Watt's fame. We were told he invented the steam engine from an idea that popped into his head while walking in Glasgow Green thinking about the steam coming out of a kettle. The better informed know he improved upon the already existing steam engine by inventing the separate condensing cylinder which made the engine far more efficient. The walking in Glasgow Green bit happens to be true. He himself described how it happened:

'I had gone to take a walk on a fine Sabbath afternoon, early in 1765. I had entered the Green by the gate at the foot of Charlotte Street, and had passed the old washing house. I was thinking upon the engine at the time and had gone as far as the herd's house, when the idea came into my mind that as steam was an elastic body it would rush into a vacuum, and if a communication were made between the cylinder and an exhausted vessel it would rush into it, and might be there condensed without cooling the cylinder... I had not walked farther than the golf-house when the whole thing was arranged in my mind.'

Watt obviously thought of this idea as a sudden, almost heaven-sent inspiration. It was, of course the result of many years of study and research, and familiarity with the engine Newcomen had invented, which had prepared his mind. It was only when we look back on our country's economic and social history that we realise the true breathtaking consequences of this man's idea.

The early use of his improved engine was limited to pumping out water from coal mines. The next step was to make a steam engine with a rotary motion that could drive all sorts of machinery. Manufacturers began to realise this engine could be used in iron works, in blast furnaces, and sheet iron rolling mills. Before the steam engine, water mills stopped in severe winters when the water froze. When the mill stopped, the employees had no work. In those days, if you didn't work you starved or went to the work house.

The steam engines then went to work in potteries, breweries, flour-mills, and spinning factories. Before the steam engine, along with the other developments in the Industrial Revolution, an ordinary family would have very few clothes, much patched and mended. Household goods such as crockery had always been in meagre supply. A wall clock was a luxury. Nails were made by hand – imagine how expensive that made boots and shoes. Large-scale production made it possible for people to afford what they could only dream of before.

Travel was changed utterly with the steam boat. Until then, ships couldn't move

unless they had wind in their sails. If there was no wind, they were becalmed for days and even weeks. Steam made it possible to make reliably timed sea journeys and have a faster turn around. Travel much beyond the village one lived in was a rare event. The expansion of trade through easier and quicker travel by rail and by sea opened our people up to new ideas and new experiences.

Before the Industrial Revolution, Britain was like an under-developed country today. If the crops failed, you died. Life offered little in the way of entertainment, and education was hard to acquire. The mass circulation newspaper had still to arrive.

It says everything you need to know about the lives of the thousands of domestic servants that they now voted with their feet in favour of the factory and the mill – and these were no picnic. At least now they had fixed hours and freedom to do as they pleased outside working hours.

This Industrial Revolution was the biggest single thing that happened this millennium, and James Watt was at the forefront making it possible to better the living conditions of all of us, creating worldwide respect for Scotland as a nation, and bringing about dramatic changes such as had never been seen in all of our previous history.

There is a picture of Keir Hardie that hangs on the wall of the Members' tea room in the House of Commons. By all accounts he was never all that keen on the House of Commons as an institution, his gifts being more suited to the soapbox than the despatch box. He joined a House of Commons that was then capable of sending a telegram congratulating the then Duchess of York on the birth of her baby, while in the same week refusing to send a message of condolences to South Wales when 260 people died in a mining accident. No wonder he did not find it congenial. His unsociable reputation, in that light, looks to have been a matter of just being reasonably choosy about his company.

He was often out of sorts with his fellow members of the newly-formed Labour Party in parliament. It was generally agreed he was not a successful parliamentary leader. He felt despair when the socialism he held dear and sacrificed his health for, failed to overcome the chauvinism and jingoism of the First World War.

Yet, during his life, no other MP or political thinker or writer came anywhere near to him in changing people's thinking. No-one else was as successful in making this peculiarly British brand of socialism a mainstream political force. Some other leading lights fell by the wayside. He remained firm to the end of his days. People continue to fight the causes he fought: class equality; trade union rights; women's equality; democratic control of local services; full employment; peace and disarmament; internationalism. He was at the opening of the Second International in 1889, and was a committed member of its International Bureau until he died.

Keir Hardie experienced the Liberals' failure to defend the rights of working people over many years before he came to the conclusion that a new party was needed. The

Labour Party grew when people saw the Taff Vale judgement in 1901, when the Law Lords swept away rights the unions had taken for granted for quarter of a century and the Liberals had nothing to say. Later, the Law Lords entered the fray again. They ruled that any political activity by a trade union was against the law. Keir Hardie declared, in response, 'if the Labour Members were being paid by brewers or landowners or railway directors or financiers to represent their interests in the House of Commons, no objection would have been taken. It is only because they are being paid to represent an interest that is dangerous to all the other interests that the issue is being forced upon us'. The split in the centre-left that has characterised this century could only have been avoided by successful prodding of the Liberals into taking action they had shown over and over again they were not willing to take.

When, even today, women are still in a battle to ensure equal representation, it is instructive to realise how far ahead of his time Keir Hardie was in supporting the women's suffrage movement. He saw clearly that this was a matter of justice and equality, when other prominent socialists were opposed to women gaining the vote on the grounds that women like Mrs Pankhurst were middle class.

I have been a member for 40 years of a party that will be a 100 years old this coming spring. I almost feel historic myself. In early days, I took its existence for granted. It was simply there. In a more reflective frame of mind, I realise what a remarkable achievement it was. The start in life Keir Hardie had would have crushed any ambition in most people. Born in poverty, the son of a single mother, he was out working to earn money the family needed when he was only eight years old. That he had such soaring ambition not just for himself alone, but for all humanity, demonstrates a great human spirit. That he kept on, faithful to the end, and broke the mould of British politics, was a spectacular achievement.

Professor John Haldane (b 1954), philosopher, nominated:

St Margaret of Scotland (c1045-1093) John Buchan: Lord Tweedsmuir (1875-1940)

Born in Hungary in 1046, Margaret [St Margaret of Scotland] was an early political migrant to Scotland, along with members of her family. Her father had been invited by the English supreme council to replace Edward the Confessor, but he died shortly after arriving on English soil. The family remained at the court but on the Confessor's death the government decided that her brother Edgar had no right to the succession and subsequently he, his sister and other relatives were encouraged to take flight.

The ship in which they escaped for the continent was blown north and west to the shores of Fife. Hearing of the refugee's arrival in Scotland, Malcolm Canmore made

his way from Dunfermline to greet them. Very soon, Margaret's beauty, learning and religious commitment won his heart and they married at Dunfermline in 1069.

There followed a period of 'Anglicisation' and 'Europeanisation' of the court and kingdom, particularly with regard to the church. Though much of this was institutionalised during the reign of her sons, Edgar, Alexander and David, it was Margaret who brought Benedictine monks to establish the Abbey at Dunfermline, and who gave a lead in caring for the poor and sick. She provided for pilgrims to St Andrews by establishing a ferry across the Forth and harangued the old local church leaders to organise into diocese and to regularise the liturgical and sacramental life of the church throughout Scotland. Her husband and eldest son were killed in battle in 1093 and Margaret died a few days later. In 1250, she was canonised. To this day, her chapel atop Edinburgh Castle remains a potent shrine to her self-effacing but intense religious faith.

At a time when Scotland is in search of an ennobling self-conception to raise it above narrow political interest, and when the Christian churches appear to be losing their historic role in shaping the conscience of the nation, St Margaret Queen of Scotland offers the example of a determinate spirituality conjoined to a social mission – and serves as a reminder of the fact that foreign influence is ancient and often benign.

It is hard to think of any Scot in the 20th century who achieved as much in as many fields as John Buchan. Born in 1875, son of a Free Church manse, his family moved from Perth to Fife to Glasgow. From Hutchesons' Grammar School, Buchan won a bursary to the University, and from there a scholarship took him to Oxford where he quickly made his mark, taking a First and becoming President of the Union.

At Oxford, Buchan was already publishing and listed in *Who's Who*, but his ambitions were greater and more various. Then and later, he read for the Bar, served in the post-Boer War reconstruction of South Africa, became a director of the publishers Nelson & Sons, a director of Reuters news agency, the Scottish Universities' MP, member of the House of Lords, Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Kirk, Chancellor of the University of Edinburgh and finally Governor-General of Canada. He died there in 1940.

Along the way, Buchan published well over 100 books and hundreds more articles. His multi-volumed *History of the First World War*, written as hostilities proceeded, is a remarkable accomplishment and has come to be re-appreciated in recent years. Among his best works from a literary perspective are his biographies of great men such as those of Augustus, Cromwell, Montrose and Scott; but it is for his thrillers, particularly those featuring Richard Hannay, that Buchan remains best known. The first, *The Thirty Nine Steps*, has not been out of print since it was first published in 1915.

Buchan combines many features rarely found together: his taste for the outdoors

and for library scholarship, his appetite for position and his genuine love of ordinary Scots folk, his concern with decisive action and with the imaginative understanding of complex and often troubled figures, his Presbyterian Christianity and his feeling for the pagan worlds and for the mysteries of Catholicism. Many of these aspects are brought together in his final and posthumously published *Sick Heart River* (1941). Any Scot wishing to celebrate the last century and the next would do well to read or re-read this fine book and be reminded of Buchan's multi-aspected greatness.

Dr James Hunter (b 1948), writer and historian, nominated:

St Columba (521-597) Tom Johnston (1881-1965)

Although I wrote extensively about both of them in *Last of the Free*, my attempt at a millennial history of the Highlands and Islands, Columba and Tom Johnston are separated there by several hundred pages as well as by 14 centuries. While I had not a moment's hesitation – for reasons touched on subsequently – in nominating them, it's only now that it occurs to me to think of them, as it were, in conjunction. On so doing, it seems to me immediately apparent that they were two of a kind.

Were I, which God forbid, talking about St Columba and Tom Johnston on the *Good Morning Scotland* 'Thought for the Day' slot, I should doubtless say that both brought light – the one metaphorically, and other literally – where previously there had been darkness. But that would be to turn into Sunday school ciphers two men who, though they became, in their different ways, establishment figures, first demonstrated their shared strength of character by selecting career paths that were as different as they could possibly be from those normally followed by people of their backgrounds.

Tom Johnston was reared in a douce, middle-class home in late Victorian Kirkintilloch. He was expected by his shopkeeper father to follow his uncle into the law. Instead, he became a socialist and a journalist whose skill with a pen is preserved for all time in the most searing polemic ever produced in Scotland, *Our Scots Noble Families*. Whether those MSPs who will shortly be considering the Scottish Executive's land reform proposals have read this book (recently and laudably reprinted by Argyll Publishing), I don't know. But I hope they have – for then they'll be aware just why land reform, as radical and far-reaching as possible, is so long overdue.

Columba or Colum Cille, as he was and is called in his own Gaelic language, began in equally rebellious fashion. His family circumstances were not so much bourgeois as aristocratic. His great-grandfather was Niall Noigiallach, Niall of the Nine Hostages, one of early medieval Ireland's most successful hero kings. And collectively Columba's kin, the Ui Neill, were starting to take charge, at the time of Colum Cille's birth, of Ulster. Columba, then, was meant to be a princely warrior. Instead, at a period when Christianity was viewed with as much suspicion in Columba's Donegal as socialism was to be viewed in Tom Johnston's Kirkintilloch, he became a monk – a monk who proceeded, moreover, to fall out spectacularly with Ireland's ecclesiastical authorities and who departed for Scotland, therefore, under something of a cloud.

Lots of others from Ulster were then doing the same thing. They called themselves Gaels, these folk. But the Romans, years before, had dubbed them Scoti, Scots. Thus it came about that when the Gaelic-speaking kings of those Gaelic-speaking immigrants eventually united their new homeland under their rule, the country thus created became known as Scotland.

For centuries, of course, our kings were buried in Iona, the little island where Colum Cille, on getting there, created the monastery that became one of Europe's principal centres of learning. Today, when the Highlands and Islands are habitually regarded as peripheral and insignificant, it gives me some comfort to know – and every time I visit Dublin I go to look at the volumes in question – that once our place was capable of turning out, in the so-called *Book of Kells*, the greatest artistic masterpiece of Europe's early middle-ages.

What the Highlands and Islands were once, I reckon, they can be again. A place that gives a lead – whether culturally or in other ways. We're just beginning, I think, to realise that ambition. But such success as we're achieving we owe very much to my other candidate for greatness. Tom Johnston went on from his agitating beginnings to become Secretary of State for Scotland in Winston Churchill's wartime coalition. In that capacity – recalling, all the while, his youthful determination to do something constructive for landlord-ridden localities like the Highlands and Islands – he created the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board.

After the war, Johnston became the Hydro Board's chairman and insisted – in the face of Whitehall's determination to have Highland electricity exported south – that his priority was to extend to every Highlands and Islands' household a domestic electricity supply. Johnston won that battle. In doing so, he made possible the regeneration of the Highlands and Islands. If Columba's memorial is the *Book of Kells*, Johnston's memorial consists of something equally impressive – a set of architecturally outstanding dams and power stations. They were great Scots, both of them.

Maurice Lindsay (1918-2009), poet and broadcaster, nominated:

Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) Sir Alexander Fleming (1881-1955)

There was a crisis of identity in Scotland around the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. A move was afoot to abandon the name Scotland in favour of North Britain; a move, alas!, supported at one stage in his career by none other than James Boswell.

Burns – not chosen as one of my 'greatest' simply because he will doubtless have had many other promoters – preceded by Ramsay and Fergusson, through his genius and widespread popularity as a poet, saved the 'guid Scots tongue' from oblivion under pressure of English, and certainly gave it continuing literary validity. The other partner in this salvation of Scotland was Sir Walter Scott.

Until the publication of the Scottish stories in the Waverley Novels series, ordinary people in Scotland must have been largely ignorant of the history of their country, having no ready access to official papers and the like. In those novels – the great novels, indeed, like *The Fortunes of Nigel, Guy Mannering, Rob Roy, Old Mortality* and *Waverley* itself – Scott presented many of the confrontation points of Scottish history in a compelling and readable manner. Contrary to popular belief, though he did not disguise his affection for the past and its customs, he always came down on the side of change.

At his best, or even at his most prosey, common to all Scott's novels is the way in which he made creative use of history. His practice was to establish a series of generalised historical backcloths, complete with minor figures – Highland social conditions just before 1715 in *Rob Roy*, the Porteous affair after 1707 in *The Heart of Midlothian* and the consequence for Jacobite hopes after the shattering defeat of Culloden in *Redgauntlet* – then fit in the foreground the main characters, mostly of his own creation; but sometimes incorporating aspects of actual people, though not usually placed precisely in their real-life context.

Scott also made use of remarks or turns of phrase which had stuck in his capacious memory. The value of Scott's antiquarian and historical knowledge was that where the reuse of a phrase or a custom was, strictly speaking, an anachronism, he could give it a meaningful turn, thus making it add to the sense of the realistic. He certainly believed in the value of the historical novel, both as a means of keeping alive a knowledge of traditions among those who never read history and as an added stimulus to those who did.

Alexander Fleming, the son of an Ayrshire farmer, was born at Lichfield in 1881. He came to London when he was 14 and worked for a time as a clerk in a shipping office before enrolling as a medical student at St Mary's Hospital in 1902. After

qualifying in 1906, he joined the inoculation department under Almonth Wright and rapidly gained experience in the treatment of bacterial diseases by vaccines and chemotherapy, notably employing Salvarson in the treatment of syphilis, something no doubt useful when he and Wright served in the military hospital at Boulogne during World War II. By 1928, he held professorial status.

By 1922, Fleming had already discovered lysozyme. It was while studying this that he noticed an unusual mould growing on a neglected culture dish. This he isolated and grew into a pure culture, which turned out to be penicillin, or *Penicillium notatum*, to give it its proper title.

It is, perhaps, odd to reflect that Scott's novels, once so avidly devoured, now reach a mass readership only after one of them has been serialised on television and a paperback follow-up issued. At least such visually prompted readership demonstrates their inherent quality and value. Similarly, in the case of antibiotics, of which penicillin was the forerunner, human greed has resulted in these life-saving drugs being fed to animals likely to enter the food-chain, in order to increase their growth; a practice, we are warned, liable to lessen their effectiveness when prescribed for humans.

Odd, is it not, how we choose to use the good things great men bequeath to us?

John McAllion (b 1948), politician, nominated:

Sir William Wallace (c1270-1305) Mick McGahey (1925-99)

My abiding memory of Mick McGahey is of him speaking to a packed meeting in Dundee during the miners' strike of 1984-85. He finished his speech that night with a quote from Shelley's *The Mask of Anarchy*:

Rise like Lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number –
Shake your chains to earth like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you
Ye are many – they are few

Coming from most other speakers I have heard in my time in politics, such a finish would have caused embarrassment and unease. Delivered in Mick's gravely working-class accent, it brought the packed hall to its feet cheering and clapping.

That audience, of course, was applauding more than a well-deserved speech. They were giving recognition to that rare phenomenon in politics – a political leader with 100% integrity.

In my view, Mick was always much more than a leader of the Scottish miners and a member of the Communist Party. In a very real sense he represented the best of the organised working class in the 20th century.

He never deserted his working-class roots. He was of the people and remained so throughout his life. He feared no boss, no political or class enemy. It could truly be said of him that he wanted to rise with his class. Mick kept faith with the socialist vision which others used to get a start in politics and then cast aside as they rose out of the working class.

For me, Mick McGahey represented the kind of socialism which inspired millions around the world but which was never put into practice in this most terrible of centuries. He stands alone for me as the great Scot of that century.

So what does he have in common with William Wallace, whom I have chosen as the Greatest Scot of all time? In truth, little is known about the life of the real William Wallace other than – as one historian has accurately observed – 'the last bitter month of it, and glorious year when he was 26 and the leader of his country'.

Most of what we know about that time is myth rather than reality. But sometimes myth matters more than reality. Like every other nation, Scotland is an imagined community. We are who we think we are and the myth of William Wallace is central to our sense of ourselves.

Wallace, like McGahey, is of the people. He is hated by his feudal superiors in England and Scotland alike. He too is feared by the establishment of his day. He threatens the very basis of feudal society. With him the people rise and demand freedom. No-one questions his integrity or courage.

In the story of William Wallace, we can see this little country begin to fight for its own identity and its own vision of a fair society. Almost 700 years after his death, that struggle is still going on as it has gone on in every generation since that time.

Nowadays, of course, we are told that globalisation will undermine and destroy the very idea of nations. Our freedoms are being restricted to those which are allowed by the diktat of an all-powerful market place. The class war is over because those who own and control capital have won. For me this is all 'globaloney'. People can still take control of their own destinies. They can still decide for themselves the kind of society they wish to live in. Socialism is still the best hope for mankind. Democratic nations are still vehicles for building a socialism in which nations can live together in peace.

I'm grateful to Michael McGahey and to William Wallace for making it possible for me to hold to these beliefs in 1999. They truly are great Scots.

Professor Neil MacCormick (1941-2009), lawyer, academic and politician, nominated:

Adam Smith (1723-90) John MacCormick (1904-61)

The Scottish contribution to the history of civilisation has been a large one, and includes much in the way of practical invention. More important still have been ideas contributed by Scots, and among these none have more significance than the ideas of Adam Smith.

An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations, first published in 1776, is Smith's inspired statement of the principles of political economy and the merits of a system of free trade within a framework of public provision of public goods such as education. It is the greatest classic of what is now known as classical economic theory. Among its many virtues are included a careful regard to empirical evidence, acquired during his continental tour as tutor to the young Earl of Lauderdale, and a sound grasp of legal principles and an awareness of the need to set economic theory against its social background – Smith subscribes to, and makes good use of, a 'stadial' conception of human society, in which the age of hunters and fishermen is succeeded by that of the pastoralists, then an agrarian economy and finally commercial society. These are not presented by Smith as inevitably ordered historical stages, but more as ideal types of possible economies, commercial society necessarily presupposing some emergence from less developed forms.

The Wealth of Nations is unquestionably one of the greatest, most influential and most durable works of economic and social science. It is also the work of a philosopher – Smith was Professor of Logic for a year, and then Professor of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow for 12 years from 1752. Working with ideas from his friend and older contemporary David Hume, he developed a theory of moral sentiments based on human beings' capacity for human sympathy, for feeling each other's pleasures and pains, and for joining with others in the resentment of harm inflicted by one person on another. The theoretical device of the 'ideal spectator' explains our ability to develop from raw emotions a rational and reflective body of moral opinions. It is important to remember that the political economist was also moral philosopher – and, indeed, jurist, though his lecturers on jurisprudence were never prepared by him for publication and survive only through students' notes. The history of human ideas will always contain a large chapter devoted to the thought and influence of Adam Smith.

Of all those to whom credit is due for the re-establishment of a Scottish Parliament before the end of the 20th century, John MacCormick (1904-1961) belongs high on any reasonable list of original motivators. Although at the time of his death at only 56

years of age, it appeared as though his life's work had gone down in failure, the events of the years 1997-99 represented the fulfilment of ideas he advocated all his life.

His own story of the national movement in Scotland through to the early Fifties is told in his partly autobiographical *The Flag in the Wind* (London, Gollancz, 1954). There, he recounts the story of the foundation of the National Party of Scotland in 1928, and the process of its merger with the Scottish Party, founding the Scottish National Party in 1934. He gives also his view of the split in the SNP in 1942, and the formation by his own dissident wing of the organisation 'Scottish Convention' that was to launch the Scottish Covenant in 1949.

The Covenant was an engagement of the signatories to do all in their power to secure the establishment of a Scottish Parliament with full authority over the domestic affairs of Scotland. This idea was given a more detailed formulation in a paper, *Blueprint for Scotland*, published by the Covenant Association. The scheme was for a Scottish Parliament within a UK framework where defence, foreign affairs, currency and like matters were reserved to the UK Parliament and all domestic affairs entrusted to the Scottish Parliament. Two million out of three million electors gave their support in the Covenant campaign of 1949-51.

Of Highland background, with roots in Mull and Iona and Glenurquhart, McCormick in private was a man of poetry and romance, but in public a lawyer and practical politician with a gift for compromise and conviction in the virtues of constitutionalism and gradualism. A spectacularly good platform orator, he suffered acutely from stones in the kidney, which undoubtedly shortened his life.

Vice Admiral Sir Roderick Macdonald (1921-2001), naval commander, nominated:

Robert Burns (1759-96)
Andrew Browne Cunningham: Viscount Cunningham (1883-1963)

The criteria that I used to arrive at the greatest Scot in history was: first, an undisputed international reputation; second, a stature and quality demonstrably acknowledged as being particularly Scottish even by Scots – a people not renowned for universal agreement about anybody or anything. This proved to be a one-horse race.

Quoted every day of the year, often unwittingly, Robert Burns is without any doubt the best-known Scot; and this to such an extent that Scots take it all for granted. Worldwide, whether in Patagonia or Moscow – even slightly south of Watford – Burns societies thrive and annually celebrate his immortal memory with enthusiasm, style and lack of inhibition – enjoying his songs, poetry, humour and philosophy

contained therein. Readers of the *Scottish Review* need no appreciation from me of the genius or the man.

Translated into every known language; on one occasion in a Skye village hall the late Sorley MacLean raised the roof with a roisterous – specially rendered by him into Gaelic – *Tam O'Shanter*. In more remote islands in the Pacific, gastronomically incredible menus are imported, no expense spared, from the far away land of bashed neaps – digestive pleasures guaranteed by prophylactic application of malt and barley. Citizens of diverse ethnic origin brag interminably about Scottish descent, tartan, football and golf – weep and hooch to the sound of pipes skirled, perhaps electronically, or by wind-up gramophone. This global celebration of the greatest Scot in history is universally recognised as requiring a period of one year for recovery.

Lenin, when questioned, said it was too soon to assess the effect of the French Revolution. Considering the many fashionable contenders for Scot of the century, it seems reasonable to suppose that, had we lost two world wars, the rich and civilised stage where such Great and Good performed would not exist. So, first things first: which Scot made the greatest contribution to victory in either war and therefore such a competition possible?

Outbreak of WW2 found Cunningham Commander in Chief Mediterranean Fleet. Here against all the odds he made an irreplaceable contribution at the lowest point of the war. Mostly at sea exercising personal command, he never played to the gallery or media. Though ruthless with failure, once a subordinate proved himself, he trusted him entirely and delegation became total. Tough as old boots and a disciplinarian, but never pompous, he was fair and considerate of his sailors and concerned for their families.

He successfully resisted Winston's hair-brained demands for ludicrous, doomed-to-fail diversions. Genuinely modest, he did not appreciate the significance of his resounding success at Taranto – later to be copied by the Japanese at Pearl Harbour – or Matapan; but nobody could be more aware that the loss of Malta, or defeat of our army in North Africa, leading to disaster in the East, would have been laid at his door. He refused, when urged at highest military level, to allow the army to surrender in Crete in view of heavy losses already inflicted on his fleet. His reaction: 'We land them; it is our duty to take them off. You have said that it will take three years to build a new fleet. I say it would take 300 to build a new tradition'.

In 1942, Cunningham – his reputation uniquely recognised by the Americans – was made Naval CinC Allied Expeditionary Force, North Africa and Mediterranean. The following year, Sicily was invaded and in September the Italian Fleet surrendered. He then became First Sea Lord and member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff involved in invasion of Europe, and eventual surrender of Germany and Japan – attending Summit meetings in Quebec, Yalta and Potsdam.

Lives of our famous warriors have been notably precarious, often brutal and usually short. Undefeated in war and happily married, this warrior was never more content than with his rod on the river. Aged 80, after lunch with an old friend in London, Admiral of the Fleet Lord Cunningham of Hyndhope (in the County of Selkirk), Knight of the Thistle, GCB, OM, DSO**, died in a taxi on his way to Waterloo. Over his desk he kept a quotation from James Graham, Marquis of Montrose:

He either fears his fate too much Or his deserts are small, That does not put it to the touch To fain or lose it all.

Professor Ged Martin (b 1945), historian, nominated:

Sir John A Macdonald (1815-91) Hamish Henderson (1919-2002)

I nominated Sir John A Macdonald as the greatest Scot of all time because he built a country. Glasgow-born of Highland parents, he grew up in Ontario and in 1867 designed the constitution that tied scattered colonies together into the nucleus of the Dominion of Canada. He was the country's first Prime Minister, and by the time he died in office in 1891, Canada stretched to the Pacific and was linked from end to end by railway. Not a bad record, especially as Macdonald was a damaged personality. For decades he drank heavily, often losing all control in the face of crisis. Canadians cope with this by creating two Macdonalds, one a stained-glass nation-builder, the other a bibulous joke figure. It is time to integrate the two. Greatness is about overcoming flaws, not impersonating Superman.

When Macdonald died, a broken-hearted colleague said that anyone writing the history of Canada for the previous 50 years would have to write the dead premier's biography. In a way, that was Macdonald's failure as well as his success, for no nation can be a one-man band.

In democratic Scotland, greatness has to involve being somehow typical, but typical-plus. Hamish Henderson was born in 1919. It would be easy to put together an unctuous tribute to 'Hamish' (although that's what everybody calls him) – 'once a gadfly but now a grand old man' – easy and off-beam. Henderson both embodies and enhances what Scotland is all about. It did not start that way. He went to Cambridge and travelled in Germany, both unusual in a young Scot in the 1930s. But not for Henderson the Blair-Lamont route of dumping inconvenient North British origins.

In 1937, he saw decent Germans swooning over Hitler, and learnt that fascism had to be fought, on the battlefields of Egypt and Italy, and in the hearts and minds of people. His Cyrenaica elegies were the intentional Henderson, in the tradition of Holderlin and Owen and Yeats. By translating Gramsci from Italian, he raised Marxist studies in English above yah-boo turgidity.

Joining Edinburgh University's School of Scottish Studies in 1952, he made the study of folklore in this country intellectually rigorous while ensuring that it stayed close to its humane roots. He was vigorous in denouncing those who dismissed the folk tradition as a kailyard of sentimentality. Only once was he ever wrong-footed, when one of his informants sang into his tape-recorder an upgraded version of his own song against apartheid. He even became an unlikely film star.

While defending the integrity of popular culture, Henderson was always ready to denounce those who used race or religion or sexual orientation to divide people. He had seen the real Hitler and would not tolerate pint-sized imitations. Sometimes, he got it wrong: CND was not the answer to the Bomb, and he should have spotted the 'No Entry' sign on the cul-de-sac of the Jim Sillars' breakaway SLP. More often he kept the flag of decency flying, as in his denunciation of the South African Government as 'a prize assortment of malignant racialist crackpots' throughout the eternal decades of minority rule. This was no identikit, flavour-of-the-month agitator. He blamed Catholics as well as Protestants for creating evil stereotypes in Ulster, and claimed that folklorists were more useful than politicians in understanding the province and its problems. Memorably, he dismissed *Private Eye* as a 'pestilence-breeding organ' – or it would have been memorable if those champions of the shocking had possessed the guts to print his letter.

But a mere list does not testify to greatness. Hamish Henderson is the greatest Scot of the 20th century because his identification with the country is instinctive and magnificent, passionate and open. Edinburgh University failed to honour him as he deserved. He refused the OBE (Keeper of the Realm would have been more appropriate) because it came from the hands of Thatcher.

Perhaps being both typically and uniquely Scottish at one and the same time is an obstacle to the recognition of greatness. Sir John A Macdonald enlarged the physical boundaries of his adopted country. Hamish Henderson has infused the land of his birth with the mighty spirit of his own Scottishness.

Janet Paisley (b 1948), poet, nominated:

Lady Anne Farquharson-Mackintosh (1723-87) Naomi Mitchison (1897-1999)

Go to Culloden. You'll not find the name of Anne Farquharson, the Lady Mackintosh. No monument. No record. Yet this young woman was taken from her home at Moy Hall, bare miles from the battlefield, toured around her devastated estates and paraded through her dead troops on the field before incarceration in Inverness jail. Of all the Jacobite commanders, humiliation was reserved for her alone.

Why? She was a woman but many Jacobites were. She opposed her husband. Angus, the Mackintosh, had taken up his commission in the Black Watch when the rising began. But many families supported both sides, heart against head.

She raised his clan to fight for the rebellion. Other women also raised clans. She had earlier humiliated the government army when Lord Loudon, informed the Prince was visiting Moy Hall, set out with 1,500 soldiers to capture him. Anne, with only a handful of servants aided by a wild night and peat stooks, scared them away. Two hundred deserted to the Jacobites. At the Rout of Moy, a petticoat colonel had made a laughing stock of them all.

Perhaps we now have it. She made the government look and feel foolish. This slim, beautiful 22-year-old was caricatured in London as a frighteningly fierce warrior leading her troops into battle, as she may well have done. Her punishment was unique, designed to fill her head with nightmares and her soul with guilt. She escaped hanging. Cumberland, amused that Charles had placed Anne's captured husband in her custody, made her captive to her husband. Cowed, she was not. Years later, when she and Angus were received at court, Cumberland asked her to dance and bid the band strike up his war song. When it ended, she made a request. 'Sir,' she said. 'I have danced to your tune. Now will you dance to mine?' Manners being everything, the Duke could not refuse. The defeated rebel had the band play *The Auld Stuarts Back Again*.

Flora MacDonald's contribution to that period was minor but acceptably feminine. In story and statue, she has been retained. Anne Farquharson was everything the new Protestant and pseudo-English society of Scotland feared. Her contribution was major and did not fit their required submissive role for women. She behaved as if she was the equal of man. So she was removed.

When Scotland became Calvinist, it became sexist. While Catholicism had been forced to restore the eradicated goddess, albeit as a desexualised virgin, in Scotland the Reformation rubbed women out. The wisdom of appearing non-verbal was assured by witch fires and a long period of religious and social constraint. The role

and rights of women were eroded, the maternal blood line eradicated in favour of a male line, the equal right to inherit title removed. Our women warriors, leaders and reformers vanished from history.

Likewise, our writers. More women write than men, and they write more. The male brain processes 70,000 words daily, the female brain twice that many. Records show that women publish far more. On the tricky subject of worth, who decides? Robert Burns said women writing in his day were far better lyricists than himself. As his inspiration, Hugh MacDiarmid credited women writing in Scots as raising the language as a literary tool above the kailyard prose of his gender. Naomi Mitchison was one of Scotland's greatest writers, critically acclaimed and prolific. An inspirational human being, politically active, by all accounts lusty and joyful, she was internationally known and even adopted as leader by African tribes.

Naomi died in January 1999, just as the millennium comes to a close. Already she has disappeared. Waterstone's, during the year, promoted a list of 100 famous Scottish writers. Only one woman appeared on it. Muriel Spark. In a few short months, Naomi was gone and forgotten. Muriel will go the same way. Hundreds, maybe thousands, of others have gone into that void. Poets, fiction writers, playwrights.

Our male writers are remembered and celebrated. Take a trip around the monuments. From the North: the Iain Crichton Smith fellowship; Neil Gunn prize; Grassic Gibbon centre; Souter's house; Scott monument; Ramsay statue; Stevenson room; MacDiarmid's Brownsbank museum; James Hogg statue; Burns society, centre, cottage, statues, slept-here-there-everywhere plaques. Now seek out one to Naomi or the many who pre-deceased her. Do the Scottish public still know their names, that body of work?

The vanishing woman is a Scottish phenomenon that shames us. We are limp and lop-sided, with half our history and culture missing, unaware of who might actually be who in Scotland. Presbyterianism and union with a then chauvinist society began this self-wounding. But now we lag behind, brutish and handicapped in a modern world. Who can't name several deceased English women writers, or a living American or Canadian?

Anne Farquharson of Invercauld and Naomi Mitchison. The question is not why I choose them. But why not?

Sheriff Gordon Shiach (b 1935), lawyer, nominated:

James Dalrymple: Viscount Stair (1619-95) Sorley MacLean (1911-96)

The anonymous letter in Twelfth Night, Act 2 Scene 5, tells Malvolio:

Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em.

Sadly for Malvolio, the letter did not help him to understand greatness. The editor, similarly, gave his readers no help to define 'greatest Scot'. Is it someone whose contribution has been internationally recognised; or perhaps who has done most to mould Scottish nationhood?

In opting for the latter, I have nominated Scots whose names may mean little outside Scotland, or indeed to many fellow Scots. The selection reflects my own view of those who have made the greatest contribution to important facets of Scottish life and letters.

Dr G M Hutton described James Dalrymple, 1st Viscount Stair (1619-95) as 'one of Scotland's most eminent scholars and statesmen... universally acknowledged as the genius who first established Scots law as a complete and coherent rational system, and the most complete master of jurisprudence that Scotland has ever produced'. It is this aspect, rather than his political importance, which prompted my nomination.

Stair, the jurist, is best remembered for his great synthesis of Scots law entitled *Institutions of the Law of Scotland*. While there were other institutional writers, he has been assessed as standing 'pre-eminent'. Forbes writing in 1714, says of Stair: 'His excellent Writings will carry down his Memory to the latest Posterity. *His Institutions of the Law of Scotland*, wherein that is compared with the Canon and the Civic laws, and the Customs of neighbouring Nations, are so useful, that few considerable Families in Scotland, not to mention professed Lawyers, do want them'. Even today, a lawyer, seeking to elucidate an otherwise intractable problem by reverting to first principles, would often be well-advised to start with Stair's *Institutions*.

The poet Tom Scott wrote in 1970 of Somhairle MacGill-Eain: 'That (he) is a great poet in the Gaelic tradition, a man not merely for time, but for eternity, I have no doubt whatever, and commit myself to this view without hesitation'. Time surely has bolstered this opinion. Sorley (to use the English version of his forename) dedicated his life to the education of young people; to the creation of great Gaelic verse; and to the preservation of the Gaelic language. While many of his audience at poetry readings had no Gaelic, the sonorities as he read in his mother tongue brought an excitement which was never quite there in the English translation. Although we can

no longer wait in anticipation for his modest introduction – 'And now I'll read it in the Gaelic' – the memory of greatness remains. The *proof* of greatness is in his collected works.

Iain Crichton Smith said of Sorley's work: 'The miracle of the poetry is difficult to define. It consists, of course, in mastery of language; but more than that there is a strangeness and eeriness at the heart of some of this poetry which is quite simply beyond most of the practitioners of the art this century.'

Why then did I make the nominations? Irvine Smith says of Stair's *Institutions* that they 'presented Scots law as a complete and coherent system, Scots law as we have since known it'. Without this synthesis and consolidation, our legal system would be the less, and our identity as a nation would surely be enfeebled. Similarly, the Gaelic language remains a precious and living preserve of national identity. Its survival must depend both on education and enthusiasm. These are the very elements which underpin the life and work of Sorley MacLean.

Professor Hugh Simpson (b 1931), pathologist and explorer, nominated:

William Thomson: Lord Kelvin (1824-1907) Ian Donald (1910-87)

It is not often that a doctor can alter medical practice. Ian Donald was one of the few. Due to him, 'ultrasound' is now a household word. Every branch of medicine is touched by it. Every hospital ward has a diagnostic machine and most new mothers a picture to prove it.

Ian Donald brought this into effect. Although born in Cornwall in 1910, his father and grandfather had been Scottish doctors. Graduating in medicine from St Thomas's in 1937, he joined the RAF at the outbreak of war. Always interested in gadgets, he became intrigued by the fledgling developments of radar and sonar, first invented by a French physicist as a possible detection of submarines.

Returning to London after the war, he became interested in obstetrics, putting his interest in machines to use by inventing means of aiding the breathing of new-born babies. Called 'Mad Donald' by his colleagues, he was looked upon as a crazy inventor.

Appointed to the Chair of Midwifery at the University of Glasgow in 1954, he had a chance to flourish. His enthusiasm and restless creative energy, his eagerness to challenge established practice and his dynamic, lively lectures became part of the scene. Publication of his book *Practical Obstetric Problems* brought him world-wide fame.

Meanwhile, he had been mulling over the question of how could sonar be used to

detect the odd lumps such as fibroids and ovarian cysts that caused such problems in his practice. With this in mind, he took a collection of such recently removed specimens to the research department of Babcock and Wilcox at Renfrew, who were using ultrasound to detect flaws in metal. He saw the potential at once and this led to a link with the Kelvin and Hughes Scientific Instrument Company who set about making a useable apparatus that could be taken to the bedside.

Scepticism and ridicule greeted Ian Donald's research. He silenced this by pursuing and perfecting the technique, and by 1959, he could demonstrate that clear echoes could be obtained from the fetal head. Application of this meant that size and growth of the foetus could be assessed. Diagnosis of complications (multiple pregnancy, placenta praevia, fetal abnormality) now became possible without the dangers from X-rays then used for this purpose.

To quote Ian Donald himself: 'Anyone who is satisfied with his diagnostic ability and surgical results is unlikely to contribute much to the launching of a new medical service. He should be consumed with a divine discontent with things as they are'.

Luckily for us all, Ian was such a man. Also, he had the right ideas at the right time. It must not be forgotten that Scottish engineering was behind the development of medical ultrasound. Now, all apparatus is made in Japan.

Scientific thinking was changed by Lord Kelvin (my nomination for greatest Scot ever). His inventions and principles have influenced the course of all scientific development throughout the world. He was Professor of Natural Philosophy at the University of Glasgow for 53 years. Born in Ireland, he came to Glasgow at the age of eight, when his father was appointed to the Chair of Mathematics. Educated at home and by attending his father's lectures, he became a matriculated student at Glasgow at the age of 10. After a five years' course he then proceeded to Cambridge for another five years.

His return to Glasgow to become a professor, at 22, coincided with the emergence of the new sciences of current electricity and thermodynamics. Influenced by the mathematics of his father, he insisted that accuracy was vitally important. He applied this thinking to mechanics and out of this developed the basics for the instruments that he invented to carry out his experiments.

Today's scientists consider that Kelvin's most important discovery in pure science was the second law of thermodynamics which established the scientific basis for the age of steam. In applied science the most striking contribution was the first transatlantic telephone cable, the laying of this made possible by his close association with the Clyde shipbuilders.

In later years, his own creative energy resulted in the electrical and power industries of today. His original thinking led to the science of geophysics and the understanding of the tides, to the 'vortex atom' theory, to a new form of astronomical

clock of absolute accuracy. His yacht, the *Lalla Rookh*, was a floating laboratory on which he invented the modern mariner's compass and the means of measuring the depth of the sea.

When switching on the light this evening, remember that, as a result of Kelvin's practical application of science, his house in Glasgow was the first in the world to be lit by electricity.

Recognised as the leading figure in science of his day, Kelvin is buried in Westminster Abbey. If 'greatness' is a measure of influence on the next generation, Lord Kelvin comes out on top.

Bill Speirs (1952-2009), trade unionist, nominated:

George Buchanan (1506-82) Margaret Irwin (1858-1940)

Margaret Irwin was born in 1858, on board a barque in the South China Seas; but though a child of the 19th century, she was a key figure in the 20th as far as Scotland is concerned.

When the STUC was founded a century ago, breaking away from the TUC over the issues of the unions' political stance and the need for distinctive Scottish institutions to meet Scottish needs, it was a very male organisation. No surprise there. What was surprising, perhaps, was that the first elections saw the poll topped by a woman, Margaret Irwin, who became my first predecessor as General Secretary of the STUC.

Margaret had been Secretary of the 100,000-strong Scottish Federal Council for Women's Trades, battling to improve the lot of grossly exploited women workers, in campaigns such as that to get laundries included in the factories' legislation in order to end such obscenities as women being expected to work 37-hour shifts – non-stop.

She fought for women's suffrage and for equal pay, constantly pointing out that this was in the interests of both male and female workers, as when she told a mass meeting of mill and factory workers that 'a uniform rate of wages, for work of the same nature and efficiency, is the best safeguard against the present ruinous competition which exists and this can only be had by Trade Union effort'.

Margaret Irwin never became a fashionable figure: but her legacy as a social and workplace reformer has been immense, as a leader who rejected all forms of sectarianism, who saw that men and women could only ultimately advance as human beings if they did so together, and who saw those who create our country's wealth as the real embodiment of that wealth.

George Buchanan was, like Margaret Irwin, educated at the University of St

Andrews (where she obtained the degree of LLA – Lady Literate in Art, the only one available to women at the time): unlike her he went on to university in Paris, and in fact spent the greater part of his adult life in France, one of those Scots of the Renaissance who was at home in all of Europe while always knowing Scotland as home. That universality was aided by the use of Latin as the continent's tongue of learning, and Buchanan was widely regarded as the finest European user of the language in his day. He was also hailed as a brilliant poet, who a century after his death was described by John Dryden as 'a writer comparable to any of the moderns and excelled by few of the ancients'.

The struggles of the Reformation saw him return to Scotland, the man previously a Catholic humanist now become a severe Calvinist. Installed as tutor to the future James VI and I, his influence on the future course of life in these islands can be seen as profound. Also profound was his contribution to modern political and philosophical discourse, centrally in his immense work *De Jure Regni apud Scotos*, justifying the overthrow of their monarch by the Scottish people. This book became one of the most influential – and in absolutist quarters, feared – well into the next century, shaping anti-royalist thinking before and during the English Civil War: 101 years after Buchanan's death, it was burned by the University of Oxford.

He was never a one-dimensional man, though. Alongside the great philosophical tracts, Buchanan compiled several volumes of jokes and hilarious tales, including the legendary *Daft Watty's Ramble from Ayr to Carlisle*. In the life he lived, a sense of humour was probably indispensable.

George Buchanan, Renaissance savant, died in poverty.

Professor Christopher Whatley (b 1948), historian, nominated:

Sir John Clerk (1676-1755) Tom Johnston (1881-1965)

Terribly difficult to choose the greatest Scot in history, as so many individuals have particular admirable qualities – Bruce, Wallace, Burns and the rest – but I've chosen Sir John Clerk (1676-1755) as he seems to represent so much that is intrinsically Scottish but he's also rare in that he was also a politician who was genuinely committed to Scotland's interests. Even within the United Kingdom which the Union of 1707 created, Clerk never lost his commitment to Scottish history and culture, which he saw and understood in the broader context of Europe and the world.

A real Scottish patriot, then, as well as being a polymath. A man – and member of the Scottish Parliament – who more than most Scots recognised and wrestled with the age-old problem in Scotland's history: how to effect a working relationship with

England and raise Scotland to a position of economic and political respectability in a fiercely competitive world without abandoning Scottish virtues.

Honest and a realist (and in some respects, contrary to his better-known contemporary Andrew Fletcher), he did not attempt to court popular favour with his views – he had somewhat reluctantly supported Union in 1706 and 1707. Clerk was also a fierce defender of Scottish independence and identity as exemplified in her archaeology, history and culture. He was well aware of Scotland's weaknesses and prepared to acknowledge and confront these. He was a European who befriended some of the greatest scholars of his time, and who contributed in a practical way to the improvement of Scottish agriculture and industry. He composed music (which has recently been recorded), wrote reasonable poetry and compelling and influential tracts on Scotland's condition. He spent much of his later life writing a little-known but enormously thoughtful *History of the Union*.

As the greatest Scot of the 20th century, Thomas Johnston.

Striking as a man – a socialist – who recognised the need to trim while in power, but who at the same time held on to his principles. Johnston was enormously influential in left-wing circles in the early 20th century, not least through his editorship of *Forward*. He was a passionate writer (if a less eloquent speaker), who in 1909 published *Our Scots Noble Families*, an enormously popular and effective assault on the former abuses of power exercised by the Scottish landed classes. 1923 saw the publication of his seminal *History of the Scottish Working Classes*, a landmark text in Scottish history.

His political career (he became a Kirkintilloch ILP town councillor in 1913) is marked by his practical achievements – in opening a municipal cinema, for example, along with other schemes which benefited the community. One of the 'Clydesiders' of the 1920s (elected in 1922, and the best according to Beatrice Webb), Johnston rose to national prominence as Secretary of State for Scotland between 1929 and 1931 and from 1941. Committed to the Scottish cause, but within a Westminster context, Johnston played an outstanding role in the regeneration of Scottish economic and cultural life outside as well as inside parliament.

He straddles the century, having roots in the early Labour movement, but who in office set so much in train which would lay the foundations for the regeneration of Scotland which has occurred during the more recent decades.

Canon Kenyon Wright (1932-2017), constitutional reformer, nominated:

Robert the Bruce (1274-1329) Hugh MacDiarmid (1892-1978)

To nominate the great Robert [the Bruce] may seem just too obvious – but my reasons not only run deep into the meaning of our history as a nation, but are starkly relevant to our contemporary debate on the direction of our new democracy. I choose Robert not primarily because of who he was or what he did, but for what he represents.

I choose Robert not for the legendary spider nor for Bannockburn, but for Arbroath – though Arbroath could not have happened without Bannockburn and at least the spirit of the spider.

My reference is, of course, to the Declaration of Arbroath of 1320 – so far in advance of its time in its understanding of sovereignty that it deserves to be seen as one of the foundation documents of European democracy, and is certainly the source and spring from which flows the continuous stream that leads directly to the Claim of Right of 1989, and the Scottish Parliament of 1999.

The ringing words about freedom are well known – but the most significant part of the Declaration lies in the limitation it sets on the sovereignty of the king: 'Robert himself, should he turn aside from the task he has begun, and yield Scotland of us to the English King or his people, we should cast out as the enemy of us all, and we should choose another King to defend our freedom'.

Suitably adapted, not a bad message to give to the new Scottish Parliament!

I recall the words of a Commissioner at the General Assembly of the Kirk in 1989 – 'In the Declaration of Arbroath, they said to Robert – ye may be the King, but ye dae as ye're telt, or ye're on the burroo!'

That concept of limited and answerable sovereignty, in such stark contrast to the idolatry of Westminster's claims, is the heritage which Robert represents – and we need it now perhaps more than ever as we strive for a new political culture.

He appeals to the romantic and the visionary in me.

I too have experienced that piercing love of 'the little white rose of Scotland, that smells sharp and sweet'. I too have known how it 'breaks the heart'.'

At the first meeting of the Scottish Constitutional Convention in March 1989, when all those politicians lined up to sign the 'Claim of Right for Scotland' and thus recognised the sovereignty of the people, I quoted words of MacDiarmid from *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* which I hope will always mark our national identity, and set our vision of the nation in the context of Europe and the world:

He canna Scotland see, wha yet, Canna see the infinite. And Scotland in true scale to it.

Contributors

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Alasdair McKillop is a writer based in Edinburgh

Christine Martin grew up as a child of the manse

Bill Paterson* is a distinguished Scottish actor and commentator. He has appeared in many films and television programmes and lives in London

Bill Paterson* is a Glasgow-based writer

Eileen Reid is a writer

Kenneth Roy was a distinguished Scottish journalist and founding editor of the *Scottish Review*. He died in 2018

Anthony Seaton is Emeritus Professor of Environmental and Occupational Medicine at Aberdeen University and Senior Consultant to the Edinburgh Institute of Occupational Medicine

David Torrance is an author and contemporary historian

Alex Wood is a writer and former headteacher

For who's who in the **Greatest Scots** feature, see individual headings at the start of each contribution

* Two Bill Patersons contribute to the Scottish Review. To avoid confusion, one is described as 'actor, London'; the other as 'writer, Glasgow'