

GREENPRINT

News from the Scottish Green Party
Naidheachdan o Phàrtaidh Uaine na h-Alba



Summer (An Samhradh) 2013



Greens against the bedroom tax

By Councillors Steve Burgess and Gavin Corbett

The bedroom tax – or under-occupation charge, as it is formally known – penalises working age households on benefits if they are deemed to be “under-occupying” their council or housing association home.

If that is the case, between 14% and 25% is taken off housing benefit. This is in spite of the occupation standards being far from generous and in the full knowledge that there are nothing like enough smaller homes for people to move to. Of all the welfare changes, it is probably the least rational and most vindictive.

The various bedroom tax marches on 30 March were well-attended by Greens and it was important to show that our party stands shoulder to shoulder with those worst hit. But demonstrations themselves don't always achieve the change we want (witness the massive anti-Iraq war demos in 2003), so it is important to engage with the nitty-gritty of policy.

Back in February, the Greens submitted a motion to the Council's Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee, urging the council to pledge not to evict someone

solely for bedroom-tax rent arrears. At the time, Edinburgh was the first Council to look at this. There followed a long period of prevarication before, on 16 April, the Labour-SNP Coalition in Edinburgh decided to adopt the Green position.

Councils cannot stop the bedroom tax but at least we can ensure that the price paid is not homelessness.

In addition, the City Council agreed to two further recommendations from the Greens – to examine reclassification of bedrooms as a way of avoiding the penalty being levied in the first place; and to try to persuade housing associations in the city also to adopt no-eviction stances. Earlier, in the year, we also put £1 million on our budget package for Discretionary Housing Payments to tackle hardship.

“Councils cannot stop the bedroom tax but at least we can ensure that the price paid is not homelessness.”

That is just the bare bones of the process. Many hours of detailed discussion went on with branch members, other organisations and other councillors, to ensure that the policy could work in detail. ‘No evictions’ is not an answer to the bedroom tax but it can never be right to cast someone out on the street because the benefit ladder has been knocked from under their feet.

www.scottishgreens.org.uk

Editor's Letter

By Richard Doherty

It may have started off slowly, but 2013 is turning out to be as politically-charged a year as any. This edition looks at Trident and the Bedroom Tax, but protests against these form only part of an ongoing resistance to our society's rapidly increasing inequality.

The coming together of many incompatible elements on the political left has exposed a lot of problems, but also indicated the widespread desire to better organise a coherent coalition of resistance against the greed and cynicism impacting so negatively on our communities.

The Scottish Greens are proud to buck the current trend among mainstream parties and stand up for local communities, and we've been busy spreading that message in Aberdeen Donside and Edinburgh's Liberton/Gilmerton ahead of the by elections there on 20 June.

Ironically, the assault we see against our communities itself amounts to a tacit acceptance that there is still such a thing as society. So it's fitting that this debate has been brought to the fore recently, and only helps to make this such an interesting moment in politics.

This is particularly true in Scotland, but with less than 500 days until the independence referendum there is still a lack of grown up, open and honest debate about the state of democracy in our country, and the place of our country within the wider world.

Greenprint is again home to superb writers offering thoughts on these topics and many more. Please enjoy, and if inspired to further the conversation, do get involved.

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The corrosion of underemployment

By Alison Johnstone MSP

A new UN report says there will be 73 million young people out of work this year. Scotland isn't suffering to the same extent as our European neighbours, but there is no room for complacency as unemployment among 16-25 year olds is twice as high as among older adults.

Some commentators have expressed surprise that the unemployment numbers aren't even higher. One reason for this is the growth in the number of people who are underemployed.

Holyrood's Economy Committee – of which I am a member – recently carried out an inquiry into the issue. Giving evidence, the STUC expressed concern that a narrow focus on headline levels might disguise worrying labour market trends that could have significant consequences for workers and communities across the country.

They rightly highlighted the fact that unemployment and employment figures show only one side of the story, and in communities across the country many people are struggling to make ends meet on a low income, as opposed to having no income altogether. It also means many skilled young people and graduates aren't able to fully utilise their knowledge and abilities.

Underemployment is increasing and is affecting women particularly badly, especially those working in the social care, retail and tourism sectors. Many people who previously held full time posts have accepted reduced hours rather than lose their jobs entirely.

The need to supplement earnings with Working Tax Credits is increasingly common. However, welfare reforms mean eligibility criteria are harder to meet. Evidence from Citizens Advice Scotland reported increased demand for their expertise and a growing number of individuals and families in crisis.

Too often the jobs on offer are low-skilled, low waged and with limited job security. There is a worrying increase in zero hour contracts, where employees don't have 'traditional' rights and may have no idea how many, if any, hours an employer will be able to offer on a week-to-week basis.

In Parliament Scottish Greens have called on the Scottish Government to use the Public Procurement Reform Bill to ensure that companies receiving public

“Underemployment is increasing and is affecting women particularly badly.”

money don't use zero hour contracts. We have questioned the massive subsidies received by multinationals like Amazon, while dodging tax.

Let's focus instead on supporting the small and medium enterprises that provide sustainable employment. Micro-businesses, those with fewer than 10 employees, make up nearly 94% of Scottish business. Over 48% of unemployed people who find work in the private sector go to work in a micro-business.

Scottish Greens have called upon the Government to reverse cuts to college funding, asked for research into Scotland's childcare costs, amongst the very highest in Europe, and into the implications of internships as we took evidence from graduates who were unable to gain work experience due to a “back-log” of graduates from previous years. Employers are less likely to recruit staff at entry level when a steady supply of willing interns, desperate for work experience, is available to carry out many duties.

There is cross party support for job creation programmes, education and training, and increased awareness of the opportunities of properly supported entrepreneurship and the importance of labour rights in such a tight market.



Why I left the SNP to join the Greens

By Scott Lumsden



Like many others, 19 October was a breaking point for my support of the SNP. I had many doubts about the direction that the SNP were heading in, but the decision to join an organisation that support the use of nuclear weapons, whilst also claiming to stand against the weapons currently in Faslane, was ultimately the straw that broke the camel's back.

This view – that it's ok to have nuclear weapons in existence but not in Scotland – is, to me, a nationalist one only. I oppose nuclear weapons and that is all there is to it. I don't care if they're in Scotland, England or Iran. No matter the location, nuclear weapons pose a military threat to humanity and leech funds from public services such as medical care and welfare.

As I previously stated, this was not the only objection I had to SNP policy. The party's insistence that an independent Scotland could have low rates of tax for corporations whilst maintaining the same level of welfare as Scandinavian states such as Sweden or Norway is ridiculous. I fear this is simply Alex Salmond trying to appease his big-business friends.

Since I left the party, the SNP has suggested that the USA would be able to maintain a military base on Scottish soil. They must simply be deluded if they believe that the Scottish public want their country to turn into yet another US military colony, used to fuel their planes before bombing some poor third world country. An independent Scotland must engage with the world in a peaceful, progressive manner. As we have seen with the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, such military co-operation with the United States does not allow us to do this.

I joined the Scottish Greens because I believe that Scotland deserves an alternative to the right-wing, Murdoch-friendly SNP, and war-mongering New Labour and Conservative parties. The Greens are campaigning for a more socially and economically just Scotland, not austerity. The Greens seek a peaceful Scotland, not a US satellite state.

Recent polling has shown that support for independence is highest amongst working class people. This is no surprise to me. These are the people that most need to escape the brutal cuts inflicted on communities by the ConDem coalition. That is why I believe the Greens play such an important part in the 'Yes' Campaign. We can show people that there is an alternative to the SNP's vision of an independent Scotland. There is an alternative to austerity, there is an alternative to the neo-liberal agenda and there is an alternative to parties that have done nothing good for working-class people across Scotland.

Left: Patrick Harvie MSP speaking at an anti-nuclear rally.

Weapons, power & toxic ideas

By Chris Ballance

Spiralling costs motivated Centrica to abandon plans for a new nuclear plant in the UK, Cumbria rejected the idea of an underground radioactive waste storage centre, and the cost of cleaning up Sellafield nuclear reprocessing plant raced past £67.5bn with no end in sight.

And yet, firms have been offered 40-year backing from the UK government after a U-turn on taxpayer-funded subsidies for building new nuclear power stations. In light of all this, **Chris Ballance** outlines the progression of his anti-nuclear activism.

My first political memory is the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the 50-years-on analyses late last year brought it all rushing back to mind. I remember the little girl down the road running up to tell me: "There's going to be a war, this weekend, we're all going to die!" I remember my parents trying to soothe me – but then reading for the first time their Daily Telegraph, and finding out it was true. I never really trusted my parents' political judgement again...

How close we came to mass annihilation was only revealed years later. Russian commanders admitted that in the middle of the stand off, a submarine captain panicked and tried to fire his nuclear torpedoes. He needed consent from two other officers. The first agreed, but his second-in-command, Vasili Arkhipov, refused. It is not an overstatement to say Vasili Arkhipov saved the world.

And that brought me to the Scottish Green Party, 20 years later, via CND and the realisation that the nuclear power industry ultimately exacerbates the dangers of nuclear weapons. Beyond the irresponsibility of burying highly radioactive waste – the most dangerous substance ever invented – beneath our feet for tens of thousands of years, each nuclear power site is itself a potential catastrophe – whether triggered by mechanical error (Windscale, 1957), human error (Chernobyl, 1986) or act of nature (Fukushima, 2011).

Becoming an activist in the movement against the 1970s' expansion of nuclear power, it became obvious that nuclear power and community power are incompatible. You cannot have a community-owned nuclear plant – but you can have huge numbers of community-owned renewables. You cannot have

nuclear without an armed nuclear police force, armed waste storage indefinitely, international mega-corporations, uranium mining and centralisation – all the apotheosis of Green politics.

Coupled with that is that example of one person standing firm against the consensus and the panic, to refuse to do what his colleagues wanted, because he knew it was wrong – both ethically and from a point of view of survival.

"You cannot have a community-owned nuclear plant – but you can have huge numbers of community-owned renewables."

That's the other thing that makes me a Green: my admiration of those, like the Scottish Green Party, who have no fear of speaking out against what they can see is plainly wrong – even when they are the only party in the room taking that stand, and however uncomfortable that makes life for them.

**Analysis of the Cuban missile crisis:
peaceneeds.info/node/6970/nearly-end-world**

Photo by Neil G Hamilton



SCRAP TRIDENT



Scrap Trident: an idea whose time has come

By Benjamin Wray

Choir singers belt out a version of ‘bin the bomb’ as the amassed crowd wave anti-nuke placards in support. I could be describing a demonstration from half a century ago, such is the history of the anti-nukes movement in the UK.

In many ways it’s sad that since the march from Trafalgar Square to Aldermaston in 1958, every generation has carried the CND peace symbol up and down the UK, yet, on an international scale, nuclear weapons have become more, not less, prolific. On the other hand, marching on 13 April in the footsteps of a long and proud tradition gives me a greater determination to make sure that this time we will bin the bomb.

If every other generation failed, what gives us a better chance? Well, we have a few things in our armoury which our predecessors didn’t. A coming-together of factors gives a golden opportunity for the modern anti-nukes movement.

The first factor is that we live in a world now where Trident is known to be redundant – no one seriously thinks it’s useful today. David Cameron’s attempt to create a panic around the threat of Kim Jong-un is the best the pro-nuke brigade can muster. Ludicrous on several levels, not least since the mathematics of North Korea being able to nuke Britain and Britain being able to respond don’t work.

“A coming-together of factors gives a golden opportunity for the modern anti-nukes movement.”

Secondly, we live an ‘age of austerity’ where ‘we all need to tighten our belts’, according to Osborne and his millionaire mates. The argument for spending billions on Trident renewal in the context of the sharpest cuts in public expenditure since the 1920’s is unjustifiable. Schools and hospitals, or show that North Korean tyrant who’s boss? It’s obvious what most people want.

Thirdly, the independence referendum is on the horizon. The SNP’s backsliding on NATO is a major cause for concern, but a commitment has been made that ridding Scotland of nukes would form part of a post-independence constitution. The issue is less whether you fully believe Salmond or not at this stage, and more that independence offers political leverage for Scots to get the bomb out of the Clyde that we never had before.

Labour mostly sit on their hands and mutter inconsequentially along with the Lib-Dems, while others want to stick with Cameron’s plan of full Trident renewal. The only credible challenge to Trident comes via Scotland’s independence campaign. We will have scored a victory for the anti-nukes movement on a global scale, but we will also put the rest of the UK in a major practical predicament with no other waters deep enough for the missiles.

Those factors were the context for the ‘Scrap Trident: let Scotland lead the way to a nuclear free world’



SCRAP TRIDENT



protests of 13-15 April. The Scrap Trident Coalition was organised across the constitutional divide and included Labour figures as well, but if we are to be honest about it the vast majority who promoted the demonstration, marched on the Saturday and blockaded on the Monday, were committed independence supporters. Prominent on the march was the Radical Independence contingent with hundreds of placards that read '18/09/14 – Make Trident History'.

The independence message ran through the speeches and chants as well, but there was something quite noticeable about the content of the independence support: the vast majority of it was non-SNP. A clear left-wing of the independence movement has emerged consisting of Greens, SSP, trade-unionists and dissident SNPers who refuse to accept that joining the nuclear NATO alliance can be consistent with opposing Trident. The demonstration could certainly in no way be described as hostile to the SNP, but I wouldn't be surprised if the fear of hostility kept many SNP leaders away who would previously not have thought twice about marching on an anti-Trident demo.

Another theme was connecting the question of the bedroom tax to Trident. As Cat Boyd from PCS said: "The Tories would rather take away our bedrooms than take away nuclear weapons!" The cost argument over

nukes frustrates some in the movement: 'surely the ethical case is more than enough?' they argue.

"The Tories would rather take away our bedrooms than take away nuclear weapons!"

But the cost argument is what will make it a referendum issue for many voters. If Trident can be seen as an argument about society's

priorities, it can be a major weapon in the independence debate. Dividing the demonstration into different 'blocs' called 'Fund disability benefits, Scrap Trident', 'Fund Education, Scrap Trident', etc was a creative way of integrating this perspective.

Both the blockade and the demonstration received reasonable media coverage, but it will be up to us to make sure it stays in the press until referendum time. This demonstration was just the start, but it's about time our movement made sure that it was just the start of the end for nukes in the UK.

From top: Cllr Maggie Chapman, Alison Johnstone MSP and Patrick Harvie MSP say No to Trident.



Remember peak oil?

By Mandy Meikle

Yes, despite claims to the contrary, peak oil hasn't gone away. Peak oil was never about oil 'running out' – that will never happen because the economics of oil extraction will become unviable before oil reserves are totally depleted.

The term 'peak oil' refers to the production rate of conventional crude oil (we'll get back to what 'conventional' means later). 'Peaking' occurs for all non-renewable resources (as well as for renewable ones which are being extracted faster than they can be replenished) and means that the rate of production cannot increase; it does not mean that production will suddenly stop.

It is easy to dismiss 'peak oil' as a distraction because we have over a billion barrels left in known conventional reserves, but it doesn't matter how much oil is in the ground, it's getting it to market that counts.

No one actually wants oil, or any other form of energy. It is the services provided that matter: miles travelled, crops harvested, synthetic materials manufactured (all for consumers to consume). So flow rate is key because oil is currently our most exploited form of energy, and energy is the ability to do work.

Imagine you were offered a bank account with £1m in it, but there's a proviso: you can only withdraw £10 per day from that reserve. It is not the size of the reserve that counts, it's access to it. Our globalised economy cannot function without access to energy at current (increased if you want growth) levels of demand. As well as radical efficiency improvements, reducing energy demand requires us to prioritise what we use energy for.

Goldilocks oil

Oil is classified as 'conventional' and 'un/non-conventional'. Conventional oil, which is commonly known as crude oil, is typically the highest quality oil, flowing with comparative ease, and is the least expensive to produce. However, of all the world's oil, conventional only makes up about one-third. Non-conventional oils, which include heavy oil and tar sand oil, are not as readily processed, partly because our infrastructure is not geared up to use them in their natural state. They are the dross of oil and we haven't bothered about them, until now. Welcome to the peak.

Non-conventional oil production often requires a great deal of capital investment into infrastructure (such as new processing plants), which only happens if the return is sufficiently high to not only recoup investment, but make an attractive profit. For that you need a high oil price and certainty over reserve size. Once you've got your infrastructure, non-conventional oils require a greater energy input for processing per unit of energy produced, meaning that compared to conventional oil you have less surplus energy to provide services with.

This shift is consistent with peak oil predictions, which said that conventional oil production would plateau and that the decline in conventional oil fields would have to be made up by expensive, non-conventional oil. In recent years, both oil price and investment in production has increased considerably; in 2012, \$600 billion was spent on oil production. Yet since 2005, we have only raised global conventional (crude) production by 3%, to 75 million barrels per day. Right now, we're struggling to keep up with declines in mature crude oil fields and that pace of decline is accelerating.

“We have passed peak production and are scrabbling for the dregs at the bottom of the fossil fuel barrel.”



Remember peak oil?

(continued)

Kurt Cobb sums the situation up well: “How much oil you can get out of the ground on a daily basis is what counts, and it’s getting harder and harder to extract the amount of oil we desire from the Earth’s crust each day. We extracted the easy stuff first. We cannot now expect to extract the difficult stuff at the same high rates as the easy stuff”.

As for oil, so for gas

Non-conventional gas refers to natural gas (primarily methane) produced from shales, tight sandstones or coal beds. ‘Fracking’ (short for hydraulic fracturing) is the process where rocks are fractured to release trapped natural gas, as opposed to free-flowing methane extracted via a conventional gas well. Fracking is the so-called ‘miracle’ new technology – blasting rocks to release gas now that conventional resources are depleting. The technology may be new, but the mind-set isn’t.

Investment is being found in times of austerity to extract dirtier energy than that we rely on already. It is all the more frustrating to know that this is exactly how the fossil fuel industry was predicted to react. We have passed peak production and are scrabbling for the dregs at the bottom of the fossil fuel barrel.

Figures abound as to whether the US shale boom is real or, as I suspect, another short-term, money-making fiction. Yet, like many of the bad ideas from the US, it seems to be coming here too. China has huge shale reserves and, yes, methane does burn more cleanly than coal if you are only worried about carbon emissions. But China turning to shale gas to rapidly develop its economy isn’t something to get excited about – it’s like the Titanic deciding to aim for a different iceberg, although it does make slightly more sense than a tiny island awash with renewable resources turning to non-conventional gas as a source of energy. Furthermore, the US is relying heavily on shale these days but its coal exports are up, so there’s no overall improvement at a global level. Fossil fuels will inevitably be extracted, sold and consumed if they can be.

Our switch to non-conventional sources of oil and gas is the latest phase of the energy crisis – peak oil has not ‘gone away’, we’ve just stopped talking about it. If we do not reduce energy demand, all the alternatives – from tar sands to turbines – fail. What we need to invest in now is a system which will function on much less energy. That’s a localised and decentralised world.

Mandy Meikle has been speaking on peak oil issues since 2004. She edits the Reforesting Scotland Journal and is working to set up a local Trust in her community.

**Mandy blogs occasionally as The Cheery Pessimist:
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Photo by Casey Flesler

An unconventional energy threat

By Mary Church, FoE Scotland



As conventional fossil fuel sources dry up, the industry has been developing ways of extracting gas that is trapped inside the rock formations, such as shale gas, coal bed methane and tight gas. Together, they are known as unconventional gas, because of the new techniques needed to access them.

One of the most controversial of these techniques is hydraulic fracturing, or 'fracking', made infamous by the 2010 film 'Gaslands' which showed people in Pennsylvania setting their taps on fire, and linked this to rampant gas drilling in the Marcellus Shale. Fracking involves drilling deep in the earth and pumping a mixture of water and toxic chemicals under high pressure into the bore hole to open up fractures and ease the flow of gas for extraction.

The energy industry promotes unconventional gas as a clean source of indigenous energy, and a crucial 'bridging fuel'. Opponents of shale point to the toxic cocktail of carcinogenic and gender-bending chemicals commonly found in fracking fluid, and an increasing number of studies showing that the carbon footprint of unconventional gas could be as bad as that of coal. Even if local environmental impacts could be mitigated, burning the gas will make it all but impossible to meet global climate targets.

The less well known coal bed methane is also making an unwelcome impact, particularly in Australia where the industry is facing increasing opposition. Unlike shale gas, coal bed methane doesn't always involve fracking, however extracting this kind of gas comes with its own distinct risks – as well as those very similar to shale.

Coal bed methane is extracted by de-pressurising the seams through drilling vertically and horizontally and pumping out water to release gas. But where seams are less permeable, or as gas flow starts to decline, wells can be fracked to increase productivity. In Australia up to 40% of wells will be fracked.

Communities living near gas fields link extraction activities to a host of health problems including headaches, persistent rashes, nausea, joint and muscle pain and spontaneous nosebleeds. Farmers are playing a key role in the widespread 'Lock the Gate' coalition because of the impact de-pressuring has on their water supplies – in fact the industry has admitted that it's impossible for them to extract the gas without affecting ground water levels.

Scotland has some shale reserves, but the most immediate threat is from coal bed methane. Australian gas company Dart Energy's European flagship coal bed methane project is at Airth, near Falkirk. Still at the testing stage, the project already has 16 wells drilled, and a live planning application proposes a further 22 wells. Full field development could see over a hundred wells in less than 300 km².

What makes the prospect of developments like these so alarming is that most of the unconventional gas resource in Scotland is located in the most heavily populated parts of Scotland – right across the central belt, with pockets in southern Scotland too.

In New South Wales the government recently introduced a ban on any coal bed methane extraction within 2km of residential areas. Communities living near coal and shale deposits may well be wondering why on earth they aren't being afforded the same protection.

“The carbon footprint of unconventional gas could be as bad as that of coal.”

More Canadian oil in the pipeline

By Rob Kay

To green-minded folk in Scotland and abroad, and to the marginalised Native American communities in their reserves, the exploitation of the dirty tar sands and massive shale resources in northern Canada is a global threat of huge proportions.

Land-locked Alberta sees only one problem: getting their oil to the market. The long Canadian Pacific rail freight tankers snaking through the landscape can't handle the enormous demand. Thousands of miles of controversial new pipelines are proposed or underway. The Keystone XL pipelines will carry oil thousands of kilometres to the Gulf of Mexico, if they secure US approval. And Canadian officials are deciding whether to approve another pipeline that would carry hydrocarbons in semi-liquid form for 1,172 kilometres from Alberta's tar sands over the Canadian Rockies to British Columbia. Near its proposed terminus, the proposal has met with public outcry from local fishing and tourism-dependent communities, and fierce opposition from tribes of the Coastal First Nations.

I spent two weeks in Calgary with my son this year, gaining an insight into the massive political obstacles facing green Canadians on this vexed issue of fossil fuels. Mineral wealth is the main reason millions of new Albertans migrated to this remote province over the past 50 years. This is a young, fast growing state, and Albertans enjoy one of the highest quality lifestyles on the planet. They see cheap fuel as part of that lifestyle – gasoline costs half what it costs in the UK. Consider the context: it's mid-March, and outside the temperature is -13C. Homes are spacious and property prices are holding up. Shopping malls are thriving, and the local ice-hockey team has no problems filling a 12,000-seat stadium with tickets changing hands at \$110. Ironically, the local team is called The Calgary Flames – when a goal is scored the huge gas flares roar into action round the arena.

One advantage of Alberta's oil wealth is that education, libraries, sports centres, transportation and public health services appear very sound, despite recent municipal cutbacks. There are extensive networks of parks, cycle paths, good buses and trams – yet not a single solar panel or wind-turbine in sight.

Do Albertans pause to worry about the environmental impact of new pipelines across the Rockies? There is little evidence of it if so. Do they consider the potential damage to pristine fjords, or pollution of ground water? They weren't sharing it if they do. We chatted in friendly bars and pubs, at the hockey games, and in their comfortable, well-appointed homes. Just don't mention global warming or the temperature suddenly drops. An opposition leader was ruthlessly lampooned and vilified in the Calgary Herald recently for daring to speak out about the environmental dangers of oil.



Photo by Danielle Scott

To families here – many with strong Scottish connections – this oil is their future and they will fight to retain control of it, in much the same way British miners fought to retain their pits in the 1980s. And they vote for whichever political party is pro-oil. Whatever government is elected to the federal Canadian government in Ottawa, Albertans generate so much wealth they will always get their way.

Most Albertans don't appear to want to know about climate change. The question is, can international public opinion stop this juggernaut, when trillions of dollars and millions of livelihoods are viewed to be at stake?

Society survives individualism

By James Mackenzie

The day after former Conservative PM Margaret Thatcher's funeral, the Scottish Parliament met to consider the legacy of what Patrick Harvie MSP described as "a Government which knew the price of everything and the value of nothing".

There was a fascinating reaction to the topic of Holyrood's delayed debate – brought by the Green-Independent group of MSPs – on Thatcher's famous quote that "there is no such thing as society" (and no, there's no amount of context which excuses it).

The UK coalition parties were united in their desire for the debate to be moved, perhaps surprisingly, although of course they are jointly responsible for the turbo-Thatcherite direction Westminster's taking. The SNP took a public "it's up to them" position, but appear to have argued for a delay at the Bureau.

Labour were the only other party to take a clear position supporting the original debate, while understandably calling for it to be conducted with respect.

"Scots value society highly and next year's referendum is an unprecedented opportunity to start shaping the fairer society we want to live in."

This unfortunate accident of timing meant the Greens and independents were forced to choose between irrelevance and debating the legacy of Thatcherism, probably not the topic they would have picked if their one chance each year to pick what the Scottish Parliament should debate had fallen on another day.

Nevertheless, tactically, the outcome is pretty good – the reaction effectively illustrates the range of positions at Holyrood. At one end you have the Greens and independents, united by a broad rejection of Thatcherism. At the other, you have the coalition parties determined to defend it, and then Labour and the SNP taking a middle position. And

the changed date means the Tories were in the chamber to defend her, which always helps retoxify them in the eyes of much of Scotland. I'm personally very comfortable with the Greens and independents leading the charge against them on behalf of those Scots who didn't like the economic side of Thatcherism any more than they liked the social side.

Because this is a popular position to take. By an extraordinary coincidence, on the very eve of the Iron Lady's death, the Greens published the results of a poll which suggests that Thatcherite selfishness won't be the primary motivation for Scots deciding how to vote in next year's referendum. Pleasingly, 58% of respondents said that they would want to pick whichever outcome was more likely to deliver a fairer and more equal society, with just 10% saying they would pick on what would make them personally better off.

The coincidences don't end with the timing. In his comments on the poll, Patrick Harvie said: "Margaret Thatcher famously declared society does not exist. It's quite clear Scots value society highly and next year's referendum is an unprecedented opportunity to start shaping the fairer society we want to live in."

Turning to another famous comment from the former PM, when she was asked what her greatest achievement was, she said "New Labour". As one of those who bitterly regretted Blairism's acceptance of her core principles, it'd be great if a fairer, more equal and independent Scotland turned out to be her truly greatest achievement.

James Mackenzie is the former head of media for the Green MSPs.

For more of James' writing on politics visit: betternation.org



Photo by Natalie Bacon



A legal education

By Sean Templeton, advocate



Photo by Connor Tarter

As a result of my previous involvement in a high profile criminal case representing a child sex offender that featured internet pornography, I am regularly approached by campaigners and journalists in search of support or comment on some form of action to protect children from exposure to graphic sexual images online.

I have complete sympathy for their concerns and while it would be idealistic to turn the clock back to a more innocent time, it is unrealistic and no technological barrier will stop access to the internet if a child is determined. Therefore, in reply I tend to cite what I consider to be a significant failure in the present system, education on the law.

On the issue of sexual assaults, the law in Scotland was codified in the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009. However there was no public information campaign and confusion on the law in this area continues to exist. That was evident recently in the type of comments reported in the press and online by adults over the outstanding case of Julian Assange and, in particular, whether a sleeping person can consent to a sexual act.

If the law is not properly understood by adults how can we expect children to know what behaviour is acceptable and, further, at what age? There is need for a more frank explanation of the law. In the case of sexual matters this should include discussion on consent and what that means, as well as the issue of age-related offences.

However, the necessary education on legal issues does not stop at sexual behaviour and sexual offences.

“It satisfies those in charge to have a populous that do not fully know their rights.”

Everyone knows the phrase ‘ignorance of the law is no excuse’ but inherent in that must be a duty to inform all of our young as to what is legal and what is not. To ask new adults or adolescents to join a game where the rules may never have been explained to them, and then tell them when they break the rules that the fact they did not know what they were is not a defence is very unfair. Therefore, there ought to be more routine education on criminal law with scope for frank discussions on drugs, assault, knives & weapons, public disorder, theft, road traffic law and more.

Moreover, some basic legal education should continue to cover civil law. Having recently assisted some P7 pupils in a voluntary law project on contracts, it occurred to me that I had never considered what a contract was until I was at law school, by then a 20-something. Yet in talking to pupils, they very quickly grasp the concept and then they continued to appreciate the limitation of their own ability to enter contracts by analysing a case regarding a mobile phone contract dispute. for example.

While of course it takes time out of the busy school schedule, it is hard to understand why this education is not there for all children already. How many crimes might have been avoided? How many citizens might avoid being duped by unfair contracts if we arm children with the ability to question and understand their rights? This easily extends into family law, employment rights, and property ownership. The only reason that I can think for not suitably introducing such education is that it satisfies those in charge to have a populous that do not fully know their rights and do not know the rules of the game. Education is the best defence.

Lessons from local elections in England & Wales

By Adam Ramsay

In Oxford's University Parks county council division this May, we won through hard work and knowing our audience, but - most importantly - we learnt the importance of communicating core Green Party values.

Whereas other parties have daily access to the national media, almost no one knows what the values of the Green Party are, so we have to tell them. And we have to tell them in the clearest possible language – people know which side they are on, and if they are going to switch from their old party to us, they need to know we better embody the values they care about than do the old parties.

And the good news is that, usually, we do. People care about their neighbours, they do give a damn about their community, about fairness and equality, and they reward us when we are brave enough for saying we do too. Since election day, I've joked that we won by campaigning for higher taxes and more immigrants, but it is, essentially, true.

The main thing we talked about in the campaign was our commitment to saving vital care services for elderly and disabled people. We explained to people what's being cut – help getting out of bed, help showering for those who can't wash themselves, meals on wheels, day care centres etc. And we told them that we don't want to live in a community where the most vulnerable people don't get the basic care services that they need.

And then we explained that our councillors had shown that a council tax increase averaging 40p for the average household would cover all of these cuts, but that the other parties hadn't been willing to risk their political careers by asking for a tiny tax rise, even to save the most crucial care services for the most vulnerable people. Everyone I told this story was, rightly, shocked that Labour refused to make the case for saving these services.

Likewise, we promised to fight to keep Oxford an international city – welcoming of immigrants. In our penultimate leaflet to students, the headline was 'Stand up to the immigrant bashers'. We made it clear to students that when the other parties call for a crackdown on immigrants, they are talking about our friends.

Of course, the specific issues will be different everywhere – in central Oxford, with an international population, immigration is a good wedge between us and the right wing parties. Our brilliant retiring county councillor Larry Sanders had done the work defending care services, and shown how little extra council tax would be needed to save them, so we were in a good position to show the cowardice, right wingness and ineptitude of Labour. But everywhere, Labour are a right wing party. And everywhere, people, at heart, when presented with the brutal local consequences of right wing policies, don't like them.

The point is this: there is a large swathe of the population – a majority of people in many places – who are actively alienated from Labour as they pander to UKIP on immigration, and the Tories on tax. Where we are brave – where these people see us fighting their corner – they will reward us. Where we are timid, they may as well stick with Labour.

Election success in England & Wales

The Green Party of England & Wales made steady progress in the recent elections, with a net gain of five councillors taking it up to 141 principal authority councillors.

The party gained a new presence on six councils (Warwickshire, two councillors; Essex, two; Surrey, one; Cornwall, one; Devon, one; Kent, one) and doubled its numbers on Worcestershire County Council (to two) and Bristol Council (to four).

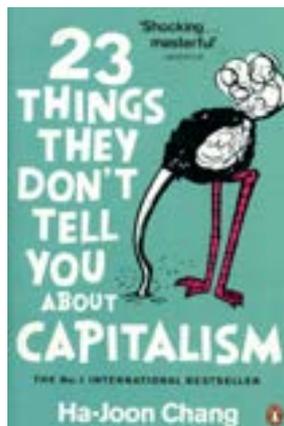
Green Party leader Natalie Bennett said: "We started this campaign with the aim of spreading much more widely across the country, winning seats on councils on which we had not previously been represented, and we've achieved that aim."

In Warwickshire Cllr Keith Kondakor defeated the Tory council leader, while Cllr Jonathan Chilvers took a seat off Labour.

Cllr Chilvers said: "We focused on working hard with and for the local community, putting the party's wider principles into practical local action. Whether that is reducing inequality by campaigning for a Living Wage, improving our local environment or working to solve community problems from the grass roots up, we painted a picture of Green ideas and values."

Elsewhere, Sam Coates was elected with a thumping majority in Oxford, promising to stand up to the immigrant bashers and fight to defend care services – described by campaign manager Adam Ramsay as "an enthusiastically left wing ticket".

Richard Doherty



23 Things They Don't Tell You About Capitalism

Ha-Joon Chang
(Penguin, 2010)

Although now three years old, Ha-Joon Chang's myth-busting book is still an essential read, and not just for those with a particular interest in economics. At a time when myths about social security and the welfare state are peddled with increasing ferocity and frequency, such myth-busting is essential reading for Greens. The growing awareness of the lies peddled by Osborne, IDS and co about workers and shirkers, scroungers and strivers is feeding an appetite amongst many people who are becoming aware that perhaps not all the things we're told about how our society and our economy work are accurate.

It seems a prime time, therefore to revisit Chang's myth-busting guide to all things capitalist. A specialist

in development economics and reader in the political economy of development at Cambridge, Chang writes with a clarity that makes his ideas ultra-accessible. The book is split into 23 chapters, each dealing with "things" that a mystical "they" don't tell us, entitled Thing 1, Thing 2 and so on. Topics such as the opening chapter's "There's no such thing as a free market" and Thing 9 - "We do not live in a post-industrial age" do exactly what they say on the tin, laying out the myths we are constantly presented with and dispelling each in turn.

Chang is not simply another in the long line of economists who want to have their say about the global crash and offer their expert opinion in mind-numbing, self-congratulatory "I saw it coming" econo-speak. Rather, his book serves as a guide to better understanding the world we live in and provides the tools for us to tackle the myths that we're surrounded by on a daily basis. From the ideology of trickle-down economics, to the idea that poor countries just aren't enterprising enough, Chang pulls together a multitude of evidence with which to throw out each assertion, making '23 Things They Don't Tell You About Capitalism' utterly essential reading.

Reviewed by Sarah Beattie-Smith

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A Green Scotland in a Green Europe

The Autumn Conference of the Scottish Green Party will take place on 5 - 6 October 2013, in Inverness, in the Eden Court Theatre.

Keynote speakers include **Manuel Sarazin**, speaker on Europe in the German Parliament, **Mike Danson**, Professor of Enterprise at Heriot Watt University, and **Karine Polwart**, celebrated Scottish singer/songwriter and champion of Scottish Independence.

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