

Greenprint

News from the Scottish Green Party • Summer 2010

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Cut Carbon Emissions, We Said



After eleven years of Green representation in the Scottish Parliament, and a decade in the European Parliament, this

year's general election represents another historic step forward – the first Green MP at Westminster. Caroline Lucas's first appearances in the Commons have already shown her bringing the Green challenge to the forefront of Parliamentary politics, just as she has done so ably in front of TV viewers on Question Time for years. I can't think of anyone better suited to this groundbreaking role than Caroline, or anywhere I'd be happier having excuses to visit than Brighton Pavilion!

The Tory/Liberal coalition she faces turned quite a few stomachs in Scotland in its very first days, as huge numbers of people who had voted tactically watched that nice Mr Clegg handing the Tories the key to Number 10. Initial dismay has now been replaced by outright horror as the coalition displays its radical right-wing agenda in the emergency budget.

Not only will the new Government fail to deliver on its environmental rhetoric (no surprise there, we're

used to that after all) but it will also proceed to eviscerate the public sector and pursue an economic model more in keeping with the anti-state ideologues of the US Republican Party. Naturally it will be society's poorest people who will be hardest hit by this. The failure to create a fairer tax system is only the most obvious injustice – but the situation which will face millions who currently rely on public services will grow steadily more desperate if the LibDems and Tories press ahead with this vicious agenda.

They will argue that it's necessary, of course. Caroline has been among the highest profile voices challenging this lie about 'necessary pain'. Just as she is taking on this role at Westminster for the first time, we will need to do the same at Holyrood in the run-up to our own general election in May next year. Our Parliament needs a Green voice which is radical, not just in environmental terms, but also in its defence of public services and their role in safeguarding the common good of society.

Every other political party at Holyrood is either implementing the cuts agenda or responsible for the last decade's failures, and we have a real opportunity to become the 'change' vote of 2011. If we can, we'll do far more than retake the ground we lost in 2007; we can confirm our position as a crucial and permanent part of Scotland's political landscape, with the potential to reshape it dramatically. That opportunity is there for the taking if we are ready – not just our



Geoff Dexter

The 1980s again ... not just on TV.

parliamentary and local council teams, but our branches and activists around the country. We have an ally of immense value in Caroline Lucas, and I'm looking forward to welcoming her to Scotland to help build our campaign.

Patrick Harvie MSP



But the lady's not for cutting! Caroline Lucas took the Brighton & Hove Seat in May with a majority of 1,252, becoming the first UK Green MP.



scottish
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Election Roundup

Capital Overview



The general election was bitter-sweet in Edinburgh, as elsewhere. The sweetness came from Brighton and Hove, of course and, to some extent, from Robin Harper's 5.1% in Edinburgh East in an election where we were squeezed more mercilessly than at any time since 1992.

There was disappointment across the city too: in all 4 seats in which we stood, our vote was down on 2005. Yet this was the biggest effort we'd ever put into a Westminster election in Edinburgh. All our efforts were focused on Edinburgh East where we delivered 40,000 special election newsletters, 20,000 eve of poll cards, canvassed door-to-door, held stalls, hosted action days and won friends, if not always votes, at hustings. We gained new members, new volunteers and successfully raised almost £8,000 to fund the campaign.

Of course, our efforts and resources pale beside those of the big party machines and even quite monumental local efforts may not be rewarded.

All too frequent encounters with voters went:

"Have you voted Green in the past?"

"Yes, almost always."

"How likely are you to vote Green this time then?"

"Not this time. I'll vote Green in council, European and Scottish Parliament elections though."

We can all take comfort from the last line of this exchange. In the elections ahead, in 2011 and 2012, Green votes will be coming back to us and they will be all the greater in number for the unglamorous work we have carried out in this most unforgiving election. We can look, I believe, to the reasonable prospect of between 5-10 MSPs next year and 30 or so councillors, spread across the country the year after: in other words, a new high water mark for Green politics in Scotland.

Still, there's a danger in simply assuming that these votes will come back to us, as of right. I'd suggest 70-80% of our result this year was out of our control – whether the squeeze caused by the absurd electoral system; or the whims of a media obsessed by the leaders of the "three main parties". Let's not sweat the stuff we can't control. But it does mean looking harder at what we can control.

We can make our messages sharper; we can organise canvassing more effectively; we can marshal our money and our biggest asset of all – people – in a more focused way. All to get over our urgent call for a greener and fairer Scotland.

2011 is not far away.

Gavin Corbett, Edinburgh



Edinburgh East

Out on the street, lovely sunny day, weekend before election. Magnificent placarding effort evidenced all over Edinburgh East, and in adjoining areas – any one would have thought that we had a hundred people out rather than a few dozen.

As ever, all the punters said they were thinking of voting green, and did not, but we did make some inroads. Pollock Halls. Joan Graham and I leafleting outside the cafeteria – 2000 students eat there every evening. We never stopped speaking. They responded well – one email "thanks for coming to speak to us – the only party that could be bothered".

Many people however said they were Green voters, but wanted to vote tactically in this election, and we should understand and respect this – the Scottish Parliament election next year will not be bedevilled by the same set of concerns. Green Voters are thinking voters, and will I am sure flock back to us in ten months time, especially Labour voters who, buoyed up by the extraordinary reversion to type exemplified in May this year, will see, as they did in 1999 and 2003, that they can use their redundant second votes to express their real concerns.

Liberal voters may even transfer wholesale after voting Liberal to keep the Tories out this last time!

Be of good heart – 2011 we have an election which offers a chance to set ourselves up again

To our new volunteers and activists: Do not worry about the generally negative self castigating outbreak on the chat lines – it has happened after every election for 25 years that I remember, some kind of catharsis we Greens have to put ourselves through after every election we have fought – if we did learn to walk on water we would end up criticising each other for being unable to swim.

We will all be back to working up a cracking good campaign for 2011 soon enough!

Robin Harper MSP

Dundee East

The timing of the election nicely coincided with the delivery of our second newsletter to our target Council ward of Broughty Ferry, which makes up the central part of the constituency. So we effectively were able to manage two letter box drops to a large part of the area, though it would not have happened without the invaluable help of a group of LETS workers to whom we now owe a fair number of "dragons" (the LETS currency). Wearing our rosettes, three of us delivered a heap of newsletters showing a visible presence which

was noted by quite a few members of the public. With the other parties contesting both seats in Dundee we suspect much activity was focused on the city centre.

As candidate I attended 6 hustings. At most of them the response afterwards from some of the audience was that they liked what the Greens were saying but couldn't vote for us this time but come Holyrood . . .

The organisation from SGP was excellent and as a vintage candidate, I am impressed at how our Party has become much more professional in its approach and supportive of candidates.

We have much to do to convince more people to have the courage and belief in us to give us their vote. We also have much to do as a branch to inspire our own members to come out and help make that difference.

Shiona Baird

Ochil and South Perthshire

With some trepidation, naivety and excitement, I submitted my nomination form to be a candidate for the Westminster election. The following few months seem to be more of the same – trepidation, naivety and excitement. This was my first experience standing as a candidate at this level and I would highly recommend it to anyone who enjoys the rollercoaster of experience with adrenalin rushes, tummy churning fear and then the exhilaration that follows.

With hindsight I recognise that the two main drawbacks for me were the lack of funds and not being permitted to participate on the same pitch as the other bigger parties. The lack of funds prevented us from producing more than just a freepost leaflet and prevented us from having more publicity materials to work with on the streets. The playing field is not level – from not being invited to various hustings to being refused a voice on TV / radio and being given short space in the press, it proved to be frustrating to say the least. I realise many of you have known this for a long time but this is my first awareness experience of this and I was not comfortable with it.

Having said this, however, there were so many more positives than the 2 negatives that the balance was very much on the positive side.

I worked very closely with Andrew Thompson my election and campaign Agent (unofficially) who guided me with reason, calm and support through the campaign.

The biggest low was at my first hustings. I like to think that I appeared to be a cool, calm professional. Inside I was, in fact, a blubbing jelly fish! I can now look back and smile – even

laugh about the whole thing but at the time my confidence was shaken badly. I felt unprepared and out of my depth. I could say the questions were rubbish (or just not what I expected), I could say that I was out of my depth, I could say that I was . . . I could go on and on but you get the picture. The very nice Chairman did actually ask me if I was ok – that made me worse – was it really that obvious? Oh dear! I stopped short of sheer panic. I pleaded with my eyes at someone who knew me to please let the ground open up and swallow me. Then it was over. Andrew did offer me the option to pull out of the next evenings hustings which was in a labour stronghold are of the constituency. I refused. I was determined – never again will I do so badly. Then I managed to talk myself round to believing that me on a bad day was better than the other candidates on their best day. I promise that this was achieved only with coffee and chocolate and no other type of drugs!

I went from this low point to growing much more in confidence – I spoke more strongly at hustings, I took on the challenge of peoples perceptions face to face, I spoke honestly with those I met and I had a laugh. My key ingredients – integrity and laughter. I learned very quickly that if you talked to people and did not bombard them with facts and stats, they actually connected with you. Making that connection is a great feeling.

Nominations for Holyrood are now out. I am going to go for it again. There is so much more that can be done, so much more to learn and to teach. There is a whole new challenge that I want to embrace and encourage others to share in the experience – integrity and laughter will be a big part of it and it starts now.

Hilary Charles

Stirling

It's 2:30am, May 7th and I'm waiting on stage for the election result as the Green candidate for Stirling. But is it 2001 or 2010? I have certainly been here before as the candidate – same election, same place, same result, with Labour winning by a mile and the green vote hovering at around 750. First thought was a little disappointment tinged with the hope that 500 miles away another Green is on the brink of something remarkable.

We did expect a bit more, after all we keep improving our local campaigns every time we stand in Stirling. This was no exception – the visits by Patrick and Robin, the multiple leaflets, the good presence on the street, the big local media

continued over ►





coverage and positive feedback from hustings. But the picture after 10 years of Holyrood is that voters are wise and see real opportunities to nationally elect Greens in-between those big shifts in government and only when they have a fair vote to use.

Back to the noughties . . . in 2003 another night saw the Green Holyrood regional vote rocket up to nearly 11% in Stirling as the surge spread across Scotland. A great night and one which followed a Westminster election where at least we had made voters think about the party as an option even if they couldn't quite make that choice in 2001. So, a good omen for our party for Holyrood next year and the chance of greater MSP numbers. But perhaps more significantly, a base for 2012 and the council elections where we can compete on a more level field with the big parties and build that long term stable representation that was such a decisive factor in Brighton.

Next action is to find those 750 voters and get them to join!

Mark Ruskell

Ross, Skye and Lochaber

In Ross Skye and Lochaber I stood as a candidate with the intention of profile-raising for Holyrood and support for our target ward of Black Isle, which is where we concentrated our activity.

The campaign was a bit low-key in some ways with only 2 hustings – I believe because organisations that might have run hustings had a problem with Charles Kennedy's availability.

We did some doorknocking for the first time for several elections (not a proper canvas) and found a lot of goodwill towards the Greens and promises of a vote in the future when they have a second one to spare. So our task for Holyrood is to make sure that happens!

On election night we joined the SNP's ballot box sampling team and I have the results though at time of writing haven't studied them.

Support from the SGP centrally in terms of press and resources was good.

Lessons for next year – more doorknocking so more helpers needed!

Eleanor Scott

Argyll and Bute

This was the first time that Scottish Greens had stood in the Argyll and Bute constituency. It seemed to me that it was fertile ground for us long term and in the meantime my campaign had the following aims: to mobilise and energise existing members; to increase our support and membership base; to give people the option of

voting Green and finally to help raise the party's profile in the lead up to next year's Holyrood election – in 2007 we were just 1000 votes short of re-electing Eleanor Scott as the Highlands and Islands MSP.

Whilst we are unable to predict the result next May, the campaign succeeded in achieving each of the other aims. A small but dedicated band of Argyll Greens handed out leaflets, put up posters, placards and polling station boards; I added something Green, female and fresh to the hustings meetings and we got pretty good coverage in all the local media. We also gained at least 3 new members, donations and many warm wishes.

On May 5th 789 people voted Green in the biggest squeeze seen for a long time in Argyll politics. Many had emailed or spoken to me at hustings to say they would vote for us next year on the list but not for Westminster – wanted to keep the Tories out. So they voted Lib Dem and guess what – they got Tories as part of the deal – the same the country over.

We have since had a first members meeting and BBQ and have agreed to form a sub-branch of the Highlands and Islands branch to be co-ordinated by Dunoon-based Marij van Helmond. There is tentative interest amongst members in standing for the regional list for Holyrood and definite interest in standing for the council elections in 2012 and starting that work now. It has been a really positive outcome for all of us and I suspect the political future of Argyll and Bute will have a bit more than a smattering of Green.

Elaine Morrison

East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow

This was the second time I have stood for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow in the General Election as part of Target to Win. As ever, we learned loads for next time when people will hopefully feel that their Green vote will count. We got a few new volunteers, did some great fundraising and told people about our principles (particularly our anti-poverty angle). On the media side, I enjoyed working to support other candidates' media work in my temporary job with the Greens – hopefully we'll be rolling out more media support for future elections. But the undoubted highlight of the election came at 6am on the Friday morning – our first Green MP! Thanks to everyone for their support to all the candidates.

*Kirsten Robb
Lanarkshire Branch*



Election – Full SGP Results

Seat	Candidate	Vote 2010		Vote 2005		±	
Aberdeen South	Rhonda Reekie	413	1.0%	768	1.9%	-355	-0.9%
Argyll & Bute	Elaine Morrison	789	1.8%	789	1.8%	-	-
Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale	Alis Ballance	510	1.1%	510	1.1%	-	-
Dundee East	Shiona Baird	542	1.3%	542	1.3%	-	-
East Kilbride Strathaven and Lesmahagow	Kirsten Robb	1,003	2.0%	1,575	3.3%	-572	-1.3%
East Lothian	James Mackenzie	862	1.8%	1,132	2.5%	-270	-0.7%
Edinburgh East	Robin Harper	2,035	5.1%	2,266	5.7%	-231	-0.6%
Edinburgh North and Leith	Kate Joester	1,062	2.2%	2,482	5.8%	-1,420	-3.6%
Edinburgh South	Steve Burgess	881	2.0%	1,387	3.3%	-506	-1.3%
Edinburgh South West	Clare Cooney	872	1.9%	1,520	3.5%	-648	-1.6%
Glasgow Central	Alastair Whitelaw	800	2.6%	1,372	4.9%	-572	-2.3%
Glasgow North	Martin Bartos	947	3.2%	2,135	7.7%	-1,188	-4.5%
Glasgow North West	Moira Crawford	882	2.5%	1,333	3.9%	-451	-1.4%
Glasgow South	Marie Campbell	961	2.4%	1,303	3.4%	-342	-1.0%
Gordon	Sue Edwards	752	1.5%	752	1.5%	-	-
Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey	Donnie Macleod	789	1.7%	1,065	2.4%	-276	-0.7%
Midlothian	Ian Baxter	595	0.9%	595	0.9%	-	-
Ochil and South Perthshire	Hilary Charles	609	1.2%	978	2.1%	-369	-0.9%
Ross, Skye and Lochaber	Eleanor Scott	777	2.2%	1,097	3.1%	-320	-0.9%
Stirling	Mark Ruskell	746	1.6%	1,302	3.0%	-556	-1.4%
Totals		16,827	2.1%	*			

* The average vote in the 20 seats we stood in was 2.1%; the rate of the overall vote was 0.7%.

Meanwhile Down South . . .

As well as the success of Caroline Lucas, the Green Party of England & Wales achieved some particularly high results in Norwich South (14.5%) and Cambridge (7.6%). As in Scotland, the Green share of the vote was squeezed down by tactical voting ... which probably seemed a better idea at the time than it does to many voters in retrospect.

Hopefully we will be able to bid farewell to the old voting system before the next election.

We see no sign of a move to actual proportional representation at this point, whether or not the present coalition survives.

Still, Greens have now demonstrated clearly that we can win under the old system, and we can surely do better in future, with any kind of voting.



Growth

Caroline Lucas described the 2010 Westminster manifesto as “left-wing plus”, an apt description of a boldly redistributive platform, causing some to compare the party to a watermelon: green on the outside but deep red where it matters.

Some have murmured their discontent: “what about the environment?” – as if this could be separated from the economy; but our party’s contribution is to be concerned with the most sustainable solution to the basic economic problem of scarce resources and (supposedly) limitless demand. If we lose sight of the materialist grounds of politics there is the danger of becoming dangerously authoritarian or quixotic and irrelevant.

Of course, our opposition to capitalism should not be articulated in 19th Century terms, such that we reincarnate rhetoricians of class struggle, of big, centralised statism, and of bureaucratic unionism. We should not be a party that despises markets, neither should we deny the elegance of the price mechanism, even if we are rightly suspicious of their use in capitalist quasi-libertarianism. But it is possible to articulate our aspirations in terms libertarians understand, because there is nothing neutral or natural about the disconnect of people from land, of wealth from resources. Any interventions to restore this link could even be viewed in terms of responding to market failure.

Importantly the shared core of Green politics is actually quite simple: a belief in entropy, a belief that growth is far from an adequate indicator of prosperity, that we now have to refuse to keep growing and growing if we don’t want to undermine the ability of our species to live freely and securely on planet earth. The manifesto was exciting precisely because it took such a broad view of freedom, understanding that sanctifying economic growth in a world

governed by entropy is a system of collective masochism in which the poorest suffer first. Social justice and sustainability are two sides of the same coin.

There is more to the Green Party, but I would be content if we defined our core distinctive as this simple, sellable and sensible belief in the limits of growth. It is a genuinely countercultural economic position, and one which requires wholehearted advocacy.

Mark Calder, Aberdeen

Democracy

When I see the Queen on our television screens or in the newspapers, or the House of Lords, I always think: Do we really live in a democracy?

The House of Lords is an unelected, completely undemocratic branch of law-making, so is the Monarchy. And really, what have either of them contributed to our society? How have they helped us and how do they benefit us?

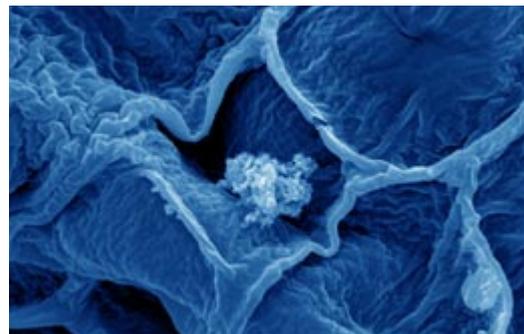
The Monarch still has an incredible amount of power, she can dissolve Parliament, choose new Prime Ministers, sack Prime Ministers (which she has done previously in Australia!) grant clemencies; she even controls the army. The House of Lords is equally powerful as the lower house.

Yet Her Majesty cost us £40 million in 2008, £12 million of that coming straight from the public purse. The Lords cost us a staggering £121 million between 2007-2008.

This combined total of around £160 million could build 5 Large secondary schools with £10 million left to spare, or a hospital to save lives. When the government make their cuts, the first place they should look should be the House of Lords, and close behind it, the Monarchy.

So when it is said that we live in a democracy, I always ask myself, is that really true?

Luca Scarabello



Art and Ecology

The Work of SGP Member Alexander Hamilton

No-one viewing Alexander Hamilton’s sensitive cyanotypes of flowers and plants (shown above and at the Fruitmarket Gallery) can doubt his empathy with nature. At the age of 12, his family moved from Northampton to Caithness, and in the Flow Country he began a love affair with the natural environment which was to be the focus of his life’s work.

Raised near Dunnett Head, he spent his youth scrabbling up and down cliffs. He was fascinated by the fossils and plants collected by Thurso baker Robert Dick in the 1850s, displayed in the local museum.

At Edinburgh College of Art, Alex hoped to explore his interest in viewing the essence of nature through the human spirit, but found his tutors were only interested in depicting nature from behind an easel. It was only with the advent of Joseph Beuys in the 1970s that Alex found another artist who shared his way of looking at nature. Beuys had trained as a botanist and had a deep emotional connection to landscape and a commitment to social engagement through art.

Alex moved out of Edinburgh and went to live in a caravan in the Pentland Hills. He started to work with installations of plants and water. He wanted his tutors to travel out to Ninemileburn to see them, but they insisted that he brought work into the college. It was only the intervention of the external examiner, who spotted the potential in Alex’s vision, which resulted in his successful graduation in 1972.

In 1973, he went to live on the deserted island of Stroma to work with plants rather than imposing his own view of them. He came across the work of Anne Atkins, who had used cyanotypes to record seaweeds, and began to explore this medium.

In the 1990’s, Alex worked with scientists

from Edinburgh University to produce a series of images of the pollution found on tulip petals from Princes Street Gardens. The stunning images, shown at the Fruitmarket Gallery, showed that this pollution was caused by microscopic particles from the diesel used by buses and taxis, causing up to 300 deaths a year.

More recently, Alex was awarded a Leverhulme Scholarship to study at John Ruskin's house at Brantwood in the Lake District. Ruskin was interested in the plants which are generally overlooked, wild flowers, those which grow by the side of the road or on wasteland. In *Proserpina*, published between 1875 and 1882, Ruskin had explored the relationship of people and nature, drawing on Goethe's great book, *The Metamorphosis of Plants*. Ruskin's idea was to try through practical experimentation to illustrate the interconnectedness of people and plants. He established small-scale orchards and wheat fields to show that it was possible to produce food on a small scale in a way sympathetic to the environment, working with nature. Ruskin was also one of the first writers to draw attention to the effects of pollution and the loss of connection to the natural world.

A British Council Darwin in 2009 award will allow Alex to continue to explore hidden phenology, working with an institute in Poland and culminating in an exhibition at the Royal Botanic Gardens in May 2010 and a further exhibition called *Natural Magic*, at the Museo Bilotti in Rome in 2011.

For further information on his latest projects, see:

www.alexanderhamilton.co.uk

Rosemary Burnett

House Banks

In Norway at the end of the war, the German troops adopted a scorched-earth policy, pursued by the Russians on their way South. There wasn't much left of the towns and homes, and it gets chilly over here.

The State created **Husbanken** (The House Bank).

The bank provided cheap loans to groups of neighbours getting together as work teams to build up their ruined homes again. The result? It worked like a dream, creating a highly trained national work force and a harmonious society.

As a direct consequence Norway developed from the poorest country in the world to the richest in just 25 years, able to take over their oil industry within just 10 years from the start with a fully trained national work force.

Perhaps the government could establish a similar House Bank under the same conditions; convert the homes of today into places of pride, creating neighbourhoods based on respect and harmony and the creation of thousands of jobs; a massive activity and demand for all required products and a massive boost to industry.

The new areas to be designed as places of great beauty and harmony. Every house, a different design – plants, gardens, food allotments and workshops, to mention just a few opportunities.

John Herron, john@johnherron.no

Glasgow Supports Our Indigenous Film Industry

In May 2010, Glasgow Green Councillors were able to gain cross-party support to ensure that film-making can secure its future as part of *Creative Scotland*. A motion was put forward to acknowledge the changing landscape for arts and culture due to the establishment of Creative Scotland in June. We have noted the new era with Scottish Screen and the Scottish Arts Council being brought together as one entity. Now, communities will have an opportunity to promote their cultural life, artists, writers, film-makers, musicians and world class cultural facilities to Andrew Dixon, the new Chief Executive of Creative Scotland.

The history of Scottish film-making is a remarkable story. In the 1980s, Bill Forsyth's films *Gregory's Girl* and *Local Hero* challenged the 'mystical' view of Scotland. They provided invaluable experience for Scottish crew and established the idea of a viable Scottish film industry, though it was to be another decade before the idea really took root. It is only in 1994, when *Shallow Grave* broke through that a native industry started to emerge. It brought together the notable talents of John Hodge, Andrew Macdonald and Danny Boyle. The *Scottish Film Production Fund* put public money into *Shallow Grave* at the script stage.

At this time Glasgow was in the process of setting up the *Glasgow Film Fund* to attract film-makers to the city. *Shallow Grave* was the first film to get support from the fund, which in turn was able to redirect its share of profits into other films. *Trainspotting*, made by the same team, followed in 1996. Unlike *Shallow Grave*, it became a hit in the United States. The cast included the nucleus of what would be a new wave of "Scottish" international stars. Since 1997, much has been achieved on the back of these successes with encouragement and backing from *Scottish Screen*; most recently Peter Capaldi and Armando Iannucci in *The Thick of It*.

We have to thank the many inspiring figures involved in the short film schemes, the lottery funds, Glasgow Film Fund as well as Scottish Screen who have played important roles in developing an indigenous film industry. As Creative Scotland takes over, it is understood that legislation makes it clear that it will honour all existing funding arrangements. The retention of the Scottish Screen offices provides a base in Glasgow from which Creative Scotland can fulfil its commitment to continue to assist the development of the City's arts and cultural sector.

Support for Nuclear Weapons Abolition

On Saturday 5th June 2010, thousands of people gathered at nuclear weapons bases to call for the abolition of nuclear weapons. Martha Wardrop joined members of *Womens International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) Scotland* and Scottish CND at North Gate of Faslane Trident base. Further information at:

- <http://www.ukwilpf.org.uk/>
- <http://www.lionaid.org/>

Martha Wardrop

Campaigns (continued)

Land Tax – Basic Points

Fair Taxes

The housing market is like a compulsory lottery, with relative poverty as the punishment for failing to participate.

Most landowners got huge unearned gains between 1997 and 2007, but a land value tax (LVT) would also affect recent first-time buyers, who have already paid the full price for their land.

Unfair taxes are demoralising in the old-fashioned sense of lowering the moral tone of society. MPs' expenses claims for second homes are a recent example.

Capital Value

The annual value of a property is equal to its capital value multiplied by the interest rate plus the property tax rate. The annual value of land is determined by its earning potential. The capital value of buildings and other manufactured assets is determined by the cost of replacement. So any increase in property tax is balanced elsewhere in the equation, with an increase in the annual value of buildings or a decrease in the capital value of land.

The tax rate on the capital value of land should be kept within the same range as interest rates, so that no more than half of the annual value is collected as tax. Pressure for maximum exploitation of land would be avoided, and there would still be reliable market information about capital values. Effectively, half of the land would have been nationalised.

LVT should be phased in slowly so that future capital gains are reduced, rather than current land prices. Ancient woodland and wetlands should not be taxed.

Other Assets Taxes

Capital gains tax and inheritance tax leave any capital gain untaxed until the sale or transfer of the property. So they punish mobility and collect less revenue than a tax at the same rate on the annual value of the property.

Wealth will be also be redistributed unfairly and investment decisions distorted if residential property is not taxed.

Only irreplaceable essential assets, such as land, should be taxed. Manufactured assets, with prices approximately equal to the cost of replacement, have limited speculative potential. Speculation in luxury goods only affects connoisseurs and gamblers.

Local Tax

If local LVT, paid by owners, replaced Council Tax, paid by occupiers, rents would increase. But subsequent variations in LVT couldn't always be matched by variations in affordable rents. So in the long term LVT wouldn't always be passed on to tenants.

LVT is financially equivalent to the planning gains sometimes demanded from developers by local councils. With local LVT, the council effectively becomes owner of part of the capital value increase, and collects the rent on it as LVT.

Speculative Bubbles

The average UK house price increased by about 170% between 1997 and 2007. That's about 10-4% per year, giving an annual gain in capital value approximately equal to the average (median) income.

The purpose of land tax is the prevention of bubbles and speculation, and the collection of some of the unearned value. I don't think a logical fair economy can be achieved without it.

*Alison Marshall
Edinburgh Green Party.*

Greenprint welcomes submissions on any topic, but reserves the right to edit or reject submissions. The date for first submissions (which can include outlines) for the next edition is 30 August 2010.

The mailing date will be around 27 September 2010 (subject to events).

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